

Invisible victims? Where are male victims of conflict-related sexual violence in international law and policy?

European Journal of Women's Studies

2015, Vol. 22(4) 412–427

© The Author(s) 2015

Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/1350506815605345

ejw.sagepub.com



Ellen Anna Philo Gorris

Independent researcher, Belgium

Abstract

In this article the author argues that men and boys have been historically and structurally rendered an invisible group of victims in international human rights and policy responses towards conflict-related sexual violence stemming from the United Nations. The apparent female-focused approach of instruments on sexual violence is criticized followed by a discussion – through analysis and interviews with legal scholars and champions for the recognition of male survivors' experiences – of the first 'emergence' of male victims in these instruments and key actors involved in this process. The existing serious dichotomy between visible and invisible victims is prominently based on their 'gender identity' and leads to structural discrimination of male victims of rape or other forms of sexual violence. To overcome this situation and develop more inclusive instruments, a reconceptualization is needed of the meaning and use of words like 'gender' and 'gender-based violence'. Additionally, a more intersectional approach to sexual violence should be adopted, understanding that victims have a multitude of identities such as ethnicity or religious affiliation that make them particularly vulnerable to suffering.

Keywords

Sexual violence, male victims, human rights, conflict, gender, Women, Peace and Security, intersectionality, women

'The issue is that, the box is just not even on the form. I don't think that men are empowered, but neither do they not want to answer those questions, it is just that we have never thought to ask those questions' (Chris Anderson, 2013, personal communication).

Corresponding author:

Ellen Anna Philo Gorris, Rue du Trone 227, Brussels, 1050, Belgium.

Email: ellengorris@gmail.com

Since the mass rapes of women during the genocide in Rwanda and the war in the Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s, the widespread manifestation of sexual violence during genocides, wars and armed conflicts has become an internationally recognized issue. This has led to better documentation, as well as the adoption of several legal instruments and advocacy initiatives (see UN General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, 1993; UN, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, 1995; UN Security Council Resolution [UNSCR] 1325, 2000). Whilst much of the literature on conflict-related sexual violence focuses on the victimization of women and girls, scholars and international media outlets¹ are increasingly paying attention to male victims. This is indirectly an outcome of the international women's rights movement, without whose successful efforts for attention to and legislation on the victimization of women in wars and genocides, sexual violence would not have become an international issue in the first place. Nevertheless, scholars and activists working on male sexual victimization argue that men constitute as yet 'unrecognized' or 'invisible' victims of conflict-related sexual violence: invisible through under-reporting and the limitations of national and international legal frameworks. Challenges include inaccurate reporting by aid workers, who expect only women to be victims, and failures in national laws that do criminalize acts of rape or sexual violence for female victims but then leave male victims subject to prosecution for homosexual relations when the perpetrator is also a male (Grey and Shepherd, 2013; Lewis, 2009; Sivakumaran, 2007, 2010; Stemple, 2009; Zarkov, 2001).

The 2007 Global Overview of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces estimates that in the last decade, sexual violence against men has been observed in 25 armed conflicts worldwide (59 armed conflicts if sexual exploitation of boys is included) (Bastick et al., 2007). The UN Commission of Experts reporting on the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia in the 1990s documented a vast amount of male-directed sexual violence, especially against detainees, that took many forms such as genital mutilation (including full castration), forced rape and other forced sexual acts (e.g. between detainees or family members) (UN, Commission of Experts Yugoslavia, 1994). A number of cases of sexual violence against men have also been tried before international criminal tribunals, where the *ad hoc* tribunals set up after the genocide in Rwanda and the conflict in the Former Yugoslavia are considered pioneers in defining sexual assault, rape and sexual violence in an inclusive manner that also relates to violence against men and boys (see *Prosecutor v. Cesic*, 11 March 2003; *Prosecutor v. Niyitegaka*, 16 May 2003; *Prosecutor v. Stakic*, 22 March 2006; *Prosecutor v. Todorovic*, 31 July 2007). More recently, the widespread media coverage of the prisoner abuse scandal in Abu Ghraib, the practice of *bacha-bachi* boys in Afghanistan and male rape against civilian men in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has generated international attention (Johnson et al., 2010). Finally, conflict-related sexual violence against men was dubbed an 'emerging concern' by UN Secretary-General Ban ki-Moon in 2013, referring to the sexual violence experienced by men in conflicts in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Syria (UN, Report of the Secretary-General, 2013: paras 10, 17, 27, 45, 73, 84–85, 90).

This article builds on my research into international legal and policy responses to conflict-related sexual violence against men. It seeks first to demonstrate the ways in

which international human rights and policy instruments stemming from the UN have historically silenced or structurally rendered men and boy victims invisible – because they have been geared almost exclusively to the visibility and protection of women and girls. Second, I discuss recent developments in the increased visibility of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and their ‘emergence’ in an important legislative instrument, namely the UN Women, Peace and Security Resolution 2106. Third, based on interviews with scholars and experts who have been instrumental in advocating for increased visibility, I analyse both the progress made and the challenges ahead in terms of addressing conflict-related sexual violence against men. Finally, the concluding section consists of reflections regarding the future of research and policy-making in this field.

International law and policy instruments on conflict-related sexual violence

Conflict-related sexual violence refers to incidents or patterns of sexual violence – against women, men and children – that includes rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization and other comparable acts, occurring in conflict or post-conflict settings. Sexual violence can also be considered an act of genocide, when committed with the intention of contributing to the destruction of a particular national, ethnic, racial, religious or social group (ICC, 2011; UN, Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2011; UNSCR 1820, 2008: para. 4).

