

Photo: Erik Marmor



Silent Cry

Sexual Violence Crimes on October 7

Special Report by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel
February 2024

Content Warning: The report contains graphic descriptions
of sexual abuse, torture, and murder.



The Association of
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Abstract

Hamas's attack on October 7th included brutal sexual assaults, carried out systematically and deliberately towards Israeli civilians. Numerous testimonies and pieces of disclosed and classified information present a clear picture of identical patterns of action repeated in each of the attack zones – the Nova Festival, private homes in the Gaza envelope kibbutzim, and IDF bases. Sexual assaults were conducted also on some of the 254 victims who were abducted to the Gaza Strip. Therefore, there is a high likelihood that the kidnapped women and men in Hamas captivity are still at risk of sexual abuse at any given moment.

Hamas's attack included violent acts of rape, accompanied by threats with weapons, and in some cases targeted towards injured women. Many of the rapes were conducted by Hamas terrorists in groups. Often, the rape was perpetrated in front of an audience – partners, family, or friends – in a manner intended to increase the pain and humiliation of all present. Hamas terrorists hunted down young women and men who fled the Nova festival, and according to testimonies, dragged them by their hair while the victims were screaming. The actions targeted women, girls, and men. In most cases, the victims were murdered after or even during the rape.

A series of testimonies, interviews, and additional sources unequivocally indicate that Hamas terrorists employed sadistic practices aimed at intensifying the degree of humiliation and terror inherent in sexual violence. Many of the bodies of sexual crime victims were found bound and shackled. The genitals of both women and men were brutally mutilated, and in some cases weapons were inserted into them. The terrorists did not stop at shooting; they also cut and mutilated sexual organs and other body parts with knives.



The report summarizes the findings of a preliminary examination of all the public and classified information, interviews, and testimonies that can be revealed at this time, more of which is expected to reveal over time. The report clearly shows that sexual abuse was not an isolated incident or sporadic opportunistic cases but rather a clear operational strategy.

Those who choose to remain silent, silence others, or deny the sexual crimes committed by Hamas will be remembered accordingly.

Opening Remarks

Orit Sulitzeanu

Executive Director — The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel

2024. Seven years since the #MeToo movement erupted, a quarter of a century after the Kosovo War in which the use of sexual violence in warfare entered public discourse, decades of feminist struggle to break the walls of silence and denial surrounding sexual assault – and the world is silent once again.

Against this incomprehensible silence, the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (ARCCI) released this report, which examines the sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated in the massacre of October 7, 2023 and the war that ensued.

The information and testimonies the report presents indicate beyond any doubt what occurred, but significant parts of the story are yet to be revealed. Since sexual assault typically involves delayed disclosure, especially during wartime, the picture presented in the report is still preliminary. In the months and years to come, depending on the decision of the survivors, we may be able to provide a more comprehensive account of the sexual assaults conducted on October 7th and thereafter.



Introduction

On Saturday, October 7, 2023, at 06:29 AM, during the festive holiday of Simchat Torah, Hamas initiated a sudden attack on Israel from the Gaza Strip. Under heavy rocket fire, thousands of militants infiltrated into Israeli territory. They entered homes in kibbutzim on the border with Gaza while family members were asleep in their beds or sheltering in safe rooms; they raided a large outdoor music festival taking place in the area; seized control of IDF bases, and particularly targeted IDF observation posts with unarmed women soldiers in position. Over 1,200 people were murdered in a single day, the vast majority of whom were civilians, and 254 Israeli and foreign citizens were abducted to the Gaza Strip, including women, men, children, babies, and the elderly.

Immediately following the massacre, numerous accounts began to emerge about sexual offenses that occurred during it. The testimonies came from all locations of the attack – homes, the Nova festival, and IDF bases. Subsequently, with the release of some of the hostages, testimonies about sexual violence in captivity also surfaced, crimes which may be continuing to occur even as these lines are being written.

This special report focuses on the sexual and gender-based offenses committed during the war. It offers an analysis of testimonies and information about the events by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel, as can be presented at this point in time (February 2024, four months after the outbreak of the war). This serves as initial evidence of systematic and widespread sexual crimes conducted by Hamas.

Addressing sexual and gender-based violence during war inherently involves a tension between society and the individual. For society, there is a historical, national, and international significance in acknowledging the atrocities that occurred. In face of denial that started as the first accounts were emerging, testimonies and detailed information about the assaults are urgently needed. This is especially poignant as many



of those who have been raped and tortured were murdered, unable to ever voice their experiences. When most of the victims of sexual assaults are murdered, we have a moral and humanitarian obligation to amplify their silent cry.

However, survivors should not be demanded to speak out in order to serve people's interest to know. The choice of whether to speak, what to disclose, when, and how should be theirs, and theirs only. Typically, sexual violence in "normal" circumstances is characterized by delayed disclosure, with most cases not reported until months, years, or even decades later, and sometimes never. Experience worldwide indicates that in times of war, disclosure is even further delayed. This process of maturation must not be hastened. After their bodies have been violated, survivors must be allowed to regain control, which may include telling their stories at a time that is appropriate for them.

Throughout the writing process, we aimed to uphold this complexity. At any point of uncertainty, we acted according to the ethical principles of the rape crisis centers, which prioritize the preferences, choices and needs of the survivors. Consequently, we cannot present in this document all the information and accounts that we received confidentially. Nevertheless, we have made an effort to provide an account that reflects information available from publicly available sources as well as information whose sources we cannot disclose at this stage.



About the Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel

The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel (ARCCI) was founded in 1990 as an umbrella organization, uniting nine rape crisis centers spread across the country that receive approximately 50,000 inquiries each year. **The rape crisis centers for survivors of sexual assault** operate on an individual level and provide a wide range of services for survivors of sexual violence, including immediate psychological support, support groups, assistance in legal and medical processes, advocacy, and more. These services are offered to victims and survivors from all sectors of Israeli society, to family members, and to professional teams. In addition, the rape crisis centers work within their local communities and in partnership with ARCCI, operating education, awareness, and prevention programs.

