



Aid Worker Security Report 2019

Speakable:

**Addressing sexual violence and
gender-based risk in humanitarian aid**

Humanitarian Outcomes

Summary of key findings

- ▶ 2018 was the second worst year on record for aid worker security, with 399 aid workers affected by major violence in 221 separate attacks.
- ▶ Victims included 126 aid workers killed, 143 wounded, and 130 kidnapped.
- ▶ South Sudan continues to experience the highest number of attacks; recent mass hostage-takings there have driven up global kidnapping figures. Kidnappings also increased once again in Afghanistan.
- ▶ Violence against aid workers increased sharply in Democratic Republic of Congo, due to increased criminal activity and the beginning of a spate of attacks on Ebola responders, which worsened in 2019.
- ▶ National staff, always the majority of victims in absolute numbers, now also experience increased attack rates and fatality rates per capita relative to international staff, reflecting increased localisation of aid in high-risk areas.
- ▶ Male aid workers experience three-to-six times higher attack rates than females overall but the largest gender variance is in the category of sexual violence, which predominantly affects women.
- ▶ For all years, the database records 29 victims of sexual violence (all female), a number assumed to be artificially low due to underreporting. Sexual violence was used in 8 per cent of all attacks involving female victims.
- ▶ Data on sexual violence and gender-differentiated analysis is weak across the sector. As a result, much of what we think we know about gender-based risks and appropriate mitigation strategies is based on assumptions that lack empirical support.
- ▶ Sexual violence poses particular challenges to risk management due to the stigma surrounding the subject and because it is virtually the only type of violent threat to aid workers where perpetrators may be inside as well as outside the organisation.
- ▶ Because sexual violence has the potential to inflict significant long-term harm, it is critical to ensure full risk awareness and informed acceptance on the part of staff a priori, as well as to provide intensive aftercare and support. Discomfort with the subject, and gender dynamics within field teams, hinders these conversations.
- ▶ The same lack of direct and explicit attention to these issues can contribute to an organisational culture that is permissive of sexual harassment and misconduct, potentially increasing the risk for more serious sexual violence to occur.
- ▶ Organisations can help increase reporting, and thereby better understand and address the problem, by taking proactive measures to remove the current obstacles to—and onus on—the victims.

Introduction

Table 1: Major attacks on aid workers: Summary statistics, 2007–2018

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018*
Number of incidents	155	130	152	170	265	192	148	162	158	221
Total aid worker victims	295	254	309	277	474	333	287	294	313	399
Total killed	108	72	86	70	156	122	109	107	139	126
Total injured	94	84	126	115	178	88	109	98	102	143
Total kidnapped**	93	98	97	92	140	123	69	89	72	130
International victims	74	46	29	49	58	32	28	43	28	29
National victims	221	208	280	228	416	301	259	251	285	370
UN staff	102	44	91	58	110	67	43	71	48	69
International NGO staff	128	148	141	86	136	152	176	157	98	179
National NGO and Red Cross/Crescent Society staff	55	47	77	107	206	98	62	51	154	141
ICRC staff	9	10	5	3	14	16	3	12	13	10
IFRC staff	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	0

*Figures verified as of 19 June 2019.

**Survivors.

This year's *Aid Worker Security Report* examines the issue of sexual violence and the differing risks for female and male aid workers in violent operational settings. The Aid Worker Security Database (AWSDB) has always tracked incidents of rape and violent sexual assault as a distinct category of attack but we have not studied the issue in any depth until now. The principal reason for this is the dearth of reliable data to measure the problem and provide an empirical foundation for analysis. While today we see the beginning of better reporting and gender-specific staffing numbers, sexual violence continues to be underreported by an indeterminate but significant degree.

So why are we tackling this topic now? First, some important published research in the past few years has helpfully launched the conversation within the sector and provided agencies with practical guidance for addressing the problem without the need to wait for comprehensive data.¹ The current cultural movement of #MeToo (and its cousin in the aid sector, #AidToo) has also helped to break taboos around discussion of sexual violence and misconduct, which is a crucial first step toward better measurement and mitigation. There is a new focus on 'safeguarding' aid staff and recipients from this type of harm.²

Additionally, some humanitarian organisations have started to disaggregate their staffing data by gender, which, while still not widely practiced across the sector, allows for at least a preliminary

¹ Recent research includes: European Interagency Security Forum (EISF)'s *Managing Sexual Violence Against Aid Workers* (2019) and *Managing the Security of Aid Workers with Diverse Profiles* (2018); *STOP the Sexual Assault Against Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers* (Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017); and surveys conducted by *Report the Abuse* (Nobert, 2017) and the *Humanitarian Women's Network* (2017). These include EISF's *Managing Sexual Violence Against Aid Workers* (2019) and *Managing the Security of Aid Workers with Diverse Profiles* (2018), a 2017 study by Mazurana and Donnelly Feinstein International Center, and surveys conducted by Report the Abuse and the Humanitarian Women's Network between 2016 and 2018.

² Megan Nobert provides a definition for the term safeguarding as "protection of individuals involved in either the delivery or receipt of humanitarian or development aid from acts of sexual violence, sexual exploitation, abuse, bullying, and other forms of harmful conduct by representatives or employees of aid organisations". (Nobert, 2019).

look at the rates of violence affecting men and women. Finally, from our standpoint in applied research on operational security for aid workers, we believe this study could contribute to the discourse by highlighting the gaps in the evidence base, reporting systems, risk assessment, and duty of care—and identifying their causes and potential solutions.

We recognise three separate but interrelated sets of issues in this area that the aid sector is reckoning with: 1) sexual violence, meaning rape and sexual assault; 2) non-violent forms of sexual misconduct, such as sexual harassment; and 3) sexual exploitation and abuse by aid workers of the people they are meant to help. All pose a challenge for humanitarian organisations and each requires different mitigation measures and policies. But they are also linked in that organisational cultures that fail to deal decisively with sexual harassment can increase the risk of sexual assault and, further, perpetrators of sexual abuse within organisations present risks to their colleagues and the general population alike. We do our best in this report to keep the issues separate but to recognise the linkages between them.

In addition to the annual update and analysis of aid worker violence statistics, for this report we examined our data back to 1997 to ensure correct coding of sexual violence reports as well as the gender of victims. We gathered staffing data from 15 humanitarian organisations that track the specific number of men and women they have working for them in the field (still uncommon in the sector), for the years in which they also experienced attacks.³ This provided the denominators that allowed us to roughly compare attack rates between men and women in operational contexts. We also collected and reviewed global and national statistics on sexual violence generally to help estimate the extent of underreporting of sexual violence in aid worker attacks.

The qualitative research included interviews with 37 humanitarian practitioners and subject experts;⁴ and a review of recent literature, policy documents and published guidance.

As a final caveat, our approach to this issue from the standpoint of operational security for humanitarian aid workers should not obscure or diminish the fact that the risk and prevalence of gender-based violence (GBV) is far worse for the civilians in every context than for aid workers, and for national aid workers more than international staff.

DEFINITIONS*

Sexual violence

The category used for attacks recorded in the AWSD, this term encompasses all forms of rape and violent sexual assault.

Sexual assault

A broader term than sexual violence—can include rape as well as any non-consensual sexual activity such as unwanted touching or kissing.

Sexual harassment

Non-physical, unwelcome sexual advances or behaviours creating a humiliating or hostile environment, typically in the workplace and online.

Gender-based violence

Any physically harmful act based on socially ascribed differences between men and women. Can include rape as well as domestic violence against women.

Sexual exploitation

The abuse of power, trust, or another's vulnerability for sexual purposes.

