

Setting a research agenda for conflict-related sexual violence

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Project Background

- Rape in war is a crime. It is not inevitable. (UN Security Council Resolutions 1820 and 1888)
- Growth in programming to address sexual violence in conflict settings and to prevent rape in war.
- Increasing number of agencies undertaking research driven by growing concern about the scale of the problem and importance for prevention and response to have data.
- Current evidence base is scanty, lacks clear/shared definition of sexual violence, methodologically weak and not comparable across sites and over time.

Initiative to develop a research agenda

- Need to identify strategic priorities to guide research in this field.
- In support of the knowledge building work of UN Action, WHO and SVRI commissioned development of a research agenda on sexual violence in conflict and post conflict settings
- Aimed to identify key research priorities for next 5 years

Developing a Research Agenda

Multi-staged and consultative process involving :

1. Establishing an expert advisory panel
2. Advisory panel identified 10 key research themes and specific research questions within each theme.
3. Broader consultation via a global on-line survey available in English and French – 176 responses (156 English & 20 French)
4. Literature review to identify publications on conflict-related sexual violence and knowledge gaps identified in existing literature



The literature

- Research by country
- Magnitude
- Understanding rape as a tactic of war
- Impact on individuals, families, communities and countries
- Men and boys as survivors
- Children born of rape
- Programmatic responses

Research by Country

Country-specific research articles (not including other reports) identified by the review included:

- DRC: 18 published research articles and several major reports
- Uganda: 7 published research articles
- Former Yugoslavia: 7 published research articles
- Rwanda: 6 published research articles
- Sierra Leone: 6 published research articles
- Liberia: 5 published research articles

Magnitude

- Measuring magnitude is a contentious issue fraught with methodological challenges and ethical concerns.
- Great variability across studies – definition; population; data collection methods.
- Available figures are estimates – at best.
- Reliable and comparable cross country data on prevalence of conflict-related sexual violence does not exist
- Not identified as a research priority
- Others argue lack of data hampers targeted responses in areas of great need.

Understanding Rape as a Tactic of War

“In DRC... as in other contemporary conflicts, sexual violence is employed as a weapon of war because it is inexpensive, readily available, but still extremely effective”

Bartels et al 2010

- Sexual violence differs in different settings (not all conflicts are characterised by high levels of SV):
 - Individual incentives / drivers – biology; breakdown traditional gender roles, revenge and retribution, or ‘just for fun’
 - Advance group objectives e.g. ethnic cleansing / foster unity, loyalty and camaraderie i.e. “brotherhood of guilt”
 - Availability of sanctions for or against sexual violence within armed groups, units and the individual
- Gaps: Systemic use of alcohol and psychoactive substances; need for epidemiological data and structured interviews with both victims and perpetrators. Understand how opportunistic and strategic reasons for rape interact. Which situations are more likely to involve sexual violence? What can we learn from situations where it isn’t used?

Impact

- Literature biased towards adult women
- Individual: rejection from family; driven from homes; separation/divorce; harassment; physically unable to work; depression/PTSD; anxiety, loss of respect; pregnancy; fistula; fear; suicide.
- Family and Community: erodes social and economic mechanisms that protect civilians from sexual violence; normalisation or moving from a perpetrator as a combatant to civilian perpetrator
- Gaps:
 - men and children
 - relationship b/w mother and children post-rape and impact on parenting
 - impact on spouses/partner relationships
 - understanding the status of women in conflict areas prior to the conflict and during the conflict: Social norms around gender including prevalence of other forms of GBV.
 - Impact of sexual violence on community behaviors / respect for law & rights

Men and Boys as Survivors

- Again literature is limited and of relatively poor quality. Little known about the number of male survivors of conflict related sexual violence
- Three forms identified in the literature
 - Physical violence e.g. castration
 - Forcing civilians to rape other, incl. family members
 - Males are forced to witness rape of female family members
- Gaps: magnitude of the problem, psychological impact; trauma of witnessing and/or being forced to rape female family members

