



# Sexual Violence Against Men during Conflicts: Bridging the Gap between Theory and Practice

Exploratory Workshop  
Geneva 26-27 February 2015

## Scientific Report

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Sexual violence against men has been identified throughout history in diverse war settings. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Peru, Sri Lanka, the Former Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone, among others, sporadic evidence on the targeting of men in conflict settings has emerged, mostly from NGOs. Such evidence, however, has not been combined and categorised systematically in order to advance an in-depth understanding of the problem. Although existing works flag the prevalence of sexual violence against men (SVAM) in specific settings, there is little systematic and comparative analyses of the phenomenon, leaving research gaps in need of further investigation.

Considering the importance of deepening and broadening our understanding of the conceptualisation, meanings and deployments of sexual violence in conflict situations, the Graduate Institute's Programme on Gender and Global Change (PGGC) hosted an exploratory workshop on February 26 and 27, 2015. The event was organized by Paula Drumond, Research Assistant at the PGGC, and Professor Elisabeth Prügl, Director of the PGGC, with the generous support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF).

The main purpose of workshop was twofold. First, the event aimed at assessing the advances, gaps and challenges related to research and policy on conflict-related sexual violence against men. Second, it sought to encourage the production of cumulative and comparative knowledge on the topic. To that effect, the workshop promoted direct interaction and interdisciplinary knowledge exchange between researchers and practitioners based in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, the Netherlands and Uganda.

The event started with a keynote speech by **Chris Dolan**, Director of the Refugee Law Project (RLP), Uganda. The lecture reflected on how sexual violence against men is not a recent phenomenon. Episodes of male rape can be found in ancient paintings, arts and narratives. Nonetheless, Dolan argued that it is still difficult to include the image of men and boys as victims in the international agenda. His keynote provided examples of contemporary uses of sexual violence against men in conflicts by drawing on the experience of RLP in Uganda.

The first panel mapped the debates on the topic and presented existing empirical findings as well as theoretical reflections on sexual violence against men in different scenarios.

**Adam Jones**, from the University of British Columbia Okanagan, emphasised how scholarly literature on sexual violence against men benefits from groundbreaking work done by feminist scholars during the 1990s. He highlighted that homophobia hampers the global engagement with male victims of sexual violence and suppresses the emergence of institutional mechanisms and services to victims. Feminist perspectives and their institutional manifestations also pose difficulties, restricting the understanding of gender-based violence

to women and girls as victims. Although awareness on the role of women as perpetrators has grown, there is still a concern that opening space to male victims risks the hijacking of feminist agenda.

**Paula Drumond**, from the Graduate Institute, based her presentation on a comparative analysis of performances of sexual violence against men in three different conflicts: The Democratic Republic of the Congo, the former Yugoslavia, and Peru. By surveying records and jurisprudence of tribunals and truth commissions, her presentation illustrated how sexual violence against men is a diverse and complex phenomenon that follows different scripts depending on the war settings in which such acts are being staged. Although hegemonic masculinity is commonly used as a master concept pushed to fit into different contexts, Drumond proposed an approach that considers how sexual violence against men is contextually displayed.

**Callum Watson**, of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, focused on the perpetration of sexual violence against men in the security sector. The presentation took on the institutions in which perpetrators of sexual violence flourish. According to Watson, there are two elements that need to be in place for sexual violence against men in conflict to occur: a motivated perpetrator and an enabling environment. While motivation is related to power over dominating another individual, an enabling environment is a combination of command climate, institutional culture and reporting climate. Watson argued for the need to promote internal civilian control of security institutions so as to de-stigmatize survivors, discredit perpetrators and provide for survivors' need.

The second session focused on the methodological challenges for policy and research on sexual violence against men. By looking at data on the internal conflict in Peru, **Michelle Leiby**, from Wooster College in the US, demonstrated how sexual violence against men was more frequent than initially reported by the Peruvian Truth Commission. Leiby argued that it is important to note the difference between what is being reported by the victim and what is being coded by the interviewer. Although it is often assumed that men do not report sexual violence, when they do talk about it, it is not uncommon that interviewers miss such stories, coding them a torture instead of sexual violence. Gender identities also affect coding: in her analysis, Leiby found that male interviewers were less likely to interpret stories as sexual violence than female interviewers.

