

CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE AGAINST BOYS: FROM RECOGNITION TO RESPONSE

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Rawand Aziz, Grecia Hernandez Perez, Zoe Howard, Uma Menon, Oluwatise Okeremi and Lara Zakaria served as rapporteurs.

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KEYNOTE ADDRESSES¹ AND OPENING REMARKS

Participants were welcomed by Professor of Politics and International Affairs and Director of LISD Andrew Moravcsik, Princeton University, and Associate Research Scholar at LISD Barbara Buckinx, Princeton University, who leads LISD's project on Gender in the Global Community, which examines the functioning of gendered structures and norms in the international system. Keynotes were delivered by H.E. Virginia Gamba, Under-Secretary-General and Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (SRSG CAAC), and H.E. Mona Juul, Permanent Representative of Norway to the United Nations. Founder and Executive Director of All Survivors Project (ASP) Charu Lata Hogg provided opening remarks.

Professor Moravcsik opened the plenary by welcoming all to the event on behalf of LISD and its cosponsors OSRSG CAAC and ASP. He noted that LISD has worked on these issues for many years and that the institute has produced scholarship on gender norms, human rights, and economic issues, partnering with organizations that fight against conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). LISD's goals are to have a real-world impact beyond scholarly study, and to deepen the conversation and publicize this issue beyond the United Nations.

Dr. Buckinx introduced the keynote speakers and highlighted the joint work conducted by LISD and ASP on issues related to CRSV, which

include the cocreation of a report with ASP on principles on CRSV in detention settings and a workshop and report on the intersections between CRSV against men, boys, LGBTIQ+ persons and human trafficking. She noted that risks, vulnerabilities, and harms of CRSV against boys are not well understood. The fact that CRSV is perpetrated against all people is a moral outrage and it is imperative that researchers, practitioners, and funders understand and respond accordingly.

Keynote by H.E. Virginia Gamba

H.E. Gamba began by saying that it was an honor for her to be among practitioners, policymakers, donor countries, and others working to strengthen the prevention of and response to CRSV committed against children. The focus today and tomorrow is on CRSV committed against boys specifically. Her office monitors and reports on the six grave violations committed against children in situations of armed conflict (with rape and other forms of sexual violence one of them), in addition to the recruitment and use of children, killing and maiming, attacks on schools and hospitals, abduction, and the denial of humanitarian access to children. Because her mandate was created 25 years ago, evidence collected through the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism pursuant to Security Council resolution 1612 underscores that boys and girls often face different and evolving risks across the conflict

¹ The keynotes are verbatim accounts of the presentation.

situations. Children's exposure to grave violations is shaped by gender norms and other intersecting identity-based characteristics, including ethnicity, age, race, religion, ability/disability, economic status, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression. Gamba emphasized the need for all of us to better understand how gender shapes risk and vulnerability for different groups of children in situations of armed conflict to provide gender-responsive prevention, protection, and reintegration support to all children, including boys.

Gamba highlighted UN data points to the disproportionate impact of CRSV on girls, but under-reporting is widely acknowledged for both girls and boys. The reports of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict provide sex-disaggregated data and trends on how many girls and boys are affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence. In the most recent annual report, published in July 2022, 1,332 incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence were verified against 1,326 children, including 1,298 girls and 28 boys. But to the extent that they are addressed in other reports or platforms, data on boys may often be subsumed under CRSV against "males" or against "children," which can render boys invisible. They may also be treated as a homogenous group that does not take into account differing risks and vulnerabilities according to identity-based characteristics. She noted that the same can be said for girls, although there is an increasing awareness that girls face special risks and have unique needs in this context. Incomplete understanding of and insufficient focus on the risks, vulnerabilities, and gendered harm resulting from CRSV against boys can have negative consequences,

with boys still frequently overlooked in CRSV prevention and response strategies. As a result, boy survivors are often unable to access adequate medical, mental health, and psychosocial support services and justice responses.

For these reasons, Gamba pointed out that her office undertook joint research with ASP and, together with Princeton University, organized this week's workshop. The aim is to provide a platform for discussions with a specific focus on boy survivors of CRSV to shed light on this issue, so strengthened prevention, protection, and response can be provided to all child survivors of CRSV. She also drew attention to the two draft discussion papers that inform the deliberations. The first one focuses on CRSV against boys in detention settings and the second on strengthening reintegration support to boy survivors of CRSV in the context of association with a party to the conflict, through a case study focused on the Central African Republic. The research outcomes and recommendations show that there is a need to develop a deeper understanding of the gendered nature of violations against children, specifically on CRSV, to ensure that causes, consequences, and impacts against boys and girls are better understood to improve prevention and response. Gamba underscored the need for enhanced research and commitment from donors, implementers, and researchers to apply and test research findings and work together to share findings and results. The findings from research papers also show that policymakers, protection, and humanitarian actors, including those working on human rights and child protection, share the acknowledgement that girls almost inevitably will suffer sexual violence in conflict, and that

this issue must be strongly and sensitively addressed. This acknowledgement needs to be expanded to include all children, including boys and children of diverse sexual identities, who have increased vulnerabilities to sexual violence.

