Evidence *for* Action:

What Works to Prevent Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Conflict-related sexual violence is preventable

Globally, the number and intensity of armed conflicts is increasing and these conflicts are lasting longer, causing more people to be displaced (United Nations, 2022a). Within this context, widespread conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is occurring, defined as sexual violence directly or indirectly linked to a conflict (full definition below). Typically, CRSV is conceptualized as non-partner perpetrated violence, however sexual violence within intimate partner relationships may also increase during conflict. In 2021, the Secretary General's report on CRSV noted that parties credibly suspected of engaging in CRSV were active in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Mali, Myanmar, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, and Syria. Emerging evidence on the use of CRSV in other crises, including in Ukraine, Ethiopia, and Afghanistan, shows that CRSV is a widespread problem requiring urgent and concerted action.

Definition of CRSV

CRSV is defined as: "Rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. That link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, which includes terrorist entities; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a political, ethnic or religious minority group or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse, cross-border consequences such as displacement or trafficking, and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict." (United Nations, 2019).

While rigorous evidence is limited, there is an increasing body of studies documenting the prevalence, risk factors and consequences of sexual violence, and crucially the impact of programmes seeking to reduce violence against women and girls (VAWG) in conflict contexts. This report presents a high-level synthesis of existing evidence and practice on CRSV and other forms of VAWG in conflict-affected settings, based on a detailed literature review and consultations with humanitarian stakeholders and survivors' groups and networks. It identifies entry points from the evidence that can be used to shape effective efforts by the humanitarian and women, peace, and security (WPS) communities to prevent CRSV. Despite the evidence gaps, the insights from research and practice show that CRSV is not an inevitable consequence of conflict and can be prevented.

Scale and severity of CRSV

In 2021, the UN documented 3,293 cases of CRSV (United Nations, 2022b). Given the extent of under-reporting, this is likely to be a tiny fraction of the cases that occurred. These official reports highlight that limited rigorous data on CRSV is available, and existing data sources have weaknesses that affect our ability to understand the full scale of the problem. To account for this under-reporting, there have been efforts to increase the availability of population-based[1] prevalence data. While prevalence estimates of non-partner sexual violence vary by context, most studies have documented between 20 to 30% of women and girls have experienced non-partner sexual violence in various conflict-affected settings (Ellsberg et al., 2020; Sánchez Gómez et al., 2017; Vu et al., 2014; Hynes et al., 2004; Palm et al., 2019).[2] Available evidence suggests that the majority of perpetrators of this violence are known to survivors (e.g., family, friends, others in the community), rather than armed actors.

> An estimated **20 to 30%** of women and girls have experienced non-partner sexual violence in conflict-affected settings.

CRSV is one of multiple, compounding forms of violence experienced by women and girls during conflict. Other forms of VAWG that intensify during conflicts include intimate partner violence (IPV), trafficking, sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH), and harmful cultural and traditional practices such as child marriage. Populations with intersecting disadvantages that compound power differentials, such as children or adolescents, women and girls with disabilities, indigenous women and girls, lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) people, are also likely to be more at risk of experiencing CRSV. Data has shown that adolescent girls experience particularly high rates of violence.

Men and boys also experience CRSV, though reported prevalence rates are generally less when compared to sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls. While prevalence data is limited, 6-9% of men in South Sudan and 1.4% in Somalia reported experiencing some form of sexual violence during their lifetime (GWI and IRC, 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018).

Drivers of CRSV

While gender inequality is the underlying root cause of all forms of VAWG, a range of risk factors may increase the likelihood of violence. These risk factors exist at various, intersecting levels – from the national/societal to individual and include factors that contribute to men's perpetration and increase women's likelihood of experiencing violence. For example, armed conflict may reinforce societal ideas of hyper-masculinity, that emphasise the use of violence as a means to prove one's manhood or live up to their idealised understanding of "being a man" (typically strong, powerful, confident, quick to anger and use violence), which may contribute to male perpetration of CRSV (Banwell, 2014; Baaz and Stern, 2009; Meger, 2010).

At institutional levels, CRSV can serve a strategic military purpose, with commanding officers ordering its use to achieve larger ideological and/or political goals (Meger, 2016). While CRSV may sometimes be directly ordered by military commanders as a tactic, it is more often simply tolerated or seen as impossible to prevent due to weak military leadership (Olsson et al., 2020). State failure and the inability of state structures to fulfil their roles as purveyors of justice increases impunity for perpetrators, which in turn may increase the prevalence of CRSV.

Within communities, physical insecurity during armed conflict can increase vulnerability and risks of CRSV. Women may also be called upon to take up new roles which are traditionally seen as "masculine" (e.g., breadwinner, etc.) during conflict. While potentially contributing to women's empowerment, these dynamics can also lead to backlash as men turn to violence to re-establish their authority (Cardoso et al., 2016; Guruge et al., 2017; Wachter et al., 2018). Conflict conditions can also exacerbate pre-existing individual risks for perpetrating (e.g., use of drugs and alcohol, mental disorders) and experiencing (e.g., age, disability status) VAWG.

What works to prevent CRSV

There has been a significant expansion over the last decade in rigorous policy-relevant evidence on what works to prevent VAWG in low and middle-income settings, including from Phase 1 of the UK's What Works to Prevent Violence Programme. Emerging evidence shows that with careful design and implementation, VAWG is preventable, with significant effect sizes demonstrated of around 50%. While there is limited rigorous evidence specifically evaluating what works to prevent CRSV, there is important learning on how to prevent other forms of VAWG in conflict settings that is transferable. Increasing awareness and understanding of what constitutes violence often occurs as a result of prevention programming and, as this awareness increases, survivors may be more likely to seek support services.

An effective approach to preventing CRSV considers both immediate physical protection as well as longer-term empowerment and shifting of inequitable gender norms/ constructs of masculinity. Access to quality, survivor-centred response services is a prerequisite to ethical and effective prevention. Key aspects of this approach include:

→ Efforts to reduce risks and improve the immediate security of women and girls show promise (e.g., risk mitigation, localised security initiatives such as armed accompaniment during firewood collection). While the actions of UN Missions and peacekeepers may contribute to decreases in CRSV, though also have been documented to increase united consequences increases in SEAH. Overall, the quality of the evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches is low.

→ There is more high-quality evidence of the effectiveness of initiatives that seek to change underlying inequitable norms. However, many of these programmes were designed to reduce multiple forms of IPV (e.g., physical, psychological) rather than CRSV specifically. Despite this, some evidence is emerging that community-based social norms approaches can successfully reduce sexual violence and change the norms that uphold its use.

→ Evidence from non-conflict settings suggests that economic empowerment, livelihoods, and cash

transfer programming, particularly when paired with gender-transformative programming to shift attitudes and norms, can reduce VAWG. The evidence is limited and more mixed in conflict settings, showing some reductions in IPV and improvements in equitable/quality relationships, but not consistent reductions in violence outcomes. This is an important area for further research.

→ Initiatives that work to change the behaviour of security sector actors are rare, but emerging evidence suggests they may be able to change understandings of masculine norms and reduce use of violence. While there is more research on changing masculine norms globally, research with armed actors often focuses on describing militarised masculinities and the use of CRSV, rather than engaging in behaviour change efforts with security forces. More specific research on how best to change norms and behaviours within these institutions (e.g., service providers, security sector, etc.) is needed to build this evidence base.

Underlying these initiatives are efforts to create an enabling environment that increases gender equity, reduces impunity of perpetrators, and supports the implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda. This environment is built by: promoting the leadership of women's movements and rights organisations including women peacebuilding organisations and human rights defenders; supporting women's participation in peacebuilding and state building and in the creation of accountability mechanisms; improving legal frameworks and establishing survivor-centred response systems; and establishing international and national policies, commitments and plans to address CRSV (including commitments not to use CRSV, sanctions, national action plans for Women, Peace and Security and Gender-based Violence). While these efforts should contribute to the prevention of CRSV, there is limited empirical evidence of their effectiveness, and they are not the main focus of this report.

Evidence overview of promising approaches to prevent CRSV

	INITIATIVES TO PREVENT CRSV	INITIATIVES TO PREVENT WIDER VAWG THAT COULD BE EFFECTIVE TO PREVENT CRSV	INITIATIVES THAT TARGET RISK FACTORS FOR VAWG/CRSV IN CONFLICT SETTINGS	INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO PREVENT CRSV
APPROACHES	**Localised security initiatives,** e.g., alternative fuel projects or armed accompaniment when collecting firewood. **Interventions to promote positive masculine norms within the security sector** e.g., Living Peace in DRC and Burundi. **UN missions and peacekeepers.** Some policy-focused research has demonstrated reductions in CRSV after the introduction of peacekeepers and case studies have documented how missions can support state forces to reduce impunity. However, there are also documented increases in SEA associated with deployment of peacekeepers.	**Community-based social norms change,** e.g., Rethinking Power in Haiti; Transforming Masculinities in eastern DRC. **Lifeskills interventions targeting adolescent girls,** such as Girl Empower in Liberia, which integrated girls' mentoring with conditional cash transfers and reduced child marriage and risky sexual behaviours. **Livelihoods and economic empowerment programming with social empowerment/ gender transformative approaches.** While data from non-conflict settings has shown these approaches can reduce VAWG, evidence in conflict settings is mixed. However, there are examples of reductions in IPV from some studies e.g., village savings and loan groups, paired with gender-dialogue groups for couples decreased physical IPV in Côte d'Ivoire.	**Participatory approaches to identifying and mitigating risk,** e.g., Empowered Aid in Lebanon and Uganda. **Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)** to build social networks and skills and access GBV services, e.g., COMPASS, which has been seen to improve outcomes for girls that may reduce their risk factors for VAWG, but did not demonstrate a reduction of violence, potentially because of the focus only on girls themselves and not the wider community. **Emergency cash transfers,** where cash is linked to VAWG response programmes and services, e.g., emergency cash transfer programmes in Syria helped reduce negative coping strategies for women, which may reduce risks for non-partner sexual violence. However, reported IPV increased. **School-based programming,** e.g., Peace Education in Afghanistan has shown declines in peer violence, corporal punishment and patriarchal attitudes, but impacts on VAWG were not evaluated. **Mental health and reintegration support** to aid the transition from armed groups to civilian life in post-conflict societies and reframe militarised masculinities after leaving armed groups. These approaches may reduce risk factors for CRSV perpetration (e.g., mental health) but there is insufficient evidence to know if they reduce the perpetration of VAWG. More broadly, interventions targeting the military during armed conflict is weak.	**Advancing gender equality,** e.g., pass and allocate budgets to implement national laws, statutes or penal codes to prevent discriminatory practices, language, or any other form of systemic discrimination. **Supporting women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders and women's movements.** **Women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and establishing accountability mechanisms** such as national human rights institutions, civilian oversight bodies and independent monitoring bodies. **Adoption and implementation of International human rights treaties and the domestication of international human rights law.** **Establishing effective and survivor-centred justice systems** at international, national and community level. **Use of national and global commitments –** by state and non-state actors and the UN, e.g., Geneva Call's Deeds of Commitment. **Use of sanctions** in a targeted and consistent way, with sexual violence as an independent criterion, e.g., Central African Republic.
EVIDENCE SUMMARY	Overall, there is weak evidence (primarily relying on M&E data and qualitative data) or no evidence on the effectiveness of initiatives to prevent CRSV specifically.	Some rigorous evidence (RCT and quasi-experimental data) is available for interventions targeting wider forms of VAWG in conflict. However, these results need to be replicated in further contexts and most evidence more strongly links these approaches to reductions in IPV rather than non-partner sexual violence. Further adaptation and evaluation are needed to test the effectiveness of these approaches for CRSV specifically.	Some evidence from interventions that have impacted risk factors for experiencing or perpetrating VAWG or CRSV in conflict settings but results have not shown an impact on reducing women's experiences of violence (or have not been evaluated for this).	Efforts to create an enabling environment to prevent CRSV do not necessarily require (or have) data on their impact on preventing CRSV. However, research is needed (and largely missing) on how to ensure each approach is most effectively employed.

NOTES

Red is not enough evidence to make any assessment on the effectiveness of the approach on preventing CRSV or VAWG in conflict.

Orange is some evidence on improving violence outcomes but it isn't sufficient to draw a firm conclusion.

Violet are approaches that have been shown to impact risk factors but haven't impacted on violence outcomes (or haven't been evaluated for this).

Green is data from impact evaluations (either an RCT or quasi-experimental design) that shows significant reductions in violence outcomes.

Black text are approaches that are understood to support an enabling environment but, on its own, likely cannot prevent CRSV. As these approaches are generally not candidates for impact evaluations, an overall assessment of the evidence is not given.

Overall, there is underinvestment in evidence on CRSV and VAWG in conflict settings. These assessments are meant to guide but are not definitive. The best available data is from only one or two studies, with varying study designs and evaluations, making it difficult to generalise the overall effectiveness of this approach. We also recognise that alternative evaluation methods are more appropriate for some approaches (e.g. working with non-state groups). For all approaches, practice-based knowledge is an important source of learning. The sources for these studies are provided as part of the next section and references.

While no assessment of the evidence is given for enabling environment factors as these initiatives are not necessarily appropriate for impact evaluations (either because they should be components of wider change efforts – e.g., trainings, commitments not to use CRSV – or because they are wider efforts – e.g. strengthening justice systems – that occur for many reasons including affecting the use of CRSV), further research is needed to understand how best to implement these initiatives and document the outcomes they are able to achieve.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the evidence reviewed and consultations with survivors, several overarching recommendations for policymakers are identified below.

POLICY AND DIPLOMACY: Support global efforts to implement UN Action's Framework for the Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence, including supporting countries to develop and implement action plans to meet global commitments[3] to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and the multiple compounding forms of violence that women and girls experience during conflict. Diplomatic efforts can help ensure that national action plans on women, peace and security include budgeted operational provisions to prevent CRSV and that these plans are linked to the work of national action plans on gender-based violence. As part of this, it is important to support survivor-centred, ethical data collection and monitoring (e.g., Murad Code, GBVIMS) to track the effectiveness of these initiatives and document trends in sexual violence in emergencies beyond verified cases of CRSV to build a more holistic understanding of VAWG in conflict. Other priorities include political influencing to ensure countries adopt and adhere to international human rights treaties, ensuring sexual violence is addressed in any ceasefire or peace agreements, and support to facilitate meaningful participation of diverse groups of survivor-led organisations and women's rights organisations in CRSV prevention and peacebuilding processes.

PROGRAMMING: Support and invest in the careful adaptation of promising evidence-informed, survivor-centred programmes that seek to prevent CRSV and other highly elevated forms of violence against women and girls in conflict (e.g., IPV, SEAH), including:

- Prioritise risk mitigation and 'do no harm' as a minimum requirement from the earliest stage of a conflict in all aspects of humanitarian action, underpinned by robust complaints and accountability mechanisms. Promising approaches include localised security initiatives such as armed accompaniment during firewood collection or sex-segregated lines at distribution points. As part of this, it is important to expand investment in quality, survivor-centred response services, which are critical for effective and ethical prevention programming.
- Resource and implement evidence-informed programming to prevent multiple forms of VAWG in conflict settings, including CRSV. There is promising evidence from impact evaluations in conflict settings that the following approaches can be effective at reducing VAWG when carefully designed and implemented: community-based social norms change, life skills interventions combined with gender-transformative approaches that target adolescent girls, and livelihoods and economic empowerment programming with gender-transformative approaches. Further pilots and evaluations are needed to understand if these approaches can be adapted to reduce CRSV specifically.
- Innovate and evaluate approaches which may have potential for preventing CRSV and other forms of VAWG but currently lack a rigorous evidence base, including adapting norm change approaches for security actors. There is evidence that the following approaches improve risk factors that lead to violence against women and girls, and should be evaluated for their potential impact on CRSV prevention: schools-based approaches, women and girls' safe spaces, mental health interventions, emergency cash transfers, and gender-sensitive reintegration of former combatants.
- Support longer-term initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment to prevent CRSV, including by promoting gender equality, such as flexible funding for women's rights organisations and survivor-led organisations who are on the frontline of preventing CRSV, influencing and diplomatic approaches to strengthen laws and their implementation, investment in girls' higher education, and ensuring women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and accountability mechanisms.

RESEARCH: Invest in rigorous, ethical, applied research to address the gaps in the evidence base on what works; and the synthesis and communication of this evolving evidence to shape more effective international action. Priorities for research set out in the main report include how existing approaches used in conflict-affected settings may impact CRSV outcomes (e.g. women and girls' safe spaces), piloting and learning about how newer approaches (e.g. social norms change within institutional security sector actors) can most effectively be implemented and if they can successfully reduce CRSV, and testing how to adapt approaches to reach women and girls facing multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination including age, ethnicity, disability, and sexuality.

Conflict-related sexual violence is preventable

Despite the scale of the challenges, CRSV is not an inevitable consequence of conflict, and we can prevent it. Cohen and Nordås (2014) examined 129 conflicts and found that only about half (57%) had reports of CRSV (though weaknesses in reporting and documentation of CRSV may affect these findings).[4] Population-based[5] prevalence estimates of non-partner sexual violence in conflict-affected settings also vary by context, suggesting that increases in sexual violence are not always associated with armed conflict. Moreover, recent research in fragile and humanitarian settings, including evidence generated by the UK-funded What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) global research programme, has shown that it is possible to achieve significant reductions in prevalence of VAWG in conflict-affected settings. However, gaps remain in understanding exactly what interventions and policies can most successfully reduce CRSV. This report seeks to fill these gaps by synthesising existing evidence on CRSV and wider VAWG in conflict-affected settings to shape effective efforts by the humanitarian and Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) communities to prevent CRSV.

