

WORKING PAPER 17

**BETWEEN SILENCE AND
INVISIBILITY:**

**EXPERIENCES OF MALE SOUTH SUDANESE REFUGEE
SURVIVORS OF RAPE IN UGANDA**

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ABOUT

Countering Backlash aims to create much needed new knowledge around the complex phenomena of patriarchal backlash and identifying opportunities for women's rights organisations and other gender justice defenders, to address the erosion of gender objectives within development and counter gender backlash. The programme's main countries of focus are Bangladesh, Brazil, India, Kenya, Lebanon, Türkiye and Uganda.

Led by the Institute of Development Studies, Countering Backlash is being implemented by a consortium which includes: Advocates for Social Change Kenya, the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University, BRAC Institute of Governance and Development, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, Centre for Basic Research, Centre for Health and Social Justice, GenderSphere, Nucleus of Interdisciplinary Women's Studies of the Federal University of Bahia, Özyeğin University, Refugee Law Project, SAHAYOG, and Women of Uganda Network. The programme is funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

Content warning

This report contains material of a sensitive nature, including accounts of sexual and physical abuse which may be upsetting.

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Whilst this study reports on empirical realities and voices from the field, any opinions expressed (beyond those of the informants) are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of RLP, IDS, or the funder, Sida.

ACRONYMS

AIDS	acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
CRSV	conflict-related sexual violence
CVT	Centre for Victims of Torture
GBV	gender-based violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IOM	International Organization for Migration
MRA	men's rights activism
NWA	Nuer White Army
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
RLP	Refugee Law Project
RSI	Refugee Support Initiative
SGBV	sexual and gender-based violence
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Army-In Opposition
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPLM/A-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army-In Opposition
SSLS	South Sudan Law Society
SSRAU	South Sudanese Refugee Association in Uganda
STI	sexually transmitted infection
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the last few decades, increasing policy and scholarly attention has been directed towards documenting and examining the pervasiveness of sexual and gender-based violence in conflict settings. This report highlights the experiences of men who have been subjected to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in South Sudan and are now living in refugee settlements in Adjumani District in Uganda. The report centres the experiences and perspectives of some of these refugees to highlight how they navigate multiple challenges in the aftermath of experiencing sexual violence, their ways of remembering the violence and its impact, and how they deal with the precarity of the intersection of refugee life and struggles as CRSV survivors.

The report is situated within the context of ongoing and worsening gender backlash globally, defined as ‘an attack on gender equality, its institutions, and those that seek to advance gender justice’ (Lewin 2024: 142). Recent years have witnessed increasing attacks on gender justice, intersecting with multiple crises of rising authoritarianism, growing polarisation, widening inequalities, and entrenched forms of violence and impunity. Gender backlash further compounds vulnerabilities for male survivors of sexual violence living as refugees. This report, therefore, is presented as an urgent intervention that brings the experiences of male survivors of CRSV – who are also refugees – to the fore and calls for increasing policy and humanitarian attention for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to address their needs.

METHODOLOGY

The research on sexual violence against men is complex, with distinct ethical challenges, and requires careful preparation and thoughtful research dissemination approaches. Given how vulnerable the participants of the research are as survivors of sexual violence and as refugees, and the potential for harm the research entails, it is paramount to address ethical and safety issues. To ensure the safety of the participants, information obtained in the research was recorded anonymously. The participants were advised not to discuss the study with others, since stigma and discrimination is a serious issue within the broader community which could put them at risk. To help preserve anonymity, we also used oral consent in preference to written consent forms but, in some cases, signed the consent form on behalf of the participants to ensure that the consent procedures were followed. We also informed the respondents



CRSV against men has been used to humiliate the ‘other’ in order to break the spirit and destroy the dignity of the opposition.

that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose at any point not to participate in the research, exercising their right to withdraw.

Through snowball sampling, we reached 21 male survivors of CRSV residing in the Adjumani District refugee settlements and engaged them in in-depth conversations between April and May 2024. Gaining access to male survivors of CRSV from South Sudan was difficult primarily due to stigma, fear, and mistrust compounded by their refugee status. Addressing these challenges required sensitivity, cultural competence, and a trauma-informed approach to create a safe and supportive environment for male survivors to share their experiences. Sensitive research such as this often involves vulnerable populations, requiring extra precautions to ensure participants’ safety and privacy.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on in-depth narratives from male survivors of CRSV, this report highlights the forms, sites, and impact of CRSV on South Sudanese men and its intersections with their everyday lives as refugees in Uganda. CRSV against men has been used to humiliate the ‘other’ in order to break the spirit and destroy the dignity of the opposition. It has been used as a strategic weapon to destroy morale, punish, control, and inflict fear, pain, and suffering. Ethnicity has played a significant role in CRSV in the ongoing South Sudanese Civil War, with ethnic groups being targeted and affected differently.

Traditional gender roles and cultural norms have worked to shame and stigmatise victims, making them fearful of speaking out or seeking help. CRSV against men can lead to a sense of lost masculinity as survivors may feel they have failed to meet societal expectations of male strength and invincibility. This can result in feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy, which often needs to be addressed through reclaiming masculinity in a positive, empowering way through healing and support.

In the refugee settlements, sexual violence against men and boys in conflict remains largely hidden and ignored, neglected in terms of recognition, resources, and policy provision. Survivors fear being seen as weak or unmanly and fear being ostracised or rejected by family and community. A holistic care model including medical, psychological, socioeconomic, and legal support for survivors of CRSV has been designed mainly to meet female survivors' needs while male survivors struggle for care in these women-centred programmes. Although there are some institutions in Uganda that can support the South Sudanese male survivors of rape, most survivors do not seek care due to the shame and stigma associated with sexual violence.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish specialised support services for male survivors of sexual violence.
- Provide training for service providers.
- Use a trauma-sensitive approach.
- Increase funding for gender-based violence (GBV) programmes.
- Strengthen community outreach and engagement.
- Foster collaboration among organisations.
- Support the emergence and work of peer support groups.

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last few decades, increasing policy and scholarly attention has been directed towards documenting and examining the pervasiveness of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict settings. Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) is used in this report to refer to:

Incidents or patterns of sexual violence, that is, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilisation, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity, against women, men, girls or boys. Such incidents or patterns occur in conflict or post-conflict settings or other situations of concern (e.g. political strife). They also have direct or indirect nexus with the conflict or political strife itself, that is, a temporal, geographical, and/or causal link. (Chynoweth et al. 2022, adapted from Inter Agency Standing Committee 2015)

Much of the existing research examines CRSV against women and girls, who are disproportionately affected and subjected to such violence stemming from patriarchal social structures and harmful gender ideologies (Harrington 2010; Cohen 2016; Touquet and Gorris 2016). The gendered construction of an 'ideal' victim in dominant discourses within existing literature on conflict studies, peacebuilding, and security studies has meant an exclusive focus on women and girls' victimisation. The notion of men as perpetrators and women always being victims reinforces normative understandings of gender (Touquet and Gorris 2016). Such a focus arguably marginalises other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) as well as CRSV against men and boys and sexual minorities. CRSV against men and boys, although noted to be widespread and pervasive, continues to remain peripheral in attention (Sivakumaran 2007; Féron 2018; Zalewski et al. 2018).

In bringing attention to such forms of invisibilised violence, this report highlights the experiences of men who have been subjected to sexual violence during the conflict in South Sudan and who are now living in refugee settlements in Adjumani District in Uganda. A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report from 2019 noted that there were over 2.2 million South Sudanese in exile, out of whom 860,000 were being hosted in Uganda. South Sudanese refugees comprise 55.1 per cent of the total refugees hosted in Uganda (Office of the Prime Minister, Republic of Uganda 2025). This report centres the stories and perspectives of some of these refugees who have experienced CRSV, to highlight how they navigate multiple challenges in the aftermath of sexual violence, and

how they cope with the precarity of refugee life. As this report contextualises, CRSV has been used as a weapon in the South Sudan Civil War; yet, the voices and experiences of male survivors of CRSV remain under-reported.

It is also important to draw attention to the implications of the widely used framing of CRSV as a weapon of war. United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1820 in 2007 was lauded for explicitly recognising sexual violence as a weapon of war; the recognition was seen as a decisive achievement for bringing focus to gendered experiences of violence in conflict and post-conflict situations (Meger 2016). The resolution enabled CRSV to be seen not as a by-product of war, but as a targeted and deliberate policy amid the suspension of societal norms and the rule of law (Seifert 1996). The framing, however, has been criticised for its universalising and homogenising tendencies (Buss 2009; Kirby 2013; Meger 2016). Buss (2009: 145) notes that while the framing offers a way to articulate the 'systematic, pervasive and orchestrated' nature of CRSV, it may obscure and render invisible other types of harm or categories of victims, thereby enabling a 'homogenising narrative of rape' (*ibid.*: 160). This report acknowledges this possible limitation of the framing, while employing it to make sense of the instrumentalisation of sexual violence in conflict contexts.

This report is situated within the context of ongoing and worsening global gender backlash. In recent years, attacks on gender justice are increasingly intersecting with multiple crises of rising authoritarianism, growing polarisation, widening inequalities, and entrenched forms of violence and impunity (Edström et al. 2026). Sexual violence against men amid these intersecting crises is deeply intertwined with gender backlash. On the one hand, the attempts of men's rights activism (MRA) towards 'discourse capture' (Lewin 2021) draw on claims of sexual violence being gender-neutral and feminist activism leading to the erasure of men's victimisation (Gotell and Dutton 2016). This is done to counter the narratives of the pervasiveness of violence against women, framing 'rape culture as a feminist produced moral panic' while also seeking to mobilise young men and magnify their anxieties about changing gender norms (*ibid.*: 65). On the other hand, gender backlash works to intensify the social conditions that render men incapable of being vulnerable or victims. This leads to further denial, silencing, and marginalisation of male survivors of sexual violence because of increasing homophobia and essentialist understandings of gender.

As the later sections of this report highlight, the dynamics of this backlash are compounded in contexts of conflict and displacement to marginalise and silence refugee male survivors of CRSV. Amid ever-intensifying backlash globally and across multiple contexts, such forms of violence are further invisibilised. In the contemporary global moment where opposition to ‘gender ideology’ is seen to often merge with anti-migrant furore and fear (Butler 2021), the implications for refugees are even more severe. This report, therefore, is presented as an urgent intervention that brings the experiences of male survivors of CRSV – who are also refugees – to the fore and calls for increasing policy and humanitarian attention for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to address their needs. In doing so, it focuses on South Sudanese male survivors of CRSV living as refugees in Uganda. In the sections that follow, the report lays out the context of the South Sudan Civil War,

and the prevalence of CRSV therein followed by detailing the methodology and ethical approach to this research. Drawing on the narratives of survivors of CRSV, the report then presents the key findings to highlight the causes, and consequences of CRSV against men, and the challenges faced by the survivors in refugee settlements in Adjumani District in Uganda. The final section provides a set of recommendations for different stakeholders to address the needs of the survivors.



