

Reading Stories of Abused Women

Nowhere to Turn – “Justification” of Violence Against Women in the Family

Case Studies - Gender Stereotypes

Oksana, aged 54, has two children from a previous marriage. Elegant and educated, Oksana had a well-paid job and was able to support herself until she married her current husband 15 years ago. She admits knowing he was violent before she married him. In fact, twice she failed to turn up for her wedding ceremony and had to be taken by force to the registrar’s office by her husband. She told Amnesty International that despite having been able to look after her two children on her own after her divorce, she felt pressurized into getting married again. According to her, she felt less respected as a single mother and believed that for her life to be fulfilled she needed to get married. After her marriage, Oksana’s husband slowly destroyed her independence. He made her give up her job and forced her to work in his company. He paid her only enough money to buy food. He created an atmosphere at home which put her relatives and friends off from visiting her. When she failed to fulfill his demands, he beat her. Yet she never turned to the police. Twelve years ago, he pushed her against some furniture and continued kicking her while she was lying on the ground. Her back was so badly injured that she had to stay in bed for two weeks and could not walk. Her husband called a doctor he knew to look after her so that she did not have to go to a hospital where the doctors might ask her how she had sustained the injuries. Oksana believes that there are too many obstacles for her to seek a divorce. Instead, she tries to avoid confrontation. Her husband only needs to raise his hand to remind her of times when he nearly killed her. “Whatever he wants he gets, there is no point in arguing with him,” she says. “He is not interested in other people’s opinion. They do not exist for him. I do not understand how I got into this. Did I really believe him? How did I end up in this cage, chained?”

Marina, aged 36, was thrown by her partner from the window of their third floor flat. Her neighbor called the police and instigated a criminal case against Marina’s partner. Marina had been to the hospital previously after being injured by her partner and the hospital sent her to the police. But once there she always told the police that she had been attacked by a stranger on the street. She says she felt sorry for him.

Anastasia is a lawyer who has represented survivors of domestic or sexual violence. She told Amnesty International that she had been living in a violent relationship for nearly 15 years but never filed a complaint against her husband, a well respected professor and head of a faculty. The first seven years of her marriage were without violence. When Anastasia earned

more money than her husband, he began to extort money from her and tried to humiliate her by beating her. Anastasia found that the higher he rose in his position, the more obedience and servility he expected from her and the more money he demanded. Anastasia's husband was never drunk when he was violent. Until recently he beat her only on those parts of the body where marks would be less visible or could be covered up. He pulled her hair, and kicked her in the stomach and on her arms and legs. A black eye would prevent her from going to work, which would lead to her earning less money. Anastasia told AI: "Sometimes I think my husband is using me for some kind of psychological experiment... He tells me that there is nothing I can do against him; no one will believe me, because he is a respected professor and has a good reputation."

Only once did **Nina P.** bother to get a forensic certificate recording the injuries she had sustained when being beaten by her partner. She needed to take sick leave as her face was covered in bruises and she felt uncomfortable about going to work and being seen in such a condition. "People think it is your fault, once you live with him, that you like it that way," she says. Nina P. divorced her husband of two decades seven years ago, but continued to live with him. Despite the violence, Nina P. rarely called the police. Neighbors allegedly called once, but the police did not arrive. On one occasion her ex-husband was taken away for the night, but Nina P. had to pay his fine. Now she says she does not want to spend her money on her ex-husband. Nina P. went to the police to find out how to file a complaint against her husband, but later decided not to take legal action. "You better don't call the police, things only get worse," she says. "They take him away for the night maybe and then he comes back the next morning at six and is angry that you gave him to the police. Whoever you talk to – and many people have such experiences – people recommend not going to the police. My son has this friend who works for the police and he even told us 'it's better if you don't call us, things only get worse'. My husband knows there is nothing I can do against him. He thinks he has complete impunity for his actions."

Case Studies - Obstacles to Justice – Police Inaction

Liliana, an art teacher, lives with her young daughter in a hostel for workers, where she shares a bathroom and a kitchen with 30 other parties. The nearest police station is about 200 meters away from the hostel. When her former partner came to celebrate his child's birthday, he stole the key to Liliana's room and came back in the night, drunken and tried to rape Liliana. Her neighbors and Liliana called the police 16 times that night, but no one came.

Maria lives with her husband in an apartment block in the northern outskirts of a capital city. Her neighbors claim her husband beats her up about once a month, which reportedly can be overheard in the floors above and below Maria's flat. The neighbors have repeatedly called and have waited in front of Maria's door for the police to arrive. On one occasion while the neighbors told police they had heard furniture break, the husband opened the door and told the police that everything was alright and they were just moving some furniture. The police told the neighbors they could not do anything because they could not enter the flat by force.

