

Asylum-Seeking Women, Violence and Health

Where to get Information, Advice and Help



November 2009

How you might be feeling...

As an asylum-seeking woman, you may feel that you are facing a confusing and unsympathetic asylum system. This is the way that many women feel when they are pursuing an asylum claim while also trying to carry on with their daily activities.

To help you and other women seeking asylum understand more about the experiences, feelings, stresses and health concerns of women in these circumstances, we conducted research called: *Asylum-Seeking Women, Violence and Health*.

This leaflet provides a summary of main findings and identifies where to get further advice, support or help if you, or a woman you know, are currently experiencing any form of abuse or a mental health problem.

The study found that it is very common for women who are seeking asylum to have experienced violence at some point in their past. The research also showed that many women in your situation feel depressed, nervous and suffer various types of pain, including headaches, backaches and other difficult symptoms.

Information from this study has been provided to you because we think it will help you understand that some of the things that you are feeling are not unusual. We hope these study findings will help you recognise difficult pain or emotions and seek help when you need it.

Released in October 2009, the research was carried out by the Gender Violence Unit of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Scottish Refugee Council. Between February 2007 and July 2008, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 46 women who had accessed Scottish Refugee Council's Scottish Induction Service.

The full report, including recommendations, can be downloaded from Scottish Refugee Council's website:

www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/pub/Women_health

Summary of research findings

The following sections highlight the main experiences that were identified by the 46 asylum-seeking women interviewed in Scotland as part of the study.

Asylum process

"I am immensely stressed (with) anticipation of (the) Home Office correspondence. What if it is sad news? The uncertainty leaves me feeling anxious, worried and depressed."

- 56% of women with a dependent asylum claim were not told about the option to make an independent claim separate from their partner.
- 54% of the women said that the asylum process had made their health worse.
- 36% of women indicated their children were present during their asylum interview.

Violence

"I complained to the detention centre staff about the abuse, rapes and mistreatment [by many perpetrators, multiple times in detention / refugee centre in home country], but they did not pursue it further and nothing was done."

- 70% of women reported having experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.
- 65% of women said that their children had witnessed some form of violence.

Physical and mental health status

"I have thoughts such as 'things would be better if I was dead.' You feel there is no hope, future. Sometimes you feel ashamed for being you, when you tell people why you came here and that you are an asylum-seeker."

- Just over half of women reported that their health was worse in Scotland than it was in their home country, and they showed symptoms associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).
- 50% of women said they had 'difficulty remembering' things.
- 20% of women indicated they had suicidal thoughts in the past seven days before the interview for this study.

Health care use

“Due to my personal condition in [country X], I arrived here in pain [physically/mentally]. This still affects me from time to time but I am receiving medical treatments and counselling, which is helping very much... also interacting with others (and) having contact with people (helps).”

- 93% of women in Scotland said they had received adequate health care.
- 37% of women reported having at least one visit to Accident and Emergency (A&E) within the past 12 months of the study.
- 33% of women said they received Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) testing, and 54% had been tested for HIV.

What next?

Although most women interviewed said they received adequate health care, overall we feel the findings, especially the high level of violence experienced, show that support for women seeking asylum in Scotland needs to be improved.

These findings will contribute to the work Scottish Refugee Council does. We also hope the findings and resulting recommendations will assist the work of other organisations, and influence policy and decision makers in these areas.

Our key recommendations call for:

- The Home Office’s UK Border Agency (UKBA) to quickly identify vulnerable women who have experienced violence - as well as those suffering from stress or depression - and treat them appropriately in the asylum process.
 - This includes such things as promptly telling women about their right to make an independent claim separate from their partner and providing continued access to childcare during interviews.
- The Scottish Government to review all current health and domestic abuse services to ensure they meet the particular needs of asylum-seeking women as highlighted in the report.
- The Home Office and Scottish Government to provide better support for asylum seeking women that meets their particular health and protection needs.
- Training in women’s issues for both UKBA staff and immigration judges.

Where can I get help?

If you have been affected by any of the experiences described in this booklet, or if you or a woman you know is currently suffering abuse or health issues, there are numerous sources of help and advice available.

Below are contact details for some of the main organisations in Scotland who can help. Information you provide will be kept confidential and no action will be taken without your agreement.

Scottish Refugee Council

Scottish Refugee Council is charity that provides free advice and information to women and any accompanying children. We are not part of the UK Government or Home Office and provide a confidential and independent service. Our caseworkers offer support, advice and practical help in a safe environment. A female caseworker or interpreter can be arranged upon request.

Scottish Refugee Council can help you to contact any of the other organisations listed in this leaflet if you would find this helpful.

Contact us:

5 Cadogan Square
(170 Blythswood Court)
Glasgow, G2 7PH.

Freephone: **0800 085 6087** to make an appointment or get advice.

Health

If you have concerns about your or your family's physical or mental health, you should speak to your GP(doctor) in the first instance.

