



# FOCUS ON PROTECTION

A publication of UNHCR Sri Lanka

## UNHCR helps Sri Lanka deal with Sexual & Gender-Based Violence

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*UNHCR, the United Nations refugee organisation, is mandated by the United Nations to lead and coordinate international action for worldwide protection and assistance to refugees and displaced persons.*



### Dear Reader,

Sexual and gender-based violence is not an easy topic to discuss, but we must. It is difficult to discuss SGBV because it can make us uncomfortable and because the topic is so broad. Sexual and gender-based violence can occur anywhere and to anyone. It is not limited to women. It is not limited to physical abuse. It includes any action taken against someone on the basis of their sex or gender. Everything from workplace harassment and denying education to rape and forced prostitution can be included, to name just a few forms of SGBV.

In this expanded edition of *Focus on Protection*, we hope to lay out not just the problems but also the solutions. SGBV is not an issue where anyone wins, but we can prevent further violence and aid those who have suffered past abuse. I hope that you will join us in our campaign against sexual and gender-based violence and help us raise awareness about this dangerous epidemic.

Wallaya Pura  
Representative a.i, UNHCR Sri Lanka





# Sex and Gender

## What is Sexual and Gender Based Violence?

“Sexual violence”, “gender-based violence” and “violence against women” are terms that are commonly used interchangeably. All these phrases refer to violations of fundamental human rights that perpetuate stereotypical sex roles that deny human dignity and the self-determination of the individual.

The United Nations General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) defines Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) as ....violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty....While women, men, boys and girls can be victims of gender based violence, women and girls are the main victims.

SGBV includes a broad range of possible acts which could take a variety of forms. In the table on the right, there is a brief list of a few examples of SGBV.



SGBV can effect all ages and both sexes

### Examples of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence:

#### Sexual Violence

- Rape and marital rape
- Child sexual abuse, defilement and incest
- Sexual abuse
- Sexual exploitation
- Sexual harassment
- Sexual violence as a weapon of war and torture

#### Physical Violence

- Physical assault including domestic violence
- Trafficking, slavery

#### Emotional and Psychological Violence

- Verbal abuse, humiliation
- Confinement

#### Harmful Traditional Practises

- Female Genital Mutilation
- Early Marriage
- Forced Marriage
- Honour killing and maiming
- Infanticide and/or neglect
- Denial of education for girls or women

#### Socio-economic Violence

- Discrimination and/or denial of opportunities, services
- Social exclusion/ostracism based on sexual orientation
- Obstructive legislative practise





# Consequences of SGBV

## Emotional consequences

SGBV often causes great stress to victims, leading to feelings of depression, anger, anxiety or fear. Victims may blame themselves, generating a sense of shame and self-hate. SGBV can even lead to mental illness or suicidal thoughts and behaviour.

## Social consequences

Victims of SGBV often experience difficulties in their relationships with family and other members of the community. They may be blamed for the incident. The stigma of being a victim can lead to social rejection and isolation, and victims may be prevented from doing things like earning money or caring for children. In this way, SGBV can push women victims into poverty, increasing the inequality between men and women.

## Physical effects

Victims of SGBV may suffer from not only physical injuries and shock, but also the threat of infection and disease. Such injuries can also have long term effects: disability, infection, chronic pain, eating or sleeping disorders, and alcohol and drug abuse.

## Effects on reproductive health

Sexual violence can cause damage to a victim's reproductive health. For instance, it can lead to miscarriages, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortions, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and gynaecological disorders.

## Fatal outcomes

SGBV can even kill: extreme violence can lead to death; victims experiencing great emotional distress may resort to suicide; sexual violence can cause the infection of HIV/AIDS; complications from physical injuries can cause infant or maternal mortality.

### Protecting Victims and Survivors

The term **victim(s)/survivor(s)** refer to groups who have experienced SGBV. While victims should be treated with compassion and sensitivity, referring to them as survivors recognises their strength and resilience. In certain legal contexts, the term victim may be more appropriate and/or required, but in non-legal settings however, the word victim may imply powerlessness and stigmatisation. To recognise all these contingencies both terms are used.

Victims/survivors of SGBV are at a high risk of severe health and psycho-social problems, sometimes death, even in the absence of physical assault. The potential for the debilitating long-term effects of emotional and physical trauma should never be underestimated.

