

Calls to end all violence against women and girls in conflict zones

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Women in conflict zones are likely to suffer from sexual or physical violence at the hands of their husbands or partners before, during and after a period of conflict, warn experts from the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine as politicians, activists and researchers gather today in London for the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict.

In a Comment published in *The Lancet*, they urge officials to invest in prevention to keep women and girls safe from all forms of violence.

Although international attention has focused primarily on extreme cases of sexual abuse by combatants, such as targeted mass rapes during the Rwandan genocide and in the Democratic Republic of Congo, researchers on gender-based violence are revealing a much wider scope of abuses, perpetrators and victims.

This more complex picture shows that during and after the height of a conflict, sexual and other types of violence are not solely perpetrated by armed combatants, but also by husbands and other civilian men.

In a recently-published study of 2,678 people in Côte d'Ivoire, researchers found that 33% of women surveyed reported an experience of [sexual violence](#), with 29% reporting that their husband or partner was the perpetrator.

A total of 10% of women reported someone other than an intimate

partner, and only 0.3% identified an armed combatant.*

In another recent study, the researchers evaluated a programme to prevent [intimate partner violence](#) by working directly with men in a conflict setting. The results were promising, showing that men receiving the programme were better able to manage conflict in a non-violent way, and with some suggestion that levels of violence were lower.**

The authors – Mazedra Hossain, Dr Cathy Zimmerman and Professor Charlotte Watts – conclude: "As the Summit brings the international community together to address sexual violence in conflict, a broader, long-term vision is needed to prevent sexual and other forms of gender-based violence.

"Measures should be taken not only to eliminate impunity for perpetrators, but also to respond to the health and safety needs of all victims. Investment in prevention should be made, alongside the provision of support services."

Mazedra Hossain, Lecturer in Social Epidemiology at the School, added: "There is no doubt that horrific crimes, such as mass rape and violence targeted at women and girls, call for action to bring perpetrators to justice.

"However, as we address these abuses, we must also recognise that perhaps even larger numbers of women are suffering at the hands of their [husbands](#) or [partners](#).

"We have learned through our work that this violence is preventable. Global leaders should take this opportunity to invest in preventing and responding to all forms of abuse to protect [women](#) and girls."

As part of the Global Summit to End Sexual Violence in Conflict fringe,

the School's Dr Lori Heise will take part in a panel event on Wednesday 11 June to launch What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls? - a new £25 million research and innovation programme from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The programme is being delivered by a consortium that includes the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine and is led by the South African Medical Research Council.

The Rt. Hon Lynne Featherstone MP is among the speakers in the panel discussion, which will highlight the need to invest in work to address the root causes and social norms which underpin many forms of violence.

More information: Paper: www.thelancet.com/journals/lan...
[/lan... \(14\)60964-8/abstract](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lan...)

*See Hossain M, Zimmerman C, Kiss L, et al. Men's and women's experiences of violence and traumatic events in rural Cote d'Ivoire before, during and after a period of armed conflict. *BMJ Open* 2014; 4: e003644 doi:10.1136/ bmjopen-2013-003644:

researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/1591965/1/BMJ

[%20Open-2014-Hossain-.pdf](http://researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/1591965/1/BMJ)

**See Hossain M, Zimmerman C, Kiss L, et al. Working with men to prevent intimate partner violence in a conflict-affected setting: a pilot cluster randomized controlled trial in rural Cote d'Ivoire. *BMC Public Health* 2014; 14: 339:

researchonline.lshtm.ac.uk/1649031/1/Hossain%20et%20al_2014.pdf

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