

Effects of Sexual Violence and Conflict on Families and Communities in Eastern DRC

The Destabilizing Mechanisms of GBV: Societal, Economic and Political Repercussions

Jocelyn Kelly, MS

Centre D'Assistance Medico-Psychosociale, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative

October 11, 2011



HHI's Research Approach



Research Goals

HHI's research goals focus on gaps in understanding of the dynamics of sexual violence, including:

- Impact on women, men, families and communities
- Successful community-based resilience patterns
- Adaptive community protection strategies
- Attitudes around children born of rape
- Armed group behaviors, motives and methods

Research Process

- Previous research emphasizes highly violent and public forms of rape in DRC
- Research with women revealed just how important men and communities were in process of recovery/reintegration
- Asking questions specifically around sexual violence was illuminating, but still limited

Methods Overview

- Conducted 2 rounds of focus groups from 2008 - 2010
 - First round of questions focused more specifically on SV
 - Second round of questions focused on how communities have changed as a result of conflict
- Separate groups for both women and men
- Groups conducted both in towns and rural settings

UN Resolutions Relating to Gender and Security

◆ UNSCR 1820 (2008)

- Recognizes sexual violence as a security issue (can be a “tactic of war”)
- Sexual violence can be a war crime, CAH, act of genocide

Sexual Violence in the DRC: Community Voices



Sexual violence definitions

- SV was defined by both women and men as having sex with a woman against her will
- However, it was also defined much more broadly

“Rape is destruction”

- Male Focus Group Participant

“The problem [of rape] is destroying our households and families, foreigners are coming and raping our wives, devastating them. That is why we say those people are ruining our communities.”

- Male Focus Group Participant

SV changed the perceived “value” of a women as daughters, wives, or prospective wives

“If you are a girl [who has been raped], your parents will start mistreating you, they can’ t understand that you have been forced and that it was not your fault. You will never get married. They will chase you because you are not worth anything; you lose all your value because nobody will marry you.”

- Female Focus Group Participant

Customs contribute to the stigmatization of survivors

- Community responses to adultery have be applied to SV

“If you have sex out of your marriage, nobody will consider you a woman.”

- Female Focus Group Participant

- Can be seen particularly in situations around family care

“In my village, when the husband is sick, customs don’ t allow women who committed adultery, or have had sex with anyone else, to look after their husbands.”

- Female Focus Group Participant

Manifold Intersections between SV and Economics

- Inability to farm, change in land use

“We have experienced a dramatic change in land use. Most of the food which supported the city of Bukavu came from the villages. Great quantities of cassava were coming from there... Today, there are young men who have been attacking the land since the start of the war. Consequently, the land has become poorer and poorer. The villagers from those areas are now coming down to buy their food in the city. It clearly shows that the war had caused a lot of damage to the land.”

- Female Focus Group Participant

Economic Consequences of Sexual Violence

- Little incentive to farm or save

“When your field produces a lot of crops, it makes your neighbor jealous. They will go and collaborate with the Interahamwe and will follow you when you go to your field.”

-Female Focus Group Participant

“You find that if you get \$100, that same night, robbers will come and break into your apartment and kill you.”

- Male Focus Group Participant

The Economic Alternatives

- Women note a large increase in prostitution

“We have seen a dramatic increased in prostitution among girls nowadays. We have a lot of NGOs in Bukavu right now, and their presence in our milieu has contributed to that. The money that young girls receive from NGO agents encouraged the spread of prostitution... All this is done because of the economic hardship. ”

-Female Focus Group Participant

- Men note an increase in criminality (including perpetration of SV)

“By not realizing their dreams, [young men] become robbers, marijuana smokers, bandits...”

- Male Focus Group Participant

Effects of SV on Culture

- Sexual violence (esp. forced incest and SV in front of family members) was cited as a reason community values were changing

“I can say that our culture has changed. Why? Because a Congolese woman had never imagined in her life, not for a single day, that a parent would take her clothes off in front of her children. It was taboo. But today because of the war, people come and make you do immoral acts in presence of your children. The children will never respect your body again. ... When we were growing up, we didn't hear about that kind of abuse. It is a shame to see a sixty year-old man sexually abusing a ten year-old girl... Respect of the human body has no meaning at all. ”

-Female Focus Group Participant

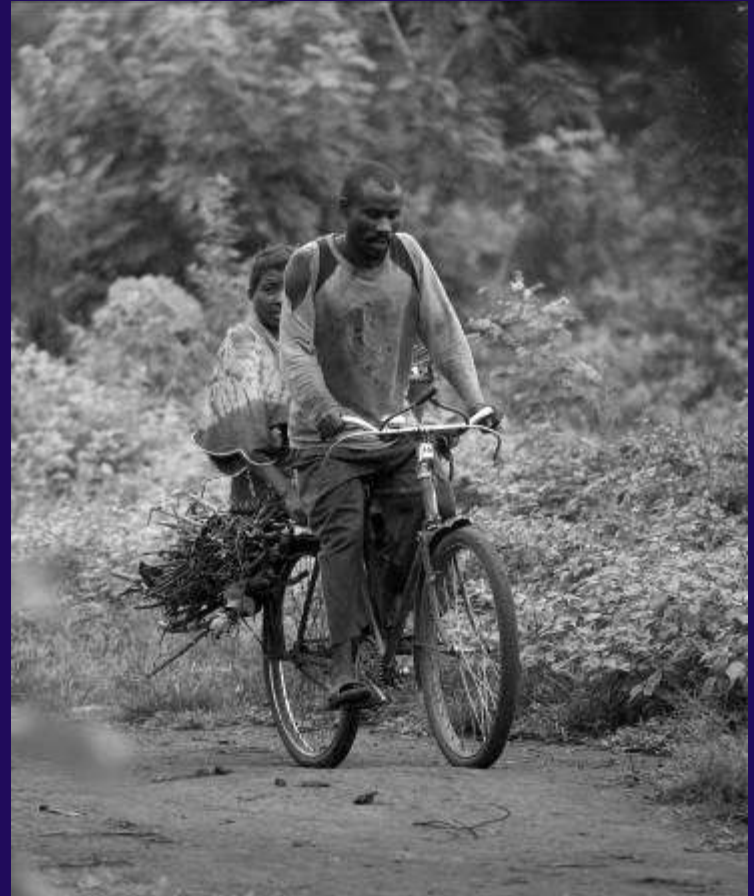
Results

Unique aspects of SGBV for community destabilization

- Strong community mores against having sex outside of marriage;
- Intense stigma associated with SGBV more than other forms of violence;
- Many societies value women based on their reproductive health (and exclusivity);
- Rape may lead to impregnation/having a child born of rape ;
- Rape is associated with STIs.

Policy Implications

- Sexual violence is a security issue with implications for women, men, families and communities
- It can have manifold effects, including: Economic, social, cultural
- Programs to address the effects of SV must target individuals, families, *and* communities



Thank you on behalf of all the
co-investigators