PSYCHO-SOCIAL OUTCOMES		NON-FATAL OUTCOMES			FATAL OUTCOMES
Emotional & Psychological Consequences	Social Consequences	Acute Physical	Chronic Physical	Reproductive	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Post traumatic stress</li> <li>• Depression</li> <li>• Anxiety, fear</li> <li>• Anger</li> <li>• Shame, insecurity, self-hate, self-blame</li> <li>• Mental illness</li> <li>• Suicidal thoughts or behaviour</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blaming the victim or survivor</li> <li>• Loss of role/function in society (e.g. earn income, child care)</li> <li>• Social stigma</li> <li>• Social rejection &amp; isolation</li> <li>• Feminisation of poverty</li> <li>• Increased gender inequalities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Injury</li> <li>• Shock</li> <li>• Disease</li> <li>• Infection</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• Somatic complaints</li> <li>• Chronic infections</li> <li>• Chronic pain</li> <li>• Digestive problems</li> <li>• Eating disorders</li> <li>• Sleep disorders</li> <li>• Alcohol/drug abuse</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Miscarriage</li> <li>• Unwanted pregnancy</li> <li>• Unsafe abortions</li> <li>• STIs including HIV/AIDS</li> <li>• Menstrual disorders</li> <li>• Pregnancy complications</li> <li>• Gynaecological disorders</li> <li>• Sexual disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homicide</li> <li>• Suicide</li> <li>• Maternal mortality</li> <li>• Infant mortality</li> <li>• AIDS-related deaths</li> </ul>



# *SGBV in Sri Lanka*

## *SGBV during conflict.....*

The people of Sri Lanka have endured almost two decades of war. The trauma of conflict has affected the entire country, but has especially ravaged the north and east of the island. For these communities the war not only signified violence, destruction and loss of life, it resulted (among other things) in repeated displacement and loss of livelihood, high levels of poverty, lack of basic necessities like food and water, lack of access to education and disruption of social and familial structures. In situations of armed conflict, women and children can become the most vulnerable and be subject to all forms of SGBV. Rape, sexual harassment, torture, assault, forced prostitution and trafficking are some of the examples of SGBV experienced by these vulnerable groups.



## *...while displaced...*

Sri Lanka has one of the largest populations of internally displaced people in the world, where an estimated 800,000 people were forced to leave their homes due to conflict. The majority of these IDPs are women and children. A significant number of the displaced communities sought refuge at welfare centres and some were offered shelter by host communities in the North Western and North Central provinces of the island.

When populations flee conflict, their family and community support systems frequently break down. Families are often separated during conflict and while fleeing, with many women and children living without husbands and extended families.

There are many contributing factors to the high levels of SGBV within welfare centres. Conditions in welfare centres are poor, and the desolate living conditions, and the general level of trauma within the population, is reflected by the disturbing rate of suicide, high levels of alcohol dependency, and frequent incidence of domestic violence, child abuse, and violence in the centres. The threat of sexual violence is always present in such climates, where social and family structures have collapsed, and social boundaries have become blurred. Girls can be seen as 'easy targets' in welfare centres, thereby becoming victims of outright rape or coercion. Some of them are forced into prostitution or to bestow 'favours' on powerful men in order to survive. The perpetrators of SGBV are sometimes the very people upon whom survivors depend to assist and protect them. Girls and women are coerced and sexually used because they do not know their rights and because they cannot sustain themselves financially.

Out of necessity, many internally displaced women have assumed some traditional "male" roles in order to provide for themselves and their families. Husbands and fathers may feel powerless, confused and resentful: their traditional role as provider and protector of the family has been temporarily usurped by the humanitarian organisations that provide food and shelter.

Women have also been targets of custodial violence during search operations, where they are sometimes harassed at checkpoints or at night during security checks of their homes. Although a state of cease-fire has been declared between the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), media reports claim that violations continue, though not to the extent that existed prior to the cease fire. SGBV is also perpetrated by non-state actors where Sinhala women have been direct victims of such attacks.





Now, following the cease-fire, and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the GoSL and the LTTE, thousands of women and children are leaving the camps and villages where they lived through the conflict and are returning to the war-torn regions that were their homes.

Here they will meet an uncertain future and will have to face and overcome further obstacles to reconstructing their lives which had so far been shaped by displacement.



