

Module 5: Background Reading on Sexual and Gender Based Violence

Endemic SGBV and its Impact on Individuals, Families and Communities

“Sexual and gender-based violence is a major protection challenge we should recognize.”
(Representative of the Swedish Government, UNHCR Dialogue, 2017)

“SGBV is endemic in all refugee situations and is a major protection issue for refugee women and girls. It occurs in all aspects of their lives, including systematic rape in conflict situations, rape as a method of community control, to destroy families, as a punishment for men, as sexual torture, sexual slavery, trafficking, female genital mutilation, and in domestic violence (Gebreyosus 2013; Asaf 2017). Men and boys also suffer from sexual violence. This abuse has severe consequences for both groups. These include severe psychological impacts, physical damage, sexually transmitted diseases and an enormous burden of shame. Women and girls additionally face bearing children of rape, are often marginalized from families or communities, or face forced marriage. Men are shamed because they cannot protect female family members, and whole communities suffer collective guilt. There is little or no legal redress and most perpetrators function with impunity (Pittaway and Pittaway 2004; Freedman 2016).

SGBV is caused by gender inequality and is simultaneously the biggest barrier to its achievement. It is also one of the hardest issues to address, because it reflects the experience of many women and girls across the world. In numerous cultures, both in the Global North and South, there is a reluctance to acknowledge that it exists, and therefore to address it. However, the development of effective responses to SGBV is the key to women’s protection, empowerment and gender equality in both refugee and host communities. It is a precursor to their full and effective participation in developing durable solutions.

SGBV is a major cross-cutting issue, as it part of all aspects of the lives of refugee women and girls. It has been documented for decades. The endemic nature of rape was recognised in the conflict in Ukraine, and many NGOs provided the morning after pill to women fleeing the violence, because the risk of rape was so real. In other parts of the world, women receive condoms to help protect them as they flee. (Excerpt from Pittaway and Bartolomei, 2018 and [Project 2022 report](#))

Putting Gender on the Agenda

For further information we suggest you consult the excellent work being done by the SEREDA Project, a multi country research project focused on the sexual violence experienced by refugee women and girls. [The SEREDA Project](#) is a major research initiative that was undertaken across the United Kingdom, Australia, Sweden and Turkey by a multi-country research team from the University of Birmingham, University of Melbourne, Uppsala University and Bilkent University.

References and Further Reading

Pittaway. E and Bartolomei. L (2018) *From Rhetoric to Reality: Achieving Gender Equality for Refugee Women and Girls*, WRC Research Paper No. 3, World Refugee Council Research Paper Series- <https://www.cigionline.org/publications/rhetoric-reality-achieving-gender-equality-refugee-women-and-girls>

Phillimore, J., K. Block, et al. (2022) ‘Forced Migration, Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Integration: Effects, Risks and Protective Factors’, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 24(2), 715-745.