BOX 1

What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls

'What Works to Prevent Violence against Women and Girls' is an innovative global programme to improve violence prevention efforts. Phase 1 of the programme contributed to expanding the evidence base on the prevalence, patterns and drivers of VAWG in conflict, and on what works to prevent VAWG, typically in more stable settings. Over the next 7 years, the 'What Works to Prevent Violence – Impact at Scale' programme (Phase 2) will test the scale-up of proven approaches, alongside:

- Pioneering and rigorously evaluating new solutions to prevent CRSV, working with world-leading experts to expand the evidence on this complex problem where few rigorous approaches have been tested before.
- Driving the use of this evidence to shape more effective, concerted international action to tackle CRSV.

Understanding conflict-related sexual violence: a holistic view

What is conflict-related sexual violence?

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is a human rights abuse, a violation of international law, and a war crime. The term encompasses multiple forms of sexual violence (e.g., rape, sexual slavery, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation, forced marriage, etc.) directly or indirectly related to conflict and perpetrated against women, girls, men, or boys (see Box 2 for the full definition). Typically, it is conceptualized as non-partner perpetrated violence, however it is important to recognize that sexual violence within intimate partner relationships may also increase during times of conflict.

BOX 2

Definition of CRSV

CRSV is defined as: "Rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls, or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict. That link may be evident in the profile of the perpetrator, who is often affiliated with a State or non-State armed group, which includes terrorist entities; the profile of the victim, who is frequently an actual or perceived member of a political, ethnic or religious minority group or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity; the climate of impunity, which is generally associated with State collapse, cross-border consequences such as displacement or trafficking, and/or violations of a ceasefire agreement. The term also encompasses trafficking in persons for the purpose of sexual violence or exploitation, when committed in situations of conflict." (United Nations, 2019).

CRSV may be a tactic of war

Rape and other forms of sexual violence can be utilised as a purposeful tactic during armed conflict (e.g., "strategic rape" or using "rape as a weapon of war," etc.), where women and girls (and to a lesser extent men and boys) are targeted as a means to bring about strategic, military, or organisational gains (Meger, 2016). The objectives of the intentional use of CRSV as a tactic of war can vary and include terrorising enemy or civilian groups, humiliating enemies, building cohesion within armed groups, as a reward for combatants, and as an aspect of ethnic cleansing/genocide by reducing the reproductive capacity of rival groups. For example, state military forces in diverse contexts such as Guatemala, Bosnia, Sudan, South Sudan, Rwanda, and Myanmar have used CRSV as a purposeful military strategy during ethnic conflict and cleansing, as well as genocide (Olsson et al., 2020; Pinaud, 2020). Other state and non-state armed groups purposefully create spaces for CRSV to occur as means to manage the sexual lives of their military forces, for example, sexual slavery experienced by the Yazidi in Iraq.

CRSV is a practice of war and can be the result of wider societal breakdowns

Sexual violence may also be employed as a "practice" of armed groups – tolerated by armed groups but not necessarily committed as a military tactic of warfare (Wood, 2018). Sexual violence employed during conflict can emerge due to breakdowns in societal norms and controls, lack of functional legal and justice systems, and separation from communities and families. For example, "opportunistic" violence may occur in the context of weak states/state failure where there are few consequences for perpetrators or within societies where violence has become normalised. Violence occurring in these contexts increases the risks of sexual violence for women and girls not only on the battlefield but also within their homes and communities.

CRSV is a form of violence against women and girls

CRSV is most commonly, although not exclusively, a form of violence against women and girls (VAWG).[6] It is both uniquely associated with the dynamics of an armed conflict and reflects the same patriarchal norms and values that underpin VAWG globally. While this brief primarily focuses on CRSV, it also considers the multiple, compounding forms of VAWG that women and girls experience during times of conflict. While we know that non-partner sexual violence often increases, other forms of violence can also intensify during conflict and in post-conflict contexts, including sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH), intimate partner violence (IPV), trafficking, and harmful cultural and traditional practices. In addition, CRSV is also increasingly being perpetrated in online spaces, with reports of increases in online sexual violence as forms of warfare, terrorism, and violent extremism – as well as a mechanism to lure trafficking victims into servitude (FCDO / Wilton Park, 2022; UNODC, 2021). These examples highlight the importance of not limiting our view of VAWG during times of conflict to only CRSV directly utilised as a tactic of war during active conflict periods.

CRSV occurs and impacts women and girls during and after conflict

CRSV should be understood within a continuum of lifelong violence against women and girls. Several studies in post-conflict states have documented that multiple experiences of violence occur over the life course of women and girls – from early childhood sexual abuse to sexual violations in

adulthood within intimate partnerships (Artz et al., 2018; Fan et al., 2016; Population Council, 2008). These multiple traumas can have long-term consequences. CRSV is, therefore, not an event that occurs, but is instead a manifestation of broader human rights violations in contexts where the lack of equal rights for women and girls – and an exacerbation of deeply held patriarchal beliefs – exists within the context of a breakdown of societal norms and controls, and a lack of functional legal and justice systems.

CRSV is also experienced by men and boys

As with violence against women and girls, CRSV perpetrated against men and boys can be both a tactic of war or a practice that occurs within conflict-affected contexts. It is also similarly an expression of power over another and can be gendered. For example, male perpetrators of CRSV have been seen to be trying to "feminise" their opponents through their use of sexual violence (Sivakumaran, 2007). CRSV can also be utilised to humiliate, demoralise, injure, and otherwise dehumanise armed groups and populations that support them. This will be explored more below.

A STRONG FRAMEWORK: CRSV in international humanitarian policy and law

In times of armed conflict, international humanitarian law (IHL) applies, which defines CRSV as a war crime. Both those who directly perpetrate sexual violence and those who allow, encourage, or influence the use of CRSV can be held responsible. However, adherence to IHL is often weak, with limited accountability mechanisms and a reliance on voluntary monitoring mechanisms by the conflict parties themselves (Olsson et al., 2020).

> CRSV is most commonly, although not exclusively, a form of violence against women and girls.

A specific international legal and policy response to CRSV emerged in the late 1990s with convictions for the use of "rape as a weapon of war" by the International Criminal Tribunals of the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda (WILPF, 2020). Subsequently, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), establishing sexual violence as a war crime, was issued. Sexual violence against children is classified as a grave violation against children during conflict and similar efforts to reduce and monitor violence against this population have been instituted by the UN. There are also 18 International Human Rights Treaties – 9 core instruments and 9 optional protocols – some of which have a significant bearing on gender-based violence (i.e., Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women) that apply to forms of VAWG in both peace and times of conflict and underly specific efforts to address CRSV.

The Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

Underpinning the international policy response to CRSV are the UN Security Council Resolutions making up the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda. These begin with Resolution 1325, which was the first to recognise that violence against women and girls is a consideration for peace and security. Overall, the resolutions that make up the WPS Agenda recognise CRSV as a tactic of war and call for an end to impunity for perpetrators, promote women's participation in peacebuilding, and propose UN-led actions to prevent and respond to CRSV. Most recently, Resolution 2467 (2019) was passed, which highlights the need for survivor-centred approaches and "acknowledges structural gender inequality and discrimination that are the root causes of sexual violence, affirming the necessity of the participation and empowerment of women as the only viable route to sustainable peace and security" (S/RES/2467).

Despite its successes at highlighting the issue of CRSV and creating common frameworks for international action, critics of the protection pillar of the WPS Agenda have raised concerns that the focus of the WPS Agenda is primarily on protecting women against bodily violations, such as wartime rape, rather than addressing CRSV in the context of reducing power imbalances between men and women and promoting women's agency (Fernbach, 2020; Heathcote 2018; Meger, 2016).

Conflict-related non-partner sexual violence

Overall prevalence

In 2021, the UN documented and verified 3,293 cases of CRSV (United Nations, 2022b). Given the extent of under-reporting, this is likely to be a tiny fraction of the cases that occurred. These official reports highlight that there is limited rigorous data on CRSV available, and existing data sources have weaknesses that limit our ability to fully understand the scale of the problem. Data from formal reporting mechanisms is often vastly under-reported due to a lack of availability/trust in reporting mechanisms, and the potential for stigma or reprisals against survivors (Palermo et al., 2014). Data sources, such as the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict dataset or the Gender-based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS), are useful tools in understanding the dynamics and characteristics of VAWG during conflict, but are not meant to estimate the number of people who experience CRSV (Cohen and Nordås, 2014).

BOX 3

Documenting Cases of CRSV: MARA and the GBVIMS

Globally, two major initiatives document cases of VAWG, including CRSV, in times of conflict. The first is the GBVIMS, which seeks to harmonise data collection of cases of VAWG, support the case management process for survivors, and enable mechanisms for safe data sharing between organisations. The second is the Monitoring, Analysis, and Reporting Arrangements on CRSV (MARA), which was created by UN Resolution 1960 "to ensure the systematic gathering of timely, accurate, reliable and objective information on conflict-related sexual violence" (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2011). The MARA serves as the basis of international advocacy and informs Security Council actions. Data collected by the MARA is more limited than data from the GBVIMS, as the MARA focuses only on verified cases of CRSV. However, as both systems focus on reported cases of violence, neither can estimate the overall prevalence of CRSV.

The purposes of the GBVIMS (primarily a tool to support service providers) and the MARA (a tool to support human rights monitoring) differ, so there are challenges in implementing both systems in parallel. Practices to promote coordinated and safe data sharing between the two systems have been developed in a Provisional Guidance Note, including the importance of ensuring all identified survivors by either system, after giving informed consent, receive appropriate referrals based on their wishes. It is possible to share GBVIMS data with the MARA, but clear decision points are laid out in the guidance note to highlight where it may not be safe or ethical. Further efforts are needed to strengthen and harmonise safe data collection to provide a more accurate picture of the scale of the problem to help develop strategies to address this violence.

To account for this known under-reporting of CRSV and other forms of VAWG, there have been efforts to increase the availability of population-based prevalence data.[7] However, it is important to acknowledge that VAWG, including CRSV, is occurring during times of conflict and that the humanitarian community needs to take action to prevent, respond to and mitigate it as a lifesaving measure from the earliest stages of the response. Prevalence estimates are not necessary to "prove" that CRSV or other forms of VAWG are occurring during armed conflict, and collecting this information is not a necessary precursor to receiving funding or implementing programming that prevents or responds to this violence.

While prevalence estimates of non-partner sexual violence vary by context, most population-based studies have documented that about 20 to 30% of women and girls have experienced non-partner sexual violence in various conflict-affected settings (Ellsberg et al., 2020; Hynes et al., 2004; Palm et al., 2019; Sánchez Gómez et al., 2017; Vu et al.,

2014).[8] These estimates suggest much higher rates of sexual violence in conflict-affect contexts than global averages. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that about 6% of women and girls globally experience non-partner sexual violence, although the true prevalence is likely to be much higher given methodological challenges and the fact that this form of violence is highly stigmatised (WHO, 2021).

These considerable differences in estimates between conflict and non-conflict settings demonstrate the direct and indirect effects of conflict on sexual violence (e.g., the erosion of community-based protection mechanisms, breakdowns in law and order, etc.). The evidence also suggests that, even in situations of armed conflict, the majority of non-partner sexual violence is perpetrated by non-combatants (Blair et al., 2016; Hossain et al., 2014). For example, in study in South Sudan only 6% of reported perpetrators of non-partner sexual violence were armed actors, while only 7% of reported incidents of non-partner sexual violence in a study from the DRC were reported as militia-related (Ellsberg et al., 2020; Palm et al., 2019).

BOX 4

CRSV and other forms of VAWG during the Ukraine conflict

After Russia's full invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, reports of CRSV committed by Russian soldiers against civilians escalated. As of June 3, 124 alleged acts of CRSV had been reported to the Human Rights Monitoring Team of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. Most of the alleged survivors were women and girls, although some were also men and boys (UN News, 2022). It is highly likely that these figures are only the tip of the iceberg, with the full scale, severity, and impact of CRSV underreported due to fear, stigma, the absence of, or lack of trust in, CRSV reporting mechanisms, and the social or legal consequences of reporting a sexual offence. Concerns have also been raised about the growing risks of other forms of sexual violence against women and girls, both within Ukraine and in the countries where they seek refuge. For example, rapid needs assessments conducted in Moldova, Poland, and Romania revealed high risks of organised trafficking and SEAH of refugee women and children, due to uncoordinated efforts by volunteers at the border and the widespread hosting of displaced populations in private households. However, to date there is no evidence on the scale of the problem (EE RSH, 2022).

The effect of this violence on survivors and their families is immense. Qualitative research with 27 survivors who had experienced CRSV in Ukraine highlighted the profound impact of sexual violence on individuals, families, and society, with survivors having substantial unmet medical, psychological, and economic needs. Survivors described emotional and physical isolation from their families and communities due to the stigma and fears of backlash, as well as economic impacts such as loss of income and housing (Nassar et al., 2022).

In response to these ongoing challenges, the Government of Ukraine signed a framework of cooperation with the UN to prevent and respond to CRSV in May 2022. The framework includes a focus on engaging and supporting civil society organisations, strengthening the capacity of the security and defence sector to prevent sexual violence and ensuring sexual violence is addressed in any ceasefire agreement (Davis and Loft, 2022).

Who is most at risk?

Rates of sexual violence can be particularly high amongst certain sub-sets of conflict-affected populations. Women and girls engaged with fighting forces (e.g., as combatants or support personnel such as cooks) in particular often report experiencing high rates of sexual violence due to the employment of sexual slavery, paramilitary or state-sanctioned sexual exploitation. One systematic review found that rates of sexual abuse among female combatants (primarily former child soldiers) ranged from 22–36% (McAlpine et al., 2016). Other research in the DRC found that 42% of former female combatants interviewed in a population-based survey reported having experienced sexual violence (Johnson et al., 2010). In Liberia, women accused of belonging to a particular ethnic group or fighting faction or who had been forced to cook for a soldier/fighter had an increased risk of reporting experiences of physical or sexual violence (Swiss, 1998).

Populations with intersecting disadvantages that compound their power differentials, such as children or adolescents, women and girls with disabilities, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex (LGBTQI+) people, may also be more at risk of experiencing CRSV. In South Sudan, for adolescents and young women, exposure to armed conflict was associated with a seven-fold increase in the odds of experiencing non-partner sexual violence compared to those who were not directly exposed (Murphy et al., 2019). In Dadaab Refugee Camp in Kenya, women with disabilities were twice as likely (32% compared to 16%) to report they had experienced non-partner physical or sexual violence during their life before arriving in the camp, compared to women without disabilities (Hossain et al., 2020).

Sexual violence perpetrated against people who do not adhere to heterosexual norms and the gender binary have also been reported in contexts as varied as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Colombia, Iraq, Nepal, Syria, and Uganda (Myrttinen and Daigle, 2017). LGBTQI+ people displaced by conflict risk being a target of sexual violence due to their refugee status as well as their sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (Ahlenback, 2022). Over half of Syrian LGBTQI+ refugees interviewed in a study had been sexually abused, with 84% of these believing they were targeted by armed groups on all sides of the conflict due to their sexual orientation/gender identity (Heartland Alliance, 2014). Both within Syria and in countries of asylum, online technology, and social media have been weaponised to perpetrate offline violence against LGBTQI+ individuals. For example, government security agents and non-state armed groups reportedly posed as gay men on apps to lure users into in-person meetings intending to arrest, kidnap, blackmail, perpetrate violence, and even kill (COAR, 2021).

There is a notable gap in evidence on the scale and impacts of CRSV on children, including its intergenerational effects (Rowley et al., 2012; ICAI, 2020). The UN has verified more than 20,000 cases of CRSV against children since 2006, but a recent study found that the scale of the problem is likely to be much higher. Girls, particularly adolescents, are at high risk of sexual violence during conflict. In fact, 98% of verified cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence were committed against girls (as opposed to boys), according to the latest data from the Children and Armed Conflict (CAAC) data for 2019. Countries where children face the highest risk of CRSV include Colombia, Iraq, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen (Sapiezynska, 2021). Child-headed households may be particularly vulnerable to exploitation.

Forced marriage is another form of CRSV, where the direct and indirect conflict dynamics can affect prevalence, particularly among girls. While girls may be abducted by armed groups and be forced to marry, other characteristics of conflict, such as increasing food insecurity, lack of educational opportunities, and increasing poverty, may contribute to rates of child, early and forced marriage (CEFM). CEFM may also be a consequence of being raped as, in a variety of contexts, marriage to the perpetrator may be considered the preferred solution. Rates of CEFM vary vastly. One systematic review from conflict-affected countries documented CEFM rates of 3–51% among women and girls (McAlpine et al., 2016), while another found no consistent relationship between CEFM and conflict (Krafft et al., 2022). Nevertheless, when it occurs CEFM can have long-term negative effects on girls, including early pregnancy, sexual and reproductive health issues, school drop out, poverty, and mental health consequences.

