

## IRAQ

# Prevalence of Rape and Other Forms of Sexual Violence against Men and Boys, and Possible Repercussions against Survivors

June 2019

The following information has been provided in response to a query from a Legal Counsel in Austria. The information is valid as at 21 June 2019.

It is widely acknowledged that reports of rape and other forms of sexual violence against men and boys is prevalent in many conflict situations, yet it is a topic that remains often underreported given the extreme shame and stigma surrounding the issue.<sup>1</sup> The same is true for Iraq and information on sexual violence against men in Iraq is scarce and likely vastly underreported.<sup>2</sup> The Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict listed Iraq among the countries for which it had received and verified reports of rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Sexual violence against men and boys in conflict remains largely hidden and ignored, neglected in terms of recognition, resources and policy provision, despite being documented in nearly every armed conflict in which sexual violence is committed”; Chatham House, *Ignoring Male Victims of Sexual Violence in Conflict Is Short-Sighted and Wrong*, 10 January 2019, <http://bit.ly/2v7Yimm>. “Although limited research on sexual violence against males has been undertaken, in settings where it has been explored, conflict-related sexual violence against men and boys has been identified as ‘regular and unexceptional, pervasive, and widespread’”; Open Global Rights, *Understanding Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys in Conflict*, 19 June 2018, <http://bit.ly/2v7Z2Yk>. See also, Fox News, *Male Rape Emerging as One of the most Under-Reported Weapons of War*, 21 March 2019, <https://fxn.ws/2v31jEr>; Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Hidden Victims: Sexual Violence Against Boys and Men in Conflict*, 19 December 2017, <https://bit.ly/31amsev>.

<sup>2</sup> “(...) male victims [of commercial sexual exploitation] also exist but are rarely identified due to significant stigma surrounding the sexual abuse of males”; Seed Foundation / Center for Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Services, *Human Trafficking in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq*, December 2018, <https://bit.ly/2VDLmDk>, p. 19. A UN Security Council report published in 2018 affirmed that “[i]nformation on sexual violence remains difficult to obtain as a result of stigma and fear of reprisals”; UN Security Council, *Implementation of Resolution 2367 (2017) – Report of the Secretary-General*, S/2018/677, 9 July 2018, [www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1438581/1226\\_1531916207\\_n1820302.pdf](http://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1438581/1226_1531916207_n1820302.pdf), para. 46. Similarly, a report published by Wilton Park, a not-for-profit executive agency of the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, described that: “*The ongoing conflict in Iraq makes it very difficult to respond to survivors of sexual violence in conflict although local organisations are doing their utmost. The extent to which men and boys are also survivors of sexual violence is not yet known and likely to be under reported. In addition, any response to conflict-related sexual violence is impacted greatly by wider societal norms in Iraq, such as the status of women, as well as attitudes to survivors. (...) The extent to which men and boys are also survivors of SV [sexual violence] is not yet known*”; Emphasis added; Wilton Park, *Country Overview – Iraq*, 2016, <https://bit.ly/314zIH2>.

<sup>3</sup> “(...) in several conflict situations covered by CAAC [Children and Armed Conflict] including Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia, incidents of rape and sexual violence against boys were documented and verified, which is indicative of a larger phenomenon” (emphasis added); Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, *Hidden Victims: Sexual Violence Against Boys and Men in Conflict*, 20 December 2017, <http://bit.ly/2it1rF8>.

Several sources described the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence against men in Iraq, including at the hands of the Shi'ite militias/Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF),<sup>4</sup> in detention facilities<sup>5</sup> and by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS).<sup>6</sup>

The motives for the use of sexual violence against male detainees during earlier conflict in Iraq have been described as follows:

*“Raping the captives in this way is not for sexual gratification, but to achieve a political agenda that aims to destroy the dignity of the enemy, the Iraqis, by arousing fear and shame in the community.”<sup>7</sup>*

And further:

*“The rape of their men relays to the Iraqi community that ‘their male members, their protectors, are unable to protect themselves ... the manliness of the man is lost and the family and community are made to feel vulnerable’ (...). Accordingly, the male prisoner and his whole community are stigmatised and disempowered since rape has turned the male prisoner into a social body; symbolically, the victim’s national identity is also feminised and humiliated.”<sup>8</sup>*

According to Amir Ashour, Founder and Executive Director of IraQueer,<sup>9</sup> “male survivors of sexual violence often are abandoned by their families or even killed, as they are perceived as people who lost their ‘manhood’.” Consequently, he considers that most male survivors would not disclose if they had been subjected to sexual violence. He made further reference to the

