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# STOP

the  
Sexual Assault  
against

## Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers

a report by Dyan Mazurana, PhD, and Phoebe Donnelly

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Feinstein International Center  
Tufts University  
114 Curtis Street  
Somerville, MA 02144  
USA  
tel: +1 617.627.3423  
fax: +1 617.627.3428  
[fic.tufts.edu](http://fic.tufts.edu)

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## **About the Authors**

Dyan Mazurana, PhD, is Research Director at the Feinstein International Center, Associate Research Professor at the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, Associate Research Professor at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and Research Fellow at the World Peace Foundation, Tufts University. Phoebe Donnelly ([phoebe.donnelly@tufts.edu](mailto:phoebe.donnelly@tufts.edu)) is Assistant Researcher at the Feinstein International Center, and a doctoral candidate at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy. To contact the authors please write to [dyan.mazurana@tufts.edu](mailto:dyan.mazurana@tufts.edu).

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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).<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

This research was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Dignitas Research Innovation Fund.

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<sup>1</sup> Humanitarian Women's Network, "Survey Data," 2016; Report the Abuse, "Survey Data."

<sup>2</sup> 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.

## **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.<sup>3</sup>
- 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.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Christine Silva and Anika K. Warren, “Building LGBT-Inclusive Workplaces: Engaging Organizations and Individuals in Change” (Catalyst, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> 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.

## 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).
- 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)<sup>5</sup> 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 knowledge 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.

<sup>5</sup> United Nations, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach,” Report of the Secretary-General A/71/818.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research and report is to contribute knowledge to the prevention of and response to sexual harassment and assault against local, national, and international humanitarian and development assistance professionals, a topic that is under-researched and under-reported.

The report's title "Stop the Sexual Assault against Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers" seeks to highlight two primary points. First, aid workers, and particularly humanitarian aid workers, realize that they will often work under difficult conditions with populations that are in crisis. Many are motivated to undertake this work by a desire to assist disaster- and conflict-affected populations and populations living in poverty. In these situations, aid workers themselves have a duty of care to the beneficiaries of their services, and this has been made clear in a number of policies, from "Do No Harm"<sup>6</sup> to the UN secretary-general's statement on zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse<sup>7</sup> and the multiple measures to protect civilians from sexual abuse and exploitation by aid workers and peacekeepers.<sup>8</sup>

In our report, we emphasize that the duty of care expected from aid workers to beneficiaries must also extend to the duty of care agencies have to protect aid workers from sexual harassment and assault. Thus, the second and main point of the title is that humanitarian and development agencies and their senior officials have the responsibility or legal obligation to avoid reasonably foreseeable acts or omissions likely to cause harm to others, including their own staff.<sup>9</sup> In terms of preventing and responding to sexual harassment and assault against

aid workers, this report finds that the sector as a whole is failing in its duty of care to aid workers.

This report intersects with two areas of international focus and concern: protection of humanitarian and development aid workers from violence and the sexual exploitation and abuse of civilians by United Nations (UN) national and international organizations' personnel. This report complements these areas of focus and helps fill an important knowledge gap on sexual harassment and assault against aid workers.

International humanitarian law (IHL) relating to the security of humanitarian personnel in situations of armed conflict produces a hierarchy of legal protections<sup>10</sup> that advantages certain groups of aid workers over others, while leaving the majority of aid workers largely covered by civilian protection.<sup>11</sup> The strongest level of legal protection for humanitarian aid workers is for "UN and associated personnel" under the 1994 Convention on the Safety of UN and Associated Personnel.<sup>12</sup> The 2005 Optional Protocol to the Convention expanded the scope of "operations" to a wider set of UN operations and associated personnel, specifically those "(a) delivering humanitarian, political or development assistance in peacebuilding, or (b) delivering emergency humanitarian assistance."<sup>13</sup> The second level of protection originates from the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 that bestow "special rights and protections—through the use of the distinctive Red Cross/Red Crescent emblem—on medical services of armed forces, civilian hospitals in wartime, and affiliates of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (including national societies, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies)."<sup>14</sup> Deliberate attacks

<sup>6</sup> Mary Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Reiner, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy."

<sup>8</sup> United Nations, "Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Report of the Secretary-General," A/70/729, 16 February 2016; United Nations, "Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse: Report of the Secretary-General," A/69/779.

<sup>9</sup> Business Dictionary, "Duty of Care."

<sup>10</sup> This section draws from the work of Julia Brooks, *Humanitarians under Attack: Tensions, Disparities, and Legal Gaps in Protection* (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative).

<sup>11</sup> Larissa Fast, *Aid in Danger: The Perils and Promise of Humanitarianism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014).

<sup>12</sup> UN General Assembly, "Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel," (December 9, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> UN General Assembly, "Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel," UN Doc. A/Res/60/518, 2005.

<sup>14</sup> Julia Brooks, *Humanitarians under Attack*.

against such persons and objects constitute war crimes under international law. The third level of protection covers all other humanitarian personnel and is grounded in Additional Protocol I.<sup>15</sup> As non-combatants, humanitarian professionals also benefit from general protections for civilians under IHL. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court defines intentional attacks against humanitarian personnel and objects as war crimes in both international<sup>16</sup> and non-international armed conflicts.<sup>17</sup>

In 2002, the sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of women and children in West Africa by personnel from the UN and national and international organizations garnered international headlines and forced the UN, NGO, and donor communities to recognize the urgent need to prevent SEA and provide for victims/survivors. In 2003, the UN secretary-general issued a statement defining sexual exploitation and abuse, as well as a zero tolerance policy on SEA by peacekeepers and UN personnel<sup>18</sup> The secretary-general has since taken multiple measures to protect civilians from SEA.<sup>19</sup> In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution requiring UN staff to assist and support victims of SEA perpetrated by UN and related personnel.<sup>20</sup> In 2011, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Our Own Staff was created<sup>21</sup> to provide leadership to advance efforts

to address protection from SEA by UN and NGO personnel, including improving implementation of the “Secretary-General’s Bulletin: Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.”<sup>22</sup> Appointing a high-level IASC task force was also intended to ensure effective engagement with humanitarian leaders at the highest levels, as the humanitarian sector lags behind the peacekeeping sector in addressing PSEA.<sup>23</sup> However, to date, these important measures do not explicitly focus on the sexual harassment, exploitation, assault, or abuse of humanitarian and development aid workers themselves, including at the hands of other aid workers and associated personnel. In February 2017, the UN secretary-general issued a report, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.” This report is among the most concrete and action-oriented reports to date from the UN on this subject and pledges to create a new UN assistant secretary-general to be appointed to work on behalf of victims of SEA, among other important commitments.<sup>24</sup> The creation of this office and concrete measures proposed in this report offer an important and timely opportunity to ensure the abuse of aid workers themselves is squarely on the agenda of the UN, governments, and INGOs.

## Current study

In 2016 and 2017, researchers from the Feinstein International Center of the Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and the World Peace Foundation at Tufts University carried out research on sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian and development aid workers to document and analyze the following:

- the state of knowledge on this issue,
- how this issue is perceived and approached in aid agency security trainings,

<sup>15</sup> International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), “Protocol Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949, and Relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflicts (Protocol I),” June 8, 1977, 1125 UNTS 3, Articles 70 and 71.

<sup>16</sup> UN General Assembly, “Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (last amended 2010),” July 17, 1998, Article 8 (ii)(b)(iii) and (xxiv).

<sup>17</sup> UN General Assembly, “Rome Statute.”

<sup>18</sup> United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit, “Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Policy.”

<sup>19</sup> United Nations, “Special Measures,” A/70/729; United Nations, “Special Measures,” A/69/779.

<sup>20</sup> UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/62/214, “United Nations Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by United Nations Staff and Related Personnel.”

<sup>21</sup> See IASC, “Global Review of Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by UN, NGO, IOM, IFRC Personnel” (2010).

<sup>22</sup> United Nations Secretariat, “Secretary-General’s Bulletin: Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse,” ST/SGB/2003/13, October 9, 2003.

<sup>23</sup> IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse by Our Own Staff.

<sup>24</sup> United Nations, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach,” Report of the Secretary-General A/71/818.

**Sexual Harassment**<sup>1</sup> is a form of sex discrimination. It includes unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. These constitute sexual harassment when 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.

**Sexual Assault**<sup>2</sup> is 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 violence**<sup>3</sup> is a form of gender-based violence. Sexual violence includes sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. It refers to any act, attempt, or threat of a sexual nature that results, or is likely to result, in physical, psychological, and emotional harm.

**Victim and Survivor.** The term **victim**<sup>4</sup> denotes a person who has experienced a violation of domestic or international law or a crime committed by another person under domestic or international law. The term **survivor** designates the person who was victimized is also someone who shows resistance, action, ingenuity, and inner strength. We combine these two terms **victim/survivor** to acknowledge that those who experience violations and abuse are also active agents who challenge the abuse, abusers, and systems that perpetuate violence.

<sup>1</sup> UN Women, "Sources of International Law Relating to Sexual Harassment"; United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, "Facts about Sexual Harassment."

<sup>2</sup> UN Women, "Definition of Sexual Assault and Other Elements."

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, "Sexual Violence," World Report on Violence and Health, 2014, pp. 149–81.

<sup>4</sup> M. Cherif Bassiouni, "International Recognition of Victims' Rights," Human Rights Law Review (2006) 6 (2): 203–79.

- contributing environmental factors,
- victims/survivors,
- perpetrators, and
- institutional systems in place for prevention and response.

## Research methods

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. Specifically, we carried out a review of scholarly and grey literature using Google Scholar, on the topic of sexual assault and harassment against humanitarian aid workers, including LGBT aid professionals. We used the following search terms: "sexual assault" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian"), "sexual violence" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian"), "safety" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian"), "security" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian"), "risk" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian"), and "gender" with "aid worker" (also with "humanitarian").

We reviewed the data and findings from two studies on this topic by Report the Abuse (1,418 respondents) in 2017 and the Women's Humanitarian Network (1,005 respondents) in 2016.<sup>25</sup> We present relevant quantitative findings from these two survey studies.

We reviewed 24 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 30 semi-structured in-depth individual interviews with women, men, LGBT, international, and national aid workers and security officers from aid agencies and subject experts. We recruited individuals for these interviews through professional humanitarian networks and our personal contacts within the humanitarian community. We then used snowball sampling to reach other individuals who had been affected by or were working on issues related to violence against aid workers. Those 30 in-depth interviews generated 135 single-spaced pages of transcribed data. Infor-

<sup>25</sup> Humanitarian Women's Network Summary of Data; Report the Abuse Data.

mation gathered from all of our sources represent women and men from more than 70 international aid organizations (including the UN and NGOs) and from governments, contractors, and those who have left the aid industry. Throughout this report, we draw heavily upon this qualitative data to highlight what we learned from the voices and experiences of people who have been affected by sexual harassment and assault.

In total, our findings are drawn from 2,423 survey respondents, a review of 24 security-training materials, portions of 57 survivor testimonies from women and men from our own interviews and Report the Abuse's study, and 30 in-depth individual interviews we carried out.

We used open-coding and inductive content analysis to identify themes that emerged from both printed materials and the transcripts of our oral interviews. In open-coding and inductive content analysis, researchers organize all their material, noting headings, categories, or themes as they emerge from multiple readings, and record these on a code sheet. Next, researchers narrow the codes by combining similar or subset codes. The materials within those codes are then more deeply analyzed. Open-coding and inductive content analysis allow a set of themes or categories to emerge from raw data through repeated examination, comparison, and grouping, which enables researchers to generate knowledge and deeper understanding of the material under study. These inductive methods are particularly appropriate for research in which few or no previous studies of the phenomenon under examination exist,<sup>26</sup> as is the case regarding sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers.

Our research was carried out with ethical approval from the Tufts University Internal Review Board. To help ensure confidentiality of our interviewee subjects, in all cases names of interviewees, countries where assaults occurred, and humanitarian agencies are removed.

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<sup>26</sup> Russell Bernard, *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*. Fifth Edition. Altamira press, UK, 2011.

This research was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Norway and the Dignitas Research Innovation Fund.

## Study overview

The main body of the study begins with **Section 3** and a discussion of findings from previous research and media coverage on violence against humanitarian aid workers more broadly, before we turn our attention to the few studies on sexual harassment and assault against aid workers. We also present important new findings from two recent international surveys of humanitarian aid workers on the topic of sexual harassment and assault and highlight where our study confirms or challenges their findings.

**Section 4** reviews security training materials from international humanitarian aid and NGO organizations and humanitarian consortiums to identify if and how they approached the subject of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers. We find inconsistencies among agency and inter-agency training materials on sexual harassment and assault against aid workers, with even weaker performance on actual training on these topics. The topic of sexual harassment and assault against LGBT staff is almost universally absent in training materials and actual trainings.

**Section 5** focuses on the need for security professionals within aid agencies to have better data on sexual assault in order to prevent and respond to this violence, and the associated complications agencies have in obtaining this information. Our analysis found six factors that lessen the likelihood of security advisors receiving data on sexual assaults, which we documented and analyzed. We then present our findings on actual security training and attention to sexual assault within those trainings.

**Section 6** presents findings on the environmental conditions conducive to sexual harassment and assault of aid workers. Our analysis revealed several key factors that underpin these environments, including the male domination of power, space and decision-making in aid agencies; a macho work environment; and work and compound environments where sexual discrimination, sexual harass-

ment, discussions and jokes about sex and sexuality, homophobia, and a “boys will be boys” attitude flourishes. Under these conditions, sexual harassment and assault is seen as permissible by perpetrators and their supporters. Other key factors include the presence of armed conflict, the breakdown of law and order (including sexual assaults against local civilian women and girls), and the abuse of drugs and alcohol to make victims more vulnerable. We also present findings on sexual harassment and assault against LGBT and heterosexual male aid workers.

**Section 7** presents findings on perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers. We documented and analyzed the patterns and characteristics of those who perpetrate sexual harassment and assault, against whom and the types of sexual harassment and assault. We found that it is overwhelmingly men who carry out sexual harassment and assault, primarily against women aid workers, but also to a lesser degree against LGBT and heterosexual men aid professionals. Our research found that perpetrators come from different sectors: humanitarian aid agencies, the security sector (including security officers working for humanitarian operations, members of the national army and police, and United Nations peacekeepers), non-state armed groups, and the civilian sector. Within each of these sectors we present findings on patterns of sexual harassment and assault.

**Section 8** offers findings related to aid agencies’ responses to sexual harassment and assault against their employees. Key to assisting survivors is creating an environment where survivors feel confident to report cases of sexual harassment and assault. However, the environment in many aid organizations does not encourage reporting due to sexist and misogynistic work settings; organizations’ failure to take harassment and assaults seriously; a pattern of blaming sexual assault victims for the attack; pressure on survivors to not talk about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault; and supervisors, co-workers and security officers being the perpetrators. Additionally, survivors may choose only to report sexual harassment and assault if they feel they will receive proper responses in

terms of being given options for prosecuting the perpetrator (whether internal to the organization or external), as well as proper medical and psychological care. Overall we found that most organizations do not have clear procedures for how to support victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault and have not built the necessary in-house expertise to respond to a report of sexual harassment and assault. Finally, we present the case of the Oxfam Safeguarding Department as a best practice for an international agency addressing sexual harassment and assault.

**Section 9** offers recommendations based on the findings presented in the study.

### 3. FINDINGS FROM PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON VIOLENCE AGAINST HUMANITARIAN AID WORKERS

#### Research on violence against aid workers

A growing body of research on violence against aid workers is documenting attacks against them, seeking to understand why this violence occurs, and if and why it has been increasing. Larissa Fast's analysis of the literature on violence against aid workers divides prior research on this topic into two categories: the first is research focused on statistical analysis and trying to understand whether danger to aid worker is increasing and if so why, and the other stream is based on data showing an increase in violent attacks against aid workers and investigating global trends that are causing or correlated to this increase.<sup>27</sup> Prior to 2006, there was debate within the international aid community as to whether security incidents against aid workers were increasing. However, in 2006 The Humanitarian Policy Group (HPG) and the Center on International Cooperation (CIC) released one of the first empirical studies on violent attacks against aid workers. Their report found that violent incidents against aid workers had increased dramatically from 1997 to 2005, but at the same time the number of aid workers in the field also greatly increased.<sup>28</sup> Given the increase both in violent incidents and the population of aid workers, the "global incident trend of violence against aid workers is found to have risen only slightly" from 1997 to 2005.<sup>29</sup> The study also found increased risk for national staff.<sup>30</sup>

In a 2009 update to this report, researchers noted that attacks against aid workers had increased sharply since 2006, with a particular increase in the

number of kidnapping incidents.<sup>31</sup> The HPG/CIC report investigates six potential variables related to the level of violence against aid workers: intensity of the conflict, the presence of UN peacekeeping forces, the influence of global terrorist movements, the presence of regional or UN Security Council member forces, and the use of a UN integrated mission.<sup>32</sup> One of the report's most robust statistical findings was that none of these six factors had a statistically significant impact on aid worker violence.<sup>33</sup>

However, other theories were suggested by scholars in the second category of research, as described by Fast, related to aid worker security. These include arguments about the pattern of the securitization of aid, citing the danger in framing underdevelopment as a source of conflict, the militarization of aid, and highlighting the blurring of lines between civilians and the military.<sup>34</sup>

Important changes in agencies' responses to violence against aid workers occurred as a result of increased attention by the UN and INGOs. Most notably, the UN Department for Safety and Security was created in 2004,<sup>35</sup> and NGO working groups began developing more collaborative security mechanisms, such as InterAction's Minimum Operating Security Standards.<sup>36</sup>

The most prominent database tracking violence against aid workers is The Aid Worker Security Database, maintained by Humanitarian Outcomes, which reports on a range of violence, including

- aerial bombardment/missile/mortar/rocket propelled grenade/lobbed grenade;
- bodily assault/beatings/stabbing with non-fire weapons or no weapons;
- bombing (set explosives with a stationary target: building, facility, home);

<sup>27</sup> Larissa Fast, "Mind the Gap: Documenting and Explaining Violence against Aid Workers," *European Journal of Internal Relations* 16, no. 3 (2010): 365–89.

<sup>28</sup> Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, and Katherine Haver, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: Trends in Policy and Operations, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 23, September 2006.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, and Victoria DiDomenico, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update," Humanitarian Policy Group, Policy Brief 34, April 2009.

<sup>32</sup> Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments," 17–18.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> Fast, "Mind the Gap," 377–79.

<sup>35</sup> Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments," 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



- body-borne improvised explosive device (IED);
- complex attack (explosives in conjunction with small arms);
- roadside IED;
- vehicle-borne IED (unknown whether remote control or suicide);
- vehicle-borne IED (remote control detonation);
- vehicle-borne IED (suicide);
- kidnapping (not killed);
- kidnap-killing;
- rape or serious sexual assault;
- landmine or unexploded ordnance (UXO) detonation; and
- shooting (small arms/light weapons, e.g., pistols, rifles, machine guns).<sup>37</sup>

The Aid Worker Security Database receives its data from media sources and through voluntary reporting from aid organizations, and it provides end-of-year summaries of the state of aid worker security. The 2015 review noted that it was the second consecutive year showing a lower global casualty toll for aid workers.<sup>38</sup> The bulk of attacks against national and international humanitarian workers were in five conflict-affected countries: Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen.<sup>39</sup> The 2015 report also highlighted that national staff were victims 13 times as often as international victims in the five conflict-affected countries and 7 times as often globally.<sup>40</sup> However, taking into account the smaller number of international staff in the field, international staff in fact experienced higher rates of attack in 2015 than national staff. Overall, kidnapping remained the most prevalent form of reported violence against aid workers, though the report notes that types of violence vary by country; for example, “shootings and assault, including rape, were the most significant type of violence in South Sudan.”<sup>41</sup> Importantly, as Cohen, Wood, and Hoover Green’s research makes clear, it is extremely difficult to gauge how *reported* and

<sup>37</sup> Humanitarian Outcomes, “The *Aid Worker Security Database*.”

<sup>38</sup> Humanitarian Outcomes, “Aid Worker Security Report Figures at a Glance: 2016.”

