



*Congolese rape victims' struggles for recognition*  
*- What can be done to challenge this reality?*

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*This Master's Thesis is carried out as a part of the education at the University of Agder and is therefore approved as a part of this education. However, this does not imply that the University answers for the methods that are used or the conclusions that are drawn.*

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## Executive Summary

With up to 400 000 women being raped annually it is clear that this is a challenging and complex problem in DR Congo. Many actors treat and support rape victims, playing an essential role in a country where health facilities are few - and a welfare system is an unknown concept. However, where the initial stage after a rape may be the most critical phase, it is important to look into how rape victims cope more long-term - after medical treatment and psychotherapy. This study has therefore interviewed female rape victims in order to get a broader understanding of their situation, after being subjected to rape(s).

Based on the stories from the Congolese women in this study it appears that the treatment and support they have received is of inevitable importance. However, being a rape victim in the DRC also represents other challenges that exceed physical and psychosocial problems. According to the female informants there are cultural structures that shapes how their lives turn out after being raped. Culture and traditions largely influences how a rape victim is perceived by the wider society, and affects rape victims socioeconomic possibilities. The general population perceive rape as an evil act. Still reactions towards rape victim are often ruthless. The culture limits both the choices of the rape victim and family-members, by shaping the way in which people are expected to manage the situation. The result from this study demonstrates that this repeatedly causes families disintegrate due to the shame and humiliation connected to a woman being raped.

There are a range of secondary effects of rape, which negatively affects both rape victims themselves, their close family, as well as the society at large. There seems to be a general wish to change this destructive reality in the DRC where the consequences of rape may be experienced as even worse than the rape itself. Simultaneously, it is important to note that the people rejecting a raped woman may not see the discriminative reaction as a valuable and desired principle. On the contrary, these reactions and responses are indirectly moulded by the Congolese culture and traditions, and limit peoples' opportunities to act another way than what is culturally understood as correct. There is obviously a need to combat the presence of sexual violence (SV) in DRC. However, in addition to preventive measures, it is imperative to conduct awareness-raising work, where gender disparities and detrimental traditions are challenged. According to the accounts given by the female rape victims, this would most likely improve their livelihood after being subjected to rape.

## Foreword

Since day one at UiAs master program in Development Management a recurring claim when discussing the prospected fieldwork and master thesis has been: Find a topic that you find interesting - a recommendation I have truly followed.

In 2004, at the first year of my Bachelor degree in Development Studies, my interests was shaped particularly in the direction of gender issues - and the link between gender and development. Subsequent work experience in an NGO that is above all concentrating on improving the peoples access to health services, have further made me increasingly engaged in development questions linked to women and health.

For me it is impossible to avoid being disturbed by the harsh consequences of SV - particularly affecting girls and women - and often worsened in contexts troubled by war, conflict and instability. When I settled on the topic for my master thesis and decided to do a fieldwork focusing on SV, the immediate whim was to complete this study in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where the problem is known to be immense - probably the country worst affected by such challenges today.

For me, although it feels somewhat inappropriate to say it, SV is an interesting and engaging topic. Simultaneously it is clearly a terrible issue to look into. As a woman I can only imagine the horrible experiences many women in the DRC - and elsewhere - go through. For me this is an issue that is impossible not to engage in. Engagement is, according to my understanding, also what is imperative in order to improve the efforts of assisting people already affected, but also to hopefully prevent such violence occurring in the future.

Currently, SV receives relatively broad attention from development actors, academics and media globally. However, due to reasons of insecurity and inaccessibility in the DRC, this is not the easiest subject and context to either work or study. Despite the fact that numerous of NGOs are involved in activities aiming at victims of SV in the DR Congo, I am of the impression that this issue requires further attention. The victims of such criminal acts should not be neglected and the rapists should not go free from prosecution linked to their violent actions.

The many appalling accounts given by female rape victims, illustrating their brutal experiences are already well documented through previous and existing research. As a result, many projects are established in order to assist victims of SV to recover after rape. In relation to this, certain mechanisms that should be part of such programs are identified and implemented as part of such programs in order for women to show resilience and go on with their lives. But there will always be room for improvement.

Countless women experience SV daily in the DRC. Fortunately, many of them receive assistance in one of the many follow-up projects offered by NGOs, clinics and hospitals in the country. However, one thing is medical and psychosocial treatment, another question is how these women in reality are able to show resilience and return to a life as before being raped. The long-term challenges, expressed by the female rape victims themselves, are what I would like to further explore and illuminate in this study.

## Acknowledgements

Doing this research and writing up the analysis has been a challenging but enriching experience. The process has been demanding and rewarding at the same time, with a steep learning curve. Despite certain stressful periods the overall remembrance of the last two years enrolled in the master program, where the predominantly focus the last few months has been on this fieldwork and thesis, will stand out as a very interesting and inspiring phase of my life. This dissertation is my personal work, but the support of many individuals and agencies have been of valuable significance in order for me to execute the fieldwork and finishing my studies.

First of all, I would certainly like to thank the women in Eastern DRC who both shared their experiences of being raped and how they cope in their lives after such experiences. Asante sana! I am humble and stunned over the strengths that you show.

I am personally thankful that I challenged countless recommendations of not travelling to the DRC due to security concerns. By actually going I challenged my own apprehension and was able to personally experience DRC, making up my own understanding of the people and their lives in the Kivus - an image that is not necessarily fitting the one you will get through the media.

Before entering the field Stig Stordahls, from PYM (De Norske Pinsemenigheters Ytremisjon), knowledge of the context was both useful and comforting. His assistance linking me to contacts in Bukavu has been of immense help, of which I am extremely grateful. Due to his guidance I was lucky enough to get access at Avenue Kalehe 16 where Dr. Tor Magne Kommedal's insight, goodwill, network and personal presence were both useful and reassuring during my stay. Thank you.

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## List of Abbreviations, Acronyms & Glossary

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
CAMPS	Centre d' Assistance Medico-Psychosociale
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNDP	Congolese Tutsi rebel group led by General Laurent Nkunda
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	National Congolese army consisting of forces from the former Kabila government and several rebel movements
FDLR	Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda. Largest rebel group in Eastern DRC comprised of the Interahamwe, Hutu members of the former Rwandan army, and a mix of displaced Rwandan Hutus. Since the beginning of 2009, there has been a joint DRC- Rwanda military offensive to disarm FDLR
GAD	Gender and Development
GDI	Gender-related Development Index, measuring expansion of capabilities
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measure is concerned with the use of capabilities
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
Interahamwe	Meaning "those who fight together", the Interahamwe refers to Hutu paramilitaries who were responsible for the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Many Interahamwe fled to DRC after the genocide and have continued to operate there primarily in the eastern region.
Mai Mai	Loosely connected Congolese militia groups without central command. The term originally applied to numerous groups defending their local communities against foreign invaders. Mai Mai groups have allied in various short-term arrangements with Hutu rebel groups, the Congolese government and RDC
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MONUC	Active United Nations peacekeeping force in DRC established in 1999 and currently the world's largest peacekeeping mission
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PYM	De Norske Pinsemenigheters Ytremisjon
Sexual Slavery	Being held in captivity by assailants for more than 24 hours for sexual assault
SGBV	Sexual Gender-Based Violence
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SV	Sexual Violence
SVRI	Sexual Violence Research Initiative
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
WFP	World Food Programme
WID	Women in Development
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Chapter 1: Introduction

This master thesis is about Congolese women's experiences with sexual violence (SV). The overall goal of this research is to capture the informants' personal perceptions, meanings and perspectives concerning SV and rape. This information forms the foundation of the further analysis in this thesis.

Gender-based violence was "relatively unspoken of until the 1990s" but is now a recognized phenomenon - unfortunately widespread in several countries on the African continent (Ampofo *et. al* 2009: 21). SV and rape is a huge problem in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and clearly a major challenge for the women subjected to such violence, which highlights the importance to prioritize actions to combat and reveal the consequences transpiring from this problem. However, such effort in general, and perhaps supporting activities offered to rape victims in particular, can and should not be based on blueprints from similar Western projects. There is a strong need to adapt programs to the local context, which in the case of DRC is proven to be highly complex and strongly influenced by cultural characteristics.

### 1.1 Presentation of research topic

The infamous reality of SV in the DRC is well-documented and reported through media, by various NGOs, international institutions and States (Congolese Women's Campaign). However, there seems to be a gap in research focusing purely on victims' own experiences and personal needs. This indicates a need for more direct attention given to the victims. In addition, a UNFPA survey demonstrates that "the flowering and attendance of numerous NGOs in the DRC does not necessarily mean relief for the victims (2006: 93). In other words, the *quality* of the work done by the many NGOs present may be questioned. This again makes the tales from rape victims' who have undergone treatment increasingly important, even essential, in order to improve the support and follow-up assistance. Therefore, this master thesis aims towards giving a stronger voice to the Congolese women, in order to reveal how the rape victims - *themselves* - experience the reality and challenges of being subjected to rape. These women's accounts should receive serious consideration from actors working in

this field. Their experiences may play a crucial role towards improving and adapting programs, where real professional and beneficiary-oriented support should unquestionably be offered to victims of SV and rape.

"Despite decades of intervention, violence against women remains one of the most pervasive forms of human rights violations worldwide" (Fried 2003: 91). According to a survey presented in the American Journal of Public Health (Peterman *et. al* 2011) more than 400 000 women between the ages of 15-49 were raped in the DRC during a twelve-month period in 2006 and 2007. Findings in Kelly *et. al* found that approximately 1.69 to 1.80 million women reported having been raped in their lifetime (2011: 2). Today, the war in the DRC is officially over, nevertheless between 30 000 and 60 000 women are still being raped every year (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 146). The violence evidently continues, a fact that may be linked to previous research done in conflict settings, showing that SV continues, or even increases, into the first stages of post-conflict/peace. These circumstances are clearly violating "a victim's sense of privacy, safety and well-being" (WHO 2003: 9).

Previous research concerning the brutality of rapes in DRC is easily accessible. In addition, many scholars, like Solhjell (2009), try to look politically into how it may be possible to tackle and prevent SV and rape from progressing in the future. It is important to have knowledge about these aspects in order to create pragmatic action towards eradicating SV. The optimal solution is clearly to prevent SV and rape from happening rather than providing a "cure" for the people affected. However, as long as the violence continues it is imperative to develop and offer suitable treatment and counselling services for the people affected, and additionally ensure that such services are made available for the victims of SV. With so many women subjected to rape(s) there is certainly a need for medical and psychosocial follow-up. According to the UNFPA survey already mentioned, there were 145 stakeholders in North Kivu and 326 actors in South Kivu offering SV related help and assistance to affected victims in 2006. Despite the large numbers of actors, the article shows that this does not necessarily mean that the support is flawless. As already pointed out, it may therefore be crucial to listen to input given by the rape victims themselves, in order to improve SV-programs. By identifying and taking female rape victims experiences into account this might increase the possibility to create positive change, which improves victims' livelihood. Their contributions can help highlight structures that have detrimental and/or challenging consequences in their lives. This information may be vague, highly contextual and relatively difficult to grasp by

external actors. Therefore, it is vital to pay attention to their experiences and viewpoints in order to further discuss central elements materializing from conversations with these women.

SV and rape clearly influences and affects the victims themselves, but is also having effects on the larger population and the society. In order to limit SV it is important to reveal social structures that may be part of the reason of the high numbers of SV and rape continuing. Here local people can play a central role. For instance, the female informants in this study helped to point out areas that could benefit from certain changes and adaptation. It seems that in order to get to the bottom of this problem of SV and rape there are certain complex issues that are closely linked to culture and tradition that needs to be addressed. Recognizing local opinions concerning the reasons behind SV will potentially make it possible to develop effective policies and strategies to decrease or eliminate the cases of SV. In addition, tales from people with personal experiences on how it is to be a rape victim may also help improve the treatment and assistance that affected people can benefit from in the future.

Based on the above, this study looks into various consequences that women in the DRC are typically facing after being raped. The social stigmatisation linked to SV within the Congolese culture proves to be immense. Such underlying structures create obstacles for rape victims to be reintegrated into their families after rape, and hampers the chance for them to show resilience. Thus, a central part of this master thesis looks into the issues of stigmatisation and discusses how culture and traditions may be of vital importance in order for female rape victims to recover. As well as being able to continue with their lives and ensure their livelihoods after being subjected to rape(s). The findings suggest that women often report concerns about socioeconomic challenges more than their worries of medical and/or psychological problems. Yet again, social and economic factors are closely interlinked, which accordingly seems to deteriorate rape victims' situation, their' real potential to ensure a secure livelihood, and to a satisfactory degree cope in life.

According to the women in this research there is a need for additional priorities in order to assist victims of SV on their way back to a "normal" life. In other words in order to work out the distressing problem of SV there is a need for behaviour change. However, "interventions that attempt to alter cultural and social norms to prevent violence are among the most widespread and prominent. Rarely, however, are they thoroughly evaluated, making it currently difficult to assess their effectiveness" (WHO 2009: 12), a reality that this study

argues should be changed. In order to appropriately assess the programs the beneficiaries should be consulted, as they may possess information that is highly valuable for a programs' efficiency.

As noted, SV is a highly complex problem, affecting both men and women. Although this study is based on the experiences of women, rape is also affecting men – both directly through sexual abuse and molestation, but also indirectly where men sense and experience the comprehensive consequences of women in their close family being raped. The local traditions influences men's lives through the cultural structures that shapes what is expected of them as men. In other words, the culture and traditions provide the framework for action - affecting both men and women - and where both genders may experience the implications emerging from a woman being raped. SV is distinguished as a global problem "not only in the geographical sense but also in terms of age and sex" (WHO 2003). However, the complexity of this problem in the DRC makes rape highly local in expression and should therefore be interpreted as such. Consequently, there is a strong need to ensure thoroughly and efficient measures that targets the entire society, both men and women, in order to end existing discriminatory norms, which particularly affect women in the DRC.

## 1.2 Problem statement

As argued, the consequences of SV impose huge stress in affected peoples' lives. SV is "brutally shattering the lives of women, men and children" (MSF 2009: 8) - ruining families - even whole communities. Violence is far-reaching, and while exact numbers are difficult to measure, we know that the costs are high and are borne by all people living in the DRC. It is evident that victims of SV require specific assistance to become healthy and enhance the chances for them to effectively move on with their lives after being raped. This is closely linked to the fact that many experience huge trauma, both physically and psychologically, after such incidents. Medical treatment and psychotherapy are evidently needed, but the infrastructure and inadequate access to facilities offering such services in the DRC may obstruct people from seeking assistance (Kelly *et. al* 2011: 6). In addition, according to density calculations from 2006 there are 0.8 hospital beds per 1 000 people in the DRC, demonstrating the lack of adequate health institutions (CIA 2012). A WHO-survey regarding health systems ranks DRC number 188 out of 191 assessed countries, and Oxfam and WHO estimate that between 37% and 75% of the population have no access to healthcare (Kelly *et.*

al 2011). In addition, stigmatisation and the sensitivity linked to SV and rape seem also to be a vital condition of whether or not victims seek help, and are simultaneously forcing many victims to keep quiet about being abused or raped. If they speak out about their experiences they may risk facing consequences such as social exclusion and rejection from their family. This confirms that cultural beliefs and traditions may strongly influence how victims manage to progress in life after being subjected to rape.

On the basis of what is written above, this master thesis specifically focuses on female rape victims' own experiences. Without preconceived theories this study is mainly considering the informants' personal views in order to obtain a better understanding of the cultural complexity shaping the consequences rape victims in the DRC repeatedly experience. Based on these women's statements the discussion will focus on key aspects emerging from the interviews, where the consequences of existing structures will be further problematized.

The brutality and inhumanity of the problem of SV and rape makes this topic important to stress both in academic research and in pragmatic action. The fact that the consequences of rape may substantially differ with various contexts makes it additionally important to involve affected people in order to ensure sufficient follow-up and treatment. Actions should to a greater extent be based on the local reality and what the beneficiaries see as crucial for their survival after being raped. What is needed and understood as essential support by victims is clearly not necessarily the same from context to context – not even from rape victim to rape victim. Therefore, development actors should continually involve stakeholders and grass root actors to ensure that actions are embedded locally, which may improve the efficiency of development action.

As long as there is no clear solution of the problem of rapes and SV, we have to make sure that victims receive adequate assistance and enlighten the population about existing services. In order to reveal challenges linked to counselling-services and assistance that is offered we have to ask the victims that have undergone treatment themselves. Is the support offered proved to be useful? Is the quality of the services provided ascertained to be efficient? We also have to look into how raped women who have undergone treatment are eventually coping and examine if there is a need to adjust the services in order to more sufficiently meet the rape victims' needs. These are all questions this study will look into. In order to help the Congolese women subjected to rape, we have to listen to *their* experiences and what *they*

perceive as important. This is believed to be critical in order to design and implement activities that creates real and positive change.

### 1.3 Research Questions

How are female victims of SV moving on with their lives after being subjected to rape(s)?

- What do female rape victims identify as essential assistance in order for them to recover and show resilience?
- How does rape affect the individual victim, their family and local communities?
- What are the main obstacles for female rape victims to recover and show resilience?
- How can the reintegration of female rape victims into their families and communities be improved?
- How can SV be prevented in the future?

### 1.4 Research Objective

The principal motivation behind studying violence and rapes in general is the "need to reduce and stop SV" (Hearn *et. al* 2007). In order to do so it is important to gain knowledge and share information of different aspects and consequences of rape. The motivation behind this particular study is based both on personal and academic motives.

The widespread rape in DRC signifies a brutal reality. This has huge consequences for the person affected, which has motivated me to do what I can to help. Since the numbers of rapes in the DRC continues to be high I wanted to explore how the rape victims are treated and assisted, and how this assistance is in line with their needs. This study therefore investigates female rape victims' personal experiences and their ability to show resilience after being subjected to rape. I am of the impression that development needs to be cultural sensitive and take local perceptions into account, something that may both guide and improve the initiated efforts. Therefore, the aim of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding on how the female rape victims perceives the effects of the widespread rapes, how this affects both the victim and the society, and what victims themselves argue is needed in order to move on in their lives.



How Congolese women experience and cope after being raped may be significantly different from what is seen in Western societies. The main objective of this study is to reveal what challenges victims of SV meet in order to return back to “normal” life. The aim is to obtain local women’s perception of what is vital and important for them, and take note of what they highlight as the main obstacles for them to subsist after being subjected to rape(s). Therefore, this study seeks the raped women’s stories and look into how problems linked to their situation is tackled and how it could potentially be improved. This master thesis aims to raise awareness around rape victims’ situation in the DRC, and highlight if something can be done to improve their livelihood.

The results of this study will hopefully contribute to raise awareness on how rape victims are coping and what is of vital importance for them to move on in their lives. This information may increase the possibilities to develop suitable strategies to meet the damaging problem of SV that today is influences both individuals and communities in such detrimental ways.

## **1.5 Methodology in brief**

The selected research strategy for this study is a qualitative methodology, which is understood as suitable when aiming to understand and describe a cultural or social phenomenon (Bryman 2008). Qualitative methodology is therefore highly relevant in this study, where the intension is to seek contextual explanations and perceptions of the consequences of rape. Here it is important to consider the qualitative difference between societies, and the fact that the logic of a culture is best understood with the theory of cultural relativism in mind (Eriksen 2001: 19). This may be especially important in a study like this, since “how forms of SV are defined, in law and society, varies throughout the world” (Hearn *et. al* 2007). This makes it essential to capture the informants’ personal views and considerations concerning rape, as it is understood in the DRC. In other words, the qualitative method is advantageous in order to obtain and understand rape victims challenges linked to their vulnerable situation, which forms the foundation of the perspectives and issues that will be further discussed in this study.

The collection of empirical data for this thesis was carried out in January/February 2012 in the eastern part of DR Congo. The research design is based within grounded theory and the

various methods for data collection have been qualitative semi/unstructured interviews, informal interviews, document analysis, and participant observation. In addition to this, grounded theory means involving all types of data (Bryman 2008: 417). This means that whatever data the researcher acquires when studying a certain area, in this case SV and rape, is considered valuable data, nonetheless if the data is collected through more informal methods.

The empirical data is the foundation the researcher uses in order to generate central concepts for the emerging theory. In short, the women participating in this study provide central information that is further discussed throughout the master thesis. This study does not aim to disclose the extent of rape in DRC, but bases the discussion on the perceptions of a selected sample of women – in order to learn more about their personal experiences with rape, and what can potentially be done to improve their situation.

## **1.6 Limit the scope of this research**

Both male and female bodies are subjected to SV, but rape is generally directly affecting more woman than men. As briefly touched upon, “the vast majority of victims of SV are female and most perpetrators are male” (WHO 2003: 6). However, women have become “convenient targets of frustration in a fractured, brutalized society, where law and order is held in abeyance” (UNIFEM 2010: 16). Based on this, female rape victims are selected as the key informants to limit the scope in this study. In light of this limitation, merely focusing on the tales from Congolese women, it is important to acknowledge the fact that men are also victims of SV. This is especially important in order to reduce the widely existing stereotypes where women are largely seen as victims and men as those in power. “This type of representation - besides being inaccurate - can only hamper the long-term struggle against violence against women” (Baaz & Stern 2010: 45-46). “Recognizing the ways in which men and boys are also victims of SV might strengthen efforts to combat SGBV against women” (Baaz & Stern 2010: 45-46). Despite this, the size and time frame of this research makes it more reasonable to limit the focus towards adult women (females above the age of 18), although this might not be optimal when referring to what Baaz & Stern argue.

Simplifying and thinking universal about a complex problem such as rape should be avoided. I am well aware of the fact that in order to being able to provide developmental aid and

humanitarian assistance some generalisations are needed to make projects feasible. It is believed that in order to really understand rape victims' situation and hence develop efficient strategies to support them – the assistance should be grounded on their perspectives. It is impossible to discuss all aspects of rape in DRC, even though there are many both interesting and important aspects that should receive attention. However, it is important to include rape victims experiences in order to guide future work in this area in a direction that is in line with what they argue is needed. Due to this, the Congolese women's experiences are imperative to grasp their situation on how to possibly create positive change, which may benefit men as well as women.

In this study, the informants provides the answers and highlights central issues that will be further commented through adding arguments raised by project professionals, reports from various NGOs and other academic researchers within the field.

## 1.7 Clarification of terminology

### 1.7.1 Violence

**Violence** is a health problem that affects millions of people across the globe (MSF 2009: 8). The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines violence as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal development, or deprivation" (WHO 2011).

"**Gender-based violence** stems from an interaction of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural factors" (Fried 2003: 88), and can be physical, psychological and sexual and can include domestic violence, sexual abuse, rape, forced sex between intimate partners, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation and forced prostitution (UNFPA 2007).

**SV** is "a term covering a wide range of activities, including rape/forced sex, indecent assault and sexually obsessive behaviour" (WHO 2003: 5).

"**Rape** is an act of non-consensual sexual intercourse. This can include the invasion of any part of the body with a sexual organ or the invasion of the vaginal or anal opening with any

object or body part. It involves the use of force, threat of force or coercion. Any penetration is considered rape" (MSF 2009: 8). This research limits its scope where the focus area will include and look into rape, excluding the prevalence of all forms of interpersonal violence related SV. All victims contacted through this study are victims of rape.

### **1.7.2 Victim vs. Survivor**

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According to Hearn *et. al* (2007) there are several different terms used of those who have been subjected to SV such as victim, survivor, thriver, AMAC and victim-survivor (2012: 4). Using the term victim in relation to SV and/or rape may be problematic. Like Narayan argues, cultural explanations may "result in pictures of Third World woman as 'victims of their culture' in ways that are interestingly different from the way in which victimisation of mainstream Western women is understood" (1997: 85). De Reus research among raped women in DRC demonstrates that "when asked if they considered themselves victims or survivors, virtually all chose the label of survivor" (Peace Women 2009). Also Mary McGoldrick, a battered wife and mother of three from Ireland, identify herself as a survivor, not a victim (in Fried 2003: 89).

This study uses the expression "victim" despite the risk of critique. I believe if looking into issues of intimate domestic violence, partner violence and violence in close relations this will make the term more problematic to use. However, the focus of this study is women that have consistently been attacked and raped by soldiers. In my view this makes it more reasonable to identify them as victims. This term is chosen with the belief that it is possible to be a victim of rape without being perceived as helpless or powerless. In fact, the findings of this study will largely demonstrate the opposite, where the women interviewed may rather be seen as courageous - despite the problems and challenges they are facing.

### **1.7.3 Culture & Tradition**

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One famous definition of culture was given by the anthropologist Edward B. Tylor in 1871 defining culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (Tylor, cited in Eriksen 2001: 17). The social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, which underlines the dynamics of culture, makes another definition: "culture, being the shifting

opinion of the community who repeatedly established and change when people do something together” (2001: 25). What is important to note, and highly relevant in a study like this, is that culture is commonly socialised into peoples behaviour in such ways that people act and behave in particular ways - without reflecting on the way in which they are acting. In this way one can say that culture shapes peoples actions, where principles on how to act and behave is broadly founded in the culture. This demonstrates a strong correlation between culture and what is perceived as expected behaviour in different areas. When fully socialised into culture and peoples behaviour such aspects may represent part of the tradition – where customs and/or beliefs are transferred from generation to generation.

### **1.7.4 Stigmatisation & Rejection**

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To be stigmatised, or a victim of stigma, means that you are looked down upon by other members of your family or community. This is closely connected to culture and tradition, where members of the culture are socialised in certain directions - shaping their room for manoeuvre. The stigmatisation of raped women in DRC frequently results in social exclusion and rejection of rape victims.

## **1.8 Outline of the thesis**

Chapter 1 provides an introduction of the thesis by presenting background information, outlining the objectives of this research and presenting the research questions. In addition, this chapter clarifies some of the central concepts and limitations in this study.

Chapter 2 gives a more thorough introduction to the context and area of this study. This section will present personal experiences and impressions from doing fieldwork in the Kivus, and give an introduction of the historic and political background of the conflict and instability of the DRC. Subsequently, this chapter continues with a systematic presentation of the issues and challenges of rape, and look into how NGOs, with the focus on Camps, organise their work on assisting rape victims.

Chapter 3 offers the literature review creating the theoretical foundation (theoretical framework) for this research. This section explores relevant literature for this study, and gives brief explanations why the selected literature are considered relevant.

