



Summary: Advanced Pediatric Training - Evaluation and Care of Children and Adolescents in Cases of Sexual Violence

Overview

The advanced pediatric training is part of a series of trainings developed by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR). The aim of these training initiatives is to help end impunity and promote comprehensive justice for survivors, while also working toward the prevention of new cases of sexual violence. These training sessions are part of a global effort designed to: 1) build institutional capacity within existing health care systems; 2) enhance multisectoral cooperation and advocacy efforts on behalf of survivors; and 3) improve forensic documentation.

Throughout the world, children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to multiple forms of violence, including sexual violence. Evaluation and care of children and adolescents who have suffered any form of violence requires a specific set of skills. They have specific mental and physical health needs, many of which can be met by clinicians specifically trained in the care and evaluation of children and adolescents.

This curriculum aims to prepare clinicians to better interview, examine, collect forensic evidence, and address physical and mental health issues in children and adolescent survivors of sexual violence. It also aims to address specific challenges in the care and assessment of child and adolescent survivors, including multisectoral collaboration.

Since PHR's training program on the evaluation and care of pediatric survivors utilizes standardized patients (patient actors), special attention should be provided to the selection, training, and preparation of standardized patients in advance of this training.

At the end of this training, you will:

- Understand children's rights and international standards, laws and national legislation related to sexual violence against children.
- Understand the principles related to informed consent, assent and dissent for children with respect to their evolving capacity.
- Learn key approaches and techniques used for interviewing child survivors of sexual violence in ways that are survivor-centered and avoid retraumatization.
- Review steps required for a comprehensive pediatric medical examination.
- Have enhanced understanding of the range of mental health and psychological presentations in child and adolescent survivors.

Intended Audience

The training targets medical and mental health professionals who care for child and adolescent survivors of sexual violence. This training curriculum is designed specifically to develop the skills of frontline first responders who are interacting directly with pediatric survivors of sexual violence and conducting forensic evaluations.

This curriculum is also designed to be used to trained professionals who are working to support survivors of sexual violence in a particular community, as the materials are designed to provide participants in the training with the skills needed to collaborate as groups of professionals.

Training Modules

Note: *It is important that the content of these training modules, as outlined in the sections below, must be adapted to the context in which the training is being delivered. The medicolegal response is different in each community and country context due a variety of factors including different legal frameworks, medical systems, resource availability, history of conflict-related sexual violence, barriers to accessing justice, and cultures.*

Only after the curriculum has considered these context-specific considerations and adapted accordingly will the training be relevant and applicable for multisectoral actors to apply the lessons learned in this training to their daily professional work.

0. **Introduction to Training**

This module offers an introduction to the organization convening the training, the training team, and the participants. This module is also used to establish the ground rules for the training.

1. **Introduction to Sexual Violence and Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Children and Adolescents**

This introductory session of the training identifies and begins to address challenges clinicians have experienced in the assessment and care of pediatric survivors of sexual violence and the challenges that exist in situations of conflict. This module also touches on the importance of the role of medical professionals examining child survivors and the role of forensic medical evaluations and evidence.

2. **What are child rights? International laws, standards and good practices that protect the rights of children**

This module introduces children's rights as defined in international human rights law. Additionally, it introduces international laws, guidelines and standards related to sexual violence against children. Finally, it introduces key terms and good practices related to supporting child survivors.

3. **Legal Background and National Laws protecting minors from sexual violence**

This module introduces the various domestic legal statutes applicable to sexual violence, particularly how a "child" or "minor" is defined per the national law of the country and national laws relevant to sexual violence against children and sexual violence/abuse cases. It also reviews national guidelines and standards for first responders in cases of child sexual violence and abuse as per national law.

NOTE: This module is highly contextual and will need to be developed specifically for the location of the training in order to be most useful to the training participants.