**Veronica Birga**, from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, discussed several methodological challenges to investigating and documenting conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys. According to Birga, two major issues in this regard are the stigma attached to sexual violence and the lack of training of investigators and service providers. On the one hand, stigma and homophobic prejudice often prevent men from reporting and seeking medical assistance. On the other hand, lack of training and expertise can affect the capacity of service providers to identify and record episodes of sexual violence against men. Finally, as it takes more time to build trust with men, they should be given the opportunity to decide if they want to talk about their violations with male or female interviewers.

**Erin Gallagher**, from the NGO Physicians for Human Rights, recounted her experience as an investigator for the UN Commission of Inquiry on Syria and Libya. In Libya, men and boys were sexually tortured and raped in detention. The purpose of such acts was to seek information, to punish, and to send a message to the opposition. In Syria, male victimization was very similar. Regarding consequences, some reported "feeling they were lesser men", and their relatives made comments such as "I would prefer that my son was dead", or "I will not talk about that to anyone." According to Gallagher, male victims will talk about physical torture, for instance, but not about sexual assaults or rape, unless they are asked about it.

Thus, the investigation team members need to be trained to conduct interviews and ask the right questions. She concluded by highlighting that, although not responsible for delivering assistance, investigators need to know and inform victims on how they can get assistance.

Based on his experience as a senior trial lawyer at the International Criminal Court, **Jean-Jacques Badibanga** recounted his experience in the investigation of the Bemba case (Central African Republic - CAR). He illustrated how sexual violence against men was perpetrated in the conflict by looking at the testimonies of two victims, P23 and P69. While P23 immediately admitted to two female investigators that he was a victim of rape, P69 talked about other victims, but not himself. He recognised that he was raped only later when he talked to male investigators. There were different kinds of trauma involved for the two victims. P23 was traumatised because one of his wives abandoned him, no longer seeing him as a man. His rape happened in public and he felt the stigma of not being able to resist the violence. In the case of P69 the rape occurred inside his house; he never sought assistance and could hide the crime. Badibanga stressed that the ICC's definition of rape is not limited to women being raped by men. For instance, there was the case of a man in the CAR, a government minister, who was raped by a woman.

The third session promoted a conversation between feminist scholars and practitioners to advance questions such as: Where are the men in feminist analysis? What does it mean to bring male victimization into a feminist agenda? And, what do episodes of sexual violence against men tell us in terms of gender (re)production?

**Marysia Zalewski**, from the University of Aberdeen, focused her presentation on the conceptual and theoretical aspects of sexual violence against men. She interrogated the implied difference between acts of sexual violence against men and women and why it matters to think differently about sexual violence against men. Her presentation suggested four answers: (a) sexual violence against men appears more shameful (b) the male body in pain is represented significantly different than the female body, (c) female bodies relate to the conflict differently, i.e. as targets; and (d) if SVAM doesn't seem to be an instrument of war in the same way as sexual violence against women. All of this has implications for theorising about gender. Referring to the questions posed by the organizers, Zalewski suggested that men are everywhere in feminist analysis, although usually not regarded as victims. Masculinity is a constitutive part of feminist theories and we need to interrogate how femininity and masculinity materialize in different sites with different vulnerabilities.

**Gizeh Becerra**, from the University of Geneva, shifted the focus to re-thinking how men's role changed from "absent perpetrators" to allies in UN discourse. By looking at different UN documents, Becerra interrogated whether engaging men as allies is changing the overall conceptualization of violence against women. Her findings showed that this new frame has not contributed to changing the female victim/male perpetrator binary, thus reproducing gender stereotypes and dichotomies. Although newly emerging frames signal increased openness, this is a long way from a transformation of the discourse.

Finally, **Henri Myrntinen**, from International Alert, sought to read the complex language of violence as a form of communication as well as a choice and a renegotiation of power relations. Violence is an imprecise language, and it is embedded in socio-cultural meanings that need to be interpreted according to context. To illustrate his argument, Myrntinen provided examples of different ways in which castration/sexual mutilation can be contextually understood depending on context. While in some contexts, castration is used as a way to deny the victim's virility, in others (such as in the former Yugoslavia), these crimes are more about destroying the reproductive capacity of the ethnic "other".

