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Forms and patterns of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in South Sudan: a qualitative study

M. Contreras, M. Murphy, C. Hollowell, D. Reddy,
M. MacRae, A. Blackwell, T. Hess, and M. Ellsberg



The Global
Women's Institute

THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY



Purpose



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- To obtain data specific to South Sudan that will inform policy and programming from the national government, local and international NGOs, and the wider international community.
- To improve, adapt, apply and disseminate appropriate methodological approaches to determining prevalence, forms and patterns of VAWG in conflict contexts.

Objective



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To understand the patterns of conflict, how the gender dynamics and VAWG contributed to or was exacerbated by the conflict, and how these dynamics changed during the conflict's various stages.



Methodology



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- Participatory FGDs Stakeholders and Community members (31)
- In-depth Interviews Stakeholders (30)
- In-depth Interviews Survivors (18)

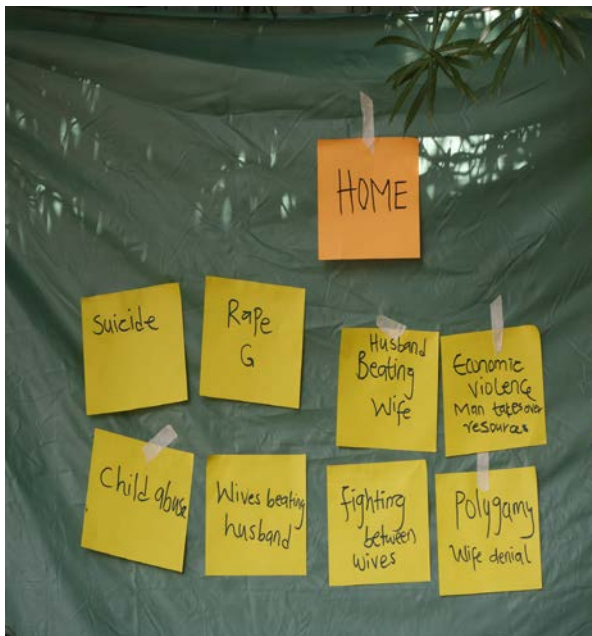


Participatory Methods



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Free-listing

Open-ended stories

Venn Diagrams



Settings and Conflicts



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Settings:

Juba City

Rumbek

Protection of Civilian Camps (POCs)
in Juba and Bentiu

Conflicts:

Civil War

Crisis 2013

Intercommunal attacks



Extreme discriminatory environment for women since early ages



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“Everything comes back to the cows”

– Female Key Informant in Rumbek

- Girls are primarily assigned domestic roles. This means that many girls are not sent to school or are forced to drop out before completion.
- The reasons given for discrimination and physical violence against girls were typically associated with bride price.
- Early marriage is commonly practiced and the opinion of the girls is generally not taken into account.
- For the extended family, the bride price is a primary vehicle for wealth accumulation, and many other traditional practices such as early marriage, wife inheritance and abduction are strategies used by families to either maximize or avoid paying bride price.

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)



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"It is common our custom to beat a woman when she has a mistake, not to the extent of killing her completely but to discipline her."

– Male Local Chiefs in Rumbek

"Most people beat and torture their wives thinking that they have paid a lot of cows. They don't care whether the wife has some other rights."

– Key Informant in Rumbek

- The most common form of violence experienced by women in adulthood is physical and sexual violence perpetrated by an intimate partner. IPV is commonly justified as a man's right to chastise a woman based on the payment of brideprice.
- Some discriminatory and abusive practices reinforce the second-class status of women such polygamy and wife inheritance.

The conflict



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“Burning of people, such as women and children, is a kind of violence that is going on in the larger Nuer community right now. The act of burning and killings of children did not happen during the first and second [civil] wars but it’s currently happening in South Sudan.”

– Men in Juba PoC site

“Women are also killed as revenge. For instance, when a woman from one community is killed men from another community will kill a woman from the same community.”

- Female Key Informant in Rumbek



The conflict: IPV



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“Before the crisis we were fighting; now they are removing our eyes, they are kicking us in the stomach.”

– Women in Bentiu PoC site

- Many drivers of VAWG are worsened due to on-going conflict in the country, exacerbating women’s experiences of IPV.
- The normalization of violence, breakdown of rule of law, displacement and increasing poverty due to the conflict were affecting experiences of IPV.
- In particular brutality of partner violence had increased since the start of the 2013 Crisis.

The conflict: Abduction and sexual assault during attack or displacement



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“Gender-based violence is taken as a tool of war in South Sudan. Women have been raped in a massive [way]. Even ten men can go and rape ten women”

– Female Key Informant in Juba

“Men are raping women and perpetrating dehumanizing acts on women in these areas – inserting things into private parts, cuts off organs. It is a very brutal kind of violence.”

– Female Key Informant in Juba

- Women are at significant risk of attack when they venture beyond the relative safety of their communities, as a result of displacement, or when men leave to engage in combat.
- Women, girls and boys are abducted by men of rival communities, often during incidents of cattle raiding. This occurs both during intercommunal violence as well as part of the 2013 Crisis. At the centre of this violence is the bride price.

Diverse experience by regions



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In Juba City

- Even with some advances in knowledge, harmful attitudes and behaviors remain firmly entrenched for most of women.
- The 2013 Crisis has made the environment more risky due to lack of security and increased poverty.

In Rumbek

- Extremely patriarchal environment in where women are exposed to different types of harmful discriminatory practices, especially concerning marriage.
- The 2013 Crisis has made the environment more risky because of lack of law and the proliferation of guns.
- Women are trapped between their own families and husbands (dowry) and the inter-communal conflict.



In POCs:

- Harmful practices continue but have been adapted and/or exacerbated due to displacement.
- The 2013 Crisis is directly associated with an increased risk of attack and rape as a result of displacement. Police officers are among the main perpetrators.
- Most women in POCs have been directly exposed to all different types of conflicts.
- Crisis exacerbating different types of VAWG.

Conclusions



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- Women in South Sudan are affected by the current conflicts but living different realities depending where they live and their ethnic group. Women in Rumbek and POCs are in a desperate situation.
- The Crisis has directly and indirectly exacerbated all different types of violence.
- Pervasive gender inequitable norms and practices, as well as continual experiences of violence (both in the form of state and community conflict and personal experiences), shape women's lives in South Sudan.





“What I witnessed in South Sudan is the worst I have seen in my almost 30 years in dealing with this issue. This is because of the combination of chronic insecurity, unimaginable living conditions, acute day-to-day protection concerns and rampant sexual violence”

Mrs. Zainab Hawa Bangura, 2014

UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict



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