

Every month RESURJ members will collectively share and reflect on some news highlights affecting sexual and reproductive, environmental and economic justice from the different regions and countries we work in... [read online](#)

India: Don't force women to stay in abusive marital relationships

By Jasmine Lovely George

The Indian Supreme Court recently passed a judgment making changes to the Anti-Dowry Harassment Law. [The judgement](#) gives a directive to police and magistrates that there be no automatic arrests or coercive actions arising out of complaints lodged under section 498A of the Indian Penal Code, without ascertaining the veracity of the complaints.

In 1983, section [498A](#) was first introduced into the Indian Penal Code. Under this section, the Anti-Dowry Harassment Law is meant to provide security and safety for women who experience dowry harassment. The Indian women's movement struggled for years to have violence against women within marriages made a cognizable, non-bailable and non-compoundable criminal offence. This recent judgement overturns their hard work.

This judgment is regressive as it places all the responsibility and powers on the gatekeepers of the law, who generally work within a patriarchal setup. It also puts more emphasis on keeping the family together, at the cost of having women experience unchecked violence in their matrimonial homes.

A group of 16 women's rights organisations sent a memorandum to the Chief Justice of India asking him to review the decision. They have cited the [National Crime Record Bureau studies](#), pointing to the rising number of dowry harassment cases against women to dispute the reasoning in the Supreme Court judgment.

Syrian refugees face systemic racism in Lebanon

By Ghiwa Sayegh

On the 30th of June 2017, the Lebanese army raided Syrian refugee camps in Ersal, located at the border between Lebanon and Syria, detaining hundreds of refugees. The media was quick to portray the raid as [anti-terrorist measures](#), hence reinforcing [the decades-long rhetoric of "terrorists" hidden among "civilians" that historically justified raids and massacres in Palestinian refugee camps](#).

The military raid came amidst polarizing positions: while many NGO circles instrumentalize Syrian refugees as tokens to increase their funding, right-wing xenophobic factions are calling for the [deportation of Syrian refugees](#). In addition to the rampant xenophobia, are calls for unconditional support of the Lebanese army as "protector of the nation."

Four of the detained Syrian refugees [died](#) under the army's custody, with [allegations of torture](#), but those deaths were dismissed as a result of ["pre-existing conditions"](#) and [illness](#). In response, Lebanese activists involved with [the Socialist Forum](#) attempted to organize solidarity protests, only to have their [names and phone numbers leaked and publically disclosed](#), which prompted a wave of death threats directed against them.

The discourse on social media obscured the struggle at hand – that of refugees, their treatment, and Lebanese xenophobia, centering the debate instead as a binary of "with or against the army." As a result, the Lebanese interior minister [banned all](#)

[protests](#), whether in solidarity with Syrian refugees or in support of the Lebanese army, effectively revoking the right to protest until further notice.

In Lebanon, Syrian refugees are subjected to [systemic and authoritarian racism](#) and their struggles are obscured, as [historical lessons from Palestinian refugees](#) teach us. Dismantling at its roots the oppression that refugees face can only happen by carefully looking at the intersections of xenophobia, militarization, a failing/illegitimate state, recurrent crackdowns on bodily autonomy, and the creation of an imagined nation-state built on the bodies and labor of refugees and migrants.

Why Sexual Violence Should Change the Public Discourse on Sexuality Education in Nigeria?

By Fadekemi Akinfaderin*

Reader warning: this piece contains descriptions and links to descriptions about sexual assault & violence, which may be triggering for survivors

Her name was Obiamaka and she was 14-years-old. She was gang-raped to death by teenage boys in her neighborhood in Lagos state. [Her story](#) has been shared publicly and widely on national media and social media. Everyone who hears about her story is moved by a mix of emotions: sadness, fear, and outrage.

Her story is not the first and sadly doesn't seem to be anywhere close to being the last. A few days after the incident, there was another case of a man raping a 20-year-old girl in the [streets of Lagos](#). And before that, a group of high school boys planned and attempted a [mass rape attack](#) on their female school mates.

With these cases and more across the country, many have offered a variety of reasons for the increased incidences and coverage of sexual assault on adolescents and young women. One not-so-shocking response has been to blame it on Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). The Nigerian Family Life and HIV & AIDS (FLHE) curriculum, which is being taught at basic education level, is an abstinence-based program and wouldn't

be considered "comprehensive" but rather, a sexuality education program. Recently, some groups, especially conservative faith-based organizations with connection to the Evangelical Christian movements from the United States, are attempting to link the provision of [sexuality education](#) to the increased cases of sexual violations in the country. They are using these brutal cases against adolescent and young women's bodies to call for [removal of sexuality education](#) from Nigerian curriculum - "*Sexuality education is creating sexual animals amongst our children*". "*When children are overly sexualized, what you get is interest in practicing the content learnt from school and rape is a result of that*". These kinds of statements, which have been thrown around in one-to-one conversations or over [social media](#), are not surprising, but they demonstrate a limited and narrow understanding of sexual violence, sexuality, and gender inequality issues.

These unfortunate recent cases bring to the forefront three critical issues: male entitlement, safety and trusting girls. These issues should be the focus of the discourse at all levels in Nigerian society.

