

ALSO SURVIVORS**THE NEED FOR MORE GENDER INCLUSIVE HUMANITARIAN SERVICE PROVISION FOR MEN, BOYS, AND SSOGI SURVIVORS OF SGBV**

Towards addressing the suffering of all, and to upholding the humanitarian mandates of neutrality and impartiality, more gender inclusive services must be provided for all victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).¹ Current humanitarian thinking rightfully acknowledges women and girls as survivors of SGBV, but often overlooks male survivors and their vulnerabilities, as well as survivors who are of diverse sex, sexual orientations, and gender identities (SSOGI). All forms of SGBV against men and boys and SSOGI need to be better understood and addressed in a way that is both conflict and context sensitive, in cooperation with local service providers. Programming, guidelines, tools, and methodologies for SGBV must use inclusive language and consider different SGBV experiences. This view is indebted to and acknowledges decades of feminist research that highlights the reality of SGBV, and places emphasis on the need to ensure that raising the profile of men and boys and SSOGI individuals as survivors of SGBV does not detract from already underfunded SGBV programs for women and girls.

Across the humanitarian aid sector, women and girls, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and other Muslim-majority countries, have historically been perceived by donors and humanitarian aid agencies as uniquely vulnerable. As such, attention is given particularly to women's empowerment and gender equality interventions. Mainstream humanitarian discussions about gender, in general, or SGBV specifically, often only reference women and girls. Existing research and programming then engages, screens, and addresses women and girls and uses female centered understandings of SGBV.² Men, and to a lesser extent boys, are conversely not perceived to be vulnerable in this way. Rather, men are often seen as either potential perpetrators of SGBV, allies in the fight to prevent it and promote gender equality, or obstacles to the latter. Rarely are men and boys treated as survivors, nor are efforts made to understand how their gendered subjectivities are impacted due to conflict, humanitarian crises response, and humanitarian governance. Evidence from the field, including Iraq, highlights this dynamic as well as the fact that men, boys, and SSOGI individuals do have experiences of SGBV; capturing this information requires different, more robust, and creative approaches than currently taken.

TECHNICAL FACTSHEET

All primary and secondary data come from the following sources unless otherwise specified:

- 8 focus group discussions with Syrian refugees, both men and women, residing in camp and non-camp settings in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in February 2019.
- 8 key informant interviews with humanitarian SGBV service providers in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in February 2019.
- Insights from a number of semi-structured qualitative interviews with internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Iraq in Anbar, Baghdad, Dohuk, Erbil, Najaf, Ninewa, and Sulaimaniya governorates between June and August 2019.
- Extensive literature review of over 50 academic articles and humanitarian policy papers on gender within the humanitarian sector.

¹ While this brief specifically addresses the humanitarian response during and after conflicts, the principles here also apply to the development, peacebuilding, and transitional justice sectors as well. Addressing the male and differing SSOGI survivors of SGBV within humanitarian response will render the issue more visible for other actors in conflict and post-conflict settings and allow for more longer-term context-sensitive approaches to SGBV and its impact on the entire community.

² William Affleck, Ann Selvadurai, and Lindsey Sikora, "Underrepresentation of men in gender-based humanitarian and refugee trauma research: a scoping review," *Intervention* 16, no. 1 (2018): 22-30; and Chris Dolan, "Letting go of the gender binary: Charting new pathways for humanitarian interventions on gender-based violence," *International Review of the Red Cross* 96, no. 894 (2014): 492.



KNOWN MALE EXPERIENCES OF SGBV IN IRAQ AND BEYOND

Female Syrian refugees spoke candidly, during focus group discussions not only of their own experiences with SGBV but highlighted their perceptions of SGBV against men and boys. While they acknowledged not knowing about sexual violence specifically perpetuated against men or boys that they knew personally (which is not surprising given the particular shameful nature of this topic), they did speak about the topic and shared stories of men who suffered severe psychological distress due to their gendered experience with war (compounded by their inability to provide financially for their families), and being the target of gangs and militias for conscription both in Syria and in Iraq. On this latter point, the women further mentioned boys being the target of local street gangs in displacement and that they knew of families who kept their sons at home from both work or school for this reason.