*No single authoritative set of definitions exists, and categories frequently overlap and have different legal meanings in different jurisdictions. The above categories draw upon definitions used by UNFPA (2017), UN Women (2014) and other sources but with specific distinctions made for the purposes of this analysis.

³ These included four large INGOs, three UN agencies, and eight Red Cross/Crescent societies in countries hosting humanitarian responses.

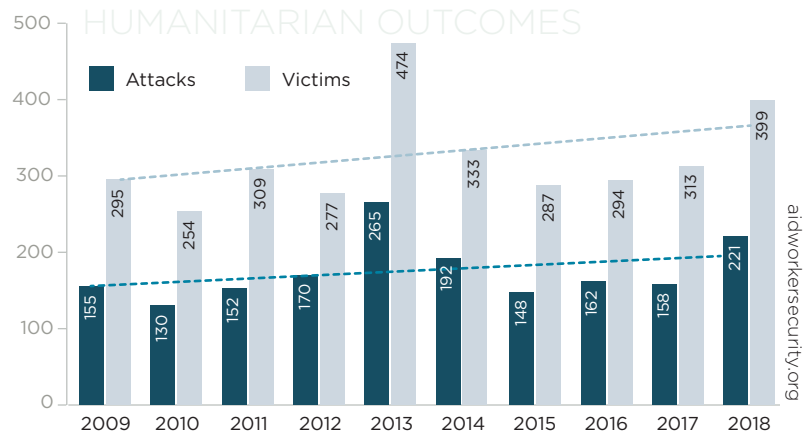
⁴ Interviewees participated anonymously. Quotes and cited input are referenced by the organisation type.

1 Aid worker attacks: Latest statistics

1.1 Global totals

While there has been no dramatic shift in the number of violent attacks against aid workers over the last 10 years, the trend nudged upwards in 2017 and 2018. The number of victims increased to 313 in 2017 and to almost 400 in 2018—the highest recorded number in five years and the second highest on record (Figure 1). The rising number of victims, in most settings not matched by a larger number of aid workers in the field, speaks to the difficulty in keeping staff secure in the conflict-affected and volatile environments that see the most of these attacks.

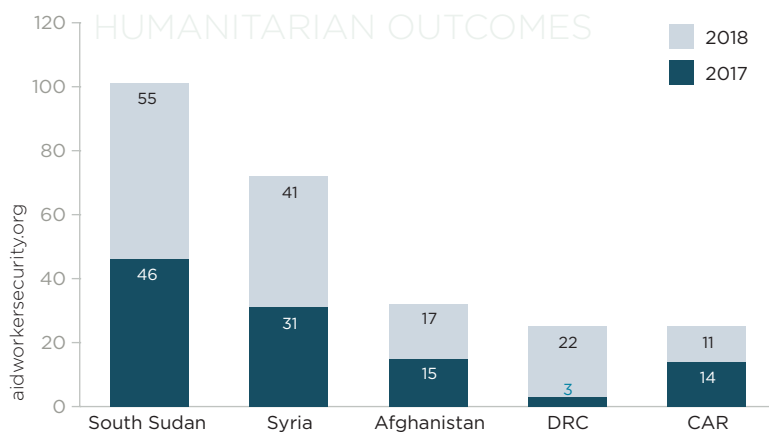
Figure 1: Major security incidents, 2009–2018*



*Figures verified as of 19 June 2019.

1.2 Country contexts and tactics

Figure 2: Highest incident contexts, 2017 and 2018



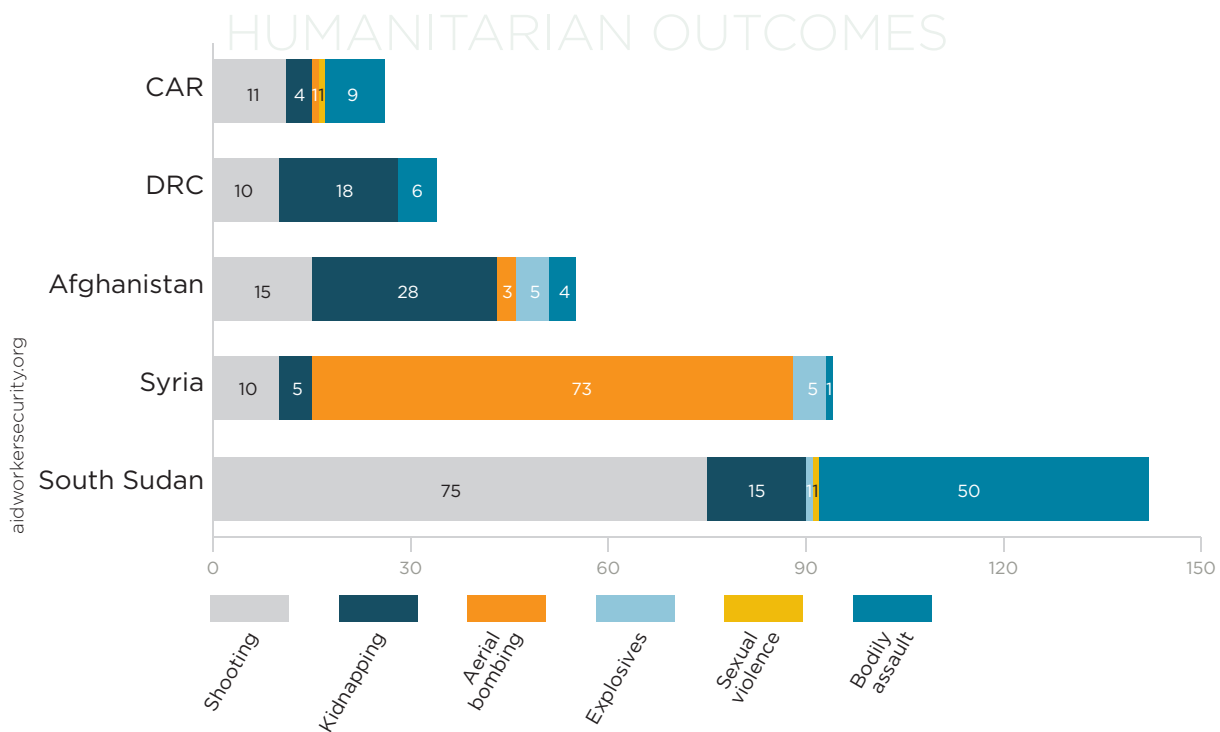
South Sudan continues to experience the greatest number of major attacks on aid operations (see Figure 2), having surpassed Afghanistan in 2015. In recent years the country has also seen a significant rise in the number of aid worker victims, notably involving the abduction of whole teams by armed groups. These were primarily in the context of ambushes/robberies, so not the norm for kidnappings as typically seen in the AWSD (which counts as kidnapping any incident where abducted victims are held for longer

than 24 hours). The next highest incident context in 2017 and 2018 was Syria, where aerial bombardment continued to be the most prevalent form of violence faced by aid workers as the civil war ground on.

By way of contrast, kidnappings and attacks with small arms (shootings) comprised most of the security incidents reported in the other most violent contexts over the past two years—Nigeria, Central African Republic (CAR) and, most recently, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

(Figure 3). DRC saw a serious increase in criminal and non-state armed group activity in 2018, and more recently is facing significant challenges to security for Ebola responders. Since the end of 2018 there have been several Ebola-related incidents, in which two people were killed and eight were seriously injured.