### *...and also outside of war...*

In addition to SGBV associated with the situation of armed conflict, there are also incidents of SGBV that occur within the family, workplace and community. The root causes of SGBV lie in society's attitudes towards and practises of gender discrimination, which place women in a subordinate position in relation to men. Rape, incest, sexual harassment, grave sexual abuse, trafficking, forced prostitution are some examples of SGBV as acknowledged by the penal code of Sri Lanka. However there are other forms of SGBV, common in Sri Lanka, such as marital rape and domestic violence, which are not recognised under Sri Lankan law.

Besides the lack of legal recognition of domestic violence as an offence punishable by law, wife beating and sexual violence within families are often not seen as violations of human rights, but rather as "family issues" which can and should be resolved within the family. There is a tendency to give family unity preference over a woman's physical security and so acts of violence, which would not be tolerated in a public arena, are thus condoned within the home.

Often societal attitudes in Sri Lanka are such that the victim/survivor tends to be blamed for the occurrence of SGBV. The emotional damage to victims/survivors is compounded by the implication that the perpetrator is not at fault. Because of the fear of social stigma, most of them never report the incident and the majority of incidents of SGBV go unreported.



# Addressing SGBV

## PREVENTING SGBV

### Transforming attitudes

SGBV is a product of people's attitudes. It is more likely to occur in communities which value men more than women, which prevent women from taking part in decision making, and which afford women fewer rights than men. In such communities, SGBV may be quietly accepted, tolerated or even condoned.

But if these attitudes can be turned around – so that women are afforded the same rights, respect and status as men – then there should develop in the community a widely-held belief that violence against women is simply not acceptable. Such a belief is the best defence against SGBV. It can be promoted through a variety of strategies, such as public awareness campaigns, training workshops and radio discussions.



### Collecting accurate information

To understand how widespread SGBV is in the community, it is critical to record incidents and to monitor how effective SGBV prevention strategies have been.

### Addressing the special needs of displaced communities

In displaced communities, programmes to reduce SGBV should also focus on the various factors that can make SGBV a greater problem in those communities. Examples of such programmes include initiatives to re-establish family and community support structures, to improve privacy in welfare after their families on the own.

## SEX AND GENDER: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

To understand the wide range of acts that constitute sexual and gender-based violence, it is useful to distinguish between the terms **gender** and **sex**.

The term **sex** refers to the *biological* characteristics of males and females. We are all born as either a man or woman.

**Gender** refers the *social* characteristics assigned to men and women. Society expects us to behave in certain ways because we are either men or women. These expectations are influenced by our culture, religion and where we are from. Gender is linked to who we are and what we do in the community, and the power relations between men and women.

Sexual and gender-based violence refers to violence directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. SGBV encompasses a wide range of acts, including:

- ❖ Rape, whether it happens inside or outside the home
- ❖ Sexual abuse of children, including incest
- ❖ Sexual harassment, including both physical harassment (such as offensively touching someone in a crowded bus) and mental harassment (such as rude or demeaning comments or threats)
- ❖ Trafficking and forced prostitution
- ❖ Denying education to girls
- ❖ Denying women job opportunities that are available to men
- ❖ Preventing women from taking part in decision-making, whether in the family or in the community.



## RESPONDING TO SGBV

SGBV can have many adverse consequences, from the physical and emotional harm done to victims, to the increased feelings of fear and insecurity in the community, to the greater strains placed on the legal system. Responses to SGBV should therefore address all levels: the victim, the perpetrator, and the broader community and legal system.

The basis of an effective response to SGBV is a referral system. This means having clear processes in place such that whenever an incident of SGBV occurs, the case is recorded, the victim is provided with appropriate assistance and the legal system deals with the perpetrator – all in a timely manner.

Victims of SGBV may require not just health care, but also psychosocial care - such as counselling or support groups - and security, if there is a threat of further violence. Legal support should also be provided to those who wish to seek legal redress for the crimes committed. All health, legal and social workers providing such assistance should be trained to support victims in a caring and professional manner.

An effective legal response to incidents of SGBV requires a strong working relationship between the police, the judiciary and public prosecutors, as well as the health and social workers providing support to the victim. It is also critical that perpetrators are dealt with in a manner that is both timely and respectful of their rights.