A number of different areas of international law are applicable to genocide, particularly international humanitarian law (which defines the so-called rules of war embodied in the Geneva Conventions and customary international law) and international criminal law (which defines international crimes and procedure for individual criminal responsibility). Traditionally, humanitarian law applied in times of war, and human rights law in times of peace, but it is now understood that human rights law remains applicable in war and conflict, affording protection and laying down obligations for states to fulfil human rights (see ICJ, 1996, 2004). International humanitarian law and international criminal law both adopt a ‘sex-neutral’ approach when describing or prohibiting wartime sexual violence, addressing male and female victims alike. However, Sivakumaran (2010: 273–274), among others, argues that though international criminal law covers sexual violence against men, problems continue to exist in the implementation of the law. He refers to cases where male victimization is not prosecuted as sexual violence (rather as torture or ‘beatings’), and cases where the record demonstrated instances of sexual violence against female *and* male victims, but the prosecution only pleaded sexual violence in the indictment to women and girls (*Prosecutor v. Sesay et al.* [‘RUF Trial’], Judgement, 20 February 2009: paras 1205, 1207, 1208). For instance, he cites a case regarding two brothers who were forced to perform oral sex: it was not the prosecutor, but the Trial Chamber that noted the possibility of prosecution under sexual violence: ‘the TC notes that the aforementioned act constitutes rape for which liability could have been found if pleaded in the appropriate manner’ (*Prosecutor v. Delalic et al.* [‘Celebici’], Judgement, 16 November 1998; Sivakumaran, 2010).

From an international human rights law perspective, sexual violence infringes on a large number of human rights, such as the right to life, the right to health, the right to bodily integrity, and, most often, as a violation of the prohibition on torture, inhumane and degrading treatment, or as a form of gender-based violence (GBV). Whilst the prohibition on torture is codified in the gender-neutral human rights instruments (UN General Assembly, Convention Against Torture, 1984: Article 1; UN General Assembly, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966: Article 7), applicable to both men and women, gender-based violence is only codified in the context of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against *Women* (CEDAW), and is thus only applicable to women (UN General Assembly, CEDAW, 1979: Article 1; UN, CEDAW General Recommendations Nos 19 and 20, 1992: paras 1, 6).

Scholars have been sceptical of the inclusion of sexual violence against men within the instruments prohibiting torture, arguing that its description is often ‘too general’, and does not include the words ‘sexual’ or ‘gender-based’, and that advocacy work on the victimization of men and boys could therefore ‘stretch these legal tools to fit a problem for which they were not explicitly crafted’ (Stemple, 2009: 636–637; see also Lewis, 2009: 19). This is a critique that could be applied for sexual violence in general, where Hennessey and Gerry argue that there ‘has been historical reluctance to class sexual violence as torture, and the treaty was not drafted with this purpose in mind’ (Hennessey and Gerry, 2010: 13). Though ‘gender-based violence’ might reasonably be thought to include both sexes (as both have a perceived or socially constructed gender), within international human rights law, as codified, it only describes *female* victimization. This observation is not a criticism of CEDAW, as its definition of GBV is entirely legitimate, given its focus on women, but I agree with scholars such as Lara Stemple (2009: 618–620) that this solitary codification of gender-based violence in the CEDAW (and not in other international human rights instruments that also apply to men and boys) has conflated ‘sexual violence’, ‘gender-based violence’ and ‘violence against women’, especially given the political context in which these terms entered UN discourse during the 1990s. At the moment, these terms are used interchangeably in UN legal and policy documents, as well as by many academics and NGOs. This practice fuels the view that sexual violence and gender-based violence solely refer to female victimization, thus leaving the victimization of men and boys invisible, under-researched and under-addressed (Linos, 2009: 1549; Stemple, 2009: 636–637). Next to this, feminist theorists such as Catharine MacKinnon have long advocated for further recognition of all rape during war as torture (MacKinnon, 1993).

It can also be argued that international blindness to male victims of conflict-related sexual violence reinforces masculinist and heteronormative gender ideologies. Research shows that male victims have a tendency to recount their story of victimization using relatively nondescript words like ‘abuse’ or ‘torture’, suppressing the specific sexual aspect of their suffering, as they regard sexual violence as compromising their masculinity (Donnelly and Kenyon, 1996: 441–448; Lewis, 2009: 9; Oosterhoff et al., 2004: 68; Peel et al., 2000: 2069; Solangon and Patel, 2012: 422).

From an international policy perspective, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) – marked as a breakthrough for women’s rights – framed for the first time sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security, describing the

multiple 'gender dimensions of war' and emphasizing women's potential roles as peace-makers, political representatives and victims of sexual violence. To date, six follow-up instruments in the context of this Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda have been adopted (Resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106 and 2122), identifying responsibilities in the area of prevention, reporting and programmatic strategies. These resolutions condemn sexual violence against women and girls in conflicts, noting that they can constitute international crimes like war crimes, crimes against humanity or acts of genocide (UNSCR 1325, 2000: para. 10). They provide a foundation for the UN's objective-setting when it comes to conflict-related sexual violence.

