

The logo for the International Peace Institute (IPI) features the letters 'IPI' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, centered within a white square.

INTERNATIONAL
PEACE
INSTITUTE

Expanding Conceptions of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence among Military Peacekeepers

Gretchen Baldwin

JUNE 2022

GRETCHEN BALDWIN is a Researcher with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) Peace Operations and Conflict Management Program. She was formerly a Research Fellow at IPI.

Email: gretchen.baldwin@sipri.org

The views expressed in this publication represent those of the author and not necessarily those of the International Peace Institute. IPI welcomes consideration of a wide range of perspectives in the pursuit of a well-informed debate on critical policies and issues in international affairs.

The author would like to thank Cassidy Giordano for research assistance; Albert Trithart and Anna Sattler for exceptional editorial and structural guidance at every stage of this paper; Phoebe Donnelly, Henri Myrntinen, Jenna Russo, Lotte Vermeij, and Jasmine-Kim Westendorf for their generous support as reviewers; and all participants in IPI's Women in Peace Operations research workshops between 2019 and 2021, whose insights helped to shape this analysis.

IPI is grateful to the Government of Canada's Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations for funding this project.

Executive Summary

UN peacekeeping missions tend to frame conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) narrowly both in terms of who its victims are and who is best placed to address it: the victims of CRSV are usually assumed to be women and girls, and there is often an expectation that women peacekeepers will be better able to address CRSV than men. These assumptions reflect the frequent conflation of "CRSV" with "violence against women and girls," as well as with "sexual and gender-based violence" (a broader phenomenon that encompasses CRSV). They also reflect the broader conflation of "women" and "gender" throughout UN policy documents and training resources for military peacekeepers.

This narrow understanding of CRSV harms victims of sexual violence who are not women and girls, including men and boys as well as sexual and gender minorities. Increasingly, UN documents recognize that women and girls are not the only victims of CRSV. However, their recommendations still tend to frame women and girls as the victims. Other groups (if they are named) are treated as add-ons, and little to no guidance is given on how to address their unique needs and vulnerabilities. This narrow understanding of victimhood is also reflected in—and perpetuated by—peacekeeping trainings, where victims are usually presented as women or girls.

Beyond the victims, narrow understandings of CRSV also harm women peacekeepers. Those pushing to increase the number of uniformed women peacekeepers often emphasize their added value in preventing and responding to CRSV. However, there is little data to back up the assumption that women are better than men at addressing CRSV. Moreover, this assumption can perpetuate the idea that women peacekeepers' primary added value is their gender identity and saddles them with additional responsibilities, often without adequate training, resources, or authority. Assigning these responsibilities to women peacekeepers is also a disservice to men peacekeepers who might benefit from learning more about how to prevent and respond to CRSV.

While it is important to keep in mind that military peacekeepers are not (and should not necessarily be) the primary responders to CRSV, they are often the first responders. They therefore need to be able to recognize different types of victims and to refer victims to appropriate service providers. Critically, skills for addressing CRSV need to be built among all peacekeepers—not only women. More broadly, peacekeeping policies and trainings should move beyond neatly binary, gendered categories such as man/woman, perpetrator/victim, and violent/peaceful and avoid reinforcing the idea that "gender" is equivalent to "women."

Introduction

In calling to increase uniformed women’s participation in peacekeeping operations, the UN has often cited the ways in which women peacekeepers can make missions more effective. For example, it is often expected that they will reduce sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of host communities by peacekeepers, better connect with women and children in host communities, and enhance missions’ efforts to protect civilians. One of the most cited rationales is that women peacekeepers will help missions better prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV).¹

It is important to recognize the positive contribution of women peacekeepers to missions’ CRSV efforts. However, seeing women peacekeepers as inherently better than men at addressing CRSV by nature of their gender identity reinforces stereotypes about the types of roles military women can or should play. Assumptions that women are better at addressing CRSV are also based on gender-essentialist understandings of CRSV as primarily consisting of women experiencing rape at the hands of armed men. More broadly, focusing primarily on CRSV, which is just one subcategory of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), risks overlooking nonsexual forms of gender-based violence.² This narrow framing of CRSV, its victims, and who is responsible for addressing it harms or limits the roles of three groups: (1) victims of sexual violence who are not women or girls; (2) women peacekeepers themselves who may be given a task they are not trained for; and (3) men peacekeepers who might benefit from learning more about how to prevent and respond to CRSV. An additional group that should be considered in future work is victims of gender-based violence that is not sexual in nature. However, this falls outside of the scope of this paper.

