

Coping Alone

Personal ways of seeking redress for survivors of conflict-SGBV

Nancy Apiyo and Lindsay McClain Opiyo

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About the Justice and Reconciliation Project

The Justice and Reconciliation Project (JRP) was established in 2005 in Gulu, Uganda to understand and explain the interests, needs, concerns and views of communities affected by conflict and to promote sustainable peace through the active involvement of war-affected communities in research and advocacy.

Find out more about JRP at <http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com> or email info@justiceandreconciliation.com

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Acronyms

ADR	Alternative Dispute Resolution
CBW	Children Born of War
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo
GJU	Gender Justice Unit
GoU	Government of Uganda
ICC	International Criminal Court
JRP	Justice Reconciliation Project
LC1	Local Council One
NTJP	National Transitional Justice Programme
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TJ	Transitional Justice
UK	United Kingdom
WAN	Women's Advocacy Network

Executive Summary

For over 20 years, the people of Northern Uganda, especially women and children, have been direct victims of a conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels. Thousands of victims suffered violations related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

Numerous studies have documented the increased acknowledgment of and response to the prevalence of SGBV during conflicts worldwide as well as the nature of these violations. Despite this, little is known about the ways in which survivors of conflict SGBV seek redress and justice for their experiences, how they cope with the aftermath of the violence and the challenging obstacles they face in so doing. Findings suggest that even after wars and conflicts formally end, survivors of SGBV continue to experience re-victimisation and human rights violations in their respective local communities.

This field note draws upon 12 individual and group storytelling sessions with 103 survivors of conflict SGBV from Adjumani, Pader and Lira districts. It narrates survivors' search for redress for SGBV during and after conflict and identifies the emergent patterns and themes across narratives. It concludes with recommendations for government, community and civil society stakeholders in order to increase survivors' access to redress and accountability during and after conflict.

This field note is organised into 3 sections that narrate the stories of conflict SGBV survivors in search of redress during and after conflict, and identify the emerging patterns and themes across narratives. It also highlights ways in which survivors through their own initiatives cope with daily re-victimisation. The report concludes with recommendations for local government actors, the community and civil society stakeholders for increasing survivors' access to redress. Names of the survivors have been changed in the field note for confidentiality purposes.

Key findings

- The search for redress for survivors of SGBV is impeded by a number of factors which are mainly physical, psychological, socio-cultural and economic.
- Due to lack of social and familial support systems, survivors of SGBV turn to their own ways of survival, some of which are non-constructive and not uplifting.
- The attainment of redress is faced with physical, psychological, socio-cultural and economic challenges.
- The accounts of SGBV survivors indicate that re-victimisation includes stigmatisation, rejection by family members, fending for children alone,

domestic violence and land grabbing.

- Constructive way of attaining redress or coping include peer support, counselling and psycho-social support, livelihood means, talking to couples, divine inspiration such as prayers and support from local authorities.
- Non-constructive ways of coping or attaining redress include alcoholism, drug abuse, isolation and aggressiveness.

Recommendations

Highlighting the factors that should be taken into consideration for the benefit of survivors of SGBV, the field note presents the following recommendations:

1. Community leaders should ensure that reported cases of sexual violence and other forms of human rights violation within the communities are prosecuted.
2. Community leaders should establish support systems for all survivors of SGBV; resolve the daily challenges they encounter; as well as facilitate their search for redress and full reintegration within the communities.
3. Social conditions should also be adequately improved in order to provide for SGBV survivors at least the basics such as education, access to training as a means of capacity building and jobs to support themselves.
4. Stakeholders should foster and encourage counselling groups since it was established that counselling was an effective trajectory through which redress can be obtained for many victims.

5. Training and psychological preparation of the community which is vital in ensuring that returnees are not re-victimised or rejected both by the communities and their families or regarded as threats.
6. Community leaders should strongly advise against the practice of abuse of women and girls by establishing a supporting system and/or a platform that implicitly tackles women and girls' abuse and inequalities in the communities and homes.

