

# **Magnitude of childhood sexual violence (SV) in refugee settlements among females and males ages 13-24 years in Uganda: Implications for programming**

## **Background**

Globally, a concerning proportion of girls and boys experience sexual violence (SV) every year, with the situation presumed to be exacerbated in refugee settings (Vu, Adam, Wirtz *et al.* 2014; UNICEF 2022). Until now, this presumption has not been backed by rigorous, population-based estimates for children in humanitarian settings.

## **Aim**

Using the first-ever Humanitarian Violence Against Children and Youth Survey, this study examined the magnitude of childhood exposure SV in refugee settlements in Uganda, along with the context in which it occurs.

## **Methods**

The analyses are based on a cross-sectional sample of 1338 females and 927 males aged 13-24 years. We explored lifetime exposure to SV among 13-17-year-olds and among 18-24-year-olds (prior to age 18).

## **Results**

The results in Table 1 show that 19.4% of females and 9.5% of males 18-24 years experienced SV in childhood. Among 13-17-year-olds, experience of SV was higher among males (10.3%) than females (8.6%). Experience of SV was more prevalent among respondents with primary school or higher educational attainment and among those reporting ever being partnered. Among 13-17-year-olds, SV was more pronounced among the food insecure (13.5% females vs 22.8% males) and orphans (9.7% females vs 13.9% males) compared to their food secure and non-orphaned counterparts. SV was more likely to occur in the evening, with most respondents (73.3% females vs 53.2% males 18-24 years) reporting that their first SV incident occurred after arrival in refugee settlements (Table 2). Among 13-17-year-old survivors, the main perpetrators of SV were classmates (36.6%) for females, and friends (47.6%) for males. Current or previous partners were the main perpetrators of SV among both females (41.6%) and males (53.7%) 18-24 years old.

## **Recommendations**

The notable findings that, for most children in refugee settings, the first incident of SV occurs after arriving in refugee settlements, and that evenings raise the risk of SV point to the need to target children with prevention and response programs early on upon their arrival in refugee settlements. Targeted awareness raising campaigns, consideration of the built environment including lighting and safe accommodation, and gender-sensitive interventions should be considered given the differences in SV exposure for females versus males.

## References

- UNICEF. 2022. *Sexual Violence Against Children* Available: <https://www.unicef.org/protection/sexual-violence-against-children> Accessed 29 January 2024
- Vu, A, A Adam, A Wirtz, K Pham, L Rubenstein, N Glass, *et al.* 2014. The Prevalence of Sexual Violence among Female Refugees in Complex Humanitarian Emergencies: a Systematic Review and Meta-analysis, *PLoS Curr* 6. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1371/currents.dis.835f10778fd80ae031aac12d3b533ca7>

## Result Tables

**Table 1: Background characteristics of respondents by experience of childhood sexual violence**

| Background factors                  | 13-17            |         |                  |         | 18-24            |         |                  |         |
|-------------------------------------|------------------|---------|------------------|---------|------------------|---------|------------------|---------|
|                                     | Females          | p-value | Males            | p-value | Females          | p-value | Males            | p-value |
| <b>Education level</b>              |                  | 0.011*  |                  | 0.447   |                  | 0.034*  |                  |         |
| Primary incomplete or less          | 7.8 [5.0-12.0]   |         | 9.0 [5.4-14.6]   |         | 14.5 [6.1-30.7]  |         | 1.7 [0.6-5.0]    | <0.001* |
| Completed primary or more           | 18.2 [9.6-31.9]  |         | 18.4 [5.8-45.0]  |         | 22.8 [10.7-42.2] |         | 13.4 [8.7-20.2]  |         |
| <b>Ever partnered</b>               |                  | 0.001*  |                  | 0.069   |                  | 0.004*  |                  | 0.002*  |
| No                                  | 5.4 [2.3-11.9]   |         | 7.6 [3.9-14.2]   |         | 8.3 [1.9-29.1]   |         | 2.9 [1.0-8.5]    |         |
| Yes                                 | 22.8 [16.1-31.2] |         | 24.9 [13.4-41.4] |         | 23.6 [11.7-41.7] |         | 14.1 [10.4-18.8] |         |
| <b>Worked in the past 12 months</b> |                  | 0.717   |                  | 0.061   |                  | 0.513   |                  | 0.001*  |
| No                                  | 8.9 [5.5-14.1]   |         | 6.4 [3.2-12.6]   |         | 19.1 [10.3-32.8] |         | 3.4 [1.3-8.8]    |         |
| Yes                                 | 7.5 [3.7-14.8]   |         | 18.5 [11.0-29.6] |         | 19.9 [7.2-44.2]  |         | 13.4 [9.5-18.6]  |         |
| <b>Food insecurity</b>              |                  | 0.556   |                  | 0.568   |                  | 0.533   |                  | 0.763   |
| No                                  | 8.1 [4.6-14.0]   |         | 9.7 [5.5-16.7]   |         | 19.9 [9.2-37.8]  |         | 9.6 [6.4-14.3]   |         |
| Yes                                 | 13.5 [3.3-41.3]  |         | 22.8 [4.3-66.2]  |         | 9.5 [2.2-33.1]   |         | 4.6 [0.5-30.8]   |         |
| <b>Orphan</b>                       |                  | 0.509   |                  | 0.375   |                  | 0.154   |                  | 0.236   |
| No                                  | 8.1 [5.1-12.6]   |         | 8.7 [4.8-15.5]   |         | 21.8 [9.5-42.4]  |         | 10.9 [6.8-17.0]  |         |
| Yes                                 | 9.7 [5.2-17.1]   |         | 13.9 [5.9-29.1]  |         | 16.1 [7.9-30.0]  |         | 7.6 [3.5-15.7]   |         |
| <b>Country of origin</b>            |                  | 0.053   |                  | 0.550   |                  | <0.001* |                  | 0.585   |
| South Sudan                         | 6.3 [3.7-10.5]   |         | 9.4 [4.4-18.6]   |         | 9.9 [6.4-15.2]   |         | 10.1 [6.0-16.6]  |         |
| DRC                                 | 14.0 [8.2-22.9]  |         | 12.4 [4.8-28.5]  |         | 31.4 [14.6-55.1] |         | 5.7 [4.2-7.7]    |         |
| Others                              | 10.8 [8.3-14.0]  |         | 10.9 [1.0-60.5]  |         | 59.1 [38.7-76.7] |         | 14.0 [4.1-38.1]  |         |
| <b>Total</b>                        | 8.6 [5.5-13.2]   |         | 10.3 [6.1-17.1]  |         | 19.4 [9.5-35.7]  |         | 9.5 [5.9-15.2]   |         |