Sexual violence against men amid these intersecting crises is deeply intertwined with gender backlash.

2 THE SOUTH SUDAN CONTEXT

The roots of the conflict in South Sudan can be traced back to the imperial conquests in the nineteenth century that rendered its peripheries, especially the southern one, systematically marginalised and grossly underdeveloped (Sefa-Nyarko 2016; De Waal 2014). The failure of the colonial and postcolonial governments to address the grievances of the southern periphery led to an agenda demanding secession for South Sudan, realised in 2011 through a referendum (Sefa-Nyarko 2016). In December 2013, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) led by President Salva Kiir, the armed opposition group Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) led by his former deputy Riek Machar, and other armed groups and affiliated militias engaged in a ferocious civil war after accusations of a coup plot (Edwards 2016; Sefa-Nyarko 2016). The fighting rapidly escalated into a brutal conflict primarily affecting the Unity, Upper Nile, and Jonglei states. By 2016 with the signing of a power sharing agreement in Addis Ababa, the violent conflicts between communities mainly stemming from historical grievances and competition over land, cattle, and grazing, had resulted in hundreds of thousands of people killed, raped, and displaced (Esuruku 2021; Sefa-Nyarko 2016).

The conflict has largely been perceived as ethnic, with Kiir and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) representing the interests of the Dinka, and Machar and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in Opposition (SPLM/A-IO) representing the interests of the Nuer (Pinaud 2021; Edwards 2016). The SPLM/A-IO characterises Kiir and the SPLM/A as an authoritarian regime only interested in securing Dinka hegemony (Pinaud 2021). The Government of the Republic of South Sudan characterises the SPLM/A-IO as a group of Nuer nationalists whose goal is to take power at any cost. In reality, ethnicity is just one element of a complicated and multi-faceted conflict, rooted in two decades of civil war in Sudan, and in which political, cultural, and socioeconomic factors play significant roles. The failure to resolve grievances from previous conflicts, a proliferation of arms, conflict over natural resources, lack of economic development, a pervasive culture of impunity, and a lack of separation between the political and military spheres are all factors that have contributed to the current crisis (*ibid.*).

The conflict resulted in the breakdown of social and legal justice systems in many parts of the country, exacerbating an already pervasive culture of impunity (Human Rights Watch 2013). The scale and severity of SGBV, particularly CRSV, increased significantly after the outbreak of the December 2013 conflict

(Amnesty International 2016). CRSV has been committed against men, women, and children in large numbers, particularly in Unity State (Human Rights Watch 2015). Additionally, conflict in parts of Central Equatoria between government forces and the armed opposition group, National Salvation Front, has resulted in attacks and sexual violence against the civilian populations. UNHCR in South Sudan (2022) noted the widespread use of sexual violence against women and girls perpetrated by all armed groups across the country. The Commission also stated that rape and sexual violence against men and boys remained under-reported (*ibid.*).

The true scale of SGBV in South Sudan remains hard to measure owing to insecurity and low levels of reporting (Pinaud 2021). We heard much anecdotal evidence from humanitarian workers and journalists in the field that in some areas within Unity State, such as Bentiu and Nyal, the majority of women have been raped. While all forms of SGBV appear to have risen since December 2013, the most dramatic increase has been in sexual violence perpetrated by armed men associated with security or militia groups (Human Rights Watch 2015). A UN assessment team in South Sudan found that most of the attacks on villages occurring as part of the conflict are accompanied by sexual violence, with rape and gang rape being the most prevalent forms of such violence committed both during and after the attacks (UNOCHA 2022).

The primary perpetrators of this violence are men known both to the survivors and members of security or militia groups (Amnesty International 2016). The SPLM/A and SPLM/A-IO militias and unidentified uniformed men are reported to have committed rape, gang rape, abduction, sexual assault, sexual slavery, castration, and stripping (Pinaud 2021; Edwards 2016). Table A.1 and Table A.2 in the Appendix provide more details on the perpetrators and victims.



A UN assessment team in South Sudan found that most of the attacks on villages occurring as part of the conflict are accompanied by sexual violence, with rape and gang rape being the most prevalent forms...

Not only is sexual violence weaponised as an instrument of war, it is also seen as a reward to men involved in the conflict. According to UNHCR in South Sudan (2022: 1):

Sexual violence in South Sudan has been instrumentalized as a reward and entitlement for youth and men participating in conflict. It serves as a means of building ethnic solidarity to mete out retribution against perceived enemies; the objective being to inflict maximum disruption and the destruction of the fabric of communities, including through their constant displacement. This scourge has had the most profound impact on victims, their families and communities.

While much of the focus on CRSV draws on the experiences of women and girls, evidence of CRSV against men and boys is increasingly recognised. However, there remains a paucity of empirical data on forms, sites, and impact of CRSV from the male survivors' perspectives (Olaluwoye, Hoban and Williams 2023). In South Sudan, while victims of all ages and genders have been subjected to sexual violence, it has also been used

as a weapon of torture against men held in detention (Global Survivors Fund 2025). The strong cultural norms prevalent in the country compound the feelings of trauma and shame for male victims of CRSV, making them suffer in silence to avoid the stigma (*ibid.*). This report provides an insight into the lived experiences of South Sudanese male survivors of CRSV in refugee settlements in Uganda, exposing the egregious neglect of their plight in academic and policy discourse. It attends to the complex and precarious realities of the refugee survivors as they navigate constraints at the intersection of gender norms, sexual violence, and lack of adequate services as refugees.



In South Sudan, while victims of all ages and genders have been subjected to sexual violence, it has also been used as a weapon of torture against men held in detention...

3 METHODOLOGY

Research on sexual violence against men is complex, with distinct ethical challenges which require careful preparation and thoughtful dissemination approaches. Given how vulnerable the research participants for this study were, as survivors of sexual violence against men and as refugees, and the potential for harm the research entailed, it was paramount to address ethical and safety issues (Chynoweth and Martin 2019). The research study primarily included participants who had been subjected to CRSV, some of whom had also been forced to commit acts of sexual violence against others.

To ensure the safety of the participants, information obtained in the research was recorded anonymously. The research participants were advised not to discuss the research with others, since stigma and discrimination is a serious issue in the broader community which could put participants at risk. Disclosure is clearly a difficult and personal choice and easier within a group of peers to begin with. Our earlier study (Edström and Dolan 2019) found that peer support was a crucial route to disclosure and even advocacy, after the group had built collective support.

We used oral consent in preference to written consent forms, to support anonymity. Where gatekeepers required written consent, we made sure that the signed consent forms were not directly linked to the participants. We also informed respondents that their participation was voluntary and that they could choose to withdraw at any point.

During our research, we heard accounts that there were some male survivors of sexual violence in the refugee settlements who were allegedly also perpetrators of rape and who had taken sanctuary there due to fear of revenge, however we were unable to verify this. There were also cases where participants had taken refuge in refugee settlements because of threats against their lives in their country of origin. Some participants had run

away from their communities because of shame and dishonour and found healing in a new environment. In all these cases, assurances of confidentiality were very important, and we repeatedly invoked it to help allay lingering anxieties. Following from Robb (2004) and Weare and Hulley (2023), we aimed to facilitate and sustain a space where the participants could freely express themselves as male survivors, including sharing emotional issues that are otherwise stereotypically relegated to the feminine experience.

3.1 STUDY AREA

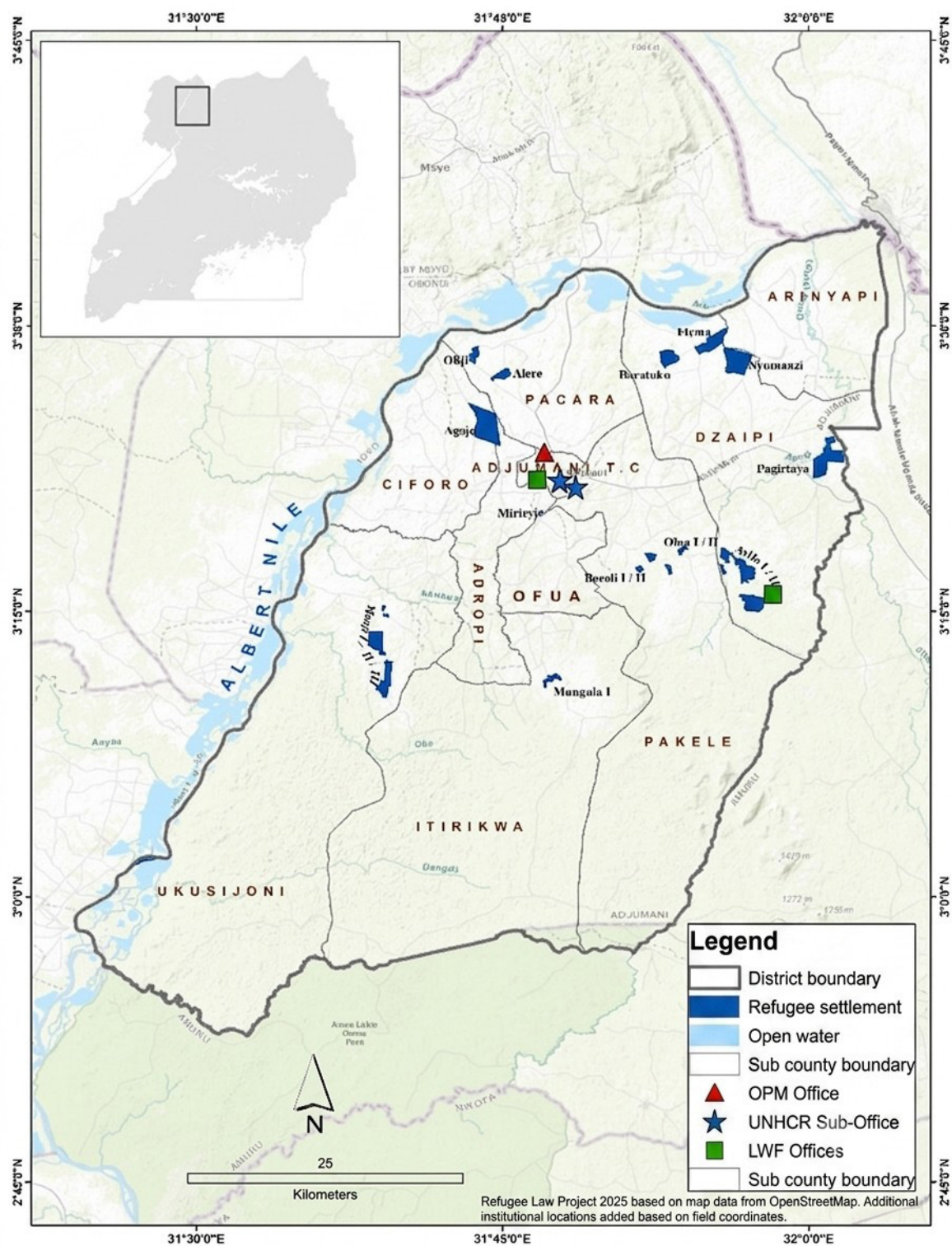
This research was conducted in Adjumani District, located in the Ma'di sub-region bordering Moyo, Obongi, and Amuru in Uganda. The district has a population comprising 300,590 host communities and 240,000 refugees and asylum seekers. There are 20 refugee settlements scattered throughout the district (UNHCR 2025). As shown in the map in Figure 3.1, most settlements are in relatively underdeveloped areas.

