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STOP

the
Sexual Assault
against

Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study's goal is to contribute knowledge to the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and assault against aid workers, a topic that is under-researched and under-reported. This is one of the first scholarly, in-depth studies of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers, including heterosexual women and men and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) aid professionals.

Definitions and methods

In this study we define **sexual assault** as any action in which, through coercion (including the use of drugs or alcohol), threat or force, the offender subjects the victim to sexual touch that is unwanted and offensive. Sexual assault can range from unwanted touching and groping, to battery, attempted rape, rape, and sexual torture.

Sexual harassment is a form of sex discrimination that includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. These acts constitute sexual harassment when this conduct explicitly or implicitly affects an individual's employment, unreasonably interferes with an individual's work performance, or creates an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment.

Throughout this document we use the term **victim** to denote a person who has experienced a violation of domestic or international law or a crime committed by another person under domestic or international law. We use the term **survivor** to designate the person who was victimized is also someone who shows resistance, action, ingenuity, and inner strength. We combine these two terms **victim/survivor** to designate that those who experience violations and abuse are also active agents who challenge the abuse, abusers, and systems that perpetuate violence.

Our findings are based on the collection of primary data and a thorough review, coding, and analysis of 78 scholarly works, grey literature, and media reports on the subject. We also reviewed the data

and findings from two recent (2017 and 2016 respectfully) survey studies on this topic by Report the Abuse (1,418 respondents) and the Women's Humanitarian Network (1,005 respondents).¹ Additionally, we consulted databases that track incidents of violence against aid workers including the Aid Worker Security Database by Humanitarian Outcomes and The Aid in Danger Database by Insecurity Insights.² We reviewed security training materials from international aid organizations and consortiums to identify how they approached the subject of sexual harassment and assault against aid workers. We carried out semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with female, male, LGBT, international, and national aid workers; security officers from aid agencies; and subject experts on security and humanitarian aid workers. In total, our findings are drawn from 78 scholarly works; grey and media literature, manuscripts, or reports; 2,423 survey respondents from Humanitarian Women's Network and Report the Abuse studies; a review of 24 security-training materials; portions of 57 testimonies from women and men who were victims of sexual harassment and assault from our own interviews and Report the Abuse's study; and 30 in-depth individual interviews we conducted. Those 30 in-depth interviews generated 135 single-spaced pages of transcribed data. Information gathered from aid workers in all of these sources represent women and men from more than 70 international aid organizations, including the UN and NGOs; governments; contractors; and those who have left the aid industry.

Because sexual harassment and assault against aid workers is such an under-reported phenomenon, we purposefully include the voices of those in the aid world who spoke to us about their experiences and observations throughout this report.

¹ Humanitarian Women's Network, "Survey Data," 2016. Accessed December 5, 2016, <http://humanitarianwomens-network.org/>; Report the Abuse, "Survey Data." Accessed December 5, 2016, <http://www.reporttheabuse.org/research/survey-data/>.

² See the Aid Security Digests by Insecurity Insight, accessed March 10, 2017, <http://www.insecurityinsight.org/aidin-danger/digests/> and the Aid Worker Security Database by Humanitarian Outcomes.

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Summary of research findings: Who is at risk, from whom, where?

The vast majority of humanitarian aid victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault are women. Women aid workers of different nationalities and across a range of educational, experience, and authority levels within missions reported sexual harassment and assault.

Sexual harassment and assault of female aid workers appears widespread, with many individual victims/survivors experiencing numerous acts of harassment and assault; yet it remains grossly underreported and under-acknowledged.

The majority of perpetrators of both sexual harassment and sexual assault are men working in the aid industry, often those in supervisory or higher-level positions compared with their victims, or men employed by aid agencies as security providers. Perpetrators are also from armed forces and groups and civilians within the area where the aid workers are operating.

Based on our review of security training materials, aid agencies appear to make an (incorrect) assumption that armed actors form the group that poses the greatest threat of sexual assault to humanitarian aid workers.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) aid workers reported sexual identity harassment, blackmail, threats, and assaults against them, primarily by men working in the aid industry or security providers employed by aid agencies.

Interviewees reported sexual harassment and assault against aid workers in contexts where a sexist, homophobic work atmosphere exists (including in housing compounds) and senior management does not stop it; a macho form of masculinity dominates the humanitarian relief space; recreational use of drugs and alcohol occurs; high levels of conflict- and non-conflict-related violence against local civilian women exist; armed conflict is on-going; and rule of law is weak or non-existent.

How well do agencies prevent and respond?

Only a few agencies that were interviewed and whose materials were reviewed had formal policies and procedures for prevention, security training, investigation, and response to sexual assault against aid workers. And even among these, interviewees reported a lack of enforcement of these policies and procedures.

