

# Family Mediation: Formative research to describe a Congolese intervention to reintegrate female survivors of sexual violence



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# Foundation RamaLevina



- Congolese NGO
- Partnerships with local leaders and health centers
- Evidence driven interventions on health, economics and reintegration

# Family Rejection



- Abandonment by a family member
- 6-29% of survivors using services in South Kivu report rejection (Steiner 2009, HHI and OSI 2009)
- Perceptions in Kivus and Ituri (Vinck 2008)
  - 25% would not accept survivor into home or community
  - 35% would not accept survivor into home if she had a child after rape

# Rationale for the study



- Few studies examine the impact of sexual violence on family and community relationships
- Lack of information on locally designed, culturally appropriate interventions

# Objectives



- To describe reasons for rejection of female survivors of sexual violence
- To describe the design of a Congolese-led family mediation program

# Family Mediation



- Locally designed and culturally acceptable intervention
- Family counseling and problem solving
- Conducted by community health workers, local leaders, and other respected persons

# Methods



- 27 In-depth interviews and 2 focus group discussions
- Interview guide development and translation
- Participant selection and recruitment
- Detailed documentation
- Weekly review meetings

# Analysis



- Coding: themes and repeat coding
- Focus on patterns and variations across interviews
- Discussion and consensus on findings and programmatic implications



# Study Participants



## In depth interviews

- 13 female survivors of sexual violence
- 3 spouses
- 4 mediators
- 5 health care providers
- 1 community member

## 2 Focus Group Discussions

- Community group (12 men, 4 women)
- Community meeting (including village chief)

# Overview of Themes



- Impact of sexual violence on individual, family and community
- Description of family rejection
- Factors that increase risk for family rejection
- Description of and opportunities to develop family mediation program

# Factors that increase risk for family rejection



- Fear of illness:  
*“brings sicknesses...there is a fear that lingers in her. She jumps for nothing. She has thought very much”*
- Fear the perpetrator will return
- Family and peer pressure:  
*“among members of the family, you realize there are those that hate you”*
- Loss of value in the family and community

# Factors that increase risk for family rejection



- Loss of wealth
- Fear/Beliefs:  
*“If another man has sexual intercourse with a married woman, the husband is going to die”*
- No distinction between infidelity and rape: *“wife of the Interahamwe”*
- Inability to resume sexual relations

# Family Mediation Program



- Identification
- Assessment of problems
  - “We speak to her. It’s then that you can draw the consequences and the trauma and after, we know what we are going to do”*
- Discussion with concerned family members
  - “We listen to him. We look for solutions with the husband until the he can understand that it wasn’t the fault of his wife”*

# Family Mediation Program



- Involvement of influential family and community members
- Sensitization and reduction of stigma in family and community  
*“they must leave me alone, in peace, because what happened was not my fault” and “that it is luck that I am in life (alive)”*
- Follow-up visits to “see if they are really living together”

# Family Mediation



- Difficult mediations:
  - Raped multiple times
  - Remarried
  - Child after rape
  - Husband has left the village

“it is poverty because if this wife has a profitable activity, the husband will not do menace anymore”  
- *community health worker*

# Next Steps



- Strengthening of family mediation program
- Supplement with socio-economic and psychosocial programs programs
- Characterize risk factors for rejection, the relationship between rejection and mental health



# Thank You



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