BOX 5

CRSV in Ethiopia

In November 2020, conflict broke out between the Ethiopian federal government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). Tigray is a regional state in northern Ethiopia and leaders from the TPLF comprised most of Ethiopia's ruling coalition prior to 2018. All parties to the conflict have carried out CRSV against individuals of all sexes and ages in Ethiopia. During the first phase of the conflict from Nov 2020-June 2021, in retaliation to TPLF's military attack on the Northern command and to quell the resistance in Tigray, Ethiopian and allied forces have reportedly utilised CRSV. During the second phase of the conflict from July 2021 to December 2021,the TPLF took a less strategic but of an ethnically motivated and revenge rape (Mukwege Foundation, 2022). The UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict noted 'numerous and disturbing patterns' of sexual violence, including rape and gang rape against the elderly and women with disabilities during the conflict and in camp settings (UN, 2021b). The COVID-19 pandemic has also reportedly made it harder to track the scale of CRSV in the Northern Ethiopia region including Tigray and prevent it, by diverting essential resources, creating an environment of impunity and 'driving it underground' (Saldinger, 2021). There have also been reports of military actors forcing women and girls to exchange sex for access to basic commodities (United Nations, 2021). While the majority of those targeted are women and girls, some reports of men and boys experiencing sexual violence have emerged (Mazurana, 2021).

Violence against men and boys

Men and boys who engage with armed groups or are exposed to conflict may be more likely to perpetrate CRSV – either as a tactic of war or opportunistically during the breakdown of social norms and/or rule of law. Experiences of violence in childhood are often associated with perpetration of violence later in life and these connections are replicated in conflict-affected countries where violence may be normalised as part of everyday life. For example, in Somalia, men exposed to violence during their childhood were more than likely to report perpetrating non-partner sexual violence compared to those who did not report exposure to violence (Wirtz et al. 2018).

Men and boys also experience CRSV, though reported non-partner sexual violence prevalence rates are generally less when compared to sexual violence perpetrated against women and girls. While prevalence data is limited, less than 10% of men in South Sudan (6–9%) and Somalia (1.4%) reported experiencing some form of sexual violence during their lifetime (GWI and IRC, 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018). Similarly, while cases of sexual violence that make it into formal reporting structures are very limited, 97% of cases of CRSV documented by the Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict in 2021 were reported by women or girls (United Nations, 2022b). However, as with VAWG, these estimates are likely under-reported due to shame and stigma.

As with women and girls, certain sub-populations – such as armed combatants – may be more likely to experience sexual violence. For example, in Liberia, 33% of former male combatants reported having experienced sexual violence in a cross-sectional survey (Johnson et al., 2008). Furthermore, a systematic review of sexual abuse among male combatants (primarily former child soldiers) found rates that ranged from 5 to 57% among men (McApline et al., 2016). In addition, incarcerated men, particularly political prisoners in conflict-affected contexts, also often experience high rates of sexual violence (Ackerman, 2015). This highlights that, while women and girls experience higher rates of sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts, certain sub-populations of men and boys are at heightened risk.

BOX 6

CRSV in Afghanistan

Sexual violence and increasing impunity and reduction of support services for women and girls experiencing violence has been documented since the reinstallation of the Taliban (Amnesty International, 2021a). Prior to the fall of the previous government, and though chronically under-reported, 1,518 cases of VAWG were documented in the first six months of 2021 (Amnesty International, 2021b). Since the installation of the new government, there is no data on cases of VAWG and the closure of many legal and response mechanisms (e.g., shelters) further limit support for women and girls experiencing violence (Amnesty International, 2021b).

Risk factors for the perpetration of VAWG have also increased, including rising poverty and increased restrictions on the roles of women in society (Amnesty International, 2021b). One of the first acts of the new government was the release of prisoners throughout the country, including those imprisoned due to perpetration of VAWG. Women employed in the justice sector were dismissed from their positions and often forced into hiding due to threats of reprisals from men they had convicted (Amnesty International, 2021b). Women and girls are also being arbitrarily detained by the Taliban for “moral corruption” - with reports of torture and inhumane conditions within the prisons these women are being held at (Amnesty International, 2022). Rising sexual violence perpetrated against boys is also a concern - including traditional practices such as “bacha bazi”(where young boys who are brought for dancing or other forms of entertainment are exploited by older, more powerful men) (United Nations, 2021).

Severity

Rates of sexual violence are not only particularly high in conflict-affected settings, but these experiences of violence are often extremely brutal. The normalisation of violence within conflict-affected societies (and within armed groups where violent masculinities are valued) can contribute to sexual violence, characterised by increasing brutality in times of conflict (Koos, 2017; Ellsberg et al., 2021). Gang rape perpetrated by armed groups as part of conflict is documented (Wood, 2006; Van Rooyen et al., 2010; GWI and IRC, 2017). Women and girls often experience sexual violence multiple times in these settings or may be detained for long periods of times as sexual slaves (Wood, 2006). Qualitative research with former female combatants highlights how girls often viewed the sexual violence they experienced as more debilitating than their experiences in direct armed conflict (Denov and Maclure, 2006).

BOX 7

CRSV in South Sudan

Women and girls in South Sudan experience high rates of VAWG, compounded by gender inequitable norms and attitudes that justify the use of violence and view men in traditional roles such as protectors and heads of households and communities (GWI and IRC, 2017). Despite these widespread gender inequalities, CRSV has not been widely documented in all conflicts within the country. For example, during the war for independence from Khartoum (1955-2005), the South Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) sought to prevent the use of CRSV by explicitly speaking out against it. The geographic and political dynamics behind the crisis (with most of the military engagement occurring within the geographic territory of Southern Sudan) potentially helped restrain the use of CRSV as it was against the interests of the SPLA to utilise CRSV against their own people.

Conversely in more recent conflicts in the country (in 2016 and 2018), CRSV has been more widely documented. Rape has been reported during conflicts between the SPLA and the SPLA-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO) as well as in more localised intercommunal violence. For example, women and girls who sought UN protection in the UN Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites reported increases in CRSV during times of heightened conflict between the government and the SPLA-IO, while it has been noted that the use of CRSV is interlinked with efforts to ethnically cleanse a country of a rival group, with women targeted to reduce their reproductive capacity (Amnesty International, 2017; UN Human Rights Council, 2017). Abduction of girls and forced marriages, along with other forms of VAWG such as IPV and increases in traditional practices such as polygamy and wife inheritance have also been documented (GWI and IRC, 2017).

Consequences

Both immediate and long-term physical and mental consequences of CRSV affect the health and well-being of survivors. Survivors of sexual violence often face stigma as well as family and community rejection. Socially, they may be unable to marry or be ostracised for having an unwed pregnancy (or conversely, may be forced to marry to avoid the additional stigma of an unwed pregnancy) (Ellsberg, 2021). When an incident of violence occurs during conflict, these consequences may be heightened as an act of violence that is intensely private intersects with communal interests and political aims. The very existence of survivors of CRSV may be unwelcome reminders to their families and communities of the war and trauma associated with it. Discriminatory laws, heightened vulnerability to trafficking, and a perceived association of the survivors with the enemy endanger them. For survivors who bear children of the enemy, these consequences can continue throughout the woman's and her child's life and lead to ongoing stigma and isolation.

For those women and girls associated with fighting forces, reintegration into their communities, including any children they had, can be challenging. Research in Uganda with women who had been abducted by the Lord's Resistance Army found that over two-thirds experienced a

long-lasting impact on their mental and physical health due to forced marriage, rape, or forced pregnancy. Over ten years later, the enduring consequences of CRSV included anxiety, depression, and untreated sexually transmitted infections. Almost half faced stigma and social isolation, which extended to their children born in captivity (Woldetsadik et al., 2022).

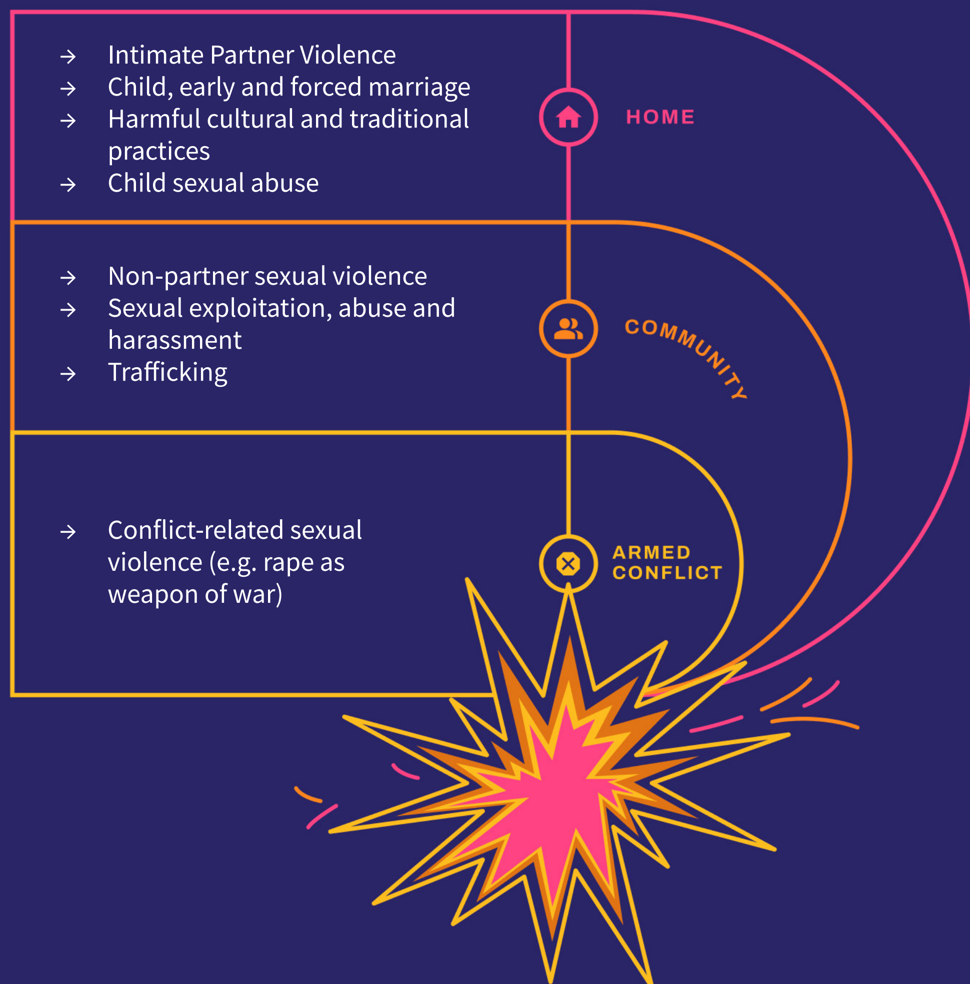
There are also long-term educational impacts when conflict-related sexual violence is perpetrated in and along school routes. Armed parties have committed sexual violence as part of targeted attacks against girls' education, most notably in 2014 when Boko Haram abducted 276 girls from their school in Chibok, Nigeria. Many of the schoolgirls were subjected to forced marriage, sexual slavery, and other forms of sexual violence. Research by the Global Coalition to Protect Children from Attack (GCPEA, 2019) shows the devastating long-term impact of conflict-related sexual violence on girls' loss of education, as parents pull their girls out of school as a precautionary measure.

In addition to these individual consequences, there are wider communal and societal outcomes due to the use of CRSV. For example, when CRSV is used as a tactic of war, it can be a driver of further conflict and lead to continued cycles of revenge (attacks, rapes, etc.) that actively undermine efforts to create peace. Abductions (for marriage, sexual slavery, etc.) and sexual violence may be perpetrated as a response of a community or armed group after experiencing an attack (Mootz et al., 2017; Ellsberg et al., 2021). This violence may increase in severity as attacks between rival groups continue. For example, in South Sudan, where an exchange of bride price is needed in order to marry, inter-communal attacks occur as means for young men to acquire the resources needed for marriage or to directly abduct women without payment (GWI and IRC, 2017). These attacks often set off cycles of revenge attacks within the country.

Furthermore, when CRSV is not addressed in peace agreements or these agreements include blanket amnesties for perpetrators, survivors may go into the post-conflict period lacking trust in the government, legal systems, or international or local non-governmental service providers. For example, the 1999 Lomé Agreement included provisions for blanket amnesty for sexual violence in Sierra Leone. Stakeholders interviewed in post-conflict Sierra Leone noted that rates of IPV and rape were still high and raised concerns that peacebuilding efforts had not achieved real peace for women and girls (Swaine et al., n.d.). Similarly, promises of amnesties for sexual violence have been seen to increase the use of this violence by rebel groups, suggesting that impunity can help sustain the practice of CRSV (Binningsbø and Nordås, 2022). Researchers have also demonstrated that conflicts are likely to re-emerge when rebel groups continue to perpetrate sexual violence during relatively "peaceful" periods (Nagel, 2021).

Key forms of VAWG in conflict-affected contexts

Fig. 1 The effects of armed conflict radiate from the conflict itself through the community and into the home.



Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment

SEAH has been widely documented in contexts of armed conflict and displacement as unequal power dynamics between those with money, influence, and power (including peacekeepers, aid workers, military contractors) and those without are affected by conflict. In Liberia, the arrival of UN peacekeeping forces deployed in part to respond to CRSV led to increases in SEAH (Olsson et al., 2020). More than 40% of women surveyed in greater Monrovia reported engaging in transactional sex with UN personnel, and there was an increase in the risk of engaging in transactional sex with each additional battalion of UN peacekeepers deployed (Beber et al., 2017). In more recent data from a population-based survey in three sites in South Sudan (Juba, Rumbek, and the Juba Protection of Civilian sites), about 20% of women and girls reported engaging in transactional sex to gain access to needed goods or services (GWI and the IRC, 2017). The lines between CRSV and SEAH can be blurred, with nominally consensual relationships occurring between soldiers and the conflict-affected population, where power differentials mean that true consent might not be able to be achieved (Olsson et al., 2020). Similarly, rape can occur in spaces where conflict-affected populations are trying to access goods or services. Given these linkages, SEAH could be considered a form of CRSV.

Intimate partner violence

Studies have shown that conflict can affect not only rates of non-partner sexual violence but is also often associated with increases in IPV, including sexual violence perpetrated by partners (Stark and Ager, 2011; Ellsberg et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2021). For example, in South Sudan, the likelihood of women and girls being subjected to IPV increased by two to three times if they had been directly exposed to an incident of armed conflict or had been displaced (compared to women and girls who did not have these experiences) (Ellsberg et al., 2020). In Nigeria,

the Boko Haram insurgency increased the risk of IPV by 4 percentage points, while IPV declined by 5 percentage points in areas not affected by Boko Haram (Ekhator-Mobayode et al., 2022). Similar findings in Colombia and Liberia demonstrate that displaced women had 40 to 55% greater odds of experiencing IPV than non-displaced women (Kelly et al., 2021). In the occupied Palestinian Territories, married and unmarried women experiencing military operations reported increased IPV (Müller and Tranchant, 2019).

Evidence also demonstrates extremely high levels of partner sexual violence (e.g., marital rape) occurring in conflict-affected settings. For example, in Liberia, about 70% of married or separated women in two counties had experienced marital rape in the previous 18 months; while about 20–25% of women had been raped outside of marriage during the same time period (CPC Network, 2009). In Somalia, 25% of women had experienced partner sexual violence, while 4% experienced non-partner sexual violence (Wirtz et al., 2018). While rates of both partner and non-partner violence are extremely high, in general, a much higher percentage of women and girls are being impacted by sexual violence from their partners. In addition, many women experience both partner and non-partner violence in conflict settings. For example, a risk factor identified among women and girls in South Sudan for experiencing non-partner sexual violence was previous experiences of IPV (Ellsberg et al., 2020).

These risks of violence continue into the post-conflict period, particularly perpetrated by former combatants and among women who were associated with armed groups, again demonstrating the connections between experiencing IPV and the dynamics of armed conflict. In post-conflict Uganda, former LRA abductees faced both stigma and IPV upon their return to their communities (Annan and Brier, 2010). Furthermore, women and girls have described the return of IPV to their homes as male combatants or prisoners have returned in contexts as varied as Northern Ireland, El Salvador, the former Yugoslavia, and Timor-Leste (Charlesworth and Wood, 2001; Fitzsimmons, 2005; Swaine, 2018; United Nations, 2002).

Trafficking

Globally, over 50% of detected trafficking victims were trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation, and 7 in 10 victims were women or girls (UNODC, 2021). While there are no specific estimates of prevalence of human trafficking in conflict settings, UN Security Council Resolution 2195 (2014) connects terrorism/insurgencies and its impact on international peace and security, including increases in trafficking. As with CRSV, lack of rule of law, impunity, economic instability/loss of livelihoods, state failure, and deterioration of support networks are some factors that may affect the prevalence of trafficking in humanitarian settings (IOM, 2020). Furthermore, migrants who do not have permission to work or stay in a country have been noted as particularly vulnerable, accounting for up to 65% of detected cases in some regions (UNODC, 2021). Intersections between trafficking and terrorism also exist, with terror groups trafficking women and girls for sexual purposes (UN Action, 2022).

Harmful cultural and traditional practices

Gendered harmful cultural and traditional practices (e.g., wife inheritance, bride price payment for marriage, and child abduction for the purpose of child marriage) may be heightened during conflict. For example, the death of men may increase polygamous relationships and wife inheritance practices (Ellsberg et al., 2021). Cultures that rely on bride prices in exchange for marriage may also find these practices changing during armed conflict (Hudson and Matfess, 2017). For example, in South Sudan, many tribes traditionally pay a bride price by gifting cattle to the bride's family in exchange for marriage. In the post-independence period, many regions of the country saw a sharp increase in the number of cattle needed to pay the bride prices. These circumstances led to increasing inter-communal raids, in which cattle were stolen to acquire the bride price needed to marry, or women and girls were abducted to marry in lieu of paying this bride price (Ellsberg et al., 2021). Rebel and terrorist groups may also offer to pay bride prices as an incentive to recruit new members (Hudson and Matfess, 2017). These circumstances again demonstrate the complexity of conflict dynamics and violence that may be perpetrated against women and girls during times of conflict.