The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel acts as an agent for social change at both the national and systemic levels, complementing and relying on the individual work carried out in the rape crisis centers. The association works to promote rights and services for survivors of sexual assault, to adopt preventive and systemic treatment measures, and to reduce the incidence of the phenomenon in Israel. The association's activities include, among others, promoting policy and legislation, fundamental legal proceedings, shaping public discourse on the phenomenon of sexual violence, research, and the collection and dissemination of knowledge.

The diverse services provided by the centers and the association are the result of over three decades of experience, during which time saw the creation of a professional body of knowledge and expertise regarding sexual violence in general, its characteristics, and its implications for the lives of victims and survivors, and society as a whole.



Background: Sexual Crimes in War

Sexual violence, in both national and international armed conflict, is explicitly defined as war crimes prohibited by the Rome Statute (1998). The statute established the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to act in cases of sexual crimes in wartime.

Characteristics

The literature identifies several unique characteristics of sexual violence in war, with short-term and long-term consequences:¹

- **Life-threatening situations:** Sexual violence during wartime is predominantly perpetrated by soldiers or armed forces against unarmed civilians. In these circumstances, sexual violence is linked to a direct threat to life.
- **Reporting:** The prevalence of sexual assaults and rape during war and captivity is particularly high. However, these offenses are also characterized by significant underreporting, both due to difficulties in reporting (such as shame, fear of social stigma and retaliation, etc.) and the fact that a significant number of the victims are killed or die afterward.
- **Proliferation of gang rapes:** Estimates suggest that around 90% of wartime rapes are gang rapes committed in the presence and participation of multiple perpetrators.² The collective perpetration is known to strengthen bonds and camaraderie among the perpetrator.

1 Hagen, K. & Yohani, S. (2010). The nature and psychosocial consequences of war rape for individuals and communities. *International journal of psychological studies*, 2(2), 14–25

2 Vlachova, M., & BIASON, L. (Eds.). (2005). *Women in an insecure world: Violence against women, facts, figures, and analysis*. Geneva, Switzerland: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces.



- **Sexual violence in the presence of others:** In addition to gang rapes and sexual attacks committed in the presence of other perpetrators, sexual violence during war is often perpetrated in the presence of other women to instill fear, or in the presence of family members and other community members to demonstrate and deepen oppression and humiliation. Rape of a partner or family member aims to expand the humiliation to bystanders who remain powerless or suffer additional violence in attempts to stop it. Another exertion of control is when one of the family members is forced to rape another family member. Dragging women out of their homes to the sound of their screams is a way to harm the community and exert control over the enemy through psychological and physical means. In the current era, the use of media and social networks – distributing videos depicting atrocities – allows for spreading fear to a wider audience, beyond those physically present.
- **Brutality:** Wartime rape often occurs alongside practices of sadism, xenophobia, and dehumanization. Rape during wartime is characterized by dehumanization, where the woman in front of the perpetrator is not considered human but rather a symbolic body subjected to hatred and violence. Brutality is also manifested in the physical injuries accompanying sexual violence during wartime.
- **Characteristics of slavery and subjugation:** During wartime, we see women held in captivity and subjected to sexual assault and rape. Women and young girls are held in "rape camps" where they undergo torture, verbal abuse, and intensive rape.

These characteristics provide a framework for understanding the nature and impact of sexual violence in wartime, highlighting the need for comprehensive responses to address the complex challenges posed by such crimes.



Implications

Following sexual violence experience in war, survivors often struggle to receive the required treatment and support since the societies are focused on rebuilding and survival rather than addressing sexual violence survivors' needs.

Sexual trauma in war occurs within the context of larger, complex emergency situations, which include the destruction of political, economic, socio-cultural, and health infrastructures.³ Often, the Survivors and their families must cope with the displacement of their communities and the need to resettle.

Psychological Implications

Sexual assault during war is characterized by a loss of control over the body, similar to other forms of sexual assault, but also by a loss of one's basic sense of security and control over all aspects of life.

Women who have experienced sexual assault during war may experience PTSD, general anxiety, sleep disturbances, flashbacks, nightmares, and depression. Other possible consequences include disinterest in the environment, loss of self-esteem, hopelessness, self-loathing, body dissociation, and self-harm.⁴

The consequences may also include intentional isolation by survivors who impose themselves distance due to fear of stigma, shame, rejection, or negative responses.⁵

3 Toole, M. J., & Waldman, R. J.(1997). The public health aspects of complex emergencies and refugee situations. *Annual review of public health*, 18(1), 283–312

4 Hagen & Yohani, 2010

5 Bernard, V., & Durham, H. (2014). Sexual violence in armed conflict: From breaking the silence to breaking the cycle. *International Review of the Red Cross*, 96(894), 427–434



Physical Implications

Women who have experienced rape during wartime may also suffer from physical traumas, including vaginal and rectal injuries, tears and lacerations, throat injuries (as a result of forced oral sex), fractures, and broken bones.

The medical consequences of sexual trauma can include sexually transmitted infections (such as HIV), sexual dysfunction, reproductive disorders, carcinoma, narcotic addiction, chronic infections, as well as more "common" somatic symptoms such as back pain, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, insomnia, chronic pelvic pain, hormonal dysfunction, gastrointestinal pain, and eating disorders.

Medical treatment during and after wartime may be limited or impossible; there may be difficulties in treating injuries due to unsanitary conditions, shortages of supplies and medications, inadequate medical facilities, and the victims' difficulty in reporting or disclosing the injury. As a result, women who have been sexually assaulted during war often face long-term health problems.⁶

Methodology

To prepare this report, dozens of pieces of information related to the conduct of sexual and gender crimes were examined. Various pieces of information were collected from official sources, publications in local and international press, interviews with "first responders" in different arenas, professionals' accounts, as well as confidential information received by ARCCI. Information from social media or unverified sources was not included.

