



Research themes and questions to guide research on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings



Together the literature review and online survey identified key themes and specific questions for research on sexual violence in conflict. Through this process a number of countries experiencing conflict were found to be under-represented in the literature, with the bulk of the published literature coming from DRC, Uganda, Former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Liberia. No published research was found from Afghanistan and Somalia, and very few published journal articles or other reports were identified from Burundi, Central African Republic, and Guinea, while Burma, Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), Chechnya, East Timor and South Sudan were also poorly represented in the published literature.

In addition to addressing these geographical gaps in the published literature, the following specific research questions under each theme were identified as priority:

Priority Theme I:

The scope and effectiveness of programs to prevent conflict-related sexual violence

Identification of prevention program approaches (i.e. scope of existing prevention approaches)

- What models exist for community-based prevention of conflict-related sexual violence perpetrated by armed groups and/or non-state actors? What forms of positive collective action exist to prevent (or minimize) conflict-related sexual violence?
- What evidence exists for the effectiveness of community based programmes for the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence?
- How can programs to prevent conflict-related sexual violence be adapted to fit best the cultural context of different country settings?
- What are the options for scaling up effective prevention programs? Are programs that have wide reach more or less effective in preventing conflict-related sexual violence than programs that are limited in reach but go deeper into relevant issues?

Identification of key actors in prevention programs (e.g. males, females, perpetrators, beneficiaries, community leaders)

- What successful models exist for effectively engaging men and boys / women / families and schools / religious leaders / social leaders / perpetrators in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence?
- How do beneficiaries perceive programs to prevent conflict-related sexual violence, and what areas do they typically identify for improvement/modification? What do survivors of conflict-related sexual violence believe are effective prevention approaches? What do combatants believe are effective approaches to prevent conflict-related sexual violence?
- How do national laws and policies impact on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence at the community level?

Impact and effectiveness of prevention programs (general)

- What are appropriate outcomes and outcome measures for sexual violence prevention programmes in conflict? How can they be used to design better evaluations of prevention programmes?
- What are the basic components of any effective program to prevent conflict-related sexual violence? (best practices)

Research themes and questions to guide research on sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings

- What UN-led initiatives have made a tangible impact on the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence and against which baseline information can this be measured?
- What factors lead to the sustainability or failure of programs to prevent conflict-related sexual violence?

Impact and effectiveness of prevention programs (specific issues)

- Is there evidence that conflict-related sexual violence prevention approaches can be effectively integrated in DDR processes in order to prevent future sexual violence?
- Does effective security sector reform contribute to the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence?
- Can military assets be effectively deployed or leveraged to prevent conflict-related sexual violence? How?
- Does the threat of sanctions serve as an effective deterrent in the prevention of conflict-related sexual violence? (national level and individual level)
- What are the possible methods for applying a specific value to the benefits expected from specific prevention approaches (e.g. quality of life, range of the types of violence prevented)?
- Is there evidence that efforts to prevent conflict-related sexual violence may directly or indirectly exacerbate unequal gender relations or sexual violence?

Priority Theme 2:

The scope and effectiveness of programs to respond to conflict-related sexual violence

Survivors' perspectives and experiences

- What do the survivors of conflict-related sexual violence identify as their immediate needs?
- What are successful strategies for making services accessible and responsive for men and women survivors of conflict-related sexual violence?
- What are survivors' perceptions about the services they receive in response to conflict-related sexual violence? What services exist for survivors who may be dependent on the perpetrator (e.g. forced marriage) or face stigma from the community?

Identification of program approaches (i.e. scope of existing approaches to respond to conflict-related sexual violence)

- What is the scope of programs that address the needs of conflict-related sexual violence survivors across countries? i.e. inventory of program approaches in conflict-affected countries including all relevant sectors
- How can programs to respond to conflict-related sexual violence be adapted to fit the cultural context of different country settings? Can programs be adapted from one geographic context to another?
- What are the mechanisms available to support children who are survivors of conflict-related sexual violence and to ensure the quality of services available to them?
- What models and best practices exist for programs that respond to conflict-related sexual violence through DDR programs?
- What models and best practices exist for integrating conflict-related sexual violence response services into other care and services (e.g. physical health and economic development services)?

