

2024

PROMISING PATHWAYS FOR THE PREVENTION OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

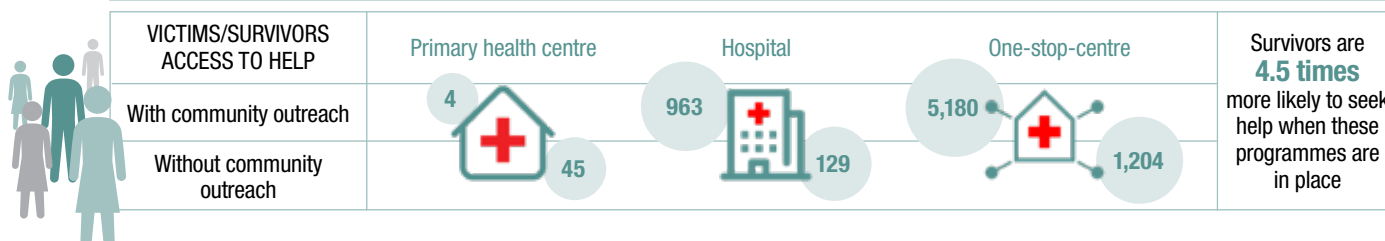
Sexual violence, including rape, is always prohibited under international law and can amount to a war crime when committed during armed conflict. It affects women, men, girls, boys and people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and/or other gender identities and gender expressions. It affects civilians, combatants and persons hors de combat. It is almost never an isolated act. Sexual violence is often part of a wider pattern of abuse, occurring alongside other violations of international humanitarian law (IHL), such as torture, killing, looting, child recruitment and the destruction of property. It is closely linked to pre-existing gender-based violence, which is often worsened by conflict and typically continues into post-conflict periods.

Addressing sexual violence is part of the ICRC's core humanitarian and legal mandate and preventing it is one of its priorities. In 2022, the ICRC launched its Prevention of Sexual Violence Programme (PSVP). Through this multi-country, multidisciplinary and results-oriented programme, the organization aims to strengthen its work to reduce the risk of sexual violence and/or prevent it. The PSVP focuses on addressing underlying attitudes and practices among weapon bearers and communities in fragile conflict- or violence-affected settings where the ICRC is operational. With this programme, the ICRC also helps tackle a shared challenge among humanitarian organizations: that of measuring the effectiveness of efforts to prevent sexual violence.

This document summarizes some key findings from the implementation of the PSVP in 2024 following two models:

PSVP MODEL	ARMS CARRIERS MODEL	COMMUNITY MODEL
OBJECTIVE	Reducing sexual violence by weapon bearers, be they state armed forces (military, police), non-state armed groups or gangs.	Reducing the stigma experienced by victims/survivors of sexual violence, thereby contributing to their recovery and decreasing their exposure to additional harm.
HIGHLIGHTED PRACTICE PSVP 2024	The ICRC produced a new training package, Be Prepared, to help weapon bearers prevent sexual violence. It draws directly on evidence gathered by the PSVP in 2023 and puts into practice key recommendations from the study The Roots of Restraint in War, turning its findings into practical training tools.	The ICRC's Stigma Impact Model was co-developed in consultation with victims/survivors of sexual violence, service providers and advocates across 19 countries. It was shared with humanitarian practitioners, authorities and donors.
OUTREACH PSVP 2024	Three contexts supported by the PSVP; Type of weapon bearers: state armed forces and non-state armed groups; 475 weapon bearers were part of the PSVP monitoring, evaluation and learning process (accounting for 19% of all ICRC prevention activities in the countries receiving PSVP support).	Two contexts supported by the PSVP: Ethiopia and South Sudan; 633 community influencers trained , including members of the National Red Cross Societies; Over 15,000 outreach sessions conducted with community members , including 2,337 sessions (15%) as the PSVP monitoring, evaluation and learning sample; 151,920 people reached by the programme, including 35,014 (38% male, 62% female) who took part in the monitoring, evaluation and learning process.