This issue brief explores how the UN system currently understands SGBV and CRSV, how this

understanding affects the responsibilities, roles, and perceptions of military peacekeepers, and how UN policies—especially those focused on military women’s participation in peacekeeping—might be more inclusive. It draws on desk research as well as ten interviews with practitioners, UN personnel, and academic gender experts, as well as insights shared in four closed-door, expert-level workshops on uniformed women’s participation in peacekeeping operations held at IPI between November 2019 and November 2021.

Problematizing Narrow Definitions of CRSV and SGBV

The primary emphasis of the WPS agenda—as seen in the name—is women and women’s rights. As many have noted, this reinforces the misconception that “women” and “gender” are synonymous—in other words, that only women have a gender identity or that focusing on gender means focusing on women. It also erases anyone who does not fall neatly into the binary categories of “men” and “women.”

Given that the WPS agenda is the primary vehicle through which gender is mainstreamed in UN peacekeeping, this conflation of “gender” and “women” can be seen throughout UN policy documents and training resources for military peacekeepers. By equating gender with women, UN peacekeeping operations are missing opportunities to analyze the full spectrum of gendered needs and capabilities both within the mission and in the host community. It also often means that the burden of “gender work” is placed on women peacekeepers—and not on men peacekeepers—regardless of whether they are gender experts. This gendered division of labor perpetuates stereotypes among mission personnel and reflects a narrow understanding of the victims and perpetrators of CRSV.

1 Lotte Vermeij, “Woman First, Soldier Second: Taboos and Stigmas Facing Military Women in UN Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, October 2020; Gretchen Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons: The Evolution of Gendered Community Engagement in UN Peace Operations,” International Peace Institute, November 2021; Lisa Sharland, “Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations: Assessing Influence and Impact,” International Peace Institute, January 2021, pp. 14–15; IPI research workshop on women, peace, and security (WPS) and protection of civilians, November 2019; IPI research workshop on UN engagement teams, January 2020.

2 See, for example: Claire Duncanson, “Beyond Liberal vs. Liberating: Women’s Economic Empowerment in the United Nations’ Women, Peace and Security Agenda,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 21, no. 1 (2019); and Sara Meger, “The Fetishization of Sexual Violence in International Security,” *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 2016).

Box 1. Definitions

Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) refers to “any type of violence directed against individuals or groups based on their sex or gender. Women, men, girls, boys and lesbian, gay, bi, trans, and intersex (LGBTI) people can all be victims of SGBV. However, it disproportionately affects women and girls due to deeply entrenched gender norms and unequal power relationships. SGBV is endemic in all societies, due to the global nature of gender inequality and [is] not necessarily... conflict related. It increases further during periods of conflict, population displacement and political instability. While [conflict-related sexual violence] is one form of SGBV, other forms include female genital mutilation, intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse.”³

Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) refers to “rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, enforced sterilization, forced marriage, and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity perpetrated against women, men, girls or boys that is directly or indirectly linked to a conflict.”⁴ Victims are frequently actual or perceived members of a “political, ethnic or religious minority group or targeted on the basis of actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.”⁵

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) encompasses two distinct phenomena: sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Sexual exploitation is “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.”⁶ Sexual abuse is “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions.”⁷

Sexual and gender minorities include “lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgender people (LGBT); intersex people (people whose bodies do not have typically male or female sex characteristics due to variations in chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones and/or genitals); gender non-conforming people who may not see themselves as transgender; and people involved in same-sex relations who may not see themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual, possibly preferring another word to self identify (such as polyamorous, queer or two-spirited) or possibly preferring no label at all.”⁸

Limited Conceptions of Who Can Be Victims of CRSV

Given the frequent conflation of women and gender, CRSV and SGBV are commonly used interchangeably with “violence against women and girls.” The collapsing of these terms into each other reinforces the view that only women (and sometimes girls) have gender identities, erases sexual violence against men and gender minorities, and suggests that only violence against women is sexualized and that all violence against women is sexual in nature while limiting the understanding

of (and therefore policy and programming to address) the very broad spectrum of gendered violence. Where policy and training course materials acknowledge that there are gaps in this limited understanding of gender and peacekeeping, they do so briefly and rhetorically, without deep substance or actionable recommendations.