Figure 3: Highest incident contexts with types of attack, 2016–2018

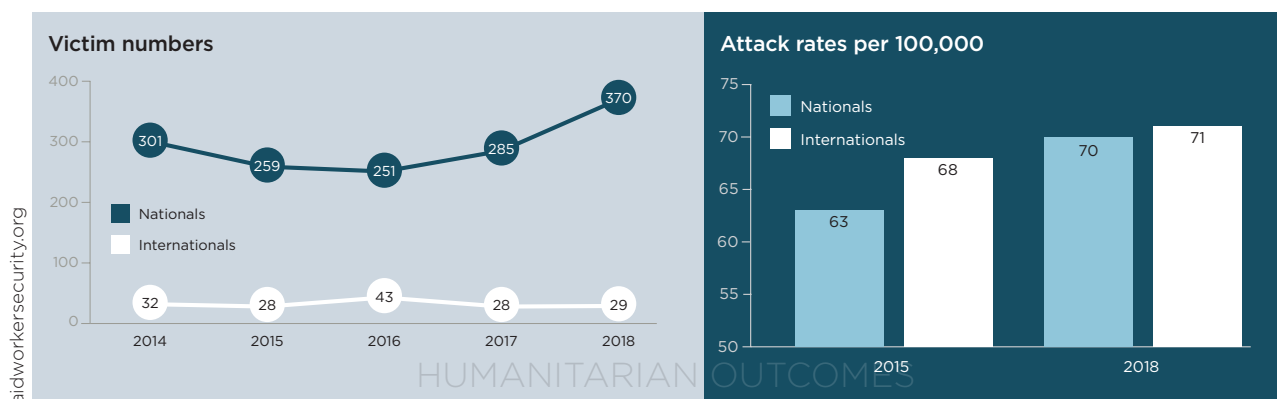


1.3 Aid workers affected

Nationals and internationals

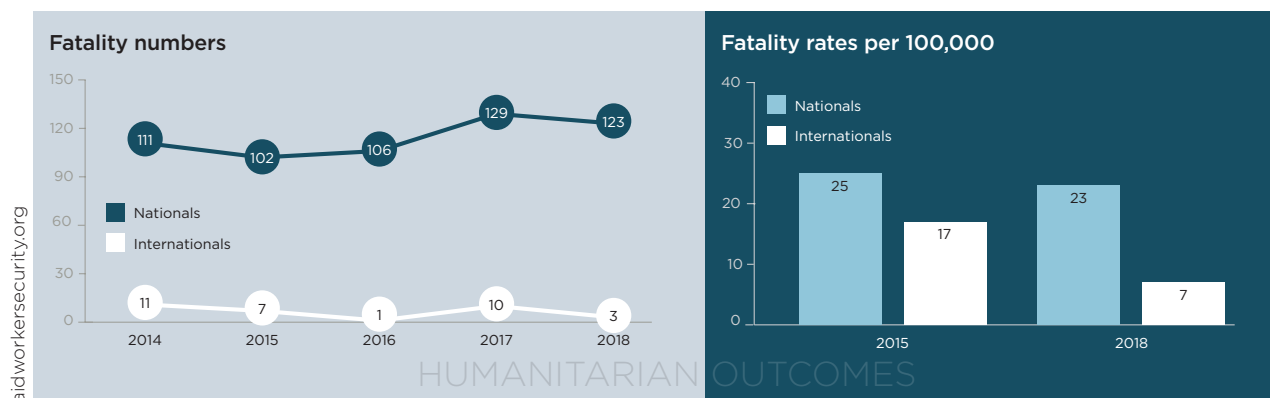
National aid workers continue to bear the brunt of the violence in terms of absolute numbers—and, increasingly, in terms of relative rates.⁵ The most recent data show that while attack rates have risen for both nationals and internationals, the rate increase has been steeper for national staff than for their international counterparts (Figure 4). Furthermore, although international staff continue to experience slightly higher overall attack rates than nationals, the *fatality* rates for nationals are higher than for internationals—and the gap has widened considerably in recent years (Figure 5).

Figure 4: National and international victim trends, 2014–2018



⁵ Comparative attack rates were calculated using Humanitarian Outcomes' estimates of the humanitarian worker population in the field, as prepared for [The State of the Humanitarian System 2018](#) (Knox-Clarke et al., 2018).

Figure 5: Fatalities and fatality rates, 2014–2018



The growing divergence between national and international victims is indicative of humanitarian access constraints in the high-risk, recent conflict-driven emergencies that make up most of the humanitarian caseload. In these settings, the humanitarian coverage of needs in the most dangerous areas is low and increasingly reliant on national partner organisations as international organisations have reduced their presence or consolidated it in safer areas. The effect is one of risk-transfer to local partners and personnel in a distorted, unintended form of ‘localisation’, and it raises pressing ethical questions about the security risk management resources afforded to local actors (Stoddard, Czwaro & Hamsik, 2019).

Women and men

In all years of recorded incidents (1997–2018), there have been 2,377 reported male victims and 359 reported female victims.⁶ It is difficult to estimate differentiated attack rates, since most organisations do not carefully track the numbers of men and women on their staff from year to year. To probe this question, we compiled a sample of humanitarian organisations that had gender-disaggregated staff data in the years that they had also experienced attacks. The sample group contained four large international NGOs, three UN humanitarian agencies, and eight national Red Cross/Crescent societies. We found that male employees, on average, experienced over three times the rate of violence compared to females, which accords with global data on violence patterns in general (Table 2). Extrapolating the average male-to-female ratio of this group of organisations to the entire sector (i.e. assuming a global aid worker population of 43 per cent women) yields attack rates of 11 per 100,000 for women and 65 per 100,000 for men.

Table 2: Male and female rates of victimisation (per 100,000 employed staff)

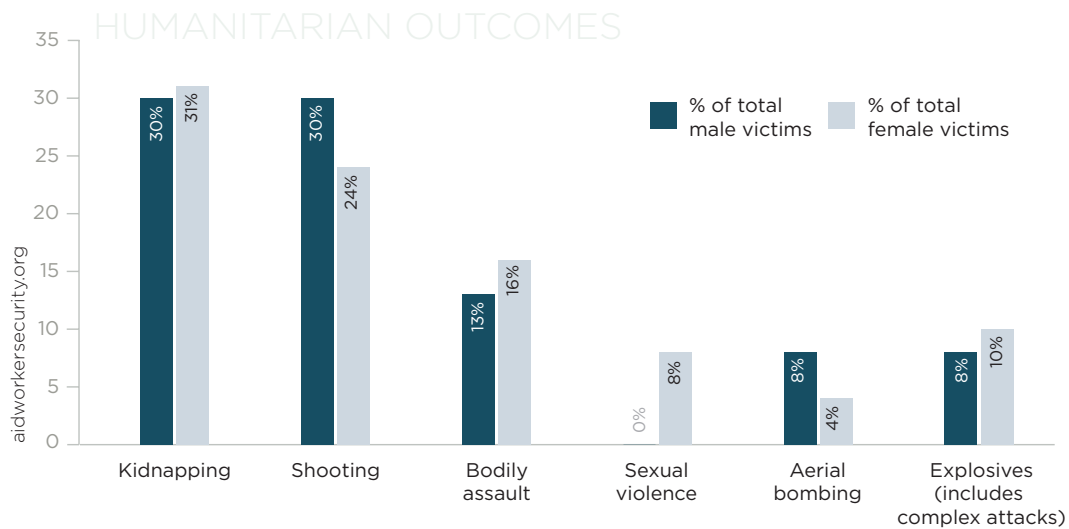
	Men	Women	Male/Female ratio
Major attacks (our aid organisation sample)	92	30	3.1
Major attacks (global aid workers est.)	66	12	5.5
Homicide (global population)	13	2	6.5

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⁶ AWSD records the gender of victims when it is specified in reports or can be reasonably determined. Organisations and field security platforms have gradually become more precise in their reporting of security incidents. The gender of staff remains unclear in 30 per cent of the incidents recorded.

