

## Types Of Sexual, Gender Based Violence Faced by Congolese Male Refugees Face in Kakuma Refugee Camp - Kenya

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### Abstract

*Sexual violence is a significant public health and human rights issue worldwide. Refugees and asylum seekers affected by armed conflict are particularly vulnerable. In Kenya, the extent of sexual violence in humanitarian settings remains underexplored. Although many organizations address gender-based violence, little is known about male refugees who are victims of sexual violence. This paper aims to identify how cultural norms influence sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) faced by Congolese male refugees in Kakuma Camp. The study adopted a mixed cross-sectional survey research design. The study population for this study included refugee male survivors of sexual violence within Kakuma refugee camp, Turkana West Constituency. purposive sampling was used to select male refugees who formed the sampling frame. Simple random sampling was used to select 382 male refugees and 6 key informants as the respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data. The key Findings revealed that Congolese male refugees in Kakuma experience various forms of SGBV, including physical abuse (46%), sexual abuse (33%), and psychological abuse (21%). Younger males (18-29 years) reported higher incidences of SGBV compared to older age groups. Cultural norms significantly impacted the reporting and perception of SGBV, with societal stigma and the pressure to conform to traditional masculine roles discouraging many victims from seeking help. The study concluded that addressing SGBV among male refugees requires a multisectoral approach that includes cultural sensitivity, awareness programs, and support systems tailored to the unique needs of male survivors.*

**Keywords:** Sexual, Gender Based Violence, Male Refugees

## Introduction

Sexual violence may be viewed as a global public health issue, a violation of human rights and, in egregious cases, may constitute a crime against humanity. It comprises sexual, emotional-psychological, physical, psychological and socio-economic violence as well as harmful cultural practices. In addition to its negative effect on victims' well-being and participation in society, sexual violence may have significant consequences on sexual, reproductive, physical and psychological health at the international level, such as the reported occurrence of afflicting refugees seeking protection (Mumba,2020).

Although violence has been with us since time immemorial, it was only in 1996 that the World Health Assembly Resolution recognized the increasing importance of violence as a leading worldwide public health problem (Muller, & Shahrokh,2017). Violence is an extremely complex phenomenon that has its roots in the interaction of many factors - biological, social, cultural, economic and political and is mainly caused by unequal power relations. Gender, social inequalities and inequities are related to many of the risk factors of violence particularly at the societal level. These factors can exacerbate other risk factors that create conditions in which violence can thrive. Conversely increased equality and equity can multiply the effects of protective factors to reduce the level of violence.

Male identity and masculine norms are undeniably linked with violence, with men and boys disproportionately likely both to perpetrate violent crimes and to die by homicide and suicide (World Bank Group, 2022). While biology may play a role in shaping a tendency toward certain forms of violence, the “nature” of men and boys is not the sole predictor of their violent behaviors or experiences. Rather, boys and men are often raised, socialized, and/or encouraged to be violent, depending on their social surroundings and life conditions. The international community largely abdicates to domestic law jurisdiction over rape, sexual assault (including murder), forced prostitution and reproductive subordination.

The vulnerability of men and boys to sexual violence has been especially within camps, during military operations, in detention centres, or following abduction into primary paramilitary centres and while seeking refuge. However, it noted that little is known about the prevalence rate of sexual violence against men and the incidence is likely to be under-reported. Masculinity notions and gender discourses shapes how survivors and society make sense of sexual assault. In research literature up until 1980, the pronoun ‘she’ was used almost exclusively when referring to sexual abuse survivors (Big-Alabo, et al., 2022).

Kenya has been a home to many refugees since 1971. In recent years, Kenya has witnessed a great influx of refugees mostly triggered by protracted humanitarian crises in the neighbouring countries. The settlement design of main Kakuma camp comprises of four sections namely, Kakuma 1,2,3 and 4. Each section is divided into blocks and blocks divided into zones. Each zone has several households with mixed nationalities. Majority of those refugees have been absorbed into the refugee camps (Kakuma and Dadaab) and the surrounding areas.

