



‘THE SOCIAL SCAR’

Stigma Arising from Conflict Related Sexual Violence in Sri Lanka

Introduction

This Briefing Paper is based on the study entitled *‘The Social Scar’: Stigma Arising from Conflict Related Sexual Violence* carried out by the Centre for Equality and Justice. The study includes the analysis of data gathered from thirty-two victim-survivors, eight victim representatives of victim-survivors, and nine service providers.

An assessment of the stigma experienced by victim-survivors of conflict related sexual violence (CRSV) indicates that a ‘cycle of violence’ is put in motion by the stigma levelled at such victim-survivors. This Briefing Paper summarizes the study, which highlights the impact of stigma arising from CRSV on all aspects of the lives of victim-survivors, as well as their family members and the women from the community.

Basic Details Relating to the Study

Where was the Study Conducted?

- The data for this study was collected from the Northern, Eastern, North Central, and North Western provinces of Sri Lanka. Interviews were conducted in the following areas: Ampara, Anuradhapura, Jaffna, Kilinochchi, Mannar, Polonnaruwa, Puttalam and Vavuniya.

How was the Study Conducted?

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather the basic data necessary for the completion of the study. Fifty three (53) such semi-structured interviews were conducted in Sinhala and Tamil. Three groups of individuals contributed to the study by providing information. Victim-survivors of conflict related sexual violence, representatives of victim-survivors and service providers contributed by sharing their experiences on the condition of preservation of their confidentiality. The participants of the study were identified through the snow-balling method of sampling where the participants were instrumental in introducing more participants to be involved with the study.

Interviewees	
• Victim-survivors and victim representatives	= 40
• Service providers	= 13
• Male victim-survivors	= 2

What were the Challenges Faced when Conducting the Study?

- Understanding the life experiences of victim-survivors, who have been affected by stigma associated with CRSV, is difficult; and therefore, the possibility of capturing the complete emotional extent of stigma on victim-survivors is challenging. Accessing victim-survivors, who are a vulnerable population, was challenging, as most victim-survivors were unwilling to participate in a study of this nature for fear of reprisals and stigma.
- The study is also limited in the sense that it is based on the experiences shared by the victim-survivors, representatives of victim-survivors, and service providers. As the intention of conducting this study was to assess the impact of stigma caused by conflict related sexual violence, neither the identity of the alleged perpetrators of CRSV nor the specific details pertaining to the incident of CRSV were taken into account in this study.

CRSV in Brief

What is CRSV?

According to “*Post-war Sri Lanka: Specific Needs of Sexual Violence Victim Survivors and Children Born of Rape*” (UN WOMEN 2017), CRSV includes: early marriage, forced marriage, sexual exploitation, rape, gang rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, continuous checkpoint harassment, domestic violence, trafficking, unwanted pregnancies, forced contraception, sexual torture, marital rape, violence and harassment during military surveillance.

What is CRSV According to International Standards?

CRSV is “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 [...] The term also encompasses trafficking in persons when committed in situations of conflict for the purpose of sexual violence/exploitation”.

-Conflict Related Sexual Violence, Report of the Secretary General, at p.3-

What are the Limited Situations where CRSV was addressed in the Sri Lankan Criminal Justice System?

- *Krishanthi Kumaraswamy Case* [1996]
- *The Maradana Rape Case* [2001]
- *Vishvamadu Rape Case* [2010]
- *Trial – at – Bar for the Gang Rape of a Teenager in Jaffna* [2015]

When Does CRSV Occur?

- CRSV could occur during conflict, post-conflict or other situations of concern, such as political strife. CRSV may also occur during weakened State capacity and during a climate of impunity.

The Main Findings of the Study

- The study revealed that most CRSV survivors experience stigma. Moreover, males, who are generally not perceived as victims of CRSV, face unique challenges in attempting to face and address the stigma of CRSV.
- Stigma arising from CRSV impacts victim-survivors’ perception of self and their aspirations. The study further revealed that stigma leads to a cycle of violence.
- Stigma arising from CRSV also impacts family members and dependents of victim-survivors.