Chapter 4 explains the methodology employed in this thesis and the reasons behind the selected research strategy, design, sample and data collection techniques. This part also discusses the issues of limitations and ethical considerations regarding the data collection, and describes the analysis of findings. This chapter provides both methodical clarifications and underline personal experiences from the research process, especially focusing on the fieldwork and data collection.

Chapter 5 presents the empirical findings and a discussion of these in the light of the theoretical framework. The chapter consists of five main parts.

- Part one is linked to the first sub question in section 1.3 above: What kind of assistance is essential in order for female rape victims to recover and show resilience?
- Part two is linked to the second sub question in section 1.3 above: How does rapes affect the individual victims, their families and local communities?
- Part three is linked to the third sub question in section 1.3 above: What are the main obstacles for female rape victims to recover and show resilience?
- Part four is linked to the fourth sub question in section 1.3 above: How can the reintegration of female rape victims into their families and communities be improved?
- Part five is linked to the last sub question in section 1.3 above: How can SV be prevented in the future?

A more detailed outline of each section in chapter 5 will follow on page 62.

Chapter 6 offers concluding remarks, summarizes the main findings of the thesis and provides future recommendations.

## Chapter 2: Contextual background



Source: CIA 2012

The eastern part of The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is experiencing the world's highest numbers on SV, labelled the "world capital of rape" by Kristof and Wudunn (2009: 93).

This fieldwork is completed as a qualitative research mainly among people living and/or working in the conflict-ridden provinces of eastern Congo: The Kivus. The empirical data is chiefly collected in the province capitals of Bukavu (South Kivu) and Goma (North Kivu).

### 2.1 Personal tales from doing fieldwork in DR Congo

There is no doubt that the DRC has experienced numerous challenges linked to war and conflict the last years. Some of the events have been made known by international media, but much of what is happening never reaches outside the Congolese borders. This became even clearer during the fieldwork, where for instance stories of massacres leaving more than 100 people dead were known locally, but not reaching international commercial media as far as I could see.

The Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) discourages people from travelling in the northern and eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo if it is not strictly necessary. "For the cities of Goma, Bukavu and Kisangani and the rest of the Democratic Republic of Congo, there is reason to exercise caution" (UD 2012). Being personally aware of the extreme situation in the DRC and the additional concerns for potential escalating violence coinciding with the most recent national elections that were held on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November

2011, it was a tense feeling crossing the Rwandan border-post of Cyangugu - entering into the Congolese city of Bukavu in the beginning of 2012.

Despite the reasonable straightforward border crossing, it immediately hit me that this is a country obviously struggling: the poverty is clearly visible, the infrastructure is bad and the general maintenance in the urban landscape seems absent. This could perhaps be the description of many African countries, but what stand out in Kivus province capital Bukavu is the presence of countless organisations such as IRC, NRC, MSF, NCA, War child Holland, Care International, World Food Programme, several missionary organisations, various UN-organisations (UNFPA, OCHA, UNIFEM, Unicef etc.) - even the World Wildlife Foundation - just to mention a few. In addition, the attendance of military troops, national, as well as international forces represented by the UN, underline the severe condition and instability in the country. There is clearly an international benevolence towards assisting DRC with the numerous of challenges they face after years of conflict and ineffective leadership. The dark history of DRC has for instance left the country in profound poverty that further escalates and exacerbates the many social problems from which the population of today is struggling and suffering.

Regardless of the challenging situation, the lives of the local people seemingly continue. The city of Bukavu comes to life around dusk when the people are drawn to the streets: driving their motorcycle taxis, selling cell-phone-credit or various household items or commodity products such as cassava, pineapple or passion fruit. Despite the widespread poverty, severe malnutrition is fortunately not typically seen, due to Kivus' fertile and productive soil.

Despite many problems of poverty, violence and insecurity, Bukavu is a nice city located on five hills looking over the gorgeous Kivu Lake. The Belgian heritage is clearly visible by the stunning colonial buildings, which regardless of lacking maintenance, still gives the South Kivu province capital a distinct appearance. In comparison, the province capital of Northern Kivu, Goma, is rather dissimilar in topography with a more flat landscape - although also located by Lake Kivu. Another differentiating factor is caused by the Nyiragongo volcano whose eruptions (last in 2011) give the surroundings a dark, grey and rather depressing look. The presence of organisations and militants were not as palpable in Goma as in Bukavu, yet they are absolutely present.



Despite peace, the situation in DRC is tense, and there are many recommendations and precautions that should be followed as a foreigner, in order to minimize the likelihood of ending up in uncomfortable or even frightening situations. As a consequence of the instable situation, and due to preliminary incidents where expatriates have been injured, raped and even killed, most international organisations sending staff to DRC, such as the UN or NRC, do not admit family or partners to join their employees – advertising their positions as non family postings.

A few days before the outset of this fieldwork, members of the Congolese army rebelled in the centre of Bukavu as a protest against not being properly paid. They wandered around in the streets frightening people with their aggressive behaviour, looting street vendors and firing their Kalashnikovs up into the air. This shows that staying in this setting may suddenly expose you to unpleasant experiences or place you in demanding situations. Personally experiencing the context made the difficult situation of the DRC more comprehensible. The atrocious history with violent colonial rule and war, have lead to unacceptable conditions for the Congolese population that currently needs to be both talked about, and prioritized, in order to create change.

## **2.2 Historical and political background**

The history of DRC shows many challenges often linked to widespread corruption and war. From 1885 up until colonization by Belgium in 1908 the county was controlled and mistreated by King Leopold (Reybrouck 2011). Independence was gained in 1960, followed by a military coup where Mobuto Seko Seko seized power (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 174), which put him in charge of the autocratic regime Zaïre, lasting from 1965-1996. In 1996 Laurent-Désiré Kabila declared war against the sitting power of the dictator Mobuto. The year after the AFDL enters Kinshasa, forced Mobuto to flee the country, and announced Kabila the new president of the DRC.

Prior to the power shift, the situation in DRC was aggravated by the Rwanda-genocide in 1994 and the following refugee crisis. Nearly two millions Hutu refugees fled Rwanda and entered the DRC after the RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) took control in Rwanda. Many of the refugees entering DRC were members of the Interahamwe, which were an extremist Hutu paramilitary organisation behind many of the killing of almost 1 million Tutsis and moderate

Hutus during the Rwandan genocide (Kelly 2010: 14). The Interahamwe militia (under the new name of FDLR) established themselves in the eastern part of DRC. The new leadership in Rwanda supported the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) soldiers in search of the people of the Interahamwe. As a result, Interahamwe formed a coalition with the Mai-Mai soldiers (loosely connected Congolese militia groups without central command) against the Rwandan army. This was the beginning of the widespread abuse and exploitation of the people in the DRC, were rape and torture affected especially women (Dolan 2010: 18).

In 1998 war again became a fact. Kabila declares war against Rwanda and Tutsis in the eastern part of the country. Several African countries were involved in this conflict, labelled the “lake war”. A peace agreement was signed in Lusaka (Zambia) in 1999, but did not bring peace. This resulted in the world's largest UN military operation, MONUC, which failed to eliminate the presence of various military groups as intended. In 2001 president Laurent-Désiré Kabila was killed and his son, Laurent Kabila, succeeds the presidency. In 2002 the Sun City (South Africa) peace declaration is signed under the agreement of free elections and demobilisation of foreign troops in the country. The war was formally over in 2003 (CIA Factbook, MSF 2011), though in 2004 Laurent Kabila capture the city of Bukavu.

In 2007 the conflict escalates again with fighting's between the government army (supported by FDLR and Mai Mai) and Nkundas forces of CNDP. The UN Security Council increases the UN operation by sending more soldiers (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 175). In January 2009 Rwanda's army enters eastern DRC to capture the FDLR-rebels. This was based on a joint agreement between Rwanda's president Kagame and the Congolese president Kabila. Approximately one month later the Rwandan troops who are leaving DRC declare the joint offensive towards Hutu-rebels linked to the FDLR as a success.

### **2.3 Vulnerability & existing gender views**

Gender roles usually refer to the set of social and behavioural norms that are considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex. In DRC men largely holds power within both society and government, while women are repetitively excluded and/or neglected from power positions. Official statistics reflect and demonstrate the inequality among genders within the country. Women in DR Congo have a low degree of protection regarding family matters. Men are generally seen as the head of the household. Congolese women may often

face traditional norms that confine them solely to household work and keep them away from attending school. A married woman is for instance required to obtain her husbands consent to sign certain acts and contracts. This again means that women have virtually no access to independent bank loans and bank accounts due to the requirement of authorizations from their husbands. In addition Congolese women have limited access to land. This is not directed by the law, which in contrast state that, "land concessions can be given to men and women without distinction" (SIGI 2012). However, traditional customs disallow women access to land, which reflects that traditional and discriminatory attitudes towards women remain strong in the country. Nonetheless, "Women in DRC do not have access to property other than land, since everything must be administered by their husbands" (SIGI 2012).

Table 1: Demonstrating gender inequalities

Description	Females	Males
Population with at least secondary education (% ages 25 and older)	10.7	36.2
Labour force participation rate (%)	56.5	85.6
Seats in national parliament (%)	9,4	90,6

Table 2: Reflecting poverty and its consequences in DRC

Description	Percentage
Fertility rate	5,5
Maternal mortality ratio (2008)	670
National poverty	71.3
PPP \$1.25 a day (%) line	59,2
Population vulnerable to poverty (%)	16.1
Population in severe poverty	46.5
Health adjusted life expectancy (years)	45

Despite the fact that the DRC ratified The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1986 (PeaceWomen 2012), discrimination is apparent in the country. "All too often [...] these human rights standards remain only words on a page, never being effectively implemented. States remain vastly unaccountable for following through on their commitments - whether they involve developing policy, legislation, or programming. For example, despite commitments made at the Beijing" (Fried

2003: 100). As seen, many women and girls suffer from rape and other forms of SV throughout the DRC, especially in eastern parts of the country. People in this area are subjected to gang rape, several rapes, and many women have even experienced to be held captured as sexual slaves (UNIFEM 2011). The high numbers of rape is explained by DRCs militarized society, impunity for rapists, absence of the rule of law, in addition to women's subordinate social and legal position. All these factors increase the acceptance for violence against women and girls. Women are seen to be particularly at risk of human right abuses in conflict situations such as in the DRC (Momsen 2004: 102).

## 2.4 NGOs work related to SV and rape in DRC

As described, the presence of international organisations willing to help is clearly visible when entering into the Kivu provinces. In the field of SV and rape there are several organisations with particular programs and projects embracing medical, psychosocial and socioeconomic issues linked to this (NCA, Care International, MSF and Camps just to mention a few). Despite the extensive efforts, SV-programs may in reality not be as efficient as intended. A survey published by the UNFPA shows that the quality of the actors working in relation to SV in the DRC varies extensively (UNFPA 2006). However, the need for this kind of help is still great.

Different organisations have different mandates and focus areas. Where for instance a medical organisation, such as the MSF, focuses on instant medical relief for the victims, other organisations, like NCA or Care International, have a more long-term perspective of their work where they are also concentrating on awareness raising activities and how changing unhealthy perceptions. However, the majority of actors working with SV in the DRC are, to a greater or lesser extent, concentrating on the following issues:

- *Medical treatment*
- *Psychosocial care*
- *Financial assistance*
- *Information and awareness work*

Several actors in the field offer training that stimulates income-generating activities. This varies from clear vocational training like soap production or sewing clothes for manufacturing, or more theoretical such as basic accounting training. Care International focus on business related training such as teaching math and accounting, which may assist women to improve the success rate in petty trade, small-scale businesses and the like. The provincial director of Care International states that she is not convinced that all training offered from various organisations is sustainable. It may become challenging when organisations are offering similar activities to many women in the same community with limited markets. However, one important aspect of many SV-programs is to anchor activities in the local community by involving and listening to the participants themselves regarding what training, activities or assistance they prefer and need.

#### **2.4.1 The work of Camps**

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The women in this study have all received help from Camps (Centre d'Assistance Medico-Psychosociale). This local-based organisation was established in November 2003 and is funded by PYM and collaborates with other actors such as the UNHCR, UNICEF, UNFPA and the Swedish/Congolese organisation Hope in Action. The main office of Camps is in Bukavu, but the organisation has 11 secondary branch-offices in rural areas. According to numbers from Camps annual report (2011), 35 352 traumatized victims have been assisted by Camps since they began their work in the Kivus in 2003.

Camps vision is to "assure gender equity/equality and eradicate all kinds of gender based violence to promote integral development of men, women and children of the DR Congo" (Camps 2011). Camps aim to:

- Contribute to the eradicate SV
- Increase community reintegration of SV-survivors
- Lower the level of threats, vulnerability and exposure of sexual assaults
- Improve referral mechanisms (medical, legal, psychosocial and reinsertion)
- Develop income-generating activities
- Sensitize religious leaders, militaries, police, grass-root leaders and others

The main challenge in Camps work is the problem of insecurity and inaccessibility to certain areas, which today is caused both by the threat from rebel groups and poor infrastructure. In addition, high poverty levels and structures causing gender inequity make it challenging to improve the situation.

Camps offer medical assistance with referral to specialized services or hospitals when needed. Their psychosocial activities consist of organizing individual or collective counselling sessions, and offering family mediations if required. Camps is also focusing on socioeconomic activities such as grinding, soap production, tailoring, baking, cultivating. They also encourage women to participate in solidarity groups to share experiences and increase the efficiency of their treatment.

In order to prevent SV, Camps collaborates with community networks and coordinates training-sessions in order to achieve greater acceptance of rape victims. To distribute knowledge to the population Camps utilises radio, have frescoes with preventive messages painted on, they hand out information-leaflets, set up performances on street theatres – and arranges sensitization sessions for communities and families.

Camps is one of the organisations that is offering adequate care for rape victims, according to the UNFPA-survey mentioned above (2006: 78).

## Chapter 3: Literature review

This following section will position this study within existing literature. There are various literatures that may be relevant for this research, including research executed on violence in general, and SV in particular, as well as literature on politics, policies, intervention and treatment. This study have selected literature that is relevant to better understand the situation of rape in DRC, the efforts made by various NGOs and organisations offering assistance and to grasp the perceptions of the informants. Therefore, this review will firstly look into how rape is seen as a weapon of war. Here, the UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820 will be briefly presented and reviewed. Then this thesis will turn towards briefly looking into various explanations on why men rape, before evaluating the origin of different forms of violence. After this a brief summary of the changing views of women's role in development since the 1970s will be touched upon, since this is creates a valuable background regarding discussions concerning the roles of NGOs, and the responsibility of the international community. Subsequently, this section will discuss theories on patriarchy, and how cultural beliefs of honour and shame may shape how the people in the DRC manage the consequences of rape. This turns this literature review into how to change existing patterns, where women's empowerment may be central in order to improve the situation of raped women living in the DRC. Finally, the last section of assessing relevant literature for this study looks into how some scholars and development actors argue that in order to create positive change for raped women we need to challenge existing gender patterns by including men. As part of understanding this, this study also includes explanations and accounts held by people involved in SV-programs, in order to capture potential divergence between the views held by humanitarian practitioners working on the matter and the victims' themselves. By doing this it is possible to identify if a program covers the needs of the victims, and come up with future recommendations on which areas that should receive increased prioritisations to improve services.

### 3.1 Rape as a weapon of war

As seen, SV is a huge challenge in DRC, and is seen as an obstacle to achieve equality, development and peace" (UN 1995). Injuries and damages caused by such violence inflict

and ruin many peoples' lives. Several countries in conflict have experienced an escalating prevalence of rape, where DRC today may be the country experiencing the highest numbers, with one woman raped every minute of the day (Halperin & Mofidi 2011).

SV is repeatedly explained and broadly considered as a "weapon of war" with the overall intention from sexual offenders to suppress and silence the population they are threatening and fighting (UN 2008). Rape as a military strategy has occurred and been parts of many wars but has often been silenced. Rarely have any countries experienced such an extreme reality regarding rape as the population in DRC has the last years. However, during the wars of former Yugoslavia lasting throughout the period from 1991 to 2001, the problem of wartime rape was for the first time seriously addressed, receiving attention and condemnation from the international community. This led to intensified discussions on how war and peace may affect men and women differently. As a result of the increased attention and discussions, the UN Security Council in the year of 2000 unanimously adopted the Resolution No. 1325 on women, peace and security (S/RES/1325). This resolution was seen as an important step towards seeing women not just as victims, but also as a resource in peacekeeping and democracy-building operations.

Eight years later this resolution was followed by the adaption of UN Resolution No. 1820 (S/RES/1820). This resolution can be seen as a reinforcement of the resolution on women, peace and security. However, this resolution goes longer and recognises rape as a weapon of war where rape has been used as a "tactic of war to humiliate, dominate, instill fear in, disperse and/or forcibly relocate civilian members of a community or ethnic group" (UNSCR 2008: 1). With this definition, rape is acknowledged as a threat towards international peace and security, and the resolution thus equates sexual abuse with other weapons used in armed conflict. S/RES/1820 states that, "SV, when used as a tactic of war or to target civilians, can exacerbate conflict, and demands parties in conflict to protect civilians from it" (MSF 2009: 9).

This 1820-resolution is highly relevant for this study since it recognizes rape as a war crime and crime against humanity. This resolution is from 2008 and the DRC had at that time already experienced high prevalence of rape for several years. However, rapes are not only happening during war, as the high numbers of rapes in the DRC today demonstrates. This may be explained by the fact that "where rape has been employed as a method of warfare, it



can become a habit carried seamlessly into the post-conflict context” (UNIFEM 2010: 1). Today, alarming levels of violence against women continue to be reported in DRC, particularly in the east, as part of what is seen as a broader pattern of violence and discrimination against women and girls. In other words, rape has been used as a weapon of war in the DRC, but what is the right definition when the war is over? Who should protect the women of DRC?

The fact that SV and rape occur in such high numbers, and additionally persist even after the war has ended underlines even more clearly that women need strong laws backed by implementation and services for protection and prevention (UN Women 2012). According to the UN Security Council all member states should:

*Comply with their obligations for prosecuting persons responsible for such acts, to ensure that all victims of SV, particularly women and girls, have equal protection under the law and equal access to justice, and stresses the importance of ending impunity for such acts as part of a comprehensive approach to seeking sustainable peace, justice, truth, and national reconciliation (UN Security Council Resolution 1820 2008: 3).*

Due to the extreme situation in the DRC, the UN and the Congolese authorities have prepared The Comprehensive Strategy Against Sexual Violence to combat SV. To support such a framework it is important to ensure Congolese authorities ownership and to contribute to a coordinated effort (UD 2012). According to Solhjell “formulating a national action plan on S/RES/1325 is not enough” (2009: 33) to meet this objective. “Instead, there must be further support to awareness campaigns, getting local communities to take action and rebuild social structures” (Solhjell 2009: 33). Nevertheless, the reality is that SV and rape does not only traumatize the individual victim and can be wounding for the victims partner, it applies fractures in family-relations and effect whole communities (HHI 2011), and needs immediate priority.

### **3.2 Why men rape in the DRC**

There are clearly distinct differences amid description given to explain rape. In line with the S/RES/1820 WHO describes SV as “a violent, aggressive and hostile act used as a mean to degrade, dominate, humiliate, terrorize and control women. The hostility, aggression and/or sadism displayed by the perpetrator are intended to threaten the victim’s sense of self” (2003: 9). In the case of DRC a rape counsellor (cited in Kristof and Wudunn 2009: 94) says that, “in

other places, there is rape because soldiers want a woman. Here, [in the DRC] it's that but also a viciousness, a mentality of hatred, and it's women who pay the prize". WHO supports this arguments stating that the "underlying factors in many sexually violent acts are power and control, not, as is widely perceived, a craving for sex" (2003: 9).

In contrast to arguments explaining rape as an expression of domination, Groth argues that SV "serves to compensate for feelings of helplessness, to reassure the offender about his sexual adequacy, to assert his identity, to retain status among his peers, to defend against sexual anxieties, to achieve sexual gratification, and to discharge frustration" (Groth 2000, cited in WHO 2003: 10). This again is to some degree supported by Baaz & Stern (2008) in their article: *Making sense of violence: voices of soldiers in the DRC*. As one of very few that have interviewed the sexual offenders operating in the DRC. This research show that the soldiers from the DRC Integrated Armed Forces largely reject the above notion of rape as an act undertaken due to the craving for sex. Their' accounts is more in line with the WHO that rejects this. In addition the soldiers discards the alleged understanding of the widespread rapes to be founded on "violent tendencies, hatred or vengefulness for the enemy" – as well as denying that exercising SV is a part of being a soldier (Baaz & Stern 2008: 57). According to the interviewed soldiers the reality is completely different, where rape is also perceived as wrong by themselves and even forbidden according to military regulations (Baaz & Stern 2008: 75).

Baaz & Stern argue it is imperative to understand the motivation of the soldiers and identify the reasons behind the large numbers of rape in the DRC. If we do not pay attention to the offenders themselves this may inaccurately make us reinforce "stereotypes of African warriors as primitive and anarchic, driven by innate violence and tribal hatred" (Baaz & Stern 2008: 57). The data presented and analysed by Baaz & Stern is based on a research involving empirical data collected through 41 group interviews enclosing a total of 171 soldiers/officers participating. The deficiency of similar research makes it difficult to draw absolute conclusions, but there is reason to believe that the notions from these informants are shared by many of the soldiers behind rapes in the DRC. The findings also addresses the interconnectedness between poverty, suffering, the "craziness of war", impunity and the committing of violent acts. The content goes far in asserting that "poverty and suffering as impetus for enactments of violence" (Baaz a& Stern 2008: 75). This again is linked to the fact that military soldiers are among the poorest section of all people in the Congolese society

(Baaz & Stern 2008: 64). Statements from soldiers argue that poverty results in frustration, anger and general neglect, which again causes violence and rape (Baaz & Stern 2008: 77). It may be a simplified conclusion to state that SV is solely an indirect result of poverty, but there is clearly a significant link between the two. The sense of deprivation and victimhood, serves as an underlying theme in the ways in which the soldiers attempt to make sense of themselves as men (and women) and soldiers in relation to the violence, which they commit. There are no excuses for violent acts like rape, but it is important to note that the majority involved in such acts in the DRC, whether victim or offender is poor.

It is clear that the reason behind the large numbers of rapes and why men rap is debated. The WHO underlines this by stating, “unravelling the reasons why a given individual should choose to commit a sexually violent act is a complex matter” (2003: 10). However, it seems that the general perception explains the high numbers of rapes in DRC as a result of men wanting to dominate and humiliate. In contrast, the accounts given by the soldiers themselves give a more nuanced picture with explanation connected to “poverty, neglect, suffering, frustration, stealing, sabotage, rape, killing and injustice” (Baaz & Stern 2008: 77).

Why men rape is an applicable question for this study since it highlights that it is complex and based on wide range of explanations. In addition, it is interesting to shed light on the issue that also the offenders may be trying to manage a situation that is not necessarily recognized by their own free will. Without disclaiming the perpetrator responsibility, there is reason to believe that the offenders, as many of rape victims, are often suffering from difficult living conditions. This demonstrates the complex problem of rape in DRC, where the reality has huge consequences throughout the whole society; the victim, the victim’s family, and potentially the offender himself.

### **3.3 Direct, Structural & Cultural Violence**

As the definitions above demonstrate in page 9, rape is defined as one form of violence. This makes violence unquestionably relevant in a study like this discussing SV and consequences of rape. However, in order to identify the root-causes of rape, and even explain the intricate consequences Congolese women are subjected to after being raped, the theories of violence presented in this section are central. First, the WHO defines direct violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or

against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (WHO 2012). Rape is corresponding with this definition where the side effects of rape may be all of the above: injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment and deprivation. However, the way in which SV and rape is exercised in DRC, and how the problem is met, may be more clearly explained by including the terms of structural and cultural violence.

The expression structural violence is commonly ascribed to Johan Galtung, a Norwegian scientist and peace researcher, who initially presented the term in the 60s. Structural violence refers to a form of violence where social structure or social institution prevents people from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence is used as a tactic to suppress people indirectly, meaning that, “the violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances” (Ho 2007: 4). According to Galtung you find structural violence as root causes behind, for instance, ethnocentrism, racism, sexism and nationalism. In terms of the violence raped women in DRC are subjected to, it may be explained as a mixture between direct violence and structural violence. The actual rape in itself is evidently a physical act that may cause both physical and (or psychological) injuries. However, the root causes of this direct violence can be further explained and elaborated by the using the theory of structural violence. In contrast to direct violence, structural violence is not either direct or physical but oppresses people through political, economic or social structures.

In addition to this, Galtung also presents cultural violence, which refers to structures and principles of culture that justifies or legitimizes the use of direct or structural violence. Cultural violence is “any aspect of a culture that can be used to legitimize violence in its direct or structural form” (Galtung 1990: 291). This is crucial when discussing and explaining why many Congolese women experience rejection by their families after being raped. As this study has already touched upon, reactions from people around the victim may not be based on ignorance or cruelty towards the rape victims, but is rather reflecting culture, beliefs and traditions, which limits’ people’s scope of action. In other words, the response is shaped by what the culture defines as appropriate. This kind of symbolic violence is built into the culture and does not kill or maim like direct violence or structural violence. However, cultural violence may facilitate the use of direct and structural violence by making it appear as "right" for the people sharing the same cultural background. This is explaining social exclusion of many raped women in DRC, which is a result of underlying structures. As the women in this

study confirms, this has huge negative consequences in their lives. However, the acceptance for these traditions seems strong. This demonstrates how cultural violence further legitimizes both the use of direct and structural violence as acceptable within the Congolese society. Cultural violence is “a complicated process through which social relations of power are built, legitimized, reproduced, and naturalized” (Confortini 2006).