AWSD data on reported male and female attack victims across all organisation types and years indicate that men were more likely to be victims of shootings and aerial bombings than women, while women were slightly more likely to be victims of bodily assault (beatings and attacks with non-firearm weapons). The biggest difference between male and female victims in terms of attack type, however, is sexual violence, which reportedly affected 8 per cent of women—but no men. Men typically fill the positions that are more exposed to potential violence, such as drivers and guards, and tend to be deployed in greater numbers than women for operations in the most volatile settings.

Figure 6: Means of attack, share of male and female victims, 1997–2018



As global and national crime statistics show, across all country contexts and social settings, it is predominantly men who are both the perpetrators and victims of violence. (UNDOC, US Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2018). Men are more likely to be victims of homicide and assault with and without weapons, while women are many times more likely to be the victims of domestic violence (including intimate partner homicide) and sexual violence. These broad differentials show up in aid worker attack data as well.

2.1 Sexual violence

Humanitarian aid workers operate in environments where they are at heightened risk of sexual violence. Sexual violence is considered a special category of violence because of the additional psychological effects of humiliation and degradation experienced by its victims. It is seen to have the potential for greater trauma and longer-term effects on mental health, as well as social effects, due to shame and stigma. For these very reasons, rape is used as a weapon of war by armed groups in conflicts (UN, 2018). In environments where use of this tactic is commonplace, female humanitarian workers, particularly nationals, will also be at risk.

Sexual violence is also a unique category of attack within security risk management because the threat is both external and internal to the organisation. In other words, aid workers can be sexually assaulted by people they work with as well as by attackers in the external environment (and what limited data exist strongly suggest that aid workers are more likely to be abused by colleagues (Nobert, 2017)). However, the failure to get an accurate picture of the scope of the problem due to underreporting creates a significant obstacle at the outset. According to national and global statistics, rape is the least reported type of major crime. In the UK for example, 83 per cent of victims of sexual assault do not report their experiences to the police (Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Disincentives to reporting sexual violence are at work in the aid worker community as well. AWSD has only recorded 21 incidents of sexual violence since 1997, affecting 29 female victims.⁷ As incident reporting systems in general have improved over the past two decades, the number of reports specifying sexual violence have risen—from zero prior to 2004 to an average of two per year. However, most experts in humanitarian operational security agree that underreporting continues, both by victims and by organisations, which might decline to enter a formal report at the victim's request. The problem with proving a negative notwithstanding, humanitarian security experts interviewed for this report widely agreed on the strong probability that more sexual assaults are unreported than reported.

Sexual violence can occur within the context of another attack without being explicitly reported or coded as a different category. For instance, as more than one security expert confirmed in interviews, it is not uncommon for female kidnap victims to experience repeated rape during their captivity, or for attackers to rape the residents of a compound in the course of a raid. Rape also sometimes occurs when aid workers are detained and removed from their vehicles at checkpoints. Often these additional assaults do not show up in the official incident reports.

Understanding the differences in exposure, vulnerability, and therefore risks faced by men and women is complicated in the first instance by the fact that many organisations do not track the numbers of people they employ in field operations, and those that do very rarely disaggregate these numbers by gender. They therefore are unable to calculate relative rates of safety and security incidents to inform potential mitigation measures. In one partial exception we learned about from an interviewee, the UN undertook a gender analysis of its security incident database over the last three years. It found that male staff were more likely to face security incidents overall, while 100 per cent of sexual assaults were committed against women. Just as it is unlikely that the UN and AWSD data sets contain all sexual violence incidents, the 100 per cent female findings must also be treated with caution, as there is good reason to suspect that

⁷ Some incidents involved multiple perpetrators and victims but are each classified as a single attack.

male rape is even less likely to be reported.⁸ The UN's analysis also found that women were twice as likely to be victims of crime while off duty (for instance street crime and house robberies), perhaps because they are seen as easier targets.

2.2 Gender-differentiated risks

Other organisations interviewed for this study reported they had not seen any major differences between men and women in terms of types of incidents other than sexual assault. However, because they mostly do not compile hard data on attack rates by gender, anecdotal evidence pervades, which can lead to security policies that have little evidentiary support. For instance, some organisations have required women to sit in the front seat of vehicles going through checkpoints in contexts where it is assumed this will help avert harassment or detention. Another example is aid programmes in Latin America that preferentially hire women to work in gang territories as they are assumed less likely to be assaulted than their male colleagues given general gang-related crime statistics. Much of what we think we know about gender-based risks and appropriate mitigation strategies is based on assumptions that lack empirical support.

There is a similar dearth of data around the scale of sexual exploitation and abuse of disaster-affected populations by aid workers, 'although the problem appears pervasive' (IDC, 2018).⁹ The Humanitarian Women's Network and Report the Abuse both conducted surveys to gather information about sexual abuse against aid workers (Humanitarian Women's Network, 2017; Nobert, 2017).¹⁰ Neither survey used random samples so cannot be generalised or used to estimate prevalence rates (Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017). The Humanitarian Women's Network survey, distributed through professional networks and social media, generated 1,005 responses from women from 70 organisations, with 83 per cent of respondents being international staff. 22 per cent of respondents reported unwanted touching, 20 per cent reported threats of physical aggression, 9 per cent reported being touched in a sexual way and 4 per cent reported being forced to have sexual intercourse. 69 per cent of respondents who reported sexual assault said that they had not reported it. Report the Abuse gathered testimonies of sexual violence and found that out of 1,000 aid worker respondents, 72 per cent were survivors of sexual violence, and in 64 per cent of the reported cases, the perpetrator was a colleague of the survivor (Nobert, 2017). Both of these surveys were largely confined to international aid workers (96 per cent of those responding to Report the Abuse and 83 per cent of those to the Humanitarian Women's Network). As the International Development Committee (IDC) report (2018) points out, 'this leaves the experiences of national staff largely unknown'. Given that we know national staff make up more than 80 per cent of the total workforce, however, it is fairly certain there are a great many more national staff that are unreported victims of this abuse.

These studies suggest a problem of potentially significant scope and signal the need for further large-scale representative surveys and further in-depth qualitative work to derive more event-specific prevalence rates and patterns of harassment and assault (Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017). This would require organisations to invite comprehensive research of their country offices and records, including surveying and interviewing of current and former staff. Most international organisations are not waiting for perfect data but are instead already taking steps to secure staff members in the field and safeguard against sexual exploitation and abuse within their ranks. This is prudent but it should not excuse the continued lack of measurable evidence, as this can always be used to delay, dismiss or underplay the issue.

⁸ As EISF's report *Managing Sexual Violence against Aid Workers* notes, '[For] men and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or intersex (LGBTQI), reporting incidents of sexual violence can be particularly difficult due to heightened stigma. Some countries lack laws or policies for sexual assault or rape of men, while other countries police people's sexual orientation, gender identity and expression (SOGIE), which can prevent LGBTQI survivors of sexual violence from accessing support or justice' (2019, p.6).

⁹ A series of studies; of refugees in West Africa in 2002, of perceptions of sexual exploitation and abuse in Kenya, Namibia and Thailand in 2007 and voices from Syria in 2018 have also shown the ongoing nature of the problem (Naik, 2002; Lattu et al., 2008; UNFPA, 2017).

