

Forced migration and sexual abuse: experience of Congolese¹ adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp, Rwanda

BACKGROUND

This study deals with the link between forced migration and sexual abuse, with a special focus on adolescent girls. Existing literature associates forced migration with sexual abuse and identifies adolescent girls as the most vulnerable. However, little is known about the situation of sexual abuse among Congolese refugees in Rwanda since their arrival in 2012 due to the conflict between Congolese government forces and the M23 rebel group. This study was initiated to explore the situation of sexual abuse of Congolese adolescent girls in Kigeme camp and to suggest remedial strategies.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) with adolescent girls. Interviews also involved parents, boys, camp authorities, and neighbouring citizens.

RESULTS

The findings show that rape, unwanted physical touching, sexual exploitation, commercial sex, early marriage and girl trafficking are the main forms of sexual abuse. These are facilitated by the miserable life in the camp, shortcomings in the camp layout and security system, and adolescent developmental stage. They negatively impact girls' reproductive health, social integration and mental health.

CONCLUSIONS

Existing strategies to address sexual abuse in the camp have had positive but insufficient results, and thus need to be improved and reinforced. Improvement is suggested in the areas of the abuse reporting system, the camp layout and security system, involvement of men and youth, and the consolidation of anti-GBV (gender-based violence) clubs.

KEY WORDS

sexual abuse; adolescent; DRC; Rwanda; Kigeme

ORGANIZATION – 1: University of Rwanda, Rwanda · 2: United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Rwanda

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BACKGROUND

This study deals with the link between forced migration and sexual abuse, with a special focus on adolescent girls. The findings presented are based on field-work undertaken in Kigeme refugee camp in Rwanda, which hosts Congolese refugees. Existing literature establishes a direct link between forced migration and sexual abuse. For Zannettino (2013), sexual abuse is one of the main harms encountered by refugees during displacement. Of the victims of this abuse during migration, adolescent girls are identified as the most vulnerable (UNHCR, 2008), with a direct impact on their physical, social, and psychological lives (Roxberg, 2007; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2005). Adequate strategies are therefore a must whenever there is forced migration in order to save girls' lives.

Talking about Congolese adolescents girls in Rwanda leads to shedding light on the genesis and the process of their displacement. Congolese people have been migrating for decades, especially due to the interethnic clashes in Katanga and North Kivu provinces between 1992 and 1996, the 1996-1997 war that brought Laurent-Désiré Kabila to power and other wars that followed (Raeymaekers, 2011; Tamm & Lauterbach, 2011). With the clash between M23 – a Congolese armed rebel group that will be described later – and the Congolese government in April 2012, hundreds of thousands of Congolese in North Kivu – a province located in the eastern part of the country – have left their homes for other places within and outside the country (Jacquemot, n.d.). Thus some crossed the Congolese border to Rwanda and are the concern of the present study. These displacements have occasioned sexual abuse among displaced people and refugees (Knowles & Rimella, 2014; HRW, 2014). Appropriate approaches were thus expected to be adopted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and countries of asylum to prevent violence, to care for the survivors and to reduce the impact of sexual abuse.

However, there is little information available regarding sexual abuse of adolescent Congolese girls in Rwanda, and this gap limits the knowledge about the kinds of life they are experiencing and the development of strategies to address the challenges they face. The present study was hence conducted in one Congolese refugee camp in Rwanda, seeking to answer the following questions: What kind of sexual abuse are adolescent girls in Kigeme camp experiencing? What is the impact of sexual abuse on those girls? What are the strategies undertaken in order to address sexual abuse against adolescent girls in Kigeme camp? How can sexual abuse against adolescent girls in Kigeme camp be better addressed?

In order to answer these questions, the literature linking forced migration and sexual abuse is ex-

plored. The origin and presence of Congolese refugees in Rwanda are also pointed out. This is followed by the methodology used to collect and analyse the data. Finally the section of findings gives details of sexual abuses against Congolese adolescent girls in Kigeme camp as well as suggestions on how this problem can be better addressed.

THE LINK BETWEEN FORCED MIGRATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE

Sexual abuse is viewed as embedded in the essence of war and its consequent forced migration (Zetter, 2012). Research indicates that this act is a silent means used by men spontaneously joined together for a common battle in order to build team spirit (Sussman, 2011). Wood (2012) observes that rape can be a strategy or just a practice of war. It is a *war strategy* when it is done consciously and with the agreement of military leaders as a way to torture, cleanse or punish a particular group or as compensation of the fighters. It is a *war practice* if it happens not as the result of top-town orders and does not provide any strategic benefit. Rape during war is also linked to masculinity and power. In some instances it is used to affirm the male domination over women and other men belonging to the opponent group or the enemy (Wood, 2012). This was the view of Congolese men in refugee camps in Uganda raped in Congo by both rebels and the Congolese army who at the same time harassed them verbally, telling them that by being raped in this way they are no longer men but weak like women (Refugee Law Project, 2009).