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

*actual* violence, particularly sexual violence, may or may not track with each other, as sexual violence is widely under-reported.<sup>42</sup>

## Research on sexual abuse of humanitarian workers

To date there is very little research in any bodies of literature specifically on sexual abuse of humanitarian or NGO aid workers. Our review found no scholarly literature specifically focused on this topic. However, several NGOs are trying different methods to capture some data related to the rates of sexual assault against aid workers.

Though the Humanitarian Worker Security Database records rape or serious sexual assault against aid workers, Humanitarian Outcomes believes that these crimes are likely significantly under-reported and that their data on this form of violence therefore reflects the chronic lack of under-reporting.<sup>43</sup> Our research found that most individuals do not report incidents of sexual harassment and assault to their organization, and this is confirmed by other reports.<sup>44</sup> Another challenge with collecting accurate statistics is that security reports could use other titles for incidents of sexual assault, such as labeling an incident “physical assault” without specifying that it was a sexual assault, as security officers and aid workers noted in our interviews.

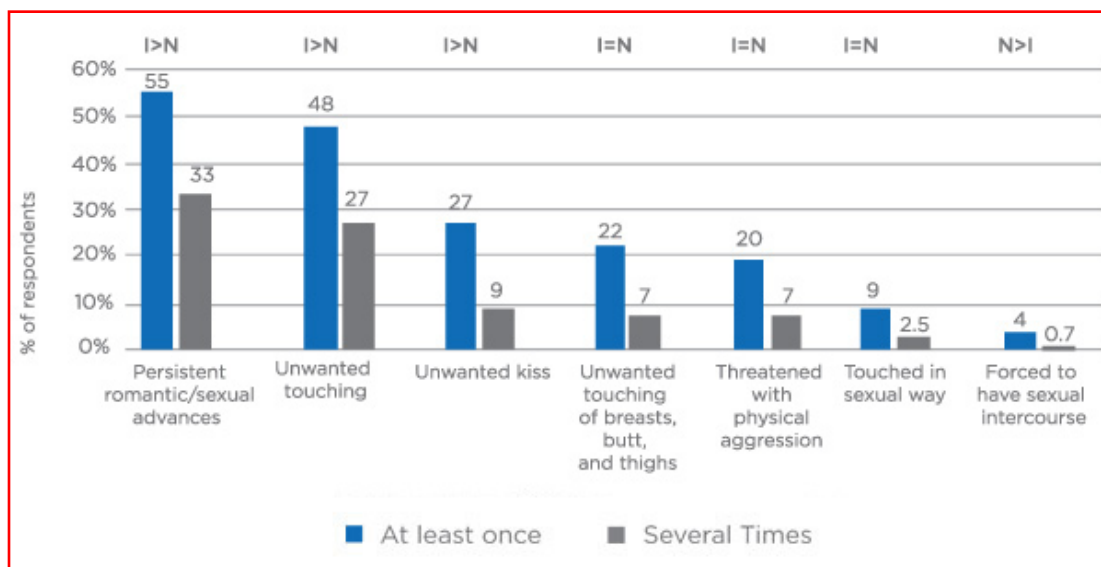
The Humanitarian Women’s Network and the NGO Report the Abuse, have carried out research specifically on sexual harassment and assault against aid workers. Both groups conducted surveys to gather information about sexual abuse against aid workers and have published reports that provide initial data on the topic. These surveys do not use random samples and therefore cannot be generalized to aid workers who did not participate in the

<sup>42</sup> Dara Kay Cohen, Amelia Hoover Green, and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Wartime Sexual Violence: Misconceptions, Implications, and Ways Forward” (Special Report 323, February 2013, United States Institute for Peace: Washington DC).

<sup>43</sup> Female humanitarian researcher, interviewed August 22, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>44</sup> Humanitarian Women’s Network, “Survey Data”; Megan Nobert, “Prevention, Policy and Procedure Checklist: Responding to Sexual Violence in Humanitarian and Development Settings” (Report the Abuse, August 2016, 19).

**Figure 1: Humanitarian Women’s Network findings on experiences of sexual assault while on mission**



Source: Humanitarian Women’s Network, “Survey Data.”

surveys. These groups have initiated important research on this important topic, but more thorough attention is needed.

Between January and March 2016, the Humanitarian Women’s Network carried out a survey of women humanitarian aid workers to capture information regarding (1) discrimination and harassment, (2) sexual aggression and assault, (3) reporting, and (4) impact on professional and personal well-being. The 35-question online survey captured both quantitative and qualitative information and was available in English and French. The survey was distributed through professional humanitarian networks and social media. A total of 1,005 women from 70 organizations responded, with 83 percent of respondents being international staff.<sup>45</sup> The study also considered discrimination and harassment in the work place, factors that our study finds are important indicators of whether sexual violence against aid workers occurs and how the organization responds.

The Humanitarian Women’s Network covered a range of sexual harassment and assault experienced by aid workers (Figure 1). The prevalence of sexual assault against women on mission reported by the Women’s Humanitarian Network is high, with 24 percent of respondents reporting having been sexually assaulted while on mission, with 35 percent of those reporting that they had more than one experiences of sexual assault while on mission.

The acts of sexual assault are significantly correlated (at 5 percent level), meaning that a woman who was subjected to one act of sexual assault significantly was more likely to have also experienced other forms. All the incidents captured in Table 1 were reported as being committed by male colleagues, and over a third of these were perpetrated by a male supervisor. International staff reported experiences of sexual assault at comparable or higher rates in the survey, compared to national staff.

The Humanitarian Women’s Network study found gross under-reporting of sexual assault against humanitarian aid workers, with 69 percent of respondents who experienced sexual assault saying they

<sup>45</sup> Humanitarian Women’s Network, “Survey Data.”

did not report the assault. The primary reasons for not reporting (Figure 2)<sup>46</sup> are confirmed by our own findings (see Sections 6, 7, and 8 of this report).

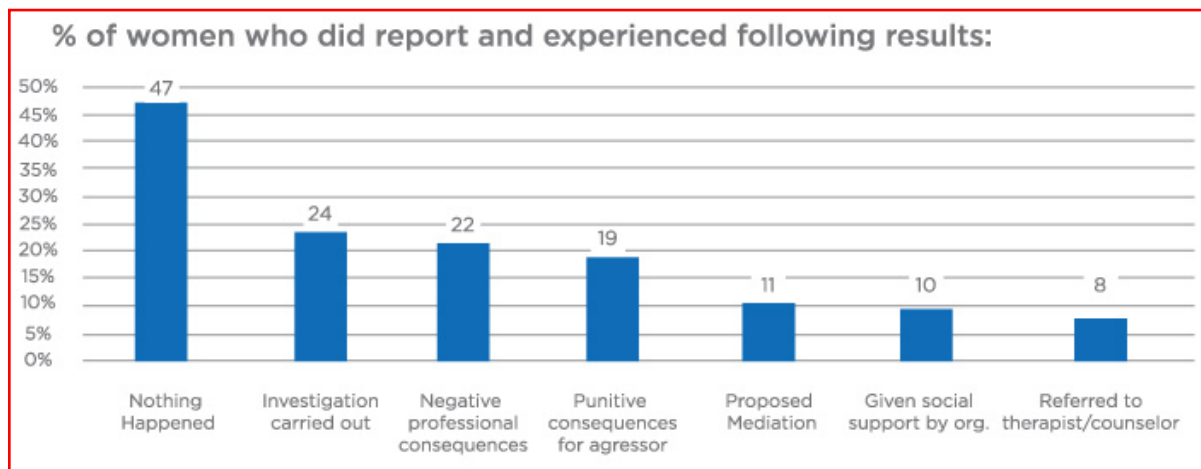
For the 31 percent of women who did report their experience of sexual aggression or assault, the majority reported to the head of office, their direct supervisor, or the human resources/staff counselor, which in most cases was a man (56 percent). Overall, women reported being deeply dissatisfied with how the organization handled the incident. The consequences, when there were any, were at times more harmful to the victim/survivor than to the alleged perpetrator (Figure 3).

The forerunner in research on this topic, Report the Abuse, created an online (and ongoing) platform—in the form of a survey—starting in August 2015 where humanitarian and develop-

**Figure 2: Humanitarian Women’s Network findings on reasons for aid workers not reporting sexual harassment and assault**

- Concerned about professional consequences
- Felt it wasn’t “serious enough” or “violent enough” to report
- Did not trust the system/anyone
- Absence of mechanism to report
- Lack of “proof” and/or knowledge of how to report
- Dealt with it personally (i.e., confronted the abuser)
- Was told not to report because of a cultural excuse
- Shame, confusion
- Fear of reprisal by aggressor

**Figure 3: Humanitarian Women’s Network findings on repercussions**



ment workers can report on their experiences with sexual violence. It has received completed surveys from 1,418 individuals as of March 10, 2017. The Report the Abuse survey has documented incidents from 1995 to 2017. The findings from those cases (reported as of March 10, 2017) are highlighted here (Figure 4).

Report the Abuse discussed factors related to the causes of sexual violence against aid workers. The

report found that survivors often do not report an incident of sexual assault because of the complexity of reporting procedures as well as retaliatory measures that are sometimes taken against survivors for reporting.<sup>47</sup> There is a negative stigma in the humanitarian community with discussing incidents of sexual violence, which our study also confirmed.<sup>48</sup> Report the Abuse found that of the organizations they researched only 30 percent had a code of con-

<sup>46</sup> Humanitarian Women’s Network, “Survey Data.”

<sup>47</sup> Nobert, “Prevention, Policy and Procedure Checklist,” 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

### **Figure 4: Report the Abuse survey, key findings**

- Of all individuals surveyed, 86 percent know an aid worker survivor of sexual violence.
- Of all individuals surveyed, 41 percent witnessed a sexual violence attack.
- Of all individuals surveyed, 69 percent are themselves survivors of sexual violence while on mission.
- Of survivors of sexual violence, 68 percent knew their attacker.
- Of survivors of sexual violence, 30 percent experienced more than one attack.
- Of survivors of sexual violence, 54 percent filed complaints with their agencies and of these only 18 percent were satisfied with how the complaint was handled.

duct, and codes of conduct varied in whether and how they discussed sexual violence.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, only 17 percent of the 92 organizations indicated that they do training related to sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>50</sup> Finally, only 13 percent (12 out of 92) of organizations had an explicit policy and/or procedure related to sexual harassment and/or sexual violence against employees.<sup>51</sup>

### **Scholarship on gender and aid worker security**

There has been limited scholarship on the importance of thinking about gender when considering aid worker security and resilience. A European Interagency Security Forum (EISF) briefing paper by Christine Persaud calls for a “gender security risk management framework,” which is about gaining perspective on the priorities of national and international female and male staff as they conduct humanitarian and development activities as safely and securely as possible, in a particular social and cultural contexts. A gendered approach to security includes reconciling the internal and

external contexts of an individual: How are internal systems of belief, identification, and values tested against the external environment of operational culture, colleagues, and context?<sup>52</sup>

Alice Gritti has argued for considering gender in the analysis of aid worker resilience. Gritti interviewed 69 international aid workers and conducted a survey of 188 international aid workers about their personal and professional experiences in aid. She finds that female aid workers reported higher levels of stress and that the security situation for expatriate female aid workers in particular was exacerbated by gender-based discrimination and harassment.<sup>53</sup> Gritti argues that these additional stressors experienced by female aid workers should be incorporated into considerations of resilience and mental health and psychosocial support for staff.

### **Media reports**

Since 2015, media stories related to incidents of sexual harassment and assault against aid workers have increased. *The Guardian* website has a section called “Secret Aid Worker” where humanitarian professionals anonymously share experiences related to incidents of sexual harassment or assault. One article from 2015 notes, “Judging from the number of submissions to Secret Aid Worker, sexual harassment in the sector is rife.”<sup>54</sup> Additionally, in the World News section of *The Guardian* an article described employers ignoring the threat of sexual violence against aid workers.<sup>55</sup> The article notes, “Victims who speak out are often labeled troublemakers,”<sup>56</sup> something our research found

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>52</sup> Christine Persaud, “Gender and Security: Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Security Risk Management” (EISF Briefing Paper, 2012, 4).

<sup>53</sup> Alice Gritti, “Building Aid Workers’ Resilience: Why a Gendered Approach Is Needed,” *Gender and Development* 23, no. 3, 2015, 449–462: 453.

<sup>54</sup> “Secret Aid Worker: Sexual Harassment and Discrimination in the Industry,” *The Guardian*, July 29, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Sandra Laville and Anna Leach, “Aid Agencies Accused of Hiding Scale of Sexual Assaults on Employees,” *The Guardian*, October 19, 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. It also appears that this was not the first attack against women aid workers in South Sudan, but the others were not reported in the media.

as well (discussed in Sections 6, 7 and 8 of this report).

Sexual assault of aid workers made global news with two recent cases that occurred in South Sudan, a country noted by Report the Abuse as a hotspot for sexual assault and attacks against aid workers more broadly.<sup>57</sup> The first attack was reported on July 2015 against Canadian aid worker Megan Nobert, who was drugged and raped on a UN operating base in South Sudan.<sup>58</sup> Her perpetrator was a man who worked for a company that was a subcontractor of UNICEF. Nobert reported the incident to both the UN and UNICEF, and it was largely due to media pressure that the UN Office for Internal Oversight Services finally carried out an investigation, the results of which have still not been shared with Nobert.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the incident did not appear in the UN's 2015 statistics on sexual exploitation and abuse.<sup>60</sup> Nobert went on to found the NGO Report the Abuse.

Targeted sexual assault against aid workers on July 11, 2016 by the South Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) also made global news.<sup>61</sup> The SPLA attacked the Terrain Hotel, sought out local and Western female aid workers and raped at least five,

with one woman reporting being gang-raped by 15 soldiers. Individuals taking shelter at the Terrain called for help from the UN compound and peacekeepers, located one mile away, but did not receive assistance due to heavy fighting.<sup>62</sup> These high profile cases and the bravery of the women who were attacked to speak out prompted some international attention to what appears to be a more widespread problem of sexual assault against aid workers.

## What we learn from environments with high levels of sexual assault

Given that little formal research into sexual assault against aid workers has been done, we thought it prudent to seek possible insights from studying other environments where sexual assault has emerged as a problem, is the subject of serious research, and has prompted a policy response: college campuses in the United States, the United States military, and UN peacekeeping missions. While recognizing these settings are different, we sought insights based on broad patterns that were conducive to abuse and curbing abuse.

Studies find high levels of sexual assault on **college campuses in the United States**. One study explains that a college campus is a "total world of living and learning."<sup>63</sup> Contexts where aid workers operate can also represent a "total world" in which employees live and work in the same environment. Another comparison between college campuses and aid workers' environments is the problem of high levels of alcohol and drug consumption, which are often correlated with increased risk environments. Both environments also have seen the use of drugs to incapacitate women: they are slipped into drinks or food, allowing perpetrators to more easily sexually assault their victims.<sup>64</sup> Research has described college campuses as places where men dominate (especially due to the power of fraternities on many

<sup>57</sup> Report the Abuse, "Survey Data."

<sup>58</sup> Jina Moore, "An Aid Worker Was Raped in South Sudan and the U.N. Did Almost Nothing about It," *Buzzfeed News*, July 31, 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Megan Norbert, personal communication with Dyan Mazurana, March 4, 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. The UN has a database with statistics on misconduct and a specific section devoted to reports of sexual exploitation and abuse within UN missions. The UN has been keeping track of the data on sexual exploitation and abuse electronically since 2007. The data comes from reports received by the UN, which are assessed by the heads of missions, by DFS/DPKO and/or by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) leading to a "reconciliation of information received by the various entities." (See Conduct in UN Field Missions, accessed March 8, 2017, <https://conduct.unmissions.org/data>.) Informal discussions regarding mandatory reporting within UN related to sexual exploitation and abuse has led some UN workers to feel demoralized because of the belief that the UN will not respond to a report or guarantee victims'/survivors' protection. Also, the fear is that someone could be fired or otherwise penalized for speaking out about an incident. "Spotlight: It's Time to Change This 'Boys will be Boys' Culture," Cassandra Complexity blog.

<sup>61</sup> Jason Beaubien, "U.N. Report Addresses Gang Rape of Aid Workers in South Sudan," August 23, 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Peggy Reeves Sanday, *Fraternity Gang Rape: Sex, Brotherhood, and Privilege on Campus* (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

<sup>64</sup> *The Guardian*, "Aid Workers and Sexual Violence: Survivors Speak Out," accessed March 2, 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/feb/17/aid-workers-and-sexual-violence-survivors-speak-out>.

campuses) and where women are excluded from the public domain.<sup>65</sup> Fraternities are boy clubs where women are outsiders and where men make the rules, and they are often the site of sexual assaults when they occur on campuses.<sup>66</sup> While humanitarian organizations are not composed only of men, they have been described as “boys clubs” environments where men dominate the mission and security leadership, and this is particularly noted in contexts where armed conflict is on-going (as discussed in detail in Section 6).

Addressing sexual assault on college campuses has benefited from increased attention and funding from US government officials in the past ten years. One of the best practices identified for preventing and responding to sexual assault on college campuses is collecting data on the problem, with a specific focus on the use of campus climate surveys.<sup>67</sup> Another key strategy for prevention of sexual assault on college campuses has been educational programs with specific support for “community-based prevention efforts involving bystander education.”<sup>68</sup> Delivering information about sexual assault to college students is critical, and research stresses the need to make “participants actively work with the message to increase their engagement with it, which is associated with greater levels of persuasion.”<sup>69</sup> In terms of supporting survivors, campus administrators find there is a benefit to dedicating a person or office for sexual violence to provide a “coordinated, comprehensive, and centralized response.”<sup>70</sup> Additionally, publicizing these

offices or resources on campus to ensure they are more known and available sends the message that addressing sexual assault is important.<sup>71</sup>

State militaries are another male dominated space where problems with sexual assault are systemic. Research on **the United States military** and sexual assault finds that, given male dominance in the military, the majority of perpetrators are males and the majority of victims are other military males<sup>72</sup> (recall that 85 percent of the US military is male).<sup>73</sup> Substance abuse is also noted as an issue that is related to sexual assault within the military. A notable pattern is that military sexual assault is more likely to occur in units where commanding officers are neutral or indifferent to assault, in contrast to those where officers do not tolerate abuse. Additionally, “the absence of a grievance procedure, an unprofessional work atmosphere, and the existence and acceptance of a sexist attitude in the workplace” are also predictors of sexual assault within military units.<sup>74</sup> Researchers find that structure of the military as a male-dominated institution and the gender disparity in leadership are impediments to resolving the issues of sexual abuse within the military.<sup>75</sup> Our research finds that the patterns of sexual assault noted in studies of the United States military regarding negative work environments, alcohol and drug abuse, acceptance of sexist attitudes and working conditions, and gender disparity are also present in and likewise contribute to sexual assault in humanitarian settings (detailed in Section 6 of this report).

One of the main steps taken to combat sexual assault in the US military was the 2005 formation of

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Jessica Bennett, “The Problem with Frats Isn’t Just Rape. It’s Power,” *Time*, December 3, 2014.

<sup>67</sup> US Department of Justice, “Protecting Students from Sexual Assault,” accessed March 8, 2017, <https://www.justice.gov/ovw/protecting-students-sexual-assault#campusclimate>.

<sup>68</sup> Jennifer Katz and Jessica Moore, “Bystander Education Training for Campus Sexual Assault Prevention: An Initial Meta-Analysis,” *Violence and Victims* 28, no. 6 (December 1, 2013): 1054–67, citing guidelines from American College Health Association.

<sup>69</sup> Lisa A. Paul and Matt J. Gray, “Sexual Assault Programming on College Campuses: Using Social Psychological Belief and Behavior Change Principles to Improve Outcomes,” *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 12, no. 2 (April 2011): 99–109.

<sup>70</sup> Angela F. Amar et al., “Administrators’ Perceptions of College Campus Protocols, Response, and Student Prevention

Efforts for Sexual Assault,” *Violence and Victims* 29, no. 4 (August 1, 2014): 579–93.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> According to a RAND study on the topic, 10,400 victims were male service members compared to 8,500 women. See Steven A. Holmes, “Sharp Decrease of Sexual Assault in Military, Study Finds,” CNN, May 1, 2015.

<sup>73</sup> “Demographics of Active Duty U.S. Military,” *Statistic Brain*, accessed March 2, 2017, <http://www.statisticbrain.com/demographics-of-active-duty-u-s-military/>.

