

women's support project

WORKING AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

International Women's Day Special Edition 2003

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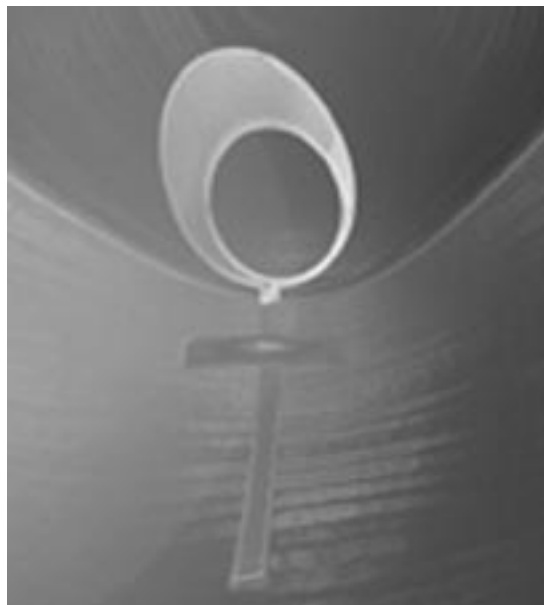
This special edition of the Women's Support Project Newsletter has been produced to celebrate International Women's Day.

International Women's Day was established in 1910 at the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen and celebrated the following year on 19th March in several European countries. The death of more than 140 women and girls less than a week later in New York had a huge impact on labour legislation and working conditions became one of the focuses of subsequent International Women's Day celebrations.

The date of the 8th March was adopted when Russian women held a strike for "bread and peace" and this led to the abdication of the Czar and Russian women were given the right to vote.

Since then International Women's Day has been celebrated throughout the world, highlighting the struggles of women in times of adversity, the progress achieved for the protection of women from male violence and to recognise those women, individually and collectively, who have dedicated their work and lives to the rights of women.

As the world grows smaller and contact across borders becomes easier, we learn more and more about women who live in different countries, the experiences we share and the difficulties we experience. It is hoped this newsletter encourages understanding and promotes support for women from all countries and cultures.



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The newsletter is available on audiotape.
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*Women's Support Project, 31 Stockwell Street, Glasgow G1 4RZ
tel: 0141 552 2221 email: info@wsproject.demon.co.uk*

A woman's voice: Sanctuary is not always the end of abuse

Scottish Refugee Council discusses the violence that forces women into exile and the problems that they face once in the UK.

There are many reasons why women may find it more difficult to leave their country of origin and seek sanctuary elsewhere. Women are often relied on to care for the young, to care for the sick, to care for the elderly and to care for the home. They may not have the resources needed to reach safety and could face difficulties travelling without the protection of male relatives.

Amnesty International has reported that more women and girls die each day because of various forms of gender based discrimination than through any other kind of Human Rights violation. Violence against women occurs in all sections of society. It does not discriminate in terms of race, culture, age, class, disability, social or economic group. It does not discriminate by nationality. Every year an immeasurable number of women are mutilated, battered, burned alive, forcibly circumcised and systematically raped with the purpose of spreading sexually transmitted disease. Every year women are subjected to widowhood rituals and domestic violence. Every year women fall victims to trafficking for the purpose of enforced prostitution.

Arrival in the UK

Upon arrival in the UK asylum seekers may find themselves stripped of their passport, fingerprinted, and unable to speak the local language. They may owe huge debts to people who assisted them in their journey to safety. This situation is exacerbated by political opinion and media reports that assert that asylum seekers are 'illegal' or 'bogus' and it is under these circumstances that our new residents will settle into their new home.

These circumstances, compounded by many others, will form the experience of women seeking sanctuary in the UK. The experience may be difficult as people undergo a period of rapid readjustment to their new circumstances, sometimes whilst dealing with a complex set of emotions including loss, grief and uncertainty caused by their experiences. Women may find it difficult to seek help for past injustices or violence against them. For the women who may have fled the forms of violence, highlighted

****K** is an 18-year-old asylum seeker from Somalia. She is supported by the government and receives accommodation and benefits. She is very shy, speaks little English and does not know many people in Glasgow. A Glaswegian man has befriended her and she thinks he is very kind.

One week her benefit is not available for payment, she approaches her new friend for help. He gives her some money but does not help her to report the problem with her benefit. At first he continues to help, but as weeks go by he starts pressuring her sexually. She has no cash support except what he provided and feels that she is already 'damaged' due to her past experiences in Somalia where she was raped. She does not know what to do.

previously, seeking sanctuary in the UK does not necessarily mean an end to abuse. These women may display diverse emotions such as fear, shame or guilt that can prevent them from seeking help or acknowledging their circumstances. Add to this an insecure immigration status and threat of deportation and it is possible that certain women may effectively be silenced.

****After** arriving in the UK as a dependent of her husband's asylum claim, and suffering domestic violence whilst living in the UK, a young woman seeks assistance through a recognised scheme to return to her country of origin with her children. She does not mention the abuse she is suffering and cites other reasons for wanting to leave the UK. She has no passport and her country of origin will not accept a travel document issued by the UK.

She is advised to contact her embassy. The embassy is contacted. They report that as the only document she has confirming her identity is one issued by the UK Home Office listing her as a dependent of her husband, she must receive written permission from her husband to leave the UK with the children.