Sexual abuse manifests itself as soon as conflict erupts. It was for example used as a weapon by Russian soldiers in World War II during the occupations in order to take revenge on the enemy; by Serbs as a tool to ethnically cleanse the Muslim population during the civil war in former Yugoslavia; by Hutu combatants during the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda (Behr, 2011), and by the national army and different armed groups in Congo (HRW, 2014).

Sexual abuse also happens when people flee and within the refugee camps. The International Rescue Committee (2012) explains here that inside and outside Yida refugee camp, South Sudan, rape and sexual abuse were the greatest concerns of refugee women and girls. In Darfur, Sudan, the Janjaweed militia were selecting Sudanese women to rape when they were fleeing. The government's army were also raping women at the checkpoints. Women were also being raped by civilians outside the camps when they were collecting firewood (HRW, 2005).

Another matter concerns who is the victim of sexual abuse in wartime. Wood (2012) specifies that both males and females are victims of rape and sexual torture during wartime. Various sources however un-

derline how females, especially adolescent girls, are particularly affected (Women Refugee's Commission, 2009). According to Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, and Lozano (2002), one in four women may experience sexual violence and one in three adolescent girls report their first sexual experience as being forced. The UNHCR (2008) also mentions that although no group is spared sexual violence in wartime, women and girls are the most affected since they are the primary target and undergo numerous kinds of violence such as rape, forced impregnation, forced abortion, trafficking, sexual slavery and sexually transmitted infections.

Similarly, factors of girls' vulnerability to sexual abuse during wartime are diverse. Some are internal, while others are external to these girls. Internal factors relate to their developmental stage, adolescence. UNICEF (2004) points out that adolescents are still able to envision a better future and this will be possible if they have role models, especially adult persons. Otherwise their optimism can change into pessimism, which renders them unable to make the right selection among various suggestions.

External factors comprise social norms and intimidation of those perceived as authority figures, which prevent adolescent girls in crisis or displacement from publicly vocalising their concerns such as sexual exploitation in order to get suitable support (Siddiqi, 2012). The miserable conditions of poverty during forced displacement also plays a role here. They render parents unable to have authority over and to care for their daughters who want to wear nice clothes and treat their bodies well (Pavlish, 2007). Sex is also sometimes used in exchange for services provided by soldiers or other officers (HRW, 2005). Some girls choose the life of sex workers in order to supplement the family income (Paik, 2012). Early marriages are also organised as girls' survival means, as a way to reduce the family load, or as a medium of family's connection to potential survival resources (IRC, 2012; Siddiqi, 2012; Machel, 1996). There is therefore a reason to expect that war refugees and displaced adolescent girls will experience attempts of sexual abuse. The present study thus sought to explore the experience of sexual abuse of adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp, Rwanda.

CONGOLESE REFUGEES IN RWANDA

Shekhawat (2009) mentions that Congo has been affected by the formation of rebellions and armed conflicts since its independence in 1960, which was the source of clashes between the government's army and rebels. These clashes resulted in the displacement of Congolese at different occasions. Tamm and Lauterbach (2011) underline that during these conflicts, sexual abuse was perpetrated by both the govern-

ment and rebels' armies due to the lack of authority and high level of impunity in spite of the existence of the law addressing sexual abuse and a zero-tolerance policy.

The present study was conducted among the population displaced by conflicts between the Congolese government and the Congolese rebel group, M23, formerly known as National Congress of the Defence of the People (CNDP). CNDP started fighting in 2008. Its army was integrated into the government army a year later, on 23 March 2009, after a signed peace agreement with the government. In April 2012, it rebelled again changing the name to M23, referring to the date of the agreement with the government (Al Jazeera, 2013). According to the BBC (2013), M23 has caused at least 800,000 people to leave their homes and was committing sexual crimes. Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2014) observes that between 19 November and 2 December 2012 they raped at least 36 women and girls in Goma city, including a 10-year-old child.