According to, Kenya Statistics Package (2022), as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022, Kenya hosted 573,508 (Dadaab 233,661 – 40.7 %, Kakuma & Kalobeyi 248,929 – 43.4 % and Urban 90,918 – 15.9 % number of refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, DR Congo, Rwanda, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Burundi South Sudan, and Uganda

among others. Even with these numbers' cases of SVM remain one of the under-reported incidences among Congolese male refugees and asylum seekers in Kakuma (UNHCR, 2021).

In Kakuma refugee camp, like in any other patriarchal society, men are the main decision makers at the family and societal levels but the experience of being a victim of sexual assault conflicts with dominant notions of masculinity. The risks of SGBV encountered by displaced persons living in the camp increases overtime because of the disruption of the family system, weak protection and coping strategies combined with loss of household income and other means of social support network. Kenya hosts one of the largest refugee camps in Africa with refugees from East, Central and the horn of Africa.

Whereas the occurrence of SGBV in refugee camp in Kenya is documented by United Nations High Commission of Refugees (UNHCR) and Kenya Government Department of Refugees Affairs (DRA) there is no official statistic on sexual and gender violence among male refugees in Kakuma. In Kakuma, sexual violence is ranked among the major gender-based forms of sexual violence and the major incident reported by women refugees in Kakuma settings. Yet very little is known and recorded about Congolese refugee men who may have experienced sexual and gender-based violence prior to their plight and who are the focus of this study.

## Methodology

The study adopted a mixed cross-sectional survey research design. The study population for this study included refugee male survivors of sexual violence within Kakuma refugee camp, Turkana West Constituency. Purposive sampling was used to select male refugees who formed the sampling frame. Simple random sampling was used to select 382 male refugees and 6 key informants as the respondents. Data was collected using questionnaires and interview schedules. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative data. Ethical considerations were put in places such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and proper handling of data was ensured

## Key Findings

### Socio-Demographic Characteristics

The socio-demographic profile of the respondents reveals that the majority are between the ages of 30 and 49 years (50.3%), with a significant portion being married (54.5%). Educational attainment varies, with most respondents having completed secondary education (36.6%). In terms of employment, the respondents are fairly evenly distributed across formal employment (26.3%), informal employment (23.7%), self-employment (24.4%), and unemployment (25.6%). The Social – Demographic Characteristics of the respondents are summarized in the table 1 below:

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents**

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n = 382)	Percent
Age	18-29 Years	93	24.3%
	30-49 Years	192	50.3%
	50-59 Years	77	20.2%
	60 and above	20	5.2%
	Total	382	100%
Marital Status	Married	208	54.5%
	Single	133	34.8%
	Separated	21	5.5%
	Divorced	12	3.1%
	Widowed	8	2.1%
	Total	382	100%
Education Level	None	57	14.9%
	Primary	113	29.6%
	Secondary	140	36.6%
	Tertiary	72	18.8%
	Total	382	100%
Occupation	Government Employee	0	0.0%
	NGO	136	35.6%
	Private Business	26	6.8%
	Unemployed	220	57.6%
	Total	382	100%

### Types of SGBV that Congolese Male Refugees Face in Kakuma Refugee Camp

*What are the types of SGBV that Congolese male refugees face in Kakuma refugee camp?* The respondents asserted that they have experienced various forms of SGBV. The respondents were required to indicate the types of sexual and gender-based violence that they encountered in the refugee camps. Table 2 summarizes

**Table 2: Types of SGBV Faced by the Respondents**

Type of SGBV	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Abuse	177	46%
Sexual Abuse	125	33%
Psychological Abuse	80	21%

As shown in Table 1, physical abuse is the commonest SGBV that the entire sample of the surveyed Congolese male refugees in Kakuma Camp, Kenya face. The reason is that 46% of the SGBV related cases are physical abuse, followed by sexual abuse at 33%. Psychological abuse is the least common SGBV, as reported by the respondents. The findings that men encounter more physical abuse than other forms of SGBV align with previous assertions by Araujo et al. (2018), Meyer et al. (2019), Chynoweth et al. (2020), Tan and Kuschminder (2022). Moreover, the other forms of SGBV, sexual and psychological abuse, can directly or indirectly contribute to physical abuse.

