

IF I SPEAK OUT, WILL IT CHANGE?

Listening to survivors of sexual
violence in eastern DRC



British Embassy
Kinshasa

tearfund

As part of the United Kingdom's Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office has funded the Anglican Church of DR Congo and Tearfund and its partners to empower and mobilise church and other faith communities to reduce sexual violence in conflict-affected areas in eastern DRC.

Tearfund is a Christian relief and development agency building a global network of local churches to help eradicate poverty.

Tearfund has 10 years' experience working through church-based partners in the response to sexual violence.

Tearfund is a founding member of We Will Speak Out, a coalition of faith-based groups, international aid agencies and individuals committed to see the end of sexual violence in communities worldwide.

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Cover photo: Adele*, 45, pictured with her fourth child, Jean-Paul, has received training to weave and sell baskets as part of the Healing Arts programme at HEAL Africa.

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It is clear that if we can strengthen this partnership by listening directly to the women affected by sexual violence, then we will be able to improve their lives. In fact, although it is inevitably painful for the survivors to share their experiences, the healing and feeling of solidarity that emerged in the discussion groups was encouraging.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Study background and justification

An analysis of the likelihood of being raped in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) clearly shows why the country is known as “the worst place to be a woman”. What evidence is there to back up this terrifying statement? The fact that at least 48 women are raped every day in the DRC, or two every hour, according to a report published by the Minister for Gender, the Family and Children of the Congolese Republic.

The strong likelihood of a woman being exposed to sexual violence in the DRC is, above all, linked to the war. The DRC has been torn apart by a circumstantial war for the last 20 years and, in these areas, primarily in eastern Congo, the militia use rape and sexual violence as weapons against their enemies. Congolese women, particularly in the rural and urban areas of South Kivu, North Kivu and Orientale Province, have been subjected to sexual violence. North and South Kivu (Goma, Bukavu) remain the worst affected areas, with 4,689 cases of sexual violence in 2011, more than 7,075 in 2012 and 3,172 in the first half of 2013. UN reports highlight the severity of both the problem and its consequences (Erturk, 2008, UN Special Rapporteur).

Given the extent of sexual violence in the DRC, there is a need to support the survivors and assess whether a survivors’ movement could help them overcome the stigma and talk about their needs. Information on the needs of survivors and on the necessity of such a movement cannot, however, be obtained without conducting a study such as this.

1.2 Aim, objectives and scope of the study

1.2.1 Aim of the study

Gender-based violence may have caught the attention of an international audience but the women affected have remained silent (Johnson, 2012). In order to overcome this silence, and our limited understanding of the experiences and needs of survivors, it is important for a survivors’ movement to be organised that is capable of expressing their needs and demands to the political decision-makers. This will enable appropriate responses to be found that can encourage a healing process and restore the dignity of the survivors.

The plan is therefore to focus on combatting sexual violence in the east of the DRC (Amnesty International report 2004). In fact, as the regional conflicts have come to an end, government control has been re-established over the region and a support system for survivors has been set up by Christian organisations, an environment has been created that is conducive to listening to the survivors and assessing their needs so that they can be re-integrated into society once more.

This study consequently aims to break the silence among the survivors of sexual violence. It will help to find out more about their circumstances, their needs and their pain and explore the resources available that would enable the beneficiaries to lead a normal life. In particular, the study aims to explore the possibility of creating a movement of survivors of sexual violence and the possible advantages of this.

1.2.2 Objectives of the study

The study has the following objectives:

- To explore the survivors' understanding of sexual violence
- To understand why the survivors remain silent
- To explore the needs and identify the priorities of the survivors with a view to understanding the healing and recovery process for these women
- To identify and understand the consequences of sexual violence for the lives of the survivors
- To establish whether it would be advantageous for the women to join a survivors' movement

1.2.3 Scope of the study

The study's findings will provide the following benefits:

- The voices of the survivors, thus far unheard, will enable the Anglican Church and other partners to understand the experiences and priority needs of these women; this will help them provide a satisfactory response. The information obtained will be used to prioritise the survivors' needs on the basis of their experiences.
- Too little is known in terms of in-depth experience of survivors and their needs around the world, and particularly in the DRC, ravaged as it has been by war. Moreover, what is known has not come from empirical study but, for the most part, from anecdotal stories. It is hoped that this study will help gain a better understanding of the experiences of survivors and their needs. By providing an open forum in which survivors' voices can be heard, this study will empower the women to engage in discussions aimed at putting together the necessary interventions.
- Finally, having listened to the survivors and depending on the conclusions of this study, the establishment of a survivors' movement will enable appropriate operational approaches to be adopted.