<sup>74</sup> Jessica A. Turchik and Susan M. Wilson. “Sexual Assault in the US Military: A Review of the Literature and Recommendations for the Future,” *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 15.4 (2010): 267–77.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

the Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO). SAPRO is mandated to serve as the Department of Defense (DOD) “single point of authority” related to sexual assault and to provide oversight to ensure all DOD programs are complying with regulations related to sexual assault.<sup>76</sup> The DOD is also working to improve reporting on incidences of sexual assault and in the past several years the number of people reporting incidences of sexual assault has increased (although questions remain as to whether this increase is a result of DOD policy or an increase in the number of incidences of sexual assault).<sup>77</sup> One policy recently created to increase reporting regards steps to eliminate retaliatory behavior against individuals who report incidences of sexual assault.<sup>78</sup> The DOD also requires that all service members and command staff receive sexual assault training.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, a 2013 Army directive requires that part of a soldier’s evaluation report will include his or her performance in “fostering a climate free of sexual assault and sexual harassment.”<sup>80</sup>

We reviewed research into what factors contribute to **sexual abuse and exploitation (SEA) by military and civilian peace mission personnel against civilian populations** and which factors help curb or prevent SEA against civilians. In particular, we looked at Kelly Neudorfer’s analysis of SEA in all 25 UN peace operations that took place during in 2006 to 2011. First, Neudorfer finds that one of the most significant factors correlated to increased prevalence of SEA by peace mission personnel is whether the conflict environment where they are present also has high levels of sexual and gender

<sup>76</sup> Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.

<sup>77</sup> Megan N. Schmid, “Combating a Different Enemy: Proposals to Change the Culture of Sexual Assault in the Military,” *Vill. L. Rev.* 55 (2010): 475, 484.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Defense Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office, “DOD Retaliation Prevention and Response Strategy,” April 28, 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Kathryn J. Holland, Verónica Caridad Rabelo, and Lilia M. Cortina, “Sexual Assault Training in the Military: Evaluating Efforts to End the ‘Invisible War,’” *American Journal of Community Psychology* 54, no. 3–4 (December 2014): 289–303, citing US GAO 2012 and Hillman 2009.

<sup>80</sup> David Vergun, “IN OER, NCOER Soldiers Now Evaluated on Commitment to Ending Sexual Harassment,” *Army News Service*, November 7, 2013.

based violence (SGBV) perpetrated by parties to the conflict or by civilians against other civilians. The more that acts of SGBV in the conflict environment are “serious” or “widespread,” the greater the likelihood that peace mission personnel will also be engaged in SEA.<sup>81</sup>

Second, conflicts in which large numbers of people are displaced are significantly correlated with higher levels of SEA by peace mission personnel.<sup>82</sup> Displaced populations are more vulnerable, in large part due to the significant disruption of their livelihoods and previous family and community protection networks. As a result, many may be reliant on relief and aid, which is often precarious and unreliable. They may also resort to negative coping strategies, including being coerced into exploitative relations to secure resources.

Other key factors that drive acceptance and practice of SEA in these sites are widespread male domination and female subordination, civilian females being coerced into sex for survival and access to resources (both prior to and during the conflict), and SEA within the civilian community being seen as acceptable by the local population.<sup>83</sup>

Neudorfer found that one of the most important measures to prevent SEA is the creation of a robust Conduct and Discipline Unit at United Nations headquarters and within each peacekeeping mission; for smaller political missions, a single person may be appointed as a conduct and discipline advisor. A second key factor associated with reduced SEA by peace mission personnel is the presence and continued empowerment of “gender focal points,” “gender advisors” or UN special representatives to the secretary-general who use their positions to help empower local populations.<sup>84</sup> Another important factor is pre- and post-deployment training (i.e., upon arrival at the mission) for all military, police, and civilian members of a peace mission, specifically on addressing and stopping SEA against civilians. Effective training is comprehensive and

<sup>81</sup> Kelly Neudorfer, *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping: An Analysis of Risk and Prevention Factors* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

situation based, in which commanders and senior civilian personnel heading units for the peace mission are given detailed training, including on issues of accountability, reporting and investigation, and SGBV and protection.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

A significant body of scholarship is focused on the security of aid workers. However, this research has not focused on specific threats to aid workers, and in particular almost no scholarship focuses on sexual harassment and assault of aid workers. Surveys from the Humanitarian Women's Network and Report the Abuse have produced important initial findings on the types of sexual harassment and assault occurring, who the perpetrators are, and how agencies and victims/survivors are responding. Research findings from other male-dominated environments in which high levels of sexual assault have been reported, including US college campuses, peacekeeping missions, and the US military, are useful to inform our analysis of humanitarian aid contexts. We see patterns in these settings that are similar to those where humanitarian aid workers are reporting abuse, including where a "boys club" environment is tolerated; where men dominate the mission and leadership; and where men (and to a lesser extent women) in charge have a condescending attitude towards women, are indifferent to sexist and homophobic work conditions, and tolerate abuse. We see in all these situations that drugs and alcohol play a role in making victims more vulnerable to assault. Finally, we see a greater risk for sexual assault against aid workers in the larger environments of humanitarian missions and peacekeeping operations where there are high levels of sexual abuse against civilian populations, a breakdown of law and order, and pervasive male domination and female subordination in which local women have to exchange sex with local and international actors to gain access to resources (discussed in greater detail in Section 6).

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.; Dyan Mazurana and Dalin Van Leuven, *Protecting Civilians from Sexual and Gender Based Violence: Insights for African Union Peace Missions*, World Peace Foundation, 2016.



## 4. SECURITY TRAINING MATERIALS AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

### Methods

We reviewed security training materials from international humanitarian aid and non-governmental organizations and consortiums to identify if and how they approached the subject of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers. To identify these materials, we used open source search engines for humanitarian security training materials more broadly, as well as searching specifically for guidelines on safety for humanitarian workers related to sexual assault in humanitarian contexts. We used the initial search results to find other training materials, guides, concept notes, or general resources that were referenced in the initial results we compiled. We requested interview participants to share security training materials from their organizations. We reviewed 15 security training resources, several of them prominent inter-agency trainings.<sup>86</sup> In addition, we reviewed a

<sup>86</sup> Some materials were shared in confidentiality with the authors, and therefore are not listed here. Those that are publically available or shared without restrictions with the authors include: United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "To Stay and Deliver: Good Practice for Humanitarians in Complex Security Environments," 2011; ECHO, "Report on Security of Humanitarian Personnel: Standards and Practices for the Security of Humanitarian Personnel and Advocacy for Humanitarian Space," January 2004; International Location Safety, "Sexual Harassment and Violence," September 29, 2015; Christine Persaud, "Gender and Security: Guidelines for Mainstreaming Gender in Security Risk Management," EISF Briefing Paper, 2012; J Davis, "Security to Go: A Risk Management Toolkit for Humanitarian Aid Agencies," European Interagency Security Forum (EISF), 2015; Humanitarian Policy Group, "Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: 2009 Update," HPG Policy Brief; Benjamin Porter and Ben Emmens, "Approaches to Staff Care in International NGOs," September 2009, InterHealth and People in Aid; Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), "Saving Lives Together: A Framework for Improving Security Arrangements among International Non-Governmental Organisations/Internal Organisations and the United Nations," October 2015; David Lloyd Roberts "Staying Alive: Safety and Security Guidelines for Humanitarian Volunteers in Conflict Areas," ICRC, January 24, 2006; Humanitarian Practice Network, "Good Practice Review: Operational Security Management in

2016 report by Report the Abuse that summarized findings related to sexual assault and aid workers from a review of 19 examples of security training material by international humanitarian aid and NGO organizations.<sup>87</sup>

### Identifying sexual aggression as a threat

Risk reduction starts with organizational and individual acknowledgement that sexual aggression against aid workers is a real threat and is occurring.<sup>88</sup> Of the 15 security training resources we analyzed, 12 explicitly addressed the issue of sexual assault against aid workers. In the review by Report the Abuse, 12 of the 19 documents on security and safety for humanitarian aid and NGO workers mentioned the risk of sexual violence as a potential danger for humanitarian workers.<sup>89</sup> However, Report the Abuse found that only four documents specifically placed a duty of care<sup>90</sup> to protect employees from sexual assault on the organizational employer.<sup>91</sup>

Our review noted the absence of any information regarding sexual assault against aid workers in some high level international inter-agency reports. The absence was noted both in general reports detailing staff care in international NGOs and, more concerning, in highly regarded reports on staying alive and safe while working in areas affected by armed conflict, namely InterHealth and People in Aid's "Approaches to Staff Care in International NGOs," and ICRC's "Staying Alive: Safety and Security Guidelines for Humanitarian Volunteers in Conflict Areas."<sup>92</sup> Additionally, one

Violent Environments," Number 8, December 2010; World Health Organization, "Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers, 2011.

<sup>87</sup> Nobert, "Prevention, Policy and Procedure Checklist."

<sup>88</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, "Operational Security Management in Violent Environments" (Good Practice Review Number 8, December 2010).

<sup>89</sup> Nobert, "Prevention, Policy and Procedure Checklist."

<sup>90</sup> A duty of care is the responsibility or legal obligation of a person or organization to avoid acts or omissions (which can be reasonably foreseen) likely to cause harm to others: Business Dictionary, "Duty of Care."

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, this 62-page report on staff care that does not mention sexual violence or sexual assault: Benjamin

2014 report examining how to improve security training noted that “gender has been missing from existing curricula.”<sup>93</sup> The report by the European Interagency Security Forum and InterAction notes that, “gender and gender-based violence awareness could benefit from being built into all levels of security training as it pertains to programming and to staff members’ work and domestic spheres.”<sup>94</sup> They quote one of the respondents to their survey on security who noted that sexual assault is not adequately covered in training and “can happen in essentially any environment, both hostile and non-hostile. It shouldn’t (only) be thought of in terms of rape by armed groups, but as a daily risk faced by people.”<sup>95</sup> This same report also highlights the need for more awareness to “cultural, gendered, and personal considerations” in security training, including sexual orientation.<sup>96</sup>

### **What information is presented on sexual assault against humanitarian aid workers?**

The two security guides that provided the most detail on the risk of sexual assault to humanitarian workers—European Civilian Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations’ (ECHO) “Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organizations” and the Humanitarian Practice’s “Good Practice Review: Operational Security Management in Violent Environments”—had similar coverage on sexual assault. The ECHO guide acknowledges that both men and women can be potential victims, while the Humanitarian Practice guide states that “certain categories of people may be at higher risk”

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Porter and Ben Emmens, “Approaches to Staff Care in International NGOs” (September 2009, InterHealth and People in Aid). See also this detailed 187-page guide by David Lloyd Roberts for ICRC: “Staying Alive: Safety and Security Guidelines for Humanitarian Volunteers in Conflict Areas.” The only mention of threat of sexual assault is when the author states that an aid worker could have “attention thrust upon you by attractive members of the opposite sex,” questions the aid worker why they are receiving that attention, and implores the aid worker to avoid putting his- or herself and colleagues at risk (96).

<sup>93</sup> Persaud, “NGO Safety and Security Training Project,” 10.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

and recommends agencies and managers conduct a risk analysis of the environment by talking to local female staff and women’s groups.<sup>97</sup> The ECHO guide provides a long list of recommendations to staff for ways to minimize one’s risk to being a victim of sexual assault, much of which places the responsibility on the women herself<sup>98</sup>:

- Avoid walking or driving alone, particularly at night.
- Avoid isolated, unsafe or poorly lit locations.
- Avoid bars or clubs where crime is known to take place.
- Trust your instincts—if they tell you to leave, leave immediately.
- Avoid drugs and excessive use of alcohol.
- Carry an alarm.
- Carry a radio or mobile phone.
- Ensure that drinks are not deliberately contaminated with drugs.
- Dress unobtrusively and appropriately, bearing in mind the local culture.
- Wear comfortable shoes.
- Socialize in groups rather than alone.
- Share accommodation rather than living alone.

A key tension emerged in the security training material between providing aid workers with tools to enhance their own security, including protecting themselves from sexual assault, and creating guidelines that appear to put the responsibility to prevent sexual assault on potential victims, who are usually presumed to be women. This tension was also noted throughout our interviews with humanitarian and NGO workers. All materials that gave guidelines on protecting oneself from sexual assault or violence also mentioned that aid workers should carefully consider their attire, monitor their activities and behavior, and limit alcohol and drug consumption.<sup>99</sup> Thus, while some training material does explicitly acknowledge that both men and women can be at risk for sexual assault, most of the guidelines focused on advice for women and high-

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<sup>97</sup> ECHO, “Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations” (2004, 92); Humanitarian Practice Network, “Operational Security Management,” 210–11.

<sup>98</sup> ECHO, “Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations,” 92.

<sup>99</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, “Operational Security Management.”

light the fact that “a woman’s dress, hairstyle and behavior can be misinterpreted by others as overtly sexual, or used as an excuse for aggression.”<sup>100</sup> Many of these recommendations are similar to those in the Humanitarian Practice guide, which suggests dressing and behaving “inconspicuously” and avoiding excessive alcohol use.<sup>101</sup>

More critically, these recommendations are insensitive to women and reinstate the belief that sexual assault is the responsibility of women (and, therefore, suggesting perhaps that they are “at fault” when an incident occurs). It is likely not an exaggeration to state that most women in the world have been taught these recommendations since a young age just to get by in their daily lives. Such recommendations fail to put the emphasis where it should be placed, the socio-cultural, political and economic structures that perpetuate male domination over women and girls and the responsibility of men to act differently. Interviewees were clear on the links to male dominance,

Sexual assault in fact occurs as a result of deep cultural and social beliefs that women and girls are a lesser gender and need to be kept in their place. Sexual assault reinstates male dominance. And, sexual assault occurs in the workplace of the UN and other organizations in the field because the notion of male dominance is alive and well in contexts of war and lawlessness.<sup>102</sup>

The Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN) guide also suggests incremental policy measures in situations where female staff (international and national) are considered “at risk,” including accompanying female staff from home to work in an agency vehicle, having drivers take women to the door of their residences, and advising female staff to travel in groups.<sup>103</sup> The guide notes, “In a hostile environment, female staff members should not be left on their own in any way, even for short periods of time.”<sup>104</sup> Yet interviewees noted that the recommendations do not always reflect what is possible,

[While the Humanitarian Practice Network guidelines offer] helpful suggestions, again, the agencies/offices need to make this mandatory or, at least, feasible. Otherwise, it doesn’t happen. What happens is women are “advised” to do these things but, then, there aren’t enough other female staff, or there aren’t enough other women available when one needs to travel. This results in these women “taking risks” and, thus, becoming “responsible” for their own assault, should one arise . . . even though, at the base, measures should have been taken by the office.<sup>105</sup>

The most detailed guidelines we found on how to respond to a potential sexual assault are outlined in ECHO’s, “Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations.” The ECHO guide notes that potential victims have three options:

1. Passive resistance: “Do or say anything to ruin the attacker’s desire to force sexual contact with you.”
2. Active resistance: Call or shout for help, try to escape, or fight back.
3. Submit: “Do this only if your life is in danger. Survival becomes your objective.”<sup>106</sup>

Another recommendation is to have a policy that all “staff members (not just women) should be informed about the risk of rape, as well as other assessed risks, prior to signing the contract, rather than merely prior to deployment.”<sup>107</sup> Both guides also highlighted appropriate responses to an incident of sexual assault, including the need to respect confidentiality. The HPN guide notes that for management, sexual assault and rape “should be treated as a medical emergency and serious security threat.”<sup>108</sup> Both guides also suggest allowing each person to assign someone to be a support contact for the victim/survivor, with the HPN guide stating that the most appropriate person might not be someone within management, which our research findings also support.<sup>109</sup> Where that person is temporarily unavailable, ensure respect for the victim’s/

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 212.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>106</sup> ECHO, “Generic Security Guide for Humanitarian Organisations,” 125.

<sup>107</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, “Operational Security Management,” 223.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 217.

survivor's confidentiality, and determine in consultation with the victim/survivor who else they want to reach out too.<sup>110</sup>

While training materials acknowledge that men and women face different risk factors related to sexual assault, we found no training material that specifically addressed different risk factors for LGBT aid professionals.<sup>111</sup> Sexual orientation and identity could be discussed in training sessions, as indicated in one report; yet this same report also highlighted the lack of space to discuss these issues.<sup>112</sup>

In addition to personal behavior risk factors, training materials tend to address environmental risk factors and situations of higher risk of sexual violence. This assessment is reflected in a risk rating system that ranks an environment based on how frequently a type of threat happens.<sup>113</sup> However, as indicated throughout our research and that of the Humanitarian Women's Network and Report the Abuse, since survivors of sexual assault tend not to report incidents, this risk ranking system is inaccurate and inherently flawed. Furthermore, while some training material noted that sexual assault is ubiquitous, others highlighted that aid agencies should have an idea which countries pose higher risks for this form of violence.<sup>114</sup> The types of

environmental risk factors highlighted include the presence of armed young men, areas that lack rule of law, and conservative societies that restrict contact between unmarried men and women.<sup>115</sup> The recommendations for ways to minimize risk also appear to be intended for environments in which the risk of sexual assault comes from outside the aid environment, as opposed to by security officers or co-workers (where many of the assaults are occurring). These recommendations include avoiding certain environments, while an aid compound or office space is presumed safe. One short note from International Location Safety on "Sexual Harassment and Violence," does state that aid workers should be "establishing clear boundaries with professional colleagues" and notes that most victims of sexual assault know their perpetrator.<sup>116</sup> However, such recommendations continue to miss the point when identifying environments that are conducive to sexual harassment and assault, the fact remains that most perpetrators are men and many are colleagues working for humanitarian agencies.<sup>117</sup> Thus, how to challenge men's ideas and behavior and how other men could play a role in helping to deter incidents are areas that should be addressed.

### **Sexual assault: Present in many training materials, absent from trainings and simulations**

While our research, the Humanitarian Women's Network, and Report the Abuse's research find that sexual assault is perpetrated against both men and women aid workers, women are much more likely to be victims.<sup>118</sup> Security advisors, security officers, managers, heads of mission, and country leads within humanitarian aid and non-governmental organizations are predominately men.<sup>119</sup> Some

<sup>110</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana. Reports by Report the Abuse and the Humanitarian Women's Network recognize that sexual assault is underreported and offer tips to create a nonjudgmental environment in which victims/survivors feel comfortable reporting incident of sexual assault.

<sup>111</sup> One survey has been conducted among LGBT humanitarian aid staff on issues of discrimination, see Rainbow Network, MSF Network for LGBTQ+ Staff and Beneficiaries, Survey on Inclusiveness for LGBTQ+ Staff and Beneficiaries, MSF Network for LGBTQ+ Staff and Beneficiaries. Survey results sent to Dyan Mazurana on March 12, 2017. A security workshop to explore inclusion and security issues for LGBTQI aid workers was conducted and the workshop report published as RedR UK and EISE, Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Aid Workers Workshop (2016).

<sup>112</sup> Anonymus, "LGBT Aid Workers: Deployment Dilemmas," *Forced Migration Review* 42 (April 2013).

<sup>113</sup> J. Davis, "Security to Go: A Risk Management Toolkit for Humanitarian Aid Agencies" (European Interagency Security Forum, 2015).

<sup>114</sup> InterHealth, "Medical and Psychological Support for Those Who Have Been Sexually Assaulted" notes that sexual violence occurs in every culture. Humanitarian Practice Network, "Operational Security Management" notes countries with particular risks.

<sup>115</sup> Humanitarian Practice Network, "Operational Security Management," 210.

<sup>116</sup> International Location Safety, "Sexual Harassment and Violence" (September 29, 2015).

<sup>117</sup> Humanitarian Women's Network, "Survey Data"; Report the Abuse, "Survey Data."

<sup>118</sup> In the survey by Report the Abuse, 84% of survivors identified as female, 13% as male, and 3% as other. See <http://www.reporttheabuse.org/research/survey-data/> for most recent data.

