



# NO SAFE PLACE:

A LIFETIME OF VIOLENCE FOR CONFLICT-AFFECTED  
WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SOUTH SUDAN



WhatWorks

TO PREVENT VIOLENCE

Violence Against Women and Girls  
in Conflict and Humanitarian Crises

SUMMARY REPORT 2017



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# GLOSSARY

AOR	Adjusted odds ratio
CIUK	CARE International United Kingdom
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DfID	Department for International Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
FGD	Focus group discussion
GBV	Gender-based violence
GWI	Global Women's Institute at George Washington University
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IPV	Intimate partner violence
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PoC	Protection of civilians
RSS	Republic of South Sudan
SEA	Sexual exploitation and abuse
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SSTC	South Sudan Transitional Constitution
TAG	Technical advisory group
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
VAWG	Violence against women and girls
WHO	World Health Organization
WPE	Women, Protection and Empowerment



# BACKGROUND

## Introduction

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) is a serious human rights violation and a significant global health and security issue. Studies suggest that the rates, perpetrators and types of VAWG fluctuate during conflict; and there is some evidence that sexual violence against both women and men increases during conflict.<sup>1</sup> The global prevalence of sexual violence among refugees and displaced persons in humanitarian crises is estimated to be 21.4%, suggesting that approximately one in five women who are refugees or displaced by an emergency experience sexual violence.<sup>2</sup> Recent studies indicate that intimate partner violence (IPV) may be more common than conflict-related sexual assault;<sup>2</sup> however, both IPV and conflict-related violence are under-reported in these settings.<sup>3</sup> Though several studies have collected robust data on VAWG in humanitarian settings, many experts argue that our overall understanding of the issue remains limited.<sup>1,2</sup>

This lack of data is especially true in South Sudan where war and armed conflict have become all too common for decades. In 2015, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), the Global Women's Institute (GWI) at the George Washington University and CARE International UK (CIUK) launched a comprehensive study to understand the prevalence, types and patterns of violence against women and girls in South Sudan who live in areas of conflict. The research is part of the United Kingdom's Department for International Development's (DfID) global programme entitled, *What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls* ('What Works') to address this dearth of evidence.

The study aims to fill substantial gaps in understanding on the intersections of VAWG and conflict in specific, war-torn areas of South Sudan. The principle aims of the study were:

- To collect data on VAWG in South Sudan to inform policy and programmes for the South Sudanese government, local and international NGOs, and the wider international community; and
- To improve, adapt, apply and disseminate appropriate methodological approaches to determine the prevalence, forms and patterns of VAWG in conflict contexts.

It should be noted that the study sites were chosen to provide insight regarding VAWG in areas currently experiencing or with a history of conflict, and the results do not represent the population of South Sudan as a whole. The study included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative component of the study consisted of a population-based household survey administered to a representative sample of women aged 15-64 in three locations: Juba City, Rumbek Centre and the Juba Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites. These sites have very different characteristics, in terms of ethnicity and experiences of conflict, and were chosen to give a diverse picture of the experiences of women and girls in areas of South Sudan impacted by the ongoing conflict. A smaller sample of men was interviewed in Juba City and Rumbek about experiences of violence, including perpetration and victimisation. Qualitative interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with community members and key informants (e.g. NGO staff, government representatives, local leaders, etc.) in each of the three sites, as well as in two additional settings: a PoC site in Bentiu and rural areas of Juba County. More extensive details on study methodology can be found in the annex of the report.

## War and Armed Conflict in South Sudan

South Sudan endured decades of conflict prior to gaining independence from Sudan in 2011. Following 50 years of civil war, Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, providing the groundwork for South Sudan's independence in July 2011. Since the signing of the CPA, tensions between Sudan and the new Republic of South Sudan have continued with smaller conflicts over the contested oil fields and territories in the border areas, as well as a new insurrection by rebel groups in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States of Sudan.

Yet just two years after gaining independence, a new armed conflict emerged. This conflict started in December 2013, following several months of deteriorating political relations between the president, Salva Kiir Mayardit, and opposition members led by his former vice president, Riek Machar. Although the 2013 Crisis largely originated



Peter Biro/IRC

as a political dispute, the existing undercurrent of ethnic tensions—primarily between Machar’s Nuer tribe and Kiir’s Dinka tribe—quickly rose to the surface and became a defining feature of the Crisis.<sup>4</sup> Tens of thousands were killed, and almost three million were displaced from their homes, including more than 200,000 who were forced to flee to United Nations (UN) PoC sites across South Sudan.<sup>5</sup>

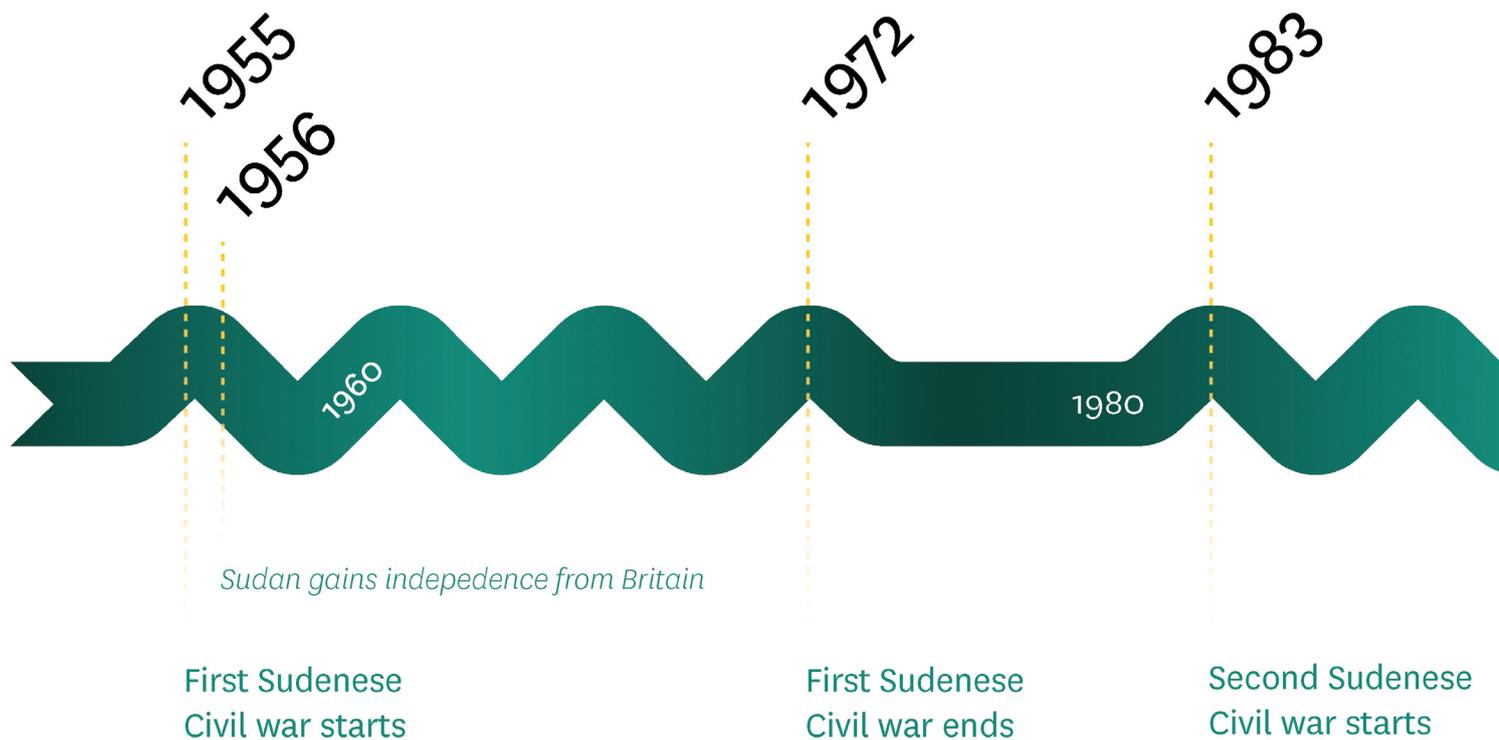
Although the parties signed a peace agreement in August 2015, violence between forces loyal to President Kiir and Vice President Machar broke out again in July 2016. In addition to targeted political and ethnic attacks, mass crime and looting occurred, and several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) servicing the PoC camps were looted of thousands of tons of food, equipment and delivery vehicles.<sup>6</sup>