Gamba pointed out that recommendations were also shaped around the need to strengthen responses for child survivors of CRSV within reintegration responses for children associated with armed forces and armed groups (CAAFAG), notably through secure, long-term funding, capacity building, access to justice, and most important, through the adoption of a survivor-centered approach.

She encouraged all participants to contribute to these recommendations and outcomes during the workshop and to widely share them once the papers are published. She drew attention to a previous study published by her office, “Gender Dimensions of Grave Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict,” which offered similar recommendations. In conclusion, she invited all participants to use the analysis in the studies to build a greater understanding of the gender dimension of the grave violations against children in armed conflict, specifically rape and other forms of sexual violence, to help us collectively ensure that all children receive the adequate protection they deserve, so that no child is left behind.

Keynote by H.E. Mona Juul

H.E. Juul thanked the organizers and those involved in designing and implementing the research. She pointed out that research within this field is scarce and that there is a need for more and highlighted that Norway’s funding

had enabled the research being discussed at Princeton.

Juul noted that the protection of children in conflict settings and the prevention of CRSV are priorities for Norway. Sexual violence against children is one of the six grave violations and as the chair of the Security Council Working Group for Children and Armed Conflict, ending and preventing these violations remains an uppermost priority for Norway. She added that Norway was proud to have contributed extensively to the development of *The Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, which was released in 2020. Juul observed that CRSV is not a “side-effect” of armed conflict and that indeed, the Secretary-General’s report on CRSV confirms that sexual violence in conflict continues to be deliberately used as a tactic of war, torture, and terror. As a serious violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law, sexual violence may also constitute a war crime.

Juul added that CRSV continues to be vastly underreported. Many cases of sexual violence go unreported due to impunity, fear of reprisals, stigma, and lack of access to justice, redress, and services for survivors. Thus, documented incidents just represent the tip of the iceberg. Although girls are disproportionately impacted by CRSV in general, boys associated with armed forces and armed groups are at high risk of CRSV. Boys deprived of their liberty are exposed to the risk of CRSV in particularly high numbers. Gender disparities among detained children are clearly visible. In the context of armed conflict and national security, the UN Global Study found that 94 percent of all children deprived of their liberty were boys. The high

numbers of detained children in situations of armed conflict is a concern in itself. Detention of children is frequently arbitrary or otherwise unlawful. Additionally, it heightens the risks of other human rights violations and abuses, such as CRSV. Juul cited the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) Article 37, which states that every child deprived of liberty shall be separated from adults unless it is considered in the child's best interest not to be. She noted that while specialized juvenile detention facilities do not guarantee protection, risks are exacerbated when children are detained together with adults.

Juul stated that the degree of risk of CRSV that children face in detention can also depend on who they are detained by and where they are held. The risk may be higher for those deprived of liberty by military actors and held in facilities that are not properly monitored. Regular monitoring of places of deprivation of liberty for children by an independent mechanism is an effective safeguard to prevent CRSV. Likewise, she stated that unofficial—or secret—places of detention pose particular risks to children, including those of CRSV. Incommunicado detention can give rise to serious human rights violations. Children have the right to maintain contact with their family through correspondence and visits. Poor detention conditions can themselves amount to ill-treatment and torture. Additionally, they exacerbate the risk of CRSV. Overcrowding, under-resourcing and understaffing, inadequate treatment, and lack of management and effective monitoring are commonplace in many facilities where children are held. Together with insufficient knowledge and competencies on how to protect children, they all represent significant risk factors.

Juul pointed out that prevention is always better than a cure. To end and prevent CRSV against children, the international community should start by addressing root causes, which means that efforts to prevent the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups must be prioritized. She pointed out that recruitment and use is not only a grave violation in itself, but it also enables multiple other violations, including sexual violence. Juul raised the importance of education as a lifesaver in this context and pointed out that children who are not in school are easy targets of abuse, exploitation, and recruitment by armed forces and groups. She highlighted that education can also help children who are exploited and abused in armed conflict to normalize life and reintegrate into society. She noted that reducing the numbers of children detained in situations of armed conflict is a key element in reducing the number of boys and girls exposed to CRSV in detention settings.

Juul highlighted that detaining children who have been exploited and abused in armed conflict is a systemic form of re-victimization. She pointed out that working with national authorities to effectively implement children's rights and to ensure robust adherence to international juvenile-justice standards is key to turning around this trend and to preventing CRSV, and that children's protection, care, and needs must be prioritized to ensure that they can be reintegrated into their communities. She added that to reduce the number of children in detention, it is imperative to address the issue of child imprisonment under national security laws.

Juul highlighted emerging understanding that trials of civilians by military tribunals

and state security courts contravene the non-derogable right to a fair trial by a competent, independent, and impartial court. It is an even more concerning breach of rights for children, who should be dealt with in specialized child justice systems. She noted that while countering terrorism, states are required to respect international human rights and that there is already detailed guidance available to assist states in upholding the rights of children in armed conflict, including those associated with armed groups designated as terrorists. However, there is a need for guidance to be translated into practice. Juul was categorical that there is no dichotomy between security interests and child rights. The two objectives of preserving public safety and protecting child rights are complementary and should be pursued simultaneously with a view to building long-lasting peace. She noted that the UN CRC applies to all children, including those associated with violent extremism and terrorism and those who have committed crimes. The protection offered by human rights conventions does not cease in times of armed conflict.

