

Guidance Note- Working with Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine

This contextualised guidance note is to support gender-based violence (GBV) actors in their work with male survivors of sexual violence in Ukraine. The GBV guiding principles and survivor-centred approach should inform responses to survivors regardless of their gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability status, ethnicity, or other diversity factors. The guidance note was developed based on global guidance, including the [GBV AoR Guidance to Gender Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), best practice, and the findings of a barrier analysis conducted by Women Refugee Commission (WRC) on behalf of the GBV Area of Responsibility (AoR) Working Group on the Needs of Male Survivors.

Accountability to women and girls in GBV programming in Ukraine:

Women and girls in Ukraine are disproportionately affected by GBV. Recognising this, GBV programming in Ukraine that supports male survivors should remain accountable to women and girls, and support to male survivors should not undermine GBV services for women and girls. It is not recommended to meet with male survivors in female only spaces, including in Women and Girls Safe Spaces. In line with the [GBV AoR Guidance to Gender Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination](#), ‘male safe spaces’ are not recommended as an intervention for male survivors of sexual violence.

Sexual violence against men and adolescent boys in Ukraine:

Sexual violence is not about sexual desire, rather it is about violence, power and control over another person. Sexual violence is defined as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, or other act directed against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the survivor. For the purpose of this guidance note, the GBV AoR has taken the definition of sexual violence against male survivors from the [WRC, 2021, Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector](#). Based on this definition, sexual violence against men and boys in Ukraine may include:

- Child sexual abuse against boys.
- Rape or attempted rape.
- Unwanted touching.
- Being forced to observe or listen to sexual violence.
- Coerced or forced participation in sexual activity, including sexual violence against other.
- Genital violence, which may include shocks or beating aimed at the testicles and penis, and castration.
- Forced stripping.
- Forced masturbation and other forms of sexual humiliation.
- Sexual exploitation.
- Trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation.

Impact of sexual violence

The following information related to the impact of sexual violence on male survivors is taken from the [WRC, 2021, Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field Friendly Guidance Note by Sector](#)

There is no ‘normal’ reaction to sexual violence. Many of the impacts of sexual violence against women and girls are similar to those experienced by women and girls. Male survivors can also experience different consequences including:

- Sexual violence among male survivors may impact their perception of masculinity, sexuality, and reproductive capacity.

- Male survivors may face challenges with their understanding of masculinity, e.g. ‘*a man should be able to protect themselves*’. Male survivors may also have feelings of guilt related to this.
- Male survivors may struggle with gender identity and sexual orientation given the myth that male survivors are, or can ‘become gay’, and wider discrimination against sexual minorities. Sexual assault is in no way related to the sexual orientation of the survivor and a person’s sexual orientation cannot be caused by sexual abuse or assault.
- It is not uncommon for male survivors to experience sexual arousal during an abusive experience- this is a physiological response. This reaction can leave the survivor feeling confusion, disgust, shame, or question their sexual orientation or identity. These responses do not imply that the survivor enjoyed the assault and do not indicate anything about the survivor's sexual orientation.

Barriers faced by male survivors in accessing services.

There are multiple barriers to male disclosures and help-seeking behaviour for male survivors of sexual violence. Entrenched social, community, and religious norms, including taboos around sexual orientation and masculinity, may stigmatize male survivors, evoke feelings of shame, and prevent male survivors from seeking assistance. These norms can make it challenging for male survivors to seek help and may result in a lack of compassion or support from social networks and service providers.

Research on service barriers faced by male survivors of sexual violence in Ukraine conducted by WRC in 2023 identified several barriers for male survivors to seek different services, including health and psychosocial support services¹. Fears regarding confidentiality of services, including fear of being identified as a survivor, and fear of being viewed or identified as being from a diverse sexual orientation or gender identity were identified as among the top barriers to accessing health or psychosocial support (PSS) survivor for male survivors. Practitioners also identified lack of knowledge or information of where to access services as a primary service barrier for adult male survivors. Please see below for a summary of key barriers and potential mitigation measures that can be adopted.

