

Service Barriers Faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine

SNAPSHOT

When a humanitarian emergency strikes, the risk of gender-based violence (GBV), including sexual violence (SV), increases. While SV against women and girls is widely recognized, SV is a risk for all people affected by conflict or crisis—women, girls, men, boys, and/including people with diverse sexual orientation and gender identity or expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC).¹ All survivors, regardless of their SOGIESC, require services and care that meet their unique needs. By addressing social norms about who can be a survivor, we are also dismantling harmful gender norms that perpetuate violence against women and girls and/including LGBTQI+ people.

In humanitarian settings, services sensitive to the unique needs of SV survivors are limited. Without appropriate response, survivors may suffer harmful effects of sexual violence, including physical and psychological trauma.

Today, we are seeing this play out in Ukraine. Within weeks of the [full-scale invasion](#) of Ukraine by Russian forces in February 2022, there were reports of incidents of SV against women and men by Russian soldiers. However, there was a lack of understanding about the barriers that male survivors face in accessing appropriate, timely, and lifesaving services.

[Service Barriers Faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine](#) outlines the findings from a rapid assessment of the barriers that adult men and adolescent boy survivors in Ukraine face in accessing GBV and other support services.² The goal of the assessment was to identify places where male SV survivors might disclose incidents of SV and to understand the training and resources needed to equip service providers to better support men and boys who experience SV in Ukraine.

Our top findings

- Based on responses from 147 people working at Ukrainian civil society organizations, humanitarian international nongovernmental organizations, UN agencies, and state social service providers, **those who had assisted male survivors since the full-scale invasion demonstrated more knowledge about barriers faced by male survivors and accessibility of services compared to those who did not.**
- **Male survivors are unlikely to access clinical management of rape (CMR) services or shelters and safe spaces.**
- **Online services, helplines or hotlines, and peer support groups are key points of disclosure** for men and boy survivors.
- **Barriers to accessing services are commonly centered around fears of being identified as a survivor, of being perceived or identified as homosexual or experiencing homophobia, or of being blamed.**

1 The Women's Refugee Commission's work to better [understand, prevent, and respond to sexual violence](#) in humanitarian settings encompasses all survivors regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. As a women's rights organization, WRC incorporates feminist principles that prioritize accountability to women and girls.

2 The assessment was undertaken by the Ukraine [GBV Area of Responsibility](#) Working Group on the Needs of Male Survivors and the [Inter-Agency Working Group](#) on Reproductive Health in Crises task team on male survivors, chaired by the Women's Refugee Commission.

Our top recommendations

- **GBV actors in Ukraine should collaborate with LGBTQI+-led civil society organizations to design and launch gender-diversity awareness campaigns** to promote gender equity and LGBTQI+ inclusion, and dismantle harmful gender norms that perpetuate violence, homophobia, transphobia, and queerphobia. Campaigns should also address social gender norms and discriminatory practices that perpetuate stigma around male survivors of SV.
- **The GBV Area of Responsibility Working Group on the Needs of Male Survivors in Ukraine** (GBV AoR WG), which comprises staff from international NGOs, UN agencies, Ukrainian civil society organizations, and potentially state social service providers **should develop guidance and implement trainings for GBV service providers that articulates concrete, practical information about SV against men and boys in all their diversity.** The guidance should include information on the impact of SV against men and boys; barriers in accessing services with tailored mitigation measures; safe approaches to respond to disclosures; and frequently asked questions about working with male survivors.
- **The GBV AoR WG should develop guidance and implement trainings for non-GBV service providers that focuses on how to respond to disclosures of SV by male survivors** and provides information about safe, effective, and responsive referral pathways.
- **Organizations delivering CMR services should ensure that staff are trained to provide CMR services to survivors in all their diversity,** including male survivors and/including people with diverse SOGIESC.
- **Organizations that provide safe spaces should ensure that staff are trained to respond to the needs of adolescent boy survivors and are equipped with an appropriate referral pathway** should the survivor require additional services.

Read [*Service Barriers Faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine.*](#)

Contact

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The [Women's Refugee Commission](#) improves the lives and protects the rights of women, children, and youth displaced by conflict and crisis.

The [Gender-Based Violence Area of Responsibility \(GBV AoR\) in Ukraine](#) coordinates GBV service delivery partners operating in Ukraine. The Ukraine GBV AoR Working Group on the Needs of Male Survivors aims to strengthen the GBV AoR and its operational partners' capacity to better support men and boys in all their diversity who experience SV in war-affected Ukraine.

The [Inter-Agency Working Group on Reproductive Health in Crises \(IAWG\)](#) is a coalition of international nongovernmental organizations, national agencies, and UN agencies working together to advance sexual and reproductive health and rights in humanitarian settings.

The [IAWG Task Team on Male Survivors of Sexual Violence](#) aims to improve the quality, availability, access, and utilization of priority minimum and comprehensive services for male survivors of sexual violence in humanitarian settings and to ensure that these efforts complement and/or reinforce services for female survivors.

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