1.3 Methodologies

1.3.1 Study design

This study has used a qualitative approach in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the impact of sexual violence on the life of each woman. The discussion group concept used a conventional process to focus on participants' perceptions. According to this approach, the participants react to questions in such a way that further information can be drawn out. There are therefore no restrictions during the data gathering and the participants have an opportunity to express themselves fully. This approach often enables participants to express their experiences and needs in terms of priorities (Chenail, 1995).

Our study focused on geographically accessible and safe villages that had, nonetheless, been affected by the wars and where the inhabitants had thus suffered sexual violence as a war crime and crime against humanity. These villages were located in a number of administrative districts of the provinces of South Kivu, North Kivu and Oriental Province

(Bunia). The Anglican Church of the Congo has been supporting these affected communities for some time and, consequently, was responsible for recruiting the participants. This task also involved providing transport for the participants to the church facilities for group discussions and back home afterwards. The aim was to understand the needs of survivors of sexual violence and so the recruiters were instructed only to include such participants.

The sampling was guided, meaning that, in each province, three samples of women were interviewed (except in North Kivu): two in the urban zone and one in the rural. There were fewer groups in the rural zones of each province due to difficulties in accessing these areas. Thus formed, the sample resulted in a total of 87 participants: 22 women in North Kivu (Goma town and surrounding rural area), 34 women in South Kivu (Bukavu town and surrounding rural area) and 31 women in Orientale Province (Bunia town and surrounding rural area). The following table shows the breakdown of women by province and by region. To be included in the sample, the participant had to have suffered sexual violence on at least one occasion. Another criterion was that the participant had to be 16 years of age or more and willing to participate.

Table 1: Breakdown of participants by group, region and zone

Zone	North Kivu (Goma)	South Kivu(Bukavu)	Oriental Province (Bunia)	Total
RURAL				
Group 1	10	11	7	28
URBAN				
Group 1	12	12	9	33
Group 2	-	11	15	26
Total	22	34	31	87

An open-ended questionnaire was used with the survivors of sexual violence. As a data gathering method, the interview was an open one in order to give the participants an opportunity to express themselves. Researchers used a recorder to ensure that they gathered all information without having to spend time writing down everything by hand.

1.3.2 Data gathering

When gathering the data, we asked the following questions:

- What do you understand by sexual violence? How would you define sexual violence?
- Why are the survivors of sexual violence not speaking out?
- What are the consequences of sexual violence? Physically and psychologically? How have the lives of survivors been affected?
- What do the survivors of sexual violence need to recover?
- Would a survivors' movement be beneficial? What would the advantages of such a movement be?

1.3.3 Data analysis

A qualitative and descriptive analysis was conducted of the data gathered, bearing in mind the objectivity, exhaustivity and exclusivity of the responses gathered by everyone during

the discussion groups. The primary data had to be regrouped into themes in order to put all information into context and report it exhaustively by theme (Cresswell, 2007).

1.3.4 Ethical principles

To ensure that the research process followed ethical principles, attention was given to the following aspects.

- *Data confidentiality*: The participants were asked to keep all information confidential and not to disclose anything discussed in the groups. Participants were not identified by name but by a number allocated to them.
- *Respect for the fundamental rights of the individual*: the survivors were taken to a safe place, their involvement was voluntary, and they were free to leave the interview at any time. In addition, to avoid security risks in some areas that are not yet fully stable, transport was provided to and from their home.
- *Informed consent*: the intentions and reasons behind the study were clearly explained to the participants using an information sheet and their informed consent obtained in writing. The participants received a copy of the consent form and the information sheet. They were told to contact the researchers if they had any questions.
- *Sensitivity*: Researchers need to be sensitive to participants' different cultures and norms; if not they may lose their trust and this could harm the study. In this study, the researchers were sensitive to the values and cultural norms of the participants and did not challenge these or impose their own standards.
- *Respect for autonomy*: the participants were treated as individuals. They were given freedom of choice to participate in the study on a voluntary basis, respecting their fundamental rights as individuals.

1.3.5 Data management

The participants were told that the personal information gathered would not be passed on to anyone not responsible for the study. The information would be held on PEAC's files, to be used for the well-being of survivors.