¹⁰ The Humanitarian Women's Network was an informal network of aid workers which aimed to create a safe space for discussion of issues including abuse and harassment facing women in the humanitarian sector. Report the Abuse was an NGO that ran between 2015 and 2017 an NGO whose mandate was to break down the silence on sexual violence against humanitarian aid workers. <https://www.eisf.eu/library/about-report-the-abuse/>

3 Challenges and gaps in security risk management

Weak data is only one reason that risk management around sexual violence has advanced less than other areas in humanitarian operational security. There is perhaps no tougher subject to discuss and address openly; freighted with fear, embarrassment, shame and social stigma, it presents huge incentives to ignore and gloss over. These attitudes, especially in the context of common gender dynamics in organisations where men tend to be overrepresented among senior staff and security positions, create a negative feedback loop in which sexual violence continues to be underreported, under-analysed and under-addressed.¹¹ In this section we will review the key elements of security risk management, highlighting new developments and continued gaps in practice.

Humanitarian organisations working amid conflict cannot escape their status as actors within the conflict context, which is possibly why the targeted acts of major violence against aid workers tend to correlate more to conflict conditions than to general crime statistics in the area (Stoddard, Harmer & Hughes, 2012). In conflict contexts where rape is used as a weapon against civilians, aid workers can be vulnerable to the same threat. At the same time, their particular working conditions expose them to risks of sexual assault from colleagues within their own organisations, or from other humanitarian or related actors, such as peace-keepers, security companies, and private contractors.

There are also major issues of reputational risk that organisations are having to deal with in relation to sexual assault. Donors are demanding that agencies put in place stronger safeguarding measures and stating that they expect this will lead to more reports and incidents. However, agencies that have reported issues have experienced subsequent funding challenges. Agencies are also dealing with a deeply aid-sceptical media in some countries, notably the UK, where some are explicitly campaigning for a reduction in aid levels (BOND, 2016). In this context, greater openness about instances of sexual assault risks feeding into an aid backlash and creates disincentives for organisations to do more to tackle issues openly.

3.1 Assessing and communicating risk

The identification of potential threats, and an assessment of the risks they pose to different staff members, are the first steps in security risk management. Security management principles have always acknowledged differing risks, vulnerabilities, and potential strengths between male and female staff. The seminal guidance published in the Humanitarian Practice Network (HPN)'s *Good Practice Review 8 (GPR8)* on 'Operational Security Management in Violent Environments' noted the importance of incorporating a gendered analysis of risk into security assessments, and that men and women might have different roles or strengths in negotiations around access and security that are context-specific (HPN 2000; 2010). The literature, and interviews undertaken for this study, suggest that the sector still has a long way to go in applying a gender lens to security risk management.

It may be helpful here to distinguish sexual violence (a threat) from 'gendered risks'. Sexual violence can affect both men and women, but women are more common targets and therefore considered most at risk. Gendered risk is the idea that staff of different genders (including non-binary) and sexual orientation have different vulnerabilities and risk profiles depending

¹¹ The report by Mazurana & Donnelly (2017) give examples of how sexual violence is impacted by dynamics related to other identities (for instance sexual orientation, non-binary identification, nationalities and power positions) as well as gender.

on the context. For example, in some situations, men may be viewed with more suspicion by armed actors and may be more likely to be detained or meet with violence. A few organisations are discussing, or have recently adopted, policies and procedures that incorporate consideration of risks relating to gender as well as a wider array of staff profiles including ethnicity, religion, age and disability. It is important to allow aid workers of these profiles to participate in their own risk management through a collaborative approach. When it comes to managing their vulnerability related to gender, sexual orientation, or disability, they are a primary source of expertise that security staff should consult.

One of the largest humanitarian INGOs recently conducted a staff survey that revealed that their female staff felt significantly more unsafe than men in many contexts. In response, the organisation's leadership worked with a gender team to review the existing policies and to set new standards, including that their risk assessment should entail an analysis and consideration of 'local cultural dynamics that pose a unique risk to diverse staff profiles'. Another large INGO includes a checklist of questions for risk assessments, including:

- What are the religious, social and cultural expectations of men/women/LGBTQI staff in the country/region/operating area?
- How do security forces react to male staff in this context? Do they react differently to female staff?
- How might national, international and local staff face differing threats?
- What is the gender balance in your organisation and are males predominant in field level roles (including drivers)?
- How might women (differentiate between local, national and international) in your office be at risk of sexual harassment and assault?

Efforts of these large organisations are the exception and remain a relatively new development in security best practice. EISF's 2018 report found that most NGOs still do not systematically address gender or diverse profiles in their security risk management. Our review of internal organisational policies showed that in most of the larger INGOs with the most developed risk assessment procedures, the majority included recognition of different risks to men and women in different contexts. In many interviews carried out for this report, however, people noted that although the necessary steps had been identified in previous guidance, their organisations had yet to put them into practice.

EISF (2018) found that approaches to risk assessment were often inadequate in terms of assessing *internal* threats, particularly those related to gender and how particular profiles such as being LGBTQI could make people vulnerable to external and internal threats in specific contexts. Security managers interviewed for this study spoke of recent reviews of security guidelines and risk management processes to ensure gendered risks and internal threats were better taken into account, noting that travel procedures were a particular focus. For example, organisations had changed policies on issues such as staying in hotels, stipulating no room-sharing and making sure that there are locks on internal doors.

More systematic inclusion of gender and diverse profiles in risk assessments is needed. Interviewees for this report talked about the need for risk assessments to be collective and collaborative, bringing all office staff together, including cleaners and guards, and ensuring all feel empowered to speak out. This is important both because it can help to better identify risks and also because it can have a deterrent effect. If everyone has been involved and encouraged to look out for risks, then people may feel less likely to get away with harassment or assault. More specifically, when managing risk of internal threats, organisations must shift the focus of risk mitigation from the potential victim (telling women how not to get raped) to the potential perpetrator

(putting measures in place to prevent and disrupt sexual assault). As a UN security expert interviewed for this study said, 'It's my strong belief that until we focus on perpetrators, we can't fully manage risk, because we don't fully understand the perpetrators of the threat event itself and how the threat takes place'. A useful framework for mitigating internal risks is known as the 'empowered bystander approach'. Perpetrators require access to targets, knowledge of their target's susceptibilities and the opportunity to exploit them. Empowered bystanders can remove the opportunities and interrupt the targeting process by being alert and actively intervening 'in the pre-assault phase where markers of sexual assault are present' (UN, 2019). They can also provide 'psychological first aid and other support, post attack' (UN, 2019). Organisation-wide awareness-raising and training on this approach has demonstrated success.

A more fundamental shift of mindset is occurring as well. To date, security risk management has largely focused on external risks (intruders or armed groups for example) rather than threats from within organisations or from staff in other agencies. Thinking seriously about the risks of sexual violence means acknowledging that many, possibly most, assaults take place within organisations and the broader aid community. Security guidance has also included little on the risk of sexual violence to men, a subject that remains vastly under-analysed and subject to taboos that make it difficult for agencies even to discuss. The wider literature suggests men are often not believed when they do report sexual assault or are blamed for it (Bullock & Beckson, 2011; Sivakumran 2007, as cited in Mazurana & Donnelly, 2017). EISF's 2018 report on security for aid workers of diverse profiles found that LGBTQI aid workers and people with disabilities were more concerned about internal threats than external threats to their security. Other striking absences in the literature are: the experience of national staff members, and the way in which these issues are being tackled by national and local organisations; and on gender differences in security risk beyond sexual assault.

In addition to adequately assessing the risks, it is important for organisations to communicate them fully to staff to ensure they understand and accept the level of risk they are taking in any given environment. And because sexual violence has the potential to cause more severe impact on the lives of victims, it is even more important to ensure full risk awareness and informed consent on the part of staff. Mazurana and Donnelly (2017) found that 'while sexual assault may be mentioned as a potential threat in documents, it is much less often raised in training and almost never appears in simulations'. According to our interviewees, although they are starting to see some improvement, this continues to be the case in much of the humanitarian sector. A cautious approach to more directly addressing this threat in orientations, meetings and trainings (with particular caution regarding simulation scenarios, which can cause trauma) will help further break down communication barriers.

