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# Documenting conflict-related sexual violence and associated attacks on health in Ethiopia: Presenting results from mixed-methods research

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*\*OJAH researchers are unnamed to respect researchers' security*

# Motivation

- Starting in November 2020 reports of widespread conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) in Tigray, Ethiopia as part of the conflict between the armed forces of Ethiopia, Eritrea, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) and other actors; reports of these violations continued after the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022
- Conflict escalated in other regions (Amhara, Afar and Oromia) fueled by impunity for human rights violations committed in Tigray.
- A need for systematic documentation of the scale, scope, and patterns of perpetration of CRSV committed in Ethiopia to ensure accountability for these violations
- PHR partnered with local health care workers and human rights documenters to introduce standardized tools to document sexual violence



The Economist

Image credit: The Economist

# Research Methodology

**Research Aims: (1)** Document patterns and perpetration of CRSV in Ethiopia and **(2)** the health system's ability to document CRSV and provide care and treatment to survivors.



- Data collection with a tool based on PHR's standardized forensic medical certificate



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# Limitations

Data does not capture CRSV perpetrated by all actors or in all areas of Ethiopia. (Phase I)

CRSV was self-reported by survivors who presented at medical facilities.

HIV positivity and pregnancy rates represent cases among those tested, not the entire cohort. (Phase I)

These findings cannot assess prevalence of CRSV in this region due to methodology and sampling

Potential for recall bias in healthcare workers being surveyed/interviewed

# Findings: Demographics of Survivors

- Conflict related sexual violence in these records overwhelmingly affected women and girls (99.3%)
- Survivors ranged in age from 8 to 69
- Majority of survivors were adults (26-older) (59%)
- 33% of survivors were young adults (18-25) and 7% were minors (under the age of 18).

## Broken Promises

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Before and  
After the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement  
in Tigray, Ethiopia