All women reported the experience of displacement as one of extreme stress, in large part due to their economic situation and the resultant change in gender roles. While they had access to psychosocial support programming, fewer options were available for men and boys. The male refugees knew of sexual violence and abuse against men and boys, but that other forms of SGBV were more common, especially traumatic experiences with security forces.

Male and female Iraqi IDPs revealed that they feared for their sons too if they were to return to their places of origin, due to the risk of being forcibly conscripted into security forces or armed groups, which is a common reason that men fled Syria as well.

Humanitarian practitioners in Iraq also acknowledged both the difficulty of engaging men and boys on SGBV directed toward them. For example, one SGBV specialist said that her team do not work at all with men and boys because it is deemed too sensitive in the context of Iraq or the wider Middle East. For those that do work with men and boys, lack of disclosure is foremost an issue as are lack of funding, and time. As one humanitarian worker noted, men and boys do not report SGBV for two reasons: 1) societal stigma (this is also particularly true for SSOGI individuals); and 2) because they do not understand what it means to be a survivor of non-sexual forms of gender-based violence.

Practitioners also pointed out that the already limited funding for SGBV in general in the Iraq context and elsewhere further impedes the ability to respond to all survivors, including those populations that tend to disclose at higher rates.³ The relatively short duration of humanitarian service provision also prevents more conducive conditions for such disclosure, particularly for population groups who already face difficulties in speaking about such violation.

Staff of a local organization, with community centers accessible to all genders, said that it often takes months for men and boys, either from the IDP, refugee, or host communities, to disclose their experiences with SGBV. Informal discussions over months often lead to trust and, ultimately, disclosure. Their approach is to have their centers open at different times for different genders and to allow people to access their services for as long as they need to build the trust necessary for disclosure and appropriate care. Even with these good practices, there are still some issues that are too sensitive for men and boys to share. Cases of rape and other

³ SGBV interventions during humanitarian crises account for under 1% of the \$15 billion provided by donors for responses, see: Natalia Kanem and Mark Lowcock, "The world over, people in crisis suffer sexual violence – this scourge must end," *The Guardian*, May 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2EPwW91>



forms of sexual violence against men in detention centers are known to local activists and organizations, but again, men feel that they cannot disclose these experiences with anyone to act on them.

Men and boys and SSOGI individuals' experiences of SGBV within MENA, especially among conflict-affected populations, is increasingly recognized.⁴ Within both IDP and refugee populations, displacement camps, migration routes, check points, workplaces, homes, and urban spaces have all been reported as common sites of SGBV against male populations.⁵ Psychological, economic, and sexual violence against men and boys has also recently been increasingly documented in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen.⁶ Perpetrators of SGBV against men and boys include state actors,⁷ military actors, traffickers, host communities, and family members. This violence manifests in a number of ways.

With respect to sexual violence amid MENA conflicts, it may take the form of rape as a weapon of war or other forms of both genital and non-genital violence.⁸ Male survivors suffer from a range of traumatic physical injuries and mental symptoms that have both short and long-term implications.⁹ The perpetrators being mostly, but not exclusively, male,¹⁰ embolden misinformation about homosexuality in relation to sexual violence and contributes to added stigma to male survivors.¹¹

In addition to sexual violence, economic and psychological gender-based violence against men and boys also contributes to a culture of silence. Within the context of violent conflict, men and boys still often have to fulfill their “breadwinner”¹² and “protector” masculinities making them vulnerable to workplace exploitation, forced labor, and human trafficking. Moreover, conflict often impedes men’s ability to adequately perform these masculinities while also upending traditional gender roles. Taken together, this makes men more susceptible to victim shaming, psychosocial disorders, and committing domestic violence.¹³ Forced displacement, compounded by either the legal inability of displaced men to find formal or informal employment or host community discrimination against the displaced, also often results in women and children having to fulfill informal breadwinner financial responsibilities outside of the home in addition to continuing domestic ones. This was particularly noted in discussions by both male and female Syrian refugees in the

⁴ United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1820, adopted in 2008, recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and UNSCR 2016, adopted in 2013, first acknowledged a place for men and boys in sexual violence interventions.