Problematically – from the perspective of male victims – the pre-Resolution 2106 documents focus on victims as having a female character, referring to 'women and girls' or sometimes 'women and children' when codifying obligations, stressing that these groups constitute the 'vast majority' of victims and that they should enjoy 'particular attention' (particularly UNSCR 1325, 2000: paras 4, 9–11; UNSCR 1820, 2008: paras 3, 6, 8, 9). In addition to the problematic convention that always associates women with children (Enloe, 2000), these statements imply not only that it is necessary to quantify suffering (through the question of who suffers the most), but also that sex is a condition for protection (Jones, 2000: 186; 2001). Victims are made visible through their sex as female; it is this 'identity' that makes them 'rights-holders' or visible 'victims' (Graham, 2006). Grey and Shepherd have argued that – in light of a poststructuralist feminist theory of the marked body, particularly that of Judith Butler (1993) – the absence of masculinity, combined with the silencing effect of dubbing women and girls as the 'vast majority' of victims, denies the possibility of the violated male body altogether (Grey and Shepherd, 2013: 122). This denied materiality has a profound effect on protection and existing programmes: men do not have access to adequate support services, because they are designed solely for female victims (SVRI, n.d.; UNHCR and RLP, 2012). This conflation of gender, identity and body silences male victims because they do not fit the 'identity' of the 'violated body'. This means international legal and policy frameworks structurally discriminate against men as victims of sexual violence.

As stressed by Sandesh Sivakumaran (2007: 270–274), sexual violence against men is just as 'gendered' and should be recognized: such violence intends to strip men of their 'masculine' status as soldier, protector, or father – the 'feminization' or 'homosexualization' of men is intended, in the eye of the perpetrator, to 'reduce' them to the subordinate status of women and non-heterosexuals, perpetuating the hegemony of masculine and heterosexual society. Researchers like Charli Carpenter argue more generally that men are also particularly affected by war in a gender-based way during wartime, for instance through sex-selective massacres, forced recruitment and sexual violence (Carpenter, 2006: 84).

Regarding the sheer magnitude of sexual violence in all forms of conflict, Catharine MacKinnon has proposed that mass rapes of women express misogyny, underpinning a pre-existing culture of gender inequality (MacKinnon, 1994: 186). Susan Brownmiller has argued that 'the original impulse to rape does not need a sophisticated political motivation beyond a general disregard for the bodily integrity of women' and that war provides 'the perfect backdrop (for men) to give vent to their contempt for women' (Brownmiller, 1976: 36). It is important here to understand the

'theory of deliberate policy of sexual violence during armed conflict' (Eboe-Osuji, 2012: 83–86), where sexual violence is used as a tactical weapon of war, with different aims, including domination, emasculation and attacking one's entire community: instilling terror, as well as forced impregnations to alter the ethnic make-up of society. Inger Skjelsbaek (2001: 215) has proposed a social constructivist perspective, where women and men are targeted, where women in the warzone are victims of sexual violence to masculinize the identity of the perpetrator and to feminize the identity of the victim. Skjelsbaek (2001: 215) also discusses a structuralist conceptualization, explaining that women in war zones are victims of sexual violence as the most forceful way to attack any ethnic, religious or political group. This could, however, arguably also apply to men who are targeted by the enemy because they belong to a particular social group.

It can be argued that the dominant focus on women and girls in international instruments may be one of the outcomes of the successful, and very necessary, attempts of feminist scholars and activists to rectify the invisibility of women's experiences in wars, conflicts and genocides (Koo, 2002). It is as a result of this sustained effort that sexual violence became an international issue in the first place. Yet, until recently, the structural silencing of men's victimization through conflict-related sexual violence in international and national legal frameworks has not only diminished our understanding of the gendering of genocides, wars and political conflict, but also deprived male victims of access to adequate resources, treatment and justice.

2013: International momentum on sexual violence

In recent years, there has been a remarkable but subtle increase in the visibility of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence, for instance UN reports referencing sexual violence against men and boys (UN Human Rights Council, 2011: paras 66–67; UN, Report of the Secretary-General, 2010: paras 8, 13; UN, Report of the Secretary General, 2012: paras 3, 7, 27, 29, 36, 67, 83, 87, 92–94), and UN documents on sexual violence that use gender-inclusive definitions of sexual violence to frame their work and implementation (UN, Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, 2011; UN, Provisional Guidance Note 1960, 2011).

Importantly, in June 2013, a new Women, Peace and Security Resolution was adopted (Resolution 2106) where men and boys were mentioned for the first time in a WPS resolution: in July 2013, (the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG–SVC) organized a first ever special UN Forum dedicated to further the understanding of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence, bringing together international activists, researchers, academics and UN entities working on sexual violence, as well as survivors. In 2012 the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) was launched by UK Foreign Secretary William Hague, in collaboration the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Zainab Bangura, and UNHCR Special Envoy Angelina Jolie, calling for international fora to address this issue. One of the expert sessions of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence, organized by the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative in London 10–13 June 2014, highlighted the specific lack of attention for male victims.