She pointed out that in line with UN CRC Article 39, States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflict. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment that fosters the health, self-respect, and dignity of the child. Where children are detained by parties to armed conflict, practical tools like handover protocols are proving effective in facilitating the swift

release and transfer to child protection actors for reintegration and other support. Another important measure to ensure the release of children are Action Plans to end and prevent grave violations against children agreed by parties to armed conflicts with the UN, which include provisions for the transfer of children in detention. She called for reintegration programs to be holistic, long term, and sustainable, and argued that support services must be safe, confidential, age and gender-sensitive, disability-inclusive, survivor-centered, and trauma-informed. They must include access to education, healthcare, and psychosocial support, as well as to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Survivors must also have access to justice and remedies. To this end, it is key that medical personnel, child protection personnel, and other relevant stakeholders are allowed regular, unannounced, and unhindered access to all places where children are detained.

Juul highlighted the need for interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral cooperation as a necessary prerequisite for a successful outcome. To strengthen responses to CRSV against boys who are deprived of their liberty in situations of armed conflict, commitments must be turned into compliance and resolutions into results. She urged that child protection capacity and CRSV expertise in monitoring and reporting teams be bolstered, and that child protection and monitoring capacity be mainstreamed in peace operations and be mandates of special political missions. To this end, sufficient resources and training capacity must be provided to child protection monitoring teams on the ground. Juul called for the need to work together to end and prevent CRSV and impunity for perpetrators, and to secure access to justice, redress, protection, and support

for survivors. She stated that Norway would remain committed to this important endeavor and ended by expressing her interest in listening to the insights and advice from other workshop panelists on how we can collaborate to end and prevent CRSV in general and against boys in particular; as well as strengthening reintegration support to boy victims/survivors of CRSV in the context of association with armed forces and armed groups.

Opening Remarks by Charu Lata Hogg, Founder and Executive Director, All Survivors Project

Charu Lata Hogg began by expressing her gratitude to the government of Norway, to Under-Secretary-General Gamba and her office, and to LISD for its vision, strength, and compassion in embracing this agenda and its support for scholarship and convenings. She also acknowledged the pivotal role that the Principality of Liechtenstein and its Permanent Mission in New York has played in amplifying efforts to ensure gender-inclusive responses to CRSV. She said that ultimately, the organizers were grateful to all the victims and survivors who place their trust in them, and thanks to whom we are able to take forward this work together.

ASP seeks to complement and reinforce existing work on CRSV and to ensure through research, advocacy, and capacity-building initiatives that sexual violence is prevented against all people and that responses are in place to serve the needs of all victims and survivors. ASP's vision is of a world where everyone is protected against conflict-related sexual violence and all victims and survivors have access to appropriate and timely care, support, and justice.

Hogg pointed out that for many reasons, the specific realities of boys in relation to sexual violence and survival remain inadequately addressed or understood. She explained that over the course of the following day, the workshop would examine how entrenched conceptual tensions and bureaucratic silos hinder the development of complementary approaches.

ASP's work shows how boys affected by sexual violence sit at the intersection of many realities that prevents us from obtaining a fuller understanding of the issue. First, sexual violence against boys, including in conflict settings, is culturally, religiously, politically, and legally a very sensitive issue. It carries the double stigmas of sexual violence and same-sex sexual conduct, further complicated by taboo issues of real and perceived sexual orientation or gender identity and expression of the survivor. Second, gender norms often position boys as safe, invulnerable, able to take care of themselves, and not at risk of sexual violence, which creates opportunities for increased perpetrator access and lack of attention by communities to signs of sexual abuse in boys. These exacerbate the lack of a focused agenda for them.

Hogg detailed some practical steps to address these barriers and to ensure that prevention and response agendas take into account the specific realities of boys.

Address the information gap: The lack of targeted research in this area urgently needs to be addressed to expand the evidence base, build on the work carried out by communities and grassroots organisations that work on the issue, and to educate and build alliances within the sector. Existing data needs to be better

disaggregated by both gender and age in ways that avoid reinforcing simple binaries.

Fill the capacity gap: In various conflict settings, knowledge and understanding of this issue is scarce. This needs to be addressed by strengthening capacity that tackles biases and myths on sexual violence to develop common principles and tools on how to engage with boys in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed way: This needs ongoing training, support, and monitoring to ensure that data is being collected on boys and that barriers are being addressed.

Acknowledge the engagement gap: Within the CRSV sector, a reluctance to engage this issue at the global level seems to exist. The reluctance by some international organizations to engage in politically sensitive issues leads to institutional blocks in better supporting boy survivors, which is often unwittingly perpetuated by funding or bureaucratic silos.