Needs of Women and Girls who Become Pregnant as a Result of Rape

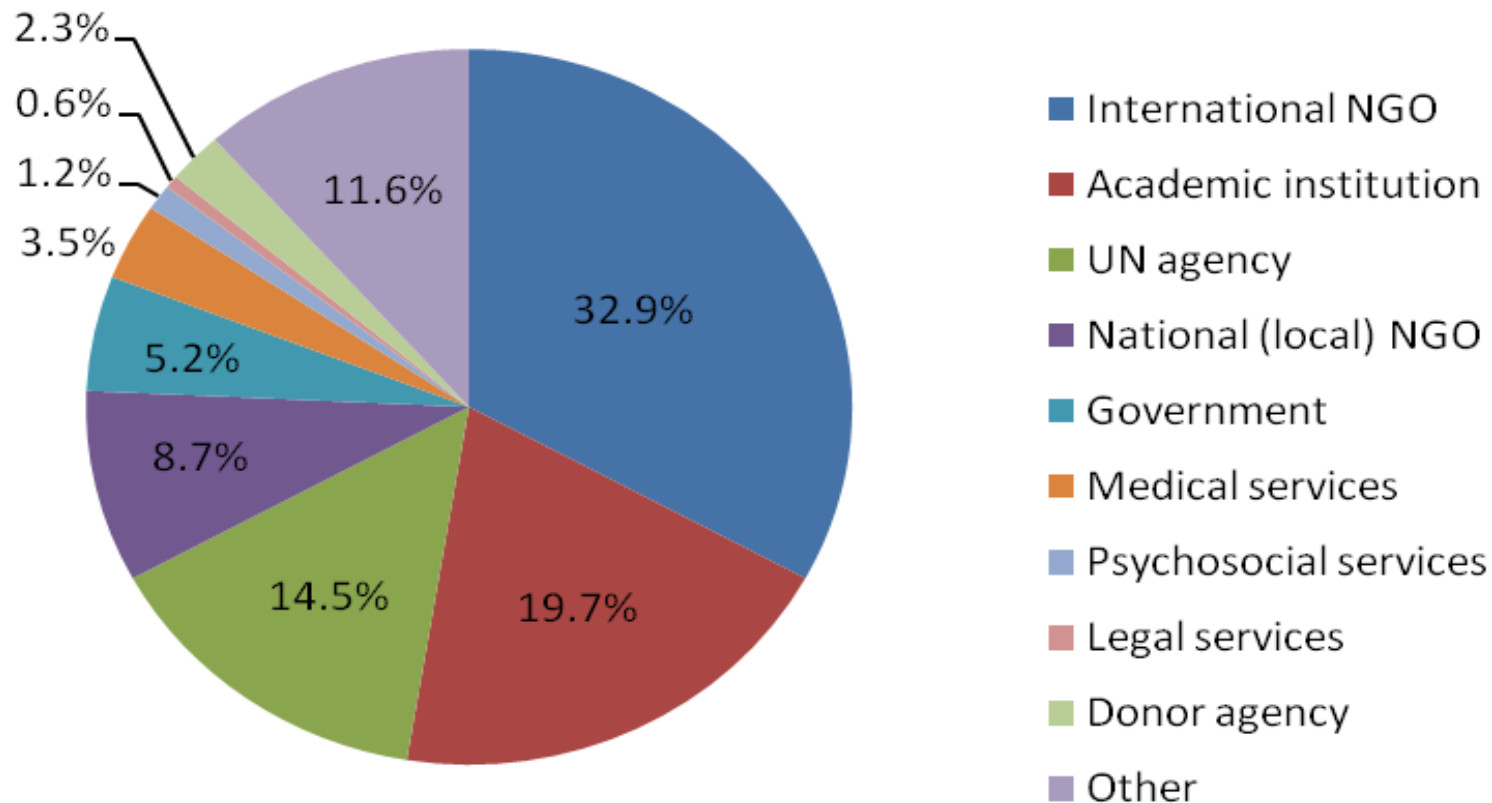
- No research articles on programmatic responses
- Limited data on magnitude, but a small but growing literature on the experiences of women and girls, and their children
- Children's needs largely overlooked by organizations reintegrating child soldiers - silence is a "protection mechanism"
- Significant stigma-related challenges for mothers and children
- Gaps: How do we gather data systematically in such a way as to empower, rather than exploit or marginalize...?" What factors promote or prevent rejection? How best to support positive outcomes for children? What constitutes best practice for program implementation?

Programmatic Responses

- Limited research on scope, and effectiveness of programmes that prevent and respond to sexual violence in conflict settings
- What programmes do exist are generally not represented in the research literature.
- We need to know what we are doing is making a difference and how we can do it better.