***"Far away there in the sunshine are my highest aspirations. I may not reach them, but I can look up and see their beauty, believe in them, and try to follow where they lead."* – Louisa May Alcott**

The woman grows increasingly depressed, as she can see no way out of her situation. This situation continues until a member of her community, whom she has confided in, reports her intentions to her husband.

After being threatened with further violence from relatives still in her country of origin should she return, the young woman feels she has no option but to claim asylum in the UK in her own right. She is distressed to have to leave her fragile support network behind and start again in another part of the UK.

Domestic violence

Women who have fled persecution and sought sanctuary in the UK may face particular difficulties if they suffer domestic violence here. Apart from the emotional difficulties associated with seeking help, women will face particular bureaucratic difficulties.

For instance, asylum seeking women, because they cannot access mainstream benefits, find it difficult, if not impossible to access specialist services such as refuge accommodation.

Within the main dispersal areas of Glasgow a number of organisations and local residents have joined together to form Refugee Support

Networks. These networks support initiatives working with refugee and asylum seeking women. The networks have developed a short term working group that is looking at investigating and addressing the needs of asylum seeking women suffering domestic violence.

(For further information about this working group you can contact Norma Mckinnon at the Scottish Refugee Council or Nick Hopkins at Glasgow Council for the Voluntary Sector).

As legislation becomes more and more draconian and asylum seekers are more often than not portrayed in a negative light, it is easy for our own opinions to be challenged and all too easy for us to begin to believe the worst of our new neighbours. It is important to remember that people seeking asylum in the UK are individuals with experiences of incredible human suffering. At the same time we should also remember that UK policies designed to assist asylum seekers can actually cause more suffering and distress for those who arrive in the UK.

**Case studies as told to the Refugee Women's Group, a group supported by the Scottish Refugee Council.

Website

<http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk>

Young women's voices: Remembering Iraqi children

Whilst researching websites to include in this edition of the newsletter, I stumbled upon www.iraqikids.com/. This is an inspiring website created by two sisters, who have been striving to end the sanctions against Iraq. The compassion and dedication shown by these two young women is truly inspiring and offers hope for our planet's future.



My name is Kouthar Al-Rawi. I am 13-years old and my sister, Marwa, is 12-years old. In January of 1998 we launched a postcard campaign to protest the sanctions against Iraq. We ask adults and children from all over the world to express their feelings about the suffering in Iraq on a postcard and mail it to us. The postcard can be artwork, a poem, or message.

The sanctions on Iraq have received an almost total media blockade in the United States. We

have visited Iraq for over one month during June 1998, October 1998 and March 1999. The sanctions are causing severe suffering on the Iraqi people. With the sanctions in place the Iraqi children are being denied food, medicine, and clean water. More than 5,000 children die each month according to UNICEF.

We believe children deserve the most basic human right, which is the right to life. The right to life is being denied to innocent Iraqi children.

"As a woman I have no country. As a woman my country is the whole world": – Virginia Woolf



These kids are without blame and they are not involved in any way with weapons, politics or oil.

The United Nations' Convention of the Rights of the Child, Article 6, states that children have the right to life. What makes the Iraqi children any different from any other children of the world?

We believe that the world will join our campaign when they learn the truth about the sanctions and what they do to the Iraqi children.

Please write a message or draw a picture on a postcard now and mail it to our campaign.

You can even send us your "email postcard." Request the end of the sanctions on the Iraqi people, for the sake of the children.

Our goal is to help end the sanctions against Iraq for the purpose of allowing the children to receive food and medicine.

Sanctions violate numerous international laws.

Protocol I additional to the Geneva Convention, 1977, Part IV, Section I, Chapter III, Article 54:

1. Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited. World Health Organization 1992: We recognize that access to nutritionally adequate and safe food is a right of each individual. We affirm...that food must not be used as a tool for political pressure.

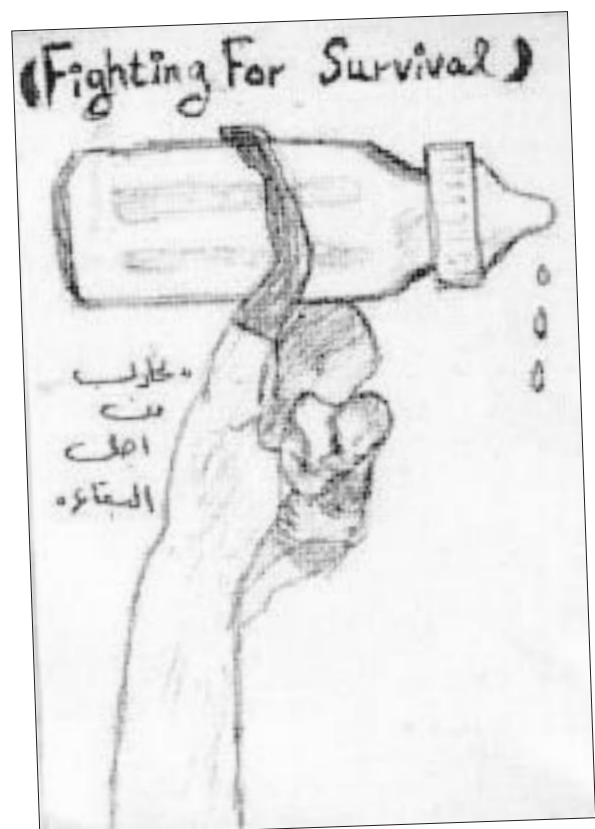
2. Sanctions take away children's rights. And children's rights are the foundation of human rights. Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 25: Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care.

