Sexual Violence in Conflict Societies: Lessons for Ireland

Assessing the need for cross border capacity

 Undertaken by Dr Ruth McAlister, Ulster University, on behalf of Newry and Mourne Policing and Community Safety Partnership

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Contents

Background to the research
The research aim..................................................................................3
Objectives...............................................................................................3
Ethics......................................................................................................3
Methodological approach.......................................................................4

Literature review international context
Introduction...........................................................................................5
Male aggression, sexual violence and conflict........................................7
The impact of sexual violence...............................................................8
Addressing conflict related sexual violence in peace agreements.............9
Dealing with the impact of sexual violence in post conflict societies.........9
Conclusions..........................................................................................11

Literature review Ireland
Introduction..........................................................................................11
Statistics................................................................................................12
The experience of sexual violence in the Republic of Ireland...............14
The experience of sexual violence in Northern Ireland........................16
Border county support...........................................................................17
Partnership working..............................................................................17
Going forward.......................................................................................18
Conclusions and recommendations....................................................19

References............................................................................................21
Background to the research

The research aim

In April 2015 Newry and Mourne Policing and Community Safety Partnership commissioned Ulster University to undertake this small piece of secondary desk-based research to establish the extent of sexual violence in Ireland, and to ascertain whether an additional service by way of a cross border strategy/facility was required to offer support to survivors of sexual violence. Evidence reveals that women are more vulnerable to sexual violence in countries that have suffered from conflict (COSC, 2009). In these situations women face further difficulties in dealing with the aftermath, such as seeking support, and also in terms of reporting the crime, which is much more problematic. To gain an understanding of these issues and how they may be applicable to Ireland a brief review of academic literature that addresses the key issues encountered by survivors of sexual violence and advocates who assist women in countries that have suffered from conflict were reviewed. Additionally, statistics that attempt to provide an account of the extent of sexual violence in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were examined, along with a review of websites to ascertain what support is currently available to survivors of sexual violence.

The research objectives were to:

- Undertake a review of academic and grey literature on sexual violence in conflict situations
- Collate statistics from police and sexual violence support organisations
- Ascertain from published information whether the border counties in Ireland may require an additional support/service
- Offer suggestions for additional research work going forward.

Research ethics

Researching sexual violence can be difficult and it can pose potential risks. These risks can be psychological and physical and impact on the participant
in the research through secondary victimisation, or the researcher who may experience vicarious trauma (Coles et al., 2014).

This piece of research however was a desk based review of academic and grey literature on sexual violence in conflict societies. The data and information quoted is all publicly available through information published on organisational websites or academic journals. No interviews, questionnaires, or any other methods of primary research were undertaken for this work; therefore the aforementioned ethical considerations around risks did not apply.

**Methodological approach**

As stated above this was a desk based piece of research. A range of social science databases held at Ulster University were searched to identify academic material related to the area of research. The search terms used were “sexual violence” and “sexual violence in conflict situations”. A total of 1560 articles were returned from these searches. A substantial amount of these were discounted as irrelevant as the databases identified “conflict” as a key search term and whilst this sometimes did appear in the title, or the abstract of the article, on many occasions it referred to statements concerning “conflict of interest”. A sift of these articles revealed that 14 were considered as central to this piece of research and have been reviewed in this brief report.

In addition, an Internet search of “grey material”\(^1\) revealed further sources for inclusion, such as newspaper reports and official reports. In total, 18 documents have been included as relevant for this review.

