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The Educational Crises and Cultural Stigmas Hindering Advocacy Efforts Targeting Sexual Violence Against the Male Gender



CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE, PEACE
AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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Project Manager's Statement

By Miss Siân Lord

Recognition of male survivors and documentation of their experiences are two elements that have long been absent from the discourse surrounding sexual violence in conflict and in peacetime. In the words of our interviewee, Dr. Sarah Chynoweth, "The way I had been trained, was that sexual violence is perpetrated against women and girls, occasionally boys and rarely men." Thus, upon delving into this issue at a deeper level, it became evident that significant work remains to be done, in research and practice, when it comes to the creation of effective responses to such violence. Remedying the existing gap in this field requires examining the underlying contributing factors and as such, for the purpose of this magazine, focus has been placed on the existence of educational crises and cultural stigmas which have contributed to a lack of understanding and a lack of action.

Unfortunately, research conducted to date not only highlights a lack of education about sexual violence against the male gender (including its underlying causes and the form it takes) but also, concerning, the fact that sexual violence is committed in the very institutions and environments built for the purpose of learning, namely, schools and universities. The inability to receive education or to be educated about the issue at hand results in a range of negative consequences, such as an educational gap. However, the deficits in education surrounding sexual violence stem far beyond the aforementioned educational mechanisms, they also extend to professional institutions. For example, the lack of education of a majority of healthcare providers in this regard results in the absence of health services tailored to the needs of male survivors of sexual violence.

Though it would be remiss to start conversations on this subject and not acknowledge a second interrelated issue which also contributes to the absence of effective responses, namely, cultural stigmas. Our other interviewee, Dr. Sherianne Kramer, in the context of very traditional cultures noted that if, "[...] you go into informal settlements that are very, very traditional and are occupying very old school understandings of gender norms [...] it becomes a little bit more difficult. [...] I don't think someone who gets raped by a woman in that context has the capacity to identify as a victim, let alone even going and accessing resources or help." Thus, it is this very stigma combined with a lack of education which often leads to silence from male victims of sexual violence and which prevents them from seeking assistance (medical, legal or otherwise), leading to substantial and long-lasting health, legal, social and economic consequences for survivors.

In order to break the silence and create awareness, the Sexual Violence Against the Male Gender Team at the Centre for African Justice, Peace and Human Rights (CAJPHR) has chosen to dedicate this edition of the magazine to these very issues, entitling this version, 'The Educational Crises And Cultural Stigmas Hindering Advocacy Efforts Targeting Sexual Violence Against the Male Gender.' It is hoped that by releasing this magazine, the CAJPHR can empower the audience to assist with research efforts, to raise awareness about the issue and to ensure that together we overcome the existing neglect of consideration cast to male survivors of sexual violence. In doing so, we are seeking to send a strong message to survivors around the world that your voice is being heard, that it is okay to seek help and that you are entitled to all the support you need.

Addressing this very difficult topic requires an examination of its various dimensions and as such, the articles in this magazine will delve into the sexual abuse and rape of men and boys in Uganda; treatment of conflict-related sexual violence victims (males versus female responses); barriers hindering access to health services for male survivors; the connection between the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda and the vulnerability of male victims of sexual violence; the rape culture that no one talks about in South Africa. Furthermore, it will include detailed remarks from two experts about the current situation on the ground and the path ahead.

With this in mind, we would like to extend a special thank you to both Dr. Sherianne Kramer, Social Science Researcher and Expert at the Mental Health Unit for the World Health Organisation, and Dr. Sarah Chynoweth, International Relief and Development Consultant for various NGOS, universities and UN Agencies. Their respective contributions have been invaluable not only for the shaping of our magazine but also for the provision of detailed insight into the day-to-day reality on the ground for individuals and communities affected by these issues. It is their research and passion which truly aids progress and awareness.

Finally, last but not least, I would like to issue a special thank you to all the Sexual Violence Against the Male Gender Team members who have helped produce and publish this issue of the sexual violence magazine for their dedication and commitment to this cause.

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Interview with Dr. Sherianne Kramer

Sherianne Kramer is a social science researcher, currently working in the Mental Health Unit at the World Health Organisation. Between 2018 and 2021 she lectured and supervised at the Amsterdam University College and the University of Amsterdam for the Council on International Educational Exchange. Sherianne is also a Honorary Researcher at the Centre for Health Policy, School of Public Health at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), where she previously held a permanent position in the Psychology Department. Prior to joining Wits, she worked as a researcher at the University of South Africa's Institute for Social and Health Sciences as well as taught at Monash University.

Her work has involved national-level crime and violence prevention and critically-oriented psychology and violence-related research; publication of findings in books and accredited journals; presentation of this research at both local and international conferences; the coordination and development of research projects; and lecturing, supervision and mentoring of students and interns. Her research is both qualitative and quantitative in nature and is primarily focused within the social science and critical psychology disciplines and include crime and violence; female and child perpetrated physical and sexual transgression; male victimhood; and gender and sexual identity and performativity.

She completed her PhD in 2014 in the area of female sexual perpetration with a focus on the victims of these crimes. Her book titled, *Female-Perpetrated Sex Abuse: Knowledge, Power, and the Cultural Conditions of Victimhood* examines FSA victimhood as a means to advance contemporary understandings of gender, sexuality and violence. Sherianne's research on child and female perpetrations of violence and male victims was awarded a competitive National Research Foundation Thuthuka Grant and a European Research Council Grant that funded collaborative work with researchers at the University of Amsterdam. She completed this work between 2017 and 2018 as a research fellow on the *Becoming Men: Masculinities in Urban Africa* Project which is part of the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research housed in the Anthropology Department at the University of Amsterdam.

Sherianne has received a number of other grants and various awards for her research, including The Feroza Adams Award for community involvement, research ability and academic prowess. Sherianne chaired the Psychological Society of South Africa Division for Research and Methodology between 2015 and 2017. She is currently an associate editor for the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology*.

In your book entitled ‘female-perpetrated sex abuse: knowledge, power, and the cultural conditions of victimhood’, you analyse ‘why victims of Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse remain so underexplored and invisible as objects of human science knowledge’, for our readers, could you please elaborate on why this is the case?

I think things are changing. When I started this work, there were 14 articles in the world on female sex crimes, and that's irrelevant of what or who the victims were, just on female sex crimes, 14 articles. When we ran a search, I was quite surprised because I thought well okay, hopefully at least under a high-income context there'd be some work done, but very little. Where there had been work done, most of these women were treated as if they were non-normative in some way in terms of their gender identity, so they were like men, they were treated like men a lot of them were actually given gender reassignment, not like physically, but gender reassignment therapy, for e.g., how do we act like women, be maternal and caring, and not act like a man. This was very early on, where I found a lot of work had been done and it seemed a little bit surprising to me that even in the year 2000-and-something we are still thinking like that. So, I started delving quite deeply into female crimes, not sex crimes, because there was a lot of literature on female criminology and that's where I had to start because there was so little on sexual violence. The female criminology literature was quite deep and dense, quite a lot from the 1970s and 1980s coming out and different theories on why women can be violent.

Most of it, what was really interesting was the common theme later applied to female sexual violence, the only possibility for a woman to be sexually violent is if she is either coerced by a man or has misunderstood her gender requirements, not consciously, but something's gone wrong unconsciously, or there is a history of really awful abuse or substance use. So vast rationalisations that just aren't applied to male criminals, often male criminals are just “bad”. I started there because that was the only place that there was research.

As my own work developed and I started working directly with these women, what I started realising was firstly the work that had been done in the area, there was like a kind of formalised category, very formalised in the context of female sexual violence discipline, so not like well known, but where in you are reading the literature, you start realising there are these three categories. The first category is the male coerced category where the woman can only commit a sexually violent act if she is coerced by a male partner or kind of a co-accomplice. I don't know how much you know about actual stories in South Africa, but something that was happening at the time, was a story about a woman who was called by the media ‘Advocate Barbie’. Basically, she was an advocate in Pretoria, South Africa. People discovered that there was an orphanage close to her home, she used to collect little girls, then her and her partner, Dirk Prinsloo, engaged in various sexual activities with these little girls, and then they'd dump them back at the orphanage, a very sad situation.

But the way the media portrayed her was that she was coerced by Dirk Prinsloo, and if you read any of the newspaper articles, they constructed him as a dangerous monster, aggressive, like the kind of real reason behind all this. He ran off to Russia and escaped any imprisonment. She was characterised kind of on this Madonna-Whore spectrum, either as this innocent woman who had been lured into violence through Dirk Prinsloo or that she was blonde, they called her “advocate Barbie” and then spoke about her big-breasts and her blonde hair. When I actually started understanding the story and went through all the court records, the story was that she had conducted the abuse and he had filmed it. To me that means she was the one who was acting violently but he was more like the accomplice, and she was the actual criminal, and the system just never treated her that way. There is a whole lot more complexity to this case because she was a high-powered woman who was given very special treatment in prison, I mean, in correctional centres in South Africa, in the male cells, there are about 80 men in a cell with two toilets and one basin. In the female cells it’s a little bit less, but she was taken away from that and was given her own solitary cell. The story has other obvious identity components which were engaging her with her whiteness and her blondeness, and her high economic status and legal status.

But, if we can just park those things, for me the basis of the problem was that she was treated in the way that this category informs how we are to think about women who are sexually violent when there is a male partner present and, how that male partner basically allows us to invisibilise her and jump back on the ‘males are aggressive’ bandwagon, so that’s the first kind.

The second kind is the teacher type, I am sure that you have come across over and over again, is a young man and there is a teacher who engages with him. This is interesting to me, because one of the boys I worked with he had this situation, and he said to me when he had this experience, he was like, “I was supposed to be like, oh my gosh, I had this first sexual experience, what a man, but I wasn’t feeling like a man, what I was feeling was raped. You know, it was against my consent, I didn’t want to do it but when I told my friends, they said, “what a man, you got laid”. The discourse around it is very much, well a hot teacher violated you and often when I talk about my own research in a social context, like a bar or whatever, there is always one guy who goes ‘oh give me one of your/the victims you work with in prison, I’ll take it.’ This is a very dangerous discourse because it really undermines the experiences of the victims.



I can give another example in South Africa, a very, very famous private school, a very beautiful teacher, she taught water polo, she had been sexually touching boys inappropriately – it's an all-boys school – for like five to six years. There were voice notes going around with these boys going, you know, the story has come out and she is going to court and whatever and I just keep thinking to myself why didn't she choose me? You know, I would have liked some of her beef.' and really problematic stuff. What I kept reminding people is just replace her with a man and tell me what you think of these voice notes and people would have been horrified. You cannot talk about a man sexually inappropriately touching a girl and be like, the girls go, 'oh give me some of that.' Everyone would be like, so, the gendered nature of the way we speak really informs the invisibility of these women.

"There were voice notes going around with these boys going, you know, the story has come out and she is going to court and whatever and I just keep thinking to myself why didn't she choose me?"

Then the final category is a predisposed type, where she had been exposed to violence herself and that's what she's learnt and so that's the only way she knows how to communicate, so she has a history of abuse and so that really rationalises, when we can't think, okay she's either forced by a man or she is a hot teacher, the only other excuse we can have for a violent woman is that she's been taught violence from the get-go. It is usually the case where you go, 'oh look at this, she was sexually abused by her father or her uncle, so it is still a man's fault. What is really interesting to me is that somehow, we keep going back to the male gender being the reason sexual violence exists at all. I think in summary, it's the way we speak about men and women, that we talk about gender and there being 60-70 genders now, and that you know, we are capacitated to think through non-binary ways of being, but it's not true. We are still very much informed by binaries between male and female. Even those binaries inform other genders, so, how do we think about trans-binaries or how do you think about a trans-gender person, we think about a transgender person as being male or female, or a combination of both, but that dichotomy still informs that transgender category. Same thing with all of the non-binary genders, it's informed by, 'is it male, is it female or is it a combination, or is it this or more?' So, as much as I really wish that we were as progressive in our gender categorisations as we assert to be, I think that we are still very much informed by that binary. Regarding 'advocate Barbie', her first name is Cézanne Visser. Her mom wrote a book about this so you should be able to find some stuff, she was not willing to talk to me directly, she refused. I believe she's refused to, she's out of prison now, but she has refused interviews and stuff, but there's a lot of material on her on the internet.



Females have a very innocent position, you would almost say, according to the society and as you have said, even though we (especially in the Western world) seem to be progressing to everyone being able to decide their gender, in essence we are not that progressive at all. We are always falling back on the biological characteristics of men and women. Do you see any progression in that in the near future, or you still don't see that change?

For the last few years, I was teaching a course at, it's an adjunct course, not at the UvA itself, it's a side course for American students who are studying at the UvA. It was a cross-cultural psychology course but one of the modules was on gender and those students from the States are really, really cognisant of this stuff. You can imagine the kinds of students that come to Amsterdam from America are ultra-liberal. You know, you are not going to have kids who are sitting in conservative positions, getting on a plane to Amsterdam to come and study gender dynamics or gender psychology. You have got, the students that arrive for that course are ultra-liberal and then of course, inform each other. I actually had a lot of quite long discussions with them because what I started feeling, actually from all my students, is that there is a lack of sophisticated thinking around this. So, everyone in my classroom tells me they themselves are non-binary, that they don't have sexual preference choices and that they are fluid. I want to say 'yay well done' but I also feel like it is not true, that we're all different and we all have different ways of being and it's almost become this ultimate category that we want to be, of fluidity, so we all start going we are all fluid, we are all gender nonbinary, we are all this.

But what it has become is more like a tag to them or you know almost like it's a cool thing to do right now, without the thoughts about 'why are we doing this?', 'why are we platforming these as real issues?'.

I kept going back to the transgender example, because, for me, I have seen transgender kids who are really struggling from the time they are four years old, with the way their body looks and the way they feel, being in complete contrast to their lived realities. The fight that they have to have every day to wake up in the wrong body is traumatising, especially around puberty. And then, you know, those who get the help that they need, they go on puberty stoppers, eventually they will have hormone replacement therapy and eventually they will have physical surgery to change themselves, that is a huge trauma. We have the highest, and in psychology what we see, is that we have some of the highest rates of suicide amongst the population. For me, a bunch of ultra-liberal America students saying to me, 'we are all nonbinary and we all have fluid capacities' actually undermines the category of people who are living the true experience of that. Because then it's kind of like oh well we're all like that, but actually it's a special category of experience that we should say 'okay, you have a different lived reality to some other people, how can we make your experience safer?'



Better in this world that you aren't driven to the edge of the society, that you aren't physically violated because of who you are, so that you do have access to the resources you need medically and physically. Instead of harping on about, I know this can sound like a little bit maybe, yeah, from an academic standpoint like maybe I am violating the very things I am supposed to be doing, but maybe instead of sitting and unpacking terminology and throwing around words like nonbinary, transgender, actually focus in on people's experiences, and I think if we can get there, then we can actually start being progressive. But I do think, especially what we've started to do is, you know I am a discourse analyst myself, the whole point of discourse analysis is to go how are these terms oppressive, how we can unpack them, destroy them, and resurrect new terminology that is more empathetic, less damaging and more progressive. So, in the face of me admitting that even I can stand out of it and go okay but 'maybe there is a place for that in academia' but in the lived experience we have to actually act and engage in a way that is progressive and that doesn't mean just using terms like 'I am fluid, or I am nonbinary'. So, it's about moving from almost academic debate to active advocacy which is what I think you guys are doing so that is great.

Yes, I can understand that maybe some people don't even know what they are saying when they use these terms for themselves. These days, we should give more attention to, 'what does it mean when we say that'?

Totally, and we also run the risk of almost, and you know it's very difficult we don't want to categorise people, because categorising is very damaging. As a psychologist, I can tell you one of the biggest problems is that we have a huge book called the 'Diagnostics Statistical Manual of Disorders'. You know as early as, in the 1970s, homosexuality was a disease in that book, and it was a defining category of illness and all of the categories of illness are problematic. You know, as soon as you get labelled with psychosis or schizophrenia or personality disorders, your life changes. Even kids who get labelled, and I really feel over-labelled, with things like ADHD, your, the structure of your learning path changes so there are very dire consequences to categorising. We also know that there are consequences in the sense that access to things like employment and social situations, those are all defined by how we are categorised. So, we don't love categorising, and we probably shouldn't where we can avoid it but the problem with this is that if we don't categorise, we run the risk of making it so universal in our experiences that we miss our differences that are also really significant because how can we help people who are defined by marginalised experiences?



So, you know, actually categorising someone as white male, middle class, European, is not great because that's a def-, there are a whole lot of constructs that come with that but if we don't do that, there are women who are black, lesbian identifying, and living in a marginalised context in South America, who don't have the resources because their counterpart does. So, we are in a very difficult space in academia and beyond, where we recognise the problems of categorisation and how they impose on things like male victims' experiences of violence, and we need to move beyond those categories, but also recognise if we don't have those categories, we can't focus on marginalised experiences and this is discourse analysis, we enforce the very things we are trying to disrupt because we need to keep referring to those categories.

This sounds like something incredibly complicated, especially in the society we live in today. Is it maybe possible because some societies are not as far in this concept as Western society, in that everyone is coming out about naming themselves in a certain way, that maybe there it's possible to start a movement?

I mean this is an interesting point because I think some of my experiences, you know, when working in informal settlements, some of the expressions of trans identities and of non-binary identities in these informal settlements are really evocative and aren't dependent on terminology or progressive understandings of gender and sexuality, they really come from the ground up.

I actually must find this link, someone did a whole photographic exhibition of expressions of kind of nonbinary genders and nonbinary sexual preferences in these informal settlements in Africa, I think it was in Kenya. It was really evocative and very beautiful. The expressions happened through how people were dressed, how people were behaving, performances, and very, very beautiful and really not dependent on Western ideas of this all. Another example I can give you is in Papua New Guinea, there is an entire tribe which is not really informed by modernity at all, no technology or anything. There's a tribe, I have their name and I think there's a colleague at UvA who goes all the time and does ethnographic research where you immerse yourself in the community. So this is interesting, they have, their sexual relationships are defined by men having sex with young boys. There are rituals around it, there's paintings of faces and the idea is that sex with young boys creates longevity, so you live for longer and if you have sex with a woman, you start reducing your longevity. So they have sex with women once or twice in their lives to procreate, as a procreation need, but then their sexual enjoyment and desire, and all the kind of sex things that are enjoyable, are embedded in these men and boy relationships.



It's not illegal because their context isn't defined by legal terms, it's not, it is really centralised in the activities of their rituals, of, kind of ritual practice, things I have seen I guess in South Africa as well, where tribes you know commit, things like the Xhosa tribe they have circumcision that takes place in the forest by a Sangoma, which directly translates as a Witch Doctor but let's not use that word, let's call it a traditional healer. It is very dangerous because a lot of boys die there, um because it is not performed by a health practitioner who has the surgical skills for it. But nonetheless it is embedded in a ritualised concrete idea of what boy and manhood looks like and so the same thing with this tribe. It is very interesting to me because they are not informed by modern understandings of gender or sexuality. This is just a natural expression of their beliefs, their rituals and their system.

If we look to history, it's the same thing, in fact modernity is the thing that imposed the male/female binary, and the heteronormative, you know the call for heteronormativity. I think Foucault is really, really interesting, he is really good at demonstrating at how we actually moved from a more progressive society to a more kind-of constrained surveilled system where the church came into power and basically if you did not conform, you were chucked into an 'asylum' for being mad or you were burnt at the stake. The reason the church controlled us in this way was because industrialisation became important and we needed to work, we needed to be productive orderly human beings, and the things that create order and structure are men and women are different, they must procreate, they must reproduce, the survival of a very productive human race.

There must be boundaries around that sexual activity, it must be for reproductive purposes only and anything that isn't for reproductive purposes dismantles our social systems so we then call it non-normative. And so, emerges this whole sexual code of morality, this whole moral code on sexuality, what you can and can't do. You know if we think about Madrid as recent as the 1990s and the 2000s, Chueca, it's a gay neighbourhood but it's really just a neighbourhood defined by diversity. There was a church for homosexual men who used to go cruising, that is where they would go and meet up with other men. Also it was a place where sex workers worked, it was kind of seen as a seedy dark area but there was a church in the middle and they, all of these people who were sex workers or who were engaging in homosexual sex, anything like that, had to then go to that church and repent for their sins. What was amazing, is – we are talking about the year the 2000s here, we are not talking about 1940, not even 1800s, we are talking about the year 2000, there's a church there and they are not allowed in the church because they are 'tarnished'.

