

Blue on Blue: Investigating Sexual Abuse of Peacekeepers



Phoebe Donnelly, Dyan Mazurana, and Eryn Papworth | April 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It is commonly assumed that the main threats to uniformed peacekeepers originate from outside of peacekeeping missions. In reality, however, many women (and some men) deployed as military or police peacekeepers are subjected to sexual abuse by other members of the organizations they serve. Until now, there has been little research specifically focused on this sexual abuse by uniformed peacekeepers against their peacekeeping colleagues. This paper helps fill that gap, drawing on a survey of peacekeepers as well as data from interviews and a closed-door workshop.

This research reveals that sexual abuse is a major threat to uniformed peacekeepers, especially women. Among all survey participants, approximately one in ten said they personally experienced sexual abuse while serving in a peacekeeping mission, while a similar proportion witnessed sexual abuse against another peacekeeper. The proportion was significantly higher for women (28 percent experienced and 26 percent witnessed) than for men (2 percent experienced and 4 percent witnessed). A large share of the incidents of abuse were perpetrated by higher-ranking men within the mission. The main factor enabling this abuse was the internal organizational cultures of the police and military forces of troop- and police-contributing countries (T/PCCs).

Despite the prevalence of sexual abuse within peacekeeping missions, the UN and T/PCCs have not put in place adequate policies to effectively respond to the issue. This lack of attention is in contrast to the relatively robust architecture for reporting on and investigating sexual exploitation and abuse of host communities. Policies and attention to the sexual abuse

of peacekeepers and sexual exploitation and abuse of host communities have been artificially separated, but these forms of abuse are fueled by similar dynamics of militarism and inequality. The responsibility for addressing sexual abuse within peacekeeping operations lies both with T/PCCs and with the UN, which should require the highest standards for behavior within peacekeeping missions.

Existing systems for addressing sexual exploitation and abuse of host communities are generally not designed for or used to address sexual abuse of peacekeepers. As a result, peacekeepers have little confidence in mechanisms for reporting sexual abuse that they experience or witness against their colleagues. Moreover, when incidents are reported, the prevailing sentiment is that perpetrators are not held accountable due to a culture of impunity within peacekeeping missions. Because current systems are insufficient and ineffective, women peacekeepers often have to protect themselves and respond to sexual abuse on their own.

If the UN and T/PCCs do not prevent and respond to sexual abuse and dismantle the patriarchal cultures that enable it, their initiatives to increase women's meaningful participation in peacekeeping operations will fail. The UN needs to take the sexual abuse of peacekeepers as seriously as it takes peacekeepers' sexual exploitation and abuse of host

communities, especially considering the interconnected systemic causes of both types of abuse.



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1. Transform the organization cultures that enable sexual abuse of peacekeepers.

Organizational cultures that enable or tolerate sexism, homophobia, and sexual discrimination, harassment, and assault reflect poorly on missions and the UN as a whole and create a toxic environment that enables other abuses. They are also a barrier to recruiting and retaining women peacekeepers. Mission leaders play a critical role in changing these cultures and should thus be evaluated, in part, on their ability to create and maintain a diverse, tolerant, inclusive, safe, secure, and respectful workplace. Toward this end, the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) should track organizational culture during a leader's tenure. In addition, the UN should recognize leaders and T/PCCs that proactively promote a positive organizational culture and prioritize preventing and responding to sexual abuse of peacekeepers.

2. Mandate robust training to prevent sexual abuse of peacekeepers.

The UN should require that all uniformed peacekeepers complete training not only on sexual abuse of host populations but also on sexual abuse within militarized organizations. This training should be in-person and at least two hours long, and it should be designed and given by experts on sexual and gender-based violence. The training should outline the links between sexual exploitation and abuse of host communities and sexual abuse of peacekeepers. The training curriculum can also draw on hypothetical situations to outline the full spectrum of sexual abuse, explain the predominant patterns of sexual abuse, and address questions about intimate relationships within peacekeeping missions. In addition, the training should explain systems for reporting sexual abuse, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators to account.

3. Require T/PCCs to address sexual abuse of peacekeepers within their contingents.

The UN should include more explicit language on sexual abuse of peacekeepers in its memoranda of understanding with T/PCCs, including a clear definition of sexual abuse, a clear statement that this abuse is prohibited by UN standards of conduct, language on expectations with regards to training and discipline, and reference to T/PCCs' commitment to relevant resolutions and conventions. The secretary-general could also expand the voluntary compact on preventing and addressing sexual exploitation and abuse to address all forms of sexual abuse within UN peacekeeping. Similarly, the UN could require countries that participate in peacekeeping operations to have a military code of justice that incorporates sexual and gender-based crimes. The UN should also withhold personnel reimbursements from T/PCCs that fail to adequately investigate and address allegations of sexual abuse by their peacekeepers. In addition, sexual abuse against peacekeepers could be prioritized through the secretary-general's Action for Peacekeeping initiative (A4P) and the plan's focus on peacekeeper safety.

4. Create a robust, confidential, and victim-centric reporting and investigation infrastructure.

The UN should create a reporting infrastructure that is anonymous and outside of the chain of command. This infrastructure could build upon the existing accountability system for sexual exploitation and abuse of host communities, which, while not perfect, has made progress in requiring commitments from the UN and accountability from T/PCCs. To enable this existing system to receive and investigate reports of sexual abuse against peacekeepers regardless of the identity of the perpetrator, the capacity of Office of Internal Oversight Services and conduct and discipline teams should be expanded. In addition, DPO should expand the use of Clear Check to prevent the redeployment of peacekeepers who sexually abuse other peacekeepers and publish reports on allegations, actions taken against perpetrators, and outcomes. The UN could also expand the Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate to support peacekeepers who experience sexual abuse. The UN should also strengthen whistleblower protections for uniformed peacekeepers reporting sexual abuse. Finally, DPO and T/PCCs should track incidences of sexual abuse within uniformed peacekeeping contingents through independent exit surveys, with the data disaggregated by the gender of the victim and perpetrator, the mission the victim is deployed to, whether the perpetrator is a member of that mission, and the rank of the perpetrator.