Finally, relevant organisational websites, predominantly based in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland were consulted for up-to-date information,

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\(^1\) By its broadest definition, grey literature is a body of materials that is not controlled through conventional channels such as publishers. It may include government research, non-profit reports, think tank assessments, reports from observations, investigations, and other primary resource materials.
including; statistics, guidance as to services offered and other material deemed relevant for this report. The websites reviewed for this research were:

- Rape Crisis Network Ireland
- The Nexus Institute
- Women's Aid Federation Northern Ireland
- Women's Aid Newry
- Women's Aid Dundalk
- Safe Ireland
- Drogheda Women's and Children's Refuge
- Rape Crisis North East
- Police Service of Northern Ireland
- An Garda Síochána
- Central Statistics Office
- Department of Justice
- COSC
- Victim Support NI
- NISRA
- European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights
- UK Government (sexual violence in conflict)
- United Nations

All of the above sources have been reviewed with the key areas discussed throughout the remainder of this short report. Specifically, the review took into account how other societies have dealt with sexual violence during conflict and post conflict situations, the extent of support currently available and whether additional recommendations can be made to aid the recovery of survivors of sexual violence.

**Literature Review**

**Sexual violence: An international context**

**Introduction**

Sexual violence can refer to, "a sexual threat, assault, interference, exploitation, humiliation, molestation, incest, involuntary prostitution, torture,
insertion of objects into genital openings and attempted rape, including statutory rape, carried out on women and girls, or men and boys" (Colombini, 2002: 167). These forms of sexual violence can occur in a wide range of locations and relationships. They can be perpetrated by those in a variety of authoritative positions, relatives or strangers, and the sexual violence itself can take place in private or public locations (McGee et al, 2002). The United Nations tell us that the link to conflict "may be evident in the profile and motivations of the perpetrator, the profile of the victim, the climate of impunity or State collapse, any cross-border dimensions or violations of the terms of a ceasefire agreement" (United Nations, 2013:4). Although sexual violence affects men and women, evidence has shown that women are more likely to be subjected to this abuse than men (Colombini, 2002) and therefore, this research report will focus predominantly on the experiences and the needs of female survivors of sexual violence.

The academic material revealed that most accounts of sexual violence in an international context related to South Africa (Borer, 2009; Akinsulure-Smith, 2014); Rwanda (Wood, 2013); Bosnia-Herzegovina (Wood, 2013), Sierra Leone (Bensel, 2014); and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Dossa et al., 2014). Meanwhile the grey literature highlights reports of sexual violence in a number of key conflict zones, such as the Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Colombia, South Sudan, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Libya to name a few (United Nations, 2013). It is recognised throughout all of this literature that not all conflicts are the same, nor is the extent of violence, therefore each of these accounts are very specific to the regions in which the research is based. That said they do provide a description of how the conflict has impacted on women and explored what methods are most appropriate to heal those who have suffered sexual violence during conflict.

One area where there is commonality in this international literature is that sexual violence is almost universally underreported. This is for multiple reasons including women and children fearing retribution and banishment by their spouses and community. Meanwhile witnesses, humanitarian workers,
journalists and others fear coming forward due to risk of reprisal (United Nations, 2013). This under reporting clearly impacts on the level of services and funding made available to help survivors of sexual violence.

Male aggression, sexual violence and conflict

Feminist scholars explain sexual violence against women as men expressing their dominance (Copelan, 1994). This is exacerbated in conflict situations with Akinsulure-Smith (2014) acknowledging in her research that women and children are more likely to be the innocent victims of warring factions and the recipients of male violence in societies experiencing conflict. In addition, the United Nations report that in some countries there is evidence of a correlation between spikes in sexual violence and military activity linked to the illegal extraction of natural resources (United Nations, 2013). The Democratic Republic of the Congo is one area where rape has been used by armed gangs to punish civilians for preventing poaching and mineral trafficking (ibid). Furthermore, the United Nations state that it is increasingly evident that sexual violence has been used to forcibly displace populations, internally and across borders in Colombia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya and the Syrian Arab Republic (ibid). This latter point emphasising various control methods employed by males in conflict societies. Indeed, it is reports and research such as this that has increased the awareness and the consciousness as to the extent and the impact that sexual violence has on women (Rowley et al., 2012).