THE IMPACT OF THE COMMUNITY OUTREACH IN HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR BY VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE



BEHAVIOURAL SOLUTIONS FOR BEHAVIOURAL PROBLEMS: SEXUAL VIOLENCE IS PREVENTABLE, AND STIGMA IS A CHOICE THAT MUST BE CHALLENGED.

The ICRC works to influence the behaviour of weapon bearers, authorities and communities to prevent conflict-related sexual violence and reduce the harm experienced by victims and survivors. Through the PSVP, the ICRC has strengthened its methodology and its ability to measure the impact of its frontline prevention efforts by adapting UNICEF's Behavioural Drivers Model. The adapted ICRC model spells out the cognitive biases that frontline efforts must overcome to succeed in reaching the intended audiences and influence the four drivers that lead, on the one hand, to reducing perpetration and vulnerability, and, on the other, to increasing restraint and existing capacities to prevent sexual violence and further harm.



By influencing these four drivers (interest, attitude, knowledge and self-efficacy), the ICRC aims to:

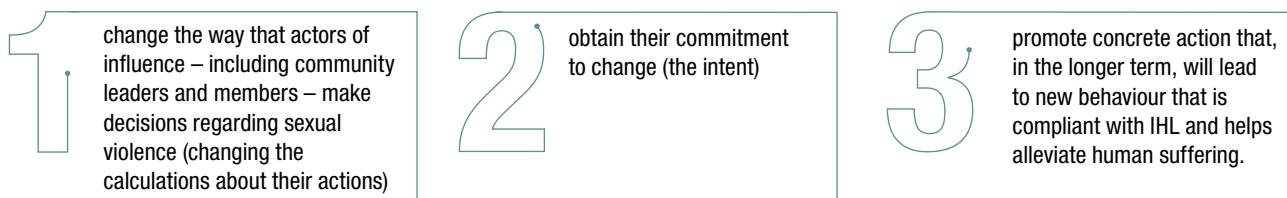


Figure 1 illustrates the behavioural model adopted by the ICRC in its frontline prevention efforts. In 2024, the monitoring, evaluation and learning tools developed by the PSVP¹ laid the foundation for an evidence-based approach that tracks progress towards the ideal behaviours that the ICRC promotes within its neutral, independent and impartial humanitarian action, grounded in the principle of humanity and the Geneva Conventions. In 2025 and 2026, the PSVP will focus on measuring the remaining stages: action (the

new practices prompted by the ICRC's action) and adoption of the promoted behaviours. The model is being developed so as to be applicable in measuring the ICRC's capacity to prevent other violations of IHL, while acknowledging the complexity of influencing behaviour change, its longer-term commitment and the many factors beyond ICRC control, such as conflict dynamics, political will and climate shocks.