The final roundtable was an open discussion among participants on future avenues for research and collaboration. In this session, participants briefly discussed existing funding and

publication opportunities as well as future avenues for research. Some argued that there is currently a lack of dialogue not only between feminist and non-feminist scholars, but also between scholars and practitioners on the topic of SVAM, which hampers the production of cumulative and comparative knowledge on the topic and evidence-based policies. Several participants expressed an interest in continued engagement and dialogue. The need to include the issue in demographic and epidemiological surveys was raised. Participants decided to set up a scholar/practitioner virtual network to continue exchanging knowledge and ideas.

Paula Drumond  
March 31, 2015

## Recommended readings

- Baaz, Maria Eriksson, and Maria Stern. 2013. *Sexual Violence As a Weapon of War?: Perceptions, Prescriptions, Problems in the Congo and Beyond*. London; New York, NY: Uppsala, Sweden: Zed Books Ltd.
- Dolan, Chris. 2014. *Into the Mainstream: Addressing Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict*.  
[http://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/briefing\\_papers/Into\\_The\\_Mainstream-Addressing\\_Sexual\\_Violence\\_against\\_Men\\_and\\_Boys\\_in\\_Conflict.pdf](http://www.refugeelawproject.org/files/briefing_papers/Into_The_Mainstream-Addressing_Sexual_Violence_against_Men_and_Boys_in_Conflict.pdf)
- Jones, Adam, and Augusta Del Zotto. 2002. "Male-on-Male Sexual Violence in Wartime: Human Rights' Last Taboo?" Paper presented at Annual Convention of the International Studies Association.
- Leiby, Michele. 2012. "The Promise and Peril of Primary Documents: Documenting Wartime Sexual Violence in El Salvador and Peru." In *Understanding and Proving International Sex Crimes*, edited by Morten Bergsmo, Butenschøn Skre, and Elisabeth Wood. Beijing: Torkel Opsahl, Academic EPublisher.
- Parpart, Jane, and Marysia Zalewski. 2008. *Rethinking the Man Question: Sex, Gender and Violence in International Relations*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- UNHCR and Refugee Law Project. 2012. *Working with Men and Boy Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Forced Displacement*.  
<http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5006aa262.pdf>.
- Sivakumaran, Sandesh. 2007. "Sexual Violence Against Men in Armed Conflict." *European Journal of International Law* 18 (2): 253–76. doi:10.1093/ejil/chm013.
- Watson, Callum. 2014. *Preventing and Responding to Sexual and Domestic Violence against Men: A Guidance Note for Security Sector Institutions*. Geneva: DCAF.  
<http://www.dcaf.ch/Publications/Preventing-and-Responding-to-Sexual-and-Domestic-Violence-against-Men-A-Guidance-Note-for-Security-Sector-Institutions>.

## **Workshop programme**

### **Thursday February, 26 2015**

- 11:30 Welcome**  
Elisabeth Prügl (IHEID) and Paula Drumond (IHEID)
- 12:30-13:45 Keynote address**  
Chris Dolan (Refugee Law Project)
- 14:00-15:45 Session 1: What is sexual violence against men? Advancing the conceptual framework**  
Discussants:
  - Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen) and Henri Myrntinen (International Alert)Presenters:
  - Adam Jones (University of British Columbia Okanagan)
  - Chris Dolan (Refugee Law Project)
  - Paula Drumond (IHEID)
  - Callum Watson (Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces)
- 16:15-18:00 Session 2: Methodological challenges and possibilities for policy and research on sexual violence against men**  
Discussant:
  - Rahel Kunz (UNIL)Presenters:
  - Michele Leiby (College of Wooster)
  - Veronica Birga (OHCHR)
  - Jean-Jacques Badibanga (International Criminal Court)
  - Erin Gallegher (Physicians for Human Rights)

### **Friday February, 27 2015**

- 9:00-10:45 Session 3: When the man question encounters a feminist agenda: exploring perspectives and approaches from theory to practice**  
Discussant:
  - Elisabeth Prügl (IHEID)Presenters:
  - Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen)
  - Gizeh Becerra (University of Geneva)
  - Henri Myrntinen (International Alert)
- 11:15-12:15 Roundtable: The way forward (Plenary Discussion)**  
Chairs: Elisabeth Prügl (IHEID), Paula Drumond (IHEID) and Marysia Zalewski (University of Aberdeen)