

Building national system capacity for Medico-legal evidence for sexual violence in conflict-affected settings

The World Health Organization (WHO) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC)/United Nations Action Project on Strengthening Medico-Legal Services for Sexual Violence Cases in Conflict-Affected Settings aims to support national capacity in conflict-affected countries, by addressing key gaps in policy and practice related to the collection and use of forensic evidence of sexual violence in these settings.

The problem:

In the past 20 years, increasing attention has been paid to ending impunity for perpetrators of sexual violence in conflict-affected settings and to achieving assistance and justice for survivors. While there have been significant advances, there remains a lack of clarity about what medico-legal evidence should be collected to support national and international criminal justice processes.



Medico-legal evidence:

Medico-legal evidence is at the intersection of medical and justice processes and appropriate implementation requires coordination between the range of actors and sectors involved in prevention of, and response to, sexual violence. These systems are frequently disrupted by conflict and may lack the capacity to provide care for survivors and to collect, analyse and utilize medico-legal evidence.

The expert consultation:

The expert meeting aimed to review lessons learnt from previous and ongoing efforts to increase capacity for collection and use of forensic data, develop policy responses and address practical challenges of working on this issue in conflict-affected settings.

Participants included experts in forensic medicine, forensic lab services, police, law, and service provision. They represented governments, United Nations agencies, and nongovernmental organizations. They shared experiences from a range of countries, including Colombia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Lebanon, Peru, South Africa, Sri Lanka and Timor-Leste.

Key challenges

Common challenges identified at the expert consultation included:

1. Knowledge/awareness gaps

- Lack of awareness in the community of where to access care
- Lack of awareness of service providers of their sectoral role
- Stigma in the community and among service providers

2. Resource constraints

- Lack of human resources
- Lack of training
- Lack of materials needed for medico-legal service provision
- Lack of money to provide needed services

3. Systems weaknesses

- Consistency of services/access across a country
- Lack of coordination between sectors
- Lack of/insufficient guidance/ standards
- Capacity imbalance between different sectors

The tool

A toolkit comprised of practitioner –focused job aides addressing the key gaps identified at the meeting has been developed and is currently undergoing review in preparation for field testing.



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