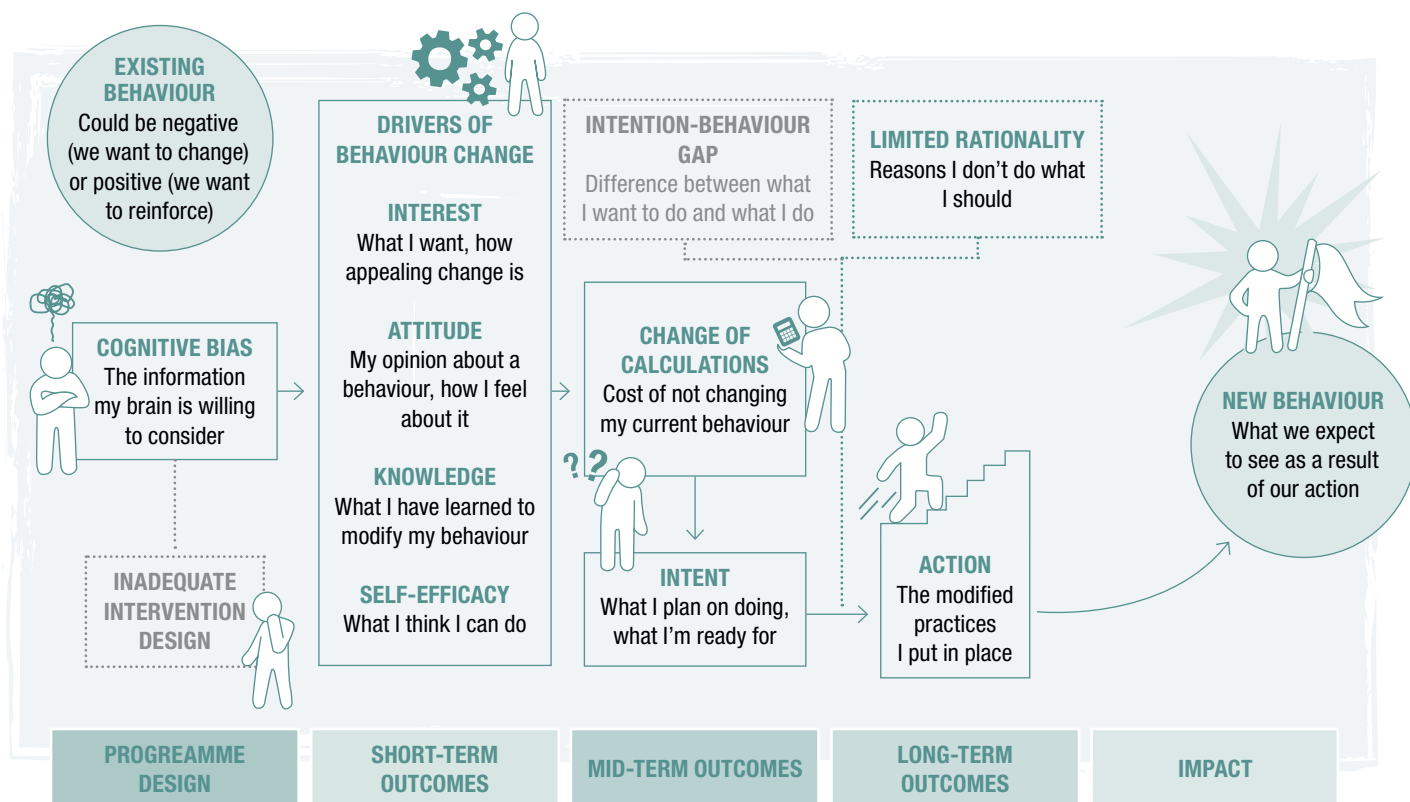


Figure 1. The ICRC's model for influencing behaviour in the frontline prevention of sexual violence, adapted from UNICEF's Behavioural Drivers Model (by Vincent Petit, 2019).

The results of the ICRC's frontline prevention efforts must always be understood in connection with its wider dialogue on behalf of people entitled to protection under IHL,

together with environment building and humanitarian diplomacy, through which the ICRC seeks to influence at the policy and systemic levels.

¹ These tools include: pre-post questionnaires, observation protocol, outreach journal, results journal, stigma scorecard.