This workshop presents an opportunity to work together to take a more holistic look at these issues, including how they are understood by different actors within conflict related situations: the victim/survivor, the local community, and the government, as well as the international humanitarian community. Hogg noted that only through these comprehensive and complementary approaches will we arrive an enriched understanding of what we may want to cocreate, including with survivor groups, to better serve all children, and all survivors.

Question and Answer Session

Audience members asked about (1) underreporting of CRSV and a potential role for academia; (2) cultural understandings of what defines a young man and a child, with reference to Afghanistan; and (3) the role of technology and social media in naming and shaming to change the discourse.

Hogg cited two *Journal of the American Medical Association* studies, one carried out in 2008 in post-conflict Liberia and the second carried out in 2010 in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), as two main prevalence studies pointing out that the difference between victimization of men and women was not very high. In the Ukraine conflict, estimates are that only 25 percent of CRSV cases against men are being reported. Disclosures don't take place within the same time frame and in some cases it takes victims decades to disclose the violations. It would be very instructive if greater academic work were done on understanding what constitutes a trauma-informed response, and there is a need to understand the causes and consequences of CRSV to support prevention efforts.

Gamba said that there are 25 conflict situations in which there are monitors, but monitoring cannot verify violations unless one UN official has personally verified it. A lack of resources and capacity makes it difficult to estimate the size and prevalence of this phenomenon. Often only 10 percent of cases are captured by the law. She called on academics to use creativity and imagination to strategize prevention methods.

Gamba declared that she had no patience for a country or an armed group that insists it can define childhood based on the group's own culture. Member states agreed to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which defines children as 0–17 years of age. The Taliban cannot claim to deserve the benefits of international engagement without taking on the responsibility of acknowledging the definition and rights of children. We do a disservice to children by calling them young adults, since young adults are between the ages of 18–24 and calling children young adults takes away the rights they deserve and need.

Juul pointed out that social media can play an interesting role on this issue, but the challenge lies in verification. She noted that there is a need to sit down with the Security Council and have 15 countries agree on any report.

SESSION I: WORKING TOWARDS GENDER-SPECIFIC UNDERSTANDINGS OF AND RESPONSES TO CRSV AGAINST CHILDREN

Chair: Evan Cinq-Mars, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations

Panelists: Onen David Ongwech, Refugee Law Project; Katherine Gambir, Women's Refugee Commission; Pauline Brosch, UN Women; Cody Ragonese, Equimundo: Center for Masculinities & Social Justice

Introduction

Conflict-related sexual violence against boys is often viewed as fuelled by a variety of different factors that include gender and power dynamics and as a result, it is considered a “gendered” violation. The lack of research attention and of robust reporting data around CRSV against boys can fuel a vicious cycle of lack of recognition. In addition, there is a gap in knowledge and understanding among humanitarian actors around crisis-affected male survivors. Humanitarian actors must be trained to tackle their own biases and myths about sexual violence to develop common principles and tools for interviewing boys in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed way. There is a need for resources, capacity training, and monitoring to ensure that data is being collected about boys and that barriers are being addressed. In addition, the most comprehensive and disaggregated data needs to be followed up by gender-transformative responses that are grounded in human rights principles.

Interventions for boy survivors of CRSV: Refugee Law Project

Onen David Ongwech noted that very few actors talk about CRSV, let alone CRSV against children, and that when they do, most of the discussion is focused on protection and education. Many children grapple with legacies of CRSV, but many actors deal with adults (rather than children), and it is clear that humanitarian responses to CRSV are not gender inclusive. Protocols to enable disclosure for child survivors of CRSV are latecomers in humanitarian work, and there are only a handful of good practices to model, learn from, and replicate. In 2013, Refugee Law Project developed a screening tool to identify survivors of CRSV, but it takes long for victims of CRSV to access services. It was not possible to screen children directly and yet many boys declared themselves 18 as they could not receive support unless they were 18. Those classified between 18 and 20 are often much younger and the majority of them are boys. If we could remove the age limits of screening, we might have more accurate data. Responding to physical injuries could trigger a deeper conversation about CRSV, such that treating physical injuries could provide an entry point to understanding whether children have suffered other forms of CRSV. Similarly, working with adults could provide the entry point for working with

children. The issue of agency is important: children are exercising agency when they challenge structural barriers to access services.

Need for additional research: Women's Refugee Commission (WRC)

Katherine Gambir framed her intervention by prioritizing accountability to women and girls and noting how sexual violence against men and boys impacts and intersects with violence against women and girls. In Phase 2 of WRC's project on strengthening sexual violence prevention and response for crisis-affected adolescent boys and male youth, the emphasis is on evaluating prevention strategies and response services to improve mental and physical health outcomes. The methods that are used involve an evidence review of literature and interviews with experts. The evidence review demonstrates that there is both a dearth of evidence on sexual exploitation of adolescent boys and male youth and a dearth of psychosocial and mental health provisions, as well as the provision of other response services for males. Some key findings are about existing gaps—the fact that there is low knowledge about risks for male survivors, limited staff capacity to prevent and respond to the needs of male survivors of sexual violence and those at risk, and a general lack of services for minors. Additional research is needed to address evidence gaps on risks and needs of crisis-affected boys and male youth and the effectiveness of sexual violence prevention and response mechanisms. There is a vital need to create separate, targeted responses for male survivors, and not to just add them to female spaces, which in turn may generate insecurity for women survivors.