The issues of power and gender are essential to understand both why SV occurs, as well as understanding the reactions that rape victims are often met with by others. Since gender is created by society the actual meaning of being a man or a woman will vary from society to society and change over time (Momsen 2004: 18). What is seen as moral acceptable in one place may be understood differently, or even as the opposite, in another area. Also cultural violence will vary according to locations. This becomes especially central when discussing the consequences of rape in the DRC, where reactions from family and others proves to be consistently different compared to how it is managed in other and more developed societies, such as in Norway. However, this does not mean that SV can or should be tolerated more in one place than in any other. But the variations demonstrate the need of being cultural sensitive in development work. Therefore, it is extremely important to pay attention to the cultural context when doing research in different and foreign parts of the world. Maybe even more important to note when the researcher is from the developed world doing a study in the developing world, or vice versa. That being said, this should not exclude the possibility of raising criticism toward attitudes and practices across culture. The likelihood of experiencing large variations in legal, social and therapeutic infrastructures are both probable and evident.

### **3.4 Theories of WID, WAD & GAD**

The UN Security Council have through their resolutions demonstrated that women need to receive special attention within development. Despite consideration among development actors or programs today this has not always been the reality. Lets take a few steps back to have a look at the history:

Development assistance and the help across countries arose in the aftermath of WW II, where the Marshall plan, or the European recovery program, was given by the United States to Europe (Smukkestad 2000). This is seen as the first economic assistance of this kind, and proved to be the initial step towards the development of bilateral aid where one country

assists another. The main focus in development programs throughout the 50s and 60s was mainly about monetary assistance, which was identified as the key to development. The theory of distribution argued that economic assistance would lift countries out of poverty and create economic growth, that would further initiate a trickle down and raise the country's prosperity. In retrospect, this modernist policy has been widely criticised for ignoring the importance of social capital (Evans 1996: 1034). According to Kabeer these growth-oriented strategies did not consider the "human factor" (2003: 11), and were in addition seen to be gender-blind. This is hugely supported by Amartya Sen:

*Human development, as an approach, is concerned with what I take to be the basic development idea: namely, advancing the richness of human life, rather than the richness of the economy in which human beings live, which is only a part of it (UNDP 2011).*

This single-minded view of economic growth as the solution of development changed throughout the 70s. Gender issues started to receive focus and were put on the development agenda, where also women were given attention when discussing development. This "birth of 'gender' in development was very much influenced by the 'new wave' of feminism in the West which emerged in the wake of civil rights and anti-colonial struggles of the 1960s" (Pearsons, in Allen & Thomas 2000: 386). The so-called *Women in Development* (WID) argued that economical centred development approaches focusing on trickle down effects and modernisation had different impacts on women and men. Therefore, the development process was not improving women's rights and status but bypassing them, and "contributing to a deterioration in women's position in developing countries" (Pearsons, in Allen & Thomas 2000: 390). This theory has later received critique of detaching women from their social context by solely focusing on the woman and her role, and simultaneously largely ignoring the interaction between man and woman. In this study, this is central when discussing how to challenge existing gender-views that has detrimental impacts affecting the whole society.

Due to the limitations and flaws identified in the WID-approach, *Women and Development* (WAD) emerged as counterweight. WAD argued that, "it was the exclusion of women from the development process rather than the process" in itself that was the problem (Pearsons, in Allen & Thomas 2000: 390). The main-argument of the WAD-approach was that the models of development have to have a more holistic and equitable approach. Another approach questioning the WID-perspective was the *Gender and Development* (GAD) in short focusing

on the relationships between the gender role and the different roles within the family and society, and problematizing the ways in which gender roles have an “impact on development initiatives and the gendered processes of development policies themselves” (Pearsons, in Allen & Thomas 2000: 390). A problem can be clearly visible, but the root-causes and origin of a problem can be found in the structures and mechanisms operating in the society. In order to assist the poor people equally one must take into account the gender inequalities (Kabeer 2004: 170), since poor women repeatedly hold subordinate positions compared to poor men. Transferring this to the discussion of SV and rape in DRC implies that awareness work takes both men and women into consideration in plans and action.

There are various criticism towards both the WID- and GAD-approach individually. WID argues that women are excluded from development because they lack skills and resources, while GAD argues that this happens because women have a subordinate role in relation to men. In short, WID focuses on women and GAD on a non-equal relationships between women and men. WID has been denigrated due to the single-minded view towards anti-poverty strategies and poor women’s practical gender needs, and opponents have called for addressing the underlying causes of gender inequality, where strategic genders interests are taken into account and challenge existing gender roles. In addition to this the discussions around masculinities has received increased attention. It has been highlighted that it is crucial to include the roles of both men and women when examining development issues, to give suitable recommendations and advises. "Masculinities have increasingly become a research focus in attempting to help men to understand and control their aggressive tendencies towards women" (Momsen 2004: 96). "Development policies have changed over time from a focus on women only to one based on gender, sometimes including environmental aspects, and most recently to an interest in masculinities" (Momsen 2004: 19). This is going to be central in section 5.4 in this study, which discusses how the inclusion of men play a crucial role to improve the situation of raped women in DRC.

People living in developing countries can be actors to change the reality. After years with politics influenced by the WID and GAD perspectives it is now time to work more broadly towards gender equality. Several development actors working in the DRC highlight this. In addition, informants in this study have underlined cultural structures and mechanism having disadvantageous effects in order to recover and show resilience after rape. This makes the next section valuable and relevant for this master thesis.

### 3.5 Patriarchal norms, Honour & Shame

Gender relations are the social constructed relations between men and women, which varies among people and contexts. The social constructed gender roles are hence a part of culture. According to Kabeer's view, "Gender refers to those rules, norms, customs and practices by which biologically associated differences between the male and female of the human species translated into socially constructed differences between men and women, boys and girls which give them unequal value, opportunities and life chances" (2004: 243). Gender roles define what is typically seen as feminine and masculine values and refines the way in which men and women are expected to behave. This is a consistent theme throughout this master thesis. Gender inequality and social structures are seen as central parts in order to explain the discrimination and rejection of many raped women. These power relations are so neatly integrated into the culture that they appear to be the only option. As Kabeer puts it: power relations are most effective when it denies choice, and hence agency, without appearing to do so (Kabeer 2004: 171-172).

When talking about gender inequality scholars with a feminist orientation repeatedly bring up the term patriarchy. Patriarchy is by Tamale defined to be "social organisation and systems based on male domination at all institutional levels from the family to the state" (Tamale 2011: 641). Gender based violence, including SV and rape, are often linked to patriarchal societies, poverty and conflicts. SV is often overrepresented in "societies with high levels of inequality" while those "experiencing rapid social change often have an increasing level of interpersonal violence" (Momsen 2004: 93). Patriarchy is in general seen as discrimination based on behaviour, conditions, or attitudes that foster stereotypes of social roles based on sex.

According to Bradley, patriarchy is the "ultimate dominance of a certain masculinity that is responsible for the injustices women suffer" (2011: 16). However, it is important to stress that this is not necessarily a view shared by everyone. In relation to this it is important to underline that gender roles takes on different attributes related to how the roles are constructed through society. In other words, gender inequality may be experienced differently in different contexts. Women may be seen as valuable, but the main issue is that "the patriarchal cultures continue to devalue feminine qualities instead of promoting them" (Kemirere 2007: 114).



In this thesis it becomes clear that DRC women are generally seen as having subordinate positions, but arguing that this is solely a result of patriarchal oppression may be a simplistic explanation. However, it is recognised that this understanding exists although this study does not see it as its main concern to discuss and go into detail about these concepts. Patriarchy was nevertheless not mentioned by any of the raped women, but this does not evidently confirm that this is not part of explaining the underlying structures of excluding raped women. The way in which raped women are treated does not seem to be caused by deliberate actions to suppress them. Rather the contrary, when a husband rejects his wife after her being raped, this may not be explained as in line with his own conviction and/or choice. As seen above, the culture encompasses certain standards, principles and values that are followed and obeyed, and makes acting in particular ways seen as the only right way. This may be closely connected to honour and shame, now following.

Honour is a concept is closely linked with other concepts like stigmatisation and rejection. Honour becomes central when talking about rejection and social exclusion. Literature linked to SV indicated that honour is relevant when talking about rape. Like Kemirere argues, the aim of rape has been to "humiliate enemy males by spoiling their valued property (women)" (2007: 43). This is linked to Stewart discussing the effect "women's behaviour can have on men's honour" (Stewart 1994: 107). Although a rape is involuntarily, the fact that a woman has had sexual contact with another man is seen as a shame. This again, fits Wikan's description of shame being the opposite of honour (1984). Both concept deals with people in social settings. "Concepts of honour (and shame) are usually strong in traditional societies where family and clan are important social institutions and more modern national and regional entities, such as the judiciary and police, are less developed" (Stewart 1994: 55). In previous times it was seen that a "defilement or violation of a woman or girl was predominantly an assault on her family and needed to be dealt with as such - often by marrying the survivor to her abuser" (Bennett, in Tamale 2011: 96). In other words, a woman could retain her family's honour by marrying her rapist. However, with the changing reality in DR Congo with widespread rapes where the offender is unknown to the victim, this tradition is not complied anymore.

*Honour is the value of a person in his own eyes, but also in the eyes of the society. It is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim, his excellence recognised by society, his right to pride (Pitt-Rivers 1977, cited in Stewart 1994: 125).*

Hence, honour is a public matter which depends on recognition from significant others in society. This becomes clear when talking to female rape victims in the DRC. They feel ashamed of what has happened to them, and are repeatedly excluded from society and rejected by their family due to them being disgraced. According to Stewart sexual honour mainly involves two kinds of disgrace where the “usual reaction is both to see her as having been mistreated by the man and to view her as having done something disgraceful” (1994: 109). Several scholars claim, that rape is used to humiliate people, and some have stated that men abandon their wives due to shame (Kemiere 2007). Honour may be either gained or lost in the struggle for public recognition and one’s social standing (Moxnes 20). However, Pitt-Rivers says that, “honour is like glass – once broken it cannot be mended” (1964: X). This indicates that once a woman is excluded from her family, it might be difficult to achieve reinsertion. However, this is prioritized by many organisations offering family mediation services, which will be demonstrated the findings chapter (chapter 5). However, According to Stewart a raped woman cannot necessarily expect to be treated with respect (Stewart 1994: 124). In the case of DRC it seems like it is shame rather than honour that is the predominant concern.

*The code of honour is a set of standards that has been picked out as having particular importance, that measures an individual's worth along some profoundly significant dimensions; and a member of that honour group who fails to meet these standards is viewed not just as inferior but often also as despicable (Stewart 1994: 55).*

### **3.6 Women’s Empowerment**

The GEM-index, prepared by the UNDP, shows the political power of women and provides statistics of the proportion of women employed in professional and technological jobs. According to these statistics there is no doubt that women in many places in the world, including DR Congo, suffer from their subordinated position. In order to change this reality, towards more gender equality, women need to be empowered. Empowerment is defined in many ways. It is a multidimensional process, comprised of economic, civil, political, social and cultural dimensions (Moghadam *et. al* 2006). Empowerment is about enabling women to live lives of wellbeing and dignity, based on equality, rights and justice. The value of equality is widely recognised and so important that it was included as goal number 3 in the MDGs towards promoting gender equality and empower women (Care 2010). By empowering women a range of positive outcomes will inevitably follow, such as improved maternal and

children's health, decreasing high birth rates towards reaching the demographic transition, provide education for more girls and women, higher female salaries just to mention a few.

Women's empowerment is about more than financial gain, although empowering women economically offers an enormous opportunity for making major strides forwards towards poverty reduction, economic growth and gender equality goals. What is clear, however, is that accessing credit or earning a wage does not itself equate with empowerment. In other words, financial gain is a mode of empowering women. This is for instance utilised in so-called micro-credit projects repeatedly offered by development practitioners. Microcredit is small loans given to poor borrowers who usually lack economical security by permanent and/or steady employment in addition to a verifiable credit history. It is designed to spur entrepreneurship, increase incomes, alleviate poverty and often empower women. In many countries there are several social factors that prevents women from contributing in the society similar to men, hence they are often cut from benefiting from economic opportunities. As a paradox it is confirmed that: "women's access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, but if it is undertaken in conditions that erode their health and exploit their labour, its costs may outweigh its benefits" (Kabeer 2005a: 24). However, micro-credit loans are only part of the solution. It is imperative that initiatives to empower women is not solely focusing on financial gain, but also, ensuring women's rights, equality and dignity.

Empowerment is a central term for this research. It is fundamental when trying to challenge existing gender inequalities in the DRC, and thus hopefully creating a more positive and problem-free future for women that are so unlucky to be subjected to rape. Empowerment also plays a crucial role in development projects and programs that aim towards assisting raped women in the DRC.

Since the 1980s development actors have focused on bottom-up approaches to ensure sustainable development (Allen & Thomas 2000). This principle states that planning should be based on local peoples interests and take their concerns into account. In order to design development projects and program that the beneficiaries real opinions and needs into consideration. "Gender interests are those that women (or men for that matter) may develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender attributes" (Molyneux, cited in Allen & Thomas 2000: 388). Before implementing development activities to assist raped women both

practical and strategic gender needs should be included in the assessment. “Practical gender needs are the needs women identify in their’ socially accepted roles in society [...] Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context” (Allen & Thomas 2000: 388). In contrast “strategic gender needs are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society” (Allen & Thomas 2000: 388). By challenging such needs it is possible to ensure greater gender equality. However, in order to achieve social changes both men and women are central, irrespectively of their gender. This means that we also have to include men in order to change a reality recognised by gender disparities and women’s subaltern positions. This will be discussed in the following section of this master thesis.

### **3.7 Include Men for Empowerment**

"No development process will be totally beneficial to a nation if it does not involve women" (Dibie 2009: 161). However, in order to create empowerment among women towards equality, it is not enough to solely focus on the women themselves. It is rather the contrary, where it is essential to also include men in this process. In fact, it is seen as vital to engage men as important partners in order or achieve more female empowerment. The *women-4-women* organisation argue that “men are key allies in women’s advancement and must be involved to change the lives, opportunities, and prospects for women” (WfW 2010: 38). According to Momsen “educating men in their role in women and children’s health has [...] been remarkably successful in changing social attitudes and gender roles in countries as different as India and Costa Rica” (2004: 104). It is therefore decisive to note that women’s empowerment is not only about women. It is essential to also engage men and boys in order to achieve “positive changes in the relationships and structures that shape the lives of women and girls as well as those of men and boys” (Care 2010).

However, “greater empowerment brings with it more resistance from women to patriarchal norms, so that men may resort to violence in an attempt to regain control’. It is therefore crucial that prevention activities safeguard the male perspective as well as that of women, and that prevention is tailored to both sexes, so as to prevent unintended consequences of empowerment efforts” (Kabeer 2000). Since the 1990s, there has been a growing attention on also including men in order to meet gender related challenges (Kabeer 2000). And today the situation has changed drastically, where women are central to a great deal of research, such as

within development studies. However, it is still important to remember that we do not generalize western concepts in foreign contexts. It is important to take the local context and understanding of gender-roles into account. The western researchers have frequently been accused simplification and generalization (Mohanty 1988: 72). For instance, Sudarkasa (1986) feel the Western gender stratification referring "to the placement of females relative to males in a dual-level hierarchy" is unsuitable applied in the African contexts, and needs to be adjusted.

Care International emphasise a range of activities in empowering women, which can be utilized in work related to SV as well: "Develop sensitization campaigns and community programs for men about women's rights, how women's rights strengthen families and communities, and the importance of joint decision making in the family. Offer programs for men alone and for men with women" (WfW 2010: 38). In addition it is recommended to involve men in solutions for women, where they highlight the importance of addressing both the needs and rights of men as well as women in SV treatment. When discussing violence this becomes evident since "part of the solution involves changing men's attitudes" (Momsen 2004: 104), due to the fact that "violence against women and girls [in many cases] occurs within the home, where violence is tolerated" (Momsen 2004: 94).

The concept of gender mainstreaming emerged as a response to the increased focus on woman and gender in development. The concept of mainstreaming focus on assessing the different implications for women and men in development by valuing gender diversity.

*Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels. It is a strategy for making the concerns and experiences of women as well as of men an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of mainstreaming is to achieve gender equality (ILO 2002).*

Gender mainstreaming was first proposed at the 1985 Third World Conference on Women in Nairobi, but was formalised at the UN Fourth conference in Beijing 10 years later. Using Gender mainstreaming as a strategy to involve both women and men political and social process, where achieve gender equality is the main objective.

### 3.8 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical review above has been selected for its significance for this study. The theoretical base is particularly relevant for issues concerning SV, gender disparities, social constructed gender roles, and how to potentially challenge existing structures and mechanism currently holding raped women back from showing resilience after being subjected to rape. Throughout the review the particular relevance of each section has been highlighted. As repeatedly emphasised the selected theories, literature and perspectives are applicable in this study. It illuminates the aspects and issues that is highlighted by the informants participating in the fieldwork, which this master thesis analysis is largely based upon.

A common trait of the chosen literature is that it demonstrates the prioritised issues in this research. SV and rape in DR Congo is a comprehensive and complex problem, with potential perspectives with many important and interesting matters to look into. The problem is off course that one master thesis cannot discuss it all.

This study's perspective is based on the impression that there is a gap in research looking into the long-term effects of rape for victims that have been receiving treatment. Therefore, this study contacted women that have been through treatment and counselling to get their story of what has been advantageous and what their daily struggles are today. Paying attention to their experiences and perceptions may thus be valuable to adapt support programs. Due to the complex nature of this problem, as repeatedly stated, it is important to take the victims' perspective into account. In this way this research is an exploratory study. Basing the research on a qualitative methodology and in grounded theory was done with the aim of learning more about this violent, yet interesting problem. This again, can hopefully lead to raising awareness of the importance of involving actors (rape victims) in development. This may be beneficial in order to a increase the chances of improving and better understand the structures that are hampering the affected women from completely recovering after experiencing rape(s).

The problem of SV in DRC, with rape in particular, proves to be a very complex and compound problem. Being able to offer suitable and efficient treatment and support to women subjected to rape(s) may be more challenging than alleged. The women participating in this study largely reveal challenges with complex cultural dimensions that may not be taken sufficiently taken into account in follow-up programs. To ensure that this study is focusing on

the aspects that are important for female rape victims themselves, this study is as mentioned based within grounded theory, which facilitates that their true meanings and experiences creates the foundation of the discussion.

Due to the sensitive nature of this study, all the names of the rape victims participating in this study has been changed in order to be unidentifiable.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter presents the methodological foundation of this study, explaining and stressing the advantages and motivation behind assessment made in relation the chosen strategy, design, sampling, methods and interpretation of the empirical data. In addition, ethical considerations and potential limitations of this study are discussed and emphasized. To sufficiently explain the decisions made, this section is backed up by applicable methodological theory. In addition, relevant experiences and knowledge encountered and gathered throughout the fieldwork in DR Congo are attached, in order to inform about the methodological reality during the empirical data collection.

### 4.1 Qualitative research approach

This study aims to reveal rape victims' experiences on how to recover, show resilience, and continue with their lives after being subjected to rape. In addition, the study intends to capture structures that impede rape victims from subsisting and managing in their lives after being victims of such SV. This again will form the basis of the further discussion and analysis.

This research asks for female rape victims' personal opinions, making the qualitative method suitable in order to collect relevant empirical data, since this method emphasizes the informants' explanations, understanding and descriptions (Bond 2006: 32, Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 127). First of all this method will assist creating a "holistic understanding of complex issues" (Schibbye 2011: 3), which the situation of widespread and currently on-going rapes in the DRC can clearly be seen as. It is verified that information regarding personal experiences is most sufficiently appropriated through personal interviews. This creates a greater opportunity to ensure more detailed explanations and grasp peoples' true meanings, which is essential in order to understand the current condition the informants are living through. In other words, to sufficiently answer this study's research questions the empirical findings need to be "rich" – meaning that the data provides in-depth information, identifies informants' personal perceptions of reality, in addition to their personal views and interpretations (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 318-319). By using qualitative methods one enables the likelihood of capturing "underlying meanings, the unexpected and sensitive issues - as well as the informants subjectivity" (Schibbye 2011: 3-4).



The qualitative method is also suitable to create empathy and mutual understanding between researcher and informants, which may be perceived as extremely important when working on a sensitive issue like SV and rape. The qualitative method assists you in under-covering processes and causality (Scibbye 2011: 5). In addition, it “may give people the chance to discuss things they have never been able to tell anyone before” (Scibbye 2011: 6), which which may be particularly relevant for a study examining an issue clearly distinguished by traditional gender views and stigmatisation.

This study intends to grasp the main challenges that female rape victims face in order to return back to a “normal” life and show resilience after being raped. The independent variables consist of the informants’ explanations and behaviour respectively. These are the factors that can explain the variation of differences and similarities. Consequently, the independent variables direct the discussion and outlines reasons, reveal patterns of the nature of the difficulties and challenges that the female rape victims’ may face, which summarises the planned outcome of this study - namely the dependent variable. In other words, the explanations (independent variables) given through the empirical data, further explains the causes that hamper reconciliation (the dependent variable).

Table 3: Variable for analysis

<b>Cases/units of analysis</b>	<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Dependent/outcome variable</b>
Informants	Explanations	What this study tries to explain
Observation	Behaviour	Resilience
Literature	Characteristics	Reconciliation

## **4.2 Research design: Grounded Theory**

Grounded theory is the most widely used method in qualitative research (Bryman 2008) and is also selected in this study. The major goal of this master thesis is to obtain rape victims view of their situation and obtain their personal views linked to their situation after receiving treatment. In the light of grounded theory, the goal for this research is to collect empirical data through interviews, existing literature, experiences and observations, in order to identify central concepts and arguments that are principal and closely linked with the problem and research questions. As part of the analysis the plan is to reveal relationships between the

empirical findings in order to be able to create theoretical assumptions (Johannessen *et. al* 2007). It is an approach and research practice where data sampling, data analysis and theory development are repeated until one can describe and explain the phenomenon that is to be researched”.

The grounded theory approach is chosen for this study, due to the fact that this particular research practice does not ask for the “truth” but rather to conceptualize the reality by analysing empirical data collected in the field. Qualitative methods are commonly associated with the interpretive framework (Ellsberg & Heise 2005: 54) and the understanding that reality is subjective rather than objective. Ellsberg & Heise argue that:

*Qualitative results allow you to understand the nuances and details of complex social phenomena from the respondents’ point of view. Although you cannot say your findings are true for everyone, you can reveal multiple layers of meaning for a particular group of people. This level of understanding is particularly important when studying human behaviour and trying to discern how it interacts with people’s beliefs, attitudes, and perceptions (2005: 55).*

As a result, there is a clear need to talk *directly* to the people affected by SV and rape in order to be able to understand the situation in an equivalent way as they subjectively experienced it, through their personal views, feelings, and individual interpretations (Ellsberg & Heise 2005: 54). Only by doing this, it is possible to explain the social reality and understand the meanings and behaviour that are constructed through human interactive activities.

The descriptive parts of grounded theory are mainly to illustrate the concept, but the approach is not descriptive in terms of being concerned with data accuracy. On the contrary, the approach is analytic with the goal of generating concepts, categories and theoretical assumptions that clarify people’s actions (Bryman 2008).

### **4.3 Preparations prior to the data collection**

One initial concern, before entering the field and starting the data collection, was linked to the factual access of relevant informants in the DR Congo. There are undoubtedly many women living in the Kivus that are relevant for this study in terms of their violent experiences, but the

real question was how to get in contact with people willing to talk about these issues, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and personal research questions enquiring intimate reports.

As noted, the grounded theory approach seeks to reveal personal views of the informants and disclose their main concerns. For this study it was therefore useful to consult with local stakeholders working with follow-up services given to rape victims, both in terms of further adjusting this study's research questions, but also with the anticipation of potentially receiving some support and assistance in the process of recruiting relevant informants (Ellsberg & Heise 2005: 52 - 57). In short, a wide range of different but relevant organisations were contacted regarding the topic of this research. However, the people I ended up being in contact with were moreover based on coincidence, and directly linked to who actually responded to my inquiries. However, one might say that these contacts were established on convenience sampling, being the actual connections that proved to be available to me as a researcher (Bryman 2008: 183-184).

The DRC is evidently a challenging context for executing empirical data collection, especially the Kivus (ref. MFAs official travel advises for DRC in page 13), and I shortly realized the importance of establishing a comprehensible network of contacts before entering the field. The ambition was to get in contact with organisations working with follow-up activities for rape victims prior to the fieldwork. This, to improve the likelihood of getting in contact with relevant informants, such as local and/or international actors working with the SV and rape in the Kivus directly – or via these organisations. These preparations were commenced approximately three months before the intended field entrance. However, as many students continuously experience: establishing serious and relevant contacts is easier said than done.

A large number of organisations, researchers and previous or current employees involved in various works on SV in the Kivus (hence being familiar with the two cities of Bukavu and Goma where the execution of the main part of this study's data collection were planned) were contacted. In the beginning, only a limited few replied the inquiries, but around six weeks before departure the situation improved. Some people located in Oslo were willing to meet me, which further put me in contact with relevant people both working from Norway and in the DRC. This allowed me to establish a few contacts in the Kivus, who were willing to assist me on arrival. This was a satisfactory feeling, and should turn out to be a good starting point

for me when reaching Bukavu, which is the city where the initial part of this fieldwork took place.

#### 4.4 In the Congolese field

After entering the field, the already established network of contacts were extremely valuable to me in terms of further acquiring informants for the data collection. This was to a large degree based on snowball sampling (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 107), where my initial contacts evolved to other groups/individuals (Scibbye 2011). However, my interviewees were closely selected on the basis of their relevance for me investigating personal experiences with rape. According to Bryman (2008), purposive sampling is recommended when the research is based on qualitative interviews. This is a strategic approach where respondents are selected according to their relevance for the topic of study. However, one might also argue that this sampling was convenience sampling, due to the fact that one counsellor in an collaborative organisation selected the interviewees rather than giving me the “free rein to do so” (Bryman 2008: 458). However, this was not experienced as being a problem for either me, or the data-material collected.

This study is mainly based on empirical data collected through interviewing 18 informants who have personal experiences (one never experienced rape but identified as vulnerable and active in association together with many rape victims) with rape and knowledge of the situation and culture in DRC. Both the mean and median age of the informants is 39 years old. The average number of children of each woman is 6,1 children. At least 11 of them have experienced to be rejected by their family, where 3 did not know due to the fact that they had not been in contact with their family after being released from the woods, where they had been held hostage as sexual slaves, or so-called soldier-wives. As previously pointed out, all names are changed in order to protect the women from potential negative reactions.