<sup>119</sup> According to the 2011 Humanitarian Response Index,

interviewees expressed that male leaders in these positions may feel uncomfortable discussing what is frequently viewed as a “women’s problem” in trainings, or may not see this as a pressing issue that everyone should be trained on. At the same time, interviewees stated that women and LGBT aid workers may feel uncomfortable raising concerns related to sexual assault to male leaders. Interviewees stated that there is still a taboo in discussing the topic of sexual assault in trainings.<sup>120</sup> One result is that security trainings have less input from female and LGBT staff members and as a result are less reflective of and able to address their experiences.<sup>121</sup> In addition, given that women are the primary victims and given the feminization of victims of sexual assault, male humanitarian aid victims/survivors are even less likely to come forward and report.

One security report also noted that female staff may be marginalized in security-related activities and may receive less security training than male staff and thus are specifically disadvantaged in terms of information sharing, briefing, and use of communications equipment.<sup>122</sup> As with other issues in humanitarian organizations, the issue of training on sexual harassment and assault is too often not funded or prioritized.

While a range of potential threats could affect humanitarian workers, security needs are constantly increasing, and agencies are struggling with competing security priorities. Whether sexual assault is discussed in security training likely varies across organization. For example, one respondent noted,

Some agencies have very robust security training for people going into these higher conflict zones. The ones I am involved with all talk about this

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the ratio of two-thirds men to one-third women as senior managers in humanitarian organizations has remain largely unchanged since 2007; see “On the Frontline: Catalysing Women’s Leadership in Humanitarian Action” (Action Aid, prepared for the World Humanitarian Summit, 2016, Turkey); ECHO, “Report on Security of Humanitarian Personnel: Standards and Practices for the Security of Humanitarian Personnel and Advocacy for Humanitarian Space” (January 2004).

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.; RedR UK and EISF, Inclusion and Security of LG-BTI Aid Workers Workshop (2016).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

issue [of sexual assault], have sessions on this issue, try to raise the issue with both male and females saying we need to be more aware of this and careful of this issue in terms of when you are traveling, but also in team houses. We just need to be more conscious that this is one issue to take into account.<sup>123</sup>

Other interviewees discussed sexual assault being incorporated into Hostile Environment Awareness Trainings (HEAT). One interview respondent explained,

We feel it is really important to address [sexual assault] as a topic and make sure it is acknowledged as not only a risk but also something that especially female travelers are fearful of and to try and bring those conversations out in the open and make it something that is talked about as other risks are.<sup>124</sup>

While it is positive that some specific trainers or organizations are incorporating the threat of sexual assault into training courses, we found that sexual assault is not routinely incorporated into actual trainings for all environments and almost never appears in simulations. Even for organizations that address sexual assault in training, we heard varying reports on how much time was devoted to this threat. One interview participant explained,

It is mentioned in the code of conduct, but it is two minutes in a briefing of more than an hour and so is that enough? No. But it is a choice that you make according to prevalence of health problems that people might have on the field and so it is mentioned but it’s not discussed at length. That is for international staff. For resident staff, they do not have this type of briefing so when they start working with us they get the code of conduct and these things are discussed point by point so they understand it and they have to sign it, we all have to sign it, but that is it. I am sure there are resident staff who have signed codes of conduct and have never heard about this subject anymore for the duration of their career.<sup>125</sup>

This quote highlights our finding that even if addressing sexual assault exists as a policy or in

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<sup>123</sup> Male trainer and counselor, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>124</sup> Female security professional, interviewed August 22, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>125</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 13, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

a training document it is not necessarily given adequate attention in training. It also highlights the differences, and again inadequacies, in training for international staff and resident or local staff on issues such as sexual assault.

Several interview participants noted that an important component of security training is awareness of risks in a given environment:

The problem is there are a lot of people who do not know what risks are because they aren't being widely reported.<sup>126</sup>

In other cases, the risk of sexual assault is downplayed or dismissed:

I was also told by a human resources officer at [agency name removed] that “rape happens everywhere,” so I should accept an assignment at a place where two humanitarian workers were known to have been raped . . . after I had been sexually assaulted elsewhere.<sup>127</sup>

Other individuals who have worked as trainers recognize problems in their training:

I have to say from the security management perspective, looking back on it in hindsight, we didn't cover it nearly as much as we should have done. We actually looked at it as part of the stress component and more from the perspective of how would you deal with someone both from the perspective of someone who had something horrific happen, and therefore the stress of that, and also the management in terms of the people who were around the person to whom the incident had happened. We talked about it more from the staff well-being perspective more than managing the incidents from the security perspective.<sup>128</sup>

Several interviewees related that sexual violence is presented in training material as something to be dealt with after it happens, as opposed to a risk to be prevented and reduced. To illustrate, one organization we interviewed noted that they offer a full day's training on “managing sexual violence,” but that the training focuses on how to care for staff

who are survivors of sexual violence, as opposed to incorporating this topic into security trainings.

## Conclusion

Our analysis of security training materials revealed that while sexual assault may be mentioned as a potential threat in the documents, it is much less often raised in training and almost never appears in simulations. We find that overall in both the materials and trainings there is a lack of attention to and understanding of the complexity of this threat to humanitarian workers and how to address it in terms of risk reduction, prevention, and response. Notably, guidelines for protecting oneself against sexual assault tend to assume sexual assault will be perpetrated by someone outside the humanitarian organization and so do very little to assist aid workers in protecting themselves against their own colleagues or local security officers working for the organization or in the context of compounds. Guidelines that we reviewed did not robustly identify and address the risks within compounds and work environments. Apparently, little attention is paid to training aid workers on what should be a zero tolerance policy for sexual harassment and sexual assault against staff and to ensuring a work environment that enforces this training and rejects sexism and homophobia.

<sup>126</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 15, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>127</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>128</sup> Female security professional, interviewed August 8, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

## 5. SECURITY PROFESSIONALS

A key finding that emerged during our interviews with security professionals within aid agencies is the need to have better data on sexual harassment and assault, and the associated complications agencies have in obtaining this information. Security professionals stated that having more information on the frequency, conditions, locations, victims, and perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault could lead to the regular incorporation of sexual harassment and assault as threats in security assessments, which currently is not often done.

Our analysis finds that security advisors often do not receive data on sexual harassment and assaults for multiple reasons. First, sexual harassment and assault is at times not a part of security analyses, in part because it is not accepted as a “real issue.”<sup>129</sup> A security expert we interviewed noted that if sexual harassment and assault are considered in security assessments it comes from the country programs assessments and remains there and is not taken up at the broader institutional level. However, even in environments where sexual harassment and assault has occurred, aid workers are at times not warned about the threat of sexual violence. An aid worker who was deployed to South Sudan and was present during the physical and sexual assaults on national and international aid workers by members of Sudan’s army noted that she was given a briefing on risks in South Sudan, but sexual assault was never mentioned as a potential risk.<sup>130</sup>

Several interviewees stated that security advisors prioritize, and thus focus training and response on, certain threats over others. For example, kidnapping is frequently prioritized not because of the rates at which it occurs, but because it paralyzes an organization when it happens. However, although higher profile risks get more attention, sexual assault still does not receive much attention in security assessments. One interviewee relayed that even for those who accept sexual assault as a problem, due to competing priorities, it is seen as “somebody

<sup>129</sup> Female security professional, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>130</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed September 8, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

else’s problem” or as something “too difficult to deal with.”<sup>131</sup>

A second key finding that was recognized in almost every interview with security professionals was that security officers within aid organizations are not usually the types of people that victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault feel comfortable reporting to. Several security professionals and other humanitarian aid interviewees highlighted that this is because security professionals are primarily men and frequently ex-military and so the security space tends to be a masculinized and militarized space<sup>132</sup>; thus, these officers are viewed as unequipped to deal well with such reports:

It doesn’t help that, at least in the [agency name removed], many of the security officers are former military or police and seem to come with a mentality and approach that views women and assault in a machismo way. Until the culture within the security sections of these offices changes, it’s unlikely many women will ever feel comfortable reporting sexual assault to them.<sup>133</sup>

Additionally, these security personnel are often not well known to victims/survivors who may want to report sexual harassment and assault, so a victim/survivor might feel hesitant sharing sensitive and personal details with someone they do not know well or in some cases have never or rarely met. Furthermore, security officers reported that if the victim/survivor is a woman or an LGBT aid worker and the perpetrator is a man within the agency (especially a senior man or a member of the security team itself), the victim/survivor may not feel comfortable reporting the harassment or assault to a male security advisor. Another issue that emerged with reporting to a security advisor was that in certain situations a victim/survivor who was sexually assaulted might have been breaking security protocols or gendered social norms, such as drinking too much, going out with a group of locals or frequenting locations that were off limits. In these

<sup>131</sup> Female security professional, interviewed August 8, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>132</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women’s Lives* (Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>133</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

types of situations, a victim/survivor could feel concerned she/he would be blamed, reported, or sanctioned by a security advisor. If security officers are from countries known to be openly hostile to LGBT individuals, LGBT persons may feel unable to report issues of sexual harassment and assault without jeopardizing their own security within the compound or their work environment.

Third, from our interviews with aid workers, and confirmed in the Humanitarian Women's Network and Report the Abuse surveys,<sup>134</sup> apparently victims/survivors rarely report their experience of sexual harassment and assault to security managers or leadership of an organization. Rather, if they do decide to share about their experience, a victim/survivor might instead choose to speak to someone outside of formal security incident reporting systems. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for agencies to collect accurate information on sexual harassment and assault.

Fourth, if organizations have reports of sexual harassment and assault, they might not choose to share them with other organizations or security consortium due to concerns about protecting the organization's reputation. Additionally, there is a precarious balance between protecting anonymity (of both an organization and an individual) and sharing information across organizations. Systems might be created to preserve anonymity, but these same systems could result in these cases not appearing in incident mapping or official reports shared between agencies, and could therefore contribute to a lack of robust understanding of the issues by agencies.

Fifth, security officers could possibly categorize an incident of sexual assault as an "assault" or "burglary" without specifying that it was a sexual assault. For example, in reporting on security of aid workers, one informant noted that while several crimes may occur alongside each other, their organization reports the "more serious nature of the incident."<sup>135</sup> Thus, in the case of a sexual assault during a kidnapping, the incident would

be reported as a kidnapping.<sup>136</sup> Several interview respondents noted that sexual violence often occurs within the context of a kidnapping, so reporting mechanisms could be classifying these incidents as kidnappings and therefore agencies are missing key cases of sexual violence in their statistics.

In some cases, deliberate misclassification shows an attempt by agency staff to downplay the sexual assault experienced by the victim/survivor:

Security officers, in my experience, simply don't view sexual assault as an issue of real concern. To exemplify, in my case, my assault went unreported. It was never reported beyond [country name withheld], where the incident occurred. It took me five years to obtain a copy of what they deemed a "report," and it was just a poorly written email drafted by a local staff person describing my sexual assault and suffocation by ether as "an attempted molestation" that occurred during a "burglary." In fact, the men [who assaulted me] were hooded, masked, and wearing military dungarees when I was reporting on human rights violations committed by the military and police.<sup>137</sup>

Sixth, it seems particularly challenging to gain data about sexual harassment and assault of humanitarian staff perpetrated by other staff members: the type of sexual assault that was reported as most common in our study, as well as by Report the Abuse and the Women's Humanitarian Network.<sup>138</sup> While one security professional thought this type of sexual harassment and assault could be addressed within existing security systems, others noted that it would be much more difficult to report cases of sexual harassment and assault by another humanitarian worker in the same organization, or even more complicated, from another organization, throwing into question how reporting and investigation would be addressed. There are various reasons for this, including hierarchy within the organization, for example, if the perpetrator was in a supervisory position to the victim/survivor or if the report came across the desk of the perpetrator in the course of reporting. Other humanitarian workers have seen situations where their colleagues

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>138</sup> Humanitarian Women's Network, "Survey Data"; Report the Abuse, "Survey Data."



reported sexual assault involving a colleague and the perpetrator remained in his job and the victim/survivor was trapped working with the perpetrator. This difficulty may be amplified for national staff due to power dynamics within aid agencies, where national staff frequently have less power and might be particularly cautious in doing anything that they see as jeopardizing a profitable livelihood for themselves and their families.

Interviewees recognized the need to improve training for security officers in how to deal with sexual harassment and assault, as well as improve training for staff members. In several interviews the topic came up of whether it was preferable to hold trainings related to sexual harassment and assault separately for men and women. The concern was that separate training for women could give the impression that women are more vulnerable, are weaker, and need to be treated specially. Additional concerns were that men need (1) to be engaged to learn about this issue, (2) to understand the zero-tolerance nature of the policy, (3) to be trained on how to prevent sexual harassment and assault in their workplace and to support victims, and (4) to understand the harm sexual harassment and assault cause to the agency, its mandate, and beneficiaries. However, interviewees recognized the benefit of holding some aspects of the trainings separately for men and women to have comfortable spaces to discuss this sensitive topic. In conservative contexts, one security specialist noted, security training might provide advice regarding dress, appearance, and acceptable gender norms around male/female behavior and relationships to potentially reduce an individual's vulnerability. However, this specialist also noted that dress and appearance are very sensitive issues and a balance is needed between advising aid workers versus accepting their freedom to make decisions on their own appearance. Ultimately, she noted, it is about taking joint responsibility (presumably between an individual and the organization they work for) to ensure staff safety and well-being.<sup>139</sup>

A few interviewees noted that their organizations are now designing training to address the safety and

well-being of LGBT staff, although we found no such training currently available in our review of security trainings (see Section 4).<sup>140</sup>

In terms of the security training currently being given to aid workers, one interview respondent noted that everyone in his/her organization is required to take a sexual harassment certification course, "but it is a joke" and people do it just to "get the certificate and get it off your back."<sup>141</sup> This same informant noted that the larger organizational environment is a breeding ground for sexual misconduct and abuse and that in some briefing messages it was even unofficially conveyed that "there is a lot of hooking up in this mission."<sup>142</sup> Another interviewee who is involved with training programs estimated that the majority of staff (not including headquarters staff) receive, on average, 90 minutes of training on the subject of sexual assault, which is approximately one-sixth of the time spent on other first aid or security topics. She also noted that sexual assault training is rarely tested in simulations, as other threats are. More promisingly, another interviewee noted that some organizations are integrating a discussion of sexual assault in their HEAT courses. However, it is not clear that all organizations incorporate a discussion about sexual assault into their trainings, and even if they do incorporate this discussion into the HEAT courses, these are not the only environments where sexual assault occurs.

## Conclusion

We find that the male-dominated and often militarized security wing of many humanitarian agencies contributes to a lack of reporting and action on sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers. Agencies need to create or expand and adequately staff investigation units and make available and enforce reporting mechanisms to enable victims/survivors to report to persons, most likely women, who are trained to handle reports of sexual

<sup>139</sup> Female security professional, interviewed August 22, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>140</sup> An important example of a workshop run on this topic is RedR UK and EISF, Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Aid Workers Workshop (2016).

<sup>141</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

harassment assault and are able to do so outside of the regular chain of reporting within a mission (discussed in more detail in Section 9), as often perpetrators within the office would have access to victims'/survivors' reports, thus placing them at risk of various forms of retaliation (which we document in Sections 6, 7 and 8). The current lack of rigor in training materials and the lack of actual training on sexual harassment and assault need to be urgently addressed, as do the attitudes of leadership that currently convey a dismissive attitude to sexual harassment and assault and contribute to environments of abuse.

## 6. ENVIRONMENTS CONDUCTIVE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

Nearly every person we interviewed identified similar key environmental factors that they believed contributed to sexual harassment and assault against aid workers. In this section, we identify and analyze those factors and provide testimony from aid workers to illuminate our findings.

### Sexism, machismo, and male domination

Most aid operations are led and dominated by men, and this appears to be particularly the case in situations where active armed conflict is occurring. The male domination of the power, space, and decision-making in aid agencies is reported to contribute to a macho environment, where males with power (through positions of authority or weapons, for security officers) foster a work and, in the case of compounds, living atmosphere where sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, discussions and jokes about sex and sexuality, homophobia, and a “boys will be boys” attitude flourishes. Under these conditions, sexual harassment and assault is seen as permissible by perpetrators and their supporters:

We are living in patriarchal environments and we are working in them as well, both from the local communities and also from other aid workers. I am working in a multinational institution and even here we have very different views, from me being Scandinavian, to the level of sexism, etc., being expressed by others that would never be accepted in Scandinavia. This is putting people at risk.<sup>143</sup>

There is also the irony, indeed the hypocrisy, that the very agencies that promote gender equality, human rights, and women’s and girls’ rights, have staff that are guilty of degrading and violating these same standards within their own operations:

[We have] organizations that have mission statements and whose existence is about reducing inequality or women’s empowerment, as an example, and then to hear stories about field teams where there is rampant, misogynistic, sexually

<sup>143</sup> Female policy officer in a humanitarian organization, interviewed August 2, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

exploitive humor and conversation that goes on a regular basis with no kind of pushback. And then when it gets reported people are told, “That is just life in the field and if you can’t hack it you should get out.”<sup>144</sup>

The presence of armed conflict, and its associated higher risk levels, was seen as a core component driving a hyper-masculinized environment among aid workers, which in turn was seen as conducive to sexual harassment and assault and having a direct and negative effect on reporting:

I think there is a broader humanitarian sector culture that is deeply at play and the typical characterization of “the cowboy” and increased risk appetite are really promoted. What I have heard a lot from survivors [of sexual assault] was them really grappling with “do I report or not report,” as they did not want to be known or perceived as weak . . . I think that [this environment] also has had a deep effect on whether people are willing to participate in or report into a system, if one even exists.<sup>145</sup>

[Organization name withheld] tends to use the insecurity and armed conflict to make the working environment very masculinized. When you go to meetings at high levels, you have an absolute male majority in charge of operations, missions and projects. So this makes reporting [on sexual harassment and assault] very difficult . . . So the factors that make it conducive to abuse and hard to report is that it is really male and masculinized dominated, operating in situations of conflict and high insecurity, staff from anti-gay countries, male security officers, male health officers, male supervisors, and at the national level, your complaints or reports go to them and their view on what to do is based a lot on their gender, views, religion, culture, etc.<sup>146</sup>

Conditions of male domination and hyper-masculinized missions foster environments that not only put people at risk, particularly women, but also create conditions under which perpetrators continue harassing and assaulting:

<sup>144</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 26, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>145</sup> Male and female humanitarian organization headquarters employees, interviewed together on August 25, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>146</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 29, 2016, by Dyan Mazurana.