This has started to change, however. The UN has a living definition of CRSV that can be updated in line with global developments, and gender-related UN documents have increasingly recognized that women and girls are not the only victims of sexual

3 United Nations, “Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence,” 2020, p. 6.

4 UN Security Council, *Conflict-Related Sexual Violence—Report of the Secretary-General*, UN Doc. S/2022/272, March 29, 2022, para. 4. Importantly, non-binary, transgender, and sexual minorities are not named explicitly as potential victim groups in this definition of CRSV despite their particular vulnerability in conflict settings.

5 Ibid.

6 UN Secretariat, *Secretary General’s Bulletin—Special Measures for Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse*, UN Doc. ST/SGB/2003/13, October 9, 2003, section 1.

7 Ibid.

8 Jeffrey O’Malley et al., “The Sustainable Development Goals: Sexual and Gender Minorities,” UN Development Programme, 2018, p. 27.

Table 1. Treatment of CRSV in select documents related to peacekeeping

<p>Documents that address the role of military peacekeeping in addressing CRSV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPKO/DFS Guidelines: Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations (UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and Department of Field Services (DFS), 2010) • Lesson 2.6: Conflict Related Sexual Violence, Core Pre-deployment Training Materials (DPKO and DFS, 2017) • United Nations Field Missions: Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Policy (UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA), Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), 2019)
<p>Documents that acknowledge CRSV as a subset of SGBV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson 2.6: Conflict Related Sexual Violence, Core Pre-deployment Training Materials (DPKO and DFS, 2017) • Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Emergencies (Global Protection Cluster, 2019) • United Nations Field Missions: Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Policy (DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and OSRSG-SVC, 2019) • Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and OSRSG-SVC, 2020)
<p>Documents that mention nonsexual forms of gender-based violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource Package (DPO, 2020) • The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook (DPO, 2020)
<p>Documents that mention men and boys as potential victims of CRSV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO and DFS, 2018) • Gender Perspectives in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (Peace Operations Training Institute, 2018) • Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Emergencies (Global Protection Cluster, 2019) • Preventing Violence Against Women and Promoting Gender Equality in Peacekeeping (Peace Operations Training Institute and Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), 2019) • United Nations Field Missions: Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and OSRSG-SVC, 2019) • Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource Package (DPO, 2020) • Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and OSRSG-SVC, 2020)

<p>Documents that mention sexual and gender minorities as potential victims of CRSV</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Handbook for Coordinating Gender-based Violence Interventions in Emergencies (Global Protection Cluster, 2019) • Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (DPO, DPPA, OHCHR, and OSRSG-SVC, 2020)
<p>Documents that highlight women peacekeepers as uniquely positioned to address the needs of women and girls in the host community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPKO/DFS Guidelines: Integrating a Gender Perspective into the Work of the United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO and DFS, 2010) • Gender Equality and Women, Peace and Security Resource Package (DPO, 2020) • The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping Handbook (DPO, 2020)

violence. For example, Security Council Resolution 2106 (2013) acknowledges that “men and boys” are affected by sexual violence, and Resolution 2467 (2019) acknowledges that “men and boys” are also “targets” of sexual violence. This trend is even more apparent in handbooks and reports, which tend to be more inclusive in how they define potential victims of CRSV than shorter, more political documents such as resolutions (see Table 1). For example, the UN CRSV handbook and the secretary-general’s recent annual reports on CRSV repeatedly acknowledge that women and girls are not the only victims of CRSV. These expansive definitions could set a positive precedent for future policies related to gender and peacekeeping, as they indicate an openness to redefining the scope of CRSV prevention and response.