Availability and accessibility of clinical services

- What policies/frameworks exist to promote an appropriate response to conflict-related sexual violence as well as integration into reproductive health services and how effective are they?
- What are the most effective approaches to support conflict-related sexual violence survivors to seek care?
- Does routine screening increase the identification of conflict-related sexual violence survivors?
- How can services be improved to respond more effectively to secondary trauma of service providers, families and community members?

Mental health services

- What feasible and effective models of service exist for addressing the mental health repercussions experienced by conflict-related sexual violence survivors? What impact does this support have on survivors' functionality?
- Does utilization of appropriate sexual assault services have a long term impact on conflict-related sexual violence survivors' mental health and well-being?
- How effective are programs that provide psychological support to family members, including male partners, of conflict-related sexual violence survivors?
- What evidence-based methods and best practices exist (or can be developed) to monitor the effectiveness of psychosocial care given to conflict-related sexual violence survivors?

Community-level interventions approaches

- What models and best practices exist for community-based programs that respond to conflict-related sexual violence and reducing stigma?
- To what extent are community members aware of the benefits and location of medical care for conflict-related sexual violence survivors where those services exist?
- What effective approaches exist to use community networks for promoting the timely presentation of conflict-related sexual violence survivors for medical care?
- Is community-based post-rape care for conflict-related sexual violence survivors safe and feasible where facility-based care is not possible?
- What effective methods exist for helping conflict-related sexual violence survivors to reintegrate into their communities, and how is the effectiveness of those methods measured?

Impact and effectiveness of response programs (general)

- Which program approaches have been most effective in addressing the needs of conflict-related sexual violence survivors? What are the key elements of an effective program, what outcome measures are used, and what evidence exists to indicate that the approaches used are effective?
- What is the relative effectiveness of different approaches employed to respond to conflict-related sexual violence (either as individual approaches or in combinations of approaches)? Which multi-sectoral models can be demonstrated to be most effective?
- What are the options for scaling up effective programs that respond to conflict-related sexual violence? Are programs that have wide reach more or less effective in responding to conflict-related sexual violence than programs that are limited in reach but go deeper into relevant issues?

Other

- What are the key obstacles to implementing the sexual violence response components of the MISDP?
- What are the factors affecting access and utilization of services by male sexual violence survivors?
- Is there evidence that efforts to respond to conflict-related sexual violence may directly or indirectly exacerbate unequal gender relations or sexual violence?
- What is the effect of reparations programs for survivors of sexual violence on the security of the survivors and the overall security of their communities in a post-conflict setting?

Priority Theme 3:

The impact of conflict-related sexual violence on individuals, families, communities and countries

General:

- How does sexual violence impact on individuals, families, communities and countries according to the cultural context?
- In what ways are the impacts at each level gendered and gender-specific?

Impact of conflict-related sexual violence on the individual:

- What relationships do survivors use to face conflict-related sexual violence?
- What are the consequences of stigmatization for victims of sexual violence?
- What are the long-term psychological side effects for survivors of GBV?
- What do individuals who have survived sexual violence want in order for justice to be served?
- What are the protective factors (individual, family and community) that influence women's reintegration post-rape?
- Shame and stigma are seen as an inevitable result of sexual violence, is this the case? Are children born of rape discriminated against?

Impact of conflict-related sexual violence on families:

- How does conflict-related sexual violence affect post-conflict family relations (including intimate partner violence, and children born of rape)?
- What are short and long term consequences within the family/community?
- What are the experiences of men who are partners to victims of sexual violence and how does their unaddressed traumatization affect the family unit?

Impact of conflict-related sexual violence on communities:

- How does stigma factor in community recovery from conflict?
- How do communities cope with widespread sexual violence? What are the protective and risk factors?
- Do experiences of sexual violence during conflict have a long term impact on society's view of the role of women?