6 Hagen & Yohani, 2010



After locating the information, a process of cataloging and analysis was conducted to map out the areas and patterns of operation of the incidents in which sexual crimes were committed. As stated in the introduction to this report, first-hand accounts of what occurred and shared with the ARCCI team as part of its work were not included. However, an effort was made to reflect issues that were reported in first-hand accounts in the analysis.

On the Process of Collecting Evidence: "But why aren't they speaking?"

The difficulty of disclosing sexual assaults is a well-known and recognized feature, even in peacetime. When the assault occurs in the context of war, it seems that additional dimensions of difficulty inhibit disclosure. This aspect is well-known in the research literature on sexual violence during wartime, as described above, and it is also significantly evident in the current context.

As stated, in our rape crisis centers, we estimate that in the coming years, some of those who have suffered sexual violence on October 7th and in the subsequent war may decide to share their stories.

Findings

First Analytical Axis: Arenas

Analysis of the data reveals that sexual and gender-based violence systematically occurred in all arenas where the October 7th massacre occurred, as well as in captivity. In what follows, we outline the key zones in which these incidents occurred and summarize the sexual assaults that are known to have taken place in each.



The “Nova” Festival

The music festival “Nova” took place in an open area near Kibbutz Re’im, produced especially for the Sukkot holiday. It was held between October 6th and October 7th, hosting about 4,400 attendees.⁷ At 6:29 am, sirens alerting of a missile attack went off in the festival area, and shortly after, it was decided to close the festival and disperse the celebrating crowd. Simultaneously, terrorists infiltrated the area with trucks and paragliders, seizing, assaulting, murdering, and taking attendees captive.

The crimes that occurred at the Festival area took place in the festival compound and at several sites in its vicinity, where participants fled attempting to escape the terrorists and missile fire. Some were captured in bomb shelters and hiding places where they tried to take refuge.

A day after the massacre, a video was posted on social media showing a woman in a ripped dress, without underwear, injured and with her face burned. Police investigators estimated that she had been raped.⁸ The woman who filmed the video (while searching for her friend, who was later found to have been kidnapped) recounted that a cut wound appeared on the body's leg, which she estimated was caused when her underwear was cut off.⁹

Several survivors of the massacre provided eyewitness testimony of gang rape, where women were abused and handled between multiple terrorists who beat up, injured, and ultimately murdered them.¹⁰

7 Korial, A., Levi, L., & Glickman, A. (November 23, 2019). “Please, I’m begging. They’re killing me”: Investigation and tales of heroism from the massacre at Re’im. *Ynet*. www.ynet.co.il/news/article/yokra13681367 [Hebrew]

8 Gettelmanm, J., Schwartz, A., & Sella, A. (28.12.23). “Screams without words”: How Hamas weaponized sexual violence on Oct. 7. *The New York Times*. www.nytimes.com/2023/12/28/world/middleeast/oct-7-attacks-hamas-israel-sexual-violence.html

9 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Eden Vasli, 31.1.23

10 Lamb, C. (2.12.23). First Hamas fighters raped her. Then they shot her in the head. *The Sunday Times*. www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ten-hamas-fighters-were-raping-the-woman-she-begged-for-death-6ldlmh8sp *The Jewish Chronicle* (3.12.23). Hamas gang raped and beheaded women at rave massacre, fresh testimony reveals. *The Jewish Chronicle*. www.thejc.com/news/israel/hamas-gang-raped-and-beheaded-women-at-rave-massacre-fresh-testimony-reveals-blpoghdI; Gettelmanm, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23



One survivor who wandered the area after the massacre described it as an “apocalypse of bodies, Girls with no clothing on, upper body clothes, lower body clothes”.¹¹

These descriptions align with accounts from professional rescue and emergency teams that treated and removed the bodies, who testified about many bodies arriving partially clothed or unclothed, heavy bleeding from the pelvic area, and mutilation of genital organs.¹²

Kibbutzim and Villages in the South

During the October 7th attack, terrorists entered homes in kibbutzim and villages in the western Negev. Due to the timing of the attack - the holiday of Simchat Torah, some of the local residents hosted family members and guests who came for the holiday. The terrorists broke into hundreds of homes, murdered their inhabitants or took them captive threatening them with weapons or by setting the homes on fire.

According to rescuers’ testimonies and forensic evidence, signs of sexual assault were found in many local residents near the murder scenes. In many cases, it appears that the acts were committed in the presence of spouses or other family members who were forced to witness the violence.

In Kibbutz Be’eri, where 90 of its residents were murdered, several testimonies were collected regarding the bodies of women and girls who were raped, mostly in their bedrooms, while partially dressed in their pajamas. ZAKA volunteers and rescue forces described a row of houses where bodies with signs of sexual assault were found, including

11 Saban, A.(28.11.23). “More than 1,500 Harrowing Testimonies That the Mind and Soul Struggle to Digest”: A Stirring Debate in the Committee for the Advancement of Women’s Status. *Israel Hayom*. www.israelhayom.co.il/news/local/article/14879357 [Hebrew]

12 Sky News (1.2.24).Israel-Hama war: Some female victims of 7 October ‘had their faces obliterated’ [Israel-Hama war: Some female victims of 7 October ‘had their faces obliterated’ | World News | Sky News](#); Gettelmanm, Schwartz & Sella, 28.12.23



women and girls who were stripped of their underwear,¹³ and insertion of a knife into the genital area.¹⁴

Similar testimonies were provided to the Association of Rape Crisis Centers by soldiers and rescue forces who evacuated bodies in other kibbutzim. Chaim Otmazgin, head of the special units in ZAKA and an officer in the National Rescue and Fire Command, describes another kibbutz where he saw two naked bodies of women with objects penetrating their bodies.¹⁵ Nira Shpak, a resident of Kfar Aza who took upon herself the task of identifying the bodies of the 60 killed in the kibbutz, recounted several bodies found with exposed intimate organs, sometimes with their clothes torn apart.¹⁶

