

Meeting Report
OCHA – Policy Development and Studies Branch

**Use of Sexual Violence in Conflict:
Identifying Research Priorities to Inform More Effective Interventions**
26 June 2008
UN – New York

Sexual violence, when used or commissioned as a tactic of war in order to deliberately target civilians or as a part of a widespread or systematic attack against civilian populations, can significantly exacerbate situations of armed conflict and may impede the restoration of international peace and security, affirms in this regard that effective steps to prevent and respond to such acts of sexual violence can significantly contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, and expresses its readiness, when considering situations on the agenda of the Council, to, where necessary, adopt appropriate steps to address widespread or systematic sexual violence;

Resolution 1820 (2008) Adopted by the Security Council, 19 June 2008

OVERVIEW OF THE MEETING

The humanitarian community has increasingly recognized the need for a more effective response to the complex and growing problem of sexual violence in conflict. Crucial to any such response is improved understanding of the nature and scope of sexual violence, as highlighted by the recent passage of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1820. To this end, and as part of its broader commitment to addressing sexual violence in conflict, OCHA's Policy Development and Studies Branch organized a one-day expert meeting to review current research on, and identify gaps in relation to, two priority topics:

1. **Sexual violence in armed conflict: understanding the motivations**
2. **The nature, scope and motivation for sexual violence against men and boys in conflict**

Key outputs of the meeting were:

1. Identification of **research priorities** for the two topics, focusing on areas where improved understanding would facilitate the design of better-informed and more effective strategies for preventing sexual violence in armed conflict.
2. Identification and **agreement on next steps** to build on the current knowledge-base and establish communities of practice.

The meeting brought together 27 academics and practitioners in the field of gender-based violence and protection (see Annex 1). Discussions were based on background papers prepared by OCHA (available at <http://ochaonline.un.org/gender>) as well as on presentations by select participants of their work in the priority areas. In addition, a lunchtime meeting on sexual violence was convened, aimed at a broader UN, Member State and NGO audience of some 70 participants.

PRESENTATIONS OF THE TOPICS

Topic 1: Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Understanding the Motivations

FRAMING THE ISSUE

What are the motivations for sexual violence in war? Is there a common framework or distinct categories to define the various reasons why rape and other forms of sexual violence are carried out against civilians during armed conflict? Understanding the reasons for rape and other forms of sexual violence will assist in developing interventions that could either prevent or mitigate these crimes.

The discussion paper presented the findings from 16 studies which provide insight into the different motivations underlying the use of sexual violence in armed conflict. One key conclusion to be drawn from this review is that considering sexual violence in conflict as either “opportunistic” or as “a method of warfare” is too simplistic. On the contrary, it is motivated and perpetuated by a complex mix of individual and collective, pre-meditated and circumstantial reasons.

Based on the review of the literature and communication with different scholars, the following four main theories were put forward as possible “standards” to use in describing motivations for the use of sexual violence in conflict.

- A. Gender Inequality Theory
- B. The Psycho-Social and Economic Background Theory
- C. The Strategic Rape Theory
- D. The Biosocial Theory

PRESENTATIONS ON TOPIC 1

To begin the discussion on this topic, **Maria Stern of the University of Gothenburg** provided a summary of her work with Dr. Maria Eriksson Baaz, entitled *Why do Soldiers Rape: Gender, Violence and Sexuality in the DRC Army*. **Stern and Baaz** explore the ways soldiers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) understand the horrific levels of rape committed by members of the military in the east of the country. They focus on the reasons that the soldiers give as to why rape occurs and conclude that rape in the DRC cannot be explained either as an unavoidable aspect of warring or simply as a ‘weapon of war’.

The authors find that the testimonies of the soldiers they interviewed do not fit the different categories of rape identified in the literature. (The literature review, available on <http://ochaonline.un.org/gender> provides an overview of some of these categories). Rather, the soldiers identify two categories of rape:

- **Lust rape:** the “inevitable” consequence of what happens when a “real” man is deprived of the possibilities to have sex (no money and no leave).
- **Evil rape:** not a reflection of sexual needs, but of frustrations arising from hunger, poverty, neglect and the “craziness” of war.

Thus, rather than being a method of warfare, Baaz and Stern conclude that rape in the DRC stems from a mix of perceived victimhood, poverty and idealized masculinity types that are not achievable. This conclusion fits quite well with the *psycho-social and economic background theory* mentioned above, even though the soldier’s explanations of “lust rapes” fall more within the *biosocial theory*. The explanation of “evil rape” does also to some extent support the claim of the *gender inequality theory* that rape is not an expression of sexual desire. This fits the pattern of the studies examined: while most of them adhere to one main theory, they also contain explanatory elements from other theories.