August 2023



# Findings: Patterns of Perpetration of CRSV

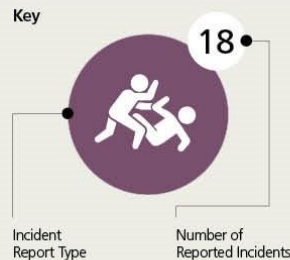
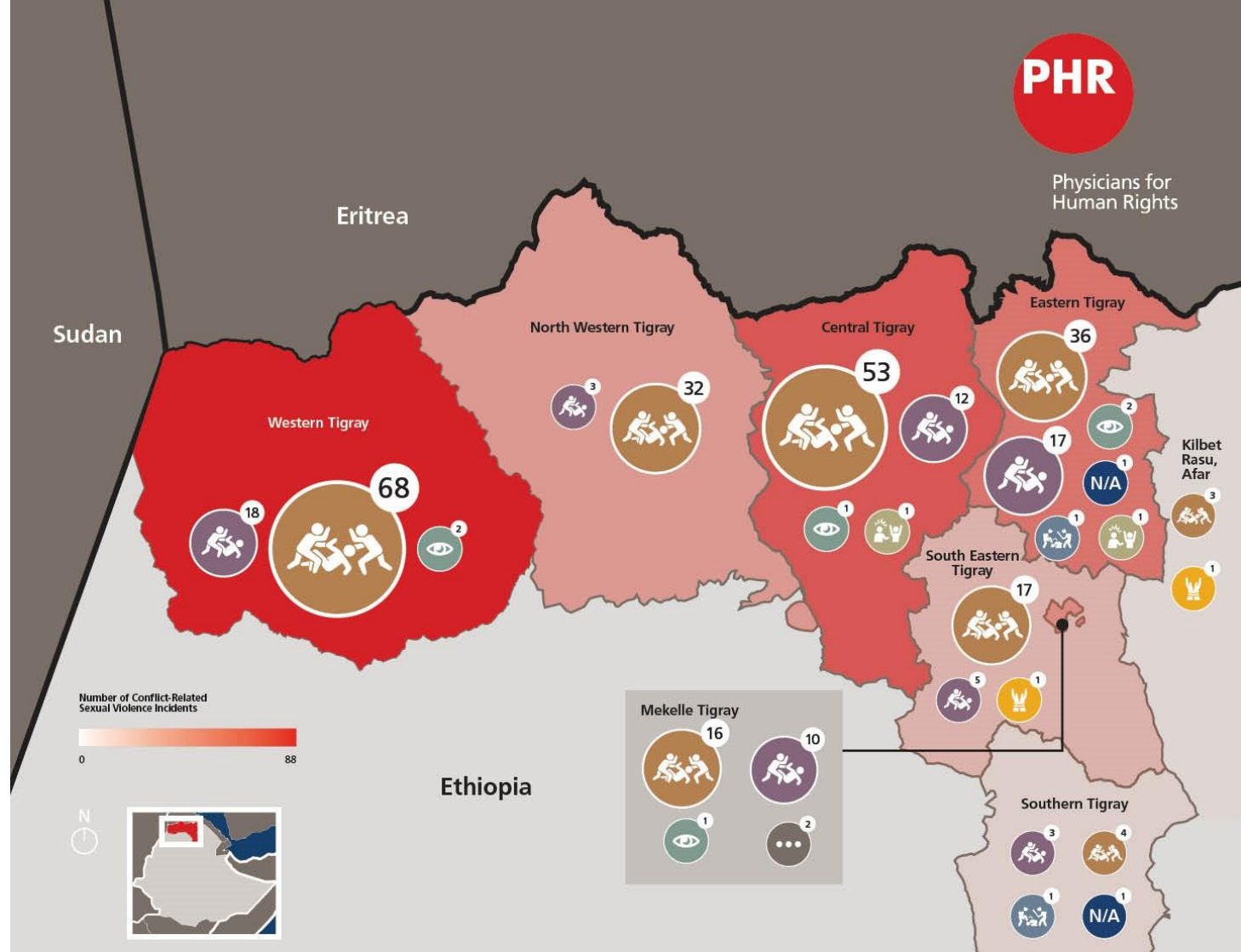
- **Types of CRSV:** Rape by **multiple perpetrators** most common type of CRSV reported (233 instances reported; 76%). 10 (3%) records where the patient reported being in conditions of captivity while experiencing multiple perpetrator rape.
- **Specific acts of CRSV:** 299 cases of penetration of female genitalia with penis (98%) and 40 cases of penetration of anus with a penis (13%). 360 specific acts of sexual violence were reported in 304 patient records, indicating many experienced more than one form of sexual violence in the same incident.
- **Use of force/weaponry:** Perpetrators frequently used weapons during the incidents, most commonly guns (137 instances reported; 45%)
- Survivors recounted witnessing the killing of family members before, during or after sexual violence.

“They took her to their camp and raped her for 6 months.”

“They tied her hands and legs in front of her child and raped her then they killed her four-year-old child and repeatedly raped her.”

“She claimed her brother was killed by Eritrean soldiers in front of her and raped in front of the dead body.”

# Findings: Geographic Location of Incidents



- Incident Report Type**
- Rape by a Single Perpetrator
  - Rape by Multiple Perpetrators
  - Forced Touching
  - Beating
  - Forced Witnessing
  - Type of Sexual Violence Not Reported
  - Sexual Violence in Captivity
  - Other

**Note**  
The map above depicts incidents of conflict-related sexual violence that occurred from November 2020 through June 2023, from a randomly selected sample of 304 medical records.



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# Findings: Characteristics of Perpetrators

- CRSV incidents conducted by **a median of 3 perpetrators**
- Perpetrators were most commonly identified as **members of the military (96%), Tigrigna language speaking (66%), and previously unknown** to the survivor.
- 28% of perpetrators were identified as speaking Amharic.
- While specific information on perpetration of these violations was not available in all records, our analysis of available data (197 cases) show **that most (73%) of cases** analyzed were identified by the survivor as being **perpetrated by members of the Eritrean Army**, followed by Amhara Special Forces (10%), Fano Militia (9%), Ethiopian Army (8%), and Afar Special Forces (1%).