Barriers to accessing health and/or psychosocial support services	Mitigation measures
Fear of being identified as survivors and/or no availability of confidential treatment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The principle of confidentiality should be adhered to in service provision, do not share information about the survivor without their informed consent. - Provide services in a space that male survivors can safely and routinely access without drawing attention to themselves, e.g., provision of clinical management of rape (CMR) services within maternity hospitals are less accessible to men. Rooms used for one-to-one consultations/meetings with male survivors should not be identified as case management rooms/meeting rooms for male survivors. - Consider the naming of your centre/service location to ensure the name doesn’t compromise confidentiality.
Fear of being identified or viewed as LGBTQI+	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reassure survivors as needed- sexual violence does not determine sexual identity or sexual orientation.

¹ GBV AoR, the Interagency Task Team on Reproductive Health in Crises task team on male survivors in crisis, chaired by the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC), 2023, Service Barriers faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine.

and/or fear of homophobia.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use and reflect back the language and terms that the survivor uses. Ask the survivor what pronouns they use, and do not assume the gender identity of the perpetrator(s). - Only record information related to sexual orientation, gender identity or expression <u>if it is relevant and the information is required</u>. If there are any concerns that recording this information could increase protection and/or safety risks for this survivor, do not record this information. - Service providers who provide support to male survivors must have the necessary level of knowledge, skills and the abilities to work with this category of survivors.
No knowledge or information of where to access services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Male friendly services should be included as part of GBV service mapping. - Gender specific language can be helpful to highlight that men can receive services; include men in posters/communication materials, as appropriate. - Once quality services are established, conduct targeted outreach to male survivors, in part by being present at other settings in the community where men are likely seeking services (e.g., LGBTIQ+ centres, HIV/STI clinics etc.).
Fear of being blamed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Service providers should understand that men and boys can experience sexual violence and be able to receive any disclosures without judgement. - Be sensitive that terms such as ‘rape’ may be sensitive and a barrier for male survivors who don’t associate their experience with that concept. - Avoid asking ‘why’ questions (e.g., “Why were you walking alone at night in that area?”) - Identify and refer male survivors to peer support groups available in the community. Ensure that peer support groups are held in a confidential space that is both physically and psychologically safe.
No choice of staff with the required gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ask the survivor what gender staff they prefer. The majority of perpetrators of sexual violence against men and boys are men, so do not assume that the survivor would prefer to receive care from a male staff member. If you are unable to offer a service provider of the preferred gender, offer a trained chaperone or support person of the preferred gender to accompany the survivor.
Perception that the service is not good enough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Think about the physical space where services are being offered (including artwork, posters, bathroom) and whether the physical space is welcoming to male survivors. Spaces specifically designed to promote the safety and well-being of women and girl survivors (e.g., Women and Girl Friendly Spaces) should not be altered to be inclusive for men and boys. - However, practitioners delivering services to all survivors should ensure the service delivery platform is welcoming to all survivors. - Provide staff with training and ongoing supervision and support on considerations for working with male survivors and/including people with diverse sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics.
Fear of conscription/mobilization into the armed forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Engage with legal actors to provide safe and confidential legal support to male survivors so they can better understand their legal rights. - Consider the provision of online or remote services for male survivors of sexual violence.

Alternative entry points for male survivors

Support to male survivors should never be provided at women and girls safe spaces due to the need to preserve female only spaces. However, male survivors should not be turned away from services without support or referral to an appropriate and male survivor friendly service. As such, there is a need for clear service mapping and identification of male friendly services for male survivors as part of the establishment of any GBV programming.

Guidance from the GBV AoR notes that male survivors rarely report sexual violence incidents immediately, and frequently do so only when the physical effects of attacks require urgent intervention². When men and boys do disclose their experiences of sexual violence, they often disclose in different ways to women and girls and may disclose to non-GBV service providers, highlighting the need to engage non-GBV actors in trainings and capacity enhancing efforts when working with male survivors. Below is a summary of potential entry points for male survivors of sexual violence identified through the barrier analysis in Ukraine:

Men	Boys
Online services (e.g. chats)	Online services (e.g. chats)
Helplines/hotlines	Helplines/hotlines
Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Services- Non- GBV specialised	Peer groups (e.g. friends)
Police	Child friendly spaces
Health centre or hospital	Child Protection Services
LGBTIQ+ community centres or services	

Considerations for Case Management and Psycho-social Support (PSS) Service Providers Working with Male Survivors of Sexual Violence

Staffing considerations

Do not make assumptions about the gender of the staff person whom a male survivor prefers to disclose to. Male survivors have individual and unique preferences regarding the gender of their service provider. Male survivors should be offered a choice between GBV case managers who identify as “men” or “women”. In Ukraine, many GBV staff are women. If you are unable to offer a service provider of the preferred gender, offer a trained chaperone or support person of the preferred gender to accompany the male survivor (if they consent).