The respondents for this research were drawn from Mirieyi, Elema, Ayilo I, Ayilo II, and from self-settled refugees residing in Adjumani Town. The researchers' clear understanding of the local context and of the major languages spoken in the refugee settlements, such as Juba Arabic, English, Swahili, Ma'di, and other South Sudanese languages, helped strengthen trust and engagement.



Some participants had run away from their communities because of shame and dishonour and found healing in a new environment.

Figure 3.1 Map showing refugee settlements in Adjumani District



Source: Refugee Law Project 2025 based on [map data from OpenStreetMap](#).

3.2 GAINING ACCESS AND RECRUITMENT OF RESPONDENTS

Through snowball sampling, we reached 21 male survivors of CRSV residing in the above-named refugee settlements and engaged them in in-depth conversations between April and May 2024. Gaining access to male survivors of CRSV from South Sudan was difficult primarily due to stigma, fear, and mistrust, compounded by the refugee status of the respondents. We faced challenges recruiting participants due to the sensitive and delicate nature of the research we were conducting. In the beginning, some survivors were ashamed or embarrassed to disclose their experiences due to societal expectations of masculinity to always be dominant. Some survivors were reluctant to share their experiences, fearing that it might undermine their perceived strength and masculinity. However, some were eventually more willing to talk in detail. We navigated the different respondent responses by either letting them speak and listening to them uninterrupted or by providing additional prompts and repeated reassurances. Often, when we were seeking to establish contact with a survivor, he would ask during our telephone conversation whether he could trust us. This allowed us to reflect on questions of mistrust or potential violation of trust vis-à-vis researchers that the survivors could grapple with, fearing judgment, blame, or betrayal. Addressing these challenges required sensitivity, cultural competence, and a trauma-informed approach to create a safe and supportive environment for male survivors to share their experiences.

Building on established relationships with respondents from previous research, we gained access to participants. Utilising snowball sampling, we asked our participants to refer some survivors who were willing to participate in the study. Snowball sampling yielded tremendous results because the initial participants acted as gatekeepers, referring others they trusted, creating a chain of trust. The participants were also connected to other participants with similar experiences, increasing the relevance of the sample. The snowball sampling allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the context of the study.

Societal beliefs surrounding masculinity often perpetuate the silence and secrecy around sexual violence against men. Traditional gender roles and expectations can make it difficult for men to disclose sexual violence experiences (Ghosh and Kumar 2024). It was crucial for us to recognise and acknowledge that the survivors were sharing their experiences with us in a societal context of stigma and silencing around such forms of violence. This required a nuanced and culturally sensitive approach to challenge harmful gender stereotypes while also recognising issues of power, primarily those stemming from the researchers' authority, to ensure that respondents were not inadvertently coerced into sharing their stories (Weare

and Hulley 2023). Therefore, it was conveyed to respondents repeatedly that they could choose not to participate in the research or not to address specific questions at any point.

Avoiding judgmental language that blames or shames helps create a supportive environment for the male survivors of sexual violence. It felt important to allow the participants to assert their own knowledge, as some of them framed the experiences as a loss of masculinity. In certain environments, communities referred to the survivors as 'brave men' (*alrijal alshujean*) or 'men of courage' (*rijal alshajaea*), which recognises the survivors' strength in sharing their experiences, especially as they come together and find peer support (Edström and Dolan 2019). These descriptions acknowledge the harm without shame or blame. In this respect, we also strove to use terms with the survivors that acknowledged their strength and resilience in the face of trauma, reflected in the very act of respondents sharing their stories despite the violence they were put through and the stigma attached to it.

3.3 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conducting sensitive research on the subject of CRSV against men now living as refugees poses unique challenges that can impact the validity, reliability, and ethics of the study. Sensitive research such as this involves vulnerable populations and requires extra precautions to ensure participants' safety and privacy. It was paramount that our research followed the 'do no harm' principle. We had to navigate complex ethical guidelines, obtain informed consent, and maintain confidentiality throughout the research and in the dissemination of the findings. We were deeply aware that breaches of confidentiality could have severe consequences, damaging participants' trust and reputation, especially where it is intimately connected to stigma and silencing and could result in reprisals. Participant consent was necessary whilst allowing them to withdraw at any time if they did not want to continue. We were also aware that our own biases, experiences, and positionality could influence data collection and analysis, potentially leading to flawed conclusions. Acknowledging and addressing these biases, some of which could stem from stereotypical understandings of masculinity as dominant and men as inviolable, was crucial to avoid distorting our findings and to not reinforce harmful gender stereotypes. Biases can lead to inaccurate or incomplete results,



Some survivors were reluctant to share their experiences, fearing that it might undermine their perceived strength and masculinity.

perpetuating harmful stereotypes or reinforcing existing social exclusion and misrepresentation.

By acknowledging our own biases, we were able to mitigate their impact, enhance the credibility of the research, and promote more inclusive and equitable findings. For example, sometimes we overlooked specific cultural differences that shaped how people understood, experienced, and framed sexual violence. Therefore, it was important for us to acknowledge and address these biases and to develop increasing cultural sensitivity and culture-specific knowledge to ensure respectful, inclusive, and accurate research that prioritised survivors' voices and experiences.

After our in-depth interviews with the survivors, and to minimise the potential for re-traumatising them, we felt it important to signpost them to support services. Following Weare and Hulley (2023: 2241), the signposting to services felt necessary 'because specialist support services for male survivors may be less visible or less accessible'. We primarily referred the survivors to the Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) for support. TPO is a NGO dedicated to providing mental health and psychosocial support to vulnerable populations. Since 1992, TPO has been providing support to refugees in Adjumani District and other refugee-hosting districts in the West Nile with support from UN Women and the Government of Japan. However, we could not follow up with the survivors to confirm whether they had accepted our recommendations, as TPO said they had not received them at their facilities.

4 KEY FINDINGS

Based on the in-depth narratives from male survivors of CRSV, this section presents the research findings drawing attention to the forms, sites, and impact of CRSV on South Sudanese men and its intersections with their everyday lives as refugees in Uganda. In highlighting these experiences through centring survivor voices, the findings are intended to inform policies, programmes, and services to address the unique needs of male survivors of CRSV and to promote an inclusive and supportive environment for all survivors of sexual violence. The testimonies in this report are not used to make exhaustive or definitive claims on the list of violations that South Sudanese men have faced in the civil war. The focus is squarely on drawing attention to the male survivors of CRSV, the kinds of sexual violence they have experienced and the motivations underpinning this violence, and the consequences it has had on their lives. We present this report as a call for greater intervention to secure recognition, solidarity, and support for the survivors. The testimonies are presented here in narrative form, organised thematically, without any identifying information.

4.1 CRSV AGAINST MEN AS A WEAPON OF WAR IN SOUTH SUDAN

The level of sexual violence in the South Sudan Civil War has been noted to be ‘shockingly widespread and brutal’ with women of all ages and many men targeted (Amnesty International 2017a). The rape of men has been used by the SPLA, SPLA-IO, and other organised forces to humiliate the ‘other’ in order to break the spirit and destroy the dignity of the opposition. It has been used as a strategic weapon to destroy morale, punish, control, and inflict fear, pain, and suffering on the targeted men, as the testimony presented here shows:

I came to Uganda to seek medical treatment because I was totally disorganised by the Dinka men who thought they owned South Sudan and they could do whatever they wanted, including taking men to become their wives. I was nearly raped to death because of my identity as a Nuer. I was beaten and forcefully undressed and raped several times in turns for several hours and left to die. I managed to go back to the camp at night, and I was helpless for about three weeks. I attempted to commit suicide seven times, but I did not have the energy to do so. When some people from the camp were going to Uganda for medical treatment, I came with them. I am not going back to South Sudan. (in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

Ethnicity has played a significant role in CRSV in the ongoing South Sudanese Civil War. The warring factions, particularly the SPLA and the SPLA-IO, targeted men from specific ethnic groups, such as the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk, for rape and sexual violence (Pinaud 2021; Edwards 2016). Longstanding ethnic tensions and rivalries were exploited and exacerbated during the conflict (Esuruku 2021; Esuruku and Ojara 2023). Ethnicity was used to assert power and dominance over rival groups, with rape and sexual violence serving to humiliate and emasculate opponents. The case below is an example of the use of ethnicity in CRSV:

The Dut Ku Beny arrested us near Giada Military Barracks on a Saturday morning, and we were put under gunpoint and forced to rape other men who were captured, and they were also forced to rape us. We realised that the Nuer were forced to rape the Nuer by the Dut Ku Beny, the special presidential guards who were mainly Dinka. When you declined the orders, you were tortured, molested, and dismembered. This inhuman and degrading treatment continued for several days at the amusement of our tormentors. One night, a few of us managed to escape, and we headed toward Nimule, and that is when we ended up here in Uganda.

(in-depth interview, Elema refugee settlement)

The testimony is telling of how some men were forced to rape other men as a way to bring stigma and shame to both. Traditional gender roles and cultural norms worked to shame and stigmatise victims, making them fearful of speaking out or seeking help. Ethnicity-related stigma and shame contribute to under-reporting of cases of CRSV against men, making it difficult to understand the full extent of the problem. Men are abducted and held captive, subjected to repeated rape and sexual exploitation. They are raped in public as a form of spectacle to humiliate and terrorise the community. Multiple perpetrators from the same ethnic group rape a single victim, reinforcing ethnic dominance. The vulnerabilities are compounded for internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and ethnic groups forced to flee their homes (UNSC 2023).

Men are raped as revenge for perceived past injustice or attacks by rival ethnic groups. Rape is used to humiliate and emasculate men from rival ethnic groups, undermining their cultural identity and dignity. Men in displacement camps are vulnerable to sexual violence by rival armed groups. In the case of Gatpiny (name changed), they were identified and picked at night from

a protected area and repeatedly raped by the Dinka, and some men from their community also organised themselves and allegedly raped the Dinka as described below:

Rape of men is common, especially during the civil war which began in 2013. I think it was provoked by the Dut Ku Beny, as a way of subduing the Nuer. Hardly did they know that ... [some men in our community could also] ... teach them lessons of their lives. It was horrible. I don't think I will go back there even when peace is restored in South Sudan.

(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

The soldiers who were affiliated with the SPLA used ethnic slurs and told the victim that he was being punished for being a Nuer. This narrative was shared by other male survivors of sexual violence from the refugee settlements in Uganda.

