



LIECHTENSTEIN INSTITUTE
ON SELF-DETERMINATION
AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

ALL SURVIVORS PROJECT

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Building a Gender Inclusive Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence

The Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton University (LISD) and All Survivors Project convened a workshop, “Building a Gender Inclusive Response to Conflict Related Sexual Violence,” on May 3-4, 2018, at Princeton University. This workshop brought together academics, policy makers, and key UN and NGO actors, and aimed to facilitate discussions around the multi-disciplinary themes of violence prevention, gender and law, and feminist theory to better understand the dynamics of and responses to male sexual victimization in conflict situations.¹

CONTEXT

Sexual violence is pervasive in situations of armed conflict and displacement, where it is widely employed as a tactic of war, terrorism, torture and repression, and where the weakening of rule of law and social protection mechanisms create wider vulnerabilities to sexual victimization. While women and girls are disproportionately impacted, evidence is emerging which shows that men and boys are also highly vulnerable to conflict related sexual violence, and are often also the targets of sexual violence by armed actors and others.

Due to the strenuous efforts of women’s rights advocates, conflict-related sexual violence against women and girls is now squarely on international agendas. In contrast, conflict related sexual violence against men and boys remains largely hidden from view. Lack of detailed documentation and research means that the issue is not well understood, and thus the issue is largely ignored by policy makers, practitioners, and

1. Princeton University Students Reva Abrol '18, Sarah Sakha '18, and Angela Wu '19 served as workshop rapporteurs.

in on-the-ground responses. As a result, men and boys are poorly protected, male survivors of sexual violence have little access to medical and other vital services and support, and their right to justice is routinely denied.

Societal constructs of masculinity and victimhood, alongside homophobia, contribute to a culture of silence and impunity (although within some judicial systems this crime has been occasionally prosecuted), deterring many male survivors from reporting their victimization out of fear of being publicly identified as victims of sexual violence.² Patriarchal family and community structures are a cross-cutting risk factor for violence against women, men and children, and are frameworks within which additional risk factors are found. In the context of armed conflict, such sexual violence is frequently used as a weapon of war with the intent to fracture communities and reduce their capacity to resist, and sexual humiliation is frequently linked to ethnic humiliation.

Rather than accepting under-reporting of sexual violence as an inevitable consequence of stigma, careful inquiry and investigation is necessary, and specific strategies should be adopted to encourage and support all survivors to safely and confidentially report and seek assistance and treatment. If conflict related sexual violence, whether against males or females, is denied and responses suppressed, it will almost inevitably continue.

INTRODUCTION

The workshop began with informal discussions among participants on May 3 and carried on

2. See for instance, Chris Dolan, "Has Patriarchy Been Stealing the Feminists' Clothes? Conflict Related Sexual Violence and UN Security Council Resolutions," *IDS Bulletin* (January 2014), 5; Sandesh Sivakumaran, "Lost in Translation: UN Responses to Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Situations of Armed Conflict," *International Review of the Red Cross*, 92, 877 (March 2010): 259; Marysia Zalewski, Paula Drummond, Elisabeth Prugl and Maria Stern, eds., *Sexual Violence Against Men in Global Politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018).

to three formal working sessions on May 4. The first session featured presentations which sought to explore our current understanding and knowledge of sexual violence against men and boys, critically examine the gaps in research and responses, and articulate the rationale for further work. The second session included presentations that focused on how international legal instruments have excluded male victims, how sexualized torture has been used in conflict situations to inflict deep humiliation on collective and individual gendered identities, and the co-relation between sexual violence against men and boys and violence mitigation. The third session explored how feminist scholarship and theory can be applied to advance responses to male sexual violence to ensure these responses are effective and inclusive. The workshop closed with a final wrap-up session in which, based on discussions from the previous sessions, participants discussed key issues for further consideration and around which specific policy recommendations might be crafted. This report summarizes the content of the off-the-record working sessions, highlighting the main takeaways from each.

SESSION I

Male Sexual Victimization in Conflict and Displacement: Why Do We Need an Agenda?