Conceptual framework on drivers of CRSV

While gender inequality is the underlying root cause of all forms of VAWG, certain risk factors and drivers may increase the likelihood of violence. To conceptualise the drivers of CRSV, the following framework utilises a socio-ecological model to categorise and structure the available evidence. For brevity, we do not go into detail in the narrative on every potential driver of CRSV but highlight some of the most important aspects of each layer of the framework to help elucidate the complexities in times of armed conflict that may impact rates of CRSV.

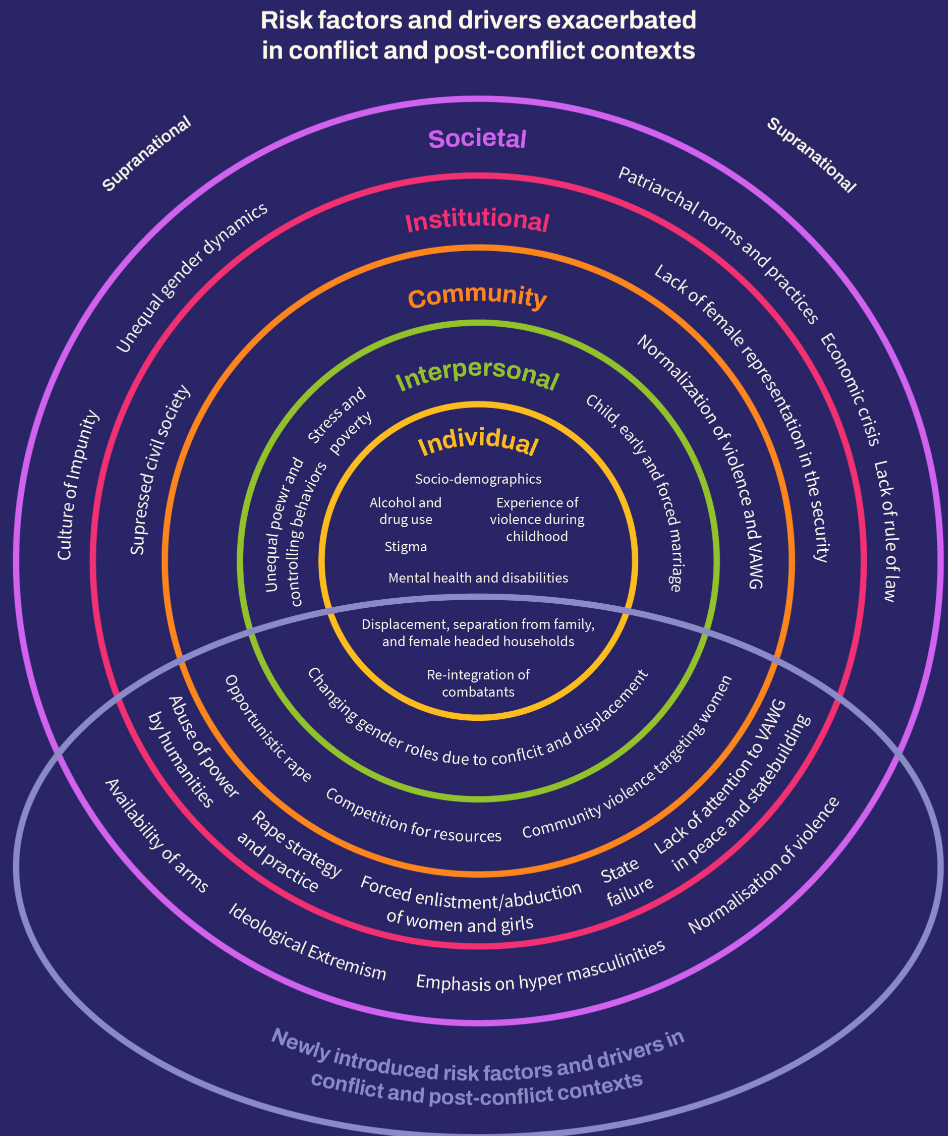


Figure 2: Socio-ecological Framework for Drivers of CRSV and Other Forms of Conflict-affected VAWG (Adapted from: Murphy et al. 2022)

There are a multitude of connections between wider conflict dynamics on the societal level, violence perpetrated against women as a tactic of armed conflict/at the community level, and interpersonal violence. At each level, the use of violence to resolve conflict or obtain objectives highlights the normalisation of violence from the global through individual experience. Armed conflict reinforces the unequal power dynamics that promote men's power over women and other marginalised groups and reflects views of hegemonic masculinities that valorise male power and strength, with armed conflict even employed under the pretext of ensuring that women are protected (Heathcote 2009, 2011, 2018). Within this context of patriarchy and unequal power dynamics between men and women there are a number of societal, community, and individual factors that may increase VAWG during conflict. While none of these factors alone may lead to the widespread use of CRSV, each increases the likelihood of sexual violence, both directly and indirectly related to the armed conflict.

Societal

While the introduction of an armed conflict into existing patriarchal societies may not always lead to CRSV, patriarchy is a necessary, if not sufficient, condition that can engender the conditions that promote the use of CRSV (Cohen et al., 2013). This patriarchy, often operationalised as inequitable gender norms, underpins all forms of VAWG, including CRSV. Armed conflict also reinforces societal ideas of hyper-masculinity that emphasise the use of violence to prove one's manhood or live up to an idealised understanding of "being a man" (typically strong, powerful, confident, quick to anger and use violence, etc.), which can lead to perpetration of violence (Banwell, 2014; Baaz and Stern, 2009; Meger 2010). For example, ex-combatants in the DRC spoke of men's biological urges as the drivers of their use of rape during conflict, promoting the idea of men as not being able to control their need for sex (Ingelaere and Wilén, 2017). Rape or other forms of sexual violence may also be used to "feminise" men by forcing them to experience a "female" form of violence or by making them "lesser" by attacking women under their protection (Baaz and Stern, 2009; Seifert, 1996).

Armed conflict helps to normalise the use of violence – both by combatants and community members living within societies where violence is increasing. Witnessing or perpetrating violence can lead to a feeling of disengagement or a depersonalisation for the victims/survivors (Muñoz-Rojas and Frésard, 2004). Societal norms shift as armed conflict increases, and the traditional taboos against the use of sexual violence may be reduced (Baaz and Stern, 2009; GWI and IRC, 2017). The COVID-19 pandemic has also exacerbated drivers of CRSV, such as gender inequality, economic stress, and food insecurity, while also 'feeding' the drivers of conflict and instability more broadly (Guterres, 2021).

Institutional

For CRSV directly associated with an armed conflict, the use of CRSV often serves a strategic military purpose, with commanding officers ordering the use of sexual violence to achieve the group's larger ideological and/or political goals, including as a tool of ethnic cleansing and genocide against rival ethnic groups (Olsson et al., 2020; Pinaud, 2020). However, while military commanders may directly order CRSV as a tactic, it is more often tolerated or perceived as not possible to be prevented by weak military leadership (Olsson et al., 2020).

The internal structure, composition, and recruitment of armed groups may help to explain why some of these groups utilise CRSV and others do not (ICAI, 2020). CRSV has been found to be more commonly employed (or at least documented) as perpetrated by state, rather than non-state, actors (Olsson et al., 2020). Weak command and control structures have been found to be associated with more use of CRSV within armed groups – as not all CRSV is sanctioned by the armed groups overall (Bigio and Vogelstein, 2017). There is evidence that social dynamics of groups, including the acceptance of the use of CRSV, may help to explain some of the CRSV perpetrated by armed groups (Olsson et al., 2020). Gang rape may be utilised to build group cohesion or demonstrate loyalty within armed groups (Cohen, 2017; Wood, 2018).

Women and girls may also be associated with fighting forces, including in fighting, or supporting roles (e.g., as combatants, harbouring or transferring weapons and persons, as insurgents or members of resistance movements, cooks, or other support personnel). These conditions increase the risk of experiencing CRSV for women and girls who may be considered "wives" of combatants or used as sexual slaves by armed groups (Coulter, 2009; McKay and Mazurana, 2004).

State failure and the inability of state structures to fulfil their roles as purveyors of justice increase impunity for perpetrators, which may increase the prevalence of CRSV. Similarly, overstretched police and justice systems may de-prioritise cases of sexual violence in the context of wider state failure. These conflict contexts also introduce new potential perpetrators of violence, who may come as part of peacekeeping operations, as aid workers, or with the private sector. The introduction (or increasing numbers) of these groups can introduce or further exacerbate inequitable power dynamics in conflict-affected communities, exacerbating risks of SEAH (Hutchinson et al., 2016; McAlpine et al., 2016).

Community

Physical insecurity associated with armed conflict can lead to increased vulnerability and risk of CRSV, including women and girls on the move as they flee violence and once they reach the relative safety of a refugee camp, internally displaced persons settlement, or other point of refuge. In camp settings, poor physical layout or security, including congested accommodations, lack of lighting, or placement of latrines/water points in unsafe

areas, can increase the risk of sexual violence and/or IPV (Bermudez et al., 2018; Freedman et al., 2016; GWI and IRC, 2017; Iyakaremye and Mukagatare, 2016; Muhwezi et al., 2011; Rosenberg, 2016). Women and girls living in displacement also experience the loss of normal support structures (as seen in an increase in female and child-headed households) which may put them at heightened risk of sexual violence, IPV, and SEAH (Cardoso et al., 2016; Wachter et al., 2018). Women and girls may be attacked when they leave the relative safety of population centres to collect firewood, farm, etc. (Bermudez et al., 2018; GWI and IRC, 2017; Iyakaremye and Mukagatare, 2016; Williams et al., 2018; Wirtz et al., 2014). These security concerns may also have secondary impacts on rates of CEFM, with families seeking to marry off their daughters as protection against sexual violence (Melnikas et al., 2020; Murphy et al., 2019; Mourtada et al. 2017; Sharma et al., 2020; Presler-Marshall et al., 2020).

Interpersonal

In addition to these drivers of VAWG directly associated with the introduction of armed conflict into an area, conflict can also exacerbate pre-existing risks of VAWG. Conflict conditions often leads to increased poverty and household stress, which may increase IPV and/or force women and girls to exchange sex to obtain access to goods and services (Cardoso et al., 2016; Ellsberg et al., 2021; Iyakaremye and Mukagatare, 2016; Mootz et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018). Due to male unemployment or while men are away directly engaging in armed conflict, women may also be called upon to take up new roles which are traditionally seen as "masculine" (e.g., breadwinner). While potentially contributing to women's empowerment, these dynamics can lead to backlash as men turn to violence to re-establish their authority (Cardoso et al., 2016; Guruge et al., 2017; Wachter et al., 2018).

Individual

Armed conflict can be associated with increased use of drugs and alcohol by both combatants and non-combatants. Male use of these substances has been linked to increases in perpetration of sexual violence and IPV (Guruge et al., 2017; Mootz et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018; Wachter et al., 2017). Conflict experiences may contribute to increases in mental disorders in men, which increase the risk that men perpetrate sexual violence (Goessmann et al., 2019; Nandi et al., 2017). Women and girls with disabilities may also be more likely to experience sexual violence (Hossain et al., 2020). Stigma faced by survivors of CRSV may also further marginalise them and increase their risk of experiencing additional violence; while violence experienced in childhood can have lasting impacts, including increasing the risk of men perpetrating violence in adulthood (Nandi et al., 2017).

Evidence on what works to prevent CRSV

Over the last decade, researchers and practitioners have explored what works to prevent violence against women and girls, with several rigorous studies in conflict settings (including randomised control trials (RCTs) of social norms change programmes in Somalia and South Sudan and adolescent girls' interventions in Ethiopia, DRC, Liberia and elsewhere). However, few studies measure the impact of prevention programming on CRSV specifically, while measurement challenges and research constraints (including stigma, access constraints, and ethical challenges in conducting rigorous research in resource-constrained settings) affect the quality of existing evidence.

Despite this, there is a growing evidence base on what works to reduce VAWG in conflict-affected settings and the quality of studies is also generally improving: a recent systematic review covering 17 evaluations of VAWG prevention programmes in conflict and humanitarian settings rated the quality of 10 studies as good, six as fair, and only one as poor (Spangaro et al., 2021). Other policy-focused research (e.g., cross-national studies on the effectiveness of peacekeeping to prevent CRSV) adds to our knowledge of potential evidence-based prevention strategies.

This section pulls together the disparate evidence to identify promising programming and policy initiatives that may reduce CRSV and other associated forms of VAWG during armed conflict. As highlighted in UN Action's Framework for the Prevention of Conflict Related Sexual Violence, preventing CRSV requires actions throughout each level of the socio-ecological model (including supernational, institutional/structural, community, and individual). We consider both evidence of approaches that specifically seek to reduce sexual violence and wider initiatives that seek to empower women and girls, reduce power imbalances, reframe masculinities, and reduce VAWG more broadly. See Table 1 for a summary of the approaches explored below.

Evidence overview of promising approaches to prevent CRSV

	INITIATIVES TO PREVENT CRSV	INITIATIVES TO PREVENT WIDER VAWG THAT COULD BE EFFECTIVE TO PREVENT CRSV	INITIATIVES THAT TARGET RISK FACTORS FOR VAWG/CRSV IN CONFLICT SETTINGS	INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT AN ENABLING ENVIRONMENT TO PREVENT CRSV
APPROACHES	**Localised security initiatives,** e.g., alternative fuel projects or armed accompaniment when collecting firewood. **Interventions to promote positive masculine norms within the security sector** e.g., Living Peace in DRC and Burundi. **UN missions and peacekeepers.** Some policy-focused research has demonstrated reductions in CRSV after the introduction of peacekeepers and case studies have documented how missions can support state forces to reduce impunity. However, there are also documented increases in SEA associated with deployment of peacekeepers.	**Community-based social norms change,** e.g., Rethinking Power in Haiti; Transforming Masculinities in eastern DRC. **Lifeskills interventions targeting adolescent girls,** such as Girl Empower in Liberia, which integrated girls' mentoring with conditional cash transfers and reduced child marriage and risky sexual behaviours. **Livelihoods and economic empowerment programming with social empowerment/ gender transformative approaches.** While data from non-conflict settings has shown these approaches can reduce VAWG, evidence in conflict settings is mixed. However, there are examples of reductions in IPV from some studies e.g., village savings and loan groups, paired with gender-dialogue groups for couples decreased physical IPV in Côte d'Ivoire.	**Participatory approaches to identifying and mitigating risk,** e.g., Empowered Aid in Lebanon and Uganda. **Women and Girls Safe Spaces (WGSS)** to build social networks and skills and access GBV services, e.g., COMPASS, which has been seen to improve outcomes for girls that may reduce their risk factors for VAWG, but did not demonstrate a reduction of violence, potentially because of the focus only on girls themselves and not the wider community. **Emergency cash transfers,** where cash is linked to VAWG response programmes and services, e.g., emergency cash transfer programmes in Syria helped reduce negative coping strategies for women, which may reduce risks for non-partner sexual violence. However, reported IPV increased. **School-based programming,** e.g., Peace Education in Afghanistan has shown declines in peer violence, corporal punishment and patriarchal attitudes, but impacts on VAWG were not evaluated. **Mental health and reintegration support** to aid the transition from armed groups to civilian life in post-conflict societies and reframe militarised masculinities after leaving armed groups. These approaches may reduce risk factors for CRSV perpetration (e.g., mental health) but there is insufficient evidence to know if they reduce the perpetration of VAWG. More broadly, interventions targeting the military during armed conflict is weak.	**Advancing gender equality,** e.g., pass and allocate budgets to implement national laws, statutes or penal codes to prevent discriminatory practices, language, or any other form of systemic discrimination. **Supporting women's rights organisations, women human rights defenders and women's movements.** **Women's meaningful participation in peacebuilding and establishing accountability mechanisms** such as national human rights institutions, civilian oversight bodies and independent monitoring bodies. **Adoption and implementation of International human rights treaties and the domestication of international human rights law.** **Establishing effective and survivor-centred justice systems** at international, national and community level. **Use of national and global commitments –** by state and non-state actors and the UN, e.g., Geneva Call's Deeds of Commitment. **Use of sanctions** in a targeted and consistent way, with sexual violence as an independent criterion, e.g., Central African Republic.
EVIDENCE SUMMARY	Overall, there is weak evidence (primarily relying on M&E data and qualitative data) or no evidence on the effectiveness of initiatives to prevent CRSV specifically.	Some rigorous evidence (RCT and quasi-experimental data) is available for interventions targeting wider forms of VAWG in conflict. However, these results need to be replicated in further contexts and most evidence more strongly links these approaches to reductions in IPV rather than non-partner sexual violence. Further adaptation and evaluation are needed to test the effectiveness of these approaches for CRSV specifically.	Some evidence from interventions that have impacted risk factors for experiencing or perpetrating VAWG or CRSV in conflict settings but results have not shown an impact on reducing women's experiences of violence (or have not been evaluated for this).	Efforts to create an enabling environment to prevent CRSV do not necessarily require (or have) data on their impact on preventing CRSV. However, research is needed (and largely missing) on how to ensure each approach is most effectively employed.

NOTES

Red is not enough evidence to make any assessment on the effectiveness of the approach on preventing CRSV or VAWG in conflict.

