

Sexual violence in war has lasting effect

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

Pregnancy as a result of rape, [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and social exclusion are among the commonly found long-term effects, according to the study. The findings highlight the need for care of survivors and their families in the long term, researchers say.

Awareness of war-related [sexual violence](#) against civilians has increased in recent years, with advocates for action including actor and director Angelina Jolie. In the first wide-ranging review of its kind, researchers analysed the results of 20 studies from six countries spanning more than 30 years, including in Africa and Europe. Eight of the studies included male and female victims.

Physical and mental effects

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

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

Social exclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

More information: I. Ba et al. Physical, mental and social consequences in civilians who have experienced war-related sexual violence: a systematic review (1981–2014), *Public Health* (2016). [DOI: 10.1016/j.puhe.2016.07.019](#)

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