Several agency and inter-agency security manuals that we reviewed did not mention sexual assault (despite highlighting numerous other security threats) and none specifically discussed sexual-based crimes specifically against LGBT aid workers.

Sexual assault is given little if any time during actual training sessions—the focus is often on how women should behave to protect themselves—and rarely was reported as part of security training simulations. An attitude of treating sexual assault as “not a serious or real issue” was reported by those discussing training materials and trainings. Little effort is undertaken to train, teach, and advocate for men to change their behaviors or to be active bystanders in prevention, a surprising finding when men’s behavior is the driving reason for the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in the field and workplace.

Agency response to sexual harassment and assault varied widely, with some blaming, firing, or black-listing victims/survivors to—much more rarely—robust and careful formal responses. Agency response differed for international and national staff, with national staff disadvantaged. Respondents almost uniformly alleged a lack of formal policies addressing sexual harassment and assault against LGBT aid workers.

Under-reporting of sexual harassment and assault is widespread. Women and LGBT aid professionals who did report were widely dissatisfied with their agencies’ responses and experienced more harmful professional and personal consequences than those of their alleged perpetrators, who at times remained in their positions and continued perpetrating.

Within humanitarian agencies, there is a widespread lack of adequate physical and, especially,

psychological and emotional health care available for victims/survivors of sexual assault. In addition, work-related injuries are rarely compensated for, particularly for those with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or other psychological and emotional care needs.

Oxfam's careful approach to addressing sexual harassment and assault against aid workers, through their Safeguarding Department, is shared as a best practice, and we encourage other agencies to develop more robust responses to preventing and responding to this violence.

Recommendations

The United Nations, national and international humanitarian and development agencies, and governments, foundations, and other donors that support these organizations and agencies should:

Create workplace environments free from sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault.

- Recognize and robustly counter environmental factors that contribute to sexual discrimination, harassment and assault. These factors include (1) the male domination of power, space, and decision-making in aid agencies; (2) a “macho” environment, where males with power (through positions of authority or weapons, in the case of security officers) foster a work and living atmosphere where sexual discrimination and harassment, discussions and jokes about sex, homophobia, and a “boys will be boys” attitude flourishes and where sexual assault is seen as permissible by perpetrators and their supporters.
- Actively recruit, hire and promote to positions of power and decision-making women and men whose past work performance demonstrate a clear commitment to the rights of women, LGBT persons, and other minorities.
- Require assessments of senior staff and heads of security to include performance measures on fostering a work environment in which the rights and dignity of women, LGBT individuals, and other minorities are upheld, where these groups feel welcome, and where sexual

discrimination and harassment, discussions and jokes about sex, and homophobia are not tolerated. Senior staff and heads of security whose assessments fall short should be required to take and pass mandatory trainings or be removed from their positions.

- Recognize that armed conflict and the breakdown of law and order, including sexual assaults against local civilian women and girls, are red flags that aid agencies' national and international staff are at an elevated risk for assault by both external and internal actors. Factor these realities into security trainings, briefings, and prevention and response systems.
- For security reports, collect accurate statistics by including and reporting sexual assault when it occurs along with other forms of violence against aid workers.

At the agency level, develop, promote and enforce policy, training, and protocol for preventing and responding to sexual harassment and assault.

Screening

- Ensure a mandatory, rigorous screening and training of all staff at all levels to ensure that people are physically, psychologically, and emotionally able to handle the high-stress environments where aid workers operate. A person whose psychological assessment demonstrates that he or she views women, LGBT individuals, refugees, indigenous populations, persons of different religious backgrounds, or other minority populations in a discriminatory way or normalizes the abuse of these populations should not be permitted to work in these environments.

Policies

- Develop, promote and enforce zero-tolerance policies for everyone employed by the agency (staff, contractors, interns, etc.) that prohibits discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual blackmail, sexual assault, and exploitation of beneficiaries, locals, and aid personnel, including LGBT persons.

Protocols for response

- Ensure that all staff—international and national—have clear and up-to-date information on how to report violations and abuse to investigation units prior to and after deployment. Develop and provide robust mechanisms for reporting sexual harassment and assault. Publicize how to report instances of sexual assault and harassment.
- Create and provide resources for robust, external, multidisciplinary investigative units with specialists in investigating and responding to sexual harassment, assault, and exploitation. Ensure teams respond quickly and efficiently to complaints from internationals, nationals, and local staff. Ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation of all cases to improve response.

