

Interviewing Survivors of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence during the Russia-Ukraine War: Mapping an Empirical Gap

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Background

Since 2014, and especially following Russia’s full-scale invasion in 2022, conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been extensively documented in the Russia-Ukraine war. Yet no empirical research examines how Ukrainian investigative authorities interview CRSV survivors, a critical gap at the intersection of evidence collection and survivor wellbeing.

Evidence Base

- Rapport-building increases cooperation and information yield (Collins et al., 2002; Walsh & Bull, 2012);
- Cognitive interviewing enhances the completeness of witness accounts without a meaningful loss of accuracy (Memon et al., 2010);
- Victims of sexual crimes may face numerous barriers to disclosure, including self-blame, shame, traumatisation, and difficulties recalling and verbalising their experiences (e.g., Joleby et al., 2020; Korkman, 2024; Korkman, Filipović & Hope, in press; Lavoie et al., 2019);
- Leading questioning increases suggestibility (Gudjonsson, 2003);
- Inadequate interviewing may contribute to secondary victimisation in sexual assault contexts (Campbell, 2008).

Research Questions

- Do current interviewing practices reflect established scientific principles?
- Are trauma-informed and non-suggestive approaches systematically applied?
- How are evidentiary demands balanced with survivor wellbeing?
- Where are the gaps, and how can practice be improved?

Anticipated Contributions

- First empirical mapping of CRSV interviewing practices in Ukraine
- Identification of alignment and gaps with evidence-based principles
- Practical recommendations tailored to conflict-zone conditions
- Foundation for future training and policy development

Participants & Design

Cross-sectional survey design. Investigative professionals currently or previously working CRSV cases within:

- National Police of Ukraine
- Office of the General Prosecutor of Ukraine
- Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) Participation is voluntary and anonymous. Survey administered online; approximately 20-30 minutes.

Exploratory scope. This study does not test causal hypotheses. Its purpose is to generate the first descriptive picture of CRSV interviewing in Ukraine, a necessary precondition for any evidence-based improvement of practice in an active conflict setting.

Ethics. Anonymous, voluntary participation. Data stored at ÅAU in compliance with GDPR. Participants may withdraw anytime.

Status. Data collection is planned. This poster presents the study design and theoretical framework in advance of data collection.

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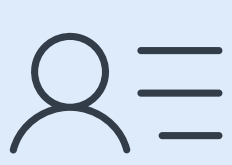
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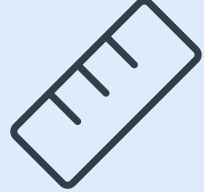
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Survey Instruments

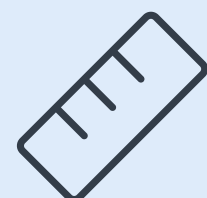
Part 1



Demographics
Background & professional profile
Agency, role, experience, training



IRMA (updated)
Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale
22 items, 5-point scale



MRMS-SV
Male Rape Myth Scale
19 items, 6-point scale



Attitudes toward CRSV during the war
Custom attitudinal measure
17 items, 5-point scale

Part 2



Interview simulation
Vignette-based question task
3 disclosure scenarios



Open practice
Investigative interview practice
Process, documentation, approach

Procedure: Interview Simulation

Participants read short survivor disclosure vignettes and formulate one question they would ask in a real investigative interview. Responses are analysed qualitatively for question type, trauma-sensitivity, and suggestiveness.

Example vignette: “They came to my house and threatened me with weapons. They said I should go with them, otherwise they would shoot me. I went with them to protect my family, and then it happened.”

