

**Country: Afghanistan**

**Organisation: Afghanistan – Women for Afghan Women**

**Project title: Family Guidance Center – Kabul Province**

**Reporting period: March 1, 2011 – May 31, 2011**

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**Shelter Crisis Update:**

In 2010, the president established a commission to investigate the claim that shelters are immoral. The commission visited shelters across the country including WAW's, but findings have not been published. As a follow-up to this investigation, in early 2011, the Afghan government sponsored a bill that proposes to seize the 14 women's shelters in Afghanistan (including 4 run by WAW) from the organizations that have founded and run them and place them under the control of MoWA. At first, the feeling among all the women's organizations was that this bill was destined to become the law of the land and that this was the beginning of the end of women's rights in Afghanistan, but we are no longer discouraged.

WAW has played a key role in a powerful and effective advocacy campaign that brought together Afghan grassroots women's organizations, international women's human rights organizations, and representatives of both the American and Afghan governments. rights advocates who have been active in this situation have asked for in terms of the autonomy As a result of negotiations, the Afghan government has agreed to everything the group of women's human rights organizations except for one clause – the government still wants shelter clients to be handed over to any family member who come to claim them. WAW will never agree to such a clause because it negates the whole purpose of a safe house. With the continued support of all our allies and supporters, we believe we will prevail in this case as well.

**PROJECT DESCRIPTION**

WAW's Family Guidance Centers and shelter provides relief to victims of domestic violence and other forms of human right violations. The violations women in Afghanistan suffer include domestic violence, rape and other sexual abuses, such as trafficking, underage and forced marriage, the exchange of female children as payment for a crime (the custom *baad*), and threats of honor killings. On a daily basis, the FGC helps women seeking a divorce when there is no alternative to violence, women and girls facing prison sentences for running away from abusive situations, and girls as young as 9-years old who have been sold as brides to men of all ages.

Women may arrive there after fleeing to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), hospitals, police departments

or the FGC itself. WAW staff evaluates each case in its own unique context. In all cases, women are provided with counseling and mediation to ensure the successful resolution of family conflict and reintegration into society. Women living in families that are deemed untreatable or in situations that defy remediation will stay in our secure shelter until WAW mediators facilitate their reintegration with their marital or birth families or work out another solution. During that time, they receive literacy training, life skills training, counseling, legal services or other services as may be necessary to alleviate her situation.

As for children accompanying their mothers, WAW provides medical attention as needed and places them in our kindergarten.

Before a woman can return to her home, if that proves possible and in keeping with her human rights, the family must agree in writing to permit follow-ups, unannounced visits for a minimum of one year. This step is essential in a culture where “honor” killings of women who bring shame on the family are common and go virtually unpunished.

WAW has a high success rate in resolution of cases in the shelter for many reasons. Whenever possible, WAW involves the perpetrators of crimes in these efforts, and religious leaders are often included in family discussions. The news of WAW’s FGC has spread to relatives, neighbors, communities, and government agencies. Our work influences far more people than just our immediate clients. This is evident in the increasing number of women seeking WAW’s services on their own (as opposed to being referred by other agencies). Since 2007 to present, WAW has registered a total of 2,814 cases across the country.

***Overall Objective:*** To improve the rights, status and living conditions of extremely vulnerable women and girls in conflict with conservative culture in Afghanistan.

***Short term Objectives and Indicators:***

**Objective 1: To enhance access for Afghan women and girls to professional counseling and mediation services.**

Indicators are quantitative and are recorded in our database. Below is a breakdown of cases for the reporting period.

*Figure 1: Highlights the breakdown in cases during the reporting period (March 1, 2011 – May 31, 2011).*

<b>Description</b>	<b>Dec - Feb</b>	<b>Mar - May</b>
Number of new cases during reporting period	62	96
Number of female adult clients	43	63
Number of male clients	-	2
Number of clients who were underage	19	31

Number of new cases still open	26	38
Follow-up cases	12	22
Closed cases	24	36
Legal cases	25	9
Mediation and counseling cases	37	87
Number of cases referred to FGC shelter during reporting period	53	93
Number of children accompanying mothers to the shelter during the reporting period	8	7

From March – May 2011, the Kabul FGC registered 96 new cases, of which, 56% are Tajik, 22% are Hazara, 16% are Pashtoon, 5% are Uzbek, and 2% are of other nationalities such as Pakistani.

Our staff solved 108 cases, 27 of which were legal and 81 were mediation and counseling. We also continue to follow up cases when the client returns to a situation originally deemed dangerous to make sure the offending person or people adhere to the agreement and the client is safe.

During the reporting period, WAW’s case managers facilitated 501 sessions with the clients and their family members. Of these sessions, 440 were counseling and mediation and 61 were legal sessions.

