



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: 16 September 2016

Sexual violence in war has complex and lasting effect, study shows

Survivors of sexual violence in war zones suffer long lasting consequences, such as physical injury, mental trauma and social stigma, wide-ranging research suggests.

Pregnancy as a result of rape, post-traumatic stress disorder and social exclusion are among the commonly found long-term effects, according to the study.

The findings highlight the need for care of survivors and their families in the long term, researchers say.

Awareness of war-related sexual violence against civilians has increased in recent years, with advocates for action including actor and director Angelina Jolie.

In the first wide-ranging review of its kind, researchers analysed the results of 20 studies from six countries spanning more than 30 years, including in Africa and Europe. Eight of the studies included male and female victims.

Rape and abduction were the most commonly reported types of sexual violence. Survivors suffered physical consequences including pregnancy, physical trauma, and sexually transmitted diseases.

Those studies that included mental health effects found that up to three-quarters of survivors were impacted by conditions such as PTSD, depression and anxiety.

Other studies found that victims commonly suffered social exclusion, such as being abandoned by their families or communities.

It also reveals the impact on children, particularly those conceived as a result of rape, who experience negative social pressure and are shown to be vulnerable to malnutrition, lack of education, and exclusion.

The true scale of the problem is hard to judge, because of taboos around sexual violence and a lack of medical support, both of which discourage victims from seeking help, researchers say.

Men and women of all ages can be victims, and women as well as men can be perpetrators, the study shows.

Ranked among the top universities in the world

Responses aimed at helping victims should be tailored to each specific group affected, the researchers say.

The study, which included analysis of conflict in Croatia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, was published in the journal *Public Health*.

Professor Raj Bhopal, of the University of Edinburgh's Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics, said: "War-related sexual violence is a long-standing, horrific and little-researched problem with immense, long-lasting consequences for victims, their families and society."

Inessa Ba, an independent researcher who led the study, said: "The needs of victims are multidimensional. More research is needed, not only in how to prevent sexual violence, but in how to cope with the consequences, informing public health policy and support on the ground."

For further information, please contact:

Ronald Kerr, Press and PR Office

Tel +44 131 650 9547 Email Ronald.Kerr@ed.ac.uk