



After Abduction: Access to Reintegration Programs and Mental Health Status of Young Female Abductees in Northern Uganda

Background

Reintegration programs are often offered to former combatants and abductees to gain civilian status and support services to reintegrate into post-conflict society in northern Uganda, but many former abductees, including many young women, reintegrate on their own.

The Question

How many young female abductees access post-abduction reintegration programming and how does their mental health status differ from those who self-reintegrated?

The Study

In conjunction with the Gulu Branch of The AIDS Support Organization (TASO) in northern Uganda, a community-based cross-sectional study was conducted looking at HIV prevention treatment and care among 400 young sex workers. **Between June 2011 and January 2012, researchers analyzed interviews from 129 young women** who had previously been abducted by the Lords Resistance Army (LRA). This project was supported in part through the Gender, Violence and HIV Team.

The Results

Of 129 young female abductees interviewed:

- **56 (43.4%) had participated in a reintegration program.**
- All were abducted between 1988-2010 for an average time of one year,
- The median age of abduction was 13 years old,
- 76.6% escaped, 15.6% were released, and 7% were rescued.

Support and Reintegration

- 67.8% accessed traditional cleansing ceremonies,
- 37.5% received amnesty,
- 28.6% went to a reception centre,
- 12.5% received a reinsertion package.

Objectives of reintegration:

- *Provide support and opportunities to live 'normal' lives,*
- *Become a functioning member of society,*
- *Resume education,*
- *Gain skills training,*
- *Reduce trauma, including anxiety and depression.*

Following the war in northern Uganda, mental health status was not significantly different between those who accessed a reintegration program compared to those who self-reintegrated.

The Policy Implications

- The successful reintegration of combatants and abductees into their communities is a complex and open-ended process between combatants, abductees, and the recipient community.
- These results support the need for gender-specific services and ongoing evaluation of reintegration programming to benefit our understanding of the legacy of abduction.

Muldoon KA, Muzaaya G, Betancourt TS, Ajok M, Akello M, Petruf Z, Nguyen P, Baines EK, Shannon K. After abduction: exploring access to reintegration programs and mental health status among young female abductees in Northern Uganda. *Conflict and Health*, 2014, 8:5.