Orange is some evidence on improving violence outcomes but it isn't sufficient to draw a firm conclusion.

Violet are approaches that have been shown to impact risk factors but haven't impacted on violence outcomes (or haven't been evaluated for this).

Green is data from impact evaluations (either an RCT or quasi-experimental design) that shows significant reductions in violence outcomes.

Black text are approaches that are understood to support an enabling environment but, on its own, likely cannot prevent CRSV. As these approaches are generally not candidates for impact evaluations, an overall assessment of the evidence is not given.

Overall, there is underinvestment in evidence on CRSV and VAWG in conflict settings. These assessments are meant to guide but are not definitive. The best available data is from only one or two studies, with varying study designs and evaluations, making it difficult to generalise the overall effectiveness of this approach. We also recognise that alternative evaluation methods are more appropriate for some approaches (e.g. working with non-state groups). For all approaches, practice-based knowledge is an important source of learning. The sources for these studies are provided as part of the next section and references.

While no assessment of the evidence is given for enabling environment factors as these initiatives are not necessarily appropriate for impact evaluations (either because they should be components of wider change efforts – e.g., trainings, commitments not to use CRSV – or because they are wider efforts – e.g. strengthening justice systems – that occur for many reasons including affecting the use of CRSV), further research is needed to understand how best to implement these initiatives and document the outcomes they are able to achieve.

Access to quality response services are prerequisites to ethical and effective prevention. This is particularly important as prevention programmes can increased awareness and understanding of what constitutes violence and increase the likelihood that survivors seek support services. There is also promising evidence from the Communities Care programme in Somalia (see below) that combined community-based prevention and response programming can both change harmful social norms that sustain sexual violence and increase the confidence of women and girls in available survivor support services (Glass et al., 2019).

Prevention approaches

Effective prevention needs to build on both wider gender equality efforts and ensure women's (including survivor's) meaningful participation throughout. Results from a recent evaluation of CARE's Women Lead in Emergencies approach show the importance of women's leadership in humanitarian settings, and how, by intentionally working with women to reduce barriers that prevent them from taking up leadership positions, women can be more engaged in decision-making processes and take up leadership roles that lead to more collective action and better humanitarian responses (CARE International, 2022). These wider efforts need to be complemented by specific structural and operational actions (such as social norms change, rule of law strengthening, etc.) and interventions that target the drivers of CRSV in each context (UN Action, 2022). As such, the approaches laid out here, while assessed separately, likely would be most effective when implemented in combination.

Below, we start from interventions to meet women's immediate security needs and mitigate the immediate risks of CRSV that can and should be rolled out quickly in times of conflict. We move on to consider what works to influence long-term behaviour change and empowerment, recognising that each piece builds upon one another over time.

1

Risk mitigation activities to improve the immediate security of women and girls

Contexts: Acute emergencies and protracted crises (e.g., refugee camps, IDP settlements)
Level of operation: Supranational/institutional/community
Types of Violence: CRSV, SEAH, Trafficking

Risk mitigation in humanitarian action

Risk mitigation activities seek to "reduce the risk of exposure to GBV (e.g., ensuring that reports on 'hot spots' are immediately addressed through risk-reduction strategies; ensuring sufficient lighting and security patrols are in place from the onset of establishing displacement camps etc.)" (Inter-Agency Standing Committee, 2015). However, risk mitigation is often not well-funded or prioritised (Murphy and Bourassa, 2021). Key approaches to mitigate the risk of VAWG within the humanitarian space are laid out in the GBV Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence in Humanitarian Action and emphasise how risk mitigation is the responsibility of all humanitarian actors. For example, in the Water, Sanitation and Hygiene sector, this may include separating latrines for males and females and ensuring locks on latrines and showers, which can reduce the risk that women and girls experience sexual violence. These traditional risk mitigation activities can also be expanded to specifically consider risks in spaces where reported cases of CRSV are particularly high, such as in detention centres, as well as mitigating risks of other forms of violence that increase in humanitarian settings, such as trafficking for sexual exploitation. While principles and approaches have been developed to consider prevention/risk mitigation efforts in these contexts (see an example of guidance for preventing CRSV in detention settings and the Global Protection Cluster's guidance on anti-trafficking actions), there is no empirical evidence of their effectiveness.

Throughout all risk mitigation efforts, proactive engagement of women and girls to identify safety risks and develop strategies to reduce these risks are important components of humanitarian responses (e.g., community safety mapping efforts, safety audits, etc). These participatory approaches have been highlighted in programmes such as the Global Women's Institute's Empowered Aid participatory action research project that works with women and girls to identify potential areas of risk for SEAH (e.g. during food distributions, etc.) and to create strategies to reduce these risks (see box on next page).

Other examples integrate CRSV and VAWG prevention within community-based peacebuilding initiatives. For example, in South Sudan, the work of the Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) incorporates aspects of unarmed civilian protection and women's empowerment to work through community mechanisms to prevent VAWG, including CRSV. Working with local groups to understand context-specific drivers of VAWG and seeking to disrupt patriarchal norms reinforced by armed conflict, NP's approach promotes community-led efforts to identify and address the risks women and girls face. To support this work, NP establishes Women's Protection teams who utilise methods such as protective accompaniment, patrols, mediation with authorities and other context-specific tactics to reduce the risks they experience (Nonviolent Peaceforce, 2022). These efforts, while not evaluated for their impact on CRSV specifically, demonstrate how peacebuilding and VAWG prevention efforts can be integrated to improve the immediate security of women and girls.

BOX 8

Empowered Aid: Transforming Gender and Power Dynamics in Humanitarian Aid Delivery (Potts, Fattal et al., 2020; Potts, Kolli et al., 2020)

Context: Ongoing humanitarian aid operations in Uganda (Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement) and Lebanon (the city of Tripoli)

Intervention: The Empowered Aid programme was launched in 2018 to uncover and test proactive measures to mitigate risk and prevent abuse. In Uganda, three pilots were conducted within food, dignity kit, and solar lamp distributions: increasing the number of women aid workers at the distribution site and organising small groups of aid recipients to travel and arrive at the distribution together during pre-assigned times. In Lebanon, two pilots were conducted to distribute fuel vouchers and food. The first utilised a door-to-door distribution modality with at least one female aid worker present and the second organised small groups of aid recipients to travel and arrive at the distribution meeting point together at pre-assigned times.

Implementation team: Global Women's Institute with International Rescue Committee and World Vision (Uganda), and CARE International (Lebanon)

Research methods: Participatory research with refugee women and girls, their communities, and emerging women researchers, who formulated sets of recommendations for safer aid distributions, which were then tested in small-scale pilots in ongoing humanitarian aid operations. Using the research findings on SEAH risk, the research team collaboratively adapted distribution monitoring tools – such as safety audits, surveys, and focus groups – to proactively monitor for SEAH and address risks as soon as they arise.

Findings: In Uganda, at the food distribution pilot, where the research team increased the proportion of female staff to 100% and increased volunteers to be majority female, household survey respondents reported higher levels of feeling "free of fear" than other food distribution sites (84% vs 77%), as well as lower levels of fear than at other food distribution sites (3% vs 8%).

In Lebanon, in both pilots, women and men consistently identified the door-to-door distribution modality as safer during the household survey, citing avoiding SEAH-related risks associated with taxis or going to a distribution site. Survey respondents who attended the food distribution pilot reported high satisfaction from both distribution modalities (82%), with the pre-assigned times distribution reporting slightly higher levels of satisfaction than the door-to-door distribution (82% and 77% respectively).

The project is now supporting international and local aid actors in East Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia to strengthen the enabling environment for safe access to humanitarian aid for all crisis-affected people, including women and girls in all their diversity.

Localised security initiatives

Localised security initiatives can help reduce opportunistic CRSV against women. For example, firewood interventions (e.g., fuel-efficient cookstoves) can reduce the need to leave populated areas, while increases in physical protection (e.g., accompaniment, security patrols) can reduce the risk of sexual violence (Spangaro et al., 2013). In Kenya, an evaluation of a firewood project at the Dadaab refugee camp found a 45% decrease in reported rapes during the period the programme was implemented, while there was a simultaneous increase of 78–113% in other locations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2001). A well-trained and supervised anti-banditry unit that frequently patrolled the area was one reported factor that contributed towards reducing the rate of sexual violence. The employment of early warning systems can also complement and help direct when to scale up security activities as they can help stakeholders monitor and assess when increases in CRSV are likely to occur. While no evaluations have examined the effectiveness of such systems, best practices have been consolidated to inform implementation (see Box 9).

BOX 9

Best practices in CRSV early warning and monitoring (Idris, 2022)

CRSV early warning and monitoring systems help identify risk and vulnerable groups so that prevention programming can be targeted to areas with the most need. Best practices identified include:

- **Staffing of peace missions:** It is important to have specialist personnel such as Women's Protection Advisors and to ensure that women are included in peacebuilding teams. However, all mission staff are responsible for monitoring CRSV and should be sensitised and trained on CRSV.
- **Community engagement:** Build trust with the community to promote reporting of cases. Dedicated personnel – such as community liaison assistants – are needed to support this work. Local leaders should be mobilised to support anti-CRSV initiatives.
- **Guiding principles:** Utilise approaches that protect survivors and do no harm. For example: ensure the safety of survivors and the confidentiality of data; acquire informed consent; treat survivors with respect; do not discriminate and apply objectivity and impartiality.
- **Collection, sharing, and analysis of CRSV information:** Use appropriate and standardised data collection templates and do not share confidential data with other agencies/actors.
- **Utilise CRSV early warning matrix of indicators:** Use the matrix to assess changes in the operating environment and potential increases in CRSV.
- **Raise awareness and advocate:** Raise awareness in the community about reporting mechanisms. Work to increase knowledge and reduce stigma around CRSV.
- **Raise the alarm:** When potential risks of CRSV are identified, communicate this to the affected populations and implement interventions to increase the immediate security of the population (e.g., increasing patrols of peacekeepers).

UN Missions and peacekeepers

UN Missions and UN peacekeepers have roles to play in providing immediate security to conflict-affected populations; however, peacekeeping personnel often have little experience with preventing or responding to CRSV (Olsson et al., 2020). UN peace operations and political missions are mandated to address CRSV, including establishing, monitoring, analysing, and reporting arrangements; securing and implementing commitments to end CRSV; and supporting security sector reform (SSR) efforts. Dedicated staff – such as Women's Protection Advisors – have been reported to have a beneficial effect in ensuring that CRSV mandates are implemented and monitored (Olsson et al., 2020). However, evidence of the efficacy of these initiatives to reduce CRSV is mixed.

At a macro level, researchers have studied whether the presence of UN Missions and peacekeepers have impacted the reported rates of CRSV. One study found that there was, on average, no reduction in state perpetrated CRSV after peacekeeping operations were introduced (Johansson and Hultman, 2019). However, they did find that UN Missions with a protection of civilians' mandate and a sizable UN police force were associated with fewer reports of CRSV perpetrated by rebel groups. Their work also draws out the importance of a strong command and control structure within the armed group that peacekeepers are seeking to influence, suggesting that opportunistic or fragmented levels of CRSV are harder for centralised UN structures to influence. Another study used a different approach by matching conflicts that were similar but did, or did not, receive a peacekeeping mission (Kirschner and Miller, 2019). In this case, the researchers found that the very presence of a UN mission reduced the chance of CRSV by 20% and that this decrease is even greater when peacekeepers were deployed. They noted that larger deployments and missions with large civilian components were most effective at reducing CRSV.

More detailed research into three UN peacekeeping missions (UNMISS in South Sudan, MONUSCO in the DRC, and MINUSCA in CAR) documented examples of good practices. These included: UN Missions proactively engaging women in early warning forums, collecting sex-disaggregated data, and including information about CRSV in their reporting (Spink, 2020). This research also documented specific outcomes of the work of peacekeeping missions, such as engagement with armed actors, the release of women and girls abducted during conflict, securing commitments by armed actors not to employ CRSV, and reductions in reported incidents of CRSV. However, progress has been uneven, and efforts to prevent and respond to CRSV have not been fully institutionalised. For example, the researchers found gaps in awareness and training of mission military personnel due to regular rotation of troops. Furthermore, the capacity of gender and CRSV specialists was often stretched thin, and commitment among military leaders and lower-level civilian leadership to address CRSV was found to be inconsistent (Spink, 2020).

There are also opportunities for missions and peacekeeping forces to engage with state actors to reduce the use of CRSV. State forces may be more susceptible to international sanctions than non-state groups and have more interaction with the international community – such as being trained or otherwise supported by peacekeeping forces – which present moments for influence to institute policies and practices that may help to reduce the use of CRSV (Olsson et al., 2020). However, there are also concerns that some efforts to support a state in addressing CRSV lead to the development of parallel systems that separate the protection and support needs of women and girls who experienced CRSV from those who experience other forms of VAWG. See Box 10 for an example of UN support to state forces in the DRC.

BOX 10

Supporting State Forces in the DRC (Olsson et al., 2020)

Context: Conflict-affected areas of the eastern DRC

Intervention: The United Nations Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUC) was mandated to support the national military – the Forces Armeés de la RDC (FARDC). Their approach tried to reduce impunity of state forces by stipulating that armed forces that committed violations against civilians would not be eligible for UN support (a policy which eventually would become the UN Human Rights Due Diligence Policy) and supporting the military justice system to fight impunity within their ranks.

Research methods: Case study

Findings: Over time, the number of violations recorded attributed to the FARC and Police Nationale Congolaise (PNC) reduced (though some increases were noted during periods of increased political tension) (Zerrougui, 2018). However, these reductions cannot be directly attributed to the work of Mission as they could have been caused by many factors and are based on reported cases (which may not reflect the true underlying prevalence).

Mechanisms that were believed to help induce these changes, including: convicting senior elements of the FARDC; signed commitments by commanders to prevent and address sexual violence; convictions of members of the state security forces; and the provision of training on legal obligations. A UN Comprehensive Strategy against Sexual Violence in Conflict and National Action Plan for Gender-based Violence were then developed to further support efforts to reduce CRSV and VAWG in general (Olsson et al., 2020).

Despite some successes in preventing CRSV, UN peacekeepers have been implicated in the use of sexual violence in peacekeeping operations, often due to predatory and exploitative sexual cultures within peacekeeping missions. Data relating to SEAH perpetrated by peacekeepers has indicated that there are higher levels of reporting of such violence in operations involving larger troop contingents (i.e., a greater number of men), conflict environments where there were lower numbers of conflict-related deaths, but had high levels of sexual violence, and in less developed host countries (for the peacekeeping missions) (Nordås and Rustad, 2013).

Research has also shown that peacekeeping missions with greater numbers of women in peacekeeping roles, as well as troops from contributing countries with more gender equitable norms, were less prone to SEAH (Karim and Beardsley, 2016). However, these studies highlight that female peacekeepers are often prevented from leaving the UN compounds and engaging with the populations they are meant to serve, suggesting that, at least in active conflict settings, the full benefits of having this gender diversity within peacekeeping forces may not be seen (Karim, 2017). The UN has adopted a "zero tolerance" policy towards the perpetration of CRSV/SEAH by peacekeeping personnel, and community-based complaints mechanisms to facilitate the reporting of cases are now standard in humanitarian action. However, the effectiveness of these efforts is not fully known. A 2008 study of the zero-tolerance approach of SEAH in Haiti and Liberia highlighted that it had yielded some positive results, but poor enforcement and challenging local conditions tended to dilute prevention efforts (Jennings, 2008). Furthermore, a study of sexual exploitation and abuse perpetrated by peacekeeping personnel in various contexts between 2007 and 2014 found that breakdowns in military discipline within lower ranks and socialisation towards sexual violence perpetration were major risk factors for such violence (Moncrief, 2017). Given this, improvements to military discipline and counteracting such socialisation amongst rank-and-file peacekeepers may help prevent SEAH/CRSV – though no empirical research has shown how the culture of UN peacekeeping missions can be shifted. In response to these documented issues, the UN General Secretary set up a "trust fund" to support victims and survivors of SEAH, introduced a strategy to prevent and respond to this violence, and data is now published about allegations of SEAH.

Safe spaces and life skills interventions

Contexts: Acute emergencies, protracted crises and post-conflict
Level of operation: Individual
Types of Violence: CRSV, IPV, CEFM

Women and girls' safe spaces

Women and Girls' Safe Spaces (WGSS) have been used for decades by VAWG actors in humanitarian programming as an entry point for women and adolescent girls to report protection concerns and voice their needs. At the most basic level, WGSS are physical spaces where women and adolescent girls can be free from harm and harassment. They can also build knowledge, support well-being, develop confidence and voice, support the development of social networks, and link survivors to support services.

A recent systematic review of safe space and life skills interventions identified 7 studies of these approaches in humanitarian settings but found that none reported reductions in exposure to or incidence of VAWG (though these measures were not included in all studies). Three studies documented some improvements in psychosocial well-being, social support, and attitudes toward rites of passage (Stark et al., 2022). Other evaluations (e.g., the COMPASS programme) have shown improvements in outcomes such as more friendships, new mentors, and improved family relationships; however, they have often not led to reductions in rates of violence (Stark et al., 2018). It is posited that these mixed results stem from the fact that these programmes focus on girls themselves and therefore can only have limited impacts on the root causes of VAWG (e.g., gender inequitable norms) which need to be changed throughout the wider community. However, it is also possible that interventions targeting adolescent girls won't see their full effect on VAWG reduction until girls get older and enter into long term, cohabitating relationships.