# *SGBV and UNHCR*

Acts of sexual and gender-based violence violate a number of Human Rights principles enshrined in international Human Rights laws. These include the right to security of the person; the right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right to freedom from torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment and the right to life. As the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR is mandated to provide international protection to refugees. In Sri Lanka, UNHCR is also charged with the protecting of IDPs as agreed with the Government. UNHCR together with States shares the responsibility for ensuring that refugees are protected against SGBV. While most victims are women and most perpetrators are men, infringements take a variety of forms and can be perpetrated by and against both men and women.

UNHCR has issued many directives specifically addressing the issues of sexual and gender-based violence and general protection of refugees and IDPs, especially women and children including: Sexual Violence Against Refugees: Guidelines on Prevention and Response; UNHCR Executive Committee Conclusions; the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.



## *UNHCR's Five Commitments to Refugees and Internally Displaced Women*

UNHCR has dedicated itself to implementing five key commitments that will advance the rights of refugee and internally displaced women, mainstream gender equality, and help prevent and ensure compassionate responses to sexual and gender-based violence. Whilst these five commitments do not constitute an exhaustive list of priorities for refugee and internally displaced women, they nevertheless form critical building blocks for eliminating the vulnerability of refugees and IDPs to SGBV. The commitments are:

1. Develop integrated country-level strategies to address sexual violence, including domestic violence, against refugee/internally displaced women.
2. Register refugee/internally displaced women individually and provide them with relevant documentation to ensure their individual security, freedom of movement and access to essential services. All IDPs/refugees—both men and women are to participate equally in the registration process.
3. Ensure that 50 per cent of representatives in all management committees and other bodies representing refugees/IDPs to UNHCR in urban, rural and camp settings are women.
4. Ensure refugee/internally displaced women's direct and indirect participation in the management of food and non-food item distribution so that these goods are directly controlled by adult female household members.
5. The provision of sanitary materials to all women and girls of concern to UNHCR should become a standard practice in UNHCR's assistance programmes.





# Campaign Against SGBV

In Sri Lanka, UNHCR has identified sexual and gender-based violence as a major protection concern among the country's displaced communities. SGBV is a very broad concept. It includes everything from rape, to incest, to domestic violence, to alcohol-related violence, to trafficking, to discrimination in the workplace, to the subjugation of women in the home, to physical harassment on buses or at work, to demeaning comments and gestures.

One of the reasons that SGBV is prevalent in Sri Lanka is the lack of information and awareness about this issue within Sri Lankan society. Understanding the consequences of this paucity of information to groups who are most vulnerable to SGBV, UNHCR has many projects that focus extensively on raising awareness. Together with its implementing partners in and around the country, UNHCR has worked with the IDP community, the host population, the legal fraternity, the police and NGO's extensively since 2003 to train them and encourage them to be aware of SGBV in the country and as such to strengthen their institutional and personal capacity.

Following on from this, UNHCR will launch a media campaign on SGBV in English, Sinhala and Tamil at the end of 2004, focusing on creating awareness and stressing the need for preventative measures. Acknowledging that SGBV is a nationwide concern, UNHCR intends to target the entire population through its media campaign in print and electronic media.

Another reason that SGBV is prevalent in Sri Lanka is women's economical dependence on men; therefore many of UNHCR's SGBV programs involve facilitating the provision of vocational training for women so that they are capable of becoming self-sufficient. Addressing specific protection issues such as SGBV can also act as a catalyst for discussing other issues such as health, alcohol awareness, education and employment.

UNHCR works alongside a number of local and international NGOs in addressing issues of SGBV. Examples of these implementing partners include District Child Protection Committee, Family Rehabilitation Centre, FORUT, Holistic Centre, Sri Lanka Human Rights Commission, HUDEC, JSAC, Legal Aid Foundation (LAF), Probation Services Jaffna, Save the Children, Sewa Lanka, Shatium, Women's Development Centre (WDC), Rural Development Foundation (RDF), Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) and UNICEF.

## Projects in Progress

UNHCR is most active in its field locations in the north and the east of Sri Lanka. One of its first initiatives on gender issues was in Vavuniya in 1999/2000 when UNHCR sought to work with Suriya, a well-recognised women's NGO in Batticaloa, to provide training and expertise to another NGO based in Vavuniya. Thereafter, UNHCR has engaged in many ad hoc projects on SGBV as and when the need arose.

With the sudden increase in the number of reported incidents of SGBV especially in the Puttalam area, UNHCR made an effort to streamline its activities to systematically address the increasing number of sexual and gender-based violence incidents. Although, the focus was on both men and women as stated above, the women proved to be the most vulnerable. As such many of UNHCR's programmes on SGBV focused on the plight of women.