Worryingly, this increasing consciousness has highlighted that sexual violence against women and girls has taken on a new character, influenced in part by the ongoing conflict in Afghanistan, according to United Nations partners (United Nations, 2013). Sexual violence in this context includes, abduction, rape and sexual assault of women and children in communities under the control of anti-government elements, including the Taliban (ibid, 2013). In many instances, women and children who make a report that they have been victims of sexual violence are themselves subsequently accused of committing crimes and punished, either through being publicly stoned or
another means. It is therefore unsurprising that sexual violence in such situations is hugely under reported.

*The impact of sexual violence*

The long lasting psychological impact on women in particular was a key area of concern from the articles reviewed for this research. Thomas (2007) explains that the trauma of sexual violence is so severe because such an act allows the aggressor to invade the victims' most intimate space. The European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) (2014) report that those who have experienced sexual violence were significantly more likely to suffer from emotional and psychological issues such as panic attacks, depression, anxiety and to have a general feeling of vulnerability. In addition, Akinsulure-Smith (2014) acknowledges that the psychological impact of sexual violence experienced in conflict situations is much more difficult to address effectively, because women's safety and their very lives may have been threatened. It has also been demonstrated by Matevosyan (2009) that women with serious mental health issues such as schizophrenia, mood disorders and depression are more likely to suffer adverse sexual and reproductive outcomes, such as more lifetime sex partners and gynecological problems. In addition to the depression, anxiety and flashbacks experienced by women who had suffered rape in conflict, it was also highlighted by research undertaken the FRA (2014) that women experience various physical injuries, ranging from bruises and fractures, to internal injuries.

This literature reveals that in order for survivors of sexual violence to move forward they want these crimes to be acknowledged by all of those parties involved and they want the perpetrators to ensure that the sexual violence will not be repeated (United Nations, 2015a). In addition, to heal the physical and mental scars and to reclaim their dignity, they advocate for improved education and opportunities for entrepreneurship in order support themselves and their families (ibid).
Addressing conflict related sexual violence in peace agreements

The international literature suggests that few ceasefires or peace agreements have taken cognisance of the impact of conflict related sexual violence. Colombini (2002) for example notes that once conflict has ended the focus tends to be on rebuilding political systems, or improving the economic situation, yet violence against women is allowed to slip down the agenda in terms of priorities. Goodyear & McGinn (1998) also note that if, (and when) sexual violence is addressed the response is limited to primary healthcare. The United Nations stipulate that peace-building and the post conflict period should contain a gendered perspective and sexual violence considerations should be central, not an afterthought (United Nations, 2015a). In south Sudan, the United Nations (2015b) believe that a sustainable solution to the crisis can only be sustained if women as leaders and agents of change are fully consulted in the process of reconciliation.

If left unaddressed the impact of sexual violence can trigger cycles of vigilantism and undermine confidence in the peace agreements. The inclusion of sexual violence can on the other hand strengthen peace, improve transparency in the process and increase confidence amongst those parties involved (United Nations, online, date unknown).

Dealing with the impact of sexual violence in post conflict societies

In addition to including the impact of sexual violence at a strategic level through its inclusion in peace agreements, practical support must also be made available to those communities affected by this crime. The impact of sexual violence can often last long after the act itself affecting both the physical and mental health of those who experience it. To illustrate, research by Canning (2013) reveals that the impacts of conflict related sexual violence does not come easily to an end when women have fled from the threat, but the effects transcend the situation in which individual women are abused. A similar point was noted by Cohen and Nordas (2014) with these authors acknowledging that the impacts of sexual violence continue in the post conflict phase.
It is therefore imperative that the survivors of sexual violence are able to avail of support services that are available to them in order that they can take steps in the healing process. However, a clear political will is required for this to happen. In Colombia, the government appears to be committed to eradicating sexual violence and to implement laws and policies to support survivors of sexual violence (United Nations, 2015a). The main challenge however is to turn this political will and aspirations into tangible solutions were communities impacted by sexual violence can begin to see support on the ground. The situation in Libya is much worse because since the end of conflict in October 2011 the government has made few commitments to address the problem of conflict related sexual violence, with almost a total absence of services which compounds survivors coming forward (United Nations, 2013). Meanwhile in Bosnia and Herzegovina efforts to build partnerships between governmental and non-governmental sectors and to strengthen the capacity of service providers is ongoing, yet gaps remain here in terms of funding and in the legal framework (ibid).