There are those, including some we spoke to for the study, who believe that reminding women of the risk of sexual violence is unnecessary and patronising. Women go through each day being aware of the risk of sexual violence, the logic goes; there is no need to impress it upon them when it is a constant of their lived experience. This attitude, we would argue, is counter-productive. It is one thing to be generally aware, as a female, of one's inherent vulnerability to sexual violence, it is another to actively consider the potential for encountering this violence as a known risk of a particular deployment. A former field worker recounted one security orientation that went into specific and graphic detail of what Americans might be subjected to if kidnapped, which she said worked well to focus people's minds so that they would absorb the seriousness of the risk. However, she said, 'when it came to gender, nobody ever said, "if you are a woman who is kidnapped, it is probable that you will be chained to a bed and raped by multiple men every day"'. This was the case for [two of our colleagues]'.

Gender dynamics between security coordinators (often men) and female staff can hinder communication around sexual violence. Both women and men often find the subject uncomfortable and may be predisposed to avoid it, or to get through the discussion as quickly as possible. Men may want to avoid seeming patronising or scaremongering, while women may resist asking questions so as not to feed stereotypes of their being frightened or weak.

Similar communication blocks can contribute to underreporting of incidents of sexual violence after they occur. Organisations recognise this and are making efforts to hire more women into security positions, to appoint more women as security focal points and to ensure that there are multiple pathways for reporting incidents of sexual violence.

3.2 Reporting incidents: Issues and obstacles

It is now well-established practice for organisations to systematically report, record and compile security incidents affecting their staff and operations. Tracking incidents is essential for internal security management and sharing this information with other organisations working in the same area is vital for the security of the wider community. When it comes to sexual violence, however, the tracking and sharing of incidents is seriously challenged by personal and organisational obstacles.

First, the victim may be deeply reluctant to speak of what happened due to a sense of shame and stigma, made worse by risk management mindsets that put the onus on the victim to avoid assault. In other cases, even if an organisation is aware of an incident, it may refrain from formally documenting it at the victim's request. Apart from some active kidnappings, sexual violence is the only type of security incident in which protecting confidentiality and maintaining organisational silence is a major point of concern. Many organisations now have clear policy commitments to respecting confidentiality and privacy, acknowledging that these commitments can create difficult trade-offs between the interests of the victim and the interests of the organisation/sector, or for pursuing justice. Some take a 'survivor-led' approach, which 'grants the survivor total decision-making control over all aspects of the post-assault process,' even if this means disregarding normal procedures (EISF, 2019, p. 10). The UN security incident system, for example, will not record a report of sexual violence, even fully anonymised, without the express permission of the staff member involved. Other organisations have similar reporting policies, which have at times met with blowback from other organisations upon learning they were not informed of a major assault in an area that had potential serious implications for their own staff members' security. A 'survivor-centred' approach, in contrast, endeavours to protect privacy and confidentiality while at the same time retaining decision-making scope for the organisation to balance these concerns against those for the security of the victim and others (EISF, 2019).

Other problems can stem from security management reporting systems that only deal with incidents involving external perpetrators, while internal cases of sexual assault or harassment are more likely to be handled through human resources (HR). This means that an internal sexual assault can take place in an organisation without the security team even hearing about it. This siloing has the potential to blur the lines of responsibility in more serious internal cases, while also preventing information on internal incidents from informing risk analysis or being shared outside the organisation. It is likely that the internal sexual assault victims face even greater obstacles to reporting the violence. Internal reporting involves whistleblowing dynamics, and the threat of losing one's job. The widespread use of short-term contracts can exacerbate this problem, making staff members more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation 'as they fear they will not have their contract renewed' (IDC, 2018, p.73). One interviewee said simply, 'In the office, the junior female national staff have the least amount of power, and need their jobs the most, so are the most vulnerable to exploitation'.

A repeated theme among security experts interviewed for this study was that if an organisation wants to encourage and increase reporting, it must take steps to remove as many obstacles as possible. Palermo, Bleck and Peterman (2013), analysing the underreporting of GBV in developing countries, found that 40 per cent of women affected had previously disclosed the incident(s) to someone—although only 7 per cent had reported to a formal source. Likewise, interviewees confirm that many reports are, at least in the first instance, made to a trusted colleague rather than a security officer. This reinforces the value of agencies having multiple possible channels for reporting abuse and assault (including hotlines and safeguarding focal points as well as in formal channels), without insisting on a formal line of report.

The fact that security professionals are often men was seen by many interviewees as problematic in terms of how comfortable women were likely to feel reporting instances of sexual assault. This was also highlighted by Mazurana and Donnelly (2017) who noted that security professionals are often ex-military, so the security space tends to be masculinised and militarised in ways that inhibit the reporting of sexual assault. The ratio of men to women in this field has been changing, however, and organisations are making deliberate efforts to hire more women as security officers and designate women as security focal points and several have targets to achieve a gender balance. This is not to say that only women can be effective in communicating empathetically and building trust in these situations. Interviewees noted there were many male security officers effective in this role, and they point to the more traditional military backgrounds of many in the field as being more the problem than the person's gender.

3.3 Responding to incidents

Interviews with victims of sexual violence make clear that the aftercare and follow-up provided by organisations can make all of the difference in recovery and longer term psychological well-being. This involves more than providing the basics immediately after the assault (such as emergency contraception, anti-HIV prophylaxis, trauma counselling and other necessary medical care). Longer-term psychological support, career counselling and legal assistance are often needed. Our interviews with sexual violence survivors turned up both good and bad examples of aftercare and follow up by humanitarian NGOs. Some were grateful to feel surrounded and cared for by the organisation in situ for the immediate post-event period as opposed to immediately evacuated home, where they would have felt isolated and unable to communicate about their experience. Others experienced a devastating lack of support for longer-term psychological needs when these were not covered by the organisation's insurance policy.

Mazurana and Donnelly (2017) found that most organisations lacked clear procedures for how to support survivors, and even where policies and procedures were in place they were not being enacted sufficiently well in practice. The systems in place for supporting victims and survivors are, however, changing fast with organisations developing and strengthening systems—many driven by scandals that came to light in 2018. Most of the larger organisations today, including those we interviewed, tend to have the basics of appropriate medical aftercare in place and provisions for ongoing support and counselling either through arrangements with external providers or in-house. EISF (2019) provides comprehensive guidance on responding to incidents of sexual violence covering immediate response, actions to be taken within 24 hours, actions to be taken with 24–72 hours and post-incident action and aftercare, including investigations. One persistent problem is that suitable support is not always available for national staff survivors, who are rarely evacuated.

It is too early to say, and was beyond the scope of this study, whether the additional investments in reporting channels and support mechanisms are helping those affected by sexual violence to feel more confident in reporting incidents or better supported in the event of incidents. There's a clear need for further research into whether changes in policy are translating into improved practice.

The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) has appointed 'champions' to take forward a vision 'of a humanitarian environment in which people caught up in crises feel safe and respected and can access the protection and assistance they need without fear of exploitation or abuse by any aid worker, and in which aid workers themselves feel supported, respected and empowered to deliver such assistance in working environments free from sexual harassment'. One of the three main objectives for this initiative is 'improving quality, survivor-centred support and protection'. This is defined as including as appropriate medical care, psychosocial support, legal assistance and reintegration, improving the experience of recourse and ensuring a consistent approach among IASC members (IASC, 2018a).