The SRS–SVC, and potentially the PSVI, have probably been the key drivers of the adoption of a G8 Declaration on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict (2013: para. 3), a General Assembly Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence (2013: para. 4) and the aforementioned Security Council Resolution 2106. As a novelty in any high-level political documents, these instruments largely adopt gender-inclusive language, referring to ‘victims’ or ‘individuals’. Notably, though it is a step forward that men and boys are mentioned as victims, all instruments employ a kind of ‘but-also’ construction. Focusing on Resolution 2106, it reads:

Noting with concern that sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations disproportionately affects women and girls, as well as groups that are particularly vulnerable or may be specifically targeted, *while also* affecting men and boys and those secondarily traumatized as forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members. (UNSCR 2106, 2013: Preamble; emphasis added)

The intergovernmental debate awareness of men and boys as an ‘emerging’ victim group could be a major breakthrough, increasing the visibility of male victims and raising expectations of programmes to address their needs. However, Resolution 2106 clearly concentrates on women and girls as ‘disproportionately’ affected by sexual violence, with men and boys as secondary victims. The ‘but-also’ construction sees males as secondary to the experiences of women, and women are mentioned most frequently (i.e. 18 times), portrayed in such roles as victim, peace builders and critical contributors to society. Men and boys are discussed only in two preamble paragraphs, as victims and in an instrumentalist capacity (Stemple, 2009), as a group whose involvement is needed to prevent forms of violence against women (UNSCR 2106, 2013: Preamble, para. 5). This framing reinforces traditional gender stereotyping, where men are conceptualized as aggressive perpetrators, and women as non-violent victims: the traditional notions of hegemonic masculinity and heterosexuality.

Interviewing key actors: Challenges

To gain a deeper understanding of the process that led to these international policy developments, interviews were conducted in 2013 and 2014² with advocates of the recognition of male victims of conflict-related sexual violence, and with legal scholars that have written on the issue. The interviewees included a number of participants in the earlier mentioned UN Forum on Male-Directed Sexual Violence. The purpose of the interviews was to map key actors and to obtain further insights into the current and future challenges to advancing the topic on the international agenda. In total, 10 individuals shared their experience and perspectives: six individuals via Skype and four by email.

In terms of the key actors or champions of inclusion and visibility of male victims, at the UN level many interviewees praised the leadership and interest of SRS–SVC Zainab Bangura, the UNHCR and the Assistant Secretary-General for Safety and Security Ms Mbaranga Gasarabwe, with the first being particularly commended for taking the political courage to organize the UN Forum in the first place, especially since her office’s mandate stems from the Women, Peace and Security framework. Kate Adams of War

Child UK stated that the PSVI initiative has been significant in putting political weight behind an issue that had lacked high-level attention, namely sexual violence during war-time in general (Kate Adams, 2 October 2013, personal communication). A representative of the PSVI stated that ‘male victims (and children), and the importance of including them in the scope of the initiative, came up as part of a specific NGO consultation, where there was a separate session on male and boy victims. It was raised by a number of NGOs and the SRSg–SVC office’ (Ann Hannah, 16 October 2013, personal communication).³

On the NGO side, many pointed to Chris Dolan from the Uganda-based Refugee Law Project (RLP), Alastair Hilton of First Step Cambodia and Ken Clearwater of New Zealand-based Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust (MSSAT) as particularly active in the international setting.⁴ Dolan, Hilton and Clearwater have collaborated in creating the South-South Institute on Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement in 2013,⁵ which, at that time, was the first ever survivors’ conference focused on male survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. Their aim is that this platform will play an important role in institutional advocacy, raising awareness and education, and centralizing survivors’ voices. Even though all interviewees stressed that there is no formal lobby or official international spokesperson, Dolan was often identified as the key expert on conflict-related sexual violence against men, and the RLP as a key organization that advocates for male victims through, for instance, videos and special events and, importantly, the supporting of refugee victims of sexual violence.⁶

All interviewees agreed that the general visibility of conflict-related male victims of sexual violence on the global agenda has increased markedly over the last few years. Nevertheless, it was stressed that the newly adopted documents and the recent events, especially the UN Forum, are ‘baby steps’ or the ‘first step among many’, identifying a number of important remaining or continuing challenges.

Nearly all interviewees emphasized that the focus on women as a potential victim group appears to continue to dominate. Kate Adams of War Child UK stressed that whilst it is a big step forward that men and boys are mentioned in the G8 Declaration, in terms of international action on the issue, they are still an afterthought, and their visibility is secondary (Kate Adams, 2013, personal communication). Lara Stemple explained that it would have been better if Resolution 2106 were to separate the relevant sentences quoted earlier with a period or full stop, starting a new sentence on indirect victims, so that direct victimization would be framed inclusively for females and males – followed separately by an equally inclusive approach to indirect victimization (Lara Stemple, 2013, personal communication).

Adam Jones, Hilton and Clearwater emphasized that sexual violence is still predominantly framed within a GBV setting and often considered exclusively as a ‘women’s issue’ (Adam Jones, Alastair Hilton, Ken Clearwater, 2013, personal communication). Mike Lew commented that the lagging of visibility of male victims behind awareness of female victimization ‘is understandable as women have been pioneering awareness for a lot longer and there is much greater social-cultural denial about male vulnerability’ (Mike Lew, 2013, personal communication).

That this is a serious issue with far-reaching and undesirable consequences became clear when some interviewees noted that they encountered ‘resistance’ against the recognition of male victims from organizations working in the ‘GBV sector’, also at the UN

Forum where some attendees were cited as stating that 'we all know who the real victims [women] and the real perpetrators [men] are'.

Hilton stated that it is not always easy to understand why this resistance occurs, but as there has been so little debate to date, it may be due to a lack of understanding of the issue and due to the difficulty of fitting the reality of sexual abuse into dominant gender perspectives. This resistance can also be pragmatic, where interviewees testified that there is a concern that already scarce resources for women and girls will have to be reallocated and a worry that drawing attention to men and boys will *undo* some of the progress achieved over the last decades in women's rights and the violence against women campaign.

