



RCD Women's News

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Working together for a safer London

A platform for change

By Detective Inspector Jim Blair (Diversity & Citizen Focus Directorate – Gender Strand)

The Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) is committed to working together with the residents of London in order to provide the highest quality service.

On 15 March 2007 the MPS is hosting a joint conference with the Refugee Council to provide a forum to listen to refugee and asylum seeking men and women around the issues of gender and community safety. This conference aims to raise awareness of gender issues in order to help refugee community organisations to deliver an enhanced service to women in the community. The MPS is also seeking to uncover possible gaps in current service delivery and also raise awareness around gender issues.

During 2005-2006 over 110,000 domestic incidents were reported. This is not a true reflection of the number of domestic incidents taking place as most are hidden from statutory agencies. The criminal justice system can be used to prosecute offenders, however, the primary interest of the police is to ensure the safety of those oppressed by such violence and abuse. The police can provide a range of options to those suffering abuse.

Abuse and violence diminishes the life experiences of men, women, children and the broader community. It may involve overt physical violence but also less visible forms: psychological; the threat of physical violence; sexual; financial; and emotional. People suffer, often for long periods of time and feel that they are alone and somehow that the abuse is their fault. No one has the right to abuse and use violence against another. There is a broad range of support available.

Children often suffer directly and also through exposure to the abuse around them. Over 90% of children hear the abuse or violence and as a result, suffer depression, reduced success at school and misery. This is child abuse. The police will provide support for the mother and children and the offender will be dealt with.

Where the abuse relates to violence, which is the vast majority of cases, there can be community pressure not to expose families and communities to external criticism. This is wrong. If people do not challenge, then they are colluding with the abuse.

There is a domestic violence concession to immigration rules. Where domestic violence has caused the relationship to break down between husband and wife during the two year probationary period, the spouse or unmarried partner can apply for indefinite leave to remain. There are conditions applied and police can help provide the information to support applications.

The Metropolitan Police Service deal with 'honour' based abuse/violence, as forms of domestic violence. Specific types coming to notice in London include: Forced marriage; early marriage/child marriage; dowry issues; trafficking of women; and Female Genital Mutilation. Many of these practices are traditional practices often linked to culture and identity. All of these practices are criminal offences in the United Kingdom.

For more information about this conference contact, **Elaheh Rambarzini** on **020 7346 1160**, **elaheh.rambarzini@refugeecouncil.org.uk** or **Jim Blair** at Diversity & Citizen Focus Directorate – Gender Strand at, **jim.blair@met.police.uk** or on, **020 7161 2855**

New report

Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid have produced a new report about the individual complaints mechanism of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on violence against women. The report analyses the cases of eight women asylum seekers around the world who have used this mechanism to try to prevent themselves being deported. For the full report visit:

www.asylumaid.org.uk/New%20RWRP/RWRP_RRP_Publicationslist.htm

Funding

The Elizabeth Nuffield Educational Fund gives grants to women studying to improve their employment prospects. Grants are currently given to: women in higher education; women in further education; women refugee studying for professional requalification; and other projects of interest to the fund that address the financial needs of adult women learners.

For more information contact **Suzanne Berry** or **Bernadine Chelvanayagam** on **020 7631 0566** or email enef@nuffieldfoundation.org

Removal of the Gender Guidelines from Asylum Immigration Tribunal (AIT) website

In September 2006 the AIT announced that their Gender Guidelines for Immigration Judges had been removed from the AIT website stating, "The Gender Guidelines are not, and have never been, the policy of the AIT and they have no AIT approval." Their inclusion on the AIT website was an "error". Concerns have been raised about this by the Refugee Council and other NGOs at Stakeholder meetings. The AIT believe that the main problem is that the Guidelines contain statements on interpretations of the law which are for the Courts to deal with and not the AIT. Consequently, the Guidelines become out of date very quickly.

The need for Gender Guidelines was highlighted in the Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape publication 'Misjudging rape' in November 2006.* The report includes examples of cases where the AIT gender guidelines on issues such as credibility and internal relocation were not followed, with disastrous consequences for the women involved. The Refugee Council will continue to work with the AIT and will press for appropriate AIT guidance for Immigration Judges on gender-sensitive procedures and consideration of claims.

In April 2007, the Gender Equality Duty, brought in by the Equality Act 2006, will also come into force. This introduces a general duty to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for women and men. The Gender Equality Duty applies to all public authorities including private and voluntary sector bodies carrying out functions of a public nature, which could arguably include legal representatives. We believe that the gender guidelines would assist the AIT to meet this duty. We will keep you updated.

* **'Misjudging rape'** can be obtained from Crossroads Books, Crossroads Women's Centre, PO Box 287; London NW6 5QU. Tel **020 7482 2496**

Resources for women asylum seekers

The Refugee Women's Resource Project (RWRP) and Asylum Aid have produced a new set of resources for newly arrived women asylum seekers to ensure that they know their rights under the Home Office (HO) gender guidance (the Asylum Policy Instruction on gender issues in the asylum claim).

The resources consist of:

- A pack of leaflets directed at asylum seeking women, explaining the HO policy for deciding women's asylum claims in twelve different languages and
- An audio CD for training and awareness-raising purposes in English.

The leaflets are available to download free at www.asylumaid.org.uk or call **020 7377 5123**

To submit any articles about women's asylum issues, email penny.mclean@refugeecouncil.org.uk