



RCD Women's News

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Refugee Council launches two reports containing new evidence of rape and sexual violence among refugee women in the UK

Gemma Juma – Head of International and UK Policy (Refugee Council)

Refugee women are more affected by violence against women than any other women's population in the world. In 2006, with the support of Comic Relief, the Refugee Council set up the Vulnerable Women's Project (VWP) to address the needs of refugee and asylum seeking women. The project offers a mixture of practical support and therapeutic counselling to women who have been victims of rape and sexual violence in their countries of origin and here in the UK. Alongside individual casework, the project aims to influence decision makers and raise awareness of the needs and rights of refugee and asylum seeking women who have experienced sexual violence. At a conference in London in February 2009, we published a literature review with interim findings on the extent and impact of sexual violence against refugee women, and a Good Practice Guide for agencies working with refugee women.

Between 1 December 2006 and 31 August 2008 the VWP assisted over 150 women. Of these women:

- 76% had been raped, either in their country of origin or the UK
- 76% were experiencing trauma-related psychological distress
- 35% had suffered some form of violence
- 27% had physical injuries
- 22% had been sexually abused
- 20% had gynaecological problems as a result of their experiences
- 15% had become pregnant as a result of being raped
- 9% had been threatened with rape or sexual abuse while in detention in their country of origin
- 5% had had a child as a result of being raped

The experiences these women have undergone have serious physical and psychological impacts. We are now analysing the outcomes of clients' asylum claims. Current data shows that the majority of women survivors of sexual violence in the project are being refused asylum. As a result, many are destitute and even more vulnerable, resulting in some having to enter or stay in violent or sexually abusive relationships in exchange for somewhere to stay and in order to survive.

We are now in the final year of the project and are working to secure improvements to the treatment of vulnerable women within the UK asylum system. We are seeking: an end to destitution; ensuring that the women are able to disclose their experiences to asylum decision-makers; that vulnerable women can benefit from high quality legal advice and representation; making high quality and appropriate health services available at all stages of the asylum process; and ensuring refugee and asylum seeking women's rights and needs figure more prominently within government policy on violence against women.

On 9 March 2009 the Government launched a consultation on violence against women and girls – we urge individuals and organisations to respond, to ensure that the Government addresses the particular needs of refugee and asylum seeking women.

If you are interested in working in partnership with us in order to address these issues, please contact **Gemma.Juma@refugeecouncil.org.uk** on **020 7346 1171**. For more information see: the Literature Review and the Good Practice Guide, which are available on the Refugee Council website:

www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy/position/2009/vulnerable_women/

Funding news

Paul Hamlyn Foundation Education and Learning Programme (UK)

Under its Education and Learning programme, the Foundation funds projects that promote innovation and change in the areas of supplementary schooling and tackling school exclusion and truancy.

Eligible organisations include charities, individual pre-schools, schools, out-of-school clubs, supplementary schools, and youth clubs. They must demonstrate benefits to the wider community, including partnership working to increase access to education and learning to all communities and age groups. Applications can be made at any time. For more information see www.phf.org.uk/page.asp?id=85

Training

Refugee Women's Association (RWA) is launching a new training course leading to NVQ qualifications in Advice and Guidance for staff or volunteers of Womens' Organisations.

The course is free and starts in April 2009 (One day per week).

Who can attend the course?

Refugee/migrant women providing advice and guidance in a paid or voluntary capacity in refugee or migrant womens' organisations or women's sections.

There are still some places left, so please contact **Ayse** as soon as possible on **020 7923 2412** or email ayse@refugeewomen.org.uk

Take part in the largest cross – government consultation on violence against women

The Home Secretary, Jacqui Smith, launched the largest ever cross-government public consultation to tackle violence against women and girls on 9 March 2009.

The *Together we can end Violence against Women and Girls Strategy** consultation sets out the action that the Government has taken to tackle all forms of violence against women and girls. It also looks at what more can be done to challenge the attitudes that may condone it, in order to help them feel safer.

Violence against women is any violence that targets a woman because she is a woman. It is also violence that disproportionately affects women. It includes physical, sexual or psychological harm such as domestic violence, sexual assault, forced marriage, stalking, 'honour' attacks, human trafficking and female genital mutilation. It also includes threats of violence and kidnapping.

You can take part in many ways:

- Complete the quick and easy online survey at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/keepwomensafe/survey/
- Download the consultation paper* and post or email your reply
- Attend one of the national events – in a brightly painted bus they are travelling the country to talk to everyone. The bus will be in the following location on these dates. Specific times and locations are being confirmed daily so check the following website for details www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/violence-against-women-bua

Location of the bus

West Midlands: 26-28, March, East Midlands: 2-4 April, North East: 9-11 April, Yorkshire and Humber: 16-18 April, South West: 23-25 April, North West: 30 April - 2 May, London: 7-9 May.

*See the strategy at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/documents/cons-2009-vaw/

If you would like to submit an article to *RCO Women's News* about your RCO's work, or would like to write about a topical issue, please email: development@refugeecouncil.org.uk.