Case Studies - Obstacles to Justice – Refusal to Take Up a Complaint

A young woman, who was not registered in the city she lived in, told Amnesty International that when she went to the police station to file a complaint against the father of her partner, she was told that she would only attract attention to the fact that she had no national passport and no registration for this city. The police officer she spoke to said: "My dear girl, you do not want to create more problems for yourself then you already have, do you?"

Tamara (28) got married when she was only 18. Her husband soon started beating her but she did not tell anybody about it because she was too ashamed. After one especially violent attack, she left the flat and lived for some time on her own. His relatives found her and convinced her to return. Soon the violence resumed. She did not call the police once. One day in winter he made her undress, put on a swimsuit and pushed her out of the flat. She went to the neighbors, who let her in and rang the police. Her husband followed her and apologized for the "mad" behavior of his wife. After that Tamara left for good. In another case, Tamara was harassed by her ex- husband's family, after she had left him. She was stalked and insulted publicly by her ex-husband's father, who also called the workplace to abuse her verbally and blame her for ending her marriage. Her complaint against the father of her ex-husband was rejected by a court, as she had not been physically attacked.

Case Studies - Obstacles to Justice – Lack of Restraining Orders and other Measures of Immediate Protection

Daria, aged 30, had been living for more than two months with her daughter and her mother in a small room in a shelter of a city. She told Amnesty International that only the day before, her former partner accosted and verbally abused her in the street as she returned from work. She said that though she tried to leave work at different times and take different routes, there

were only a limited number of options. Daria lived with her partner, almost 20 years her senior. They had a nine-year-old daughter. Daria said that when they were together, she took three different jobs to make ends meet while he worked irregularly. Daria told Amnesty International that he tried to humiliate her for working for the little money she earned. He was also very jealous and accused her of meeting other men instead of going to work. Daria said that sometimes he beat and raped her to punish her for her “infidelity”. When Daria finally left him and moved into a small one-room flat on the ground floor of a multi-apartment house, he started stalking her. He threatened to kill her by cutting her up. Once, he attacked her on the street leaving her with a concussion. A female passer-by tried to help her but was not willing to act as a witness in a trial. On one occasion, her ex-partner threw a glass bottle at Daria and her mother, Svetlana. He then tried to injure Svetlana with a knife and wounded Daria’s hand. When she went to the police she was told that there was no evidence that she had not attacked her partner with the knife and hurt herself while trying to injure him. As far as the police were concerned, no crime had been committed. In autumn 2004, Daria’s partner entered her new flat, burnt most of her clothes and destroyed other possessions. This happened shortly after he had received a one year conditional sentence for having committed acts of hooliganism at his public housing. He has never been charged for attacking or threatening Daria. Shortly after Daria and her daughter had moved to the shelter, her ex-partner waited outside his daughter’s school and told her that she would soon move in with him, as “your mother will not be there anymore to take care of you”. After that, Daria’s mother left her job and moved into the shelter to teach her grandchild.

Case Studies - Obstacles to Justice – A Botched Trial

Galina, aged 32, turned to the crisis centre for legal support after her husband attacked her in October 2002. She told how her husband had returned home late at night with his friend – a police officer – Andrei (pseudonym) while she was in bed. “Sergei entered my room, pulled me out of bed and dragged me into the kitchen. There he twisted my arms, pushed me... and started beating my head against the floor. He said that he is the ‘czar and ruler’ and that I must do whatever he tells me to do. He forced me to repeat his words, and continued to bend my arms. I asked him: ‘Do you want to kill me?’ He answered: ‘I will bring you to such a state that you will kill yourself. You need to be beaten and beaten. You are just a piece of meat. If I kill you I won’t get punished.’” Sergei then picked up a wooden hammer and Andrei commented, “This is a kitchen utensil and only women fight with it, men use their fists.” Andrei did nothing to help Galina. “He was there until the end,” she said, “and I would never have thought that someone working as a police officer could act in such a mean way in such a situation.” Galina reported the incident to the police who, in turn, sent her for a forensic

examination. When she went to the hospital, she was told that they did not have room for her. She was advised to stay in bed at home and visit a specialist, which she did the following day. Her medical condition worsened and she was taken to hospital about a week later. The police officer who sent Galina for a forensic examination did not wait for the results and filed the evidence in court without it, claiming that she did not want a forensic examination. The judge therefore did not know that Galina had been hospitalized. When she returned from hospital, she found written notification that the trial had started without her. However, by law, all parties to a trial are supposed to be notified in person. In court the judge rejected Galina's complaint because the form had been filled incorrectly. Reportedly, the judge then decided to close the case because the deadline for producing an amended complaint had expired. With the help of Women's Alliance, Galina managed to reopen the case. But her husband had, in the meantime, left the city. The proceedings against him were subsequently dropped as he could not be found. Galina has since divorced and has moved to another flat with her daughter.

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