⁵ All Survivors Project, The Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law, and UCLA School of Law Health & Human Rights Law Project, “*Destroyed from Within: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Syria and Turkey* (Lichtenstein: All Survivors Project, 2018), 11; and Jennifer S. Rosenberg, “Men and Boys, Including Male Survivors,” from *Mean Streets: Identifying and Responding to Urban Refugees’ Risks of Gender-Based Violence* (New York: Women’s Refugee Commission, 2016), 3.

⁶ See, for example, Lawyers and Doctors for Human Rights, “*The Soul Has Died: Devastating Impact of Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Syrian Detention* (Gazientep: LDHR, 2019); UN High Commissioner for Refugees, “*Iraq: Prevalence of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence against Men and Boys, and Possible Repercussions against Survivors*” (Geneva / Baghdad: UNHCR, 2019), <https://bit.ly/2oYMXW9>; Sarah Chynoweth, “*More Than One Million Pains: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys on the Central Mediterranean Route to Italy* (New York: Women’s Refugee Commission, 2019); and Amnesty International, “*Yemen: Ta’iz authorities must tackle child rape and abuse under militia rule*,” *Amnesty International*, March 8, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2EPwW91>

⁷ In modern-day Iraq, for example, authorities (national and international, including the U.S.) have used SGBV as a tool for state building and to disempower and emasculate non-hegemonic males, see, Ariel I. Ahram, “Sexual violence and the making of ISIS,” *Survival* 57, no. 3 (2015): 57-78;

⁸ LDHR, “*The Soul Has Died*,” 6.

⁹ All Survivors Project, “*Destroyed from Within*,” 25.

¹⁰ Sarah Chynoweth, “*We Keep It in Our Hearts: Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Syria* (Geneva: UNHCR, 2017), 15.

¹¹ This in turn adds to the vulnerability of SSOGI people in the MENA region, where in most countries, homosexuality is criminalized and socially taboo.

¹² Lewis E. Turner, *Challenging Refugee Men: Humanitarianism and Masculinities in Za’tari Refugee Camp*, PhD thesis (London: SOAS, University of London, 2018), 128.

¹³ Chynoweth, “*We Keep It in Our Hearts*,” 37, 128; Turner, *Challenging Refugee Men*, 209-10.



Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The impact of SGBV against men and boys consequently causes a ripple effect throughout families and communities.¹⁴

Despite growing recognition and documentation of these abuses and their impacts on the wider community, there is still little legal, medical, or psychosocial recourse even for male survivors who do disclose what has happened to them in their countries of origin or displacement.

BARRIERS IN ADDRESSING THESE EXPERIENCES IN HUMANITARIAN SETTINGS

Such structural discrimination against male SGBV survivors also influences language and cultural norms. For example, in Arabic speaking contexts, gender-based violence in general is often translated as “violence against women” because there is no strict equivalent in Arabic.¹⁵ Taken together, these result in gender discriminatory service provision based on a unidirectional understanding of survivors that is not conflict or context sensitive. The gendering of men and boys primarily as perpetrators of violence or potential change actors is also rooted in a lack of capacity, expertise, and, in turn, sensitivity by service providers to address and engage them as survivors of SGBV.¹⁶ This is evidenced by the lack of protection mechanisms,¹⁷ awareness initiatives, and referral pathways or spaces for male survivors of SGBV.¹⁸ Furthermore, without sufficient funds from donors, practitioners cannot develop their capacity, expertise, and sensitivity towards men and boys as survivors of SGBV and care impartially for all survivors of SGBV.¹⁹

These conceptualizations of men and boys are compounded by a lack of data about experiences that men and boys and SSOGI have with SGBV due, in large part, to underreporting because of significant stigma and shame, particularly in the MENA context. In societies with deep societal stigma surrounding diverse sexual orientations, in particular male homosexuality, coming forth as a male survivor raises suspicions of the individual’s sexual orientation. Where homosexuality is further criminalized, in addition to deep societal shame and stigma, survivors may fear being prosecuted by coming forward.

