



TRIPLE JEOPARDY: Protecting At-Risk Refugee Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

*Older, Disabled, Male Survivors and Sexual Minority Refugees
in Chad, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda*

DECEMBER 2014

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



**Welcome the stranger.
Protect the refugee.**

BACKGROUND

Refugees across the globe are vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence, whether due to conflict in their countries of origin or because of the instability inherent in the migration process. [Stigma, shame and fear](#) – of reprisals by perpetrators, marginalization by the community or mistreatment by service providers – inhibit many from disclosing experiences of sexual and gender-based violence.

Laudable international efforts have begun to focus on the prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence in the contexts of humanitarian crisis and forced migration. But there is increasing awareness that certain refugee populations – including [older people, people with disabilities, male survivors and sexual minorities](#) – are often overlooked in sexual and gender-based violence programming.

Facing ongoing exposure to sexual and gender-based violence in countries of asylum, and often unable to access services and protection, these refugees are effectively placed in [triple jeopardy](#):

- ◆ as survivors of sexual and gender-based violence
- ◆ as refugees and asylum seekers in foreign lands, and
- ◆ as members of groups that face stigmatization, stereotyping and marginalization.

HIAS, a nonprofit organization that protects refugees in 14 countries across five continents, recognized the lack of widespread sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response programming targeted to older people, people with disabilities, male survivors and sexual minorities.

To develop a deeper understanding of the scope of the problem, HIAS undertook a [yearlong study](#), conducting [217 interviews](#) in four countries with large refugee populations – [Chad, Kenya, South Africa and Uganda](#). This research included in-depth interviews with 112 refugees in each of the four categories of people at risk for sexual and gender-based violence, detailing their experiences and personal observations. In addition, researchers interviewed representatives of 102 organizational stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, UNHCR and refugee community groups.

The refugees interviewed came from [13 countries of origin](#) across Africa with [40% from the DRC](#), [27% from Sudan](#) and [12% from Somalia](#).

Survivors described acts of sexual and gender-based violence by many different types of [perpetrators](#). They included neighbors, police, soldiers, rebel group members, prison wardens and fellow inmates in countries of origin. One man described being imprisoned by the militia in his country of origin and placed in a cell with five men who raped him for a week. Other people suffered at the hands of smugglers, other refugees, intimate partners and family members, some of whom acted as caregivers to older or disabled refugees in countries of asylum.

The types of [violence and abuse](#) inflicted upon the refugee survivors included a catalog of horrific offenses – rape, gang rape, genital torture, abduction, threats of violence and emotional exploitation. A transgender man told of being verbally threatened by a local man who then entered the survivor's home and committed violent rape; no neighbors responded to pleas for help.

The refugees suffered a range of [physical consequences](#) from the sexual and gender-based violence inflicted upon them. People experienced genital damage, rectal tears and injuries to all parts of their bodies. Some contracted sexually transmitted infections; several women became pregnant. The mother of a disabled girl described how her daughter, unable to walk, was assaulted and impregnated by unknown men in their country of origin and gave birth to a medically-needy infant in the country of asylum.

[Psychological consequences](#) included loss of sleep and appetite, self-harm, self-isolation, substance abuse, feelings of low self-esteem, depression and anxiety, particularly when coupled with the loss of the ability to work. Some survivors had been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. One gay survivor of sexual and gender-based violence in both the country of origin and country of asylum confided that he no longer felt the will to live.

TRIPLE JEOPARDY: Protecting At-Risk Refugee Survivors of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence aims to highlight the unique vulnerability and needs of older, disabled, male survivors and sexual minority refugees, while recognizing that the many women and girls who fall outside these categories encounter equal difficulties and risks of sexual and gender-based violence.

The report identifies the particular **protection gaps** that these at-risk refugees face; highlights **good practices**; and makes **recommendations** to government agencies, UNHCR, NGOs and refugee communities to increase the inclusion of these four at-risk groups in sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

TRIPLE JEOPARDY sets out six Key Recommendations to stakeholders to ensure that older, disabled, male survivors and sexual minority refugees access their basic rights and tailored protective services:

- 1 **Train** staff, with the assistance of specialized NGOs, to improve identification of these at-risk refugees, undertake outreach to them and provide them with appropriate services
- 2 **Coordinate** services by building robust referral mechanisms for at-risk refugees, including at SGBV Working Groups, and encourage involvement of specialized NGOs and refugee community leaders
- 3 **Engage** refugee communities in prevention and response by involving men and boys in prevention and empowering at-risk survivors
- 4 **Identify** at-risk survivors by opening satellite offices, sending staff to refugee neighborhoods and hiring refugee organizers, frontline staff and interpreters of diverse backgrounds, genders and ages
- 5 **Accommodate** the unmet needs of at-risk refugees and their families with funding and programs to facilitate their access to safe shelter, medical care, mental health services, legal aid, livelihood opportunities and social assistance; modify facilities and services to ensure access by refugee survivors with disabilities, and
- 6 **Measure** the scope of the problem by collecting data on the incidence of sexual and gender-based

violence against at-risk refugees, disaggregated by age, type of impairment, sexual orientation and gender identity; monitor and evaluate the integration of older, disabled, male and sexual minority refugees in sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response programs.