Noam Mark, a member of the emergency security team of Kibbutz Re'im, found three bodies of young women from the festival in one of the houses.¹⁷ The bodies were found naked, with clear signs of severe sexual violence.¹⁸ Mark provided the police with testimony along with a video supporting his claims.¹⁹

Research by *The New York Times* presents at least 24 bodies with signs

13 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Chaim Otmazgin, 28.1.24; Rose, E., & Villarraga, H. (17.10.23). Rescue workers recount horrors found in kibbutz attacked by Hamas. *Reuters*, www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/rescue-workers-recount-horrors-found-kibbutz-attacked-by-hamas-2023-10-17/; Keller-Lynn, C. (9.11.23). Amid war and urgent need to ID bodies, evidence of Hamas's October 7 rapes slips away. *The Times of Israel*. www.timesofisrael.com/amid-war-and-urgent-need-to-id-bodies-evidence-of-hamass-october-7-rapes-slips-away/

14 Williamson, L. (5.12.23). Israel Gaza: Hamas raped and mutilated women on 7 October, BBC hears. *BBC*. www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67629181

15 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Chaim Otmazgin, 28.1.24

16 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Nira Shpak, 10.2.23

17 It is unclear how the young women arrived at the kibbutz – whether they fled and tried to find refuge there, or whether they were brought in by the terrorists. In a conversation with him, Mark estimates that it is the second possibility, as according to him, it was impossible to enter the kibbutz during the attack.

18 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Noam Mark, 5.2.24

19 Dadon, A. (30.12.23). First publication The unpublished eyewitness testimony to the acts of rape by Hamas terrorists on 7.10. 12 News. www.mako.co.il/news-military/6361323ddea5a810/Article-c18ee2771bbbc81026.htm [Hebrew]



of sexual abuse in Be’eri and Kfar Aza.²⁰ Additional information about sexual assaults on surviving young women, originally not disclosed, has reached the rape crisis centers.²¹

Israel Defense Force (IDF) Bases

Information about the incidents at IDF bases is relatively limited, but also includes gender-based and sexual assaults. A female Lieutenant, who survived the invasion into the base at Erez Crossing, recounted how a terrorist threatened her with a weapon and demanded she remove her uniform.²² She was rescued when another terrorist apprehended him.

Rescue team which attended to the bodies described those of female soldiers with signs of sexual violence. Shari Mendes, a volunteer who attended to women’s bodies at the “Shura” camp,²³ reported witnessing four bodies of female soldiers with signs of sexual violence, some with extensive bleeding in the pelvic area.²⁴ Maayan, a dentist and military officer who also worked at the camp, said she saw at least 10 bodies of female soldiers with clear signs of sexual violence.²⁵ Moshe Pinchi, an officer in the Israeli police, showed *The New York Times* a video featuring two soldiers who were shot in their genitals, which was filmed by

20 Gettelmanm, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23

21 Confidential information received by the Association of Rape Crisis Centers.

22 Zaitoun. Y. (23.10.17). “Chilling testimony from a female officer who survived an ambush: “The terrorist wanted me to take off my uniform.” *Ynet*. www.ynet.co.il/blogs/gazawar1/article/hy3deuhwp [Hebrew]; McKernan, B. (10.11.23). *Israel women’s groups warn of failure to keep evidence of sexual violence in Hamas attacks*. *The Guardian*. www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/10/israel-womens-groups-warn-of-failure-to-keep-evidence-of-sexual-violence-in-hamas-attacks

23 A military base where body identification took place for Israel, following the October 7th massacre

24 Gettelmanm, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23

25 Keller-Lynn, 9.11.23



Hamas operatives and retrieved by the IDF.²⁶

Additional information about sexual assault of female soldiers, which was not initially disclosed, reached the rape crisis centers.²⁷

Captivity in Gaza

Information about gender-based and sexual violence committed on hostages while in captivity started emerging when the first hostages returned to Israel in December 23'. Unlike incidents that occurred in other arenas, where many of the victims were murdered, these assaults were committed against individuals who are hopefully still alive. Special sensitivity is required in dealing with these assaults, which concern the mental health of individuals who are still alive, and upon their release, will be entitled to choose whether and how to tell their stories.

Published testimonies indicate that both men and women were sexually assaulted during captivity.²⁸ Chen and Agam Goldstein, a mother and her teenage daughter who were kidnapped from their home in Kfar Aza and released after 51 days in captivity, noted that they encountered at least 3 female hostages who suffered sexual assault during captivity.²⁹

Aviva Segal, who was also kidnapped from her home in Kfar Aza and

26 Gettelmann, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23

27 Classified information reached the ARCCI.

28 *The Times of Israel* (6.12.23). At least 10 freed hostages were sexually abused in Hamas captivity, doctor says. www.timesofisrael.com/at-least-10-freed-hostages-were-sexually-abused-by-hamas-in-captivity-doctor-says/

29 Perez. E. (11.12.23). Chen Goldstein-Almog who was released from captivity: three abductees told us that they were sexually assaulted, *Kan Resher Bet*, www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/defense/650523/ [Hebrew]; *Ynet* (16.11.24), "When we were left alone, they told us they were sexually assaulted – and we cried": Agam, who left Gaza, fears for the hostages. www.ynet.co.il/news/article/skum8axta [Hebrew]; Shimoni, R. (11.12.23) They Were Held Captive by Hamas, but Their Biggest Fear Was Israeli Airstrikes. *Haaretz*. www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-12-11/ty-article-magazine/premium/they-were-held-captive-by-hamas-but-their-biggest-fear-was-israeli-airstrikes/0000018c-554b-db23-ad9f-7ddb3c990000



released after over 50 days in captivity, also spoke about sexual assaults committed on young women, including a case of a young woman who was assaulted immediately after being taken to the bathroom.³⁰ She testified that Hamas militants turned both women and men into “puppets on a string”.³¹

Second Analytical Axis: Mapping Patterns of Sexual Assault

Sexual assault during wartime is a phenomenon with interrelated occurrences, rather than a collection of anecdotal cases. In this section, we will present an analysis of activity patterns – the patterns of abuse that recurred in the sexual and gender-based assaults committed during the events of October 7th and thereafter.