<sup>4</sup> Based on a report first published in the German online magazine “Der Spiegel”, The New Arab online newspaper reported in May 2017, “Ali Arkady – a Kurdish photojournalist who has now been forced to flee Iraq for his safety – was given unprecedented access to Iraqi forces controlled by the Badr Organisation, one of Iran’s many proxies in the country, operating under the authority of the interior ministry. Arkady reported that **he witnessed troops from the Rapid Response Forces torturing and murdering men and young boys, and also raping their own allies from the so-called Sunni Mobilisation Forces**” (emphasis added); The New Arab, *The Iraq Report: Government Crimes Fan Flames of Conflict*, 24 May 2017, <http://bit.ly/2UWqmqro>. See also, Der Spiegel, *Anti-IS-Kämpfer: Das Sind nicht Helden, Sondern Monster*, 27 May 2017, <https://spon.de/aeY4q>; The Sunday Times, *Murder, Rape and Torture... not by Isis, but the Iraqi Military*, 23 July 2017, <http://bit.ly/2DdNU0B>; Al Jazeera, *Iraq Deserves Heroes, but only Has Monsters*, 3 June 2017, <http://bit.ly/2Zcfcncz>. An Al-Anbar Governorate official described to Human Rights Watch (HRW) that detainees released following their abduction by Shi'ite militias/PMF from the town of Saqlawiyah (Al-Anbar) in 2016 “(...) showed signs of torture, including **rape, burns, knife cuts, and bruising from beatings**” (emphasis added); HRW, *Fallujah Abuses Test Control of Militias*, 8 June 2016, [www.refworld.org/docid/57590fcd4.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/57590fcd4.html). The Geneva International Centre for Justice reported in September 2016: “Reports [relating to torture at the hands of Shi'ite militias] indicate that men were also raped with sticks and bottles in an attempt to emasculate them”; Geneva International Centre for Justice, *Militias in Iraq – The Hidden Face of Terrorism*, September 2016, <http://bit.ly/2KFcn5n>, p. 20. See also, Gay Star, ‘I Had to Sit on a Pepsi Bottle’: Gay Men in Iraq Reveal Shocking Torture Stories, 27 March 2019, <https://sqg.io/VhCmt23>.

<sup>5</sup> A book published in Arabic by writer Ali Al-Kash in 2017 describes the use of rape and other sexual violence against men in Iraqi detention facilities. The book describes that the perpetrators (including police officers, members of the military and Shi'ite militias) use rape and other sexual violence on account of their victims being “from a different sect”. The book also describes that sexual violence against men remains underreported in light of the societal shame attributed to this type of violence; Ali Al-Kash, *Sacred Rape in Iraq of Obscenity*, 1 February 2017, <https://bit.ly/2X8ebVE>, pp. 137-156. Amnesty International in 2014 provided the following testimony of a former Sunni Arab detainee who had been held in an interrogation centre in Baghdad military airport: “He said that he had been repeatedly beaten with cables and sticks; subjected to prolonged **electric shocks, notably to the pubic area** and after he had water thrown on him to increase the impact of the electric shocks; and **threatened with being raped with a stick**. He said virtually all the other detainees held with him were likewise tortured”; Amnesty International, *Absolute Impunity: Militia Rule in Iraq*, 14 October 2014, MDE 14/015/2014, [www.refworld.org/docid/54491b3b4.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/54491b3b4.html), p. 20. For further examples, see HRW, *Iraq: Chilling Accounts of Torture, Deaths*, 19 August 2018, <https://bit.ly/2MZmlLy>; HRW, *Iraq: Judges Disregard Torture Allegations*, 31 July 2018, [www.refworld.org/docid/5ba0c8b34.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5ba0c8b34.html); Iraqi Civil Society Solidarity Initiative (ICSSI), *Rape and Torture Prevalent in Iraqi Prison System*, 22 December 2013, <https://bit.ly/2Z7c4lQ>; Amnesty International, *New Order, Same Abuses: Unlawful Detentions and Torture in Iraq*, 13 September 2010, [www.refworld.org/docid/4c8ddbd12.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c8ddbd12.html), p. 32; The Independent, *Secret Iraqi Government Prison Was ‘Worse than Abu Ghraib’*, 29 April 2010, <https://ind.pn/2PaS7Hc>.

<sup>6</sup> For examples of boys having been subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence by ISIS, see UN Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence*, S/2018/250, 23 March 2018, [www.refworld.org/docid/5b29148d7.html](http://www.refworld.org/docid/5b29148d7.html), para. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Pertanika Journals, *Rape Talks Louder than Guns Feminising Men via Wartime Rape in Judith Thompson’s Palace of the End*, 2018, <http://bit.ly/2UXqxJD>, p. 294.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 295-296.

<sup>9</sup> See IraQueer, *About*, accessed 21 June 2019, <https://www.iraqueer.org/about.html>.

risks of acquiring sexually transmitted infections and the inability to seek out medical assistance for fear of being reported to their families or the authorities.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> E-mail exchange with Amir Ashour, IraQueer, May 2019 (on file with UNHCR).