Stigma negatively affects the relationships of the victim-survivor with the community.

- The study revealed that stigma associated with CRSV deters and prevents victim-survivors from accessing various services, including medical services and criminal justice.
- The findings revealed that community based organizations fill a gap in State services and provide a sense of empowerment to victim-survivors. In some circumstances, such organizations helped victim-survivors access services and had aided the victim-survivors to successfully pursue criminal justice. However, it was further found that offering assistance through community based organizations has to be cautiously undertaken, as that too may lead to stigma.
- It was further revealed that there are risks associated with advocating against CRSV and stigma. There have been instances where risks to liberty and security have been posed due to stigma. For instance, speaking out against stigma associated with sex work had led to a victim-survivor's property being burnt down and ultimately the victim-survivor had to leave her village. Moreover, representatives of victim-survivors recounted risks that they had to face when providing support to those who experienced CRSV. The study revealed that these create an 'additional set of barriers in combating stigma'.

Victim-Survivors and Perpetrators

Who are Victim-Survivors?

- The victim-survivors interviewed for the study were all women, except two male victim-survivors. However, it should be noted that victim-survivors could be men, women, or children of both sexes. Male victim-survivors may face other challenges, such as the society not being open to viewing them as victims as there is a general

perception that women are the sole victims of sexual violence.

- According to the United Nations, Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power, victims mean *“persons who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws operative within Member States, including those laws proscribing criminal abuse of power.”*

Who are the Perpetrators?

- The victim survivors who were interviewed for this study claimed that they had been subjected to sexual violence by a range of alleged perpetrators, including married partners, other immediate family members, members of armed forces, public officers, police officers, men in the community and strangers. The experiences divulged by the victim-survivors during the course of this study indicate that they have been subjected to sexual violence not only by parties directly linked to the conflict, but also by other individuals including family members.
- The nature of the parties involved in the violation may change the manner in which society and the law regard an act of sexual violence. Sexual violence perpetrated by parties not directly linked to the conflict, such as family members and men in the community, can be included within CRSV in certain instances, only to the extent where it is related to sexual violence that has been perpetrated by a party to the conflict. Accordingly, there are limitations with regard to the possibility of characterizing such violence as CRSV. The report identifies three main instances where an act of sexual violence committed by a party, not directly linked to the conflict, may be regarded as a CRSV. The three instances are:

- i. Where CRSV makes victim-survivors vulnerable to sexual violence by parties not directly related to the conflict.
 - ii. Where sexual violence by intimate partners, family members etc. make victim-survivors vulnerable to CRSV.
 - iii. Where due to conflict related social vulnerabilities, girls enter into and/or are forced into underage marriage.
- The study also revealed instances where public officers who had come in subsequent contact with victim-survivors had subjected them to further sexual violence by demanding sexual bribery or by making sexual advances. According to the victim-survivors, most of such further violence can be attributed to the stigma associated with CRSV.

Stigma Associated with CRSV

What is Stigma?

- Stigma may arise due to three reasons:
 - i. Problems of knowledge: this means that those who are ignorant of the gravity of CRSV or the circumstances surrounding CRSV may stigmatise victim-survivors due to their ignorance. Moreover, problems of knowledge occur due to the spread of incorrect information about CRSV and victim-survivors.
 - ii. Problems of attitudes: when people bear prejudicial attitudes, they may refuse to empathise with victim-survivors. For instance, prejudiced minds may compel people to deny victim-survivors access to community events and they may not be accepted at social gatherings.
 - iii. Problems of behaviour: this means that some may display discriminatory behaviour by refusing to accept victim-survivors into the

society or by justifying the CRSV that such victim-survivors had faced, for instance, by stating that they belong to a different race or religious community that is considered an 'enemy' community.