During the analysis of the testimonies and information at our disposal, both from open sources and classified ones, it emerged that the patterns can be divided into two main categories:

- **War Rape Practices:** Patterns of action used to perpetrate sexual assault during an armed conflict.
- **Sadistic Practices:** Practices characterized by brutal, demonstrative features aimed at intensifying the degradation and terror of sexual assault both physically and symbolically.

In most of the assaults, in addition to the first category of practices, practices in the the second category were also prevalent.

30 Aharon, D. (9.1.2024). Rape and Torture in Captivity: The harrowing testimony of the released captive. *Kan*, www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/local/681088/ [Hebrew]

31 Pelman, V. (23.1.23). Women released from captivity: “There are girls there who haven’t had their period for a long time.” *Kan*, www.kan.org.il/content/kan-news/local/690304/ [Hebrew]



The Practice of Rape During War

Systematic Use of Brutal Violence to Commit Rape

From various accounts, it emerges that during the raids on the Kibbutzim, the capturing of civilians and soldiers (both women and men), and their captivity, Hamas militants systematically carried out acts of rape that involved penetrating the bodies of women, some of whom were injured, while using brutal violence.

Survivors of the Nova massacre who provided eyewitness testimonies of rape described rapes of injured women, or further injury during the rape, culminating in murder when finished.

Sapir, a survivor of the Nova massacre who provided detailed eyewitness testimony to the police, described how from a hiding place near Highway 232, she saw a large group of Hamas militants dressed in uniforms, passing injured women between them. She described five different rape cases she witnessed. In one instance, she saw a young woman with a back injury, her pants pulled down below her knees, being pulled by one terrorist from her hair while another terrorist was penetrating her. Each time the woman resisted, the terrorist stabbed her in the back. In another case, she saw how while one of the terrorists was raping a woman, another was cutting her and mutilating her body.³²

Raz Cohen and Shoham Gueta, survivors from the festival that hid in another section of Highway 232, recounted seeing terrorists raping a young naked woman and stabbing her repeatedly. “Literally butchering her,” according to Gueta.³³ In another interview given by

32 Gettelmann, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23; Breiner, J. (8.11.23). Israeli Police Collect Eyewitness Testimony of Gang Rape During Hamas Attack. *Haaretz* www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-11-08/ty-article/israeli-police-collect-eyewitness-testimony-of-gang-rape-during-hamas-attack/0000018b-b025-d3c1-a39b-bee5ef400000

33 Gettelmann, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23



Cohen, he testified that during the brutal rape, he saw that “the girl wasn’t moving anymore. But the terrorist continued raping her”.³⁴

Yoni Saadon, a survivor from the festival who witnessed the rape of a young woman enduring severe violence, recounted hearing the victim screaming, “Stop it – already I’m going to die anyway from what you are doing, just kill me!” When they finished they were laughing and the last one shot her in the head”.³⁵

Gad Liberson, who survived the festival, testified to hearing the abuse from his hiding place: “I hear shots, gunfire, bursts over our heads, and I hear girls speaking in English: ‘Help’, ‘No’, ‘Please’. ...The girls were crying. It sounded like they were being raped. They take them to the pickup trucks, they cry, they scream. They shoot them. I heard men’s voices screaming, and when I heard shots they immediately stopped screaming. I heard the girls for a long time.”³⁶

Another survivor from the festival recounted in his testimony to police seeing bodies of women on the ground who were brutally raped. “There were girls there whose pelvises were simply broken from being raped so much”.³⁷

In addition, the rescuers who retrieved the bodies also described signs of rape alongside other severe injuries. Similar accounts were given in relation to incidents that occurred in the vicinity of the festival and in kibbutzim homes.³⁸

34 Kan Zman Emet (14.12.23). “I saw and couldn’t do anything:” testimonies of rape from the festival. www.kan.org.il/content/kan/kan-11/p-12043/s7/655396 [Hebrew]

35 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 3.12.23

36 Kan Zman Emet, 14.12.23

37 Saban, 28.11.23

38 E. Rose & H. Villarraga (17.10.23). Rescue workers recount horrors found in kibbutz attacked by Hamas. *Reuters*, www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/rescue-workers-recount-horrors-found-kibbutz-attacked-by-hamas-2023-10-17/



Colonel Israel Weiss, who was involved in identifying bodies at the military rabbinate camp “Shura” testified that some of the bodies had undergone torture and rape.³⁹ Shari Mendes, who was involved in identifying female bodies at the camp, reported that acts of rape were directed at women of all ages and girls, from children to the elderly, and were carried out so brutally that they led to fractures of their pelvic bones.⁴⁰

Multiple Abusers/Gang Rape

Based on eyewitness accounts, it appears that the sexual assaults and acts of rape were committed by several participants, as well as in the presence of other witnesses and excited crowds.

Sapir, a survivor of the Nova festival, described the beginning of the acts of rape she witnessed at a sort of meeting point of dozens of men, most of them dressed in Hamas uniforms, who were passing weapons from hand to hand – and wounded women. She described several cases of rape that were committed collaboratively by multiple perpetrators. In another case of rape, “They bent someone over. I realized he was raping her and passing her on to someone else also in uniform.”⁴¹

Raz Cohen and Shoham Gueta, survivors of the Nova festival, reported that five (Cohen) or four (Gueta) terrorists participated in the rape they saw.⁴² According to Yoni Saadon, between eight and ten terrorists participated in the rape case he witnessed.⁴³

39 Reuters (15.10.23) Israeli forensic teams describe signs of torture, abuse. www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israeli-forensic-teams-describe-signs-torture-abuse-2023-10-15

41 Visegrád 24.(24.10.23). An Israeli woman responsible for identifying female victims of the Hamas massacre confirms that Hamas terrorists raped children and elderly women. twitter.com/visegrad24/status/1716737563749237030

41 Shimoni, 11.12.23

42 Gettelmann, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23

43 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 3.12.23



Rape in the Presence of Family/Community Members

In some cases, the sexual abuse took place in front of family members or friends who were forced to watch the sexual abuse under threat to the victim's life and their own, without the ability of acting to stop it.

