

Mapping UNSW Impact Global Development

Primary SDG	5: GENDER EQUALITY
Broad theme	Refugee women and girls
Research	Changing policy in response to high levels of rape and sexual abuse among refugee women and girls
Impact region	Global
Faculty	Arts and Social Sciences
School/Institute	Forced Migration Research Network
Academics	Dr Linda Bartolomei, Honorary Adjunct Professor Eileen Pittaway
Project partners	UNHCR
Related SDGs	5: Health and Wellbeing
	16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Elevator pitch

UNSW is shaping law and policy at the UN level concerning female refugees and their high level of vulnerability to rape and sexual abuse, and it is looking at how best to implement new policy to minimise the number of women and girls exposed to this kind of abuse.

The Challenge: Endemic sexual abuse of refugee women and girls

There is a high level of systematic rape and sexual abuse among refugee women and girls. Perpetrators include soldiers, border guards, employers, police, and locals. Women and girls are forced into marriages and into survival sex to feed themselves and their families.

Twenty years ago rape and sexual abuse were not recognised under international criminal law. Both are now war crimes and recognised reasons for refugee status. Law and policy has responded but there are barriers to implementation, including a lack of funding and political will. Further work is needed to put law and policy into action and to develop effective monitoring and evaluation methodologies.

UNSW's solution: Report to the UNHCR, research ways to implement and evaluate new policies

In partnership with UNHCR, Linda and Eileen and a team of refugee women undertook a gender audit of the UN's new Global Compact on Refugees. The aims of the audit were to ensure that the needs of women and girls and men and boys are recognised, and that all potential solutions reflect a commitment to gender equality and an effective response to sexual and gender-based violence.

With colleagues Eileen Pittaway and Caroline Lennette, Linda has applied for ARC funding to undertake political advocacy work around the sexual abuse of female refugees. When the UNHCR releases its Global Compact on Refugees, how will governments implement it? How should they monitor and evaluate progress?

The research team will involve women from refugee backgrounds in the design and development of programs and evaluation strategies, and to self-represent in Geneva.

The Impact: Influence law and policy, educate refugee organisations, minimise abuse

By looking at ways to implement new UNCHR policy around refugees and sexual abuse among women and girls, Linda and Eileen's work will influence law and policy in countries where there are significant refugee populations, minimising the number of women and girls exposed to rape and sexual abuse.

Their work will also educate and influence service providers in refugee communities, including host community services and NGOs, as well as local refugee organisations engaged in aid and advocacy work. This sphere of influence includes the World Bank, that until now, has primarily funded development work but is starting to recognise rape and sexual abuse among refugees as an emergency issue that needs more attention.

Researchers

Dr Linda Bartolomei is a Senior Lecturer and the co-convenor of the Forced Migration Research Network at UNSW. Since 2001 with now Honorary Adjunct Professor Eileen Pittaway, Linda has explored the challenges and responses to refugee women and girls in Kenya, Ethiopia, Thailand, India, Sri Lanka and Australia. Their work was instrumental in the introduction of the UNHCR's Conclusion on the Protection of Women and Girls at Risk in 2006 and the implementation of the Heightened Risk Identification Tool. Linda first started working with refugees in the early 1980s as a trainee social worker in Melbourne.

Adjunct Professor Eileen Pittaway was Director of the Centre for Refugee Research at UNSW, and Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences and International Studies from 1999 to 2013. She now continues her research activities and involvement with UNSW in an honorary capacity. Her major focus has been the prevention of and response to the rape, sexual abuse and gender-based violence experienced by refugee women at risk, both overseas and following resettlement to Australia. In 2005, she received a NSW Premier's Award for services to refugee education in Australia, and in 2012, was made a Member of the Order of Australia for her work with refugees.

Ben Falkenmire 30.01.18