Copies of all transcriptions and participant details will be held securely by PEAC. This data will be held for five years. The researchers will hold all electronic data on password-protected personal computers to which only the researchers have access.

2. STUDY FINDINGS

2.1 Introduction

This study focused particularly on sexual violence against women. We are aware, through Curran, Zengele and Mukamana's study (2013:8), that men and boys may also be the victims of sexual violence but our study focused only on women and we hope that other studies will consider the problems faced by men.

As mentioned previously in the methodology, a total of 87 women from different areas of three provinces, North Kivu, South Kivu and Orientale Province, participated in this study.

The following discussion presents the study findings broken down by objective. The findings are presented for each objective using the themes identified in the data analysis.

2.2 Survivors' understanding of sexual violence

The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." It was in relation to this definition that we wanted to establish what the women understood by sexual violence.

By analysing sexual violence in relation to this definition, the survivors' responses, which were virtually the same in all regions covered by the study, focused on the following issues: force and brutality, satanic behaviour and cultural injustice favouring men.

2.2.1 Force and brutality

On the theme of "force and brutality", most points of view converged around a definition of violence as being the act of forcing women to perform sexual acts without their consent or authorisation. A few extracts from the women's definitions are reported verbatim below:

"Sexual violence is when a man takes a woman by force and has sex without her consent."
(Survivor No. 6, rural zone, Goma)

"Sexual violence is when someone mistreats you and forces you to have sex with them." (Survivor No. 4, rural zone, Bunia)

The women's perception of sexual violence is that it is not only a forced sexual act but also a brutal act. According to the women's discussions, this brutality is expressed in terms of tearing the survivors' clothes and beating them. In some cases, the rape took place following the murder of the survivor's family, her husband and children. The following are the women's comments in this regard:

"Sexual violence is when men come and roughly tear your clothes, remove your knickers and have sex with you without your permission." (Survivor No. 3, urban zone, Goma)

"Sexual violence is when men come and beat you, knock you about and force you to have sex without asking you." (Survivor No. 5, rural zone, Goma)

"...sexual violence is something bad that I have experienced. I lost everything. My house was burnt, my husband killed, my children massacred. My body was tortured and I was gang raped..." (Survivor No. 7, urban zone, Bunia)

From a psychological point of view, the survivors define sexual violence as a humiliating act. In addition to being a forced and brutal act, rape is humiliating, particularly when committed in front of one's children and husband. Such humiliation was expressed by the survivors in the following terms:

"Sexual violence is when a man forces himself on you in the open, in front of your children and husband." (Survivor No. 2, urban zone, Goma)

"I was raped in front of my children; for me, sexual violence is an internal wound that will never heal." (Survivor No. 4, urban zone, Bunia)

The survivors contextualise their understanding of sexual violence with references to the war, stating that sexual violence is when combatants come and kill the survivors' families before raping the women. In relation to acts committed during war, they also define sexual violence as an act by which many combatants rape one woman at the same time. In their own terms, the survivors state the following:

"Sexual violence is when a group of people knock at your door, tie up your husband, chase away your children. They rape you, steal everything they can find in the house and force you to carry it all into the bush where they keep you prisoner for months." (Survivor No. 4, rural zone, Bukavu)

"Sexual violence is when several (3 or 4) men penetrate you one after the other without your permission." (Survivor No. 4, rural zone, Bunia)

"Sexual violence is when men force open your door, enter the house, steal everything they can find and force a father to have sex with his daughter or a son to have sex with his mother in front of everyone." (Survivor No. 3, urban zone, Bunia)

"My 17-year-old daughter was raped on her way home from school. The militia took her by force into the forest and gang raped her." (Survivor No. 6, rural zone, Bukavu)

"Sexual violence is when someone has sex with you who you don't know and you will never see again." (Survivor No. 8, rural zone, Bukavu)

" ... They killed my husband and children. They took me hostage. I lived with them in the forest. I prepared food for them. They gang raped me. Among the rapists were children the same age as my grandchildren ... " (Survivor No. 6, urban zone, Bunia)

2.2.2 Satanic practice

Once they had realised that the perpetrators' objective was more than that of simply satisfying their sexual desire, the survivors' discussions also converged around the fact that rape was a satanic practice. They mentioned that, in most cases, the perpetrators would force wooden sticks into the survivors' vaginas after the rape. The following section describes how the survivors perceive rape as a bizarre act.