So they would have to repent through a window but there are bars on the window and a priest on the other side. But, there is a very, well there's a strong religious emphasis, and legal emphasis, and medical emphasis, on what is wrong and right sexually and medically, and yeah. I mean yeah, we can talk about this for hours but basically I think that in these contexts where there isn't this modern demonstration of religion or Western religion, and Western ideas of how society should function and Western ideas of the law, and Western ideas of medicine, gender and sexuality do perform in different ways and are performed in different ways, and I think we could take some lessons from those spaces. Certainly, we've seen it with some of the work with HIV and men's groups in Kenya, just how different that is from the European experiences.

Yes. It really puts the note on who are we (necessarily) to say what is wrong or right? We often think we know everything and that it is always right, but there is much to learn from other communities, especially from those we don't know.

The Global North is really much smaller than the Global South and the marginalised communities in the Global South make up a much more varied and greater population, and a much more demanding population because their resources are limited. This is often what I try and explain about patriarchal structures to my students, because I don't know why, but often students think of patriarchy as like, there's this monarch and it is just like a white man, or that the monarch might just be white man/men. The idea that patriarchy is just a bunch of white men going 'we win, you lose', but that's not what patriarchy is.

Patriarchy is embedded in the structures and systems, and it means that all women and all men are oppressed by it, regardless of race, regardless of gender and the truth is that men are constructed as certain things, and so they have to live up to those things, and the ever-watching eye of a patriarchal structure. Also, women can be very patriarchal.

I lived in South Africa, which is completely defined by diversity, and what always was interesting to me was how patriarchies in South Africa are showed. So, for example, you have situations where you have female CEOs and all they have to do is put on a suit and they become very patriarchal in their look, in how people respect them. It's a small thing, but the signal, the clothing signal, has a lot of power. A power suit says a lot about a woman being like a man. Interestingly, you have Zulu tribes in South Africa, and those Zulu tribes are defined by very traditional gender norms. So, you have a chief and then often you have kind of the male head of the family, and it's a polygamous society so he is allowed to have 40 wives should he wish. They can have as many kids as they want. There are countries in the West where polygamy is illegal, but it is very much legal in traditional law in South Africa. There are these polygamous families and women 'belong' to men.

I was working with a group of women who all had contracted HIV from their partners and I said to them, ‘why have you not left them?’ The consistent answer was that they provide, they go to work, they are the breadwinners and the threat of my children not eating and having a roof over their head, not having an education (because in South Africa we have to pay for education) is far greater than my HIV status. Women are meant to, I mean we (South Africa) are one of the only countries in the world where we have this horrific phenomenon called corrective rape. Where lesbian-identifying women in informal settlements are raped by men who are trying to demonstrate to them what their ‘supposed’ to be doing with their bodies, they’re correcting them through rape. So, in these societies, the chiefs have this incredible power, and you know, you can really see this kind of patriarchal figure, all of patriarchy, being represented in this man, but let me tell you, he gets in a taxi or a minibus and comes over to Johannesburg central or in the Johannesburg industrial centre, and he comes face-to-face with a woman CEO of a very famous bank, his status goes like this (down) and she goes like this (up). It’s fascinating to me because actually in those moments, he is undermined by her patriarchal energy and the patriarchy she represents. I like using this example because I think it makes us remember that whiteness does not equal patriarchy, that maleness does not equal patriarchy, it’s the structures that allow certain gender dynamics that is what patriarchy is. The imbalance between different genders in a given moment, is a patriarchal thing. It is very important for us to keep considering in the context of male victims of female sexual violence.

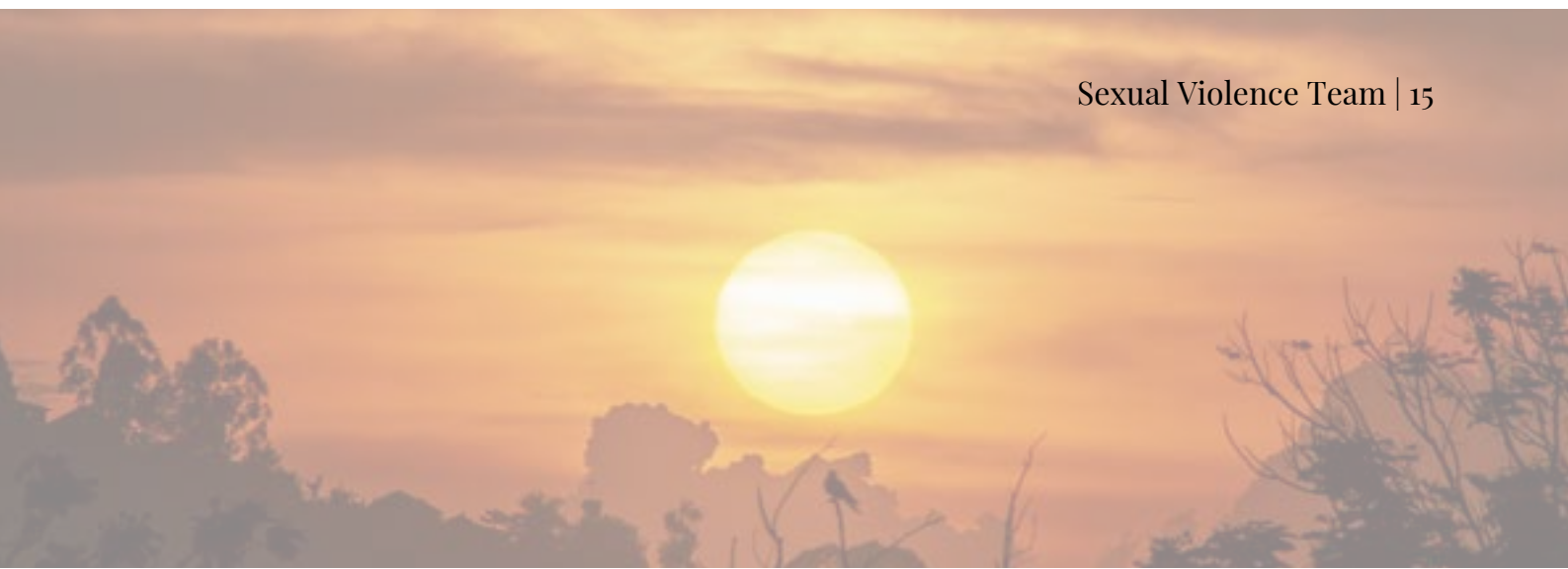
Your publication entitled ‘The making of male victimhood in South African Female Perpetrated Sexual Abuse’ co-authored with Brett Bowman, the first of its kind to explore the possibilities for men to identify themselves as female sexual abuse victims, what do such possibilities entail? Are they readily available to men or is there further work to be done in this regard?

It is very complicated. Every single male victim I have worked with, initially do not identify themselves as victims of a sexual event. Some of them recognise it as a violent event and then can see themselves as victims but none of them have seen it as a sexual event and some of them just didn’t think through it as any kind of a criminal act, but rather just as an experience. What was the consistent kind of thing that enabled these men to identify themselves as victims was exposure to media in some form. So for some of them, some of them had been violated by men as well.

One of them, he had been sexually violated by his mother his whole life, never ever saw it as sexually violent, despite when he actually describes the event, it was clear sexual abuse. I mean she was touching him inappropriately during bath time, she was trying to get him to be aroused, like lots of inappropriate touching and stuff. So, it is clear from an objective perspective that it does fit within the definition of sexual abuse, but he never saw it as sexual abuse. Then later on, he said to me that the way his mother had engaged with him kind of enabled an entire life narrative of sexual victimisation in some way.

He went on to be abused for quite a long time by a male neighbour as well, which he immediately recognised as sexually violent, but the activities weren't different from what his mother was doing. So, it was very interesting how his brain kind of framed one event as sexually violent and the other as not at all. Then what happened was, he started a group called Matrix Men, he started a support group for male victims of sexual violence, not only violated by females but also by males and other identifying genders. So everyone he works for is a male victim of some form of sexual violence. Martin, and he's happy for me to expose his name because part of his journey has been helping other people and he has come to all my talks, he's really been a great informant. Martin started this group Matrix Men which started off as an online support group for male victims of sexual violence. It has now merged into something a little bit more formalised; I think there's group meetings and there's a lot of advocacy stuff going on as well. I hear from him now and then, he's really busy with it. He started these groups and someone else in these groups described an experience with a woman and he kind of said, on an informal chat online, and he said, it was like reading his own story and suddenly he twisted back and thought, 'oh, I was sexually violated by my mother', that was one instance.

Another instance, was I went on the radio to call for victims of sexual violence because I was struggling through my psychological networks because people don't admit these things in therapy. So, I went on all the biggest radio stations in South Africa and was interviewed by the DJs because I guess they were really interested in what I was talking about and some of the guys who I interviewed said they heard me on the radio and there like was this flood of 'oh there's a name for this, this happened to me and now what she describing happened and now she's putting a name on it.' So yeah, it was like, it was, I guess, the thing we were talking about earlier about categorising experience, is even though we do not want to label it, for these men, it was really important to be able to identify as victims, that there was a label for them and that they could find that label. Once they found that category of experience, they could then access me and then access other help, like actual therapy and resources. But the problem is, until you are able to self-define as a victim, you can't access the resources because you are not self-defining. So the resources are there, there are therapists, there are mental health resources, I mean more in high income and middle-income communities than low-income communities in Africa, or South Africa and beyond.



But, it is actually less about the resources and more like can I self-identify as a victim? There are some very difficult pathways that happen once you do self-identify. So it became really complicated for most of these men. There were these constant negotiations, 'am I a victim or am I not, these are the reasons I might be, these are the reasons I'm not or this the reason I am'.

Once they kind of overcome that, they have to talk about very real things. So, the key question that happens all the time is, women are physically weaker than men, how did this happen and how did it happen if you weren't aroused? In those contexts where men were not given medicine to become aroused or some form of medicalised version of that, in those contexts, they became aroused because of a physical response to sexual activity. You know, when women are raped, women also become aroused, and the reason your body does that is to protect you from harm. In a courtroom, that is never used as evidence against a woman, that she was a wanting or eager or consenting party in the event of a rape. But, as soon as a man becomes aroused in the event of a rape, he gets dismissed in court, because 'Oh, he was aroused, therefore, he must've therefore been a consenting party and this is rubbish'. So, again, we see the differences in the treatment of male and female victims. But also, that body arousal, because it's defined as 'oh he was eager', there's something that happens psychologically in these victims. They start talking a lot about something that I labelled as body betrayal, feeling like I have these psychological experiences of non-consent, of violation, but my body is responding in an affirmative way and so this body betrayal became a defining feature of all of the victims that I worked with; it was just like an ongoing thread.

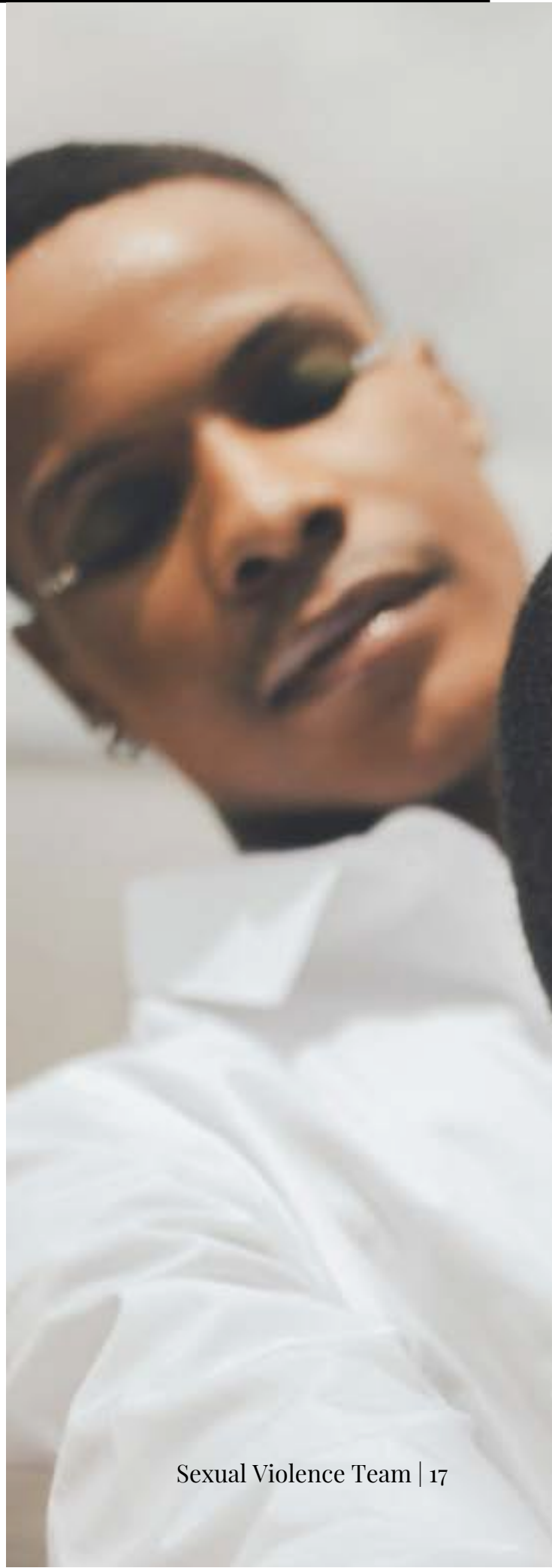
That body betrayal also allowed them to think through what is this victimisation. So, it's that experience, it's also the experience of just feeling completely emasculated and not being able to articulate that a woman sexually offended them.

It completely inverts everything we understand about sex, sexuality, consent, who can and can't be a victim, and who is and who is not a perpetrator. Victimhood comes with some issues, because once you admit you're a victim, you undermine your masculinity and you reassure society that you aren't capacitated to take care of yourself. So, then these men would rely on other kinds of discourses, like 'Oh, I was inebriated at the time', 'I was weakened by this', 'or she was strengthened by that', so a lot of rationalising supporting statements for how this became possible. But I mean there were also cases where I had one man who was hijacked by three women and they gave him Viagra, actually in Zimbabwe. In some African tribes, there is a lot of discussion that certain body fluids have healing powers. Unfortunately, there was a lot, in the early 2000s, of mythology around babies being able to heal AIDS, so there were a lot of babies being raped, tiny little babies, very, very devastating. That stereotype has thankfully softened a little bit, but it's a very real discourse or story or narrative that had been circulated. Similarly, male sperm has certain 'healing powers' for other diseases, I don't know what it was in the context of this particular case, but these, I am unsure what it was in the context of this particular case but three women gave him Viagra, he was therefore aroused through medical purposes and then they collected his sperm for whatever healing reasons that they had.

So that was an easy case because he could say that he said that ‘well of course I didn’t want it but I was given Viagra.’ In other cases, it’s not so easy because they weren’t given Viagra.

I can certainly agree with finding these reasons why men were unable to say that they had experienced sexual abuse, especially the physical concept of getting an erection, but it’s not their fault, it’s just their body reacting to something. It is also interesting to hear that this man named Martin, even though he was all in this organisation, he was still not aware of the fact that his mother sexually assaulted him.

Well for Martin, it was a complex journey for him and I think, so he started this organisation, it was in still in the early phases of this organisation and this organisation was very much founded on his experiences of being a male victim of sexual violence, but, of a male perpetrator and I think, talking online and having those discussions really surfaced his other experiences. I think his experiences are valid and he is very cognisant of cycles of abuse and journeys. He has a daughter and he spoke a lot about being so afraid of his own capacities and like knowing what his mother did to him and yeah, like the self-awareness is really interesting and also really sad. I also worked with; this was very interesting as well, just how sexuality becomes questioned in the face of all of this. One of the participants was sexually violated by his older sister, she was much, much older to him, I think she was 16 or 18, and he was like 5, and throughout his childhood, she was the oldest of many kids, she used to lock him in the bathroom and force him to perform oral sex on her. He grew up doing that regularly.



He actually wasn't confused about anything, I think he was very cognisant that he had been hurt by her, but what happened was, later on, he realised or he identified as a homosexual. He said something that has stayed with me, I mean I spoke to him last maybe ten years ago and this has stayed with me, he said 'did my abuse inform my homosexuality or did my homosexuality inform my abuse?' He had this driving question, 'did my sister see what, who I was going to become, that I was going to love men and was she in essence performing a corrective rape on me and demonstrating you know, "normative sex", what she might've thought of "normative sex". Or, did I become a homosexual because my sister raped me?' And these are hard questions because they impact your whole identity. Actually, it may be neither of those things and very likely they are not actually related or they might be or they might be related in different ways. These are the driving questions of his life and he's never going to be able to answer that, and it really informs his everyday experience. I felt very sad for him that he can't experience who he is without that being very much being embedded in a complex trauma.

I think most of these, most of the people that I was speaking to were really, it was the first time they were sharing their stories, so, it also gave them an opportunity. This was also something very difficult for me because I was like, 'what am I doing?', you know, I am now exposing people who did not experience themselves as victims, I mean, of course they were in other ways exposed and I was reinforcing it, but I felt there was a lot of hard questioning from my perspective. Like, am I reinforcing the experience of victimisation? What is my role as a research psychologist in the context of these peoples' victimhoods? What are the consequences for them? Once you self-identify as a victim, 'victimness' is a hard thing.

To be 'victim worthy' is a hard thing, especially in South Africa. Also, another thing that is very African or South African specific, is that we don't have faith or trust in the policing system and so often rape isn't reported. When I've asked, and not just male victims, but all victims of female sex offenders if they had reported, even if they had reported male perpetrators, they very rarely reported female perpetrators because, number one, they don't really have faith in the system but worse than that, the police are constructed as very patriarchal and as very traditional. They were like 'no, no, they wouldn't believe me, they would've laughed at me and nothing would've happened and I actually felt really silly saying it'. Then when I was working in the prisons and working directly with some of these women who were female sex offenders, you could really see how the system connects in this way. I mean, the first time I ever went and I asked if I could have a warden present, they all laughed at me, the social workers, they were like, 'these are just women, what're you scared of?'. When I was walking through the male centres, men are dressed in their orange uniforms, some are shackled, there is really an alert that these are prisons with prisoners inside. You walk into the female prison, and everyone is wearing their own clothes. The rehabilitation for female criminals is like baking and religion (religious courses) and then you go to the male centres and they are doing hard-core work on rape, learning what rape is and what not. It's this vastly gendered experience and that narrative of the police won't believe me and there will be no consequence in the courts and even if there are consequences in the courts, there will be no consequences in the correctional centres, that takes a life form.

We are aware of the fact that there is a lack of education, in the sense of proper sexual education, in many of the countries of the African continent, would you say there is progress in at least South Africa regarding this concept which, for example, can assist individuals who have been abused by a woman earlier to come to the conclusion that they have been abused?

I mean South Africa is a complex space because it's very diverse and you have kind of pockets of Global North society and Global South society. If you are in big centres like Johannesburg or Cape Town and you're inside the kind of middle-income contexts, it's very European, it's very Americanised. In fact, sometimes, I have family in America, I go there and I feel they are way less progressive than my South African context. I mean yeah, in those contexts, people are still surprised but there are definitely resources available and yeah, I guess the idea about gender fluidity and sexuality, and all that is being questioned. Then you go into informal settlements that are very, very traditional and are occupying very old school understandings of gender norms and I think in those spaces it becomes a little bit more difficult. I don't think, so, if you look at the Zulu culture that I spoke about with the Chief and like a polygamous family, I don't think someone who gets raped by a woman in that context has the capacity to identify as a victim, let alone even going and accessing resources or help.