Table 4: Participating informants

Informant	Name	Age	Status	No of children	Rejection	When	No of years
Victim 1	Deborah	42	Married	8	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Victim 2	Jannie	37	Married	6	Unknown	2012	0
Victim 3	Michelle	33	Married	5	Unknown	2012	0
Victim 4	Delia	30	Widow	4	Unknown	2012	0
Victim 5	Brenda	46	Married	4	Yes	2005	7
Victim 6	Farelle	48	Married	7	Unknown	never	never
Victim 7	Rose	50	Widow	6	No	2006	6
Victim 8	Valentina	40	Married	7	Yes	2005	7
Victim 9	Noellie	38	Married	7	Yes	2006	6
Victim 10	Ruth	45	Widow	8	Yes	2009	3
Victim 11	Gladys	22	Unmarried	0	No	2009	3
Victim 12	Nancy	35	Married	7	Yes	2007	5
Victim 13	Dorcas	37	Married	8	Yes	2011	1
Victim 14	Elodie	31	Married	6	Yes	2009	3
Victim 15	Ariana	45	Married	10	No	2007	5
Victim 16	Sarah	54	Widow	4	Yes	2002	10
Victim 17	Gloria	48	Married	9	Yes	2000	12
Victim 18	Grace	28	Widow	4	Yes	2005	7

## 4.5 Qualitative methods for data collection

The objective of this study is to give a comprehensive description of local rape victims' opinions in order to increase the understanding on how they cope after being raped and subsequently receiving treatment and counselling. As noted, the role of qualitative research is to examine the social world "through an examination of the interpretation [and interaction] of that world by its participants" (Bryman 2008: 366). In order to increasingly understand the rape victims' situation, it is vital to identify links, similarities, relationships and interconnectedness between statements from the informants (Bryman 2008: 552). Then again, this study will strive towards explaining these links by analysing the structures and mechanism, which these informants highlight as central. The qualitative method can also assist disclosing possible contradictions that may be of crucial character, by for instance reveal disagreement between the information given by the informants. This study aims to do this by focusing on semi-structured/unstructured interviews, observation, and searching for existing data and information through analysing present literature and research.

### **4.5.1 Qualitative Interviews**

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The main method for data collection in this research is based on semi-structured interviews. The study uses suitable adapted interview guides linked to the group of informants in order to assure the reliability of the empirical data (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 46). This is further discussed in section 4.7. Once again, the sensitivity linked to SV and personal stories imposes potential constraints in terms of data collection. However, meeting informants in private (informant, researcher and translator) is potentially the best way to attain detailed and proper information. Due to the language barrier the interviews were executed by engaging an interpreter. The use of an interpreter is clearly an essential part of the interviews done for this study, and can have several influential factors. The experiences linked to this will be further discussed in section 4.8.3.

Already after a few interviews the first signs of theoretical saturation emerged (Bryman 2008: 542). The informant group representing former rape victims did to a high degree provide similar answers to the questions prepared and asked from the interview guide. In short, after 10 interviews the gathered information and gathered data did not illuminate the concepts any further (Bryman 2008).

### **4.5.2 Observation**

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Being in the fortunate position of being in contact with a specific organisation, Camps, working on follow-up services offered to rape victims, pen up the possibility to attend and observe various activities arranged by the organisations counsellors and carried out both in the main office and locally in rape victims home communities. This gave me the opportunity to not only read and receive information about their actions through talking to employees, but also provided the chance to observe different stages of their' follow-up program - in person.

Being in close contact with Camps also lead to the coincidence of being present when new victims (so-called "fresh cases") arrived at the premises of the organisation for the first time. In addition to this I actually got the opportunity to talk to some of these women. Also, a visit to a specialized hospital were organised, were I could experience the facilities of where rape victims are transferred if they suffer from serious infections or severe physical injuries caused by exceptionally violent rapes. This again, provided the possibility to speak to staff occupied in this work - both on the medical and administration level.

Furthermore, I requested to follow some of the coordinators when visiting three different branch offices in nearby villages. This formed an opportunity for me to attend and observe sensitizing sessions that were arranged among female rape victims organised in small local associations. As explained above, these gatherings were arranged by the organisation subsequent to both medical and psychosocial treatment. These sensitizing activities are organized in order to encourage women to stay together, improve the ways of managing socioeconomic challenges, and for counsellors to teach the women the valuable lesson of staying together and supporting each other – making it easier to deal with various problems which each and everyone of them may encounter.

Having the possibility to be present and observe the practical work of Camps allowed me to gain a deeper insight into their work on assisting female rape victims. This was priceless information that made me understand the value of assisting-activities more holistically, and was surely and advantages when talking to the women that have received treatment and repeatedly referred to this during the interviews.

#### **4.5.3 Document analysis**

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After deciding for both the topic and context of this fieldwork, and while still preparing for departure, several organisations and researchers working on the matter were, as previously mentioned, contacted. This contact provided quite a few recommendations on applicable literature and articles relevant for this study. After entering the DRC and being in contact with staff involved in programs assisting victims of rape, this again offered additional access to certain reports and statistics - developed by different relevant actors. Document analysis has been an imperative part of this master thesis, in order for me to be sufficiently updated on existing research regarding SV and rape in the eastern part of DRC. In addition it has been vital in order to identify existing explanations and recommendations pointed out by other researchers and organisations on how to satisfactorily assist rape victims. This has additionally given me more information on how selected NGOs work and how they think about the situation. This is interesting knowledge to have in order to see if this fits what the informants in this study highlights and state as important for them.

Despite accessing literature and reports relevant for both DRC and SV/rape, there seems, as highlighted above, to be a lack of information and research focusing directly on the explicit issue of this study. When it comes to consequences that extend *beyond* the subject of victims' medical and/or psychosocial conditions, there seems to be a deficiency in relevant research executed in the Kivus. In my opinion, it is important to note that widespread rape does also have other kinds of consequences, both for the victims and for the overall society, which the findings of this study will further discuss in chapter 6. It is therefore imperative to adjust efforts regarding the problem of SV and rape to be in harmony with what the beneficiaries argue is essential and needed. This makes research with this perspective vital in order to raise awareness of this importance, and hopefully improve assistance given to rape victims and thus their livelihood.

#### **4.5.4 Focus groups**

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The initial plan was to arrange focus groups to gather data for this study. Informants' discussing and potentially sharing experiences stemming from their common experiences can be of valuable importance for a study like this. Focus groups can be an efficient way of revealing important data and obtain valuable information that may not be revealed through other methods. For instance Tonheim (2011) trained local research assistants for her research data collection on child soldiers in DRC. By using local assistants she experienced to disclose significant information and personal narratives that no researcher had been notified of prior to her research. This demonstrates the potential added value of arranging focus groups in addition to the 1:1-interviews.

Unfortunately, for this study it happened to be too challenging to arrange focus groups. This was mainly due to the language barrier and given the limited time and challenges to find a suitable translator/research assistant. As a result, the planned focus group discussions were left out. However, I am aware that this could have been valuable for this study's data collection. For instance potential divergence between the participating women's regarding their opinions on challenges to completely recover and show resilience after rape, could have been revealed. However, based on the organized 1:1-interviews it seems like the women in this study struggle with more or less similar issues, and face corresponding challenges, after being subjected to rape. Nevertheless, focus groups may potentially have ignited discussions that again could have revealed disagreements connected to this issue.



## 4.6 Coding of data

The key intention of grounded theory is generating theory from the collected empirical data through analysis. The approach is both inductive and deductive and the most vital steps of grounded theory are the process of coding, conceptualization and categorization. The initial step of this research is linked to the data collection, which in this case consists of a mix between semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, observations and reviewing literature as seen above.

When doing research one should constantly compare and ask questions related to the empirical findings, which is a crucial step in order to code data and distinguish relationships between categories (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 179). Central to the analysis is “the process whereby data are broken down into components parts” (Bryman 2008: 552). During the process of gathering the empirical data I immediately started the procedure of coding the data by sorting and classifying the collected data. Here I identified key findings in order to potentially identify patterns and groupings visible in the sources of data. Similar codes were then further grouped into similar concepts, which again was formed into categories. The categories make the foundation towards the creation of theoretical assumptions, which is the overall goal of the grounded theory, by comparing and discovering relationships in the data material (Bryman 2008). As already underlined, this study seeks the rape victims own experiences, which again forms the basis of further discussing existing structures and mechanisms that seems to hamper rape victims recovery, resilience and livelihood.

## 4.7 Analysis of data

The actual interviews represent the raw material of this research, while the transcribed documents represent the tangible basis for the data analysis. The process from the interview to the transcribed data represents the first part of the data reduction, which demands accuracy in order to create a good and trustworthy foundation for the analysis. Therefore, shortly after the interviews were held the empirical data was transcribed into written material. This was a deliberate action in order to decrease the likelihood of “loosing” valuable data (Dalen 2011: 58). In minor studies like this master thesis I could do all the transcribing myself (without the use of research assistants), which gave me a unique opportunity to better understand and know my data (Dalen 2011: 5).

In a qualitative study like this, the collected data is largely based on information and contributions given by the participating informants. In addition the analysis includes factual information about the interviewees (presented in table 4 on page 43) as well as non-verbal behaviour and my own observations during the interviews and stay in the Kivus (Dalen 2011).

The actual analysis started already during the interviews (Dalen 2011: 56). After finishing the interviews I based my analysis strongly on the neatly transcribed documents. Due to the language barrier, I did not perceive it as satisfyingly efficient to tape-record the interviews, since this would demand an interpreter when wanting to listen through the interviews in retrospect of the completed interviews. Therefore, I instantly decided that my transcribed interview statements are texts open for further interpretations – and not only the oral information gathered during the interviews (Dalen 2011: 58).

In the analysis the aim is to “raise the data material from descriptions to a more interpretative level” (Dalen 2011: 60, authors own translation). In other words, the empirical data including personal accounts, statements and narratives provided by the informants, has further been analysed more theoretically. However, since this research has the design of grounded theory it is important to repeatedly note that the analysis is mainly based on the perspectives and perceptions that the female rape victims highlighted through the interviews. These contributions subsequently pointed out the main points of interest selected for the further discussion. These issues are primarily regarding the challenges they face after being subjected to rape, which in the findings section (Chapter 5) is further commented by interpreting and evaluating the underlying structures and root causes, hence linking this to relevant theory reviewed in chapter 3 above.

## **4.8 Reliability and Validity**

Since there is no absolute truth in social science one might ask how to trust the research findings of such studies. Although one cannot say that the data is the absolute truth, one can ensure that the analysis, based on the collected empirical data, represent the reality. This can be done for instance by testing the reliability by comparing the study with the work done by other researchers, and is of course linked to the method chosen you use when collecting the

data. Then again, where reliability represents the reality, the validity is about how relevant the data is in order to support a study's research question. In other words, what questions will answer the defined research question stated on page 6 (1.3) the best possible way? A researcher's connection to the phenomenon that is to be studied may influence the study's validity and interpretation of data (Dalen 2011: 94). The research topic is largely selected due to personal interest, but also due to the impression that SV and rape needs to be talked about in order to create a change in the DRC. Mainly having knowledge of this issue through literature made it important to ensure intersubjectivity between me, as a researcher, and the informants during the qualitative interviews. This is important in order to satisfactorily grasp the women's personal understanding of their situation – how they experience it.

In other words, validity is about ensuring that the research is measuring or testing what the study aspires and argues it is going to do. Therefore, validity is not as relevant in research using the grounded theory, and where the foundation of the study is founded in the data gathered by talking to the chosen informants. According to Glaser & Strauss (1967) validity within grounded theory-studies should rather focus on how closely concepts fit with the incidents they are representing. Research is not only about academic interest, but is also dealing with the real concern of the participants in the study (here: the female rape victims). In addition, the emerging theory, which comes out from analysing the data gathered in interviews, gives relevant and varied explanations on how to solve a problem. On top of this, the theory should be dynamic, meaning that the theory can be altered when new relevant data is compared to existing data. In short, a grounded theory is never right or wrong, it just has more or less fit, relevance, workability and modifiability (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

In this study I assess the emphasised aspects like this:

The concepts of rape, stigmatisation and culture/tradition are closely fitting the main issues raised by the informants. Then again, the relevance of this study is easy both to identify and defend. The rape victims themselves are the real focus of the study, and their' concerns can hopefully improve the situation and support which rape victims in the future will receive. Subsequently, the workability of this study is a challenging issue. In connection with the complexity of the problem of SV and rape in DRC, it is challenging and hard to create positive change. However, as the accounts given by the informants demonstrate: existing structures needs to be challenged. Consequently, this study suggests raising awareness in order to challenge gender-hostile traditions and today's depressing reality particularly

experienced by female rape victims. Nevertheless, such changes are unquestionably dependent on a long process that requires both time and money. Finally, the modifiability of this study is clear. Culture and social aspects of life are dynamic. This underlines the possibility to actually change the situation having huge consequences for the people in DRC today. Change is what this study recommends and calls for, which again obviously open up the results from this study to required and requested transformation in the future.

## 4.9 Limitations

First of all, conducting research in a national and cultural setting, largely unfamiliar to the researcher, may cause limitations that are difficult for me to directly point out. Then again, the fact that rape victims participating in this study all receive(d) help and assistance from the same actor/institution (Camps). This may have influenced the answers in a corresponding direction. This may be the fact since the activities they all have been part of similar counselling services, received equivalent sensitizing offers and exposed to corresponding information from the same actor. Unfortunately, there was not sufficient time to compare the views of victims receiving treatment and counselling from different institutions, although this would have been of huge interest.

### 4.9.1 Mutual relationship amid researcher and informant

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In qualitative research it is an advantage to ensure a comfortable relationship between researcher and informants. In other words, it is vital to establish trust from the interviewees in order to make sure that the information gathered in interviews is believed to be true, honest and accurate. The qualitative method gives proximity to the interviewees, which may be fundamental in order to ascertain a trustful relationship between the informant and researcher (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 142). This was taken into consideration, especially before and during the interviews. However, due to the limited time spent in the field and only meeting each interviewee at one occasion - as part as the interview process - this relationship was of a rather superficial and simple nature. Nevertheless, from the researchers perspective the atmosphere throughout the interviews was recognized as equal and content.

SV and rape is a sensitive topic, which makes a mutual and relaxed relationship important between researcher and informant important in order to obtain relevant information. If trust is

not established one might experience biases in the respondents' behaviour and/or answers. This may for instance be linked to the fact that informants try to influence the researcher in a certain direction, that they attempt to give answers they *believe* the researcher "wants" or requests, or it could be the result of respondents feeling afraid or anxious to be entirely honest because they fear personal consequences (Dalen 2011: 102) – a condition that may be even greater when discussing a touchy topic, known as to be stigmatised in DRC.

#### **4.9.2 Available resources and security constraints**

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One evident limitation of this research is linked to restricted time and resources. However, preparatory work completed before leaving Norway, made it easier to get going when eventually entering then field. Another major limitation is linked to security and the actual possibilities to move around in the Kivus. Ideally, more villages and rural areas would have been visited, but unfortunately the imminent risk made this unadvisable. It would have been interesting to compare rural and urban areas, and for instance identify if and whether the challenges and struggles vary in connection to this. However, the rural areas are more prone to violent attacks and represent insecure areas. Talking to soldiers or warlords directly involved with rape and SV could potentially have added a more nuanced aspect to this study. However, this was inadvisable due to several reasons both of practical reasons and of security concerns, and was shortly discarded since it may have put people, myself included, in needless danger.

#### **4.9.3 The use of an interpreter**

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The experience of using a local interpreter during the fieldwork of this study caused both positive and negative outcomes. A general issue when using an interpreter is the unavoidable fact of interruptions that may disturb the informants and potentially influencing their answers. This is especially a challenge while interviewing talkative informants. For example, at one instance during this study both the researcher and interpreter wanted to pause an informants response she was giving to one question, in order for the interpreter to translate before progressing, but experienced that the interviewee in return requested *us* to wait until she had finished her account.

Due to the fact that the DRC, and especially the eastern parts of the country, still experienced immense problems related to SV and rape, the Kivus was an obvious context to visit in order to look into rape victims' personal experiences with the consequences of rape. Being aware of probable challenges linked to speaking neither Moshi, or Swahili nor French, which are the main languages spoken in the Kivus, did not stop the research from taking place. As part of the preparatory activities people with prior experiences from working in this area, and being in similar positions language-wise, was consulted. Their feedback was convincing in the direction that it would be possible to execute the research in the DRC despite potential, and highly expected, language barriers between researcher and informants.

As part of preparing for the field-entrance, individual researchers and organisations were contacted with the aim of getting in contact with a professional translator. Unfortunately, getting hold of an interpreter, in order to establish a contract, was not possible to arrange before personally reaching the DRC. Despite this, an interpreter was fortunately identified and introduced to this study after me staying only one day in the field. This made it possible to start off with the interviews more or less immediately after arriving in Bukavu.

Nevertheless, there are always some endangering elements connected to the use of an interpreter. First, the information will always be decoded and understood by the translator before "passed over" to the researcher. In other words, there is always the risk that meanings are lost in translation (Bryman 2008). Although the interpreter used in this study possesses an undergraduate degree in language and literature, he did not completely master the English language, which caused some challenges in terms of not being able to perfectly communicate with the translator during the interviews. Although the essence of what the informants expressed was comprehended, the translation made it difficult to obtain *accurate* statements from the interviewees. There were also a few instances where the interpreter had to repeat translations, or rephrase the sentences in order for the researcher to grasp and fully understand what he was saying/translating. However, this interpreter has previously been repeatedly used to translate reports from Camps, and has previously been used by other Norwegian representatives visiting the Kivus for work purposes. Hence, the challenges I personally experienced when using the interpreter may have been due to my unfamiliarity of communicating via an interpreter, as well as the interpreter performing an "inadequate" job.

However, the fact of having a male interpreter raising questions of both a personal and sensitive nature may have influenced the answers received from the female informants. Due to this, actions were immediately taken in order to find a female interpreter - without success. However, Congolese people working with raped women argued that using a male interpreter is not representing a problem. Neither did the interviews leave the impression that the respondents perceived this as being neither uncomfortable nor a problem. This may challenge the assumption that women do not speak about these matters in front of men (Bradley 2011: 44). However, from a personally perspective, employing a female translator is still believed to have been the best solution and therefore preferable. But, as noted, this was unfortunately not possible to arrange.

Nevertheless, the interpreter was clearly aware of particular issues linked to him being both a man and a local individual. He demonstrated this for instance on one occasion by directing the researcher to the side, informing that he knew one of the women waiting to be interviewed. The interpreter said he believed this could potentially influence this specific woman's behaviour and answers, since he is familiar to her and knows members of her close family. As a result, the decision that he was not going to be the interpreter for this interview was made. Another lady working in the office stepped in as a translator, although her limited knowledge of English required me to simplify some of the questions during this specific interview. All things considered, it is believed that this was the best arrangement when this acquaintance-issue turned up. It was truly satisfying to see that the interpreter acting professionally and being truly aware of his potential influence in such a case.

The above demonstrates potential disadvantages of hiring a local interpreter. However, one advantage of collaborating with a local translator may be that the person is familiar with the selected research topic and may for instance point out cultural codes, unfamiliar to the researcher. The fact that the translator was knowledgeable of the conflict in the DRC, including the problem of SV/rapes, in addition to the general work of Camps, was positive in the sense that the interpreter fundamentally understood the questions from the pre-made interview guides. Simultaneously, it left a more negative feeling that this may have influenced the answers obtained during the interviews, at least to some degree. Since most interviews took place in Swahili or Moshi it was impossible for me to verify (unknown to these languages) that the translations were accurate. Additionally, engaging a local interpreter may potentially influence the result linked to the interpreters subjectively regarding the topic.

However, total objectivity may not be possible to achieve whatever background the interpreter holds. This may not even be possible when acting without an interpreter (when speaking the interview-language fluently), since there is always a chance that a researcher himself cannot guarantee an entire impartiality to the subject discussed.

#### **4.9.4 The researchers' potential influence**

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As mentioned above, it is impossible to completely ensure neutrality and objectivity, which is linked to the fact that all researchers carry ballast that might shape understandings and make them biased in one direction or the other. The “reality is subjective rather than objective - it exists in the views, feelings, and interpretations of individuals, including the researcher” (Ellsberg & Heise 2005: 54). This may lead researchers to provide informants with certain traits or values. It is therefore important to highlight that the researcher should strive towards being as objective as possible. However, as discussed above it is simultaneously imperative to facilitate the exchange of meanings by establishing trust and confidence between researcher and informants, in order to understand the complex and dissimilar cultural reality experienced by the people consulted in the research (Johannessen *et. al* 2007).

However, during interviews a researcher function as a “filter” that facilitates picking up additional information, such as articulation, acts and behaviour, which are not possible to reveal through words alone (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 127-128). This could certainly be valuable information, especially if there are inconsistencies between what an informant is saying and doing. However, this can also be challenging while doing research in a foreign culture such as the DRC, where the researcher of Norwegian origin is not perfectly familiar with Congolese cultural codes. However, using a local translator may assist identifying such discrepancy, although this may also involve certain limitations and disadvantages, as discussed in the section above.

Nevertheless, my position as a foreigner may surely influence what the respondents decided to relay. However, one native Congolese woman told me that being a foreign researcher might actually be positive for when collection data. She backed up this argument by explaining that not being part of the local community can be an advantage since informants may feel more comfortable to open up and share their experiences to a “stranger”. The informants may be more confident that giving their personal accounts will not have any



repercussion, contrary to the potential threat if the researcher were local. According to this lady, it may indeed be more problematic to talk to a local researcher than a foreigner, since the local Congolese informant and the researcher of the same origin share the same cultural background, thus encompasses similar cultural values. Additionally, being from the same area inevitably increases the risk that the researcher may know someone in the informants' family or social circle. Hence, in such occasions the informants may in fact be more hesitant to share their stories and experiences due to the fear of being judged based on local and traditional views. In conclusion, being a foreigner is not necessarily negative in this sense, although it definitely entails other weak points such as not mastering the local language or not being familiar with all cultural codes.

#### **4.9.5 Interview location with disturbances**

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The majority of the interviews took place at the premises of Camps in charge of the treatment and follow-up activities of the raped women interviewed in this study. An advantage of this is that these women have been in the program for some time (although over various periods) and are both familiar with the office, counselling activities, the people working on the grounds and the general follow-up program. However, this may simultaneously be a disadvantage in terms of the staff being, seen from the researchers personal point of view, lacking professionalism in the way they encountered the informants.

First of all, the issue of confidentiality seems to be an issue receiving low priority. I repeatedly experienced to be interrupted during the interviews of people looking for colleagues or coming to fetch something from the room where the interviews were performed. As a visitor doing interviews in the local organisations building and meeting women enrolled in their program made it somehow feeling inappropriate to correct them by saying that these interruptions are unacceptable. Instead, I made sure that the interviews were temporarily halted during the disruption and continued first when the person left the room or closed the door. This kind of pausing may have influenced the flow of information. However, it is seen as the researchers responsibility and perceived as imperative to ensure confidentiality for informants in a study of a sensitive nature (Dalen 2011: 101). Therefore, as a way of ensuring the confidentiality of the informants, short breaks were preferred above continuing the interview while other people than the researcher and interpreter was present. Nevertheless, no negative reactions or hesitation from any of the interviewees were noticed,

which may possibly be a result rising from the fact that the victims participating in this study largely are familiar with the staff working at Camps. Simultaneously, this may also be a reason explaining why the staff did not entirely respect the privacy of the interview-sessions. They may have been of the impression that they as counsellors already knew the stories of the victims being interviewed. Nonetheless, a separate and neutral room for conducting the interviews would have been preferred, but due to logistical issues and practical matters regarding the arrangement of the interviews, this specific place were eventually seen as the most adequate, although other arrangements (such as me visiting the informants instead of them coming to see me) were considered.

#### **4.9.6 Selection of informants**

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In order to get in contact with female rape victims I worked through the organisation Camps. Consequently, I did not directly recruit the informants personally. This selection was made by one counsellor involved in Camps' SV-programs. This may of course have influenced the selection of informants in a certain direction. The general impression is that the informants interviewed were more or less randomly picked, despite me asking for a particular profile. What seems to have been decisive and determining the variety of interviewees was mainly the question of the respondents' availability, opportunity and willingness to attend, rather than specifically criterions sat in collaboration of the researcher and informant-recruiter. The profile and background of what women I wanted to talk to was explained and described. In order to meet rape victims that were anticipated to have to a certain extent started processing what happened, this study requested women that had received treatment and had been in the program for at least a year. This was seen as necessary in order for the informants to have experienced the effect of the treatment and counselling. In addition, to fit the aim of this study it was also vital that it had been a while since the rape, in order for the interviewed women being able to reflect on the more long-term consequences the rape has had - both personally and positioned in a larger picture. Subsequently, it is perceived that women receiving treatment may potentially be more accustomed to talk about their experiences without too much difficulty. This was highly imperative due to this study looking at overall implications of rape, without the researcher encompassing either therapeutically education or intensions of acting as someone with such knowledge.

## 4.10 Ethical considerations

Beside security concerns and access to informants, which has already been discussed, another key limitation of this research is the risk of informants not being interested in attending the interviews or refusing to answer certain questions, due to for instance the sensitivity and/or personal nature of the questions. Executing a research on victims “of SV should not be undertaken without careful forethought, preparation, attention to motivation, ethics, and dissemination, and where possible, support” (Hearn *et. al* 2007). Before entering the field I feared prospective problems linked especially to the sensitive nature of SV and rape. The fact that many of my informants have experienced brutal violence, rape and witnessed killings and torture, I envisaged this to be stories that would be difficult to talk about and that some of the women potentially would refuse or avoid to talk about what had happen to them. There is for instance a risk that certain people will reject to be part of the project because they fear consequences from the local community or family, which at worst could cause additional stigma when linked to a cultural sensitive topic as SV and rape. However, once I begun my interviews my understanding changed. My overall impression gathered from the time in the field is that women involved in follow-up programs had received training, obtained advice and undergone sensitizing activities that have made them understand and somewhat accept their situation. This has made them aware of being personally innocent of what happened and casual victims of rape. This, I believe makes them better prepared to openly talk about their experiences. However, I also interviewed three rape victims prior to them receiving professional treatment and counselling, and these women also seemed surprisingly willing to share their experiences, even though they seemed both tense and tattered.