In conclusion, the JRP as a promoter of justice and reconciliation identified the need to reinforce the principle of transitional justice in order to ensure a smooth process for reintegration of survivors of SGBV into the community and redress for them.

Introduction

The prevalence of sexual violence during conflicts has received the attention, acknowledgement and the response of the world. This is due primarily to increased media coverage of issues surrounding the effects of war on civilians, especially women and children. Further coverage by humanitarian organisations and academics on conflicts in northern Nigeria, Syria and the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) among others; have raised further awareness of the consequences of wars.

In 2014, the United Kingdom (UK) government convened a global summit to end sexual violence during conflicts; to raise the profile of the issue and launch an international protocol for documenting and investigating sexual violence during conflicts. Over 1,700 people from 123 countries participated in the event.¹ In August 2015, Uganda hosted a follow-up symposium on accountability for conflict sexual violence. It was attended by non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, legal entities as well as health and law enforcement workers serving on the frontlines to redress matters related to the effects

of war on civilians.² Findings from a multi-country study reveal the “key accountability barriers and strategies for reporting, investigating, and prosecuting cases of sexual violence” and provide recommendations for improving survivors/victims’ access to accountability and justice.³

In many conflict settings women continuously experience targeted violence and a host of other human rights abuses as part of military campaigns and as a breakdown of community norms that tend to accompany armed conflict. Unfortunately, during such conflicts, women have to comply with sexual exploitation by soldiers and the community aid workers as a means through which they provide for their families⁴. In northern Uganda, both girls and women have been abducted by military forces and used as sexual and domestic labourers. This includes, regrettably women and girls in camps.⁵ The effects and abuse during violent conflicts left them vulnerable. Consequently, the process of reintegration becomes a daunting challenge to these women due to social stigmatisation and marginalisation within their communities.

¹<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/sexual-violence-in-conflict>

²<https://www.law.berkeley.edu/centers/human-rights-center/events/upcoming-events/missing-peace-practitioners-workshop-kampala>

³<https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/The-Long-Road-Accountability-Study-Executive-Summary.pdf>, p. 1.

⁴UN Women The Dust Has Not Yet Settled” Victims’ Views on The Right to Remedy and Reparation A Report from the Greater North of Uganda <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/WebStories/DustHasNotYetSettled.pdf>

⁵Apiyo, N., & Opiyo, M. L. (2015). My Body A Battlefield: Survivors’ Experiences of Conflict Sexual Violence in Koch Ongako. Gulu: Justice and Reconciliation Project. Retrieved from <http://www.justiceandreconciliation.com/publications/field-notes/my-body-a-battlefield-survivors-experiences-of-conflict-sexual-violence-in-koch-ongako>

In northern Uganda, during the long-standing conflicts, sexual violence was perpetrated against men and women, boys and girls, at unprecedented rates by state and non-state actors and civilians. Violence during war includes rape, forced marriage and pregnancy, sexual exploitation and sexual molestation by rebels. Although, considerable numbers of studies have documented the nature of these hostilities incurred on victims, little is known about the ways in which victims cope or attempt to seek redress and justice on the wrong inflicted on them.⁶

For the purposes of this publication, “redress” is defined as **“making right a wrong or loss by repairing a person or persons to the fullest extent possible, to the state they were in before the wrong or loss occurred, or the way they would have [wanted] it to be had the wrong or loss not occurred”**. Redress should, however, be done individually and collectively with the “aim to acknowledge wrongs, address harms and provide those affected with required means to rebuild their lives.”⁷

