

WHAT WE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN CRISIS CONDITIONS



What we should know about sexual and gender-based violence in crisis conditions

This leaflet is intended for all service providers (health professionals, social workers, psychologists, and the police), humanitarian organizations and volunteers involved in dealing with humanitarian crises.

The leaflet was developed in cooperation with the Working Group preparing Standard Operating Procedures on Gender-Based Violence in Crisis Situations and with the support of UNFPA Office in Skopje.

Gender-based violence - an international framework

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to any harmful act perpetrated contrary to a person's will based on socially ascribed differences between men and women. It includes physical, sexual or mental injury (violence) or suffering, threats of this kind, coercion and deprivation of liberty.

Types/categories of gender-based violence

- 1. Rape:** Involuntary (without consent) unauthorized penetration in the vagina, anus or mouth by the penis or any other part of the body. It includes penetration into the vagina or anus with an object.
- 2. Sexual harassment, assault:** Any act of sexual intercourse without consent which does not result in or include penetration. For example, attempted rape, involuntary kissing, stroking or touching the genitals or buttocks. Female genital mutilation is an act of violence that affects sexual organs and as such, should be classified as sexual harassment. This type does not imply rape, where penetration occurs.
- 3. Physical violence:** An act of physical violence, which is not of a sexual nature. For example: hitting, slapping, strangling, cutting, pushing, burning, shooting or using any type of weapons, any discomfort or injury. This type does not include female genital mutilation.
- 4. Forced marriage:** Marriage against a person's will. This also implies child marriages, i.e. marriages under the age of 18.
- 5. Psychological/emotional abuse:** Inflicting mental or emotional pain or injury. For example, threats of physical or sexual violence, intimidation, humiliation, forced isolation, stalking, harassment, unwanted attention, comments, gestures or written words with sexual or intimidating content, destruction of personal valuables.
- 6. Human trafficking and sexual exploitation:** A combination of different types of GBV often intensified during crisis situations.



Why does the risk of gender-based violence increase in crisis situations?

In times of crisis and crisis situations, many factors associated with gender-based violence contribute to increasing the risk and vulnerability of citizens, especially women.

Some of these factors and risks are:

- ◆ Displacement
- ◆ Lack of basic resources in the community
- ◆ Lack of protection within and by the community
- ◆ Disrupted social services
- ◆ Impaired or weakened infrastructure
- ◆ Changed cultural and gender norms
- ◆ Increased militarization
- ◆ Use of sexual abuse and rape as a weapon of war.

Who is most vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence in times of crisis and crisis situations?

- ◆ Adolescent girls
- ◆ Unaccompanied minors
- ◆ Women headed households
- ◆ Elderly men and women
- ◆ Persons belonging to ethnic/religious minorities
- ◆ Persons with physical or intellectual disabilities
- ◆ People with specific health conditions (serious illness, STI/HIV-AIDS, pregnancy and lactation)
- ◆ Persons with a previous history of sexual abuse (as victims and/or witnesses, including marriage at an early age).





What are the most important risk factors for exposure to sexual and gender-based violence?

Risk factors for gender-based violence related to person's context:

- ◆ Lack of male presence (which would ensure the protection, inheritance rights, social acceptance by the community)
- ◆ Lack of family/community bonds
- ◆ Lack of funds
- ◆ Lack of opportunity to meet basic needs (for food, water, hygiene, personal belongings, sleep, etc.)
- ◆ Lack and/or loss of legal documents (relating to personal identity, parenting, property, etc.).

Gender-based violence risk factors related to the external environment:

- ◆ Lack of access to information
- ◆ Unsafe mode of transportation including, but not limited to:
 - Transportation in overcrowded public vehicles such as trains and buses, without supervision
 - Transportation in unsupervised private vehicles such as taxis
 - Illegal transport such as smuggling
 - Crossing certain segments on foot, without supervision
- ◆ Abuse of authority (illegal deprivation of liberty, disabling legal assistance, etc.)
- ◆ Insufficient security in Transit Centers and Refugee Centers, including but not limited to:
 - Overcrowded places
 - Dark and isolated places
 - Lack of services/facilities for men, women, children and people with special needs (toilets, sleeping space, places for food distribution and registration)
 - Lack of supervision of all places
 - Inappropriate behavior by the humanitarian personnel, including sexual harassment and abuse.