Some of the displaced people following the M23 fights fled to Rwanda. In 2014, about 74,337 Congolese refugees were hosted in Rwanda, dispatched in almost all provinces (UNHCR, 2014). These refugees joined Rwanda when the country was receiving worldwide applause for its significant progress in promoting gender equality and women's empowerment. In particular, the 2003 constitution guarantees women the minimum of 30% of decision making positions in public institutions (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). Sixty-four percent of parliament members were women. Signs of integration of women in decision making positions in Rwanda also included the appointment and election of women to 40% of the cabinet, 40% of the judiciary, 40% of provincial governance and 38% of district councils. Gender was moreover integrated into the economic development and poverty reduction strategy as a crosscutting issue. Other efforts were also observed in education and training, reproductive and maternal health, and human rights (Republic of Rwanda, 2014). These efforts have raised an expectation that people staying in Rwanda will enjoy a high level of gender equality. However, the findings of the present study are unable to confidently confirm this suggestion, especially for Congolese adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp.

PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURE

STUDY DESIGN

The present study was designed using a qualitative approach. For Maxwell (1996), the strength of a qualitative study derives primarily from its inductive approach. It focuses on specific situations or people and puts emphasis on words rather than numbers. The present study therefore sought to understand the situ-

ation of sexual abuse in a refugee camp and strategies developed to address it. The study was also designed as a case study. As with Creswell (1994), a case study explores a single entity, "the case", and collects detailed information to find out what is the particularity of the group. Kigeme refugee camp was thus chosen, with adolescent girls being the focus. The study has moreover a phenomenological design in which human lived experience is described in detail by the participant (Creswell, 1994). In this way, lived experience of sexual abuse was narrated by adolescent girls.

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STUDY AREA

Kigeme refugee camp where the study was conducted is situated in Nyamagabe District, Southern Province, Rwanda. It was formerly used to host Burundian refugees who were repatriated in May 2009. It was reopened in 2012 after the clash between the Congolese army and the M23 rebel group and is the one hosting the largest number of Congolese refugees in Rwanda (UNHCR, 2013, 2014). Statistics available for this camp reveal that 61% of people in the camp are children and adolescents under 18 years old. In 2013, the number of adolescent girls aged between 12 and 17 years old in this camp was estimated at 1651 (UNHCR, 2013). As the literature above suggests that adolescent girl refugees are greatly exposed to sexual abuse, it was expected that there would be a large number of adolescent girls exposed to this risk in Kigeme refugee camp.

SELECTION PROCEDURE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Individual interviews mainly targeted teenage girls. These were selected through criterion sampling in order to ensure their age. The other target comprised pregnant girls and teenage mothers. These were reached through snowball sampling methods where participants were intervening in order to reach their colleagues. Finally, boys, mothers and fathers also participated. The selection of this group followed a purposive sampling method. Some staff in this camp and neighbour population were also purposively chosen. The sample of this study was therefore composed of 10 teenagers, 2 boys, 2 mothers, 2 fathers, and one staff member, making a total of 17 people. Focus group discussions were organised with teenagers with participants from the above-mentioned categories also chosen using respective sampling methods. Five FGDs were conducted, of which two were with teenagers and the others were with one of each of the other categories.

DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES, PROCEDURE AND INSTRUMENTS

As alluded to above, individual interview and FGD were used as data collection techniques, each technique having a corresponding interview guide. Individual interviews took place inside the house or in an empty place within the camp according to the preference of the participants and the assurance of quietness and non-disturbance of that place. For the FGD, only empty places were used. Interviewer's introduction, explanation of the study's purpose as well as interviewee's oral consent were always assured before starting asking questions. Questions were then asked in Kinyarwanda language in the form of conversation and dialogue, while probes were used where necessary. Two girls who were not comfortable with disclosing their situation in a group were given the possibility to talk in individual interviews.

DATA ANALYSIS

An audio recorder was used to record individual interviews and FGDs. After data collection, information was transcribed in Kinyarwanda. Data analysis was done manually following the model suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2011), which consists of organizing the data, immersion in the data, generating categories and themes, coding the data, offering interpretation, searching for alternative understandings and writing the report. In this study, interview transcripts were read and organised. Themes were identified, categorised, coded and interpreted. Finally, findings were viewed in the light of previous literature before make conclusions. The following section details the findings and their interpretation.

SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST CONGOLESE ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KIGEME CAMP

FORMS OF SEXUAL ABUSE EXPERIENCED BY ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KIGEME REFUGEE CAMP

A number of forms of sexual abuse were found in Kigeme camp. Adolescent girls are experiencing rape. All participants in this study acknowledged the existence of rape of girls in the camp. A 14-year-old girl narrated how rape is perpetrated by young and adult people, including family members. She said:

Rape in this camp is alarming, girls are raped day after day, I know one girl who was raped by another child and another one who was raped by her own father at 12 years old!

Rape by family members was also mentioned by a 13-year-old, who testified:

Recently, a boy raped his own cousin when the victim was bringing him tea in the morning as usual and she found him in underwear prepared to rape her. He forced a bed sheet in her mouth so that she could not cry.