On the subject of funding, Hilton believed that resources need to be significantly increased to cater for all victims, as for now most funding streams consider GBV not to apply to men and boys. They 'do not want to undermine the issue of violence against women and girls, because it is a huge issue and in most settings it is not adequately addressed; we are not asking for a reduction in commitment or resources, all we are asking for is recognition, visibility and opportunities to effectively address this issue in partnership with others and there continue to be considerable institutional, cultural, and social barriers that need to be overcome' (Alastair Hilton, 2013, personal communication).

Another challenge to overcome is the continued stigma and lack of belief when it comes to male victimization. Men's suffering of sexual violence continues to be minimized or denied, even by high-level representatives of international organizations. Hilton shared an example from a meeting of senior representatives of an organization playing a major role within the international community, where one influential stakeholder commented on evidence from research highlighting the increased prevalence of boys being abused as perhaps being a case of 'boys just playing around' (Alastair Hilton, 2013, personal communication). In turn, Clearwater's observation was that 'the shame and guilt that goes along with being abused makes it difficult for men to come forward to get the support and services they need, because they only see services and resources provided for women' (Ken Clearwater, 2013, personal communication).

Yet the recent developments highlight that change is under way. Dolan stressed that what is imperative is that the issue has been taken on board. He noted that 'when looking back at Resolution 1325 issued over a decade ago, then Resolution 2106, though still having a victim hierarchy, is an important step forward because it opened up the discussion' and that 'when looking at it from a purist perspective, wanting a statement or framing that in your opinion reflects reality then it is of course very unsatisfactory, but if you look at it from an activist perspective, that knows how difficult it is to get any movement, then Resolution 2106 is a huge achievement' (Chris Dolan, 2013, personal communication).

Several interviewees, including Chris Anderson, compared what is happening with male victims today with what happened with female victims decades ago, when their suffering was a taboo and their experiences were left invisible. In this regard, he stressed that bridges need to be built between the two movements, noting that the work done around women's rights has created a very powerful, visible and dynamic political force, from which he and others championing for the recognition of male victims now benefit since the fact that we can discuss sexual violence was made possible by this movement in the first place. He also added his wish for a 'shift away from language that focuses on

casting males as exclusively perpetrators of violence and females as exclusively victims of violence, towards a language that is more gender inclusive, recognizing that both men and women can be both victims and perpetrators of violence' (Chris Anderson, 2013, personal communication). Along the same lines, some interviewees argued that acknowledging only the suffering of one gender is ethically wrong, and impedes our understanding of sexual violence as a whole.

In Dolan's view, it is appropriate and positive that the Women, Peace and Security agenda has now taken up this issue, stressing that 'if you can get this kind of reframing from within of an issue that was perceived as a sort of women's rights frame, then the ground has really shifted'. He commented that the last thing he wants is that attention for men and boys is framed in opposition to working on Women, Peace and Security, because 'gender is about gender, it is not about men on their own or women on their own, it is about relationships and interactions, and when you work on these issues it should be in an inclusive fashion'. He also stated that relevant actors should go beyond the numbers game, because 'even if numerically there are more male perpetrators and more women victims, this does not tell you how to address this issue'.

Looking to the future, Dolan noted that he had been working on a screening tool for victims, in collaboration with Johns Hopkins University's principal investigator Alexander Vu, funded by the American State Department. He was optimistic that the first results will be a game-changer, providing the necessary data and statistics to back their claim for recognition of male victims. At the time of writing, they had screened 447 adult male refugees, where 13.4% indicated to having experienced sexual violence in the previous year, and 38.5% having suffered some form of sexual violence during their lifetimes (Dolan, 2014). For Dolan, 'it is great to see how many survivors are speaking out and standing up, which was unthought of a few years ago; from the 1990s where nobody wanted to come forward as a victim to today where a support group will put on a play in a refugee settlement in the middle of everybody with the "story of the male survivor" and all the issues that come along with that'. Hilton argued that some of the real change is already happening on the ground in some settings and that it will be crucial to 'place the experience and voices of those affected at the very center of future efforts'.

Conclusion: Theoretical challenges and further research

Assessing the various challenges identified above, an overarching issue is that 'gender' in general, and sexual violence as a form of gender-based violence in particular, continue to be mainly associated with the experiences of women and female victimization. The visibility of the female victim and the absent presence of the male perpetrator in the discussed legal instruments promote masculinist and heteronormative gender ideologies; the same ideologies that are exploited by the perpetrators of sexual violence against men and women. Blindness to conflict-related male sexual victimization not only impedes our understanding of the gendered dynamics of genocides, wars and armed conflict, but also prevents access to support services and justice for male victims. Scholars and activists working on sexual victimization of men during conflicts have long been arguing for the inclusion of sexual violence against men in international policy and legal frameworks, alongside sexual violence against women. And, as I have shown above, significant but

limited steps have been taken in this regard, particularly in the adoption of new high-level documents in 2013, whose value should be proven in the coming years.

If one theoretical and political challenge is to delink gender and women (and as an extension, gender-based violence and violence against women), another one is to expand our understanding of 'identity'. It is important to recognize that policy language that links an 'identity', as described by someone's sex, to a 'marked body' will inevitably silence and discriminate against certain victims. One approach that could prevent this type of discrimination is the intersectional approach, which recognizes the multitude of identities a 'body' may carry (including race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, social class, sexual orientation, etc.) and the interweaving of different forms of discrimination in a single person's experience (Crenshaw, 1991). This approach can help overcome the problem that in many of our human rights frameworks the rights of one person are conceptualized at the expense of another (Symington, 2004). In genocide, someone's other identities beside their 'sex' (such as their national, racial, ethnic, political or religious identity – one of the requirements for a series of acts to amount to genocide) may determine their vulnerability, making an intersectional perspective imperative.