This pattern emerged clearly in the testimonies of the ZAKA teams that collected and cleared kibbutz bodies, who found the bodies of women in the homes with signs of sexual abuse, alongside the bodies of family members or friends who seemed to have been forced to witness the abuse.

Itzik Itach, a ZAKA volunteer, described a couple – man and woman – who were found tied to each other, naked, with clear signs of rape on the woman's body.⁴⁴ Nachman Dyksztejna, another volunteer, described the bodies of two women found tied by their hands and feet to a bed, one having been sexually abused and found with a knife in her genitals.⁴⁵

The Association of Rape Crisis Centers received additional information about soldiers who found the bodies of family members, with the woman's body without clothes and with signs of sexual abuse. According to the position of the body, it seems that her partner was forced to watch the sexual abuse before their murders.⁴⁶

At the festival, it seems that the crowd present during the attack was mainly made up of festival-goers who were murdered (along with the witnesses who hid and gave testimony about what they saw and heard). Rami Davidian, a resident of the area who independently rescued hundreds of people from the festival, told the Association

44 Rose & Villarraga, 17.10.23 Williamson, L. (5.12.23). Israel Gaza: Hamas raped and mutilated women on 7 October, BBC hears. BBC News. www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67629181

45 Williamson, 5.12.23

46 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with an IFD official, 31.10.23



of Rape Crisis Centers that he found the bodies of “a boyfriend and girlfriend, they stripped them, (looks like) they were told to hug and they died hugging. There were beatings on their bodies. They abused them”.⁴⁷ Also, festival-goers whose bodies with signs of abuse were found in Kibbutz Re'im were found together in the same space, in a way that shows that the abuse was committed together.⁴⁸

The rape crisis centers received information about similar cases where survivors were witnessed to watch the abuse.

Sexual Offenses of Males

From the evidence and information gathered, it appears that sexual abuse was also committed against men.

According to the testimonies of the ZAKA members who collected the bodies from the festival area and the houses, some of the men who were found were also sexually abused. In some cases, their intimate organs were mutilated.⁴⁹ Chaim Otmazgin described the body of a man from the festival that was stripped and shackled, and an attempt was made to burn him.⁵⁰

A witness who was rescued from the Festival describes how she saw bodies of men whose genitals had been cut off.⁵¹ A paramedic who described the injuries stated that the injuries were also to the men and that “There were a lot of gun wounds there. Shooting was

47 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Rami Davidian, 7.2.24

48 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Noam Mark, 5.2.24

49 Saban, A. (8.11.23). “She was raped and executed:” New evidence from the horrors of October 7 is revealed. *Israel Hayom* www.israelhayom.co.il/news/defense/article/14801490 [Hebrew]

50 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Chaim Otmazgin, 28.1.23

51 Saban, 28.11.23



targeted at sexual organs. We saw that a lot. They had a thing with sexual organs.”⁵²

Nirah Shpak from Kfar Aza testified that she saw the body of a man who was left naked from the waist down.⁵³

Medical teams that treated the hostages who were released from captivity reported that men were also sexually assaulted in captivity.⁵⁴

Execution During or After the Rape

Eyewitnesses to rape at the Nova festival described cases in which the terrorists shot the victims in the head during the rape or immediately after.

According to Sapir, a survivor of the Nova festival, in one case the rapist “shot her in the head while he was raping her, he didn’t even pull up his pants”.⁵⁵ Yoni Saadon described how “When they finished they were laughing and the last one shot her in the head”.⁵⁶

Another survivor of the Nova festival provided the police with earwitness testimony, which stated that after the rape, the terrorists set fire to the women. “We heard girls that were pulled out of the shelters, girls that shouted, they raped girls, burned them just after that. all the bodies outside were burned...”.⁵⁷

The video documenting the body of a woman who participated in the festival illustrates that after the assault, the body was burned.

52 United Nations Event, 4.12.23, 41:30

53 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Nirah Shpak, 11.2.24

54 *The Times of Israel*, 6.12.23

55 Breiner, J. (8.11.2023) X. twitter.com/JoshBreiner/status/1722282840824614947?s=20

56 *The Jewish Chronicle*, 3.12.23

57 United Nations, 4.12.23, 41:30



Drawn from the fact that so many of the bodies were found with signs of sexual abuse, it paints a clear picture that after the assaults, they were killed.

Sadistic Practices

Binding and Tying

From the descriptions provided by the rescue and aid forces who arrived at the scenes of the massacre, it emerged that a significant portion of the bodies showing signs of sexual assault were found bound and gagged, and sometimes even tied to one another.

Indeed, almost all testimonies about the presence of family members describe the binding of the sexual assault victim or the family member forced to witness the assault, as indicated by the testimonies of Itach⁵⁸ and Dyksztejna.⁵⁹

The New York Times interviewed four rescuers from the Nova festival who described the sight of women's bodies with spread legs, without underwear, some with hands tied with ropes and zip ties. The bodies were found at the main area, but also along the road, in the park, and in open fields – places where the attendees fled in an attempt to save their lives. Jamal Waraki, a ZAKA volunteer, recounted a body of a young woman whose “hands were tied behind her back, she was bent forward, half-naked, her underwear stripped below her knees”.⁶⁰

Rescuer Rami Davidian said that he saw more than five bodies of women “tied to trees. Each one three, five meters from the other. Naked. They were tied with clothes or blankets around the tree with

58 Rose & Villarraga, 17.10.23

59 Williamson, 5.12.23

60 Williamson, 5.12.23



their hands, or standing leaning tied to the tree”.⁶¹

Mutilation and Destruction of Genital Organs

From the testimonies of eyewitnesses, rescue, and medical forces, a clear pattern emerges of deliberate harm to the genital organs of both men and women. This includes, among other things, direct and targeted shooting, mutilation of organs, and destruction and burning of sexual and intimate organs.