However, a closer look at these documents shows that they still frame their recommendations for action around the “women and girls as victims” trope. Men and boys, if they are named, are treated

By equating gender with women, UN peacekeeping operations are missing opportunities to analyze the full spectrum of gendered needs and capabilities both within the mission and in the host community.

as add-ons rather than separate groups of victims with unique needs and vulnerabilities, and there is little guidance on how to identify and report the CRSV they experience or to ensure they receive adequate support. For example, while the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) includes men and boys in its working definition of CRSV, women’s protection advisers are the primary liaison for nonemergency assistance to victims.⁹ This seems to preclude assistance to gender minorities or men and boys, as the mandates of women’s protection advisers are centered on women and girls, and there is no comparable position for other types of victims.¹⁰ As a result, even

when policies are inclusive on paper, the application of this inclusive language is often a matter of individual discretion (e.g., whether the person responding to sexual violence recognizes men as potential victims).¹¹

Attention to CRSV against men and boys is lacking in part because violence against women on the

9 This guidance was included in the mission’s “pocket cards,” which explain peacekeepers’ mandates in relation to patrol-related activities, including responding to CRSV, protecting civilians (including children specifically), preventing or reporting human rights violations and abuses, and dealing with captured persons. Pocket cards are designed to quickly answer the most critical “who,” “where,” “when,” and “how” questions and to provide information on reporting and general guidelines for military personnel. MONUSCO was the first mission to introduce these pocket cards in the mid-2010s. Interview with gender adviser formerly deployed to MONUSCO, November 2020.

10 Office of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (OSRSG-SVC), “Women’s Protection Advisers,” available at www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/our-work/womens-protection-advisers/; Thalif Deen, “UN Deploys Women Protection Advisers to Curb Sexual Violence,” Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom, July 16, 2013, available at www.peacewomen.org/resource/un-deploys-women-protection-advisers-curb-sexual-violence.

11 Heleen Touquet and Ellen Gorris, “Out of the Shadows? The Inclusion of Men and Boys in Conceptualisations of Wartime Sexual Violence,” *Reproductive Health Matters* 24, no. 47 (2016).

basis of their gender is often a socially acceptable concept and aligns with existing biases and assumptions.¹² Gender-based violence against men and boys, on the other hand—particularly when that violence is sexual in nature—can be more uncomfortable to discuss or address, in part because accepting that such violence occurs can challenge patriarchal norms and assumptions. For example, some military peacekeepers argue that men and boys who are victims of CRSV would not seek or engage with psychosocial services “even if [those services] existed.”¹³ However, research has shown that men and boys do seek out and use such services if they exist (though CRSV resources are lacking for all victims in most conflict settings).¹⁴ Sexual violence against men is also not always understood as sexual violence, even by the victims themselves. For example, men often experience sexual violence in the context of torture or hazing, which are rarely acknowledged as CRSV or SGBV, particularly in securitized state or non-state institutions.¹⁵ Additionally, men in conflict settings are often forced to sexually violate family members or witness family members being sexually violated, which causes psychological and emotional distress but is rarely addressed in policy documents on SGBV or CRSV.¹⁶

Sexual and gender minorities are rarely mentioned at all in peacekeeping policies and resources, and the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO) “do[es] not appear substantively engaged on the topic [of sexual orientation and gender identity].”¹⁷ When gender and sexual minorities are mentioned, as with

men and boys, they are often included as a side note. There are no concrete recommendations and guidelines on how peacekeepers should consider or work with them, particularly in the face of cultural taboos and legal barriers such as laws criminalizing homosexuality. UN peacekeeping missions, in turn, have rarely included sexual and gender minorities in their reporting, contributing to a lack of data on the sexual orientation of victims.¹⁸ There is also little guidance on the unique forms of SGBV that sexual and gender minorities may experience. For example, SGBV is often used against sexual and gender minorities as a form of social control and policing of binary gender norms, and it can often take the form of blackmail or extortion.¹⁹

This narrow understanding of victimhood is also reflected in—and perpetuated by—peacekeeping trainings, where victims are usually presented as women or girls. One interviewee pointed out that peacekeepers’ “understanding of who becomes victims [as well as] how is not very well developed... because of the ways we are institutionally trained.”²⁰ Another noted that “if you don’t actually train people to recognize things, they see things but they don’t really see them. They just assume it’s how things are.”²¹ These shortcomings are exacerbated by the fact that gender and CRSV trainings are often short and optional, and the mandatory pre-deployment training on CRSV is limited in scope and packaged with a lot of other information.²²

More broadly, military peacekeepers’ understanding of CRSV and SGBV is complicated by ambiguity in

12 While this is somewhat dependent on context, violence against women tends to be accepted because it reinforces the protector mentality that women are inherently vulnerable victims. Institutional training is unlikely to significantly challenge such deeply held gender assumptions and biases. The author thanks Jasmine-Kim Westendorf for nuancing this point during the review process.