Jennifer Leaning of the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative summarized research on rape in conflict situations such as Kosovo, Rwanda, Chad, Darfur and DRC. She and her co-authors found that sexual violence is more likely to be applied as a strategy of war in “highly communalized wars, where the division between civilian and combatant has collapsed and widespread hatred of an ethnic group has been allowed to prevail.” Leaning mentioned Darfur as one example that could be explained by the *strategic rape theory*. The early period of the Darfur conflict was marked by

Janjaweed attacks on pastoralist communities to drive them away from their villages. The attacks were characterized by women being raped in large numbers while men were hunted down and killed. Men have stated that women protected them by getting raped, by slowing down and distracting the Janjaweed. Leaning explained that the Janjaweed were able to perpetrate rape because of their military superiority to the mostly unarmed villagers, meaning that no immediate counter-attack could be mobilized in time to stop the raping and pillaging.

Leaning, taking more of a *psycho-social and economic background theory* approach, went on to describe how experts looking at the phenomenology of rapes in the DRC have made links to the large-scale social and economic disruptions to Congolese society as early as the pre-colonial intra-Africa slave trade. Due to the protracted disruption to the Congolese culture over centuries, women have in many cases become the economic drivers who manage households. The fact that many women have to resort to selling sexual favors to provide for their husbands and children has resulted in a distancing between men and women. Men, many of whom are armed, have a sense of rage in not being able to fulfill their traditionally ascribed roles. Leaning stressed that history alone is not a primary determinant of the current DRC rape phenomena. However, the historical external and internal disruption of Congolese society does help to explain the position of women and men in the current crisis, which in turn can help to understand motivations behind the staggering incidence of rape in this setting.

PRIORITY AREAS AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES

During the discussion participants cited additional research perspectives to deepen the analysis of rape in armed conflict. These included consideration of fraternity gang rape theory; neurology; adolescent sexuality; normative values in the society, the armed forces and of individuals; the potential positive and negative roles of religious institutions; the changing social and cultural roles of women and men; rape as means of restructuring gender roles; the importance of military discipline and organizational structures for preventing rape; and comparative case studies of those who rape and those who decide not to rape in a given setting.

It was agreed that while there is literature from peace-time case studies to build on, there is a need to understand differences between ways of analyzing sexual violence in war and peace-time, and it should be kept in mind that GBV data for peacetime may or may not be relevant to understanding rape in conflict or post-conflict settings. It was also noted that it is important to compare how the occurrence and reporting of sexual violence develops during the course of a conflict, and the link between sexual violence during and after armed conflict.

Some methodological difficulties in researching sexual violence in armed conflict were mentioned; including possible selection-, reporting- or recall bias in speaking with combatants. In the DRC case, the soldiers interviewed were not self-proclaimed rapists and it was difficult to tease out whose stories were being told. Poverty and war as explanations for the cause of rape highlights what soldiers said, but not necessarily what they do or think. This underscores the importance of triangulating information, testing against population data and the need to be skeptical of all information provided or disclosed. The presence of international actors results in "contamination effects" that make it harder to reap reliable results.

Several of the participants warned against researching sexual violence separately from other human rights and international humanitarian law (IHL) violations, and stressed the need to look at how and why sexual violence is perpetrated in connection with other violent acts.

The following is a summary of **key research priorities** in understanding motivations for sexual violence in conflict:

1. Agree upon a **common framework**, building on the one proposed in the discussion paper circulated prior to this meeting, with distinct categories to define the various reasons why rape and other forms of sexual violence are carried out against civilians in conflict in order to meaningfully compare motivation across conflicts and groups of combatant.
2. **Longitudinal analysis:** Review how the patterns of sexual violence change during the time-span of an armed conflict and if motivations for the use of sexual violence change over time.
3. **The study of perpetrators** of wartime sexual violence, building on existing studies of peacetime perpetrators of sexual violence, as well as existing studies of perpetrators of other war crimes.