I have a case pending for over two years now against an [organization name withheld] security officer who exposed himself in broad daylight in front of my accommodation and masturbated to me. I was working for the [organization name withheld] mission in [country name withheld] as an [position title withheld] officer. I actually recorded him on my phone, reported him, submitted the video as evidence . . . and here we are more than two years later. Since then he's done the same thing to two other women . . . He still has his job. In fact, a few months after I reported the incident, his superiors—the ones in charge of the investigation, since they are security—assigned him to protect my boss with whom I travelled extensively throughout [country name withheld]. He was armed. It was unnerving to say the least. I have since left the [organization name withheld], as did the other two victims. . . .<sup>147</sup>

This same case also illustrates the challenges victims/survivors may face in reporting and having appropriate action taken:

My view is that the main issue is the reporting mechanism itself where it involves mostly men because that is who works predominately in the security offices and units. So, they are just simply not trained to respond effectively and with any sort of understanding and compassion. In my case, what I noticed, they dismissed it as just something that was not a big deal. “Boys will be boys,” “he made a mistake,” “it is okay,” “we will take care of it.” More like a brotherhood attitude as opposed to taking it seriously and that I may have been hurt or traumatized or made to feel unsafe. That was my biggest issue with reporting itself, where my attacker ended up being from security so it created an impossible situation; there was no trust possible for me when I was reporting it. . . . There was no specific follow-up or offer of counseling or any sort of compassionate way of helping me through it. The most damaging part was the reaction and the impunity. Because, as I mentioned, in my particular case, the accused has his legal rights protected and he is still working there and the case is still pending. It has now been two years and thankfully I have video evidence; otherwise it would be my word against his as there has been such a high turn around in the mission where I served that those who were familiar with the case, those who interviewed me, those who investigated, are no longer there, and their files have not been properly transferred to their replace-

ments. All has been lost. The man is still happily working there being dangerous to female coworkers; he is a predator in my view. I think when you experience that and when your female colleagues see that even though I reported the case, even though I had pretty solid visual evidence of the assault happening, the fact that the perpetrator is still working there discourages women from reporting anything because you feel like unless you actually get beat up or killed or raped then they won't take it seriously.<sup>148</sup>

Environments that international women aid workers reported that felt insecure to them also are unsafe for women and men working there in other capacities as lower-level staff:

There is a commonality where everyone is in this high-stress environment, but the risks [for different staff] definitely are different. I know that where I was, the fact that we didn't get to leave the compound very often—we were really almost jailed—and there were so few women, it was mostly a male-dominated working and living environment. I felt the risks for women were exaggerated because I never felt like I could relax. Even in the moments when people were together in a social setting you could never relax because there were ten men around you at every single moment. You always had to watch yourself, one drink too many could perhaps put me in a bad situation. I also know we had a lot of outside contractors for cleaning, cooking, and these support services, that I have heard of a lot of abuse occurred against those workers because they were from Bangladesh or one of these countries where it was difficult for them to get the job and work permit in [country name withheld]. So they were at the mercy of their employers. And I heard of instances of some of the workers that were male being abused by staffers of my organization, but never reporting for fear of reprisal. Two other [sexual abuse] victims in [the same location where I was sexually assaulted] were cleaners from the Philippines who didn't have their passports on them; their employer [agency name withheld] kept their passports, which we discovered in the investigation. It goes to their great credit they actually reported it. It is so easy not to report it for fear of losing one's job, that you won't be believed, and other consequences that international staff can't really imagine.<sup>149</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>148</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

One of the most important findings to come out of the research by the Women’s Humanitarian Network and Report the Abuse is that, at least in their survey populations, the majority of perpetrators of sexual assault and sexual harassment against aid workers are male aid workers themselves, very often supervisors. An important finding from our research links directly to their findings: Male domination within aid missions—in terms of levels of authority, power, decision-making, resources—combined with a macho attitude about humanitarian relief, contributes to demeaning and dangerous work and living environments where sexual harassment and assault is much more likely to occur. Because sexual assault exists on a continuum with sexism, homophobia, sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual and gender-based violence, it is important to address the full range of acts. Thus, ensuring at the highest levels of aid organizations and their field missions that humanitarian work and living spaces are free from sexual discrimination, sexual harassment, discussions and jokes about sex and sexuality, homophobia, and a dismissive attitude around sexism and homophobia is essential to preventing sexual assault against aid workers.

### **Break down of law and order, including sexual assaults against women in the larger environment**

The larger environment in which humanitarian operations take place plays a contributing role in making it more or less likely that sexual harassment and assault occurs against humanitarian aid workers. In particular, interviewees noted that aid workers are more likely to be sexually harassed and assaulted in situations of on-going conflict; multiple armed forces and groups are fighting in the conflict; a breakdown of justice, law and order; and impunity for crimes, including sexual violence. While we do not have quantitative evidence of these factors contributing to sexual assault against aid workers, other quantitative studies show these factors are significantly correlated with higher rates of sexual assault and abuse by peacekeepers against civilian populations (as detailed in Sections 6 and

7).<sup>150</sup> At the same time, our qualitative data finds evidence that these external factors do in fact play a role in some of the sexual harassment and assaults against aid workers.

The case of the sexual assaults against national and international women aid workers by the Sudan People’s Liberation Army in South Sudan in July 2016 occurred in just such an environment as we have described. The case illustrates how, within this environment, aid workers were also subjected to sexual violence and assault. A survivor of the attack whom we interviewed explained the conditions on the ground prior to the attack and the lack of understanding by humanitarian agencies and aid workers that national and international women aid workers were also at risk:

[Prior to going into South Sudan on mission] I also got a briefing from our global security manager—it is worth pointing out that sexual assault was not included as one of the potential threats or things that could possibly happen. So it really wasn’t on the radar at all. That is something that has come up since the attack happened on our compound. In November 2015, there had been two international aid workers who were riding in a car in the evening and they were stopped and raped by some soldiers; I did not hear about that. I had no idea something like that happened. This type of stuff had happened before to international women but was not brought to my attention at all. . . .

In South Sudan everyone knew that sexual violence was a huge problem for South Sudanese women, particularly for the Vice President’s tribe, the Nuers. There have been some big reports over the course of this year documenting rape as a weapon of war and the complete impunity that surrounded sexual violence of all kinds. I guess now thinking back on that it is kind of shocking that we didn’t think: okay this basically means there is a culture of armed forces who just think they can do whatever they want and get away with it. And that given the bad economic situation in South Sudan, the fact that these soldiers aren’t paid, they are told, “Do what you want and that is how we are going to pay you.” It definitely should have been on the radar that not only South Sudanese women are at risk, but women are at risk in general.

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<sup>150</sup> Neudorfer, *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in UN Peacekeeping*.

What happened to us [at the attack in July 2016 on the Terrain Hotel], there were multiple nationalities and some women who were clearly white and foreign and also African women who were part of our group. I don't think anyone received worse or better treatment than others. But definitely in the South Sudan context ordinary civilian women who are from the Nuer tribe are particularly targeted for rape all the time. I don't know if in South Sudan being a foreign woman necessarily protects you. I think that is an assumption that we all make. I think it is pretty clear it didn't stop the attackers from doing what they did to us.<sup>151</sup>

Importantly, the conditions we are exploring in this section make it not only more possible that aid workers will be assaulted by outside forces, as in the case above, but also that their own work environments can become more conducive to sexual assault by co-workers:

The [country name removed] governance system was broken down so there was nothing like police and so on. The place was a disaster zone. They were not keeping law and order. . . .

We were in the confined staff compound, and then in that compound you share the rooms. [Local staff] had to find a way of accommodation. So for them they were vulnerable. Even food, they have to rely on the little amount that we should pay them at the end of the week. Even the way we are paying them would make them vulnerable to any advances against their wish. These are the conditions they are in. Even when they are going to the field, they are squeezing in the vehicle, so sometimes to get good seat sometimes you have to . . . you see what I am trying to say. The condition of work was so poor for them.

We had one international staff in our compound who was from [country name withheld]. He was our supervisor. He formed a clique. He was doing wrong things [including sexual abuse] and using immediate subordinates and rewarding them for protecting him. He would reward them by promoting them and by not controlling their performance and so on. [For the local women who worked there] the place was deadly.

**Interviewer: Would local aid workers who were victims of sexual assault by their employers report it to the police?**

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<sup>151</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed September 8, 2016, Phoebe Donnelly.

There was nothing for reporting to police. It was exploitation for survival. They were themselves affected persons, locals from the war-affected region, they would not go crying. They would only cry after their contracts are not renewed.<sup>152</sup>

Even in non-conflict affected countries, high levels of sexual and gender-based violence mean that many national women staff are abused in their own homes and societies, and agencies are rarely responsive. This abuse can then spill over into aid work environments, even where aid workers are trying to prevent and address sexual and gender based violence:

We ask our employees to be caretakers, but they themselves can be victims, almost daily, and the employer rarely looks at the burden and need for support these people have. In [country name withheld] this was a big issue. We considered that most of our female staff were daily being abused and we are speaking of one of the countries that has one of the highest prevalence rates of sexual violence in the world. My experience was being targeted in [this same country]. It was very powerful experience because I had just arrived in the country as the new project manager and I received text messages that were directed at me and were sexually threatening. Because of the country context, and the verticality of our thematic issue, and the fact that we constantly discussed sexual violence, and the fact that I was a victim of this harassment and assault was really something that unsettled me. I myself did not receive appropriate support. I was in tears for several hours. I was paralyzed because I knew it was someone from my own team, my national team. I felt attacked from within. The people I found around me were expatriates from my team, including my supervisor. They weren't supportive, not because they lacked the intention or the will, but because they lacked knowledge on how to support and how to name this experience as sexual violence.<sup>153</sup>

The two most important findings here are that, first, aid agencies need to be aware that external factors regarding insecurity; armed groups; failure of justice, law, and order to enforce and administer security and justice; and impunity for crimes are important factors contributing to environments

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<sup>152</sup> Male national humanitarian worker, interviewed August 22, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>153</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 14, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

conducive to sexual assault against aid workers. Second, the spillover of these factors means that working in these conditions, aid workers are not only more at risk from attacks by external actors, but also from other humanitarian aid workers (as we detailed), the latter of which does not seem to be fully recognized and addressed by aid agencies.

## Drugs and alcohol

Most people we interviewed raised the consumption of drugs and alcohol as contributing factors in sexual harassment and assault against aid workers. The abuse of alcohol, drug use, and social environments in which heavy drinking occurred were noted as elements in how aid workers socialized and released stress, particularly in areas where they had limited movement and had to live and work in compounds. Interviewees noted that often alternative outlets for stress management and aid worker self-care were lacking, and funding was not prioritized to help aid workers maintain good mental or physical health while on mission. Perpetrators assaulted victims under the influence of drugs and alcohol, and aid worker victims were at times made more vulnerable and unable to resist assault by both voluntary and involuntary drug and alcohol consumption:

Partying and alcohol can be an issue [in sexual assault] as well, the fact is that people are partying and there is a lot of alcohol in many of these settings.<sup>154</sup>

I think it is the high levels of stress and being enclosed in compounds where you cannot actually leave and interact with locals and have some basic freedom of movement. It is in these high-stress, highly dangerous places. In [country name withheld] we worked and slept and lived in one place 24/7, and there were instances at least once a week where there would be a mortar flying over the compound. It was stressful and people were coping in the best way they could because the system didn't provide for well-being and staff welfare. There were never any funds. You would have to dedicate space to a communal room, and space was very precious in these instances. Staff welfare was always an issue and people were forced to cope the way could and they knew, which led to

a lot of drinking, a lot of self-destructive and unhealthy behaviors, and I think that leads to [sexual assault]. My attacker was drunk and the two other instances when he [attacked other women] he was drunk again. There was definitely a pattern.<sup>155</sup>

In some cases, victims are made vulnerable by voluntarily taking alcohol or drugs and then felt their behavior would be used against them to dismiss or invalidate their claims:

Mainly internationals, mainly women, but some men, who are raped in social circumstances at parties, compounds, guest houses. . . . Usually it is a situation where they have not come forward, where they have blamed themselves, because they have been high or drinking so they are drunk and everyone is drunk. What they are saying is because of the culture of misogyny in lots of organizations they feel they wouldn't be believed because they would have been seen kissing, groping, or dancing with someone and when they are later raped they feel no one would believe them.<sup>156</sup>

In some countries, such as South Sudan and Iraq, aid workers reported that the use of date rape drugs (also known as predator drugs) is known to be widespread. A perpetrator administers a date rape drug to the victim (without their knowledge) to incapacitate the victim and render them vulnerable to sexual assault. One of the most well-known sexual assault cases against an aid professional is that of Megan Nobert, whose assault by another humanitarian who administered her date rape drugs and the inadequate response by her employer led her to start the organization Report the Abuse. Here she narrates her story:

While on mission for a humanitarian organisation in South Sudan, I was drugged and sexually assaulted by a member of the humanitarian community. I was given a combination of cocaine, codeine, morphine and oxycodone. I blacked out early that evening and don't remember exactly what happened to me; all I have is the memory of waking up early, naked and alone in my accommodation, violently ill from the drugs I had not consented to taking. I lost between 4 and 6 hours that night, and, while part of me is grateful that the darkness means I do not have to relive the memory of what was done to me, part

<sup>154</sup> Female policy officer in a humanitarian organization, interviewed August 2, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>155</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>156</sup> Female security trainer, interviewed August 10, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

of me will also always wonder what exactly did happen. I do not expect to ever get the answer to that question. . . .

I wasn't given any training on how to prevent or handle acts of sexual violence. I have also never been told about any policies or procedures that might exist to handle complaints of sexual violence. . . .

My assaulter worked for a sub-contractor employed by a United Nations agency. Under Section 2.5 of the United Nations General Conditions of Contracts for the Provision of Goods and Services, the agency has no responsibility for the actions of the employees of its vendors. This is the conclusion that the agency came to when I approached them to file a complaint of sexual assault, the only recourse available to me at the time. Before I was able to file a complaint with the sub-contractor, I was told that the UN agency requested that my assaulter be fired. I do not believe there was any malice intended in this request; it did however deny me the opportunity to pursue the only vaguely legal pathway available to me, the only formal acknowledgement that what happened to me was wrong.<sup>157</sup>

In some instances, survivors were immediately questioned as to their possible consumption of alcohol, regardless of the circumstances of their case:

The first question I was asked after my assault—in the middle of the night by the staff person on call for emergencies that week—was, “Were you drinking?” as if I were to blame. I had not been drinking. My bedroom door was kicked down in the middle of the night while I was sleeping by masked men wearing military attire.<sup>158</sup>

In some cases, claiming that victims have a drinking or drug problem was a means used by agencies to refuse to deal with a victim's/survivor's sexual assault and harassment. One interviewee gave an example of a case he investigated regarding a female international staff and a local male security officer:

There were charges brought up against an international Western woman on our staff who allegedly tried to seduce a local security officer who was a national staff. I was the one to investigate. All the minutes shared were very well documented and

it seemed on paper a very strong case against her. But in fact when I investigated, it was clear the charges were all made up about her; for example, she wasn't even in the country on the dates she was supposedly trying to get this security guard to sleep with her. Sexual blackmailing her was what they were trying to do as the [country name withheld] national staff wanted to get rid of her. We had to get her out of the country as it became a security threat, especially as it was the security officers bringing the false charges. When I took it to a higher level to get the local staff removed, at headquarters the response was that she had a drinking problem and he wasn't going to deal with her, so even after repeated tries it went nowhere.<sup>159</sup>

The presence of alcohol and drugs and a heavy reliance on parties in which alcohol, and to a lesser extent drugs, are consumed as a means to deal with the levels of stress that aid workers encounter are contributing factors in sexual assaults experienced by aid workers. The health and well-being of aid professionals working and living in intensive and highly stressful environments cannot be adequately managed by rest and relaxation breaks every several weeks. It is imperative that aid agencies invest resources in alternative and healthy means for aid workers to socialize, decompress, and relieve stress and not rely on dysfunctional and harmful coping mechanisms.

## Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender aid workers

A workshop held in 2016 by RedR UK and EISF on inclusion and security for LGBT aid workers concluded that

Individual aid workers and individual security/HR/country managers end up making decisions about ‘what is right/possible/safe’ without relevant knowledge or training on how to make decisions relating to LGBTI workers’ safety and opportunities. This leads to enormous inequality within the field and insecurity for LGBTI aid workers.<sup>160</sup>

Interviewees we spoke with in our study described working for agencies and in countries where pervasive sexist and homophobic attitudes existed among

<sup>157</sup> Megan Nobert, “Aid Worker: I Was Drugged and Raped by Another Humanitarian in South Sudan,” *The Guardian* (July 29, 2015).

<sup>158</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>159</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 29, 2016, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>160</sup> RedR UK and EISF, Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Aid Workers Workshop (2016).



aid workers contributed to demeaning, unsafe, and abusive work environments for heterosexual women and LGBT aid professionals:

[Sexual minorities] had to put up with negative or harmful comments and a hostile work environment. At that point, when [co-workers] say hurtful things, you have to agree, and having any disagreement over rights of sexual minorities in an environment where people internally could turn against you in your own compound is very tricky. So, when in these environments, you have to be quiet or you can put yourself at risk. So, you just have to put up with it. You have to then be even more low profile than in your own home environment.<sup>161</sup>

LGBT victims were often unable to report sexual harassment and assault within the missions because they feared violence by their colleagues, who often were intensely anti-gay and from countries where homosexuality is punishable by death.<sup>162</sup> This resulted in cases that can be termed “sexual identity blackmail,” where perpetrators would pressure victims to do what they told them to do, or face having their sexual identity revealed to their anti-gay colleagues.

Very homophobic and nasty jokes have been repeated in every one of my assignments, no one would expect an action; it is an ongoing thing through all the missions. I had another case of exposure of genitals and playing with genitals by one man trying to seduce another man. It was assumed by the perpetrator that there were no other gay people around him and his victim would be seduced and submit. And the perpetrator believed that getting the other man to have sex with him would improve their working relationship. . . . In speaking out on this I would expose [the victim] more than help him, so it’s not always about reporting. It’s a bigger risk saying, “There is a gay colleague here,” than of actually helping the person, because it would likely expose them to risk, especially if they are in a location where it could take longer to evacuate them or it’s isolated.<sup>163</sup>

Threats targeting LGBT staff can make compounds where aid workers live extremely unsafe for LGBT aid professionals, a factor their abusers use to abuse

and silence them; whereas staff compounds are supposed to be places of refuge and security:

On assignment in [country name withheld], I noticed a pattern of a colleague who was breaking security rules by bringing home local women to his place, and he was in a relationship with a local woman who was allegedly the daughter of a high ranking member of the [armed group name withheld]. I raised this rule breaking with the person, as I thought it was a security risk for us all, and he said the real security issue was me and my sexuality and it was in fact a national security threat and that he would raise it as such. You see, we are working in a very hostile environment, in [country name withheld], and on that mission, I didn’t have the backing of colleagues to raise it as he was threatening to raise the issue of my sexuality if I did. I had colleagues from Uganda and Kenya so that I could not feel backed up and it was calculated on his part, knowing that my colleagues likely won’t back me as a gay man. The pattern was sexual blackmail, taking into account that even within my compound I would not have protection if I raised it, that my own colleagues might become a security risk to me.<sup>164</sup>

When LGBT victims/survivors were national staff working in countries where homosexuals face death, this contributed to their belief that abuse was impossible to report for fear of losing their lives, a factor their abusers also took into account.

Let’s face it, [homosexuality] is a hidden thing in many of the countries in which we operate, where homosexuality puts you at risk for your life if it is known. That is a more hidden issue and that could have even more dire consequences for people. Especially in conflict arenas—people saying, “He is gay, he is a sodomizer”—that may have a worse end for that person.<sup>165</sup>

A security trainer reported on the sexual violence against LGBT individuals that she encountered while on mission:

[There is] what [is] called “corrective rape,” where [national] homosexual staff are raped and told to keep quiet because otherwise they can be stoned to death. That was something that was definitely going on.<sup>166</sup>

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> See also RedR UK and EISE, *Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Aid Workers Workshop* (2016).

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Male trainer and counselor, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>166</sup> Female security trainer, interviewed August 10, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

A group of [gay male aid workers] said there is something you need to know about: “Homosexual staff are really vulnerable.” They brought this up to me. Maybe you have a man who is effeminate, maybe homosexual or heterosexual, but because of the fact they are effeminate they are a target for blackmail, blackmail will take place because they say, “I will out you unless you do what I want.” Rape through coercion. That was one thing [that was happening].<sup>167</sup>

In our review of security training materials, we encountered none that discussed sexual harassment and assault against LGBT staff as an issue.<sup>168</sup> Yet nearly everyone we interviewed reported masculinized and homophobic work and living environments in their aid agencies, which were much more pronounced in field missions. This atmosphere led to widespread lack of confidence in agencies’, particularly field missions’, abilities to handle sexual harassment and assault against LGBT aid professionals. In fact, LGBT staff often felt unsafe to reveal their sexual identity to any of their immediate co-workers, particularly in the field:

[As a gay man in the aid industry] knowing that people are from contexts that are very homophobic and anti-gay—like all of Africa, where 80 percent of our operations are—I would not be willing to report to them, and maybe that is my prejudice, but I think it would be shared by many of my gay and lesbian colleagues.<sup>169</sup>

The lack of serious attention by aid agencies to address the pervasive anti-gay and homophobic employee work and living atmosphere, particularly in the field, is putting LGBT and heterosexual national and international employees at risk of sexual harassment and assault and other potentially life-threatening violence.

## Sexual assault against male humanitarian aid workers

Research finds that sexual assault against men is seriously underreported, that when men do report,

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> An important workshop on this topic was held in 2016: see RedR UK and EISE, *Inclusion and Security of LGBTI Aid Workers Workshop* (2016).