Lack of data on male and SSOGI SGBV survivors is also attributed to limited funding for male and SSOGI survivors in particular,²⁰ which in turn impedes further funding and development of appropriate policy and programmatic responses, especially in relation to these populations. Feminist scholarship has made great advances in arguing that lack of data should not be used as evidence of a lack of SGBV against women and girls and has rightfully placed SGBV in the spotlight; similarly, a lack of data about rates and experiences among men, boys, and SSOGI individuals should not be used to justify their exclusion.

Finally, the duration of most SGBV programs remain too short to effectively engage with male and SSOGI survivors of SGBV; it takes a longer period of time to develop their trust before they

¹⁴ LDHR, “*The Soul Has Died*,” 5.

¹⁵ In Arabic, the translation of “gender-based violence” is contentious. In formal Arabic it is translated as “violence against a social type,” but in colloquial common usage, it is interpreted as “violence against women and girls,” see, Turner, *Challenging Refugee Men*, 176-181.

¹⁶ Secret Aid Worker, “Men have as many issues as women, we just don’t know what they are,” *The Guardian*, February 14, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2JAGgAm>

¹⁷ All Survivors Project, “*Destroyed from Within*,” 28, 30; Chynoweth, “*We Keep It in Our Hearts*,” 52, 57.

¹⁸ All Survivors Project, “*Destroyed from Within*,” 13, 31, 34, 39; Turner, *Challenging Refugee Men*, 138, 141.

¹⁹ Veronique Barbelet, “Male gender-based violence: a silent crisis,” *Overseas Development Institute*, June 23, 2014, <https://bit.ly/2V6frJ5>; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “OCHA Message: Humanitarian Principles,” April 2010, <https://bit.ly/2VZznh8>

²⁰ Chynoweth, “*We Keep It in Our Hearts*,” 62.



might self-disclose experiences with SGBV, especially if the experience is sexual in nature.²¹ Moreover, longer programming would enable practitioners to engage men and boys in dealing not only with violent behavior but negative masculinities that make men and boys more inclined to not disclose experiencing SGBV and that enable violations against women and girls and SSOGI individuals to occur with relative impunity.

CONCLUSION

Decades of feminist²² and humanitarian research on the spectrum of vulnerability in conflict settings acknowledges the impact of SGBV on different communities. Recent intersectional feminist scholarship advocates for actor inclusivity wherein localized tools are based on the language and experiences of the targeted beneficiaries.²³ This includes how women and men in conflict-affected settings perform gender roles and further encompasses SGBV being enacted against men and boys during conflict as a political maneuver to disempower certain individuals and communities.²⁴ Qualitative findings presented here and elsewhere²⁵ on SGBV experiences of men and boys validate these intersectional feminist analyses and highlight trends on the ground that should be taken into account for funding and intervention. At the same time, more large-scale quantitative data on SGBV against men and boys is still limited, underpinned by underreporting, cultural stigma, and misperceptions of vulnerability²⁶ – not because violations are not taking place.

²¹ Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights and ASUDA, *Combating Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Refugee Crises: Lessons from Working with Syrian Refugees in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq* (London: Ceasefire Centre for Civilian Rights, 2019), 49-50.

²² Chynoweyth, "More than One Million Pains," 3.

²³ Lewis Turner, "The politics of labeling refugee men as 'vulnerable,'" *Social Politics* 0, no. 0 (2019): 1-23.

²⁴ Chris Dolan, "Inclusive gender: Why tackling gender hierarchies cannot be at the expense of human rights or the humanitarian imperative," *International Review of the Red Cross* 98, no. 902 (2017): 627; Dolan, "Letting go," 493-494.

²⁵ See, for example, All Survivors Project, "Destroyed from Within;" Abram, "Sexual violence;" LDHR, "The Soul Has Died;" Chynoweyth, "More than One Million Pains."