Even though I did not notice or experience any reluctance of talking to me it was obviously demanding for some of the rape victims to talk about their experiences, and to recall what had occurred in the past. However, since my questions were mainly outlined to obtain rape victims experiences on how to recover and return back to their lives after such an incidence, the need for these women to go into detail about their stories were not the main goal of the interviews. However, in order for me to paint a picture on the circumstances and how the women initially ended up joining an SGBV-program, I always asked about the incidence leading up to this. This was formulated as an open-ended question, were the majority of women started to tell, quite detailed, about their experiences. Despite the fact that my

informants seemed comfortable to share their stories, some were obviously affected by what their situation, and some wept and sobbed during parts of the interview.

The ethics play an important role in this study and as noted, a researcher is responsible for protecting his/her informants. Therefore, it is important that the respondents are provided with sufficient information about the study and why it is carried out, in order for them to know the reason behind being interviewed, and to establish trust between researcher and informants as discussed above. First of all, it is important to inform the respondents about the purpose of the study, and another crucial aspect is to notify the respondents of their informed consent and the confidentiality of the research (Johannessen *et. al* 2007: 93-94). Information on informed consent should be repeated ahead of the interviews, in order to make sure that the informants are fully aware that they may resign from the study if they decide that they do not want to participate. In this study, this was done both when recruiting informants and before starting the actual interview. The recruitment-process was, as previously mentioned, prepared in collaboration with one counsellor in the SGBV-project. This counsellor were thoroughly informed about the reason behind this research and were specifically asked to emphasized that attending the interviews was completely voluntarily for the women when she was in contact with potential interviewees and asked them if they were willing to participate. However, since I was not personally present while she was doing the calls/arranging meetings, it is impossible to completely guarantee that this was sufficiently underlined for each and every woman requested. Nevertheless, central information about the research should be given, although it is clear that this may have limiting effects on the results, where respondents for example adjust their behaviour and explanations to be in line with what they assume the study are requesting.

Ahead of each interview I introduced myself and told the informants about my background. I told them that I was a student, doing research in order to learn more about the issue of SV and rape, and that this would make the basis of my thesis. I highlighted that the information gathered during the interview would be treated as the foundation of my master thesis. I decided not to use consent forms, due to uncertainty about how people would react on such documents, where it may feel both intimidating and very formal to sign such papers. In addition I was unsure of the literacy rate of the informants (which according to the figures in table 3 page 17 is relatively high in the DRC), which made me opt for a verbal information

session, where I made sure that the participants both understood the research and agreed to participate.

In order to encourage women to participate this study presents the findings while leaving all real names of participating persons out, replacing them with pseudonym names. In this way it ensures that all participants are kept anonymous in order to protect the participants from future reactions. Hence, in the initial phase of each interview I also repeated and informed the respondents about the voluntarily nature of my research. I told them that their name would be anonymous in the finalised thesis, and that if they found any of my questions difficult to answer, or to talk about during the interview, we would simply skip that question.

I highlighted the right to withhold information or avoid replying to certain questions, without this having any sort of penalties.

Since it is voluntarily to be an informant in a study like this, one might both expect and respect, that some people may refrain from participating. However, my experience regarding this was that most victims seemed comfortable telling their story and sharing their experiences. The majority even expressed their thankfulness of getting the chance of talk to and meet me. Off course there were differences in how the informants behaved, where for instance some were more talkative than others. However, I did not experience any of the women appearing to be truly uncomfortable, and none of them expressed that they wanted to skip any of my questions, although I sometimes received pretty short, or had to present probing questions to make them understand the question appropriately (Bryman 2008).

I highlighted my position as an independent student not linked to any government or organisation, especially underlining that I was not linked to the work in the follow-up program they are part of. I believe the latter issue was especially important to stress, since some of my questions were directly linked to the women's experiences of the assistance they receive(d), also encouraging them to highlight personal views on potential weaknesses and insufficiencies of the program. If they were of the understanding that I was part of the program they might have been hesitating to criticize the program. Simultaneously, one or two of the informants actually encouraged me to go forward with their recommendations to Camps, which may be an evidence of the women not being as frightened to speak their mind as assumed. Nonetheless, there might be differences between individuals, so I perceive it as important to point out impartiality, rather than risking receiving biased answers.

It is important, in order to “make clear their separation from authorities and professionals, ensuring that there are not false hopes raised in the consent process” (Hearn *et. al* 2007: 9). Despite the fact that this was emphasized I experienced both enquiries for money and encouragement for increased support from some of the informants. One woman encouraged me to contact people that may change the situation for her. Another one says that she prays to God to send someone to help her, simultaneously insinuating that that person could be me (the researcher).

#### **4.10.1 Refreshments and financial allowances**

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As a rule of thumb, it is seen as unethical to pay or induce people to attend your research, since this may inflict with answers you obtain (Bryman 2008). However, the balance and understanding of the difference between inducements and general hospitality may be blurred.

By recruiting informants through Camps I highlighted the importance of informing the female respondents that attending the interview was entirely voluntarily. I suggested that I could personally visit the women where they are staying, but one of the coordinators working with these women encouraged me to do the interviews in the organisations’ office. She stated that this was the best solution, which may be linked to the fact that these women not necessarily want to draw attention to their neighbourhood regarding them being raped. Me showing up at the victims’ place could potentially have resulted in unnecessary and unwelcomed attention towards these women. Hence, I agreed on the suggestion of arranging the interviews at the premises of Camps. However, the timing of when the informants should show up was hard to communicate, resulting in several women showing up at the same time. Consequently, this made some women having to sit and wait for some time, while I was interviewing others, and remain until it was their turn. This again made one employee at Camps suggesting that I (the researcher) should provide some food and drinks for the time the informants waited.

Unsure of what to do I decided to both confer with my contact-person at the organisation as well as a Norwegian researcher previously executing several studies in the Kivus. They both encouraged me to do as the woman working at Camps proposed. The researcher gave an example making me realize that this would be unproblematic to do, and would not influence my answers, simply by saying: you would have done it back home! And yes, it is perfectly

normal to provide drinks and the like to people attending meetings in the Western part of the world, so why should this be any different in the DRC?

I also ended up deciding to pay my informants for the transport to and from the office (approximately 1\$ USD per person). This decision were made due to the fact that these women in reality prioritised talking to me at the expense of performing their everyday tasks usually executed to earn money for their daily livelihood. Attending the interviews as informants were entirely voluntarily, but why should they be the ones in reality paying to see me? It felt reasonable to compensate at least for the money they spent by coming to the office for the interviews. However, in order to limit the influence this small amount of money could potentially have on the answers, I always gave the money after the interview was completed - and simultaneously underlined that this was an allowance meant to cover transport expenses. My experience was that this was greatly appreciated by the informants and not something that was expected.

The preceding four chapters have laid the foundation for the discussion and how the fieldwork in DRC was conducted. The master thesis will now continue with present and analyse the empirical findings in the following chapter.

## Chapter 5: Findings and Analysis

The following chapter presents the empirical findings and discusses the collected data up against relevant theories and literature within the field (presented in chapter 3). In order to make the findings clear and comprehensible the chapter is further divided into 5 parts, where each part is linked to one of the research questions that the empirical data and analysis will aim to discuss and respond to.

Part one is discusses what is identified as essential assistance for female rape victims to recover and show resilience. Through the raped women's stories the discussion points out elements, which the women found most vital. In addition, this section discusses how to adapt programs towards meeting victims' needs, and in an efficient manner.

Part two is largely based on accounts given by the raped women, and discussed how rape affects the individual victims, their families and local communities through social exclusion. First, the reasons for rejection are highlighted, before giving examples of this and looking why this is happening. Focus is mainly on raped women's personal experiences of stigmatisation and exclusion.

Part three looks into the main obstacles for female rape victims to recover and increase resilience. This is closely linked with social exclusion discussed above. It is clear that the rape often leads to rejection. This again leads to additional challenges, which will be emphasised in this section.

Part four explores how the reinsertion of female rape victims into their families can be improved. This part is mainly evaluating stories given by people and actors working with challenges stemming from the widespread numbers of rape. This part underlines how the effects of rape can be eradicated.

Part five is briefly considering how SV can be prevented in the future. Recommendations given by professionals working with rape will be discussed, In addition, the voices of raped women and findings from other researcher in this field will be included to highlight how reinsertion of raped women into their family may be possible.



## 5.1 Part one: Essential support for rape victims

Part one is linked to the first sub question in section 1.3 above: What kind of assistance is essential in order for female rape victims to recover and show resilience?

This section presents and discusses the findings related to rape victims' experience of what has been most helpful for them to rebuild their lives. The victims interviewed were asked to picture their situation and condition in the period following the rape. The discussion is based on personal experiences and description gathered from interviewing female rape victims in the aftermath of them receiving treatment. The outcome largely confirms the vitality of immediate assistance and shows how treatment has been of immense support for the women to recover. Simultaneously, the women interviewed got the opportunity to indicate and suggest potential improvements of the SV-program, and point out potential aspects that could have been positive for their healing. There is clearly a need for adapted programs in order to meet the various needs of rape victims. According to international recommendations this should also be adhered to. However, there is no doubt that resources may limit the reality of such programs' as the discussion will point out.

### 5.1.1 Medical and Psychosocial assistance

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“SV has a significant negative impact on the health of the population” (WHO 2003: 1). Therefore, organisations, NGOs and clinics do predominantly prioritize a health-based approach where medical and psychosocial assistance is the first priority. Medical and psychosocial assistance is unquestionably the most prominent actions a rape program should contain in order to assist raped women. The potential reproductive and sexual health consequences are numerous – unwanted pregnancy, STIs, HIV/AIDS and the like (WHO 2003). According to rape victim counsellors, going through medical treatment and receiving psychosocial support makes the majority of victims recover their health.

Physical symptoms of rape are many. However, it is also identified that many can present these physical problems such as headache, back ache, diarrhoea, vision disturbances and other pain as their main claim, while these symptoms in reality may have causal explanations. It may be linked to psychosocial causes, says the general director of Camps. It is therefore evident for rape victims to go through a psychological reassessment, to break the sadness and

discontent rape victims are generally feeling, and for them to recover and strengthen their hope for the future. Psychosocial assistance makes victims recognize that they may have been the authors of their own suffering, burying themselves in personal depression and negative thoughts.

Here, it is essential to repeat that the victims in this study *all* have received treatment from the same program offered by Camps. The general remarks reflect beneficial experiences received through the treatment and counselling provided them. Their approval is unmistakable positive, and a recurring recommendation from rape victims already undergone treatment to women in the same situation is to “stay calm and seek treatment”. This clearly demonstrates their overall satisfaction with the given treatment. However, the fact that basic health services are limited in the DRC (Ref: page 4) may partly be the reason why rape victims express such huge gratitude for receiving help.

All informants argue that the attendance in the Camps-program has been advantageous, although to a various degree. Regarding this issue WHO declares that: “not all victims of SV react in the same way” (2003: 73). In terms of physical injuries some informants told about experiences like beating, cutting and other violent acts causing physical injuries. Previously, a lot of visible injuries caused by physical trauma and torture were seen (Ref: REV page 79). In addition, there used to be a trend where victims’ seek help later, which led to severe infections and long-term gynaecological problems. Those who have experienced severe medical conditions like this, repeatedly state that the most vital for them have been the medical treatment.

The extreme situation in the DRC may be difficult to grasp, and it can be hard to get a clear picture of the circumstances rape victims go through. Ariana (45) experienced to be raped 5 years ago. She says it is about impossible to give credible descriptions, and pass on the stories of what she has seen and experienced, since her familiarity and personal experiences of violence is so horrific. Yet, she refers to stories of activities, such as people being tied to trees and tortured, women being burned and even lit on fire, and examples of men forced to have sexual intercourse with their daughters. This, in addition to other literature more detailed presenting the nature of SV in DRC, gives an indication of what many rape victims in reality have been through.

Arianna's experiences of the follow-up assistance after being raped, is here presented as an additional introduction of what she and many other Congolese women with her have experienced.

At that time of the rape, Ariana lived in a village frequently visited by the Interahamwe-soldiers (FDLR) searching for valuables and food. One night when her husband was away, the soldiers knocked on her door asking for money. She did not have anything to spare and as a result she was aggressively taken from the house. She was forced to leave her children terrified, weeping and all by themselves. In the forest the abducted women were 'forced to do what was expected of them' and 'act as wives' of the soldiers – implying forced sex. One day Ariana was instructed to go looking for firewood, which provided an opportunity for her to escape, something she describes as "a miracle of God". Some time after this incidence, a counsellor representing Camps came to the village in order to assist rape victims. At that time Ariana went through a phase where she suffered both physically and psychologically. Ariana utters that "you can just imagine yourself..." when asked how the rape affected her psychologically. According to her personal description she cried a lot and was not able to think positive. Even today, she explains that she cannot stop thinking of her vulnerability and her daily struggle to get food on the table. It is clear that such concerns again may be worsening the situation taken into account what psychiatric strains these women have been through. However, Camps have assisted her with necessary medicines and have given her, according to herself, valuable instructions and advises, which has been helpful. She expresses great appreciation and thanks God for the help she has received.

Ariana's story shows that the psychological aspects may be hard to bear. However, psychological consequences may be difficult to visually observe and pinpoint. This may be a reason why such assistance was not highlighted as the most important among the interviewed women. However, all informants disclosed descriptions demonstrating personal struggles in order to hopefully forget what they have been through. When it comes to psychological grievances, the women reported experiences of trauma, anxiety, depression and despair when entering the program. This study received descriptions from informants describing themselves as "useless, having no value, lacking hope and feeling as a living dead".

Grace (28) is one woman clearly affected by what happened to her. She tells that she is thinking of what happened to her and her family all the time, and that this is affecting her

mental state. She has received advise to not thinking too much about what happened to her, and she therefore prays to God that she may forget as time goes by. She describes that when she came back from the forest where she had been held captured she did not know how to situate herself in the world. Ruth (45) says: "I can explain it to you, but a none-victim will never understand". Despite depressions, the majority of women state that the advice they have received from the counsellors have been useful for them to move on and to regain their strength. In general the women are feeling better after receiving psychotherapy, even though some reveal that they still experience nightmares and other returning reminders of what happened to them. Gloria (48) tells that even it has been 12 years since she was raped she continues to be worried and sad when thinking of what happened to her. Sarah (54) says that she stills startles in fear when she sees a soldier, although it is ten years since she was raped.

The fact that psychological consequences was not as clearly pinpointed by the informants in this study, may also be linked with the traditional views of medicine, where psychological conditions are not as acknowledged as physical injuries. However, this is the author's own assumptions and not something that has been discussed in detail with any of the informants.

### **5.1.2 the need for adapted and individual treatment**

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Both the narratives relating to experiences of the rape before receiving treatment, and accounts describing how rape victims were coping after receiving treatment varies. This is most probably linked to the fact that people are different, a point that is clearly highlighted in the WHO's *guidelines for medico-legal care for victims of Sexual Violence*. According to these guiding principles, the WHO states that:

*Some victims experience immediate psychological distress, others short-term and/or long-term psychological problems. The amount and length of social support and/or psychological counselling required by victims of violence varies enormously, depending on the degree of psychological trauma suffered and the victim's own coping skills and abilities. The level of social support post assault is therefore best determined on a case-by-case basis (WHO 2003: 73).*

The suggested need for individual follow-up is an issue stressed by several organisations and programs, such as MSF, NRC, CRN, Care International, PMU, Camps. Individual adapted assistance appears to be a necessary and imperative aspect of successful treatment. However, the reality shows some discrepancy in the way this is actually realised. Among the

interviewees in this study, different experiences linked to the program evidently exists, and it is apparent that people hold diverse appreciations towards how the follow-up activities have helped them - be it physical, psychological or practical counselling. The feedback from the informants in this study demonstrates that people are of somewhat different opinions when it comes to the quality of the follow-up treatment and counselling services they have received. However, this seems to be more generally connected to non-medical issues, like financial assistance and training (which will be discussed in more detail below), rather than concerning medical treatment and/or psychotherapy.

Women are also expressed different satisfaction-levels of the mediation services offered as reconciliation-services between rape victim and husband/family. While some women tell about their experiences of such negotiations, others say that Camps never offered such assistance. This suggests varying quality and/or inconsistencies in the program. This may be linked to variations of the people/coordinators/counsellors employed in an organisation, or other factors such as available time, infrastructure and the like. Additionally, this response from the participants is perhaps influenced by the fact that some victims are not fully aware the organizations work that is offered by organisations. This again, may question the responsibility quality of the organisation. Furthermore, some people/victims may generally be of a more critical stance towards what they have acquired from a program, and the services they consider they are entitled to.

However, WHO highlight in their guidelines that “health care providers should be familiar with the full range of formal and informal resources that are available locally for victims of SV. It is the role of the health care worker to help patients identify and choose the most suitable option(s) for their particular requirements” (WHO 2003: 74). In short, the organisations and clinics are responsible for providing the necessary guidance, information and treatment. This is clearly a challenging task, but it seems naive to believe that rape victims should unravel this information themselves, and demand services they identify as needed. First of all, low education levels (Ref. table 2 page 17) may influence the victims understanding of their needs and what services that are required. Secondly, the information in a developing country such as DR Congo is frequently limited, and people’s access to technologies/ICT’s that supports the spread of information may be restricted (Heeks 2008). There are still numerous of victims that never receive treatment or counselling, due to lack of information and many obstacles to reach medical care (Kelly *et. al* 2011, MSF 2004, WHO

2003). Subsequently, inadequate infrastructure may challenge peoples' ability to seek information or treatment that is essential. Therefore, it is imperative that health care providers, both through local and international health clinics/hospitals, are thoroughly trained in order to offer sufficient services.

The WHO further recommends that "patients should be given both verbal and written referrals for support services, which may include: rape crisis centres, shelters or safe houses, HIV/AIDS counselling, legal aid, victim witness programs, support groups, therapists, financial assistance agencies, social service agencies" (WHO 2003: 74). However, there is no doubt that "the types of referrals given will vary depending on the patient's individual needs and circumstances, and also on the availability of facilities and resources" (WHO 2003: 74). Nevertheless, the factual definition of concepts means that what is put under one term, such as social services or legal aid, may be relative and different from one actor to the other. Especially when looking at actors operating in developing to underdeveloped countries, who are encouraged to follow the same standards prepared in the West. Consequently, one program may offer more/less than others due to aspects such as the financial situation, dissimilar definitions of what is required or possible, tangible access to trained workforce, and the like.

As a result of the above, victims may experience differences in the quality of the assistance they receive. Differences may be even greater when comparing different projects, but it is clear that even if victims attend the same program there might be differences - not the least over time. This may also be part of the reason why this study have recognised some dissimilarities. As noted, the participants interviewed in this study has experienced to be raped in a period stretching from 2 up until 12 years ago. Camps have offered services since 2003, and there is reason to believe that their support has changed within this time. The fact that some women were raped already in 2000, and Camps was established first in 2003, demonstrates that some must have struggled with rape-related problems long before receiving help.

Asking informants about what they perceive as the *most critical* support in order to being able to rebuild, cope and move on in their lives - the gathered response where for instance suggesting:

- *Medical treatment for health recovery*
- *Medical treatment in order to feel like a human again*
- *Assistance to find means to cover the victims' primary needs*
- *Kit with clothing in order to survive in the city*
- *Assistance that is important for the victims and her family*
- *Being healed and being able to get something to eat*

Sarah (54) is a widow and shares a very strong and emotional story, showing that she has been in great need of medical assistance. She used to live in a village until one day in 2002 when three men wearing military uniforms, carrying knives and guns, attacked her while working in the field, and collectively raped her. After the rape she was taken care of by some civilians. Later, the soldiers came back to the house one night, entered by force, and violently beat Sarah's husband, raped Sarah for the second time and sexually molested their 7-year old daughter. All family members were brought to the hospital, but both her husband and daughter died due to their inflicted injuries. Sarah herself suffered from serious medical problems after the attack. She describes her uterus as being completely destroyed following the violent rape. Despite professional surgery it has, still up to now (10 years later), not been possible to repair the damages applied by the rapists. These inhuman experiences have also hugely impacted Sarah psychological health. She tells about occasions where she breaks down of emotions escalating from her experiences.

Another woman, Gloria (48), emphasises the crucial need for both professional medical care and psychosocial assistance. In 2000 Gloria and her 14-year old daughter were abducted to the forest. They were kept naked in a hole in the ground and abused as sexual slaves by soldiers. Gloria stayed in the forest for approximately two weeks, experiencing horrendous acts such as watching her own daughter being killed by the soldiers. One day as the guard fell asleep Gloria managed to escape. Although this happened 12 years ago, Gloria says she still gets a headache, is worried and feeling unwell, when thinking of what occurred. However, the follow-up that she has received has assisted her to feel more at ease. Now she understands that despite what happened to her she is still a human being, and she should look ahead and not worry too much about what happened in the past. Medically, Gloria says she was about to die when returning from the woods. However, she managed to recover after receiving appropriate treatment and medication. She clearly points out medical treatment as the most vital assistance in order for her to continue in her life. However, she is always worried for her

responsibility as mother of 9, and the constant struggle to earn enough money to cover housing expenses.

These women's accounts demonstrate that there will be different needs and requirements for efficient treatment. It is clear that one person experiencing great trauma may need more assistance compared to a person not encountering and feeling the same consequences. As noted, people react differently to violent experiences. In addition, a person in need of less assistance before recovering may experience that the program is highly effective, while a person struggling with major problems after undergoing extensive medical treatment and/or psychological counselling experience utter dissatisfaction, for instance due to a personal understanding that the received treatment have not been successful. However, since the focus of many organisations and clinics is on individual counselling, one might expect that victims with dissimilar needs prior to treatment would experience rather equal results after following a program adapted to their needs. However, there is no doubt that adapting programs in order to make the assistance more suitable for each participant demands both time and money. One might suspect that the unanimous plan within the humanitarian health sector may be to offer individualised programs, but this may be difficult to realize in reality. This is in line with the argument of Steiner *et. al* (2009) stating that "humanitarian programming in this field is challenging due to the multiple needs of rape survivors."

### **5.1.3 Potential consequences of maladapted programs**

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As previously pointed out, this study represents women that have received treatment. However, it is important to stress the existing need for additional health facilities in the DRC. There rules some kind of consensus among international agencies working that rape in the DRC is underreported since the majority of Congolese citizens do not have access to health care (Ref: page 4). As a result, many rape victims never receive professional medical help and therefore fall out of the statistics.

There are, without a doubt, numerous of rape victims in the Kivu provinces. However, the foundation of the published statistics may be of insufficient and of varying quality. First of all, one rape victim may receive treatment from several different organisations. This would increase the likelihood that these victims are counted more than once. All rape victims in this study did however deny that they have obtained assistance from more than one actor.



However, it is evident that this may happen. DRC is a poor country and people may turn to creative methods to receive additional assistance or more benefits. Experiences from maladapted programs demonstrate this, for instance when poor people identify this as a clear opportunity to get hand of free articles, which the following example shows.

Former projects, directed towards SGBV-victims, did have a different focus. Care International admits flaws in one of their initial SV-programs. Preliminary activities focused around handing out kits containing items for the rape victims' household. This led to a huge concentration of women arguing that they had been raped in order to receive such benefits, even though they were not raped. This shows that the distribution of items may be based on deliberate considerations, but is not necessarily a sustainable solution. Consequently, this highlights the importance of carefully evaluating activities. It is essential to ensure a comprehensive preparation-phase, including thorough stakeholder analysis, which helps limit avoidable flaws. Another consequence of maladapted programs and activities is the risk of increased stigmatisation of rape victims. First, it makes it easier to identify the victims of rape. Additionally, such activities may cause jealousy within the local communities due to some people receiving assistance that others are not benefitting. This will be further elaborated in the subsequent part of this master thesis.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the problem of SV in general and rape in particular is far-reaching and has huge consequences for the Congolese population.

## **5.2 Part two: Rape influencing family relations**

Part two is linked to the first sub question in section 1.3: How does rape(s) affect the individual victims, their families and local communities?

This part will look into personal experiences and explanations of female rape victims, and demonstrates challenges they have met subsequent of being raped.

As seen in DR Congo the recurrent gender view is subordinating women against men. This skewed relationship between men and women is apparent in statistics such as the tables based on the Human Development Report (2011) in page 12, and confirming that women are underrepresented in education, government employment and the like. Females' inferior

position compared to men makes Congolese women vulnerable for. For rape victims this may have enhanced negative consequences. Being subjected to SV and rape bursts the existing picture of a woman as pure and monogamous. As a consequence many women experience the reality of social exclusion involving rejection by the husband and close family.

Rape may inflict both stress and challenges in a woman's life, and traditional norms and customs may limit her opportunities for the upcoming future. Since Congolese females in general possess subaltern positions compared to males, they may face no other options than to comply with decisions made by them. Decisions are often based on traditional standards. In other words, being unwillingly subjected to direct violence, such as rape, may subsequently lead to structural violence, discrimination and family-rejection since this appears as the only "right" thing to do. As Kabeer puts it, "subordinate groups are likely to accept, and even collude with, their lot in society if the alternative either does not appear possible or else carries heavy personal and social costs" (2004: 172). And for a raped woman in DRC being excluded there may not seem like there is much she can do about her situation.

### **5.2.1 Reasons for rejection**

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Every informant in this study confirms that discrimination against women is widespread in the country. One informant argues that women are generally not considered socially strong compared men perceived as physically and psychologically powerful. Women's subaltern positions gives stimulus for many of the challenges raped women is subjected to. This affects the way in which raped women are repeatedly treated by their husbands, family and general society. Stigmatizing seems to be crucial for raped women's ability to show resilience. Also Congolese laws and regulations make it difficult for women to gain privileges and rights, such as financial independence, which may be critical managing life without a husband. These women's accounts show that this is not only affecting them, but their children, other family members, including their husbands. This shows that rejection is affecting more people than the excluded woman.

"Culture and tradition condemn rape but also humiliate women who because they have been raped are considered shameful to the family and the society" (UNHCR 2011: 20). This is an extreme paradox, but traditions are evidently upholding the customs that strikes the individual rape victims, and proves to have long-term consequences affecting the entire society. Another

central aspect is that the rejection is not solely a reaction towards the rape victim only. It may also equally reflect the position of the husband, where he may feel insufficient or a failure since he failed to protect his wife.

