

Sexual violence against men and boys and members of the LGBTIQ+ community

Sexual violence against men and boys is a form of gender-based violence. Until recently, international and national treaties and efforts have focused on women and girls as survivors of GBV, with the understanding that gender-based discrimination is at the heart of GBV and it affects women and girls disproportionately. Although global data on the extent of sexual violence experienced by men and boys is scarce, CRSV against men and members of the LGBTIQ+ community is increasingly documented.

Case studies suggest that the prevalence is significant. For instance, 23.6% men in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2010 and 32.6% former male combatants in Liberia in 2008 reported having experienced sexual violence. In Yei County of South Sudan, 47% men reported experiencing or witnessing sexual violence against a man (2008).¹ In 2018, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic reported detailed evidence of sexual violence against men and boys in Syria. At the Open Debate on CRSV of the Security Council in April 2021, Pramila Patten, the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on CRSV said: “Reports of sexual violence against men and boys were recorded in almost all of the countries examined, with the majority occurring in detention settings”.

Social and gender norms with strict binary gender structures are among key drivers of sexual violence against men and a barrier to men survivors seeking help. These norms manifest in the view that “real men” cannot be weak or victims. In Northern Uganda, for example, people perceived men as nonexistent after they were raped by government soldiers because of the belief that the rape had ‘turned them into women’. The overwhelming shame, humiliation, anger and fear resulting from sexual violence can lead to heightened anxiety, self-harm, depression and drug abuse among men survivors – they sometimes become aggressive towards others, including their family members.

Specific risk factors that affect sexual violence against men and boys include criminalisation of same-sex relations and lack of legal protection for male survivors and discrimination and violence against persons of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, expression and sex characteristics.

¹ Touquet, Heleen and Chynoweth, Sarah et al. (2020): From ‘It Rarely Happens’ to ‘It’s Worse for Men’. Dispelling Misconceptions about Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement, in: The Journal of Humanitarian Affairs, Vol. 2, Issue 3 (2020), p 25–34.

The SDC's Position on Male Survivors

Gender inequality is anchored in strict definitions of what it means to be a man or a woman, accompanied by a rigid heteronormativity. Many of the reasons for sexual violence against men and boys are rooted in these gender norms, such as conflict-related sexual violence, which aims to defeat and subjugate the men of enemy groups, or sexual violence to discipline or punish gender non-conforming men and boys, including members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

As a result of the sexual violence, many men and boys are not only physically wounded, but they are also traumatised because the crime committed against them is an attack against their gender identities and/or their diverse sexual orientation or gender expression.

Hence, the SDC includes sexual violence against men and boys in its advocacy for the right of everyone to be protected from sexual violence and to receive gender-responsive care.

The SDC advocates for increased funding to address GBV. Services for men, boys and LGBTIQ+ survivors should be funded in addition to, not in competition with, services for girls and women.

Source: SDC 2022. [Position paper](#) on sexual violence against men and boys including members of the LGBTIQ+ community.

Types of sexual violence against men and boys include rape or torture targeting the sexual organs, public humiliation by forcing sexual acts, forced marriage, voyeurism, harassment, sexual slavery or trafficking for sexual purposes. In Afghanistan, for example, boys as young as 11, young men and transgender youth are forced to dance and sexually serve their “keepers” who are men associated with armed forces/groups or otherwise influential in their societies.² Abuse of men and particularly boys and young adults is also frequently committed by community members, by employers, by teachers or family members.

Who is committing sexual violence in conflict?

“When Rohingya refugees were asked about sexual violence against men and boys, they exclusively discussed sexual violence perpetrated by Myanmar military forces, whereas service providers reported that the majority of men/boy survivors accessing sexual violence care were boys and young men abused by family or community members.”

Source: Touquet, H. et al (2020). [From ‘It Rarely Happens’ to ‘It’s worse for men’](#) – dispelling misconceptions about sexual violence against men and boys in conflict and displacement.

² ASP & YHDO (2020): AFGHANISTAN – Briefing to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence against Boys in Afghanistan, 85th session of CRC, September 2020.

Evidence shows that **with appropriate care and a politically and socially supportive environment men and boys, just as women and girls, can heal from trauma of sexual violence** and be empowered survivors. Men survivors, just as women, rarely report sexual violence incidents immediately, and tend to do so when the physical wounds require urgent intervention. They, just like women survivors, require a survivor-centred, multi-service response, consisting of medical, psychosocial, legal and economic support.