- Stigma could also be categorised as:
 - Self-stigma
 - Family stigma
 - Stigma arising from the community
- Although stigma has been categorised and defined in the international context, there is no clear understanding of stigma within the Sri Lankan context. Moreover, there are no direct legal provisions or policies targeted at addressing stigma.
- This lack of awareness has led to problems of understanding how stigma has a long-term impact on the victims.

The National Policy on Reconciliation and Coexistence of 2017 does **NOT** acknowledge a State obligation or a societal responsibility to address stigma, due to conflict related sexual violence, in order to bring about reconciliation and/or coexistence.

- According to a report published by UN Women, stigma generated by CRSV could vary in accordance with the context. It notes that stigma experienced by children born of war is different to the nature of stigma experienced by children born of rape.
- At the international level, stigma is identified as a debilitating phenomenon. According to the 2017 report by the UN Secretary General, stigma is a "strikingly consistent concern" which makes victim-survivors of sexual violence "twice traumatized". Trauma is first created by the perpetrator, and at the next level, it is created by the society and the State.



“With growing awareness and development of a deeper understanding of CRSV, the UN has now identified stigma due to conflict related sexual violence as demanding critical, immediate and sustained interventions.”

- According to the Secretary General’s Report, shame and stigma are “integral to the logic of sexual violence”.
- According to the Principles for Global Action: **Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated to Sexual Violence in Conflict** developed by the government of UK, “stigma involves penalising or placing blame on individuals, groups or communities for bringing shame or ‘transgressing’ from the standards of their community or society. SVC [sexual violence in conflict] related stigma is not only the expression of individual values, beliefs or attitudes – it is the forceful expression of social norms that are cultivated within a given society through the behaviours and actions of groups of people and institutions, and is an extension of the stigma that is present in pre-existing conflict.”

Core Aspects of the Principles for Global Action

1. Addressing root causes of stigma
2. Avoiding the reproduction of stigma
3. Reducing stigma related risk
4. Ensuring that victim-survivors/survivors are at the centre of efforts directed at removing stigma
5. Pursuing effective stigma prevention

Challenges Faced by Victim-Survivors

- The victim-survivors, on most occasions, had abstained from seeking legal aid as there was a fear of reprisals and further stigma. This was especially so in circumstances where the alleged perpetrators were from the police or the armed forces. Victim-survivors are at times subject to further sexual violence by intimate partners,

family members, etc. At times, CRSV further extends to continuing violence committed through sexual advances by public officers, sexual violence on sex workers, being forced into sexual slavery, and sexual bribery, etc.

- Stigma is not the sole trauma that is borne by the victim-survivors. Stigma becomes more traumatic when placed on victim-survivors who are already experiencing other types of conflict related trauma such as forced displacement, death of family members, disappearances of family members, loss of property, widowhood, lack of livelihood opportunities, being subject to surveillance, and other types of hardships.

Stigma of CRSV and the Cycle of Violence

- When victim survivors of CRSV do not have the means to address the psychological impact of stigma, they could become violent themselves.
- Stigma associated with CRSV could expose victim-survivors to further violence.

‘[The] cycle of violence that victim survivors of stigma are caught up in is tragic and unacceptable. Having been traumatized by CRSV, they are pushed into this vicious cycle by stigma generated by society and the failures of institutions to effectively deal with the violence and to prevent its recurrence. It is also a tragic indication of the failure of social networks and families to help the victim survivor to heal and recover as far as possible from the CRSV.’

Stigma as a Socio-Religious Construct

- Social norms and perceptions about womanhood, influenced by religious beliefs and cultural practices, generate stigma.
- The above-mentioned societal standards determine the value or the identity of a woman in terms of her body/sexuality.

“There was no escape... from religion, the law or even the community.”