Amidst this backdrop of warring political factions in South Sudan, there have been ongoing inter-communal conflicts. Inter-communal conflicts often centre on localised tensions such as land for cattle grazing; accumulation of

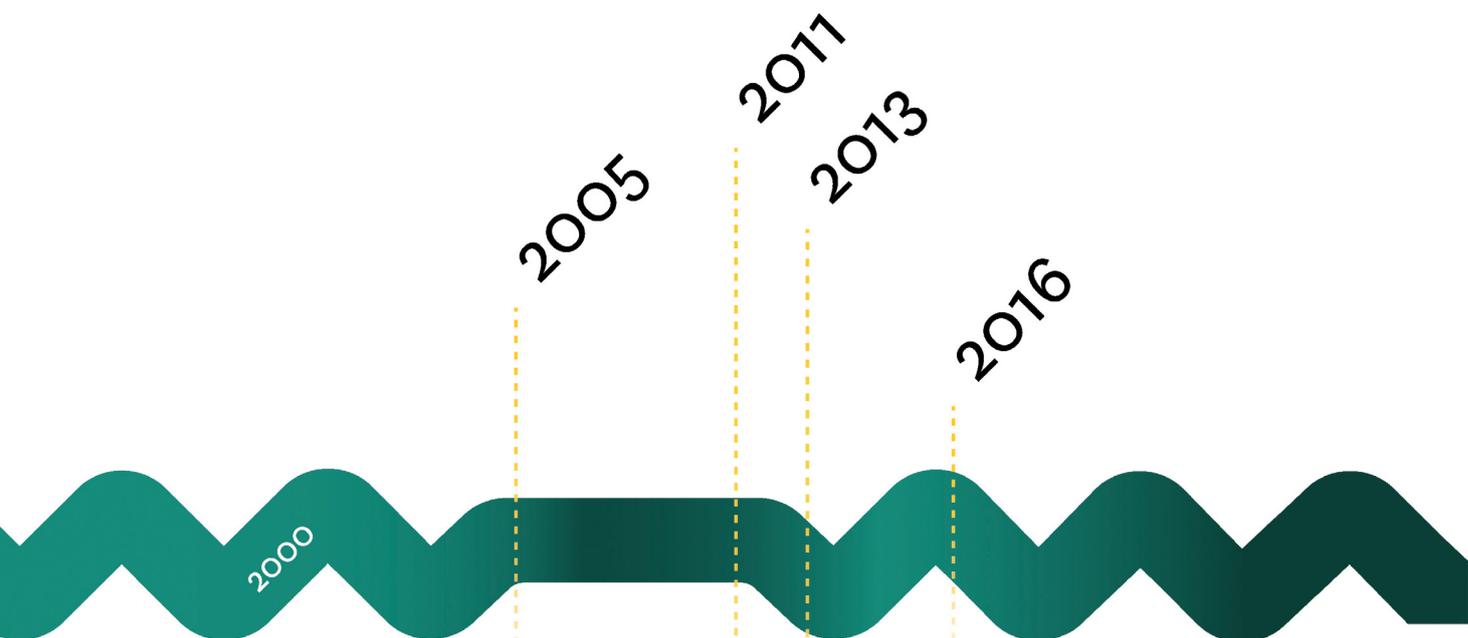
wealth (via cattle raiding); and abduction of women and girls for marriage.<sup>8</sup> Many of these incidents trigger revenge attacks/killings from the victimised community, causing a cycle of revenge attacks that perpetuate continuing insecurity. Although inter-communal conflicts have existed for years in South Sudan, they have become even more common in times of war and famine when families who have lost their cattle seek ways to regain their wealth by raiding neighbouring communities.

Increased VAWG is only one aspect of the negative effects that women and girls in South Sudan have faced as a result of the conflict and instability that has affected their lives through the various iterations of the Civil War, ongoing armed conflict and inter-communal tensions. This ongoing violence has exacerbated instability and poverty throughout large parts of the country and has been a continual impediment to the development of the country, including the country’s education, political and economic systems, which has left little to no institutional structures to deliver services or to facilitate decision-making.<sup>9</sup>

# PHASES OF CONFLICT IN SUDAN



Following Sudan's independence from Britain in 1956, there have been two distinct periods of fighting. The first lasted from 1955 to 1972.



### Second Sudanese Civil war ends

The second Sudanese Civil War culminated in the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005.

### Continued political tensions re-erupt on July 7 2016

Since July, 2016, more than 200,000 people have fled to neighbouring countries, and over 38,000 IDPs are seeking shelter at the UN House PoC sites in Juba.

### 2013 Crisis conflict ends with peace agreement in August 2015

### 2013 Crisis conflict starts

*South Sudan becomes the newest independant nation*

### Constant smaller conflicts

Since the signing of the CPA, tensions between Sudan and the new Republic of South Sudan (RSS) have continued with smaller conflicts over the contested oil fields and territories in the border areas, as well as a new insurrection by rebel groups in South Kordofan and Blue Nile States of Sudan.

In addition to the ethnic element of the 2013 Crisis, general inter-communal conflicts have been a continuing facet of life in the newly independent South Sudan.

# SOUTH SUDAN STUDY LOCATIONS

## Juba Protection of Civilian Site

Central Equatoria State



Setting	- Camp
Ethnicity:	- Primarily Nuer, some Equatorian tribes
Main affecting conflict(s)	- 2013 Crisis
Data Collected	- Quantitative (with women and men) and qualitative

The PoC sites were created on UN bases around the country in response to the ethnic targeting of the 2013 Crisis. Almost 40,000 civilians—a vast majority from the Nuer tribe—were residents of Juba’s two PoC sites at the end of 2016.