I think it is so defined by context, immediate relationships and knowledge. One thing that was really interesting actually is, this was very interesting for me, is that I was working with the kind of range of female sex offenders who had been identified by the courts in correctional facilities and all of them, all of them, were from low-income contexts, and had histories of quite abusive pasts, had very low education levels. I was like, 'okay, so this is what we are working with, people in low-income settings with low education'. Then when I did my call for victims, the men and women who came forward were all highly educated, all of them had tertiary degrees and some had postgraduate degrees. It's not to say that there are no perpetrators who are high income or, this is what I call 'cultural capital,' so kind of access to more tertiary level education and access to resources like that. So, it's not to say that all victims come from those contexts. I tried to unpack this and what I realised was two things, you can be identified as a female sex offender from an objective source right, so the police or some other justice party decides you are a sexual offender and then takes you to the courts and then you go to prison, if you get convicted. But, her victims will never see it as violent because when you are living in an informal context that is defined everyday by crime and violence, and I can tell you, I've worked in these places, you go to a shebeen - a shebeen is like an illegal bar where alcohol is sold, and so, it's illegal but there's hundreds and thousands - and you go there, I used, I would walk into a shebeen on a Monday morning in one of the informal settings I'm working and it's packed.

Packed with men and women who don't have jobs. The shebeen has an account or book, so they can't afford to buy the alcohol but they put their names down, and then finally, one day you go and get a day's wages for a paint job, so you land up going to the shebeen and paying off your debt, your alcohol debt, and starting again. In these shebeens, people just for no reason stab each other, kill each other, like everyone's drunk and everyone's frustrated, there's competition for resources. These kinds of contexts are highly violent. You know, I mean just the things that I was exposed to those years working in those communities, it's just the nature of these spaces, they are defined by violence. So, when you live in such a violent place, things have to be really violent before a person goes, I was violated. Touching someone in a middle-income context in South Africa inappropriately, the whole world will know about it, but in a low-income context, I don't think anyone would even notice. So, what I started realising is that, where we can identify female sex offenders in lower income contexts, we will probably not identify the victims, because it has to be really violent before those people come forward. Before they realise, they have been violated, there needs to be blood, there needs to be pain. So, some sexual inappropriate touching probably will get missed. In higher income spaces and educated groups, victims go to university and they start accessing a tool called discourse and language, and they are given the ability to talk through these things and a language to talk through these things.

In those spaces, the sex offender may not identify themselves as a perpetrator but the victim has the resources and knowledge to go, 'I can articulate this now'. The kind of difference between knowing I'm a victim, knowing I'm a sex offender, really is embedded in language and knowledge, which is really interesting to me and again speaks to the power of gender norms and gender dynamics that we construct.

Yes. It's very sad that this is the situation and that it's almost normal, it's the context with which we have to say these things.

Ironically, in this situation, it's not because they have access to financial or economic resources, it's that they have access to a knowledge base, words and language. That is very powerful because it means that we don't have to find funding to help victims, we have to find ways to articulate their victimhood.



In your article ‘Surfacing (im)possible victims: A critical review of the conditions of possibility for South African victims of female sex crime’ you state that Female-Perpetrated Sexual Abuse victimhood is underexplored and that many victims remain invisible to the criminal justice but especially health systems. Could you shortly summarise why this is so? Also, this article was written in 2014, since eight years have now passed, do you believe this has changed yet? Are there any projects going on that will change it in the near future?

So, I’m first going to talk on the more global context, so, as I said when I started this work, there were 14 articles. That is not true anymore. There are hundreds and hundreds of articles about victims of female sex offenders, there are thousands. Where there are male victims there are less articles, but you know definitely the academic area of work is growing. The thing is that academia has to impact law. So, we need legal definitions to change. South Africa has actually, despite all the kind of limited ideas about gender and whatever in some of the traditional contexts, we actually have a very progressive constitution and a very progressive legal document that defines sexual acts. In 2007, the Sexual Offences Act was reworked and the definition of rape basically was, any person could be violated through non-consensual sexual activity and being penetrated in any orifice in their body by any other perpetrator, which means it completely opens it up to being any gender can violate any gender in any way. All that has to happen is that it is non-consensual and there is penetration if it’s rape. Otherwise, if there is no penetration, it’s sexual violence and that is a whole other journey of terminology that we don’t need to go down that rabbit hole right now.

What is important to note is that academia and the knowledge there had some sort of impact on the legal definition of sexual offences, yet it hasn’t always trickled down into actual court rooms, into policing, and into health care practice. It’s still bewildering to people. That said, I must say, when I talk about my research in South Africa, people are less bewildered than they are here which is surprising because in the Netherlands you know, we have more progressive understandings of gender norms. I am always amazed that if I look at the school parking lot, or you know a school pick-up place in South Africa it’s just women, and here, it is very much men, women, dad, mom, whoever can. Child care is seen as a parent’s responsibility, not a maternal thing. It’s called parental leave, not maternity leave. So, despite all of that actually, people are very surprised by my work and can’t fathom it, that is not always the case in South Africa. But, South Africans are used to violence and it would be surprising if women had escaped that. We live within a culture of violence, so it’s very normative for us so maybe that’s why. So, as I said, the legal definition hasn’t kind of trickled down into day-to-day activities.

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More problematic is somewhere like America, the FBI still defines rape as a man penetrating a woman and I'm bewildered by this because not only does it mean that only men can rape, but only women can be raped, which is, I really thought that we're past this. One of the things I have had a look at is if you look at research in the 1960s, it was like there was no such thing as child sex abuse, it just didn't exist. That doesn't mean it wasn't happening, it means that we weren't documenting it because it was distinctly uncomfortable for us, and then we started acknowledging it and then it became this huge thing where we just researched child sex abuse, but mainly females. It was only late, late 1960s that we started to acknowledge that 50% of the children being sexually abused were boy children. And I am hoping that the evolution of academia has a significant impact and you know, unfortunately, South African researchers are not always taken seriously and policy makers don't always listen, but in places like the Netherlands, research is deemed as very significant. So much so that a PhD studentship has an actual salary. You know when I did my PhD in South Africa, I did not have any money, like nobody gave me money to do the research, it's not valued in the same way. So, I hope that the canon of work that is happening in academia does start impacting kind of legal definitions and health definitions of sexual abuse and that starts filtering into day-to-day resources and practices that victims are entitled to and can facilitate kind of therapeutic work and healthcare.

Yes. Is that image also changing of researchers in South Africa? Is there also, for example, specific topics of research in South Africa which are not taken seriously or is it just a general thing?

It's a good question. I think if you are in medical research, it's generally taken much more seriously. So, and I saw it myself, I was doing some work in one of the general hospitals and I was wearing a lab coat and suddenly, everyone was very impressed by my work and meanwhile, I mean that work to me, I was collecting some samples, the work was honestly mundane compared to the work I was doing in psychology. I think actually in general in the world, human sciences, social sciences aren't seen as significant or impactful as medical research. But, I will say that the work I am doing at the World Health Organisation, what I have started to see is that the work we are doing is we are trying to embed mental healthcare into primary healthcare so that doctors, nurses, midwives are actually equipped to do mental health work, and I am starting to hear, and I am doing it also with a PhD student in South Africa where we are building community-based healthcare in primary health, and I am starting to hear an acknowledgment that mental health is a real thing, that mental health should be worked through. Pretty much in the kind of generation that is studying now, that use mental health, and I think in turn values the human and social sciences, so I think there is a shift and not just in high income contexts, but also in low- and middle-income contexts, so there are definitely shifts.

Unfortunately, in South Africa, like the last I checked I think 1% of the population has PhDs, then think about the Netherlands, every second person has a PhD and some people have two, and in Germany some have three. It is not abnormal to proceed into such an advanced postgraduate career, it is really abnormal in South Africa. So, I mean the crime and violence area of work, kind of the crossing of crime, violence, and psychology, I think there were like 30 of us in the whole country that were working in that area. We worked together, you know, we, there was no-one we didn't know personally, didn't go to conferences personally with and that is a very small number in a country where there are 54 million people. So, if you think about how many researchers engage with crime and violence in the Netherlands, in a country where there's only 11 million people, the numbers, the rates, the ratios are vast. So, I don't know, I am hoping so and I think that there is evolution but I think it's slow going and I think there's a lot going on in the background. Like, you know we want to focus on, part of this is altering knowledge and that is a long progressive job. In order to alter how we understand gender, we have to change the way we conceive men and women, the way we perceive the structure of society, that is a lot of philosophical hard work. Meanwhile, we've got climate change, we've got a war in Ukraine, we've got all these very practical things happening around us that are screaming for help and it's very hard in the face of that to go "guys, this research is super important, I promise".

Especially when I present the fact that sometimes the cases are, 0.8% of all cases are male victims of sexual violence, then people are like, 'okay, can we focus on the other 99%?' and this has been my ongoing issue, when I'm presenting in an academic context in South Africa I'm really supported. But a few years ago, I went to a congress, a violence congress, it was just a general congress on violence in South Africa, and I was really shut down. There were a lot of, so, it was half academics and the other half were lobbyists and NGOs, and people really didn't like it. They said to me, undermining how violent men are and how weak women are actually undermines our project too. There is something called the 16 days of activism in December in South Africa, and it's 16 days of activism against women and child violations, so a very heavy focus on child and female victims and I had a problem with that because I demonstrated that in my internship I worked, one of the projects I worked on, was gathering data from the mortuaries on all the deaths that were non-communicable diseases.

I really was focused on homicide and suicide, and what I found was that most, 77% of the victims were black young men between the ages of 15 and 25. I was like, so we have 16 days of activism against child and female victims of violence but they're not the ones dying. 77% of the people who are dying are black young men, our economic workforce and I actually think that we're failing to see, you know, I am not saying that women and children are not exposed to violence, they are really, really exposed to violence in South Africa, and there are women who are raped all the time and children who are physically harmed and malnourished, and all these things, but I don't think that focusing on one should be mutually exclusive to focusing on the other, I think there is space for both. I think that constructing men as only aggressive and never victimised, completely misses the fact that 77% of bodies, mortuaries are full of dead bodies, that are men's bodies.

So, I think, I was really shut down and yeah, the response was you are undermining the very purpose of something like the 16 days of activism and you know, "you're making out like men aren't violent and women aren't victims". It was such a binary way of seeing it and I've really, I tried to call for a little bit more flexibility and a little more of just like tentative thinking and being able to contain that both men and women have the capacity to be violent and that both men and women have the capacity to be victims, we're all just human. So, I was really shut down at that conference and then later on, I also was invited to the Department of Corrections to present the work on female sex offenders at their annual conference and again, you know, correctional centres really, they just thought that this wasn't valuable that I should refocus my energy on men who commit these acts because there are more of them and because it's more common. And, my argument is that we don't know if it's more common or not because we don't have people reporting this because they don't have access to the resources to report. So, it's a circular thing, we don't have people reporting because they don't know how and then people jump to the conclusion that it doesn't happen. You can see if you look at the self-reports, it can go up to like 58%, where people are victimised by women in some capacity. So, 0.8% to 58% in the same country, it was in the UK I think, is a vast difference.



If I may ask, when you say that there is not much change or regulation, and not much importance given to female perpetrated sexual violence, is one of the causes the gender of the people in power? Maybe because there are a lot of males in politics/power, maybe they think well this is not something we need to focus on?

I want to agree with you but actually it's my earlier point that like when women enter certain spaces, they occupy the same patriarchal attitudes. So female police officers and female social workers that I have been exposed to were not more receptive at all, they were actually a little bit dumbfounded, they reinforced some of the gender norms to me. Oh, this is a very good example, I was invited to a POWS Conference. POWS is the psychological society in the UK and each year they host one student who has done particularly well and pay for her and it's an all-female conference. I was really excited, it was in the UK in a castle, and it was a whole thing. It was just females so it was like, it felt like it was going to be really exciting. And I had won this prize to go there, and I had just finished my masters and I had just been working in the prisons, and I was fresh out of university, so very young and naïve but also like fresh out of this research. I presented my work and wow; people didn't like it. There were a lot of researchers doing work on sexuality and female empowerment and female sexuality and the liberation of female sexuality and they really felt like I was damaging the construction of powerful and positive female sexuality, that I was presenting a negative version of it, which undermined the work that 'must' be done by postmodern feminists.

And I was like "hey I'm a postmodern feminist" and they were like, "no you're not because you're undermining, you know" and for me, I think actually it is very empowering to know that women are capacitated in the same way as men and that we aren't only sexually weak and sexually penetrable. I think for so long, only women have been seen as penetrable and men becoming possibly penetrable also like you know weakens the patriarchy a bit so that does balance out a little bit, but it wasn't received well. Particularly by women who were engaging in queer theory and stuff like sexual liberation, and it was not received well at all. So, I'm not sure that people's gender matters, it's more how we deem gender. It's very interesting.

In 'Accounting for the 'invisibility' of the female paedophile: an expert-based perspective from South Africa', you write about an existing discrepancy between the statistical presence of female offenders and their apparent absence as objects of research and public engagement. Your study explored the perceptions of female child sex offenders with a focus on the paedophile as a possible subtype, by key South African professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse. Could you explain to us the findings of this study? In particular, highlighting (if possible) why there is a difference in perceptions relating to gender and child sex abuse?

So, that was focused on female paedophilia which is a very particular category of female sexual violence. It's a difficult one because, and I think I should probably touch on this a little bit, when you hear about child sexual abuse, it's not always paedophilia.

If I may ask, when you say that there is not much change or regulation, and not much importance given to female perpetrated sexual violence, is one of the causes the gender of the people in power? Maybe because there are a lot of males in politics/power, maybe they think well this is not something we need to focus on?

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In 'Accounting for the 'invisibility' of the female paedophile: an expert-based perspective from South Africa', you write about an existing discrepancy between the statistical presence of female offenders and their apparent absence as objects of research and public engagement. Your study explored the perceptions of female child sex offenders with a focus on the paedophile as a possible subtype, by key South African professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse. Could you explain to us the findings of this study? In particular, highlighting (if possible) why there is a difference in perceptions relating to gender and child sex abuse?

So, that was focused on female paedophilia which is a very particular category of female sexual violence. It's a difficult one because, and I think I should probably touch on this a little bit, when you hear about child sexual abuse, it's not always paedophilia.

So, paedophilia is defined as someone, the perpetrator, having an intense psychological attraction to children, that they experience discomfort at this, that they don't like it. They often don't even engage in full blown sexual, or sex, it's often petting, touching, there's a lot of grooming, and it's very confusing for the child because the child often feels very loved. Paedophilia is a really complex phenomenon where the child feels both loved and confused, and often what happens is only once a paedophile's identified and the child has to go through a court procedure, does the child start to understand they were abused and then only becomes traumatised at that point. So, there's a lot of work on what is the post, you know, what are the roles of trauma and is trauma, if we think, it is very difficult and very controversial, I mean there's a lot of discussions on, you know, back in the day, in early Greek times, children and men had sex all the time and that was 'normal'. To our society that is bound by ages of consent and what really is the age of consent? Because in some countries it is 16, some it's 17, some it's 18. What is it that you suddenly turn 18 and have the capacity to have sex, the capacity to drive a car or to drink alcohol, like what makes 18 the age? Or 16, or whatever age it is in a particular country. There are really difficult questions about all this, but paedophilia is defined as, anyone who is underaged in a particular context, so it is very difficult. It is very difficult to think about the children who are exposed.

Now you throw in a woman who is a paedophile and this completely disrupts everything we understand about maternal caregiving. A woman who is sexually violent with a child, we can kind of get our heads around this because she is really in a power space, right, she is older and bigger, there's that physical difference, she has the emotional power. But, a woman who is in love with a child, who is attracted to a child, that undermines everything we know about things like maternity. It's really disruptive to understandings of the maternal way of being. So this was a particularly hard question to ask professionals because we are not just talking about violating a child. So I'll give you an example, one of the women I worked with, she had been sexually violating her child for about 7 years, and when I said to her, I asked her about like, this process of her experiences, she said, well, I am not a sex offender because it was all a performance, because we used to do it and then we used to sell it as child pornography online, that is how me and my child survived, and I was like, but did you touch your child inappropriately, did you do this act and this act to them, she said yes, but it was a performance, it wasn't real. In this instance we call it sexual abuse, but we wouldn't call it paedophilia because she was not in love with this child and grooming this child or desirous about this child and that's a very different question. So the questions in this paper were very much focused on clinical paedophilia where someone has a categorised experience of psychological desire for a child.

Not one of the people that I spoke to, could fathom such a thing, but they could fathom a woman who could be violent. I spoke to basically, the head of Childline, this is a toll-free number that children who are being abused in some way can phone and get access to help. I spoke to her, I spoke to a female police officer, I spoke to a man who works with paedophiles, none of them had ever been exposed to female paedophilia. When I started researching it, there were no female paedophiles that had been identified on planet earth that I know of. And, when we talk about female sex offending, we only think of it in the context of child sex abuse but not paedophilia. I wonder, how much of that is real, because if you look in the DSM, there's soft implications that someone who commits paedophilia is a man, and that this is a male-driven experience, and many of the sexual "disorders", exhibitionism, voyeurism, it's very male orientated. I don't know if it's not a thing that females engage in, I doubt that, I would be very surprised. I think it's just so opposite to what we understand about women that we can't articulate it, even in a book like the DSM, so yeah.

Yes, I think even for me, I did not up until now think about how female sex offenders or female paedophiles are completely different from the sexual exploitation of a child because they completely do different things.

A lot of the time, where sex abuse happens, so one of the participants I worked with, her mother used to lie her on the kitchen table and insert various objects into her, very violent and um, that was clearly not paedophilia, that was violent sex abuse.



“Even though my sexual organs were being violated, it wasn’t from a sexually desirous place”. This is something that is an ongoing discussion in all of sexual violence, is, is this about power or is this about desire? Very rarely is it about sexual desire, and that is why paedophilia is a special category of sexual violence and actually, often it is not violent, it’s actually quite loving. While it might be illegal because of the age of consent, it might not be as violent as someone being raped or sexually violated in the same way.

In the publication ‘Female-perpetrated sex abuse: knowledge, power, and the cultural conditions of victimhood’, you seek to analyse the limited and rigid discourses in psychological theory and practice which seem to influence who can be deemed ‘victim worthy’ through paradigms that construct victimhood as gendered? Could you shed further light on these discourses and how they achieve this effect?” If you could just share a few more sentences on this since we have also discussed this above.

So, I mean especially in SA, if you talk about victims, you are particularly victim-worthy if you are a child, and then a female, and whiteness also gives you a lot of access to victimhood. What starts to happen is, my colleague Brett and I talk about what we called a ‘hierarchy of victimhood’, where men are at the bottom, like men are not victim-worthy, like you should defend yourself. Women are in the middle and children are in the top category, the most innocent, the most able to impair, the most naïve, those are like the most able and most worthy of victimhood because they ‘don’t understand’.

Of course, gender is not the only identity category we contain, we are raced, we are cultured, we are sexualised and what we see is that as you start interrogating different identity components, so, a male who identifies as a homosexual is even less worthy than a male who is heterosexual. Same thing with women, women who are heterosexual are able to access resources and are able to go through the system in a much better way, so I think if you are a black lesbian-identifying woman, you are going to have a much harder time than if you are a white heterosexual woman. You can both go to the police with the exact same story and you will be sympathised more because of certain racial and marginalisation categories that are happening in that space. We can see it also in like apartheid time, just like how black women were sexually violated and you know, if that had happened to a white woman I think it would have been a very different response. Yeah, it also depends who the rapist is, so is it a white man or black man or white woman etc? So the perpetrator and the victim’s identities then come together to define where on this victim hierarchy the victim is ‘allowed’ to be.

My aim I guess as I thought through these things was to turn this hierarchy around and put males in a space, with the capacity for them to become victims and even later on, that’s what in my postdoc, I studied children who violate. So, all of the things I have worked on are about female offenders, child offenders and male victims, and really turning that hierarchy on its head.

“ I mean we can get into the whole thing about children and it is complex, but you know, we have constructed children as the most innocent group and childhood as the most innocent time, yet I have like eight files on children who committed violent acts, like family mass homicides. You know, we have, as early as 1992, those two eight-year-old boys who tied a two-year old boy to a railway track after sodomising him and beating him up. You know, these are kids, and so, our own constructions don't really have life in the face of real events and it's those events that we need to start letting inform us of who is victim worthy, and actually everyone should be worthy of victimhood. Everyone is a human being and from a humanitarian perspective, everyone should be allowed to feel violated and access to resources for that.

Exploring the role between culture and perceptions of violence.

I think this takes us back to what I was saying earlier, if you live in a very violent culture, it takes a lot for us to report, it takes a lot for us to say that this is violent enough for me to walk down to the police station and report it. 95% of cases that are reported in South Africa are probably from middle-income people who have insurance policies that need to be activated because their things were stolen. Most of us don't have faith in the police system, so I think most of us wouldn't bother if things were just stolen and no one was injured. I know the times I've reported to the police it's literally been for insurance purposes, to get a case number for insurance.