In Jaffna, UNHCR focused on strengthening the capacity of the Jaffna Social Action Centre (JSAC), a national NGO, to better address SGBV. JSAC provides a 'safe haven' for women who need an outlet from their everyday lives, they are provided some form of vocational training and it functions as a forerunner providing training on a variety of human rights issues with the assistance of

**"Acts or threats of violence, whether occurring within the home or in the community, or perpetrated or condoned by the State, instils fear and insecurity in women's lives and are obstacles to the achievement of equality and for development and peace. The fear of violence, including harassment, is a permanent constraint on the mobility of women and limits their access to resources and basic activities. High social, health and economic costs to the individual and society are associated with violence against women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men." (Paragraph 117)**

### Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995

A result of the deliberations of Governments participating in the Fourth World Conference on Women in September 1995 in Beijing and includes all forms of discrimination as violence against women and girls and reaffirms States' responsibility to work to eliminate them.



experts in that field. In 2003, the national organizations working on gender issues decided to form a women's committee through which they aim to streamline their activities and minimise duplication.

A similar initiative has been taken in Puttalam with the formation of a women's committee with representation from the Legal Aid Foundation (LAF), the Human Rights Commission (HRC), FORUT, Child Vision, the District Medical Officer and UNICEF. This committee seeks to monitor acts of SGBV and takes appropriate action to ensure the safety of the survivor(s). It requests support from the GoSL and other NGOs to provide survivors of SGBV with medical, psychological and legal aid.

In Puttalam, FORUT in conjunction with UNHCR has an "Empowerment of Women" program which helps women in Welfare Centres and Resettlement villages to acquire vocational skills so that they will have resources with which to improve their living conditions. The skills taught to the women include sewing, food processing, handicraft-making and small enterprise development.

Two "drop in" centres were opened in the two largest welfare centres in Vavuniya in order to raise awareness of SGBV amongst the IDP community and provide the survivors with a place to go to when they require assistance. This initiative appears to be effective, especially as the persons working there are from amongst the IDP and host communities which in turn foster greater understanding and acceptance of the need to seek assistance in such cases.

A similar exercise has been initiated in Trincomalee with the formation of women's groups within the welfare centres. This group conducts its meetings in their community centre and has functioned as a "self help" group for women survivors. In 2004, this concept was extended to include the men within the welfare centres with the intention of not alienating the men from these discussions. This move has hitherto been readily accepted.

In Mannar, UNHCR worked closely with the Rural Development Foundation (RDF) as its implementing partner to set up an SGBV "network" – in essence, a comprehensive referral system. For instance, the Legal Aid Foundation (LAF) will provide legal support, RDF will coordinate with the Police's women and children's desk, and doctors and therapists will be on-call in the event of a referral.

The main focus of UNHCR activities is to raise awareness on SGBV with the aim of empowering women socially and economically. Targeting both IDPs in welfare centres as well as returnees, the programmes in place involve a range of activities including:

- Forming women's groups and holding workshops to raise awareness of SGBV, women's rights, health and leadership skills.
- Conducting programmes, such as street dramas and puppet shows, to raise awareness on women's rights in welfare centres.
- Holding training workshops on sexual and gender-based violence, conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence.
- Establishing "drop-in centres" in welfare centres that offer information and counselling services, and conducting referrals for health and legal services in cases of SGBV.
- Holding vocational training programmes and providing grants for vulnerable women IDPs to enable them to start earning a living
- Operating day-care centres for children from morning to evening so that they can be in a safe environment while mothers engage in work or other productive activities

## Tracking SGBV in Puttalam

As part of UNHCR's effort to collect accurate information about SGBV, a survey was conducted in Puttalam. The results show how widespread SGBV has become and provide useful information about the types of SGBV present. The table on the opposite page shows the results of the survey.