SOME PROMISING PRACTICES WITH WEAPON BEARERS IN 2024

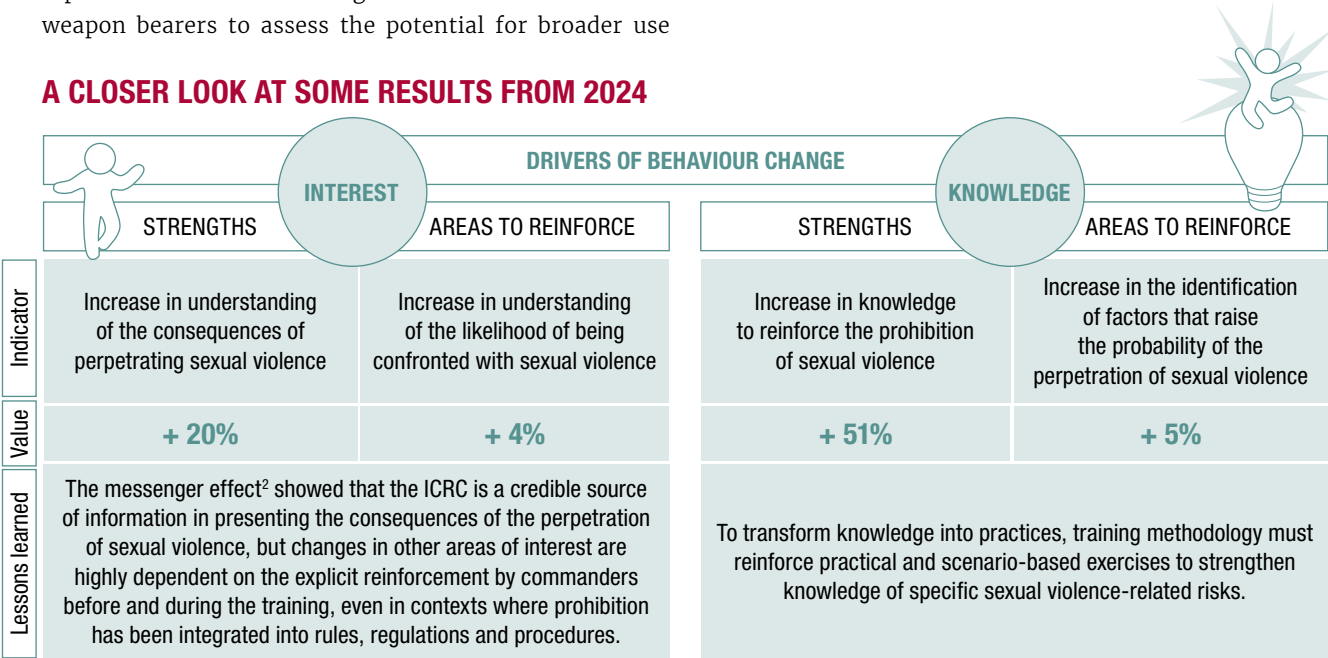
Owing to its unique mandate, the ICRC engages in a confidential manner with weapon bearers to promote behaviour that is compliant with the principles and rules of IHL, thus helping to reduce human suffering during armed conflict. Sexual violence is not an inevitable by-product of war. It is preventable. Its prohibition must be commanded and enforced, and its commission sanctioned. We engage with weapon bearers to reduce the threat and perpetration of sexual violence.

EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ICRC TRAINING MODEL IN PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Based on the adapted Behavioural Drivers Model and a thorough analysis of the motivations, sources of restraint and patterns of sexual violence committed by armed actors, the ICRC tested a new approach to training weapon bearers with regard to their obligation to prevent sexual violence. A new frontline training package, Be prepared. Armed Actors and Sexual Violence, was piloted by several ICRC delegations, either through formal training sessions or their ongoing protection dialogue and awareness-raising with weapon bearers. An analysis was also conducted with representatives from 12 organizations that work with weapon bearers to assess the potential for broader use

of the ICRC’s model. These experts reviewed the model’s underlying logic and success indicators across the behaviour change dimensions that the ICRC seeks to influence. They concluded that the frontline training package is applicable in many (43%) or most (36%) conflict-affected contexts, amounting to a generalizability rate of 79%. These findings highlight the model’s strong potential for scale-up – both within the ICRC, with continued expansion planned for 2025–2026, and externally, through possible adaptation for use by other humanitarian organizations or military instructors.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME RESULTS FROM 2024



UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

The PSVP data reveal an instruction gap of 50% in 2024. This means that, of the 65% instructors who received specific training on preventing sexual violence, only 15% then trained others in their turn (Figure 2). The data also show a trust gap of 28% in the effectiveness of the chain of command with regard to the prevention of sexual violence (Figure 3).