Priority Theme 4:

Better understanding of the different forms and motivations of conflict-related sexual violence

Perpetrators

- What transforms soldiers into sexual violence perpetrators?
- To what extent are members of armed groups forced to take part in this culture of violence?
- What are the perceived alternatives to violence in gaining access to food, money, and sexual contact with women?
- What are the policies, human resources, political will and penalties for perpetrators?

The relationship between conflict-related sexual violence and gender-based violence

- Do other forms of GBV increase as a result of conflict affecting a community/society?
- What is the link between sexual violence by armed groups and sexual violence by civilians?
- Does domestic violence result in or increase as an effect of wider conflict affecting a community/society?
- How does the type of violence change due to conflict-related sexual violence? What are the differences and similarities?

Priority Theme 5:

Integration of sexual assault services in sexual and reproductive health services including emergency contraception, safe abortion services, and family planning?

Survivors' needs and behaviours

- Does routine screening increase the identification of rape survivors (in conflict-affected settings)?
- What is the adherence rate to PEP when given for sexual assault (in conflict-affected settings)?
- What is the level of abortion requests due to conflict-affected rape, as opposed to unmet need for contraception?
- What are the factors affecting access/provision/utilization of emergency contraceptives, safe abortion, and family planning?

Health systems structures, capacities and policies

- To what extent are primary health care facilities able to provide sexual violence response services?
- What are the best strategies to ensure the availability of reproductive health commodities in very vulnerable communities such as eastern DRC?
- What policies/frameworks exist to promote appropriate responses to sexual violence as well as integration in other reproductive health services?

Priority Theme 6:

The role of economic empowerment and holistic approaches in the prevention of, and response to, conflict-related sexual violence

- How does economic empowerment impact long-term recovery from sexual violence?
- How does economic empowerment impact reintegration into the survivors' community after sexual violence?
- What is the effect of a village led microfinance program on reintegration of survivors of sexual violence and their children?
- In a setting where adequate services for survivors are present, what is the effect of women-centred economic empowerment programming on incidence of sexual violence?
- Is community-wide economic empowerment more effective in reducing sexual violence than other approaches?
- What is the effect of a village led microfinance program on individual, family and community resilience outcomes? (decrease in mental health distress, cohesion and self-confidence as examples)

Priority Theme 7:

How to respond to the needs of women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related rape and children born of rape?

Women and girls' experiences and needs

- What are the needs of women and girls that become pregnant as a result of rape? What challenges do they face during pregnancy, child-birth and in raising babies?
- What influences the rejection/acceptance continuum women face when impregnated through rape?

The experiences and needs of children born of rape

- What happens to children born of rape? Who addresses/takes care of the interests of the children born of rape in region/country?
- How have children of rape coped and what are their needs?

Services and policies

- What services and policy frameworks exist that can respond to the needs of the women and girls, and their partners, who are affected by pregnancy as a result of rape?
- What community services/programmes have proven useful in de-stigmatizing pregnancy related to rape?
- What are the mechanisms available to support and ensure quality services provided to children who are raped?

Priority Theme 8:

The needs of ex-combatant sexual violence survivors (male and female) and effective program approaches

Experiences and needs of ex-combatant sexual violence survivors

- How does the experience of sexual violence, including enforced perpetration, affect the (possibly different) transitions of male and female ex-combatants back to civilian life?
- How does the experience of being an enforced perpetrator of sexual violence affect former combatants at the psychological level, both male and female?
- What services should be provided to ex-combatant survivors?

Program effectiveness

- What are the most effective forms of intervention in DDR processes for meeting the needs of ex-combatant sexual violence survivors?
- What interventions are effective in addressing the psychological needs of ex-combatant sexual violence survivors?
- What is the effect of reparations programs for survivors of sexual violence on the security of the survivors and the overall security of their communities in a post-conflict setting?