In terms of practical solutions for support in Sierra Leone, Akinsulure-Smith (2014) stated that flexibility in terms of the length of time of appointments and when in the day they were held were important. Peer support for counsellors was also recommended as good practice. Finally, extensive groundwork to build trust was an absolute necessity before beginning any trauma work. This latter point was also emphasised by Colombini's (2002) work in Rwanda. Organisations working with women who escaped from sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo stated that long term engagement with women was most beneficial, whether this is in formal or informal support sessions (Canning, 2013). In South Africa, Borer's work (2009) advocates the use of truth commissions to show a commitment to dealing with sexual violence as part of conflict. However, women find it extremely difficult to discuss rape and other forms of sexual assault in private let alone in public. She therefore recommends female commissioners and allowing survivors to remain anonymous to encourage more women to come forward.
Finally, the international literature highlighted some barriers to working with survivors of sexual violence in conflict. Whilst, the wide range of excellent services offered by rape crisis advocates was emphasised, in terms not only of emotional and physical support, but with legal support also (Ullman and Townsend, 2007) they are very much under resourced which understandably impacts on the level of service they can provide to survivors of sexual violence.

Conclusions
The international review highlighted that regardless of the type of conflict, it is women who suffer sexual violence at the hands of men. The reporting of such crimes was shown to be extremely problematic in conflict situations, as was seeking support for the survivors. The scars of sexual violence, both mental and physical are long lasting and therefore long term support is required to help women heal from the trauma. Yet, this support is generally not forthcoming due to a lack of political will and funding. This can impact not only on fragile peace agreements, but also in terms of services and support offered to survivors of sexual violence. These areas and more will now be explored in relation to sexual violence and support available in Ireland.

Sexual violence in Ireland
Introduction
It is very difficult to obtain accurate statistics that provide a true account of the extent of sexual violence in society. As mentioned in the previous section women find rape and other types of sexual assault very difficult to talk about and despite the very serious impact on the physical and psychological health of the woman it can take years for some survivors of sexual violence to seek help and support (Landenburger, 1989). This is not a situation unique to Irish culture, however there is still much concern that there is a considerable under reporting of sexual violence in Irish society due to feelings of shame or embarrassment, fear, or that they may not be believed (COSC, 2009; DoJ, 2011; RCNI, 2012). In fact a lack of comparable data on sexual violence throughout the EU compounds the response of agencies to respond as
effectively as possible to survivors of sexual violence (FRA, 2014). In this short report police recorded crime statistics together with statistics from support organisations will be used to try to present as complete a picture as possible.

Statistics: Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

It is very difficult to make direct comparisons regarding the extent of sexual violence across the whole of the island due to jurisdictional differences in terms of how and when data is collected and how sexual violence and varying offences are defined². The An Garda Síochána website highlights the recognition of the physical, emotional and psychological pain of those who experience sexual violence and promotes a sympathetic, compassionate and sensitive approach to those reporting such crimes. The organisation also shows its commitment to interagency working to improve the service they provide to victims of sexual crime. The lynchpin of this interagency working comes in the form of: The National Guidelines on Referral and Forensic Clinical Examinations in Ireland 2nd edition (2010). It is claimed that:

"The interagency nature of these guidelines will enable consistent provision of high quality care at all stages of the journey, regardless of the circumstances of the assault or the person’s involvement with criminal justice agencies"(ibid: 9).

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is Ireland's national statistics office. The following table is formulated from statistics recorded in their crime and justice statistics database showing sexual offence by year.