-Victim-survivor of alleged rape-

- A service provider noted that the “society has a belief system of how it should function, how men and women should be, etc. If something happens out of that belief system, it will be considered wrong. Pressure by the society to ensure it is considered wrong is what stigma is...”
- A striking finding in the study was that “victim-survivors of stigma are preoccupied with negative aspects of religious practices rather than the more redeeming aspects of those practices, possibly because society uses the more judgmental aspects of religion to promote stigma”.

“Stigma is a sort of labelling. How society treats the victim and how the individual suffers. With regard to housing, neighbours would not talk to the victim, a victim is looked at sympathetically, people are scared to associate with them. Factors contributing to stigma are fear, culture, social norms, and power structures in society.”

-A Service Provider-

Stigma of being a Male Victim-Survivor of CRSV

There is a taboo of homosexuality associated with being a male victim-survivor of CRSV.

There is a lack of empathy, understanding and willingness of society to listen to male victim-survivors of CRSV.

Society perceives males who have been raped by another man to be weak and ‘woman-like’.

Male victim-survivors complained of ‘feeling impotent’ and said that their experience of CRSV lead to inferiority complexes.

“Being in a male dominated community, the sexual violence committed on a male isn’t always seen as a violence. People use different terms for that like torture, molestation, and bad touch. People are still confused as to how a man can be raped? Because it is believed that men are the ones who rape and women are the ones who get raped. There is a stigma that if you are a victim of rape then you must be a female. As the male dominance in the country still prevails, it would be shameful to say that I am a victim of sexual violence. Also that would give further points for the bullies and society in general to call names, disgrace and disown the victims.”

-Male victim-survivor of alleged rape-

Impact of Stigma

- The end of an armed conflict or any other conflict does not imply that CRSV has come to an end. That is because stigma associated with CRSV can lead to further sexual violence or marginalization from society. The origin of these problems rests in CRSV and its continuing realities. Especially since stigma associated with CRSV continues even after a conflict has ended.

“Stigma related to CRSV is a continuing reality for victim-survivors regardless of the end of the armed conflict.”

“Another victim survivor pointed out that CRSV cannot be proven after the fact except perhaps through remaining scars on the body. As such, the harm that leads to trauma and stigma cannot be visualized by others. This has a compounding effect on a victim survivor’s life and reduces the possibilities of recovering from the trauma of CRSV and of dealing with stigma.”

- Stigma associated with CRSV has a lifelong impact because the lives of victim-survivors of CRSV tend to remain unchanged even though many



other aspects of the community life may have undergone improvements and changes. The study has identified that the impact of stigma can be ‘pervasive’ and impact the victim-survivors, his / her family members, the community and the wider society.

Direct Impact on the Victim-Survivors

“After this incident, the villagers started to treat me differently. If I stand in the bus halt they won’t come there. If I go to the village market they won’t talk to me. My relatives didn’t want me to visit them in their homes. I began to feel the difference.”

- Change of victim-survivor’s perception of self
- Diminishing self-worth

Positive Aspirations of Victim – Survivors

“Despite the trauma and stigma that is recounted by the victim survivors, at least some nurture aspirations of hope, justice and continue to experience a sense of empowerment. One victim survivor talked about her desire to live an independent life and her conviction that she should not give up on life. Another victim survivor stated that she feels a sense of relief and comfort due to her income and employment. A victim survivor of underage marriage spoke of the need to develop courage and self-confidence so that she can move forward in life. A victim survivor expressed a strong sense of agency despite her victim survivor status. She was determined to explore all possible avenues to rebuild her house and to support her children who were born out of wedlock. Another victim survivor who had had to leave her village and resettle elsewhere with only her mother and a few other family members due to the stigma that she experienced because of her advocacy against stigma associated with CRSV speaks of developing a sense of empowerment.”

- Aspirations of the victim-survivors are negatively affected. This means that victim-survivors are trapped in a cycle of self-blame, helplessness and hopelessness. One victim-survivor has described herself as ‘an invalid coin’ meaning that her life has lost its value from the society’s point of view.
- Victim-survivors are afraid of accessing the criminal justice system especially where the alleged perpetrators are members of the armed forces or the police.
- Due to the excessively bureaucratic nature of the justice system, where victim-survivors are treated with no emotion or in a matter-of-fact manner, most victim-survivors have lost faith in the system of justice.