"Sexual violence is when men find you in the field, hit you, have sex with you and push a wooden stick into your vagina." (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bunia)

2.2.3 Cultural injustice favouring men

The survivors likened sexual violence to the cultural norms that give men more power, including the power to have sex whenever they want, either by force or by mutual consent. For the participants, this cultural situation is the same as sexual violence. The participants from Kalehe (Bukavu) confirmed this in the following terms:

" ...If it is true that a man does not have the right to his wife whenever he wants, then I am raped nearly all the time " (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bukavu)

" ... To begin with I objected but he began to spend nights away! I figured it was better that he rape me than expose himself to prostitutes ... " (Survivor No. 5, rural zone, Bukavu).

If we look more closely at the statements above, we see that although the women agree that forced sex, even on the part of their husband, is rape, conversely they also believe, in line with their culture, that forced sex with their husband cannot be rape. Survivors from the rural area of Bukavu (who are Bashi) said that women do not speak of rape between a man and his wife.

"A husband doesn't rape!!" (Survivor No. 4, rural zone, Bukavu)

2.3 Why do the survivors not speak out?

The discussions showed that the survivors prefer to remain silent for reasons that can be grouped into six headings. These are: abandonment, rejection, lack of support, protection, shame/guilt and threats.

2.3.1 Abandonment/rejection

Most of the reasons given by the survivors to explain why they do not report sexual violence relate to a fear of being rejected. It is particularly difficult in this society for it to be discovered that a woman has had sexual relations with a man other than her husband. A raped girl will never be able to marry if the community find out what has happened. A married woman who has suffered sexual violence cannot tell her husband for fear of being rejected. In some cases, where the violence is known to the husband, particularly in cases of rape by combatants in front of him, the sexual violence remains a secret between husband and wife.

" ...We cannot tell our children what happened, it is a secret between my husband and myself. Even my in-laws don't know about it, as they might reject me..."

(Survivor No. 6, rural zone, Bunia)

2.3.2 Stigma

Women again emphasised the negative social consequences of making known the fact that they have been raped. They are often considered as prostitutes, and presumed to have been infected with HIV. The women told us that they do not say they have been raped because they fear they will be stigmatised. It is a common belief in African culture that a raped woman has been infected with HIV. This is exacerbated by the rapists' perception that rape is a way of curing HIV/AIDS.

2.3.3 Unfair cultural norms

The survivors likened sexual violence to unfair cultural norms. These norms relate to sexual violence instigated by a husband against his wife. The women prefer to blame their culture, or the culture of the Jews as written in the Bible. The studies conducted in Goma, Bunia and Bukavu showed that husbands force their wives to have sexual relations with them. This kind of violence is normalised. The survivors' opinions revolve around a wife's loyalty and obedience to her husband. Moreover, they prefer to blame or condemn nature, rather than their husband:

"We women are born inferior to men, the Bible says so. And our culture confirms it "
(Survivor No. 5, rural zone, Bukavu)

2.3.4 Fear

During the discussions with survivors, fear also emerged as a common theme explaining their silence with regard to sexual violence. Most of the women and girls raped were afraid of being rejected by their community. They were afraid of being considered prostitutes, stating it in these terms:

" ...I am afraid of being exposed to my family and the community. They may not believe me. They will treat me like a prostitute and my husband will leave me for good. So I prefer to keep quiet ... " (Survivor No. 2, rural zone, Bunia)

"If they find out that our daughter was raped, no-one will marry her."
(Survivor No. 5, rural zone, Bukavu)

2.3.5 Threats

Threats were also noted as being important. Threats may occur when a survivor is raped by someone in a position of authority. Sometimes this relates to death threats, sometimes to a threat that the woman will lose her job. The following quote is self-explanatory in this regard.

"... If you tell anyone I raped you, I'll kill you!..." (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bukavu, quoting her aggressor).

" ...I was raped by our priest in the local church. I was a (primary school) teacher at the time. I was coming from school with my books in my hands. The priest called me over and I complied. He immediately jumped on me and raped me. I shouted out but no-one came to help me. They heard my cries but didn't dare confront the priest!" (Survivor No. 9, urban zone, Bukavu).

"At the time of the rape, I was six months pregnant and I lost the baby. If I told anyone what happened, they wouldn't believe me! That was my dilemma. Even my husband would reject me. He is the same age as the priest who raped me. He's from the same village, they went to primary school together and, when we got married, he was even the priest my husband chose to conduct the service. When I revealed what had happened, the priest was transferred to another diocese. Everyone, including my husband, began to threaten me. I had seduced a man of God. I was the devil, and the school decided to terminate my contract. I don't teach any more. I don't have a husband any more. All my job applications are immediately rejected, at church my friends no longer want to sit with me. I am threatened in all areas of my life..."