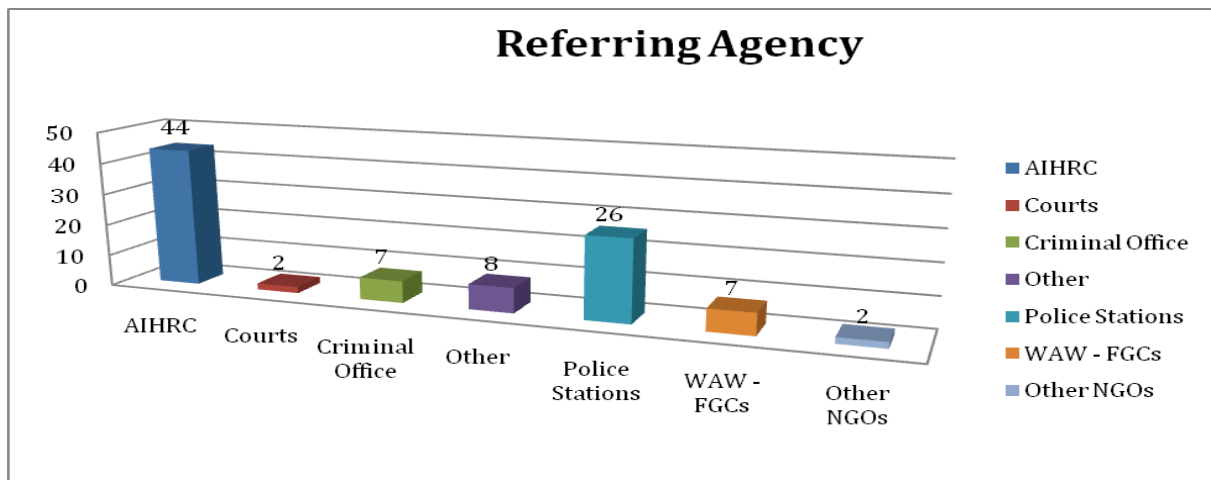


Figure 2: Highlights the breakdown in cases referred to the Kabul FGC and shelter during the reporting period (March 1, 2011 – May 31, 2011).

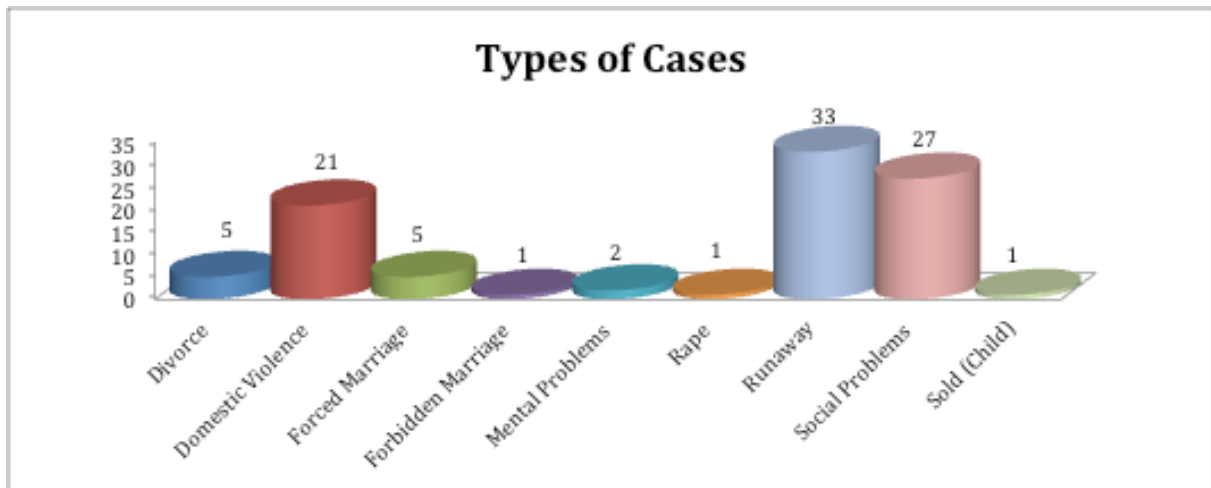


Figure 3: Illustrates the breakdown on the types of cases registered during the reporting period (March 1, 2011 – May 31, 2011).

\* Clients may present multiple issues upon arriving at our FGC. However, after the intensive intake process, the case manager along with the client will identify the critical issue(s) to be addressed.

