

# 1 What is conflict-related sexual violence?

## Which acts are included?

Conflict-related sexual violence refers to rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, forced nudity and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity.

## Which circumstances make sexual violence conflict-related?

Sexual violence can be understood as **conflict-related** when there is a direct or indirect link to conflict:

- **Temporal link** - closeness in time between the act and the conflict
- **Geographical link** - within an area affected by conflict
- **Causal link** - whether there is a connection to the conflict

## Who can be a victim?

**EVERYONE.**

ANYONE can be a victim of sexual violence – men and women, boys and girls, old people and young people.

Sexual violence is about power, control and violence, not sexual attraction.

# 2 What you should know about CRSV

## Sexual violence may be used:

- To terrorise the civilian population
- As a method of interrogation or punishment
- To target a specific group
- As a military tactic or means of attacking civilians
- To take advantage of a coercive or lawless environment

## Situations with a high risk of sexual violence:

- Forcible recruitment / use of child soldiers
- Abductions
- Interrogation or torture
- Ethnic/political conflict
- Detention/prison situations
- Checkpoints, population displacement
- Separation of men and women
- House raids by armed groups



## MYTHS AND STEREOTYPES

It was the victim's fault.

All victims feel ashamed/frightened/broken

Most claims are false and should not be believed

Only women can be victims of sexual violence

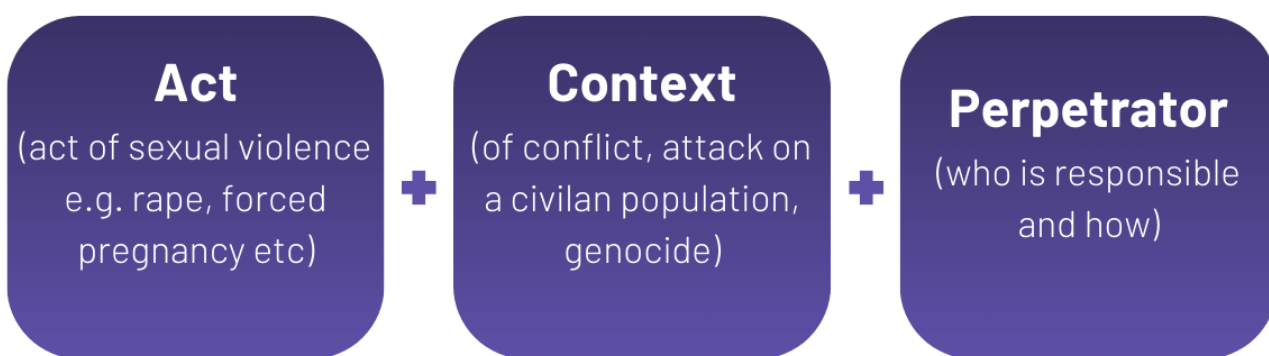
Anyone who has difficulty remembering is lying

Genuine victims will cry/refuse to discuss it

# 3 Sexual violence as an international crime



To hold individuals responsible for sexual violence as an international crime, three separate categories of legal elements are required:



Under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, acts of sexual violence can include:



War Crimes	
Specific crimes of sexual violence	Other relevant war crimes
Rape	Torture
Sexual Slavery	Cruel treatment
Forced pregnancy	Mutilation
Enforced prostitution	Outrage on personal dignity
Enforced sterilisation	Humiliating or degrading treatment
Other forms of sexual violence	

Crimes Against Humanity	
Specific crimes of sexual violence	Other relevant crimes against humanity
Rape	Torture
Sexual Slavery	Persecution
Forced pregnancy	Extermination
Enforced prostitution	Other inhumane acts
Enforced sterilisation	
Other forms of sexual violence	



# IMPACT

## of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence



**Physical:** injuries, STIs, disability, sterility, unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, sexual dysfunction

**Relational:** impact on relationship with partner/children/family



VICTIM/  
SURVIVOR

**Psychological:** trauma, flashbacks, nightmares, depression



**Economic:** family abandonment, loss of social status/job

**Social:** stigma, blame, exclusion, rejection, breakdown of communities



**Note!** Some victims prefer to be referred to as **survivors**: you need to find out what they prefer.

# SEXUAL VIOLENCE CAN ALSO BE A PART OF **GENOCIDE**

Sexual violence does  
not need to involve  
physical force or  
violence



When the environment  
is threatening, or  
violent, giving  
**CONSENT** becomes  
**IRRELEVANT**



# 5 Preparation: building trust to identify survivors



Due to stigma, fears, trauma from CRSV it can be more challenging to identify survivors of sexual violence than other crimes. Survivors may be reluctant, unwilling or unable to speak about their experiences.