Under international and domestic law, including the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, victims of gross human rights violations such as sexual violence during conflict have the right to redress.⁸ In the same vein, it is encouraging to

note that the Government of Uganda (GoU) is currently developing a national transitional justice policy comprised of established programmes for reparations, which makes individual and collective provision for redress. However, its enactment has been stalled within the Cabinet.⁹ This leaves ad hoc compensation by the state and courts of law, as well as arbitrary alternative dispute resolution processes such as mediation and cultural rituals and ceremonies through which victims in Uganda can conceivably obtain redress for conflict-related wrongs. There have been successful strategic litigation suits for loss of livestock, such as through the Acholi War Debt Claimants,¹⁰ and a number of programmes exist for medical rehabilitation, such as through the International Criminal Court (ICC) Trust Fund for Victims.¹¹

In March 2015, JRP, with support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation set out to better understand ways in which survivors of SGBV seek redress during and after violent conflict in the absence of official policies and processes for TJ. Building upon JRP’s previous work to document conflict SGBV violations and the re-victimisation of survivors in the post-conflict period¹² and the aforementioned summits, symposiums and publications.

The Gender Justice Unit (GJU) at JRP

6 Otunnu, O. Causes and consequences of the war in Acholiland, (Uganda, 2002), 13, http://www.c-r.org/downloads/Accord%2011_2Causes%20and%20consequences%20of%20the%20war_2002_ENG.pdf.

7 <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-USA-Right-Redress-2010-English.pdf>, p. 3.

8 Section 50 of the Ugandan Constitution of 1995 provides that “[a]ny person or organization may bring an action against the violation of another person’s or group’s human rights.”¹ <https://dredf.org/international/UgaConst.html>

9 Okiror, S. (2016, September 26). Truth and reconciliation in limbo: Ugandan cabinet drags on enacting transitional justice policy.

Retrieved from Let’s Talk, Uganda: <http://letstalk.ug/article/truth-and-reconciliation-limbo-ugandan-cabinet-drags-enacting-transitional-justice-policy>

10 Daily Monitor, Tuesday April 30th 2013

11 www.trustfundforvictims.org

12 Apiyo, N. (2014, May). A chance to speak - what documenting SGBV taught us. Voices, p. 14. Retrieved from <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Voices-Issue-07-WEB.pdf>

was founded in 2012 as a response to gender-related war crimes experiences, needs and victims of conflicts' desires for redress in northern Uganda. Its main goal is to recognise and support gender justice and social repair of women and men affected by conflict by creating a platform to exchange; valuing victims lived experiences, knowledge and fostering leadership and reorienting justice debates towards TJ. Since March 2015, GJU has sought to support TJ efforts for survivors of SGBV in northern Uganda and to promote their reintegration processes through undertaking community-based documentation of SGBV, strengthening survivors' ability to respond to SGBV, undertaking survivor-led engagements at the community level, and creating an avenue for advocacy, networking, referral and information-sharing.

A major component of the project focuses on building the capacity of and supporting the growth and advocacy of the Women's Advocacy Network (WAN) at JRP. The WAN is a forum where war-affected women come together to advocate for justice, acknowledge and account for gender-based violations and abuses inflicted upon victims during war in northern Uganda.¹³ It [WAN] was formed in May 2011 with the aim of empowering women survivors of conflict to participate in post-conflict policy debates and to engage grassroots communities in gendered discussions on reintegration and reconciliation.

The WAN is currently comprised of 16 groups in the Acholi, Lango and West Nile sub-regions. Members of three of the groups in Adjumani, Lira and Pader districts participated in individual and

group storytelling sessions for this field note.

Methodology

In March 2015, GJU conducted documentation with 103 female survivors of conflict-SGBV in Adjumani, Lira and Pader districts. These women had previously been identified as survivors of SGBV through a baseline survey exercise and consented to engage in a research on ways in which they could attain redress on their own.

We used individual interviews with focus groups during the research. Twelve female participants were involved in individual interviews.

Participants were given personal history books with accounts of their personal stories for personal use. The names of the participants have been changed to protect their identities.

Limitations and areas for future research

There was a relatively small sample size and geographical scope because [it was] limited to MacArthur groups and due to time, funding and human resource constraints.