4.2 FORMS AND MODALITIES OF CRSV AGAINST MEN

Several forms of CRSV against men have been documented in the South Sudan Civil War, and emerged from our conversations as well. These acts are used as weapons of war to humiliate, degrade, and terrorise men and boys, with severe physical and psychological consequences. Men and boys have been subjected to **forced sodomy** by perpetrators seeking to humiliate, terrorise, and control. **Rape with objects** is another reported form, involving objects such as weapons (guns, bayonets, etc.), sticks, bottles, and other blunt objects. Other forms of **sexual torture** including – genital mutilation, electric shocks to the genitals, beating and whipping of the genitals, etc. – have been reported as being used to extract information or confessions, or to punish and humiliate victims. **Gang rape** of men has been



These acts are used as weapons of war to humiliate, degrade, and terrorise men and boys, with severe physical and psychological consequences.

used as a weapon of war, perpetrated by both government forces and opposition groups against individuals.

Beyond inflicting pain and individual physical and psychological trauma, several tactics target social standing and more psychosocial aspects. For example, **sexual slavery** has been reported, with men and boys being abducted, detained, and forced into sexual servitude for extended periods. Many have also been subjected to **forced nudity** and stripped of their clothing, often in public. Another form of sexual violence has been the **public rape** of men, used to humiliate and terrorise the community.

Various collective forms of sexual violence have also been reported. Groups of men and boys have been subjected to **mass rape**, often in public and at gunpoint. This is often referred to as **ethnic-based rape**, as the intention is to dehumanise and demoralise entire groups. Another reported tactic has involved the **forced marriage** of men to women from rival ethnic groups, and **revenge rape** of men has also been used by armed groups and military forces on rival ethnic groups. These forms are summarised in Table 4.1, below, and described in more detail in the Appendix in Table A.3.

Table 4.1 Forms of CRSV against men in the South Sudan Civil War

Violence on bodies	Attacks on social status	Targeting of collectives
Forced sodomy	Forced nudity, often public	Mass rape, often public
Rape with objects	Sexual slavery	Ethnic-based rape
Sexual torture	Public rape	Forced marriage
Gang rape		Revenge rape

Source: Authors' own based on fieldwork.

Whilst these forms of violence can be distinguished by their apparent aim and level of targeting (from individual bodies and minds to social standing and relations to entire groups' collective cohesion), they – as well as their motives and impacts – often overlap and interact.

CRSV against men has a profound impact on survivors, affecting their physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing, with profound and long-lasting consequences affecting various aspects of their lives. It can lead to a sense of lost masculinity as survivors may feel they have failed to meet societal expectations of strength and invincibility. This can result in feelings of shame, guilt, and inadequacy, often needing to be addressed through reclaiming masculinity in a positive, empowering way, through healing and support. A survivor described his ordeal thus:

I cannot speak for all survivors of male rape because each one of us had different experiences and our circumstances are different. It is only the survivor who knows what has been taken away from him. The feeling a man gets after rape by a man is like your world has collapsed, and you have nothing left to hold on to. You are no longer the same, and there is no pretence about this, at least in my case. When people tell survivors of rape against men to seek help, sometimes I think they don't know what they are talking about because they don't understand what it means to be raped by a man in a culture like mine. When it happens to you, you are no longer a man. You cannot defend yourself before your people, and your family. Now you understand why I am a refugee and alone.
(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

The violation of the male body is not acceptable from a collective perspective, because the male body symbolically epitomises the symbiotic link that is forged between masculine strength and national or group culture (Widanaralage *et al.* 2022; Féron 2017). The existence of sexual violence against men is therefore frequently collectively denied or silenced, especially in contexts



The existence of sexual violence against men is ... frequently collectively denied or silenced, especially in contexts where national or ethnic identities are seen as weakened or threatened...

where national or ethnic identities are seen as weakened or threatened, which is almost always the case in conflict and post-conflict settings. Male survivors of rape may experience physical and emotional trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, anxiety, and feelings of shame, guilt, and isolation (O'Brien, Keith and Shoemaker 2015; Traunmüller, Kijewski and Freitag 2019). Indirect impacts can manifest in various ways, such as emotional distress, feelings of guilt, shame, or helplessness. In some cases, it may result in difficulty in forming healthy relationships as well as struggling with masculinity and gender roles.

Male survivors of CRSV suffer a direct negative influence on their physical and mental health including short- and long-term physical injury, fear, anxiety, despair, low self-esteem, social difficulties, and suicidal thoughts (Depraetere *et al.* 2020). Together with other socioeconomic implications such as being unable to work, dropping out of school, being stigmatised, and being shunned by their communities, it is also linked to an increased risk of sexual and reproductive health issues (Asgary, Emery and Wong 2013). Although men are perceived to be less affected by sexual victimisation, evidence shows that male victims are affected as much as female victims, and may even be associated with worse outcomes (Peterson *et al.* 2011). Table 4.2 draws out the impacts.

Table 4.2 Impacts of CRSV against men

Physical • Genital and anal injuries • Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) • HIV/AIDS • Chronic pain • Gastrointestinal problems • Sleep disturbances	Emotional • Anxiety • Depression • Anger • Guilt • Shame • Emotional numbing • Mood swings
Economic • Loss of livelihood • Unemployment • Difficulty with daily life tasks • Stigma and discrimination at work • Financial dependence on others • Difficulty with education or career advancement • Increased healthcare costs	Psychological • Feelings of vulnerability • Loss of masculinity • PTSD • Difficulty with trust • Self-blame and self-doubt • Feelings of helplessness • Suicidal thoughts and attempts • Flashbacks and nightmares • Avoidance behaviours
Social • Social isolation • Family rejection • Community stigma	Sexual • Difficulty with intimacy and relationships • Hyperarousal and hypervigilance • Impotence and erectile dysfunction

Source: Authors' own based on fieldwork; Depraetere *et al.* 2020; Thomas and Kopel 2023.

4.3 SILENCE, STIGMA, AND INVISIBILISATION OF MALE SURVIVORS

The acts of CRSV against men are seen as emasculating, and while many male victims are willing to give accounts of what they witnessed, they are less likely to express what they experienced during conflict. Victims are silenced by the fear of social ignominy, and risk being ostracised from their communities should they report that they were sexually violated (Sivakumaran 2007). This problem is compounded by destructive cultural stereotypes where men are viewed as sexually dominant and women as submissive. Male victims who have been subjected to any form of penetration, therefore, risk being labelled as less manly or, in some contexts, as homosexual (Ngari 2016). This can be especially difficult in a refugee environment, where survivors who are courageous enough to seek help may be viewed with suspicion and they sometimes feel they are misunderstood. So, they choose to stay silent and are unable to get help from professionals, as presented in the case below:

When I arrived at Elegu border, we were transported to the reception centre at Pagerinya with other arrivals. The official at the reception centre interviewed me, and they kept filling in whatever I told them into the computer. When I told him that I was a victim of rape, he immediately told me to sit aside and wait. The official took too long to get back to me, and during that time, I became anxious and contemplated going back to South Sudan. After some time, I was called and driven away to talk to medical people who wanted to examine me, but I refused to be examined. I was not ready for the medical check up because I was afraid. I even got more nervous when I heard them say that I was making up the rape case. I thought I was in the wrong place, and I escaped to Adjumani Town, where I have lived since 2021. I have agreed to talk to you because you are different, mature, understanding, and easy to talk to.

(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

Male survivors of CRSV often face significant stigma and discrimination, leading to social isolation and marginalisation which is often compounded by cultural norms. This can further exacerbate the trauma and suffering they have endured, as the testimony presented below highlights:

If I openly tell people that I am a survivor of male rape and I need some help, the little manliness left in me will disappear as well. Some things are left as they are, and it's a matter of time before they get resolved. I am trying to imagine a man going to a man or woman and telling them that men have raped him! How do I even begin it? I have only talked to you because my friend introduced me to you, and he told me that you are trustworthy and you don't even write down our names.

(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

4.4 MASCULINITY AND THE CRISIS OF SELF

There is a general misconception that men are immune to sexual violence, owing to gender stereotypes of women as weak and therefore victims, while men are either the powerful protectors or the perpetrators of violence. The stereotype of traditional masculinity is inconsistent with the position of victimhood, leading many to believe a man, unlike a woman, should be able to protect himself. The extreme shame and stigma surrounding the issue causes many victims to remain silent, while those who do talk often mask their experiences in the more masculine language of torture rather than rape (Goodley 2019).

Male survivors often frame CRSV as having lost their masculinities (*Alrujul almafquda*) after rape by men (*Aightsab aldhukur*). The feelings of loss of masculinity are reflected in the emotional, psychological, and social struggles survivors face in reconciling their traditional masculine identity with the trauma that they have experienced (Christensen and Kyed 2022). Survivors feel emasculated, ashamed, and guilty, have a loss of sense of self, have difficulty with intimacy and relationships, struggle with emotional expression, feel less of a man or warrior, fear being seen as weak or vulnerable, face difficulty with daily life and routine, struggle with assertiveness and boundaries, and feel disconnected from their pre-trauma self. Survivors feel they have lost their sense of control, physical strength, emotional toughness, and ability to protect themselves and others. This can lead to intense psychological distress, isolation, and stigma. Being feminised (*tanith*) due to experiencing sexual violence in war is a term used to describe how survivors may be stripped of their traditional masculine status and identity, and instead, be subjected to societal expectations and stereotypes typically associated with femininity.

In most African cultural settings, lost masculinity after rape in war can be particularly complex and nuanced, as traditional masculine roles and expectations are deeply rooted in cultural and societal norms. Therefore, understanding how survivors frame this and what they mean requires cultural sensitivity and non-judgmental listening. There are distinct ways in which survivors reflect on the loss of masculinity and the crisis of the self that they experience post sexual violence, and how they feel they are seen. These include a range of feelings, such as: (i) **lost masculinity** with its traditional 'warrior' and 'protector' associations, including feelings of weakness, emasculation, disempowerment, and failure; (ii) **social isolation**, including a sense of shame, exclusion, helplessness, and being seen as below other men; (iii) **increased vulnerability** and loss of autonomy; (iv) **emotional turmoil and relational challenges**, including anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation, and; (v) **disconnection and identity crises**, including feeling a loss of

community, belonging, and cultural identity. These notions are described in greater detail in Table A.4 in the Appendix.

In dealing with feelings about the loss of masculinity, survivors turn to secrecy and silencing, not disclosing their experiences, withdrawal and isolation from family and community because of feelings of shame, substance abuse to cope with pain and shame, and exhibit aggressive behaviour as a way to regain control and a sense of masculinity. Some take up traditional forms of healing through rituals, ceremonies or initiation rites to cure the 'loss of manhood' as presented below:

When we came here, a traditional ceremony was organised for us so that we were cured of the loss of manhood. You know when the enemy takes away your manhood, it has to be returned to you traditionally. During the traditional ceremony, certain rituals were performed after which you were either given a wife or reconnected with your former wife. In my case, I was given a wife, and since then, I have had two children, and I am free from the torment of male rape.