South Africa is a very violent place, everyone has been a victim of violence but it is interesting that like, the other work I've done in South Africa is on homicide and it's much more quantitative and like very recently, my colleagues and I wrote a paper on homicide and what it kind of looks like in the context of house robberies. What is really interesting is that we see that an escalation of violence where white men expose a gun, that white male victims expose a gun to a black male perpetrator who's holding a gun, it seems to escalate the violence, and those men are constituted as victims, but immediately erase their victimhood by demonstrating a capacity to violate the perpetrator. It's awful because in the end those victims usually die, because victims having a gun escalates the violence and there ends up being a shoot-out that might have not been the case if the victim hadn't tried to present his weapon. But, what is very interesting for me is how manhood, as I said it's a very quantitative research project, so we never explore the gender dynamics or whatever, it's purely quants, numbers, talking through facts, but for me at the back of my mind, I'm always thinking about the gender dynamics between a white man and usually, and I mean there's history here as well of course, there is apartheid. There are very heavy gun laws in SA, so you can't just own a gun, you have to go through a really intense licensing process, so what happens is, there's just hundreds of hundreds of guns available on the black market and that's how people access guns. It's crazy.

South Africa is a very violent place, everyone has been a victim of violence but it is interesting that like, the other work I've done in South Africa is on homicide and it's much more quantitative and like very recently, my colleagues and I wrote a paper on homicide I don't know how much you guys follow any of the news in South Africa, but recently we had a situation where basically the whole country started looting stores and going crazy, and in Natal there are a lot of racial dynamics between black communities and Indian communities. The Indian communities just took up arms and were standing with rifles in front of the stores, I've never seen that. There is history at play here, there's dynamics of race and it's complex in South Africa. So, these questions can't really be thought through without the race of victims and without the history of how communities were both involved in the first place.

These informal settlements emerged from apartheid policy where people were taken out of central middle-income communities and put into townships that were far away. People there were not given resources, no education, the education that they'd formerly had was now transferred to labour-based education where they were learning to become labourers. Um, and justified with IQ tests that were given to them in English and of course they failed because they spoke Afrikaans or Zulu, or Xhosa, or whatever. So, this whole system of oppression drives our violent culture, and we can't miss that one context is an informal settlement that is far away from the rest of the city and that a historical event has impacted what violence looks like today. Just a load of questions, so hard to answer that question because it's so complex. It's driven by identity components, race, and level of income because now there is an emergent, a very dense emerging black middle class and I would say black upper middle class who have harnessed a lot of the country's wealth which is great, but what we start seeing, you know what Frantz Fanon used to call 'black face white mask', like this position where black people and politics are starting to re-enact what white politicians were doing during these oppressive times, the poorer get poorer and richer get richer, it's economics, it's race, it's so many competing factors that like all direct how we identify violence and how we think through a violent event.



In your article ‘Confession, psychology and the shaping of subjectivity through interviews with victims of female-perpetrated sexual violence’, you state that both victims as well as offenders draw on different types of narratives to sustain some form of invisibility. Could you explain why each of these parties choose to draw upon such narratives?

I don't think it's a choice, I think it is informed by unconscious narratives, messages and understandings of constructions of reality. I think that we are not slaves to structures and discourses, but we very much take reality as it's given to us and in an unquestioning way. You know, if I think about myself, I am cognisant of these constructions because I work through them every day and I write about them, yet I walk into a prison and I am immediately more scared of men than I am of female prisoners. Why? I immediately respond differently to each of those parties. So, I don't think it's conscious, I think these are very unconscious narratives that slip in through messages that we receive all day long. Advertising, marketing, they remind us, who are victims, who are not, who is powerful, who is not, who is violent, who is not, and I think those really drive into spaces like that.

From your research, what have you deduced about the way male victims negotiate masculinity and victimhood in the context of female sexual abuse, especially in your area of focus, namely the Global South?

It's interesting because it does really disrupt what we think is 'normal' abuse and it's really interesting, so all of the people I've worked with really construct male-on-female abuse as completely 'normal', and I know that might not be the case in Europe but in South Africa where women are raped so regularly, it is really kind of constructed as, oh it is just normal to be violated by a man if you are a woman in some way.



On the other end of the spectrum, female-perpetrated violence is seen as completely non-normative, and then a step further, where men are victims it's even more bewildering. I think that that step further is really interesting because it completely turns our understanding of violence upside down in South Africa. Not only do you have a perpetrator that isn't male, but you have a victim that isn't female, it's all wrong and it's all not what we understand about violence. In the face of those, it is interesting to see it happening. It is interesting to see the capacity for it to happen.

Why does rape to overthrow masculinity happen? Like any violent event, due to many different factors. When someone, it's also, it is very, South Africa is very special in the sense that, I doubt very much that it would be as violent as it is if we didn't have the social structure, the historical structure and the racialised structures that have informed our current reality. We don't, you don't really hear about like some crazy person who eventually gets diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder, who has like chucked 50 women down into his basement and rapes them every night and ties them up. You turn on the television, there are 400 stories of this in America, we don't have that. We don't have school shootings, I don't think we have ever had a school shooting. You turn on the TV, America has like four school shootings a day. We don't have mass shootings. If there is a mass shooting, it's because some robbers had robbed a jewellery store in a shopping centre and they ran through it and as they were running they were shooting people. There is not the sense of violence that we are trying to kill people. The sense is that we are trying to access resources, like breaking into a house, and we use violence to get to that.

It's very hard to understand because sometimes someone will lose their life for a cell phone, or not even, just they get hijacked, the robbers run away with nothing but the people are dead.

The aim and the target of the violence is very rarely to violate. I'm not saying it is never, I think there have been plenty of women who have been raped in South Africa and they are targeted violently, and then there's people who have been exposed to physical violence and are the target of the violation. The central target is usually around competition for resources and socio-economic differences, or driven by hate because of those socio-economic differences. So where it's like, "Okay, I want to kill this person" it's probably because they have and I don't. Given that, it's also very hard to understand events like these because we are not used to thinking through violence like this. I mean there is the most sordid case that I have ever come across where a person was working as a gardener of a family who went in with three or four of his friends and he obviously had access to property and they stole everything. Waited for the dad to get home to get access to the safe and then the mother came home with the two kids and the dog. What proceeded, and I am not going to describe it because it was very, very bad, but what preceded was a very violent couple of hours. They were on drugs and I think they were hyping each other up but very, very violent, like violence that I have not heard of. In the next few hours, they all died, including the dog. Similarly, a few years ago, a young woman was hijacked at 4am in the morning with her friend in the car and the intention was again to steal, and they were intending to steal the car. These four men involved here also proceeded down the most atrocious events of violence.

In both situations, even though the atrocity and the violent nature of it is so bewildering, both have been started with a limited access to resources and with targeting those resources for themselves. So in the face of that, where someone just becomes sexually violent and violates a man, and it's really inexplicable because of the gendered nature of it, now it is also inexplicable because it is not how we construct violence in South Africa. It becomes even more difficult to say why do these things happen? But as I was saying earlier, in every violent event, one does not become violent because they have some sort of personality trait or because they grew up in a particular way. You can have twins living in the same house and one becomes violent whilst the other one doesn't. There are a set of events, there are economic, personality factors, environmental factors, stress, current employment, lack of employment, family issues, racial background – how you were brought up, and there are of course things like racial dynamics, gender dynamics, political and cultural climate. It's a million factors pointing to the one event that becomes violent, and I don't think we can say exactly 'why' because of that.

Similarly, in the above article you call for greater awareness of female child sex offenders by scholars, mental health professionals and the public more broadly. More than 12 years have passed since this article was written back in 2011, has this call been heard? If not, how do you believe we can increase this awareness?

I mean I think as I said earlier, increased research is important and I do think we're lacking. I mean if I think about my dad's PhD, I looked at his references and it was one page. He told me, you know, in the 1980s, if you wanted a journal article you had to go to the library and order it, and it would come six weeks later.

Now, information is at our fingertips and because of that, people are writing and producing research very quickly. I am an associate editor on the 'Journal of Social and Political Psychology' and we are publishing papers that, honestly, we have had on the desk for two years, the amount of papers is just unmanageable. We have to reject so many because there is so much research coming in and I think that is great, that is one way.

"(...) in every violent event, one does not become violent because they have some sort of personality trait or because they grew up in a particular way."

Because of the influx of knowledge, the inflation of the internet, resources and all that kind of thing, I think that we will naturally start driving that research and as I said earlier, in the 1960s there was no research on child abuse and then there was, and then it became more focused on male children. You know, when I started there was no work being done at all on female sex offenders, now there is a big cannon of research. I'm hoping the same thing will happen with male victims of female sexual violence, and it will, but my, I think we must be wary not to reinforce the gender dynamics, that are invisibilised in practice and that we need to remain open minded. Actually, what's really necessary now, is being able to translate that research into policy, into advocacy and into health-related practice, and that therapists, police forces and medical students must learn about these things and they must be equipped to deal with them.



Interview with Dr. Sarah Chynoweth

Dr. Sarah Chynoweth is an international relief and development consultant working with various NGOs, universities and UN agencies. She obtained her Master of Arts degree in Human Rights at Columbia University and further obtained her PhD in Social Sciences/Global Health at the University of New South Wales. Dr. Chynoweth has spent the last twenty years practising in humanitarian affairs and human rights, specialising in sexual and reproductive health, gender and public health. In 2003, she helped co-found Circle of Health International, an NGO focused on women's and girls' health in crises. After undertaking applied research on sexual violence against men and boys in the Syria crisis for UNHCR in 2017, she founded the Sexual Violence Project at the Women's Refugee Commission, a feminist initiative focused on male and LGBTIQ+ survivors.

In your publication entitled “It’s Happening to Our Men as Well: Sexual Violence Against Rohingya Men and Boys” you mention that sexual violence against the male gender is a ‘complex, taboo, and under-researched issue’. For our readers, could you please give an overview of why this is the case? Furthermore, could you touch upon what piqued your interest in researching and addressing such issues?

At the time of the Rohingya study – which was in 2018 – understanding of this issue in the humanitarian sector was still pretty nascent. There were a handful of scholars and advocates focused on this issue, but awareness in the humanitarian sector was low. Research was fairly limited. There are many different reasons for this. In the humanitarian field, I think it mainly had to do with lack of knowledge. We just didn’t know that this was an issue. The way I had been trained, was that sexual violence is perpetrated against women and girls, occasionally boys, and rarely men. That was the common understanding for a long time. We now know this isn’t the case, in the sense that we now know it is not rare or uncommon for men and boys to suffer sexual violence. It wasn’t a nefarious ignoring of the issue. We didn’t know or understand the extent. These issues take time to emerge and to understand.

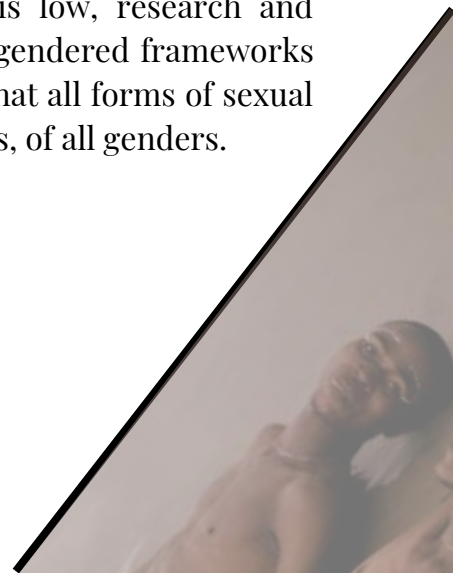
For me personally, I became interested in this issue after doing some research for UNHCR in the Syria crisis in 2016. I’ve worked on sexual violence and reproductive health for women and girls for 20 years – that is where my heart is. At the same time, I was profoundly affected by how widespread sexual violence against men and boys was in the Syrian war – it went against my entire training which had told me that this was rare. It was eye-opening for me. Especially because it were the Syrian women coming forward saying, “Something happened to my husband. Please help us.” It clearly affected everyone, women and girls included. I also saw the need for a feminist approach to this issue – that we have to maintain targeted attention and funding for women and girls. I wanted to figure out how the humanitarian sector could start to think and address this issue in a nuanced, feminist way.

In the report “Sexual violence against men and boys in conflict and displacement: Findings from a qualitative study in Bangladesh, Italy, and Kenya. Synthesis report” authored in 2020, you thoroughly discuss the impacts of sexual violence on victims. Based on your experience, have you found there to be a significant difference in terms of the mental and physical impacts on male versus female survivors?

Yes and no. There are obvious differences – cisgender women and girls, for example, can become pregnant and may be forced to give birth against their will. This has profound, multi-layered impacts that cisgender men and boys do not face. Male survivors can suffer traumatic amputation of the penis or testes, among other consequences. Both can experience sexually transmitted infections, rectal fissures, etc. The mental health impacts can be similar in terms of depression, PTSD, dissociation, and so on. But sexual violence can also have complex impacts on gender identity. Some women survivors feel they are “spoiled” or “impure”. Straight men may experience a sense of gendered dislocation, they may not feel like a man or a boy that they were before the violence. For LGBTQ persons, some may feel that they “deserved” the violence, as a form of “punishment” for transgressing social norms. So the impacts can be both similar and gender specific. And of course it depends on the individual themselves, how they process the violence.

Additionally, in the aforementioned report from 2020, one of the key recommendations included ensuring “[...] legal definitions of rape and other forms of sexual violence are inclusive of male victims and female perpetrators and address common forms of sexual violence against men and boys”. Though several legal frameworks cover the prohibition of sexual violence against women and children, many countries still face certain challenges when it comes to including the male gender in such definitions. With your knowledge and expertise in mind, why do you believe that these challenges still exist? What factors are preventing the amendment of relevant legal definitions?

It often took decades of advocacy by women’s groups to get sexual violence into national legal frameworks. For example, until 30 or 40 years ago, marital rape was not criminalised in the vast majority of the world. It is still legal in many countries. It took years of sustained advocacy to recognise the different forms of sexual violence and make amends to the existing laws. The narrow legal frameworks in place in some countries today are outdated and need revising – which is still the case for many forms of sexual violence against women and girls too. It is not because these laws are “anti-men”. Awareness of male victims and especially female perpetrators is low, research and advocacy has been limited – the whole idea of it goes against our gendered frameworks and understanding. These laws absolutely need to be changed, so that all forms of sexual violence are criminalised. They have devastating effects on survivors, of all genders.



In January 2018, you founded and led the Sexual Violence Project at the Women’s Refugee Commission, which primarily focused on sexual violence against displaced men and boys, including gay, bisexual, transgender and others with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity and/or expression (GBT+). Were there any challenges you yourself faced while conducting research for the Project, especially with having such limited sources or legal frameworks to work with?

The main challenges weren’t the legal frameworks. The main challenge to conducting the research was how to ethically undertake the study. How do we explore such a sensitive issue with conflict-affected communities, particularly ones who have experienced profound individual and collective trauma? How do we ensure this work is grounded in a feminist framework, and complements rather than undermines related work on gender-based violence? How, if possible, do we adequately explore the varying needs and experiences of the broad study population – young boys, adolescent boys, straight men, transgender men, transgender women, gay men, nonbinary persons, queer youth, among others? Those were some of the main challenges.



In the publication, “We Have a Broken Heart: Sexual Violence against Refugees in Nairobi and Mombasa, Kenya”, readers were given insight into the distressing and alarming numbers of violent incidents perpetrated against men and boys (in several countries in Africa). In particular, the conclusion noted that “persons with diverse SOGIESC (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, or Sex Characteristics) are highly vulnerable to sexual violence in the three countries of origin and appear to be at particular risk from family and community members.” Could you please elaborate on why the incidents of sexual violence against the male gender and persons with diverse SOGIESC are significantly higher in African countries? As well as why such risks stem, in particular, from family and community members?

Oh, I don’t think we can say that sexual violence against persons with diverse SOGIESC is higher in African countries. I don’t see any evidence for that. What I was trying to get at in the report – perhaps poorly – is that the gay and trans refugees we spoke with talked much more about sexual violence and abuse by their family and communities rather than armed groups. Being sexually abused by uncles or men in the community, or being forced – usually by other men – to have sex with women. It was in stark contrast to speaking with straight men, who talked about sexual violence almost entirely within the context of the conflict or at border crossings. I’m sure there are reasons for this. For example, sexual violence in war is more acceptable to talk about than sexual violence in the community. This is a pattern I’ve seen in multiple settings. But I also think that persons with diverse SOGIESC are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and abuse in their communities. It reminded me of when the humanitarian sector first started addressing sexual violence against women and girls. Initially we thought the perpetrators were mainly “men with guns”, but it turns out it’s more often their fathers and brothers and male community members.

In your co-authored publication, “From ‘It Rarely Happens’ to ‘It’s Worse for Men’: Dispelling Misconceptions about Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement”, you address various misconceptions in relation to sexual violence against the male gender and as such, we would like to take the opportunity to delve into these misconceptions further. Starting with, where do you think the misconception that “conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys is almost always perpetrated in detention and imprisonment” stems from?

This was one of the most important realisations for me while doing this research. That sexual violence against men is perpetrated in many, many different contexts. The narrative that it only happens in detention is inaccurate and harmful, because it obscures the other settings in which sexual violence is perpetrated. Maybe this misconception emerged because detention is where the issue first came to public light. Sexual violence against men in jail and prison is common knowledge. It’s also more acceptable to disclose victimisation in this setting. In prison, the man is entirely powerless. There is no possibility to resist. But disclosing that you were assaulted by a neighbour, or even worse a woman, that is infinitely more difficult. Because it goes against the idea that men are strong, that they should be able to resist. There is an unspoken suggestion that, outside of the context of total powerlessness – that is, prison – that maybe they secretly “wanted it.” This powerful intersection of social forces regarding masculinity, homophobia, power, sex, makes it very difficult for men to disclose. But! What I found interesting is that men do want to talk about it. They do want to disclose. Just like women do. We used to think that “women will never talk about rape.” That’s clearly not the case. The same thing with men – I’ve heard from colleagues many times that “the men don’t want to talk about it.” No, you need to work with them to find the right approach, the appropriate way, and then they will.

“There is no possibility to resist. But disclosing that you were assaulted by a neighbour, or even worse a woman, that is infinitely more difficult. Because it goes against the idea that men are strong, that they should be able to resist.”

Similarly, another one of the listed misconceptions is that, “the most common form of conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys is anal rape”, why do you think these form the focus of existing discourses and what impact does such a narrow view have?

I think it stems from our focus on sexual violence against women and girls in conflict, which has often focused on rape. We talk about “rape in war”, we equivocate sexual violence and rape. It’s understandable that humanitarian actors extrapolated that this is mainly how men experience sexual violence, but it is inaccurate. It also stems from the fact that many male survivors themselves don’t think of other forms of sexualised violence as sexual violence. They don’t conceptualise it for themselves as such, much less communicate it to others. Being forced to watch your wife being raped – this is common in a number of conflicts – but men don’t think that they have been sexually victimised as well. Further, many humanitarian workers don’t understand the varied forms of sexual violence against men and boys, so they don’t document it as such. I once asked a major medical provider if they had any male survivors and they said no. Then I asked if any male patients were presenting with trauma to the genitals, and they said, ah yes, we see quite a bit of that. They hadn’t connected the dots that this was a form of sexual violence too.



In the article, there is mention of the misconception that “gender neutral services are best equipped to address the needs of survivors of all genders” in relation to sexual violence. With this in mind, do you believe it is more effective to address services needs according to gender? If so, how does one best achieve this?

It depends on the service. Some services should be gender specific – men-only support groups for survivors can be helpful for example. Dedicated, specialised services for women and girls, such as safe spaces, are very important. Other services, such as medical or mental health care, don’t need to be gender specific, but providers should be trained on how to support, treat and manage survivors of different genders and different sexes, as well as different sexual orientations. It’s a matter of nuance and thoughtfulness, rather than a scripted, blanket approach, to try to meet the diverse needs of a community.