<sup>169</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 29, 2016, by Dyan Mazurana.

they are often not believed or are blamed for the assault, and few resources are available to assist survivors.<sup>170</sup> The majority of cases we recorded regarding sexual harassment and assault against male humanitarian aid workers were committed by male aid workers against gay men or men who were seen by perpetrators as effeminate, according to interviewees.<sup>171</sup> These cases form part of the analysis on sexual assault against LGBT aid professionals above. We recorded no cases where women were accused of sexually assaulting male aid workers; similarly studies on SEA by peacekeepers found no recorded cases of women peacekeepers engaged in sexual abuse of local populations. Report the Abuse has received reports of women sexually harassing and assaulting men.<sup>172</sup>

However, a few interviewees reported what they considered to be international female aid workers’ inappropriate use of power and resources to pressure national male aid workers into maintaining intimate relations with them. These interviewees alleged that agency policies prohibit relationships between national and international staff unless there is freedom of consent and a genuine and serious commitment to the relationship by both parties. Given the imbalance of power, it was at times difficult to determine how genuine the consent was on the part of the male national staff:

[Country name removed] is very strict with national regulations for aid workers. Everyone is trained on what you can and cannot do, so one cannot claim they don’t know. Yet there were many cases of ex-pat women having national staff [country name removed] boyfriends. These men had wives who had to be quiet as their husbands were the breadwinner and needed to keep these relationships going to keep their jobs. I witnessed the same thing happening in [country name removed] and [country name removed] too when I was there, ex-pat women becoming involved

<sup>170</sup> Clayton M. Bullock and Mace Beckson, “Male Victims of Sexual Assault: Phenomenology, Psychology, Physiology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 39 (2) (April 2011): 197–205.

<sup>171</sup> One of the best studies on the topic of sexual violence against men is Sandesh Sivakumaran, “Sexual Violence against Men in Armed Conflict,” *The European Journal of International Law* 18, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>172</sup> Megan Nobert, personal communication, March 12, 2017, with Dyan Mazurana.

with local male staff who were already married. In all my security rules it is written, “No relationships with national staff unless it is with serious intentions.” We cannot regulate people’s romantic or sexual lives. It is hard to know if it is mutual relationship or abuse of power. But in most all the cases, there is clear employer/employee relationship and so there are very unequal power dynamics going on.<sup>173</sup>

Thus, while no cases of sexual assault of men, women, or LGBT aid workers by women aid workers were reported during our interviews, we do know that women are also capable of abusing power, including in unequal sexual relations.

## Conclusion

Our analysis presents several environmental factors within aid agencies and their missions that are conducive to sexual harassment and assault of aid workers. Importantly, these same factors contribute to creating a permissive environment for perpetrators and their supporters to continue carrying out abuse. These internal factors are completely within the purview and control of the agencies, and no excuses should be given by leadership for not eradicating these forms of discrimination and violence from the workplace.

Several external factors were found to play important roles in making aid workers’ work environments more conducive to sexual harassment and assault. While these external factors are outside the control of aid agencies, how they recognize, prepare, and respond to them is completely within their control. For example, situations of armed conflict should not be addressed with male-dominated, masculinized, “cowboy,” risk-taking responses; such attitudes and responses are dangerous for not only beneficiaries but for local, national, and international aid workers themselves, as this study shows. Furthermore, while drugs and alcohol are well known to play a role in sexual assault of aid workers, our findings point away from blaming the victim/survivor (e.g., “she shouldn’t have been drinking”) to recognizing that perpetrators make use of alcohol and drugs to embolden or excuse

themselves, impair their victims, and carry out their attacks.

The breakdown of law and order, including sexual assaults against local civilian women, men, girls, and boys should be recognized by aid agencies as red flags for elevated risks to their own national and international staff for assault by external and internal actors. Agencies should factor these realities into their security trainings and prevention and response systems.

Finally, our findings on sexual harassment and assault against LGBT aid workers suggest an aid industry that is rife with homophobia and anti-gay sentiment, factors that contribute to abuse of heterosexual women and LGBT aid professionals. LGBT aid workers report that their co-workers and security agents hired by their agencies are the primary source of harassment, blackmail, assault, and at times life-threatening abuse—this should be a wake-up call to the aid industry and the donors supporting it. In Section 9 we provide detailed recommendation on ensuring prevention of and response to sexual harassment and assault against aid workers.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

## 7. PERPETRATORS

This study is among the first to gather in-depth data and report specifically on perpetrators of sexual harassment and assault against humanitarian aid workers. Our study seeks to better understand not only the conditions promoting sexual harassment and assault against aid workers (as analyzed in Section 6), but also to document and analyze the patterns and characteristics of those who perpetrate sexual assault, against whom, and the types of sexual assaults. We found that, overwhelmingly, men carry out sexual harassment and assault, primarily against women aid workers, but also to a lesser degree against LGBT and heterosexual men aid professionals. These findings confirm similar findings by both the Women's Humanitarian Network and Report the Abuse. Our research finds that perpetrators come from different sectors: humanitarian aid agencies, the security sector (including security officers working for humanitarian operations, members of the national army and police, and United Nations peacekeepers), non-state armed groups, and local populations.

As we explore findings on perpetrators in this section, keep in mind the politics of reporting and perpetrating. This means we should consider not only who carries out the violence, but which perpetrators are reported on, have cases documented against them, and are sanctioned. Conversely, who is able to cover it up and possibly continue perpetrating, and what conditions allow this to continue?

Sexual harassment, assault, and abuse are primarily motivated by the perpetrator's desire to exercise power over his/her victim(s).<sup>174</sup> Regarding the link between power and who perpetrates sexual harassment and assault against aid workers,

Males above the age of 30 is what I have encountered, and then the common denominator that they are in some kind of position of power. That applies to internal and external [perpetrators], whether it is men in militias with guns who attack, like South Sudan recently, or it is power that

is offered by the organization, but the common denominator is power.<sup>175</sup>

### Male humanitarian aid workers

Though not representative samples, the research carried out independently by both the Women's Humanitarian Network and Report the Abuse found that male colleagues within humanitarian aid agencies perpetrated the largest proportion of the reported sexual harassment and assault. Our findings corroborate these studies, as the majority of cases we collected in our interviews involved male humanitarian actors and male security officers as perpetrators, which we detailed in Section 6. *The Guardian* has also run a series of stories on sexual assault against aid workers and the majority of cases reported are perpetrated by male humanitarian aid workers.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, the Women's Humanitarian Network found that often (in about a third of cases) it is male supervisors who carried out the sexual harassment and assault against their female subordinates. *The Guardian* recorded one such assault:

It was in December last year, while Pierce was working on a project in a remote area of South Sudan, that she says she was attacked. She was living in a tented compound with other men and women from local charities. On her last night before a contract break she says a colleague "came into my tent while I was asleep and climbed into my bed naked and raped me." Pierce reported the attack to a superior in a phone call the following day. "I was exhausted, in pain and probably in shock," said Pierce (not her real name). "The first thing she asked me was why no one had heard me scream. I was questioned as to why I hadn't reported it directly to the staff of the local non profit—all men, some of whom reported to the man who raped me—or why I hadn't told my driver or programme officers—all male. She wanted to know why my tent hadn't been locked, why had I been in the compound and why I didn't call and report it immediately as it happened? Why I didn't fight back more?"<sup>177</sup>

<sup>175</sup> Male and female humanitarian organization headquarters employees, interviewed together on August 25, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly

<sup>176</sup> See the Secret Aid Worker blog, *The Guardian*.

<sup>177</sup> Anna Leach and Sandra Lavielle, "Raped by a Colleague then Fired: The Aid Worker who Refused to Keep Quiet," *The Guardian*, October 19, 2015.

<sup>174</sup> Liz Kelly, *Surviving Sexual Violence* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

*The Guardian* also uncovered similar stories of assault by male aid workers and humanitarian agencies' failure to address and stop perpetration.

I was working with a small NGO in an emergency situation, living and working 24/7 in a compound, just the six of us—three other women, two men. One day, cooking in the kitchen, one of the guys pulls down my T-shirt to reveal my breasts. I was so shocked I didn't know what to say. So I made a joke, saying this was something I should report to HR. He was HR. When I told a friend she advised me to report it. It took me a couple of months to do so, as the head of field office was out of the mission area, and I was uncomfortable with the potential repercussions, given our confined living/working conditions. When I finally told the head of office, the response was: "You must have done something to invite this. Guys don't just do that without an invitation."<sup>178</sup>

Power imbalance, including among national and international staff, people of different genders, and different positions and ranks in these volatile environments are a key factor in perpetrators' ability to commit sexual assault, and were noted repeatedly by our interviewees:

I have come across various, mainly elderly or mature men, where I would say they really have strange attitudes—a sense of entitlement—about what they think they can do with younger staff members who come to work. I know of people having created particular posts to attract a particular person to apply for that post, selected them, and put them in a vulnerable position. I think because in this particular case he really wanted that woman to be there and he had the power to do it. In my view, he was really a dubious individual, but for some reason some of these people really make it to quite powerful positions in some organizations and they seem to have the right networks to be completely protected. In this case, the woman complained and she was finally sacked by the organization and disbarred from ever working for them again. The organization was just not willing to listen. The top people were entirely protecting the head of country office who had done all of this. I think it is probably a mixture of individuals having a funny sense of how important they are in relation to other people, and probably having

sufficient networks to know they should protect themselves.<sup>179</sup>

Perpetrators also factor in power imbalances between international and national staff:

For national staff the risk factor is often related to unequal power relationships within an office. They are dependent on a new person, often an expatriate coming in and deciding if a local contract is renewed or ended. That puts them in a vulnerable situation. I think national staff are more vulnerable to any violence, including sexual violence, that is prevalent in the society they are coming from, be it within family structures or broader society structures. The risk factor is twofold linked to societies they are in and personal context, but also their very weak position versus the internationals they work with and the very unequal power structures.<sup>180</sup>

National staff comprise approximately 80 percent of humanitarian aid workers, and thus by sheer numbers alone they experience the brunt of sexual harassment and assault. However, the little research that exists comparing national and international aid workers does not find much of a difference in the prevalence rates of sexual assault against national staff compared to internationals.<sup>181</sup> More research is needed to better understand the differences between national and international staff and their experiences of sexual assault, as well as agencies' responses.

Based on our review of security training materials (discussed in Section 4), aid agencies appear to assume that armed forces and groups pose the greatest threat of sexual assault to humanitarian aid workers. As a result, they place more emphasis on compounds as places of refuge and encourage women to seek the presence of other (male) aid workers for safety. While compounds and colleagues should be places and people with whom aid workers feel safe, research, including ours, finds that the majority of attackers are male aid workers or male security officers assigned to protect the agency staff or compound, and that at times a culture that protects perpetrators exists within the

<sup>178</sup> Secret Aid Worker blog, "Sexual Harassment and Discrimination in the Industry."

<sup>179</sup> Female security professional, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Humanitarian Women's Network, "Survey Data."

office. This reality must be addressed directly by aid agencies.

## Armed actors

Armed actors can pose a serious threat to aid workers and they should be a focus within all security trainings and briefings. Based on the material we gathered and reviewed on sexual assault against aid workers by armed actors, we report several findings.

First, armed actors use rape and sexual abuse in conflict, in part, to communicate to other males or power holders the perpetrator's superior power and masculinity. Recalling that masculinity is a status that has to be affirmed by others and oneself,<sup>182</sup> male perpetrators use violence against women's and girls' bodies as a means to demonstrate their power over the victims' male relatives, but also of their larger social/cultural/religious/ethnic/class/caste community.<sup>183</sup> We contend that in some conflict settings where sexual violence is occurring by armed actors against civilian women, armed actors may extend this message with the sexual assault of female humanitarian aid workers to demonstrate power over particular organizations and the forces or governments they perceive they are aligned with.<sup>184</sup> Speaking in the aftermath of armed groups sexually assaulting aid workers,<sup>185</sup> an interviewee working there stated,

[T]hey also enjoy doing it because it is a show of power over an organization, because I raped somebody who is working for that organization and they are proud of it. . . . If an NGO happened to be on either side of this militant group, the assumption was that you are working on that side and those are our enemies and you are also

<sup>182</sup> Michael Kimmel, "Masculinities and Gun Violence: The Personal Meets the Political" (paper prepared for a session at the UN: "Men, Women and Gun Violence," July 14, 2005); Gary Barker and Christine Ricardo, "Young Men and the Construction of Masculinity in Sub-Saharan Africa: Implications for HIV/AIDS, Conflict and Violence," in *The Other Half of Gender: Men's Issues in Development* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2006, 159–93).

<sup>183</sup> Dyan Mazurana and Keith Proctor, "Gender and Humanitarian Action," *Handbook on Humanitarian Action*, eds Roger Mac Ginty and Jenny H. Peterson (Routledge, 2014), 49–61.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>185</sup> This case does not refer to South Sudan.

our enemy. Whatever they unleash against the women of their enemies or the guards of their enemies it goes along the same with aid workers. Because some of them do not understand why some agencies operate in a particular region and not in another region. . . . They just see since you are not in our area you must be for the enemy. So whatever we do to them we will also do to you.<sup>186</sup>

The attacks against national and international aid workers in South Sudan by the SPLA in July 2016 provide a clear example of how aid workers can be attacked to send a message to the agencies and governments their perpetrators believe they represent. It also appears to be an example of strategic wartime rape, in which rape was used by commanders in pursuit of the group's objectives.<sup>187</sup> According to the Associated Press,

On July 11, South Sudanese troops, fresh from winning a battle in the capital, Juba, over opposition forces, went on a nearly four-hour rampage through a residential compound popular with foreigners, in one of the worst targeted attacks on aid workers in South Sudan's three-year civil war. They shot dead a local journalist while forcing the foreigners to watch, raped several foreign women, singled out Americans, beat and robbed people and carried out mock executions, several witnesses told The Associated Press. . . . One soldier ranted against foreigners. "He definitely had pronounced hatred against America," Libot said, recalling the soldier's words: "You messed up this country. You're helping the rebels. The people in the UN, they're helping the rebels."<sup>188</sup>

Reporting on the same attack after several investigations had been carried out,

"The soldiers then pulled people out one by one," AP reports. "One woman said she was sexually assaulted by multiple men. Another Western woman said soldiers beat her with fists and threatened her with their guns when she tried to resist. She said five men raped her." Again, AP is careful not to specify the nationalities of the women, but several survivors told Patinkin that soldiers specifically asked the terrified aid workers if they were American, and when someone said yes, the beating would begin. According to the Human Rights

<sup>186</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 31, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>187</sup> Cohen et al., "Wartime Sexual Violence."

<sup>188</sup> Associated Press, "Rampaging South Sudan Troops Rape Foreigners, Kill Local," August 15, 2016.

Watch report, witnesses recalled soldiers cheering as they took turns raping women.<sup>189</sup>

In other cases, rape and sexual assault is a practice by armed actors; it is not strategic or directly ordered, but is practiced by soldiers and condoned by commanders and is a means used to demonstrate their power, masculinity and domination over other groups.<sup>190</sup>

I have been in situations where militant groups come to me—because I have done a lot of training with militant groups—to ask me what I am talking about. “We do not care about ICC, about the international legal standard, all we want is that we kill everyone who opposes us. We want all foreigners to leave our country so we can fight and whoever is stronger will be the one to continue leading the country.” All of these things happen and when you hear something like that from the people who are supposed to be in leadership positions, leaders in the country, but they are killing their own people and do not want you to talk about it. Militant groups are used to raping women and girls each day, so for them raping a foreigner is not an issue. It is something that goes on all the time, it is normal; they do not understand why you are talking about it.<sup>191</sup>

In other cases, armed actors may sexually assault aid workers in a more opportunistic manner, one that is carried out for private reasons—gratification or revenge—but is not part of a larger group goal.<sup>192</sup>

## Security officers and United Nations peacekeepers

We have detailed at length in Section 6 findings of security officers for aid agencies perpetrating sexual assault against women and LGBT aid workers. We can see that much of this violence appears to be within the range of sexual assault as a practice and opportunistic sexual assault. Sexual assault is labeled a practice when it is known and tolerated by the perpetrator’s superior(s), or carried out by

<sup>189</sup> Christopher Dickey, “U.S. Kept Quiet after Americans Were Attacked by Soldiers in South Sudan,” *The Daily Beast*, August 16, 2016.

<sup>190</sup> Cohen et al., “Wartime Sexual Violence.”

<sup>191</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 31, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>192</sup> Cohen et al., “Wartime Sexual Violence.”

security heads themselves.<sup>193</sup> In several of the cases discussed above, the security officers appear to be serial perpetrators, as the women we interviewed each noted they were one of several victims/survivors they knew about. In other cases, the sexual assaults by security officers appeared opportunistic, which means that they were not apparently part of a larger group goal and were carried out by one or more persons with their own agendas<sup>194</sup>:

I knew someone who was attacked by a military UN peacekeeper, which was also interesting because if you look at regulations there shouldn’t be military and civilian mingling. But we cohabitated, which was against the rules. But those were the restraints of space. So that was concerning because not only did you have to watch out for your colleagues, but also the people in charge of protecting the compound.<sup>195</sup>

The result was that those supposedly in charge of ensuring aid worker security were themselves major security risks, in particular for women and LGBT staff. In such cases women aid workers, and in some cases LGBT staff, face threats inside and outside of their agencies, with essentially no safe space.

## Civilians

The majority of cases of civilians sexually assaulting aid workers were opportunistic. In several cases reported by Sophie Edwards for Devex news, women aid workers were raped by their taxi drivers, gangs of men, or individuals while on vacation from their jobs.<sup>196</sup> In other cases we documented, women aid workers were sexually assaulted by local civilians who watched for windows of opportunity to attack:

In [country name removed] there were a number of incidents of sexual assault [against aid workers]. There was a lady who was very good working with the people, so she used to make trips every morning, come back, go back out in the afternoon. For several months she worked like that. Then somebody just decided and thought: She leaves at this time, passes this time here, and in most cases she is always alone. Okay she became a target. She

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>196</sup> Sophie Edwards, “Sexual Assault and Harassment in the Aid Sector: Survivor Stories,” February 7, 2017.

was violated. That is why now security protocols are very important.<sup>197</sup>

The breaking or disregard of gender and cultural norms was also noted in several interviews as playing an important role in civilians assaulting female aid workers. In one case reported to us, the violation of proper gender norms and relations resulted in the rape of a female humanitarian aid worker by civilian neighbors as a means to punish her and members of her household and force them out of the neighborhood:

There was an attack by the neighbors on a house where men and women delegates lived together. It was about expatriates, international staff living in a house where only residents would live. They rented a house because they didn't have a budget and lived on a low budget. In that area of the city, when they moved in men and women together, they had parties, there was alcohol, which in that society was not accepted. They made a terrace on the roof and in that society making a terrace on the roof is something you don't do because you can spy on neighbors and women neighbors . . . and the neighbors thought that was something you don't do. That was a society where men and women do not live together in such a way and they wanted to make that clear, I suppose. So, they attacked the house and they singled out the female in that house and sexually assaulted her. . . . [The expats] made a lot of cultural mistakes and [the locals] they wanted to drive them out of the neighborhood.<sup>198</sup>

Many interviewees we talked with reported that sexual harassment and assault against women in public places by civilians was widespread, which included both local women and national and international women aid workers. Such conditions are part of the larger environment that makes sexual assault against aid workers by their colleagues, security actors, armed groups, and civilians that much more likely to occur.

## Conclusion

At the core of sexual harassment and assault against aid workers is the desire of perpetrators to dem-

onstrate masculinized power and domination over their victims. Perpetrators come from numerous different sectors where humanitarian operations are present: They are within humanitarian aid agencies, the security sector (including security officers working for humanitarian operations, members of the national army and police, and UN peacekeepers), non-state armed groups, and local populations. While security protocols can help safeguard against opportunistic violence, much more must be done by agencies to robustly address sexual harassment and assault against aid workers as a practice by some humanitarian aid workers and security officers working with them. Furthermore, much more realistic assessments, trainings, and security protocols need to be in place to address sexual assault as a practice and strategy by armed actors and non-state armed groups and to better protect aid workers from opportunistic assault.

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<sup>197</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 31, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>198</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 13, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.