(in-depth interview, Ayilo I refugee settlement)

Others take up sports, hunting, or other traditionally masculine pursuits to 'reclaim' their masculinity.

It is important to note that these coping mechanisms may vary across different African cultures and contexts and may be influenced by factors such as urbanisation and exposure to globalised ideals of masculinity.

4.5 LIVING AS CRSV SURVIVORS IN REFUGEE SETTINGS

In the refugee settlements, CRSV against men and boys remains largely hidden and ignored; neglected in terms of recognition, resources, and policy provision, despite being documented in nearly every armed conflict in which sexual violence has been committed. Some of the traumatised male survivors are hiding in refugee settlements and other parts of Uganda. CRSV against men is one of the well-kept secrets that mostly exists as a rumour among South Sudanese refugee communities. Both perpetrators and victims of CRSV against men deny it to avoid accountability and consequences. They also deny it to maintain their community reputation and social status. Survivors fear being seen as weak or unmanly and fear being ostracised or rejected by family and community.

While some survivors choose to move to refugee settlements as a way to heal by contributing to the community, others have been retraumatised by finding that their abusers are also living in the refugee settlements, magnifying their insecurities. The following testimony highlights this:

I met one of the perpetrators of sexual violence in the settlement during the distribution of food rations. I first ran away, then returned to ascertain that he was the one. I looked at him closely and confirmed that he was my abuser. After noticing that I was one of his victims, he attempted to move away, but I kept following him closely while contemplating my next move. I wanted to grab him and annihilate his evil penis, but he took a bodaboda and disappeared. That was when I knew that some of the perpetrators of this disgusting rape are also refugees in Uganda. That week, I did not sleep. I was filled with fear and anger, and thought that the time to take my revenge had come. I wanted to do something very bad to him, but I did not know exactly what I wanted to do. I was afraid that he might come back and find me, overpower me, and rape me again. I was so insecure, and it was at this point that I changed my settlement.

(in-depth interview, Ayilo I refugee settlement)

Another victim that the researchers interviewed for this report had been raped multiple times in front of other prisoners, and he was forced to witness the rape of other men. After his release, the victim experienced social ostracism and stigma from his community, who viewed him as unmanly due to the rape. The victim has since moved to a refugee settlement in Adjumani and suffers from physical and emotional trauma, depression, and anxiety, even as he seeks space in the new community to heal. The extract below highlights this:

I left South Sudan to hide away from my tormenters, relatives, and friends because I wanted safety and time to heal. I feel different, I am withdrawn, I have no feelings for women, and I am a shadow of a man. I have not talked about my situation with professional people except people who knew about my situation from South Sudan. However, whenever I think about what had happened to me, I feel helpless, I withdraw to myself, and I go to my room and cry bitterly. I have learned to deal with the situation by learning new skills and being useful to the community.

(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)



Both perpetrators and victims of CRSV against men deny it to avoid accountability and consequences.

4.6 BARRIERS TO INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT AND CARE

A study conducted by Weare, Hulley and Craig (2024) established that the barriers to disclosure faced by male victims/survivors of sexual abuse are likely to differ considerably from those for female rape survivors. A holistic care model including medical, psychological, socioeconomic, and legal support for survivors of CRSV has been designed mainly to meet female survivors' needs while male survivors struggle for care in women-centred programmes (Alexandre 2024; Alexandre *et al.* 2022).

In refugee settlements, male survivors of CRSV fear disclosing their health conditions due to shame until they become worse or it is too late for treatment. In cases where survivors have dared to go to medical centres and talk about their conditions, healthcare providers have lacked the technical capacity to treat and care for CRSV cases against men. Most survivors are regarded as homosexual because of the myth that men cannot be raped. The cultural and societal taboos surrounding sexual violence against men make the survivors shun medical treatment. The negative social judgments and strong cultural norms that men are not supposed to be victims of rape force survivors to remain silent.

When my bleeding became worse, I went to the health centre for treatment, and after examination, the health officer told me to go and get a police statement before treatment. I was scared, went back home, and said to myself, these professionals are not here for people like us. I was raped, I am a refugee, I am bleeding, and I am sent to the police to get treatment! If I went to the police, what exactly would I have told them? That I have been raped by soldiers in South Sudan, I am bleeding, and the health personnel need a police statement to enable me to get treatment! My brother, I have chosen to survive locally!

(in-depth interview, Ayilo I refugee settlement)

The male survivors of rape reported that talking about their experiences is the hardest thing for them to do because they are often misunderstood. Some survivors claimed that the UNHCR suggest that some male refugees use a claim of CRSV as a cover to qualify for resettlement in a third country. Some of the CRSV survivors who have attempted to seek help have been turned away and were consequently more stigmatised, as in the following case:

After escaping from Aweil Prison, it was clear to me that I should leave South Sudan for good. I wanted to cross to Uganda and then go to another country. I was advised to travel to Old Kampala Police Station to fill out a form and then go to the Office of the Prime Minister. After bribing my way to get the form and to get interviewed, I applied to go to Canada, but my application was rejected because they did not understand how a man can be raped by other men. I was told that my case was weak, but I could appeal. I was devastated and enraged because I felt misunderstood by those I thought were knowledgeable. The following morning, I went to Adjumani, and since then I have been quiet.

(in-depth interview, Adjumani Town)

As a way of closing these loopholes, the Refugee Law Project (RLP) in Uganda took on the responsibility of identifying, lobbying, and advocating for male survivors of sexual violence. RLP asked the government and institutions assisting refugees and asylum seekers to recognise the problem and train service providers to offer medical care, counselling, and other assistance for male survivors of rape (Waddimba n.d.). Although there are institutions in Uganda (see Table 4.3 below) that may support the South Sudanese male survivors of rape, most survivors do not seek care due to the shame and stigma associated with their experience.

The male survivors of rape strongly believe that lost masculinity can be a significant aspect of their trauma, and healing may involve reclaiming and redefining masculinity in a positive, empowering way. This can be achieved through traditional healing practices, counselling, support groups, and ceremonies that restore honour and dignity. Most survivors we interviewed believed that traditional healing practices can restore a sense of masculinity, pride, and purpose, helping individuals reclaim their identity and reconnect with their cultural heritage. However, it is important to note that these ways may vary across cultures and communities and should be approached respectfully and sensitively. Many believe that spiritual and cultural revitalisation offers a holistic approach to restoring masculinity, addressing the physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person's life. Therefore, when it comes to addressing CRSV against men, it is essential to take into account cultural nuances when providing support and resources to survivors.

Table 4.3 Organisations that support survivors

Organisations	Support
Refugee Support Initiative (RSI)	Offers counselling, legal aid, and community support.
Refugee Law Project (RLP)	Provides legal assistance, counselling, and advocacy.
Centre for Victims of Torture (CVT)	Provides counselling, physiotherapy, and legal assistance.
South Sudanese Refugee Association in Uganda (SSRAU)	Provides community support and advocacy.
UNHCR Uganda	Offers protection services, including support for survivors of sexual violence.
International Organization for Migration (IOM) Uganda	Provides counselling, medical care, and legal support.
Local hospitals and health centres	Offer medical care and documentation of evidence.

Source: Authors' own.

5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report has provided crucial insights into the experiences and challenges prevalent in relation to male survivors of CRSV. In doing so, the study challenges the dominant discourses that have historically silenced these survivors. The report has documented the lived experiences of male survivors of CRSV as they navigate the treacherous terrain of refugee life, where the perpetuation of violence and trauma is starkly compared with the quest for survival and dignity. Our findings underscore the urgent need to decolonise the dominant frameworks that have traditionally shaped our understanding of sexual violence, displacement, and masculinity. By centring the voices and experiences of South Sudanese male survivors of CRSV, we have drawn attention to the ways in which gender, sexuality, and refugee status intersect to produce unique forms of vulnerability and resilience.

As we seek to theorise and respond to the global refugee crisis, this research serves as a stark reminder of the need to move beyond the reductionist logics of ‘moral and emotional reckoning’ and instead embrace a more nuanced and relational understanding of the lived experiences of male survivors in refugee settings. This is especially critical in a time of increasing gender backlash (well documented by the Countering Backlash programme) which is further worsening the conditions for differently placed individuals and communities. In Uganda, in recent years, President Museveni has showcased increasing authoritarianism to entrench power in his long-serving regime. This has resulted in shrinking space for activism and a clampdown on rights organisations, including the freezing of funds, which makes it difficult for many organisations to function freely (Edström *et al.* 2026). Considering how backlash in local contexts can be driven by higher-level trends and crises elsewhere, homophobic understandings and approaches can further intensify challenges for male survivors of CRSV. Combined with funding shortfalls owing to a steep decrease in humanitarian aid to cover the basic needs of refugee populations in Uganda (Kisembo and Luyiga 2026), this could have severe implications for resource allocation for refugees. More specifically, the support and care services needed by South Sudanese male survivors of CRSV may not be able to reach them or address their needs holistically.



Our findings underscore the urgent need to decolonise the dominant frameworks that have traditionally shaped our understanding of sexual violence, displacement, and masculinity.

This report calls for policymakers and implementers to relinquish the dominant gender binaries and heterosexual assumptions that have historically silenced male survivors of sexual violence. Instead, they must prioritise inclusive support services, legal accountability, and community engagement to address the unique needs and experiences of male survivors of CRSV. The report further challenges international and local institutions to acknowledge the intersectional dynamics of sexual violence, displacement, and masculinity, and prioritise the voices and experiences of rape survivors in policy and programme development. By doing so, we can work towards a more inclusive and equitable response to sexual violence in refugee settings, one that acknowledges the complex and nuanced experiences of all survivors.

Finally, this research serves as a testament to the resilience and courage of South Sudanese male survivors of CRSV in refugee settlements in Uganda. In voicing their experiences and trying to rebuild their lives as a part of healing in a refugee environment, the survivors navigate the intersections of vulnerability and resilience. As Edström *et al.* (2016) have demonstrated in their work with male survivors of sexual violence living as refugees in Uganda, despite the odds stacked against them, the survivors have developed resilience and mutual support through collective action. This report is a call to action for a more inclusive and nuanced approach to addressing sexual violence in refugee settings. By centring their voices and experiences, we can begin to dismantle the patriarchal and heteronormative structures that perpetuate sexual violence, creating a more just and peaceful world for all.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

This report underscores the urgent need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to address the needs of male South Sudanese refugee survivors of CRSV, especially amid a growing context of gender backlash that can further invisibilise their plight and render inadequate the provision of services and support they require. Here are some of our recommendations to stakeholders.