Rape was also highlighted by camp authorities, the representative of the Ministry of Disaster Management and Refugee Affairs (MIDIMAR) as well as the representative of the UNHCR in this camp.

Another form of sexual abuse in this camp is the unwanted physical touching. This comprises the touching of breasts or other body parts and kissing without consent. One boy mentioned this in a FGD, specifying that touching girls is something that cannot be escaped and that happens spontaneously when boys meet girls. He said, *It is something that you do not plan, you meet a girl and you have a desire and your instinct pushes you to touch her body part even if you do not desire her sexually.* As to unwanted kisses, they happen in the evening when the darkness starts coming. Girls are therefore kissed by people they may not even recognise.

Sexual exploitation is another form of sexual abuse in Kigeme camp. This is characterised by having sex in exchange for some gifts or a little money, taking advantage of the girls' deplorable financial conditions. This abuse is mostly perpetrated by external people, ones who are wealthy and are able to convince girls of other future advantages. A 12-year-old girl put it this way:

When adolescent girls want expensive objects like mobile phones and clothes that parents are not able to provide, they accept advances (having sex) from someone who can fill their needs.

The representative of MIDIMAR confirmed that people from outside the camp do come in pretending to be coming for business but that they instead try to use adolescent girls in exchange for money and material things.

Commercial sex is another form of sexual abuse. This is also mostly done outside the camp among the neighbouring population or in other towns in Rwanda, including the capital Kigali. A 14-year-old girl explained:

Girls in this camp are involved in prostitution. They go outside the camp; they take taxis in the evening around 5 p.m. to go to Nyamagabe or Butare towns and come back the following day early in the morning around 5 a.m.

The representative of MIDIMAR specified here that the commercial work is indeed done but secretly since refugees know that if they are caught severe measures can be taken.

Sexual abuse includes early marriage. This is done in discretion in different ways by boys, girls and parents. Either girls and boys decide to stay together without informing parents or camp leaders, or parents receive a dowry for their daughter and silently let her go with a boy, or girls hide their age, claiming

to be adults in order to officially get married. At this point, a UNHCR social worker said:

One girl was married at 14 years old but her parents told the UNHCR and MIDIMAR that she was 20. It is really difficult to know the exact age of Congolese because in their country they have a culture of changing age in order to have some rights, like what they call "droit de vote" (right to elect), therefore fighting early marriage becomes complicated.

The last form of sexual abuse identified in Kigeme camp is the trafficking of adolescent girls. Adolescent girls go missing in the camp. Most participants in FGDs and individual interviews underlined that girls are taken by people from outside the camp who promise them paid jobs and that when they come back they are pregnant or HIV positive. A 17-year-old who witnessed adolescent traffic said:

I remember one woman from Butare town who came and took two girls, promising them a job paying fifteen thousand Rwandan francs (about twenty-one US dollars) per month, but in Butare she handed them to two men for sex. One girl refused and she was beaten. They called the police and she was brought back to the camp. The second one has been missing up to now.

Another boy witnessed a girl being taken to Ruhengeri (current Musanze District) in a Prado car and who never came back. Some girls also revealed that people approached them and attempted to recruit them.

The findings of this study identified that adolescent girl trafficking is done in the form of a plot between people from outside the camp and people inside the camp, and both men and women are involved. The representative of Rwanda Women Network (RWN) explained how the trafficking is done in a chain:

There are refugees who are in connection with people from outside who come to traffic adolescent girls. The call that I received while interacting with you was telling me that there are four adolescent girls from Kigeme camp who have been found in Ruhango (a town far from Kigeme camp). This is a crucial problem we have, people come to take girls from the camp to use them.

However, people in charge of the management of this camp provide disparate explanations. A MIDIMAR worker acknowledged that they have registered cases of girls trafficking and that these girls were brought back. But another officer of this ministry in the same camp denied this phenomenon, recognizing only that some children sought permission to search for jobs outside the camp. One of the refugee representatives admitted this trafficking indirectly when he said: *I do not have any more information about trafficked adolescent girls, but there are children who are missing from the camp and we do not know their whereabouts.*

The literature reveals that sexual abuse of adolescent girls in refugee camps was also found in Sri

Lanka (Women's Refugee Commission, 2009), Syria (FIDH, 2012), Guinea and Sierra Leone (Rakita, 1999), South Sudan (International Rescue Committee, 2012), Somalia (WRC, 2012), Tanzania (Roxberg, 2007), and some other refugee camps in Rwanda (Pavlish, 2007). The findings of the present study showed that adolescent girls in Kigeme camp also undergo sexual abuse. It is however worth examining the factors fuelling these abuses.