Not a zero-sum game: UN Women

Pauline Brosch of UN Women emphasized that women and girls are by far the most affected by CRSV. We must be careful to not divert attention from their needs when discussing sexual violence against boys. Sexual violence is rooted in patriarchy and harmful notions of masculinity, and tackling this must be our common goal. Regardless of their gender and their age, all people have the right to access justice and services. The international normative framework has grown to respond to this issue, and although the first resolution on Women, Peace and Security 1325 did not mention boys, Resolution 2467 mentioned boys and men.

UN Women has a longstanding partnership with Justice Rapid Response and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, through which it deploys gender advisors to human rights investigations. In 2019, UN Women also began to deploy child rights advisors, the latest deployment being in Ukraine. Deployments are a part of the mandate for UN Women because the majority of child survivors of CRSV are girls and because CRSV against boys and girls have the same root causes. Irrespective of the differences in the kind of abuse inflicted on boys and girls, it is important to not see this as a zero-sum game. The common goal is to secure greater funding for all survivors.

Understanding masculinity as a response: Equimundo

Cody Ragonese introduced Equimundo by explaining that the organization works to achieve gender equality and social justice

by transforming intergenerational violence. He noted that masculinities matter and are integral to the understanding of and response to the needs of men and boys. It is important to understand masculine norms and their relationship to violence as there are internalized masculinities, for example, when a heterosexual male is considered a penetrator, defender, someone who is self-sufficient, and upholds honor. It is important to understand how internalized masculinities manifest at the individual level. If someone embodies these notions/values, that person is much less likely to acknowledge his trauma, use coping mechanisms, and seek help. At an institutional/community level, Equimundo services may reinforce these masculinities. Few services are designed to meet the needs of men and boys in a gendered way. There is, broadly, a lack of empathy and skills to deal with men and boys and in addition, funding is skewed towards women and girls. At the community level there is dismissal, stigma, and retaliation. UN conventions exclude specific language if service can be inclusive of men. The inevitable consequences of this are developmental stunting and the fact that witnessing and experiencing violence as a child increases perpetration of violence as an adult. It is vital to design masculinity-centered interventions that are culturally relevant and trauma informed without losing a sense of that man box.

SESSION II: THE RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES OF BOYS TO CRSV IN DETENTION SETTINGS

Chair: Charu Lata Hogg, All Survivors Project

Panelists: Bo Viktor Nylund, UNICEF; Zama Neff, Human Rights Watch; Maria Carolina Aissa de Figueredo, International Committee of the Red Cross

Introduction

Research on sexual violence against children in conflict settings points to particular situations of heightened risk for boys. These include situations of deprivation of liberty or military contexts in which boys associated with armed forces and armed groups are vulnerable to sexual violence by other members of forces/groups, and may also be forced to commit such acts against others. The vast majority (over 95 percent) of children detained in armed conflict are boys.¹ So, although all children are at risk of sexual violence in detention setting, and girls are disproportionately impacted by CRSV generally, ASP focuses on how detainment exposes boys to the risk of CRSV in particularly high numbers. Chronic underreporting of CRSV in general, combined with challenges involved in gathering data in detention settings, means that the true scale of the problem is not known, and that the risks to, vulnerabilities of, and impacts on

young detainees are poorly understood. This, by extension, hampers efforts to effectively prevent and respond to it.

A focus on Northeast Syria: UNICEF

Bo Viktor Nyland honed in on his experience in Syria, where he was UNICEF representative, and the agency worked with children and mothers lingering in locations in the northeast of the country. In 2019, ISIS lost its territory there and became guerrillas. This meant that about 10,000 women and children of more than 60 nationalities were spread across different detention facilities and prisons in Northeast Syria.

UNICEF had access to some sites, some of which were prisonlike camps, such as Al-Hol, where children and mothers were housed in tents. There was little freedom of movement for the women who had joined at the time of ISIS's recruitment. UNICEF observed that as children got older, especially boys, they were moved into other facilities and generally to what are called rehabilitation centers. There were indications that some of the mothers were

¹ Based on the number of verified cases of deprivation of liberty contained in United Nations, Annual Reports of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2020, A/74/845-S/2020/525. At <https://undocs.org/S/2020/525>; May 2021, A/75/873-S/2021/437. At <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>; and June 2022, A/76/871-S/2022/493. At <https://undocs.org/S/2022/493>. Although deprivation of liberty is not one of the six grave violations against children identified and condemned by the UN Security Council, it is an issue of concern (as is the military use of schools and hospitals) on which the UN-led Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on grave violations against children in armed conflict systematically collects data.

forcing themselves onto these boys to have more boys to serve the caliphate. It is clear that these children have not had association with ISIS but are victims of circumstances that create grounds for abuse and radicalisation. Interventions are needed on a priority basis.