2.3.6 Lack of protection

The other issue related to the women's silence is the lack of protection offered by an invisible government system. People see that there is no government presence. Nearly all survivors asked themselves the same question. What would be the point in breaking their silence if there were no support from the government? The village chief, the most immediate authority, has neither power nor resources. He is no more than a shadow of an authority. He follows everything that goes on but can do nothing. There is also a problem of impunity and corruption, and this does nothing to help convict and sentence criminals.

"... Even if I speak out, what will change?... " (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bunia)

" ...We have nothing, the area chief doesn't know what to do for women who have been raped, the clinics can't help us any more. There aren't as many NGOs as there used to be, what can we do?... " (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bukavu)

2.3.7 Shame

Most women and girls who have been raped recognise that what they are going through is unbearable and are ashamed to find themselves in such a situation. The fear of being humiliated, rejected or judged thus becomes a reason for protecting themselves by keeping quiet. Some women fear for the safety of their children, should they denounce their rapists or aggressors.

"I was raped and I didn't cry out. I simply told my husband what had happened. We kept quiet to protect our household. If my in-laws find out what has happened they will force their son to divorce me." (Survivor No. 5, rural zone, Bukavu)

2.4 How have the survivors' lives been affected?

There are serious consequences for women if they disclose the fact that they have suffered sexual violence. Some of these consequences have been grouped under the following headings: poverty, constant trauma, rejection, life in danger, isolation, shame and guilt.

2.4.1 They suffer from poverty

The discussions on this issue demonstrated how sexual violence impoverishes the survivors. One consequence may be that they become ill and are no longer able to work. Furthermore, if they are rejected by their family they may also be prevented from accessing the family resources, again resulting in poverty. On this subject, it is important to note that Congolese women are the economic pillars of their society, particularly in rural areas. The following quotations show how violence can lead to poverty:

"Very early in the morning, we go to the field to fetch food for the whole family. But our fields have become strategic hotspots for aggression! We're afraid to go there anymore! So where will we get our food now? (Survivor No. 10, rural zone, Bukavu)

"Since I was little, all I've done is farm. When I married, I worked in the family fields. I no longer have my husband. I feed the children and pay for their education. I was raped twice in my fields! Now I prefer to stay at home and die of starvation. But how will I send my children to school?" (Survivor No. 5, urban zone, Goma)

2.4.2 They suffer from constant trauma

Survivors of sexual violence also suffer physical and mental trauma on a daily basis. They may not have died physically but they die in a different way because their personality changes almost completely after the rape. Testimonials from the women interviewed highlighted the physical trauma in terms of genital infections, genital and urinary mutilations, wounds and injuries in these terms:

" ...I was raped by the men and, two months later, the MSF doctors decided to remove my womb...my parents accused me of being a prostitute and now I have no hope of having children in the future.... " (Survivor No. 6, urban zone, Bukavu)

" ... the soldiers came while I was in the field fetching food for my family. I don't know how many of them there were. During and after the rape, I was unconscious for several hours. The women from the village helped me get dressed and took me to the MSF clinic for emergency treatment. Despite the care I received, now I cannot control my bowels, and I have a genital infection that won't clear up and which I didn't have before the rape. I feel extremely humiliated at having been raped by a group of young men the same age as my grandchildren who were supposed to be protecting me ... "

(Survivor No. 8, urban zone, Goma)

" ...I worry about so many things, I can no longer sleep..."

In relation to the trauma, a survivor from Goma (Survivor No. 6, urban zone), an elderly woman, said: *"Rape, for me, is like the inexplicable slaughter of women."* In the rural area of Bunia, a young raped girl said: *"Rape is like a bomb that destroys everything that is female."* (Survivor No. 6)

2.4.3 They are rejected

The raped women revealed that they are rejected by their husbands and families and, consequently, become withdrawn and are very often rejected even by society, with people accusing them of having been the cause of the rape and of having sexually transmissible infections.

