

## **Interventions for sexually abused female children in conflict areas of Uganda: A Case of Gulu District**

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### **Abstract**

This study looks at “Interventions for sexually abused female children in conflict areas of Uganda: A case study of Gulu District”. Sexual abuse has been recognized as one of the most significant social problems facing children in conflict situations at the global level. The girl child was the central focus of this study because young girls have been found to be at higher risk for sexual abuse than boys (Kaplan, 2005). The empowerment theory, supplemented by the systems theory, was used to provide a theoretical framework to inform the study. A cross-sectional design was used, and the study was carried out in Gulu District, because this area experienced horrendous atrocities during the twenty two years of conflict which is over now. The study primarily used qualitative methods of data collection to obtain the necessary data, though this was supplemented by quantitative methods.

The study population mainly included formerly abducted girls and young women between 15-25 years of age who had experienced sexual abuse while in captivity. A total number of 229 respondents were selected for the survey, and among these, a few respondents were purposively selected for their life stories. Data was collected through documentary review, personal interviewing, focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The findings reveal that, upon their return from captivity, 76.9 % of the sexually abused girls reported to the reception centres whereas 23.1 % went straight back to the communities.

Those who joined the reception centres received psychosocial support services, such as counseling, medical care, art therapy, and various recreational activities such as sports, drama and music. While those who did not join the centers obtained assistance such as traditional cleansing, spiritual support, clothing and enrollment in school from the community. The reintegration efforts to facilitate and ensure the re-entry of these girls into their communities mainly consisted of tracing the families, conducting follow-up, giving them reinsertion packages, skills training and capital for starting businesses, and encouraging cultural activities. The findings indicated that the rehabilitation services were helpful in overcoming the girls’ traumatic experiences to a certain extent, while some of the reintegration efforts met their needs in part. However, they faced huge challenges in the community; these included persistent stigmatization, recurring nightmares and psychological problems, loss of parents, as well as poverty and limited economic opportunities. When the girls left the centres and went back to the community, it was found that they were overwhelmed by several serious challenges, which indicates a gap and a shortcoming in the rehabilitation and reintegration efforts of the reception centres. The findings therefore highlight an urgent need for community based services to support and empower the sexually abused girls. A framework for improved delivery of services is also suggested. This constitutes an interactive integrated model that is based on better interaction and collaboration between the social services system, the family and the community systems, in ensuring effective rehabilitation and reintegration of these young girls and women who have been affected by armed conflict.