



STILL NOT SAFE

Violence against Women & Girls of the Nuba Mountains

Yida Refugee Camp, March 2012



“Violence against us was happening all the time. Raping was happening frequently.”

-Adult female focus group participant

Violence in the Republic of the Sudan's Nuba Mountains has worsened over the last nine months, displacing more than 300,000 people from their homes. Civilians living in the region face regular aerial bombardment and are forced to seek shelter in caves. Since the onset of conflict in August 2011, approximately 25,000 civilians have fled across the border into South Sudan, seeking shelter in an informal refugee camp known as Yida. Gender-based violence is a defining feature of the experiences of women and girls as they flee Nuba, as they cross the border, and once they arrive at refugee camps such as Yida.

The International Rescue Committee (IRC) emergency team conducted an assessment of the nature and extent of gender-based violence experienced by women and girls in Yida camp. Over a one-week period this February, the IRC spoke with more than 100 women and girls and several key members of the community, and conducted multiple safety audits to identify the types of violence that women and girls experienced while fleeing Nuba and upon arriving in Yida, the additional risk factors contributing to their ongoing insecurity, and the availability and accessibility of services and support.

Violence against Women & Girls

“We are always expected to keep silent. These same men will come back and kill you”

-Adult female focus group participant

Women and girls identified rape as a common feature of the experience of both fleeing the Nuba Mountains and crossing into South Sudan. Women and girls were raped in front of family members, raped by multiple perpetrators, and “taken” for long periods of time, sometimes never to return. Rape was also identified as an **ongoing concern for women and girls in Yida camp**, most often when a woman or girl is collecting grass or firewood.

Adult women in the camp say **that Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is the most common form of violence experienced by married women** in the camp, with many reporting an increase in the frequency of IPV since arriving in Yida. “Married women are beaten all the time. If you are married, you are hit.” Another woman stated: “It is so common. Who would you tell? Everyone is being beaten.”

Girls under the age of 15 in Yida are being forced into marriage, primarily due to their limited access to secondary education in the camp, families' need to access money or resources in exchange for marriage, and families' assumptions that marriage is a means to “protect” or “control” their daughters.

Survivors of gender-based violence are afraid of speaking out. Participants reported that women or girls who have been raped or physically assaulted are extremely unlikely to report it to anyone in the current environment, in which they are unable to safely access confidential services.

Risks for Women & Girls

"We do not go to the market alone. The men wait for us there, and the military wait for us there. If she is alone, the military men will grab her and make her have sex with them."

-Adolescent girl in Yida camp

Women and girls feel least secure, and **most at risk, when collecting firewood or grass or when working late in the market.** Groups of men, both military and non-military, congregate in the market and near water points, where they often harass or attack women and girls. Adolescent girls identified the market, located within the boundaries of the camp, as a place where girls are very likely to be targeted and attacked. One girl stated: "These men are looking for girls. They don't want the older women."



Within the borders of Yida, there are large numbers of **unmarried women and girls without their families.** Although there is no clearly allocated space for female headed households within the camp, there is an unfinished compound where unaccompanied girls are now living. This compound has further isolated an already marginalized group, while also increasing their vulnerability with its close proximity to places where groups of men and boys congregate. In addition, the compound lacks sufficient sleeping space, bathing areas or latrines, adult female guardians living within the compound, and a guard at the unsecured gate.

The **absence of secondary education in the camp** is a major risk factor for adolescent girls. Secondary schools were established in another refugee camp elsewhere in Unity State, and families prefer to send their boy rather than their girl children due to cultural and safety concerns. Lack of readily-available education for girls makes families

more inclined to marry their daughters at an earlier age to "minimize the burden" girls place on their families. One woman reported, "if they don't have schools, they need to marry at 12 or 13."

Recommendations to UN agencies & Humanitarian Organizations

The following actions can help increase women and girls' access to critical and life-saving interventions:

- 1. Ensure access to quality health services for women and girls, including survivors of rape, sexual assault and other forms of GBV.** Women and girls need to be able to safely access confidential GBV-specific health care, including survivor-centered and age-appropriate treatment.
- 2. Develop female-only safe spaces for women and girls** to report protection concerns and access age appropriate emotional support services. This will allow for a safe environment for women and girls to report incidents of GBV and other concerns and to effectively access counseling, case management, and larger group and emotional support activities.
- 3. Adapt referral pathways to provide the refugee population access to comprehensive, safe and confidential support services.** Survivors who come to any service provider should be able to immediately access age-appropriate health or emotional support services, through appropriate referrals.
- 4. Ensure minimum standards are met to prevent or mitigate the risk of violence to women and girls,** with an emphasis on child protection/education, camp management (specifically site planning), security, and food and non—food item (NFI) distributions. Priorities should include increased access to secondary education for adolescent girls, appropriate safe living areas for girls and young women without their families, patrols for firewood or grass collection, and better site planning.
- 5. Secure funding for GBV support as a critical component of any life-saving intervention.** Funding is critical to ensure that these comprehensive, safe, and confidential services form an essential part of an emergency response in Yida camp.