Challenges related to self-efficacy require an approach that combines frontline prevention activities with environment building and influence at the structural level, such as reinforcing the mandatory integration of sexual violence prevention into the training curricula.

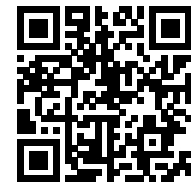
CHALLENGES RELATED TO SELF-EFFICACY					
THE INSTRUCTION GAP		50%	THE TRUST GAP		28%
Have received specific training to address sexual violence linked to conflict		65%	% of commanders that believe in their effectiveness to stop perpetration of sexual violence		96%
Have trained to address sexual violence linked to conflict		15%	% of armed actors that believe their commanders would stop sexual violence		68%

2 The “messenger effect” refers to the phenomenon in which people’s acceptance of a message is significantly influenced by who delivers it, based on their perceived authority, credibility, likeability, etc., rather than just the content itself. See Martin, S., and Marks, J., Messengers: Who We Listen To, Who We Don’t, and Why, PublicAffairs, 2019.

SOME PROMISING PRACTICES WITH COMMUNITIES IN 2024

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN TACKLING STIGMA IN OUR COMMUNITIES

The ICRC works alongside affected communities, building their capacity to reduce exposure to sexual violence, addressing vulnerabilities to prevent its occurrence and lessening its long-term impact when it does happen. By challenging stigma and increasing support for victims/survivors, the community outreach programme aims to foster a supportive immediate environment, increase access to services by those subjected to sexual violence and help them to recover. The programme is carried out in Ethiopia and South Sudan together with the Ethiopian Red Cross Society, South Sudan Red Cross, Danish Red Cross and Swedish Red Cross.



BETTER PROTECTION FOR VICTIMS/SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE: SAFER COMMUNITIES

The devastating impact of stigma against victims/survivors of sexual violence informed the development of the ICRC's Stigma Impact Model, which was presented in 2024. This policy brief reflects the experiences and recommendations of victims/survivors, communities, organizations, authorities and service providers based on testimonies from 19 countries. The recommendations in the brief will guide ICRC action through an implementation roadmap that brings together frontline and humanitarian diplomacy efforts.



A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME RESULTS FROM 2024

In 2024, over 15,000 community outreach sessions on stigma reduction were conducted by the 633 community influencers trained by the ICRC and partner National Red Cross Societies. The sessions reached over 150,000 community members, including local authorities, religious leaders, service providers, community leaders, youth and teachers.

- In 98% of the sessions, commitments were made to support survivors;
- In 96% of the sessions, commitments were made to reject perpetrators;
- After 11% of the sessions, direct identification and referrals of victims/survivors of sexual violence were undertaken, in line with the “do no harm” principle.

DRIVERS OF BEHAVIOUR CHANGE			
COGNITIVE BIASES		ATTITUDES	
STRENGTHS		STRENGTHS	AREAS TO REINFORCE
Indicator	Reduction in misconception that sexual violence is a “women’s” issue	Increase in perpetrator accountability	Increase in understanding of the invisibility of sexual violence
Value	-17%	+ 18%	+ 7%
Lessons learned	While there have been positive shifts in certain cognitive biases, such as the belief that only women and girls can be victims of sexual violence, the taboo around sexual violence remains deeply entrenched and will require long-term efforts to address. Some groups, particularly religious leaders and teachers, continue to show strong resistance. In fact, for a few of these profiles, attitudes appear to have worsened slightly. However, there has been an 18% reduction in the taboo among local authorities. It will be important for the PSVP to evaluate the broader impact of these shifts and the potential ripple effects in the coming years of the programme.		In general, the community outreach programme shows positive changes in the participants’ attitudes towards sexual violence. The very promising results in shifting the blame towards the perpetrator could contribute to reducing incidents of sexual violence within the community. However, misconceptions around the “invisible scars” (or the fact that physical evidence is the sole proof of sexual violence) remain – with the exception of police responders, which demonstrate an improvement of 27%.

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