

My name is Bridget John, and I'm a widow and an asylum seeker. I am 36 in December, and my son is 10 in December. I am a Roman Catholic from Lahore, with degrees in Psychology and English literature. My son's father was my late husband, John Abraham. He worked as a Customer services manager in a government gas company, and he was the only Christian in his office, and because he was a manager over Muslim colleagues, he was greatly resented, since Islamic practice in Pakistan is that Muslims should always be in the position of domination and authority, and most Muslims are very unhappy to work under a Christian. Several of his employees were supporters or members of a banned extremist group. They pressured him to convert to Islam, but my husband repeatedly refused, and for a while they ceased and we thought the danger was over. Then, one night, there was a works dinner out, and I heard some noises outside, and I saw these men beating and kicking him to the floor, over and over, raining blows on him. I called an ambulance, and I can't describe the experience of watching the bloodied body of my husband being carried in to the ambulance. He didn't make it to hospital, he died of a fatal head wound. He was the only child of his parents, and his child, our son, was only one year old, and now I was a widow, having to cope with the fear and the distress and grief. Then the autopsy revealed he had also been poisoned. I learnt that at the dinner, these men had accused my husband of blasphemy by insulting the Islamic prophet, which carries the death penalty. I think that either they meant to kill him with the poison, then beat him when that didn't work enough, or they poisoned him to make him vulnerable. He was my pillar of support, and my life gone. He was the only son in his family, and so my in-laws grief too was ..... I can't describe it, theirs or mine. Only after about a month did I manage to pick up the courage and drag myself to the police station to file a case. The reason it needs courage, over and above overcoming grief, is that police in Pakistan routinely treat Christians extremely badly. The police refused to take my 'First Information Report'. They said I had committed blasphemy just like my husband, and they locked me in a little room, not a proper cell. There was no formal arrest and so no paperwork. After two or three days, the door opened and Mr Akmal and a Mr Ramzan entered, those two men who had killed my husband. I was tied to the side of the bed, and they stripped all my clothes off and tortured me, burning me with lit cigarettes, and then... I was raped. The day after, I was released, because somebody friendly secretly bribed the police to let me go. But after that those two men kept sending people to harass me and try and force me into the prostitution, trying to get me with Muslim child, so that I would be forced to convert or else lose the child.

After some considerable time, I had to go. I found a 'travel agent' who gave me a forged Pakistani passport, and I made it to France first, and then wanted to come to England. I don't know French, but I knew English. Soon after I arrived in 2011 I claimed asylum. I asked my pastor to provide a letter to confirm the circumstances of my husband's death, but even though we were active members of the church, he refused, certainly because he is so afraid of the consequences of speaking out.

I've eventually found a church here, but I suffered greatly with terrible nightmares. I kept seeing my husband's body, all covered in blood, being carried off, night and day, and get flashbacks of the rape, the touch on my skin, just, everything. I've been to psychiatrists and on medication for depression, which helps, but it leaves me numb and listless. I try to be strong because I am my son's only parent now, but it affects him too. I've been to counselling, and to experts in treating victims of torture. Their doctors documented the burn marks from the torture. My claim for asylum was rejected, and at several appeals. The forged passport and going via France were issues, but they also said that my testimony was not credible because of discrepancies, and my husband hadn't been killed the way he

had. They said I got a fake death certificate because of spelling mistakes and differences in hospital name, and then twisted my story to incorporate the poisoning on the death certificate, even though I explained about the hospital changing name. They dismissed the torture experts report, and said I could have got my scars in ways other than being tortured in a police cell. I am close to the end of the process, and so far all my appeals have been rejected. I am so very afraid. They are so vengeful – they want to kill my husband's son too because they want to see the end of my husband's generation. If I keep close to family, mine and his, they can easily find me. The people who reject my appeals say I can just move to another area, but I will have no support. I am educated, but that can just make me more of a target. I will be a single woman, and Christian women get raped and sexually assaulted all the time, at work, at home, in the streets, going into church. And if someone finds out that my husband was killed for blasphemy..... The extremist groups are everywhere. There is no safe area. Christian areas and churches get bombed, in Karachi they get attacked by the Taliban, and the police so often treat us just like the terrorists do and abuse us. My son might not remember his father, but he is vividly aware of the trauma and the danger, and I don't want to go back, for his sake as well as mine. We are desperate to stay, and I am bewildered because when the Home Office tells me it is safe to return, it is obvious they have no idea of what the reality we Christians have to endure really is like.