

Brief supporting Evidence Report 182

THERAPEUTIC ACTIVISM: MEN OF HOPE REFUGEE ASSOCIATION UGANDA BREAKING THE SILENCE OVER MALE RAPE IN CONFLICT- RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Empowerment of Women and Girls

Jerker Edström, Chris Dolan and Thea Shahrokh,
with Onen David

March 2016



The IDS programme on Strengthening Evidence-based Policy works across seven key themes. Each theme works with partner institutions to co-construct policy-relevant knowledge and engage in policy-influencing processes. This material has been developed under the Empowerment of Women and Girls theme.

The development of this material has been led by Institute of Development Studies and Refugee Law Project who jointly hold the copyright. Input was provided by Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRAU).

The authors would like to thank all members of MOHRAU for their proactive and engaged involvement in this research process – particularly the core reference group: Aimé Moninga, Alain Kabenga, Thierry Inongi, Steven Kighoma and Joseph. The authors would also like to thank Dieudonne Maganya and Kabafunzaki Darius King, of the Video Advocacy Unit of the RLP's Media for Social Change programme, for their unstinting technical support. Special thanks also to Judy El Bushra, Elizabeth Mills, Elaine Mercer and Amy Hall for their thorough review of – and extremely helpful comments on – the draft report and film. Thanks are also due to Jim Sumberg, Deepta Chopra and many others from the institutions to which the authors are affiliated, and to the UK Department for International Development for its support under the IDS Accountable Grant. While the authors are deeply grateful for all the support and inputs, they take full responsibility for the views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this report, as well as for any errors.

The material has been funded by UK aid from the UK Government, however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK Government's official policies.

AG Level 2 Output ID: 123

THERAPEUTIC ACTIVISM: MEN OF HOPE REFUGEE ASSOCIATION UGANDA BREAKING THE SILENCE OVER MALE RAPE IN CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Jerker Edström, Chris Dolan and Thea Shahrokh, with Onen David

March 2016

This is an Open Access publication distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are clearly credited.

First published by the Institute of Development Studies in March 2016
© Institute of Development Studies/Refugee Law Project 2016

IDS is a charitable company limited by guarantee and registered in England (No. 877338).

Men's experiences as victims of sexual and gender-based violence remain little recognised in research, policy or practice. Mainstream narratives generally continue to depict men as perpetrators of violence and women as victims. Yet, having been linked to forced migration in contexts of armed conflict, sexual violence against men is slowly becoming recognised as far more widespread than was previously thought. Responding to this, the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) approached the Refugee Law Project (RLP) and Men of Hope Refugee Association Uganda (MOHRAU) in order to jointly design and carry out a study on collective action among male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence.

The Evidence Report that this brief accompanies explores one central question addressed by the study: 'despite the odds stacked against them, what makes it possible for male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to organise and become activists, challenging discriminatory social and gender norms?' The study finds that, despite pervasive discrimination, groups of male survivors have been able to develop resilience and mutual support through collective action. Further, the study finds that third-party service providers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can play an important support role in reinforcing the resilience and capacity of male survivors to organise collectively.

The report addresses the overarching question through three main sub-questions:

1. How can looking at male survivors of sexual violence help us understand the complexity of men's relationship to sexual and gender-based violence?
2. How and why do groups of male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence respond to their experiences of violence, oppression, stigmatisation and marginalisation, including as refugees?
3. How does the individual agency of male survivors of sexual violence living as refugees interact with collective action to respond to the experience of violence and marginalisation?

Approach and methodology

This study adopts key elements of a feminist framework of empowerment through critical consciousness and collective action (applied to male rather than female victims), but also relevant critical theory and concepts on masculinities, trauma recovery, agency, migration and refugee status in relation to activism and citizenship. This combination of perspectives was chosen to help us move away from common limiting assumptions about sexual and gender-based violence, and gender. It also allows for a substantive recognition of the unique set of issues driving these men's experiences of marginalisation, and their responses.

The research employed a collaborative and grounded approach. Research framing and questions were co-constructed between Men of Hope members and staff from RLP and IDS. Furthermore, the research was designed to allow insights and understanding to emerge directly from the data, as opposed to searching for a predetermined hypothesis. We aimed to ensure that context and history were taken into account in the way that meaning was constructed in the analysis. Research subjects comprised 36 MOHRAU members and four of their female partners, all living as refugees in Uganda (predominantly as a result of having moved away from conflict within the Great Lakes Region). Focusing on understanding both individual journeys and the dynamics of the group, participants were purposefully sampled.