13 Interview with former gender adviser deployed to MONUSCO, November 2020. Similar sentiments were shared in a December 2020 interview with a former MONUSCO force commander as well as in two closed-door workshops hosted by IPI in November 2019 and February 2020. Relatedly, men who do come forward to report SGBV are sometimes turned away or discouraged from pursuing justice. Will Storr, “The Rape of Men: The Darkest Secret of War,” *The Guardian*, July 16, 2011; interview with academic gender expert, December 2020.

14 Heleen Touquet et al., “From ‘It Rarely Happens’ to ‘It’s Worse for Men’: Dispelling Misconceptions about Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and Displacement,” *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 2, no. 3 (September 2020).

15 Interview with Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) peacekeeping trainer, January 2021.

16 Interview with staff member of the UN Department of Peace Operations’ (DPO) gender unit, October 2021.

17 Albert Trithart, “A UN for All? UN Policy and Programming on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics,” International Peace Institute, February 2021. DPO staff indicated in a recent IPI workshop that the agency is assessing ways to better consider sexual and gender minorities in policies related to the protection of civilians.

18 It is also important to note, however, that collecting data on sexual and gender minorities is complex, and there are many reasons why individuals would not want to “out” themselves when reporting violence.

19 Megan Daigle and Henri Myrntinen, “Bringing Diverse Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) into Peacebuilding Policy and Practice,” *Gender and Development* 26, no. 1 (2018); José Fernando Serrano-Amaya, *Homophobic Violence in Armed Conflict and Political Transition* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

20 Interview with former gender adviser deployed to MONUSCO, November 2020.

21 Interview with former gender adviser deployed to MONUSCO, November 2020.

22 The courses referred to include the Peace Operations Training Institute’s “Gender Perspectives in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations” from 2018 and “Preventing Violence Against Women and Promoting Gender Equality in Peacekeeping” from 2019; interview with staff member of DPO gender unit, October 2020.

Box 2. Sexual abuse of and by military peacekeepers

Increasing attention has been paid in recent years to sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) of host communities, including men and boys, by UN peacekeepers.²³ SEA is a breach of trust between host communities and peacekeeping missions, especially when the UN and troop-contributing countries fail to appropriately respond to such incidents. It can also reduce community members' willingness to report cases of CRSV, not only because it reduces trust but also because it may make them feel unsafe reporting to military peacekeepers and can signal that missions do not take such violence seriously.²⁴ Considering the prevalence of SEA, deploying military peacekeepers to respond to violence may actually increase the risk of CRSV in host communities, and investigations can re-traumatize victims and sometimes are motivated by a desire to discredit their testimonies.²⁵

Compared to SEA perpetrated by peacekeepers, considerably less attention has been paid to sexual abuse of peacekeepers. As recent research has shown, sexual abuse within UN missions and the militaries of troop-contributing countries is a serious and widespread problem that leads many peacekeepers to question whether to deploy or redeploy.²⁶ Both men and women peacekeepers can experience sexual abuse, though women face a heightened risk due to the culture of sexism, power dynamics, and overall low number of women in peacekeeping missions. Men in security institutions, particularly the military, also risk facing sexual violence due to a culture of homophobia and militarized masculinity.²⁷

