

Mental Health and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

A Laguna Collective Working Group

This working group consists of professionals with a background in general health, gynaecology, psychology, psychiatry, law, and medical anthropology. It aims to work on a holistic, context-related approach – intrapsychic and interpersonal, economic, political, gender-related, social, cultural, religious, and historical – to better understand conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) and to explore additional strategies and methods that can be added to the existing preventive, therapeutic and training approaches.

CRSV is not only a threat to every individual's (mental) well-being, but also to one's right to a life of dignity, and to humanity's collective peace and security. CRSV is frequently and deliberately used to attack civilians, causing long-term psychological problems and humiliation, disrupting families and the social fabric, generation displacement, and cycles of violence. CRSV is also used as a tactic of violent extremism and terrorism.

The term 'conflict-related sexual violence' refers to rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, forced sexual acts upon others, sexual torture, and any other form of similarly serious sexual violence perpetrated against women, men, girls, boys, and LGBTQI+ persons that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.

In this working group CRSV is expanded to sexual violence as a direct consequence of conflict due to the collapse of a state, often combined with the collapse of social support systems, a climate of impunity, refugees' fragile position, individuals' inability to cope with high stress levels, economic difficulties, discrimination, stigmatisation, and exclusion.

Our integrated approach is based on the realisation that the current emphasis is mainly on women and girls, while research shows that CRSV is also directed to boys and men and that the LGBTQI+ community faces an extra threat. In addition, refugees face different threats in the various contexts and phases during their flight, and therefore need varying types of support. Currently, these underlying causes and the consequences of CRSV are often not part of the support and treatment strategies.

This working group aims to contribute to a more integrated, holistic approach based on findings in the literature and the perspective and needs formulated by people who have experienced CRSV. Our working group works on a guidance note to help trainers and practitioners to use an integrated approach and to collaborate with other professionals in other fields as required.