PoC sites were not designed for long-term habitation and have limited humanitarian services available to the communities. Since the July 2016 Crisis, the situation has worsened. There is overcrowding due to the influx of IDPs, and non-related families sometimes must live together in communal 4x5m2 shelters for several months.

Poverty, insufficient livelihoods opportunities and poor infrastructure (schools, health services, etc.) are also difficulties faced by PoC site residents.

## Juba County

Central Equatoria State



Setting	- Rural
Ethnicity:	- Equatorian tribes (Primarily Bari)
Main affecting conflict(s)	- Civil War and Intercommunal Attacks
Data Collected	- Qualitative only

Juba County is, beyond Juba City itself, primarily rural. While, according to the 2008 census the population of the county was almost 400,000, extensive immigration into Juba City suggests the population is much greater today. As in the capital city, residents of Juba County have experienced each of three most recent conflicts affecting the wider country.

In addition to being affected by these conflicts, widespread poverty and years of under-development have shaped the situation in Juba County. As with Juba City, issues of crime—particularly while traveling by road—also affect the county.

## Rumbek

Lakes State



Setting	- Rural
Ethnicity:	- Dinka
Main affecting conflict(s)	- Civil War & intercommunal attacks
Data Collected	- Quantitative (with women and men) and qualitative

Dominated by the Dinka tribe, residents of Rumbek Centre in Lakes State are primarily dependent on a pastoralist lifestyle. Cattle raids, alone or in combination with the abduction or rape of women and children, are common occurrences.

This violence only compounds the underlying issues that affect their communities noted by Rumbek residents: poverty; lack of health care; limited education; and few livelihoods opportunities.

CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

SUDAN

D.R. CONGO



**Bentiou Protection of Civilian Site**  
Unity State



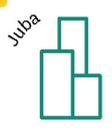
Setting	- Camp
Ethnicity:	- Nuer
Main affecting conflict(s)	- 2013 Crisis
Data Collected	- Qualitative only

The Bentiou PoC site was established in Unity State in December 2013 under similar conditions to the Juba PoC sites. In this PoC site, the majority Nuer population have been directly affected by violence and displaced from their homes in primarily rural areas.

Bentiou has experienced multiple outbreaks of violence since its establishment, both within and directly outside of the site, causing significant congestion and deterioration of camp conditions.

It also has been subject to a proliferation of arms due to the on-going conflict. At the time of data collection in June 2016, almost 100,000 people were residing within the site.

**Juba City**  
Central Equatoria State



Setting	- Urban/ Peri-urban
Ethnicity:	- Mix of Equatorian, Dinka & other tribes
Main affecting conflict(s)	- Civil War and 2013 Crisis
Data Collected	- Quantitative (with women and men) and qualitative

During the Second Sudanese Civil War, the capital city of Juba was a garrison town primarily controlled by the Khartoum government with an estimated population of 250,000 in 2005. Since the signing of the CPA (2005) and independence (2011), Juba has grown into a bustling city with a wide cross section of tribes from throughout South Sudan residing within its environs.

Since 2013, internally displaced persons from around the country have flocked to Juba. The economy has faltered, primarily due to the falling price of oil and decreased agricultural output in response to the conflict. Crime, from armed gangs in town to armed robbers on the roads surrounding town, is also common. Despite these challenges, Juba has considerably better services and access to government systems and international aid compared to other regions in South Sudan,

# STUDY RESULTS

## Key Findings

This is the first large-scale research study of violence against women and girls (VAWG) in several areas of South Sudan that have known war and conflict for many years. The study found that VAWG is pervasive in these conflict zones with up to 65% of women and girls experiencing physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. These are among the highest rates of VAWG in the world.<sup>10,11</sup>

The research results show that up to 33% of women in these areas experienced sexual violence from a non-partner, and many of the incidents were directly related to a raid, displacement or abduction. Women and girls who live in Juba Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites are the most vulnerable to this type of assault—almost a quarter of women who experienced this violence reported that they experienced multiple incidents of sexual violence.

While women and girls were often subject to sexual violence by armed actors, they also felt the impact of conflict in a number of other ways. Experiences of displacement, the breakdown of rule of law, increases in crime and the normalisation of violence also affect VAWG.

These indirect experiences of conflict have an impact on violence in the home. Intimate partner violence (IPV) was the most common form of VAWG found in the study. In Rumbek alone, 73% of women who are or have been partnered reported they experienced IPV in their lifetime. Times of conflict exacerbate IPV, as women reported increased brutality and frequency of assaults due to the chaos and economic insecurity of war.

Long-standing discriminatory practices such as bride price, child and forced marriage and polygamy, in addition to years of war, have created an environment where violence against women and girls is common in these parts of South Sudan, with many subjected to violence at the hands of family members throughout their lives. Bride price is the custom of a man giving money or cattle in exchange for a girl to marry, a practice that affects VAWG throughout the lives of women and girls. Many patriarchal practices, such as child marriage, wife inheritance and abduction are all closely linked to bride price.

Most survivors of violence in South Sudan do not seek help after experiencing an assault due to shame, stigma and a culture of silence. A breakdown in the rule of law has also contributed to an environment of impunity where there are no consequences for men who commit acts of violence. To reduce violence against women and girls in these areas of South Sudan, humanitarian efforts need to address the root causes and drivers of VAWG as well as provide direct service delivery to these communities<sup>a</sup>.

## Violence in the Community

The results of the quantitative survey show that the populations in all settings studied have been severely affected by armed conflict, albeit with different characteristics and intensity at different times. During the lengthy Sudanese civil wars, almost the entire country was affected by violence at some stage of the conflict, while the 2013 Crisis primarily affected the population of Juba City and the Juba and Bentiu PoC sites, among the study sites.

## Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls

Sexual assault of women and girls during conflict in South Sudan was a serious concern of study participants. Up to 33% of women reported experiencing non-partner sexual violence (including rape, attempted rape or any other unwanted sexual acts) during their lifetime. Perpetrators of non-partner assault can include police officers or other armed actors, strangers or known persons.

During conflict, women and girls may be raped by armed actors as a way to terrorise rival communities, or may be caught up during an armed attack and raped. Rape can also be specifically used as a weapon of revenge. This includes specifically targeting women and girls to draw men out of hiding and into further violence. Women and girls in the PoCs also described being unsafe and reported that rape commonly occurred in areas such as the toilets or bath houses, as well as when they left the PoC sites to farm, collect firewood or engage in livelihoods.

<sup>a</sup> For more information on the research and detailed results, please see the main report, The Global Women's Institute and International Rescue Committee. (2017). *No Safe Place: A Lifetime of Violence for Conflict-Affected Women and Girls in South Sudan*. Washington DC: George Washington University and London: IRC.