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FACTORS OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS' SEXUAL ABUSES IN KIGEME REFUGEE CAMP

The most prominent factor of adolescent girl sexual abuse in Kigeme refugee camp is the poverty and its consequent miserable conditions. This is at the basis of many forms of sexual abuse. In relation to rape, most of the time this happens when girls develop relationships with men in search of money, as in the following case:

We had a case of a man who called a girl, showing her an amount of only five hundred Rwandan francs (about 0.7 US dollars), and as the girl was in need of money, she went to him and ended up being raped, for five hundred Rwandan francs.

The camp social officer also reported the case of a girl raped by a hair dresser who had given her money sometimes before.

Poverty also plays role in sexual exploitation. Here, girls agree to repeatedly have sex with men who give them some gifts such as a cell phone, clothes, body lotion, etc. In this case, there are many girls negotiating this kind of deal. Some boys expressed being approached by girls in this way:

I experienced this, a girl whose name I cannot reveal here came to me and asked me for only one hundred francs (about 0.15 US dollars) and she said I can have with her one round of sex in exchange.

Once, a girl asked me to buy her a cup of tea and said that she would give me what I wanted... When a girl talks like that in our culture, it means that she can even give you sex.

The negotiation of repeated sexual intercourse in exchange for money or other material items was also acknowledged by the refugee representative, who in addition specified that what happens is known only when there are some disagreements in the deal. Girls who give birth repeatedly sleep with men in order to gain the means to take care of themselves and of their children.

Poverty is moreover at the basis of commercial sex. Because of the financial limitations of families, girls are not able to meet their basic needs. Some of them therefore choose to engage in commercial sex or their parents push them to do so. Early marriage is connected to poverty as well. As mentioned above, adolescent girls choose early marriage in order to

quit their families who cannot meet their needs. Some parents also accept it in order to reduce the family load or to make this marriage a connection for survival. Poverty is moreover a factor in trafficking of girls. Participants stated that girls do not resist following people who promise them a paid job, even when they are human traffickers.

Poverty is lastly the main cause of sleeping around. This especially happens to girl students after the three first years of secondary school, which are free in Rwanda. Those who are unable to pay for the remaining three years tend to sleep around because they are not occupied by any other activity. At this point, a mother uttered:

In the refugee camp there is not much to do. Young people are not qualified to find good jobs outside, so they fall into prostitution easily. Again, being uneducated, the adolescent girls cannot have the capacity to create their own projects or to innovate other things to do. They therefore go for prostitution.

Besides the poverty, the lack of parental authority is another factor of sexual abuse in Kigeme refugee camp. Unaccompanied children living alone in their houses are most vulnerable to rape. When the perpetrators come to their homes they do not easily find someone to rescue them. In addition, unaccompanied children and orphans do not have role models in their homes, which exposes them to all kinds of uncontrolled attractions and sexual abuse. In other conditions, adolescents are encouraged by their parents to constitute their own family in their own house, which is a strategy to increase the quantity of assistance received from donors but puts these children under great risk of sexual abuse.

Another scenario of lack of parental authority stated by participants is related to the small houses of refugees. Because of this, parents do not find free time to meet as husband and wife, and thus send their children to other families of relatives where they may risk sexual abuse by these relatives or their children. The lack of parental authority can also be generated by parents' own careless behaviour. There are parents who also mistreat their children by beating or insulting them or willingly preventing them from enjoying peace in the house. These children search for refuge and role models in external people, who may abuse them.

Another factor of adolescent sexual abuse in Kigeme refugee camp is the camp layout and security problem. Men and women use the same toilets and bathrooms. This facilitates some men to rape women and girls when they are already naked in these facilities. Rape also happens to those who try to take a bath in other hidden places. The other problem related to the camp layout and security is the lack of external fences and inside lighting. Because the camp is also intersected by the National Road from Kigali the capital to the South West of Rwanda and South

Kivu in Congo, and is quite active, girls are caught by passengers in the darkness of the evening or night and raped. The lack of fences and lighting also facilitates people from outside who come in the night to abuse women and girls sexually as well as girls who escape for trafficking and commercial sex. However, some girls are raped when sent outside the camp to fetch water or collect firewood.

The breakdown of patriarchal authority which happens unexpectedly also relates to adolescent sexual abuse in Kigeme refugee camp. Because of having very limited financial means, some men collect food from the UNHCR and directly sell it. This increases the families' poverty and misery because the money is used for drinking beer instead of taking care of the family. On the other hand, because of men's financial incapacity, some women look down on their husbands, saying that their husband is a UNHCR or refugee card which provides them with survival means. This irritates men, who may become careless and aggressive, causing trouble and disorder in the house.