²⁶ Affleck, Selvadurai, and Sikora, "Underrepresentation," 23.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are recommendations for the planning and implementation of gender inclusive humanitarian service provision:

For policy and advocacy

- Humanitarian advocacy, policy, and funding, specifically in Iraq and the broader region, must address this issue in a way that does not sacrifice care for female victims of SGBV. The absence of data on male survivors needs to be understood contextually. Without appropriate advocacy, policy, and funding, this issue will remain hidden.
- Likewise, consultations on SGBV must include actors – both women and men – from conflict affected areas in the Global South, not only those from the Global North. It is important that language surrounding policy and interventions resonate with local understandings of what it means to be a survivor and what SGBV looks like, as well as resonating with the lived experiences of those affected by SGBV.

For programming

- SGBV programming should be inclusive of all survivors. As an essential step to this end, all guidelines, tools, and policies at all levels must use inclusive language and consider different SGBV experiences, not only of women and girls, but also of men and boys and SSOGI. This commitment must come from main SGBV actors as well as donors and other key stakeholders. Using non-inclusive language impacts the way service providers program for SGBV.
- Moreover, providers must also operate for their services to be inclusive of all survivors, in a way that does not come at the expense of supporting female survivors. Centers can either have gender specific times, or times when families are welcome, in addition to specific hours for only women and girls. If it is not possible to be more inclusive in the same space, then services for men and boys could be provided outside the center in other safe spaces identified, such as a room in a partnering organization's office to receive male individual cases as needed. If service providers keep referring to and targeting only women and girls in with regard to SGBV, men and boys and SSOGI are unlikely to report any incidents.
- The response to SGBV against women and girls, men and boys, and SSOGI must be intersectional in nature, that includes provisions for protection, child-protection, SGBV, health, livelihoods, and mental health and psychosocial care. Focal points for male and SSOGI survivors of SGBV should be established in each context, with a priority of working with local partners, who tend to carry out most work with male and SSOGI survivors of SGBV. SGBV policy and programming should not be gender neutral or gender blind. Specific interventions should be tailored to women and girls, men and boys, and SSOGI survivors of SGBV.
- More needs to be known about the different forms of SGBV against men and boys and SSOGI, particular to each context. Capturing this information needs to become a higher priority in order to address the needs of all survivors of SGBV. Moreover, programming and responses must be more sensitive to the reality that most male and SSOGI survivors of SGBV suffer in silence. Researchers and humanitarian practitioners should work with local organizations and actors who are more familiar with the context to develop conflict and cul-

turally-sensitive research and programming methodologies that are more inclusive in nature, without losing the rightful focus on women and girls. A localized approach is essential.

- Awareness sessions for beneficiary communities about SGBV should include information about different forms of SGBV against men and boys and SSOGI, not only against women and girls. This must also address the difference between male survivors of SGBV and homosexuality stigmatization. This may help reduce social stigma and shame and allow men to more freely come forward with their experiences of SGBV, which, in turn, will allow for more appropriate interventions to address the real needs of male survivors of SGBV. These awareness sessions should not be limited to beneficiary communities only, however, but should address the wider community in which beneficiaries live as well.
- More attention needs to be paid to providing psychosocial support services for men and boys. Some SGBV service providers reported men approaching them because they needed someone to talk to and be heard, not to report SGBV incidents. The lack of psychosocial support programming for men may not only contribute to them not reporting incidents when they are survivors but may contribute to them perpetuating SGBV. Creating psychosocial support programs that target men could also be a means of creating trust and enable disclosing experiences of SGBV.
- Inclusive SGBV capacity building should address not only local and international humanitarian workers, but also local medical, mental health, and social care practitioners who might avoid or deny this issue due to stigma. This needs to come alongside gender inclusive SGBV awareness sessions targeting humanitarian actors, medical practitioners, and local legal and law enforcement personnel.

ABOUT SOCIAL INQUIRY

Social Inquiry is an Iraq-based not-for-profit research institution focused on influencing policy and praxis that establishes civic trust and repairs social fabric within and between fragile communities, and communities and the state.

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