A second group of vulnerable boys were in rehabilitation centers and were either moved from camps or identified as Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in rebel-held areas. While the stated reason by SDF was that it required more facilities to rehabilitate the boys, it was clear that these were sites for further radicalization and abuse. In these centers, boys live close to one other and are vulnerable to exploitation including sexual violence by their caretakers and also among themselves. These facilities must be looked at further to prevent abuse and to support victims.

The third of site of abuse occurs within prisons. Before a prison break in January 2022, about 150 children were present in these prisons and the number of those who escaped or were killed remains unclear. After one visit, UNICEF decided to refrain from visiting again until it was able to engage in both protection and assistance work. During the visit, it became clear that boys were absolutely the most vulnerable. Sixty boys were in each cell, lying on mattresses in dark rooms with limited access to services. Boys looked untidy and un-nourished.

Documentation as a tool to visibility: Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Zama Neff spoke about HRW's research on detention, which focused on addressing gaps in documentation and accountability by ex-

amining two specific areas: sexual violence in relation to diverse sexual orientation and gender identity, and the military detention of children.

One area of concern is that security forces and nonstate armed groups perpetrate sexual violence against LGBTIQ+ people. A second is the detention of children for security reasons. Sexual violence is frequently used during interrogations as a form of torture and children are increasingly detained under new counterterrorism legislation. There is data about the circumstances of detention: in Malaysia, access to various necessities is withheld and children are held without charge for years and subjected to torture. They are provided inadequate food in overcrowded sites, which creates risk factors for sexual violence. Hundreds of children in Nigeria have been held without charge for months or years. Many of these children were abducted by Boko Haram or apprehended (some were only five years old). Children were put in adult cells, which contributed to more sexual assault. HRW's other research focused on children in military detention in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan, and the organization has documented other forms of torture against children. In Ukraine, documentation exists of rape and sexual violence against women and threats of rape against men, but there are concerns about how the gap in knowledge will be addressed.

The recommendation that flows from this research is the immediate release of children to civilian authorities. The handover protocols have worked in Mali, Chad, and Niger. Sites must be monitored without restrictions. The lack of data remains frustrating and children are rarely prioritized. While it is difficult to

document, we should not wait for documentation as pathways to support can be developed. Children are often invisible in conflicts that are adult-centric and lack an intersectional approach. There is an acute failure of accountability for violence and crimes against children—crimes against them are not prosecuted and mechanisms do not have explicit mandates on children. When there is specialized expertise, it takes the pressure off of everyone else and the message for human rights monitors is to not interview vulnerable people (children, elderly, and people with disabilities). The key question remains: How do we place what happens with children at the core of investigations if we do not interview them and document at all? We need to think more about the ethical implications of not doing this work.

Spotlight on root causes: International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

Maria Carolina Aissa de Figueredo explained that ICRC is a neutral, impartial, and independent humanitarian organization that has been working for over 159 years to protect and assist those affected by armed conflicts and other situations of violence (OSV) whereby the levels of violence and their humanitarian consequences are equally severe. This is often done in partnership with the respective national societies (Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement) in the nearly 100 countries where ICRC is operating. The ICRC also works to promote knowledge and acceptance of international humanitarian law and supports States party to the Geneva Conventions to fulfill their legal obligations. Last, the ICRC also supports detaining authorities to ensure dignified and humane

treatment and adequate material conditions for persons deprived of their liberty. In 2021 alone, the ICRC visited more than 889 places of detention holding more than 731,112 detainees in 73 contexts.

Sexual and gender-based violence occurs on a continuum, with armed conflicts/OSV further increasing the risks of exposure and compounding humanitarian consequences by complicating access to essential services. While survivor-centered response and mitigation measures are critical, prevention of sexual violence is often overlooked. In 2022, the ICRC launched its Program for Sexual Violence Prevention to address these systemic gaps; it focuses on developing a global theory of change and a methodological toolkit for influencing behavioral change that can lead to better prevention of sexual violence in communities and among arms carriers. The program is currently being piloted in several ICRC contexts, for example, Colombia, DRC, and Ethiopia.

The ICRC is also working to raise awareness regarding the impact of sexual violence on all persons affected by armed conflict/OSV. Notably, sexual violence is a gendered phenomenon that overwhelmingly affects girls, but its prevalence, incidence, and impact on boys is often overlooked. In collaboration with the Norwegian Red Cross, the ICRC conducted operational research on the impact of sexual violence among men, boys, and members of the LGBTIQ+ community, which was released within the framework of the 2022 report, “That Never Happens Here.” Findings from this research illustrate that men can constitute anywhere from 20 to 50 percent of victims/survivors of sexual violence in conflict-related settings; in detention settings alone,

between 50 and 80 percent of male torture survivors have reported sexual violence.