" ...I lived well with my husband and our five children. After the rape, my husband rejected me and told the children I was no longer his wife but the wife of the Interahamwe... I became pregnant from the rape. As soon as I had given birth to the child, his brothers tried to find a way of killing him. They threatened him all the time and, in the end, the child began to ask if there was something wrong with him. One day he asked me: 'Who am I? Where do I come from? Who is my father?' ... "

" ...I am alone,.... I no longer work...My family has rejected me.... "

2.4.4 Life in danger: they suffer from delusions

One of the survivors said that her experience was the result of bad spirits. She can't understand that it was done by a man. *"When I see a man, I see bad spirits..."* (Survivor No. 3, rural zone, Bukavu). She added that no-one can change this.

2.4.5 Isolation, shame and guilt

Some participants explained that they were ashamed of the rape because they felt as if they had been used as a sexual object. This sometimes leads them to become withdrawn, to suffer feelings of guilt and to speak little.

2.5 What the survivors need in order to recover

Following a rape, women need many different kinds of assistance. Based on the discussions, we have grouped these aspects into themes such as medical care, psychological support, financial support and legal assistance.

The discussions on this issue can be grouped into five sections:

2.5.1 Medical care

The survivors suffer from gynaecological problems and general ill-health. A minority of women became disabled following the rape. The need for medical care can be seen in the fact that they propose that medical centres should be nearer at hand, they would like medical care to be provided free of charge and to have their partners covered as well. They would like the health centres to be supplied with the necessary drugs and the nurses to be permanently in post. All these parameters indicate that there is a need for adequate medical care.

2.5.2 Psychological support

Many cases of rape have irreversible psychological effects, particularly when the rape results in an unwanted baby.

“ ...I have a one-year seven-month-old child and I am pregnant. Both are the result of repeated rapes. I don't feel good about these children. They remind me of their fathers who disabled me... What can I do to feel love towards my children?...”
(Survivor No. 4, urban zone, Bukavu)

The women suffer because their husbands, their children, their parents were murdered during the war. Most of the victims still feel worthless, unhappy and disenchanted with life. They fear unknown people and some would prefer to die rather than carry on living. The trauma of the sexual violence they have witnessed is also at the root of these psychological difficulties. Some of them were even forced to have sex with their own sons. Because of these events and the ensuing mental health problems, these women need psychological support. They would like to see sufficient, permanent and qualified psychosocial workers.

2.5.3 Social assistance

After being raped, women suffer all kinds of problems within their close family and friends that call for social assistance: they are rejected, scorned, marginalised, left to their fate. Some of them give birth to the rapists' children who, for their part, simply add to the women's suffering: some rape survivors love these children despite themselves but those

who love them with all their heart are rare. There are some who are ashamed of them and others who are constantly angry with them. Some have even abandoned these children. Some children are accepted by the woman's family but others are subjected to all kinds of ill-treatment from their mothers' husbands. Their mothers-in-law and their mothers' parents and brothers, even their half-brothers, look down on them.

Most of the women interviewed had a low level of education: most had attended only primary school, which meant they could not read and write well. A small percentage had attended secondary school but the rest were completely illiterate. Most of the women had dropped out of school due to the local culture, which values a woman's work in the home over and above their education. Some girls had dropped out of school due to teenage pregnancies, others were unable to continue their studies because they had been raped in public and/or taken into sexual slavery.

There is a clear need created by children born of rape, and this can be seen in the fact that some women wish the government would take responsibility for these children, although most would just like to have enough resources of their own to be able to provide for them. Others insist that families must be made more aware so that they understand the women's situation. All these problems require social assistance.

2.5.4 Financial support

Before the wars, most of the women interviewed were farmers, although some made a living from livestock rearing, others as seamstresses and yet others as small traders. During the armed conflicts, the women lost much of their valuable property, including houses, household objects, livestock, fields, work tools, businesses.

Some women have not been involved in income-generating activities since the rape as physical weaknesses mean they no longer have the capacity. Others have been displaced from their homes and are living with host families, thus having had to abandon their fields. The lack of financial support has physical, social, legal and even economic consequences. Most of those interviewed wanted to receive some financial support.

At Masisi, the survivors of sexual violence are farming in cooperatives, they are pooling their money and are thus able to support each other in case of rape. Their hope still lies with NGOs, which are rare in the region. The churches offer nothing but spiritual support. The women need something to eat. They have nothing at all.

".....We want to form a cooperative to work together but we don't have the money..."
(Survivor No. 6, urban zone, Bukavu)

2.5.5 Legal assistance and security

For the majority of survivors, their attackers are unknown. Others say there are no legal clinics in the area otherwise they would make a complaint. For others, they have little money to pursue cases through the courts. Yet others are afraid of reprisals and the remainder have no time to go to court.