In relation to the report entitled, “” We Keep It in Our Heart” - Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in the Syria Crisis”, in which you stated that “[...] research on Sexual Violence against Males during armed conflict is limited. The available research on SVM suffers from varied methodologies, definitions, and designs, rendering it difficult to determine the global extent of the problem.” As we head into 2023, do you believe that this statement still holds true today? If yes, how could research on this subject be improved so that sexual violence against men and boys no longer remains underreported and under-researched?

There has been a fair amount of work on this issue over the last 5 years, by different organisations, advocates, researchers and survivors themselves. There is more understanding and awareness. But I think this statement from the Syria report still holds true. We still don’t have much solid quantitative data, not a population level. There is some data on boys, such as from the VACS reports, but very little on men. It might take another decade or so before we have better evidence. There are a number of practical steps that can be undertaken to improve the evidence base. Integrating questions about male victimisation into existing national surveys on violence for example. A bigger challenge is awareness raising at the community level, to help men and boy survivors come forward to access services, if they are available. This requires sustained effort, and innovative approaches, and survivors and communities have to be involved – that is essential.

The final question we would like to ask is, what message would you like to leave with our readers who are inspired by the cause and who wish to take action to help eradicate such violence?

Well, first of all, it's wonderful if your readers are inspired to help others, to help address such violence. I would like to mention that occasionally I see people who are new to this issue, who feel strongly about it, and sometimes they end up blaming women's groups for the lack of attention and services for men and boys. That somehow it is women's groups, and gender-based violence advocates, who have failed men and boys. This is a very unfortunate and misguided course. Without women's groups, without GBV services, without feminist thought, we would have no services for anyone, women or men. The reason we have services and knowledge about sexual violence is because of women's groups, women's advocates. It is not their fault that little has been done for men and boy survivors, in fact they are often the ones providing the services for them. That's just a word of caution for those new to this issue. The other thing I would say is that there is a lot you can do in your personal life. I've had many men spontaneously disclose to me – taxi drivers, friends. Learn how to receive disclosures and support survivors, learn psychological first aid and where to refer them.



PREVENTING SEXUAL ABUSE AND RAPE OF BOYS AND MEN IN UGANDA

“Silence is the greatest ally of sexual violence”

Denis Mukwege



Written by
Rick Machiels

The prevalence of sexual abuse and rape committed within educational environments is a major problem which reveals itself all over the world. Schools are supposed to be one of the places in a child's life where he or she should feel safe and comfortable, yet the opposite often tends to be true, instead their reality consists of being confronted with physical and mental abuse, including sexual abuse, ranging from inappropriate comments to ruthless rape. Though a vast majority of sexual abuse is directed towards female students, males also form the target of such behaviour. The research shows that sexual abuse is often perpetrated by either a teacher or a fellow student (from the same school) both inside and outside of the official school campus. [1]

It appears that there is not one form of educational environment which is immune from the problem of abuse towards its pupils, regardless of whether an individual attends primary or secondary school, or university, sexual abuse hits all the layers of education and significantly disrupts the continuation of students' education.

It is often the case that those who have experienced sexual abuse are afraid to talk about it, especially children, whose complaints are unfortunately sometimes taken less seriously. Young boys are even less likely to express themselves about being a victim of sexual abuse compared to young girls. Research focused on young male victims of sexual violence shows that they often feel like “less of a man” after being sexually assaulted or abused. They tend to have a sense of shame and blame over the fact that they could not stop the assault or abuse. This especially occurs when the boy experienced an erection and/or ejaculation during the assault or abuse. Furthermore, boys worry about disbelief or judgment when they want to tell others about the sexual abuse which happened to them. [2]

¹ ‘Sexual Violence in South African Schools’ Human Rights Watch < https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/2001/safrica/%A-FINAL-01.htm> Accessed on 09 December 2022.

² ‘Sexual Assault on Men and Boys’ RAINN < https://www.rainn.org/articles/sexual-assault-men-and-boys> Accessed on 21 November 2022.

DEFINING SEXUAL ABUSE

Although most individuals are able to conceptualise and create an image of what sexual abuse is, before delving further into this article, it is of great importance to establish a common definition for the sake of clarity. For present purposes, sexual abuse will be defined as, unwanted sexual touching; attempt to unwanted sexual touching or physically forced sex; sexual contact due to intimidation or coercion; and sexual behaviour that a person does not understand or give consent to, including sharing pornography, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation. Throughout this piece, sexual violence will be used synonymously with sexual abuse [3]. Further, the term ‘children’, as used in this article, references those below 18 years of age (i.e., the most accepted definition of a child).

COUNTRY STUDY: SEXUAL ABUSE IN UGANDA

Though sexual violence is a major issue worldwide, and often hidden behind closed doors, in Africa there has been a concerning trend towards the normalisation of such violence. The reasons underlying such a trend being varied, for example, sexual abuse (specifically rape) can form part of a certain community’s culture. In Malawi, villages have a “hyena” who essentially rapes young girls to prepare them for adulthood. Further, in South Sudan rape is often used as a weapon of warfare. In South Africa, gang rape, locally known as “jackrolling”, is a ritual and a sport among young men. These sorts of issues are usually rooted in the past, often influenced in particular by the colonial past. Underdevelopment and overpowering of the male’s position in society is often a defining characteristic in societies where sexual violence is normalised, commonly leading to unawareness and corruption.

Whilst sexual violence is widespread throughout Africa, there is a particular prevalence of such issues in Uganda. One of the factors contributing to this problem is the fact that a majority of the population is not properly educated about the reality of what is allowed and what is not, regarding sexual abuse. In fact, just 37% of children are actually aware of the fact that sexual abuse is illegal in Uganda, similarly, only 52% of the teachers are aware of this. Further, less than 50% of children strongly agree that any adult who has sex with a child should be punished under the law, and only 39% of the children strongly agree that a child has the right to refuse sex even if the child received a gift or money. Unfortunately, of the 47% of children who reported receiving a ‘bad touch’, 50% identified a caregiver as the perpetrator whilst 33% identified a teacher. Summarised, these statistics reveal a serious lack of education on this topic not only for children but also teachers and other relevant stakeholders. Consequently, one may ask, how can affected societies solve a problem when its own people do not know the seriousness of the problem or do not know that it is a problem at all? [4] Despite these figures, the true extent of this issue in Uganda remains unknown. Such a gap can be attributed to various factors such as, the reality that a lot of children do not express themselves about sexual abuse due to being afraid of not being believed, being shamed, being shunned, or because they actually believe that this type of behaviour is normal.

3 The Bantwana Initiative of World Education Inc., *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence against Children in and around Schools: A Training Curriculum Designed for Teachers and Other Adults Supporting Children in Schools and Communities* (1st edition, 2016).

4 The Bantwana Initiative of World Education Inc., *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence against Children in and around Schools: A Training Curriculum Designed for Teachers and Other Adults Supporting Children in Schools and Communities* (1st edition, 2016).

THE LEGAL SIDE

For a long time, society has held the perception that sexual abuse is worse when committed on a person who is not able to defend him- or herself. Since males are often expected to be the stronger gender, sexual abuse has been viewed as something which only occurs on females. As the way of thinking in society is often reflected upon in laws, this perception of victims tends to infiltrate the laws of different countries. However, there has been recent positive developments with amendments adopted in several countries which expand the legal definition to facilitate the inclusion of men as victims. However, this has not always been the case, there are still many countries in the world which do not include men as possible victims of rape. In the context of Uganda, section 123 of the Uganda Penal Code (2007), still defines rape as an act which can only be perpetrated against females, thus, according to this law, men cannot be raped.

One of the key questions that comes to mind in this regard is, why does Uganda still adopt this approach? The answer to this question can likely be found both in its colonial past (being a former colony of the U.K.) and within the narrative surrounding societal constructions of gender roles in Africa.

Firstly, how does the colonial past influence this approach? In the case of Uganda, a former British colony, there was the adoption of the common law system which developed the sense that women were viewed as property of the man and less as a human being. The woman being the property of either her husband or her father (before marriage) meant that the rape of a woman could be seen as an attack on the father and/or husband. Since the perpetrator would trespass on his property, it was thus used as an attack. As a result of this, laws punishing rape were created. Since common law viewed rape as an offence that could only be committed against women, the consequence is that many penal codes still look at it this way.

Secondly, pertaining to societal construction, in various African regions, including Uganda, traditional and typical expectations of how a man “should be” remain firmly in place, more specifically, men should be strong, assertive, brave, and have a considerable amount of willpower. When a man does not conform to these standards, he will be viewed as a “lessened man”. All in all, according to the existing societal view, a man should not be able to be raped, else it is shame on him



In Uganda, opinions regarding male rape differ depending on whether an individual is in the bigger modernised cities or countryside. However, in both, there is an immense lack of awareness regarding male rape, in fact, many are highly convinced that male rape is not happening at all. If a married man were to be raped, the result would likely be that the woman he is married to would leave him, due to the fact that from their perspective, he has lost his “masculinity”. This realization, as aforementioned, demonstrates how deeply the classical and traditional view of a man is rooted inside of the Ugandan community. As such, views held by Ugandan communities tend to be confronting for those raised in Western societies, where the concept of masculinity is continually being redefined. In the former communities, masculinity is often linked to the image of a strong man who is never afraid, does not cry, and can defeat any threat coming his way. Someone who is not able to be overpowered. Perhaps changing the definition of rape in the penal code could be a beginning in changing the hard expectations of men in Uganda. [7]

THE WAY FORWARD: ACHIEVING PREVENTION

The main question which this article seeks to address is, how do we prevent rape and sexual abuse from happening within educational environments in Uganda? As discussed earlier, there is a huge lack of knowledge and acknowledgment within the country regarding sexual abuse, particularly when it comes to sexual abuse perpetrated against males. Many children are not even aware of how serious the violation is in a situation where an older student and/or adult teacher has sexual intercourse with them against their will.

They either do not believe they have the power or ability to report what has happened or they perceive the actions as being normal. Similarly, many adults lack any knowledge of the issue of sexual abuse of men. The reality is that if this problem continues to go unacknowledged, to not be seen as a problem at all, then any form of solution will remain unobtainable (nor will any thought be cast to the need for such solutions).

[8] By becoming more aware of the issue at stake, it will be easier for all stakeholders to unite with the shared goal of creating safer and more comfortable educational settings in Uganda. Once the environment becomes safer it then opens up a space in which people can address their stories of abuse and in doing so, an air of accountability is established making it less opportunistic for people to commit such sexual abuse again. However, this is easier said than done as achieving such steps requires major changes which takes a lot of time. Luckily there are various projects, initiatives, organisations etc. in Uganda, and other nations in Africa, which have started to engage in this process. For example, Raising Voices, the Bantwana World Education Initiative, the All-Survivors Project and Refugee Law Project are four organisations/initiatives aimed at improving the well-being of victims of sexual violence in Africa. These initiatives have projects which try to improve the lives of victims, improve the situation at educative institutions or for refugees, and in general contribute to the betterment of the situation for male victims of sexual violence.

7. Will Storr, “The rape of men: the darkest secret of war”, (2011) *The Guardian* <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/17/the-rape-of-men>> Accessed on 28 October 2022.

8. The Bantwana Initiative of World Education Inc., *Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence against Children in and around Schools: A Training Curriculum Designed for Teachers and Other Adults Supporting Children in Schools and Communities* (1st edition, 2016)

The Good School Toolkit

The Good School Toolkit is a prime example of the abovementioned initiatives, with the toolkit having helped thousands of African children already. This endeavour is being overseen by the activist organisation “Raising Voices”, which strives, through various projects, to prevent violence against women and children. Even though females stand at the centre of this organisation’s focus, the work being conducted also helps to improve the lives of men and boys. To elaborate, the Good School Toolkit is essentially a school-wide intervention led by teachers, students and school-affiliated community members. Together they work to influence the operational culture of the entire school through four entry points: 1) teacher-student relationships; 2) peer-to-peer relationships; 3) student- and teacher-to-school relationships; and 4) parent-and community-to-school governance relationships. The government in Uganda has distributed the Toolkit materials already to more than 5,000 schools nationwide. [9]

The Six Core Steps

With approximately 1,000 schools in Uganda already using the Good School Toolkit, 50+ journal articles written about the good school toolkit’s evidenced-based methodologies, 100+ communities utilising this approach and 1,000+ members of the prevention network involved, one can deduce that the Good School Toolkit is an effective method.

The method which is used by Raising Voices is primarily motivated by ‘six core steps’. These six steps help to identify the problems, connect the school to the community, help create a new school culture, and build a steady system to continue the project in the future. A more detailed version of the six core steps is provided here below:

1. **Your Team & Network:** Schools identify key protagonists at school and create Good School Committees to build school-wide support for the process;
2. **Preparing for Change:** Baseline measurements gather information on each school’s starting point, and school leaders cultivate interest among parents, the community and local education officials;
3. **Good Teachers & Teaching:** A school-wide reflection on teacher-student relationships provides a renewed sense of teacher roles, increased professional support, and new approaches for positive student engagement;
4. **Positive Discipline:** Schools reflect on how violence manifests and establish a new school culture by exploring positive disciplinary methods to create students who believe in themselves;
5. **Good Learning Environment:** Schools reflect on what a good learning environment looks like and work with all stakeholders to foster a psychological sense of safety and inclusion; and
6. **Good Administration & the Future:** The work of the preceding steps is celebrated and consolidated through reflection and transfer of leadership to the school administration. [10]

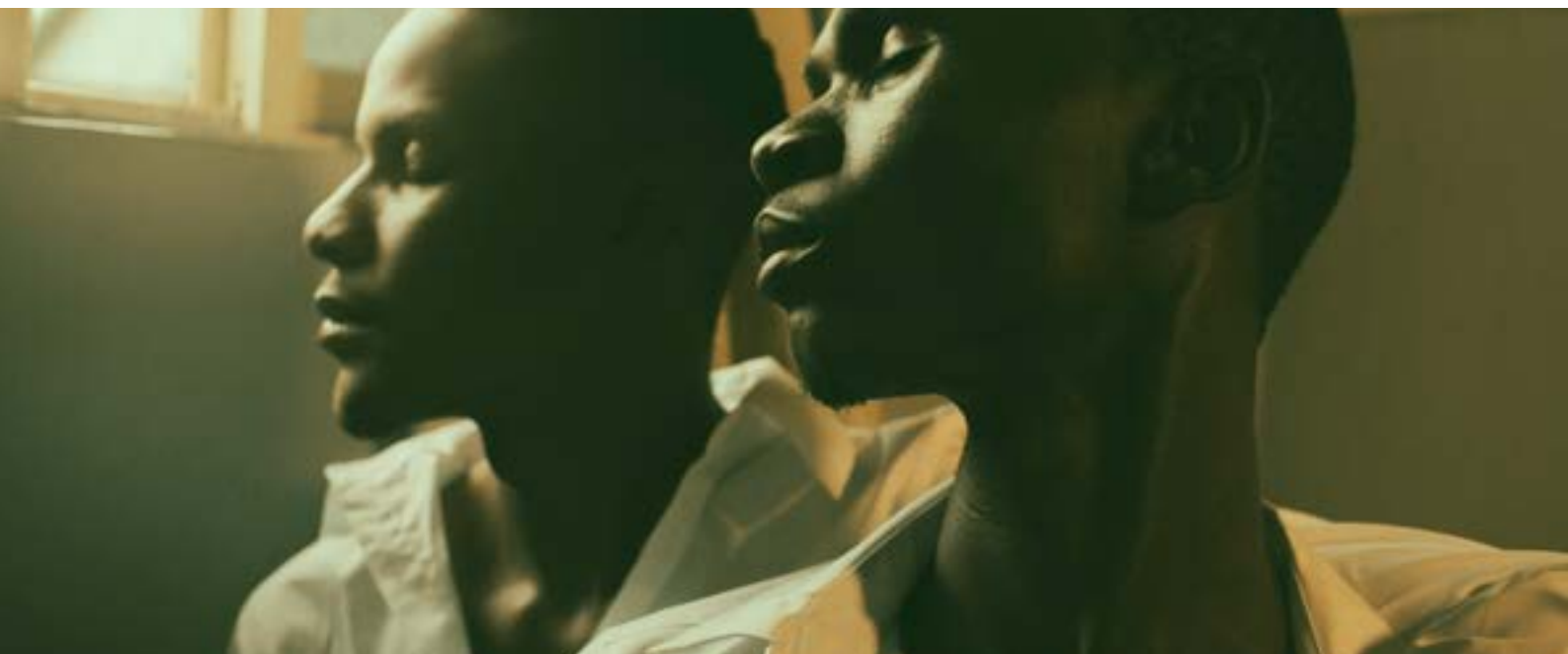
9. Raising Voices, ‘the good school toolkit’ < <https://raisingvoices.org/children/the-good-school-toolkit/> > Accessed on 27 October 2022.

10. Raising Voices, ‘the good school toolkit’ < <https://raisingvoices.org/children/the-good-school-toolkit/> > Accessed on 27 October 2022.

Although the project places its main focus on bringing an end to physical punishments as techniques to teach discipline, like corporal punishments, it also delves into the relationship between student and teacher. In particular, the way the teacher views his or her students, and a safe school environment, including abolishing the poisoned environment of sexual abuse and misbehaviour towards students. Reflection on what a good learning environment should look like in order to create a safe and comfortable study environment for the children is a must in the steps to stop the sexual abuse happening in schools.

Bantwana World Education

Another leading initiative in the field stems from an organisation named Bantwana World Education. This particular project implements various programs around the African continent focused on different subjects, all with the goal to improve the wellbeing of vulnerable children and their caregivers, as well as families affected by HIV, AIDS and poverty. [11] In Uganda their network consists of 235,000 children, youth and caregivers. [12]



In Uganda, this system of working has led to various results. The Good School study showed that the Toolkit reduced children's risk of experiencing physical violence by school staff by 42 percent over 18 months of implementation. The message of the Toolkit is being spread around quickly, it is already implemented in 23 Ugandan districts and is changing the culture at schools, bringing the schools closer to the communities.

There they have an ongoing education program that addresses the needs of in- and out-of-school youth using an integrated approach to help youth understand their roles and responsibilities, to protect themselves, and to report violence. The organisation does so by engaging in social and protective asset building clubs, in the provision of education subsidies so youth stay in school and of livelihoods to improve economic resilience. To date, there are more than 5,000 in-school children successfully involved with this program.

11. Bantwana World Education, 'Our Mission' <<https://bantwana.org/about/#mission>> Accessed on 27 October 2022.

12. Bantwana World Education, 'Uganda' <https://bantwana.org/country/uganda/> Accessed on 27 October 2022.

Building upon the above, social norms change approaches have also been layered into programming in order to help to create positive shifts in children, teachers, caregivers, and in communities to address the underlying driver of violence against children – including sexual violence and teen pregnancy. They are also focusing on prevention of abuse and violence by tailoring differing education course towards both children and adults. With this in mind, Bantwana World Education has created a training curriculum for teachers and other adults on the topic of how to interact and respond to children who have experienced sexual violence, what to do when you know sexual violence happens somewhere (and how it should be dealt with), and also how to prevent sexual violence from happening again in the future. [13] In addition to the above, the project seeks to engage with parents by establishing parenting interventions which contribute to the strengthening of the trust relationship between the child and caregiver.

What can one find in this curriculum? To summarise, there is mention of signs indicating abuse; causes for teenage pregnancy; how to communicate with a victim of abuse; active listening skills; talking with children about concerns; dos and don'ts pertaining to children reporting sexual violence etc. The information included is not necessarily complicated or unexpected to those who are familiar with this topic of sexual violence. However, as touched upon earlier, there is a prevailing lack of knowledge and acknowledgment in Uganda, and the organisation has purposefully approached this issue by adopting a low threshold when it comes to discussing and acting upon these issues with all relevant parties (including facilitating an understanding of what the future should look like).