Men and boys require separate and tailored GBV services. Specialised GBV services for men and boys enable and encourage them to reduce their physical pain, to break through their isolation and to support “the renegotiation of gendered identities”. Medical personnel as well as services that can be an entry point for disclosure by survivors must be trained to understand how to respond to men (including transgender) survivors of sexual violence. Detailed guidance on key issues of an adequate multi-sector response for survivors of sexual violence against men and boys is increasingly available (see [list of Resources](#) at the end of this Tip sheet).

Services and approaches that are developed to respond to women GBV survivors, such as Women and Girls Safe Spaces and One Stop Crisis Centres located in the maternity section of hospitals are not appropriate for men and boys. One Stop Crisis Centers must however be prepared to respond to boy children who are often brought to this service by parents.

Critical reflection on gender norms, gender inequality and causes and consequences of GBV are relevant to preventing GBV against men and boys and members of the LGBTIQ+ communities, just as they are relevant for women and girls. Increased critical understanding of how unequal gender norms harm women and girls as well as men and boys can change attitudes and reduce violence and stigma.

Potential entry points for reaching out to men and boy survivors of GBV.

For adult males

- Health centres/hospitals
- Services for torture survivors
- MHPSS services (non GBV specific)
- Community centres
- Legal aid clinics
- Peer critical reflection/awareness sessions
- Demobilisation/disarmament Reintegration programmes for former combatants

For boys, adolescents, young adults

- Family members including siblings
- Health centres or hospitals
- Teachers
- Caregivers
- Reintegration services for children associated with armed forces and groups
- Child friendly spaces
- Child helplines
- Child protection case workers
- Youth centres/ youth programmes

Source: [GBV AoR \(2021\)](#): Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination.

? — Essential questions to ask when addressing sexual violence against men and boys

In addition to the questions shared in [Tip sheet 1: Multisectoral GBV response](#), ask the following questions when looking at projects that address men and boy survivors of sexual violence.

1 — How will the project reach out to men and boy survivors of GBV?

Replicating a gender segregated safe space model (such as Women and Girls Safe Spaces or One Stop Crisis Centres for women and girls) is not recommended for men and boys. Evidence suggests that there are more effective options for supporting male survivors' disclosure and access to services. For instance, men-only group psychosocial support, including sessions led by a trained psychologist or mental health professional with experience in supporting male survivors, or peer support models may be considered as a response to male survivors of sexual violence, depending on the context. For boys, it is important that the project collaborates with child protection services and specialised actors.



Ask the following questions:

- What will be the entry points for reaching out to men and boys? It is important to consult with men/key informants from the affected community to identify locations where adult male sexual violence survivors can safely and routinely access services without arousing suspicion or drawing attention to themselves.
- Who will be the outreach workers and what training will they have for safe identification and referrals for adult males and boy survivors?
- How well does the implementing partner organisation know the local experience of male survivors? Avoid application of a service model developed in the Global North without a thorough understanding of the local context.

2 — How will the project address homophobia and transphobia while addressing GBV against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ communities?

Just as discrimination and stigmatisation against women and girl survivors of GBV prevents them from accessing services, men and boy survivors of GBV are also deterred from seeking help and care services. Deep rooted structural and social barriers, including discriminatory laws and policies, such as those that criminalise same-sex relationships, often lead to criminalisation and persecution of men and LGBTIQ+ survivors of GBV. GBV service providers, such as the police, health workers and protection staff, often hold homophobic and transphobic views. While they are able to perceive women, girls and even boy children as victims of GBV, they may not see adolescent boys and adult males as victims of sexual violence. It is important that in GBV projects supported by the SDC, all GBV service providers are sensitised and skilled in addressing GBV against men, boys and members of the LGBTIQ+ communities.



When reviewing projects that address GBV against men and boys check the following:

- How are the project staff and service providers trained? Have they reflected on their own biases against male survivors or LGBTIQ+ persons?
- Has the project considered the risks to men and LGBTIQ+ survivors from law enforcement? How will the project mitigate such risks and support survivors? How does the project protect the survivors from possible persecution where same-sex relationships are criminalised?

References and further reading

SDC Position Paper (2021): Sexual Violence Against Men And Boys, Including Against Members Of The LGBTIQ+ Community.

Chynoweth, S. and D. Busher (2021): Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings. A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector. WRC, 2021.

WRC (2021): Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants who are Survivors or at Risk of Sexual Violence. A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe.

GBV AoR (2021): Guidance to Gender-Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination.

All Survivors Project (2019): Checklist on preventing and addressing conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys.

Touquet, H. et al. (2020): From 'It Rarely Happens' to 'It's Worse for Men': Dispelling Misconceptions about Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement, in: Journal of Humanitarian Affairs Volume 2, No. 3 (2020), 25–34.

UNHCR (2012): Need to Know Guidance: Working with Men and Boy Survivors of Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Forced Displacement.