Presentations under the first theme identified the gaps in our understanding, while critically examining the gaps in research and responses and articulating the rationale for further work. Attention was drawn to the fact that issues of exclusion of kinds of victimization arise when policy makers and program implementers fail to engage in gender-based analysis and when universal assumptions are drawn from data which exists primarily on gender-based violence against women and girls. Gendered stereotyping of masculinity and femininity often in practice function to hide male victims of conflict related sexual violence, and therefore problematizes responses to conflict related sexual violence against men and boys. Lack of

KEY POINTS: SESSION I

1. There is a need to *foster and mainstream gender inclusive understanding* related to conflict related sexual violence, including by undertaking a revision of guiding principles.
2. There is a need to *reframe understanding of sexual violence against men and boys* as not simply torture, which can make invisible the sexual components of torture, silence men on this issue, and limit legal recourse.
3. There is a need to *develop holistic treatment mechanisms* for male victims of conflict related sexual violence that are survivor centered, and focus on the family and community as well as the individual.
4. There is a particular need to *gather information about conflict related sexual violence on three specific male populations*—refugees, ex-combatants, and detainees—through monitoring, screening, and documentation.

appropriate outreach, fears of stigmatization and/or prosecution of the victims, and framing sexual violence against boys and men solely as torture, further contributes to the lack of data that would allow an accurate understanding of the scope of the problem.

Panelists therefore highlighted the need to deepen our understanding and research on scope, forms, and impacts of sexual and gender-based violence, and the urgent need to provide mechanisms which allow male victims and survivors of conflict related sexual violence to seek legal recourse. It was put forward that this could be advanced through five focus areas: physical, psychological, psycho-social, psycho-sexual, and political.

This session also addressed how responses to male sexual victimization can be both gender inclusive and gender sensitive, in the context of upending traditional gender stereotypes. These stereotypes include, for example, norms that link notions of masculinity with war, and those that characterize an “ideal” soldier—and therefore an ideal man—with masculinized conceptions of being strong and brave. Soldiers who are victims of sexual violence are often perceived as having failed in both their duties

and manhood. It was pointed out that ideas about gender are so fixed that such notions of manhood are reflected in international law and policy, and often fail to recognize the reality of victimization of men through sexual violence. Further, overemphasizing female victimhood perpetuates male invincibility which can further exacerbate violence against women, and can put in question the issue of male identity when male survivors believe that the idea of being a man implies invulnerability.

Most Security Council Resolutions related to conflict related sexual violence have focused almost exclusively on sexual violence against women and children, with the exception of UNSCR 2106 (2013) which includes a reference to “men and boys and those secondarily traumatized.” Perpetration of sexual violence by women has been documented, but references to such acts likewise remains absent in international instruments. In the majority, the issue of sexual violence against men is dealt with in footnotes of UN resolutions, conclusions, and policy documents, and has not been treated as a primary area of concern. It was put forward that to conceptualize sexual violence as an issue that only affects women and girls is harmful, but the question remains whether the UN,

governments, and civil society can be gender inclusive and gender sensitive. This was considered by panelists as both a practical necessity and a moral imperative.

There is limited research on the issue of sexual violence against men and boys, but as pointed out by the panelists, this begs the question, why are male victims still so routinely and frequently overlooked? Among the many reasons flagged included issues related to on-the-ground responses: response mechanisms that are designed with only women and girls as recipients of care and aid; the framing of male abuse as torture which can serve to hide the multifaceted impacts of violation; health providers who look only for physical trauma and are not trained to recognize psychological trauma inflicted from sexual violence as such; stigma constituting a significant barrier to self-disclosure; laws that are not inclusive and are in many cases affirmatively persecutory in nature (e.g. laws against same-sex sexual relations); and men and boys simply not being asked about their sexual victimization.