The postcards we receive will be used to create one of the most important Art Shows the world will ever see. The date and time of this showing will be announced on this web site.

In August 1999 we had our first small display of cards in Room XXIII of the Palais Des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. We send letters to the President with copies of the cards on a regular basis and remind him that the postcard campaign is in full progress. The Art Show is being organized on his behalf, because of the inhumane sanctions endorsed by the U.S. government. Samples of the postcards we have received thus far are show in the "Postcard" sections.

● For more information www.iraqikids.com/
Website for the above campaign

Iraqi Kids Relief Fund, PO Box 1141, San Pedro, California 90733, USA



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." – Margaret Mead

Working in Turkey: Kate Philips, Active Learning Centre



Despite recent Turkish legislation, which outlaws domestic violence and brings in protection orders to exclude violent men, women's groups are very aware that the law is not implemented. This is especially true in the GAP region of Southern Turkey where women's lives are shaped by customary and religious ideas, which ensure that abuse is commonplace.

On a recent visit, to work with women's organizations on how the British Human Rights Fund might help to develop women's groups, we listened to many women. They spoke of early marriage, abduction, and rapes forgiven if the rapist agrees to marry his victim and of women killed to maintain family honour. I noted that women were not seen helping in family businesses, drinking in cafés or relaxing in the open air. The public sphere was reserved for men. Research showed that almost two out of ten girls marry before the age of fifteen, one half live in marriages to which they have not given their consent. As we prepare for war in the region, we may reflect, that at the time of the last Iraq war, the related conflict between Kurdish nationalists and the Turkish State led to women being forced from their homes and land, threats to family members and sexual abuse and rape in the custody of the security forces.

According to human rights groups some of this continued under the emergency regime which followed. Human rights groups talked of widespread unresolved psychological trauma, and a complete lack of services to cope with this.

The first women's rights convention (CEDAW) which provides the framework for our own, and other national legislation, was signed in 1979. It referred to "cultural practices" based on ideas of inferiority, which must be changed, but did not name gender violence as a rights violation. Research, argument and well organized lobbying by women have kept this question on the international agenda since. Their work has resulted in the United Nations Declaration on Violence against Women which is shaping national action. The declaration defines the problem as physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in:

- the family; including battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.
- the community; including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.
- or perpetrated by the State wherever it occurs.

Recognition of the State as perpetrator of violence, even when peacekeeping, is important. Conflict has escalated, and the nature of war has changed. Three quarters of war deaths are civilian. About half of all countries have seen conflict in the last ten years. Forced removal from your home, violence and threats to family, sexual abuse and rape from men of the opposing force are common modern life experiences and a reason why so many seek asylum elsewhere. The sanitised images of missiles, uniforms and tanks are a very partial view. And when the peacekeepers move in, as we heard from Kurdish women in Turkey, women are very vulnerable to abuse by security forces.

A special report on violence against women was recently submitted to the United Nations Commissioner on Human Rights. It tried to capture "the cultural practices" which lead to violence. The list of common practices which violate rights included:

"We look into mirrors but we only see the effects of our times on us, not our effects on others." – Pearl Bailey

■ **Female genital mutilation.** 2 million are at risk each year in societies where girls are not considered adult until this operation is performed.

■ **Honor killings.** Related to family honor and carried out by relatives on behalf of family. Women are most often the victims because they are seen as family property and the killers gain heroic status by avenging enemies. Killings are not necessarily out of love, shame or jealousy. A house, land or cattle may be the source of feud and these days the availability of weapons is a factor.



■ **Pledging of girls** who may be given to temples to be used by men, bought as prostitutes, or given to priests to atone for the sins of male relatives.

■ **Witch hunting.** Common where people believe that evil spirits are responsible for ill fortune. Women branded as witches are tortured to confess.

■ **Caste.** Designates some women as worthless and legitimates abuse. Low caste women constantly risk assault from upper caste men.

■ **Marriage.** Many girls are wed before puberty. Forced marriages are common. In many countries if a man rapes a woman and subsequently marries her he has not committed a crime.

■ **Discriminatory laws** uphold unequal status in marriage and inheritance, property, land ownership and consent.

■ **Son preference** can manifest itself in family bias in health, education and workload, neglect, deprivation, ill treatment and infanticide. Most of the 10,000 abortions in India are female fetuses. More than one in ten females are aborted in China.

■ **Restrictive practices** on movement, especially outside the home, no access to jobs, business or education and the covering of women. These restrictions may be

accompanied by violent reprimands for violations.

■ **Practices that violate women's reproductive rights** include lack of control over fertility, damage done by teenage motherhood without birth attendants and various other sexual practices such as dry sex which is the norm in Africa and is painful and damaging.

■ **Perceptions of beauty** encourage abuse of the female body such as foot binding, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery.

■ **Incest and sexual abuse**, from forced masturbation to sexualized beating and rape. Most victims are female.

The report describes how these practices are rooted in a belief that the freedom of a woman should be curtailed and regulated, especially her sexual identity. It also examines the relationship between masculinity and violence. It concludes that in most societies heroic men are violent men. Violence enhances male status. Our modern heroes are cowboys, soldiers, mullahs who want to punish and "honor" killers. The report concludes that UN member states have a responsibility to work to change this situation, to legislate and punish acts of violence against women. It also recognizes that the law is just a starting point. As we recognized recently in Turkey, women's organizations are essential to change.

"Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood." – Marie Curie

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan

RAWA, the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, was established in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1977 as an independent political/social organization of Afghan women fighting for human rights and for social justice in Afghanistan. The founders were a number of Afghan woman intellectuals under the sagacious leadership of Meena who in 1987 was assassinated in Quetta, Pakistan, by Afghan agents of the then KGB in connivance with the fundamentalist band of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.

RAWA's objective was to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at acquiring women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government based on democratic and secular values in Afghanistan. Despite the suffocating political atmosphere, RAWA very soon became involved in widespread activities in different socio-political arenas including education, health and income generation as well as political agitation.

Inside Afghanistan:

Our work inside Afghanistan consists mainly of support to female victims of war and atrocities committed by belligerent groups. Our workers contact families and particularly women who either themselves or their family members have been victimized by the fundamentalists.

Highlighting their misadventures via reports published in Women's Message, alerting international sentinels of human rights such as Amnesty International and similar organizations to human rights violations against women, providing psycho-social support, transferring victims to Pakistan for medical treatment, transferring children of traumatized families to Pakistan for rehabilitation and a better chance of education, tracing missing females and/or their family members, assisting families in evacuating from battlefield and areas affected by any natural calamities and resettling them in safer places, supplying such families with basic living needs and in extreme cases identifying sponsors for 'family adoption' of uprooted families or individuals and facilitating their



integration. We also distribute food among needy families in drought/war/earthquake-stricken villages.

Despite the abovementioned activities, our regular activities inside Afghanistan can be summarized as follows:

Educational/propaganda: Though our activities inside Afghanistan are underground and restricted due to the prejudiced and brutal behavior of the fundamentalists, we are successfully running our "home-based" schools and literacy courses. For the time being we are running schools for girls and boys and literacy courses for illiterate women and young girls. Our work under the fundamentalists is difficult and dangerous.

We also have circles of women and young girls in which we discuss with them about concepts such as women rights, the need to fight the fundamentalists, the necessity of education and social participation, concepts of democracy and civic freedoms and the ways to solve the Afghan problem and maintaining women's and human rights in Afghanistan.

Health-care: We have mobile health teams in 8 provinces of Afghanistan. The mobile teams mainly treat those women who cannot go to the doctors because of their financial problems. We also treat the children and in some cases the wounded men. In the areas where they work, our mobile teams are usually delivering about 3-child per day. In addition of treating the women and children, our teams are also running first aid courses for young girls and literate women. Last year the teams successfully carried out the polio vaccination program in their concerned areas.

Financial: We have chicken farms, small carpet-

"Women are not inherently passive or peaceful. We're not inherently anything but human". – Robin Morgan

weaving, embroidery and knitting workplaces, bee-fostering project, handicraft and tailoring units. All these projects are under the direct control and supervision of RAWA. Moreover, we also provide assistance to those women who want to run their own projects like chicken farms, handicraft or tailoring. By providing them short-term loans we help lots of these women, who are mostly widows, to feed their families.

Our plans for the future

1. To expand and focus activities as much as possible on education of women and children; establishing free and modern schools, institutions and courses; publishing text books and audio and video tapes containing today's knowledge and sciences and distributing them freely among the pupils; establishing libraries not only in the cities but in the rural and remote areas.

We have these plans because we are firmly of the opinion that knowledge itself is a great power and it will raise women's awareness about their human rights and their place in society and about the social and political problems of the country which consequently will lead to understand their worthy role in every sphere.

2. To set up many computer courses for women and girls with the Internet facilities. We have learned how wonderful is having access to a computer and Internet. It is by itself a "university".

We have a keen desire to educate as many women in computer as our possibilities might permit. We will do our best that computer and Internet must not be seemed as monopoly of men.

3. In addition of including English in curriculum of all our schools and even courses, we have plan to establish English courses for all women and girls. It would make our plan to promoting computer education, rather complete. Without having access to computer and familiarity with English language, enjoying a civilized life in 21st century would be difficult if not impossible.

4. To establish numerous courses for women especially for widows in order to learn them a trade so that they can earn their living as honorable members of society.

5. To publish special books and periodicals for women, teenager girls, adults, youths and children in the main languages of the country.
6. To establish "Meena Library" in every main city of Afghanistan and provide thousands of modern books in Persian and Pushto to public.



Followers of Meena
Filled with compassion for the sad
The women of RAWA
Are the cure for years of jihad
How blind the Taliban
And where are the jihadis eyes?
The women of RAWA
Won't someone listen to their cries?
For the world, a new millennium
For Afghanistan, the Dark Ages
The women of RAWA
More valuable than mullahs and sages
A ray of hope in the darkness
From Peshawar to Kabul and Mazar to
Kandahar
The women of RAWA
Bringing hope and healing both near and afar
Marching in the streets
Their weapons are banners and chanting
The women of RAWA
Fear not fundamentalist ranting
In a dry and barren desert
Like a spring bubbling up through the sand
The women of RAWA
Peace, freedom, democracy and women's
rights are their stand
Sister, brother
Will you take time to know their plight
The women of RAWA
Need your help in their fight

Website for RAWA:

<http://www.fancymaketing.net/index.html>

"We cannot silence the voices that we do not like hearing. We can, however, do everything in our power to make certain that other voices are heard." – Deborah Prothrow-Stith

Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: Faeza Khan, Gender Advocacy Project

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WOMANKIND Worldwide is the only UK-based charity dedicated to women's development and women's human rights globally. Our vision is of a future society in which women can take their place as equal partners in determining the values, direction and governance of their community and country – for the benefit of all. Aiming to ensure that women's rights are recognised, we believe that the best people to help women are women themselves. We work with local groups to help them find their own solutions, assisting them in their efforts to find a path that leads away from discrimination to equality. At present we have over seventy partners in twenty countries.

