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

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Foundation RamaLevina

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

- Abandonment by a family member

- 6-29% of survivors using services in South Kivu report rejection (Steiner 2009, HHI and OSI 2009)

- Perceptions in Kivus and Ituri (Vinck 2008)
  - 25% would not accept survivor into home or community
  - 35% would not accept survivor into home if she had a child after rape
Rationale for the study

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

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

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

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

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

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

2 Focus Group Discussions
- Community group (12 men, 4 women)
- Community meeting (including village chief)
Overview of Themes

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

- Fear of illness: “brings sicknesses...there is a fear that lingers in her. She jumps for nothing. She has thought very much”

- Fear the perpetrator will return

- Family and peer pressure: “among members of the family, you realize there are those that hate you”

- Loss of value in the family and community
Factors that increase risk for family rejection

- Loss of wealth

- Fear/Beliefs:
  "If another man has sexual intercourse with a married woman, the husband is going to die"

- No distinction between infidelity and rape: "wife of the Interahamwe"

- Inability to resume sexual relations
Family Mediation Program

- Identification

- Assessment of problems
  “We speak to her. It’s then that you can draw the consequences and the trauma and after, we know what we are going to do”

- Discussion with concerned family members
  “We listen to him. We look for solutions with the husband until the he can understand that it wasn’t the fault of his wife”
Family Mediation Program

- Involvement of influential family and community members

- Sensitization and reduction of stigma in family and community
  
  “they must leave me alone, in peace, because what happened was not my fault” and “that it is luck that I am in life (alive)”

- Follow-up visits to “see if they are really living together”
Family Mediation

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

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

- community health worker
Next Steps

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

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