

War Rape in Eastern Congo: A Multi-perspective Exploration into the Traumatization of Women, Men and Children.

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War rape in the east Congo context is used systematically to force into submission and destroy families and communities by creating environments of insecurity and an atmosphere of shame. Women's bodies viewed as property and recreational objects for the military become part of the gendered battlefield and constitute territory to be claimed. Raped women, impregnated by the enemy and/or seen as potential carriers of sexually transmitted infections namely HIV are blamed and shamefully stigmatized. The children born of rape whether kept, abandoned or given away serve as a living reminder of the trauma and inevitably carry the stigma of being fathered by the "enemy". Women are moreover forced to make difficult decisions while the children born of rape, are the least visible of vulnerable children in war zones. In addition, women's reproductive organs are brutalized and penetrated by objects while their male relatives are forced to participate and entire families forced to witness. The men have expressed a deep sense of shame at their inability to defend their families. These rigid and embedded genders constructs of masculinity: "owner" and "protector", and femininity that of "property" and "purity" (sex only within the marital bond) underlie the shame/honour complex which enables its exploitation in war.

Humanitarian services are challenged, as their limited focus on raped women only obscures the reality that entire communities have been traumatised and there are few programs in place that address the needs of traumatised men.

"Child soldiers" expressed a feeling of superiority while in possession of a weapon and of having singularity of focus for their "job" as soldiers, where killing/destroying of the enemy "other" takes precedence over all other acts. This concept of "othering" not only dehumanises the enemy but overrides the natural inclination to value life. In this warped yet effective war ideology, women who are the bearers of new life warrant an exacerbated form of destruction/torture.

This paper is part of an ongoing research and the overall aim is to address the complex dimensions of war rape in Eastern DRC with a focus on traumatised masculinities, the role of gendered constructions and shame as well as the difficult decisions surrounding children borne of rape and their fate.