



SEXUAL VIOLENCE RESEARCH INITIATIVE



What is sexual violence?*

Sexual violence is defined as: “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person’s sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work.”

Sexual violence can take place in different circumstances and settings. These include coerced sex in marriage and dating relationships, rape by strangers, systematic rape during armed conflict, sexual harassment, sexual abuse of children, sexual abuse of people with mental or physical disabilities, forced prostitution and sexual trafficking, child marriage, denial of the right to use contraception, forced abortion and violent acts against the sexual integrity of women, including female genital cutting and obligatory inspections for virginity.



* Krug et al., eds. World report on violence and health, Geneva, World Health Organisation, 2002.

Sexual violence

Sexual violence is a violation of human rights and a serious public health problem. It has a profound impact on physical and mental health, both immediately and many years after the assault. To date, sexual violence has received insufficient attention from researchers, policy-makers and programme designers and it has been a long struggle to have it recognised as a legitimate public health issue.

Why is research on sexual violence important?

Sexual violence is a substantially neglected area of research. In many parts of the world, there is virtually no research. Most of our knowledge about sexual violence internationally has been derived from work with women survivors. Very little research has been conducted on rape prevention and only a handful of theoretically-based interventions have been developed and evaluated. Interventions to respond to sexual violence are also limited; they are usually not oriented towards the needs of survivors and many have not been evaluated. Internationally, the standard legal approach to the punishment of rapists results in only a very small proportion of rape perpetrators being convicted of rape. Research is needed on alternative justice models.

Sexual Violence in Statistics

- *In Uttar Pradesh, India, 29% of men report having sexually abused their wives.*
- *In Lima, Peru, 40% of young women report forced sexual initiation.*
- *In Monrovia, Liberia, 18% of women interviewed had experienced rape or attempted rape during the conflict.*
- *In the Czech Republic, 11.6% of women over 15 report ever having had forced sex.*
- *In South Africa, there is more than one perpetrator involved in 30% of rapes reported to the police.*
- *In the US, women survivors reported being raped an average of 2.9 times.*

Sexual Violence Research Initiative

The Sexual Violence Research Initiative (SVRI) was launched in 2003 to create a network of experienced and committed researchers, policy makers, activists and donors to ensure that the many aspects of sexual violence are addressed. The work of the SVRI is guided by a Coordinating Group of experts from different disciplines, networks of organisations on sexual violence and global regions. The SVRI is an initiative of the Global Forum for Health Research. It was initially hosted by the World Health Organisation, before moving to the South African Medical Research Council, Gender and Health Research Unit.

SVRI overall aim

The SVRI aims to promote research on sexual violence and to generate empirical data to ensure that sexual violence is recognised as a priority public health issue.

SVRI specific objectives

More specifically, the SVRI objectives are to:

- Increase awareness of sexual violence as a priority public health problem through evidence-based communication and information
- Strengthen the support and funding base for research on sexual violence
- Build capacity in sexual violence research
- Improve knowledge of sexual violence internationally to influence policy and service delivery

Health consequences of sexual violence include:

sexually transmitted infections, HIV, unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion, chronic pelvic pain, genital injuries, pelvic fistulae, urinary tract infections, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, suicide, and homicide.

SVRI key activities

Key activities of the SVRI include:

- Creation of a network of experienced and committed researchers, policy-makers, activists and donors via activities such as the SVRI e-mail updates, online discussion forum, conferences and meetings
- Development of an interactive website on sexual violence research (www.svri.org) which includes country pages, tools, measuring instruments, funding information, links and other resources on sexual violence
- Stimulate and support research on sexual violence through calls for proposals, providing technical assistance, publicising research priorities and promoting sexual violence as a key focus area among donors

Sexual violence research agenda

The SVRI has developed a research agenda for sexual violence. The agenda was informed by a review of published literature on sexual violence, a series of SVRI facilitated international expert meetings and discussions, as well as recommendations arising from the WHO World Report on Violence and Health.

Key focus areas for research in the field of sexual violence include:

- Nature, Prevalence, Social Context and Risk Factors Associated with Sexual Violence
- Appropriateness and Effectiveness of Sexual Violence Services
- Sexual Violence Prevention
- Sexual Violence and Restorative Justice
- Child Sexual Abuse
- Human Trafficking for Sexual Exploitation
- Sexual Violence in Conflict and Emergency Settings
- Female Genital Cutting



UN/DPI PHOTO



UN/DPI PHOTO



UN/DPI PHOTO

Sexual violence
is a global issue
that requires coordinated
evidence-based
responses.



SVRI, c/o
Gender and Health Research Unit
Medical Research Council
Private Bag X385
0001
Pretoria
South Africa

Telephone: +27 12 339 8527
Facsimilie: +27 12 339 8582

E-mail: svri@mrc.ac.za
Website: www.svri.org

Global Forum
for Health Research
HELPING CORRECT THE 10 | 90 GAP