## 8. AGENCY RESPONSE TO SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND ASSAULT

This section presents findings related to aid agencies' responses to sexual harassment and assault against their employees. Key to assisting survivors is creating an environment where survivors feel confident to report cases of sexual harassment and assault. However, many aid organizations do not encourage reporting due to a sexist and misogynistic work setting (see Sections 6 and 7); failure to take the harassment and assaults seriously; a pattern of blaming sexual assault victims/survivors for the attack; pressure on survivors not to talk about their experiences with sexual harassment and assault; and supervisors, co-workers, and security officers who are perpetrators. Additionally, victims/survivors may only choose to report sexual harassment and assault if they feel they will receive proper responses in terms of being given options for prosecuting the perpetrator (whether internal to the organization or externally), as well as proper medical and psychological care. Overall, we found in our interviews with humanitarian aid actors and security personnel that most organizations lack clear procedures for how to support victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault and have not built the necessary in-house expertise to respond to a report of sexual harassment and assault. When agencies do have policies and procedures, they can fail to enact them and so they exist largely only on paper. To demonstrate that organizations can enact robust policies and procedures and respond to this problem, we point to the case of Oxfam as a best practice in addressing sexual harassment and assault against aid workers.

### **Victims/survivors are blamed, sanctioned, or fired for reporting**

Victims/survivors often do not report experiencing sexual harassment and assault out of concern that they will be blamed or punished by their agency. One interview subject noted that sexual harassment and assault is really about “power and extortion, and it can ruin your career and character so [peo-

ple] do not speak.”<sup>199</sup> Several interview subjects had either experienced it themselves, or heard stories of other women reporting their experiences of sexual harassment and violence and being fired from their organization. One survivor we interviewed stated that she was fired by the humanitarian aid agency she worked for because she spoke to other female aid workers and to a reporter from *The Guardian* about her experience of being sexually assaulted by a fellow aid worker. She was fired a week after *The Guardian* article came out<sup>200</sup>:

I personally felt isolated from what I experienced. Because I am isolated I can't talk about it and I felt stigmatized and marginalized. I think people do not know what is going on. With other security incidents it is open—there was a bomb here. . . . But with something like [sexual assault], with all the stigma, it is not something that it is talked about. I also think it is has to do with funding too. If any incident [occurs it] is a big deal. When it happened to me [I was raped], I was told these kind of things can shut projects down. I wanted to show I was a team player and I wasn't going to harm the project. I still feel like I was treated in a hostile manner from management. I have talked to other woman who have felt this too, and that also keeps us from pushing the matter and going up the reporting chain.<sup>201</sup>

Knowledge of agencies firing individuals who reported incidents of sexual harassment and assault was common among our interviewees, and this creates an environment in which aid workers fear backlash from reporting, thus contributing to the chronic under-reporting of sexual harassment and assault we documented throughout our research:

There was a woman who got raped and then afterwards felt like the NGO she was working for got rid of her because they did not want her to keep talking about it. Even though she was saying they should change their protocol, and she was upset and needing to talk about it with her colleagues, the NGO was saying to just be quiet and not talk about it. When she wasn't [quiet] they ended her contract.<sup>202</sup>

<sup>199</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 15, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>200</sup> Leach and Laville, “Raped by a Colleague then Fired.”

<sup>201</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>202</sup> Female reporter, interviewed August 5, 2016, by Phoebe

Interview respondents explained that humanitarian organizations appear to be more concerned about their reputation than the well-being of individual aid workers. This led the organizations to respond to sexual harassment and assault in a way that focused on how it would affect the agency's reputation if the public found out about the abuses women aid workers face at the hands of their colleagues, those hired to protect them (security officers), or armed actors in the areas they are working.

## Problems with reporting processes

The reporting process itself is often fraught with problems. Interviewees told us that reporting processes for sexual harassment and assault were often unknown and un-discussed, lacked transparency, and were themselves blocks to getting the agency to respond.

First, there are significant problems with censorship by field-based superiors and security officers, who at times create an environment that intimidates or prevents victim/survivors from reporting:

How could I report it on the compound? The bosses were male and were hostile to me, security would have to let me out, how could I report it? You are traumatized and you are talked to like you are incompetent.<sup>203</sup>

As discussed in Sections 5 and 6, security officers are often seen as unapproachable by victim/survivors of sexual harassment and assault. This happens because aid organizations often have a heavily masculinized, and often militarized, space; there are few women in security positions; and security officers are at times perpetrators themselves or protect more senior men in the organization who are perpetrators. Survivors of sexual assault said they felt like the organizations they worked for “brushed [their cases] under the carpet” and did not think their complaints “were serious enough.”<sup>204</sup> We also heard instances of victims/survivors being blamed by superiors and security officers for situations

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Donnelly.

<sup>203</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>204</sup> Female reporter, interviewed August 5, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

of sexual violence when they reported them (as described in Sections 6 and 7).

Second, confusion reigns, both within organizations and among aid workers, about who is the appropriate person to report an incident of sexual harassment or assault to (whether a security director, human resources person, or someone else within the organization). Many organizations have not identified best practices and lack a clear and transparent protocol for how to respond when sexual harassment and assault occurs.<sup>205</sup> An aid worker said that in preparation for her work in South Sudan she had “no idea of any reporting mechanisms” or who to report to if an incident of sexual assault occurred; she later witnessed several of her colleagues being sexual assaulted while on the job.<sup>206</sup> Her example is perhaps especially surprising since South Sudan is an environment where aid workers had been victims of sexual violence in 2015 and where widespread sexual violence is a well-known feature of the conflict. Such cases illustrate that organizations need clear and transparent policies and procedures put in place to try and prevent incidences and then also before an incident happens so that the individuals who are involved in the response are already familiar with the process.

Third, it is not only organizational leadership that does not know what to do in cases of sexual harassment and assault; individuals are confused regarding the best way to respond to their colleagues and friends within the organization who are victims/survivors. One male humanitarian worker noted that if he thought a colleague had been sexually assaulted, he would not feel comfortable asking about it:

I am not going to sit down with my female colleague and ask them what happened to them because you need to be an expert or a counselor to be able to handle that kind of situation.<sup>207</sup>

We discovered that survivors of sexual harassment and assault are more likely to report the incident to

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<sup>205</sup> Female reporter, interviewed August 5, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>206</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed September 8, 2016, Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>207</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 31, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

a friend within the organization, than go directly to the organization leadership. However, if a colleague does not know the appropriate way to respond to a survivor, or where to refer them to make a safe report, they are often unable to assist. Creating an environment in which colleagues know who to refer a victim/survivor to is part of a supportive organizational culture. Additionally, creating a supportive environment within an organization for survivors involves removing the stigma of discussing sexual harassment and assault.

Finally, even when organizations do have policies about how to deal with sexual harassment and assault, “you have a difference in what happens at the corporate level and what filters down into the field.”<sup>208</sup> For policies and procedures to be effective, organizations need political will—from headquarters leadership to the leadership of field offices—to ensure these policies and procedures are enforced. Additionally, promoting compliance with policies requires training and preparation in advance and while on mission, robust mechanisms for investigation and response in missions and at headquarters, and monitoring and evaluation of the handling of cases.

## **Survivors lack confidence in organizational systems to respond**

Even if their organizations have policies on sexual assault and harassment, survivors frequently lack confidence that the agency will respond to their report with the appropriate level of seriousness and care:

I think it’s also important to highlight the very important distinction that some of those who have these policies in place don’t, in fact, enact them. So, they’ve taken measures because, for example, survivors or news agencies have spoken out against them. But these measures are largely in the form of policies or procedural guidelines but have not manifested into concrete change through implementation of policies/procedures, regular trainings or even efforts toward a cultural shift within the workplace mentality.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>208</sup> Male trainer and counselor, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>209</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

Aid workers are aware of the work atmosphere tolerated by their agency, often reporting it to be sexist, homophobic, and a “boys club,” particularly in field offices. These conditions shape how victims/survivors view their agency’s willingness and capacity to respond in a professional and fair manner:

If we think of GBV on a continuum that at the “lower end of the continuum” there are the jokes told in the office, there is the question of whether reports of sexual harassment are taken seriously. Seeing that [sexist remarks and behavior] are taken seriously can give people confidence that more grave incidents will be taken seriously. . . . We are taking all that information in all the time [what is taken seriously and what is not] whether consciously or not. In the moment if something has happened, we are evaluating a whole series of risks and benefits of reporting and [the way past sexist behavior is treated] is an important data point that many people use. That is one important thing, [we need to] take more mild forms of sexual violence seriously.<sup>210</sup>

The fact that individuals within an organization notice how other cases are dealt with was reinforced in an interview of a survivor who reported her case and was forced to continue working with her perpetrator:

The fact that the perpetrator is still working there discourages women from reporting anything, because you feel like unless you actually get beat up or killed or raped then they won’t take it seriously. Even in those cases, I wouldn’t trust going through these channels.<sup>211</sup>

This lack of confidence in the organization’s willingness to deal in a rigorous manner with reports of sexual harassment and assault also extends to victim’s/survivor’s lack of confidence that an organization will keep a report confidential.

Something we have also heard from survivors is that the issue of confidentiality is obviously very important. So, in contrast to other security incidents where many people may know what has happened, where reports get circulated widely, the incident is discussed because security protocols need to be reviewed; obviously there needs to be a much tighter circle of people who have informa-

<sup>210</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 26, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>211</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

tion on what has happened [for a case of sexual assault]. People should know what that process is ahead of time, it should be very transparent and discussed and communicated within the organization prior to an incident. The entire response around an incident of sexual violence—to the degree possible—[should] have one point of contact that helps with that process. Whereas if there is another kind of security incident you may interact with someone from security, human resources, with other people within the organization as that response is happening. But narrowing the number of people involved in the response [for sexual assault] contributes to people's confidence around confidentiality.<sup>212</sup>

In other instances discussed in our interviews, survivors initially thought the human resources (HR) department treated their cases seriously, but then the organization did not follow through with a robust response:

People were saying when they have approached [their organization] they felt that it had been dealt with initially quite well, but then it had fallen by the way side, or they spoke to the perpetrator and the perpetrator had gotten away with it. . . . Nothing had been taken any further. So, while lots of people felt like it was dealt with seriously, went through right channels, there was a structure to deal with the issue, there was some kind of reticence on the part of the HR department or they just were not sure how to deal with it.<sup>213</sup>

Another reason that cases are dropped appears to be the slow, complicated and inadequate investigation process:

I think the processes are really weak. My understanding is no matter what happens—we actually joked with my colleagues, you could come up to someone and beat them bloody to death with twenty witnesses and yet the investigation will take at least a year. . . . And usually the chain of command is local security unit writes the report, but then it has to go to regional conduct and discipline unit, and then headquarters has to get involved. Whether it is volume of cases or just the fact that those in charge of investigation are so far removed from the actual place and situation, that it is just so cumbersome and takes so long.

<sup>212</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 26, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>213</sup> Female reporter, interviewed August 10, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

The person who perpetrates the violation or crime seems to have all their rights protected, while the victim is just powerless.<sup>214</sup>

This concern with the organizational handling of reports of sexual harassment and assault can be even more severe for LGBT individuals who may fear outing themselves or that their case will not be handled with the appropriate level of sensitivity. One LGBT individual who reported a case of sexual violence noted that he felt his case was dealt with more seriously because he was in a position of power and well-networked at headquarters. He commented that for a lesbian woman he knew in his organization, he doubted she would receive the same response because she would have had to report her case to her country director who was known to be homophobic.<sup>215</sup>

## Organizations' lack of expertise

Many organizations appear to lack the appropriate level of expertise for prevention and response to sexual harassment and assault. Several interview respondents recognized the lack of capability within the organizations they worked with:

There needs to be a different kind of training for people within the organization. You cannot assume that people know what to do, know how to interact with a survivor of sexual violence, and are familiar with the dynamics of it. So, there needs to be some special training around that.<sup>216</sup>

Gaining expertise requires an organizational commitment at the highest levels and the appropriate human and material resources.

We recognize that as an organization, more and more resources have to be put behind this work. . . . In [country name removed] we have statutory regulations in terms of how to respond to incidents being raised like this. You actually need to know what [you] are doing to ensure compliance in 100 percent of cases.<sup>217</sup>

<sup>214</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>215</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 29, 2016, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>216</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 26, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>217</sup> Female humanitarian organization headquarters employee,

Clear procedures for how to deal appropriately with external security and judicial mechanisms in incidents of sexual harassment and violence are also needed:

The reason we need our specialist to be involved right from the beginning when we do risk assessment and write terms of reference is that we need to know the parameters of what we need to be doing. We seek a lot of legal advice. We have a lot of knowledge already, but we also seek specialists because we need to be able to answer really tricky questions like, “If you were to do an internal investigation will it ruin my case if I report it to the police?” . . . I have to advise someone who has reported a rape by a colleague—I have to tell them—“You have to do what you want, [you] can do an internal investigation, but if you chose the police route you might find that police can’t take that case any further because evidence has been tampered with [by an internal agency investigation].” They [police] would say, “No we cannot take this case further because you have spoken to all the people involved, warned the accused we are coming. We do not speak to the subject of the complaint until the end because they will tamper with evidence or intimate witnesses.” All these things cause us to ask people early on, “Would you like our support to report this to criminal justice services?” . . . We are always treading a line, we have to be seen as non-judgmental. But we are potentially the only source of information to survivors in difficult and vulnerable times.<sup>218</sup>

In other instances, failure to have trained people results in victim/survivor’s cases not being kept confidential and victim/survivors not consulted on how they wanted to proceed:

Internally I would have liked my report to go immediately to my supervisor. I hoped that might mean it was kept more confidential, because it wasn’t really. It really should have been systematic that an organization keeps confidentiality and that there is an internal procedure for that support, including their request of informed consent from the victim on how to move forward, even internally.<sup>219</sup>

Individuals we spoke with who have expertise in dealing with victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault noted that best practice gives the vic-

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interviewed August 22, 2016 by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid.

<sup>219</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 14, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

tim/survivor a sense of agency and control over the process and involves recognizing and making clear the different options a victim/survivor has after an assault. One interview respondent explained,

What our advice tends to focus on is supporting that person, giving them back that sense of agency and control, talking about the immediate post-attack. If we are talking serious cases of rape and sexual violence where someone may want to have samples collected, we can talk about the challenges around that and why some people will want to, why they won’t, the different contexts, the potential implications.<sup>220</sup>

One humanitarian worker discussed her experience after reporting an incident of sexual assault, where the expertise and support she needed were completely lacking in the organizational response.

There was no duty of care at all. If I had to do it over, or advise someone else, I would say get yourself a lawyer, because a lawyer can represent you to say what you need. I could have a week off legally to recover and it wouldn’t have come out of my leave. It was in the jurisdiction of the U.S. government so there were so many things I could have had that I didn’t have [or know about]. I was also supposed to have discussion up the chain. But it was never reported. That is duty of care, that management even at HQ would know what was going on. [Instead], there was a tremendously toxic environment and basically it was seen as I was the problem.<sup>221</sup>

Even in situations where the leadership might want to help a survivor report an incident of sexual harassment and assault, a lack of consultation with the victim/survivor could lead to additional stress to a survivor and actions taken against his/her will. One individual who reported a case of sexual harassment to her supervisor explained,

I was accompanied some days after to the local police; we were in the capital so it was a big city. [We went] to the police station, specifically to the section of the police force that is charged with following up on reports of sexual violence and there were supposedly people trained on that. I followed the lead of my supervisor. . . . I am not sure if he asked if I was fine with that—definitely something that should happen—at the time I just arrived

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<sup>220</sup> Female security professional, interviewed August 22, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>221</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

and had full trust in my supervisor and followed his lead. I am not sure if that is the right thing to do, at least in some contexts, to report to local police. . . . I wasn't sure that was the best choice in the context we were in.<sup>222</sup>

Aid workers are frequently operating in countries with weak judicial and/or security systems and local institutions may not have the capacity or will to investigate or prosecute:

The judicial system is quite difficult; a lot of the time you have to accept nothing will get done about it. I guess that is quite hard, that is probably quite a big barrier to reporting of sexual assault. There is no power to get any justice, so why put yourself through that?<sup>223</sup>

However, even if formal institutions are not in place where an aid worker is operating to investigate or respond to an incident of sexual assault, organizations can still create internal procedures to provide a victim/survivor with justice and care. One humanitarian worker who deals with cases of sexual assault for her organization explained the importance of trust in the organization or the system:

You will find the majority of our past cases couldn't be acted upon, and that in large part came from the survivors not having enough trust in those processes. But now [since organizational changes to create robust investigation and response teams] something like upwards 93–95 percent of our cases are investigated.<sup>224</sup>

An organization with robust processes of investigation and response in place gives victims/survivors the confidence to report to their organization and to choose to have the organization investigate and respond to the case.

Responding to incidents of sexual harassment and assault requires expertise and knowledge that many organizations do not have, or they (currently) are not willing to spend the resources or time to build capacity. This expertise involves creating the proper training and enforcement mechanisms and

proper reporting systems, having staff on hand for timely and competent investigation and response, and monitoring and evaluating the entire system (from training to handling of cases). It also involves returning agency to survivors by informing them of their options in the aftermath of sexual assault. Many of these options are time sensitive and therefore an organization must understand the context, have teams ready to respond, and be prepared with information to share with the victim/survivor. Some humanitarian organizations rely on the expertise of other organizations to help their staff in coping with traumatic experiences, including sexual harassment and assault. For example, InterHealth Worldwide, Headington Institute, Antares Foundation, and Centre for Humanitarian Psychology all offer assistance to aid workers who have survived traumatic events to help promote their recovery and resilience. However, working with external experts requires a humanitarian organization be able to refer survivors to the organization, which is not possible if survivors do not feel confident or comfortable identifying themselves as a victim/survivor to their own organization.

### **Physical, psychological, and emotional care**

Many organizations are aware that survivors of sexual harassment and assault may require physical, psychological, and emotional health care. However, in our interviews we discovered a gap in the level of medical care offered to survivors of sexual assault to treat physical conditions, as compared to the lower levels of psychological and emotional care. One interview participant explained,

It depends on country they are in and their organization. Does their organization have medical support in the country? Do they have PEP [post-exposure prophylaxis used to prevent HIV transmission] kits? Are they in a place where there are functioning hospital systems where they get proper care?<sup>225</sup>

We looked further into this this issue, focusing on PEP kits used to prevent HIV transmission. PEP kits are expensive, and require specific care and

<sup>222</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 14, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>223</sup> Male security officer, interviewed August 19, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>224</sup> Female humanitarian organization headquarters employee, interviewed August 22, 2016 by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>225</sup> Female training manager and psychotherapist, interviewed August 16, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

refrigeration, which can be a challenge in some of the environments aid workers operate in.<sup>226</sup> PEP kits must be given to a survivor within 72 hours of exposure and the earlier the medication is started the greater the likelihood of blocking the virus.<sup>227</sup> According to the UN Cares Program, the UN system-wide workplace program on HIV,

In countries and locations where you cannot be reasonably assured to get the necessary emergency medication in emergency rooms of hospitals, the UN system, through the UN Cares programme, ensures that Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) kits are available in UN system offices and are made available to all UN personnel and their family members.<sup>228</sup>

However, later the organization noted,

In some cases there is neither access to a PEP kit nor a facility to provide one within your particular country. The Designated Official for Security (usually the Resident Coordinator) is required to ensure the establishment of a Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Emergency Protocol, which will identify the nearest regional medical evacuation centre where comprehensive follow-up can take place, including the quickest evacuation route(s) and method(s) for achieving this.<sup>229</sup>

One interview participant summarized the issue of PEP kits and the variation across organizations and countries:

My observation is that there is a real uneven standard among NGOs about whether they keep emergency contraception and PEP kits available for people period, but particularly in contexts where there are higher levels of sexual violence. Obviously having access to those medical interventions very soon after an incident is important.<sup>230</sup>

However, some interviewees reported a lack care, indeed negligence, in terms of ensuring medical kits are available:

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<sup>226</sup> Male trainer and counselor, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly. See also “Preventing HIV: Cost-effectiveness” (NAM aidsmap).

<sup>227</sup> UN Cares, “Post-exposure Prophylaxis.”

<sup>228</sup> Ibid.