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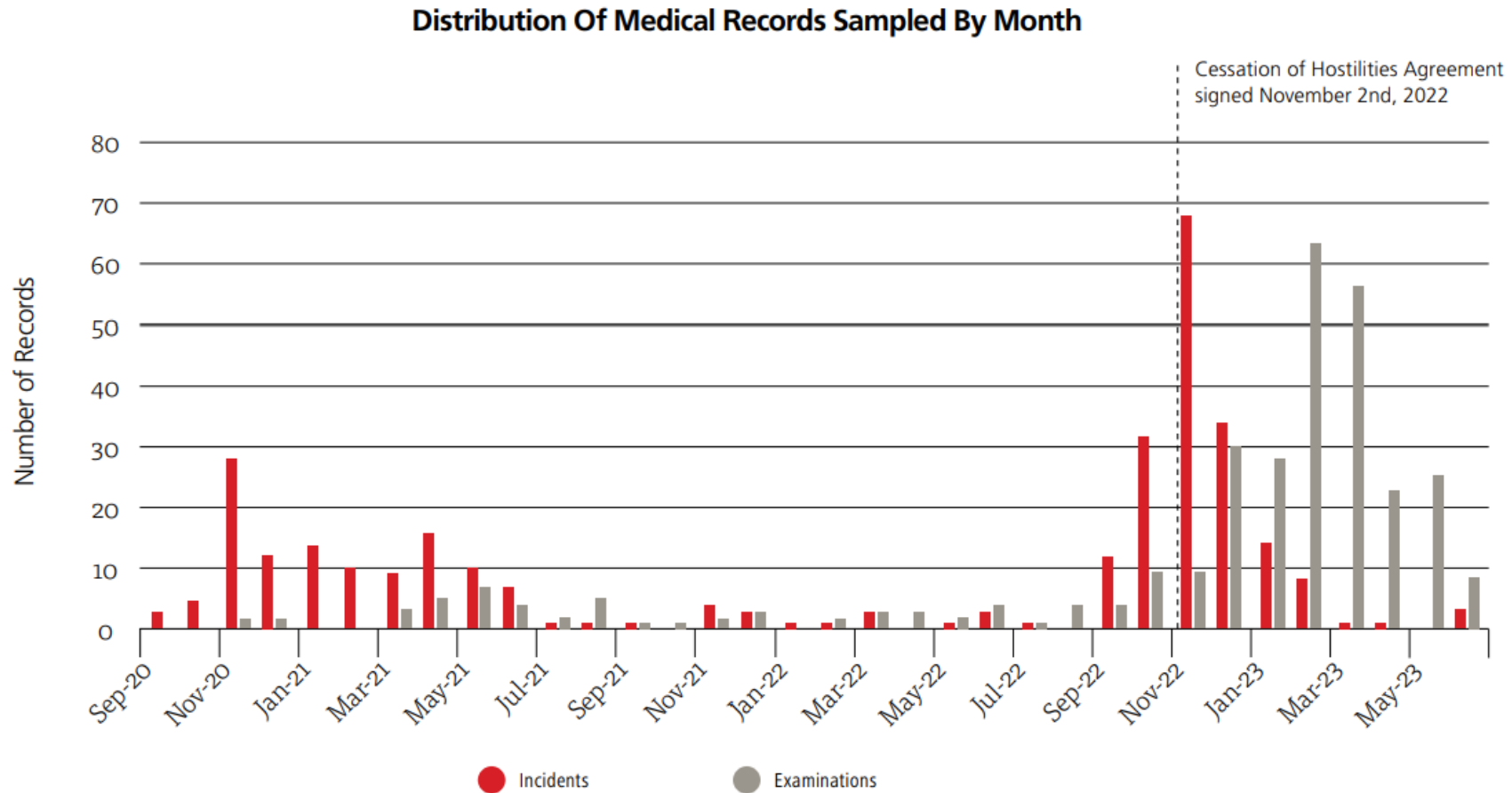
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# Findings: Clinical Findings