The family and married couple stands as highly acknowledged and appreciated in the Congolese society. For many women, getting married and having a family of their own is what really counts in life. Also, if you experience problems the ones you turn to is your family. If a woman is rejected, she will suddenly be more or less on her own. Grace (28) is a rape victim that is solely on her own after being raped in an attack that also killed her husband. She does not expect to have a new husband in the future, due to the explanation that no man would ever take a raped woman for love. This statement shows how a raped woman may be stigmatised and looked down upon, and exemplifies the difficulties for a raped woman to move on - in line with the general expectations of the society - to a large degree meaning having a husband. When a woman experience to be abandoned this represents a major collapse of what she has achieved. Experiencing rejection is an additional challenging factor a situation that is both strenuous and difficult for a raped woman. Obviously, such experiences are characterized by psychological challenges like sadness and depression, which may further exacerbate the already challenged mental condition a woman might suffer from subsequent of being raped.

“The official matrimonial system in DR Congo is monogamy“ (SIGI 2012), which means the woman is her husbands’ property. The general manager of Camps says that, in DRC it is seen as problem not to get married since both men and women are seen to have a natural part in a family. As noted, virginity is deeply honoured and respected and there is no acceptance of brides that have lost their virginity, no matter if this is a result from voluntarily intercourse or due to rape. Connected to this, it is also shameful to share your wife sexually with someone else, even if this other man is a rapist - and the woman is a casual victim. Men would “be laughed at and ridiculed because their wives slept with other men, something that may lead men to feel inferior when they compare themselves to other men” (HHI & OSI 2009: 26). Hence, as one rape counsellor argues, the difficulties to get married after a woman is raped are linked to the honour of the potential husband.

A "women who have sex outside of marriage, whether voluntarily or by force, [are] perceived to bring misfortune to the household" (Kelly *et. al* 2011: 4). Hence women may be rejected as

the only way out, although it is clearly not a desirable solution. This demonstrates a complex situation where a man may feel obliged to leave his wife due to prejudice from the wider family and general society, regardless of he wants to or not. Honour beliefs and convictions are acting strong within the Congolese community and highly influencing decisions that are made, also related to rejection of raped victims.

Opposition and enmity from others frequently meet rape victims'. Many of the women in this study have been subjected to supportive activities offered by counsellors and organisational activities. However, when asked if they have ever experienced support from other people or establishments, the response was in general negative. No one had experienced support from any of their friends or family members, but a couple of the informants have received some trivial assistance from the church in terms of food or small assisting items. However, one of them argues this was due to her situation as a widow and not necessarily linked to her being a victim of SV. The lack of support and rather rejection is an issue that clearly deteriorates women already suffering. There is clearly a need to achieve changes in the detrimental attitudes hampering rape victims from moving on in their lives. "The shame should be on those who abandon these women, those who raped them, and all those who do not support them" (UNHCR 2011: 37).

As seen here, rape may cause both physical and mental problems for the victims, where women in DRC frequently also suffer from social stigma, which repeatedly have huge negative consequences in their lives. As seen, one common effect is social exclusion and rejection of victims by their close family. Consequently, abandoned women may have no place to live, not even a place in the society. Many rape victims are hesitant to seek help because they fear stigmatisation from other people. One counsellor working closely with raped woman says that silence and secrecy is therefore one strategy regularly undertaken to avoid the potential consequences and following problems of rejection. One woman in this study, Ruth (45), reveals that she has been raped on two separate occasions. After the first rape she was subjected to she decided to keep the incidence to herself, in order to avoid additional problems emerging from cultural norms striking rape victims. Another woman tells that no one outside her close family knows about what happened to her. This appears to be a deliberate decision to protect her self from negative attention and rumours. In this specific case, the woman is still unmarried and by keeping the rape undisclosed is certainly a strategy in order for her to improve her likelihood of finding a man, since it may be problematic to get

married subsequently of being raped. Seeking treatment means disclosing information and facing rejection and stigmatisation; keeping it secret may affect their health or cost them their lives" (MSF 2009: 19).

Another reason influencing statistics is that many victims are frightened to seek help due to reasons such as revenge from the rapist(s) and/or rejection from the family. Statistics from MSF shows for instance that "among those who had suffered SV eighty-one percent of women interviewed in mobile clinics and 95% in health centres and hospitals said that shame was the main reason they did not seek care" (MSF 2009: 24). The rejection seems to be based on the husband in particular, and families in general, fearing diseases and contamination, something that is also highlighted in Kelly *et. al* (2011: 4).

The provincial coordinator for Care international argues that people hiding the fact that they have been raped is also a problem. This again, is commonly linked to the fear of stigmatisation from the society, where rape victims may prefer keeping the rape a private secret instead of being insulted or even rejected by the family and/or the community. As seen, traditional customs may lead to rejections of a raped woman along with explanations that she is diseased, have HIV (can contaminate husband/family) and that she herself wanted the rape to happen. Both informants in this study, such as Jeannine, in addition to verification from literature and research, highlight the fear of sickness and contamination as one explanation of why rejection occurs (Kelly *et. al* 2011, HHI 2009). However, this seems to be a somewhat simplistic explanation of a very complex problem that is suspected to be much more multifaceted. For instance, the data collected for this study reveal statements that are believed to insinuate a connection between rejection and the issues of honour and shame. For instance Grace (28) saying no man would ever take a raped woman for love or the fact that Glories husband left her with the explanation that he could not stay together with a raped woman.

Rejection is a big problem and the way in which this is tried to be resolved is not always the best. The examples of the women and families keeping quiet of rapes are a verification of the custom, which leads to maintaining such damaging traditions. The husband may be "too ashamed and afraid to lose his honour so the rape is silenced and the woman is allowed to stay" (MSF 2009: 31). However, in a long-term perspective, the silence concerning rapes may be more harmful than valuable. Not admitting such experiences may increase the probability of not being treated for physical or psychological problems. This again may have additionally

consequences such as increasing the likelihood of contaminating sexual partners by untreated STIs. Eventually, the silence maintains upholding traditions and cultural norms, both causing huge challenges and problems for the women being raped as well as having secondary consequences for the society at large.

Rapes represent a huge problem in the Congolese society, but stigmatisation and rejection is further leading to additional challenges. Research demonstrates that men in general show signs that they see it as their role and duty to protect their family. Therefore, they might perceive it as upsetting and embarrassing not hindering their wives from being raped. In fact men's "inability to protect their household was one reason listed as to why men rejected their wives" (HHI & OSI 2009: 30). However, patriarchy reflected in Congolese norms and customs seems to stand strong, both as an underlying reason for rape happening - as well as influencing reactions patterns that the women subjected to rape repeatedly meet. Congolese women are generally suffering from inequalities from men making them subordinate and submissive. The discrimination becomes even more apparent when a woman is raped. Due to existing gender view, in addition to widespread poverty, a Congolese woman may not face the most possibilities beforehand, but being raped is most certainly limiting a woman's prospective.

### **5.2.2 The changing nature of rape and social reactions**

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Eriksen's definition of culture ("the shifting opinion of the community who repeatedly established and change when people do something together" 2001: 25) is underlining the fundamental fact that cultures are dynamic and changing. This is perhaps also the explanation of why one Congolese woman in her 60s, met during this study, argues that the present rapes and violence seen across the DRC was not something she recalls as a problem when growing up. In contrast, the reality of today shows that one woman is raped nearly every minute in the DRC (Halperin & Mofidi 2011), which is portraying a totally different story from what this woman recalls from the 60-70s.

Brenda (46) says she does not really comprehend the situation in DRC in terms of the violent escalation and the increasing occurrence of rapes. She argues she does not know the actual reasons and root-causes leading to rapes and SV. She tells about how the Hutu refugees entered the DRC from Rwanda, fleeing from the genocide in 1994, where the Interahamwe

were the main perpetrators of the killing of Tutsis and moderate Hutus (Ref. contextual background page 15). Linked to the situation at that time, these people arrived in the DRC due to a humanitarian cause, escaping Rwanda in order to save their own lives. Brenda reveals that at that time the refugees begged for mercy, assistance and food, and she tells that the Congolese people assisted them as well as they could, considering their own challenging situation. However, at a given time something drastically changed, she tells, and the Hutus started withdrawing and stealing money and items from the Congolese people. She says she does not know why the Hutus started raping and killing - a statement that is in line with Dolan stating that there is a general "lack of understanding of who the perpetrators are and what drives them" (2010: 54).

The situation in DRC and the problem of SV and extensive rapes is rather distinctive compared to many other contexts. According to the general director of Camps working with rape in the DRC, the political weaknesses play a central role and have consequences for rape victims, where impunity makes offenders go free. Rapes in DR Congo are commonly explained as a weapon of war. Although evidence show that rapes are not necessarily strictly used as such, and that also high levels of SV exist in non-conflict areas (Peterman *et. al* 2011). In such ways, widespread rapes can also have detrimental impacts on the civil society by increasing the risk towards contaminating civilian men with the attitudes as soldiers apparently have, giving the impression that SV and rape is acceptable. Up till now, the majority of reported rape cases show that military soldiers constitute the majority of offenders, but nowadays the civilian cases are observed to be growing. However, this may also be linked to unrecorded numbers in relation to domestic violence, where awareness-raising activities and increased knowledge make more women realise that violence in close relationship is not either something that should be tolerated. Hence, more women today have the courage to seek help after being assaulted by their husbands.

According to the general director of Camps, SV is a result of unequal gender relations and the widespread tendency where men try to control women's sexuality (Eriksen 2001: 17). SV is linked to cultural issues where women are dominated. Another factor, he says, is that when men are frustrated in their lives, without jobs and feeling weak, this can transpire their frustration and atrocity emerging to the surface as violence affecting women. Rape, on the other side, is according to him a direct cause and principle of war. There are also political reasons facilitating the high rape statistics. For instance, the continued presence of Rwandan

soldiers causing more rapes, which is used as a mean to dominate people in order to continue mineral extraction from the Congolese soil. In other words, it is a result of socioeconomic reasons, where the Rwandans living in DRC needs minerals for financial profit to sustain their own livelihood. In short, there are two main aspects that are direct causes of SV according to the general director of Camps:

- *Cultural aspect – where males have the tendency to dominate females*
- *Political aspect – the lack of leadership makes people resorting to violence in order to gain and sustain control*

### **5.2.3 Changing circumstances causes social exclusion**

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A medical doctor working in the Kivus since the 70s tells that at the local hospital where he was employed they identified a change already around 1998, where the medical staff recognised an apparent increase in the numbers of rape cases where combatants were frequently reported as the perpetrator.

It is evident that the stigmatisation of rape victims in DRC is high, where victims may experience discrimination from both close family as well as the wider society. Several women, also a few participating in this study, have experienced to be raped in front of family members. This is accused of being staged by the perpetrators in order to further increase the victims' humiliation and likelihood of stigmatisation. Gladys (22) tells about being attacked at home, raped collectively with her own mother - both witnessed by the rest of the family. Others again tell about being raped in front of their husbands, something that may influence husbands despising patterns and increase the chance that they will reject their wives. A study done by The Harvard Humanitarian Initiative highlights, "women who were raped in the presence of their family members specifically mentioned the additional shame of having had family members witness the attack" (HHI/Oxfam 2010: 35).

Michelle (33) is a woman that has been a victim of SV several times, also the alleged rape-strategy of some soldiers to increase peoples' humiliation and suffering. She says it seems like the Interahamwe encompasses a lot of anger that they exercise on the Congolese population in such ways. In 2005 she experienced that the kidnappers entered her house, forcing her husband to rape their daughter in front of her. Then, she was taken away and kept



hostage in the forest where she both witnessed and experienced horrific and torturing acts, like people that was hung upside-down from trees, sexually abused, and physically injured by injecting branches of trees into the sexual organs.

The above demonstrates a trend that escalates towards the end of the 90s, when the nature of the rapes proved to become more violent. So-called instrumentation rapes involves that an inanimate object or any part of the human body, not amounting to sexual intercourse, is used to penetrate the vagina or anus (Speed & Vestvik 2009). Mukvege and Nangini (2009) label this kind of brutality: rape with extreme violence (REV). Interahamwe troops have been infamous for raping with instruments such as guns (Kelly 2010: 3). The UN supports this argument by asserting that FDLR rapes are not “merely” rape but also pure *torture*. “Some burn their victims, some introduce objects into their vaginas, and some shoot into their victims’ vaginas... From a medical perspective, the cases of rape by the FDLR are the most severe climate of general acceptance and tolerance for violence against women and girls and troops “forcing people to watch as other members of their family were killed” (Kelly 2010: 3), such the experiences of for instance Grace (28), Sarah (54) in this study demonstrates. As seen, Gloria was abducted into the forest accompanied by several women from her village - including her teenage daughter. The soldiers repeatedly raped both her and her girl while there were hold hostage in the bush. Eventually, the daughters’ resistance grew, something that made the soldiers lose their temper... As a consequence they tied the girl to a tree and killed her in front of her mother.

Medical assistance is as previously highlighted imperative, sometimes even lifesaving, for rape victims. However, providing medical treatment may also cause additional challenges, causing more stigmatisation. Fistula is “an injury in the birth canal that allows leakage from the bladder or rectum into the vagina leaving a woman permanently incontinent, often leading to isolation and exclusion from the family and community” (Tamale 2011: 640). Fistula can for instance be caused by so-called instrumentation rape.” (UN 2010: 10). In addition, also medical conditions may increase the likelihood for a rape victim to experience abusive behaviour from other people, where conditions such as infection by HIV and STI’s or fistula can increase the risk-factors for rejection (Kelly *et. al* 2011: 5, HHI 2009).

Panzi hospital, approximately 30 minutes drive outside of Bukavu in Southern Kivu, is widely acknowledged for its fistula surgery. The health staff in this hospital has clearly

assisted many women and given them a “new” life. Nowadays, disfigurement as a cause of rape is still present, but not in such high numbers (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 148). This is confirmed for instance by one woman interviewed for this study that works at this hospital. Details from rape victims in this study suggest that several of them suffers from fistula by uttering description as “the uterus is destroyed, abdomen pain and water coming out”. Fistula assistance is off course very valuable for women suffering from such diagnosis. This treatment also demands special knowledge and skills, which is not found many places in the DRC. It is beneficial that certain projects focus on rape victims. However, when it comes to the real numbers of rape victims treated, this data may be inaccurate. The fact that Panzi promote free follow-up and surgery for victims of sexual rape, may encourage women to give the impression that they have been raped, even though a majority of fistula cases in the DRC are argued to in reality be pregnancy and birth related – so-called obstetrical fistulas (Onsrud *et. al* 2008).

In short, the way in which such activities are promoted, which yet again is frequently linked to funding and financial support, may shape who is requesting help and consequently have an effect on statistics. In this case, fistula is a serious and stigmatised condition, having many impacts in a woman’s life. The objective should clearly be to offer assistance to everyone suffering from such problems. However, offering free surgery to victims of rape - in a poor setting as eastern DRC - where obstetrical fistula patients in comparison have to pay, will apparently increase the number of alleged rape victims. This demonstrates that efforts may also influence the reality and potentially amplify the number of SV.

As seen, there has been a changing nature of rape, but the way in which such problems are managed and dealt with seems also to have undergone great change throughout the recent years. The participants in this study suggest that in previous times rapes were resolved between the respectively families of the victim and the rapist. This is in line with Crenshaw stating, “battering and rape, once seen as private (family matters)” (1993: 1241). Previously there were traditionally arrangements where the rapist had to marry the victim and/or pay a financial compensation to the afflicted family. Clearly, one can discuss how beneficial such customs are in terms of protecting and assisting the woman affected by the rape, when she in the end is forced to marry her own rapist. However, even if this is not protecting the woman, it is apparent that female rape victims were not excluded by their families or communities, which is one major problem affecting many raped women in the DRC today.

Unfortunately, many jurisdictions have marital rape exemptions in their laws; although married women are subject to rape by their husbands the law does not recognize it as such” (WHO 2003: 11). This is clearly a statement that is challenged in the DRC, where marital rape repeatedly seems *not* to be identified as rape. One medical doctor working in DRC refers to a seminar a few years back where he was holding a lecture, and where the participants responded by laughter when he addressed the problem of domestic violence and marital rape. This is something that suggests them not recognize marital rape - as rape. In contrast, and important to note, the WHO state that “any forced sex or forced sexual activity constitutes rape, regardless of whether or not the woman is married to the perpetrator. This is also confirmed by a Congolese counsellor working with rape victims, demonstrating the same understanding, by saying that rapes within marriage are not generally seen as a problem. This all implies that forced sex between husband and wife is seen as an entitlement rather than abuse, clearly influencing the work on eliminating rape and SV.

In other words, it is not only the reality in terms of risk that has been changing, also the way in which families and communities look at, recognize and solve rape cases has undergone great change. In the DRC, “1/3 of people asked stated that they would not accept that the victims of SV returned back to the local community. This shows how effective rape is as a tactic and weapon of war in order to destabilize and destroy a local community” (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 146).

Moreover, some women utter that the stigma they face as survivors of SV can be just as traumatic as the attack itself (HHI 2009: 4). In addition to physical and psychological pain the feeling of shame is a common trait shared by the informants in this study. Several of the respondents reveal that following the rape they felt ashamed of their situation and begun to hide and avoid meeting other people. One of the women interviewed in this study even states: you do not want your children to know due to your shamefulness. This is further elaborated by Kelly *et. al* quoting an informant who declares that “even your own children can start thinking that you have been contaminated” (2011: 4), demonstrating how deeply the stigma is rooted, where also children are aware of the shame of being subjected to rape.

#### 5.2.4 The persistent problem of Rejection

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The traditional view is that if a woman is raped, she is damaged, and brings shame to the family (Stewart 1994). The research *Experiences of female survivors of SV in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo: a mixed-methods study* shows that “29% of women were rejected by their families and 6.2% by their communities” (Kelly *et. al* 2011: 4). Also the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative reveals that, “one in three women reported being rejected by their husbands and one in 15 women reported being rejected by their communities after rape” (2009: 4). The findings from this study show even greater rejection-rates and confirm the pattern of women repeatedly being excluded by their husbands, family and communities. According to Luk van Baelen, the “society often does not recognize the victims as a victim. Victims are accused more often than the perpetrators” (MSF 2009: 21) something the following examples from one of the female informants in this study demonstrates:

Elodie (33) a 31-year-old mother of six, was abducted to the forest as part of an attack of her village. She was kidnapped for one week and sexually abused in ways that left her with severe physical problems. After she returned back her close family stated that she was deceased and they decided that they could not stay together with her anymore. Even her husband left her - despite the involuntary nature of the rape she had been subjected to.

Returning back to 45-year-old Ariana’s story. She was abducted and treated as a sex slave in the forest. After some time she managed to escape. Everybody in her village was very happy to see her when she returned. However, after some time the situation somewhat changed and her family’s understanding was split. On one side, family members argued that the raping is simply an awful habit of the kidnappers and the rape was clearly not something that took place due to her own will. In fact, many people died in the meeting with the soldiers, which made her actual surviving something they should all be happy for. However, on the other side other relatives shared the impression that she should be chased away due to the fact that she had been raped. This also eventually happened...

“The shame and humiliation inflicted by these crimes is intended to prohibit recovery and reintegration into society, and to thereby destroy the victims’ families and communities” (HHI/Oxfam 2010: 35). The findings and response from the informants in this study extensively confirms this statement. Therefore, many organisations working with rape victims

offer family mediation services in order to reunite the couple or family. Despite reports arguing that the rejection numbers are declining - the majority of the victims talked to in this study have experienced abandonment. This suggests that the traditional understanding of gender is profoundly embedded in the society. It takes time to change such beliefs and behaviours.

Jannie (37) expresses that her family in fact hates her from what happened to her, and that they do not want to be in contact with her. She does not even want the counsellors to attempt any negotiation with her family in law, since they have already clearly stated that they do not want anything to do with her after the rape. This reaction impedes the possibility for external partners to offer counselling and mediating services between the victim and family, hence decreases the likelihood of reunion. The rejection of Jannie demonstrates the family's perception of her as a raped woman, and further suggests how deeply rooted the traditional views concerning rape are, making close family leaving a raped family member behind. In addition, the testimony of this Jannie suggests that even raped women themselves respect their families' decision, despite the fact that rejection may hurt and make them depressed. This again shows signs of a rather joint understanding of rape victims as bringing shame to the family, no matter if you are a male or a female, and which seems to also be partly respected by the victims themselves. Some women experience their husbands leaving them. Others experience to be chased away from the family and village. The reactions when a woman is raped seems difficult to control in other ways, and causes social exclusion of many women after rape.

A few of the informants in this study reveal that they have experienced being target of upsetting rumours like them being diseased and infected by infections such as HIV/AIDS. Gossip and offensive rumours are identified as common consequences rape victims are facing. This is for instance mentioned in Kelly *et. al* stating that "stigmatisation in the community was often expressed as gossip or "finger pointing" [...] which intensified survivors' feelings of shame and humiliation" (2011: 4). Also the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative declares this, highlighting that both women and men "noted that gossip was one of the most hurtful ways in which communities contributed to the stigma and humiliation rape victims experienced" (HHI & OSI 2009: 24).

Lets turn back to Brenda. She tells that her family initially welcomed her, since they recognized that she had actually faced serious risks of actually dying. However, her problems with fistula made people in her community starting despising her, which she exemplifies by telling that no one wants to sit beside her or somewhere she has been sitting. Her story is clearly something that imposes huge sadness in her life, and she weeps when telling about this depressing part of her existence. As a consequence of her fistula problems, her family started insulting her and subsequently chased her away. Today, her situation makes it impossible for her to return to her village although she says she wish she could.

Another informant in this study, Sarah (54), previously referred to, also experienced to be rejected by her family. As noted, she survived a terrible attack in 2002 leaving both her husband and daughter dead. She explains that the incident led to a misunderstanding, where her family-in-law questioned the circumstances of the attack. Due to the fact that her husband died during the soldiers forced entry - while she survived - the family suspected that she was not raped but voluntarily involved in the sexual activities. This consequently made them reject her.

In fact, suspicion of adultery and inappropriate behaviour seems to be frequent explanations of why men separate from their raped wives. According to relevant literature men repeatedly blame women for being raped (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 106). Similar to Western discussions over rapes, Congolese men may suggest that “women provoked rape by wearing revealing clothes, travelling at night, or being far from their community” when the rape happens (HHI & OSI 2009: 23). For raped women, such accusations and allegation may have huge negative and additionally impacts in their lives. Since stigmatisation can last for decades, widespread infliction of SV may effectively destroy the cultural and social bonds of entire communities (HHI/Oxfam 2010: 5). Additionally, it seems like widowhood may be increasingly demanding for rape victims, where the likelihood of being rejected is even greater. Statistics from Kelly *et. al* demonstrates that women “who were widowed were almost five times as likely to report feelings of general isolation compared to married women” (2011: 4). Being able to stay together with their husband and close family was a noticeable but enclosed desire among many of the informants in this study. However, it may be difficult for a woman to convince her family of the advantages staying together. Consequently, organisations collaborate with influential people that can act as role models, and play a significant role to

bring change. This will be further discussed in section 5.4.3. As discussed in section 5.1 the quality of services offered by organisations may vary or be understood differently.

Although they do not represent the majority of the women in this study also some of the informants interviewed here has been reinserted with their family and husbands after being raped. Sarah's (54) husband supported her after being raped, and even went to court to claim justice. Rose (50) was also welcomed back by her family and the family of Noellie do respect her although she has been raped. She tells that when she eventually recovered her health and demonstrated that she is managing her life and financial issues, also her brother in law realized that she is still a human being – despite being raped...

Rejection is deeply embedded in Congolese cultural norms and values and there are many problems linked to this. Professionals working on matters related to SV and rapes in the DRC argue that the rejection of rape victims is decreasing. For instance, one Congolese pastor met during this fieldwork, and which are engaged in knowledge raising activities linked to SV, argues that in his village today approximately 80% of the women are reinserted with their families. He also underlines that there has been an improvement in this area the last few years. Also staff at Panzi hospital supports his statement.

Despite alleged improvement regarding reuniting couples after rape, the majority of the informants in this study are still abandoned and rejected by their spouse and/or family, due to the shame and stigma associated with rape. However, as previously noted, this could be linked to the informants chosen for this study. In order to be able to investigate long-term consequences of rape victims' that have received assistance. Therefore, the participants of this study are mainly women that have received rape related support over a period of time. As a result, the informants have experiences of rape throughout the last 12 years. Hence, the positive development expressed nowadays, highlighted both by one pastor and several organisations, showing fewer families rejecting raped women, this may be a relatively resent change that is not necessarily the reality for the women in this study. Nevertheless, despite positive improvements where more and more women are reunited with their families after being subjected to rape, there are still countless of women already rejected. In addition, if the numbers given by the pastor is applicable to the rest of the DRC almost 300 women are rejected due to rape every day.

According to the general director of Camps working closely with the support of raped women, the biggest challenge for victims of SV is being able return back to the life they used to have. Stigmatisation from family and community repeatedly leads to the rejection of raped women. There is certainly a problem of reintegration, and when a family has rejected a woman, the *community* will not take her into the warmth either. The traditional values play a strong role in the DRC, and which we have seen, this has detrimental consequences in many peoples' lives. The way out of this vicious cycle is off course to put an end to the rapes from happening in the first place. However, it is also imperative getting rid of the stigma in order to make the Congolese population accept rape victims' situation, this may evidently assist them towards showing resilience. As he says, this can be done through changing attitudes and similar long-term goals. As part of this, family mediation where people are sensitized and convinced that rape victims are not responsible for the abuse they have been subjected to. Also, husbands should be told that as a married couple the husband is in one way or another responsible for his wife and children, therefore there is no good reason for rejecting her. This will be further discussed in part 5.4, where female empowerment and gender mainstreaming are seen as an indispensable part of programs that aim to support female rape victims. According to Fried, "gender-based violence was once considered a taboo subject, expressed in whispers or suffered in silence. Now it is part of the public agenda" (2003: 89). However, there is still a long way to go in DR Congo.