Training

- Develop mandatory pre- and post-deployment materials, trainings, and simulations that address sexual harassment and assault by both external and internal actors. These should provide clear information on risk reduction and prevention and on response systems (including on sanctions for perpetrators and on agency and external resources).
- Create and implement diversity training for all employees with a specific section on LGBT individuals. A lack of information and awareness of the situations of LGBT colleagues can lead other employees to rely on stereotypes that can create a hostile workplace.³
- Train all employees in bystander intervention for any harassment to (1) create awareness (allowing bystanders to recognize problematic behavior), (2) create a sense of collective responsibility, (3) create a sense of empowerment, and (4) provide resources that employees can use during an intervention.⁴

³ Christine Silva and Anika K. Warren, “Building LGBT-Inclusive Workplaces: Engaging Organizations and Individuals in Change” (Catalyst, 2009). Accessed March 9, 2017, <http://www.glen.ie/attachments/Catalyst.PDF>.

⁴ Guidelines provided by US Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, “Select Task Force on the Study of Harassment in the Workplace,” report of co-chairs Chai R. Feldblum and Victoria A. Lipnic, June 2016. Accessed

Leadership

- Require leadership at international, regional, and national levels and lead security officers to attend and pass robust trainings on ensuring zero-tolerance for sexism, homophobia, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in workplaces, living compounds, and the field.
- Hold senior-level officials accountable should they not ensure high quality investigation or fail to enact punitive measures where recommended by the investigative team. Senior-level staff who ignore, fail to take action, cover up or dismiss cases of sexual assault and harassment without turning them over to proper investigative units, or who fail to carry out recommended sanctions should be fired.

Ensure high quality, ethical, and lawful treatment of victims/survivors.

- Develop and provide robust mechanisms for staff to report sexual harassment and assault.
- Ensure that all staff have access to physical, psychological, emotional, legal, and social support services, including post-contract for a period of time.
- Ensure that all “post-exposure preventive (PEP) treatment” kits (for emergency medical response for individuals exposed to the HIV virus) are current and usable and that the list and contact information of agencies and personnel with PEP kits within countries are current and publicized.
- Develop, strengthen, promote, and ensure comprehensive whistleblower protection and response policies within the agency to protect whistleblowers from retaliation.
- Ensure that for both national and international staff, high quality and professional physical, psychological, emotional, and career support services are available to victims/survivors (regardless of whether they choose to formally report an incident).

March 2, 2016, <https://www.eeoc.gov/eeoc/publications/fs-sex.cfm>.

- Ensure that survivors are not penalized or suffer career consequences by reporting incidents of sexual harassment and assault.
- Develop robust policies regarding sanctioning staff or contractors that investigations concluded engaged in sexual harassment and assault. Inform victims/survivors of the outcomes of the investigations and any resulting sanctions.

At the global level, develop high quality, standardized approaches to prevent and address sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault.

- The UN’s Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) should take the lead on fostering inter-agency efforts to better document and understand sexual harassment and assault against aid workers, including LGBT individuals, and share and promote best practices on preventing, investigating, and responding to sexual harassment and assault.
- Develop external platforms, either globally or in several regional offices, that serve the United Nations and international NGOs where victims/survivors can report their cases. Upon reporting, the victim/survivor would be assigned a case manager who would assess, refer, and ensure the provision of legal, medical, psychological, emotional, and career support services. International humanitarian and development agencies should develop similar external platforms and services within their own agencies.
- Ensure that the new UN assistant secretary-general to be appointed to work on behalf of victims of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA)⁵ reports directly to the UN secretary-general and that her/his mandate includes victims/survivors working for UN and INGO humanitarian and development aid agencies.
- Under the leadership of the IASC’s Protection from Sexual Abuse (PSEA) task force and the new UN assistant secretary-general to be appointed to work on behalf of victims of SEA, the humanitarian sector should share knowl-

edge about best practices regarding preventing and responding to sexual harassment and assault and support other agencies in their process of developing appropriate prevention and response mechanisms. This can involve sharing resources, convening international discussions about the topic, and developing mechanisms to share information across locations.

Address knowledge gaps.

Additional research is needed on the topic of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian and development aid workers. We highlight three main areas in which more research is needed:

- First, address particularly significant knowledge gaps on a number of thematic topics: differences in experiences of international, national and local staff; the experiences of LGBT and male victims/survivors; and best practices and lessons learned as agencies respond to reports of sexual harassment and assault.
- Second, conduct a large-scale representative study, one that would enable documentation and analysis regarding prevalence rates, patterns of sexual harassment and assault (who, what, where, when), the effects on victims/survivors, and agency response.
- Third, conduct several detailed country case studies that would enable a deeper understanding of the contexts in which sexual assault against aid workers does and does not occur, why, and what agencies can do to better prevent and respond.

⁵ United Nations, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach,” Report of the Secretary-General A/71/818. Accessed March 10, 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/N1604056.pdf>.