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Throughout the world, historically and today, women have been vulnerable to acts of violence in the family, the community and by the State and such violence represents a major barrier to the realisation of human rights in the twenty first century. Gender based violence is not only a violation of women's human rights and a threat to their health but acts as a barrier to development. It undermines women's self-determination, their political and economic opportunities and their control over their lives and bodies. Domestic Violence is one of the most common forms of violence against women and cuts across the boundaries of race, class, cultural affiliation, religion and socio-economic status.

Violence has long characterised South African society where the violence of Apartheid has structured ordinary peoples lives. The process of transition from an era of Apartheid was accompanied by a culture of militarisation and patriarchal ideology. High incidences of all forms of violence coupled with gender identities based on power and privilege versus



submissiveness and passivity has created an ethos where gender violence flourishes. Coupled with racial inequality, poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and disparity in access to resources all increase women's vulnerability to violence. One in four women in South Africa experience abuse at the hands of their intimate partner. While this statistic mirrors the international experience it is considered to be a conservative estimate.

1994 represented a landmark year for South African citizens marking the end of formal Apartheid. Central to transformation of the political environment was a recognition of the need for gender equality in building a new democracy. The adoption of the South African Constitution which enshrines the notion of gender equality and the Bill of Rights, the ratification of international treaties such as CEDAW and Beijing Platform of Action as well as the reformulation of legislation and policies protecting women displayed the Governments commitment to addressing gender and violence against women. However despite the



"if you are going to hold someone down you're going to have to hold on by the other end of the chain. You are confined by your own repression." – Toni Morrison



commitment and the changing policy environment statistics continue to escalate. This is largely due to an inability by the State to resource legislation and policy, which is meant to transform the lives of grassroots women, offering them protection from the law.

Over the past decade many services offering counselling to abused women have emerged, but is still not able to sufficiently deal with the growing need for assistance. Shelters and safe houses for abused women seeking refuge from the perpetrator are few and far between and struggle to survive due to the lack of financial resources. Attempts by service providers to coordinate services between the various sectors have failed as bureaucracy plagues the processes. A large proportion of services offered to abused women are offered by the non-profit sector unsupported by government.

In rural areas women are hardest hit, and the situation is further exacerbated by increasing levels of poverty, unemployment and the spread of the HIV/AIDS. Services providers who work with abused women are faced with many challenges, as they are having to deal with a range of issues due to the complexity of domestic violence and the lack of specialised services.

Further challenges to the sector are the transformation of attitudes toward domestic violence, with communities and officials alike perpetuating the notion of the private/public divide which prevents the issue from reaching the public agenda. This ideology locks women in abusive relationships and prevents an effective response from the police who are often called to the woman's assistance.

Due to the growing demand for assistance by abused women, many service providers have stretched scarce resources in an attempt to broaden their service. The approach used to broaden the service base has often been through the use of volunteers. A number of organisations run services with the assistance of volunteers who fulfilled very vital roles in the process of helping. Mobilising community women through capacitating them with counselling skills has also been an innovative way to address an escalating problem.

Due to the need for direct service delivery, work around prevention of gender-based violence is in its infancy stage in South Africa. There is a recognition now that expertise in this area needs to be developed or the eventual eradication of gender-based violence will be an impossibility. There is a need to engage men in discussions around ending gender-based violence and addressing the socialisation of young people in terms of their acceptance of their gender roles based on the principle of respect and equality.

South Africa has come a long way in this last ten years towards addressing some of the important issues of gender-based violence. However, should a long term strategy not be developed, taking into account the ever increasing trap of poverty, the rapid spreading of HIV/AIDS and the escalating statistic of women being abused in various ways by intimate partners, the democracy and development which is very much in its early phases in this country will be threatened.



Website for womankind:
<http://www.womankind.org.uk/>

"It is justice, not charity, that is wanting in the world." – Mary Wollstonecraft

Women in combat: Caroline Moser

Caroline Moser explores some of the issues which she encountered, and conclusions drawn, during a two-year work programme on gender, armed conflict and political violence which explored conflict zones in Central and South America. (February 2002)



Introduction

In recent years increasing attention has been paid to the horrific impacts of war on women. However, analysis of conflict situations, and policies and interventions to deal with the complex humanitarian emergencies created by them, are, sadly, still largely gender blind. Oversimplified understandings of armed conflict and political violence have tended to portray men as the main actors and victims of violence, underestimating the effect of armed conflict and political violence on women and, indeed, their involvement in it.

The severe situations of oppression and insecurity brought about by armed conflict and political violence affect both men and women, and their families and communities, in conflict zones. Men, and especially young men, are more often than not targets for armed groups either as suspected collaborators with the enemy, or as potential recruits. However, increasingly women and both male and female children are also being targeted in terror tactics that seek to undermine family and community structures, in order to secure territorial and social control.