Priority Theme 9:

Men and boys as survivors of conflict-related sexual violence

Experiences and needs of male conflict-related sexual violence survivors

- What is the prevalence of SGBV among men and boys?
- How can we access the stories of men/boys who are victims of rape/sexual violence and its impact on them?
- What are the community perceptions of male survivors?
- What is the contribution of cultural attitudes about violence to the motivations to violate men?
- What are the different needs of male sexual violence survivors from different cultural and religious backgrounds?
- What are the health, social impact and needs for boys and men who are survivors of sexual violence? Are they different from female survivors?

Services for male conflict-related sexual violence survivors

- How effective are existing programs at recognizing and addressing the existence and needs of male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence?
- What are the factors affecting access and utilization of sexual violence services by male survivors?

Impact of conflict-related sexual violence against males on future violence

- What role does male-directed sexual violence play in the perpetuation of conflicts?

Priority Theme 10:

The impact of conflict on male gender identities and conceptualization of masculinity

Male gender identities, expectations and relationships

- Do gender identities change during conflict? How?
- Does participation in conflict change normative ideas about violence and sex?
- How is masculinity conceptualized before and after the conflict by men and by women?
- In a post-conflict situation how does perpetration of sexual violence impact on relationships?
- How can we reduce stigma by focusing on male gender identities around conflict?

Male gender identities and violence

- How do men explain their own violence?
- How is the perpetration of sexual violence in war contingent on male identity construction?
- How do peers influence men's attitude towards sexual violence in a conflict situation?
- Who are the men who other men admire who chose not to take part in sexual violence in conflict and why?
- To what extent does the construct of militarised masculinity affect the growth and development of the adolescent child soldier who himself has been a perpetrator of sexual violence?

Gender and the macro-environment

- What, if any, is the connection between male perpetrators of sexual violence, nationhood and notions of masculinity?
- Which masculinity constructions within military organizations limit sexual violence?
- Power dynamics serve a role in sexual violence perpetration, in what ways have colonial structures contributed to sexual violence? What is the perpetrator communicating?

Strengthening Research Capacity on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post Conflict Settings

To strengthen our understanding of rape in war and ultimately prevent it, we need to ensure that the research undertaken is both priority driven and is carried out in such a way that it provides a sound practical and empirical basis for interventions/programmes, policy and advocacy on sexual violence in conflict and post conflict settings. This may be achieved by addressing issues of research methods and definitions; collaboration around research; dissemination and sharing of research findings; advocacy and research funding and supporting evidenced based programming. Research on sexual violence in conflict and post conflict settings can therefore be strengthened by:

Research methods, definitions:

- Promoting rigor and consistency in taxonomy to provide a shared understanding of basic concepts for research on conflict-related sexual violence and thus allow for comparability of research findings across settings and contexts;
- Developing consensus on definitions and measurement methodologies for sexual violence in conflict and post conflict research;
- Ensuring research and methods used are guided by existing professional standards and guidelines, including the WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies;
- Developing, adaptation and sharing of research instruments validated for use with study populations.

Collaboration:

- Encouraging and supporting thoughtful collaborations of research teams that consist of a mix of professionals;
- Strengthening local research capacities;
- The creation of a conflict-related sexual violence research working group.

Information sharing:

- The establishment of platforms and partnerships for the sharing of conflict-related sexual violence research findings, including sharing both published and grey literature (organization reports), workshops and conferences;
- Ensuring that research information gets back to the field through the use of participatory research methods and other approaches to dissemination.

Advocacy and research funding:

- Assisting donors in shaping funding programmes that are based on research gaps and priorities through the dissemination of the research agenda for conflict-related sexual violence to funders/donor agencies, policy makers, service planners, and gender and human rights advocates.

Program related:

- The development of programmes that are theoretically based;
- Supporting the evaluation and development of evidenced based programmes.
- Promote the responsible reporting of sound research findings by researchers, journalists and advocacy groups to ensure research findings are used to inform the development of evidence-based responses



Sexual Violence Research Initiative

Gender and Health Research Unit
Medical Research Council
Private Bag X385
Pretoria
South Africa
0001

svri@mrc.ac.za
www.svri.org