

Refugee Women at Risk

A failure of protection – a case for action

If you can find a woman in this camp who has not been raped I will give you a prize!!”

*“But they are all at risk – do you want to resettle every woman in this camp?”
Quote from a Senior Refugee Camp Manager*

INTRODUCTION

In most refugee situations **all** women and girls are at risk of rape and other forms of sexual and gender based violence. Many refugee women and

incidents and compounded by lack of adequate protection. This creates extreme levels of risk and vulnerability to further abuse and trauma. Because of resource shortages and lack of effective systems, the international protection system often fails to respond to the needs of these women. This failure has been documented in refugee situations around the world. Most recently it is evident in the protracted refugee situations in Darfur and Chad. This systems failure can lead to further incidences of violence, exploitation, sexual abuse and even death. The UNHCR “Women at Risk” resettlement criteria (UNHCR 2000) was designed to provide a rapid and effective response to these women. Recent research indicates that this program continues to fail.

me for other basic necessities such as soap and sanitary towels. She has been ostracised by the community because she is a single mother without family support and because she has run away from a forced marriage. Her options for food are either selling sex in a dangerous and violent environment, where often the men who use the desperate women, (incorrectly called “prostitutes”), will beat them and not pay any money. “Sometimes the kinder men give us a few shillings”.

Another option is a so called “marriage” or “protection” by an older man who is likely to be violent, and abandon her whenever she becomes pregnant again. The young woman in question does not want either option and has sought protection from an aid agency in the camp. She has been in “protective custody” for 15 months in a

Detailing the compounding risk factors

In documenting her story, it was identified that the risk she faces is comprised of a series of incidents over time which have made her increasingly more vulnerable to violence and human rights abuses. Lack of protection at the time of these incidences has compounded her risk factors. At the present time, lack of adequate protection is the biggest risk factor she faces.

INCIDENT 1: IN HER HOME COUNTRY

When she was 12, her village in Southern Sudan was bombed and her parents were killed. She saw them die. She then ran with her elder brother and neighbours over the mountains into Kenya. On the way, the group was attacked by rebels. Her brother was shot and she thought he was dead, some of the rebels stole his clothes and his shoes. She stayed with the body all night in fear, and in the morning she noticed signs of life. An unknown woman helped them and the brother recovered. They then resumed the journey and reached Kenya.

Risk factors

This first incident left her vulnerable on several counts:

- Ø she saw her parents and siblings killed in a violent manner,
- Ø she was an orphaned single girl,
- Ø she lost her home and everything familiar,
- Ø she endured an horrendous journey to Kenya.

Post traumatic stress disorder is still evident 5 years later. She has never recovered. An unknown woman helped her.

again came to the attention of UNHCR who arranged for her to go to Kakuma and be fostered by a new family.

Risk Factors

A child alone the Nairobi slums.

Severe case of multiple rapes with its attendant consequences.

INCIDENT 4

At first the ne

She is now in a situation where resettlement is probably the only durable solution. Resettlement will be extremely difficult for this young woman. She does not speak English. She has not attended school since she was 12. She is carrying unresolved issues from a number of serious traumas.