Freedom of movement

Physical security is a key factor in securing a livelihood. If rural families are unable to farm their land or to get to market to sell their goods due to military activity, the family's food security is severely compromised. More often than not, women have the primary responsibility for securing food, and consequently they face particular danger in collecting water, firewood and food from the fields in conflict zones. Mobility constraints also exist for populations of violence-affected urban areas. A spatial 'geography of violence' determines mobility patterns of local residents as they attempt to avoid violence 'hotspots'. This severely affects people's productivity and social and political interaction, thus jeopardising their access to employment, education, health and other services as well as destroying networks of trust and reciprocity.

Internal Displacement

Forced displacement resulting from repeated threats and attacks on local communities as a result of armed conflict/political violence is a particularly gendered experience. Not only do women make up a larger number of the displaced, but

men and women cope differently with displacement and adaptation to their new environment, determined largely by their socialized identities as fathers, mothers, husbands and wives.

Research from Colombia shows that although women find the process of displacement itself more difficult to deal with than men, they have greater flexibility in adapting to their new environments and establishing survival strategies. Paradoxically, this flexibility means that the reintegration and reconstruction process into family and community can be particularly difficult for women returning from exile or displacement. Many may have undergone significant changes in their responsibilities in private and public lives, often in the absence of their husbands. Not only do widows find themselves heading households, but often older women are forced to take on responsibility for grandchildren when the middle generation has fled or been killed.

Women ex-combatants

Increasing numbers of women are joining armed groups in countries such as El Salvador and Colombia as combatants and supporters, with evidence also showing forced

"When men talk about defense, they always claim to be protecting women and children, but they never ask the women and children what they think." – Patricia Schroeder

recruitment of children of both sexes into armed forces. The main recruitment base for most insurgent armed groups remains the rural areas. In Colombia, for instance, increasing numbers of young women have joined guerrilla groups over recent years. It seems that these young rural women with low levels of education, most of them between 15 and 17 years of age, often join up as a means of escaping the oppression and drudgery they experience in their families and communities.

Women's lives as combatants present particular gender related challenges. On the one hand women tend to gain a certain level of autonomy and respect within the armed groups and have some equal responsibility to men, carrying out a variety of tasks from active combat, intelligence work and radio operators to nurses, runners and stored ammunition, food, and hiding soldiers. On the other hand they often face severe feelings of personal guilt and societal rejection related to the suppression of their maternal role and to the perceived transgression of the parameters surrounding the exercise of their sexuality.

These gendered experiences mean that the particular needs of women ex-combatants for reintegration into society must be recognised and planned for as part of demobilization programmes.

Women and peace processes

The speed of peace negotiations and peace



accords in El Salvador, for example, meant that although comprehensive and heralded as highly successful, they often failed to include human relations at the heart of the war. Nor did they address any of the fundamental underlying causes of the war, such as high levels of inequality, poverty and poor political processes. Of greatest importance, women were totally absent from the peace negotiations and completely invisible in the peace accords.

The challenge is to make women visible

Women's roles in society change in many ways in conflict situations. Peace, demobilisation, re-integration and rebuilding processes must all be structured to include women. It is important to ensure that their (often new-found) independence and leadership

skills are employed so that they can become peaceful social and political actors in post-conflict situations. It is also critically important to involve men in the implementation of such reintegration processes to ensure such changes are not revoked, or repressed, leading to the return to women's pre-conflict roles in society.

Additional Reading:

Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark *Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*; London Zed Press (2001)

Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark 'Gender, conflict and building sustainable peace: recent lessons from Latin America' *Gender and Development*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Nov pp 29-39 (2001)

Caroline Moser and Fiona Clark 'Latin American Experiences of Gender, Conflict and Building Sustainable Peace: Challenges for Colombia' Conference Report (2000)

"Reconciliation should be accompanied by justice, otherwise it will not last. While we all hope for peace it shouldn't be at any cost but peace based on principle, on justice" – Corazon Aquino

Losing the Game – Julie Bindel

Detectives probing an alleged prostitution and brothel racket recently arrested an unnamed female police constable based in Byker, Newcastle. A male colleague of hers at the same station is also charged, along with a civilian man, as an accessory to prostitution and grievous bodily harm, and of procuring women to leave their homes to frequent a brothel.

Shocking as these allegations will be to many, it will come as no surprise to any of the thousands of women working as prostitutes in Britain today. Jenny, a former prostitute who worked both on the streets and in brothels told me that many of her customers were serving police officers. "They would threaten to arrest me unless I gave them a freebie. Often they would come into the sauna, or pick me up in the street and take me to their squad car. I knew it was pointless complaining, and so did they, so I just had to put up with it. Most of the girls I worked with had similar experiences."

The police service, and wider society, has long had an ambiguous relationship with prostitution and the sex industry. Police officers accepting "sexual favours" in return for "turning a blind eye" to the activities of individual prostitutes and brothel owners is seen as unimportant compared with, say, accepting money from drug dealers.

Prostitutes are seen by much of society as their own worst enemies – and to blame for any abuse that they suffer. We only have to compare media coverage of the so-called bin-bag murders and the murder of the two young women in Birmingham to realise how little sympathy the former were afforded. In some tabloid reports, the three women's names were not even given; they were simply referred to as "vice girls", "prostitutes" or "hookers". It is as if as soon as the news came out about who these women were, we stopped looking for explanations of why they had been brutally murdered. NHI ("No Human Involved") was a common phrase used until recently by some police officers to describe a prostitute murder by a pimp or punter. We need to think about how we, as a society, can humanise these women in the eyes of the public. Prostitution is not a "victimless crime", highlighted by the shocking levels of sexual violence which the women suffer on a daily basis.