The big picture reality, according to session panelists, is that the issue of male sexual violence is underreported, under-documented, under-acknowledged, and under-understood. There was consensus that it would be dangerous for the international community to absolve itself of the responsibility to respond, using the pretext of not understanding the issue. Building on the position that has been adopted by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence that it would be detrimental to try to dislocate this issue from the normative framework of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, there was consensus among panel discussants that separating the issue of conflict related sexual violence against men and boys from the WPS agenda and its existing toolkit would serve in a practical sense to weaken more so than strengthen the agenda. Panelists noted that key rationales for victimization through sexualized violence apply both to girls and women as to boys and men: the

feminization of men and boys is part of a larger logic that informs the subordination of women; sexual violence is often utilized as a means to fracture families and communities and reduce capacities to resist; and gendered humiliation is frequently linked to ethnic humiliation.

The vulnerabilities of those in contexts of mass displacement and forced migration were identified as a particular source of concern. UNHCR has pointed to current figures of 43 million internally displaced persons and some 20 million refugees worldwide. Both during conflict and during their journeys from conflict situations, men but boys especially are subjected to sexual violence. LGBTI populations likewise remain particularly vulnerable and have been well documented among refugees fleeing Syria and Iraq. More than a decade ago, the WHO estimated that in a single year, 73 million boys and 150 million girls experienced sexual abuse, yet the number of NGOs which focus on sexual violence against men and boys remains pitifully low.³ Within the context of internal and cross-border displacement, it is essential that service providers conduct sensitization, training, and escalate awareness-raising programs for their staffs, adapt existing tools to ensure that they respond to sexual violence against men and boys; adjust programming and referral pathways; and in all these efforts make sure that NGO, local community, and state involvement is secured.

SESSION II

Conceptions of Victimhood and the Need for Gender Inclusive Formulations: Why Are They Relevant?

Panelists in this session focused on how current understandings of the issue of sexual violence

3. UNHCR, "Figures at a Glance," www.unhcr.org/figures-at-a-glance.html; UNHCR, "We Keep It in Our Heart," *Study on Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis*, 27 November 2017, data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/60864; United Nations, *A/61/299* (29 August 2006), 10.

KEY POINTS: SESSION II

1. Gender-inclusive analysis of conflict related sexual violence, as well as the creation of effective policy and jurisprudence, calls for a *broadening of the definition of what constitutes sexual violence*.
2. There is a need for *additional attention and resources for survivor assistance and mental health services* for male victims of conflict related sexual violence, and for programs that both document violations and provide individual, family, and community rehabilitative services.
3. Attention must be given to *building capacity and competencies while allocating sufficient time for interventions* that are context specific, well-resourced, and survivor centered.
4. There must be a *recognition of potential opportunities and resources for interventions against sexual violence pre-conflict, during conflict, and in post-conflict settings* which lead to broad changes in behaviors and social norms.

against men and boys are shaped by international legal instruments, which in turn influence approaches to and resources for victim treatment and how these might be addressed through new strategies to address violence mitigation. The first presentation outlined the issue of conflict related sexual violence against males in international jurisprudence, and how international justice mechanisms have contributed to breaking down stereotypes and myths surrounding this issue. In 1943, the United Nations War Crimes Commission began cataloging the commission of sexualized violence during World War II. Indeed, the military tribunals of Nuremberg and Tokyo captured evidence of male genital mutilation, and the Tokyo judgment mentions evidence of treatment including male castration, male genital mutilation, and men being forced to have sex with family members or others.

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) further put forward a burgeoning body of jurisprudence on male sexual violence, and advanced 14 cases which took into consideration sexual violence against men and boys. While the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) applied the same ap-

proach as that taken by ICTY, it failed to provide jurisprudence on this issue. Male and female sexual violence was similarly inconsistently addressed in the Special Court of Sierra Leone, Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia, and Extraordinary African Chambers in Senegalese Courts. In all of these situations it was noted that the International Criminal Court has produced mixed results around the issue of conflict related sexual violence committed against men and boys.