4.1 National staff and partners

In general, national and international staff members face different sorts of threats and levels of risk, which are, or should be, considered in the organisation's security plan. But there are gendered issues that are particular to different types of staff as well. Organisations have been slow to offer national staff that are local to the area and living in their own homes comparable levels of security support such as off-hours transportation or communications equipment. Some organisations see their duty of care to their national staff as starting from when they leave home on their way to work, and others when they arrive at the office. This is problematic not only because the local environment may be highly insecure but also because, as national staff of an international organisation, these aid workers face heightened risk compared to other members of their community. Women may face particular risks of sexual violence while travelling to, from or for work.

Humanitarian organisations also recognise that although they may not have a legal duty of care for their local partner organisations, or for the safety and security of their local staff while off the job, they have a moral duty to provide support to mitigate their risk (Stoddard, Czwarno & Hamsik, 2019). Acting on this 'ethical duty of care,' organisations have provided additional transportation support and even site security for staff members' homes. Agencies are starting to recognise that global data on sexual assault and domestic violence makes it clear that female national staff are likely to be most at risk of GBV within their own homes. Consequently, some have offered agency counselling and support to women affected by domestic violence or sexual violence at home.

Female national staff members are likely to hold less powerful positions in the organisation and be more vulnerable to job loss, and hence the least likely to report abuse at the hands of internal perpetrators. A global staff survey conducted by the UN found that 'the highest levels of underreporting of both misconduct/wrongdoing and retaliation come from non-staff categories, namely consultants, contractors, interns, junior professional officers and United Nations Volunteers...[T]hose with a temporary contract are the least likely to report misconduct/wrongdoing and retaliation'. (Cronin & Afifi, 2018, p. x). The term 'non-staff' itself suggests the greater vulnerability of these categories of people working for organisations and that they may be particularly at risk of sexual violence and less likely to feel able to report it.

As with other aspects of security management, it is widely recognised that southern, national and local partner organisations of international agencies often have less elaborate security management systems, fewer resources to manage risks and are at earlier stages in terms of addressing gendered risks. International organisations have started to provide support to local partners to review policies and processes through a gender lens, and to put in place more robust approaches to safeguarding. Where agencies have run gender or gender and security training, national partners have often been able to attend. There is a clear danger, however, that as donors demand more of a focus on safeguarding, international agencies are passing down demands to local agencies to make additional investments and put further processes in place without the support and extra resources needed.

4.2 Deployments and equality considerations

Humanitarian organisations recognise that there can sometimes be a tension between mitigating risks for certain types of staff, such as women, and adhering to their values of non-discrimination based on gender or other identity. Some get around the appearance of having greater restrictions on women (for instance curfews, accommodation requirements or prohibited bars/public places), by making the policy apply universally. As one aid worker commented, their organisation made it clear to all staff that a risk-based restriction for one was a restriction for all, and that, 'it is not our job to enable your social life'. Some written policies contain 'no, but' language around gender (and identity) discrimination in staff deployments. The organisations recognise that women and other groups should not be denied opportunities of traveling to different posts and that they will be made aware of the dangers that they may encounter, but there may be circumstances where they may be prevented from travelling if the overall threat assessment finds that deploying women and other groups might place them in high risk.

In practice, however, those we interviewed did not see the tension between risk management and non-discrimination as a major problem, noting they had found ways to enable men and women to work safely in all contexts, taking into account their different risk profiles. As one interviewee put it, 'a few years ago you got accused of sexism if you gave special instructions to female travellers, for example. This has improved as our analysis and instructions have improved. Instead of blanket issuances, we use risk and context-specific measures, such as women should minimise interaction with specific groups and not go to specific places. It is more detailed rather than blanket non-deployment or curfews'. The need for contextualised policies and practices around gender is especially acute in areas such as Pashtun regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan where having female staff members can create particular risks due to cultural-religious restrictions on women working and moving in public spaces, and at the same time utterly necessary to undertake certain types of aid programming. Often this requires negotiating with family members and community leaders, arranging specific accommodation, guaranteeing appropriate levels of separation between male and female staff and even arranging for male relatives to travel with female staff members.

Oxfam's guidelines for limited access humanitarian programming notes that women face different risks from men, particularly with respect to sexual violence and, '[as] a result, insecure contexts can lead INGO managers and local partners to automatically exclude women from assessment teams and monitoring activities. At the same time, in some contexts, women can be safer, travel more easily and even be at less risk of sexual or other violence than men' (Oxfam, 2017, p. 10). The guidance recommends discussing risks with implementing teams and balancing assumptions and cultural attitudes with actual evidence to make sure that male-dominated teams are only created in response to actual rather than perceived risk.

4.3 Sexual harassment and exploitation

The context in which humanitarians work bring heightened risk of sexual violence or abuse from within. Mazurana and Donnelly (2017) point to 'macho environments' where male domination of power, space and decision-making creates conditions where harassment and assault can take place. Their study also points to potential risks arising from the use of drugs and alcohol in social settings and the fact that aid workers sometimes have to live and work in close quarters and under stressful conditions.¹² One-third of respondents to a UN staff study conducted by Deloitte reported that they had experienced at least one instance of harassment and 1.3 per cent reported having experienced an attempted or actual sexual assault in the workplace within the last two years (Deloitte, 2019). Interviewees for this report attested to seeing definite links between

¹² Research on sexual assault at work in the US identified employment situations associated with high risks of harassment and abuse as including: working in isolated contexts; temporary work status; working in male-dominated jobs; and working in a setting with significant power differentials (Shaw et al 2018). All of these are relevant to humanitarian work.

work environments that tolerated sexual misconduct/harassment and the risk of more serious incidents of sexual violence to staff, as well as risks of exploitation of aid recipients and local community members.

The complex and interlocking issues of gender-based violence faced in humanitarian settings comes through clearly in reports such as the UN Women (2014) study of GBV amongst Syrian refugees in the Kurdistan region of Iraq. The research found pervasive sexual harassment, widespread transactional and survival sex, abuses of power and sexual exploitation, increased intimate partner violence and forced and early marriage. Pre-crisis high levels of GBV were exacerbated by the experience of displacement, bringing with it inadequate access to affordable safe housing, overcrowding, lack of opportunities for employment and education and displacement-related stress, leading to feelings of helplessness and frustration. The UN Population Fund, assessing GBV in Syria, found that '[Distribution] sites are often perceived as unsafe places, which are dominated by men'. And '[Sexual] exploitation by humanitarian workers at distributions was commonly cited by participants (in focus group discussions) as a risk faced by women and girls when trying to access aid' (UNFPA, 2017, p. 11).

The issue of sexual assault within organisations cannot be tackled in isolation from wider cultures of sexual violence and it is unrealistic to expect aid organisations to be islands of exception. As Csaky (2008) found, sexual exploitation and abuse of children by aid workers often goes hand in hand with abuse committed by individuals within the community such as businessmen, teachers and the police as well as abuse committed within children's own families. Moreover, anecdotal evidence suggests that predators will seek employment in places where they have access to vulnerable individuals, such as child-focused charities. IDC (2018) cites testimony from the first head of safeguarding about attitudes within Oxfam, '[After] all Oxfam was Oxfam and the belief was that that sort of thing was unlikely to happen in such a moral, professional organisation' (p. 25). Risk assessments need to take into account and understand the wider contexts of GBV within which humanitarian agencies are operating.

As EISF contends, 'robust and confidential whistleblowing mechanisms are an essential part of prevention efforts' and can serve as a deterrent against potential perpetrators' (2019, p. 26). We heard from those interviewed for this report that organisations have been strengthening their reporting channels, particularly beginning in 2018 in response to the focus on safeguarding and investing in increasing their capacity to conduct investigations—both through hiring additional investigators and in conducting training courses to increase investigatory capacity.