Have we come to see prostitution as harmless, and such an inevitability that we don't care if police officers and social workers pop into the local brothel or kerb-crawl King's Cross on their way into their offices to deal with the fallout of this industry? Men's right to use prostitutes is embedded in our culture – we call it a "choice" and, wrongly, the "oldest profession". There is a prevailing attitude that men "have needs" that their regular partners cannot fulfil, and that prostitution doesn't hurt anyone involved.



So what are police doing to control the sex industry? Liz Kelly and Linda Regan's report for the Home Office, *Stopping Traffic*, which detailed the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation into the UK and involved a national survey of the 43 police forces in England and Wales, found that only one police area actively monitored the off-street sex industry, an obvious case of "what the eye does not see the heart does not grieve over".

Why is it that policing prostitution is such a low priority, even though the sex industry has proven links to organised crime, homicide, drugs and guns? There are clear links between the sex industry and other forms of criminality, as has been shown by those researching the consequences of street prostitution, such as Roger Mathews in a recent London-based study. We seem to care so little about the women involved, even though the likelihood is that many will have suffered abuse in childhood, be under the control of a pimp, be addicted to hard drugs and suffering from health problems. Police rarely arrest pimps or brothel owners, yet regularly pick up prostitutes on soliciting charges.

Legalising prostitution would not stamp out police corruption. Reports from Australia, where brothel prostitution is legal, suggest that the illegal layer of the sex industry still flourishes, as do its links with organised crime. Nor will legalisation help women escape.

There are examples of effective social and policing interventions on prostitution that we

"Nothing in life is to be feared. It is only to be understood." – Marie Curie

should look at more closely. Glasgow City Council and the King's Cross development initiative warn their employees that they will face disciplinary proceedings if they are found using prostitutes. In Sweden, where demand not supply is seen as the problem, anyone attempting to buy sex will be prosecuted, and those attempting to sell will be assisted to leave the industry.

The only sensible way to deal with this abuse of women's human rights is to decriminalise the women, put government funding into helping women leave prostitution, and for police to start treating the issue as a serious crime. One prostitute dies in the UK every month. The police, in being so complacent, are effectively saying that some women's lives are worth more than others.

● Julie Bindel is a researcher at the Child and Women Abuse Studies Unit, London Metropolitan University

(Friday January 24, 2003, *The Guardian*)

Relevant Websites

<http://www.inet.co.th/org/gaatw>

Global alliance against Traffic in women. A movement of members consisting of both organisations and individuals world wide.

<http://www.catwinternational.org>

Website for the Coalition Against Trafficking in women, a non governmental organisation that promotes women's human rights.

<http://www.trafficked-women.org/>

The Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking. An Alliance of non-profit service providers, grassroots advocacy groups and activists.

Franki Guide

In recent months the subject of commercial sexual exploitation, and in particular prostitution, has been widely discussed. The discussion has been as varied as the approaches by local authorities across Scotland.

Glasgow City Council has been working to encourage a consistent approach from services in the area. In March last year they launched "Guidelines for organisations working with women involved in prostitution".

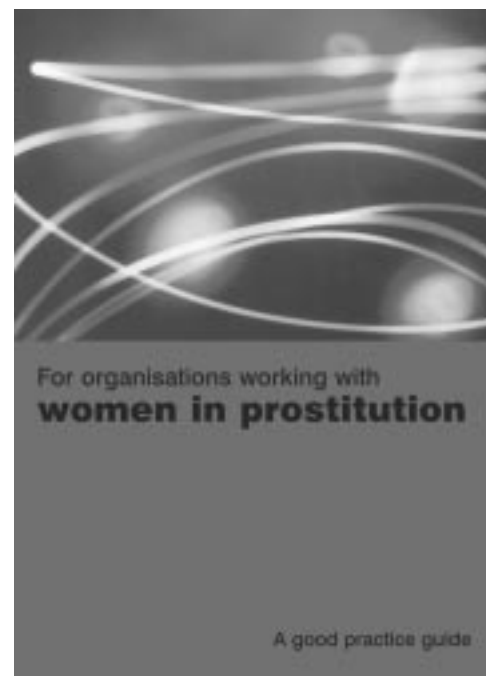
The guidelines were revamped from the guide produced by the Franki Project in Bolton, to

We're Not Unstoppable

How come you cannot stop us?
You could if only you tried.
And perhaps if you had made an effort,
One less prostitute would have died.

How come you cannot stop us?
Just charge us and send us to court.
You seem to favour the punter, laugh,
joke, oh and then file a report.

How come you cannot stop us?
While you claim you're doing your best,
the only time you appear to make an effort,
is when you have a new strategy to test.



include legislation and services in Scotland, and in particular Glasgow.

Covering areas such as policy guidance, working with women and resources, the guide encourages service providers to recognise the abuse caused through prostitution and to recognise women who are involved in prostitution as survivors of abuse.

"The liberated woman is a person who believes that she is as human as man. The liberated woman does not insist on her freedom so as to abuse it." – Kathleen Vande Kieft

Women's Support Project

Library Resources

Stopping Traffic: Exploring the extent of, and responses to, trafficking in women for sexual exploitation in the UK.

Liz Kelly and Linda Regan

Home Office Police Research Series, Paper 125 (2000)

This exploratory study is an excellent introduction to the trafficking of women, not only in Britain but across the Globe. A previously ignored issue, but which is being discussed with growing interest, trafficking can have the reputation as an issue that affects developing worlds rather than the "civilised" countries such as Britain.