## Training on Victim's Rights for State Prosecutors

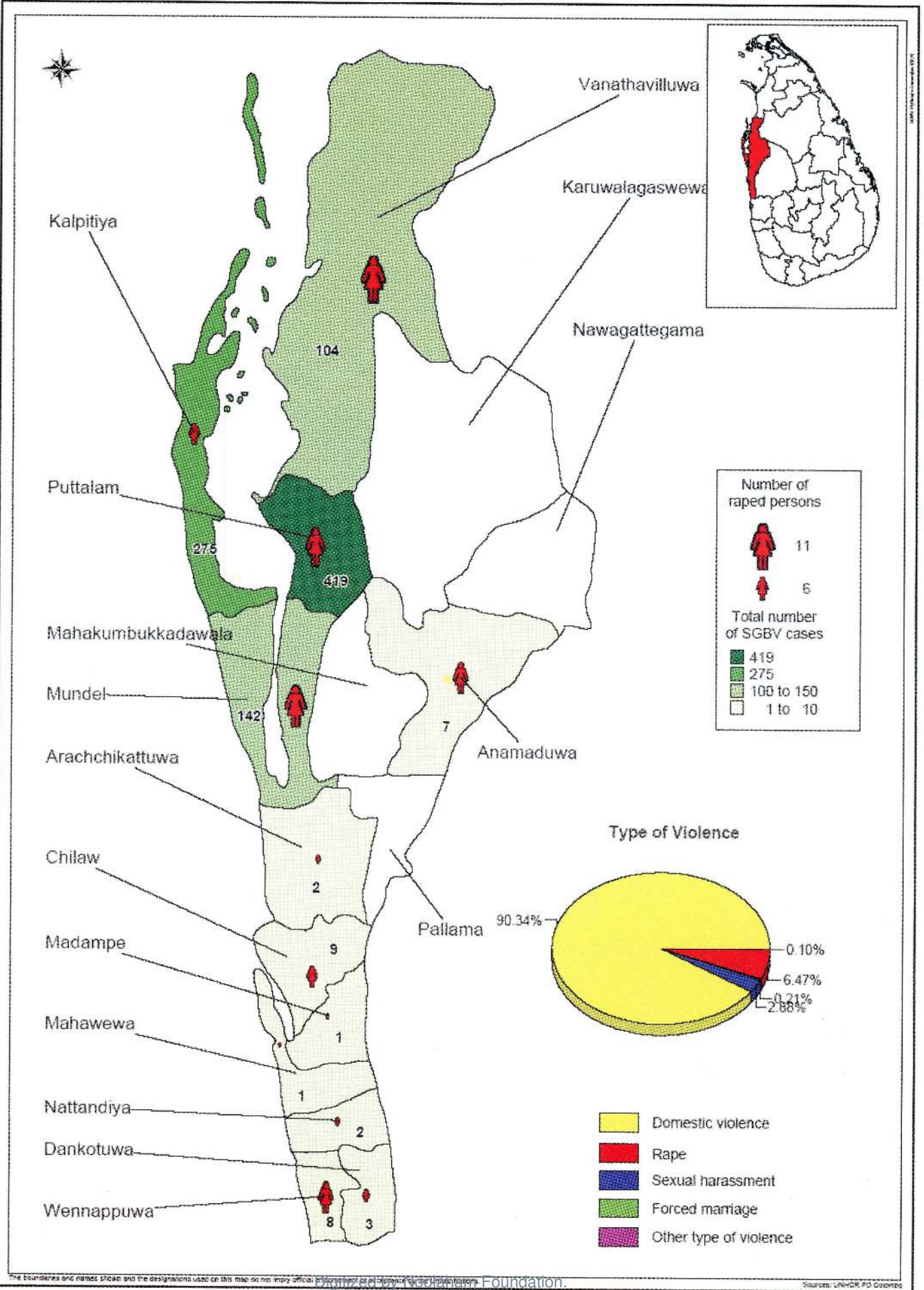


Training on "Victims Rights vs. Rights of the Accused in an Adversarial System" was organised by the Attorney General's department, the Centre for the Victims of Crime and UNHCR on 14 August 2004. This was attended by close upon a hundred State Counsel and Prosecuting Attorneys from the Attorney General's Department. The key note address on protection of victims of gender-based violence within the Sri Lankan criminal system was delivered by the Attorney General Mr. K.C. Kamalabayson and he was followed by Justice Shiranee Thilakawardena, Judge of the Supreme Court who spoke on Human rights, equality and their accommodation in an adversarial system through victim-friendly procedures.

An international perspective on the issue was provided by Mr. Nick Cowdery QC, Director of Public Prosecutions (Australia) and President of the International Association of Prosecutors in his address on "Balancing Rights – the Role of the Prosecutor" and by Justice Marcus Einfeld QC a former Supreme and Federal Court Judge and Human Rights Commissioner in Australia who spoke on a "Comparison of the Adversarial System with the Inquisitorial System within a Human Rights Framework."