Panelists asserted that both in the context of international jurisprudence, a gender-inclusive analysis of conflict related sexual violence requires that the definition of what constitutes “sexual violence” needs to be broadened. This is particularly true in the context of including aspects of sexualized psychological torture which extends to those who may not be raped themselves, consideration of the issue of genital mutilation as a specific form of violence which also has sexual implications, the multifaceted implications of forced labor and slavery as a sexual system which targets males, the impact of forced marriages on males, and beatings as a potential form of sexual violence since they can include relentless beating of the genitalia. As

the definition of “sexual violence” continues to evolve in international jurisprudence, it remains a pressing obligation to advance understandings and responses to conflict related sexual violence against males under international criminal law, and international courts are required to do so without discrimination.

Rehabilitation and healing through counseling and social services for those who have suffered sexual violence and trauma was also highlighted in this session. The impacts of sexual victimization of males include a range of symptoms which are common to other trauma survivors, including anxiety, depression, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and are often severe, including functional impairments in many life areas. There are particular vulnerabilities for boys in the context of child labor and pre-existing risks in camp settings where ongoing conflict destroys social norms and protection mechanisms. Mental health and rehabilitation services, however, remain a particularly under-resourced service for male victims of conflict related sexual violence, partially because of the lack of documentation that identifies the need for such resources.

The continued lack of attention towards sexual violence against males, sometimes due to a lack of funding, has serious implications and unaddressed, has the potential for spill-over effects. A toxic sense of shame expressed by male survivors has the potential to trigger behavior (e.g. suicide, domestic violence, substance abuse) which is dangerous to both the survivor and to others, while the physical, emotional, and psychological effects are many and largely remain unattended. There have been attempts to address the disconnect between mental health and rehabilitation services and documentation and research for the purposes of accountability through a model of “therapeutic documentation.” This approach provides survivors an opportunity to document their stories for a variety of purposes of their choosing (e.g. individual, advocacy, research, accountability/legal) after they have completed their mental health services. This integrated approach can reduce the

potential harm of being interviewed on such a sensitive topic and when done well has the potential to further healing. Individual therapy and group therapy formats are both useful in reducing symptoms but limited funding for in-depth long-term mental health services that is needed for rehabilitation of male victims of conflict related sexual violence, as opposed to general psychosocial work, restricts the ability to provide this treatment. Funding is much more available for general psychosocial services that are inadequate to address the particular rehabilitation needs of male survivors of sexual violence.

The session also addressed the interconnectedness of sexual violence and the cycle of violent conflict. In various stages of the cycle of violence—in pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict/state-building—there are potential opportunities for interventions to mitigate against sexual violence. In all these phases, attention needs to be paid to activities and interventions which lead to broad changes in behaviors and social norms. Work on mitigating violence during conflict for example could explore the possibilities of early warning systems, rapid response mechanisms, the deterrence of violence and protection of civilian populations by peacekeeping forces, the establishment of safe spaces and zones of peace, and the development of monitoring and reporting systems. During the post-conflict and state-building phase, it was put forward that stigma reduction work could include broader work on laws, policies, and systems including on justice sector reform, and security sector accountability. It was emphasized that whatever interventions are undertaken and at whatever point in the cycle of violence, the principles of programming need to ensure that they are contextualized appropriately and are inclusive, participative, and community centered. Funding, however, was raised as a crucial concern in building and supporting preventive responses.

KEY POINTS: SESSION III

1. Because conflict related sexual violence impacts different gendered groups in diverse and different ways, there is a *need to be gender inclusive but not gender neutral* and craft response strategies without creating a hierarchy of harm.
2. Because gender is lived and experienced both within and outside of traditional binary frameworks, it is important to understand the ways in which notions of masculinity, femininity and *hierarchies within this binary, shape notions of victimization and responses* to sexual violence.
3. Because dialogue and responses to sexual violence often take place within gender-specific contexts, it is necessary to *focus on movement building that is inclusive* and avoids perpetuating an “us vs. them” paradigm.
4. Because a “scarcity myth” shapes resource allocation, access, benefits and control, and has played a key role in building antagonism towards the idea of gender inclusivity, *financial structures need to be reformed* to better support civil society, the promotion of justice, and victim/survivor outreach and treatment.