## Identifying people who are close to the survivors

- Identify organisations working with women or girls, including development projects, or on violence against women (CSOs working with girls & women, emergency rooms, international NGOs with programmes supporting women such as MSF, Norwegian Refugee Council, Save the Children, CARE)
- Build relationships with NGOs and CSOs working with women & girls
- Seek to be introduced to a known survivor or activist who may be willing to support planning - this should be a female "person of trust" / person who accompanies or who has access to survivors of CRSV
- Consider a small 'outreach/information' meeting about your visit that survivors (or others) can attend
- During an outreach/information meeting introduce yourself, provide information about who you are, why you are there, explain the case, manage expectations, explain victims' rights
- Before selecting or working with an intermediary, you should consider the following issues:
  - Suitability to approach female/male survivors
  - Reliable means of contacting intermediary
  - Relevant local support groups/organisations
  - Impact on risks to survivors and witnesses
  - Background check, affiliations and gender views

## Practical considerations

Dos	Don'ts
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Research and engage with referral / support services in the area before attempting to make contact with survivors</li><li>• Always ensure the safety and privacy of survivors</li><li>• Be cautious of stereotypes about how survivors 'should' react or behave</li><li>• Assess and respond to survivors' needs, fears and concerns</li><li>• Collaborate with local community leaders to facilitate identification and support efforts</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make assumptions about who might be a survivor based on age, gender or social status</li><li>• Pressure individuals to identify themselves as survivors of sexual violence</li><li>• Rush the identification process; allow survivors to share at their own pace</li><li>• Record or disclose any information without survivors' informed consent</li></ul>



# VICTIM'S RIGHTS



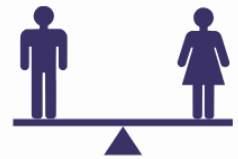
## Victim/Survivor?

Using "survivor" rather than "victim" can be empowering. It emphasises resilience, strength and capacity to overcome adversity. Choosing which term depends on the individual.



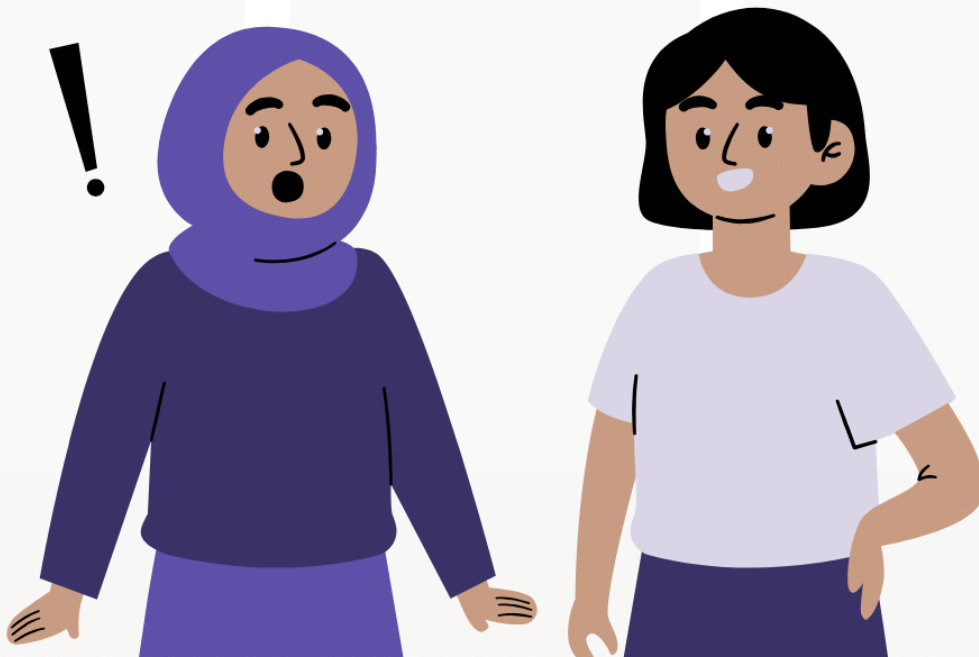
## Survivor-centered?

Allowing the victim to inform how you work with and for them, ensuring dignity and respect



## Gender sensitive?

Take into account the different experiences, situations, needs and attributes of women, men, girls, boys and others in planning, activities and interactions



# 6 Planning the meeting

## Planning and preparation

- Ensure research and planning involves a known survivor or person close to survivors to understand the key issues and concerns faced by survivors of CRSV
- Conduct a risk assessment for all those involved, including survivor to be met, any intermediaries (person accompanying), interpreter, and yourself
- Plan for the safety of persons, equipment, phone, any written materials
- Be sure to have a plan for the meeting, including how long it will take
- Identify important topics and potential questions
- Ensure there is time for breaks, refreshments, provision for transport
- Make provision for childcare needs e.g. breastfeeding, nappy changing
- Identify relevant referral services e.g. medical and psycho-social services, local NGOs and victims support groups, local/national/regional organisations, legal or economic aid services

### Selecting the meeting location



- Safety and comfort of location for the survivor e.g. somewhere familiar
- Privacy of location – can you be seen or heard
- Is it culturally and religiously appropriate
- Ease of access/distance to location for survivor
- Cost & provision of transport to location for survivor
- Safety of survivor when arriving and leaving
- Timing of interview and access to location
- Other individuals in meeting location