Table 6: Prevalence of ‘lifetime’ and ‘past 12 months’ non-partner sexual violence reported by female respondents (by site)

	JUBA n = 477 (%)	RUMBEK n = 804 (%)	JUBA PoCs n = 963 (%)
Ever experienced non-partner sexual violence (including rape, attempted rape, unwanted touching and being forced to undress)	28	33	29
Experienced non-partner sexual violence in the past 12 months	5	8	11

Women who had experienced rape or sexual assault in Rumbek and the Juba PoCs noted that this experience most commonly occurred during a raid/attack, abduction or displacement (70% of female respondents who had experienced sexual violence in Rumbek; 75% in the Juba PoC sites).

Although a majority of women who experienced non-partner sexual assault experienced this violence only once in their lifetime, a considerable proportion of women in all three sites reported they had experienced this violence multiple times.

In particular, women in the Juba PoCs reported experiencing incidents of non-partner sexual violence many times.

### Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys

Male respondents also reported having experienced sexual violence, although less frequently than women and girls. Overall, 9% of men in Juba and 6% in Rumbek reported having experienced some type of sexual violence (including: rape, attempted rape, unwanted touching or being forced to undress).



Mary Ellsberg/GWI



Kate Geraghty/CARE/Fairfax media

## Factors Contributing to Pervasive VAWG in Areas of Conflict

In addition to women being directly targeted for killing, rape and sexual assault during periods of conflict, the prolonged wars have resulted in a generalised breakdown of the rule of law and an environment where the use of violence is widely accepted, impunity is widespread and opportunistic crime is rampant. Long-standing cultural practices that promote gender inequality also serve to reinforce use of violence in the home and are discussed in further detail page 17.

## Normalisation of Violence

The normalisation of violence in communities affected by insecurity may influence VAWG. Guns and other weapons are common throughout the country, particularly in the hands of youth and civilians. The prevalence of these weapons desensitises those conducting acts of violence and facilitates the continuing cycle of revenge killings, rapes, etc. The increase of arms in the community and associated criminality and violence seem to be contributing to a rise in sexual assault and IPV.

As a response to this increasing insecurity, men are often seen to be preventing women and girls from leaving the house without permission, working outside the home or attending school. While viewed as protective acts by men, women's lack of agency in making these decisions is striking.

## Breakdown of the Rule of Law

Related to the growing culture of violence across South Sudan, overall there is a breakdown in the rule of law—particularly since the onset of the armed conflict in 2013. Traditional mechanisms to solve incidents of VAWG at the community level have broken down, and access to the formal justice system is limited. This has contributed to an environment where there are no consequences for men who commit acts of violence. This was particularly seen in more rural areas, such as Rumbek, which are further from the central government in Juba.

**'In the past, there was rule of law so women and girls were not attacked. Now there is no proper justice system, no functioning rule of**

**law. Now the government has no power. They have the same number of guns as civilians.'**

– Key informant Rumbek

### Opportunistic Crime

An increase in criminal activity is linked to poverty, particularly in Juba City, but also in the surrounding county and PoC sites. Chief among these are incidents of non-partner sexual assault perpetrated by armed men or gangs associated with criminal elements in and around Juba. There were numerous reports of

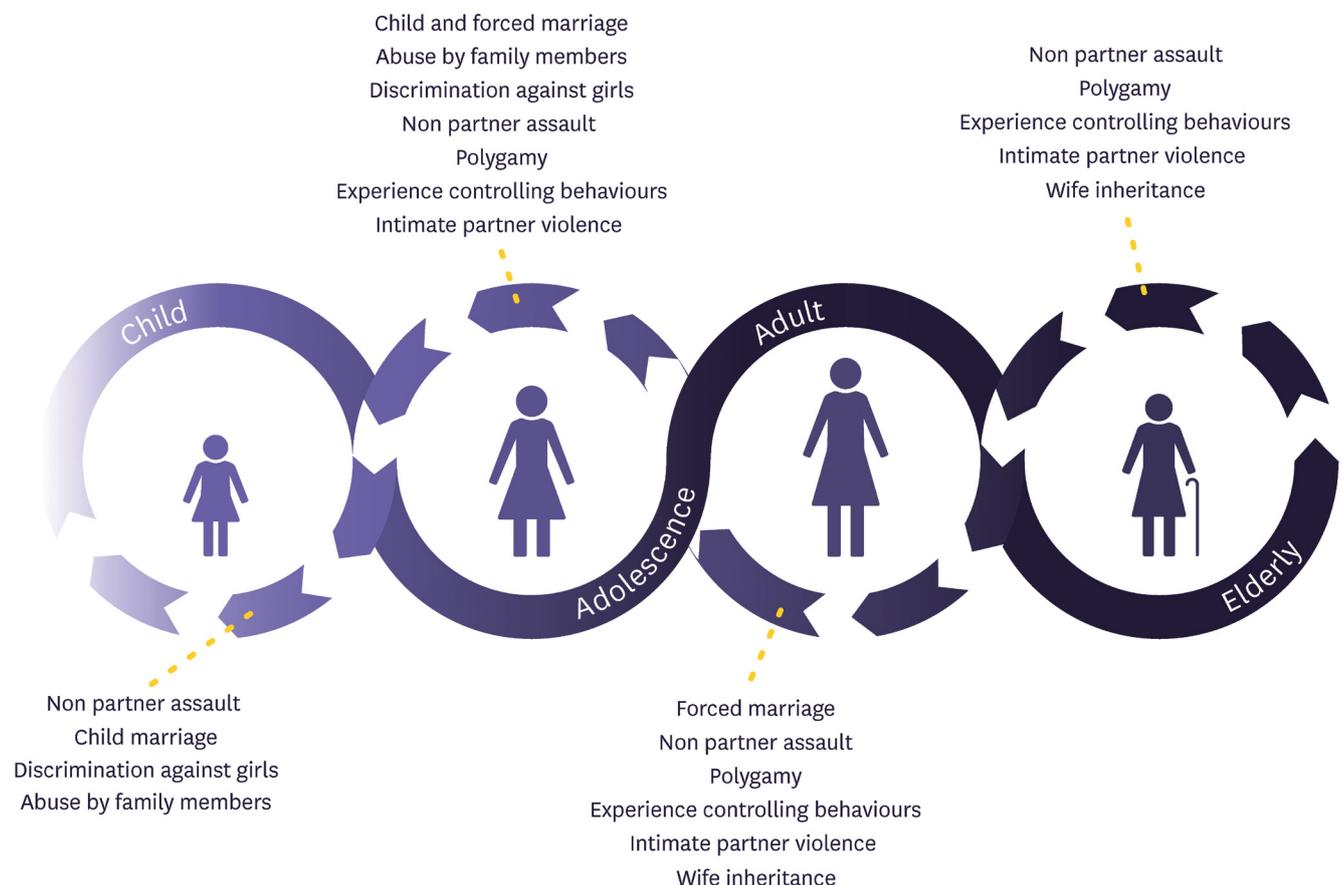
women attacked by armed gunmen and criminals when leaving the PoC sites or communities to engage in farming, collecting firewood or engaging in livelihoods. Participants noted that the security of girls and women on the roads has decreased in recent years.