Whereas the research underpinning this article is limited in several ways due to the constraints of resources and time, as well as of publicly available data, it still highlights a structural discrimination as well as a gap in protection. I have also shown that sexual violence against men is slowly becoming a little less invisible, partially as an outcome of the international recognition of sexual violence in genocide, war and conflict, which has been possible with the tremendous efforts of international women's rights advocates. I agree with the interviewed experts that instead of viewing the women's movement and the movement for the recognition of male sexual victimization as competitors, bridges should be built for sharing of experiences, solidarity and joint struggle against masculinist, heteronormative gender norms. Further research and analysis should therefore endeavour to study sexual violence *as a whole*, assessing the relationship between sexual violence directed against women and girls *and* against men and boys, in terms of both overlaps and differences.

Whilst this article problematizes the lack of international attention to male victims of sexual violence, the magnitude of sexual violence against women and girls remains undisputed. Violence against women and girls demands significant and ongoing (international) attention, which in itself poses a continuing struggle. One may wonder therefore whether the 'emergence' of men and boys as potential victims within the Women, Peace and Security discourse is appropriate, as this not only leads to an unintentional and undesired 'competition' between the victim groups for visibility and resources, but also bars addressing the particularities of sexual violence experienced by women and men. Perhaps the addressing of sexual violence should therefore move towards a more 'gender' or 'gender and conflict' framework – or at least also be addressed in other policy frames alongside the Women, Peace and Security sphere. It should be recalled that the Women, Peace and Security agenda is not only about protecting women, but also about the role of women as important political stakeholders and actors in peace processes. These aspects should not be forgotten, or clouded by an dominant focus on sexual violence, because conceptualizing women solely as victims does not encourage empowerment or equality. Moreover, the acknowledgement of male sexual victimization should therefore not be

framed as ‘going against women’, but rather as an issue that fits well within the larger aims of a feminist research and policy agenda of uncovering structures of silencing and discrimination within dominant frameworks.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the Office of the SRSG–SVC who pointed me to relevant documents, and who provided me with information on the 2013 Forum for background information purposes. I am also grateful for the academic insights of Lara Stemple and Adam Jones, and all the representatives of the following organizations for their willingness to share their views and experiences in the interviews and in writing: Refugee Law Project, First Step Cambodia, MSSAT New Zealand, Male Survivor US, War Child UK, Watchlist, Next Step Counselling and Training Centre and the Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office. A detailed list of interviewees and dates of the interviews is included at the end of the article. Where quotes of interviewees are used, this is with their consent.

Author’s note

The author is an assistant policy officer on rights of the child at the European Commission, but writes this article in her private capacity. The views set out in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the European Union. Neither the European Union institutions and bodies nor any person acting on their behalf may be held responsible for the use which may be made of the information contained in this article.

This article builds on the master’s thesis entitled *Invisible victims? Male rape and other forms of sexual violence against men in armed conflict*, which the author wrote in the context of the European Master’s Degree in Human Rights and Democratization at the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratization, written during the second semester and supervised by the Central European University, Budapest.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. Over the past decade, academics and public media have contributed to greater international awareness of male victimization of conflict-related sexual violence. Scholars like Lara Stemple, Adam Jones, Dustin Lewis, Sandesh Sivakumaran, Laurel Fletcher, Charli Carpenter, Laura Shepherd, Rosemary Grey, Lynn Lawry, Pauline Oosterhoff, Miranda Alison and Kirsten Johnson have contributed much to the visibility of male victims. For their publications, please consult the References. On international media: see for instance Gittleman (2009), Storr (2011), Stemple (2011), Al Jazeera (2011), Frontline (2012), BBC World Service (2012).
2. Most interviews took place in October and November 2013, with several follow-up emails and approving of quotes taking place into 2014.
3. To shape the PSVI and map current activity, and gaps, the UK government held consultation sessions with NGOs, academics, faith groups and the UN, especially the SRSG–SVC and UN Action. NGOs that participated in these consultations included, amongst others, Save

the Children, War Child, Nobel Women's Initiative, Women's Initiative for Gender Justice, Care International, Amnesty International, Global Justice Centre and Physicians for Human Rights. In this process, a separate evidence session was held on understanding children as victims, on protection as part of programme intervention and the limitations of prosecution to stop sexual violence occurring, where attention was raised to the issue of men and boys victims.

4. Hilton explained that he first heard about Chris Dolan through Will Storr's *Guardian* article 'The rape of men', after which they met for the first time during a MaleSurvivor conference in 2012 where they both participated in an international panel and also linked up with Ken Clearwater.
5. This conference was organized by Refugee Law Project in collaboration with First Step Cambodia, Male Survivors of Sexual Abuse Trust New Zealand, Men of Hope Uganda, Men of Peace Uganda and the International Human Rights Law Clinic, University of California Berkeley. The first edition was held from 8 to 12 April 2013 in Kampala, Uganda. A second edition was held in May 2015 in Phnom Penh. A third edition is planned for 2017 in New Zealand.
6. Dolan has been working on the issue since 2008, when he collaborated with a young filmmaker on a first ever documentary on the issue, released in 2009 and titled *Gender Against Men*. The same year RLP also organized an open call for a first ever men-only workshop on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, which was attended by 150 survivors from five different language backgrounds. Since then more patients and clients came to then, and in 2011 a small group of men started a support group, today known as Men of Hope with over 80 members. RLP's work has been featured in a number of media outlets. and Dolan was also commissioned by the UNHCR to draft humanitarian guidelines on working with male victims, published in 2012, and was asked to write the final report on the UN Forum. For more information, see <http://www.refugeelawproject.org/>.