4. The phenomenon of “**epidemic-like” sexual violence** - what triggers the escalation of sexual violence? Positive feedback mechanisms for perpetration of sexual violence within groups of combatants or escalating revenge where one group reacts to sexual violence, or reports of such violence, perpetrated by the opponent, are suggested as possible triggers. **DRC is a possible case study** of how sexual violence has reached epidemic-like proportion. Elisabeth J. Wood (unpublished manuscript, 2008) suggests looking at epidemiological models of analysis to inform such studies.
5. Explore **opportunities and concepts of impunity** as variables that need to be analyzed in each conflict: effective chains of command and military justice mechanisms, prison conditions, breakdown of law and order, the role/ impact of functional versus dysfunctional security sectors, as well as interactions between global and local legal discourses.
6. Better understanding of the **role of men as keepers of cultural taboos** and social mores. If men are unfulfilled in traditional roles, how can they be agents in changing those? Field experiences and research have demonstrated that men have cited need for training on gender, particularly in valuing and forming relationships with women. Men's groups exploring these issues were mentioned as a current prevention strategy that warrants further study.
7. Expand research on the impact of **sexual violence on children** including as direct victims, witnesses, children born of rape, exposed to family members suffering from post-traumatic disorders; and as perpetrators.
8. Study the **role that religion**, including religious institutions and personnel are playing; positively or negatively, in prevention to sexual violence in conflict as well as the promotion of care for survivors.
9. Explore how the better knowledge of the **drivers or motivations of sexual violence** in conflict can be used to improve our prevention efforts.

Topic 2: Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Armed Conflict

FRAMING THE ISSUE

Sexual violence against men and boys is generally understood as encompassing rape and sexual assault in their different forms. However, the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda has noted that sexual violence “is not limited to physical invasion of the human body and may include acts that do not involve penetration or even physical contact”. Although sexual violence against men and boys during violent conflicts is poorly documented, it is believed to be widespread. In the last decade alone, incidents of sexual violence against men and boys have been reported in over 25 conflicts. However, little statistical data exists on the subject, and information that does exist tends to be anecdotal.

Sexual violence against men and boys has been labeled “the forgotten method of torture” by health practitioners and academics alike. In wartime, it is predominantly an expression of aggression, power and dominance over the enemy rather than an expression of satisfying the perpetrator’s sexual desire. Sexual violence often involves purposeful action aimed at maintaining supremacy through intimidation, abuse and repression. Closely related, there is another important meaning behind sexual violence against men and boys: the intent to “emasculate” the enemy himself, and turn him into a *de facto* “female” through sexual cruelty.

PRESENTATIONS ON TOPIC 2

To begin the discussion on this topic, **Sandesh Sivakumaran of the University of Nottingham** noted that sexual violence by men against men has occurred in numerous conflicts, ranging in time from Ancient Persia and the Crusades to the conflicts in Iraq and the DRC. Despite such accounts, however, relatively little material exists on

the subject and the issue tends to be relegated to a footnote in studies on sexual violence and other human rights and IHL violations in conflict.

Sivakumaran mentioned underreporting of rape and sexual violence is **due to shame, confusion, guilt, fear and stigma**. Sexual violence is often buried under the rubric of “abuse” or “torture”. Analysis of the documentary sources of these abuses reveals that they consist, almost in their entirety, of studies published in medical literature or reports of non-governmental and inter-governmental organizations with a presence in the field. Cases have rarely worked their way through the system to reach the stage at which lawyers traditionally become involved.

Sivakumaran discussed the different forms of sexual violence against men and boys: rape, enforced sterilization, enforced nudity, enforced masturbation, genital violence, and being forced to rape someone else (enforced rape). The desire to ‘emasculate’ the enemy is another important factor. Emasculation can take place through “feminization”, “homosexualization” and the prevention of procreation.

Sivakumaran stressed that sexual violence against men and boys must be considered when studying sexual violence in conflict more broadly. It forms part of the gender dimension of conflict and attention to the issue may lead to a more nuanced consideration of the roles and experiences of men and boys, women and girls, in armed conflict.

Wynne Russell of the Australian National University discussed how sexual violence against men and boys has been reported in 25 armed conflicts across the world in the last decade. Even so, such violence remains largely undocumented. Unless we better understand the scope and consequences of such violence, male survivors will continue to be deprived of care and justice.

Russell stressed that systematic collection of data is vital. Organizations operating in the field should strengthen efforts to identify male victims of sexual violence and create reporting categories for violence that affects male sexuality and reproductive capacity, such as the mutilation of the genitals. Mechanisms are needed for expert discussion within and across cultural contexts on how to provide assistance for men and boy survivors. Male victims need to be fully represented in international justice initiatives and included in national laws on sexual violence.