Interviewees talked about the need to shift and establish organisational cultures over the medium to long term. There is a need to look at the whole culture of an organisation—recruitment, training, management. Trust is fundamental; people have to have trust that they can report, and that issues will be dealt with correctly and professionally. The aim should be to establish an environment where people are very clear about what is and is not acceptable behaviour, and that it is not a place where someone can get away with sexual abuse. Part of building that trust means carrying out proper investigations, with appropriate follow-up action and transparency. That also presents a communication challenge; it's not just about having the right systems and processes in place but making sure that people know about them, understand them and know how to report incidents—from drivers, guards and cleaners through to senior management.

4.4 Recent initiatives

Some organisations have instituted gender-specific security training. Within the UN system there is a Women's Security Awareness Training (WSAT) which is broad-based training but in sessions limited to women only, with the idea that it will allow for more open discussions of gender-based risks and sexual violence. While creating safe and open opportunities for discussion of risks is vital, and this may sometimes need women-only spaces, there is also a need to forge openness

across men and women in order to tackle issues of secrecy and silence. There is also a risk that limiting sexual violence discussions to women-only trainings could feed a view of men only as potential perpetrators rather than also as potential allies. To counter this mindset, experts now promote the use of the “empowered bystander” approach, in which all staff members are trained and encouraged to be alert to harmful behaviour of others, and to intervene in positive ways.

In its 2019 report, EISF called on its member organisations to include key messages about sexual violence risks, and how the organisation responds to such incidents, in staff pre-departure briefings, in-country security briefings and training sessions. Regular training focused on sexual violence should cover not only awareness of risks but also the role colleagues can play in the prevention and response to incidents.

Global staff surveys are one way of helping to provide stronger data on the extent and patterns of sexual harassment and abuse within organisations (Cronin and Afifi, 2018). UNICEF was cited as an example of good practice, fielding a global staff survey every two years, the results of which inform UNICEF’s global and regional action plans. The survey allows for a secure and confidential way for all levels of staff to have a voice in the organisation’s direction.

In part driven by donor demands, fears of a public backlash and reputational risks—and in part because they recognise the need to do more—organisations are making real investments in strengthening how they tackle safeguarding, sexual exploitation and abuse and deal with instances of sexual assault. Many of the initiatives, processes, policies and guidance being put in place are new and it is too early to say what impact these will have on the reporting of incidents and the capacity of organisations to provide better support to people who are the victims of sexual assault. The focus on safe-guarding in 2018 has also led to a series of initiatives to strengthen vetting and reference-checking processes in order to prevent re-employment of transgressors across the sector. The IASC champions are developing IASC-wide common standards for vetting and reference checking (IASC 2018a; 2018b).¹³ There are also initiatives underway to explore the feasibility of a unified database and indexing system tied to individualised ‘humanitarian passports’ (IDC, 2018, p.41).

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) hosted a safeguarding summit in October 2018. Since then, a five-year project with INTERPOL has started aiming to stop perpetrators of sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment from moving around the the sector (DFID, 2019). It will strengthen and digitise criminal record checks, improve information sharing between countries and train staff. A Disclosure of Misconduct Scheme is also being developed. While recognising that initiatives were underway, some interviewees still felt that wider culture change was unlikely until clearer messages were signalled through actually firing people found guilty of misconduct.

Donor governments were seen by those interviewed as contributing to driving change in 2018. There were increasing demands for agencies to demonstrate due diligence on safeguarding. DFID for example issued enhanced due diligence procedures for safeguarding for its partners. Interviewees for this study noted that the increased donor focus on safeguarding was not necessarily leading to more resources and that additional investments were coming from organisations’ resources at the expense of the ability to invest in other areas. IDC (IDC, 2018, p.40); heard evidence from BOND calling for a new approach to budgeting where ‘safeguarding is not treated as an add-on but a fundamental aspect of how we treat people’ (p. 40) and from DFID calling for organisations to be upfront about any need for more resources. Interviewees also noted that the recent safeguarding focus has made it harder to share good practice as organisations have been very internally focused and sensitive to further reputational risk.

The continuing rise in the number of aid workers affected by violence each year speaks to the challenge of providing humanitarian aid in conflict-affected areas. Within this larger problem, the largely unseen incidence of sexual violence risks going under-analysed and under-addressed by the humanitarian sector. Incident reporting has improved among humanitarian organisations but large gaps remain in the data available on gender and security. Increasing reporting will require organisations to make the process as simple and unthreatening as possible, with multiple possible channels to report. Additional investments in tools such as regular, comprehensive anonymous staff surveys and app-based reporting systems would also help produce a better picture of the scale and prevalence of sexual violence. Organisations should more systematically disaggregate data by gender and analyse gendered differences in security incidents. They need also to address the particular data gaps around instances of sexual violence against men and LGBTQI individuals. And finally, much more evidence is also needed on the experience of national staff and national NGOs. Better data would enable more informed risk management and allow organisations to better gauge progress.

As is common in the sector, the development of principles and policies has exceeded implementation and practice. Although operational guidance and policies have long recognised some of the risks of sexual violence, the experience of survivors suggests that risk management processes, training and post-incident support remain inadequate. In particular, organisations have not done enough to identify and mitigate risks arising within and between organisations. Better tackling these internal risks requires a shift in approach by security managers in order to focus on internal as well as external risks.

Given the pervasive underreporting of sexual violence (globally and within the humanitarian sector), more still needs to be done to enable people to safely report incidents and to ensure that incidents are dealt with effectively. Organisations need to be wary of the tendency to put the onus on victims, particularly women, to ensure their own safety and to also focus on discouraging and dealing with perpetrators of sexual violence within their own staff. Agencies must take decisive action—in recruitment, training, deployment and management—to prevent sexual harm. This should include embracing the empowered bystander approach and seeking to instill this mindset in workplace culture.

In the context of competing demands on scarce resources and often overwhelming and inadequately met humanitarian needs, organisations need to make difficult decisions on how much they can afford to invest in strengthening their safeguarding systems. It is clear that there is a real problem of sexual violence that needs to be more strongly addressed and that creating organisational cultures that are safer, particularly for women, requires a major effort.

Organisations have started to put stronger policies and procedures in place, in part driven by greater attention to safeguarding issues in 2018, and comprehensive guidance is now available (EISF, 2019). However, changing organisational cultures requires long-term and sustained effort to tackle the self-perpetuating silence and stigma around sexual violence and fears around reputational risk. There is a need to insist on frank discussion for the purposes of squarely acknowledging and addressing the risk, and for making clear that sexually hostile workplaces will not be tolerated. Silos between HR, safeguarding and security departments within organisations still need to be tackled. Security managers have a critical role to play in enabling organisations to more effectively prepare for, mitigate and respond to risks of sexual violence, but alone they can only do so much. It is also important for country directors and even the

Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators (RC/HCs) to take steps to change the culture at the field level, as well as to push governments to prosecute perpetrators and seek justice for victims.

The second highest number of aid worker attack victims on record in 2018 serves as a reminder that for every year that political actors fail to resolve armed conflicts, what should be unacceptable levels of violence against aid workers, health facilities and civilians become increasingly normalised and unremarkable. Arguably, this is especially true of sexual violence, already shrouded in silence and near invisibility. The recent watering down of the UN Security Council resolution 2106 on sexual violence in conflict further bodes ill. Countering normalisation requires special efforts to focus on, measure, expose and openly address the issue—efforts towards which humanitarians could usefully take the vanguard.

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‘While today we see the beginning of better reporting and gender-specific numbers, sexual violence continues to be underreported by an indeterminate but significant degree’.

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June 2019

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