- **Establish specialised support services for male survivors of sexual violence**

Support services should include counselling and medical care to address their unique needs and challenges. Trained counsellors should provide survivors with a safe and confidential space to share their experiences, emotions, and concerns. Counselling can help the survivors process their trauma, manage stress, and develop coping strategies. The survivors may also require medical attention for physical injuries, STIs, or other health concerns. Specialised medical care can provide forensic examinations and documentation, STI testing and treatment, HIV post-exposure prophylaxis, and mental health assessments, and referrals for the survivors.

- **Provide training for service providers**

Service providers should receive sensitisation training on CRSV against men, trauma-informed care, and cultural sensitivity. This training is crucial to ensure providers can effectively support and care for the male survivors. It can help them to understand the dynamics of CRSV against men, and recognise signs and symptoms. It can also help service providers to address myths and misconceptions about sexual violence against men and understand the impact on survivors. Services should be accessible, including location, language, and physical accessibility. Services should address the physical, emotional, and social needs of survivors. This will lead to improved mental health and wellbeing, and enhanced physical health and safety of the male survivor of rape. It will increase trust and engagement with support services, better coping mechanisms, and resilience, and will empower the survivors to reclaim their dignity and promote their healing.



CRSV against men is under-reported, and increased funding can help raise awareness and encourage reporting.

- **Use a trauma-sensitive approach**

Service providers need a better understanding of trauma and its effects, and the need to create a safe and supportive environment for male survivors of sexual violence. Using trauma-sensitive language and communication and avoiding triggers and re-traumatisation is essential. These can foster trust and empowerment of the survivors. Service providers should also be aware that survivors come from different cultural backgrounds. Therefore, understanding cultural differences and nuances, recognising the impact of culture on trauma and recovery, and addressing cultural barriers and biases are important in care provision.

- **Increase funding for GBV programmes**

UNHCR and its partners should increase funding for GBV programmes, with a focus on initiatives addressing sexual violence against men, but not at the detriment of funding for programmes addressing sexual violence against women. This is crucial to ensure comprehensive support services for male survivors to help heal and rebuild their lives. CRSV against men is under-reported, and increased funding can help raise awareness and encourage reporting. Male survivors require specialised services, which can be resource-intensive. It is critical to support research to improve understanding of CRSV and GBV, informing evidence-based programming. Research outputs should be used to engage with communities, promoting social change, and challenging harmful gender norms.

- **Strengthen community outreach and engagement**

Strengthening community outreach and engagement through inclusive awareness campaigns and dialogue is crucial to address CRSV against men and GBV. There is a need to collaborate with local organisations, religious leaders, and influencers to address problems associated with acknowledging and addressing sexual violence against men. Sharing survivors' stories and their journeys of resilience through social media platforms can enable awareness and engagement with the issue. Engaging community leaders and outreach workers is crucial, especially on culturally sensitive approaches to handling survivors. Strengthening community outreach and engagement can create a supportive environment that encourages survivors to seek help, promotes inclusive dialogue, and challenges harmful gender norms and stereotypes.

- **Foster collaboration among stakeholder organisations**

Foster collaboration among stakeholders to ensure a coordinated response. It is critical to ensure a unified and comprehensive response and to leverage resources and expertise. Avoiding duplication of efforts and enhancing service delivery and accessibility is key. The stakeholders should include UNHCR, the

Government of Uganda (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Gender, etc.), partner organisations (non-governmental organisations, community-based organisations, etc.), community leaders and representatives, survivors and survivor networks. Collaboration ensures a comprehensive and coordinated response to address CRSV against men and its stigma and silencing, ultimately improving the lives of survivors and affected communities.

- **Support the emergence and work of peer support groups**

Peer support is essential to facilitate a safe space for male survivors to express themselves. It allows for individuals and groups to collectively heal and foster new identities, challenging

both isolation and the stigma and silencing that they face. Peer support and self-help groups need to be supported to go beyond reintegration policies for survivors, to also enable them to recognise the multiplicity of their identities and experiences and to construct new spaces of belonging. It is therefore crucial that support services enable a mix of therapeutic models, that move beyond an individualistic focus on addressing trauma to sustaining spaces of collective healing and (new) belonging.

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APPENDIX

Table A.1 Perpetrators of CRSV against men

Perpetrators	Targeted groups	Reasons for sexual violence
South Sudanese government forces (SPLA) and its militias: 1. Mathiang Anyoor (formerly known as the 'Dot Ke Bang' militia) – a Dinka-dominated militia from President Salva Kiir's home state of Warrap. 2. SPLA-IG (internal security) – a militia responsible for internal security and intelligence gathering. 3. Tiger Battalion – an elite militia unit responsible for special operations. 4. Gelweng militia – a militia from the Gelweng community in Northern Bahr el Ghazal.	• Civilians, especially women and girls, in areas perceived to support the opposition. • Women and girls in displacement camps and urban centres. • Men and boys, particularly those perceived to be opposition supporters.	• Rape is used to assert control and dominance over the population. • Sexual violence is used to perpetuate ethnic rivalries and hatred. • Rape is used as a form of revenge against perceived enemy groups. • Perpetrators believe they will not be held accountable for their actions. • A culture of aggression, masculinity, and dominance contributes to the perpetuation of sexual violence. • Weak military leadership and discipline allow soldiers to commit atrocities with impunity. • Unaddressed historical conflicts and grievances contribute to ongoing violence. • Sexual violence is used to control resources, such as land, oil, and water. • Rape is used as a tool to intimidate, displace, and terrorise populations. • Harmful traditional beliefs and practices perpetuate violence against women and marginalised groups.

Opposition forces (SPLA-IO and other rebel groups): 1. Nuer White Army (NWA) – a Nuer-dominated militia from the opposition stronghold of Unity State. 2. Jikany Nuer militia – a militia from the Jikany Nuer community in Unity State. 3. Odukpla militia – a militia from the Odukpla community in Upper Nile State. 4. Shilluk militia – a militia from the Shilluk community in Upper Nile State.	• Civilians, including women and girls, in areas under their control. • Women and girls associated with the government or perceived as government supporters. • Men and boys who are perceived to be government supporters.	• Rape is used to assert control and dominance over the population. • Sexual violence is used to perpetuate ethnic rivalries and hatred. • Rape is used as a form of revenge against perceived enemy groups. • Perpetrators believe they will not be held accountable for their actions. • A culture of aggression, masculinity, and dominance contributes to the perpetuation of sexual violence. • Weak military leadership and discipline allow soldiers to commit atrocities with impunity. • Unaddressed historical conflicts and grievances contribute to ongoing violence. • Sexual violence is used to control resources, such as land, oil, and water. • Rape is used as a tool to intimidate, displace, and terrorise populations. • Harmful traditional beliefs and practices perpetuate violence against women and marginalised groups.
Militia groups: 1. NWA (Nuer militia) 2. Gelweng militia (Dinka militia) 3. Mathiang Anyoor (Dinka militia) 4. Dot Ke Bang (Dinka militia) 5. Jikany Nuer militia 6. Odukpla militia 7. Shilluk militia 8. Fertit militia 9. Azande militia	• Civilians, especially women and girls, from rival ethnic groups. • Women and girls in displacement camps and urban centres. • Men and boys who are perceived to be from rival ethnic groups.	• Humiliate and degrade the targeted ethnic group. • Destroy cultural identity and masculinity. • Assert dominance and control over the enemy. • Punish or take revenge against perceived enemy groups. • Force displacement or expulsion from territory.

Tribal militias: 1. Dinka militias: - Mathiang Anyoor - Gelweng militia - Dot Ke Bang 2. Nuer militias: - NWA - Jikany Nuer militia 3. Shilluk militia 4. Azande militia 5. Fertit militia 6. Murle militia 7. Kachipo militia 8. Bari militia	• Women and girls from rival tribes. • Men and boys who are perceived to be from rival tribes.	• Break the spirit and cohesion of the targeted group. • Create fear, shame, and stigma. • Destroy social and cultural fabric. • Impose dominance and control over resources and territory. • Perpetuate hatred and intolerance.
Armed cattle herders: 1. Nuer 2. Dinka (Titweg/Gelweng) 3. Murle	• Women and girls from rival tribes or communities. • Men and boys who are perceived to be from rival tribes or communities.	• Rape is used to assert dominance over rival communities and territories. • Rape may be used to assert superiority over other ethnic or tribal groups. • Control over land, resources, and cattle routes may drive violence and sexual violence. • Harmful gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity perpetuate violence and exploitation. • Perpetrators may feel emboldened by the lack of consequences for their actions. • The availability of weapons enables armed cattle herders to commit violence and sexual violence. • Communities displaced by conflict or competition for resources may be more vulnerable to sexual violence. • Unresolved conflicts and historical tensions between communities can contribute to ongoing violence and sexual violence.

Foreign forces (Sudanese and Ugandan troops)	• Civilians, especially women and girls, in areas under their control. • Women and girls are perceived to be associated with the opposition.	• Perpetrators may exploit their position of authority and control. • Harmful gender stereotypes and toxic masculinity can perpetuate violence and exploitation. • Some soldiers may act on personal impulses or gratification. • War creates an environment conducive to sexual violence, exploiting vulnerable populations. • Impunity and lack of consequences enable perpetrators to continue committing atrocities. • Historical conflicts, ethnic tensions, and cultural norms can contribute to a culture of violence.
UN Peacekeepers (in some cases)	• Women and girls in displacement camps and urban centres. • Men and boys in their care and protection.	• Some peacekeepers may act on personal impulses or gratification. • Impunity and lack of consequences enable perpetrators to continue committing atrocities. • Peacekeepers may exploit their position of authority and trust. • Harmful attitudes towards women and girls perpetuate violence and exploitation. • Insufficient vetting, training, and supervision can contribute to a culture of impunity. • Peacekeepers may be dealing with their own trauma and stress, leading to unacceptable behaviour.

Source: Authors' own based on in-depth interviews; Human Rights Watch (2023); Amnesty International (2022, 2017b); UNMISS (2020); UNICEF (2019); UNMISS and OHCHR (2018); Edwards 2016; Pinaud 2021.

