

HUSBAND RULED NO THREAT TO IRANIAN WIFE

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DATE: September 8, 2005

PUBLICATION: Palm Beach Post, The (FL)

EDITION: WEST

SECTION: LOCAL

PAGE: 1B

MEMO: Did not run MSL.

For weeks, a 32-year-old Iranian woman was kept in a Wellington home as a sex slave, forced to perform acts she found abhorrent or risk the wrath of her new husband, who is strong even though he must use a wheelchair.

At least that's how her attorney and advocates told it in court on Wednesday. The husband and his parents, however, offered a vastly different view.

The woman, Mhernoosh Khosratag, used the family to escape the poverty of her homeland and then concocted the story to get out of the marriage, said Mahmood Abdolahi, whose 34-year-old son is accused of mistreating the woman he married less than two months ago.

Abdolahi said his son, Ali-Reza, who has used a wheelchair for 13 years, is incapable of pulling a sheet over his head, much less using one to choke his new wife.

Without ruling on the validity of the wildly divergent claims, Circuit Judge Jack Cook agreed that Ali-Reza Abdolahi poses no threat to Khosratag.

With Khosratag now living in a shelter for victims of domestic violence, Cook said he found no reason to grant her request for a restraining order to prevent Abdolahi from having any contact with her for a year.

"Mr. Abdolahi certainly is not a danger to this petitioner," Cook said. "She has two arms and two legs. She can certainly just walk away."

He rejected attorney Samantha Vacciana's claims that Khosratag's culture makes it impossible for her to simply walk away.

"A dowry was paid for her," Vacciana said. Khosratag feels obligated to Abdolahi and his family.

Now in the county's human service system, Cook countered, Khosratag has "a whole bevy of people" who can help her stay away from Abdolahi.

The sordid tale isn't unique, Vacciana said. Scores of immigrant woman are brought into the county each year by men who end up exploiting them, she said.

Unable to work because of their immigrant status and told they have no right to contact the police, they are trapped, she said. A year ago, she and other lawyers at Legal Aid Society of Palm Beach County formed Immigrant Victims of Domestic Abuse to represent such women.

Khosratag became her client after sheriff's deputies, called to the Abdolahis' home to investigate a report of domestic violence, took her to Columbia Medical Center under the state's Baker Act.

A doctor found bruises all over her body. The doctor suspected that, instead of being mentally ill, which is what the act covers, she had been abused.

Richard **Tendler**, who represented Abdolahi, agreed that there are tragic cases involving domestic violence. But, he said, this wasn't one of them.

"Legal Aid should really take a look at the type of cases they are filing," he said.

Mahmood Abdolahi said he contacted Khosratag after reading a sad story about her in an Iranian newspaper. He said he wanted to help her and hoped she would help his son.

The retired general contractor said he never paid a dowry. But between trips to Dubai, a wedding in Iran and one here and other expenses, he said, the marriage cost him about \$30,000.

Abdolahi says Khosratag should be sent back to Iran.

Vacciana said she will help her through the bureaucratic maze of immigration procedures in the hope that she can stay in the country.

Staff writer Susan Spencer-Wendel contributed to this story.

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