Perspectives are limited to redress sought by female survivors of conflict SGBV and SGBV re-victimisation (and perhaps the experiences of male survivors differ, as would the experiences of survivors of other

¹³ <http://justiceandreconciliation.com/initiatives/womens-advocacy-network/>

crimes, such as loss of property or land mines.

There is need for further research to determine the similarities and differences of redress experiences for victims across Uganda in order to determine the uniqueness of survivors' of SGBV experiences during redress and to individual communities.

Context

In 2014, JRP carried out a baseline survey to establish the extent to which SGBV re-victimisation among female survivors in northern Uganda had been addressed. We noted that sexual and gender-based victimisation of female survivors of conflict in the aftermath of war as the most predominant violation experienced. According to the report on the survey, 93% of female survivors reported that they re-experience similar threats of sexual violence as they did in the past. 93% also reported they had experienced at least one form of re-victimisation or another in their lives.¹⁴

Survivors of sexual violence in the event of conflict face a number of challenges such as meaningful reintegration in the community, rejection, re-victimisation amongst other challenges in the society. These challenges stand as stumbling blocks to their abilities to seek redress from the same community that reprehend them. For instance, 69% of female participants involved in the research point out the socio-cultural nature of SGBV re-victimisation such as insults, rejection, stigmatisation, and discrimination from their families and members of their communities.

Others, on the other hand, experience physical, psychological and economic re-victimisation, such as marital abuse, rape, domestic violence, fear

of the unknown, trauma and poverty. Such re-victimisation carries severe consequences of which, according to 58% of respondents, are psychological in nature: hopelessness, stress, shame, which in some instances lead to suicide contemplation. According to the baseline report, 65% of interviewed survivors asserted to have taken no action after the initial conflict SGBV violations due to both physical and psychological predicament such as injuries and fear of being re-victimised. However, 42% noted that they reported the incidences of SGBV re-victimisation they experienced in the communities with the hope of obtaining redress, counselling or advice. Hence, this field note seeks to better understand, through analytical research of personal accounts, stories-telling and statistics of victims, strategies survivors use to seek redress for their conflict SGBV and SGBV re-victimisation experiences and to better comprehend how these strategies can be better anchored in order to achieve expected results. It was also to understand initiatives taken by survivors to cope with daily re-victimisation

¹⁴ Opiyo, L.M & Kahunde, C. Establishing the extent of SGBV re-victimisation among female survivors of conflict SGBV in Northern Uganda. (2014), P.3.

Accounts of SGBV re-victimisation and ways of seeking redress

Although, the guns are silent there are still pieces to pick up after the conflict such as ending violence against women within the society. This section discusses re-victimisation challenges these women face after conflict, while attempting to seeking justice and reparation from the communities.

Due to lack of social support, survivors of conflict SGBV resort to their own constructive/positive coping mechanisms to prevent and minimise chances of re-victimisation. In the absence of social support, some survivors adopt non-constructive/negative coping mechanisms such as alcohol abuse. Considering that northern Uganda communities have not established workable institutions and support systems for these victims, survivors of SGBV have resorted to their own mechanisms of survival in a discriminative and marginalised community to meet end needs for themselves and their children born of war.

For instance, Harriet stated that she was not an alcoholic before her abduction. However, after she has returned from

captivity she became an alcoholic who would fight with her husband if he denied her alcohol. According to Harriet, alcohol was her source of psychological consolation and a way of confronting stigma directed to her.¹⁵

Stigmatisation

Survivors of SGBV continue to be vulnerable because of the social stigmatisation attached to them. These women lack the confidence to talk about their experiences and agonies. Therefore, they die in silence mainly because of rejection, insults and social discrimination they encounter on a daily basis from the community and family members.

A survivor of SGBV, Stella recounted that *'the neighbour instigated his first wife to disturb me since I returned from captivity that the evil spirits I carried from captivity would haunt her children or I would kill her children'*.¹⁶

Social stigmatisation makes survivors become aggressive. Some of these

15 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

16 Survivor during individual interviews 18th March 2015, Adjumani district

women admit to the use of force when stigmatised even though their aggressiveness worsens their social relationship with the community.