### **5.3 Part three: Socioeconomic challenges**

Part three is linked to the third sub question in section 1.3 above: What are the main obstacles for female rape victims to recover and show resilience?

As seen in section 5.2, stigmatisation and cultural norms are still causing social, especially familial, exclusion (Steiner et. al 2009). This rejection has far-reaching consequences both in a woman's personal life, but does also have consequences for the society at large, as pointed out above. Rape in the DRC leads to secondary implications that increase the probability that raped women ever more struggles to ensure their livelihood.

This section mainly looks into secondary consequences of rape. These outcomes, in addition to women's already subordinate positions and limited rights, are increasingly deteriorating women's lives. As the discussion will demonstrate, many problems rise from directly from



the fact that rape victims' are rejected by family-members. In other words, cultural norms and values behaviour and reaction patterns that strongly influences rape victims' possibilities to live a "normal" life after rape. Being rejected may cause comprehensive changes in a rape victims' life and does for instance repeatedly force women to adapt to an uncertain lifestyle that is unfamiliar and frightening.

### **5.3.1 Financial consequences of rejection**

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Rape victims' in this study call for more and improved monetary support linked to the various socioeconomic issues that they face in order for them to cope better in life. Financial challenges are pointed out as a pervasive setback in the rape victims' lives.

As previously noted, the women in this study clearly express gratefulness for receiving treatment from Camps, helping them to cope in their lives. For instance, the organisation has supplied Ariana with necessary medicines in addition to valuable advises and instructions. She expresses gratitude for what she has received. However, Ariana was also forced to move to the city due to insecurity in her village. She says adapting to a new place and to new income-generating activities is challenging. She tells that there are many people fleeing to the urban areas in fear of the kidnappers. However, many lack the means to stay in the city, which makes it difficult to lead an urban life. Ariana's story highlights socioeconomic factors as her biggest challenges in her life today. Despite her situation she appears as both strong and positive. However, but she is concerned about her struggle to ensure enough food and cover housing expenses. Camps has assisted her with some money but she encourages them to look closer into financial issues, and if possible provide more assistance to recover the women from the pain and worries connected to these economic challenges, such as paying rent or covering school-fees for children. In contrast, Sarah (54) is of the impression that Camps has done as much as possible they could. They have helping her with paying rent, school fees for her four children, provided vocational training and supplied her with a sewing machine.

From a western perspective, one might think that medical problems caused by rape may be hard to cope with and that the psychosocial trauma may be agonizing. However, these problems are not necessarily the major challenges that the Congolese women highlighted in this study. The provincial director in Care international says: "you should not underestimate

the African women" implying that despite experiencing rape and other traumatic incidents, these women repeatedly continue to strive for survival for themselves and their children. In other words, there seems to be a general attitude not dwelling with difficult experiences. On the contrary, rape victims seem to look forward and try to forget. Regardless of physical or psychological pain - money is still the necessary mean for them to ensure livelihood.

Grace (28) rents a room in Bukavu, which she shares with her 4 kids. She tells that she used to live happily in a village together with her husband and her family until both her mother and father were killed in a violent attack. As a result of this, she and her husband went to the city of Bukavu when she was pregnant. However, after a while they returned back to their home village, which would turn out to have detrimental consequences for the family of Grace. One night the soldiers broke in to their house in a terrifying attack. The soldiers threatened Grace that if she cried they would kill her husband. This was how the situation eventually transpired and the soldiers took her to the forest. Three of them repeatedly raped her, but after approximately two weeks she was designated as the "wife" of one of the combatants. She reluctantly stayed in the forest for approximately two months before successfully managing to escape. Grace suffered from severe medical conditions and was also pregnant when she returned back home. What she went through has affected her in many ways. She tells that she is constantly thinking of what happened to her and her family in the past. However, psychosocial follow-up has somehow helped her, and the medical treatment, including fistula surgery, has healed her physical wounds. She seems pleased with the assistance Camps has given her in terms of this, but she is a bit disappointed of the financial assistance offered. In fact she argues that the organisation said they would help her, but up till now she has not received any training or economic support. Due to her strenuous economic situation she constantly worries about the future and how to ensure schooling for her children and to have a place to stay. She says a miracle is needed to solve her miserable situation. The story of Grace shows how many women experience additional problems subsequent of being raped, where economic challenges stands as the most challenging part in many women's lives. This is tightly linked to stigmatisation, which this study identifies as still existing in the DRC.

Being raped represents both physical and psychological challenges. However, the tales from these raped Congolese women illustrate that socioeconomic challenges may be the most difficult for to overcome. Asking victims, that have been through treatment-programs, about their biggest challenges of today, recurring statements are lacking money to send children to

school or covering housing expenses, as well as the fearing that business will fall short. When informants were asked about their future hopes for themselves and their children, the response typically focused on their offspring, which is also in line with the findings from De Reus (Peace Women 2012). Women largely wish that their children should have the opportunity to attend school.

Elodie (33) describes her own medical condition after being raped by soldiers 3 years ago, as problematic. However, the drugs have helped her to recover from her painful conditions. Psychologically she says she “felt like dying” after the attack. However, through the follow-up program she has received instructions and advises that makes her able to live with her experiences. Although it puts her through daunting times both emotionally and financially. For the future Elodie hopes to have enough money so she will be able to pay the rent for somewhere safe to stay. Yet, she is sincerely worried for how her life will turn out, and she both wishes and calls for extended assistance from Camps, in order for her to be able to provide food and ensure housing.

Gloria (48) is happy surviving the rape 12 years ago, but she is now worried for the future because she cannot afford to send her children to school. As a result, she is unsure of how they will be able to support her in the time to come. Female-headed households “are often among the poorest as they contain fewer working adults than male-headed households and women earning lower wages than men. Their composition has also been said to constitute a poverty trap, with children disadvantaged because they may have to leave school early to seek paid employment or take over household chores to allow the mother to work outside the home” (Momsen 2004: 44). This may be hard for Gloria to accept and during the interview she gives the impression of being unhappy. She struggles to manage in life and says that she desperately needs more financial means. However, she does not ask for more assistance from Camps, which she means have done whatever they can to help here.

The women in this study frequently expressed sadness and pointed out multiple challenges rising from social exclusion and being rejected by their family. However, when asking informants openly regarding their hopes and dreams for the future not one single woman expressed or highlighted that she wanted and wish to be reintegrated in her family. Here again, the recurring answer linked to financial challenges. The ultimate desire was, as seen above, linked to school fees being paid and housing-rent covered. Although these issues are

not directly linked to the wish of being reintegrated with the family, it is clear that financial issues are different for a female being on her own - in contrast to having a husband. It is though for a woman to handle her situation as a rape victim. In addition these women also have to take care of herself and her children in a society influenced by instability and poverty.

When rejected a woman shoulders enormous burdens, and is suddenly responsible also for tasks formerly carried out by men, in addition to those she is traditionally responsible (WfWI 2010: 17). It is obviously hard and demanding for a woman to tackle both consequences of rape and simultaneously ensuring her family's livelihood without assistance from others. Many organisations, including Camps, offer training that can assist rape victims to manage better in their life. However, Elodie (33) a mother of six, and rejected by her family, says she does not have time to attend such training, simply because she is fully engaged with taking care of her children.

Ruth (45) exemplifies the challenges she experiences by being single-parent by using the Swahili proverb translated into "one thumb does not break a lice", meaning that there are certain things you cannot achieve alone and, where it is often easier to be two, instead of alone.

*“Kidole kimoja hakivunjake cawa”*

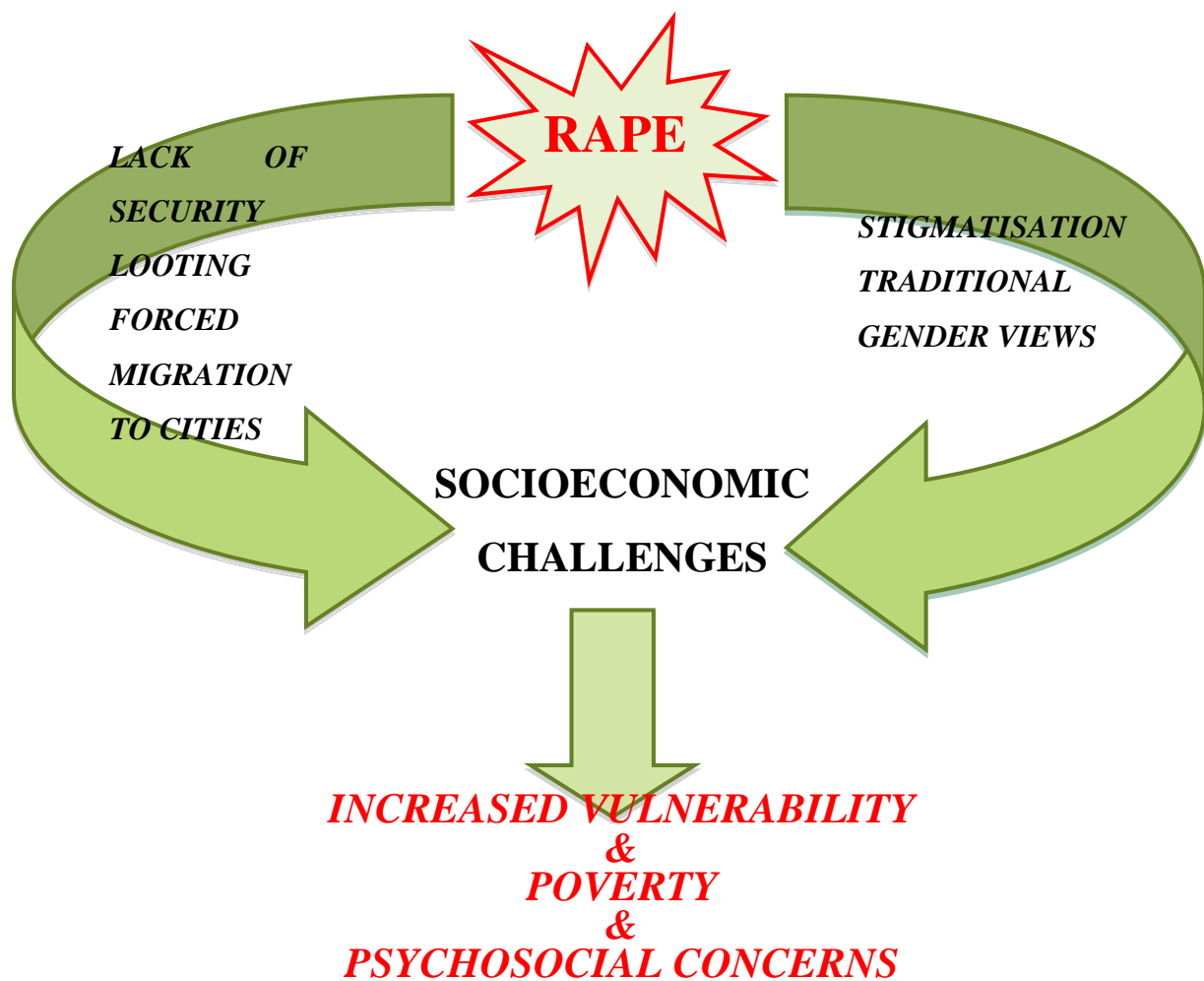
*Ruth (45) - 2 times a victim of rape and widow  
Swahili proverb meaning “One thumb does not break a lice”*

Michelle (33) tells that her biggest challenge in life is to solve her financial situation, so she has the means to buy food. She argues that solving her financial issues would hopefully increase her opportunity to go back home and be reintegrated with her family. This effect is in fact verified in reality. There seems to be an improved chance of family reintegration when a woman demonstrates that she constitutes as a valuable resource for the family (Kabeer 2005). Evidence shows that by offering vocational training and socioeconomic assistance to a rape

victim this significantly increases the chances that the husband and family welcomes the woman back home, after being initially excluded from the family.

As table 2 on page 12 shows, the poverty levels in the DRC are very high, with a national poverty rate of 71.3 percent and where 46.3 percent of the people are living in severe poverty (CIA 2012). Many Congolese women does evidently experience poverty also prior to the rape, but being a victim of rape may further increase such challenges in life. Being socially excluded from society largely means having to move and take on activities and work, which the women may not necessarily be accustomed to. Consequently, this may cause increased poverty, which again may influence a victims' psychosocial health. This is for instance demonstrated by Jannie (37) revealing that she sometimes thinks of her former life in the village, and the fact that it used to be easier for her to obtain food. Being alone makes a Congolese woman more vulnerable and increases her struggles to ensure a safe place to stay and to cover primary needs.

This shows that poverty is making a woman more at risk to experience rape, which again increases the likelihood of intensified poverty that further may deteriorate and create additional challenges, such as socioeconomic problems. In other words, it is a vicious cycle. Rather contrary, Crenshaw argues that intersectional subordination "is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment" (1991: 1249).



### 5.3.2 Urban challenges

Due to security concerns people have been forced to leave their homes in DRC, which has led to a growing number of IDPs in the DRC the latest years (Human Right Watch 2010). Forced migration and displacement is typically increasing people's vulnerability due to the missing out of the protection from the local community (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 148). Forced migration may also be seen as a consequence of rape being socially excluded a woman is repeatedly forced to move since staying on her own, exacerbates her vulnerability in areas prone to violent attacks. Many people have experienced looting and burning of houses,

meaning that they do not have anything to return back to after being attacked. This has made the situation even more problematic for a great number of people living in the DRC.

Many rape victims point out that moving to a new area represents unknown and demanding challenges. For instance higher living costs and adjusting to new income activities makes life more challenging. Being alone, due to rejection or killings of close family, is obviously further increasing a woman's socioeconomic challenges. Deborah (42) tells that her being subjected to rape first of all troubles her personally and makes her feeling unwell. However, in addition to these feelings, the soldiers who raped her also stole everything what her family was in possession of. Loosing everything, and being compelled to start all over again forced her daughter to quit school because Deborah was not able to cover the school fees on her own after being raped. This makes Deborah feeling miserable. This demonstrates how the attacks may also affect children, like this girl not having the chance to continue her schooling. This again, may have huge implications for her future life – both personally and socially.

All the female rape victims in this study are all living in, or around, areas that are categorised as urban. The majority of the informants ended up here due to conflict and security concerns in their villages. Despite tension and occasional violence in the city, urban areas are perceived as being fundamentally safer than the rural. However, this does not mean that life in the city is uncomplicated and problem-free. Many women in the DRC find themselves in economic hardship and these economic challenges may be even worse after rape (MSF 2004: 31).

Economic hardship is not easily mastered whether in a rural or urban setting. However, several of the informants in this study utter concerns about their situation in the city. This includes apprehensions of higher prices, living costs' and being forced to adapt to new and unfamiliar economic activities. Sarah (54) describes herself as being lucky since she has received training to become a tailor. She says living in Bukavu – on her own – is a hard task. She used to be a farmer, but due to security and to poor infrastructure it is impossible to go back to the village. Furthermore, the house is burned down and the family has rejected her – so there is no reason to go. In the city, there are only activities to earn money, but no field to ensure self-sufficiency like in the rural villages.

Elodie (33) raped 3 years ago and also rejected by her family. This represents what this study understands as a typical situation for raped women in the DRC. Elodie faces difficult

conditions in the city. Without her family-members Elodie (33) is now completely on her own in the city. This makes her financial situation very challenging. In order to survive she has to alternate between working as a porter (carrying luggage for other people) and selling charcoal. These two activities leave a minimal profit, and it is hard have enough means to feed her children and to ensure a place for the family to stay. Elodie (33) describes their current situation as critical since the landlord threatens to chase the family due to late payment. This stresses her and makes her worry for what will happen next in her life. She feels forced to go back to the village, but it is not safe.

Brenda (46), says that as a result of being excluded from her following the rape 7 years ago, she is now forced to stay in the city - leading a demanding life she is not content with. Unaccustomed to the urban-life she is now what she calls a "street woman". Brenda is dependent on begging money from strangers in order to survive.

As seen, examples show how the consequences of rape may influence victims' lives more long-term. Being rejected by the family means that many women are forced to move somewhere else and start their life all over again. "For women who have been raped, the capacity to care for their children and to participate in community life is greatly diminished" (HHI/Oxfam 2010: 5). This makes the situation even more difficult to cope with, such as the story of the "street-woman" above illustrates. Grace (28) is another woman sensing the urban challenges. She is originally from a village but now living in the city she currently earns her income by washing clothes for other people. She claims, life is harder in the city. In the village you can produce your own food and be more or less self-sufficient. However, in the city, without a plot or a field, you have to earn your livelihood by other means. This is hard when you are not familiar with urban activities.

Due to widespread rapes, insecurity, increased economic opportunities and displacement both in Goma and Bukavu, the two cities have experienced, and still experience, a rapid population growth. This means that people migrating to the cities may originally be of rural decent, thus not necessarily been exposed to information linked to rape. There are many challenges connected to urbanization, especially in the Kivus where issues such as infrastructure, water access and housing represent a significant challenge – also in the city. Both Bukavu and Goma have experienced population growth the latest years and residential areas are today covering wide-reaching areas connected by poor and inadequate infrastructure. Among plenty



of challenges this also represents an obstacle to access medical care. The deficiency of hospital beds visualised (page 4) constitutes a true obstacle in order to receive qualified treatment, which is important for rape victims. Despite higher security levels in urban areas, there is a strong reason to believe that the number of rape victims is high, due to preceding years stream of people migrating to the city. Poor infrastructure and transport options may in reality even prevent people from seeking help, since it may be expensive and time-consuming, both in terms of transport and treatment expenditures. The above demonstrates that it is not necessarily unproblematic for rape victims to receive essential assistance in urban areas. People do not have a real choice of where to live and are often forced to undergo certain changes in their lives, to survive in the city.

As seen, the lack of information and quality services represents additional aspects obstructing rape victims, and others, from seeking medical assistance when needed. When people are unaware of existing services this again decreases people seeking assistance. Care International tells about a surprising finding revealed when they in June 2009 initiated an urban SV program in Goma. Their surveys demonstrated a general lack of knowledge of SV, treatment and rights. This proves that the village areas have been repeatedly focused on while the city has been more disregarded.

If people stay in the village, the stress and constant worry of violent attacks may be a huge obstacle in their lives. Sarah (54) case brutally reveals this. She was raped close to home in her village. After some time away they returned back to the village. They entered by force and violently beat her husband, they raped Sarah for the second time – and sexually abused their 7-year old daughter. All family members were brought to the hospital, but both Sarah husband and daughter died due to their injuries. Despite the fact that challenges may vary from rural to urban areas, the life in the countryside is not necessarily superior to the life in the city - at least not as long as the security issues are inadequately addressed, which Sarah's story illustrates.

The general impression is that many organisations and clinics offers SV programs focusing on medical or psychosocial assistance, which off course is of crucial importance. However, being reinserted in the community may possibly be the most vital aspect in order for women to recover from their terrible experiences. One woman describes her life as a vicious cycle

after being raped. She says it is a problem for her to stay in Bukavu where she fears to meet the rapists again. Simultaneously it is impossible for her to return back to the village.

### **5.3.3 Women and development**

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"Gender based violence is fundamentally a violation against human rights. Stemming such violence will be crucial in working towards poverty reduction as well as human security" (Baaz & Stern 2010: 5). As the empirical data in this study demonstrates: Social exclusion and rejection makes it even harder to manage in life. In general it seems like the women are partly coping, but utter that they are unable to fully function without more support (WfWI 2010). Due to women's limited rights it is hard for them to establish a life on their own.

In the case of the DRC, the war is formally over, but the violence continues. According to MONUSCO (2011) the high numbers of SV is a result of inadequate "community protection mechanisms and [the fact that] the status of women and girls have gradually been eroded" over time. Another issues is that, "in an increasingly militarized society, impunity, absence of the rule of law and women's subordinate social and legal position reinforces a climate of general acceptance and tolerance for violence against women and girls" (UN 3/8/2010). The former secretary general of the United Nations, Mr. Kofi Annan, argues that, "women play an active role in informal peace processes [...] striving to bring about reconciliation and security before, during and after conflicts" (Momsen 2009: 105). Therefore, "if SV is not fully addressed in ceasefires and peace processes, there will [not necessarily] be no peace for women" (Momsen 2009: 105).

## **5.4 How to increase family reinsertions?**

Part four is linked to the fourth sub question in section 1.3 above: How can the reintegration of female rape victims into their families and communities be improved?

Rape has influenced many Congolese women's lives the last 10-15 years. It is imperative that these victims are offered appropriate treatment and support to recover and return back to life. Unfortunately, there are additional factors holding women back and negatively affect their livelihood. SV in the DRC can be considered structural violence where people's suffering are built into the social structures, causes different social or economic opportunities.

As the tales from female rape victims demonstrate, their problems stretch beyond both physical and psychosocial matters. This leads to conditions that no physician or psychologist can cure. However, existing challenges may potentially be solved by raising awareness and changing people's attitudes. This demands extensive efforts where both men and women are convinced that the existing cultural norms and traditional standards are not necessarily helping, not the least the raped female. As seen, the women in this study largely confirm that being social excluded leads to a life in amplified economic hardship. This again influences the possibility to ensure a satisfying standard of living including taking care of, raising and ensuring that children goes to school. Hence, the children of raped women are seen as also suffering from the way in which their mother is treated and considered by the society.

Social exclusion of raped women are not beneficial for anyone in the DRC. As noted, SV and rape is an efficient strategy to make the society more vulnerable and less resistant towards oppression. Actions should be taken in order to protect women from strong traditional values, upholding stigmatisation and rejection. It seems that keeping families together may limit some of the challenges women face after being subjected to rape. This requires huge efforts challenging existing gender disparities and sharing knowledge focusing the advantages of staying together, supporting a rape victim – instead of despising her.

#### **5.4.1 A need for changing attitudes**

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Today, women suffer under traditional values making them powerless in the meeting with the society's view of them as a victim rape. Poverty has additionally negative impacts that may furthermore deteriorate women's subsistence. For instance, "poverty is [...] characterized by poor access to education, health services and NGO outreach" (Bennett, in Tamale 2011: 95). This might assist upholding gender inequality, which again legitimates SGBV-violence. Hence, equality needs to be addressed in DRC in order to improve the situation.

In order to prevent more rapes to take place it is important to pinpoint the principle causes of rape, where the researchers in the domain may have been ignorant in terms of both causes and consequences of SGBV. Towards the local communities there have been initiated activities stressing the importance of accepting rape victims are explained. People are informed of what the legal laws state and provide. One problem of today is the conflict between the laws on one

side and culture and custom understanding concerning rape on the other. The sensitizing activities focuses on perception change regarding females where people are told that both males and females encompass the same rights and are equal. However, as well as men has to recognize that women are of equal worth as men, women must learn not to consider men to be the masters. The process of changing existing attitudes is a long process, but if it is accomplished and repeated again and again, we will succeed in the end!

Sachs calls for action, "we have given careful consideration to the issue of gender equity, that is, to an improved economic and social status for Africa's women" (Sachs *et. al* 2004: 118-147). Currently, women's low status makes them lack the power needed to challenge their own situation, which may be required in order to create change. "Individual empowerment is an important starting point towards social transformation. However, unless it leads to some form of structural change it will do little to undermine the systemic reproduction of inequality" (Kabeer 2004: 175). Congolese should be empowered and men have to recognise the value of women. In sum, this would hopefully challenge gender-hostile structures influencing the Congolese society.

#### **5.4.2 Improving women's livelihood with microcredit**

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Improving women's livelihood and possibility to earn their own money can empower women. By organizing women in associations and groups they can learn from each other's experiences and manage financial challenges together. This is utilized in several follow-up programs designed to assist rape victims. "Low-level projects like micro-credit or soap manufacture have been designed by local associations" (MSF 2009: 32), and this can help fighting the stigma attached to rape victims. Simultaneously, this could provide socioeconomic support allowing rape victims to maintain their livelihoods and dignity. This again may facilitate families realising the advantages of staying together by convincing husbands of the value of their wives.

Through economic support organisations, like Camps, can offer rape victims a sustainable way of generating income. Providing such financial solutions for the raped women to manage in their lives, this may again increases family reintegration - even limit the probability of social exclusion in the first place. Because, access to paid work may "improve women's

agency within the family since it provides them with an independent source of income and hence a stronger 'fallback' position (Kabeer 2004: 172).

The general director of Camps tells an encouraging story about a woman from Kisangani, who was left by her husband after being raped. This particular woman received assistance from Camps. She received a pig that eventually provided the woman with 9 piglets. She sold the animals and earned more money for her livelihood, in line with similar initiatives such as pigs for peace (Glass 2012). As a consequence, her husband saw what she achieved and managed well in life. He then realized the importance of his wife and asked for her forgiveness. This is an example of how efficient and important it is to support these women. Not only for them to continue, but also to make Congolese men realize the importance and value of women. This may reunite couples that are split due to the cultural tradition of social exclusion.

The case above shows clear and pragmatic results of assisting a rape victim where "changes in any one dimension can lead to changes in others" (Kabeer 2004: 175). In this case the woman receives assistance, succeeds in what she is doing, which makes her husband see her as something else than merely a raped woman. Being an important brick of the household and valuable in order to ensure income, husbands may be convinced to take his wife back.

Camps has according to Sarah (54) guided her in a desirable direction after she was raped and became a widow 10 years ago. The program has helped her adapting to a new profession but still the main challenges in her life are about gathering enough means for a decent livelihood. Sarah is extremely grateful towards the help she has received from the organisation and considers the people at Camps as "her parents" and says that they have achieved as much as they could for Sarah. Helping her with paying housing rent, paying school fees for her four surviving children, vocational training and supplied her with a sewing machine. She used to be a farmer, but the circumstances of insecurity and poor infrastructure makes it impossible to go back to her village. Sarah may be seen as lucky, but despite all the help and support she has received, she is still facing socioeconomic challenges in life and has not been reinserted with her family. However, she seems to manage better in life than many of the other victims in this study, which suggest the overall advantages of support that extends beyond the medical treatment and psychotherapy.

"Microfinance promotes empowerment as the desired goal for women, interpreting the term as a discrete outcome and separating it from its original meaning of transformed power relations in the household or the public spaces" (Visvanathan *et. al* 2011: 52). Several informants in this study state that income-generating training is an efficient way of empowering women. This may facilitate women to be reunited with their husbands and reaching resilience after being raped, due to the fact that she is seen as valuable in terms of means and goods.