² See Appendix One of the National Guidelines on Referral and Forensic Clinical Examination in Ireland (2010) for a clear breakdown on how the Law relates to sexual offences in Ireland.
As illustrated in Table One the extent of sexual violence has fluctuated in the 10 years from 2003 to 2013. It is however difficult to ascertain whether there has been a sharp increase in this type of crime around 2010-2011, or if this is because survivors of sexual violence feel more confident in reporting such crime due to work that has been undertaken in recent years by both support organisations and law enforcement.

The Police Service of Northern Ireland's website does not contain information as to how the organisation deals with sexual offence cases. However, a link to a Department of Justice publication entitled: "Information, help and support for adult victims of rape and sexual assault in Northern Ireland" (DoJ, 2011) is available. This handbook contains valuable, help, information and support and is divided into clear sections³.

The official reported crime statistics for Northern Ireland for sexual offences over the same period show that the figures remained relatively stable until 2012 and since then there has been a steady rise. Table Two reveals the

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³ Under Section 3 there is a helpful section entitled: Law, which covers sexual offence legislation for Northern Ireland
extent of the total number of sexual offences recorded by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

**Table Two**

**PSNI Recorded Crime Sexual Offences (2015)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sexual Offences</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>2003/04</td>
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<td>2004/05</td>
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<td>2005/06</td>
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<td>2013/14</td>
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</table>

Once again it is difficult to ascertain if the increase in 2012 is because more sexual offences have been committed, or whether there is greater confidence on the part of the survivor to come forward and report the crime. A further consequence of the increase may also be attributed to the "Yewtree Effect" whereby a rise in the reporting of sexual offences has been prompted by the high profile investigation of Jimmy Savile.

**The experience of sexual violence in the Republic of Ireland**

The Sexual Abuse and Violence in Ireland (SAVI) report published in 2002 was the first major study of over 3000 members of the general public about their attitudes, beliefs, and their own lifetime experiences of sexual violence (McGee *et al*, 2002). This was a groundbreaking 392 page report which allowed a greater picture of the extent and the impact of sexual violence to be captured. The evidence from this report allowed Rape Crisis Centres around the country to develop relevant services and provide effective help to as many people as possible. Indeed, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre has underlined the need for a second SAVI, with their helpline calls in 2012 being at their highest since 2009 (Irish Times, 2014). The increase in helpline calls and survivors of
sexual violence contacting organisations for support is reflected across the country, showing the absolute need for additional recourses (RCNI, 2011, 2013, RCNE, 2014).

This short piece of research cannot do the content of the SAVI report justice; therefore some key statistics have instead been highlighted. Importantly, the report identified that childhood sexual abuse is an important marker of increased risk of adult sexual violence with 28% of women and 20% of men being abused by different perpetrators as both children and adults (McGee et al., 2002: xxxv). Similar to the international research, this report discovered that the impact of sexual violence had far reaching consequences, with approximately 30% of women and 18% of men reporting that their experiences of sexual violence (whether in childhood, adulthood, or both) has had a moderate, or extreme effect on their lives (ibid: xxxvi). The report also echoed the psychological impacts demonstrated in the international literature with survivors of sexual violence more likely to have used medication for anxiety or depression, or to have been an inpatient in a psychiatric hospital compared to those without such experiences (McGee et al., 2002).

In terms of the reporting of sexual violence the report revealed that 47% of those who disclosed experiences of sexual violence in the SAVI study had not previously disclosed that abuse to others (ibid: xxxvi). The annual report from Rape Crisis North East (2014) also reveals that only 40% of survivors reported the sexual violence to the police. Unsurprising then are the findings from a recently published wide-ranging EU survey which revealed that Irish women are far less likely than the European average of 53% to contact the Gardai or any other organisation after enduring abuse (FRA, 2014). This point underlines the extent of the underreporting of this crime in Ireland that was highlighted earlier, which consequently has as impact in terms of available service provision.