Martha, a survivor of SGBV from Adjumani District, said *'I banged my neighbour's head with an axe when she said I act like a rebel. I feel bitter when stigmatised'*.¹⁷

On their own, these women have resorted to various ways of responding to stigma and other forms of discrimination. Some hold their peace and ignore the insults while others seek the intervention of local leaders. For many others, living in isolation from the rest of the community seems more ideal.

Alum, a survivor from Lira District said, *"I deal with insults that may bring stress or worries by isolating myself from the public and the community."*¹⁸

Ejwang, on the other hand, said, *"When I am insulted or stigmatised I keep quiet. That is why nobody gets a chance to insult me because they don't understand me."*¹⁹

Nevertheless, the local authorities have taken some initiatives to sensitise the local community about the practice of stigmatisation against survivors of SGBV and discourage the community from stigmatising them. They also urge survivors to live in harmony with the rest of the community. When Abigail fell victim of stigmatisation, she and her aunt reported the matter to the Local Council One (LC1) [chief] of the village

who later gathered the community to advise it against stigmatisation of SGBV victims. The LC1 urged the victim and the community strive for a harmonious coexistence.

Abigail further stated that *'the LC 1 of her community made her [to] sign a consensus document stating that 'I will not disturb the local community and the local community should not do otherwise but they should treat me as their fellow friend.'*²⁰

It is vital to note that the intervention of the local authorities has made commendable changes in the attitudes of the local community towards victims of SGBV and there is now a peaceful cohesion in the community.

It is also imperative to note that children born of war (CBW) undergo the same stigmatisation from the local community. Nevertheless, the council of local authorities has been relatively helpful in attempting to ensure that the matter is adequately addressed.

Jessica said *'I returned from captivity with two children. I have joined the women groups where we acquire momentum and advise on how well to give care to our CBW. We also obtain financial support from our group savings which I use to pay my children school fees. However, they face stigmatisation at school from their fellow pupils. I brought the matter to the attention of LC1 who has warned the community against abusing my daughter'*.²¹

17 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

18 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

20 Survivor during individual interviews 18th March 2015, Adjumani district

19 Survivor during focus group discussion 24th March 2015, Lira district

21 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

Rejection by family members

Families provide the social structure that survivors need to cope with the violations incurred on them. When this social support system is betrayed through rejection, it leaves the victims in a more vulnerable and hopeless state. The rejection and abuse from family and relatives make the lives of SGBV more unbearable both within the communities and in the homes. Despite, the stigmatisation and discrimination from the local community, the family support system remains important in assisting survivors of SGBV to claim justice and redress and facilitate the reintegration process of victims in the communities. There are several factors constituting to family rejection of CBW and survivors of SGBV. Some families are not keen to take in an additional burden, to feed and care for the CBW that survivors bring to the families. Hence, rejection and every sort of abuse of the victims become inevitable. In some instances the families might accept the CBW but leave the latter in the total care of their mothers. However, it is worth noting that it is not easy to solely care for CBW in stigmatised and discriminative communities where survivors of SGBV and the children thereof are portrayed as “the others”. The truth remains that there more effort has to be made by the community leaders to facilitate the reintegration and redress processes for victims of conflicts.

Joyce was given land by her father. But her family members want her to leave. She says *‘after returning from captivity, I tried going back to my husband because*

*at the time of my abduction, I was married. Unfortunately, my husband refused to take me back because he already knew I was [living with HIV/AIDS] so he feared infection. I am on ARV drugs now. My father gave me land to live on but my family members don’t like me and they want me to leave the place yet I have no place to go’.*²²

However, it is also important to note that some survivors have been supported by their family members.