**This excerpt is from an article published on the [South Feminist Voices blog](#). To read the full article, [click here](#).*

Why Stricter Laws Alone are Never Enough in Pakistan

By Sheena Hadi

Reader warning: this piece contains descriptions and links to descriptions about sexual assault & violence, which may be triggering for survivors

In October, 2016 the Pakistan government celebrated the passing of stricter penal policies on rape and "honor" killings, which introduced [25-year sentences for rapists and life sentences \(with the possibility of capital punishment\) for those who murder in the name of "honor"](#).

Law makers, civil society activists and parliamentarians alike stood firmly behind the need for such laws to ensure that gender-based crimes

such as rape saw a decrease and women gained greater access to the judicial system.

Fast-forward to 10 months later, a 16 year-old girl, in the rural village of Rajapur in the Punjab province, was [publicly raped](#) under the order of a local village council (*Jirga*) to avenge a suspected rape committed by her brother. In order to seek redress for the act, the family of the original rape survivor sought a quick solution to justice by approaching village elders, who ordered that the appropriate punishment for the rapist, would be to bring dishonor on his family by raping his unmarried sister. While technically not recognized by Pakistani courts, *jirgas* operate all over rural parts of the country due to inefficiencies in and lack of access to the judicial system. In this case, the council was made up of elders from both sides of the families who negotiated the terms of the punishment.

Women's rights groups expressed anger at the lack of progress since 2002, when the [ordered gang rape of Mukhtaran Mai gained global media coverage](#). After a lengthy trial and as a result of inadequate evidence, the judges acquitted most of the 14 men who had been arrested for participating in Mai's rape. In the current case, over 20 members of the council, who were present during the rape, have been arrested after the mothers of both girls took an unusual step and [reported the incidents](#) to the Violence Against Women center in the nearby city of Multan. As mechanisms for gathering and processing evidence are still lacking, the outcome of the investigation has not yet been disclosed. However, many are encouraged by swifter moves on the part of the government and local law enforcement to create channels for reporting violence as well as holding the perpetrators accountable.

Yet, while state intentions may have improved, what the case also indicates is that stricter rape laws have not shifted the social status of women as symbols of honor nor have they addressed harmful social approaches to justice which often use women to barter power through marriage and violence. A majority of the estimated 1000 annual murders in the name of honor are not reported to any authorities. [As stated by Abira Ashfaq](#), a lawyer

working on human rights, ending sexual violence against women will involve far more from the government by way of devising "holistic solutions that address women's lack of power in society" and operationalizing state services such as "help lines, shelters, victim support services, and legal aid clinics for women." In other words, with law comes the need for practical measures that address gaps in reporting, support, rehabilitation and perhaps most importantly, education and awareness raising that speaks to altering discriminatory social norms and gender inequalities that lie at the heart of violence against women.

The impact of austerity on adolescent health in the UK

By Mari-Claire Price

After seven years of austerity, the UK is starting to see significant negative impacts on people's health and wellbeing, including specific impacts on young people and adolescents' health.

In 2016, the number of young people that presented to emergency services with psychiatric problems, [doubled since 2009](#), the year before the UK government first introduced its new fiscal policy of austerity. This is no coincidence. The links between poverty and its impacts on children and adolescent's mental health is well documented. In 2012, the [UK chief medical officer reported](#) that children in the poorest homes were three times more likely to have a mental health problems than those from wealthier homes. Austerity related factors; housing conditions, cuts to public services such as parks and libraries, cuts to social services, rising hunger, increased risk of violence, and reduced income and opportunities, all contribute to the number of people seeking mental health services in the UK. This has risen from 500,000 to 1.7 million since 2010, including 7% rise in adolescents using mental health services between 2016 and 2017 alone. That is without even taking into account a rise in the number of adolescents seeking services. Similarly, there has been a 25% rise in people accessing sexual health services in the UK since 2012, including a rise for adolescents.

While the number of adolescents seeking health services is increasing, austerity measures have decreased the availability and quality of sexual and mental health services. [£600 million has been cut](#) from mental health trusts, with significant cuts to Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), and spending on sexual health down by [£64 million in 4 years](#) due to significant cuts to public health spending and council budgets.

Suicide is now the leading cause of death for people under 25 in the UK, yet CAMHS services have been cut so severely that only [1,500 CAMHS beds](#) are available for children and adolescents across mental health services in the country. Cases of children and adolescents being turned away from mental health services, [including suicidal children and adolescents](#), is more and more common, 1 in 6 in some areas.

[The social determinants of health](#) are obvious. 11% of 16 to 24-year-olds who are not in education, training or employment are twice as likely than other young people to experience mental health problems. They are also increasingly the ones most unlikely to use sexual health services, use contraception, and access STI testing, and are more likely to use to cigarettes, drugs and alcohol. Young people from poor areas are the most likely to be impacted. Seven years of austerity has also led to a recent halt in progress made on [closing the gap of life expectancy](#) between rich and poor in the UK.

The fiscal policy of austerity, and its proponents, have created vicious cyclical conditions of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, ill health and mental health issues for millions of people across the UK, and adolescents are a group facing huge negative impacts to their health, wellbeing, lives and future.

The UK government must end its continuing policy of austerity and privatization and reverse the damage it has done to young people and adolescents, by investing in mental health, education, free or affordable recreational activities, employment and training opportunities for young people, whilst addressing growing poverty, social exclusion and inequalities.