Published on *Treatment Action Campaign* (http://tac.org.za/community)

LUSIKISIKI GIRL ABDUCTED IN KWA NCELE

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Created *2009/06/17 - 10:52am*
17 June, 2009 - 10:52 ? moderator

The custom of *ukuthwalwa* is being abused in some remote areas of Lusikisiki, including kwa Ncele, Khanayayo and Hlabathi. Once a custom of arranged marriages, *ukuthwalwa* has become a violent practise. In many cases, parents are arranging for young girls to marry without the
girls? consent. More violent scenarios involve *ukuthwalwa* being used to legitimise the abduction of 14 to 17 year old girls for forced marriage. The victims are being abducted by strangers as well as by relatives. These young girls are being forced into unlawful marriages with widowed men who are 55 to 70 years old. The men are often HIV positive.

Civil societies like Parallegal, Lucarc, TAC and government departments are in outrage about the custom of ukuthwalwa. Programs are being implemented to raise awareness and prevention of this dangerous practise. Such a program has been started in kwa Khanyayo in response to the outcry in the vicinity against child abduction. A community door to door outreach campaign (?Stop a girl to child abduction, put an end to violating children?s rights?) aims to stop child abduction in the area.

In Palmerton, actions are being taken to provide these victims of ukuthwalwa with a safe place to seek refuge from their abusers. Mayor Zoleka Langa Capa of the OR Tambo municipality has opened the Palmerton Care Centre. The Centre accomodates 85 children from 6
OR Tambo district municipalities: Mbizana, Nyandeni, King Sabatha Dalindyebo, Ingquza Hill (Flagstaff & Lusikisiki), Port St. John?s and Mhlontlo. Whether they are orphans, sufferers of domestic violence, or rape victims, these children find the care, support and love they need at the Centre. The children are also given the opportunity to go to school. Some attend Palmerton Jun. Sec. School, while others study at Palmerton Sen. Sec. School.

The TAC branch in Lusikisiki visited the Centre to speak with 8 girls there who are victims of ukuthwalwa. The girls had been abducted by their relatives, locked into guarded huts, and forced to have unprotected sex with strangers who later became their new husbands.

The first girl to speak with TAC about her traumatising experience was 14 year old Neliswa Shabane. Earlier this year, Neliswa ran away from her hut which was guarded by five men, two of which were her relatives. Just after she ran away, Neliswa met the mayor?s daughter as she was driving through kwa Ncele. ?I did not want to marry an old man; all I want is to go
to school,? Neliswa told her. The mayor?s daughter took Neliswa to the Mthontsasa police station to report that she was about to be abducted.

TAC also listened to the damaging story of Nolizwi Nosinama, an orphan at the Palmerton Care Centre. In 2006, at the age of 14, Nolizwi was kidnapped and forced to marry a 55 year old man suffering from Tuberculosis (TB). For *lobolo*, the man paid Nolizwi?s aunt 3 cows.
Nolizwi has said that her husband (Madala) ?used to force, beat me in the body and squeeze me on neck whenever he needed to have sex.? One month after she was abducted, Nolizwi became pregnant. She was given little support from her mother-in-law, especially after Nolizwi?s husband feld to Durban to seek work. Nolizwi decided to report her situation to the
Mthontsasa police station after she was exposed to the door to door campaign in her area. Now 17 years old, Nolizwi and her two year old son stay at the Centre while she studies in grade 7.

In addition to speaking with the girls, TAC provided an education segment to them on human and legal rights. The girls were also given a presentation on HIV basics and protection. *Ukuthwalwa* as a practise of forced marriage, and in many cases rape, is a violation of children?s rights. Furthermore, these girls are often forced to have unprotected sex with these men, putting them at risk of contracting HIV. Their children are then also at risk of being born with HIV. In accordance with these health concerns, the Rescue Assistant Area Manager at the Centre has promised to work with TAC to allow for ongoing treatment literacy and education on human and legal rights for the children staying there.

These young, brave girls at the Palmerton Care Centre are hoping for nothing more than a brighter future. Through the actions of awareness and prevention campaigns, the number of *ukuthwalwa* victims will hopefully lessen.The children especially thank mayor Zoleka Langa
Capa who came to their rescue in their times of victimisation.

Source URL (retrieved on *2016/05/27 - 10:25am*): http://tac.org.za/community/node/2611