Caseworkers and PSS staff working with male survivors should be sensitised to and be able to respond to the specific needs of male survivors. Staff working with male survivors should consider their own feelings and bias when working with male survivors, including LGBTIQ+ survivors, to ensure that they can convey warmth, non-judgement, empathy and provide information and support to the person. GBV Caseworkers working with male survivors should complete the [Male Survivors and LGBTI modules of the IASC Case Management training](#) and receive regular supervision support.

Responding to disclosures of sexual violence from male survivors

Never pressure the person to disclose sexual violence or share more than they feel comfortable sharing. Always refer back to the GBV guiding principles of confidentiality, safety, self-determination and non-discrimination. Below are some additional key points for responding to disclosures of sexual violence from male survivors:

² [GBV AoR Guidance to Gender Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination.](#)

- Never assume the survivor’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Validate concerns around sexuality and provide accurate information that sexual assault does not change someone’s sexual orientation.
- Remember that disclosure is a process. It often takes time; male survivors may provide hints or ask about something they hear happened to a friend.
- Survivors may not disclose directly. Instead, they may talk about experiences of being tortured. They may not know how to categorise the violence, or experience. Male survivors might mention certain physical or mental health issues: Bodily complaints such as back pain, abdominal pain, and other body pain that cannot be explained, may be related to sexual violence. Some male survivors may mention certain physical or mental health issues and some male survivors may be unable or reluctant to accurately categorise or express the sexual aspects of the violence they experienced and may instead use the terms ‘torture’ or ‘abuse’.
- Provide reassurance if needed: The experience of sexual violence does not make you ‘less of a man’. However, GBV actors should avoid reinforcing the traditional ideas and gender norms about what it means to be a man.
- Validate and reaffirm their bravery and strength, e.g., ‘thank you for sharing that’, ‘you are very brave, it takes a lot of courage to talk about this’.
- Never pressure the person to disclose sexual violence or tell you more than they feel comfortable sharing.

Safety Planning with Male Survivors

As with female survivors, the safety of the male survivor is a priority. Male survivors may have poor support networks and challenges identifying trusted people. Safety planning is most relevant in cases where the survivor is still living with, or is in contact with the perpetrator, or is being persecuted by the perpetrator. Safety planning is an ongoing process and safety plans should assess the survivor’s current level of safety, find out the exact circumstances in which the survivor is in most danger, and the resources the survivor has and develop a plan for safety that incorporates those resources. Useful questions to assess the survivor’s safety include:

- Do you know the perpetrator?
- If yes, is the abuse or threat of abuse ongoing?
- Does the perpetrator have access to you, including ease of access to your home, or being in your social circle?

Phone-based/online case management and PSS services with male survivors

The barrier analysis among GBV and non-GBV actors in Ukraine identified that some male survivors may prefer to access phone-based or online services. Some GBV hotlines in Ukraine may focus on support to women and girls experiencing violence and psychosocial distress, however, similar to in-person services, hotlines should never refuse to offer support to any individual calling in distress. The same GBV guiding principles should be followed with male survivors when providing phone-based or online services. If the services are not specifically designed to address the needs of male survivors, the service provider should have a list of referral numbers for services equipped to work with male survivors. Phone-based and online services can support in reducing some of the concerns regarding confidentiality for male survivors. Hotline services should be anonymous, and survivors should not be required to provide personal identifying information to access services.

Male survivors with complex needs and capacities

GBV actors should consider the intersecting and overlapping identities of male survivors which influence their risk of sexual violence and their coping strategies. Male survivors from some identities may face unique GBV risks and barriers in accessing services. Examples of identities that can impact GBV risks and barriers in accessing services for male survivors, include diverse sexual orientations,

gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), minors, disability status, and religious or ethnic minorities, including the Roma community.