References

- Alison MH (2007) Wartime sexual violence: Women's human rights and questions of masculinity. *Review of International Studies* 33(1): 75–90.
- Al Jazeera (2011) Inside story. 28 July. Available at: www.aljazeera.com/programmes/inside-story/2011/07/2011728101626315380.html.
- Bastick M, Grimm K and Kunz R (eds) for the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (2007) Sexual violence in armed conflict, global overview and implications for the security sector 2007 ('Global Overview 2007'). Available at: www.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/sexualviolence_conflict_full%5B1%5D.pdf.
- BBC World Service (2012) An unspeakable act. 28 July. Available at: www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00vp5pk.
- Brownmiller S (1976) *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Butler J (1993) *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. New York: Routledge.
- Carpenter RC (2006) Recognizing gender-based violence against civilian men and boys in conflict situations. *Security Dialogue* 37(1): 83–103.
- Crenshaw K (1991) Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review* 43(3): 1241–1299.
- Dolan C (2014) Into the mainstream: Addressing sexual violence against men and boys in conflict. In: *Workshop at Overseas Development Institute*, 14 May 2014. Available at: www.refugeelawproject.org/files/briefing_papers/Into_The_Mainstream-Addressing_Sexual_Violence_against_Men_and_Boys_in_Conflict.pdf.

- Donnelly D and Kenyon S (1996) 'Honey, we don't do men': Gender stereotypes and the provision of services to sexually assaulted males. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 11(3): 441–448.
- Eboe-Osui C (2012) *International Law and Sexual Violence in Armed Conflicts*. Hamburg: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Enloe C (2000) *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Frontline (2012) The dancing boys of Afghanistan. Available at: www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/dancingboys/view/.
- G8 (2013) Declaration to End Sexual Violence. Available at: www.unrol.org/doc.aspx?d=3371.
- Gettleman J (2009) Symbol of unhealed Congo: Male rape victims. *New York Times*, 4 August. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2009/08/05/world/africa/05congo.html.
- Graham H (2006) Male rape and the careful construction of the male victim. *Social and Legal Studies* 15(2): 187–208.
- Grey R and Shepherd L (2013) 'Stop rape now?' Masculinity, responsibility, and conflict-related sexual violence. *Men and Masculinities* 16(1): 115–135.
- Hennessey T and Gerry F (2010) International human rights law and sexual violence against men in conflict zones. *Halsbury Law Exchange* 1, 6.
- ICC (International Criminal Court) (2011) Elements of crimes. Available at: refworld.org/docid/4ff5dd7d2.html.
- ICJ (International Court of Justice) (1996) Legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons, advisory opinion. ICJ Reports, 8 July, p. 226
- ICJ (International Court of Justice) (2004) Advisory opinion concerning legal consequences of the construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. 9 July.
- Johnson K, Scott J, Rughita B, et al. (2010) Association of sexual violence and human rights violations with physical and mental health in territories of the Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. *Journal of the American Medical Association* 304(5): 553–562.
- Jones A (2000) Gendercide and genocide. *Journal of Genocide Research* 2(2): 185–211.
- Jones A (2001) Effacing the male: Gender, misrepresentation and exclusion in the Kosovo war. *Transitions: The Journal of Men's Perspectives* 21(1): 1–18.
- Koo K (2002) Confronting a disciplinary blindness: Women, war and rape in the international politics of security. *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37(3): 525–536.
- Lewis DA (2009) Unrecognized victims: Sexual violence against men in conflict settings under international law. *Wisconsin International Law Journal* 27(1): 1–49.
- Linos N (2009) Rethinking gender-based violence during war: Is violence against civilian men a problem worth addressing? *Social Science and Medicine* 68(2): 1548–1551.
- MacKinnon C (1993) On torture: A feminist perspective on human rights. In: Mahoney KE and Mahoney P (eds) *Human Rights in the Twenty-First Century: A Global Challenge*. Boston: Martinus Nijhoff.
- MacKinnon C (1994) Rape, genocide and women's human rights. In: Stiglmayer A (ed) *Mass Rape: The War Against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina*. Toronto: Bison Books.
- Oosterhoff P, Zwanikken P and Ketting E (2004) Sexual torture of men in Croatia and other conflict situations: An open secret. *Reproductive Health Matters* 23: 68–77.
- Peel M, Mahtani A, Hinshelwood G and Forrest D (2000) The sexual abuse of men in detention in Sri Lanka. *The Lancet* 355: 2069–2070
- Prosecutor v. Cesic*, Judgment, IT-95-10/1-S, 11 March 2003.
- Prosecutor v. Delalic et al.* ('Celebici'), Judgement, IT-96-21-T, 16 November 1998.
- Prosecutor v. Niyitegeka*, Case No. ICTR-96-14-T, 16 May 2003.
- Prosecutor v. Sesay, Kallon and Gbao* ('RUF Trial'), Judgement, SCSL-04-15-T, 20 February 2009.