Beyond these practical issues, an examination of sexual violence against men and boys can also contribute to a better understanding of the construction of models of masculinity, both at the global and local levels. In particular, there is a need to understand the way in which particular models of masculinity reinforce, and are reinforced by, sexualized violence against men and boys, and also the ways in which men and boys, as well as women and girls, are made vulnerable by rigid social norms of masculinity. Finally, the incorporation of men and boys into analyses of conflict-related sexual violence is important to the wider cause of combating sexual violence against all persons.

PRIORITY AREAS AND RESEARCH PRIORITIES

There was agreement among participants that shining a light on the issues of sexual violence against men and boys was crucial and timely. It was agreed that the research gaps on the issue are extensive. In particular **sexual violence against boys** is poorly researched - a finding that is surprising in light of the attention given to the issue of children and armed conflict.

While UN Security Council Resolution 1820's does not mention sexual violence against men and boys specifically, it does open the door for reporting on such violence by calling on reporting on “information on situations of armed conflict in which sexual violence has been widely or systematically employed against civilians; analysis of the prevalence and trends of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict...” Improved methodologies for collecting data on men and boys should be required so that information on the problem can be reported within follow up to SCR 1820.

Participants discussed whether the phenomena is changing (are more men being raped?) or is it the international response or attention to the issue that is changing? Some concern was also expressed at the potential implications of focusing international resources on men as victims as this may draw attention away from women and girl survivors of sexual violence. It was suggested that some find it easier to look at women and girls as victims, rather

than as political agents and similarly find the notion of men and boys being raped as troubling. Participants agreed that the study of sexual violence against men and boys in conflict could only enrich our knowledge about such violence directed towards women and girls, and that researchers should take care to not unwittingly divert attention from sexual violence against women and girls. Some also noted the need to examine why some men are targeted and not others, such as elders or traditional leaders.

The following **research questions were proposed:**

1. How does sexual violence against men and boys in armed conflict connect with **wider gender research** on masculinities, power, and security issues?
2. How do **gendered power dynamics** interact with conflict dynamics through "emasculation," intimidation and efforts to destroy families, communities, social networks and as a particular weapon of ethnic cleansing, or genocide?
3. What place does sexual violence against men and boys play in **conflict perpetuation** or the choice of particular forms of retaliatory violence?
4. How can sexual violence against men and boys or of males forced to rape family members or non-relatives influence post-conflict **reintegration of ex-combatants**?
5. What correlation, if any, exists between sexual violence against men and boys and the **incidence of sexual violence against women and girls**?
6. How does **sexual violence in institutions** (military, prisons) contribute to conflict-related sexual violence?

The following is a summary of **key research priorities**.

1. Systematic collection of baseline **data on trends** including location, frequency and specific type of sexual violence against men and boys.
2. Detailed case studies in order to understand the **different patterns of sexual violence against men and boys**, motivations of perpetrators, and community responses to survivors. Leaning *et al.* and Russell identify cases which might offer valuable insight, such as Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sri Lanka, Sudan (Darfur).
3. Define areas where research on sexual violence against men and boys intersects with similar research from other settings (e.g. **prison/detention rape**).
4. Examination of **past interventions** to identify lessons learned (e.g. evaluate the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia's efforts to highlight the issue of male on male sexual violence).
5. Build upon lessons learned from past experiences in conducting research on sexual violence against women and girls to **conduct similar studies and determine trends** regarding sexual violence against men and boys.

WAYS FORWARD AND COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Overall the meeting achieved output one and identified **research priorities** for the two topics. It is hoped that this research agenda will guide academicians and practitioners in the pursuit of information to fill gaps to facilitate the design of better-informed and more effective strategies for responding to and preventing sexual violence in armed conflict.

Though the time for discussion of the second outcome of the meeting, the development of **communities of practice**, was limited, some important points and follow-up actions were raised. It was noted that in many current GBV prevention and response programmes in humanitarian action there is minimal emphasis on developing communities of practice or supporting efforts to fill gaps in the research. **GBV programmes at country level should be encouraged** to develop such communities of practice. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of promoting South-South research and capacities of Southern researchers as drivers of the international research agenda. A **mapping of institutions conducting research** on the use of sexual violence in conflict was proposed. It was also suggested that online research hubs be established where existing research initiatives can be accessed (see annex 2).