Addressing both SEA by peacekeepers and sexual abuse of peacekeepers requires not only implementing new rules and mandates to counter these threats but also expanding peacekeepers' knowledge and understanding of the types of victims and clarifying who is an appropriate responder to incidents of CRSV. Perhaps most importantly, doing so requires addressing the innate gendered nature of militaries, militarized masculinity, and historical norms around gendered, homophobic, and militarized violence internal to security institutions.²⁸ It also requires problematizing the disturbingly prevalent assumption that "having more female soldiers [makes] military units better able to respond to sexual violence," which puts the onus for addressing the problem on women rather than challenging men's behavior and social and cultural norms.²⁹

their mandates. Military peacekeepers typically use "CRSV" to describe what they are mandated to respond to. Many other forms of SGBV, such as early marriage, fall outside of what military peacekeepers can or should address. As one interviewee said, SGBV "could encompass anything" and might

take the focus away from more targeted responses to sexual violence.³⁰ Many forms of SGBV, as well as follow-up with victims of CRSV, can often be better handled by missions' civilian components or other actors.³¹ Military peacekeepers' reputations as perpetrators of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) can

23 While this publication focuses on military peacekeepers, SEA of host communities and sexual abuse of peacekeepers are serious problems for all peacekeeping personnel (both as victims and as perpetrators). Therefore, the narrow focus of this research should not be seen as downplaying the civilian side of this issue.

24 Jenna Russo, "UN Peacekeeping and Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence," International Peace Institute, May 2022.

25 Interview with academic gender expert, December 2020. For more on this, see: Jasmine-Kim Westendorf and Louise Searle, "Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peace Operations: Trends, Policy Responses and Future Directions," *International Affairs* 93, no. 2 (March 2017). The author thanks Henri Myrntinen for nuancing this point during the review process.

26 Vermeij, "Women First, Soldier Second"; Phoebe Donnelly, Dyan Mazurana, and Eryn Papworth, "Blue on Blue: Investigating Sexual Abuse of Peacekeepers," International Peace Institute, April 2022. See also: Heather Huhtanen, "Global MOWIP Report—Fit-for-the-Future Peace Operations: Advancing Gender Equality to Achieve Long-term and Sustainable Peace," Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), June 2022.

27 Dave Philipps, "Six Men Tell Their Stories of Sexual Assault in the Military," *New York Times*, September 10, 2019; Miriam Matthews et al., "Needs of Male Sexual Assault Victims in the US Armed Forces," *RAND Health Quarterly* 8, no. 2 (2018); C. Todd Lopez, "Male Hazing Most Common Type of Sexual Assault, Expert Reveals," US Army, April 18, 2016.

28 Anwarul K. Chowdhury, "10 Years On, The Promises to Women Need to Be Kept," *NATO Review*, October 13, 2010; Dean Peacock, "The Gendered Political Economy of Militarized Peacekeeping," *IPI Global Observatory*, October 28, 2021. While this issue brief focuses on uniformed peacekeeping, rates of SEA perpetrated by civilian peacekeepers are distressingly high (and, like any widespread abuse, certainly underreported). Civilian peacekeepers account for more allegations of SEA per capita than military peacekeepers, while police peacekeepers have the lowest levels of per capita allegations. The author thanks Jasmine-Kim Westendorf for nuancing this point during the review process.

29 Hannah Wright, "Ending Sexual Violence and the War System—Or Militarizing Feminism?" *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 17, no. 3 (July 2015), p. 505.

30 Interview with ECOWAS peacekeeping trainer, January 2021.

31 Ibid.

also undermine their ability to meaningfully respond to CRSV (see Box 2).³²

Nonetheless, some missions have recently been mandated to address not just CRSV but also SGBV more broadly. While the language may have changed on paper, this change has not necessarily carried over to the resources and activities devoted to addressing CRSV and SGBV, and headquarters and mission personnel sometimes use the two terms interchangeably.³³ Moreover, the UN has many well-established guidance documents and structures that focus on CRSV, while guidance on how peacekeepers should address SGBV is less developed.³⁴

Regardless of how they understand CRSV or SGBV, peacekeepers must adopt an inclusive understanding of the victims of this violence. Limiting the scope of what is considered SGBV “may result in the exclusion of violence against and between men,” as well as against sexual and gender minorities.³⁵ In the long run, efforts to prevent and respond to SGBV that focus only on violence against women can “[hamper] sustainable peacebuilding and development in post-conflict societies” and “[limit] the potential efficacy of interventions around gender-based violence.”³⁶

The assumption that women peacekeepers will be better able to address CRSV than men perpetuates the idea that their primary added value is their gender identity.