The examples of maladapted programs in page 71, demonstrates the need for a thoroughly evaluating programs. A central question is whether one can acquire equality and real empowerment as long as gender hierarchies are left undressed (Visvanathan *et. al* 2011: 52)? By opposing voices, micro-credit is in fact seen as a type of violence where women experience backlash from men who cannot receive micro credit loans (Momsen 2004: 94). In addition, a rape victim's improved financial opportunities may be the only reason for the husband to revert to his wife, and one might discuss whether or not this is real empowerment? From a Western perspective a woman would not generally appreciate respect due to her ability to earn money. However, in a poverty-struck society with gender disparities micro-credit may be seen as an efficient tool to challenge existing structures. The financial aspects may be positive for a raped woman, but it is imperative to underline the importance of a husband regain his respect towards his wife after she has been subjected to rape in order to change traditional standards.

Several organisations offer training and micro-credit opportunities for raped women. However, as noted by numerous of actors working with microcredit and similar activities, new stigma may arise as a direct cause of such assistance. Also Camps experienced new stigma emerged as a response towards raped women receiving help. For instance, other poor women may see the assistance as valuable, which may generate tension and discrimination. As noted, the majority of people are poor, and special treatment received by some segments of the population may increase other issues. Groups of people that receive special assistance in terms of items and/or training may be discriminated by the general society due to jealousy by others. Such special treatment may also increase the possibility of others to disclose whose been subjected to rape. Hence the added stigmatisation this may cause. This shows that a deed that in theory is universally good may have unsolicited consequences, which again can increase the pressure towards the victim rather than be of any help. This shows the

complexity of the problem and demonstrates that there is no easy and straightforward solution to sufficiently support female rape victims. Empowerment is about more than “identifying practices that are harmful and suggesting they be eradicated” (Bradley 2011: 16). Another aspect that needs to be stressed is the fact that when offering training and income generating activities to the women, this may have negative effect on the relationship between women and men. At worst, empowering women may lead to emasculating men, which again can have unwanted consequences.

As a consequence, Camps saw the need to adopt their policy in order to also include poor and vulnerable women (not raped) in associations with rape victims. By having a more humanitarian approach stigma was avoided and beneficiaries more probable to be accepted by people from the outside. By developing women’s associations all women in the alliance (be it poor or rape victims) may support and learn from each other. In addition, such activities may facilitate a growing number of social economic activists, which according to the general director of Camps is of great importance to achieve positive development and challenge existing gender disparities.

"In socially stratified societies, where gender prejudice is compounded by longstanding practices of stigma and ostracism, microcredit could constitute a channel for upward mobility" (Visvanathan *et. al* 2011: 53). Therefore, some offer rape victims income-generating activities, creates associations and propose microcredit as a solution to improve the economic situation. Accompanied by Camps, and being present during some of their association meetings demonstrated education focusing on hard work, and how to avoid quarrels, for instance, about money within the group. The advisor tried to convince the women participating that money is not coming easily, and that you have to work hard and be smart in order to succeed. However, he underlined that it is easier to start off and benefit from a small financial start, which explains why for instance Camps assists women groups with necessary resources. The counsellor highlights that it is imperative to be careful about expenses and manage the effort in a direction that creates positive development. Eradicating poverty requires hard work every day where one can alternate between different activities, to be more efficient. But you should always do something, he says. The advisor draws a parallel to robbery: if you one day eat without been working, you know that you did not do an effort for the money spent for the food. You should always consider what you actually have before you spent. Another issue emphasized by the Camps advisor is for the women to welcome

their customers by facilitate additional sales and solicitation of potential customers. They should not be introverted but rather expose themselves and their products by attracting attention. This is an issue linked to women's position in DRC. They should be careful and invisible, but the advisor is challenging this view by telling them to fight for their rights, and underlining that this is vital in order to attract customers and do well in business. The women are encouraged to discuss and agree on how they can attract customers.

Most women in this study have undergone sensitizing activities, which have supported them in the direction of settling down and "accepting" their situation. However, since many still experience the backsides of rejection, it is clearly not enough to target women alone in order to create change for rape victims in the DRC. There is a need for more openness and broader acceptance of rape as a problem, since it affects many people in the DRC. As both counsellors and several of the women that have undergone treatment stated: "is not the end of the world". Striving towards more people, including men, being of the same view would most certainly have positive impacts and improve the situation. There is an urgent need to break the sensitivity and taboo regarding rape, in order to mobilize expanded public support for these courageous women, eradicating discriminatory traditions. After years of putting down much work and effort, both counsellors and other participants in this study, indicate a positive change towards more openness about rape (Speed & Vestvik 2009). However, there is still a long way to go and much that can be done.

Stigmatisation has negative impacts in many rape victims lives. Rejection of female rape victims is evidently not a beneficial long-term solution. As seen, social exclusion is rather causing additional challenges for rape victims and other family members, especially children. Organisations and others working with issues related to SV and rape in DRC seems to be chiefly aware of destructive traditions that repeatedly harmfully affect peoples' lives, both individually and collectively. Raising knowledge and awareness, as well as changing existing attitudes, are all needed to create change. However, it seems like such activities in reality are given inferior priorities compared to actions that are directly related to health. A wide range of programs are apparently primarily offering activities of medical and psychosocial support, while long-term assistance such as changing existing attitudes and raising awareness may receive limited preference, although it may be pointed out as essential both in visions and project plans.



Being raised with the belief that females are subordinate to men makes it likely that a rejected woman is vulnerable when left alone. In addition, the inflicted shame and potential accusations must be hard to bear. As already discussed, medical and psychosocial support is certainly necessary for the victims to move on in their lives, but in order to create long-term change there is a strong need to challenge existing structures, values and attitudes. That being said, medical follow-up services may consequentially raise awareness regarding the issues of SV and rape since raped women are taught to believe in themselves. However, more explicit information targeting men are also needed, in order to prevent Congolese women from the cruel consequences of gender discrimination, and to avoid families disintegrate. Important to note, the way in which the husband responds to his wife being raped seems to be closely linked to reactions from the wider family and community. This is unmistakably reflected in Kelly *et. al* where one interviewee articulates that, “if your husband doesn’t humiliate you, other people won’t” (2011: 5). In general, Congolese women repeatedly stress the value of a good relationship to their husbands is to move on in their lives after being raped (Kelly *et. al* 2011, UNHCR 2011: 55). Hence, if the husband supports his wife this simultaneously increases the likelihood that the community will do the same. Therefore, “men in particular should be encouraged to speak out and play an active role in reversing the stigma which shames victims of rape rather than perpetrators” (UNHCR2011: 55).

There is a need to change the attitudes that reproduces women’s oppression. This is not simply done by empowering women, and it is vital to include men in order to create a more holistically change. Working with and towards men can hopefully challenge existing traditional structures and actions. By strategically including men in rape-related activities may increase knowledge-levels, hence moving away from traditional and gender suppressive principles, which may constitute an important change in raped women’s lives. In addition, this can simultaneously prevent more men from turning to domestic violence themselves, which is an increasing problem both mentioned by people working with these issues in the DRC, as well as reflected in statistics (Dolan 2008: 39, Peterman *et. al* 2011). Gender sensitizing work is undoubtedly needed in order to prevent SV from escalating in the future. It seems like the violent acts are becoming an increasingly part of civil society, where for instance men may perceive sex as a right that they can claim, unrelated to whether or not the woman agrees. Sarah (54) is concern for the contagion effect the rapes may have on the civil society.

### 5.4.3 Appropriate and suitable programs

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DRC is certainly influenced by traditional values that have shown deteriorating effects especially affecting women. The way in which this problem is handled by the civil society today, with stigmatisation, prejudice and social exclusion, is a contributing factor that maintains the suppression of women. This has several long-term societal consequences. By focusing more on education, information-sharing and additional support may assist men to move away from women oppressive acts.

In order to make the consequences of rape as limited as possible, it is vital to thoroughly evaluate activities and ensure that the given support is in line with what the victims need. It is important to remember that the reality is constantly changing, and supporting activities that were previously seen as proficient may later be perceived as outdated or ineffectual. For instance, the continuously changing development discourse, where women were neglected until the 70s, is a clear example of this. However, "gender theory and research will need to reconsider themselves again and again" (Connell 2002: 151) to be in line with various cultures. This demonstrates the need that development plans are continually adapted to the local reality. Understanding the context is a very important step in order to develop strategies to eventually combat SGBV (Bennett, in Tamale 2011: 95). Hopefully, local knowledge can increase the chances to implement effective initiatives and reduce the cases of SV (Rosario 2011). In order to do so we should listen to the beneficiaries' arguments of what the needs are. The voices of the victims should be included when plans, activities and strategies are developed. Carmen del Rosario argues that gender equality and violence prevention efforts are "most successful when grounded in the context of local cultures and traditions" (2011).

The two NGOs CRN and Hope in Action collaborate in their "Fatherhood program". They support arguments above, being of the impression that educating men and increasing their awareness can be an effective method to prevent violence against women. By addressing the root causes of violence, such as discriminatory traditions, men's alleged superiority over women is challenged. This kind of program is therefore believed to promote the understanding and relationships between attitudes/beliefs, thoughts, and actions, hence transforming men's behaviour. Through the learning-process the aim is to make men realize the presence of various choices, and that their' culture and traditions may largely influence

the way they relate to violence against women (Rosario 2011). In other words, the program makes men recognize that violence is a learned behaviour that can be changed. Both men and women are hurt by SGBV, but one positive aspect is that cultural structures are dynamic and local traditions can be changed if organised and done properly.

Men should take responsibility for their actions. In line with what has been presented, Rosario claims that society, culture, religion and the media create the role of men. Therefore roles can be changed by teaching men the value to their family and community. This again, can further “break the cycle of violence by passing to their children information that women and girls are human beings and need to be respected and valued as such” (Rosario 2011). In other words, by empowering men it is possible to end and prevent violence against women. Hence, it is imperative to provide men with “new ways to use and communicate their power in respectful, non-violent relation to women” (Rosario 2011). This involves increased self-awareness, learning about both real and socially imposed differences between men and women. As seen in DRC, most men do not support violence against women. However, the problem may be that they do not know how to challenge or stop it (Rosario 2011). Therefore, it is crucial to guide men in the right direction, where violence is not longer seen as either normal or beneficial between women and men. It is clear that it is not enough to train only the women of their rights through empowerment-programs. In order for them to be able to claim these rights, it is necessary that men are if the same understanding. However, some scholars like Datta argue that "the extent to which fatherhood and masculinities are malleable and subject to change is debatable" (2011: 133).

Care International provincial director says neglecting the problem of rejection additionally deteriorate rape victims' situation, it is therefore important to stress male participation. Due to this, Care plans to more extensively engage so-called change agents into their programs in order to increase knowledge regarding rape. These change agents should have knowledge regarding the issue and preferably be men that can both act as role models and share information among males in the community. This could be done through utilizing people in powerful positions, who would work as role models for the general population. Here the change agents play an important role, since changing male's behaviour may be easier achievable if the information comes from a man himself. This again may be further improved if this is a local man. This kind of a bottom-up approach where the project is anchored locally

by using local change agents may be a preferable solution. When seeking changes in existing attitudes, this may in fact be crucial.

Several organisations, health clinics and NGOs are sensitizing religious leaders, militaries, police, grass-root leaders, men and women. It is clear that in order to create change one have to aim at the broader change agents, may be useful to reach out and convince people of advantages of a more equal, balanced and democratic society, under slogans for instance promoted by medical doctors at Panzi hospital stating: "Stop raping our biggest resource - power to the women and girls in DR Congo" (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 112). According to Kelly *et. al* "Integrating religious and community leaders into programs that respond to negative attitudes towards survivors will be vital when addressing the stigma towards these women" (2011: 8). In order to facilitate change it is according to the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative imperative to include the understanding of community perspectives on SV as well as gender. There is clearly a need for more sensitizing activities challenging existing gender inequality and subordination position of women. It is possible to create change in beliefs and values that subsequently are reflected in people's actions.

In addition both men and women have to believe themselves that gender equality is positive and indispensable. One would think that most people engaged in work aiming to support women of SV are of this impression. However, this particular study involved at least two episodes where discriminatory attitudes became apparent for the researcher. The first occasion was when one female counsellor told me, after a whole day out in the village, that I looked tired. This was immediately followed up by one of the men in the group who argued that women, more than men, get tired when working, because women are not as strong as men... The second occasion the same man was translating what another man was saying. The interviewee stated that in order to create change there is a need to sensitize both men and women to understand that women are worth the same as men. Here, the interpreter actually ended up saying "women are almost like men"... This demonstrates how the root-causes leading to the rejection of raped women seems to be strongly embedded in the culture, thus challenging to get rid of. In order to achieve serious, real and sustainable change one must challenge these root-causes, as Rosario (2001) argues above.

When asking Congolese people about the general understanding of rape in the society, they all reply by saying: everybody is of the impression that this is wrong. This is a positive

indication. However, it is imperative to identify the cultural norms/traditions that maintains the rejection of rape victims, having huge implications in many rape victims lives. In order to empower women - men must be included. Today, men may feel that they do not have a choice when another man rapes their spouse. They may and feel obliged to follow customs, including discrimination, prejudice and rejection (HHI & OSI 2009: 27). Therefore, it is fundamental to point out the root-causes of why the stigmatisation and rejection materialize. Hence potentially both decrease the numbers of SV against women, and preventing women from being rejected by their husbands. There is reason to target root-causes of the discrimination that can have advantageous impact towards eradicating rape. However, there is also a strong need to address the rape victims situation in terms of limiting additional suffering.

The argumentation above argues that the majority of the population condemn rape, but this may not be enough. It is not sufficient to create “well-meaning men” as Porter (2006) puts it. According to him such men say that they are in favour of equality, but does not have the courage to raise their voice in order to challenge these structures with deliberate action. In order to create change we need role models and change agents who are willing to go in front and raise their voices. A man like this would be the perfect change agent. The Congolese structures of inequality can be moved in a democratic direction. However, "whether it does is a question of social struggle (Connell 2002: 145). In other words, people must be willing to fight for change.

## **5.5 Part five: How to prevent SV**

Part five is linked to the last sub question in section 1.3 above: How can SV be prevented in the future?

This study focuses on information given by rape victims, where it became evident that the majority of informants additionally suffer due to social exclusion after being raped. As a consequence, their personal experiences linked to this, in addition to a discussion of how to challenge harmful practices and traditions, is central in this master thesis. However, when discussing the depressing reality of many of these women it also appears as sensible to include a section on how to combat SV and stop rapes from continuing in the DRC, which off course is the ultimate goal for the future.

### 5.5.1 Simple solutions suggested to solve complex problems

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When raising the question on how SV and rapes can be prevented in the future the women gave the impression of a somewhat joint understanding. Like Solhjell (2008: 25) I experienced that the female victims repeatedly "blamed the Interhamwe as perpetrators". Despite studies alleging that prosecutors are found in all military groupings. However, the co-founder of Panzi Foundation USA, Dr. De Reus' research confirms that most women were attacked by FDLR soldiers (Peace Women 2012), something the majority of informants in this study also suggest.

The general was to get the soldiers out of the country. Some argue it is the governments' responsibility to protect the population, while others look turn to religious solutions and argue that only God can solve the problems DRC is facing. They pray to God to bring peace, and convince the authorities and government to face these serious matters. The security issue represents a huge challenge in the populations' life, which Jannie (37) describes like we live together with the enemy who can surprise us anytime - we never know when. One woman says that the armed troops from Rwanda have created a social problem, and that the only solution would be to repatriate the soldiers back to their country. In this informants' view the current situation is unbearable, forcing the Congolese people to live close to their enemy. The local people are generally armless, which makes them incapable of defending themselves against the prowlers infamous of looting, rapes and killing.

Michelle (33) states that the government should take responsibility concerning security for the people, who "Deborah" (42) follows up by simply saying, "the government is not functioning". The government should pay soldiers well so they do not do things like this. "Currently, soldiers are among the poorest section of Congolese society [...Salaries are...] very low and is insufficient to sustain a family" (Baaz & Stern 2008: 64). SV is frequently explained to be a result of soldiers not being paid, who rob when they need money. Another informant declares that she says is thinking of many things that needs to be restored. In her view the president is evil and shrinks from his responsibilities. We need a good president that is responsible for the victims in terms of jobs, schooling and so on.

When asked about their proposal on how to prevent SV and rapes in the future the recurrent response was to the solution lies with good governance and established processes, which will make the repatriating of the Interahamwe possible. However, the repatriating of the Interahamwe may be a rather simplistic solution of a problem that in reality is extremely complex. However, this result may be linked with the informants' own situation, where most of them in reality, according to themselves, were raped by FDLR soldiers. Since this is their personal experience of what have caused problems in their lives, they may not necessarily think of any other solution than repatriation the Rwandan soldiers.

However, talking with humanitarian workers who work in close relation with the issue of SV in different instances, the response what of a different nature. As noted, the situation in DRC is very complex and the reason behind the high numbers of rapes may be multifaceted. Due to the limited scope of explanations from the rape victims themselves, this section will be based more on information gathered from professionals working in various NGOs in the Kivus and literature review where previous research is the foundation of the further discussion. In order to also being able to add the prosecutors voice into the explanation behind the widespread occurrence of rapes in DRC Baaz & Sterns (2008) work, including their personal interviews with soldiers will be employed.

The presence of military groupings in the Congolese forest is definitely representing a challenge for the people living in surroundings villages. There is a general understanding that these soldiers must be repatriated into society, because the current situation and their presence create problems for the local population. This is clearly demonstrated by one woman who puts it "I have never seen such crime before these people arrived". Stories that people cannot move safely around today makes it difficult to perform work-related tasks, such as cultivating or travelling to markets. In addition, one woamn mentions that husbands cannot leave home because they have to stay home to ensure security, which again means limited employment possibilities. In other words, the living conditions are complicated. There is a wish to send repatriate and reintegrate soldiers so the local population can live like previous times without the soldiers around.

### **5.5.2 Impunity and the states' responsibility**

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"The violence is an image for suffering and frustration, damaging discipline and corrupt leaders" (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 149). The SV in Congo is extremely damaging and seen as the worst in the world (Kristof and Wudunn 2009: 95). Accounts given by people living in the DRC makes it clear that something needs to be done. But how can this reality be improved? Is it enough to just send home the soldiers from Rwanda?

The rape victims in this study have different opinions regarding what they consider as appropriate consequences for their rapist(s). Some say forgiveness is the best solution while others state imprisonment. In contrast, some of the women that have experienced to be raped say that death is the only justified punishment for the abuses they have been subjected to. Grace (28) says that all soldiers should be killed as revenge from God to their inhuman acts. Ruth (45) even tells that if she met the persons who raped her, she herself could possible be able to kill them herself.

Elodie (33) is clearly suffering from her experiences, however when asked how she recognises the situation of excessively use of violence by military groupings, she says that the answer to the problem of extensively rapes is not to meet evil with evil. Ariana laughs when the question: In your opinion, what do you consider appropriate consequences or a suitable punishment for the man/men who raped you? is raised. She says the Congolese people are accustomed to forgiveness and the only way is to pray God for mercy. Simultaneously, she underlines the governments' responsibility to send the rebels back to their home country so she and her fellow villagers can go back to their residence.

However, one woman says it is impossible to "hunt these people down", because you never know where they are. Michelle (33) argues it is difficult to eliminate the problem by removing the FDLR soldiers, since the Hutu armed groups are already 'natives' and installed in the forest. However, today's situation is unbearable, where people cannot feel safe in their own houses. Soldiers repeatedly attack villages at night, and the government is acting irresponsible and do not ensure the safety of families, a responsibility many Congolese people are calling for. As a result of lacking and inadequate leadership, members of the civil society have started to enforce civil justice.

A general and shared explanation as one major aspect that maintains the high number of rapes in DRC is the fact that most perpetrators go free. "The existence of active armed groups on



the one hand, and a weak state on the other, have combined with patriarchal attitudes in Congolese society to produce a culture of impunity where rape goes unchallenged and unpunished" (Dymond 2008: 6). Talking to the raped women they repeatedly state that it is impossible to make a legal case since they do not know the person(s) who raped them. This is something that is challenged by the NGOs who collaborates with the army officers in order to get hold of the right person. Although, there is some kind of cooperation, this is argued by some to perhaps be a "play to the gallery" where the army officers may be perceived as helpful and cooperative, while the reality may be different. However, the increased results show improvement, which may be a proof of the opposite. Simultaneously, several people working with rape cases argue there has been an increase in the number of rapes between people in close relationships. While some argue that it is difficult to prosecute the rapist in cases where the victim do not know the victim, the provincial coordinator in Care in contrast underlines the hesitation among rape victims to go on with allegations towards perpetrators in civil cases - where the rapist is known to the victim. This may prove that uncertainty of coming forward in both instances.

*Gender norms, which stigmatise female and male victims of SV, make tackling impunity even more difficult, as many victims cannot break the silence around what happened to them [...] Popular explanations for why men rape women, or indeed other men, vary widely, and ignore the impact on the victim's own sexuality (Dolan 2010: 9).*

Similar to the global north, "most victims do not report incidences of gender-based violence" (Ampofo *et. al* 2009: 21). It is therefore difficult to identify the victims, because of stigmatisation and humiliation from others, in addition to victims may fear reprisals by perpetrators if they come forward. Another issue that seems to avert people from seeking help and/or reporting rape-cases is the lack of laws preventing victims (MSF 2009: 9). "Most African nations do not have sexual harassment laws" (Dobie 2009: 168) even though the protection from violence is a human right (Momsen 2004: 92).

The problem of impunity is something that today is prioritized and focused on by many actors working on improving the situation in DRC. By focusing on the importance of ensuring some kind of punishment for the rape prosecutor, further encouraging rape victims to bring their case forward and nonetheless facilitating this to happen, one will hopefully be able to change the situation bit by bit. The statistics from Camps shows remarkable results linked to taking cases to court. However, the increase could have been even greater, but the lack of an

adequate amount of resources makes it impossible to bring more cases forward. In other words, it is possible to assist even more victims to have their case questioned.

Most informants request a stronger state that ensures security and legal rights for the population. Nowadays, it is clear that government and authorities are failing to meet the problem of SV (Speed & Vestvik 2009: 154), and that there is a strong need for a functioning rule of law. It is important to “prosecute rape crimes, from the highest level of command to the lowest, to send a clear message this type of violence will not be tolerated” (Kelly 2010: 13). “Legislation that is enforced can send clear messages to society that violent behaviour is not acceptable” (WHO 2009: 12).

Another major issue, linked to impunity, is the problem of corruption in DRC. Gloria (48) pictures the reality by telling about what happened to her. She was raped by two civilians, which she was able to recognize. As a result, both rapists were arrested and sentenced to 2 years of imprisonment. However, after about 3,5 months they were already out... According to Gloria's understanding this was a direct result of corruption, where sexual offenders and other criminals have the possibility to bribe themselves out of jail. According to several informants in this study corruption is found in every layer of the Congolese society. As a result, a prosecutor with money can induce authorities to receive shorter sentences or pay off prison-guards to get out of jail. Such practises may deter rape victims from bringing their case to court, since it does not bring any real consequences for the rapist and may be mentally exhausting. Something needs to be done to change this reality.

Nowadays, the majority of countries in the world explicitly outlaw gender-based violence (Fried 2003: 89), but this is clearly not working sufficiently in the DRC (impunity). Legal systems and law enforcement agencies are usually insensitive to the problems, needs and rights of women. In most instances, women in institutions tend to be assigned marginal positions and are rarely involved in decision-making at higher levels because of their subordinate position in the patriarchal society (UNDP (2001:58). In this light, patriarchal domination is a structural problem, which needs to be addressed through radical restructuring and transformation of gender relations in societies (Kemirere 2009: 27).

The solution to the high numbers of rapes clearly linked to the political organisation and environment. The promoted philosophy of the government may have increased problems and

challenges that has further intensified social problems and led to more rapes. The ideology of structural violence may have been part of politics, for instance since apparent agreement between president Kagame in Rwanda and Joseph Kabila in DR Congo, where is argued to have made Rwanda extract large amounts of minerals and money from the DRC. In fact, Mukvege & Nangini argue that the trafficking of DRCs minerals is assisting the occurrence of atrocities (2009). Leaving the population in the east vulnerable and victims of their activities. This kind of regulation may have held and kept the local population confined in unjust structures, obstructing their possibilities to develop and lead a decent life, due to the conflicts, safety concerns, job possibilities and the like. The war and the presence of military groups have increased the number of refugees and the number of IDPs, which again have influenced and increased the number of rapes and violent behaviour.

## Chapter 6: Conclusions & Recommendations

The initial plan for this study was to look into rape victims' experiences to get an understanding how they perceive the help and support they have received. As mentioned, and exemplified throughout this thesis, the situation in DRC is difficult and complex, making the population facing various problems. However, there are initiated massive attempts involving global aid and support to assist the population in DR Congo in various ways. A weakness may be that the assistance that given is not sufficiently adapted to what the people need. This may be especially vital in programs involving sensitive challenges such as sexual violence.

The motivation for doing this research is largely based on the wish to ensure that vulnerable groups are getting the support that they deserve and that we do whatever is possible to change the unbearable situation and assist victims of rape as best we can. This fieldwork has confirmed that raped women may suffer from long-term consequences of rape, even if they have been in a follow-up program. By talking to the informants in this study it has become evident that culture and tradition plays a central role in relation to how a woman is coping after being subjected to rape. It is clear that women suffers' due to gender-hostile customs, often resulting in social exclusion and additional problems of raped women.

Women's hold a rather weak position in DRC. However, by paying attention to their explanations and taking their meanings, views and perspectives into account when adapting services, projects and plans – I believe we can adapt and improve programs in positive directions – helping more people in need. Rape is recognized as a global problem, but it is clear that how it is understood and handled locally widely differs. Culture directs how people understand and tackles rape in DRC, and this is clearly a disadvantage for the affected women. It is therefore imperative to take culture into account in order to offer assistance that is in line with the victims needs - and which is aiming for a long-term solution – eradicating discriminatory traditions. The medical and psychosocial assistance is essential, but based on the experiences the informants in this study shares, many of them struggle after being raped due to challenges which emerges as a result of certain cultural values. This reality should be changed.

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