Factors of adolescent sexual abuse also include their developmental stage and the culture of early marriage in Congo. Concerning the developmental stage, adolescents are still young while their sexual desire is high. This was claimed by boys, who said:

During adolescence, the blood is very hot, and boys feel the desire of having sex, therefore they may tend to force girls to have sex with them... On many occasions, girls are the ones who go to boys' homes and they agree to have sex with them, but in the end, girls claim that they were raped, when they need it as well.

These boys underline that both adolescent girls and boys take part in sexual abuse. Another respondent argued here that high sexual desire in adolescence may render girls unable to argue with or resist the suggestions of people who entice them into sexual activity.

Congolese culture is a factor in early marriage. According to the United Nations Population Fund (2010), the Democratic Republic of Congo "has one of the highest child marriage prevalence rates in the world" (United Nations Population Fund, 2010, p. 1). In Congo, girls normally marry when younger than 20 years. This culture has therefore influenced behaviours in Kigeme refugee camp. Since this was compromising the Rwandan law which establishes the minimum age of marriage at 21 years old (African Child Policy Forum, 2013), refugee families were declaring girls older than they really were in order to have the possibility to marry them early.

Another factor of sexual abuse is the under-reporting of sexual crimes. Many cases of sexual abuse, including rape, are not reported because the victims fear the stigma, the shame and the isolation that can follow. Cases are also not reported because no actions are taken to punish the perpetrators. Participants complain here that even when perpetrators are

arrested, they are released after a short time while the victim remains with that shame with possible additional threats and harassment from the same perpetrator. One of the camp leaders stated:

We catch perpetrators; they (security officers) take them and detain them for a few days, then afterwards they are released. When they are back in the camp they harass those who revealed them. It is discouraging and we ask ourselves why we have to report it, since the perpetrators are not punished.

Other victims do not report abuse because the perpetrator is a family member or an important person in the community such as a teacher, camp leader, cousin, or parent. Not reporting perpetrators occurred because girls feared they would stop providing them with due services, or that they would mistreat them if they were punished by security officers. This silence and other factors mentioned above therefore make sexual abuse a normal behaviour in Kigeme refugee camp.

Forced migration and sexual abuse

IMPACT OF SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KIGEME REFUGEE CAMP

Sexual abuse perpetrated against adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp leaves them with consequences and impacts at several levels. The consequences are observed in reproductive health. One refugee representative said:

Girls undergo abortion in this camp and parents are involved. You can see a girl pregnant today, then the following day or a few days later, when you meet her, she is normal.

One camp authority also stated:

There is abortion here, known and unknown; there was a neighbour of this camp who was helping girls to abort, pretending to be a doctor. After being discovered, security officers arrested him.

In these excerpts, the reproductive health problems are early pregnancies, abortion and difficulties in giving birth. Many girls in this camp get pregnant before 18 years old. Because of the financial and social situation, most of them try to abort. The worst issue here is that they hide themselves and attempt abortion without proper medical assistance, sometimes helped by their parents or charlatan doctors. Even those who seek medical assistance are treated with little chance of success because their body parts are not yet strong (Iyakaremye, 2013). Some of them undergo caesarean section when giving birth, or continue bleeding for a long period after delivery. Others feel pain in the abdomen or have other complications. There are also those who, because of an unbalanced diet, are unable to breastfeed their babies (Irvine, Bradley, Cupples, & Boohan, 1997; Valdez, 2006).

Additionally to reproductive health are HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. One parent said: *As parents, we are very sad when our daughters are sexually abused, but when they get infected it is as if they are dead and we bury them.* As it appears in this statement, parents are upset because of their children's sexual abuse, especially when they are infected with sexually transmitted infections. The other consequence is the social rejection and stigma of sexually abused girls or those living with HIV, within and outside their families. Sexually abused adolescent girls are no longer free to chat with peers, including those who impregnated them, and feel at risk of not being married. Those with children are not socially accepted or assisted as a mother like married women and are held responsible for what happened to them. The voice of a 17-year-old mother is much more eloquent at this point:

My boyfriend asked me to have sex with him, and I accepted. When I realized that I was pregnant, I informed him but he denied it, saying that the pregnancy was not his, that he is not the only one to know how to impregnate. Since that time I never feel happy. I dropped my studies when I was in senior two; my partner had rejected me. When I delivered the baby I could not breastfeed her; even when I was holding my baby in my arms I was crying. My baby stopped breastfeeding before six months and this haunted me a lot [cries in tears].

Apart from being rejected, some pregnant adolescents and adolescent mothers are also harassed in their families or are forced to leave their homes because this situation is considered as a shame to the parents. Children experience the same threat from rape as their mothers.