Gendered Division of Labor among Military Peacekeepers Responding to CRSV

The UN continues to push for increasing the number of uniformed women deployed to peacekeeping operations.³⁷ Those pushing for this increase often use both rights-based and operational justifications. While rights-based justifications are premised on women’s equal right to deploy to peacekeeping operations, operational justifications

are premised on the presumed added value of women peacekeepers. Operational arguments tend to rely on gendered assumptions or stereotypes about women’s and men’s “innate” abilities.³⁸ One of the most prevalent of these assumptions is that women

peacekeepers will be better able to address CRSV because of their presumed personal connection with women victims in host communities.³⁹

This assumption can perpetuate the idea that women peacekeepers’ primary added value is their gender identity. One interviewee even stated that decreasing CRSV is sometimes seen as the only benefit of deploying women to UN missions.⁴⁰ This assumption also saddles women with additional

32 Interview with academic gender expert, November 2020.

33 Russo, “UN Peacekeeping and Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence”; Sharland, “Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peacekeeping Operations,” pp. 14–15; Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons”; Vermeij, “Woman First, Soldier Second.” In a January 2021 interview, an ECOWAS peacekeeper trainer pointed out that one possible reason for this is that CRSV has been conceptualized within the peace and security sectors while SGBV has been conceptualized within the humanitarian sphere.

34 Russo, “UN Peacekeeping and Protection of Civilians from Sexual and Gender-Based Violence.” There is some guidance for SGBV response by specialized police teams, but this is not widespread. The author thanks Lotte Vermeij for emphasizing this point during the review process.

35 Karen Graaff, “The Implications of a Narrow Understanding of Gender-Based Violence,” *Feminist Encounters* 5, no. 1 (2021), p. 5.

36 Pamela Scully, “Expanding the Concept of Gender-Based Violence in Peacebuilding and Development,” *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 5, no. 3 (October 2010), p. 23.

37 This is done through both internal initiatives like the UN’s Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy and external initiatives like the Canadian government’s Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, both of which aim to increase women’s “full, equal, and meaningful participation” in peace operations. UN DPO, “Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy 2018–2028,” 2018; Government of Canada, “Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations,” available at www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/gender_equality-egalite_des_genres/elsie_initiative-initiative_elsie.aspx?lang=eng.

38 Nina Wilén, “What’s the ‘Added Value’ of Male Peacekeepers? (Or—Why We Should Stop Instrumentalising Female Peacekeepers’ Participation),” Egmont Royal Institute for International Relations, February 2020.

39 Ibid.; Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons.”

40 Interview with expert on WPS and SEA in peacekeeping policy, October 2020.

responsibilities—either formal or implicit—by merit of their gender identity, often without adequate training, resources, or authority. Relatedly, there are reports that many men peacekeepers believe they should not engage with sexual violence, reflecting the idea that women should respond to “women-specific issues” and that men may be a liability in this area.⁴¹ As a result, responsibility for preventing and responding to CRSV often falls on individual women rather than institutions, and the focus tends to be on the behaviors of individual men rather than the range of factors that give rise to CRSV. Moreover, women and men alike may end up in roles that do not align with their skill sets.⁴²

Despite the assumption that women peacekeepers can address CRSV more effectively than men, there is little data to back this up.⁴³ The masculine nature of security institutions, as well as the fact that most publicly acknowledged sexual violence is perpetrated by men against women, does suggest that victims may be more open to reporting CRSV to women. Indeed, one interviewee at UN headquarters said that more CRSV is reported when more women peacekeepers are deployed.⁴⁴ However, this evidence remains anecdotal, as missions do not collect data on the gender of peacekeepers referring CRSV incidents.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Too often, military peacekeepers have a narrow understanding of the dynamics of CRSV and of who should respond to it. This is in part because of gender biases at the individual, institutional, and cultural levels. It is also attributable to real practical

constraints. While military peacekeepers can play a crucial role in addressing CRSV, including by deterring violence through their physical presence, they are not well-equipped to address its root causes, hold perpetrators to account, or support victims. With vast mandates and insufficient resources, military peacekeepers are unlikely to be able to significantly expand the scope of their work on CRSV.⁴⁶ Nor is it necessarily appropriate for them to do so, especially considering the allegations of SEA surrounding many military peacekeeping contingents.