<sup>229</sup> Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Female humanitarian professional specializing in humanitarian staff care, interviewed August 26, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

What has happened in the case of some [agency name removed] survivors is that the PEP kits were, in fact, expired when survivors needed them. Or, in other cases, the contact name of the person responsible for the PEP kit in the country was outdated. In fact, I was asked to review the [agency name removed] list of people responsible for these kits in 2013 and discovered that the list at that time was so outdated that the names hadn't been updated in seven years.<sup>231</sup>

While the level of care across organizations and locations is certainly uneven in terms of medical responses, an even bigger issue concerns the level of psychosocial care provided to survivors of sexual harassment and assault. One participant noted,

Medical care is quite advanced, the psychological not at all. This was the third mission that I was on, and our organization did have counselors but they are heavily understaffed, overworked, unsupported. They don't have any ability to make medical decisions. I recall in one of my missions I was in such distress that I had to seek help from a counselor and all they advised me on was breathing exercises because they were unable to prescribe medication, unable to perhaps suggest that I take a leave of absence and get myself out of a potentially harmful situation. . . . Even they were somewhat embarrassed in the limited help they could offer. These are great professionals and I value their work. It is just not the right help because I have so many examples and so many instances of truly horrendous situations where our colleagues were killed and the institutional response being, “Okay here is the hotline number and you can talk to the counselors. . . .”<sup>232</sup>

Other interviewees noted that agencies need to upgrade the required qualifications of counselors and their level of experience in the field to ensure they are able to adequately handle cases of sexual harassment and assault.

Overall, we found a lack of organizational emphasis on aid workers' physical, psychological, and emotional well-being (as noted also in Section 6). To illustrate, an interviewee noted that in many places agencies have not “even set in place specific occupational stress counseling that can actually

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<sup>231</sup> Female humanitarian professional, interviewed March 6, 2017, by Dyan Mazurana.

<sup>232</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed August 17, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

respond to sexual assaults. . . . [They tell us,] ‘It’s in development.’”<sup>233</sup>

The lack of attention to psychological and emotional health and well-being may reflect a stigma towards this type of assistance, particularly in male-dominated environments that celebrate risk-taking and “cowboy behavior.” Stigma against psychological and emotional health care is also present in many countries:

I am not entirely sure why [individuals in a specific country would not use the “helpline” in the office], but I think it is a different culture; there are lots of cultural barriers for how they deal with things. They deal with things differently. Even in the UK we are behind the US in psychosocial support. Having a therapist is like, “Whoa that guy is mental!” There is still that stigma around that here [in the UK], so I try to think what it is like in developing countries.<sup>234</sup>

Another interview participant, who reported an experience of sexual assault to her organization, faced lack of response in gaining access to needed counseling, and to the use information gained from her counseling to inform the organization’s protocol:

There was a tremendous toxic environment and basically it was seen as I was the problem. When I actually pressed the point after I was laid off they said, “Okay we will get you counseling.” I had two sessions and they were extended to eight sessions, and I think that was because I was seen as a liability. They are supposed to follow-up on sessions and use that to change the protocol. . . . Counseling was good. . . . The therapist and I were waiting for our final session because [we were waiting on the] HR director, something I signed to release information to improve reporting protocol, and [the HR director] never followed up on that.<sup>235</sup>

In this case, the individual was trying to work with her organization and the counselor to have her case incorporated into reporting mechanisms, but the organization she worked with made it impossible for her to do this due to its lack of follow up at the higher levels.

<sup>233</sup> Male and female humanitarian organization headquarters employees, interviewed together on August 25, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>234</sup> Male security officer, interviewed August 19, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>235</sup> Female international aid worker, interviewed September 1, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

Another interviewee noted that an individual she knew who had been raped didn’t report it to her organization because she “didn’t feel like her story would be kept confidential, or that she would be offered counseling, or that she would be dealt with in a sensitive way.”<sup>236</sup>

If individuals do not think they will be offered appropriate medical care or psychosocial care, and that reporting will not result in actions to sanction perpetrators and stop future perpetration, they have little incentive to report an incident of sexual harassment or assault. Unfortunately, the general sense among interviewees seemed to be that humanitarian organizations do not prioritize the well-being or health of their staff. The issues in the uneven standards for medical and psychosocial care also reflect the lack of policies in place for how to respond to a survivor of sexual harassment or assault.

## Comparing national and international staff care

A key finding that emerged from our interviews related to the different treatment of victims/survivors of sexual harassment and assault based on whether they are national (from the country where the organization is working) or international aid workers. While we heard varying opinions on whether national or international staff are more at risk for sexual assault (which likely also depends on the type of sexual harassment and assault and the environment), our conversations about care for staff in the aftermath of sexual harassment and assault highlighted the discrepancy in response. Specifically, we found a discrepancy in the level of care available for aid workers posted in different countries and between national and international staff.

To illustrate, in the case of the attack at the Terrain complex in South Sudan, both international and national staff were victims/survivors of sexual assault, including rape and gang rape, and other forms of violence. In the aftermath of the attack no PEP kits were available in Juba; nor did any means

<sup>236</sup> Female reporter, interviewed August 5, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.



exist to collect physical evidence. The international staff were evacuated out of South Sudan in the window of time where they could get medical care to prevent possible pregnancies and stop the transmission of HIV or other STDs and diseases and receive other necessary physical and (initial) psychological and emotional health care. However, the national staff women who were also raped and assaulted were left in Juba, without access to the necessary medicine to prevent pregnancies, HIV, STDs, or other diseases. The international staff members called from the countries they had been evacuated to speak to their colleagues in an attempt to inform the national women staff of the medications they needed and what to look for. The international staff we interviewed were unclear whether those medicines were available or if the survivors were able to take them in time. It remains unclear what kinds of national physical, let alone psychological and emotional, health care was available to the national staff in the aftermath of the attacks in Juba.<sup>237</sup>

Our interviewees confirmed that key differences can be found in the kinds of medical and mental health care available for international and national staff:

For international staff and national staff it would be a little bit different, not in the beginning but the follow-up. For international staff and national staff, we have the same post-rape kit, which contains a number of drugs to try to control any HIV infection or Hepatitis B or sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancies. That kit is used for anybody who works for us. I have also given kits to other people who came to me from outside my organization. Then it would split—for international staff we would evacuate that person, we end the mission of that person and send them home. They would receive medical follow-up covered by our insurance, medical and psychological follow-up. And they would be put on sick leave for whatever long period it would take them to come back on their feet. For resident staff we would use local healthcare facilities to do the follow-up. So depending on what is locally available we would try to find the best care. If for instance, I can imagine in some of the countries where there is no psychological care for instance, I imagine we

<sup>237</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed September 8, 2016, Phoebe Donnelly.

would organize psychological care per distance, per telephone or Skype or something like that.<sup>238</sup>

Another individual explained:

There is great response and quick response for expats. For nationals I am not sure. They don't have the same package. It would be up to individuals how far they would want to go, many national staff don't have the international package. It's a good national package, but all the health care would have to be care within the country. They would go to the best hospital and health professional that country offers . . . which may not have the same capabilities. International references are possible, but it would be up to the head of mission to do this and approve it.<sup>239</sup>

Many countries where humanitarian aid operations exist have national health services well below international standards, and few have robust psychological and emotional health services. Thus national aid workers who experience sexual assault or harassment that requires physical, psychological and emotional health services are often disadvantaged in the care they receive.

### **Best practice: Oxfam Global**

We asked people we interviewed about best practices for addressing sexual harassment and assault by humanitarian and development aid agencies. Several interviewees referenced Oxfam's work through their Safeguarding Department. Below we examine Oxfam's Safeguarding Department to highlight the components that make their work a best practice for addressing sexual harassment and assault.

Oxfam's Safeguarding team works towards an operating environment that is free from sexual exploitation and abuse and any form of child or vulnerable-adult abuse perpetrated by representatives of the organization. The Safeguarding team is one of three independent functions in Oxfam's Internal Audit Department that assist the organization's Trustees and Leadership team by independently reviewing Oxfam's activities, processes, and systems with particular regard to risk and control aspects. Oxfam's Internal Audit and Fraud and Corruption teams

<sup>238</sup> Female international humanitarian worker, interviewed October 13, 2016, by Phoebe Donnelly.

<sup>239</sup> Male international humanitarian worker, interviewed August 29, 2016, by Dyan Mazurana.

join the Safeguarding team to make up the Internal Audit Department.<sup>240</sup>

“Getting our own house in order” is the slogan for the Safeguarding Department at Oxfam. The Safeguarding Department focuses on preventing abuse among staff, volunteers, and partner organizations. It focuses on sexual misconduct, but also looks at different forms of abuse against children or vulnerable adults. The Safeguarding team “prevents and responds to acts of sexual violence perpetrated by our own staff, volunteers, partners and other representatives, and supports those who are affected by them.”<sup>241</sup>

A key tenant of Oxfam’s Safeguarding Department is building confidence in the organization’s practices and structures so individuals feel comfortable reporting incidents of abuse. Since the Safeguarding Department was created in 2012, on average, reported incidents have increased 100 percent per year. In 2015/16 financial year, Oxfam had 64 incidents reported to them. Before the creation of Oxfam’s Safeguarding Department in its current form in 2012, the majority of the cases reported to Oxfam could not be acted upon because the survivor did not want to proceed with an internal investigation due to a lack of trust in the process. However, now the Safeguarding Department investigates approximately 93–95 percent of cases reported to them. They are also seeing fewer cases of survivors not following through with the investigation process or not going forward because they fear their perpetrators or undesirable outcomes.

The Safeguarding Department strives to be accessible to survivors. To do this, the Department started by appointing a Safeguarding focal point in every one of Oxfam’s six regional centers. The focal points are usually senior personnel within the organization and have received extensive training on how to deal with survivors of sexual assault and violence. The focal points are frequently human resources advisors, or work in gender departments, or are people that the staff and volunteers in the

region already know. The Safeguarding Department found that people do not generally report through anonymous email addresses, regardless of how much they are publicized. Individuals want to report to people they know and trust, and therefore the Safeguarding Department created focal points. As of January 2017, Oxfam had approximately 80 trained country focal points and prioritized developing a relationship and clear line of communication between the focal points and headquarters.

The Safeguarding Department’s investigation process was designed using best practices for protection from sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (PSEA), drawing from the work of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Task Force on the “Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) by Our Own Staff,” to protect beneficiaries in regions where aid organizations operate.<sup>242</sup> Oxfam’s Safeguarding Department begins its investigation process when one of its specialist investigators contacts a survivor who has made a complaint. The Safeguarding Department found that many individuals prefer speaking to investigators at the headquarters level, because they may feel intimidated within their own mission, or they do not want to speak to someone about the investigation that they see on a daily basis. The Safeguarding Department then gathers supporting documentary evidence and a list of further people who could speak about the incident. Oxfam is careful to balance the duty of care to the subject of the complaint, while at the same time carefully following employment laws. This frequently involves needing to give enough

<sup>240</sup> Oxfam, “Safeguarding Coordinator.”

<sup>241</sup> Hannah Clare, Policy and Practice Blog, Oxfam, March 11, 2016, accessed March 10, 2017, available at <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/blog/2016/03/safeguarding-getting-our-own-house-in-order>.

<sup>242</sup> The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) by Our Own Staff was established in January 2011 as a result of the IASC Review of PSEA by UN, NGO, IOM, and IFRC personnel. The IASC Task Force is a venue for collaboration among all IASC members (UN, NGO, IOM, and IFRC) with cross cutting focus on the humanitarian, development and peacekeeping contexts. The objectives of the IASC Task Force are three-fold: (1) supporting field offices in implementing joint community based complaints mechanisms (including victim assistance) and related activities (comparing the situation before and after the implementation of the projects); (2) supporting agencies in institutionalizing minimum operating standards for PSEA within their respective organization; (3) mainstreaming PSEA within relevant IASC subsidiary bodies and cluster systems. PSEA, “PSEA Task Force.”

notice to the subject of the complaint to meet with them. The Safeguarding team's investigators write a report that is given to a pre-determined senior "decision maker," who is at least at the level of a country director in the international division. This person then decides whether or not to uphold, or partially uphold, the original complaint along with any sanctions.

If the accused is found to have carried out the alleged action, at a minimum, he/she will be given a final written warning. More often than not, the penalty is termination. Once an investigation report has been completed, it is handed to the decision maker who decides whether it needs to become a disciplinary process. This part of the process is undertaken by management line and HR processes. The subject of the complaint is given the option to appeal.

If a survivor wants to go through formal judicial systems he/she is given the option to explore that by the Safeguarding team. Legal action can be complicated. The Safeguarding Department works with specialists who can answer tricky questions related to judicial procedures. They offer their support to a survivor to report their case to criminal justice services, if that is the route the survivor would like to take, and the Safeguarding Department seeks to inform the victim/survivor of possible complications in this process. For example, frequently the police cannot take a case any further if the evidence has already been tampered with by an internal administrative investigation. The Safeguarding Department's main message on whether to go through criminal justice proceedings is that it should be the survivor's choice.

Oxfam's Safeguarding Department aims to have a strong relationship and line of communication with Oxfam's security advisors, and representatives from the Safeguarding team meet with security personnel at least once a month. This relationship between the Safeguarding Department and security personnel supports increased reporting. Communicating with security advisors also gives the Safeguarding Department an opportunity to discuss identifying and managing risks and learning more about what each security team is doing. The Safeguarding Department also encourages security

advisors to let them know if they think someone in their mission might need to talk about a sexual assault that could have been reported as a different crime (as discussed earlier, people are more likely to report non-sexual forms of violence, although sexual assault may occur as part of these crimes). The Safeguarding Department also can inform security advisors about the best ways to speak with victims/survivors of sexual assault.

The Safeguarding Department's work is part of Oxfam's stated commitment to transparency. To illustrate, the Safeguarding Department provides public reports every year on its statistics. To help build the capacity of other organizations to create their own robust systems for addressing sexual harassment and assault, Oxfam's Safeguarding Department is discussing a two-year plan to make their resources freely available online to any organization that wants to establish similar services. The Safeguarding team already makes many of these documents and advice available to other professionals in the sector.

This brief best-practice case study of Oxfam's Safeguarding Department detailed their methods to increase reporting: the creation of high-level regional and local focal points trained to deal with and centrally refer reports, open communication with security advisors, and the building of employees' confidence that if they report an incident it will be dealt with through high-quality investigations and careful responses. The Safeguarding Department at Oxfam recognizes the expertise required to assist victims/survivors of sexual assault and has built capacities inside Oxfam, while also relying on specialists outside the organization as necessary. This best practice case study demonstrates that when an organization prioritizes reducing and responding to sexual harassment and sexual assault, and provides the human and material resources to do so, the result is significant improvements in terms of increased reporting, increased investigations, sanctions against perpetrators, victims/survivors who are informed of their options and given some control over their experience, and improved communication across the organization.

## Conclusion

Assisting aid workers who have experienced sexual assault requires creating an environment where they can report an incident to their organization and feel confident that their report will be taken seriously and they will receive proper care. However, we found that not only are aid workers' reports of experiences with sexual assault not taken seriously, but aid workers can be blamed for the violence they experienced and can be silenced, ignored, demeaned, fired, and blacklisted. Responding to sexual harassment and assault requires a level of preparedness and expertise that currently most aid organizations do not appear to readily possess. Where they do respond, aid organizations are more prepared in the medical response to situations of sexual assault, but lack emphasis on psychological and emotional care for survivors. National staff within aid organizations face even more barriers to receiving proper care after incidents of sexual assault. More positively, Oxfam Global has instituted a best practice process for addressing sexual harassment and assault. We applaud its willingness to share documents with other agencies to create similar responses and encourage other agencies to make it a priority to take advantage of this learning to create their own robust systems for response and prevention of sexual harassment and assault.

## 9. 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.

- Remain updated on the risk of sexual assault or harassment in environments aid workers are deploying to, and stay informed of office dynamics that could lead to a situation of sexual assault. Be open and honest in informing aid workers deploying to these areas of these potential risks.
- For security reports, collect accurate statistics by including and reporting sexual assault when it occurs along with other forms of violence against aid workers.
- Develop an internal reporting system that allows victims/survivors or witnesses of sexual assault to report to a pre-determined contact within their office who will then report the incident to a separate department within the organization. Anyone who chooses to report an incident of sexual assault should know that they can inform the organization without engaging in a formal investigation process.

### **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.

- Proactively think through challenges that might arise for LGBT employees and create clear policies in advance, for example, reviewing dress code guidelines or addressing policies on housing and bathrooms for transgender employees.

### **Protocols for response**

- Comprehensively address sexual assault against aid workers, including LGBTQ staff, in ways that do not stigmatize or blame victims/survivors, including in security manuals and pre- and post-deployment training for all environments.
- Ensure that all staff—international and national—have clear and up-to-date information on how to report violation 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.
- Require and enforce strict sanctions against those who are found to have perpetrated sexual harassment, assault, and exploitation, as well as any staff who participated in covering up or trying to dismiss these crimes and offenses.
- Invest resources in alternative and healthy means for aid workers to socialize, decompress, and relieve stress, and discourage dysfunctional and harmful responses, including abuse of alcohol and drugs.

### **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).

- Educate all employees on the extent of sexual harassment in different workplaces (even if these statistics are not specific to their organization) and explain the forms of discrimination or harassment that can occur in their organization.
- 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.<sup>243</sup>
- 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.<sup>244</sup>

### **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.
- Leaders at every level should receive training on how to recognize and react to sexist or homophobic behavior, harassment, or assault in different forms. This training should include information on punitive measures that will be undertaken against violators and those who participate in covering up or trying to dismiss these cases.
- Leadership should demonstrate they will not tolerate sexist or homophobic comments or actions and respond swiftly with penalties for those employees who do not follow this environment.

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<sup>243</sup> Christine Silva and Anika K. Warren, “Building LGBT-Inclusive Workplaces: Engaging Organizations and Individuals in Change” (Catalyst, 2009).

<sup>244</sup> 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.

- 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.**

- Prior to and after deployment, ensure that all staff have clear and up-to-date information on how to report violations and abuses to investigation units.
- Develop and provide robust mechanisms for staff to report sexual harassment and assault.
- Develop clear policies and procedures to ensure local and national offices are prepared if an event of sexual assault does occur.
- 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.
- In consultation with victims/survivors, as needed, ensure quick protection measures for staff that are under threat from their colleagues.
- Support victims/survivors while at the same time giving them control over their career paths and how they would like to proceed.
- Do not require victims/survivors to remain in the duty station where the incident took place.
- Do not terminate victims’/survivors’ positions if they refuse to return to that duty station but find them other locations in which they can finish out their contracts and continue their careers, if they so choose.
- If the victim/survivor wants to remain at their duty station, remove the alleged perpetrator(s) until the investigation is complete. Ensure the protection of the victim/survivor during the investigation.
- 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).
- Ensure that agency counselors are highly trained professionals with proven experience in working effectively with survivors of sexual assault and related harms. All agency counselors should undergo mandatory, regular training on recognizing and preventing discrimination, sexual harassment, and sexual assault, and on best practices for working with victims/survivors, including LGBT individuals. Counselors that dismiss victims’/survivors’ claims telling them to “get used to it,” “get over it,” “stop talking about it,” etc., should be investigated by the external investigation unit and potentially fired.
- Ensure that victims of sexual harassment and assault are able to claim compensation for work-related injuries, including (but not limited to) any resulting PTSD or other psychological and emotional care needs.
- Do not terminate victims’/survivors’ contracts because they are on sick leave recovering from the aftermath of the assault when their contracts come to an end. Stop the clock on their contracts if they take sick leave due to assault and start it again when they are ready to resume work.
- 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)<sup>245</sup> 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.
- Develop and adopt measures to ensure that individuals terminated from service in one part of the United Nations or INGO systems owing to substantiated allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse will not be rehired in any other part. Include a clause in every personal history profile, or its equivalent within the UN or INGO entity, if the applicant was the subject of pending allegations or disciplinary measures at the time of separation and agreeing that past records of employment with other United Nations and INGO entities may be accessed. Cooperate, as appropriate, with governments and external organizations in the conduct of their

<sup>245</sup> United Nations, “Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: A New Approach,” Report of the Secretary-General A/71/818.

own reference checks that may involve such individuals. Ensure that the new “UN special coordinator on improving the United Nations response to sexual exploitation and abuse,” that will serve as the United Nations centralized repository of cases of SEA has in her/his mandate cases regarding those who were victimized while 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 knowledge 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.



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**Feinstein**  
**InternationalCenter**

Feinstein International Center  
Tufts University  
114 Curtis Street  
Somerville, MA 02144  
USA  
tel: +1 617.627.3423  
fax: +1 617.627.3428  
[fic.tufts.edu](http://fic.tufts.edu)