### **Objective 2: To provide safety for endangered women in the WAW shelter.**

The majority of our clients have never been to school and are illiterate, approximately 47%. For those who stay in the shelter for a brief time, the most we can do is provide the rudiments of an education and teach basic life skills. Even this limited exposure to literacy and ideas may be a starting point for women whose past lives have been marked by extreme intellectual deprivation. But for the women who stay in the shelter for at least 5 months, the importance of our educational program cannot be overestimated. Many leave able to read, write, and do basic arithmetic. Others are well on their way to literacy. If they practice reading whatever written material they can lay their hands on or even find a literacy class near their home, they will have taken a major step toward self-empowerment. This is the most valuable service we will have done for them.

We originally used the curriculum of the Ministry of Education, but we soon discovered that as a three-year program, it is not useful for our shelter residents. We have now developed our own teaching materials.

An experienced teacher teaches the literacy classes 5 days a week. The teacher has divided the residents into 2 groups:

- ✚ Group 1 consists of women and girls who are illiterate and need to start at the beginning.
- ✚ Group 2 consists of women and girls who have had some education.

Class sizes vary week to week as clients leave the shelter and new ones arrive.

The curriculum, which is based on 3-month cycles, covers reading and writing in Dari, basic math and measurement, Islamic studies (especially women's rights and family relations in Islam), and life skills classes, which offer women basic knowledge regardless of the length of time they stay at the shelter.

*Vocational Training* – Shelter clients receive vocational training classes 5 days per week in tailoring, crocheting, cooking and basic jewelry making. During the reporting period, over 278 clients participated in these classes. Long-term shelter clients are offered an opportunity to gain work experience in WAW's FGC office, assisting the kindergarten teacher, housekeeping staff, and cooks.

*Life Skills* – Clients take Islamic studies and life skills classes 5 days a week for 3 hours a day. Islamic study topics include women's rights in Islam, the role of a husband and wife in Islam, and Islamic regulations regarding prayer. WAW recognizes the importance of religion in Afghan culture and uses this class to build the clients' understanding of their rights in the religious context. These classes also build our credibility with the families and with the Government of Afghanistan.

Life skills classes focus on health and hygiene, family relationships, civic education, conflict resolution, and childcare. While living at the shelter, the women also participate in group therapy, role-playing, and picture methods. These strategies give women knowledge and skills to assist their reintegration into family and community.

All children living with their mothers in the shelter can attend the FGC kindergarten, where they learn the alphabet, colors, shapes, counting and other subjects appropriate to children. Our experienced teacher and an assistant (who's also a client in the shelter) work on the children's social and communication skills.

**Objective 3: To enhance legal defense of rights of women and children in Kabul and other cities where WAW has FGCs.**

During the period, our staff registered 9 new legal cases and solved 27 legal cases from the previous reporting period. They facilitated 61 legal sessions with clients, prosecutors, judges and shuras.

The types of legal cases solved during the period include divorce, domestic violence, runaway, and forced marriages.

**Objective 4: To strengthen the capacity of staff of participating public and private agencies and of clients' families and communities to exercise social protection of Afghan women and girls.**

In mid-April, WAW extended its Women's Rights are Human Right (WRHR) project to Kabul, Kapisa, and Marzar. The project aims to provide training to over 1,375

community members: 500 in Kabul, 375 in Kapisa, and 500 in Mazar. All trainings are current on schedule.

**Objective 5: To support Afghanistan's commitments to international treaty bodies on MDGs (especially goal #3).**

WAW's mission and projects continue to provide support to the Government of Afghanistan's commitments to strengthen social protection of its most vulnerable people, among whom women and girls are its largest sub-group. Those at risk for harmful cultural practices and violence are a high national priority.

WAW continues to contribute to MoLSAMD and other relevant coordinating bodies' knowledge and experience vis-à-vis the ongoing refinement of standards and registration of care services and care providers, referral mechanisms, monitoring mechanisms and indicators. This input will reinforce the public/private partnership, supporting national leadership in fulfilling its obligations to its most vulnerable citizens.

In addition, WAW continues to support Afghanistan's commitments to international treaty bodies on MDGs (especially goal #3) in the following manner:

- Data compiled and shared by WAW on number of actual services, number of total clients and number of resolved cases, information to be shared with UNIFEM, human rights NGOs, journalists and other media agents upon request
- Percentage of total number of cases documented of women, girls and families seeking such help resolved by mediation. We will be able to provide this information to Afghanistan's reporting bodies concerning MDG commitments.
- Overall national data (when available) on violence against women, which should show a reduction over time in locations served by WAW.

■ **Undertaken activities during the reporting period (short description of the various activities):**

The follow activities are carried out throughout the life of the project.