Yet while military peacekeepers are not (and should not necessarily be) the primary responders to CRSV, they are often the first responders. They therefore need to be able to recognize different types of victims and to refer victims to appropriate service providers, as well as avoid undermining CRSV prevention and response by other actors.⁴⁷ Critically, these skills need to be built among all peacekeepers—not only women.

Even if it takes time to design and implement mechanisms for missions to respond to CRSV in a holistic and responsible way, there is little harm in introducing a broader understanding of CRSV into manuals and policies as soon as possible. Peacekeeping policies and trainings should move beyond neatly binary, gendered categories such as man/woman, perpetrator/victim, and violent/peaceful and avoid reinforcing the idea that “gender” is equivalent to “women.” They should also pay more attention to men, boys, and sexual and gender minorities as potential victims of CRSV—though without directing attention away from women and girls.

Peacekeeping policies and trainings should move beyond neatly binary, gendered categories such as man/woman, perpetrator/victim, and violent/peaceful.

41 This issue was raised at IPI expert roundtables in November 2019, February 2020, and December 2020.

42 Sharland, “Women, Peace, and Security Mandates for UN Peace Operations,” pp. 14–15; Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons”; Huhtanen, “Global MOWIP Report”; Vermeij, “Woman First, Soldier Second”; IPI closed-door workshop, January 2020; IPI workshops, November 2019, January 2020, and February 2020.

43 One exception is a recent study showing that a greater presence of women peacekeepers is associated with an increase in reporting of rape. See: Neil Narang and Yanjun Liu, “Does Female Ratio Balancing Influence the Efficacy of Peacekeeping Units? Exploring the Impact of Female Peacekeepers on Post-Conflict Outcomes and Behavior,” *International Interactions* 48, no. 2 (2022).

44 Interview with staff member of DPO gender unit, October 2020. This sentiment has also been repeated in multiple closed-door workshops hosted by IPI between 2019 and 2022.

45 Baldwin, “From Female Engagement Teams to Engagement Platoons,” p. 19; Robert U. Nagel, Kate Fin, and Julia Maenza, “Gendered Impacts on Operational Effectiveness of UN Peace Operations,” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, May 2021; Robert U. Nagel, Kate Fin, and Julia Maenza, “You Cannot Improve What You Do Not Measure—The Gendered Dimensions of UN PKO Data,” *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, March 2022.

46 Interview with troop- and police-contributing country WPS and SEA policy experts; interview with staff member of DPO gender unit, October 2020.

47 The author thanks Henri Myrntinen for nuancing this point during the review process.

This must go beyond simply inserting “men and boys” and “sexual and gender minorities” alongside existing language tailored to women and girls. A perennial—and justified—critique from champions of the WPS agenda is that one should not simply “add women and stir.” So, too, should men, boys, and sexual and gender minorities be recognized as having their own unique, gendered needs. As one interviewee pointed out, slippage in services for victims of SGBV begins with the language. “Men

and boys” or “sexual and gender minorities” may be added to policy or mandate language, but without concrete action points linked to that language, “it slips out.”⁴⁸ As peacekeepers and policymakers consider these more expansive understandings of CRSV, particularly in training materials, it will be important to ensure that individuals are taught about gender and CRSV not just in a normative sense but also in a practical, technical sense.

⁴⁸ Interview with academic gender expert, November 2020.

The **INTERNATIONAL PEACE INSTITUTE** (IPI) is an independent, international not-for-profit think tank dedicated to managing risk and building resilience to promote peace, security, and sustainable development. To achieve its purpose, IPI employs a mix of policy research, strategic analysis, publishing, and convening. With staff from around the world and a broad range of academic fields, IPI has offices facing United Nations headquarters in New York and in Manama.



777 United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017-3521, USA
TEL +1-212-687-4300 FAX +1-212-983-8246

52-52 Harbour House, Bahrain Financial Harbour
P.O. Box 1467, Manama, Bahrain

www.ipinst.org