## SGBV IN PUTTALAM DISTRICT within January 2003 and December 2003





## Mobile Health Clinic and attention to SGBV in Trincomalee

UNHCR and the Sri Lankan Red Cross Society (SLRCS) are conducting a double-faceted programme to help vulnerable people, especially women and children, in Trincomalee District. The project comprises the use of a Mobile Health Clinic to meet the medical and health needs of the IDP's and returnee communities, and an analogous programme whose agenda is addressing the problems of SGBV.

The Mobile Health Clinic provides curative care, psychosocial and counselling support, as well as awareness especially to women and adolescent children, on HIV/AIDS, other sexually transmitted diseases and protection from them, reproductive health, and the use of contraceptives. The programme will be continued until the state health sector restores the public health structure in the area.

The complementary SGBV programme encourages women's groups to openly discuss SGBV and thereby promotes reporting. It raises awareness in communities about the negative effects of violence on families and communities at large, it promotes awareness about women's rights, and provides information and support to abused women on services available to them.

## Island Wide Survey of SGBV

To better understand the extent of SGBV in Sri Lanka's North and East, as well as how key actors are responding to reported cases, UNHCR commissioned the Centre for Women's Research (CENWOR) to carry out a survey on sexual and gender-based violence in the North and East of the country in late 2003. The survey collected data from key institutions that have direct links to victims of SGBV, such as police stations, hospitals and welfare centres for a period of three months



It assesses action taken by these institutions in response to individual complaints including results achieved and/or issues/concerns/problems faced/identified. A survey of the South of the country will be done as a second phase to the above. Data that had already been gathered by CENWOR during a previous research for the areas of Galle, Moneragala and Hambantota will be updated during the second phase.

The information gathered, although not exhaustive, identifies the number and nature of incidents, perpetrators, victims, action taken etc. and enables a general overview of the SGBV situation in Sri Lanka. This survey will also be used to identify gaps currently present in addressing SGBV, so that better coordinated strategies could be formulated in dealing with these issues.

These are just some examples of how UNHCR is trying to deal with SGBV in Sri Lanka. There are many other projects in progress and numerous other individuals and organisations who are trying to combat this phenomenon within our society. It is an understatement to say that SGBV is a complex issue. It is an area of concern that will take years to address with any type of efficacy. Still it is necessary to start somewhere, and the results of past efforts to address SGBV have been promising. The hope today is to create social mechanisms which will be able to provide for the immediate and long-term needs of survivors as well as to create a climate of awareness and respect for women, so that Sexual and Gender-Based Violence will no longer be such a recurrent problem in Sri Lanka.



## UNHCR Spokesperson for SGBV

Swarna Mallawarachchi is one of Sri Lanka's leading actresses, certainly one of the most versatile and daring. She has been the leading lady of Sri Lankan cinema for the past two decades. She is the atypical Sri Lankan actress, popular and acclaimed by both audiences and critics alike. She entered the film world with no training or experience but proved to be a natural star. In her career, she acted in 45 films, won the Best Actress Award 26 times, and received the honour of the Presidential, OCIC, Sarasawiya and Swarna Sanka Awards. During all her time in cinema, Mallawarachchi maintained high standards for the roles she played and films she joined, never once producing a commercial film.

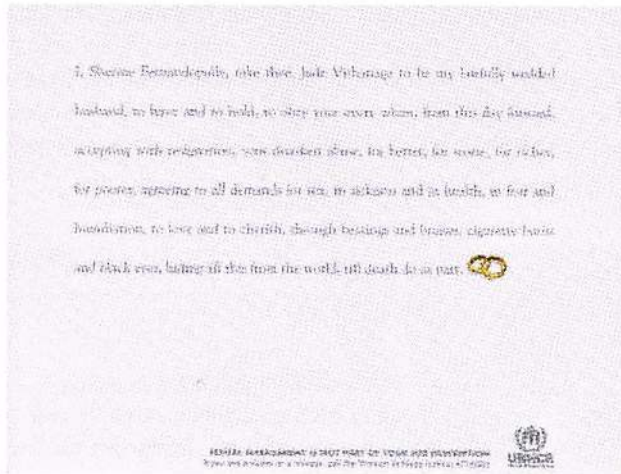
Recently, she joined UNHCR as a spokesperson against sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). As UNHCR begins its island-wide media campaign against SGBV, Mallawarachchi will lead the way, speaking out, and helping to protect the vulnerable.



