

International workshop on building knowledge to improve existing service responses for all survivors

Developing an analytical framework outlining the links between conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys, health sector and policy

Outcome Statement

All Survivors Project (ASP) and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) hosted a two-day workshop on 11-12 October 2018 in London to mark the beginning of a consultative process to build knowledge in responding to conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys. The workshop represented a first step in the development of a research framework which will result in improving medical and mental health responses for all survivors of sexual violence in situations of conflict and displacement.

The workshop brought together 22 international humanitarian, human rights and criminal justice practitioners, policy experts, academics and donors, as well as gender, health, protection and child protection experts working in Afghanistan, Central African Republic (CAR) and Turkey.¹ The workshop was part of ASP's broader efforts to support multi-disciplinary and cross-country dialogue and research on sexual violence against men and boys to inform policy and technical efforts. It marked the first ever facilitated dialogue between practitioners in the three focus countries, augmented by the experience and expertise from different institutions, including representatives of UN gender, child protection and refugee agencies, INGOs and academia.

Workshop participants were able to showcase initiatives in the three countries where the needs of male survivors are being addressed. Yet there was broad recognition that greater knowledge and understanding of the problem is needed, including the physical, mental and social impact on survivors, existing barriers to accessing care and support and that further evidence is required on appropriate responses to male survivors' needs.

Challenges and pointers on strengthening responses for male survivors identified by workshop participants

Discussions revealed broad consensus on the many barriers in availability and accessibility of quality, survivor-centred, multi-disciplinary services providing care and support for male survivors [as well as specific groups, in particular LGBT+ persons] and resulted in practical suggestions on how these could be addressed. First among the identified challenges was the **insufficient capacity to respond to sexual violence** in many conflict settings resulting in gaps in services for survivors, regardless of their gender.

¹ Workshop participants included representatives of UNFPA, UNHCR, UNICEF, WHO, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) [Observer], Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), the Afghanistan-based NGO, Youth Health and Development Organization (YHDO), Kings College Hospital, London, University of St Andrews, Scotland and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). Afghanistan, CAR and Turkey are among ASP's focus countries for research and advocacy, see www.allurvivorsproject.org

Specialist services for survivors (male and female) of sexual torture were also regarded as a significant gap globally.

In Afghanistan, CAR and Turkey, where survivors seem to face similar challenges in accessing medical and MHPSS services the need for **ensuring safe and confidential spaces in all services that are easily accessible to all survivors** and for the **establishment of referral pathways** to enable access to appropriate care from different services was raised. **Capacity building, including the development of training tools, mentoring and quality control** was considered a priority response to the highlighted problem of lack of skills and competency among many health professionals in identifying clinical and other “silent” signs of sexual violence among men and boys, and to build know-how in responding appropriately to disclosure by male patients. **Training of medical, psychological and psychosocial personnel in psychological first aid for all survivors, including men and boys** was also stressed. The need to open up dialogue to include health and other staff’s **personal attitudes and beliefs** towards sexual violence against men and boys in a way that fosters safe and open reflection was regarded as essential to ensure a non-judgmental, empathic and supportive survivor-centred response.

It was agreed that addressing sexual violence against **children** requires deepening understanding of and building good practice on issues such as informed consent, confidentiality and safeguarding. In addition, the need to **understand and respond to gender specific vulnerabilities to sexual violence for children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAFAAG), separated children and children on the move** was highlighted. The important role of communities in facilitating identification of male survivors, providing support and referring them to appropriate services was emphasised and participants recommended **accelerated and continuous efforts to build and sustain community skills and engagement to support male survivors of sexual violence**.

Participants also identified challenges and solutions on legal and other forms of protection. Common barriers to accessing justice by survivors of sexual violence in all three countries were pointed out and the need for **capacity building of law enforcement and justice officials** identified to enable them to effectively investigate incidents of sexual violence against all survivors with a specific focus on men and boys, and for **support to enable the safe participation of male survivors in judicial processes**. An absence of livelihood opportunities for survivors was also seen as contributing to the exposure of repeated harm and recommendations were made on the need for **economic opportunities for adult male survivors and access to education and vocational training for boys and adolescents**.

These and other outcomes from the workshop will be used to inform the development of a research framework that will allow for an assessment of existing medical and mental health responses, including an understanding of barriers to access by men and boys to services in ASP’s three focus countries, and the start of a multi-country evidence-building on what constitutes an adequate response to male survivors. It is planned that the framework will be used in other contexts to deepen understanding and improve responses on sexual violence in other countries.

For further details see [Summary report on International workshop on Building knowledge to improve existing service responses for all survivors: Developing an analytical framework outlining the links between conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys, health sector and policy responses for conflict-affected populations](#).