Given the above, those interviewed wanted to see the government face up to its responsibilities in terms of ensuring the people's safety. The need to clear their name through the justice system was expressed by some in that they wanted their attackers arrested.

"...if there had been peace, this would never have happened to us" says one of the participants from Masisi district in the rural area of Goma. For other women in eastern DRC, the one thing they need above all is PEACE. They need a secure, peaceful region. They dream only of an end to these wars.

"... Before the war, Congolese women were spoilt, we lived in peaceful communities, we were respected by everyone but now I want the war to end....." (Survivor No. 6, urban zone, Goma)

"... we want to be able to speak without anyone doing us harm..."
(Survivor No. 4, rural zone, Goma).

2.6 Would a survivors' movement be useful?

They women acknowledged the importance of such a movement, feeling it would be useful in a number of ways. Movements like this can offer comprehensive assistance to survivors' projects aimed at preventing and limiting gender-based violence in the region.

2.6.1 Facilitating recovery

Essential services could be provided to the survivors of sexual violence, including case management and psychosocial and health services.

2.6.2 Promoting solidarity

The women felt a survivors' movement would be useful. Their comments were as follows:

"....A movement that would address our needs the world over..." (Participant V, Goma)

"....A movement that would connect us to local churches for a process of spiritual healing..."

2.6.3 Silent no more

More reliable information is needed in order to be able to take measures to prevent and analyse sexual violence in these regions. This will only be achieved by movements aimed at creating mechanisms to ensure the dignity and protection of women.

Sexual violence is a weapon used by all warring parties in the conflict zones. Unfortunately, even representatives of MONUSCO (United Nations Organization Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo), who are supposed to be protecting women and children, are involved. They manipulate situations through the use of money. Many young girls fall pregnant following manipulation or intimidation by these MONUSCO employees (Gonthier-Maurin, 2013). The women are used as forced labour in their camps and become sex slaves.

"....They took me into their camps in the forest, they raped me anywhere and anyway...for six months I was with the fighters. I don't remember how many of them I had to service every day with my body... and that was after they had killed my husband and four sons."
(Survivor No. 2, rural zone, Bukavu)

3. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The silence surrounding sexual violence among survivors has been an obstacle to resolving issues in this regard, making it difficult for political decision-makers to ascertain the circumstances of survivors and thus be able to help them. Most of what we know on the subject of sexual violence, particularly in the DRC, comes from anecdotal accounts rather than empirical studies. Consequently, the aim of this study was to break this silence among the survivors by using a methodology that would enable everyone to express their point of view on the issue of sexual violence.

Sexual violence is a concept that cannot be fully understood by the survivors and so the research strategy used was one of exploring their understanding of the concept. In fact, sexual violence may take various forms depending on the circumstances. The study noted, in this regard, that survivors in the DRC generally understood what sexual violence meant within the context of war. Conversely, discussions with the survivors in the Congo also showed that they were not aware that forced sex with their husband was also a kind of sexual violence. The culture in which these survivors have grown up explains their lack of understanding in this regard. The survivors noted that it was an accepted part of the DRC's culture for a husband to have sex with his wife whenever he wants and thus a husband cannot rape his wife.

While an understanding of sexual violence is essential to be able to denounce it, there seems to be a consensus around the fact that survivors prefer to remain silent after suffering acts of sexual violence. This was certainly the case in the Congo. This silence may be due to a number of factors, some of them context-specific. In the case of the DRC, the discussions with survivors led us to divide the causes of this silence into two broad categories: a) factors associated with cultural norms, and b) the lack of a responsible government or judicial system to argue the survivors' cases. Culture has always been a cause of silence in relation to sexual violence in African societies. The unique insight of this study with regard to cultural norms is that the survivor is often categorically rejected by her community. For example, it is very difficult for a survivor of sexual violence who is not yet married to find someone within the community willing to marry her if they are aware of her situation. Another unique aspect of the silence in the Congo is the lack of a government or judicial support system. Elsewhere, the perpetrators of sexual violence are prosecuted and convicted by solidly-established institutions. This is not the case in the provinces where this study was conducted. The discussions with the survivors showed that this lack of any support system is a significant reason why the survivors maintain their silence. All the survivors stated that it was futile to report cases of sexual violence in these provinces and even, perhaps, across the whole country.

