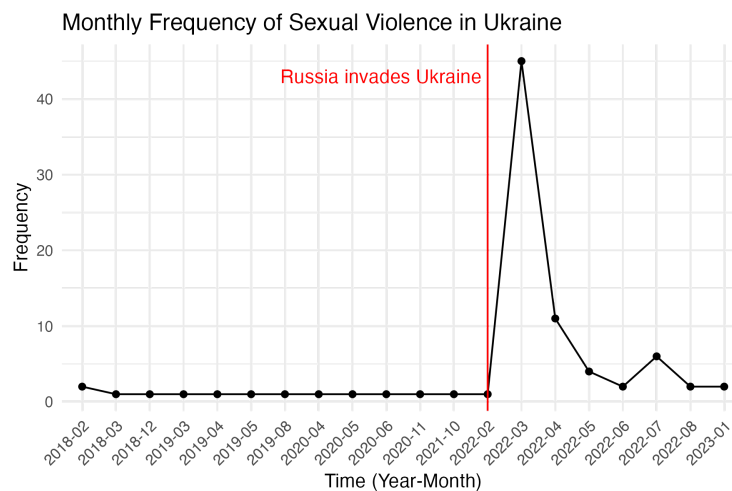


# The Explosion of Sexual Violence in the Invasion of Ukraine

By: Jakob Aggers

In the pre-dawn hours of February 24, 2022, the world awoke to a new era of conflict in Europe as Russia launched a massive, multi-front invasion into Ukraine. From the historic streets of Kyiv to the strategic port city of Mariupol, Russian forces advanced, unleashing a storm of artillery and airstrikes that shattered cities and marked the start of a devastating and far-reaching war. This brutal aggression not only threatened Ukraine's sovereignty but also precipitated a dire humanitarian crisis, with deep and disturbing impacts including a sharp rise in incidents of sexual violence.

The first documented case of sexual violence during the Russian invasion of Ukraine occurred on February 28, 2022 in Kyiv where a Russian soldier allegedly raped a 28 year old woman. In the month that followed, Russian soldiers committed at least 45 acts of conflict related sexual violence against Ukrainian citizens and soldiers.



In March and April alone, there were horrifying reports across several regions. For instance, on 9 March, near Bucha, Kyiv, "Russian soldiers raped a woman," and in another instance, they "forced other Ukrainian detainees to watch." The brutality escalated by the end of the month, with "Russian soldiers repeatedly raping and killing a woman in front of her son" in Mariupol, highlighting the horrifying personal violations accompanying military advances. April did not see any respite; for example, in Bucha, after the area was liberated, it was reported that "Russian soldiers raped and

killed an unspecified number of women... the women's bodies were found burned."

As Russian forces continued their operations in Ukraine post-April 2022, their advance was marked by continued and systematic instances of sexual violence. Specific reports from various regions during this period provide a harrowing overview of the situation.

In May 2022, the Kharkiv region witnessed brutal episodes of sexual violence. A particularly distressing report came from a village near Izyum, where on May 15th, a Russian soldier was reported to have "repeatedly raped" a 24-year-old woman in her own home, threatening further violence if she resisted or reported the incident. Further south, in Izium Ukraine, Russian soldiers abducted a woman in Izium, Kharkiv region, tortured her with electric current and repeatedly raped her, while holding in captivity for 10 days in the week of July 10, 2022.

Moving south to the Kherson region, by June 2022, there were frequent and grave assaults reported. On June 22, in a village outside the city of Kherson, a woman in her thirties was "raped at gunpoint" by Russian troops

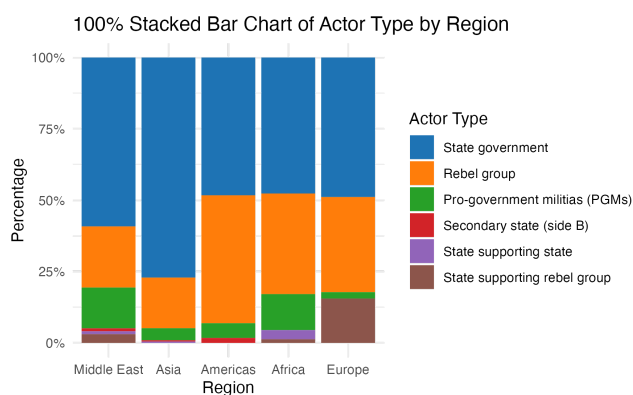
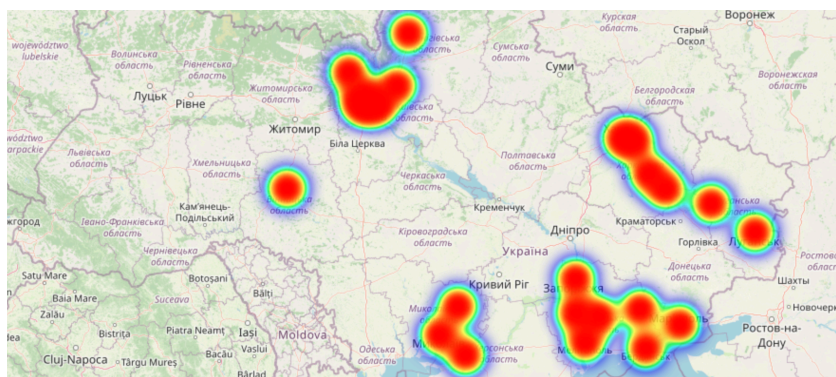
while her husband and children were forced to watch, a tactic used in multiple interactions by the invaders to instill fear and suppress resistance among the local population.

Around 10 July 2022 (week of), Russian soldiers abducted a woman in Iziurm, Kharkiv region, tortured her with electric current and repeatedly raped her, while holding in captivity for 10 days.

However, the brutality enacted on Ukrainians was not only directed towards citizens, but opposing soldiers as well. Around 28 July 2022, a Russian soldier of Kadyrov's Chechen Battalion castrated and then shot dead a captured Ukrainian soldier near a sanatorium in the area of Pryvillia, Luhansk. The videos of torture first appeared on a pro-Russian Telegram channel on 28 July.

In the shadows of the relentless conflict, Ukraine faces a harrowing surge of sexual violence, with Kyiv and Kherson emerging as grim epicenters. The stark numbers tell a distressing story: Kyiv has recorded the highest incidences, with 15 cases pinpointed around the coordinates (50.5435,

30.2120) and another 10 near (50.5218, 30.2506). Meanwhile, Kherson reports eight distressing events at (46.6558, 32.6178), underscoring the pervasive atmosphere of fear and trauma that blankets these regions. As the war drags on, these figures not only map the geographical contours of horror but also beckon a global outcry for urgent interventions to protect the vulnerable and halt the vile use of sexual violence as a tool of war.



According to the Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict Dataset, state actors commit nearly 50% of conflict related sexual violence cases, while state supported rebel groups make up nearly 20% of cases (the highest proportion of any region). While not reported in the ACLED instance dataset, Russia supported rebel groups in Ukraine that conducted more than 1000 acts of conflict related sexual violence, including rape, forced prostitution, sexual mutilation, and sexual torture, according to the SVAC dataset and Human Rights Watch.

As the conflict in Ukraine continues, the disturbing trend of sexual violence casts a long shadow over the war-torn nation. The evidence gathered not only highlights the acute crises in regions like Kyiv and Kherson but also points to a broader, systemic weaponization of sexual violence in warfare. As the international community continues to watch the war in Ukraine unfold, it must remain diligent to documenting instances of sexual violence and do everything it can to prevent more cases of such atrocities in war.