

REPORTING AND INTERPRETING DATA ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE FROM CONFLICT-AFFECTED COUNTRIES

“DOS AND DON'TS”

INTRODUCTION

Information on the nature and scope of sexual violence during and immediately after conflict is increasingly demanded by governments, NGOs, UN bodies (such as the Security Council), and humanitarian workers. When collected, analysed and reported correctly, data on sexual violence can serve many purposes, including drawing political attention to the issue and mobilizing resources for comprehensive gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response programmes. Data can also help shape the mandates of international peacekeepers and rule of law actors. This Note is intended to assist staff from UN Country Teams and Integrated Missions to improve data collection, analysis and reporting on sexual violence in conflict. Any data collected on sexual violence must respect established ethical and safety principles, such as security, confidentiality, anonymity, informed consent, safety and protection from retribution, and protection of the data itself (see Key Resources).

DOS AND DON'TS FOR COLLECTING, ANALYSING, AND REPORTING ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A. GENERAL

- **Do seek advice from data experts** to agree on what information to collect, share and report and how to do so safely and ethically.
- **Do verify the information wherever possible.** Obtain data from at least three different sources and always inquire about the methodology used to collect this data.

B. ANALYSING DATA

- **Do examine how the data match** other information coming from the field and consider how contextual factors influence data quality.
- **Do assess the quality of the data.** Have the data been collected and analysed in methodologically sound ways? Are they generalizable to a larger population? If so, to which population?

C. REPORTING

- **Do keep in mind the audience and possible use.** If the data are being shared with the media, donors or policymakers make sure that guidance is offered on the interpretation of the data. Briefing notes may help.
- **Do provide the context for all data reported.** If known, and safe to do so, provide information on the camps/clinics/districts from where cases are reported. Be specific, e.g. “reported cases from x number of health facilities”.
- **Do provide a comprehensive description of the incident** as long as this cannot be linked back to individual survivors (precise date and location, information on the victims and perpetrators, ethnicity, age, sex, should be included when safe to do so).
- **Do provide additional information which may have contributed to changes in the number of reported cases.** For example, more services available, public information campaigns, upsurge in violent attacks. Whenever possible, information on when incidents took place should be collected and the information reported along with aggregated numbers.
- **Do label all tables, charts and maps appropriately** to avoid being taken out of context and clearly state the sources for any data cited.

- **Don't share data that may be linked back to an individual or group of individuals.**
- **Don't take data at face value:** assess original sources, including their quality/reliability.
- **Don't assume that reported data on sexual violence or trends in reports represent actual prevalence and trends in the extent of sexual violence.**

DATA SOURCES ON SEXUAL VIOLENCE

A. CASE REPORTS

Case reports on sexual violence are often collected by health service providers, social workers, police, courts or humanitarian/human rights workers. In addition to specific descriptions of the nature of the crime, case reports include information on who reported the case, when s/he reported and to whom, the perpetrator(s), the place and time the incident took place, and the survivor's support network.

Strengths of case reports (when aggregated and properly contextualized):

- May be used to **alert actors to issues of concern** for further investigation and action.
- Can **help identify the services survivors report to** and whether these or other services need to be strengthened.
- Can **help inform prevention and response programming.**
- Can **support efforts to ensure accountability for sexual crimes.**

Limitations of case reports:

- Case reports **represent only specific cases which have been reported** and do not reflect the totality of those affected. A very small percentage of those who experience sexual violence actually report the crime because of stigma, shame, fear of retribution, or lack of services or confidence in available services. It is not possible to make accurate assessments about the number of cases of sexual violence from case reports alone. **It is inappropriate to make assumptions about trends from case reports.**
- **Those who report their experiences of sexual violence may not be the "average" victim** in terms of personal characteristics, type/severity of attack, impact, characteristics of perpetrator, and likelihood of further violence if the perpetrator is identified.
- Aggregated data drawn from case reports do not provide an accurate picture of trends. For example, an increase in the number seeking services for sexual violence may follow public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and alert to services; if not contextualized, the increase may be misinterpreted as representing a sudden increase in sexual violence incidence.
- Data on case reports may **combine cases from multiple years, obscuring the magnitude of the problem.** There is often a lapse between the time a sexual violence crime occurs and when it is reported.

Data from case reports:

- Do not tell us the totality of those affected: likely to be tip of the iceberg
- Do not tell us who is globally affected: those reporting may not be the "average" victim
- Do not tell us temporal or location trends: at most they tell us who is reporting when

B. CASE NARRATIVES:

Case narratives are first-person accounts which detail personal experiences of sexual violence. Case narratives are generally collected by journalists.

Strengths of case narratives:

- Case narratives contextualize and **put a human face on the data.**

Limitations of case narratives:

- Case narratives are **limited by their individuality** and cannot be used to infer a trend. Those who choose to tell their stories may differ significantly from those who do not (in terms of personal characteristics, type/severity of attack, impact, characteristics of perpetrator and likelihood of further violence if the perpetrator is identified).
- Journalists will edit for length and clarity, and often **the most shocking narratives will be published.**

KEY RESOURCES

1. WHO Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Researching, Documenting and Monitoring Sexual Violence in Emergencies. Geneva, World Health Organization, 2007.

http://www.who.int/gender/documents/OMS_Ethics&Safety10Aug07.pdf

2. Guidelines for Gender-Based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Settings: Focusing on Prevention of and Response to Sexual Violence in Emergencies. Inter-Agency Standing Committee. Geneva, 2005.

http://www.humanitarianinfo.org/iasc/content/subsidi/tf_gender/gbv.asp