



CARSV STIGMA TOOLKIT FOR JUSTICE



What is the Stigma Toolkit for Justice?

Synergy's Stigma Toolkit equips **justice actors & justice systems** to become **survivor-centric, trauma-informed and capable of delivering the predictable and rigorous justice** necessary to end impunity for conflict and atrocity-related sexual violence (CARSV).

The Stigma Toolkit provides a **roadmap for recognising and understanding the effects of stigma** across the justice spectrum so that survivors feel empowered and secure enough to disclose their experiences and seek justice. Justice systems that meet survivor-centric and trauma-informed standards will prosecute more cases and convict more perpetrators, reducing impunity.

Why is it Necessary?

Despite legislative reforms, deployment of gender experts, and in-house trainings, **almost every criminal justice system still fails to deliver predictable and rigorous justice outcomes for sexual violence offences, including conflict and atrocity-related sexual violence (CARSV).**

In the US:

- 19% of reported cases lead to an arrest
- 6% of reported cases end in conviction
- 1% resulting in convictions following a trial

In London:

- 14% of cases reported to the police are passed to a prosecutor
- 9% lead to charges
- 6% to trial & 1% to conviction

Given the estimated levels of under-reporting, this would mean between 0.84% and 1.92% of sexual assault or rape cases end in criminal accountability against the perpetrator in the US, and 0.84% in London.

We see **high attrition rates for sexual violence cases** all over the world, and when we look closely we can identify the root effect of **gendered stigma** and harmful misunderstandings and attitudes to sexual violence **affecting decision-making and outcomes in criminal cases.** It is the same for conflict and atrocity-related sexual violence where stigma is institutionalised into laws, policies, practice and decision-making.

This toolkit is a roadmap for justice leadership to change culture, enhance survivor-centred approaches and build CARSV competencies. I believe **this tool can change the experience of survivors** so that they are not harmed or retraumatised and can access justice safely. I also believe this tool can help improve outcomes and reduce attrition rates for sexual violence cases.

The Toolkit improves justice processes to produce greater accountability for CARSV by:

- 1 Helping justice actors and civil society advocates identify and tackle systemic gendered misunderstandings, assumptions and myths (stigma) which prevent reporting and lead to high attrition rates at all stages of the criminal justice proceedings;
- 2 Providing a road map to more survivor-centred, non-stigmatising, non-traumatising processes;
- 3 Providing tools to support building competencies, and monitoring change.

The Toolkit has two parts:

Part A is an indicator and assessment framework tool which helps justice actors and civil society measure **CARSV competencies** in terms of **survivor-centred, non-stigmatising processes** and **work cultures** across all stages and functions of a criminal justice system. This competency framework can also serve as a road-map for building capacity and improving systems and processes.

Part B is a set of smaller complementary work and **management tools** for **organisational change** and **practice improvement**, which **can help change work process**, practice and decision-making, and tackle harmful bias and stigma against CARSV and its survivors. These tools can be used individually or as part of an institutional response to the assessment conducted using Part A.

In my experience as a human rights advocate and survivor, I have come to understand the profound impact of stigma. Through my work, I have learned the importance of treating individuals with dignity and respect, ensuring their protection and holistic support. It saddens me to witness survivors of sexual conflict not receiving the necessary support due to the influence of stigma, preventing them from opening up to potential helpers.

The Stigma Toolkit is vital in raising awareness about the impact of stigma on victims of conflict and atrocity-related sexual violence. Stigma affects their psychological well-being, and physical health and limits their opportunities in education, employment, and parenting.

*The Toolkit aims to inform and promote access to necessary services, including the criminal justice system, which currently lacks responsiveness and fails to recognize the impact of stigma. By breaking down stereotypes and biases, **the Toolkit encourages a holistic approach and accountability in supporting survivors.***

Philomene Uwamaliya - Survivor Health Expert



Developing the Toolkit

A diverse group of experts across fields (legal, medical, psychosocial, survivor advocacy, and including survivors themselves) and around the world collaborated over the course of several months to discuss intended scope and outcomes, draft chapters, engage in discussions and reviews, and draft tools for stakeholders to use in assessing and improving the way justice systems handle sexual violence cases.

The Toolkit is currently in the pilot phase, then it will be revised based upon feedback, and finally it will be shared publicly for stakeholders to use around the world.

Why Synergy for Justice?

Synergy for Justice is a women-led, multi-disciplinary team working to enhance justice and end impunity for torture, sexual violence, and human rights violations. In collaboration with partner organisations, we ensure that survivors of torture and sexual violence can access justice, receive the care they need to heal, and fully participate in society.

Synergy collaborates with grassroots organisations and community facilitators to help survivors access resources for healing and address the stigma of sexual violence and the embedded beliefs that prevent survivors from reconnecting with their families and communities. Synergy's stigma reduction programme helps communities deal with the fear, trauma, and stress created by oppression and ongoing human rights violations. Communities that successfully deal with the social and relational effects of war and conflict can provide better care for survivors and help them return to full participation in society.

What's Next?

Synergy for Justice will pilot a chapter of the toolkit in South Sudan with its partner, Steward Women. Using the Stigma Toolkit, Steward Women will assess survivor interaction and engagement in South Sudan's justice sector by collecting data on survivor experiences and perspectives on the current situation for access to justice for women survivors of CARSV and broader forms of SV. Synergy will also train the survivor groups and networks on developing advocacy strategies and advocacy reports to improve survivors' experience with the justice system in South Sudan.

If your organisation would like to be involved in piloting the Stigma Toolkit, please contact us with the contextual details at info@synergyforjustice.org