- WAW's case managers continue to perform a rigorous intake process that includes all family members to determine the most suitable approach to the case.
- Ongoing counseling with family, including husband, mother-in-law and children in an empathetic, non-judgmental environment, welcoming to all family members, offering confidentiality, professionalism and culturally sensitive services.
- Individual treatment for husband (or other male family members) in all cases where participants are openly involved and committed. Treatment consists of counseling and mediation with client and receptive family members.
- Legal advice from experts in human rights and civil/Islamic law and representation of clients by WAW lawyers in court.
- Follow-up visits with client and family to prevent relapses.

- To support actual treatment, formal and informal discussion groups designed to empower women and men to make changes in their behavior within and outside the family structure. Additional groups for entire family are conducted by progressive mullahs and Islamic feminists on such topics as women's rights, peaceful, nonviolent family life as defined by Islamic law, and transgressions of Islamic and civil law such as forced and underage marriage.
  - Ongoing staff training - our staff attends all available workshops and have become excellent trainers themselves.
- **Results (if possible, please quantify the results. For example, how many people took part in the programme/have received a small loan/credit):**

Please note results are listed under the relevant objectives.

- **Difficulties encountered during the reporting period (for example: political, economical situation in the country/city where you are operating):**

During the reporting period WAW's staff encountered the following challenges:

- Increased presence of the Taliban.
- Growing insecurity throughout the country.
- Increase in support for Taliban principles of law enforcement.
- Disturbing incidents of stoning of women in violation of Sharia law.
- Domestic violence and lack of access to education.
- Lack of knowledge on the part of the general population about human rights and how to enforce them.

**Please provide:**

- **Pictures - will post updated photos later this month**
- **Human-interest story of one or two persons who benefited from this project (for example background of a child who took part in your project, how she/he is doing now, activities she/he likes very much etc.)**

#### **TAMANIA - 25**

Tamania was engaged to a fellow classmate, she met while attending university, and although it was an arranged marriage, Tamania was very happy. A few months after her engagement, Tamania's mother passed away and Tamania's father grew unhappy with her engagement. When her fiance's family began the wedding arrangements, Tamania's father threathend to call of the engagement. In private, Tamania protested and her father serverly beat her. He told her that this was not her decision to make and stubbornly insisted on canceling her engagement.

Under these conditions, Tamania had no choice but to run away. She sought assistance from the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, who reffered her to WAW's

Family Guidance Center, where she was assigned a case worker and provided shelter by WAW. Tamania's case worker arranged various counseling and mediation sessions with Tamania's father and in-laws. After several sessions, Tamania's father agreed to uphold the terms of the engagement. Though WAW is continuing to monitor this case, the issue appears to have been resolved, and both Tamania and her fiancé's family eagerly await their upcoming marriage.

### **JAMILA**

Jamila is 40 years old and lives in WAW's shelter. She has escaped from a long abusive marriage that produced four children – now 16, 12, 10 and 6. The first time Jamila left her husband, she was arrested and sent to jail for 15 days for running away from home. She had no choice but to return to her husband and the regular severe abuse she had suffered for years. An illustration of the type of cruelty she underwent is that her husband would tie her up naked and beat her with a wire until she fainted.

The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) referred Jamila to WAW. WAW has provided her with a safe, secure home and a lawyer who is processing her divorce. Her husband wants the children. Jamila's lawyer is determined to win her case and obtain custody of the children for her.

### **NAHEEDA & NOORIA**

*Baad* is an old Afghan practice in which girls, often very young children, are given to a victim's family as compensation. Naheeda and Nooria were 5 and 4 years old when they were given as *baad*. Their older sister had been engaged but ran away. The fiancé's family demanded two girls as compensation – one for the runaway and one for the wedding expenses. Both little girls lived with the family for ten years. Then, the father in the family decided he would marry the older girl, now 15 years old.

When his wife found out, she went to the AIHRC for help. The case was referred to WAW who demanded a meeting of the families and threatened to charge the father unless the girls were given back to their family. The mediation worked and the girls have now returned to their home.

As with all WAW's case, there is a mandatory one-year follow up to assure that the parties are living up to the terms of the resolution.

### **SAMAR GUL**

Samar Gul is 23 years old and was married for 4 years. The marriage was not consummated because of the husband's impotence. Samar Gul's in-laws blamed her for the childlessness and started to beat her. Finally, she told them their son was impotent. She said she was going back to her father's house and getting a divorce.

When they found out her plan, Samar Gul's in-laws decided a man in the family should rape her so she would not be able to ask for a divorce. They staged the rape, but Samar Gul fought back. She managed to escape. Injured and naked, she made it to a police station who referred her to WAW.



Samur Gul is now living in WAW's shelter and her divorce is being processed.

- **Recent Newsletter (if available)** Please refer to WAW's webpage later this month for our most recent Enews, press coverage, and events at <http://www.womenforafghanwomen.org/eneews.php>