“I couldn’t find peace afterwards. It remains as a raw and unhealed wound in my life.”

- Losing interest in life/harbours suicidal thoughts.

“I did not seek any medical care because of fear.”
 “No, I never sought the protection of the law.”

- Often, CRSV and associated stigma result in victim -survivors undergoing lifelong trauma, sometimes resulting in physical and/or mental ill health.

“Victims are surrounded in an environment which has gender discrimination ingrained in their societal values. If the victims don’t receive justice for what they’ve experienced it is only stigma that follows them. Therefore they suffer within themselves. This ruins their wellbeing. Even favourable opportunities are lost and an environment where such opportunities can be retrieved is also lost. It obstructs a healthy social flourishing.”

- In certain circumstances, advocating against CRSV and stigma has resulted in threats to the lives of victim-survivors.

- Fear of contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

“I felt shame when I made a complaint at the police, because there were only male translators. He later said, he considers me as his sister and to speak without being shy. He inquired with care.”

- Stigma of “guilt by association” with the perpetrator and their group.

“When I found out that I was going to have a child due to the rape I got very scared. When everyone found out that I was going to bear a ‘fatherless’ child they began to ostracize me. My family chased me away. I couldn’t face the village. Since these things happened I have gone back to the village only once. My father tried to kill me, he chased me away. Even my friends in the village shunned me. Thereafter I never went back to my village.”

- Perceived dishonour of loss of chastity/virginity.
- Stigma of maternity out of wedlock, especially with regard to children of the enemy.
- Homosexuality taboos in the case of male rape.
- Shame of being unable to defend oneself and loved ones.
- Lethal retaliation.
- Honour crimes.

“Immediate consequences of CRSV and stigma traps victim-survivors in a cycle of trauma, stigma, poverty which is vicious”

- Suicide.
- Untreated diseases.
- Unsafe abortions.
- Economic exclusion.
- Extreme poverty/indigence.

“Not only will they not help they will not even look at my face. They will understand when this kind of thing happens to them.”

- Labelling and stigmatisation has led some victim-survivors to confused decision-making or adopting unfavourable choices, such as choosing to engage in sex work.
- Feelings of isolation.
- Victim-survivors who had been subjected to CRSV reported that they are considered as “prey” and targeted. Such targeting especially occurs if they are single or widowed.

Impact on Others

- Family members and dependants of victim-survivors are affected by CRSV and stigma arising from CRSV.
- Children of victim-survivors, especially when born of rape, are targeted for bullying and undergo emotional trauma.
- Children conceived due to rape are forced to live away from their biological mothers.
- Relationships that the victim-survivor has with the community are negatively affected.

“I was married. I had two children. They began to get frustrated after this incident. My husband started to insult me and scold me. Because I couldn’t bear that treatment anymore I separated from him.”

- Family members of victim-survivors face stigmatization in society due to their relationship to or with the victim-survivor.
- Family members are subject to bullying and harassment, and their quality of life decreases as a result.



“I used to be a person who had good relationships with people in the village. Now I don’t go out. I am scared to go out carrying my child [born due to the sexual violence experienced]. My future has been destroyed.”

- In the event of a pregnancy resulting from CRSV, there is a threat of the mother transmitting venereal diseases to the baby.

General Results Arising from Stigma Related to CRSV

- Obstacles to engaging with the community effectively reduces a victim-survivor’s ability to generate a sufficient income.
- Economic vulnerability aids in the continuation of societal vulnerability, which then contributes to the vicious cycle of such victim-survivors, and their dependents, being further exposed to violence.
- CRSV and stigma arising from CRSV contribute to deteriorating the public life of victim-survivors in an irremediable manner.
- There is little to no involvement of victim-survivors in transitional/transformational justice processes due to the lack of social awareness or social indifference to stigma arising from CRSV.
- Lack of awareness and sensitivity to CRSV and stigma contribute to the continuation of violence.
- Ingrained social attitudes regarding sexual violence contribute to increasing stereotypical attitudes of discrimination against victim-survivors.