4. **Defining Consent, Assent, and Dissent**

This module addresses legal and ethical considerations when obtaining informed consent or assent in cases of sexual violence against children and adolescents. It also addresses the importance of respecting dissent expressed by children and considering children's evolving capacity when developing processes for obtaining informed consent and assent.

5. **Mental Health of Child Survivors**

This module provides an overview of the psychological impacts of sexual violence on children, particularly describing the manifestations of trauma in children based on different chronological, emotional, and developmental stages. It also includes guidance on how to identify and document trauma during examinations how to provide trauma-informed care, and making referrals. In addition, it covers use of standardized tools for assessing trauma, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety in children.

6. **Interviewing Child and Adolescent Survivors of Sexual Violence**

This module examines key techniques used for interviewing child survivors, including preparing the physical space, principles of child interviews, and behavioral observations during interviews. The discussion will identify different approaches for interviewing children of various ages as compared to adults. It examines interview techniques and how to ask key questions, including non-suggestive questioning techniques. It also discusses factors that can influence disclosure and how to interpret children's statements.

7. **Physical Exam and Forensic Evidence Collection**

This module introduces the elements of medical evaluations, including preparation before the exam, the clinician's intake of patient history, behavioral observations, and physical examination techniques for sexual violence survivors. This module addresses the therapeutic value of the forensic exam and the principles of physical exam based on a child's age and developmental stage. It also reviews examination techniques, including head-to-toe examination for male and female bodies, collecting forensic evidence, and testing needs. Finally, this module introduces the medicolegal forms used to document forensic evidence of sexual violence. This module will explain the value of standardized medical certificates (and introduce context-specific standardized forms as applicable), the use of medical terms, and the process by which the form is used and transferred to police investigators.

8. **Standardized Patient Practical Exercise**

This module is practical and focuses on rotating between three cases with standardized patients to provide participants with an opportunity to practice using the tools and approaches covered in the modules in interviewing and using standardized forms with patients. Feedback will be provided to participants after each interview/examination.

*Child-friendly space at Panzi Hospital, Bukavu, DRC, 2024.
Photo: Physicians for Human Rights*



Additional Materials

- Video: What is Informed Consent. <https://phr.org/what-is-informed-consent/>
 - This film provides an overview of the key steps for clinicians to follow in order to obtain informed consent from patients before, during, and after a forensic examination for sexual assault.
- Video: How to Obtain Meaningful Informed Consent. <https://phr.org/how-to-obtain-meaningful-informed-consent/>
 - This film provides an overview of the key steps for clinicians to follow in order to obtain informed consent from patients before, during, and after a forensic examination for sexual assault. This film is intended to be screened for clinicians.
- Video: What is Forensic Photography? <https://phr.org/what-is-forensic-photography/>
 - This film provides an overview of the key elements for documenting photographic evidence of sexual violence in connection with a sexual assault medical examination. This film is intended to be screened for clinicians.
- Foundational Principles for Applying the Concepts of Consent, Assent, Dissent and Evolving Individual Capacity to Ensure Trauma-informed Documentation, Justice, and Reparations Processes for Child Survivors of Sexual Violence. https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Foundational-Principles_7.19.24_EN.pdf
 - These foundational principles provide key considerations for professionals to use when developing and implementing consent and assent processes for child survivors of sexual violence that respect children's right to be heard and evolving capacity within trauma-informed justice and reparation processes.
- Forensic Medical Certificate. <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Forensic-Medical-Certificate.pdf>
 - A standardized medical form to collect, document, and preserve court-admissible evidence of sexual violence.
- Forensic Medical Certificate: Practical Guide. <https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Medical-Certificate-Companion-Guide-DRC-FINAL-ENGLISH.pdf>
 - This practical guide provides tips for healthcare providers who are using the forensic medical certificate to conduct a clinical evaluation of a survivor of sexual violence.
- Facts about the Hymen. https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/PHR-Hymen-Fact-Sheet_English-FINAL.pdf
 - This factsheet presents facts that show that the examination of the hymen is not an accurate or reliable test of sexual activity, including sexual assault.