Combined interventions that promote adolescent girls' empowerment

Combined interventions are more promising, such as Girl Empower, which integrates a girls' mentoring programme with conditional cash transfers paid on the condition of a girl's attendance at mentorship sessions. Participation in the Girl Empower programme was associated with reduced rates of child marriage and risky sexual behaviours, though it did not have an impact on the risk of being raped, and participation slightly increased the risk of experiencing non-consensual touching (Özler et al., 2020).

BOX 11

Girl Empower, Liberia (Hallman et., 2018; Özler et al., 2020)

Context: 56 communities in Nimba County, Liberia, for 10 months during 2016

Intervention: The Girl Empower (GE) mentorship programme aims to equip adolescent girls with the skills and experiences necessary to make healthy life choices and reduce the risk of experiencing sexual violence. The evaluation also tested the additional impact of a conditional cash transfer (GE+) paid to families. This payment was based on a girl's attendance at mentorship sessions. 772 girls aged 13–14 years old participated in life-skill session groups of 6 to 20 girls that met on a weekly basis in safe spaces. Girls were guided through 32 weeks of curriculum-based sessions by young female mentors from the community.
Implementation team: International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Research methods: A cluster-randomised controlled trial with three study arms (control, GE, and GE+, clustered at the village-level).

Findings: Girl Empower reduced rates of child marriage and increased condom use. All these impacts were sustained 12 months after the end of the programme. At 24 months, there were sustained improvements in gender attitudes, life skills and sexual and reproductive health, but sexual violence did not reduce among adolescent girls. The study also highlighted the importance of monitoring unintended risks and building in careful protection considerations when delivering cash. Girls in the group that received the Girl Empower programming plus a cash transfer had a slightly, but statistically significant, greater chance of experiencing non-consensual touching. The study concluded that violence prevention programmes should be paired with response services designed for adolescent girls.

Safe space and life skills interventions should be inclusive. Research by the Women's Refugee Commission in conflict-affected communities in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Jordan, Turkey, Egypt, Iraq, and the Northern Caucasus in the Russian Federation has emphasised the importance of inclusive, safe spaces for girls with disabilities to reduce their risk of violence. Adolescent girls with disabilities are at a higher risk of violence but are often excluded from girls' programming due to misperceptions about their capacity to participate (Pearce et al., 2016).

3

Reducing economic stress and empowering women and girls

Contexts: Acute emergencies, protracted crises, and post-conflict
Level of operation: Community/individual
Types of violence: CRSV, IPV, CEFM

Economic empowerment, livelihoods and cash transfer approaches often seek to reduce household stress, decrease reliance on negative coping strategies (including survival sex and SEAH), and increase the ability of women to leave abusive situations. Globally, combined economic and social empowerment programmes that take agender transformative approach have been found to be effective at reducing experiences of IPV (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). Similarly, cash (or food) transfers, particularly those combined with social components such as group discussions on gender roles and relationships, have been seen to be effective in reducing IPV (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). However, there is very limited information about how these interventions affect non-partner sexual violence.

Cash transfer programming

The use of cash transfer programmes is widespread in emergency settings. While we know these approaches can help populations meet their immediate needs, consideration is also needed to minimise risks and optimise their potential impact on reducing VAWG. For cash transfer programmes, available evidence has shown mixed impacts in conflict-affected settings, and some concerns around increased risk of SEAH and IPV. A literature review of 28 studies on the use of cash transfers in humanitarian settings found that 80% of reviewed studies reported some positive effect on IPV (Cross, Manell, and Megevand, 2018). However, most of the studies were not impact evaluations, limiting the conclusions that can be drawn from this evidence. The one impact evaluation included in the review found that cash assistance did not affect child marriage (the one VAWG outcome assessed) (Battistin, 2016).

Other research, for example a study on an unconditional cash and voucher programme in Somalia, found cases of women being included on beneficiary lists in exchange for sexual favours, and 20% of interview respondents reported having experienced threats or violence – all believing the threats to be related to their receipt of aid (Hedlund et al., 2013). In conflict-affected northeast Syria, an evaluation of an emergency cash transfer programme (See Box 12) found that, while women reported increased food security and reductions in negative coping strategies such as children working, begging, or going into severe debt, IPV increased among married women, including sexual and economic intimate partner violence, although it is not clear whether this can be attributed to the cash transfer (Falb et al., 2019).

BOX 12

Emergency Cash Transfers in Raqqa Governorate, Syria (Falb et al., 2019)

Context: Raqqa Governorate, northeast Syria, in 2018. Cash transfer targeted areas from which ISIS had recently withdrawn and which had received new influxes of internally displaced people fleeing conflict in Raqqa City.

Intervention: Emergency, short-term (3-month), unconditional cash transfer for non-food items (NFIs). Monthly cash transfers of US$76 per month targeted at heads of households, regardless of sex.

Implementation team: International Rescue Committee (IRC)

Research methods: The mixed methods assessment included a pre-post-test design combined with qualitative interviews at endline. Conducted under the What Works to Prevent VAWG programme, the study sought to understand whether cash can improve protection outcomes for women and girls in acute emergency settings.

Findings: Three weeks after receiving the final transfer, women reported increased food security and reduced negative coping strategies (e.g., having children work, begging and going into severe debt). However, married women also reported increased intimate partner violence during the cash transfer period, with significant increases in sexual violence and economic abuse from partners. Without a control arm, it is difficult to attribute the increase in IPV to the cash transfer. Furthermore, it is possible that the increased disclosure of violence at endline was due to women becoming more comfortable with the research team.

The very short-term nature of the project may also have limited the potential impact on gender and VAWG outcomes. Nevertheless, the study highlights the need for further research on how to build gender components and risk mitigation strategies into acute cash responses, and for adequate protection mechanisms for women and girls to be instituted across humanitarian cash programmes.

Livelihoods and economic empowerment programming combined with gender transformative approaches

Livelihoods and economic empowerment programming that incorporates skills building/asset transfers and aspects that seek to rebalance power between men and women (e.g., sharing decision-making, changing gender norms, etc.) have been found to be effective at preventing VAWG globally (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). These approaches could be effective in conflict-affected contexts, and studies have demonstrated improvements in gender equitable and quality relationships (Green et al., 2015; Glass et al., 2017; Gibbs et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2013). However, statistically significant reductions on VAWG outcomes have not always been documented. For example, Pigs for Peace is a livestock microfinance programme implemented in conflict-affected DRC that demonstrated reductions in male perpetrated IPV, but those reductions were not statistically significant between the control and intervention groups. Studies in Afghanistan and Uganda documented improvements in relationships, but no reductions in IPV (Green et al., 2015; Gibbs et al., 2020). However, a study from conflict-affected Côte d'Ivoire found that women's participation in village savings and loans (VSLA) groups and gender dialogue groups (with their male partners) reduced reported experiences of physical IPV", though sexual and economic IPV were not reduced (Gupta et al., 2013).

Attitudes and norms change interventions

Contexts: Protracted crisis and post-conflict
Level of operation: Institutional/community
Types of Violence: CRSV, IPV, CEFM, Other Traditional Practices

Community-based social norms change programming

Due to the association of all VAWG, including CRSV, with patriarchal norms and practices, community-based interventions that seek to transform attitudes, behaviours, and social norms that sustain unequal gender power relations and sexual violence in conflict are core to prevention efforts. Interventions such as the Transforming Masculinities programme, which works with faith leaders and community champions to change social norms, have demonstrated that reductions in non-partner sexual violence are possible with a community-based norm change approach (Palm et al., 2019).

BOX 13

Transforming Masculinities in the DRC (Palm et al., 2019)

Context: 15 conflict-affected villages in Ituri Province, eastern DRC.

Intervention: A gender-transformative approach that utilises faith leaders and communities as a means to change social norms around gender and violence. The approach works with members of faith communities to reflect, including through the use of scriptural reflections, on their understanding of gender, masculinities, and gender equality through the lens of faith. The programme targets both faith leaders and community "gender champions" from the wider community to engage community members through a series of "community conversations" to reflect critically on ideas around gender and the use of violence. Faith leaders then share these concepts with the wider community through sermons, prayer groups, youth groups and counselling. Community action groups are also set up to provide basic psychosocial support to survivors and help them access medical treatment.

Implementation team: Tearfund and HEAL Africa

Research methods: Longitudinal qualitative panel study and baseline/endline household surveys

Findings: Significant reductions in both IPV (rates dropped by more than half) and non-partner sexual violence (five-fold reduction in rates of non-partner sexual violence), as well as improved attitudes towards gender equality and VAWG. However, there were no comparison or control communities for this study; therefore, we cannot conclude that the programme caused these changes.

Other community-based social norms interventions – such as UNICEF's Communities Care programme (See Box 14) – have also documented significant reductions in the acceptance of harmful social norms that sustain sexual violence (Glass et al., 2019). Newer adaptations of successful social norms programmes, such as SASA!, are now integrating new approaches that target behaviour change within institutions (e.g., businesses, government offices, churches, etc.) as well as the wider community (see Raising Voices' SASA! Together programme). The approach is also being adapted for humanitarian and insecure settings. For example, a recent evaluation of SASA! adapted for the Haitian context (Rethinking Power) was implemented in what has been described by the UN as a humanitarian catastrophe (Cursino, 2022). Despite increases in gang insecurity as well as economic and social upheaval in the intervention area, the study demonstrated decreases in multiple forms of VAWG among women and adolescent girls in general and specifically among women and girls with disabilities (Bourassa et al., 2022a; Bourassa

et al., 2022b). For example, in the past 12 months, physical and/or sexual IPV halved within the intervention group (and declined significantly compared to the group that did not receive the intervention). However, no change was detected in the rates of non-partner sexual violence among the intervention or comparison groups. However, in the context of increasing gang violence and community insecurity (which specifically occurred in the intervention sites), the fact that rates of non-partner violence did not increase was viewed as promising.

BOX 14

Communities Care Programme: Somalia, and South Sudan

Context: Internally displaced camps and communities in Somalia (Mogadishu) and South Sudan (Yei and Warrap).

Intervention: Community-based model for preventing and responding to sexual violence against girls and women in conflict-affected settings. The programme focuses both on strengthening community-based care for survivors of sexual violence and on preventing sexual violence by transforming individual behaviours, group practices and beliefs that contribute to sexual violence. The programme's primary approach is facilitating dialogues among key community change makers (e.g., influential people and groups within the community) to reflect on their values and supporting collective commitment and action (e.g., community events, advocate to change laws). It also supports the strengthening of multisectoral systems and services for survivors.

Implementation team: UNICEF with International Committee for the Development of Peoples (CISP) (Somalia) and Voice for Change (VFC), and The Organization for Children's Harmony (TOCH) (South Sudan). The research partner was John Hopkins University.

Research methods: Both pilots were conducted over 24-month, and the impact evaluation used a longitudinal community-based design. For the pilot in Somalia, a brief, and valid social norms index was developed to facilitate measurement of changes in the norms that sustain sexual violence and other forms of VAWG in humanitarian settings.

Findings: In Somalia, there was a significant improvement in social norms, including a 22.3% reduction in the social norms that support protecting family honour, and a 11.1% reduction in social norms that support negative responses towards sexual violence survivors (UNICEF, 2021a; Glass et al., 2019). Additionally, participants in intervention districts showed increased confidence in VAWG services across diverse sectors compared to the control district.

In South Sudan, there were positive changes in personal beliefs and successful spread of community dialogue messaging to the community in areas that participated in the programme. In one community, there was a 13% reduction in personal beliefs that support negative responses towards sexual violence survivors (UNICEF, 2021b). In relation to the community dialogues, 72.6% had heard a message about the problem of VAWG in the community, and 39.2% thought that the community's attitude about VAWG had changed for the better in the last year (UNICEF, 2021b).

Social norms change programming targeting security sector actors

Changes in attitudes and norms within armed groups may also be an effective strategy (particularly coupled with punishment for perpetrators) to reduce the use of sexual violence by combatants. Research has shown that groups that reject sexual violence as a normative practice can prevent its use during conflict (Muvumba Sellström, 2019). However, there is only weak evidence on the effectiveness of approaches to change behaviours within these groups. Norms change programming that targets specific elements of the security sector, employing many of the same lessons of wider community-based change efforts, but focusing on the specific occupational challenges and hyper-masculine norms observed within these institutions, is a promising approach. For example, using a norm change approach, the Living Peace programme (see Box 15) successfully reduced reported violence perpetration within the Congolese Police Forces in a post-conflict context.

Other studies have documented the importance of informal socialisation mechanisms when working with non-state actors, functionally changing values and norms rather than just instilling punishments (ICRC, 2018). For example, importing generic Codes of Conduct (rather than developing a specific document for the organisation) and conducting one-off trainings were not seen to be effective in changing non-state actors' use of CRSV. The researchers concluded that a deeper understanding of gender-power dynamics within each organisation and context are essential to promote behaviour change (Olsson et al., 2020).

BOX 15

Living Peace in the DRC: Using social norms approaches to train security actors

Context: 48 communities in North and South Kivu provinces, DRC. Living Peace has been adapted to other contexts, including Sierra Leone, Lebanon, Cameroon, Brazil, and the United States.

Intervention: Living Peace aims to prevent violence in post-conflict settings by promoting norms of positive masculinity. It uses a combination of group therapy led by trained facilitators, community outreach, and engagement of powerful local stakeholders and institutions, including the police. During the scale-up phase in DRC, Living Peace trained police and military to question and change rigid, gender-inequitable, and violence-supportive norms and attitudes, both within their own families and the wider community. Weekly group sessions with the Congolese National Police explored the factors contributing to violence, including previous trauma experienced during the conflict and traditional gender norms that support violence. The sessions ended with a community celebration involving the policemen, their wives and other community stakeholders. The ceremony acts as a call to the wider community to help the policemen continue their paths to change, but also to spread messages of healing and nonviolence (Promundo, 2015).

Implementation team: Equimundo (previously Promundo) and Institut Supérieur du Lac

Research methods: Qualitative, time series evaluation using key informant interviews and focus groups with project participants and their partners, project staff, and key stakeholders. No control group utilised.

Findings: The evaluation found decreased use of violence, including physical violence against wives and children, by male (and, in some cases, female) participants. In addition, gender-transformative training sessions for military and police officers helped police learn nonviolent strategies to cope with conflict and have supported the creation of more peaceful relationships with communities. There were also clear commitments from police and military representatives to integrate the social norms approach into their work as a best practice to prevent urban violence and address sexual and gender-based violence, due to high levels of satisfaction with the project outcomes (Promundo, 2019).

School-based programming

Globally, school-based programming has been seen to prevent dating and/or sexual violence, though this research has been focused on high-income countries (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). The Rethinking Power programme in Haiti had planned to implement a school-based change process (based on the SASA! approach), but schools were closed due to insecurity and COVID-19 during much of the implementation period (Bourassa et al., 2022a). The programme had less of an impact on the lives of adolescent girls than hoped due to this lack of school-based activities. In Afghanistan, a school-based peace education intervention focused primarily on preventing peer violence. Although the evaluation did not employ a comparison group, the intervention demonstrated significant declines in peer violence victimisation and perpetration, as well as declines in corporal punishment and significantly fewer patriarchal attitudes (Corboz et al., 2019). Overall, school-based programming provides an entry point to begin a wider attitude and norms change programming at an early age, potentially leading to longer-term change.

Awareness-raising activities

Standalone awareness-raising activities often seek to increase knowledge and change attitudes about VAWG and CRSV. For example, training in international humanitarian law is a common approach to raising awareness of CRSV in conflict-settings, though there is no evidence of the effectiveness of this approach (though some tools have been developed to support better measurement of the impact of these approaches). Some awareness-raising activities, such as the 'Stop War Now' and 'GET CROSS' campaigns, have had considerable media reach and increased the visibility of CRSV. However, they have also been critiqued for their narrow focus, lack of impact on prevention, and securitisation of CRSV at the expense of other types of violence in conflict (Banwell, 2020). The wider evidence on VAWG and SEAH in conflict and non-conflict settings suggests that standalone awareness-raising activities are unlikely to prevent CRSV, although they may be effective as part of a multi-component intervention (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020).

BOX 16

Inclusive approaches to prevention programming

Breaking down barriers that prevent groups with intersecting disadvantages from benefiting is essential to effective and equitable prevention efforts. Research on what works to prevent violence against LGBTQI+ people remains at an early stage, with the evidence from conflict and humanitarian settings being particularly limited (Ahlenback, 2022). Although not focused on CRSV specifically, a study of the experiences of LGBTQI+ people in conflict and humanitarian settings recommended the following approaches to address violence, discrimination, and exclusion:

- Partner with local LGBTQI+ organisations before a conflict or emergency unfolds as part of disaster preparedness.
- Redistribute power and funding to LGBTQI+ organisations.
- Provide supportive, empathetic, and empowering services within existing structures.
- Fund research and programmes valued by local LGBTQI actors.

There are similar weaknesses in the evidence base around what works to prevent violence against women and girls with disabilities. However, one recent evaluation (of Safe and Capable which was implemented as part of a wider SASA! approach in Haiti) documented decreases in IPV (Bourassa et al., 2022b). Similar to the recommendations for work with LGBTI+ groups, the Safe and Capable report noted a number of recommendations to ensure full inclusion of people with disabilities including:

- Hire staff who are women and girls with disabilities.
- Consider having a paid accountability consultant to help guide the work on VAWG with disabilities and who has experience in both, as well as an advisory panel composed of people with disabilities.
- Work with women and girls with disabilities to consider how to remove barriers to participation in community events/activities (e.g., support for transport to community events, etc.) to foster participation.
- Support women and girls with disabilities to speak out and be leaders in their communities on issues that affect them.

