

# **Mental health and gender-based violence: Helping survivors of sexual violence in conflict – a training manual for helpers**

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## **Background**

Women living in conflict areas, or fleeing such areas, are frequently subjected to extreme forms of violence such as gender based violence (GBV) including rape. The mental health problems are often quite severe for those affected. Even so, the assistance available in such settings is often very limited, both in terms of physical and mental health care, and legal aid.

## **Aims**

This training manual, developed by Health and Human Rights Info (HHRI) aims at assisting helpers who provide help and psychosocial support to survivors of GBV during disasters, conflicts and emergencies. In these areas there is often a limited access to, or even complete lack of, health professionals with mental health expertise.

The manual offers a new contribution to the already existing material, by being a low intensity training manual that focuses on mental health issues following GBV, uses a therapeutic metaphor, grounding exercises and human rights perspective, and other tools, in order to create better trauma sensitive helpers.

This support may empower the GBV-survivor. By understanding her own trauma reaction and by finding ways to deal with traumatic memories and trauma triggers, the survivor can find new ways to cope. The goal is to assist the survivor to be in charge of her own life.

## **Methods**

The strength of this manual is that it is developed based on training offered to personnel working with sexually traumatized women in Congo as well as clinical work with rape victims in war and conflict areas. The manual has been piloted in 5 different countries around the world. Based on these experiences, significant changes and developments have taken place in order to make it even more usable in different cultural settings.

The training uses a single metaphorical narrative to describe the experience and consequences of GBV. We explain the course that trauma takes in generic terms through the metaphor of the Butterfly Woman; it remains a story but at the same time it is clinically accurate.

The manual contains practical perspectives, tools and exercises that can be implemented in situations where the need to provide assistance is of essence. The use of the Butterfly Woman metaphor is described and illustrated. Through examples it is shown how such a story can be a shared point of reference between helpers and survivors, and a way of working with trauma in an indirect way. The trauma event, the reactions and ways to assist the survivor are depicted through the story, based on clinical as well as scientific experience and knowledge.

## Results

As this is a presentation of a training manual it is too early to conclude anything. The manual and attached information about its construction and use can be found at <http://hhri-gbv-manual.org/> The project has been founded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway and the Mental Health Project.