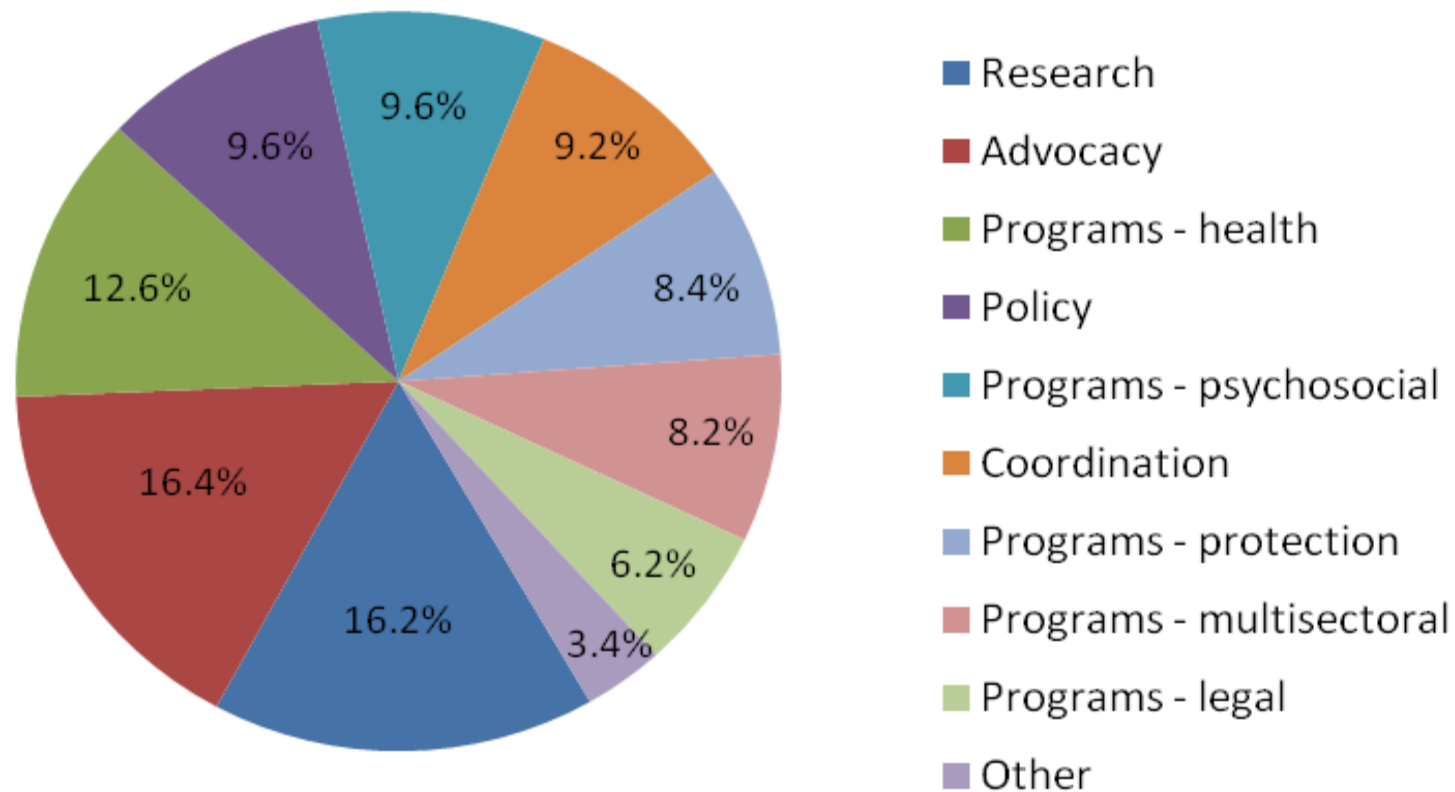
Key Findings: On-line survey Respondents

What type of organization do you work for?