How to recognize that a person is a survivor of gender-based violence?

Women and girls refuse food, water, and are ashamed to take sanitary towels and other hygiene products. Refusal to establish eye contact, looking away and at the ground is more likely to occur in survivors of gender-based violence and among individuals at risk. It is important that these messages be conveyed regardless of the lack of response from the other side.

Survivors of gender-based violence facing acute stress and in need of psychological first aid can have the following signs and symptoms:

- ◆ Shaking, headache, feeling great fatigue, loss of appetite, general body pain;
- ◆ Crying, sadness, depressive mood, regret;
- ◆ Anxiety, fear;
- ◆ Being wary;
- ◆ Concern that something bad will happen;
- ◆ Insomnia, nightmares;
- ◆ Irritability, anger;
- ◆ Guilt, shame;
- ◆ Confusion, emotional numbness, unreal feeling or dizziness;
- ◆ Looks withdrawn or is completely stiff (not moving);
- ◆ Does not respond to others, does not speak at all, is disoriented (for example, does not know their name, where they come from or where they are);
- ◆ Can not take care of themselves or their children (for example, can not drink or eat, can not make simple decisions).



A gender-based violence survivor who needs psychological first aid **is unlikely to seek any assistance**

How can you help gender-based violence survivors?

It is very important for everybody who offers help to know how to recognize the symptoms of acute stress and act accordingly. In such cases all persons offering help should identify **basic and/or urgent needs** - including those issues that may seem minor or secondary, but the survivor perceives as urgent and basic, and they should be promptly responded. This will help survivors to:

- ◆ Increase their trust in those offering help;
- ◆ Recognize real needs;
- ◆ Become more aware of the environment and potential sources and types of support available.

Offer to escort the survivor (according to their request) to the referral services available on the site:

- ◆ Mobile gynecological clinic/unit;
- ◆ Psychological first aid (field workers, specialized NGOs/personnel on call);
- ◆ Protection personnel (UNHCR/other humanitarian organizations' people).

In the event of identified cases of gender-based violence, assistance providers should consider and offer the survivor to be accompanied to the place where they can get a medical examination or talk with a psychologist.



Regarding individuals who are most affected or those who are reluctant to seek help, some steps can help “break the ice”, especially if this involves some **movement**:

- ◆ “After such a long journey and such bad weather you may be dehydrated. Let's go to drink some water. Let's go take a moisturizing cream or lip balm.”
- ◆ “Would you like some new clothes for you or your children? Let's go together to take some.”
- ◆ “What are you waiting here? Do you want us to go together to...?”



Respect the wishes, choice, rights and dignity of the survivor:

- ◆ Consult the survivor of where they want to seek help and respect their wishes. Do not direct, suggest or influence in any other way;
- ◆ Health professionals, social workers and psychologists who are part of Field Teams at Transit Centers are appropriate persons to conduct talks and interviews with people at risk of gender-based violence;
- ◆ Talks, interviews and surveys with persons at risk should always be conducted in conditions that ensure privacy;
- ◆ Regarding talks, surveys and interviews with persons at risk/survivors, always engage staff and interpreters of the same gender as the survivor, or in accordance with survivor's wishes;
- ◆ Show respect and keep a neutral approach. Do not laugh and do not show any disrespect to the person, his/her culture, family or situation;
- ◆ Be patient; do not push for more information if the survivor is not willing to give about her/his experience;
- ◆ Never put pressure for full disclosure of the violence case - ask only relevant questions. (For example, the status of survivor's virginity is not relevant and should not be discussed);
- ◆ Avoid requesting from the survivor to repeat their information in a number of interviews;
- ◆ Be guided by the principle of non-discrimination in every interaction with survivors and in the provision of all services.





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