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4 For example RCNE received 717 more calls in 2014 compared to 2013.
The experience of sexual violence in Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Crime Survey suggests that approximately one fifth of people aged 16-64 have experienced at least one type of sexual violence or abuse in their lifetime, with women twice as likely to have encountered such an experience (DoJ, 2011). Later statistics published in the consultation document for: "Stopping Domestic Violence and Sexual Abuse in Northern Ireland 2013-2020" (DoJ, 2013) informs us that in 2012/13 the highest level of domestic abuse incidents were recorded at 21,790 amounting to 74 incidents a day, with 5 of these resulting in murder.

In addition, the latest annual report from the Women's Aid Federation tells us that in the year April 2013 to March 2014 there was an increase in 15.6% of calls managed, from 47,597 calls in the previous year to 55,029 (Women's Aid, 2014). These latter statistics mirror those in the south of Ireland, showing a general increase in demand for support services.

In terms of women living in a post conflict society, the latest annual report from Women's Aid reveals that in October 2013 the organisation gave evidence to the Westminster Associate Parliamentary Group Inquiry on United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 on the impact of the conflict on violence against women (Women's Aid, 2014: 31). This specifically focused on their experience of supporting women who had been abused but were unable to report this to the police, either because of their community's hostility to the police, or because the perpetrator was a member of a paramilitary organisation, or security forces, and the negative impact of a weaponised society on women (ibid: 31). This latter point has reasonance with the international literature and the unique issues faced by survivors of sexual violence in conflict societies.

In terms of other support organisations, the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Centre NI offer free and confidential support for females aged 14 years and over, who survived rape or abuse, regardless of how long ago this was experienced. Additionally, the Nexus Institute works across NI to respond to
adults aged 16 years and over who have experienced sexual abuse, whether female or male.

**Border county support**

Fermanagh Women's Aid report supporting 405 women and 242 children in their 2013 annual report (Women’s Aid, 2013b). This is the highest number supported in the 21 years of the operation. The latest available statistics from Women's Aid Dundalk report that 219 women availed of support services, with 85 women and 117 children admitted to refuge, and 978 Helpline calls received (Women's Aid, 2012). Drogheda Women's and Children's Refuge also provide support to survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Their website has useful information and links for anyone (male or female) who has, or is suffering from abuse. Rape Crisis North East provide the majority of their support to survivors who reside in Louth, however their latest annual report reveals they have provided some support to women in Down and Antrim in Northern Ireland (RCNE, 2014). Rape Crisis North East also report that their services are increasingly stretched due to lack of clarity around funding and increasing demand for their support (RCNE, 2014). Women’s Aid Newry & Mourne, South Down and South Armagh, now renamed Women's Aid Armaghdown, due to development of services also provide a range of excellent support services to women who reside in the border counties of Northern Ireland. Their latest annual report reveals 1,036 women received a range of support services during 2013/14 (Women’s Aid Armaghdown, 2014). Furthermore, their involvement in Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing\(^5\) resulted in additional pre-level support for 493 women. These statistics represent an increase of almost 100% compared to the previous two years (ibid). Women's Aid Armaghdown also report that refuge and accommodation services are extremely busy with a mean occupancy of 97% (ibid). Like many other support organisations however they face an increasing demand of services with less resources.

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\(^5\) Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferencing (MARAC) is a process which evaluates the appropriate action for victims who have been assessed as high risk due to domestic/sexual violence and abuse.
Partnership working: Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

As demonstrated above there are various organisations that provide support to men, women and children in the border counties. A review of annual reports does reveal that partnership working amongst some of these support organisations does exist, for example support services will work closely with criminal justice and other agencies during the process of their work both north and south of the border. In relation to cross border working Women's Aid report having worked with the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre in advance of the extension of their 24 hour Domestic and Sexual Abuse Helpline (Women's Aid, 2013). In addition, examples of good practice between organisations in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland are shared at regional conferences (ibid). This joint working also provides opportunities for improving cross community relations across the whole of Ireland, especially in areas where community relations are still fragile following the Troubles.