SESSION III

Learning from Feminist Approaches to Combatting Sexual Violence

The third session opened with a framing discussion around the concept of gender inclusivity. It was noted that there is in fact a need to be gender inclusive, but not gender neutral. Within this context, it is essential to recognize how different gendered groups are impacted by conflict related sexual violence, but it is also essential that in doing so scholars, policy makers, and service providers do not create hierarchies of harm wherein one perpetration of harm is positioned as higher or more egregious than another. It was noted that numbers—data, which often in the case of male victims is incomplete or wholly absent—feeds into and helps perpetuate the construction of these hierarchies of harm and undercuts recognizing and responding to a variety of vulnerabilities. (Others noted that data is urgently needed to better understand the problem.) To help combat this, movement building is key in the process of crafting a gender-inclusive response to conflict related sexual violence because although the man-

ner in which men and women are targeted is often different, building a movement around addressing sexual violence across the board opens the dialogue and shifts it away from an “us vs. them” paradigm to one that recognizes how conflict related sexual violence impacts all.

Such hierarchies of harm have real impacts on the ways in which budgets are made and resources are allocated. Discussants noted that abundant attention has been paid to sexual violence against women and girls, including celebrity fueled interest in it, and this has been crucial in raising the profile of the issue within the international community, with responses to it have increasing significantly over time. Yet resource allocation still skews heavily toward military spending compared to resources budgeted for the peace and security side of the coin that includes the promotion of and supports for civil society, justice systems, and victim outreach and support. One panelist noted in this context that within the political economy of war, there exists a scarcity myth—that there are just too few resources available—and this fundamentally shapes resource allocation, access, benefit, and control. Men and boys have

remained largely overlooked while confusions and misunderstandings around the idea of gender inclusivity can make appropriate attention to both male and female victims of sexual violence difficult to achieve.

The work of feminist theory has demonstrated how the power dynamics within gender hierarchies have traditionally led to discrimination against women and girls. More recently, growing attention to the functions of masculinities shows that there can be a tendency to make sexual violence against men invisible. The challenge is to achieve inclusivity while leaving room to recognize the ways in which gender is lived and experienced, both within and outside of traditional binary frameworks. The danger of inclusivity, it was noted however, is that it has the potential to flatten the experiences of men and women, and to underappreciate the ways in which notions of masculinity and femininity, and hierarchies within this binary, continue to shape notions of victimization and responses to sexual violence.

The third session grounded these theoretical discussions, and touched upon many issues discussed throughout the day, with the case-study example of Afghanistan's Bacha Bazi, boys who dance for the entertainment of adult men, and are regularly sexually abused. Addressing Bacha Bazi effectively means addressing overlapping issues of sexual abuse and assault, child labor, human trafficking, and child soldiers. The core age group of boys within Bacha Bazi are 12 to 17 year-olds, and the vast majority are from poor families. The perpetrators, conversely, are often wealthy and powerful adult men, including leaders within the Afghan and military police forces.

The presenter noted the importance of understanding the particular socio-cultural contexts within which hierarchies of gender and power function. Afghanistan's context for defining gender roles is from within a tradition-bound, highly religious, and conservative society, in which the dividing lines between public and private, and notions of honor are rooted in highly rigid gender roles and norms. Within Afghan society strict religious laws and cultural practices function paradoxically in the case of Bacha Bazi to both normalize and stigmatize sexual violence against boys. Decades of conflict in Afghanistan have undermined the economy and family structures, and have contributed to a weak state and state justice systems that are ineffective in applying existing laws meant to criminalize the Bacha Bazi. Cultural sensitivities often keep official reporting of Bacha Bazi from happening, while impunity for its perpetrators and the lack of effective judicial responses gives no incentive for victims to come forward. Victims further contend with deep societal shame associated with making the abuse public, there is no victim or witness protection for those who do come forward, virtually no services are available for them, and they often cannot return to their communities when cases are made public. Though a 2014 national review brought the issue to light, and since February 2018 Bacha Bazi has been criminalized in the penal code, the practice is still pervasive and a stark example of conflict related sexual violence against boys.



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