**'When women go out at night [to the distribution point] to be the first in line, men were sleeping down and waiting for us. They surrounded us. They have guns, knives, sticks and pangas.'** – Woman in Bentiu PoC site

**People who carry guns here, not soldiers, are causing more violence in our community. They are the ones raiding cattle, stealing other people's properties, raping women and girls and creating insecurity at the borders and in the bush.**

– Male key informant in Rumbek

Figure 1: Violence against women and girls across the life cycle



## Violence in the Home

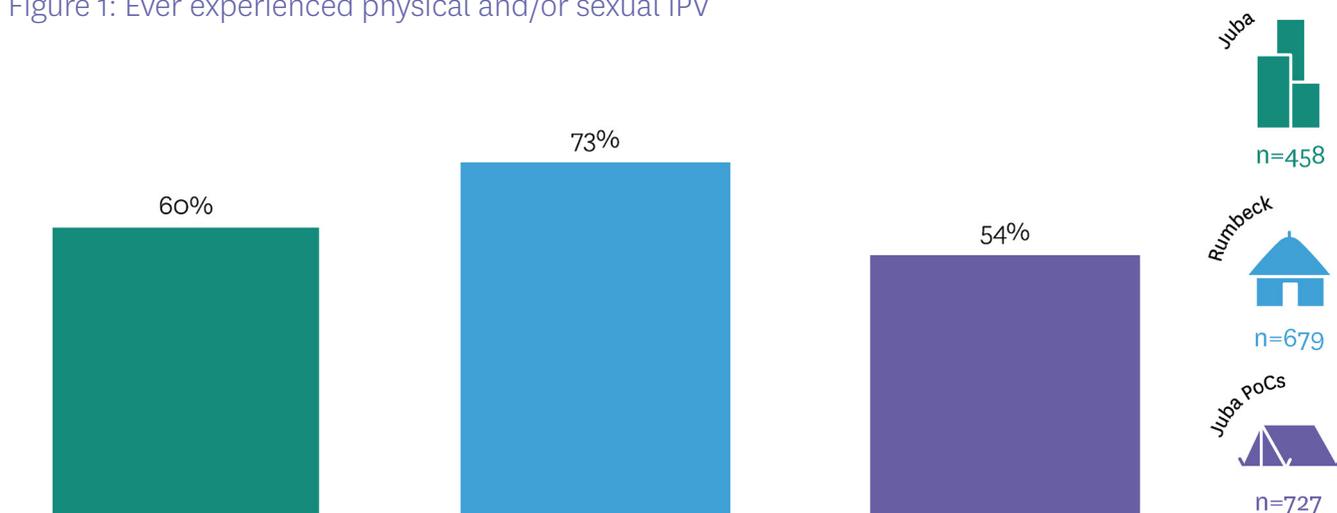
### Intimate Partner Violence

Even in times of relative calm, married women in South Sudan face continued violence, particularly in their own homes perpetrated by their husbands and other male relatives. At all the sites in the study, more than half reported experiencing physical or sexual violence from their partners over the course of their lifetimes, with almost three-quarters of women and girls in Rumbek reporting this type of violence.

Not only is physical IPV extremely common throughout the study sites, but it is also notable for its brutality and frequency. Almost

three-quarters of women who reported IPV experienced the most severe forms of violence (defined as being hit, kicked or dragged, choked or burnt, or threatened with a knife or gun) compared to moderate violence (defined as being slapped, pushed or shoved, or having something thrown at her). In addition to the severity of the violence, women in each site experienced frequent acts of violence. This is particularly true for women residing in the Juba PoC sites, where almost 50% of respondents, who had experienced physical violence, reported experiencing this violence many times in the past 12 months.

Figure 1: Ever experienced physical and/or sexual IPV



Percentage of ever-married women who reported experiencing physical and/or sexual IPV in their lifetime

Lifetime prevalence of sexual IPV ranged from 44% in the Juba PoCs to 50% in Rumbek. In qualitative interviews, women discussed how marital rape is a 'normal' practice that happens in a marriage, and in many cases, respondents did not view forced sex within marriage as a type of violence.

Acts of IPV often lead to physical injury and are a significant source of psychological distress. Approximately 60% of women in Rumbek and the Juba PoCs who experienced physical or sexual IPV reported experiencing an injury as a result. Almost 40% of women in the Juba PoCs reported severe injuries (broken bones, teeth, internal injuries, miscarriage, permanent disability or disfigurement) because of the IPV they experienced.

During the survey, women and girls were asked if the IPV they experienced had an effect on their overall wellbeing. A majority of women in all three sites reported that it did affect their wellbeing (from 59-74%).

According to focus group discussions in all sites, the distress caused by IPV was so great that some women committed suicide due to the lack of options available to her.

### Intimate Partner Violence and Conflict

While IPV is common in South Sudan both during times of conflict and times of relative stability, many drivers of VAWG are

**Everything comes back to the cows...**

– Female key informant in Rumbek

**‘It is common in our custom to beat a woman when she has made a mistake—not to the extent of killing her completely, but to discipline her.’**

– Male chief in Rumbek

worsened due to on-going conflict in the country, exacerbating women’s experiences of violence. Study participants spoke about how the same factors that impact non-partner sexual violence, including the normalisation of violence, breakdown of rule of law, displacement and increasing poverty due to the conflict, were affecting experiences of IPV. In particular, they emphasised how the brutality of IPV had increased since the start of the 2013 conflict.

**‘Before the crisis, we were fighting. Now they are removing our eyes; they are kicking us in the stomach.’** – Woman in Bentiu PoC site

Rising rates of poverty are key concerns for residents of South Sudan in each of the study areas. These may exacerbate the household stresses that were noted above as drivers of incidents of IPV and may lead to more IPV, particularly physical violence. In the PoCs women and girls experience additional stresses, such as cramped living conditions, dependence on international aid and lack of assets associated with being displaced from their home communities. During data analysis, being displaced during her lifetime was found to be associated with experiencing IPV for women and girls in Rumbek<sup>c</sup>. Similarly, for respondents in the Juba PoCs, women and girls who had experienced an attack on their home community or village or who had experienced a direct conflict event were more likely to have experienced IPV in their lifetime<sup>d</sup>.

Male PoC site residents also reported feeling that they are less able to fulfil their roles, as men, such as marrying, owning property and providing for their family. They often perceive these circumstances as causing them to lose respect within their communities, which they associate with incidents of violence.

## Discriminatory Practices in the Home that Harm Women and Girls

### Bride Price<sup>e</sup>

The custom of a man supplying a bride price in exchange for a girl to marry is common throughout South Sudan (from 58% to 88% of ever-married women in the various sites said that a bride price was paid) and is essential for understanding how women and girls are treated throughout the course of their lives. In many South Sudanese communities, the bride price is, at least partly, paid for in cows by the family of the husband to the male relatives of the woman.<sup>12,13</sup> In many regions of South Sudan, wealth is equated with the number of cows a man owns. Marriage is therefore seen as a transaction that enables families to acquire wealth.

For the extended family, the bride price is a primary vehicle for wealth accumulation, therefore, patriarchal practices, such as early marriage, wife inheritance and abduction are all closely linked to bride price. Girls may be forced to marry as a strategy to gain or retain cattle, and girls are also abducted by men so they can avoid paying bride price.<sup>12,13</sup> Conflict, and the associated increases in poverty and economic instability, has a particularly important effect on the payment of bride price.

**‘Abduction of young girls occurs in order to take them as wives because men have no money/cows for dowry’.** – Woman in Rumbek

### Violence by Family Members

Both women and men noted that physical violence against girls in the home was a common form of violence. Parents, uncles and

<sup>c</sup>In multivariate modeling after controlling for socio-demographics (age, education, etc.), marital/partner characteristics (polygamy, husband’s education and profession) and experiences of controlling behaviours.

<sup>d</sup>After controlling for socio-demographic factors (age, poverty), marital/partner characteristics (polygamy) and experiences of controlling behaviours.

<sup>e</sup>The correct term for payment by the husband’s family to the bride’s family is ‘bride price’. ‘Dowry’ usually refers to payments by the bride’s family to the husband. Only bride price is practised in South Sudan; however, the terms are often used interchangeably when describing the practise in English. We have chosen to retain the word ‘dowry’ when textual citations are used.

brothers all could be perpetrators. While commonly described as a ‘disciplinary measure’ by participants, the reasons given for physical violence against girls are typically related to girls’ prospects for bride price.

## Child and Forced Marriage

Bride price is also an important factor in the high rates of forced marriage in the household survey. For women who have been married, early marriage was common throughout each of the study sites with a vast majority of female respondents married before they left adolescence. Up to a quarter of female respondents reported that they had no choice in the decision to get married, meeting the study’s definition of a ‘forced marriage’.

Increasing levels of poverty, particularly in relation to the 2013 Crisis and inter-communal violence, have affected the practice of child and forced marriage. Participants reported that families are increasingly marrying their daughters at young ages as a means of survival due to dire economic conditions. Women and men also spoke about the impact of economic insecurity and how it leads to more women and girls being abducted for marriage.

**‘Women and girls have no voice—uncles/fathers manage the dowry. Fourteen- and fifteen-year-old girls can be married off to sixty-year-old men. Girls have no choice and mothers have no rights to refuse either.’**

– Female key informants in Rumbek

## Polygamy

Polygamy<sup>f</sup> is another patriarchal practice that reinforces women’s second-class status in South Sudan, as men are the primary decision makers when it comes to deciding to marry additional wives. Polygamy is common also across all three sites and contributes to increased tensions within the household. Suspicion and distrust between husband and wives and between co-wives can lead to violent episodes, particularly when coupled with poverty and limited resources in large households.

**‘They can even go to marry another wife without telling the wife. They just come with the new wife to the home. This incident will cause heart attack to the first wife.’**

– Woman in Juba PoC site

Both men and women acknowledged that tensions related to polygamy are particularly acute during experiences of displacement. In the PoC sites, co-wives and their children live with their husband in the same tent and conflicts over the distribution of water, food and other resources are particularly intense. Women living in the PoCs even reported having to be in the same bed and turn their face to the wall while their husbands had sex with one of their co-wives.

## Wife Inheritance

Wife inheritance refers to the practice whereby after the death of a husband, a woman is forced to marry his brother or another male relative. In this study, a majority (63%) of women who were widowed and then re-married reported that their new husband was related to their original husband (e.g. a brother, cousin, etc.). This may also contribute to psychological and physical abuse.

**‘The women are inheritable when husbands pass away. The next of kin or brother of her husband takes her to be a wife without her consent. This affects most women psychologically and gives them mental illness. She may be tortured by the next of kin or her husband’s brother.’**

– Young man in Rumbek

## Adultery

Accusations of adultery can have a severe impact on a woman’s life, and is punishable by imprisonment. The concept of adultery in South Sudan is typically used to extend male control of women’s bodies, and generally refers to any perceived extra-marital relationship that a woman might have with another man – including after divorce or her husband’s death. Even when a woman has no choice in the matter and is raped by someone who is not her husband, it may be viewed as adultery by the community.

**‘In case the husband heard [about the rape] and asked the wife, she will totally refuse to tell the husband because he might claim the rapist knew her and it was an agreement. Then he will divorce the wife.’**

– Woman in Juba County

<sup>f</sup>In this report, we use the term polygamy, rather than polygyny, as this was how key informants and community members termed the practice of a man having many multiple wives.



Kate Geraghty/CARE/Fairfax media

## After the Violence: Services and Support

### Non-Partner Assault: Where can she go?

Most cases of sexual assault go unreported. Around half of all women surveyed reported that they told no one about their experiences of non-partner sexual violence. For these violations, the shame and stigma associated with rape often prevented women from discussing the event with anyone.

For a survivor who does decide to tell someone about the event, she would typically first turn to a relative or close friend first for support. For survivors of sexual assault, the decision to report the crime to the police happens very infrequently and commonly depends on whether the survivor knows the identity of the perpetrator. If the perpetrator's identity is not known, the survivor generally would not report the crime to any formal system, as there is no mechanism for identifying the person, and the stigma of being raped would be too severe to make reporting worthwhile.

For survivors who do know the identity of the perpetrator, they may choose to report the case to the police and seek support from either the formal justice system or, more often, the customary courts and the local chiefs. However, the goal

of prosecution, particularly in the customary legal system, is typically to convince the perpetrator to marry the survivor or to collect reparations (such as cattle) from him, rather than to impart punishment or jail time. Even when men are taken to the court and prosecuted, customary law typically institutes fines or limited jail time as punishment for the perpetrator.

While most survivors did not access formal support services, those who did seek services primarily sought psychosocial support through a women's centres run by an NGO or government social workers. Women and girls who did receive services were grateful for the support they did receive – both counselling and material support.

### Intimate Partner Violence: Where can she go?

Overall, survivors do not often report cases of IPV to those outside of their immediate family. About half of the survivors in Juba city and almost 60% in the Juba PoCs said that they told no one about the violence they were experiencing. When women chose to disclose an incident, they often told a relative (including parents, husband/partners' parents or other relative).

Depending on the site, women and girls experiencing IPV were likely to seek help from differing sources and sometimes sought support from multiple resources. Survivors in Juba City overwhelmingly (85%) did not seek formal services because of this violence, while almost 70% of women living in the Juba PoCs also did not look to access any formal service. In these two sites, when women did choose to seek formal help, they most often looked to health services. About half of the women in Rumbek who had experienced IPV reported seeking some form of formal intervention. They often went to seek the support of the local, traditional courts and/or the intervention of their local chiefs for support when experiencing violence. Twenty percent also reported accessing health services as a result of this violence.

## Barriers to Services

Major barriers to accessing services still exist in South Sudan, particularly during conflict. Lack of sufficient infrastructure and trained staff, particularly in rural areas, prevent survivors from accessing needed care. Stigma and concerns that reporting will lead to retaliation can also act as barriers to access services. Lack of confidentiality at the service level can also prevent women from reaching out for help. In addition, police may not take reports seriously, particularly for cases that occur inside of marriage.

Lack of consequences for perpetrators may be exacerbated by conflict, which can also reduce the effectiveness of reporting to traditional mechanisms. This, again, reduces a woman's ability to manage situations of IPV and non-partner assault through normal mechanisms and lessens the chance that a woman will report incidents.

**'Before, people used to stick with the rules. Everybody knew what the rules were. Once the cattle have been paid, then it's done, it's finished. Now, because of the lack of implementation of the formal justice system, everything is worse.'** – Female key informant in Rumbek

The state may also institute barriers, real or perceived, for those seeking services, such as *Form 8*. This form is a holdover of Sudanese law from prior to independence that requires survivors to report to the police before receiving medical attention. While not necessary to receive any service, women across all contexts commonly referred to this form as necessary to receive medical care for cases of both physical and sexual violence and it continues to be a barrier to service access in South Sudan.



Kate Geraghty/CARE/Fairfax media

## Implications for Action

**‘We need all the girls to go to school, so we will have educated girls to take care of us ...’** – Woman from Rumbek

This work indicates that the drivers of community-level violence (poverty, increase in arms, breakdown of rule of law, increase in expected bride price payments) are also drivers of VAWG. To reduce violence against women and girls in these areas of South Sudan, humanitarian efforts need to address the root causes and drivers of VAWG as well as provide direct service delivery to these communities.

### Key Recommendations

#### *Prioritise VAWG in all humanitarian action*

VAWG must be considered in all aspects and phases of humanitarian response. This should include, at a minimum: ensuring VAWG experts are on assessment teams; VAWG programming is prioritised in pooled and bilateral funding; and all sectors integrate VAWG-risk mitigation into their response. For example, the severe food insecurity currently being experienced in South Sudan is likely to exacerbate a number of issues highlighted in the research that pre-date the onset of the food crisis, including IPV and sexual exploitation and abuse. As a result, stand-alone and integrated VAWG programming should be front and centre in response to all types of emergencies, such as the famine response in South Sudan. Such programming should, at all times, adhere to the IASC GBV Guidelines<sup>36</sup>, which are the global standards on GBV-risk reduction and provide clear and comprehensive guidance to all humanitarian actors on how to improve women’s and girls’ safety.

*Ensure VAWG programming and policy address the multiple forms of violence experienced by women and girls*

While much of the world’s attention has focused on conflict-related sexual violence (and in particular, non-partner sexual violence), programmes and policy should seek to respond to and address the root causes of VAWG as well as sexual violence, in particular, IPV, which was found to be the most prevalent form of VAWG in the sites researched in South Sudan.

#### *Invest in specific programmes targeting the unique needs of adolescent girls*

Age-appropriate prevention and response programmes are crucial to protect girls from violence and to empower them. More effort is needed to identify entryways and innovative approaches for adolescents to access existing VAWG prevention and response services: targeting teen mothers accessing health services during pregnancy; creating adolescent spaces in women-safe space programming; and providing static, mobile and technological solutions). In this effort, particular attention should be focused on promoting holistic policies and programmes that ensure collaboration across multiple sectors, including protection, education, health and economic wellbeing, in order to reach girls via various points of entry.

#### *Promote the integration of programmes addressing VAWG and community-level violence and long-term peacebuilding*

The drivers of community-level violence (poverty, increase in arms, breakdown of rule of law, increase in expected bride price payments) are also drivers of VAWG. Achieving and sustaining a more prosperous and peaceful future for South Sudan necessitates that peacebuilding programmes promote the participation of women and include an intentional focus on preventing and mitigating risks of VAWG through a strong gender analysis that prioritises women’s experience of violence at all programming phases.

**☹ We are tired of being raped. We met with the chiefs and raised our concerns. We have had no response yet.☹**

- Woman from Rumbek

### **Fund and deliver gender-transformative programming that addresses discriminatory practices and gender-inequitable norms**

Increased attention on patriarchal norms and practices is needed through a more intentional focus on prevention programmes that seek to change social norms in South Sudan. Such programming should include raising awareness of women's rights at multiple levels; facilitating women's advocacy and movement building; community mobilisation efforts; engaging men and boys in gender-transformative activities; and directing funding to local women's organisations.

### **Support women's groups and the women's movement to build local capacity to improve the status of women**

Women's groups are nascent in South Sudan and need support to create sustainable social norms change within the country. Moreover, they are an important structure through which women can be meaningfully engaged in programme design, implementation and evaluation. To be sustainable, these groups need institutional support, not just project specific support. By partnering with these groups in both VAWG prevention and response services, bridges between formal and informal support services can be built and strengthened, leading to increased support and advocacy for gender-equitable norms that can help reduce rates of violence.

## **Donors and Policymakers**

### **Prioritise funding for specialised VAWG protection programmes from the earliest stages of a crisis**

While funding for protection programming is always necessary at the onset of conflict or disaster, the reality is that the protection sector, especially VAWG programming, is among the least prioritised and funded sectors during first-phase response efforts. This research has confirmed the high levels of violence experienced by women and girls in South Sudan. Even in the absence of such indisputable data, inter-agency guidelines, such as the *IASC GBV Guidelines (Inter-Agency Standing Committee Guidelines on Integrating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Humanitarian Action)*, require humanitarian actors to assume VAWG is occurring and to treat it as a serious and life-threatening problem from day one. Dedicated funding should, therefore, be immediately available at the onset of a crisis through multi-lateral and pooled funding mechanisms to ensure that specialised VAWG response services are available

in order to meet the health, psychosocial and economic needs of survivors.

### **Allocate additional funding to support longer term VAWG programming**

Short-term prevention and response programmes delivered during the acute phase of conflict do not address the need for longer-term prevention and empowerment efforts that address deeper long-standing attitudes, behaviours and norms that underpin VAWG, including acceptance of IPV. More funding is needed to address sustained behaviour change and social norms transformations to make a real impact on reducing VAWG in this context. For example, efforts such as DFID's multi-year VAWG programming through its South Sudan Humanitarian Programme (HARISS) should be used to support long term VAWG prevention and response programming, including outside of acute emergency response phases.

### **Develop and/or adapt VAWG policies and strategies to ensure they meet global commitments under key VAWG and localisation policy frameworks**

The findings from this research reaffirm what practitioners and researchers have learned from other contexts where VAWG is prevalent, therefore, this research will help reinforce the need for other initiatives that are seeking to transform how the humanitarian and development sectors address VAWG in times of both crisis and peace. Global frameworks, such as the *Call to Action on Protection from Gender-based Violence in Emergencies*; the World Humanitarian Summit's *Five Core Commitments to Women and Girls*; Sustainable Development Goals related to gender equality (SDG 3), health (SDG 5), and partnerships (SDG 17); the Grand Bargain; and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda all include specific attention to VAWG and/or localising response efforts across the humanitarian-to-development continuum. In addition, the Real-Time Accountability Partnership (RTAP), which is currently being implemented in South Sudan and Iraq, is an initiative that promotes shared accountability to VAWG by securing high-level commitment to a set of minimum actions in emergencies. Donors and policymakers must develop and adapt policies and strategies to commit to and fulfil their obligations under these frameworks in order to truly tackle the scourge of VAWG and lay the foundation for women's and girls' health, wellbeing, participation and social and economic development.



## Practitioners

### *Focus on safe spaces for women and girls and informal support structures as part of a VAWG response programme*

Most women do not seek formal support after experiencing VAWG. Increased attention needs to be given to helping women rebuild their social networks and informal support structures (providing spaces for women to socialise with other women like them, engaging in community improvement projects, livelihood skills training, etc.) to indirectly support women who choose not to report violence. Separate, dedicated safe spaces and support programmes should also be made available that are tailored to adolescent girls in recognition of their specific needs.

### *Recognise and address the multiple barriers survivors face in accessing services in South Sudan*

Comprehensive programming is needed to address and break-down barriers that are structural (Form 8), service-related (training and support for front-line responders and local women's groups) and social norms-influenced (community mobilisation efforts—UNICEF's Communities Care programme is a promising example of programming in this area and is currently being piloted in both South Sudan and Somalia<sup>35</sup>).

### *Provide targeted training and institutional capacity building to security and legal support services*

Women accessing services were least satisfied with the support they received from the police, local leaders and local courts. Targeted capacity-building efforts are needed to improve the first response of local and UN police services to increase their sensitivity to survivors and to ensure safe and appropriate referrals. These efforts should include training; recruitment of more female security personnel; appointment of gender focal points; and issuance and enforcement of zero-tolerance policies and codes of conduct on the perpetration of VAWG, including sexual exploitation and abuse. In addition, harmonisation of the customary and formal legal systems, including strengthened enforcement of existing laws and policies, training and support for local leaders and government structures are needed to reduce the impunity of perpetrators.

### *Engage with women and girls throughout the programme design and implementation process*

Women and girls should be engaged and empowered through the design and implementation of VAWG programmes. As shown through the findings of this report, women and girls of South Sudan are well aware of the challenges and barriers to service access affecting their communities. In order to create culturally appropriate and effective VAWG prevention and response programming, women and girls need to be meaningfully engaged throughout programme design, implementation and evaluation.



Peter Biro/IRC

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# REPORT ANNEX

## Annex I: Study Methodology

### Quantitative Data Collection

The quantitative component of the study consisted of a population-based household survey administered to a representative sample of women aged 15-64 in three locations: Juba City, Rumbek Centre and the Juba PoCs. The survey was based on the *WHO Multi-country Study on Women's Health and Domestic Violence Against Women* and adapted for use in conflict settings.<sup>23</sup> All interviews were administered in-person by enumerators utilizing a mobile phone interface to reduce data collection/entry errors. While the primary goal of the study was to document the experiences of women and girls, the data were complemented by a supplemental questionnaire for men (aged 15-64) that provided information on reported perpetration and victimisation of men. The men's questionnaire was carried out only in Juba City and Rumbek, as ethical and safety best practices could not be met to conduct the survey with men in the PoC sites.

Data collection began in June 2016, but was paused in mid-July due to a new outbreak of violence in Juba City. Data collection was completed in Rumbek by the end of July, while data collection in the Juba PoC sites was resumed and completed in November-December 2016. Data collection was not finished in Juba City due to concerns for the safety and security of the enumerator and respondents.

Quantitative data from the study were analysed using descriptive statistics as well as bivariate and multivariate statistical methods. Where appropriate, bivariate statistical tests and multivariate logistic regression were used to identify individual-level risk and protective factors for different types of violence.

### Qualitative Data Collection

To inform and complement the results of the household survey, qualitative data were collected with community members, key stakeholders and survivors of VAWG. The qualitative study was conducted in five locations in South Sudan. In addition to the three sites included in the household survey, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were also conducted in Juba County and the

PoC site in Bentiu. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with female survivors of violence who had sought and received services from IRC GBV response teams. Respondents were identified and recruited to the study by IRC Women, Protection and Empowerment (WPE) response staff and interviews were conducted with WPE response staff present. Key informant interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were also carried out with individuals representing a broad cross-section of stakeholders.

The majority of the qualitative interviews were conducted during August and September 2015. Some additional qualitative interviews and focus groups were conducted May through July 2016. Additional data was gathered in the Juba PoC sites from November to December 2016.

### Response Rates

In the three sites where the household survey was conducted, a total of 2,728 individuals were interviewed: 2,244 women and 481 men. Overall household response rates were 87% for women and 86% for men. Individual response rate was 89% for women and 86% for men.

In Juba City, there were a total of 694 completed interviews: 477 females with an individual response rate of 73% and 217 males with an individual response rate of 88%. A total of 1,068 interviews were completed in Rumbek Centre: 804 females with an overall response rate of 92% and 264 males with an overall response rate of 84%. In the Juba PoC sites, where only women were interviewed, there were a total of 963 completed interviews with a response rate of 84%.



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## Partners

### What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict and Humanitarian Crises

What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (What Works) is an international multi-disciplinary partnership led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with George Washington University's Global Women's Institute (GWI) and CARE International UK (CIUK). Additional academic and research partners include the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM), the Africa Population Health Research Center (APHRC) in Nairobi, Kenya, and Forcier Consulting in Juba, South Sudan.

GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

#### The International Rescue Committee

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people whose lives and livelihoods are shattered by conflict and disaster to survive, recover and gain control of their future. At work in over 40+ countries to restore safety, dignity and hope, the IRC leads the way from harm to home.



The IRC was one of the first humanitarian organisations to launch specific programmes for survivors of violence against women and girls (VAWG), implementing VAWG programmes in refugee settings and other conflict affected communities from 1996. Over the past 17 years, the IRC has pioneered programmes that prevent and respond to VAWG, especially in emergencies and crisis, making the IRC a global leader in this field. Today, the IRC manages programmes targeting VAWG in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, helping restore the dignity of survivors, creating economic opportunities for women and girls to rebuild and transform their lives, and tackling the root causes of violence.

#### The Global Women's Institute at the George Washington University

The Global Women's Institute (GWI) envisions a world where women and girls have the same rights and opportunities as men and boys and are free from discrimination, violence and coercion. GWI is a leading organization that bridges research, education and action to advance gender equality and reduce violence and discrimination against women and girls. By strengthening the global knowledge base on gender issues and being a catalyst for change, GWI makes a difference in the lives of women at home and abroad. GWI finds interventions that work, explains why they matter and takes action to bring about change.

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#### CARE International UK

CARE International is one of the world's leading humanitarian and development organisations. Founded in 1945, the organisation has been fighting global poverty and defending the dignity of people around the world for 70 years. CARE currently works in 79 poor and developing countries, helping millions of the world's poorest people find routes out of poverty. It provides life-saving assistance when disaster strikes, and helps people rebuild their lives afterwards. It works alongside poor people and communities on long-term programmes to deliver lasting change. Its programmes and policy work tackle the underlying causes of poverty so that people can become self-sufficient. CARE places special focus on empowering women and girls because, equipped with the proper resources, women have the power to lift whole families and communities out of poverty.



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