Youth involved in the project are motivated to become involved via different programs in an effort to create an environment of trust between girls and their caregivers. The goal is to open up space for greater dialogue and support around risks faced by girls, including neglect, physical and emotional abuse, and sexual violence. Though boys are not directly mentioned or identified above, they have still been included in a number of interventions that build their social assets, increase awareness around protection and rights issues, and create platforms to elicit their input through youth-led community campaigns and dialogues. [14]

Ministry of Education and Sports

The Ministry of Education and Sports cooperates with the above-mentioned organisations/initiatives and others key stakeholders to improve the state of educational environments, including by protecting children from sexual abuse and other types of violence. The Minister of Education, Ms. Janet Museveni, has called upon all the institutions dedicated to learning to implement sexual harassment guidelines in order to make schools safe. Ms. Museveni, understands the lack of safety which is present in many schools in Uganda, stating that, “We cannot expect our learners to be safe in an environment crowded with selfish, unprofessional and backward behaviour that threatens their stability”. [15] The implementation of such guidelines is required by law, as according to the Employment Act (2006), each employer with more than 25 employees has the obligation to implement a written policy against sexual harassment which includes to notice all employers that sexual harassment is illegal. [16]

13. Ibid.

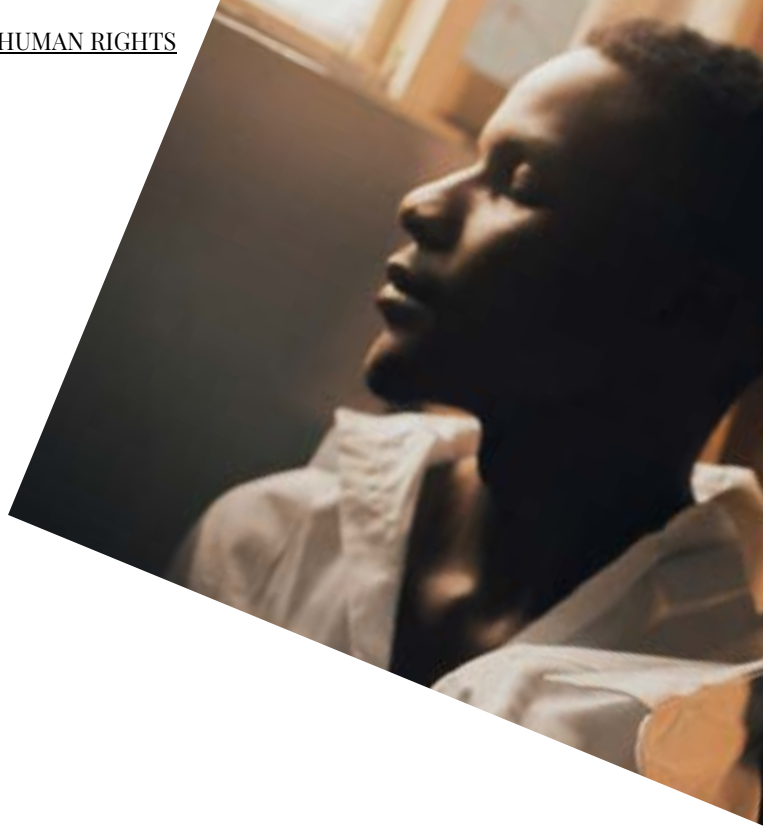
14. Bantwana World Education, ‘Uganda’ <https://bantwana.org/country/uganda/> Accessed on 27 October 2022.

15. Damali Mukhaye, ‘Uganda: Janet Tasks Schools for Fight Sexual Abuse’ (2021) Monitor <<https://www.monitor.co.ug/uganda/news/national/janet-tasks-schools-to-fight-sexual-abuse--3583096>> Accessed 27 October 2022 Para. 3.

16. S. 7(4) Employment Act 2006 Uganda.

THE FUTURE: WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

On a concluding note, it can safely be said that the situation in Uganda relating to sexual abuse towards individuals within educational settings is quite serious and worrying. It seems to be that the small amount of attention given to sexual abuse, is for a vast majority, aimed at female victims. For example, it is concerning that the law in Uganda doesn't acknowledge the fact that rape can be perpetrated against the male gender. [17] The fact that society has a strict view on men often results in males, carrying the burden of keeping up a difficult image, namely the one of the classical strong, independent, unbeatable man. [18] With that being said, whilst it is a very difficult task to change that image, it is not impossible. The solution towards achieving such change needs to start first with the subject of sexual abuse in general. In Uganda in particular, much needed change is at the beginning stages of implementing due to the work of large organisations such as Raising Voices [19] and Bantwana World Education [20] whom are working hard on improving the dire situation. Importantly, these organisations are not engaging in projects which only work in theory, rather, they seem to have a great effect in practice.



Thus, slowly but surely, progress is starting to happen in Uganda and educational settings are starting to become a safer environment. However, the battle has not yet been won, preventing and eradicating such forms of violence entirely remains a distant goal, especially for male victims whom would remain largely neglected in the literature, remain largely unaddressed in institutional and legislative change and whom as a result, prefer hide in the shadows of shame than seek the light of recovery.



17. S. 123 PCA Cap. 120 Uganda.

18. Will Storr, 'The rape of men: the darkest secret of war', (2011) The Guardian <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/17/the-rape-of-men>> Accessed on 28 October 2022.

19. Raising Voices, 'the good school toolkit' <<https://raisingvoices.org/children/the-good-school-toolkit/>> Accessed on 27 October 2022.

20. Bantwana World Education, 'Uganda' <<https://bantwana.org/country/uganda/>> Accessed on 27 October 2022.

Article

Treatment of CRSV Victims: Victimisation of Females Versus Males



Written by
Chianté Hodge

“The pain I returned with from the bush has affected me psychologically. There is so much anger and bitterness in my heart.” [1]

These words were spoken by a survivor from Barlonyo, Lamaro, who was abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) when she was just 23 years old. She was forced to stay in the bush for seven months and now, at 43, she shares her story.

Following the survivor’s return, she faced “[...] a platitude of health challenges including diabetes, gynaecological problems, as well as mental health problems such as anger, and anxiety.” [2] The effects of conflict-related sexual violence (hereinafter CRSV) remain with the victims for years and sometimes, for the rest of their lives.

1. Mahlet Atakilt Woldestadik ‘Long - Term Effects of Wartime Sexual Violence on Women and Families The case of Northern Uganda’ (Dissertation, Pardee Rand Graduate School 2018).

2. *Ibid.*

Several of the witness statements provided in the “Long – Term effects of Wartime Sexual Violence on Women and Families: the case of Northern Uganda” report reflect a range of long term emotional and psychological effects, including bitterness, anger, self – harm, nightmares related to their experience, anxiety and depression. [3] Not only does CRSV affect its victims psychologically and emotionally, but the aforementioned report also sheds light on how these traumas impact the victims’ relationships with their families and friends.

Amito, a 38-year-old survivor from Aromo, Uganda, stated that, “Rape ruins relationships between husband and wife because each time you have a misunderstanding reference is made to the rape incident...insults like you were raped, ‘you were wife of the rebels’. It makes life difficult.” [4] Women have always been considered to be the main targets of CRSV and although reports have acknowledged men and boys as victims, little is known about the nature and scale of such violence. [5] The ‘All Survivors Project Report’ is one of few unique initiatives focused on men and boys facing sexual violence in the Central African Republic (CAR). As part of this focus, interviews were conducted with male survivors (of CRSV) in order to enable them to share their story and promote awareness regarding not only their individual experiences but also those pertaining to male victims more broadly. For example, Emmanuel, a male survivor from Nana – Grebiziz shared his experience upon being captured by members of the Central African Patriotic Movement (MPC) based on the accusation of him being an “Anti – Balaka member”, stating, “They stripped and tortured me until I had no more strength. Some soldiers amused themselves with my penis. They amused themselves with my body.” [6]

CRSV has multiple definitions encompassing a vast range of violations, including rape. [7] In the “Annual Review of Political Science Journal”, such definitions were highlighted to show how each either encompassed a broad or narrow understanding of CRSV. For example, in the definition provided by Elizabeth Jean Wood, sexual violence was deemed to be “a broader category that includes rape, coerced undressing, and nonpenetrating sexual assault.” [8]



3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*

8. Ragnihild Nordas and DaraKay Cohen, ‘Annual Review of Political Science Conflict – Related Sexual Violence’(2021) <<https://www.belfercenter.org/sites/default/files/files/publication/annurev-polisci-041719-102620.pdf>> accessed 2nd November, 2022.

Whilst another definition derived from the “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict Data Set” drew on the parameters provided by the International Criminal Court (ICC), including “direct force or physical violence and/or the threat of force or coercion. This definition covers seven distinct forms of violence such as rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization/abortion, sexual mutilation, and sexual torture.” [9] Though several definitions have been compromised, as conflicts continue to occur, new ways of committing sexual violence are occurring and are yet to be reported. This gives rise to the question, what do acts of sexual violence look like for both men and women? Do they differ and if so, how? With these questions in mind, this article will seek to conduct a side – by – side comparison by exploring the nature of CRSV experienced by male and females, touching upon their similarities as well as their differences.

CRSV: The Reality Faced by Women

According to existing literature women and girls continue to be the demographic primarily affected by various forms of CRSV. [10] To provide more detailed insight into this issue, the “Human Rights Council Watch Report” focused on CRSV committed against women and girls in South Sudan will be used as an illustration. The acts being perpetrated, included rape (as well as gang rape), sexual violence, sexual slavery, forced marriages, torture and a range of sexually degrading acts. [11] To elaborate, during the armed conflict in Sudan, women would be held down whilst another man forcibly penetrated them sexually either with his penis or another object. The man detaining the woman would be waiting for his turn, whilst also guarding and threatening witnesses to prevent them intervening or seeking help. [12] Furthermore, women would be abducted, detained and used for sexual slavery. [13]

As alluded to above, sexual torture often involved beatings as well as cruel and inhuman treatment of Sudanese women, with women and girls often penetrated through their vagina, anus or both orifices with foreign objects such as pieces of wood or sticks causing serious injuries and often resulting in death. [14] They would also be dragged along the ground or through bushes, pushed against rough objects such as tree stumps, or held down in uncomfortable positions in which the victim is vigorously and repeatedly struck against a hard object or surface. [15] Sudanese women were also the victim of forced unprotected sex and unwanted pregnancies, as perpetrators of rape would often not wear any condoms or use any form of protection and would ejaculate inside of the victim, which in turn also created exposure to the risk of sexually transmitted diseases. [16]

9. *Ibid.*

10. United Nations Peacekeeping ‘Conflict Related Sexual Violence’ <<https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/conflict-related-sexual-violence> > accessed 2nd November, 2022.

11. UNHRC ‘Conflict – related sexual violence against women and girls in South Sudan’ (21 March 2022) UN DOC A/HRC/49/CRP 4.

12. *Ibid*

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

"When looking at sexual violence perpetrated against men, the types of abuses encompass violations such as anal rape and enforced masturbation, and span from ancient times to the modern day."

CRSV: The Reality Faced by Men:

Men's experiences as victims of sexual violence remain little recognised in research, policy or practice. [17] Mainstream narratives generally continue to depict men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims, this is in part due to the aforementioned limited recognition of men as victims. [18] The absence of recognition can be attributed to various factors, such as, stigma, stereotypes, guilt, fear and shame. A sentiment which is supported by multiple articles and blogs, one of them written by Rose Khan. Khan draws attention to the fact that "[...] there exists an implicit gender bias within international law, which solidifies the widely held belief that men are perpetrators and women are victims, which prevent it from providing justice to all victims of conflict-related sexual violence." [19] Khan builds on this further by talking about the gender norms within society that define men as strong combatants able to exert power over others, particularly through the use of force. Due to these norms, males who are victims of CRSV are ignored and forgotten about, leaving only the men who are perpetrators to be accounted for. Although this has been an issue for some time, sexual violence against men is slowly becoming recognised and acknowledged as far more widespread than was previously thought. [20]

As has been illustrated above, men are stereotyped as able to protect themselves from an attack and are not, unlike women, thought of as targets of CRSV. When a man has been sexually assaulted during armed conflict, his masculinity is often questioned (by himself and/or others). [21] When looking at sexual violence perpetrated against men, the types of abuses encompass violations such as anal rape and enforced masturbation, and span from ancient times to the modern day. Men are the victims of individual and gang rapes (which occur with the use of penises and other parts of the body, as well as through the use of objects), oral rape and ejaculation by perpetrators into ears and eyes, with such acts sometimes committed in front of family members. [22] Men face sexual humiliation, such as forced nudity, genital torture (where the genitalia would be beaten, burned and electrocuted) or mutilation. Further, the male gender is also subject to forced circumcision, the tying of heavy objects to the genitalia and forced sterilisation through castration.

17. *Ibid.*

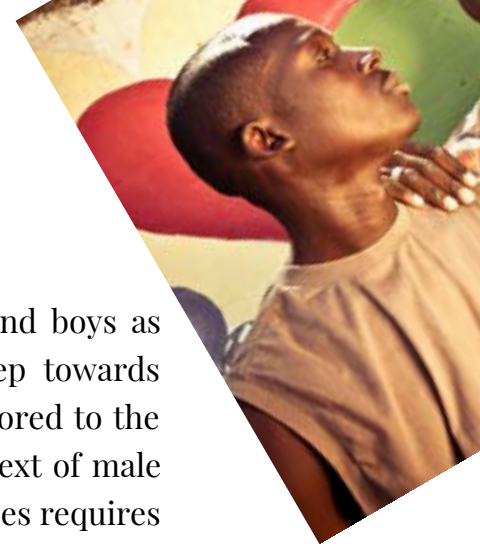
18. *Therapeutic Activism: Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda Breaking the Silence over Male Rape in Conflict-related Sexual Violence*

19. Rose Khan 'Male Victims and Female Perpetrators of International Crimes' (LSE, 7 July 2022) <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/wps/2022/07/20/male-victims-female-perpetrators-of-international-crimes/>> accessed 2nd December, 2022.

20. Louise du Toit and Elisabet le Roux, 'A feminist reflection on male victims of conflict - related sexual violence' (2020). <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Elisabet-Le-Roux-2/publication/339159466_A_feminist_reflection_on_male_victims_of_conflict-related_sexual_violence/links/5ec45354585152945149f7a/A-feminist-reflection-on-male-victims-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence.pdf> accessed 4th November, 2022.

21. <file:///C:/Users/hodge/Downloads/18IntlCrimLRev853.pdf>

22. All Survivors Project, 'Briefing on Conflict related sexual violence against men and boys prepared for Colombia's truth, coexistence, and non - repetition Commission' (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Briefing-on-Conflict-related-Sexual-Violence-against-Men-and-Boys-to-Colombias-Truth-Coexistence-and-Non-Repetition-Commission.pdf>> accessed 4th November, 2022.



Treatments Male CRSV Victims Receive:



Recognising and documenting men and boys as victims of CRSV is an important step towards ensuring the provision of services tailored to the needs of all survivors. [23] In the context of male CRSV, the provision of adequate services requires advancements towards the eradication of societal shame and stigma. [24] As mentioned, men are stereotyped as able to protect themselves from an attack and are not, unlike women, thought of as targets of sexual abuse. [25] Faced with such attitudes, male survivors may choose silence over the risk of rejection by their families and communities. [26]

Ms. Virginia Gamba, former Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, noted in 2017, that the existing lack of information “reinforces the perception that the scourge of sexual violence in armed conflict is one that affects primarily, if not exclusively, women and girls – which in turn reinforces stigma, inhibits males from disclosing their experiences, and prevents them from asking for, receiving assistance and demanding justice.” [27] As a consequence, there is the absence of much-needed data on incidents and analysis of patterns and trends to inform actions to prevent and protect against such violence, to ensure appropriate services and programmatic responses for victims/survivors and to monitor the effectiveness of interventions and fulfil reporting obligations including to human rights treaty monitoring bodies. [28]

To help remedy the issue of underreporting and lack of awareness, monitoring and investigations are being conducted by Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) through field presences, commissions of inquiry and other UN-mandated fact-finding missions, with such operations being conducted alongside investigations by UN sanctions monitoring teams, all of which contribute to the collection of evidence on sexual violence for the purpose of accountability. [29] For example, in Sri Lanka the OHCHR was able to establish that such situations were widespread and that they formed part of a deliberate strategy by state security forces.

123. Brian Stauffer “They treated us in Monstrous Ways: Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and Transgender women in the Syrian Conflict” (July 29, 2020) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/07/29/they-treated-us-monstrous-ways/sexual-violence-against-men-boys-and-transgender> > accessed 4th November, 2022.

24. Brian Stauffer “They treated us in Monstrous Ways: Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and Transgender women in the Syrian Conflict” (July 29, 2020) <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/07/29/they-treated-us-monstrous-ways/sexual-violence-against-men-boys-and-transgender> > accessed 4th November, 2022.

25. file:///C:/Users/hodge/Downloads/18IntlCrimLRev853.pdf

26. All Survivors Project, ‘I dont Know Who Can Help Me: Men and boys facing sexual violence in Central African Republic’ <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/I-Dont-Know-Who-Can-Help-Men-and-Boys-facing-Sexual-Violence-in-Central-African-Republic.pdf> > accessed 5th November, 2022.

27. All Survivors Project, ‘Checklist on preventing and addressing conflict - related sexual violence against men and boys’ (2019) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Checklist-English.pdf> > accessed 5th November, 2022.

28. Ibid

29. Ibid.

In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), the UN documented hundreds of cases of sexual violence against boys, and a population-based survey conducted in 2010 found that almost one-quarter (23.6%) of men in specific conflict-affected territories of Eastern DRC had experienced sexual violence. In the addition to the above, there has been the creation of a “Gender-Based Violence Information Management System” which allows UN and other humanitarian actors to safely collect, store, analyse and share reported incidents and data on gender-based violence (within which incidents of sexual violence are recorded for the purposes of service provision and protection).

Put simply, domestic laws prevent accountability for CRSV. While these laws may not be gender specific, statutes of limitations, legal immunities and amnesties for serious violations of international law (including sexual violence) remove the deterrent effect by facilitating impunity for perpetrators and denying victims/survivors the right to remedy. [30] In 2014, a survey of national penal codes found that in 62 countries only female victims of rape were recognised, thus, leaving male victims in a grey area. [31] Not only is the law hindering the prosecution of sexual violence but it is also an unfortunate reality that sexual violence is being perpetrated by the very people that constitute law enforcement. Sexual violence by members of state security forces can result from inadequate training, lack of discipline, ineffective command and/or poor control and oversight. [32] Men and boys fleeing armed conflict have also been subjected to sexual violence by elements of state security forces including border guards and detention officials in transit countries such as Libya and Turkey. [33] Furthermore, incidents of CRSV against men and boys involving international forces engaged in military operations abroad have also been documented in countries such as Iraq and Yemen. In the past, boys have also been among the victims of CRSV committed by peacekeepers in CAR, Haiti and Sierra Leone. [34]

Efforts to remedy the aforementioned accountability issue have been taken by the UN Security Council through successive resolutions identifying the minimum measures required of state security forces and other parties to armed conflict to combat sexual violence. These include issuing clear orders through chains of command; prohibiting sexual violence in codes of conduct, military and police field manuals or the equivalent; training troops/personnel; investigating allegations; and ensuring the accountability of perpetrators. [35] To date, joint communiqués to prevent and respond to CRSV have been signed by the UN and governments in CAR, DRC, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan. Under these communiqués, commitments to various actions have been made such as legislative and policy reform; training and capacity building of justice and security sectors; holding perpetrators of sexual violence to account; and providing reparations and access to medical and other assistance for victims/survivors. [36] In many situations of armed conflicts, emergency clinical care, health care and other services are unavailable or difficult to access. This can result from a general lack of services, insecurity, geographic location or cost. The availability and quality of and accessibility of health care and other support for male victims/survivors can also be adversely affected if services are not designed to include them, or if service providers do not have the necessary training or experience to identify and respond to their specific needs.

30. *Ibid.*

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Ibid.*

26. All Survivors Project, ‘I don’t Know Who Can Help Me: Men and boys facing sexual violence in Central African Republic’ <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/1-Dont-Know-Who-Can-Help-Men-and-Boys-facing-Sexual-Violence-in-Central-African-Republic.pdf>> accessed 5th November, 2022.

Treatments Female CRSV Victims Receive:



Concerningly, only 40 percent of women seek help or any sort of assistance after experiencing violence. [37] Though there has been some efforts directed at remedying this, with UN human rights monitoring and investigations monitoring teams including women and girls within their focus when engaging with the collection of evidence pertaining to sexual violence for the purpose of accountability. The UN continues to direct its efforts in this area, for example, through UN Women which has improved access to essential services for survivors such as shelters, organisations for women, justice and policing, social services and helplines.