# SGBV Media Campaign

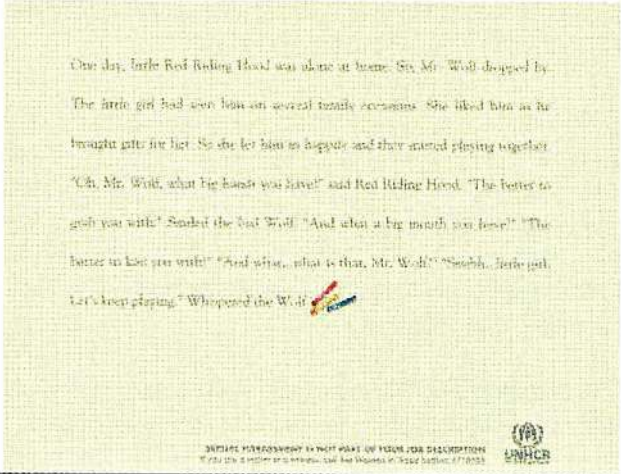
One of the reasons SGBV is prevalent in Sri Lanka is a lack of information and awareness about this issue within Sri Lankan society. Understanding the consequences of this lack of information to groups who are most vulnerable to SGBV, UNHCR has initiated projects which focus extensively on raising awareness and prevention. Together with its implementing partners in and around the country, UNHCR has worked with the IDP community, the host population, the legal network, the police and NGOs extensively since 2003 to train and encourage them to be aware of SGBV in the country and as such, strengthen their institutional and personal capacity.

As part of this awareness-raising programme, UNHCR will be launching a SGBV media campaign on 7 December 2004. UNHCR has ensured the inclusion of national expertise in designing the campaign in order to secure the alliance of national organizations. Acknowledging that SGBV is a nationwide concern, UNHCR intends to target the entire population through print and electronic media, in addition to grass-root activities aimed specifically at IDP communities.



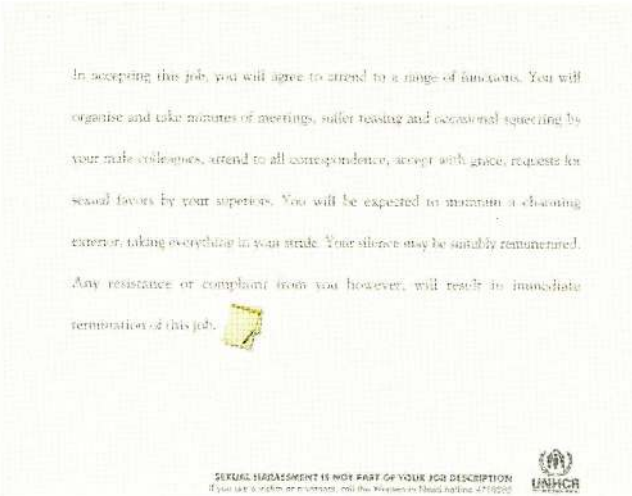
The SGBV Campaign on Domestic Violence

The campaign is focused on three types of violence: domestic violence, sexual harassment at the work place and child sexual abuse. The key message is that SGBV is not acceptable. For example, domestic violence is not acceptable even though it takes place in the privacy of one's home. It is not acceptable for men to make lewd comments to women or to inappropriately touch women in crowded buses. It is not acceptable to deny women a role in decision-making, whether in the family or the wider-community. In this sense, the campaign aims to build a community-wide culture of intolerance of SGBV.



The SGBV campaign also seeks to address the issue of child sexual abuse

The campaign will run for one year, concluding at the end of 2005. It will initially be publicised in the print, television, internet and radio mediums, with this coverage being followed by grass-root awareness-raising in the field through inter alia mobile floats, stickers, hoardings and street dramas.



The elimination of sexual harassment in the workplace is also a key aim of the UNHCR campaign.

It is hoped that by virtue of utilising such a diverse range of media outlets, UNHCR will be able to reach all members of society, to not only create awareness of SGBV, but also stress its prevention.







**Thank you for your interest in UNHCR's protection activities. For more information, please contact any one of our offices.**

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