Table A.2 Victims of CRSV against men

Victims	Perpetrators	Reasons for CRSV against men
Nuer	• The SPLA and allied militias, particularly during the 2013–14 conflict. • The national army of South Sudan, dominated by the Dinka ethnic group, has been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Nuer men and boys. • Allied militias and tribal groups affiliated with the SPLA, such as the Titweng and Gelweng, have also been implicated in sexual violence against Nuer men. • Mathiang Anyoor a Dinka-dominated militia group, also known as the 'Brown Caterpillar', has been accused of committing sexual atrocities, including rape against Nuer civilian men. • Some reports suggest that other armed groups, such as the SPLA-IO have also perpetrated sexual violence against Nuer men and boys.	• The Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups have a long history of conflict, and sexual violence was used as a weapon to humiliate and terrorise the Nuer population. • The SPLA forces, dominated by the Dinka, viewed the Nuer as a threat to their power and sought to crush their political opposition through sexual violence. • The conflict in South Sudan has strong tribal undertones, and sexual violence was used to assert dominance and control over rival tribes. • Rape was used to emasculate Nuer men, strip them of their dignity, and break their spirit. • Sexual violence was used to spread fear and intimidation among the Nuer population, forcing them to flee their homes or surrender.
Dinka	• SPLA-IO: The main opposition force, led by Riek Machar, has been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Dinka men and boys. • Allied militias and tribal groups affiliated with the SPLA-IO, such as the NWA, have also been implicated in sexual violence against Dinka men. • Some reports suggest that other rebel groups, such as the South Sudan Liberation Army (SSLA), have also perpetrated sexual violence against Dinka men and boys. • In some cases, Dinka men and boys have also been subjected to sexual violence by civilians and armed groups from other ethnic groups, such as the Equatorian tribes.	• The Dinka were targeted by opposition forces and other ethnic groups, such as the Nuer and SPLA-IO, as part of the larger ethnic conflict. • The SPLA-IO and other opposition forces viewed the Dinka as associated with the government and targeted them for sexual violence as a means to undermine the government's power. • The conflict in South Sudan has strong tribal undertones, and sexual violence was used to assert dominance and control over rival tribes. • Rape was used to emasculate Dinka men, strip them of their dignity, and break their spirit. • Sexual violence was used to spread fear and intimidation among the Dinka population, forcing them to flee their homes or surrender. • Some cases of sexual violence against Dinka men were reportedly committed as retaliation for similar atrocities committed by Dinka forces against other ethnic groups.

Shilluk	• Government forces and allied militias in Upper Nile state.	• The Shilluk were targeted by rival ethnic groups, such as the Dinka and Nuer, as part of the larger ethnic conflict. • The Shilluk are indigenous to the fertile land along the Nile River, which made them vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence by rival groups seeking to control the region. • The Shilluk were perceived to support the government, making them a target for opposition forces and other armed groups. • The Shilluk have a rich cultural heritage and economic resources, which made them a target for rival groups seeking to exploit and dominate them. • Rape was used to emasculate Shilluk men, strip them of their dignity, and break their spirit. • Sexual violence was used to spread fear and intimidation among the Shilluk population, forcing them to flee their homes or surrender.
Murle	• The SPLA has been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Murle men and boys. • Allied militias and tribal groups affiliated with the SPLA, such as the Bor Dinka and Nyarweng Dinka, have also been implicated in sexual violence against Murle men. • Some reports suggest that other armed groups, such as the SPLA-IO, have also perpetrated sexual violence against Murle men and boys. • The Lou Nuer militias, which are part of the SPLA-IO, have been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Murle men and boys.	• The Murle were targeted by rival ethnic groups, such as the Dinka, Nuer, and Lou Nuer, as part of the larger ethnic conflict. • The Murle are indigenous to the Pibor and Akobo regions, which made them vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence by rival groups seeking to control the area. • The Murle were perceived to support the government or opposition forces, making them a target for rival groups. • The Murle have a rich cultural heritage and economic resources, which made them a target for rival groups seeking to exploit and dominate them. • Rape was used to emasculate Murle men, strip them of their dignity, and break their spirit. • Sexual violence was used to spread fear and intimidation among the Murle population, forcing them to flee their homes or surrender. • The Murle have historically been subject to displacement and marginalisation, making them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. • The Murle are located in a strategic region, making them vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence by rival groups seeking to control the area.

Bari	• The SPLA has been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Bari men and boys. • Allied militias and tribal groups affiliated with the SPLA, such as the Bor Dinka and Nyarweng Dinka, have also been implicated in sexual violence against Bari men. • Some reports suggest that other armed groups, such as the SPLA-IO, have also perpetrated sexual violence against Bari men and boys. • Some local militias from other ethnic groups, such as the Mundari and the Pojulu, have also been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Bari men and boys. • Some neighbouring tribes, such as the Nyangwara and the Kakwa, have also been accused of perpetrating sexual violence against Bari men and boys.	• The Bari were targeted by rival ethnic groups, such as the Dinka and Nuer, as part of the larger ethnic conflict. • The Bari are indigenous to the area around Juba, which made them vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence by rival groups seeking to control the capital city. • The Bari were perceived to support the government or opposition forces, making them a target for rival groups. • The Bari have a rich cultural heritage and economic resources, which made them a target for rival groups seeking to exploit and dominate them. • Rape was used to emasculate Bari men, strip them of their dignity, and break their spirit. • Sexual violence was used to spread fear and intimidation among the Bari population, forcing them to flee their homes or surrender. • The Bari have historically been subject to displacement and marginalisation, making them vulnerable to violence and exploitation. • The Bari are located in a strategic region, making them vulnerable to attacks and sexual violence by rival groups seeking to control the area.
Other ethnic groups	• Government forces (SPLA) • Opposition forces (SPLA-IO) • Militias affiliated with both sides • Tribal militias • Criminal gangs • Men and boys from various smaller ethnic groups, are also affected by sexual violence.	• Ethnic rivalry and territorial control. • Political allegiance and perceived support for opposing forces. • Cultural and economic factors, such as resources and strategic locations. • Gender and masculinity, with rape used to emasculate and break the spirit of men. • Fear and intimidation, to spread terror and force displacement. • Historical grievances and displacement. • Geographic location, with strategic regions being targeted.

Source: Authors' own based on in-depth interviews, Human Rights Watch (2023); Amnesty International (2022, 2017b); UNMISS (2020); UNICEF (2019); UNMISS and OHCHR (2018); Edwards 2016; Pinaud 2021.

Table A.3 Forms of CRSV against men

Sodomy

Men and boys have been subjected to forced sodomy, often at gunpoint, by perpetrators seeking to humiliate, terrorise, and control. This form of sexual violence has been used to break spirits and destroy dignity, punish and control, inflict pain and suffering, and humiliate and dehumanise.

Survivors of sodomy have suffered severe physical trauma, including injuries and infections, psychological distress, PTSD, depression, anxiety, stigma and shame, leading to social isolation and marginalisation and difficulty accessing medical and psychological care. Perpetrators of sodomy, often armed groups and military forces, have acted with impunity, perpetuating a culture of silence and shame. This form of sexual violence against men is often done to avenge the killing of a family member.

Rape with objects

Rape with objects, also known as non-penetrative sexual violence, has been a horrific aspect of the South Sudanese Civil War. Men and boys have been subjected to this form of sexual violence, which involves the use of objects such as weapons (guns, bayonets, etc.), sticks, bottles, stones, and other blunt objects.

Perpetrators have used these objects to violate men and boys in public and private settings, causing severe physical and emotional trauma. This form of sexual violence has been used to humiliate and dehumanise, punish and control, inflict pain and suffering, break spirits, and destroy the dignity of men.

Sexual torture (genital trauma)

Sexual torture of men in the South Sudanese Civil War has been a gruesome and devastating aspect of the conflict. Perpetrators use sexual torture to extract information or confessions, punish and control, humiliate and dehumanise, inflict severe physical and psychological pain. Men and boys are subjected to various forms of sexual torture, including genital mutilation, electric shocks to the genitals, forced objects into the anus or penis, beating and whipping of the genitals, forced nudity, and sexual humiliation.

Sexual slavery

The war has led to widespread sexual violence, including sexual slavery, with men and boys being abducted, detained, and subjected to forced sexual labour. Men and boys are forced into sexual servitude, for extended periods, especially by the Murle and Dinka.

Sex slavery of men has been a lesser-reported aspect of the conflict, but it is a harsh reality that many men and boys have faced. The trauma and stigma surrounding male sexual slavery have led many survivors to suffer in silence, fearing rejection, stigma, and retaliation.

Forced nudity

Forced nudity is a violation of human dignity and a war crime, perpetuating a culture of impunity and silence. Men and boys have been forcibly stripped of their clothing, often in public, as a tactic of war to humiliate and dehumanise, break spirits and destroy dignity, control, and inflict psychological trauma.

This form of sexual violence has been perpetuated by armed groups and military forces, often as a precursor to other forms of sexual violence, such as rape and sodomy. Survivors of forced nudity have suffered severe psychological distress, including shame, guilt, anxiety, stigma and social isolation, difficulty accessing medical and psychological care, and feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness.

Public rape

Public rape of men has been a devastating aspect of the conflict, used as a weapon of war to humiliate, terrorise, and control populations. Men are raped in public as form of spectacle to humiliate and terrorise the community. This is often done in retaliation for military defeat. The losing factions rape men from the winning faction as a form of revenge.

Gang rape

Multiple perpetrators raping a single victim in public or in detention centres. Gang rape of men was used as a weapon of war, perpetrated by both government forces and opposition groups. This has been documented in various reports, including those by human rights organisations and the UN.

Victims of gang rape in South Sudan have suffered physical and emotional trauma, including injuries, stigma, and psychological distress. Many have been left with lasting physical and emotional scars, and some have been shunned by their families and communities due to the stigma of male sexual violence. The use of gang rape as a weapon of war in South Sudan has been perpetuated by a culture of impunity, where perpetrators are rarely held accountable for their actions. Efforts to address sexual violence in the country have been hindered by a lack of political will, limited access to justice and support services for survivors, and a pervasive culture of silence and stigma.

Mass rape

The mass rape of men has been a devastating and under-reported aspect of the conflict. The mass rape of men has been perpetuated by armed groups and military forces, perpetuating a culture of impunity and silence. Men and boys have been subjected to mass rape, often in public and at gunpoint, by perpetrators seeking to humiliate and dehumanise, punish and control, inflict severe physical and psychological pain, break spirits, and destroy dignity.

Survivors of mass rape have suffered severe physical injuries and disabilities, psychological trauma, including PTSD and depression, stigma and social isolation, difficulty accessing medical and psychological care, and feelings of shame, guilt, and helplessness.

Ethnic-based rape

Ethnic-based rape of men has been a devastating and targeted aspect of the conflict. Men from specific ethnic groups, such as the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluk, have been subjected to rape and sexual violence as a weapon of war, aimed at humiliating and dehumanising specific ethnic groups, punishing perceived opponents, inflicting shame and stigma, and breaking community spirit.

Survivors of ethnic-based rape have suffered severe physical and psychological trauma, stigma and social isolation within their own communities, difficulty accessing medical and psychological care, and feelings of shame, guilt, and helplessness. Perpetrators have used ethnic-based rape to perpetuate a cycle of violence and revenge, exacerbating the conflict.

Forced marriage

Men are forced to marry women from rival ethnic groups and they are also sexually assaulted. Men and boys have been forcibly married to women or girls, often as a tactic of war to punish and control communities. It is used to inflict emotional and psychological trauma and break family and social bonds.

Revenge rape

Revenge rape of men in the South Sudanese Civil War has been a brutal and devastating tactic used by armed groups and military forces. Men from rival ethnic groups such as Nuer and Dinka have been subjected to rape as revenge for perceived past injustices or attacks.