“Although the injustice happened to me without my consent, the society and culture fails to accept the justice the victim deserves. My neighbours view me as stigmatized and a scarred individual. They are sympathetic towards Vidya since she passed away. But they think of me as a humiliation to the society since I am alive.”

- Prosecution of offenders is made difficult due to the subjection of victim-survivors and their family members to further violence, loss or injury.
- Diminished reproductive capacities affect group survival negatively.
- Underreporting of sexual violence due to fear of facing stigma.

Harmful Consequences of Stigma and CRSV in Conflict-Affected Societies

- The harm that leads to trauma and stigma cannot be visualised by others. This has a compounding effect on a victim-survivor’s life and reduces the possibilities of recovering from the trauma of CRSV and dealing with stigma.

“I think the first thing most of the victims expect is to be believed. Help, corroboration, cross checking, all that comes later. Trust comes first.”

- The experiences of the victim-survivors reveal that some of them harbour animosity against the entire society due to the violence they had experienced. Such animosity, distrust, and unexposed anger at the society, augments the difficulties of achieving reconciliation in a post-war context.
- Victim survivors speak of feeling judged, isolated and cut off from their community to the point where the victim survivor herself is ultimately blamed for the harm that was caused to her.

CRSV and Related Stigma as a Gender Justice Concern

- According to a service provider affiliated with a community based women’s organization, “*victims are surrounded in an environment which has gender discrimination ingrained in their societal values.*”

- In *Principles for Global Action: Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated to Sexual Violence in Conflict*, gender inequality has been identified as a root cause for stigma. The study therefore states that stigma arising from CRSV should be regarded as a gender justice concern.
- Moreover, the recommendations made in the study, based on the opinions expressed by the victim-survivors, indicate that addressing basic human rights related issues such as inequality, premised on gendered notions, could be useful in addressing stigma effectively.

Recommendations

Recommendations Made in “Principles for Global Action: Preventing and Addressing Stigma Associated to Sexual Violence in Conflict”

- These principles state that stigma should be addressed as a human rights violation.
- It recommends resourcing and sustainability of measures for addressing stigma.
- Establishment of victim-survivor networks.
- Guarantee of protection and security for victim-survivors/survivors' children born of rape.
- The Principles for Global Action recognizes the need for urgency of action.
- Anti-stigma approaches should address the root causes of stigma.
- Victim-survivors should be placed at the centre of anti-stigma approaches.
- Victim-survivors should be involved in the process of developing approaches that are culturally relevant.

Recommendations of the Consultations Task Force (CTF) Considered in the Study

- The CTF has recommended providing reparations for physical violence and injury, including sexual violence, disability, psychosocial impact and trauma. The CTF report has further recommended that victim-survivor friendly procedures be adopted to ensure access to justice. Such procedures are expected to avoid re-traumatisation of victims.
- The CTF report has further recommended that judges and lawyers receive training on transitional justice and CRSV.
- Establishment of an Independent Special Victim-Survivor and Witness Protection Unit has also been recommended by the CTF.
- It was further recommended that the State guarantee economic, social, political, legal and cultural rights of women, irrespective of any constraints on the bases of custom, caste etc.

General Recommendations Identified in the Study

- Anti-stigma community mobilization and anti-stigma action have been identified in the study as methods of addressing stigma as a mental health concern. The following measures have been considered in that respect: mainstreaming, language and definition, information, education, communication, effective systems, using media as allies, citizenship, and participation.
- Using a “stigma lens” in all human rights approaches is another general recommendation that has been made with the intent of addressing stigma.