Male survivors with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC)

Due to queer-, trans-, and homophobia, people with diverse SOGIESC experience elevated risks of sexual violence and heightened barriers to accessing care. They experience the same impacts of trauma as survivors with non-diverse SOGIESC and similar challenges that survivors with non-diverse SOGIESC survivors experience in disclosing their experience. However, service providers should be aware that survivors with diverse SOGIESC can experience specific barriers and concerns about disclosing due to the impact of homophobia, queerphobia and transphobia. When developing safety plans with survivors with diverse SOGIESC it is important to recognise that they may experience population specific safety concerns, such as threat to be 'outed' or specific safety risks related to homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia. The lack of specialised and quality services for survivors with diverse SOGIESC can be a further barrier to care. Service providers working with survivors with diverse SOGIESC should be sensitised to the unique vulnerabilities of survivors with diverse SOGIESC, including the appropriate language and terms. GBV actors should engage with a local LGBTIQ+ organisation or initiative as appropriate.

Engaging and partnering with LGBTIQ+ focused CSOs can support access to GBV services. When working with survivors with diverse SOGIESC, service providers should follow a survivor-centred and LGBTIQ+-centered approach and the GBV guiding principles to ensure that services are non-discriminatory. Services should also not indirectly discriminate against people with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities and expressions and sex characteristics which results when organisations provide general services that are not relevant or accessible for persons with specific marginalised identities.

Male survivors of conflict related sexual violence.

While conflict related sexual violence (CRSV) most commonly affects women and girls, men and boys can also be affected. Cases of CRSV affecting men and boys have been documented in Ukraine following Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022³, the actual number of cases reported are likely much higher given the underreporting of CRSV. In line with the [Conflict-Related Sexual Violence \(CRSV\): Do's and Don'ts](#) guidance developed by the Ukraine GBV Sub-cluster GBV actors should ensure the availability of quality, safe, and comprehensive services for survivors in all their diversity. Service providers should not actively identify survivors of CRSV. Where available, GBV actors should include specialised services working survivors of torture in GBV service mapping.

Awareness Raising and Information, Education and Communication (IEC) Materials

Including information and infographics about male survivors in GBV awareness raising activities and IEC materials can support help-seeking behaviours and service take-up among male survivors. IEC materials should highlight accessible and appropriate service for men and boys, with clear messaging to ensure that female-only spaces, including women and girls' safe spaces, are preserved.

Annexes and Additional Resources:

Frequently asked questions

Why do GBV services mainly focus on women and girls? What about men and boys?

³ [OHCHR, March 2023, Report on the Human Rights Situation in Ukraine](#)

GBV actors can widely disseminate information regarding available hotline/phone based and remote services for male survivors. GBV actors can also Engage with legal actors to provide safe and confidential legal support to male survivors so they can better understand their legal rights.

Additional Resources:

This guidance note was developed using the following resources, which provide detailed information and guidance on working with male survivors of sexual violence:

English Language Resources:

- [GBV AoR Guidance to Gender Based Violence Coordinators Addressing the Needs of Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in GBV Coordination.](#)
- GBV AoR, the Interagency Task Team on Reproductive Health in Crises task team on male survivors in crisis, chaired by the Women’s Refugee Commission (WRC), 2023, Service Barriers faced by Male Survivors of Sexual Violence in Ukraine.
- [WRC, 2021, Addressing Sexual Violence against Men, Boys, and LGBTIQ+ Persons in Humanitarian Settings: A Field-Friendly Guidance Note by Sector.](#)
- [WRC and UNICEF, 2021, Supporting Young Male Refugees and Migrants Who Are Survivors or At Risk of Sexual Violence: A Field Guide for Frontline Workers in Europe.](#)
- [WRC and UNICEF, 2021, Supporting Survivors of Violence: The Role of Linguistic and Cultural Mediators, with a Focus on Gender-Based Violence and Sexual Violence against Men and Boys. A Training Curriculum](#)

Other English and Ukrainian Language Resources Available Include:

- [GBV AoR, 2022, Conflict Related Sexual Violence- Do's and Don'ts.](#)
- [Interagency Gender Based Violence Case Management Guidelines: Providing Care and Case Management Services to Gender-Based Violence Survivors in Humanitarian Settings- 2017](#)
- [How to support survivors of gender-based violence when a GBV actor is not available in your area: A step-by-step pocket guide for humanitarian practitioners.](#)
- [The Inter-Agency Minimum Standards for Gender-Based Violence in Emergencies Programming.](#)
- [IRC, 2018, Guidelines for Mobile and Remote Gender-Based Violence \(GBV\) Service Delivery.](#)