### Factors to consider when selecting an interpreter



- Personal views on gender and sexual violence (also against men)
- Profile (age, ethnicity, sex)
- Experience working with children
- Confidentiality & security concerns
- Impartiality & background check
- Trust issues for survivor (cultural/political groups)
- Need for male and female interpreters



# **RISK ASSESSMENT**

# 7 Ensuring a survivor and gender-sensitive approach



## Acknowledge survivors' victimisation

Be sensitive, humble and non-judgemental  
 Always acknowledge and affirm their experiences  
 Do not make assumptions or judge the survivor's actions or decisions

## Avoiding bias, prejudice and assumptions

Approach survivors without opinions or preconceived notions  
 Do not generalize, stereotype or discriminate against survivors based on their gender, age, ethnic, religious, or social background, or other aspects of their identity



Dos	Don'ts
Always seek informed, voluntary consent before engaging in any discussion with survivors	Make assumptions about the survivor's experiences, needs or coping mechanisms
Ensure the survivor feels safe and comfortable during any interaction	Underestimate the significance of trauma and its long-lasting effects
Let survivors share their experiences at their own pace, without interruption	Assume you know what the survivor needs or feels. Each survivor's experience is unique
Show empathy and belief in the survivor's account, acknowledging their courage in sharing their story	Pressure survivors to disclose their experiences or discuss details they are not comfortable sharing
Be aware of how your choice of words, body language and facial expressions could be interpreted	Criticize or judge the survivor's coping mechanisms or choices during and after their experience
Be aware of the potential to re-traumatize survivors through insensitive or probing questions	Make promises that you cannot fulfil, as it can lead to disappointment and mistrust
Make sure you are comfortable with sexual issues and terminology	
Always prioritise the survivor's well-being, autonomy and choices	
Ensure equal level - as a conversation that is two way	

# 8 Understanding trauma

## Emotional signs of trauma

- Confusion or shock
- Denial or avoidance of emotions
- Difficulty tracking conversations
- Difficulty concentrating or staying on task
- Anger, irritability and difficulty regulating mood
- Fear, anxiety, or obsessive worrying, panic attacks
- Intrusive memories or flashbacks
- Feelings of sadness or hopelessness
- Feeling withdrawn and disconnected from people and everyday life
- Loss of joy or enjoyment
- Depression

## Physical signs of trauma

- Overeating or not being able to eat
- Increased alcohol or substance use
- Unusual sleeping patterns
- Difficulty sleeping including insomnia
- Nightmares
- Headaches
- Nausea
- Fatigue or Exhaustion
- Racing heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Being startled easily Sweating
- Frequent crying
- Lack of self-care



### Trauma-informed approach

Conduct all activities with sensitivity, empathy and a focus on safety. Take measures to mitigate against re-traumatisation, reducing anxiety, and provide support to minimize distress and promote survivors' well-being

### Preparation and Self Care

- Prepare yourself: talk about what you might find hard with a colleague or practitioner
- Plan how many interviews and for how long each day – not to get overwhelmed
- Plan breaks
- Plan your self-care
- Take exercise, go for walks in nature, be gentle on yourself
- Acknowledge the emotional challenge
- Debrief with colleague





# RESPONDING TO TRAUMA



Ensure there is a private space available, for instance if they want to have a rest, lie down.

Allow the person to cry if they need to: sometimes people need to cry.



Let them know nobody is judging them, it is not their fault.

Calm the person: let them feel you care. Be humble and with them in their space.



Empathise: be able to feel what this person is feeling and you are there for them.

Listen. Give them space. Don't try to offer a solution.



You can change the environment: offer water, change to a place where you can talk, have paracetamol on offer if they have a headache or upset stomach.

Let them choose what they want to do: talk, walk: "what would you like to do?"



**Do not:** be aggressive, use harmful words, put pressure to understand the reason, leave them in isolation, tell them they need counselling. Avoid negative or judgmental actions.

# 9

## Interviewing survivors

# 10 Recording and storing information

## Planning and risk assessment



### **Where and how are you going to record / store / transmit the information?**

- If you collect information about sexual violence, you have an obligation to store and manage it in a way that ensures the safety of survivors and their family/community
- If you cannot guarantee or maintain the necessary facilities to store the information safely, you should consider not collecting it

### **You must plan for the following:**



Storing information identifying survivors separately from information provided

Not storing public information with protected/sensitive information

Training staff on how to locate stored information and emergency security

Avoiding checkpoint routes with sensitive information/use data encryption

Location and where information will stored and the person responsible for it

Organising information in a logical and easily accessible way





# STORING INFORMATION



## Storing documents or physical information

Store in a locked storage facility (cabinet/safe/storage unit) in a cool dry place and maintain restricted access

Keep a logbook to record any access to the storage facility. Include names, date, time and purpose of access

If the physical information is perishable, make sure the storage conditions are appropriate

## Storing digital information

Electronic or digital information must also be securely stored

Implement digital security protocols

Use strong passwords

Encrypt digital information with professional software

Automatically record any access, additions/deletions or edits to a file

Make and keep two copies of all files on computer/USB/read-only CV

Limit access to specific staff and have an emergency security plan

Maintain adequate anti-virus software