Recommendations Made by the Victim-Survivors

- Creating public awareness regarding the devastating impacts of stigma.
- Taking stigma into consideration when determining forms of reparation.
- The need to make structural reforms to ensure that State services are empathetic to the phenomenon of stigma.
- In addition to the above-mentioned general recommendations, specific recommendations applicable to different entities and/or sectors were also made by the victim-survivors.
- The recommendations made by the victim-survivors have been categorized into the categories shown below.

For the Government and Policy Makers:

Design and implement structural changes in state systems and processes to ensure that victim-survivors of CRSV are treated with empathy and support.

Design and implement a stigma sensitive reparations scheme for victim-survivors.

Ensure the enjoyment of equal rights and respect for victim-survivors.

Prohibit underage marriages by law and in practice.

Design and implement specific support programmes for children born to women who have suffered from sexual violence and CRSV.

Making livelihood support available, accessible and viable.

Design social integration programmes for victim-survivors of stigma, in consultation with them, with the hope of returning such victim-survivors, as far as possible, to the status of life they enjoyed prior to CRSV.

Train public officers on how to deal with victim-survivors of CRSV and the stigma they experience.

Develop specific programmes to address stigma associated with sex work, in the hopes of safeguarding the human rights and freedom of sex workers.

Broaden the definition of rape to criminalize sexual intercourse without consent, irrespective of the gender of the victim or offender.

Strengthen social security programmes for women who have no family support or income.

Adopting policies and measures for transitional justice and reconciliation to address concerns of victim-survivors of CRSV and stigma

For the Ministry of Health:

Ensure that basic health, education, and peace and order services are available and accessible, particularly in under-served conflict affected areas.

Identify and provide additional targeted services, such as specially trained counsellors and police officers, to the conflict affected areas.

Facilitate professional and empathetic counselling services for victim-survivors.

For the Ministry of Education:

Implement relevant sexual and reproductive health programmes for schools as a preventive and empowerment measure for children.

Allow girls to return to school after pregnancy/delivery and sensitize teachers on the reintegration of students recovering from sexual violence.

For the Ministry of Media:

Partner with the media in preventing the stigma that is generated due to unethical reporting and handling of CRSV.

Memorialize the pain and trauma of victim-survivors of CRSV and create public spaces for victim-survivor accounts to be voiced and recognized. This will help provide victim-survivors of CRSV with community recognition, as individuals with dignity and rights.

For the Department of Police:

Impunity for CRSV should be addressed with prompt investigations and prosecution.

Providing specialised training to deal with victim-survivors of CRSV in order to help them understand and deal with their complex guilt and self-blame.

Create an empathetic and trustworthy environment for victim-survivors to narrate the incident of CRSV and its impact on their lives without being judged.

Ensure that the identity of the victim-survivor is kept confidential as far as possible in dealing with CRSV at all levels.

For the Judiciary and the Legal Profession:

Provide trainings for the judiciary to sensitise them on CRSV.

Implement continuous professional training programmes that include sensitization on CRSV.

Conducting client counselling for victim-survivors.

For the Ministry of Justice and the Legal Aid Commission:

Ensure access to justice for victim-survivors of CRSV.

Providing support in making complaints, providing support during the litigation process, aiding with legal literacy and providing financial support if needed.

Maintain safe houses for victim-survivors of CRSV.

Make available counselling services so that informed choices can be made by victim-survivors regarding pregnancies due to CRSV.

For Community Based Organizations:

Design and implement workshops and/or programmes for attitudinal change among youth regarding stigma.

Generate public discussions about stigma and work on the issue for longer periods to bring about sustainable attitudinal change within society.

For Religious Organizations:

Implement and design meaningful programmes for inter-communal relationships, taking into account the impact of stigma due to the armed conflict.

Engage religious leaders, institutions and communities to raise awareness on how religious practices may promote stigma.

Partner with the community to develop religious programmes, meditation programmes, etc. to support victim-survivors of stigma to heal.