

Summary Meeting Report Sexual Violence in Conflict: Data and Data Collection Methodologies

18 and 19 December
WHO, Geneva

The demand for better data on the magnitude, nature and extent of sexual violence in conflict is coming from many quarters (governments, UN bodies, donors, others). Most recently Security Council Resolution (SCR) 1820 which has asked the Secretary General to submit a report that, inter-alia, provides *“information on situations of armed conflict in which sexual violence has been widely or systematically employed against civilians; analysis of the prevalence and trends of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict; benchmarks for measuring progress in preventing and addressing sexual violence; and plans for facilitating the collection of timely, objective, accurate and reliable information on the use of sexual violence in situations of armed conflict....”*

While there is increasing recognition of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict as a serious security, health and human rights problem, it is difficult to document and research this violence because of its sensitive nature. This meeting brought together researchers/academics on sexual violence research, UN agencies and international NGOs working on violence in conflict in order to respond to this and other requests for data and for improved data collection methodologies. The aim of the meeting was to develop consensus on what data is needed, which methodologies are best and to make recommendations for a research agenda, in order to improve knowledge and understanding of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict settings and facilitate the collection of ‘timely, objective, accurate and reliable information’ on sexual violence.

It was recognized that data is critical for advocacy, prevention, programme planning and monitoring and to sustain donor interest in implementation. Different data is needed for different purposes and the following broad areas of data needs were identified:

1. Data to understand the magnitude/nature and extent of sexual violence, including the profiling of victims and perpetrators, risk and protective factors and vulnerability assessment.
2. Data for effective interventions/ services, including better understanding of the needs of survivors and of the availability of and barriers to services, the extent of impunity and evaluation of services/interventions, including legal and judicial.
3. Data on the impact and costs, both short and long-term of sexual violence on individuals and communities during conflict, on the periphery of conflict, and post-conflict.

A range of methodological and ethical challenges were also identified, including the need to standardize terminology and data-collection instruments; combine quantitative and qualitative methods; build on work on sexual violence in non conflict settings and ensure the safety of data and of anyone collecting and providing data.

Conclusions and recommendations from the meeting

1. **Surveys.** Data on the incidence/prevalence of sexual violence (and risk and protective factors) can only be obtained through a dedicated survey. However, more work is needed to develop an international consensus on: a) operational definitions for different forms of sexual violence; b) a minimum and expanded set of data to be collected, c) guidelines on types of data and best possible methodologies (that address ethical and safety issues) that would be useful for informing prevention and intervention efforts in conflict settings.

- UN Action should support a technical working group with WHO, CDC, SVRI and others to continue to work on this, in collaboration with similar work under development by

UNICEF, CDC and others to collect information on sexual violence against children (one of the six grave violations of SCR 1612).

- UN Action will aim to support one dedicated survey per annum.

2. **Surveillance.** Surveillance using existing case reports also provides useful data, but in order to be useful the collection of surveillance data (case reports) needs to be simplified and systematised.

- Efforts will be made to standardise data collection based on the data management tool developed by the IRC/UNHCR/UNFPA GBV Information Management System (GBVIMS), following a review of the proposed classification/nomenclature of GBV.

3. **Research on scope and context.**

- A more detailed research agenda on the context of perpetration of sexual violence, identifying priorities and research questions, will be developed, building on the work of this meeting and linking with other relevant research initiatives, including the one led by the Harvard Institute. This includes: qualitative research to better understand the context in which sexual violence takes place, risk markers for women/communities and the characteristics and motivations of perpetrators, and better means to understand whether sexual violence is condemned, condoned or commanded – and where and under what circumstances it takes place.

4. **Benchmarks for assessing progress and the effectiveness of interventions.** There is a dearth of information on what works for both prevention and response and more systematic evaluation of our work on sexual violence is needed.

- By end of the first half of the year we will have an em consultation regarding evaluation of interventions.
- UNICEF will convene a group to continue the work started at this meeting to develop benchmarks (simple indicators on process, coverage and outcome) to monitor the availability, accessibility and quality of services to prevent and address sexual violence.

5. **Ensuring good data for advocacy and sustainability.** Demands for more and better data will not go away. Data is needed to justify why rape was put on the political agenda and why it should remain there.

- Given the challenges of conducting surveys and collecting good data on cases and services, we need to triangulate what we have with good qualitative research – searching all the time to pass the “threshold of credibility”.
- Sound, good quality data will be critical to sustaining interest in the implementation of SCR 1820 .

SCR 1820 demonstrates that we don't know much about rape as a tactic of war, but we know enough for the world to take it seriously. One participant said: Security Council Resolutions are passed in poetry but must be implemented in prose”