Susan [said] *‘my uncle is taking responsibility of my children born of war and they even know my uncle as their father because he supports them in all ways. For example, he helps them with their homework, providing for their necessities’.*²³

Fending for children alone

After SGBV, the women were left with children they bore and have to take care of them alone. Many of the women do not know the whereabouts of the children’s fathers. With no meaningful support from the local government these women are left to care for their children single-handedly. Lack of support towards the welfare of CBW has been the cause of more psychosocial harm on the mothers who struggle daily to care for their children amidst social rejection, abuse, poverty, economic constrains among many other challenges.

Akun said ‘I am struggling with the children on my own. I brew alcohol for

²² Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

²³ Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

survival of which sometimes customers are not available. I don't know what to do to support these children since there is no one to help me. I am also worried of my children's future. Out of these four children, I can't send them all at school; I have chosen one only to first study while the rest are still at home'.²⁴

Regardless of many challenges survivors of SGBV encounter in their newly reintegrated communities, some have developed different ways of livelihood to care for the children born of war. Some earn their living through activities like small-scale farming, brewing alcohol, selling at the local market, rearing animals and so on.

*Esther said 'I started producing charcoal, making the local pancakes and with the money I got I bought chicken and started rearing chicken. I opened children's account and saved money; I am now paying my children's school fees.'*²⁵

*Martha said 'I started brewing alcohol and bought chicken and goats. I used the money to pay for my children and dependants school fees. I have not counted the number of chicks I have but I have forty big hens, 30 ducks, 30 goats. I started rearing since 2008.'*²⁶

Santa said 'after abduction, I returned and worked hard through farming and [using] the money I got from farming, I bought animals and used the balance to pay [fees] for my children at school and [to] buy food for my family. I also joined Koch Odwogo and started group savings [association] were I get loans

and this helps me buy uniforms, books, pens for my children'.²⁷

Domestic violence

There is an increase in domestic violence due to poverty, alcoholism and other war-related factors. Survivors of SGBV encounter violence in their marriages. They are stigmatised by co-wives, in-laws and even husbands. Domestic violence evolves as a result of female barrenness, due to rape and/or sexual molestation and HIV/AIDS contracted during war. Some survivors of SGBV are blamed for HIV in the marriage especially if it is known that they contracted the disease after being raped. Some men blame the women for health issues they have contracted even if it is not certain that their SGBV partners have infected them. For women who cannot give birth as result of complications that arose after the sexual violence it is a source of re-victimisation leading to violence and abuse in their homes.

The women we met [said] they address this problem through dialogue with couples. According to the chairperson of Kuc Odwogo Women's Group, this has made positive changes in resolving the problem.

She further affirmed that there are women who were disturbed by their husbands and as a group they met and looked at how best they could help the couple. Hence, they, as a support group, sent for the husbands and talked to them and their wives. Since the

24 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

25 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

26 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

27 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

dialogue, many couples experienced some peace in their homes. Talking to couples of SGBV has proven a common strategy that helps to address domestic abuse among women groups such as WAN.

Marriages

Some survivors of SGBV suffer marital abuse from their partners and in many cases fail to build stable relationships because of the abuse. Some seek new partners, which puts them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). The search for new partners derives, however, as a result of social and economic constrains these women face within their communities. Some survivors of SGBV suffer marital abuse from their partners and in many cases fail to build stable relationships because of the abuse. Some seek new partners, which puts them at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs). The search for new partners derives, however, as a result of social and economic constrains these women face within their communities.

For example, Grace stated in her account that *'I have lived with five different men and the sixth one is my current husband. I keep walking from one marriage to another because of the stigma. I returned to my parents home but then left again with another man. I keep on getting married because I need support for my children. I do not plan to leave any marriage and always hope that I would be peaceful and provide for these children together with the*

*help of my husband but this has never worked'*²⁸.