In addition to the UN, there are multiple organisations which are dedicated to tackling sexual violence committed against women. An example of such an organisation which contributes greatly this is the World Health Organisation (WHO). In 2019, WHO and UN Women, with endorsement from 12 other UN and bilateral agencies, published RESPECT women – a framework for preventing violence against women aimed at policy makers. [38] RESPECT notes that successful interventions include those that prioritise the safety of women. Examples of promising interventions include psychosocial support and psychological interventions of survivors of intimate partner violence and community mobilisation interventions to change unequal gender norms etc. [39] There also initiatives which are country specific, for example, in CAR, a joint police/gendarmerie unit called the ‘Joint Unit for Rapid Intervention and Eradication of Sexual Violence against Women and Children’ has been established specifically to investigate and prosecute crimes of sexual violence and provide support to victims/survivors. [40]



37. UN Women, ‘Ending violence against women’ <<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women>> accessed 6th November, 2022.

38. WHO, ‘Violence against women (9 March 2021) <<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/violence-against-women>> accessed 6th November, 2022.

39. Ibid.

40. All Survivors Project, ‘Checklist on preventing and addressing conflict - related sexual violence against men and boys’(2019) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Checklist-English.pdf>> accessed 5th November, 2022.

Despite this progress, impunity has remained a consistent issue for female victims of CRSV. Due to laws providing immunities to rebel leaders, accountability has been hard to come by. To remedy this, the establishment of the ICC has played a pivotal role in ensuring that victims receive justice and perpetrators, accountability. On February 4th, 2022, the ICC delivered its long-awaited verdict regarding Dominic Ongwen, a former LRA rebel commander. The verdict marks the ICC's first ever successful prosecution of crimes of forced pregnancies and forced marriage, thereby advancing jurisprudence on international accountability on the issue. This verdict has enabled the ICC to be able to facilitate the provision of reparations to those who were permitted to partake in the case as victims. Aside from this, the ICC has also taken other initiatives to address the issue, for example, through the publication of its policy paper on sexual and gender-based violence which aimed to provide clarity and direction pertaining to such crimes by not only contributing to the ongoing development of jurisprudence but also by contributing to advancing a culture of best practice in relation to the investigation and prosecution of sexual and gender-based crimes. [41]

Moving Forward: Trying to Fill the Gender Gap

“The issue of reparations for conflict-related sexual violence has acquired increased prominence in global discourse, against the backdrop of decades of related efforts in the field of transitional justice and is critical to helping survivors to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. Yet, reparations remain the justice intervention that survivors seek the most but receive the least.” [42]

The gender-biased lenses adopted by stakeholders engaged in theory and practice pertaining to CRSV has resulted, as evidenced throughout this article, in differing responses to, as well as treatment of, male and female survivors. Though CRSV against the female gender has long been acknowledged, the same cannot be said for male survivors whom only recently entered into the peripheral of such discussions. In fact, gender-bias continues to remain one of the top issues when examining the perception of male versus female victims of CRSV as illustrated in multiple research reports, including the ‘11th Report of the UN Secretary – General on Conflict – Related Sexual Violence’, where the number of reported cases of sexual violence committed against women were eight times the amount of that committed against men. [43] Thus, although there is acknowledgement that men and boys can indeed be victims, the existing narratives surrounding gender in theory and practice continue to contribute to an ongoing gap between the two genders.



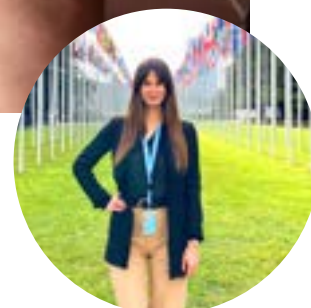
41. ICC Policy Paper on Sexual Gender – Based crimes (June 2014).

42. United Nations ‘Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict’ <<https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/factsheet-11th-annual-report-of-sg-on-conflict-related-sexual-violence-crsv/20200717-Factsheet-2019-SG-report.pdf>> accessed 5th December, 2022.

3. Ibid.



CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Written by
Marta Vaz Vieira

Barriers Hindering Access to Health Services for Male Survivors of Conflict-related sexual violence

Sexual violence against the male gender is widespread [1], with men and boys repeatedly exposed to multiple forms of sexual violence during armed conflict or post-conflict situations by various perpetrators in contexts of impunity. Conflict-related sexual violence (hereinafter, CRSV) can be used for purposes of subjugation, punishment, enslavement and entertainment, as well as a form of torture with the aim being to inflict psychological suffering, and to terrorise, humiliate, disempower and break down the self-esteem of victims. [2]

CRSV and, specifically rape, has frequently and systematically been used as a weapon of war by numerous armed groups and government forces in several conflicts (in line with the aim of humiliating and terrorising individuals, their families and communities). The aforementioned violence can take a variety of forms, including oral rape, gang rape, lethal sexual violence, object-anal rape, forced rape of others, mutilation, forced sterilisation, castration, forced nudity, forced witnessing of sexual violence on family members or peers and other acts of sexual violence. [3]

1. For example, in Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Central African Republic, Uganda, etc.

2. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 29 August 2022.

3. Ibid.; All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 29 August 2022.

Perpetrators often aim to impose domination, power and control through their actions, though such violence is not limited to one specific situation. Rather, CRSV can occur in many contexts, such as military sites, detention centres, refugee camps and people's homes. [4]

Despite the prevalence of sexual violence against the male gender, health services tailored for male survivors are rare, with the number of barriers to accessing health services high. [5] The impact of CRSV on the physical and mental health of male survivors is severe, multidimensional and long-lasting. Physical health symptoms can include abscesses, fissures and rupture of the rectum, loss of body parts, chronic pain, somatic disorders, palpitation and headaches. [6] Such injuries often make going about daily life difficult, due it being more painful to sit up, move around and even cough – often these injuries even require engaging specialists for the purposes of reconstructive surgery. [7] Without proper treatment, victims of CRSV can struggle for years with their injuries. In addition to the above, the perpetration of CRSV can also lead to reproductive and sexual health consequences, including (but not limited to) sexually transmitted infection, infertility, sexual dysfunction, genital infections, genital injuries, impotence and partial or total castration. [8] Male survivors may also experience mental health disorders and symptoms, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, self-harm, anxiety, suicidal behaviour, impaired memory, sleep problems, nightmares and cognitive impairment. [9] For some survivors, CRSV can create negative emotions and behaviours, such as, alcohol and drug abuse, low self-esteem, difficulty engaging in relationships, anger outbursts, explosive rage, hostility, emotional withdrawal, detachment, apathy, helplessness, fear, stigma and self-blame. [10] All these health consequences have devastating effects not only on individual survivors, but also on their partners, families and communities.



4. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 29 August 2022.
5. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 29 August 2022.
6. Ibid.; Sandesh Sivakumaran "Sexual violence against men in armed conflict" (2007) <<https://academic.oup.com/ejil/article/18/2/253/361968>> accessed 29 August 2022.
7. All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 29 August 2022.
8. All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 29 August 2022.
9. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 29 August 2022.
10. Ibid.

Lack of Health Care Services

Despite the aforementioned consequences on physical, reproductive, sexual and mental health, access to care services remains scarce in fragile and conflict-affected countries. [11] Access to and continuity of care remain profoundly affected by insecurity, population mobility, conflict, limited infrastructure, social and gender norms, and limited financial and human resources. According to a study in the Central African Republic (hereinafter CAR) conducted by the All Survivors Project, awareness campaigns and community information programmes have been created in order to improve understanding of the different types of violence – including CRSV against men and boys – and to raise awareness surrounding (and to publicise) the services and support available. [12] However, unfortunately, the availability of services remains very limited. [13] Drawing on the above example of CAR, the public health sector has long been degraded by successive armed conflicts and all victims continue to face tremendous obstacles in accessing public health services. [14] The main public health facilities in Bangui (the capital of CAR) have insufficient specialist services and are required, where able, to transfer complex cases to international humanitarian organisations. [15] In terms of public mental health and psychological services in CAR, there are even more limitations, with almost an entire absence of such services at all. [16] The aforementioned situation is also worsened by the widespread occurrence of looting of health care facilities, which in turn reduces their ability to help and thus limiting treatment only to those who are to travel elsewhere to seek it. Thus, the availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality of services for women, girls, men and boys is often disproportionate.



Though there is a disproportionality, what is clear, is the increased difficulty that male survivors in particular experience when seeking care. The reasons for this tend to include underreporting by men and boys' survivors, lack of identification by providers, unpreparedness of providers, lack of or limited resources and infrastructure. [17] Indeed, underreporting of CRSV by male gender survivors is very common due to the fear of negative reactions, such as homophobia, disbelief and blame (including from health providers or law enforcement authorities). [18]

11. *Ibid.*

12. All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 29 August 2022.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Ibid.*

16. *Ibid.*

17. Monica Adhiambo Onyango and Karen Hampanda, "Social construction of masculinity and male survivors of wartime sexual violence: an analytical review" (2011) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241745182_Social_Constructions_of_Masculinity_and_Male_Survivors_of_Wartime_Sexual_Violence_An_Analytical_Review> accessed 1 September 2022.

18. Sarah Chynoweth, Julie Preccero and Heleen Touquet, "Sexual violence against men and boys in conflict and forced displacement: implications for the health sector", (2017) <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09688080.2017.1401895>> accessed 1 September 2022 ; All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 1 September 2022.

Some survivors express fear of reprisals, lack of protection, fear of arrest in settings where same-sex relations are criminalised, and concerns of being abandoned by their family and their community. [19] Consequently, rigid socio-cultural norms lead to levels of stigma and rejection that make it difficult for male survivors to report incidents and receive adequate assistance or care. [20] In this regard, sexual and reproductive health services sometimes tend to be female-oriented or constituted by feminised spaces, which may seem disconcerting for male survivors who wish to seek care. [21] Many of the men who receive care do not follow through with treatment or have treatment interrupted at various stages of the process, due to lack of time, being required to return home, insecurity, unavailability of transport or lack of resources. [22] Finally, as alluded to earlier, another barrier to the provision of, and access to, care for male survivors is the lack of specialised assistance and training available. Medical services are often not prepared to respond to the needs of male survivors, with existing knowledge being quite limited. [23]



This lack of access to care only contributes to and reinforces the invisibility and silence surrounding male survivors of CRSV. As a result, survivors are likely to experience severe long-term symptoms that can affect their well-being, relationships, and social and economic integration. Thus, there is an urgent need to improve access to, and implementation of, physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health care for boys and men.

19. All Survivors Project Foundation, "Submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee" 128th Session – Central African Republic" (2020) <<https://allurvivorsproject.org/submission-to-the-un-human-rights-committee-on-the-central-african-republic-128th-session-2-27-march-2020/>> accessed 2 September 2022; Monica Adhiambo Onyango and Karen Hampanda, "Social construction of masculinity and male survivors of wartime sexual violence: an analytical review" (2011)

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241745182_Social_Constructions_of_Masculinity_and_Male_Survivors_of_Wartime_Sexual_Violence_An_Analytical_Review> accessed 2 September 2022.

20. Harry Apperley, "Hidden victims: a call to action on sexual violence against men in conflict" (2015) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13623699.2015.1060575?casa_token=jzk7XiPlgckAAAAA:dywkNLM-jGpHfj1bLEtBBeCvDEeuKqv-Gzim8HcteZEckmAj8rvQwLnsP400Yj6pQOp41EN8slxxOx4> accessed 2 September 2022.

21. Ibid.

22. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 2 September 2022.

23. Sarah Chynoweth, Julie Freccero and Heleen Touquet, "Sexual violence against men and boys in conflict and forced displacement: implications for the health sector", (2017) <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09688080.2017.1401895>> accessed 5 September 2022.

Recommendations

Despite advancements in medical care, as has been illustrated through this article, male survivors of CRSV seeking care remain particularly invisible and as such, there is the need to implement recommendations to help remedy this public health issue. In this regard, the creation and implementation of several medical infrastructures with a physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health centre is fundamental to the care of male survivors. For instance, the implementation of Denis Mukwege's one-stop-centre model of care is an approach that offers personalised support focused on individual needs, based on four key treatment areas - medical, psychological, legal and socio-economic. [24] Based on a close listening to the CRSV survivor, personalised care is planned, implemented and documented with the aim of achieving health and reintegration in society. [25] If this model of health services is conscientiously and systematically considered and implemented in all health care facilities throughout Africa, this would be a powerful tool to achieve the right to health for all.

Another essential condition is a gender-sensitive approach that considers the specific issues and needs of male gender. Therefore, awareness among care providers, knowledge and training on how to care for male gender survivors of CRSV are all important prerequisites to best address the issue. Indeed, men and boy survivors who fear blame, homophobia and scepticism will be less likely to seek help. [26] As this article demonstrates, providers' negative perceptions, beliefs or attitudes towards male survivors help to perpetuate stigma and silence around CRSV. Thus, community awareness, sensitisation and involvement are also significant strategies for overcoming stigma and discrimination. [27] The community has an important role to play in promoting health awareness, identifying survivors, encouraging survivors to seek help, providing information on services, facilitating access to care and relaying information regarding the risks and consequences of not seeking treatment. [28] For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), organisations have been engaged in addressing survivors' stigma, informing them about available services, and providing basic psychosocial support. [29]

24. Denis Mukwege, *La force des femmes* (Gallimard, 2021), p. 394.

25. Denis Mukwege and Marie Berg, "A Holistic, Person-Centred Care Model for Victims of Sexual Violence in Democratic Republic of Congo: The Panzi Hospital One-Stop Centre Model of Care" (2016) <<https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1002156>> accessed on 13 November 2022.

26. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 5 September 2022.

27. *Ibid.*

28. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 5 September 2022.

29. Cudjoe Bennett, Manka Banda, Lior Miller, Joseph Ciza, William Clemmer, Linehan Mary and Larry Streshley, "A comprehensive approach to providing services to survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in Democratic Republic of Congo: addressing more than physical trauma" (2017) <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09614524.2017.1329400>> accessed 5 September 2022.





In Uganda, girls and boys who were part of the Lord's Resistance Army benefited from an intervention based on local traditional Acholi rituals performed by community elders. [30] These rituals promoted reconciliation and reintegration practices to reduce girls' and boys' feelings of shame and guilt associated with perpetrating violence and victimisation. [31] Another final aspect to consider is the creation of shelters as a safe zone for men and boys survivors – in cases where their physical safety cannot be guaranteed or where they may be permanently exposed to the perpetrator; where they have been rejected by their family or community; where the trauma of the CRSV has reduced their ability to maintain their home, employment, or live independently; where they need support beyond what is available at home to recover from their abuse. [32]

In light of the above analysis, summarised, the proposed amendments are as follows:

- Ensuring access to physical, reproductive, sexual and mental health services for all men and boy survivors;
- Ensuring access to comprehensive health information, including sex education, contraception, services and psychosocial support;
- Ensuring a gender-sensitive approach incorporating male survivors at every stage;
- Monitoring and reporting systems that track the progress of States in preventing and promoting health care services for male survivors;
- Addressing the root causes of barriers to access to health care (such as insecurity, population mobility, limited infrastructure, social and gender norms, and limited financial and human resources);
- Conducting awareness-raising campaigns and sensitisation programmes addressing the consequences on the physical, reproductive, sexual and mental health and well-being of men and boy;
- Providing safe spaces and support for survivors at risk of reprisals, rejection by their family or community, as well as those that have reduced ability to maintain their homes, employment or independent living;
- Providing statistical data disaggregated by marital status, gender, age and place of origin to better understand the needs and risks faced by men and boy survivors of CRSV.

30. Kennedy Amone-P'Olak, "Mental states of adolescents exposed to war in Uganda: finding appropriate methods of rehabilitation." (2006) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6551403_Mental_states_of_adolescents_exposed_to_War_in_Uganda_finding_appropriate_methods_of_rehabilitation> accessed 5 September 2022.

31. Ibid.

32. All Survivors Project Foundation, "The health of male and LGBT survivors of conflict-related sexual violence" (2020) <<https://allsurvivorsproject.org/the-health-of-male-and-lgbt-survivors-of-conflict-related-sexual-violence/>> accessed 5 September 2022.



The Road Ahead

Lack of health care facilities, high levels of insecurity, conflicts-affected settings, population mobility, limited infrastructure, social and gender norms, and limited financial and human resources all contribute to the absence of effective health care, consequently exposing CRSV survivors and their communities to long-term health risks as well as varied social and economic impacts. Thus, there is still a long way to go to adequately identify, address and support all survivors of CRSV. However, as reiterated throughout this article, given the challenges and gaps that remain, there is a particular need to address the implementation and effectiveness of physical, sexual, reproductive and mental health responses to male survivors of CRSV.

In order to take steps towards remedying this issue, it is recommended that the suggested courses of action listed above, including the creation and implementation of health services facilities for all survivors, the inclusion of a gender-sensitive approach, increased capacity of health staff and awareness campaigns, amongst others, are implemented on the ground. Only by taking such action can we begin to address the roots of the limited access to care and take meaningful steps toward resolving such deficiencies.



CENTRE FOR AFRICAN JUSTICE, PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS



Written by
Ekaterina Zemskova

The Connection Between Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda and Vulnerability of Male Victims of Sexual Violence

Rape is generally a crime in which the victim is stigmatised as much as, if not more than, the rapist. This stigma is especially severe when the victims' gender is male. It is difficult for many to conceive of the possibility, let alone the prevalence, of male-on-male sexual assaults, and easy for many to feel disdain for a man who becomes a victim. To increase the reporting and prosecution of male same-sex rape, the criminal justice system must develop strategies for neutralising this stigma and enhancing sensitivity to these crimes. [1] The attempt to "outlaw" homosexuality has, unfortunately, been committed by many African states. The desire to bring homosexual men to "heterosexual normality" appears to be so high that lawmakers are prepared to introduce the death penalty for crimes that may involve gay men.

1. Kramer, E., 2022. When men are victims: applying rape shield laws to male same-sex rape. [online] Available at: <<https://www.nyulawreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/NYULawReview-73-1-Kramer.pdf>> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

These actions contribute to stigma, shame, and censure from society and certainly does not help men who are victims of conflict-related sexual violence. A prime example being the case of Uganda, where male victims are constantly affected by the patriarchal norms in the society surrounding them. Uganda along with neighbouring countries are all infiltrated with strong gender norms and roles. The idea that "in Africa no man is allowed to be vulnerable" is widespread. [2] Male victims of sexual assault no longer, in the eyes of their society, "identify as a man", which also impacts their self-image and gender identity. [3]



It has become inconceivable in the minds of many that a man can be raped. Simply put, an African man cannot be a victim of sexual violence. Key to note is that male rape can be perpetrated by a male or by a female, and yet, neither scenario is captured under the definition of rape. Male rape is an area of research that is just beginning to garner recognition, with delays attributed to – in part – previous misconceptions that a man cannot be raped. The stigma of men as victims of sexual violence makes it hard for an actual investigation to be undertaken, let alone for the violence against them to be recognised as a real offence.[4]

The Anti-Homosexuality Bill (“The Kill Gays Bill”):

A lot of men keep their experiences of sexual violence to themselves because male victims have not been afforded the same level of recognition and protection as female victims. This is partly due to the fact that male rape is often associated with homosexuality, which in Uganda, is punishable under the Anti-Homosexuality Bill (2009) (hereinafter the Bill), also known as the so-called "Kill the Gays" Bill. [5]

2. Ibid.

3. Bengtsson, I., 2022. Male Victims of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Uganda. [online] Available at: <<https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1633340/FULLTEXT01.pdf>> [Accessed 3 September 2022].

4. Abio, P., 2011. Gendered Offences in Uganda: can a man be raped. [online] Academia.edu. Available at: <https://www.academia.edu/39389967/GENDERED_OFFENCES_IN_UGANDA_CAN_A_MAN_BE_RAPED> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

5. Lažuninkaitė K., “Victims of Sexual Violence Affected by the Lord’s Resistance Army Conflict: Addressing Sexual Violence within Ugandan National Law and the International Criminal Court (ICC)” (dissertation Tilburg University Victimologie 2016)

The Bill separates homosexual (sex) acts into two different categories:

- a) **Aggravated homosexuality:** This is where one of the people engaged in gay sexual activities is HIV-positive, a minor, or disabled. When the bill was first introduced, the punishment for aggravated homosexuality was the death penalty, however, this was later changed to life imprisonment;
- b) **The offence of homosexuality:** This category is very loosely described and includes those who "promote" or "recognise" homosexuality, as well as those who attempt to engage in it. [6]

However, this Bill also has a clause that deals with the "protection of victims of homosexuality". It specifies that "a victim of homosexuality shall not be penalised for any crime committed as a direct result of his or her involvement in homosexuality". [7] Given the whole leitmotif of this law, it is difficult to see how "a victim of homosexuality" would be defined. Homosexual men can also be raped. How would a court act in such a case? They are victims of homosexuality, but they are gay themselves. How can men not be afraid of being sentenced to prison if they claim to have been raped by another man?