Shari Mendes, who worked on the “Shura” base identifying bodies, describes how a large number of bodies arrived with gunshot wounds to the genitals and chest, alongside systematic mutilation of sexual organs.⁶²

Bodies of women were found with gunshot wounds targeted at the breasts and genital mutilation, some with severed breasts. Mendes described it as “this seemed to be a systematic genital mutilation of a group of victims”.⁶³

ZAKA volunteers reported finding naked, injured women with mutilated sexual organs.⁶⁴ Chaim Otmazgin from ZAKA added that many of the bodies were found partially clothed or unclothed, with severe bleeding from the pelvis and destruction of sexual organs, indicating that even when there was no time to complete the rape, there was an intentional attempt to destroy the sexual organs to harm the “dignity” of the woman.⁶⁵

Sapir’s eyewitness testimony about the rapes at Nova include description of breast amputation with a a box cutter. After cutting

61 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Rami Davidian, 7.2.23

62 United Nations, 4.12.23, 41:30

63 ibid

64 Kan, Zman Emet, 14.12.23

65 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Rami Davidian, 7.2.23



off the breast, Sapir describes how the terrorists threw it on the floor and passed it between them like a toy.⁶⁶

Yinon Rivlin, who also survived the Nova festival, described how at one point he left his hiding place to search for more survivors. Next to the road, he saw the body of a young woman lying on her stomach, without pants or underwear, her legs spread. Her genitalia seemed “as if someone tore her apart”.⁶⁷

Rami Davidian told ARCCI that the bodies of women tied to trees also had “mutilation in intimate places that is hard to see... all their organs were cut, damaged. Blood from the genitals. They inserted iron rods into their sexual organs... there were shots in the breasts”.⁶⁸

Bodies of men were found with their genitalia severed, while others had their genitalia shot and mutilated. according to testimonies from ZAKA personnel, the intimate organs of men who suffered sexual assault were mutilated.⁶⁹ The police presented testimony from a survivor of the Nova festival, who also described bodies of men with severed genitalia.⁷⁰ Also Mendes, who dealt with bodies in “Shura,” described harm to the genitalia of men.⁷¹ Davidian recounted seeing the body of a man directly shot in the genitalia.⁷²

66 Gettelmann, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23

67 ibid

68 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Rami Davidian, 7.2.23

69 Saban, 8.11.23

70 Saban, 28.11.23

71 United Nations, 4.12.23, 41:30

72 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Rami Davidian, 7.2.23



Insertion of Weapons in Intimate Areas

Another form of assault included the insertion of weapons into genital organs – nails, grenades, and knives. It represents a specific expression of the pattern of targeted mutilation and harm to sexual organs.

ZAKA volunteer Nachman Dyksztejna described how in Be’eri, he saw the body of a woman with a knife inserted in her genital organ.⁷³

Mendes reported that “occasionally there was a need to evacuate the base because some of the victims arrived booby-trapped”.⁷⁴

Chaim Otmazgin from ZAKA described finding a naked body with a sharp object stuck in her genitalia, and another with an object penetrated through her anus. In a conversation we had with him, he described how he saw “a woman’s body stabbed in the genitalia with a serrated knife that was used to remove the woman’s internal organs, leaving them between her legs”.⁷⁵

Simcha Greenman, another ZAKA volunteer, testified that he saw in one of the houses the body of a woman with a sharp object stuck in her genitals, including nails.⁷⁶

The New York Times reported that they saw a picture of a woman’s body with dozens of nails embedded in her knees and pelvis.⁷⁷

73 Williamson, 5.12.23

74 *Maariv* (February 1, 2024). “Some of the victims arrived ‘trapped’”: New horrifying testimonies from Hamas atrocities exposed. www.maariv.co.il/news/world/Article-1072808 [Hebrew]

75 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Chaim Otmazgin, 28.1.24
76 McKernan, 10.11.23

77 Gettelmanm, Schwartz, & Sella, 28.12.23



Destruction and Mutilation of the Body

In many cases, alongside the sexual assault, deliberate mutilation of the body occurred, including facial mutilation, burning, decapitation, and disfigurement. Many bodies were found with detached heads, making the identification and burial of the victims more difficult.

Sapir, a survivor of the Nova festival, describes a rape incident where the terrorists cut off the victim's breasts followed by cutting her face. With the disfigurement of her face, she collapsed and fell out of Sapir's sight.⁷⁸

Chaim Otmazgin from ZAKA describes the body of "a woman stripped of her clothes from the upper half of her body, they shot her in the head, and then they slaughtered her. The head was detached from the body. They didn't come to kill, they came to mutilate".⁷⁹ In an interview he gave, he recounted that the sight of the mutilated bodies repeated itself at the festival scene. One of the festival participants, he says, had their chest cut open. "It's not easy to cut a body. This is someone who did it and didn't stop. [...] There's almost no body they were satisfied with (just) shooting".⁸⁰

78 ibid

79 A conversation of the Association of Rape Crisis Centers with Chaim Otmazgin, 28.1.24

80 Kan Zman Emet, 14.12.23



Summary

The testimonies and information gathered indicate that the sexual assaults committed during the October 7th attacks and thereafter were systematic, premeditated and deliberate. Sexual assaults took place (and may still be ongoing) in all areas of the attack, as described: the Nova Festival, kibbutzim and villages in the south, IDF bases, and the captivity where children, women, and men kidnapped on October 7th were held, and some still are.

From accounts of the atrocities, it appears that the perpetrators' actions display characteristic patterns of wartime sexual violence documented in literature; practices that constitute rape and gender-based violence often appear in combination with sadistic practices with demonstrably brutal characteristics.