Consequences are also observed at the psychological level. The UNHCR Social Officer reported the case of a girl raped by her own father and who was traumatized. One night she refused to go to bed. When her elder sister asked the reasons she said that she feared to be raped by her father. It was at that moment that they learned the problem she was enduring. Talking of her own experience, a 16-year-old pregnant girl said:

My partner was an electronic repair technician outside this camp; he was telling me that he wanted to marry me. He asked me for sex and I accepted to please him. I got pregnant and when I told him, he left this place; I do not know where he is now. I feel traumatized and disappointed; I dropped my studies when I was in senior three.

These psychological problems thus contribute to complicating the life of adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp. As may be expected, adolescent mothers also drop out of school because they have to care for their newborn. The question to ask now is: have the Rwandan government and the UNHCR, who are managing this camp, tried to address the problem of sexual abuse that these Congolese adolescent girls are experiencing in Kigeme refugee camp?

STRATEGIES INITIATED IN ORDER TO ADDRESS SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KIGEME REFUGEE CAMP

Many strategies have been developed in order to respond to gender issues in Kigeme camp. There was the development of overall gender awareness. UNICEF uses to contribute to this strategy in training girls on how to respond, to resist, or to fight in case of sexual abuse. Rwanda Women Network also intervenes in training and holding discussions on gender-based violence and family for young and adult refugees. The refugees have organised a weekly meeting gathering on Sundays to discuss how to address various problems in the camp, and sexual abuse is often on the agenda. This is a huge initiative and has started showing a positive impact since all the categories of people such as camp leaders and both young and adult refugees are conscious of the sexual abuse problem in the camp. However, during the fieldwork, there were still men resisting the idea of gender equality, which exposes the necessity of more sensitization. Some of these men complained during the focus group discussion that "stories of gender equality" have changed their wives and that husbands are no longer respected. Using the term "these stories" and reclaiming by force respect from women show that these men are not yet aware and convinced of the essence of gender equality, which constitutes an obstacle to promoting gender equality and addressing sexual abuse.

Another strategy developed in this camp is the crime reporting system. This is a space created by the National Police in some hospitals and refugee camps where victims of gender-based violence are received and assisted. Assistance to victims includes medical care such as post-exposure prophylaxis to prevent HIV infection and pregnancy. It also involves the arrest and punishment of the perpetrator. This system is called "Isange One Stop Centre", the name referring to a multidisciplinary package of assistance. It was good to create such a crime reporting system that caters for medical care. According to the UNHCR (2008), a special clinic in a refugee camp constitutes a space of listening, confidentiality, and counselling, and it has achieved success in other countries such as India. The only issue in Kigeme camp is that perpetrators are not exemplarily punished. According to this study, culprits are arrested for a short time and then released. Once back in the community they continue threatening people. The other matter is that although this service exists, there are always unwanted pregnancies among the youth, which shows that the strategy needs to be improved.

Another strategy is the involvement of women in the survival means management. The authority of the camp has decided to hand the survival assistance

of the family such as food and other provisions to women. This decision has responded to the problem of men who were selling received assistance in order to obtain money for beer while other family members are starving, which was worsening the nutritional problem. Families were also given economical cookers in order to reduce the problem of girls going outside the camp to collect firewood or to fetch water with the risk of being raped there. Involving women responds to the worries of the United Nations (2002), according to which when humanitarian assistance is not based on consultation with women and does not take their needs into account, women and girls may be left with few options and are forced to turn to prostitution in exchange for goods and services. The United Nations also supports the idea of distributing food directly to women instead of to men, as it was done in Kigeme camp. This view is moreover approved by Moosa (2012), who highlights the needs of power relation change between women and men in order to eradicate sexual abuse. However, this does not exclude the idea of the UNHCR (2008) and Women's Refugee Commission (WRC; 2012) that although activities to enhance gender equality have primarily focused on working with women, gender equality and elimination of abuse against women cannot be achieved without the active participation of men, because gender equality is not the dominance of either sex. Therefore men should not be left aside in Kigeme camp. Their active involvement is needed in the process; otherwise there would be no expectation of gender equality or a violence-free community.

There is also the strategy of involving youth in eradicating sexual violence in the camp. Young girls and boys are organised by RWN in anti-GBV clubs. This youth is united in order to build awareness, capacities and skills in gender equality. The club members also learn and participate in addressing HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. Involving adolescent girls in fighting sexual abuse is important. In this camp, adolescents' clubs have created safe space for the youth to express and contribute to the fighting of sexual violence. According to Brown (2013), safe space for adolescents is required to allow them to express their concerns. Siddiqi (2012) also acknowledges that programs that engage adolescent girls to build social networks, relationship with mentors, leadership and life skills have succeeded in protecting adolescent girls from a variety of risks such as early marriage and physical violence. It is however unfortunate that in spite of this programme in Kigeme camp, sexual abuses are not reported because of the culture and the fear of stigmatization.