The risk of exposure and immediate consequences are all the more acute for children, and particularly boys, in detention settings. Children are in a phase of development that when coupled with specific contexts, such as detention, can result in increased vulnerabilities. The ICRC is acutely aware of these risks, given that more than 40 percent of the individuals it works to support are children. In detention settings, there are very clear physical, procedural, staffing/training, and other challenges that exacerbate these vulnerabilities. For example, overcrowding in many detention centers may result in survival sex and other situations of coercion that are tantamount to sexual violence. Protocols within the penitentiary system may not be designed to take the specific needs of children into account and may not adequately consider how to respond to cases of sexual violence or how to prevent certain practices that can amount to sexual violence, e.g., cavity searches and/or strip searches. Staffing in detention settings is also a key challenge because most personnel have been trained on security management but very rarely on case management and how to respond and react to disclosures of sexual violence. Last, detention settings are inherently coercive. One group of people is vested with the power to oversee and contain another set of individuals. The degree of autonomy that detainees possess is limited, and their degree of dependence on staff and each other is high (multiplied tenfold in the case of children).

It is important to emphasize that persons deprived of their liberty often do not have the

resources, tools, or access to relevant channels to advocate for or to select services in general, and all the more so in cases of sexual violence. Healthcare staff within the detention facility may be limited or unavailable, and the only way for victims/survivors to receive support may be to ask a guard for help, while also being wholly cognizant of the risks of reprisals from the perpetrator and/or other individuals in their surroundings. Moreover, it may take some victims/survivors years to be comfortable with sharing their story, even to a neutral third party in a safe environment—and in particular for male victims/survivors who also have to overcome social stigma. For example, in Colombia some male victims/survivors who experienced sexual violence as boys are only disclosing 20-plus years later. Key recommendations rooted in ICRC's work focus on (1) establishing safe referral pathways to holistic services staffed by trained personnel; (2) awareness raising with public institutions and authorities that come in contact with survivors; and (3) consultation with communities to better understand risks of sexual violence and barriers to access for victims/survivors.

Questions from workshop participants focused on the need for recommendations to improve the prevention of abuse with limited resources; requests for good practices on ethical research with children in detention; strip searches of Palestinian children by Israeli military in the West Bank and whether this should be considered sexual violence; and the prevention of sexual violence in non-official detention settings.

SESSION III: RESPONDING TO CRSV AGAINST BOYS IN CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH CAAFAG REINTEGRATION PROGRAMS

Chair: Sharon Riggle, Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict

Panelists: Sylvie Bodineau, independent researcher; Trish Hiddleston, independent researcher; Fatima Khan, World Health Organization; Annie Bunting, York University

Introduction

Among the six grave violations, sexual violence remains the one that needs to be unveiled because it is a forgotten violation. Through a 12-month research process, the Global Coalition for Reintegration was able to identify the main gaps and needs in child reintegration funding and programming. This process resulted in the publication of three briefing papers in 2020, whose recommendations focus on new modalities and mechanisms for child reintegration to ensure long-term and sustainable funding for this strategic post-conflict intervention. Given the gaps between needs and available resources, it is vital that the pie is made bigger to allocate sufficient resources to reintegration.

Strengthen reintegration for all, deepen understanding of gender specific needs

Trish Hiddleston and Sylvie Bodineau presented the research conducted by ASP to address two key research questions:

- What are the challenges, gaps, and good practices in how child protection programs and associated services support boy and girl victims/survivors of CRSV in the Central African Republic (CAR)?
- How can CAAFAG reintegration programs and associated services for boy victims/survivors of CRSV in the context of their association with armed forces and armed groups in CAR be improved?

Following a participative, forward-thinking, and action-orientated methodology that was sensitive to the research topic, the work involved a review of secondary data, key informant interviews in Bangui, and focus group discussions in Zemio and Bria. Some key facts revolve around a generalized precarity in CAR, where 63 percent of the population (3.1 million people) is in need of humanitarian assistance, where instability remains predominant, and where there is the continued presence of armed groups in

rural areas amid the lacking authority of the state. Between 2014 and 2021, 17,038 children (4,517 girls and 15,521 boys) accessed UNICEF-funded reintegration support (plus 621 in first quarter 2022). CRSV is persistent and viewed as the main security risk for women and girls (HNO 2022), especially those who are internally displaced. CRSV against men and boys is also documented in some parts.

CRSV against CAAFAG is addressed through two legal and programmatic frameworks—two national strategies—in CAR to address gender-based violence and support CAAFAG reintegration:

- The national strategy to combat gender-based violence, harmful practices, and child marriage (2019)
- The national strategy for the community-based reintegration of children formerly associated with armed force (2017)

CAAFAG Reintegration Services includes a set of services delivered to children by NGOs through coordinated referral systems that include medical attention, temporary care, family reunification/family mediation, psychosocial support, education/socioeconomic reintegration, sensitization and awareness raising, introduction of youth clubs, and informal media campaigns.

Key challenges include the short-term nature of programming and funding constraints; the fact that building trust and providing substantive support take time and are complex to establish; and the uneven quality of medical service provision. Low levels of security throughout the country and the fact that CRSV “brings shame,” not only on a personal

level but also on a family level, makes it even more difficult to address.

Some crucial recommendations center around the need to improve CAAFAG reintegration response measures in general; improve access to services for child survivors; strengthen the provision of family support by child protection actors; build effective responses for boy victims/survivors of CRSV within broader reintegration efforts; and provide training and awareness-raising.