This report challenges this illusion, recognising that there has been an increase in trafficking in response to a growing sex industry alongside increased poverty, which particularly affects women. Poverty is only one of the factors that enable traffickers to coerce women into migrating and Kelly and Regan encourage readers to recognise that there is a "continuum of control" which would, "...ensure women would still be considered victims through all stages of control."

This is a fascinating study, which begins by outlining the current National, European and International legal situation. In particular Kelly and Regan highlight anomalies such as drug traffickers receiving harsher sentences than traffickers in women, which in turn discourages police intervention, therefore preventing women not only from escaping, but also discouraging them from being witnesses against their captors. Vice units have been set up across the country, however these are few and far between and often where these do not exist awareness of the issue is limited and women remain invisible.

This is particularly relevant for "within country" trafficking, where women are transported from one area of the country to the other. Kelly and Regan point that the driving force behind "within country" trafficking and International trafficking are the same, profit and control.

The study found that control of Internationally trafficked women is achieved by charging the woman not only for her travel to her destination, but also exaggerated living costs when she arrives. This means the woman is in debt before

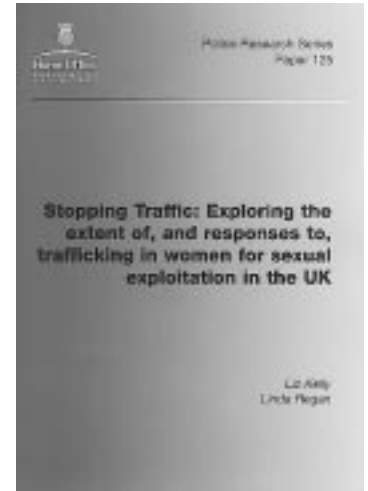
she even arrives in the country and it amounts to a contemporary form of bondage. It was also found however that women are being brought to the country through the creative use of legal systems within Britain, for example, mail order brides, immigration control and student visas.

Many of the women are unaware of the true reason why they are being transferred to the UK, believing promises of jobs with high pay, which they can use to sustain families at home.

Those who are aware do not realise the full extent of the debt and abuse they will experience. Kelly and Regan found that the vast majority of the trafficked women who managed to escape request to be returned home as soon as possible. This usually means they are returning to countries with few resources to support women who have experienced this level of abuse.

The image of liberal countries, who have introduced forms of legalised prostitution, as safe and prosperous choices for the women involved in prostitution there is shattered in this report. Statistics such as 80% of women in the Netherlands involved in prostitution are foreign to the region, and 70% of those hold no identifying papers, highlights a system that encourages unscrupulous groups to exploit women through trafficking. This "legal" demand for women as sexual commodities offers traffickers the promise of profit, which they can transfer in to essential commodities, such as children's shoes, in developing countries to sell at inflated prices, and hence the cycle begins once again.

This is a fascinating introduction to the subject of Trafficking which firmly sets Britain in place as not only a country which experiences within country trafficking, but which is also viewed as a destination country. A very informative report for students, workers and those interested in the subject.



Websites

The Women's Support Project is not responsible for the content or accessibility of the websites suggested, as this is for information only.

Afghanistan

<http://www.feminist.org.afghan/intro.asp>

Organisation dedicated to women's equality, reproductive health and non violence.

<http://www.unhcr.ch/cgi-bin/texis/rtx/afghan>

United Nations Refugee agency reports on Afghanistan.

Central America

<http://www.oneworld.net/latinamerica/english/>

English version of the One world website offering information on Latin America

Iraq

<http://casi.org.uk>

Campaign Against Sanctions on Iraq.

<http://www.epic-usa.org/>

The Education for Peace in Iraq Centre website.

Kurdish women

<http://www.kurdmedia.com/kwahk/index/htm>

Kurdish women Action Against Honour Killings. A network of Kurdish and non Kurdish activists, lawyers and academic researchers.

<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/projects/kwnet/>

Kurdish women's Studies Network.

South Africa

<http://www.womensnet.org.za/>

Women'sNet is a vibrant and innovative networking support program for South African women.

<http://www.csvr.org.za/>

Website for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in South Africa.

<http://www.politicalafrica.com/>

information website on the historical and current political climate in Africa.

General

<http://www.amnesty.org/>

Website for Amnesty International.

<http://www.ippf.org/>

Website for the International Planned Parenthood Federation.

<http://www.prostitutionresearch.com/>

Information and awareness raising website on issues surrounding prostitution.

<http://www.newint.org>

Website of the New Internationalist Website. A publications highlighting inequality and oppression.

Newsletter editorial policy

The Women's Support Project reserves the right not to include contributions which are deemed to be discriminatory to individuals and/or groups. This includes any material which attempts to blame women or children for violence perpetrated against them. The views expressed in the newsletter are not necessarily shared by the Project.

The next newsletter will be published in April 2003. Please ensure any contributions are received by 17th March 2003.

Women's Support Project contact details

31 Stockwell Street, Glasgow, G1 4RZ
tel: 0141 552 2221, fax: 0141 552 1876
email: info@wsproject.demon.co.uk
qwertyphone: 0141 552 9979

Office hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday 10.00am to 4.30pm
Wednesday 2.00pm to 4.30pm

Dawn Brennan	Newsletter/publicity
Janette Forman	Training & development work
Jan Macleod	Multi-agency & development work
Isabell Robertson	Library resources