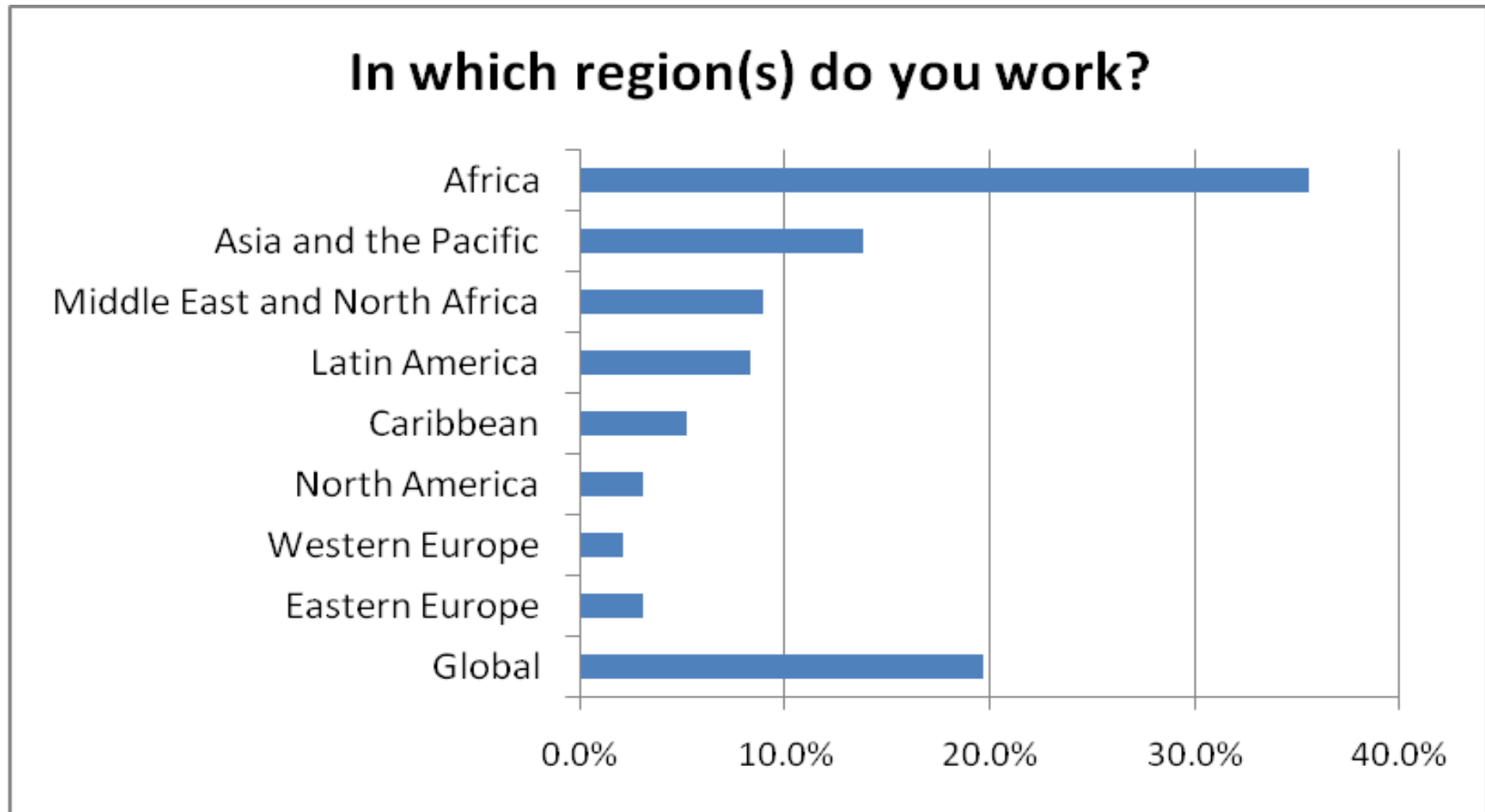


Respondents: Work Focus

How would you describe the focus of your work on conflict-related sexual violence?



Where do you work?



Research Themes: Ranking

1. The scope and effectiveness of programs to prevent conflict-related sexual violence
2. The scope and effectiveness of programs to respond to conflict-related sexual violence
3. The impact of conflict-related sexual violence on individuals, families, communities and countries
4. Better understanding of the different forms and motivations of conflict-related sexual violence
5. Integration of sexual assault services in sexual and reproductive health services including emergency contraception, safe abortion services, and family planning

Research Themes: Ranking

6. The role of economic empowerment and holistic approaches in the prevention of, and response to, conflict-related sexual violence
7. How to respond to the needs of women and girls who become pregnant as a result of conflict-related rape and children born of rape
8. The needs of ex-combatant sexual violence survivors (male and female) and effective program approaches
9. Men and boys as survivors of conflict-related sexual violence
10. The impact of conflict on male gender identities and conceptualization of masculinity

What next: How to Strengthen Research on SV in Conflict Settings

- Research methods, definitions
 - More rigor and consistency in taxonomy
 - **Consensus on definitions and measurement methodologies**
 - Closer look at the ethical aspects of research methods used
 - **Develop and adapt research tools**
- Collaboration
 - Multi-sectoral research collaboration (research teams with mix of professional expertise), systematic, not ad hoc
 - **Strengthen local research capacities**
 - Create a conflict-related sexual violence research working group

How to Strengthen Research on SV in Conflict Settings

- Information sharing

- List serve for conflict-related sexual violence, including sharing of grey literature (organization reports); forum for sharing experiences
- Ensure that research information gets back to the field; use participatory research methods
- Continue conference track on conflict-related sexual violence research

- Advocacy and research funding

- Disseminate agenda to donors and researchers

- Program related

- Support to evaluation
- Better programme design with clear theoretical underpinnings