Scale up data collection, build evidence: World Health Organization (WHO)

From the perspective of public health, Fatima Khan called for the need to consider specific mental and psychosocial responses for boys, and to examine the challenges in implementing gender-specific responses. WHO has a mandate to advocate for and to ensure equitable access to all for health services (especially for the most vulnerable). This is particularly challenging for those in conflict and humanitarian settings, and in these contexts mental health and psychosocial support is underfunded. The COVID-19 pandemic put these issues front and center, and in discussions on peace building there is more visibility on how social services can build peace. WHO has developed guidance to help practitioners improve health services, which includes tools on addressing rape in humanitarian settings that can be used for all genders. There is a gap in resources specifically for boys, and therefore this discussion is greatly valued.

In 2022, guidance was developed that acknowledges that men and boys, while facing similar barriers to services, experience

them differently, and there are questions for the care of men and boys. There are concerns about accessing services more generally and then unpacking challenges in implementing gender-specific responses. Men and boys are less likely to seek any resources. In addition, there is restriction in services and in access to them, and this is also linked to issues related to limited data. All the data show that service-seeking behavior of boys and girls is low, and lower for boys than girls. Also, the limited statistics underrepresents the scope and nature of violence against boys. These issues lead to a lack of assistance and a lack of judgment. In all this, the systematic collection of data is vital.

Rethinking masculinity and victimhood: Annie Bunting

There needs to be an expanded understanding of harms and gender violence and an expanded understanding of the class of victims. Survivor-centered and trauma-informed survivor exchanges lie at the root of responses. Grassroots work with survivors is expanding the knowledge base, and there are useful ways in which we can begin work on these issues by bringing survivors together. The survivors have nuanced understanding and it is important to do the hard work around deep listening.

Annie Bunting led the Conjugal Slavery in War project, which looked at children born of war as people with needs and perspectives different from abducted mothers. There is a need to reconsider masculinities, femininities, victim-perpetration assumptions, and men's experience of forced marriage. Within the population, it is important to consider male victims of violence, forced husbands and fatherhood, and post-conflict negotiations and

kinship. It is important to be aware of issues relating to access to resources and belonging. For example, if there are no avenues for boys to have access to their paternal clan, they may not have access to their land or their name.

SUMMARY

Although it is prohibited under international law and widely condemned, CRSV remains a pervasive feature of armed conflict from which even children are not spared. Official UN data points to the disproportionate impact of CRSV on girls, but underreporting is widely acknowledged for both girls and boys. In the case of boys, CRSV is overlooked for multiple, often mutually reinforcing reasons, including lack of awareness that boys can also be victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence, and because of the profound stigma and shame associated with it.

To the extent that they are addressed, data on boys are often subsumed under CRSV against “males” or against “children,” which can render them invisible, and/or they are treated as a homogenous group that does not take account differences in risks and vulnerabilities according to age, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background, ability/disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other intersectional factors.

Incomplete understanding of, and insufficient focus on, the risks, vulnerabilities, and gendered harms resulting from CRSV against boys can have negative consequences. Boys are still frequently overlooked in CRSV prevention and response strategies. As a result, boy victims/survivors are often unable to access adequate medical, mental health, and psychosocial support services, and justice responses.

The workshop, cohosted by the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at Princeton

University in partnership with the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC) and All Survivors Project (ASP) explored ways in which documentation of and responses to CRSV against boys can be strengthened in a manner which both complements and reinforces on-going efforts to prevent and respond to CRSV against all children.

The workshop addressed the role of policymakers, practitioners, and funders, and considered how they can work together to develop more inclusive understandings of gender and age-related risks and vulnerabilities to CRSV, and how prevention, medical/health, justice, and other responses can better address the needs and wishes of all child victims/survivors. In particular, the workshop sought to:

- Deepen understandings of risks and vulnerabilities of boys to CRSV and explore how data gathering can be strengthened in ways that are safe, ethical and appropriate for the different purposes for which information is required (child protection programs, human rights monitoring, accountability, etc.).
- Explore roles and responsibilities to protect and respond to CRSV against boys, with a particular focus on sexual violence in the contexts of detention and during their respective reintegration processes. A core aim is to identify ways in which to capitalize

on synergies between relevant agendas/stakeholders including child rights, child protection, children and armed conflict (CAAC), protection of civilians and sexual violence in armed conflict.

Discussions were informed by two reports on (1) CRSV against boys in detention settings, and (2) reintegration support to boy victims/survivors of CRSV in the context of association with armed forces and armed groups.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Barbara Buckinx is Associate Research Scholar with the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs, where she leads the Institute's Project on Gender in the Global Community and the Project on Self-Determination, Migration, and Environment. She was a pre-doctoral fellow with the Political Theory Project at Brown University, a Justitia Amplificata and Kassel Foundation post-doctoral fellow at Goethe University Frankfurt, and a Fellow with the Center on Global Justice at the University of California, San Diego. In her work, she aims to reconcile the divide between normative political theory and policy research, and give guidance to scholars as well as policy makers on how to target reform in global governance.

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