Moreover, consensual sex between same-sex adults in Uganda had been illegal since the British colonial rule. The new Bill, however, created additional crimes such as "promotion of homosexuality", which carries a five-year sentence; and "aiding and abetting homosexuality", with a maximum sentence of seven years.[8] You may think that this Bill targeted only homosexual individuals. However, homosexuality is defined in such a broad fashion as to include "touching another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality". This is a provision highly prone to abuse and puts all citizens (both heterosexuals and homosexuals) at great risk. Such a provision would make it very easy for a person to bring false accusations against anybody. Furthermore, the Bill imposes a fine and a term of imprisonment for up to three years for any person in authority over a homosexual who fails to report the offender within 24 hours of acquiring such knowledge. Hence, the Bill requires family members to spy on one another.[9] As captured by Navi Pillay, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in 2014, "disapproval of homosexuality by some can never justify violating the fundamental human rights of others".[10] "The law will institutionalise discrimination and is likely to encourage harassment and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation. It is formulated so broadly that it may lead to abuse of power and accusations against anyone, not just LGBTQ+ people".[11]

6. Ambrosino, B., 2014. Uganda's Anti-Gay legislation. [online] Vox. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/2018/7/11/17562412/ugandas-anti-gay-legislation-explained>> [Accessed 28 August 2022].

7. Refworld. 2014. The Anti-Homosexuality Act of Uganda. [online] Available at: <<https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/530c4bc64.pdf>> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

8. Bowcott, O., 2014. Uganda anti-gay law led to tenfold rise in attacks on LGBTI people, report says. [online] The Guardian. Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/12/uganda-anti-gay-law-rise-attacks>> [Accessed 4 September 2022].

9. Tamale, S., 2010. A Human Rights Impact Assessment of the Ugandan Anti-homosexuality Bill 2009. [online] Equal Rights Trust. Available at: <<https://www.equalrightstrust.org/resources/sylvia-tamale-human-rights-impact-assessment-ugandan-anti-homosexuality-bill-2009-equal-rights-review-volume-four-2010-pp-49-57>> [Accessed 1 September 2022].

10. United Nations. 2014. Anti-Homosexuality law in Uganda violates human rights and endangers LGBT people - Pillay. [online] Available at: <<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2014/02/anti-homosexuality-law-uganda-violates-human-rights-and-endangers-lgbt>> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

11. Ibid.

The Current Legal and Practical Landscape in Uganda

On August 1, 2014, the Bill was declared "null and void" by Uganda's Constitutional Court which ruled that the act should never have been voted on in the first place due to a lack of quorum — i.e., the minimum number of required members for a vote. [12] That is, in essence, this law was rejected for a procedural reason, and not for a substantive reason that violates human rights. This situation seems to be discouraging and frustrating. However, as previously stated, there are still "anti-gay" articles in Ugandan criminal law. The laws of Uganda criminalise same-sex relations under Section 145 of the Ugandan Penal Code Act (1950). This act notes that any person who is having a same-sex intercourse commits an offence and is liable to life imprisonment. The laws of Uganda do not recognise male rape. [13]

In October 2019, it was reported that there were plans to revive the "Kill the Gays" Bill. Uganda's Minister for Ethics and Integrity, Mr. Simon Lokodo, asserted that "Homosexuality is not natural to Ugandans, but there has been massive recruitment by gay people in schools, and especially among the youth, where they are promoting the falsehood that people are born like that. Our current penal law is limited. It only criminalises the act. We want it made clear that anyone who is even involved in promotion and recruitment has to be criminalised. Those that do grave acts will be given the death sentence". [14] The formulation that homosexuality is something not natural to Ugandans is questionable. It is interesting to hear such a thing from a statesman of a country where representatives of the LGBTQ+ community suffer from physical and moral oppression and whose orientation is not based on the fact that someone "recruited" them into the LGBTQ+ community.

It appears that such legislation bans an entire section of Ugandan society from existing, restricts its access to justice, and effectively deprives it of security. As a consequence, people are persecuted, stigmatised, and abandoned by their relatives and friends.

12. Ambrosino, B., 2014. Uganda's Anti-Gay legislation. [online] Vox. Available at: <<https://www.vox.com/2018/7/11/17562412/ugandas-anti-gay-legislation-explained>> [Accessed 2 September 2022].

13. Omona, L., 2017. Male rape victims in the Lords resistance army war and the conflict in Eastern Congo - HHRI. [online] HHRI. Available at: <<https://www.hhri.org/publication/male-rape-victims-in-the-lords-resistance-army-war-and-the-conflict-in-eastern-congo/>> [Accessed 3 September 2022]

14. Human Dignity Trust. 2022. Uganda | Country Profile. [online] Available at: <<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/uganda/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].



On 5 April 2009, police arrested 'Sexual Minorities Uganda' activists Mr. Fred Wasukira and Mr. Brian Mpadde. Following this, on April 17th, a court charged Wasukira and Mpadde with "homosexual conduct" and remanded them to prison. Even the suggestion that someone may be homosexual is enough to warrant an investigation. In July 2009, police interrogated former Police Chief Charles Ayeikoh over allegations that he was involved in homosexual acts. Though it should be noted that this oppression of homosexuals is neither recent nor directly related to the Anti-Homosexuality Bill. Rather, there is a long-standing history of oppression of homosexuals in Uganda. For example, in July 2005, the Ugandan Constitution was amended to prohibit same-sex marriage. In August 2006, a local paper called Red Pepper published the first names and professions of forty-five alleged homosexual men in Uganda. [15]

On 21 October 2019, 16 LGBTQ+ activists were arrested on suspicion of engaging in same-sex sexual activity. The 16 men, believed to be aged between 22 and 35, were arrested at the office of a sexual health charity where they all worked and lived. Police Spokesperson Patrick Onyango indicated that officers had found lubricants, condoms, and antiretroviral drugs at the charity. Based on this, medical examinations had been conducted on all 16 people. According to the "[...] medical examination report, it was established that the suspects were involved in sexual acts punishable under the penal code", he said. [16]

What do these "medical examinations" refer to? This is a forced anal examination, a form of cruel, degrading, and inhuman treatment that can rise to the level of torture. They violate the Convention Against Torture, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the African Convention on Human and Peoples' Rights. Forced anal exams are invasive, intrusive, and profoundly humiliating. As the UN Committee against Torture has emphasised, they "[...] have no medical justification and cannot be consented to fully". Some people subjected to these examinations experience lasting psychological trauma. Several victims said that they experienced forced anal examinations as a form of sexual violence. Medical personnel who conduct forced anal exams do so in violation of international principles of medical ethics, including the prohibition on medical personnel participating in any way in acts of torture or degrading treatment. [17]

15. Dicklitch, S., 2011. Building a Barometer of Gay Rights (BGR): A Case Study of Uganda and the Persecution of Homosexuals. [online] Research Gate. Available at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/236700809_Building_a_Barometer_of_Gay_Rights_BGR_A_Case_Study_of_Uganda_and_the_Persecution_of_Homosexuals> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

16. Human Dignity Trust. 2022. Uganda | Country Profile. [online] Available at: <<https://www.humandignitytrust.org/country-profile/uganda/>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

17. Human Rights Watch. 2016. Dignity Debased. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/12/dignity-debased/forced-anal-examinations-homosexuality-prosecutions>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].

It would appear, therefore, that homosexual men may also be subjected to anal medical examinations if they go to law enforcement agencies for help following a rape. It is difficult to imagine the mental and physical suffering that these men might endure, given the criminal penalties they could potentially face.

Moving Towards A Resolution

In theory, this problem could be solved by the Sexual Offences Bill, approved by the Ugandan Parliament on May 3, 2021, if only because of its name. This bill includes some positive provisions for addressing sexual violence, including protecting sexual assault survivors' rights during criminal proceedings and criminalising sexual harassment by people in positions of authority. However, it also punishes any "sexual act between persons of the same gender," as well as anal sex between people of any gender, with up to 10 years imprisonment, in flagrant violation of the rights to privacy and non-discrimination. It even provides that if Ugandans perform these sexual acts outside Uganda, they can be prosecuted in Uganda. However, on 3rd August 2021, President Museveni rejected the Sexual Offences Bill and returned it to Parliament, stating that it covered offences already provided for in the Penal Code.^[18]

Thus, as has been alluded to, due to existing legislation and stigma from society, the vulnerability of male victims of sexual violence, even if they are not from the LGBTQ+ community, is very high. Who can they turn to for legal, medical, or psychological help? How can they avoid not only social censure but also imprisonment? How can they make sure that their homosexuality is not reported by a neighbour or a relative who does not like them? How can they live in a society where they are traumatised both psychologically and physically and become outcasts without the right to justify themselves or explain the situation? All these questions remain unanswered and only a gradual change in the policy of the state and the attitude held by society will make the plight of male victims of sexual violence at least a little easier.



18. Human Rights Watch. 2021. Uganda: Reject Sexual Offences Bill. [online] Available at: <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/05/06/uganda-reject-sexual-offences-bill>> [Accessed 5 September 2022].



Written by
Eugenia Gyamfi

THE RAPE CULTURE SILENCED IN SOUTH AFRICA

Silenced Rape Culture

Summarised, South Africa is notorious for its culture of rape and sexual violence. Although one must be careful when comparing rates and statistics cross-nationally due to vast differences in definitions of offences addressing rape (or more broadly, sexual violence) as well as differences in recording methods pertaining to the rates of unreported cases [1]. Therefore, it is important for the reader to understand that when it is said that South Africa has the highest rates of reported cases of rape and sexual violence in the world, this is said with the abovementioned factors in mind.

Translating this statement into numbers: in 2019, the South African Police Agency reported a rate of 72.1 per 100,000 people, with a total number of around 43,000 reported cases of rape. However, the full accuracy of these numbers remains in question due to missing information and unreported cases (the amount of which is believed to be higher than the number of reported cases).

Amongst those numbers of unreported cases, we can find the subject matter of this article, namely, male victims of rape and sexual violence in South Africa. First, this article will canvass the legal definition of rape and sexual violence in South Africa, and discuss whether such definitions promote a gender neutral or inclusive definition for all victims. Secondly, it will delve into the notion of cultural misconception about rape in connection with the concept of the instilled behaviour of toxic masculinity, that lead to practices such as “corrective rape” and perpetuation of homophobia due to said misconceptions. Finally, the article will acquaint the reader with the social and cultural repercussions that these offences (i.e., sexual violence) have on male victims in South Africa.

1. *World population review*, “Rape statistics by country 2022”
<<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/rape-statistics-by-country>> accessed 27 September 2022

Definition of Rape Under South African Criminal Law

When conducting an analysis on sexual violence against men the first questions that come to mind are: what are the legal definitions of rape and sexual violence? And, do such definitions (or more broadly, such provisions) ensure a safe reporting mechanism for all victims? It is very important to realise that until 2007, the law did not recognise the possibility of being raped for the male gender, rather only lesser offences could be applied to their experiences of sexual violence. The legal definitions that have been in operation since then can be found in the latest Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act No. 32 of the year 2007, of the South African Police Service, which states:



“Rape: Any person (a) who unlawfully and intentionally commits an act of sexual penetration with a complainant (b), without the consent of (b), is guilty of the offence of rape. [2]

Compelled rape: Any person (a) who unlawfully and intentionally compels a third person (c), without the consent of c, to commit an act of sexual penetration with a complainant (b), without the consent of b is guilty of the offence of compelled rape. [3]

Sexual Assault: A person (a) who unlawfully and intentionally sexually violates a complainant (b) without the consent of b, is guilty of the offence of sexual assault.” [4]

What can be deducted from this formulation is that the above act was drafted in order to ensure a gender neutral and inclusive definition of rape and sexual violence. With it, lawmakers made sure to send out a strong message, that regardless of sex and gender, one could be protected under the South African law in these circumstances. However, despite this legal progress, the cultural repercussions for victims are intense due to ongoing stigmas and taboo regarding the issue. Often victims do not even get accredited for their pain. It is even the case that where victims share their traumatising experiences to their close circles, they are laughed at and gaslighted, resulting in them not being able to report the rape and /or sexual violence which has happened to them.

2. Criminal Law Amendment Act, no 32, section 4 , reference code 23702.

3. Ibid.

4. Criminal Law Amendment Act, no. 32, 2007, section 5, reference code 23704.

Cultural Myths

For many victims this legal protection does not mean much when the social and cultural norms have become so toxic and oppressive that one cannot help but feel hopeless. Around the world one can state that the phenomena of toxic masculinity is nothing new, yet when addressing the incredibly high numbers of rape and sexual violence cases in South Africa, the topic remains a prevalent part of the discussion, though with little action taken to address it.

Rape Culture and Homophobia

A way for individuals to display their masculinity is to exercise the offence of “corrective rape”. Corrective rape is defined as the practice of individuals or group of individuals engaged in forced penetration in order to “correct” the sexual orientation of lesbians or gay men. One of the survivors of this practice named Asvat shared his experience with Ms. Angelo Louw, in an edition for a South African Youth Magazine. In recalling his own experience, Asvat stated the following,

“They thought I was a woman, and when they found out I was a man, that's when they became even more violent. They kept saying 'stabane ... stabane' [Sesotho for 'you're gay, you're gay']. They beat me so badly that my eyes were swollen shut. They hit my teeth out. There was blood everywhere. They even wanted to cut my privates off, but I'm lucky someone disturbed them.”[5]

This exposé was released four years after the incident, with Asvat's story forming one of the many unreported cases. Significantly, this story makes a prevailing connection between homophobia and the dire situation of rape and sexual violence.

According to the South African Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse (SAMSOSA) Organisation, one of the ongoing misconceptions regarding male-to-male rape is that this would be deemed a homosexual act and that only gay and bisexual men would fall victims of that act.[6] These misconceptions show how deep these types of biases are ingrained in people's beliefs in South Africa. Furthermore, SAMSOSA goes on to quote Mike Lew of the Next Step Counselling and Training Centre, whom provided an example in order to illustrate why the aforementioned misconceptions are wrong. He said: “If you hit someone over the head, you do not call it cooking”, therefore the male-on-male rape cannot simply be defined as only a homosexual act.[7]

Another dire situation relates to the sexual violence which occurs within the South African prison population, which is believed to be the ninth largest in the world. Though this topic is beginning to get more attention, there still remains significant silence regarding the perpetration of such acts (again this is also partly due to social stigma and taboo). In fact, in a study entitled, “Unspoken victims: A national study of male rape incidents and police investigation in South Africa”, several cases of such violence were uncovered, with a total of 209 male victims (consisting of 89 adults and 120 children).

5. South African Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse, “the myths of male sexual abuse and rape”, <<http://www.samsosa.org/wp/the-top-10-myths-of-male-sexual-abuse-and-rape/>> accessed 27 September 2022

6. Ibid.

7. South African Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse, “The sad reality” <<http://www.samsosa.org/wp/the-sad-reality/>> accessed 27 September 2022

The Future for South Africa

This article has strived to illustrate how in light of a now inclusive legal definition and framework relating to rape and sexual abuse in South Africa, male victims of sexual violence should have a higher level of protection. Instead, it became clear that despite this, such progress remains hindered by a patriarchal system in which toxic masculinity and the continuation of violence is promoted. This in turn creates a vicious cycle, in which the vast majority of victims end up not reporting the issue at all due to societal stigmatisation and fear of becoming a laughingstock. Encouragement of misconceptions, homophobia and discrimination within the South African system has strengthened false beliefs which are subsequently passed through generations, harming the future of the nation. One could say that education is the key and the first step for the betterment of this situation. However, what can one do when the very institutions that are supposed to stop such kind of violence are the most susceptible to sexual abuse?



From educational to correctional institutions, it seems that the rape culture in South Africa targets all individuals regardless of sex or gender. Thus, in the absence of any action, the reality seems to be very gloomy and sombre. The path ahead requires a shift in the institutional system, significant change when it comes to gender norms and perceptions, and the promotion of stronger implementation of the existing inclusive legal framework. Only then can South African work towards safeguarding the bodily integrity of victims of rape and sexual violence.

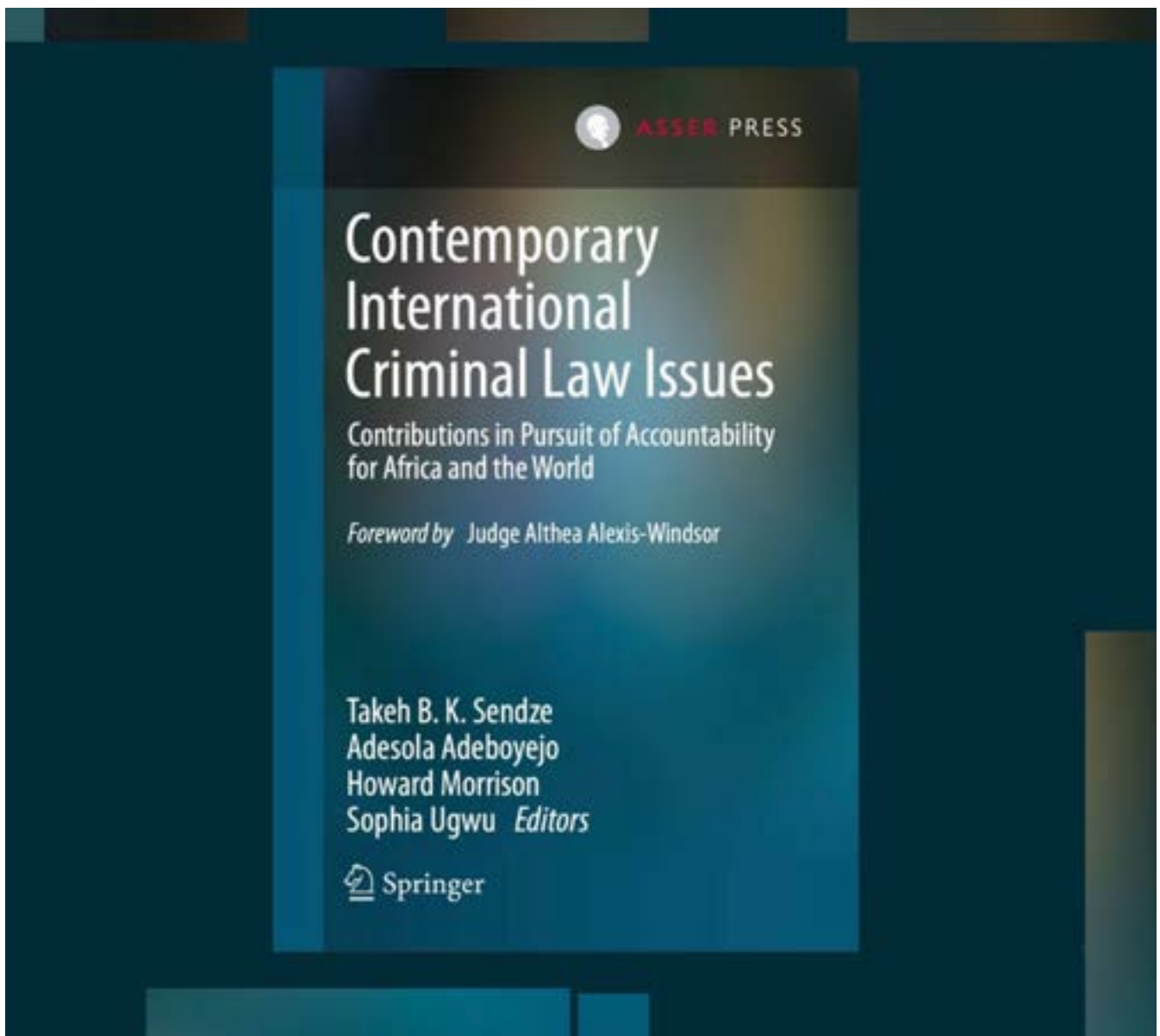
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