Land grabbing

Since the end of war, land wrangles have been a common challenge facing the communities of northern Uganda. Women, being a vulnerable group in the communities, have bore the brunt while attempting to acquire land, an important source of livelihood through agriculture in the communities. Without land it becomes difficult for survivors to fend for themselves and their children. However, possessing land assures survivors of SGBV of some sense of survival after conflict.

One of the SGBV survivors whose land was taken away said *'the only plot of land I had was claimed under the pretext that I am disabled, I can't dig. Therefore, my children and I have no land.'*²⁹

Alcoholism and Abuse of drugs

The abuse of alcohol and drugs has been associated with emotional the torment SGBV survivors encounter daily. It is not new that some of the survivors interviewed confessed during the interviews to have turned to alcohol and the use of drugs as a coping mechanism.

For example, Kevin said *'when I see people drinking alcohol, I would also join in and if I take two glasses of*

28 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

29 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

alcohol, it helps me to forget everything like stigma from people.³⁰

Tabuniah also added that *'I brew alcohol for sale but I keep one bottle for myself and later I take it. This helps me to forget the stigma and other worries because after taking alcohol, I go to sleep'*.³¹

It cannot be denied, however that the abuse of alcohol and drugs worsen survivors' situation, hence becoming an additional problem necessitating redress.

Esther said *'after returning from captivity, I isolated myself from the public. I used to take marijuana while in captivity. So when I returned home, I started taking marijuana as well and when I was drunk, I didn't want anybody to pass near my house or on my compound'*.³²

Peer support

Providing peer support to each other is one of the ways in which the survivors acknowledged [they] attempt to cope with the brunt of the violations they face. Through peer support they are able to attain some sort of individual and group healing. Because the peer support groups comprise of people with similar experiences who can relate to their stories and show empathy for one another. Through giving each other advice and emotional support they are able to lighten their burdens. Stella, for example, affirms that *'my staying in the group has helped me a lot because of the advice and teaching I have received and this keeps me moving.'* In addition,

Jessica said *'I have joined a women's group where we give ideas and advice to each other on how best to care for our children born from captivity'*.³³

While some survivors of SGBV turn to alcoholism, drug abuse, peer and support groups, others find solace in divine inspiration as last resort to re-victimisation. One of the women who transformed to be a leader in the community attributed the positive change in her life to prayers. She said *'I keep on praying and I cope up. I am now a leader in the community'*. Others admitted to have the support of their families in prayers to help them overcome the challenges they face as a result of victimisation and the effects thereof. Jane, in this regard, changed her life for better when she received the support of her father who took her for prayers after she became an alcoholic. She affirms that *'when my father saw that I was drinking a lot of alcohol, he decided to take me to the mission for prayers and told the church priest what I was doing and the priest prayed for me. Since then I have stopped drinking'*.³⁴

Counselling and psychosocial support

It is evident that psychosocial support is an important aspect of reintegration. Counselling and psychological support have been another pillar of strength for survivors of SGBV to cope positively. Esther said *'I got the counselling from an organisation and now I just keep quiet even if my husband disturbs me.'*

30 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

31 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

32 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

33 Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

*am now able to take care of my children.
I am burning charcoal for survival and
paying for my children school fees³⁵.*
She has thus far managed to stay in the
counselling group and gets advice.

³⁴ Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

³⁵ Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

Challenges faced in attaining redress

Despite a number of programmes existing to support survivors of SGBV there are a number of challenges that hinder survivors' access to redress and justice in the community. These challenges include systematic barriers such as customary laws, the marginalised role of women in the community, poverty and complicated legal procedures.

Findings from a study by the Justice, Law and Order Sector programme on gender and access to justice showed that the structural gender inequalities and biases that permeate all levels of society invariably aggravate and in some cases increase the hurdles that women must overcome in order to access justice.³⁶

Physical challenges

Inaccessibility to services due to distance is also a barrier to redress and attaining of justice for the women. The services offered by the institutions such as psychosocial and legal support cannot be readily accessed and utilised by SGBV survivors in the grassroots. Physical abuse such as rape during the conflicts caused injuries and other physical predicaments on victims

of SGBV, which limits them from successfully seeking redress from the community.³⁷

Socio-cultural challenges

It is apparent that the lack of community support system for survivors of SGBV makes the whole process of redress even harder to achieve. The lack of support and acceptance from the community leaves survivors with very limited chances of surviving in the new communities, leaving them, therefore, to the fate of re-victimisation or even further exploitation and abuse from the local communities.