Comparing the situation, the factors, and the impact of sexual abuse in Kigeme refugee camp as discussed here to the strategies initiated to address this

problem, many problems remain neither addressed nor mentioned in the plan narrated by the camp leaders. These comprise the sexual abuse resulting from the camp layout such as the lack of fences, common rest rooms, etc. Therefore, although sexual abuse of adolescent girls has been a concern of those in charge of Kigeme refugee camp, more efforts are still needed. What is the way forward?

SUGGESTIONS ON HOW SEXUAL ABUSE AGAINST ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN KIGEME REFUGEE CAMP CAN BE BETTER ADDRESSED

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In regard to the strategies used to address gender issues in Kigeme camp, five suggestions for improvement are formulated. There is a need for greater sensitization of adolescent girls and their parents to the use of existing reporting systems, which would yield an increase in the number of reported cases. This requires challenging the culture of silence about sexual matters. As mentioned above, adolescent girls are reticent to report sexual abuse because of the shame that can follow as well as the risk of not having a fiancé or a husband. This culture should therefore be discouraged because it contributes to the expansion of sexual abuse in silence.

Anti-GBV clubs have to be consolidated. Rwanda Women Network has initiated such clubs, but they are not strong because their work and achievement are not visible in the camp. It is necessary to reinforce them with more activities and more people involved. This will contribute greatly to empowering girls and developing their life skills. Skills developed within the clubs will also reinforce girls' self-protection.

Youth's education and vocational training should be developed. The results of the study show that poverty plays a crucial role in adolescent girls' sexual abuse. Reinforcing youth education and vocational training can be one of the main strategies to address this problem. This will include supporting girls to at least complete the secondary school programme and to follow any vocational training according to the labour market in the area. With this strategy, adolescent girls will be able to get a formal job or to initiate income-generating activity. They will also be occupied and usefully manage their time.

The camp layout and the security system should be improved in order to ensure greater safety. Concerning the camp layout, there should be a fence surrounding each side of the camp at either side of the main road in order to monitor refugees and the local population's movements. This monitoring should also be reinforced by lighting the camp in the night. Infrastructures should also be gender friendly and respond to gender-specific needs. This means for example that women and girls should have their own restrooms and bathrooms with adequate equipment

and installations, and similarly for men and boys. The size of the house should also be proportional to the size of the family in order to avoid promiscuity and separation of children and their parents. With regard to security improvement, the patrol should not be limited to the inside of the camp but should also include surrounding areas. Efforts should be multiplied to fight drunkenness and drug abuse within and around the camp, especially among children and youth. Perpetrators of sexual abuse should also be exemplarily punished.

Men and boys should be involved in addressing sexual abuse. This strategy would help to utilise all the potential available in the camp. Men should be sensitised, trained and involved in strategy development. Boys should be integrated into anti-GBV clubs. However, the strategies suggested here are not exhaustive. Therefore, other strategies from the grassroots may complement them.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has explored the forced migration and its association with sexual abuse against adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp. It has examined the situation of sexual abuse and its impact in this camp, as well as strategies developed to address it. The findings have shown that adolescent girls in Kigeme camp are very exposed to and have experienced sexual abuse. After the sexual abuse by the government and rebel armies in the DRC, the scene has continued in the refugee camp in Rwanda with different perpetrators that include family members, other youths in the camp, and people from outside the camp. In the camp, the rape was supplemented by other forms of sexual abuse such as early marriage, sex work, etc.

Factors of these abuses are mostly external to the developmental stage of these girls and are avoidable. Consequences of this experience weigh heavily on these girls' lives, physically and psychologically. Strategies developed to address the issue are good in principle but not necessarily so in practice and impact. This reflection on these strategies has helped to make additional suggestions in order to improve them.

The link between forced migration and sexual abuse was therefore found to be a real and lived experience of Congolese adolescent girls in Kigeme refugee camp. This study therefore plays the role of an eye opener on the sad experience of adolescent girls in refugee camps and the ways to respond to it. With this study, it is clear that in any forced migration, adequate strategies to prevent and to respond to sexual abuse are needed. The study did not however assess the percentage of those who have experienced sexual abuse in the camp, which should be the subject of further studies.

ENDNOTES

- 1 In this paper, the term "Congolese" is used as an adjective accompanying and describing names related to the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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