Note: DRC=Democratic Republic of Congo

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents among those who experienced childhood sexual violence**

| Background factors                           | 13-17            |                  | 18-24            |                  |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
|  | Females          | Males            | Females          | Males            |
| <b>Age experienced first sexual violence</b> |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| 1-9yrs                                       | 1.7 [0.2-13.9]   | 9.1 [1.4-42.1]   | 2.3 [0.8-6.7]    | -                |
| 10-18yrs                                     | 98.3 [86.1-99.8] | 90.9 [57.9-98.6] | 97.7 [93.3-99.2] | -                |
| <b>Time of day</b>                           |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Morning                                      | 10.5 [3.2-29.4]  | 35.4 [10.3-72.4] | 17.9 [8.1-35.1]  | 2.0 [0.3-12.7]   |
| Afternoon                                    | 44.4 [30.6-59.2] | 11.6 [3.5-31.8]  | 30.1 [18.0-45.8] | 38.3 [16.3-66.5] |
| Evening                                      | 44.8 [36.1-53.9] | 50.9 [20.5-80.6] | 47.3 [29.2-66.3] | 46.0 [20.9-73.4] |
| Late at night                                | 0.2 [0.0-2.1]    | 2.2 [0.3-14.3]   | 3.7 [0.6-18.1]   | 13.7 [3.7-39.9]  |
| Other  | -                | -                | 0.9 [0.1-7.9]    | -                |
| <b>Before or after arrival</b>               |                  |                  |                  |                  |
| Before                                       | 18.0 [2.7-63.0]  | 30.7 [10.9-61.7] | 21.0 [10.2-38.5] | 46.8 [8.2-89.7]  |
| After  | 82.0 [37.0-97.3] | 69.3 [38.3-89.1] | 73.3 [55.6-85.7] | 53.2 [10.3-91.8] |
| Decline                                      | -                | -                | 5.7 [2.0-14.8]   | -                |
| <b>Perpetrator</b>                           |                  |                  |                  |                  |

|                             |                  |                  |                  |                  |
|-----------------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Current or previous partner | 27.2 [9.7-56.5]  | 10.9 [3.7-28.1]  | 41.6 [13.9-75.8] | 53.7 [29.0-76.7] |
| Authority                   | 1.5 [0.2-12.8]   |                  | 3.9 [1.1-12.5]   | -                |
| Neighbor                    | 13.6 [4.4-35.2]  | 7.7 [2.8-19.3]   | 13.3 [3.6-38.6]  | 17.5 [3.6-55.0]  |
| Classmate                   | 36.6 [14.6-66.2] | 6.2 [0.9-31.8]   | 16.6 [7.9-31.9]  | 11.1 [7.5-16.0]  |
| Friend                      | 4.6 [1.1-17.6]   | 47.6 [23.6-72.9] | 6.2 [3.1-12.2]   | 15.8 [6.5-33.6]  |
| Stranger                    | 15.2 [5.5-35.7]  | 3.4 [0.5-19.8]   | 11.4 [6.5-19.2]  | 1.9 [0.3-12.4]   |
| Other                       | 1.2 [0.2-7.6]    | 24.1 [7.7-54.9]  | 6.9 [3.0-15.2]   | -                |