Through a dialogue facilitated by IDS and RLP, a context-specific framing was developed collectively between the Men of Hope leadership group, RLP and IDS, alongside the wording of research and interview questions. The IDS and RLP research team conducted 13 interviews with members of MOHRAU and four with female partners of group members.

One focus group discussion was also conducted with members on the issues posed by the emerging analysis.

Alongside these interviews and discussions, Men of Hope members also led their own process of telling and visually capturing individual and collective narratives. This involved five MOHRAU members in leadership roles developing video recordings of their individual testimonies of their journeys to activism, and a broader group of members creating a dramatised film with the title *Men Can Be Raped Too*. RLP and IDS provided technical support, including in participatory film-making.

Summary highlights of findings

How can looking at male survivors help us understand the complexity of men's relationship to sexual violence?

The existence of male survivors challenges attempts to reduce the narrative on sexual violence to men's perpetration and women's victimisation. The experiences of the men in this study – as victims, as survivors and/or as activists – demonstrate that their relationships to sex, violence and gender identity are deeply complex, and cannot be explained with reference to a simplistic gender binary. Our findings vividly demonstrate the impact of sexual violence on male victims' subjective displacement from personhood.

At its core, sexual violence ruptures the victims' understanding of their own gender identity, and of what it means to be 'men' – notions previously predicated on traditional models of masculinity expressed in relation to (and counterposed to) female identity. This rupture results in stigmatisation from the community, silencing and isolating men who have been raped. Sexual violence against men by men illustrates the socially constructed nature of gender relations enacted within broader relations of power and conflict. We see that inhabiting a man's body holds no guarantees of masculinity, and we can thus recognise the plurality of men, masculinities and their relationships to gender inequality and violence.

While many of the men in this study had not questioned their masculinity prior to being victimised, it is clear that reassessments begin to happen as individual healing and collective consciousness start to emerge. These in turn provide illustrations of concepts of intersectionality, transitions, transformations and liminality, as described in Section 3 of the report. These are useful not only in unveiling the men's complex of multiple interacting challenges, but also in understanding how *changes* in their relationships to sexual violence can come about. Being marginalised as refugees intersects with (and is compounded by) both the marginalisation experienced in relation to gender identity and position, and the question marks raised over their sexuality. However, when survivors begin to connect with other people who have had similar experiences, this opens up new possibilities – of healing, of building new identities, and of reassessing their relationships to others and to the world. It appears to be through gradual and non-linear processes and through liminal spaces of confusion and reconstitution that these transformations take place.

How and why do groups of refugee male survivors respond to their experiences of trauma?

Exposure to conflict-related sexual violence and displacement both damage the sense of self, identity and community of refugee men who have experienced this trauma. However, the emergence of peer support groups has provided a safe space for male survivors, which has been integral to enabling them to respond. Such groups can allow for interconnected individual and group healing, as well as for the building of new identities. Peer support not only mitigates the isolation but also directly challenges the reasons for marginalisation and ostracism experienced by male survivors. There is a collective rejection of assumptions that men cannot be vulnerable or raped; and patriarchal norms of male dominance and invulnerability begin to be questioned. Related to this, the research found shifts in study

participants' understanding of interpersonal relationships, resulting in closer and more egalitarian relationships between some of the women and men involved.

These findings suggest that approaches to working with groups of refugee men who are survivors of sexual violence can usefully draw on positive psychology perspectives on psychosocial support, peer support and self-help. They also indicate that such approaches need to go beyond the many approaches to trauma recovery that frame 'reintegration' as a return to established norms and communities. Approaches need to recognise changes in identities and build new communities of belonging. The findings highlight the importance of recognising the fluid spaces group members pass through or experience, and how mutual support (in these often difficult and non-linear journeys) is crucial for constructing group identity. This fluidity, and the multiple identities of individuals and collectives, can counter static prescriptive norms that limit creativity, agency and the formation of new communities.

Strategic engagement with identity narratives established within international communities – for example, 'survivors' – is an important tactic; it enables groups or individuals to make claims on an international humanitarian asylum system that has systematically excluded the rights of male victims, for reasons already discussed. This linkage to strategically accessing international support can usefully draw lessons from the experience and concept of 'therapeutic citizenship' among self-help groups of people living with HIV in Africa.