Biased cultural norms on sex and sexuality such as, for example, blaming the victim for what occurred and discrimination against children born out of wedlock, especially those born as a result of sexual violence, is a barrier for female victims of violence in accessing the justice system. It is so deeply rooted that we do not even recognise the severe nature of this discriminatory, stigmatising and inhumane attitude.³⁸

Due to their inferiority in the community,

³⁶ The Justice ;Law and Order Sector. (n.d.). Gender and Access to justice. ³⁷ The Justice ;Law and Order Sector. (n.d.). Gender and Access to justice. ³⁸ Addressing the socio-economic and cultural barriers to equal access to justice for women victims of violence By Rosa Logar, WAVE network and Domestic Abuse Intervention Center Vienna

women also lack information on what services are available, about the legal systems and rights to be protected. This, in the end, inhibits their access to justice and redress.

Socio cultural hindrances play a big role in the low reporting rates and prosecution of sexual violence in the communities. Lack of support for survivors by the community leads to fear of rejection, which eventually makes survivors live in silence. Lack of efforts to investigate, prosecute and sanction acts of violence against women and protect the victims abets the criminals their offences and condones violence against women. Prosecution of perpetrators can send a message of zero tolerance of impunity on sexual violence.

*struggling with them on my own while brewing alcohol for survival of which sometimes customers are not available. The only plot of land I had was grabbed and they claim that I am disabled I can't dig. I and my children don't have land*³⁹. Lack of financial capability makes it hard for survivors to afford legal aid or court fees, transport and communication to facilities where they can get services.

Economic challenges

Women are faced with the challenge of single-handedly providing for children born while also coping with other consequences of the violation, such as stigma. They are not able to access resources because of discriminatory gender norms. They continue to live in abject poverty. Lack of employment is another daunting challenge for many survivors of SGBV. Many women cannot find formal employment. They have to rely on petty activities, such as brewing of alcohol, for survival. They also cannot effectively be involved in agriculture since they have no access to land. Those who have access to land may not benefit from agriculture since they cannot make decision on profits from agriculture. One of the participants struggling with her children said *'[I] am*

³⁹ Survivor during focus group discussion 17th March 2015, Adjumani district

Recommendations

Following a successful field research in different districts of Northern Uganda, it can, therefore, be recommended that the following factors be taken into consideration for the benefits of survivors of SGBV;

- The leaders of communities should make sure that **reported cases of sexual violence and other forms of human rights violation within the communities are prosecuted.**
- It is strongly recommended that community leaders should **establish support systems for all survivors of SGBV.** This might contribute to a great extent to the welfare of the survivors. Also, resolve daily challenges survivors encounter and facilitate their search for redress and full reintegration within the communities.
- Social conditions should also be adequately improved in order to **provide at least the basics for survivors such as education, access to training as a means of capacity building and creating jobs** for survivors.
- Findings from the baseline have proven counselling to be an effective trajectory through which redress can be obtained for many victims. Hence, it is important to **foster and encourage counselling groups.**
- Training or psychological preparation of civil community is vital

in ensuring that returnees of war are not re-victimised or rejected both by the communities and their families or regarded as threats to them.

- The community leaders should strongly advise against the culture of abuse against women and girls by **establishing a supporting system and/or a platform that implicitly tackles women and girls' abuse and inequalities** in the communities and homes.

In conclusion, promoters of justice and reconciliation such as JRP have identified the need to reinforce the principle of transitional justice in order to ensure a smooth reintegration process and redress for survivors of SGBV into the community.