



Mental health and gender-based violence



Mental health and gender-based violence

Helping survivors of sexual violence in conflict
– a training manual

Health and Human Rights Info (HHRI) is a database that gives free information in English and Spanish on the effects of human rights violations on mental health in contexts of disaster, conflict and war. The database contains a list of publications that discuss psychosocial interventions at individual and community level. It also provides information on organisations that work in this field.

This manual has been piloted in five different countries and is written by a team composed of: Nora Sveaass (responsible for the project), Katinka Salvesen, Annika With, Helen Christie, Doris Drews, Solveig Dahl, Kristina Josefin Larsson and Elisabeth Ng Langdal. *Plain Sense* has edited and finalised the manual.

The development of this manual was funded by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Project Mental Health. The views expressed are those of HHRI and do not necessarily represent the policies of the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs or Project Mental Health.

HHRI

Kirkegata 5
0153 Oslo, Norway
postmaster@hhri.org
www.hhri.org

**If you would like a free copy of this manual email us at:
postmaster@hhri.org**



Working with survivors of GBV

Gender based violence, such as rape and other forms of sexual violence, affect the survivor in many ways, in particular it may affect mental health seriously.

These topics are among those discussed in the manual:

- The psychological meaning of trauma.
- How traumatic events affect mental health.
- The signs of severe distress and how can they be assessed.
- Triggers or trauma-reminders, and how do we deal with these.
- How to deal with nightmares?
- How to create safe spaces to permit supportive dialogue and contact?
- Different approaches that may assist a survivor to deal with trauma and to move on in life.
- Other topics relevant for psychosocial care for survivors.

The manual has three parts:

- **Points of Departure** - main ideas, themes and content.
- **Training** - timetabled over three days. With exercises and guidance for trainer and participants, learning points in relation to trauma, and how to stabilise and support survivors of trauma.
- **Relevant resources** - further reading, brief presentations of theory, and links.

The training consists of:

- **Grounding exercises** how to use grounding exercises to help survivors who are panicked or have lost their energy.
- **Exercises** in plenary to explore techniques and tools.
- **Role Play** exercises for participants, learning skills by doing them together.
- **Discussions** in plenary or small groups, sharing understanding and experiences both from work and training, and getting feedback.
- **Key points** to remember (for example, "The story shows that...".) What to bear in mind when you are doing the training or meeting a survivor.
- **Teaching instruction** is pedagogical advice to the trainer to facilitate the training.
- **The metaphor** *The Butterfly Woman* is used through the training to illustrate how a fictional story can be a shared point of reference. It is about working with trauma in an indirect way. The story describes the changes that occur in a person who is traumatised, sudden alterations in her behaviour, reactions and feelings. Reactions vary from person to person, but a story can capture general or frequent forms of responses.

The focus of the manual

This training has been developed for helpers who provide assistance and support to women who survive gender-based violence (GBV) and sexual trauma during disasters, conflicts and emergency situations, where access to health professionals with psychological or psychiatric expertise is limited.

This manual can be used in different ways. The manual is not a therapy manual, but a training manual that suggests approaches and techniques that address the psychological needs of GBV survivors. It may also supplement and deepen the understanding of health workers who already have knowledge and experience. The main purpose, however, is to be used in training of helpers, to strengthen understanding trauma and practical approaches to assistance. It may be a tool for helpers who train other helpers and for groups of helpers who need self-study materials. The manual can be read, studied and discussed, and the exercises it contains can be tested and applied in groups working with this subject matter.

The manual explores the psychological meaning of trauma and how traumatic events affect mental health. What are the signs of severe stress? How can these be assessed and understood? How does a helper approach a woman shortly after she has been through dreadful and violent experiences? How to deal with her distress and how to create safe spaces that permit supportive dialogues? What forms of contact can help survivors to recover and heal? How can reporting of violations be prepared and handled and how can the survivor's rights and safety be ensured?

Human Rights and Respect are key values. Human rights may assist both in understanding the suffering and in finding ways to respond to it in a respectful and helpful way. Willingness to help and listen, allow survivors to control their own stories, and respect their self-determination, are important values that shape the way survivors should be approached. In addition, a helper needs to know how to manage closeness and distance, how to give positive support, and how to tolerate silence. The manual includes elements of theory but focuses on practical training techniques that directly assist survivors. We hope it may provide helpers with approaches and tools they may use to assist survivors of GBV to rebuild their lives and regain their sense of dignity.

