

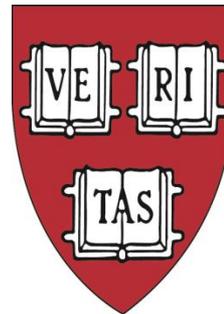
Sexual violence-related Pregnancies in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo: An analysis of access to pregnancy termination services

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Presentation on behalf of:

Santé pour les Enfants et Les Femmes

S.E.L.F. Study



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Rationale

- ▶ Sexual violence is widespread in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)
- ▶ Up to 17% of sexual-assault survivors in eastern DRC report sexual violence-related pregnancies (SVRPs)*
- ▶ Unsafe abortion is a leading cause of death and disability to women globally
- ▶ **Limited data exists on pregnancy termination after SVRPs in the DRC, a country with high MMR and restricted abortion laws**

* Bartels 2010, Johnson 2010, Kelly 2011

Study Purpose

- ▶ To understand experiences of women with SVRPs in the DRC



Bukavu

Methods

- ▶ Recruitment with respondent driven sampling (RDS)
- ▶ Two study groups
 - 1) **Parenting group:** women raising a child from an SVRP
 - 2) **Termination group:** women who terminated an SVRP
- ▶ Quantitative and qualitative questionnaires
 - ▶ Parenting experiences
 - ▶ Pregnancy termination
 - ▶ Psychosocial responses
- ▶ Study approved by Harvard IRB and local advisory board in Bukavu

Results

- ▶ **850 completed quantitative survey**
 - ▶ 757 (Parenting group)
 - ▶ 86 (Termination group)

- ▶ **55 completed the qualitative survey**
 - ▶ 38 (Parenting Group)
 - ▶ 17 (Termination Group)

Quantitative Results (Termination group N=86)

- ▶ 73% of pregnancies conceived in captivity
- ▶ 82% terminated \leq 3 months
- ▶ Methods of termination:
 - ▶ Oral medicine (55%) or herbs (35%)
 - ▶ Most took quinine or “cimpokolo”, 1 took Misoprostol
 - ▶ 21% reported $>$ 1 attempt at termination
- ▶ Majority of women accessed care through friends, family, traditional healers or “self”-obtained
 - ▶ 18% used a physician, nurse or midwife

Demographics: Qualitative Data

- ▶ 38 women raising child & 17 women had terminated
- ▶ Mean age: 34 years
- ▶ Religion: 54% Catholic & 46% Protestant
- ▶ Ethnicity: 79% Bashi
- ▶ Education: 87% no school or primary school only
- ▶ Martial status: 20% never married, 20% currently married, 24% widowed, 29% divorced

Theme 1: *Methods of termination*

“I took medicine called “cimpokolo”, I picked it and got it pounded. I pressed it in a glass and drank it. I didn’t see anybody to terminate the pregnancy because I knew since my youth that such medicine terminates pregnancies.”

- ▶ 36 year-old woman with four children who terminated an SVRP

Theme 1: *Methods of Termination*

“I went to a health center to see a nurse. I told him I had abdominal troubles. After medical examination he let me know I was pregnant. I told him how I experienced sexual violence and asked his assistance to terminate it. He gave me a tablet called 050[quinine] for termination.”

- ▶ 33 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Theme 2: *On-going pregnancies*

“I tried many times to perform termination but failed. Presently, I am pregnant from sexual violence. I am taking medicine for termination without success.”

- ▶ 40 year-old woman with six children who had an SVRP in 2006 and was pregnant with a second SVRP at the time of the study

“Yes, I intended to terminate the pregnancy but physicians refused to help me.”

- ▶ 40 year-old woman, with three children who was raising a child conceived of sexual violence

Theme 3: *Consequences of Termination*

18/38 women in the parenting expressed a fear of dying from a termination

“I informed my cousin. She was ready to help me terminate it but I refused for fear of death. When I was about to terminate the pregnancy, another woman died of termination. I was so nervous that I decided to carry it to term.”

- ▶ 23 year-old woman, single, with one child conceived from sexual violence

Theme 4: *Attitudes towards termination*

“Once married, to terminate a pregnancy is a big issue because the spouse is known. But to terminate a pregnancy from sexual violence is not a problem because it’s from a bandit.”

- ▶ 60 year-old woman with six children who terminated a pregnancy conceived of sexual violence

“I think Congo should make termination legal and save women victims of sexual violence from any juridical case or jail sentence.”

- ▶ 30 year-old woman raising four children who terminated a pregnancy conceived from sexual violence

Conclusions

- ▶ Limited access to evidence based methods of termination
- ▶ Women feared consequences of unsafe abortion
- ▶ More data needed on complications and outcomes following terminations in this setting
- ▶ Further understanding of legal barriers needed

Conclusions

- ▶ **Increased access to evidence based safe abortion care services is paramount for women in eastern DRC and other similar conflict affected regions**

Study Conclusions

Strengths

- ▶ First study to utilize RDS in this context
- ▶ Provides data for a hard-to-reach population
- ▶ Limited prior research on this topic

Limitations

- ▶ Generalizability
 - ▶ Recruitment only in Bukavu
 - ▶ Violence perpetrated by combatants
- ▶ Sensitive nature of both SVRP and termination
- ▶ Self-reporting

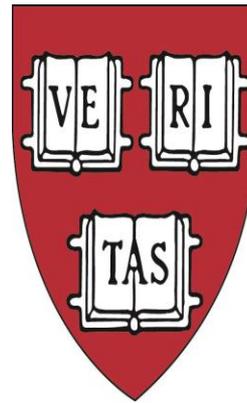
Acknowledgments: SELF study team

- ▶ Katherine Albutt, MD, MPH
- ▶ Susan Bartels, MD, MPH
- ▶ Gillian Burkhardt, MD
- ▶ Ashley Greiner MD, MPH
- ▶ Sadia Haider, MD, MPH
- ▶ Philipp Kuwert MD
- ▶ Colleen Mullen, LMHC
- ▶ Monica Onyango, PhD, MS, MPH, RN
- ▶ Shada Rouhani, MD, MPH
- ▶ Jennifer Scott, MD, MPH, MBA
- ▶ Michael VanRooyen, MD, MPH
- ▶ Partners in DRC
 - ▶ Acteurs dans le developpement et le droit a la santé pour tous (ADES)
 - ▶ Action pour la lutte Contre L'ignorance du SIDA (ALCIS)
 - ▶ Centre D'Assistance Medico-Psychosociale (CAMPS)
- ▶ Daisy Njebenje
- ▶ Amani Baro
- ▶ Ideumbo Kasigwa Helene
- ▶ Academic partners
 - ▶ Harvard Humanitarian Initiative
 - ▶ Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
 - ▶ Brigham and Women's Hospital
 - ▶ University of Greifswald
 - ▶ University of Illinois at Chicago
 - ▶ Boston University School of Public Health

Special thank you to the
women in the DRC who
participated in the study

Thanks for Listening

Questions?



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