Some of the cases described by witnesses were carried out by multiple perpetrators, sometimes with others aiding, encouraging, or committing additional assaults, such as stabbing or shooting. Thus, the victim is effectively under a double attack: sexual assault and armed assault simultaneously. Literature estimates that about 90% of wartime rape cases are committed by multiple perpetrators.⁸¹ According to literature, gang rape is intended to prove masculinity to others⁸² and to meet the social expectations of the other fighters/perpetrators present.⁸³

In addition, it appears that instances of sexual assault occurred in front of audiences including family members, community members, or other relatives. This practice is known in literature and aims to undermine the dignity and masculinity of men who fail to protect their women,⁸⁴ as well as to instill fear and reinforce oppression and humiliation.

81 Vlachova & BIASON, 2005

82 Brownmiller, S. (1975). *Against our will: Men, women and rape*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

83 Hagen & Yohani, 2010

84 Brownmiller, 1975



When other women are forced to witness the sexual assault, even if they were not themselves victims, they are influenced and subdued by the perpetrator's power.⁸⁵ Forcing spouses, parents, and siblings to witness the sexual assault of a family member is a practice of torture. In many cases, family members are killed when they were trying to protect their family from sexual assault.⁸⁶

The testimonies related to the Nova Festival suggest that the terrorists sought and captured women who tried to escape and that some of those who were hiding were ultimately captured. A "hunt" for captured women is also known in literature, where intruders find a hiding woman and then assault her in full view.⁸⁷ Also dragging women by their hair while they scream, after being captured, as described by various witnesses who survived the Festival, is a way to sow fear, harm the community, and establish control over the enemy through psychological and physical means.⁸⁸

Evidence of the events of October 7th show that children and men were also assaulted. However, information about this is currently scarce and is focused on body mutilation. Even in comparison to the already limited exposure of sexual assaults in war, the limited exposure of sexual assaults against men is typical. Generally, men suffer from compounded shame when disclosing sexual assaults, which are perceived as deeply humiliating and an attack on masculinity. They are reported at much lower rates. It is reasonable to assume that male survivors in this case will have more difficulty seeking help. Rescue forces may have also refrained from describing such "embarrassing" injuries.

85 Hagen & Yohani, 2010

86 Chang, I.(1997). *The rape of Nanking: The forgotten holocaust of World War II*. New York: Basic Books.

87 Tompkins, T. (1995). Prosecuting rape as a war crime: Speaking the unspeakable. *Notre Dame Law Review*. 70(4), 845–890

88 Schiessl, C. (2002). An element of genocide: rape, total war, and international law in the twentieth century. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 4(2), 197–210.



Evidence of tying and binding bodies, likely performed during the assaults, sometimes to other family members, is a practice of humiliation and exertion of power, as well as harming and exploiting others.

The brutal practices of mutilating intimate organs of girls, women, and men, as well as cutting of women's breasts, are intended to signify permanent injury and further destruction in addition to the sexual assault⁸⁹. According to field rescuers, the mutilation of genital organs is intended to reinforce the victim's own humiliation and symbolically, also that of the state that failed to protect them.

It is worth noting that according to reports, Iranian forces engage in similar practices targeted disfigurement of detained women's faces alongside committing acts of rape.⁹⁰

Furthermore, the use of various weapons such as knives inserted into vaginas is known from the literature as an additional form of violence in sexual assaults,⁹¹ as well as using them to threaten and coerce the victims.⁹² This may be intended to deliver a message about the perpetrator's omnipotence and capacity to reach anywhere.

In the literature, wartime rape is often accompanied by practices of sadism and dehumanization. The practices described in this document illustrate the brutality and sadism characteristic of the way the assaults were carried out. Amputating genital organs, decapitation, and "playing" with women's breasts are particularly sadistic and violent practices performed in the presence and participation of other perpetrators.

During wartime, victims are dehumanized, with the violated woman

89 Amnesty International. (2004). Violence against women fire in war-torn countries. www.amnesty.org/fr/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/nws210102004en.pdf; Vlachova & Bason, 2005

90 Razavi, E. (13.6.23). KURDISTAN DES GUERRI RES CONTRE LES MOLLAHS. Paris. www.parismatch.com/actu/international/kurdistan-des-guerrieres-contre-les-mollahs-226175

91 Bop, C. (2001). Women in conflicts, their gains and their losses. In S. Meintjes, A. Pillay, & M. Turshen (Eds.), *The aftermath: Women in post-conflict transformation* (pp. 19-33). New York: Zed Books; Kerstiens, 2004

92 Hagen & Yohani, 2010



or man not seen as human beings but rather as a symbolic body of the “enemy” onto which hatred and violence are projected.

The brutality is also evident in the physical injuries accompanying the sexual assault – for example, the amputation of organs, shooting, and the mutilation described, which constitutes a long-term harm that reaches the teams handling the bodies hours after they were captured and assaulted.

The systematic sexual assaults perpetrated by Hamas terrorists on October 7th mark a particularly painful milestone in the history of Israeli and Jewish people. We, at the rape crisis centers for victims of sexual assault, understand well the heavy burden on many fronts: the survivors who have endured, first and foremost; family members and friends who were forced to witness their loved ones undergoing sexual abuse; eyewitnesses and audio witnesses; rescue, relief, and burial preparation teams who dealt with the bodies, carrying the burden with them; family members whose loved ones were abducted; the kidnapped and released hostages, some of whom “luckily” escaped rape, spoke of the intense anxiety beneath the ground and constant fear of rape; survivors of former sexual abuse who are in regular contact with the rape crisis centers and are suffering distress, psychological deterioration, and even suicidal thoughts with exposure to stories of trauma; and the entire Israeli society, within which something has been broken.

These days, as the scars on our hearts refuse to heal, And our sisters' and brothers' souls, held hostage in Gaza's tunnels, are crying out from underground, many of those we thought were partners and allies remain silent and in so doing deny the horrors. We urge you to amplify their cries and refuse to let these victims be silenced.



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