

A qualitative assessment of
psychosocial consequences of
sexual violence-related pregnancies in
eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

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Jennifer Scott, MD, MPH
Harvard Medical School

Background

- Mental health and psychosocial consequences of sexual violence in eastern DRC include:
 - Depression, PTSD, anxiety
 - Social stigma, rejection
- Fewer data on outcomes of sexual violence-related pregnancies (SVRPs)
- Aim:
 - Understand determinants of mental health and psychosocial well-being of women with SVRPs

Study Design



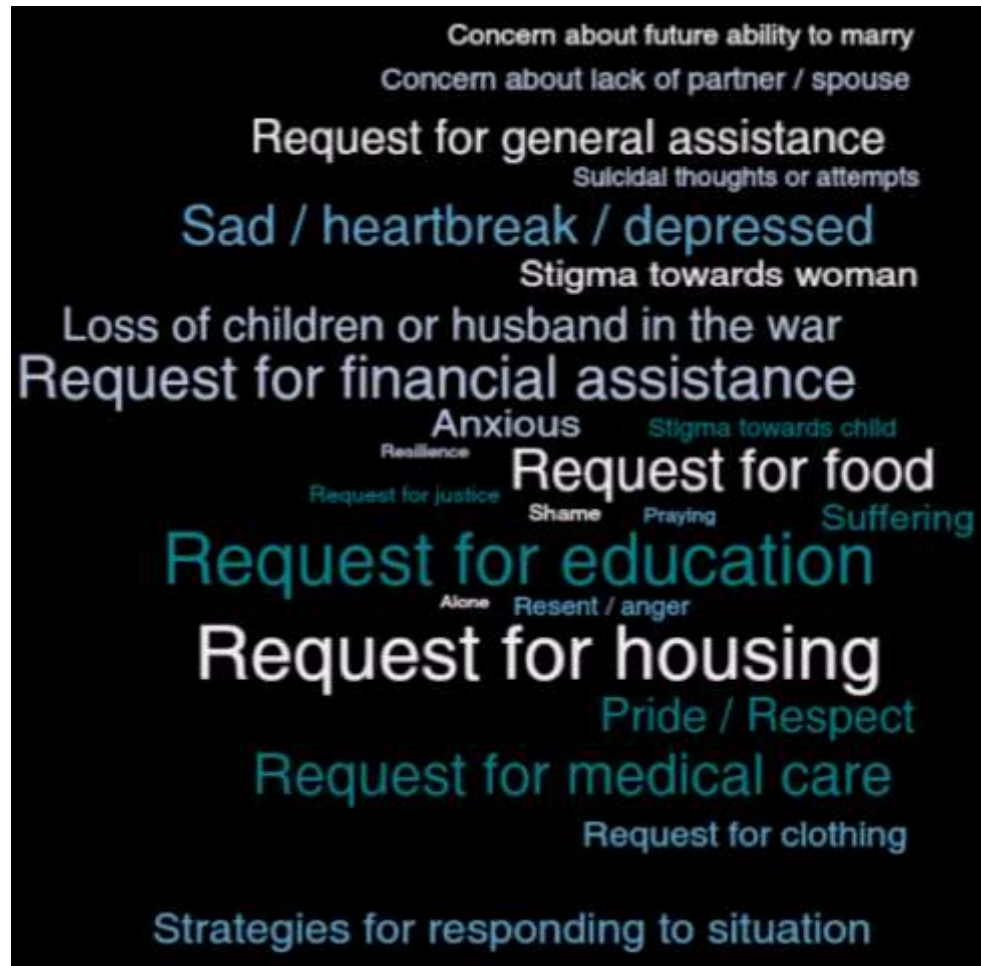
- Bukavu, DRC
- October-November 2012
- Respondent-driven sampling (RDS)
- Quantitative and qualitative methods
- Two study groups
- Semi-structured interviews
- Responses manually recorded and transcribed
- Coded independently by two researchers
- Dedoose qualitative software
- Grounded theory approach

**PARENTING
GROUP:**
Women raising
children from
SVRPs

**TERMINATION
GROUP:**
Women who
terminated an
SVRP

Results

- 852 completed quantitative survey
- 55 qualitative survey
 - 38 (Parent Group)
 - 17 (Termination Group)
- Mean age: 33



Quantitative Results

(previously presented & published)

- PTSD 58%
- Depression 49%
- Anxiety 43%
- Suicidality 34%
- Women more likely to meet symptom criteria if:
 - Stigma toward woman
 - Stigma toward child from spouse, family, community
 - Presence of spouse
- Women less likely to meet symptom criteria if:
 - Acceptance of woman
 - Acceptance of child from spouse, family, community

Mental health related to SVRP

Symptoms of depression

“I used to cry every day and hardly got any sleep. I disliked everything. I didn’t take any liking for anything from the first month to the ninth. I could not laugh. I didn’t want to meet people so I stayed at home.”

22 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

Suicidality

“When I realized I was pregnant from sexual violence. I attempted suicide. I took an overdose of medicine but I failed.”

28 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

Shame

“When I realized I was pregnant from sexual violence I was so restless and about to die of a broken heart... I was so ashamed when my children learned I was pregnant. I was very old and weak and I had already stopped giving birth.”

60 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“I had heartbreak and shame and sadness that I decided to terminate that pregnancy.”

40 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Stigma

“My main concern was the negative attitude of my environment towards me because of the child from sexual violence and the little chance to be married because of being raped.”

20 year-old raising a child
from an SVRP

“I was scared by the attitude of the community about such pregnancy.”

30 year-old woman who
terminated an SVRP

Decision-making in context of SVRP

“I decided to carry the pregnancy to term and raise the child among others though he was a burden. I could not raise my children separately and reject the one resulting from sexual violence because he has the same blood as me.”

37 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“When I realized I was pregnant I considered that pregnancy from sexual violence as a curse I felt as if I carried a little devil in my womb.”

60 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Influence of family

“I felt nervous. I felt as if I could commit suicide. But when I realized that I was not rejected by my family I decided to keep the pregnancy.”

18 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“Basically, I was forced by my spouse to perform a termination. I agreed because I needed peace at home.”

27 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Strength, endurance and strategies

“I would like to complete my studies and get married so as I can raise my child well, and have my own building to live in with my family.”

18 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“My spouse was kidnapped when they raped me for the first time...I couldn't see my spouse though I performed termination for the protection of my marriage.”

35 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Pride and respect

“The woman’s dignity should be restored as a woman is the pillar of strength in a family.”

23 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“My main concern about myself is that I’m not respected, and I’ve become an object of ridicule in front of my spouse and taken by force from home.”

40 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Call for action

“We notice that sexual violence won’t stop because the Congolese authorities don’t make an effort to fight this plague. Nobody from the government says no to rape or has the will to punish the perpetrator of sexual violence.”

37 year-old woman raising a child born from an SVRP

“The first assistance is to stop wars, to restore dignity and respect of women in their communities, to provide advice and training to men whose wives were raped to prevent rejection.”

28 year-old woman who terminated an SVRP

Conclusions

- Complexities of the psychosocial responses to SVRPs among sampled women in eastern DRC
- Influences on decision-making
- Themes emerged regarding strength, resilience, and strategies for responding
- Future research and programming

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