- Prosecutor v. Stakic*, Judgement, IT-97-24-A, 22 March 2006.
- Prosecutor v. Todorovic*, Judgement, IT-95-9/1, 31 July 2007.
- Sivakumaran S (2007) Sexual violence against men in armed conflict. *The European Journal of International Law* 18(2): 253–276.
- Sivakumaran S (2010) Lost in translation: UN responses to sexual violence against men and boys in situations of armed conflict. *International Review of the Red Cross* 92(877): 259–277.
- Skjelsbaek I (2001) Sexual violence and war: Mapping out a complex relationship. *European Journal of International Relations* 7: 211–237.
- Solangon S and Patel P (2012) Sexual violence against men in countries affected by armed conflict. *Conflict, Security and Development* 12: 417–442.
- Stemple L (2009) Male rape and human rights. *Hastings Law Journal* 60(2): 605–645.
- Stemple L (2011) Op-Ed by Lara Stemple. *The International Herald Tribune*, 2 March. Available at: www.nytimes.com/2011/03/02/opinion/02stemple.html?_r=1&.
- Storr W (2011) The rape of men. *The Guardian*, 17 July. Available at: www.theguardian.com/society/2011/jul/17/the-rape-of-men.
- SVRI (Sexual Violence Research Initiative) (n.d.) Care and support of male survivors of sexual violence. *Briefing paper*. Available at: www.svri.org/CareSupportofMaleSurviv.pdf.
- Symington A (2004) Intersectionality: A tool for gender and economic justice. *Women's Rights and Economic Change* 9: 215–248.
- UNHCR and RLP (UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Refugee Law Project) (2012) Working with men and boy survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in forced displacement. Available at: www.stoprapenow.org/uploads/advocacyresources/1343219299.pdf.
- United Nations, Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict, Analytical and Conceptual Framing of Conflict-related Sexual Violence, endorsed by the UN Action Steering Committee in May 2011. Available at: www.stoprapenow.org/uploads/advocacyresources/1321456915.pdf.
- United Nations, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, 27 October 1995.
- United Nations, Commission of Experts Yugoslavia. Annex II, Rape and Sexual Assault: A Legal Study, Final Report of the UN Commission of Experts Established Pursuant to Security Council Resolution 780 (1992), n.4. Doc S/1994/674/Add.2 (Vol. I), 28 December 1994.
- United Nations, Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendations Nos 19 and 20, adopted at the Eleventh Session, 1992 (contained in Document A/47/38), 1992, A/47/38.
- United Nations General Assembly, CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women), 18 December 1979.
- United Nations General Assembly, Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 10 December 1984.
- United Nations General Assembly, Declaration of Commitment to End Sexual Violence in Conflict, 24 September 2013. Available at: www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/244849/A_DECLARATION_OF_COMMITMENT_TO_END_SEXUAL_VIOLENCE_IN_CONFLICT_TO_PRINT....pdf.
- United Nations General Assembly, Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, A/RES/48/104, 20 December 1993.
- United Nations General Assembly, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 19 December 1966.
- United Nations Human Rights Council, Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic, A/HRC/S-17/2/Add.1, 23 November 2011. Available at: www.refworld.org/docid/4edde9d02.html.

- United Nations, Provisional Guidance Note Implementation of Security Council Resolution 1960, June 2011. Available at: www.refworld.org/pdfid/4e23ed5d2.pdf. provisional guidance note
- United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on the Implementation of Security Council Resolutions 1820 (2008) and 1888 (2009), A/65/592–S/2010/604, 24 November 2010.
- United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, A/66/657*S/2012/33*, 13 January 2012.
- United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict, A/67/792–S/2013/149, 14 March 2013.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, S/RES/1325, 31 October 2000.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1820, S/RES/1820, 19 June 2008.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1888, S/RES/1888, 30 September 2009.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1889, S/RES/1889, 5 October 2009.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 1960, S/RES/1960, 16 December 2010.
- United Nations Security Council Resolution 2106, S/RES/2106, 24 June 2013.
- UN Security Council Resolution 2122, S/RES/2122, 18 October 2013.
- Zarkov D (2001) The body of the other man: Sexual violence and the construction of masculinity, sexuality and ethnicity in the Croatian media. In: Moser C and Clark F (eds) *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. London: Zed Books, pp. 69–82.

List of interviewees

- Kate Adams, War Child UK, Skype interview on 2 October 2013, emails received on 1, 3, 17, 18, 19 October 2013.
- Christopher Anderson, MaleSurvivor US, interview on 2 October 2013, emails received on 1, 2, 14, 15 October 2013 and 5 June 2014.
- Ken Clearwater, MSSAT New Zealand, interview on 14 October 2014, emails received on 18 October 2013 and 4 and 9 June 2014.
- Chris Dolan, Refugee Law Project, Skype interview on 15 October 2013, emails received on 8, 14, 16, 17 October 2013 and 21 May and 1 July 2014.
- Ann Hannah, Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative of the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, emails received on 8, 14, 16, 17 October 2013.
- Alastair Hilton, First Step Cambodia, interview on 14 October 2014, emails received on 1, 10, 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 23 October 2013, 30 May 2014 and 10 and 12 June 2014.
- Adam Jones, UBC, emails received 1, 8, 13 October 2013.
- David Koller, Watchlist, emails received (multiple per day) on 30 September and 1 October 2013.
- Mike Lew, Next Step Counselling and Training Centre, emails received on 4, 9, 14 October 2013.
- Lara Stemple, UCLA, interview on 17 October 2013, emails received on 3, 15, 16, 17, 19, 22 October 2014 and 7 June 2014.