Furthermore, as noted earlier Rape Crisis North East provide support services in a cross border context assisting women from both sides of the border. Their 2013 annual report reveals that they have also worked with the PSNI, organising round table meetings to increase understanding of the varying roles of the organisations (RCNE, 2013). From this meeting they were invited to the Rowan Centre in Co Antrim along with Rape Crisis Donegal and Rape Crisis Network Ireland.

Going forward
The EU wide study that reported on violence against women revealed that survivors of sexual violence wanted someone to talk to, or moral support, regardless of whether it was a partner, or a stranger who had committed the violence (FRA, 2014). It also revealed that 60% of those who sought moral support felt that their needs were not met, while over a quarter said they did not receive sufficient support to protect them from future violence (ibid). Worryingly, it showed that Irish women’s needs are less likely to be met, with one in four who sought practical help, stating they did not feel satisfied afterwards (ibid).
What is apparent from this review is that various organisations regardless of whether they are located in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland are providing a lifeline to women and men who are survivors of sexual violence. However, it seems that these organisations simply have to do more, with less. A report published by COSC (2011) entitled: "Domestic and Sexual Violence Services in Ireland: Service Provision and Co-ordination" highlighted that working together, pooling resources, rather than working in isolation is key to the delivery of high quality services. In an age of austerity and budget cuts this is perhaps more of an imperative now than in the past. To illustrate, the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre has had its budget cut by 30% since 2008 (Irish Times, 2014). Budget cuts are also impacting on organisations in Northern Ireland which will ultimately impact on those who need the support most, survivors of sexual violence.

Conclusions and recommendations

This short report has revealed that women who have experienced sexual violence in conflict societies face additional problems in terms of seeking support when they do have the courage to report this crime. Clearly, the fear of repercussions, fear of not being believed, and fear of being banished from your community compounds the trauma that the woman, (man, or child) has experienced. It has also identified that the scars, both mental and physical of conflict related sexual violence transcend long after conflict has ended. The international literature highlighted that gender based sexual violence is often neglected in post conflict situations, rarely, if ever built into peace agreements and that many governments simply lack the political will to address the needs of survivors of sexual violence which clearly highlights human rights violations.

The evidence relating to Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland reveals that support services throughout the whole of the country are undertaking excellent work and it is evident that there are a lot of dedicated individuals supporting as many survivors as possible. There is also evidence of much ongoing work in terms of fundraising, awareness raising and partnership working on various support initiatives. Unfortunately these organisations have
to deal with more people with fewer resources, this impacts on the extent of the services that can be provided. The continued under reporting of sexual violence undoubtedly compounds this issue, therefore perhaps it is appropriate that a second SAVI, this time covering the whole island is undertaken.

Also, currently, both jurisdictions have separate (but very similar) policies advocating responses to domestic and sexual violence, and whilst there is evidence of sharing best practice and partnership working, this could perhaps be expanded further given good relationships already established and the very real financial cuts facing support organisations. In terms of whether a formal cross border strategy, or facility is required, this report suggests that additional conversations should take place with support organisations and their wider partners to include health and the criminal justice sector to establish what the most appropriate solution is in order to provide the best possible service and support to survivors of sexual violence going forward. It may well be determined that a local border initiative or facility be appropriate. Alternatively, a strategic all Ireland strategy with formalised partnerships could be deemed to be the most suitable course of action, one which takes into account all types of survivors of sexual violence across the whole of the island of Ireland. The way forward must have supporting survivors at its core and how this should happen within the current climate of austerity with an ever increasing demand on services.
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United Nations (2015b) Joint statement on renewed attacks against the civilian population, especially women and children, in the widening armed conflict in South Sudan. Available online at:


