



Brief #1: Introduction to Sexual Violence in the International Cooperation Sector

In the past several years, international cooperation organizations (ICOs) have shown a strong willingness to better prevent and address all forms of gender-based violence, and sexual violence in particular. In light of the importance of power relationships in the sexual violence phenomenon, and considering the specific nature of the international cooperation sector, the ICOs duty to protect deserves to be examined more thoroughly. How do we adopt a survivor-centred approach? How do we address interactions between ICO staff and local communities? These are some of the issues on which this brief will focus.

A practical toolkit comprised of five briefs was put together following two workshops held in 2018 by the Comité québécois femmes et développement (Quebec Committee on Women and Development) of AQOCI. This first brief provides an introduction to the concept of sexual violence and to the challenges of reporting this violence, in particular in the international cooperation sector. It also includes a glossary of commonly used terminology.

The practical toolkit also contains the following briefs:

Brief #2: Tools and Best Practices for the Prevention and Reporting of Sexual Violence

Brief #3: Training and Disclosure of Sexual Violence

A quick reference tool in the form of a prevention strategies checklist is also available. Other briefs are being developed and focus on case management, investigation and access to justice.

A Feminist Approach to Sexual Violence

The Comité québécois femmes et développement (CQFD) promotes a feminist approach inspired by the best practices of the Centres d'aide et de lutte contre les agressions à caractère sexuel (Assistance Centres for Victims of Sexual Assault), and centered on the survivor as the expert of her own life. The practical toolkit offers an intersectional analysis of sexual violence to understand the interactions between the multiple types of discrimination which exacerbate

more particularly the vulnerability of women and people belonging to marginalized communities, such as LGBTQI+ people, indigenous populations, racialized groups or people with disabilities.

A survivor-centred approach means that the case management process is focused on the specific needs of the person having suffered from violence, and supports her in her decision-making process in a flexible and appropriate manner. As a result of a sexual assault, many people may feel a loss of control and power over their own lives. By offering the survivor space and time to express her needs, the ICO can guide her towards the service that is most suited to her reality. It is desirable to be able to rely on resources or assistance centres which have proven expertise in the multiple social issues that can also be associated with cases of trauma. The healing process following a traumatic experience may take different forms and must not be perceived as linear or universal.

Sexual Misconduct or Sexual Violence

The expression “sexual violence” was chosen for this brief. Sexual violence is the expression of a relationship of domination of an individual over another through an act of a sexual nature, committed without consent. It represents a violation of fundamental rights, dignity, security, physical and psychological integrity, and has serious repercussions for the individuals who suffer from it. Sexual violence encompasses a range of actions, including verbal harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual assault and sexual abuse. The expression “violence of a sexual nature” is also used by many feminist organizations to highlight the violent nature of the phenomenon rather than the means used to express this violence, i.e. sexuality. The terms **victims and survivors** will be used alternatively to highlight the courage and recognize the traumatic experience of people who suffered from sexual violence.

I. Better Understanding the Phenomenon of Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is a crime¹, and it took years of struggle on the part of the women’s movement for it to be recognized as such. Women and girls represent the majority of the victims in Quebec and in Canada (84% in Quebec², 86% in Canada³). The literature on this issue highlights the diversity of the victims, showing that nobody is safe from sexual violence. It affects people of all

¹ Infractions sexuelles au Québec. Faits saillants 2014 :

https://www.securitepublique.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/Documents/police/statistiques/infractions_sexuelles/infractions_sexuelles_2014.pdf

² Stratégie gouvernementale pour prévenir et contrer les violences sexuelles 2016-2021 :

http://www.scf.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/publications/Violence/Brochure_Violences_Sexuelles.pdf

³ Metrac fact sheet on sexual assault: <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/page-535965>

social and economic backgrounds, different origins, varied education levels, diverse genders and sexual orientation, etc.⁴ However, not everyone is impacted in the same way or, more simply, not everyone is subjected to the same level of risk. A few statistics will illustrate this observation:

- 51% of women in Canada will experience one form or another of sexual violence during their life.⁵
- The majority of aggressions on young gay men are committed by heterosexual white men.⁶
- 83% of women living with a disability will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime.⁷
- Indigenous women are more vulnerable to harassment and sexual assaults.⁸

These statistics teach us that the risk of being the target of sexual violence varies based on different identity characteristics, as well as the level of power and privilege associated with it. Several organizations also stress the importance of looking at the influence of power dynamics on sexual violence.⁹ The Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres articulated this reality in the Canadian context (unofficial translation):

“The intersection of social identities is one of the most accurate predictive factors related to the probability of experiencing sexual violence. While being a woman remains the most significant risk factor, the risk of experiencing sexual violence also increases based on characteristics such as age, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity, social class, as well as if the person is indigenous, racialized, an immigrant or a refugee.”

This leads to the conclusion that the people belonging to minority or marginalized groups are more at risk of experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime. Sexism, racism, heterosexism and ableism¹⁰ are all examples of systems of oppression that contribute to sexual violence. It is therefore essential to take into account the impact of these dynamics when it comes to updating prevention, support, investigation, and access to justice practices. More broadly, the literature points to the importance of questioning the way in which these systems of oppression are reproduced within ICOs in order to support prevention efforts. Statistics on sexual violence

⁴ Site de la Table de concertation sur les agressions à caractère sexuel de Montréal :

<http://agressionsexuellemontreal.ca/violences-sexuelles>

⁵ Metrac Fact sheet on sexual assault: <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/page-535965>

⁶ National Alliance to End Sexual Violence: http://www.endsexualviolence.org/where_we_stand/male-victims/

⁷ Metrac Fact sheet on sexual assault: <http://www.sexualassaultsupport.ca/page-535965>

⁸ *Idem*

⁹ The following bodies recognize this element: The Quebec National Institute of Public Health (INSPQ), the Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres, the National Alliance to End Sexual Violence

¹⁰ Definition of the Office québécois de la langue française (unofficial translation): Attitude or behaviour which is prejudicial to a person or a group of people with disabilities, in particular physical disabilities. For some authors, ableism covers both physical and mental disabilities.

suggest that systems of oppression remain present within organizations, including in the international development and humanitarian assistance sectors.

II. The Phenomenon Within the International Development and Humanitarian Assistance Sectors

Cases of harassment, violence, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse have been reported for decades in the international development sector, in particular during peacekeeping missions and within the United Nations system. Yet there is too little scientific literature available at the moment to allow us to paint a realistic portrait of the extent to which sexual violence is prevalent in the international development sector, including in regards to the beneficiary populations. Two recent studies may, however, enlighten us on the matter.

Report the Abuse (RTA)¹¹ has opened an online platform inviting individuals to talk about their experience, with the goal of documenting the phenomenon in the international development and humanitarian assistance sectors. The data collected indicate that:

- 89% of the people who have reported an incident to the RTA were women;
- 92% of aggressors were men;
- 68% of the people abused knew their aggressor.

In July 2016, the Humanitarian Women Network (HWN) conducted a study in which 1005 women from 70 organizations responded to a survey. The HWN study highlights that:

- 24% of respondents claim to have suffered a sexual assault during a mission;
- 30% of the assaults were carried out by a male supervisor.

The report *STOP the Sexual Assault Against Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers*¹² confirms this data: the majority of sexual violence is committed against women and the phenomenon of sexual violence is largely underestimated. Some parallels can be drawn between the statistics reported in these two studies and the reality of the phenomenon in Quebec and in Canada:

- The very large majority of the victims are women (84%-86%)¹³
- A significant proportion of survivors know their aggressor (68%-77%)¹⁴.
- The level of reporting is not representative of all the incidents which actually occurred¹⁵.

¹¹ Non-governmental organization founded by Meghan Norbert in 2015 to shed some light on the phenomenon of sexual violence in the humanitarian assistance sector and to organize advocacy activities. The organization recently closed down due to a lack of funding.

¹² Mazurana, Dyan and Phoebe Donnelly (2017). *STOP the Sexual Assault against Humanitarian and Development Aid Workers*. Feinstein International Center.

¹³ For more information: Stratégie gouvernementale pour prévenir et contrer les violences sexuelles 2016-2021 : http://www.scf.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/publications/Violence/Brochure_Violences_Sexuelles.pdf

¹⁴ INSPQ Statistiques-ampleur adultes : <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/agression-sexuelle/comprendre/statistiques-ampleur-adultes>

III. Reporting

The reporting of incidents is a central issue in the fight against sexual violence. In Quebec and in Canada, it is estimated that between 90%¹⁶ and 95%¹⁷ of incidents are not reported to the authorities. There is therefore a significant gap between the level of reporting and the actual scale of the phenomenon.

Statistics on Reporting compiled by Report the Abuse

- 13% of incidents have been reported to the aggressor's organization;
- 35% of incidents have been reported to the organization of the victim-survivor;
- 18% of the individuals who reported an incident have been satisfied with the way in which the case was handled.

Statistics on reporting compiled by the Humanitarian Women Network (HWN)

- 69% of women who have suffered an aggression have not reported the incident;
- The 31% of women who reported an incident was generally dissatisfied with the way it was handled.

The level of satisfaction of survivors, following the reporting of an incident, is generally low. The HWN study tries to understand why women do not report incidents. The causes identified by the respondents are the following:

- Concern with the professional consequences;
- It was not "serious enough" or "sufficiently violent" to be reported;
- No confidence in the system/trusts no one;
- Lack of a mechanism to make a report;
- Lack of "evidence" and/or knowledge on how to report incidents;
- Preference for handling it on her own (i.e. confronting the aggressor);
- Attribution of these behaviours to the reality of working in an intercultural context;
- Shame, confusion;
- Fear of reprisals on the part of the aggressor.

The very low level of reporting of sexual violence incidents leads to the following working assumptions:

- The number of harassment and assault cases is higher than the number of cases reported to the organizations.

¹⁵ INSPQ. Rapport québécois sur la violence et la santé : <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/rapport-quebecois-sur-la-violence-et-la-sante/les-agressions-sexuelles/en-bref>

¹⁶ Brennan, S. and Taylor-Butts, A. (2008). Sexual Assault in Canada, 2004 and 2007: <http://www.nipawinoasis.com/documents/sexual%20assault.pdf>

¹⁷ INSPQ. Rapport québécois sur la violence et la santé (2018) : <https://www.inspq.qc.ca/rapport-quebecois-sur-la-violence-et-la-sante/les-agressions-sexuelles/en-bref>

- ICOs do not have a good portrait of the situation within the sector and within their organization.
- Cases where the beneficiaries are victims of sexual violence are real, even if they are usually documented anecdotally.
- Considering the dynamics which contribute to the phenomenon of sexual violence, the number of cases involving beneficiaries is likely to be higher than the number of cases involving employees or volunteers.
- During the last few decades, it is likely that many problematic behaviours remained without consequence and that individuals have remained in their position (employee-e-s or volunteers) despite committing wrongful acts.
- In the wake of the #Metoo movement and the resulting media coverage, it is possible that some people may contact ICOs to report events that took place over the course of the last few decades.

More generally, the HWN study concludes that the existence of discrimination and hostile masculinity within an organization is linked to the presence of sexual harassment and sexual violence, which is why prevention procedures and policies are so important. However, a parallel study by RTA on 92 organizations of the sector indicates that only 30% of the organizations had a code of conduct, and that only 17% of them offered training.

IV. Conclusion

According to a survey conducted in 2019, 53% of AQOCI members have developed a code of conduct. 31% have a policy which covers sexual violence, but only 50% of these policies address the issue of how to report an incident or file a complaint. 48% of members do not offer training on sexual violence. Almost 60% of members have developed procedures to support victims of sexual violence. These data confirm the need to invest in institutional capacity building of ICOs in Quebec in the area of sexual violence.

Based on this observation, AQOCI's CQFD is committed to develop a series of tools and trainings to help its members develop policies and procedures related to sexual violence. In an annex to this brief, you can consult a glossary of standard vocabulary on sexual violence, as well as a bibliography allowing for a deepening of knowledge on the issue.

ANNEX: Glossary

Sexual abuse: According to Global Affairs Canada, “sexual abuse refers to an actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”. Any sexual activity with a child is considered to be sexual abuse.

