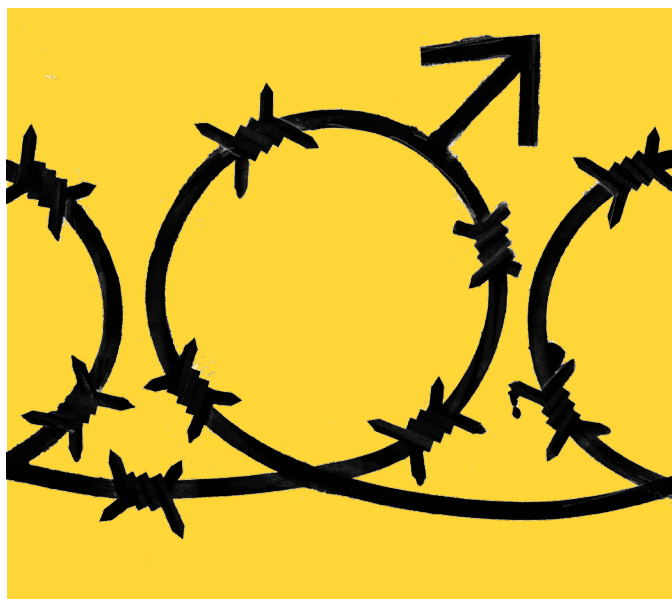


Q & A: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Syria

I. IN WHAT CONTEXTS DOES SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS TAKE PLACE IN SYRIA?

Syrian government detention is considered to be the site of greatest risk of sexual violence for men and boys, although All Survivors Project (ASP) also collected information on incidents that have taken place in the context of **armed group detention**. We also received information on sexual violence against men and boys having taken place during **house searches** or at **checkpoints** and **during forced recruitment** by armed groups.



“If you talk about sexual violence... there is no one who goes into detention without this happening to him... Sexual violence was mainly in detention [and was] systematic. All the survivors, men and women, are subjected to forced nudity... One of the main forms of torture of males is with an electric stick which is used on the sexual organs.”
- Representative of a Syrian human rights NGO, 1 November 2017.

2. WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR PERPETRATING SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST MEN AND BOYS IN SYRIA?

ASP interviewees referred to perpetrators as being from **the state security forces**, in particular Military and Air Force Intelligence branches of the security forces and associated militias, as well as, although to a lesser extent, from **non-state armed groups** including from Ahrar al-Sham, Jaysh el Islam and Al-Rahman Corps, and SDF forces. ASP also received information on sexual violence being committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Other organisations have documented systematic torture, including sexualised torture in detention facilities run by Syria’s four main intelligence agencies: the Department of Military Intelligence; the Political Security Directorate; the General Intelligence Directorate; and the Air Force Intelligence Directorate.



3. WHY ARE MEN AND BOYS SUBJECTED TO SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SYRIA?



The UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism for Syria on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict has verified incidents in which both boys and girls have been subjected to torture, including rape, threats of rape and other forms of sexual violence **to force “confessions”, to humiliate, or to pressure a relative to surrender or confess.**

Several interviewees told ASP that rape of men and boys (as well as women and girls) formed part of a wider pattern of torture used to **generate fear, obtain information, force confessions or coerce relatives into surrendering.**

Torture, rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as harassment, discrimination and exploitation of men and women by Syrian government security forces and non-state armed groups has also taken place **because of their sexual orientation and gender identity.**

4. HOW DOES SEXUAL VIOLENCE IMPACT MEN AND BOYS?

Sexual violence has devastating physical, psychological and social consequences on all survivors.

Male survivors may suffer a range of physical injuries, both genital and non-genital. They are at **increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) including HIV**, and can also experience **incontinence, problems urinating or defecating, genital and rectal trauma and pain, fistulas and fissures, impairment and damage to reproductive capacity or sexual dysfunction.**

ASP's sources report a wide range of psychological consequences for male survivors, including **symptoms of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), shame, self-blaming, guilt, anger, loss of confidence, sleep disorders, confusion, self-harm and suicidal thoughts.**

Feelings of emasculation, powerlessness and failure were also common themes mentioned by ASP interviewees in relation to male survivors.

Sexual violence against men could have serious repercussions for the survivors' relationships with spouses, families and communities. ASP informants spoke of **stigma, blame, disbelief, mistrust and ostracism** suffered by survivors.

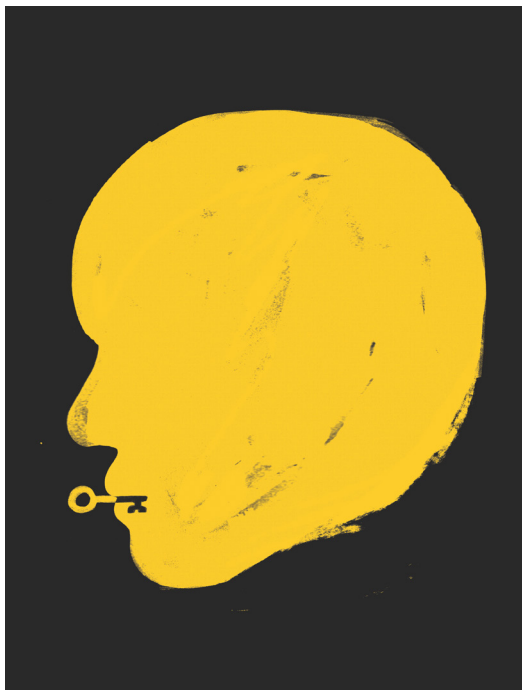


5. WHY ARE MALE SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SYRIA NOT RECEIVING ADEQUATE MEDICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CARE?

“These cases are not dealt with inside Syria, there are no organisations that take care of them and men don't talk.”
- Gender-based violence case manager, Syrian NGO, 18 September 2017.

Capacity for medical and mental health care for survivors of sexual violence in Syria was limited before the conflict but it has been severely degraded in the past seven years. The humanitarian community faces enormous external obstacles in addressing the acute and competing needs in the complex and dangerous operating environment that exists in Syria.

ASP interviewees also highlighted many internal issues within the humanitarian community that contribute to the lack of a proactive or systematic effort to provide medical and psychosocial care for male survivors of sexual violence. ASP sources overall described a situation of structural exclusion of male survivors from accessing timely, quality, safe, confidential, survivor-centred assistance and support. **Lack of leadership, capacity and funding were among the reasons cited for the insufficient attention to the needs of male survivors, but a lack of acknowledgement and even denial of the phenomenon** was widely regarded as being at the root of the problem.



6. WHY IS THERE NO JUSTICE FOR SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SYRIA?

Lack of access by independent monitors and humanitarian actors to places of detention poses a key barrier towards deterring these crimes and establishing accountability.

Syria is party to international human rights treaties that require it to take measures to prevent sexual violence and hold perpetrators to account, yet it was evident from early in the conflict that a **lack of political will and shortcomings in the judicial framework** make genuine, independent prosecutions unrealistic.

Because Syria is not a party to the Rome Statute of the ICC, and because the UN Security Council has been unable to agree that the situation of Syria should be referred to the Court, the **ICC option is currently blocked.** Hopes for justice therefore currently rest primarily with the UN General Assembly mandated mechanism, the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism on Syria (IIIM), whose role it is to collect and preserve evidence and to support criminal proceedings in national, regional or international courts. The IIIM's mandate reflects the expectation that sexual and gender-based crimes, as well as crimes against children, will receive special attention.