While more research is needed on the best approaches to ensure full inclusion of populations with intersecting disadvantages and to know what prevention programming is most effective for these groups, slowly more engagement directly with these populations is occurring to support the design and implementation of inclusive VAWG prevention programming and policies.

5

Reintegration and support to break the cycle of further violence

Contexts: Post-conflict
Level of operation: Individual/community
Types of Violence: CRSV, IPV, SEAH

Disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR)

DDR programming is the process of transitioning those associated with fighting forces back into civilian life after the end of a conflict. DDR often includes giving up arms, moving back to communities of origin (or a new location if return is not possible) and receiving aid (e.g., cash or training) to help restart civilian life. Overall, DDR programmes are often gender-blind and do not utilise the potential opportunity to re-frame masculinities as men and boys move from armed groups back to civilian life (Theidon, 2009). Reintegration programmes often include an economic component, but associated gender-transformative programming are not typically employed. Overall, there is no evidence about how DDR programmes reduce further perpetration of CRSV and VAWG during the post-conflict period.

DDR programmes are often designed for men and do not consider the specific needs of women and girls who were associated with fighting forces. For example, girls formerly associated with Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front were engaged in livelihoods programming as part of a DDR programme. However, studies of this effort found that girls were vulnerable to sexual violence during their participation due to poor protection, overcrowding and lack of enforcement of rules (Denov, 2006). More attention is needed to reduce the potential risks of further traumatisation, and SEAH perpetrated against girls during these processes. Best practices on how to support girls' reintegration after a conflict have been compiled, including the importance of ensuring all programmes are designed after a gender analysis to reduce the potential for harm and alleviate barriers that prevent girls from accessing services (Maignant and Kennedy Pfiste, 2020).

Counselling and transformation of militarised masculinities

Support for adults and children transitioning from formal or informal armed groups back to civilian life has the potential to help stop the continued perpetuation of violence in the post-conflict period. A review of mental health and psychosocial support for children associated with armed forces and armed groups programming identified a number of approaches to support the mental health and re-integration of these groups. These included approaches focused on the individual (e.g., trauma-focused counselling, art therapy), their caregivers/ families, school and educational interventions, livelihoods approaches and community-based (e.g., reintegration ceremonies) programming (Unicef, 2022). It is not known if these approaches specifically impact the perpetration or experience of VAWG in the short or long term.

Individual counselling and group support programmes, primarily from high income countries, have helped veterans address consequences of war (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder). Successful interventions in these contexts utilise peer support ("soldiers helping soldiers") and paraprofessional programme graduates, with the support of clinicians, to create veteran-friendly, safe, and judgement-free spaces (Kivari et al., 2018). Participation in mental health counselling programmes during post-conflict can provide an opportunity for men to reorient their ideas of what it means to "be a man" in a non-military environment. For example, interview data from a small sample of veterans in counselling in Israel suggested that participating in therapeutic discourse helped them begin to affirm some new ideas of masculinity (e.g., emphasising sensitivity, emotional disclosure, etc.) (Spector-Mersel and Gilbar, 2021). However, data on the impact of how these efforts may affect perpetration of VAWG is lacking and these approaches have not typically been designed to address VAWG as an explicit objective.

Reducing impunity of perpetrators and increasing accountability to women and girls

Underlying these initiatives are efforts to create an enabling environment that increases gender equity, reduces impunity of perpetrators, and supports the implementation of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda. While most of these approaches have not been evaluated to assess their effectiveness at preventing CRSV, even in the absence of a strong evidence base, they can be assumed to be key aspects of an enabling environment that will underpin the effectiveness of more specific prevention initiatives and help to drive longer-term structural change.

Leadership from women's movements and women's rights organisations

Globally, women's movements and women's rights organisations are often at the forefront of change around VAWG – and their engagement as leaders has been seen to reduce the prevalence of VAWG in fragile contexts (Ellsberg et al., 2022). In Ellsberg's study on the impact of women's movements on reductions in VAWG in Nicaragua, the authors found that mechanisms for reductions in VAWG included policy reforms as a result of feminist advocacy and increasing knowledge of laws and changes in attitudes among the population. Examples from post-conflict Liberia further the evidence of the contributions of women's movements. In this context, women's organisations were essential in advocating for the establishment of a comprehensive law against rape, the establishment of state agencies to address VAWG, and setting up a special court and investigative unit for sexual violence cases (Medie, 2013).

Women's participation and establishing accountability mechanisms

Women's participation is essential in ensuring VAWG and CRSV are considered during peace-building and state-building processes. In a review of almost two thousand peace agreements, only 6% were found to have referenced VAWG (Council on Foreign Relations, 2022). Women's participation in peacebuilding and peace negotiations has directly contributed to the inclusion of VAWG and CRSV in peace agreements and, by involving women, more lasting peace can be achieved (Swaine et al., n.d.). For example, a study of women's engagement in peace processes found a 35% increase in the probability of an agreement lasting at least 15 years when women were involved (O'Reilly et al., 2015). Despite this, women's participation in peace negotiations is declining over time, suggesting that CRSV and wider issues of VAWG will continue to be overlooked in these processes (UN, 2022d).

Women's participation has also contributed to the establishment of restitution mechanisms for survivors, such as gender-sensitive repatriation programmes. These efforts can help redress the harm caused by CRSV and provide the justice and resources needed to transform survivors' lives. By publicly recognising the crime of CRSV, they also have the potential to prevent it in the future. However, there is little evidence on the impact and effectiveness of reparations programmes due to the lack of evaluations, small sample sizes, and challenges in measuring impact. Innovative work by the Global Survivors Fund to assess the impact of reparations for survivors of CRSV – not just for individuals, but for families, communities, and nations - is being undertaken (Clugston and Fraser, 2022). Preliminary results from the study suggest that only a very small percentage of survivors are able to access meaningful reparations and that the extensive delays between the experience of CRSV and eventual reparation can diminish the impact of these initiatives (Global Survivors Fund, 2021).

Survivors and their representative organisations have a central role to play in increasing accountability to women and girls. Survivors such as Nadia Murad, the co-recipient of the 2018 Nobel Peace Prize, have been recognised for their work in advocating against sexual violence in conflict, and their testimonies have been pivotal in ensuring international action to prevent and respond to CRSV. For example, the Murad Code is a survivor-centred global code of conduct that sets out minimum standards on how to collect evidence safely and effectively on sexual violence in conflict and other settings, without retraumatising survivors. There is also evidence that providing convening spaces for survivors to tell their stories to policymakers can help ensure that the prevention of CRSV is central to peace, security, and development (see Box 17).

BOX 17

Amplifying survivors' voices to reduce impunity and increase accountability

In April 2019, a high-level regional meeting of senior officials at the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region's Regional Training Facility (ICGLR-RTF) made space for the personal testimony of a sexual violence survivor, 'Njeri' from Kenya. She told police chiefs her personal story of being raped, and going to the police for help, but being badly treated and dismissed by police officers. Although the meeting was mostly dominated by technical presentations, the human face of a survivor helped convince policymakers to take urgent action. Police chiefs were visibly moved by the story, repeatedly referring to it as the rationale for making several regional resolutions to reduce impunity and provide urgent health and psychosocial support to sexual violence survivors (Undie et al., 2019).

International human rights treaties and the domestication of international human rights law

Using legal instruments with human rights frameworks within post-conflict, transitional and developing contexts, has created platforms from which to advocate for policies, services, and resources. The existing robust international legal framework regarding CRSV suggests it is not the absence of legal norms which inhibit prevention and response in CRSV and that basic minimum standards of care have largely been set. Instead, it is the domestication of these norms, and the proactive implementation and enforcement of these preventative measures, that is lacking. However, there are mixed results of conflict-affected states creating appropriate legal protections for VAWG and CRSV. For example, in Mali, MINUSMA worked with the Malian government to draft a gender-based violence law in 2017 – though as of 2022, it has yet to be ratified (d'Elsa, 2019). However, there have been successes – particularly in post-conflict contexts – where the re-establishment of state control can lead to openings that allow for new legislation to be established.

Establishing effective and survivor-centred justice systems

While legislative changes are important, these efforts must be accompanied by changes in legal practice to ensure it is implemented in practice. For example, despite the ICC statue including a wide range of sexual crimes, it has only obtained one conviction since its establishment (Altunjan, 2021). At national levels, efforts to strengthen legal responses of government actors to reduce perpetrator impunity in conflict-affected contexts (e.g., establishing gender desks/focal points with specific training within police stations, establishing specific units to investigate cases of CRSV, etc.) have had mixed results. For example, in Nigeria in 2014, a specialised unit within the Office of the Attorney General was tasked with investigating and prosecuting crimes committed by Boko Haram, however, this group has not prosecuted any crimes involving sexual violence (UN, 2021d).

Experiences with international tribunals and national criminal trials and commissions of inquiry have also underscored the importance of including measures that ensure that survivors of CRSV can safely – and without recrimination, retaliation, persecution, or public exposure – report violations to competent authorities and be supported throughout the investigation and prosecution process. This includes having recourse to protection and appropriate judicial outcomes, including restitution and compensation. In the African context, these measures have been employed to some degree of success in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, and the Special Court for Sierra Leone. These investigations into CRSV and human rights violations have brought attention to the importance of a survivor-centred legal response, including empowering survivors/witnesses to participate in the judicial process and ensuring that their concerns about the process are addressed or explained; ensuring survivors/witnesses are well-informed about the process, what role they will play in the proceedings, and are safeguarded throughout it; and that the identities of survivor/witnesses are protected.

Use of national and international commitments

Commitments by state actors to not utilise CRSV are also mechanisms to prevent CRSV. For example, 156 UN member states endorsed the 2013 Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict. While there is limited documentation on the use of the Declaration, policymakers and practitioners working on CRSV had used it to galvanise support around CRSV prevention and response training within the police and military and to help promote the passage of a law to provide reparations for survivors (Clugston and Ward, 2022). In addition, other international commitments may affect the conditions that lead to the use of CRSV. For example, commitments to adhere to the Arms Trade Treaty of 2012, and reduce the proliferation of weapons that contribute to cycles of violence, are occurring. However, no evidence exists to demonstrate whether implementing these policies effectively reduces CRSV.

At the national level, state and non-state actors often issue commitments against the use of CRSV. For example, in Mali, in 2019, the government and the UN jointly published a Communique on preventing and responding to CRSV (Republic of Mali and the United Nations, 2019). This document affirms the government of Mali's commitment to reducing CRSV, preventing impunity, and creating an action plan to increase service provision for survivors (d'Elsa, 2019). However, the impact of these governmental commitments on the use of CRSV on the ground remains unknown.

Similar approaches have been employed with non-state actors, where groups have been trained and supported to establish commitments to not employ sexual violence and to strengthen internal procedures to ensure those who utilise violence are punished. For example, 25 of 80 armed non-state actors working with the NGO Geneva Call (See Box 18) have signed a Deed of Commitment Prohibiting Sexual Violence and Against Gender Discrimination, and 29 have signed the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children, which includes a commitment to protect girls and boys from sexual violence (Bongard and Heffes, 2019). However, the impact of these commitments on CRSV has not been evaluated, and no conclusions on their effectiveness can be drawn.

BOX 18

Geneva Call's work with non-state armed groups to prevent CRSV (Bongard and Heffes, 2019)

Geneva Call is an NGO working with armed non-state actors to promote respect for international humanitarian norms in armed conflict. In 2012, Geneva Call launched a Deed of Commitment on the Prohibition of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict and towards the Elimination of Gender Discrimination. By signing this Deed, armed non-state actors agree to: 1) Prohibit all forms of sexual violence; 2) Prevent and sanction acts of sexual violence; 3) Provide victims with access to the assistance and care they need; 4) Ensure confidentiality and protection of victims of sexual violence; 5) Eliminate discriminatory policies and practices against women or men; and 6) Ensure greater participation of women in decision-making processes.

To date, 25 armed non-state actors have signed this Deed and taken measures to implement it, although it remains challenging to monitor the impact (Geneva Call, 2022). In addition to this Deed, 29 armed non-state actors have signed the Deed of Commitment for the Protection of Children, which includes a commitment to protect girls and boys from sexual violence. Others have raised the age limit for fighters to 18 years old. A learning paper notes that their work has contributed to the release of hundreds of children associated with armed groups, although no robust evidence of this was found, and no evidence of impact on reducing CRSV was found.

Use of sanctions

At the national and international levels, efforts to reduce impunity include the use of sanctions to address CRSV. A review of eight UN sanction regimes in the Central African Republic, DRC, Libya, Mali, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen concluded that the use of sanctions has been hampered by weak implementation and lack of focus on CRSV. As an example of 'success', it highlights how sexual violence was a key standalone criterion for the use of sanctions in Central African Republic, signalling the Security Council's strong commitment to deal with the issue of sexual violence, although cautions that listing only four individuals and one entity for targeted sanctions seems "insufficient" given the large scale of sexual violence in the country (Huvé, 2018). It is also important to consider the unintended consequences of sanctions on humanitarian actors' access to locations and ability to prevent CRSV and support survivors.

Development and use of national action plans

A key action in creating coordinated action to prevent CRSV and other forms of VAWG is developing national action plans (NAPs). WPS (1325) NAPs are "national-level strategy documents that outline a government's approach and course of action for localising action on the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda" (Women's International League of Peace and Freedom., 2022). As of 2022, 53% of UN member states have established WPS NAPs, though only 36% of member states have allocated a budget to implement these documents (Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, 2022). Furthermore, weaknesses of these plans have been identified, including that they are often developed in haphazard manners and focus on state actors rather than the women and girls they were meant to serve (Shepherd, 2016; Trojanowska, 2018; Swaine, 2016, 2018). Moreover, these approaches are often conducted in parallel to developing wider GBV NAPs that focus on actions to prevent and respond to VAWG more holistically. Research has demonstrated that these disconnected approaches affect stakeholders and coordination on the ground (Swaine et al., n.d.). For example, in Sierra Leone, the NAP on GBV does not recognise the history of mass-scale sexualised violence in the country, and there are no provisions specifically to address the needs of women and girls impacted by violence during the conflict. In South Sudan, stakeholders working within the GBV sub-cluster and providing services to survivors of violence were unaware of the content of the WPS NAP and were unsure how their work related to this document (Swaine et al., n.d.).

Training and education for security sector and humanitarian actors

Complementing commitments to reducing CRSV, codes of conduct for personnel and short training courses are often utilised to ensure key security/humanitarian actors understand CRSV and SEAH as well as know about the consequences they will experience if they are found to engage in this abuse. For example, donors often require humanitarian agencies to ensure that they comply with the Interagency Standing Committee's six core principles relating to SEAH (IASC, 2019). Community complaint mechanisms, including hotlines for reporting abuse, are typically established in humanitarian settings but often have low uptake and may be unknown/or not trusted by community members.

Training efforts – particularly short training modules - are also utilised to increase awareness. For example, short training courses with peacekeeping forces have demonstrated the ability to change participants' knowledge and some attitudes, but there have been no efforts to rigorously evaluate behaviour changes over the long-term. A review of pre-deployment gender training of Australian peacekeepers concluded that the training this group received was "inadequate" in its coverage and only addressed gender in "a very limited way" without addressing power relations or peacekeepers' attitudes and behaviours (Carson, 2016).

Discussion and recommendations

What initiatives are promising to prevent CRSV?

An effective approach to prevent CRSV considers both the immediate physical protection of women and girls as well as longer-term empowerment and shifting of inequitable gender norms. When considering promising initiatives to prevent CRSV, it is important to consider the evolving phases of the conflict, from pre-conflict, early warning signs, intensification of hostilities, active conflict, ceasefires, peace negotiations, and post-conflict and recovery, which necessitate evolving programmatic approaches. Even prior to a conflict, efforts to prevent CRSV can begin. For example, developing National Action Plans for WPS and GBV that include CRSV prevention provisions, enacting relevant legislation to criminalise VAWG, promoting norms change within military and security sector institutions, and supporting gender equality and the empowerment of women.

Once a conflict begins, in acute emergency contexts, immediate security needs often take priority, such as mitigation of CRSV/VAWG risks and instituting immediate physical protection interventions (e.g., accompaniment during firewood collection). However, even during acute emergencies, best practice shows that working with women and girls throughout is essential and can also feed into longer-term empowerment strategies that can help reduce further incidences of CRSV and VAWG.

Where emergencies evolve into protracted crisis and post-conflict contexts, attention should more firmly shift to longer-term strategies such as norms change (both within communities and institutions) and longer-term empowerment efforts that seek to change the root causes of CRSV. There is more high-quality evidence on the effectiveness of these initiatives, including data from non-conflict contexts. However, many of these programmes were designed to reduce multiple forms of IPV (e.g., physical, psychological) rather than CRSV specifically. Despite this, some evidence is emerging that community-based social norms approaches can successfully reduce sexual violence and change norms that uphold its use.

While there is research on changing masculinities globally, much of the evidence in humanitarian settings focuses on describing the nature of masculinities during conflict but does not evaluate efforts to change these beliefs. Initiatives that specifically apply behaviour change principles to security sector actors are rare, but emerging evidence suggests they may be able to change inequitable norms and reduce the perpetration of VAWG. Research with armed actors often focuses on reintegration after a conflict or working with security actors in a post-conflict environment, rather than engaging with security forces while they are deployed/engaging in armed warfare. More specific research targeting how best to change norms and behaviours within these institutions (e.g., service providers, security sector, etc.) is needed to build this evidence base.

