

“Destroyed from within” Sexual violence against men and boys in Syria and Turkey

New research finds a lack of support for men and boys subjected to high levels of sexual violence in the Syrian conflict and after displacement to Turkey.

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All Survivors Project (ASP), hosted by the Williams Institute, today releases its third research report – [“Destroyed from within” Sexual violence against men and boys in Syria and Turkey](#), which presents findings on the devastating consequences of sexual violence against men and boys in these contexts, and analyses the lack of humanitarian responses to these violations.

“Our findings clearly show that sexual violence against men and boys in Syria is more prevalent than has previously been documented,” said Charu Lata Hogg, Executive Director, ASP. “More than 60% of those we interviewed told us of specific incidents of sexual violence against men and boys that had taken place in the context of the conflict in Syria.”

Armed conflict has raged in Syria since May 2011 and has been characterised by egregious violations of human rights. The conflict has resulted in a humanitarian crisis within Syria and generated massive forced displacement inside and outside Syria. Sexual violence against women, men, girls and boys has been a particularly harrowing feature of the conflict. ASP research highlights how sexual violence against men and boys has been perpetrated within Syrian government detention sites. It also shows that men and boys are subjected to sexual violence at checkpoints, during house raids and in public places by Syrian security forces, associated groups and non-state armed groups. ASP research found that boys are especially vulnerable to sexual violence, especially boys associated with armed forces and armed groups, boys involved in child labour and those who are unaccompanied or separated from their families.

Within Syria a combination of factors facilitate sexual violence against men and boys and contribute to the *de facto* impunity for those responsible. These include the lack of protection against rape for men and

boys under Syrian law; the lack of access by independent monitors and humanitarian actors to places of detention; the lack of progress in agreeing to action plans to end and prevent grave violations against children, including sexual violence, with UN “listed” state security forces and non-state armed groups; and the lack of criminal prosecutions of those responsible for sexual violence.

Although the primary focus of this research is on Syria, ASP collected information about the risk of sexual violence to men and boys from Syria as they attempt to flee to Turkey. Within Turkey, men and boys from Syria are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence in the workplace, which includes child labour, and in refugee camps and orphanages, as well as in public spaces and at home, where ASP received reports of sexual violence by members of the host community, landlords, neighbours and family members. LGBT+ people from Syria are also targeted for sexual harassment and violence in Turkey.

Sexual violence has devastating consequences for male survivors and their communities. Apart from physical injuries, sexual violence can cause short- and long-term psychological harm, affecting survivors and their relationships with loved ones. Lara Stemple, Director, Health and Human Rights Law Project, UCLA School of Law, explained that, “Consistent with findings from elsewhere around the world, ASP shows that discriminatory laws, prejudice against LGBT+ people, misunderstanding about sexual victimisation of men and boys, and rigid traditional gender norms make the situation worse. These factors exacerbate feelings of demasculinisation, self-blame, shame, and, in some cases, lead to community rejection.”

“It is completely destroying for men. If it becomes known that this man [was subjected to sexual violence], it means that this man has to leave this community [and go] where nobody knows that he has been sexually abused.” – Programme manager, INGO, 7 October 2017.

“More must be done to prevent sexual violence against men and boys, reduce the risks and vulnerabilities of men and boys to sexual violence in conflict and displacement, and to provide remedies for victims of human rights violations in Syria” said Charu Lata Hogg. “Our research reinforces the need for humanitarian agencies to ensure that medical care and psychosocial support are made accessible and available for men and boys subjected to sexual violence. More funding must be made available and inter-sectoral responses must be developed to support men and boys subjected to sexual violence.”

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[ASP](#) was formed in December 2016 as an independent research project embedded in the Williams Institute and the Health and Human Rights Law Project in UCLA School of Law. In December 2017, ASP registered as a not-for-profit Foundation in the Principality of Liechtenstein with support extended by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Principality of Liechtenstein. All Survivors Project continues to maintain a strong intellectual partnership with UCLA School of Law. ASP conducts research and advocacy to improve the global response to every victim/survivor of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict and forced displacement. ASP received Institutional Review Board approvals to commence its research on Syria and Turkey in September 2017.

[The Williams Institute](#), a think tank on sexual orientation and gender identity law and public policy, is dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research with real-world relevance.

[The Health and Human Rights Law Project at UCLA School of Law](#) seeks to improve global health by using a framework grounded in international human rights law. Through multi-disciplinary research, training and mentorship, the Project aims to examine the relationship between health and human rights and to foster the next generation of leaders working in this area.