Indeed, the term *sexual abuse* is the one most commonly used to designate a sexual assault against a minor. In the Youth Protection Act (YPA), according to Article 38 (d), there is sexual abuse in a “situation in which the child is subjected to gestures of a sexual nature by the child’s parents or another person, with or without physical contact, including any form of sexual exploitation, and the child’s parents fail to take the necessary steps to put an end to the situation” (Youth Protection Act, R.S.Q., Chapter P-34.1). Sexual abuse is not a defined criminal offence under Canada’s Criminal Code. The use of this term can therefore create some confusion when we talk about sexual assault on a minor.

Sexual assault (Government of Quebec): “A sexual assault is an act that is sexual in nature, with or without physical contact, committed by an individual without the consent of the victim or in some cases through emotional manipulation or blackmail, especially when children are involved. It is an act that subjects another person to the perpetrator’s desires through an abuse of power and/or the use of force or coercion, accompanied by implicit or explicit threats.¹⁸ ” (p. 22) The definition illustrates the range of scenarios covered by the concept of sexual assaults, including sexual assaults without contact. This definition also describes the act of aggression as an act of power and domination.

Consent: Given agreement to engage in a sexual activity, which may be withdrawn at any time. It must be voluntary rather than imposed or forced through an abuse of power (based on his situation, identity or physical characteristics). Consent may not be obtained from a person who is intoxicated or unconscious.

Enthusiastic consent: Verbal or physical manifestation of the agreement to engage in a sexual activity (to come closer, to say “yes”, “I like it”, “touch me here”, “continue”, “I want”, etc.). This exceeds the absence of the “no” as an indicator of consent. Enthusiastic consent implies an ongoing verification process with the partner during sexual activity.

Rape culture: Social and cultural attitudes and beliefs trivializing the severity and the impact of sexual violence, and normalizing this violence by considering them tolerable and unavoidable (e.g., to say things like “Boys will be boys!” to justify a male aggression).

Sexual exploitation (Source: Global Affairs Canada): “Sexual exploitation refers to any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.”

¹⁸ Ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec. (2001). Orientations gouvernementales en matière d’agression sexuelle, Québec.

Psychological harassment (CNESST): According to the Act Respecting Labour Standards, five conditions must be met to conclude to psychological harassment:

1. a vexatious behaviour;
2. which manifests itself repeatedly or during a single serious incident;
3. in a way that is hostile or unwanted;
4. which affects an employee's dignity or integrity;
5. resulting in a harmful work environment.

The definition of psychological harassment includes vexatious behaviour of a sexual nature

Sexual harassment (RQCALACS): All forms of repeated and unwanted attention or advances with a sexual connotation (staring, words, gestures, touching, threats, proposals, jokes, display of pornographic material, etc.) that cause the person to feel uncomfortable and afraid, and threaten the well-being or the employment of that person.

Survivor: Person who experienced a trauma. This term is used to honour the person's strength and resilience. It is preferred to the term *victim*, which is often perceived as passive. The people who have experienced a trauma may, however, be identified in the way that they prefer.

Social stigma: Negative perception and social disapproval toward people who survived sexual violence, which can cause shame and guilt (because the person thinks she might have *deserved* or *provoked* these acts of violence). Stigma prevents people to report what they have lived and to seek support.

Trigger: Any element that could trigger a strong emotional or physical reaction (anxiety, panic attack, recalling of images, desire to self-mutilation, etc.) in a person having experienced a trauma. A *Trigger Warning* (TW) gives a notice to the person who survived a trauma so that she can decide if she wishes to avoid the content that will be presented and discussed.

Violence of a sexual nature: The definition is similar to that of sexual violence, but this term has been put forward by several organizations in order to put the emphasis on the violent nature of the phenomenon, rather than on the means used, i.e. sexuality.

Sexual violence: Sexual violence is the expression of a relationship of domination of an individual over another through an act of a sexual nature, committed without consent. It represents a violation of fundamental rights, dignity, security, physical integrity as well as psychological integrity, and has serious repercussions on individuals who suffered from it. Sexual violence encompasses a range of actions, including verbal harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual assault and sexual abuse. It is defined by the World Health Organization as: "Any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. (2010)"

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