While there is a growing body of evidence of effective approaches in conflict-affected settings, there also is much to learn from research conducted in other contexts. For example, approaches such as SASA! have reduced VAWG in developing countries such as Uganda and are now being adapted for humanitarian settings. Raising Voices has developed a guide to support the implementation of SASA! in a humanitarian setting, including a checklist of considerations of the pre-existing conditions that need to be in place in order to utilise the approach (see Figure 2). Similar questions can help practitioners and policymakers consider how and when to adopt other approaches that have been seen to reduce VAWG in more stable contexts – particularly the need for long-term funding and sufficient human resources to implement these complex interventions. If these basics are not in place, it may cause more harm than good to try to implement a wide-ranging behaviour change programme.

Cross-Cutting Considerations

- Is there a team available with sufficient time to implement SASA!? *
- Are financial resources in place for at least the 18 months of programming? *
- Is there leadership buy-in at NGO and community levels? *
- Is a GBV management and referrals system in place (with available services)?
- Can the "Do No Harm" principle be upheld? *

Specific Considerations at Distinct Phases of Conflict

Emergency

- Are staff trainings on gender being conducted or planned? *
- Can community members and staff move safely in the community/camp? *
- Can SASA! partnerships be formed as humanitarian infrastructure is developed?

Stabilization

- Are community-based structures in place (and available to participate in programming)?
- Is a central knowledge management system available?
- Are longer-term interventions being implemented or planned?

Recovery

- Is repatriation likely and is there likely to be continued programming in the country of origin?
- Are community stabilization programs being introduced?
- Are there efforts to transition development activities?

** It is advised to refrain from implementing SASA! if you can't answer "yes" to these questions*

Figure 3: Raising Voice's Deciding If and When to Use SASA!

Research has also highlighted that humanitarian action can be oriented to support women and girl's leadership and that these groups can be engaged to effectively develop strategies to reduce the risks of experiencing CRSV. Women and girls, and other survivors of CRSV, also participate in accountability mechanisms to hold those in power to account. These efforts can help reduce impunity and improve the design and delivery of CRSV prevention programming – though most empirical evidence of their impact is small-scale or anecdotal.

As post-conflict societies emerge, CRSV remains an issue, both due to the long-term consequences for survivors as well as newly introduced risks (e.g., return of combatants, poorly instituted justice approaches, ineffectual DDR efforts, etc.). In these contexts, it is the responsibility of the state, supported by a strong civil society, to prevent cases and support survivors of this violence. Aspects of an effective enabling environment to prevent CRSV within these contexts include: promoting the leadership of women's movements and rights organisations; supporting women's participation and the creation of accountability mechanisms; improving legal frameworks and establishing survivor-centred response systems; and establishing international and national policies, commitments and plans to address CRSV (including commitments not to use CRSV, sanctions, NAPs for Women, Peace and Security and Gender-based Violence). While these efforts are likely to contribute to the prevention of CRSV, there is limited empirical evidence of their effectiveness. Complementing these wider efforts are targeted programming to support former combatants (including children) to reintegrate into civilian life and break the cycle of further violence. Mental health counselling for former combatants and gender-sensitive DDR have potential, however there is no evidence to date on their impact on reducing perpetration of CRSV or other forms of VAWG.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

Based on these learnings, a number of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners have been developed. They are categorised according to priorities for action at different stages of a conflict. While many of these approaches may continue beyond the acute crisis into a protracted crisis or in post-conflict settings (and are highly context-specific), in the table below they have been placed where they would typically be first introduced.

	In Acute Crisis:	In Protracted Crisis: Continue to implement priorities from the acute crisis period, as well as add:	In Post-Conflict Situations: Continue to implement priorities from the protracted crisis period, as well as add:
1	**Ensure that quality multi-sectoral survivor-centred VAWG response services, including support for survivors of CRSV in line with the Inter-agency Minimum Standards and WHO clinical management of rape and IPV guidelines, are adequately funded and delivered together with prevention programming.**	**Resource evidence-informed programming to prevent multiple forms of VAWG in conflict settings such as community-based gender norms change approaches** (e.g., Communities Cares, Rethinking Power, Transforming Masculinities, SASA!). It is important to engage men and boys alongside women and girls from the outset to minimise backlash and build buy in, and continually monitor for unintentional consequences throughout implementation. Further innovation and research are needed to test if these approaches can affect CRSV in addition to IPV.	**Support longer-term initiatives to strengthen the enabling environment to prevent CRSV, including by promoting gender equality,** such as influencing and diplomatic approaches to advance gender equality (e.g., strengthening laws and their implementation), investment in girls' higher education, and ensuring women can meaningfully participate in peacebuilding and accountability mechanisms.
2	**Prioritise risk mitigation activities and 'do no harm' in all aspects of humanitarian action, underpinned by robust complaints and accountability mechanisms.** Support risk mitigation activities as laid out in the Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions into Humanitarian Action. Work with women and girls to identify and reduce risks associated with cash/aid distributions and create mitigation strategies (e.g., the Empowered Aid project which identified activities such as: sex-segregated lines at distribution points; targeted support such as transport for the most vulnerable; accompaniment systems, improved security and information sharing at distributions).	**Combine economic empowerment, livelihoods, and cash transfer programming with gender transformative methodologies, and evaluate their effectiveness and feasibility in conflict settings.** Data from non-conflict settings suggest that livelihoods and economic empowerment programming that incorporates both skills building/asset transfers and aspects that seek to rebalance power between men and women (e.g., sharing decision-making, changing gender norms, etc.) are effective at preventing VAWG. Data in humanitarian settings has shown some promise (including improvements in equitable relationships) but reductions in IPV are not consistently demonstrated. Further testing is needed to determine how best these approaches can be adapted to conflict settings.	**Consider gender and VAWG throughout state-building in post-conflict contexts.** Support the development of women's civil society and build the capacity of state and non-state structures that will support survivors and help prevent further VAWG. Support restitution mechanisms for survivors, such as gender-sensitive reparations programmes.

	In Acute Crisis:	In Protracted Crisis: Continue to implement priorities from the acute crisis period, as well as add:	In Post-Conflict Situations: Continue to implement priorities from the protracted crisis period, as well as add:
3	**Support context-specific initiatives to improve immediate security and reduce negative coping strategies among women and girls and other vulnerable populations** (e.g., alternative fuel interventions, firewood distributions or accompaniment programmes, distribution of emergency cash) and women and girls' safe spaces.	**Build on best practices in behaviour change (e.g. SASA!) and promising approaches, such as the Living Peace programme, to design and test social norms change programming targeted to key security sector and legal stakeholders (e.g., police)** to shift institutional norms and practices around gender, power and violence.	**Support legal and judicial reform and transitional justice efforts to ensure these responses are survivor-centred.** Combat impunity through the criminalisation of CRSV and penal codes or statutory law. Support measures that facilitate survivors of CRSV to safely report violations to competent and supportive authorities.
4	**Support survivor-centred and ethical data collection efforts (e.g., Murad Code, GBVIMS) to document trends in sexual violence in emergencies beyond verified cases of CRSV to build a more holistic understanding of VAWG in conflict.** Provide support to ensure that human rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the MARA, are survivor centred and link identified survivors to support services. Support coordination between MARA and the GBVIMS in line with best practices.	**Further refine and test programming approaches that have been shown to improve risk factors for VAWG in conflict and adapt these to CRSV prevention.** For example: → Child and adolescent-specific interventions focused on changing attitudes and improving skills that will set them up for greater empowerment long-term (e.g., improving self-esteem/ self-efficacy, learning key life skills, changing gender attitudes- see COMPASS, Girl Empower), and may reduce their risks of experiencing VAWG later in life. These efforts should be complemented by engaging families and communities to create wider change. → Conditional cash transfers combined as part of wider support programming (e.g., Girl Empower) which may reduce child marriage and risky sexual behaviours (e.g., condom use) in adolescents and improve school attendance.	**Ensure disarmament demobilisation and reintegration caters to the needs of female ex-combatants and women and girls associated with armed or terrorist groups.** Support interventions that consider the unique needs of women and girls associated with armed groups (and their family circumstances). Employ best practices on how to support girls reintegration, including ensuring all programmes are designed after a gender analysis to reduce the potential for harm and alleviate barriers that prevent girls from accessing services.

	In Acute Crisis:	In Protracted Crisis: Continue to implement priorities from the acute crisis period, as well as add:	In Post-Conflict Situations: Continue to implement priorities from the protracted crisis period, as well as add:
5	**Ensure the intentional inclusion of people with disabilities, LGBTI+, adolescents, and other marginalised groups in programme design, implementation, and monitoring.** Emerging evidence on best practice for engaging these populations includes: → Hiring staff and/or engaging with representative groups made of people from these identity groups. → Establishing accountability mechanisms (e.g., advisory boards) to gain input and provide oversight. → Proactive engagement with group representatives to identify and remove barriers to participation.	**Support governments to domesticate key international conventions into national laws and facilitate the meaningful participation of survivors in monitoring the implementation.** Ensure member states submit their periodic reports to relevant reporting mechanisms of these international bodies and provide support for the submission of shadow reports by non-governmental organisations. Support participation of survivors in monitoring the implementation of these laws through the documentation of case reports and registering of complaints.	**Work with those associated with armed forces/groups to transition to civilian life through gender sensitive disarmament demobilisation and reintegration and mental health support to prevent ongoing and future use of VAWG.** Test if mental health counselling for former combatants and DDR programming has long term impacts on VAWG outcomes.
6	**Ensure that women and women's rights organisations, including women peacebuilders, are meaningfully engaged in peacebuilding and peace negotiation processes.** Ensure that provisions related to CRSV and VAWG in peace agreements are driven by survivors and include accountability mechanisms for women and girls to monitor adherence.	**Support countries to develop and implement action plans to meet global commitments to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and VAWG.** Support WPS national action plans and ensure they include budgeted operational provisions to prevent CRSV. Work to link these plans to the work of GBV national action plans.	
7	**Support women and girls' rights organisations and survivor-led organisations that are on the frontline of preventing VAWG with flexible, multi-year funding** that strengthens their resilience and capacity in the face of threats and enables them to respond to rapidly changing circumstances. Specialist rapid-response funders and mechanisms have a unique role in supporting women's groups to respond to sudden crisis and need resourcing. Diplomatic efforts to support women's groups to be heard is also crucial, such as pushing for their inclusion in peace processes.		

Recommendations and key learning questions to guide future research

Further to the recommendations for practitioners and policymakers are key recommendations for researchers seeking to fill the nascent evidence base around what works to prevent CRSV.

Key recommendations for researchers:

- **Support participatory and intersectional approaches to learning generation.** Work with the affected community and survivors to identify key learning questions and validate safe approaches to collecting data. Where safe, share findings with the communities where the research was conducted.

- **Conduct research on what works to prevent CRSV during acute emergencies and early-onset settings, including research focused on the mechanisms of how change is achieved.** Researchers should not only focus on impact evaluations (such as RCTs) but also conduct research (e.g., through qualitative research, review of monitoring and evaluation data, etc.) on mechanisms that may lead to reductions in violence. Cross-national policy-focused research (e.g., documenting if national VAWG laws affect reporting of VAWG to formal mechanisms across countries) is another way to increase the evidence base on the effectiveness of policy-focused approaches to prevent CRSV.

- **Incorporate VAWG outcomes into ongoing evaluations of programmes that address other risk factors for CRSV** (e.g., economic empowerment and cash transfer programming) and explore how to integrate protection and/or gender transformative components into standard practice.

- **Invest in longitudinal research to examine changes over time, particularly for norms relevant to the theory of change.** Consider evaluation approaches that track participants over time to understand long-term changes, particularly for norms change programming.

- **Standardise and clarify theories of change and measurement of outcomes within the broad definition of CRSV.** Clarity on definitions and measures of CRSV for population-based research are needed to develop a holistic evidence base where the same outcomes can be compared across conflicts. Ensure that emerging forms of violence, such as violence perpetrated in online spaces, are included in measures.

- **Prioritise safety and security over the implementation of the study and follow all ethical guidance on researching sexual violence in emergencies.** Follow the WHO ethical and safety recommendations for researching, documenting and monitoring sexual violence in emergencies and the Murad Code when designing and implementing research studies on CRSV.

Finally, the report identifies a set of learning questions on CRSV prevention, drawing on the evidence review, entry points for action and consultations with global experts, practitioners, and researchers. These learning questions are based on current gaps in research, including a lack of evidence on how some existing approaches utilised in conflict-affected settings may impact CRSV outcomes (rather than VAWG more broadly), piloting and learning about how newer approaches (e.g., social norms change within institutional security sector actors) can most effectively be implemented and if they can successfully reduce CRSV, and the impact of government/policy-level interventions. Whilst prevalence studies can be useful to highlight the magnitude and key perpetrators of CRSV, and can be influential in driving advocacy efforts, they are less likely to be catalytic research investments towards the prevention of CRSV. As such, the learning questions primarily focus on key areas where there is some evidence (often of weak quality or anecdotal) that prevention of CRSV is possible.

Key Learning Questions

In acute crises	In protracted crises	In post-conflict settings
→ What are effective approaches to working with state and non-state armed actors to prevent CRSV? → How can peacebuilding approaches be better utilised to identify and address CRSV? → What best practices are associated with the effective deployment of peacekeepers to reduce CRSV and minimise SEAH? → What impact do WGSS have in preventing CRSV (for women, adolescent girls, women and girls with disabilities)? What specific interventions within WGSS contribute to protection? → How can risk mitigation efforts (e.g., activities laid out in Guidelines for Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions into Humanitarian Action) most effectively reduce CRSV? How can these be adapted to address other forms of violence (e.g., violence perpetrated in online spaces)?	→ Which specific combinations of economic empowerment programmes plus VAWG/ CRSV prevention and response activities have a protective impact on preventing CRSV and over what duration, and amongst which diverse groups? → What strategies promoting gender equality within hyper-masculine institutions/groups (e.g., state armed groups, police, peacekeeping forces) have been successful in changing institutional norms/reducing the perpetration of CRSV? → Which combinations of intervention approaches are most effective in transforming gender inequalities and preventing CRSV against women and girls most at risk of violence? How can approaches be adapted to reach women and girls facing multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination (including age, ethnicity, disability, sexuality)? → How do community-based VAWG prevention and gender equality interventions affect displaced communities and what impact do these changes have once populations return to their communities of origin?	→ What support and reintegration measures should be put in place to support women who are associated with armed groups or who have experienced CRSV as a result of their association with armed groups? → What support and reintegration measures should be put in place to support men to reframe militarised masculinities and prevent further perpetration of VAWG in the post-conflict period? → How can gender equality help to prevent the resumption of conflict?

Endnotes

1 Population-based refers to research undertaken in a manner that allows for estimates of the prevalence of a disease or condition among a wider population. These are typically generated through the use of household surveys with robust sampling methods.

2 Based on population-based studies from sites in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor and Colombia as well as results of a meta-analysis of 19 studies from various conflict-affected contexts (though two of the studies included in the meta-analysis were focused exclusively on intimate partner violence). Recall periods of the studies varied from the past 6 months to lifetime, highlighting methodological weaknesses that affect our ability to generate accurate overall estimates of prevalence.

3 e.g., the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which frames the Women, Peace and Security agenda, the UN Framework on the Prevention of CRSV, the Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies, the World Humanitarian Summit's Five Core Commitments to Women and Girls, and the Sustainable Development Goals.

4 Based on data from the SVAC dataset, it includes sexual violence by conflict actors involved in intrastate, internationalised internal, and interstate conflicts in the period 1989–2009.

5 Population-based refers to research undertaken in a manner that allows for estimates of the prevalence of a disease or condition among a wider population. These are typically generated through the use of household surveys with robust sampling methods.

6 In this brief, we generally use the term "violence against women and girls" instead of the wider "gender-based violence" to draw attention to the fact that the violence based on gendered power imbalances affects women and girls disproportionately. In limited cases – primarily when referring to formal document or initiative titles – we refer to GBV rather than VAWG as appropriate.

7 Population-based data is generated when the affected population is directly asked about their experiences of violence through household surveys using rigorous sampling methods. These efforts can generate more accurate data on prevalence.

8 Based on population-based studies from sites in South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, East Timor and Colombia as well as results of a meta-analysis of 19 studies from various conflict-affected contexts. Variations in rates of sexual violence in conflict-affected contexts remain, and while 20–30% prevalence estimates were most commonly documented in the evidence-base, research in other contexts have documented very low (e.g., 4% in Somalia – Wirtz et al. 2018) to very high (e.g., 40% in DRC – Johnson et al., 2014) estimates as well. Furthermore, Vu et al.'s systematic review include some studies that did not define the perpetrator of sexual violence (partner or non-partner), though only two of 19 included studies focused specifically on IPV. Recall periods of the studies varied from the past 6 months to lifetime, highlighting methodological weaknesses that affect our ability to generate accurate overall estimates of prevalence. Similarly, wide variations have been found in systematic reviews examining sexual slavery in conflict settings which found 2–32% of individuals studied were survivors of this form of violence (McAlpine et al., 2016). No specific estimates of other forms of CRSV (forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilisation) were available, though some of this violence may be included in wider definitions of non-partner sexual violence. Variation in rates of sexual violence has also been documented within conflict-affected contexts, demonstrating the need for context-specific analysis of risk factors that may lead to increased or lesser use of CRSV during conflict. Differences in measurement approaches, definitions, and methods may also contribute to some of the variations in estimates.

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