Sexual violence is known to affect survivors in many ways, as has been seen in the previous sections of this study. The specific effects of sexual violence in the Congo can be better understood if we look at the role played by women in the family. Family life in the Congo, particularly in rural areas, depends on the women, who make a living growing crops. The men have virtually nothing and they stay at home. When sexual violence occurs, the women are afraid to return to their fields and the family economy suffers serious consequences. Sexual violence has always been a traumatic experience for survivors but, in the case of the Congo, it is even worse because, in addition to the "usual" sexual violence, survivors in the Congo have also had to suffer the very brutal sexual violence committed by the warring

parties. There has thus been very significant suffering on the part of the survivors of sexual violence in the Congo. One incident in this regard concerns the case of a young girl who was brutally raped by fighters and suffered damage to her womb in the process. She suffered ill-health for a long time and, in the end, had to have her womb removed, so that this young woman will never be able to have children of her own. On a more general level, sexual violence is harmful to the country's development because so many school-age girls are raped and drop out of school due to the stigma. Lower education levels in any country mean restricted development in the future. Moreover, many women have nightmares and this means that the trauma being suffered by survivors is likely to result in mental health problems.

Given all of the above, Congolese survivors are desperately in need of support. There remains the outstanding question, however, of the form this aid to survivors should take. The discussions on needs with survivors highlighted the requirement for a number of simultaneous interventions targeting both the underlying causes of sexual violence and its consequences. Culture and the lack of a support system were noted as the underlying causes of sexual violence, and poverty, trauma and isolation as its consequences. Although eliminating the root causes of sexual violence should really be the priority, the survivors insisted on the need for medical care in the aftermath of sexual violence. They also emphasised the need for financial support. By insisting on these needs, it is almost as if these women believe there is no hope of changing the cultural norms or governance structure of the country.

With regard to a movement of survivors of sexual violence, the women in the Congo were very optimistic. Discussions among the survivors are already referring to small associations of survivors that could help each other in case of medical need. They were enthusiastic at the idea of forming part of this movement as they felt it was an opportunity to get their voices heard beyond the borders of the DRC. They felt that, by addressing sexual violence, an international survivors' movement would be able to challenge cultural norms and the clear governance weaknesses.

In summary, this study focused on sexual violence against women with the aim of seeing if it could break their silence on the subject in order to facilitate intervention in this regard. This study suffered from a number of limitations. Its strength lies in the fact that it reached the survivors and adopted a methodology that allowed them to speak freely on the issue of sexual violence. However, the fact that we had several groups in urban areas may mean the results are biased towards urban voices. The study was also limited in that it did not cover sexual violence towards girls under the age of 16, even though they are in a majority in these regions. The issue of sexual violence towards boys and men was also not covered although some other studies have focused on this issue. Moreover, the samples used were not random and included a limited number of survivors whose opinions may not be representative of survivors in general. Despite these deficiencies, the study did achieve its objectives. The gaps that have been noted offer an opportunity for future researchers to consider the points not covered by this work.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cultural norms are at the root of the silence maintained by the survivors of sexual violence because, according to these norms, if they speak out they will be rejected. The lack of a justice system and of any government support at local level also makes the survivors feel that they will receive no support if they do speak out. For these reasons, the most important recommendation to come out of this study is that the government should:

- Help the population on a local level by arresting the perpetrators of sexual violence
- Ensure that cultural practices contrary to the law are challenged through the courts

As some cases of sexual violence have been imposed on the Congo by the warring parties, the international community can help resolve these cases by:

- Working for peace in the region or by
- Using the international courts to bring the perpetrators to justice

Other problems of sexual violence, such as poverty, physical and mental health issues and psychological problems, are the direct consequence of the causes outlined above. These problems could be resolved if a number of stakeholders, including the Congolese government, civil and non-governmental organisations, were to:

- Provide healthcare
- Provide psychological counselling
- Help the survivors live an economically sustainable life
- Provide community education on the tragedy of sexual violence
- Provide legal and judicial assistance

5. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that, when approached professionally, the women were able to talk about the problems they are suffering as a result of sexual violence. In addition to the information we obtained from the groups of women included in the study, there are numerous women's voices speaking out against sexual violence that are not being heard. For this reason, we think this study will provide decision-makers with advice on how to intervene in order to prevent and resolve the problems of sexual violence in a manner satisfactory to the survivors.

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IF I SPEAK OUT, WILL IT CHANGE?

Listening to survivors of sexual violence in eastern DRC

Names have been changed to protect identities



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