On the **issue of funding**, Karen Colvard listed a number of entities that have a track record for funding sexual violence research. These are The Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation, U.S. Institute of Peace, Social Science Research Council, McArthur Foundation, Carnegie Foundation, Ford Foundation, and Council for Development of Social Science in Research (Africa), FLAXO (Latin America), Trust Africa, Open Society Institute and International Peace Institute. This is not an exhaustive list, and further work is needed to identify ways to increase funding for research on sexual violence in conflict.

Future events at which the conclusions of the present meeting can be taken forward include:

- Elisabeth Jean Wood from Yale University and the Santa Fe Institute, who was not able to attend the 26 June meeting, will speak at a Brown Bag Lunch Seminar on 1 August 2008 at OCHA New York to discuss her work on explaining inter- and intra-conflict variations in the perpetration of sexual violence. Contact OCHA Kate Burns burns@un.org.
- Radcliff Institute for Advanced Study funds communities of practice under two standard research categories, exploratory and advanced seminars (15- 20 people). The first exploratory seminar is scheduled for September 2008. Contact Jennifer Leaning – Harvard Humanitarian Initiative.
- The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights on behalf of UN Action against Sexual Violence in Conflict (UN Action) is organizing a meeting in September on Access to Justice for Women Survivors of Sexual Violence. Contact OHCHR Madeline Rees – mrees@ohchr.org.
- WHO, on behalf of UN Action, is hosting an expert group meeting on lessons learned on sexual violence prevention and response, to be held in Geneva 9-11 December 2008. Contact WHO Claudia Garcia Moreno at garciamorenoc@who.int.
- The Sexual Violence Research Initiative is sponsoring their Forum 2009 “Research for Advocacy and Interventions to end Sexual Violence”, Johannesburg, South Africa, 8-11 March 2009. Contact SVRI <http://www.svri.org>.

Annexes

Annex 1

List of Participants

Annex 2

Research Hub on Gender, Peace and Security: Boston Consortium

**List of Participants: Use of Sexual Violence in Conflict: OCHA Research Meeting
26 June 2008 - Conference Room A -- United Nations New York - 9:00 - 17:30**

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Annex 2

The Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights

The Boston Consortium on Gender, Security and Human Rights and the **Social Science Research Council** are creating an on-line **Research Hub on Gender, Peace and Security** (hereafter referred to as “the ResHub”). We believe it could play a key role in facilitating the community of practice on “The Use of Sexual Violence in Conflict” which we discussed at the June 26th meeting.

The ResHub will serve two essential functions:

1. It will act as a **centralized location** to gather for all available **research** related to gender, armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction /building sustainable peace.
 - a. Our first priority is **academic research**, but we will also be adding work that comes from **NGOs** and **policy institutions** (along with a way to distinguish between them and to limit your searches to academic research, if so desired).
 - b. Additionally, the ResHub will post information about **current, on-going research projects** (prior to the point when they are visible through published results).
 - c. It will also provide information on relevant **researchers, institutions** and **networks** working in this field.
2. It will also house an **Interactive International Research Agenda** designed to articulate the most important research questions in the field of gender and armed conflict in order to:
 - a. stimulate new research and knowledge-building in this field
 - b. make it easy to find all research and researchers addressing the specific questions of interest to policy makers, practitioners and scholars.

When the ResHub is complete, you will be able to click on a research agenda question, and see:

- a. the research that has already been done that is relevant to the question (including, in each case, citations, abstracts, URLs to access full text documents, and, in some cases, the full text document itself)
- b. current (pre-publication) research projects

So when will the ResHub be available? We are in the midst of creating it. We are both drafting the **Interactive International Research Agenda** and entering information about the research and researchers right now. As you can imagine this is an enormous job (the Boston Consortium has about 20 interns working on it!). As soon as it is up and functioning, we will email the URL to everyone who was at the June 26th meeting.

You Can Contribute!

1. Please send us questions which you think are key questions for the **Interactive International Research Agenda**, based on your own sense of the most critical issues in the field(s) in which you work. That is, the questions may relate to sexual violence, but also to any other aspect of gender, armed conflict and post-conflict reconstruction / building sustainable peace. For now, before the ResHub is fully up and functioning, you can just send them to The Boston Consortium at: ResHub@genderandsecurity.org..
2. If you would be interested in developing/refining the **Interactive International Research Agenda** by commenting on the questions we are currently working with, please contact Carol Cohn at ccmcohn@aol.com.

We look forward to working with you all! If you have questions or suggestions, please contact Carol Cohn at ccmcohn@aol.com or 617-277-6775.