Men have been subjected to rape as a form of revenge against their families, communities, or ethnic groups, aimed at punishing perceived opponents, humiliating and dehumanising men and their families, inflicting shame and stigma on entire communities and perpetuating cycles of violence and revenge. Survivors of revenge rape have suffered severe physical and psychological trauma, stigma and social isolation, difficulty accessing medical and psychological care, feelings of shame, guilt, and helplessness. Revenge rape has been used to terrorise and control populations, perpetuating a culture of impunity.

Source: Authors' own based on fieldwork.

Table A.4 The intersection of CRSV against men and loss of masculinity

Loss and impact of loss	Comments
Loss of status as a 'warrior' (<i>muharib</i>) or 'community protector' (<i>hami almujtamae</i>).	Survivors: • Viewed as 'weak' (<i>daeif</i>) or 'vulnerable' (<i>muearrad</i>), contradicting traditional warrior values. • The 'emasculatation' (<i>khisiy</i>) challenges their sense of self as a strong and capable warrior. • Feel disconnected from the community and feel isolated from their comrades leading to feelings of 'loneliness and rejection' (<i>alwahdat walrafd</i>). • Feel emotionally distressed and the trauma of rape can lead to 'anxiety' (<i>qalaq</i>), 'depression' (<i>aiktiaab</i>), PTSD, and 'suicidal thoughts' (<i>'afkar antiharia</i>). • Face difficulty readjusting and reintegrating into civilian life or returning to their pre-war status. • Fear being seen as vulnerable and hesitate to seek help or disclose their experience. • Internalise shame and stigma, leading to 'self-blame' (<i>allawm aldhaatiu</i>) and 'low self-esteem' (<i>aihtiram aldhaat mutadaniy</i>). • Their experiences lead to a sense of 'purposelessness' (<i>allaahadaf</i>) and disconnection from their previous role as warriors. • Struggle with emotional and physical intimacy in personal relationships. • 'Feel betrayed' (<i>yasheur bialkhiana</i>) by their own body, their attackers, or their community's response.
Shame and stigma (<i>alear wawasmat alear</i>) for being overpowered (<i>taghalab</i>) or feminised (<i>tanith</i>).	Survivors: • 'Emasculated' (<i>khisiy</i>) and are seen as less manly or weak. • Stripped of their position of 'power' (<i>qua</i>) and 'respect' (<i>aihtiram</i>). • Vulnerable and are viewed as helpless. • 'Shamed' (<i>bialkhajal</i>) and 'ostracised' (<i>manbudh</i>) by their community. • Forced to hide their experiences and 'remain silent' (<i>abiq samitan</i>). • 'Powerless' (<i>ejiz</i>) and unable to protect themselves or others. • Treated as objects rather than as people. • Seen as sexual objects, rather than warriors. • Pushed to the margins of society, rather than being valued as a contributing member.

Fear of being seen as weak (<i>daeif</i>) or vulnerable (<i>muearrad</i>).	Survivors: • Develop 'emotional pressure' (<i>aldaght aleatifiu</i>) and are seen as emotional and vulnerable, rather than 'strong' (<i>qawiun</i>) and 'stoic' (<i>rawaqi</i>). • Perceived as weak or vulnerable, rather than strong and capable warriors. • May be seen as needing help and support, rather than being 'self-sufficient' (<i>muktafiat dhatiana</i>). • May be targeted by others who exploit their vulnerability. • May feel ashamed of their vulnerability and perceive it as a 'personal failure' (<i>alfashal alshakhsiu</i>). • Seen as failing to meet traditional masculine ideals of strength and invulnerability. • 'Lose autonomy' (<i>tafaqad alhukm aldhaatia</i>) and 'lose control' (<i>tafaqad alsaytara</i>) over their own lives and bodies. • Stigmatised as vulnerable and weak, leading to 'social isolation' (<i>aleuzl aliajtimaeiu</i>) and 'marginalisation' (<i>altahmish</i>).
Difficulty maintaining traditional gender roles.	Survivors: • May have difficulty suppressing emotions to avoid 'vulnerability' (<i>tajanub aldaef</i>). • May have difficulty in prioritising strength and stoicism over 'emotional expression' (<i>alrawaqit ealaa altaebir aleatifii</i>). • May be forced to avoid vulnerability or 'perceived weakness' (<i>alduef almalhuz</i>). • May be pressured to conform to 'masculine norms' (<i>alqawaeid ald hukuria</i>). • May be forced to hide their emotional pain or trauma to maintain a 'tough exterior' (<i>alkharij saeba</i>). • May have difficulty seeking help or support due to perceived weakness. • May struggle to accept 'emotional support' (<i>aldaem aleatifiu</i>) or 'comfort' (<i>raha</i>). • May feel obligated to maintain a strong, 'stoic façade' (<i>wajihat rawaqia</i>). • May have difficulty with 'emotional intimacy' (<i>alealaqat alhamimat aleatifia</i>) or 'connection' (<i>aitisal</i>). • May feel trapped by traditional gender expectations.

Struggles with emotional expression (<i>altaebir aleatifu</i>), seen as unmanly (<i>juban</i>).	Survivors: • May have difficulty verbalising feelings or emotions. • May suppress emotions to avoid vulnerability. • May feel numb or 'disconnected from emotions' (<i>munfasilat ean aleawatif</i>). • May struggle to express emotions in a way that feels authentic. • May have difficulty accessing and processing emotions due to 'trauma' (<i>sadma</i>). • May feel overwhelmed by 'intense emotions' (<i>mashaeir shadida</i>). • May struggle to regulate emotions, leading to 'mood swings' (<i>taqalib almizaj</i>) or 'outbursts' (<i>nawbat alghadab</i>). • May feel like their 'emotions are stuck' (<i>aleawatif ealiqa</i>) or 'frozen' (<i>mujamada</i>). • May have difficulty finding words to describe emotional experiences.
Feeling disconnected from ancestral and cultural heritage.	Survivors: • May lose their 'cultural identity' (<i>alhuiat althaqafia</i>) and 'sense of belonging' (<i>alshueur bialiantima</i>). • May feel disconnected from traditional practices (<i>almumarasat altaqlidia</i>) and customs (<i>jamaruk</i>). • May feel disengaged from ancestral roots (<i>judhur al'ajdad</i>) and legacy (<i>'iirth</i>). • May feel shame and guilt related to cultural and ancestral expectations (<i>altawaqueat althaqafiat wal'ajdad</i>). • May experience the inability to pass on cultural traditions to future generations. • Feel like a part of their cultural identity (<i>alhuiat althaqafia</i>) has been stolen. • Feel the disconnection from community and cultural support systems. • Feel they no longer belong in their cultural or ancestral community (<i>mujtamae al'ajdad</i>). • May lose cultural pride (<i>alfakhr althaqafiu</i>) and a sense of purpose (<i>alshueur bialhadaf</i>). • Feel their cultural heritage (<i>alturath althaqafiu</i>) has been tarnished or tainted.

'Loss of respect' (<i>fuqdan aliaihtiram</i>) from family and community.	Survivors: • May lose 'status' (<i>hala</i>) and 'prestige' (<i>hyba</i>). • May be viewed as 'less capable' (<i>'aqalu qudra</i>) or 'weaker' (<i>'adeaf</i>). • May be shunned or ostracised by their community or family. • May 'lose leadership' (<i>tafqid alqiada</i>) or 'authority roles' (<i>'adwar alsulta</i>). • Viewed as 'tainted' (<i>mulawath</i>) or 'damaged' (<i>talif</i>). • Perceived as 'less worthy of respect' (<i>'aqalu jadarat bialaihtiram</i>) or 'dignity' (<i>karama</i>). • May feel 'stripped of honour' (<i>jaradt min alsharaf</i>) or 'pride' (<i>fakhar</i>). • May internalise shame and 'self-blame' (<i>allawm aldhaatiu</i>).
Difficulty fulfilling traditional masculine responsibilities.	Survivors: • May prioritise provider and protector roles over 'personal wellbeing' (<i>alrafah alshakhsiu</i>). • May hide vulnerability to maintain a sense of control. • May avoid emotional expression or intimacy. • May focus on physical strength and resilience. • May neglect personal needs and feelings to fulfil duties. • May maintain a sense of 'invincibility' (<i>la taqhar</i>). • May avoid vulnerability or perceived weakness. • May prioritise family and community expectations over personal healing. • May sacrifice personal wellbeing to maintain a 'sense of masculinity' (<i>alshueur bialrujula</i>).
Feeling like a 'failed man' (<i>rajul fashil</i>) or 'failed warrior' (<i>muharib fashil</i>).	Survivors: • May be seen as failing to meet societal expectations of 'strength' (<i>qua</i>), 'courage' (<i>shajaeatan</i>), and 'invulnerability' (<i>alhasana</i>). • May feel they have lost their sense of 'self-masculine identity' (<i>alhuiat aldhekuriat aldhaatia</i>). • May be seen as less manly or 'stripped of their masculinity' (<i>tajriduhum min rujulatihim</i>). • May feel ashamed or guilty for not being able to defend themselves. • May be perceived as weak or vulnerable, rather than 'strong' (<i>qawiun</i>) and 'capable' (<i>qadir</i>). • May be seen as failing to conform to traditional gender roles and expectations. • May feel like they are lesser than other men who have not experienced rape. • May 'internalise the shame and stigma' (<i>aistieab alear wawasmat alear</i>), leading to self-blame and low self-esteem.

Struggles with ‘spirituality’ (<i>alruwhania</i>) and ‘connection to ancestors’ (<i>aitisal al’ajdad</i>).	Survivors: • May feel disconnected from ‘ancestral guidance’ (<i>tawjih al’ajdad</i>) and ‘wisdom’ (<i>hikma</i>). • May lose faith in ‘spiritual beliefs’ (<i>muetaqadat ruhia</i>) and ‘practices’ (<i>almumarasat</i>). • May have difficulty finding ‘meaning’ (<i>maenaa</i>) and ‘purpose’ (<i>ghaya</i>) in life. • May feel abandoned by ancestors (<i>aslaf</i>) and ‘spiritual forces’ (<i>alquaa alruwhia</i>). • May struggle to reconcile trauma with spiritual beliefs. • May feel a loss of ‘cultural’ (<i>thaqafia</i>) and ‘spiritual identity’ (<i>alhuiat alruwhia</i>). • May have difficulty connecting with ‘ancestral lands’ (<i>’aradi al’ajdad</i>) and ‘traditions’ (<i>altaqalid</i>). • May feel like a disconnection from the ‘sacred’ (<i>muqadas</i>) and ‘divine’ (<i>’iilhi</i>). • May struggle to find spiritual support and healing. • May feel a loss of ‘spiritual resilience’ (<i>almurunat alruwhia</i>) and ‘coping mechanisms’ (<i>aliat altaeawun</i>).
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Source: Authors’ own based on in-depth interviews, April–May 2024.

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