



Report on Kampala Summer Institute

Building on and strengthening relationships of survivors

This 5-day Summer Institute employed an innovative, survivor-led approach to understanding men's and women's relationships in coercive settings. In the first two days, 12 survivors of abduction, forced conscription and 'marriage' in wartime were brought together in closed sessions (identities withheld for confidentiality). The following three days were open to the public. On the first day of the Summer Institute, 6 male and 6 female survivors met separately to discuss their experiences during war and in post-conflict life, identifying the diversity of relationships that formed in coercive settings; how they forged bonds of interdependence for survival; and recognizing, at the same time, how precarious and often violent these relationships were.



Dr. Sam Dubal, Dr. Chris Dolan (Director of Refugee Law Project) and David Onen (MA candidate)

On the second day, the Men's and Women's groups came together to review their discussions, before exchanging and comparing with each other the differences in their experience during and following the war. The survivors' groups held a particularly focused discussion of how post-conflict life has segregated men and women based on the assumption that all men are perpetrators (despite many being abducted at a young age) and that women and children are more vulnerable than men. While important attention has been drawn to women's experiences of sexual and gender based violence through scholarly, media, and policy work, less is known about the violence men suffered during conflict. This includes men's experiences of sexual and gender based vulnerabilities and forced relations. As a result, there are few interventions designed for and available to men. We also know very little related to questions of consent and the diversity of relationships that changed over time during the war. Survivors discussed the different ways persons developed close relations to each other outside of forced ones, including bonds developed through shared experiences and care that carry over to the post-conflict period.

Survivors kicked off the third day by presenting their findings to academics from different disciplines (law, politics, history, psychology, and development studies); humanitarian service providers who work with survivors of wartime sexual and gender based violence from Rwanda, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Liberia; journalists from Uganda and Kenya and documentary makers from Uganda and the UK; and Ugandan activists and policy makers. Throughout the remaining three days, plenary sessions discussed historical precedents, justice and reparations, children born of war and central concepts. Discussions revolved around the insights of men and women who have experienced abduction, conscription and forced relationships in wartime.

Male participants discussed the need to advocate for gender inclusiveness in post-conflict interventions which currently focus largely on women and children. Income generation, health, and advocacy-led initiatives tend to leave out men, often assuming they have greater access to resources such as land. Male participants explained they also were sometimes denied land and opportunities to enter the formal economy because of social stigma. Women participants raised the challenges of stigma and rejection: unable to inherit land or remarry, they were often forced to seek jobs in low-paying sectors and raise children alone. Men participants shared similar experiences of stigma, where their marriages too were either stopped by a woman's family who rejected them based on their past, or their marriage dissolved because he could not meet the gendered expectations of providing for the family based on years of lost employment and educational opportunity. Both men and women spoke about shared health related challenges in the post-conflict period unique to their experience such as deafness of their children (who were exposed to loud sounds during battles in early stages of development), pain from bullets or shrapnel remaining in their bodies, disability and sexual or reproductive dysfunctions. Ongoing physical and emotional pain are a continued struggle for women and men, who, despite support from their peer group, still cope with trauma, socio-economic, and relationship difficulties daily.



Kampala skyline before the rain



A particularly painful reflection for participants was that men who are now the sole parent to children born from forced relationships are silenced and ignored in interventions that are solely directed at women and their children born from the same forced relationship. Participants had a long conversation about why this was so, reflecting on the rationale of gender based interventions (such as trainings, income generation projects, scholarships for children or housing) focused on women and children to the exclusion of men. They noted women were more strongly organized in this respect, and that while women's groups did sometimes work to include men, there was a need for closer re-consideration of the advantages or disadvantages of working together.

advocate for reparations and improved interventions. Most stated that they felt less isolated and alone after meeting persons who share similar experiences. They argued that the only way to change problematic assumptions about survivors was to *tell their own stories in their own words*. Participants stated that this was the first time men and women had been brought together to discuss their relationships with one another.



Children born of forced relationships panel (from left to right): Benard Okot, Ketty Anyeko, Evelyn Amony, Teddy Atim, Heleen Touquet, Godeliève Mukasarasi and Jean Fidel Uburiyemwabo

Women emphasized that peer groups were essential to healing and moving on from the violence experienced during the war. They have formed their own advocacy groups after the support they did receive from the government and NGOs did not meet their most pressing needs. In these informal peer groups, women help each other save money, develop skills, and raise children, all of which are crucial for those who receive little support from their families or new husbands.

As a result, they reported that pre-existing divisions before the Institute based on gender were transformed through their exchanges with one another. In a debriefing meeting following the Institute, participants stated “men used to look at women as the problem; women used to look at men as the problem, now we are one”; and, “we want peace, and to be united.” Finally, they discussed how they had a sense of kinship since the end of the war given their shared experiences. They stated that following the Summer Institute, they desired to continue to work together for social justice, and formed a community-based group.

The challenges facing children are two-fold. First, the circumstances of their birth stigmatizes them as ‘rebel children’. Second, most do not know the identity on their paternal side. As a result, male children who customarily inherit the land from the paternal clan are unable to access to it. Both sexes without access to paternal identity are unable to draw on ancestral relations and support, and may be unable to obtain vital documents such as national identity cards. Both men and women participants expressed a desire to have their children afforded the equal opportunities and rights available to any other Ugandan child.

Given the success of the Institute’s findings into the topic of forced relationships from the perspectives of men and women, and the innovative model of drawing on and building relationships across sectors, disciplines and survivor exchanges, the Partnership hopes to continue and develop such Summer Institutes in the coming years. The final session focused on the myriad ways survivors and survivor knowledge is often easily distorted or used by researchers, media and policy alike in ways fails to capture their diverse lived experiences. Some survivors stated they felt exploited, and that public stories reproduced unfair depictions. As such, they express the desire to speak in their own voices and as their own advocates.

In the final day of reflections on the Summer Institute, survivor-participants returned to their groups. This followed their active participation in the Institute with other policy, academic, media and legal representatives from different countries across access. They reported that learning from other’s experiences was an enriching experience. Importantly, they also reported a new sense of solidarity, leadership and desire to further

Special thanks to Erin Baines for writing this issue of the newsletter