- **Ongoing mental health symptoms were reported**, depression (17%) and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (13%).
- Three patients reported suicide attempts related to the incidents.
- Patient records also show a **range of reproductive organ injuries and disorders** (11%).
- Records suggest that **in multiples instances CRSV may have resulted in pregnancy** (8% of patients self-reported as experiencing unintended pregnancy following the incident of CRSV) **or contraction of HIV** (11% of patients tested for HIV were positive)

# Findings: Temporal Analysis of Incidents of CRSV

Figure 2: Monthly Frequency Of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Incidents and Health Facility Examinations





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# Findings: CRSV Against Children and Adolescents (under the age of 18)

- Cases range from age 8 to 17, and 95% of these cases (n=20) were in adolescents between the ages of 13 to 17.
- The sample only showed CRSV against female children or adolescents.
- 95% (n=20) of the incidents against children and adolescents in the sample occurred after November 2022.
- **The brutal patterns of CRSV observed in the overall sample were also seen in this sub-sample of records.**



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# Key Takeaways

- Findings are **consistent** with other publicly available reports and are **suggestive of non-random, widespread and large-scale CRSV**.
- Findings show the **use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as a tool of war against civilian populations**
- **High likelihood that military forces, likely associated with the Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, have perpetrated atrocity crimes**
- The data shows that **CRSV has continued since the signing of the CoHA in November 2022** and that the **scale and patterns of these crimes has not materially changed**.
- **The data likely represents only a fraction of many more cases of CRSV that have gone underreported.**

# Phase II Data Collection: Mixed Methods Approach

Using quantitative and qualitative methods to understand patterns of perpetration of CRSV and the impacts of attacks against health care across multiple conflict affected regions of Ethiopia.



Photo credit: Maria Gerth-Niculescu/TNH

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# Phase II Data Collection: Data Overview

- 602 health care worker surveys collected with health care workers in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia
- 602 ProQol assessments completed with health care workers in the Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions of Ethiopia
- 515 medical records reviewed in Tigray, Amhara and Afar regions
- 39 semi-structured interviews and 4 focus groups completed in Tigray, Amhara, Afar and Oromia regions of Ethiopia, Kenya and Sudan, with respondents who provided care to survivors.

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# Phase II Data Preview: Survey of Health Care Workers

- 365 female respondents (60.6%) and 237 Male respondents (39.4%)
- All surveys were completed by respondents who work inside Ethiopia. 509 from Tigray Region (84.6%), 61 (10.1%) from Amhara Region, 30 (5.0%) from Afar Region, and 1 (0.2%) from both Central Ethiopia Regional State and Oromia Region.
- 421 (69.9%) work in governmental hospitals, 69 (11.5%) work in government one-step center, 80 (13.3%) work in other kind of government medical facility. 18 (3.0%) work with NGOs, and 14 (2.3%) work in other kinds of facilities.
- When asked whether they treated patients who experienced conflict-related sexual violence, 448 respondents (78.4%) responded with yes, and 154 (25.6%) did not.
- 485 (80.6%) of the surveyed health care providers reported that the conflict in Ethiopia impacted the ability of survivors of CRSV to access health care in the facilities where they worked.

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# Phase II Data Preview: Medical Record Review

- 515 medical records were reviewed; in 502 cases (97.5%), the patients were females, and in 10 cases (1.9%) the patient was male.
- Rape by single perpetrator was reported in 146 cases (28.3%) and by multiple perpetrators (gang rape) in 326 (63.3%) cases.

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**Read the  
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