

Against Rape

rights, resources &
self-help information
for survivors

This is the joint website of **Women Against Rape** and **Black Women's Rape Action Project**. Both organisations are based on self-help and provide support, legal information and advocacy. We campaign for justice and protection for all women and girls, including asylum seekers, who have suffered sexual, domestic and/or racist violence.

WAR was founded in 1976. It has won changes in the law, such as making rape in marriage a crime, set legal precedents and achieved compensation for many women. BWRAP was founded in 1991. It focuses on getting justice for women of colour, bringing out the particular discrimination they face. It has prevented the deportation of many rape survivors. Both organisations are multiracial.



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Dossier calling for Yarl's Wood closure chronicles decade of abuse complaints

In the Media

Report by anti-rape campaigners, sent to all MPs, documents complaints from current and former detainees at the Bedfordshire immigration removal centre



A protest at Westminster on Monday afternoon calling for Yarl's Wood to be shut down. Photograph: Velar Grant/Zuma Press/Corbis

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A decade of complaints about sexual abuse and mistreatment at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre are documented in a report based on hundreds of complaints by detainees.

The dossier, published on Monday by Women Against Rape and Black Women's Rape Action Project, which have been working with female detainees at the centre for more than 10 years, concludes with a call that it should be shut down.

Around 200 women staged a protest outside parliament after the report was published. The demonstration heard testimony from current detainees at the Bedfordshire centre.

The report contains complaints from current and former detainees, collected from hundreds received by the two campaign groups during that period.

These include:

1. A rape survivor from Uganda reported a male guard entering her room when she was semi-naked, causing her to be retraumatised about the rape.
2. A pregnant woman reported a guard repeatedly propositioning her for sex.
3. Several women reported that strip searching and suicide watch made them feel humiliated.
4. Some women reported that guards hinted that if the women cooperated with their sexual overtures the guards would help them get released.
5. One woman told campaigners that strip searches and suicide watch were used to harass and sexually humiliate detainees. "Male guards are present when women are strip searched," she said. "If you are put on suicide watch the guards watch you when you go to the toilet, they come into your room when you are sleeping. I woke up and a guard was standing over me shining a light in my face. I was very scared."

Another said detainees felt pressured into giving in to the sexual demands of staff. "If you have to open your legs you will. You think that is the only way that you are able to speak to your family. You have to give in."

A female detainee reported that she witnessed a semi-naked woman being sat on by male guards during a removal and badly hurt as a result. But when her lawyer tried to pursue what happened, the CCTV footage of the deportation had disappeared.

One pregnant woman reported a guard continually propositioning her for sex. She said: "He flirted with me. I was scared, fragile and pregnant. The guards double date the women. Some women believe that a guard has their best interests at heart but they are easily taken in because they have no other option to get help. Guards give the impression that they have the power to get women released."

The dossier, which has been sent to all MPs, calls for the detention centre to be shut down. Campaigners are calling on female MPs in particular to work to get the centre closed.

The protesters attempted to present the report at the gates of Downing Street but were turned away by police, who told them an appointment had to be booked by members of the public who wished to hand over a petition. The campaigners said they would return to present their report at a later date.

Yarl's Wood is currently run by Serco, which secured a £70m contract in November 2014 to continue running it for eight years. A Serco spokesperson said: "Serco has taken punitive action where necessary by dismissing members of staff."

"There are two completely independent complaints systems at Yarl's Wood, one with the Independent Monitoring Board and one with the Home Office, and whenever complaints or allegations have been raised they have been properly and fully investigated and where appropriate the police have been informed."

"Furthermore Serco asked the highly respected former barrister Kate Lampard CBE, who has immense experience and credibility, to conduct an independent review of our work at Yarl's Wood."

'What crime have I committed to be held like this?': inside Yarl's Wood
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Reports of mistreatment at Yarl's Wood have been rife. The Guardian and the Observer have documented a series of claims about sexual abuse from guards and a Channel 4 News undercover report showed staff referring to detainees as "animals", "beasties" and "bitches".

A report by the charity Women For Refugee Women last year found that 13 of 38 women interviewed had been seen by male guards while they were naked, 16 said men had seen them in the shower and 14 said men had seen them while they were using the toilet.

Research by Legal Action for Women in 2005 found that 70% of women detained in Yarl's Wood were victims of rape and/or other forms of sexual violence.

Several former detainees at Yarl's Wood joined Monday's protest outside parliament. Some current detainees have spoken over the phone to the protesters and their voices were heard across Parliament Square.

One former detainee, Grace, 46, from Uganda, told the Guardian: "My mental and physical health suffered a lot while I was in there. We were humiliated in many different ways. They gave us sanitary pads that were too small causing us problems and they often entered our rooms at 6am or late at night when we were naked or partially naked. I am still suffering from my experience in Yarl's Wood."

Cristel Amiss, a coordinator for the Black Women's Rape Action Project, said: "We are calling for Yarl's Wood to be closed down, along with other immigration detention centres. Imprisoning traumatised and vulnerable women is inhumane. Giving guards power over them enables them to exploit these women's vulnerability. It's a form of torture for these women but meanwhile private companies like Serco are making a profit out of it. We hope that MPs, especially women MPs, will take a firm stand on this."

An all-party parliamentary committee has recommended that immigration detention should be limited to a maximum of 28 days and said rape survivors and pregnant women should no longer be detained.

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/jun/15/yarls-wood-report-calling-for-closure-decade-abuse-complaints>