PROTECTION GAPS

The protection gaps experienced by older, disabled, male survivors and sexual minority refugees are grounded in deep **cultural barriers**, including xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia. These gaps, coupled with the loss of social support inherent in forced migration, commonly drive these refugees into lives of acute isolation. **Legal barriers**, such as limitations on locations where refugees may live, inefficient asylum systems and the criminalization of homosexual acts, play direct and indirect roles in increasing at-risk refugees' exposure to sexual and gender-based violence.

Against this backdrop, refugees who are older, disabled, male survivors and sexual minorities face a wide range of **unmet basic needs** in countries of asylum. These include barriers to safe shelter, livelihood opportunities, police protection and, in some cases, community support. Physically disabled and some older refugees encounter additional challenges securing basic needs as a result of their lack of mobility. Male refugee survivors who are disabled by sexual violence and unable to work are deeply affected by their failure to conform to the gender role of family "breadwinner." Sexual minorities who are shunned by other refugee community members struggle to secure safe shelter.

Many of the agencies charged with preventing or responding to sexual and gender-based violence have **insufficient resources** to provide comprehensive protective services to these at-risk refugees. They also **lack the training or capacity** to tailor services, create welcoming environments or coordinate outreach and referrals to respond to at-risk refugees' unique needs. The **leadership** from UNHCR headquarters on the protection of at-risk refugees has not fully trickled down to its field operations and Implementing Partners. Finally, **inadequate collection of data** on the incidence of sexual and gender-based violence experienced by older people, people with disabilities, male survivors and sexual minorities impedes the funding and development of appropriate programmatic responses.

GOOD PRACTICES

Despite this challenging protection environment, researchers identified valuable good practices, including:

- ◆ UNHCR's 2011 *Action Against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence: An Updated Strategy*, which identifies the protection concerns of older, disabled, male survivors and sexual minority refugees, and its *SGBV Facilitator's Guide*, which provides tools to respond to their needs
- ◆ Coordination meetings held by sexual and gender-based violence service providers
- ◆ Specialized psychosocial counseling
- ◆ Prevention programming engaging male refugees
- ◆ Refugee-led support groups for survivors
- ◆ Scattered housing for at-risk refugees unable to find protection in refugee or host communities
- ◆ Legal services to help at-risk refugees secure refugee status and residency in countries of asylum, and
- ◆ Expedited resettlement for exceptionally at-risk refugee survivors.

With *TRIPLE JEOPARDY*, we hope to empower service providers and refugees to create environments where at-risk refugees are able to access greater protection from sexual and gender-based violence, and to allow survivors to fully recover and rebuild their lives in dignity.

ABOUT HIAS

HIAS is an international nonprofit organization that protects refugees in 14 countries across five continents, rescuing people whose lives are in danger for being who they are. We protect the most vulnerable refugees, helping them build new lives and reuniting them with their families in safety and freedom. We also advocate for the protection of refugees to ensure that displaced people are treated with the dignity they deserve. Guided by our Jewish values and history, we bring more than 130 years of expertise to our work with refugees. Since 1881, HIAS has assisted more than 4,500,000 people worldwide.

www.hias.org

An Older Refugee Survivor Receives Aid but Faces Ongoing Challenges

Rose, a 52 year-old Congolese woman, was living on the streets in Durban, South Africa, without any means of support and unable to speak the language. She had fled from her home in Kivu, DRC in 2011 after a group of military men stabbed and attacked her. Several raped her.

Escaping to South Africa, Rose was lost and alone until a concerned passerby helped her with temporary accommodation. After being rejected by three aid organizations, Rose finally found a shelter that provided housing, food and clothing for three months; the staff also arranged for short-term counseling, where she was able to get psychosocial help for the first time. But many issues lingered. With her asylum application still pending, Rose struggles to pay for transport for document renewals. Livelihood opportunities are limited and Rose's applications get nowhere: employers consider her "too old," she said, echoing a common experience of older refugee survivors. As a result, Rose goes back to the streets for subsistence, collecting bottles and cans for recycling. And she wonders: "How will I survive?"