How does individual agency interact with collective action to respond to marginalisation?

The findings revealed a number of elements as to 'how' individual group members' actions interact with their collective action, some of which relate to the discussion of healing (above). Initially, new members may only be concerned about (or act on) their own needs; but we have seen how collective healing quickly repositions members' motivations towards helping others within (and outside) the group. Increasing engagement gradually raises members' political consciousness of their issue within a broader oppressive context and ignites their desire to be activists for the group, and for the cause of 'breaking the silence'. We found that healing is political through challenging dominant gender narratives, and that political engagement in advocacy is also healing, individually and collectively.

A critical aspect of the dynamics of the group's functioning relates to the role of outside actors. While the group was created coming out of support activities led by RLP, the latter continues to nurture and support MOHRAU, alongside a range of other groups of vulnerable refugees and minorities. Furthermore, key members have had their horizons expanded by taking part in international meetings or learning experiences such as the South-South Institute (discussed in Section 2 of the report). Other service organisations in Kampala provide different forms of support, such as medical treatment or counselling. The role of supporters and allies is crucial, both for the group's internal development and for their individual and collective action and 'representation' in advocacy work, locally as well as globally.

Men of Hope may provide a microcosmic space for exercise of 'citizenship', which is otherwise so restricted in the daily lives of group members. In framing the issue of citizenship, we appeal to critiques of simple formalistic state-centred (or organisationally centred) narratives, which can occlude the complex negotiations of the politics of everyday lives. To even begin to grapple with the situation of refugee male survivors of sexual violence – let alone their activism for international recognition and support – we need to see citizenship as more than simply a relationship between citizens and nation states. While there are important differences in context, limiting comparisons with the experiences surrounding the HIV epidemic, historic notions of citizenship need to be significantly extended. They need to go beyond a narrow definition of the individual rights-bearing

citizen's relation to a duty-bearing nation state, to the everyday politics of people's lives, and beyond, to engage with the global 'biopolitics' of gender, humanitarian aid and law.

Conclusion

The answer to the overarching question ('what makes it possible for male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to organise and become activists, and to challenge discriminatory social and gender norms?') contains three key elements. First, we need to move away from gender-binary models for addressing the needs of individual women and households and work instead with diverse community formations and support groups. Second, the scope of models of recovery focused on individual trauma must be broadened to include collective healing as well, with a corresponding mix of therapeutic models. Supporting collective healing and the building (or rebuilding) of new identities and new relationships – at times with external support – is, in itself, a challenge to discriminatory social and gender norms. Third, it is increasingly urgent to nurture politically conscious collective action by survivors themselves, drawing strategically on specific individuals' unique capabilities and facilitating joint advocacy to influence broader international humanitarian policy and politics. Recognising the therapeutic activism of refugee survivors of sexual violence, their self-determination and their claims for the realisation of human rights will make a major contribution to the efforts of humanitarian and development policymakers and practitioners to address the issue of sexual violence effectively and sustainably.

Recommendations

In order to put into practice global policy commitments to working with all survivors of sexual violence, be they women, girls, men or boys – as outlined in the G8 declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and UN Security Council Resolution 2106 – we propose the following recommendations.

National and multilateral/United Nations (UN) development aid agencies should:

- ensure that legal and policy frameworks adopt an approach to gender that is inclusive of men and women and emphasises how gender relationships construct gender identity;
- enable processes of global citizen engagement that support survivors of sexual violence to influence international legal frameworks;
- ensure that ongoing research analysis of conflict-related sexual violence includes the issue of sexual violence against men;
- provide increased funding to address sexual and gender-based violence in conflict-affected settings, to strengthen prevention and response for all survivors.

NGOs and national implementing service providers should:

- examine their policies and services to determine whether they are inclusive of male survivors, sensitive to their needs, and empowering;
- develop training to support humanitarian service providers to ensure more inclusive approaches to addressing conflict-related sexual violence;
- provide help and mentorship in situations where support groups do not exist;
- strengthen and foster the capacities of refugee-led support groups.

Researchers in gender and sexuality, in organisational strategies and citizenship should:

- develop new approaches to addressing sexual violence with refugee groups of male survivors of violence (action research can open up possibilities of new learning);
- conduct participatory action research to support new strategies;
- assist service providers by focusing on adapting psychosocial models for individual and group healing, moving away from simple rehabilitation and reintegration.