Amina – the Muslim Women's Resource Centre

Helpline: 0808 801 0301

Network House, 311 Calder Street, Glasgow G42 7NQ

Amina offers drop-in advice, information sessions in addition to counselling services that offer support for depression, bereavement and loss. Where possible services are offered in numerous languages including: Arabic, English, Farsi, Punjabi and Urdu.

Sandyford Counselling Services 0141 211 8130

2/6 Sandyford Place (off Sauchiehall Street), Glasgow G3 7NB

www.sandyford.org/

Sandyford provides information and support on various aspects of women's health. If your local hospital does not have department that deals with sexually transmitted infections, Sandyford can identify where the nearest one is located.

Breakthrough for Women 0141 276 3981

4th Floor, 30 Bell Street, Glasgow G1 1LG

Breakthrough provides one-to-one counselling and support for women over 16 years of age who have been affected by child sexual abuse, rape or sexual assault, and who live in Glasgow. Services are offered in: English, Urdu, Punjabi, Cantonese and Mandarin.

Lifelink crisis line 0141 548 1515

www.lifelink.org.uk

Lifelink offer a range of services and treatments to help you cope better with life's challenges and improve your mental and physical wellbeing. They offer counselling and support to deal with stress, including suicidal thoughts or self-harming.

National AIDs Helpline: 0800 567 123 (24 hours)

COMPASS Asylum Seekers and Mental Health Liaison

http://www.nhsggc.org.uk/content/default.asp?page=home_compass

The COMPASS team is based in Springburn and provides culturally sensitive mental health care to children/adolescents and adults across Glasgow with a history of trauma. **Please talk to your GP before contacting COMPASS because your doctor must refer you to this service.**

Violence

Police/emergency (999)

If you or your child are in urgent need of assistance or are in danger, you can ask for assistance from the police. Reports of abuse are taken seriously and they will do their best to make sure that you are safe.

Scottish Women's Aid - Domestic Abuse Helpline 0800 027 1234 (24 hours)

Scottish Women's Aid provides information, support and safe place to stay for women, children and young people who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.

If you are experiencing abuse from someone you live with, you can report this to the Police, or speak to a specialist adviser on this helpline.

Rape Crisis Centre Glasgow 0141 552 3200

Female workers on this helpline offer confidential advice, information and support to women who have experienced rape and/or sexual assault. Services are offered in English but they may be able to offer a face-to-face appointment with an interpreter upon request.

National Rape and Sexual Assault Helpline 08088 01 03 02

www.rapecrisisscotland.org.uk/

Archway Glasgow 0141 211 8175

www.glasgowarchway.com/

If you have been assaulted within the past seven days, you can contact Archway Glasgow. They provide forensic services and support to those who have experienced rape or sexual assault. They are open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and you can either call them directly or any police office in Glasgow city can help you access the Archway.

Glasgow Violence Against Women Partnership (GVAWP)

The Partnership's website provides useful telephone numbers for services in Glasgow and across Scotland. All of this information can be found on their website: www.gvawp.org.uk

Women's Support Project 0141 552 2221

www.womenssupportproject.co.uk

The Women's Support Project offers telephone support for women whose children have been sexually abused. They also offer short-term support for adult survivors of child sexual abuse, incest, prostitution and other forms of commercial sexual exploitation.

Asylum

At your initial screening interview with the Home Office and at your following asylum interview, if you find it easier to tell your experiences to another woman you can ask:

- for a female interviewer, if you want one.
- for a female interpreter, if you want one.
- for childcare, if you require it. You should be interviewed alone, not with any relatives or children.
- to make an independent claim separate from your partner, if you want to.

Asylum Aid Advice Line 0207 354 9264

Asylum Aid's advice line offers free one-off advice on Mondays 2.00 pm – 4:30pm and Thursdays 10.00 am –12:30pm.

The Refugee Women's Resource Project

The Refugee Women's Resource Project at Asylum Aid has produced a leaflet for newly arrived asylum seeking women. It explains the Home Office policy for deciding women's asylum claims (Gender Guidance). It is available for download in multiple languages from their website:

www.asylumaid.org.uk/pages/leaflet_for_women_asylum_seekers.html

Multilingual information

In partnership with other UK agencies, Scottish Refugee Council produces useful multilingual information for asylum seekers and refugees. Leaflets include information on such areas as applying for asylum and support, and a sexual health. Please note: only leaflets bearing Scottish Refugee Council's logo apply to those living in Scotland. Leaflets are available for download in multiple languages from their website:

<http://languages.refugeecouncil.org.uk/english/summary.htm#16>

Women's groups

There are numerous women's groups in Glasgow that provide an opportunity to meet other women living in the area, share experiences and make new friends in a welcoming environment.

Mother Theresa Albanian and Women across the World Group

This group is open to all women and children are also welcome; a crèche is provided. Lunch is provided and a contribution towards travel expenses is offered. The group meets every Thursday at Garnethill Multicultural Centre 21 Rose Street, Glasgow G3 6RE, between 12.30 - 2.30 pm.

For more information contact the Maryhill Integration Network (including Central & West) on 0141 946 9106