Additionally, an assessment of the prevalence of various types of SGBVs in relation to different age groups

*Table 3: Prevalence of SGBVs by Age Group*

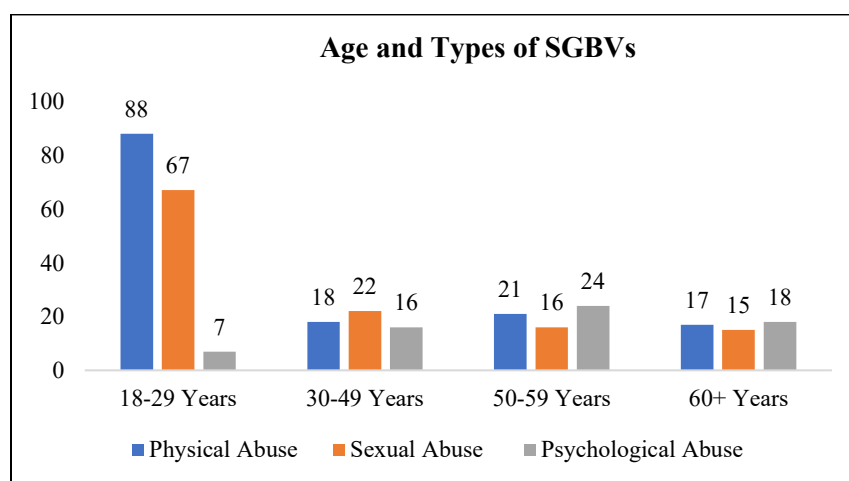
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18-29 Years	162	49
30-49 Years	56	17
50-59 Years	61	19
60+ Years	50	15

As per the results, male refugees aged between 18 and 29 years are the most prone to various types of SGBVs. Overall, at least 49% of the refugees in this age group who participated in the survey indicated that they had encountered either physical, sexual, or psychological abuse while at the Kakuma refugee camp. The other age group that is significantly affected is the 50-59-years. About 19% of members of this category indicated that they had been subjected to SGBVs. The least affected group is that of people aged more than 60 years since only 15% of such male refugees reported of having been subjected to physical, sexual, or psychological abuse, followed by the 30-39 years old category, where the prevalence rate is 17%. The findings that male refugees aged 18-29 years old are the most prone to SGBVs, while those above 60 years of age are the least affected align with the World Bank Group's (2023) report. Moreover, young people are subjected to an environment that makes it easier for them to be physically, sexually, and emotionally assaulted.

*Table 4: Frequency of Different Types of SGBVs*

Type of SGBV	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Abuse	144	48.81
Sexual Abuse	120	40.68
Psychological Abuse	65	22.03

Regarding the types of SGBVs frequency, physical abuse is the most common with a total of 144 cases reported by the respondents. Sexual abuse is also common with 120 incidences, while psychological abuse is the least prevalent with 65 cases. The findings concur with existing literature because the other forms of SGBVs usually involve physical assault (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2003).

*Figure 1: Prevalence of Different SGBVs per Age Group*

According to the findings, the 18-29-year-old male refugees are the most affected by physical abuse. About 94.6% of the respondents from this age group indicated that they are affected by this type of SGBV because their physical activity is the highest. Moreover, the group is more visible and significantly involved in confrontations because they mostly get themselves into highly risky situations. Only 9.4% of the male refugees aged 30-39 years are subjected to physical abuse. The implication is that most of these adults have created effective strategies of evading conflicts or may have been assigned roles within the refugee camps that make them avoid confrontations. However, the group aged 50-59 years seemed to report more cases of physical abuse, 27.3%, probably because of their diminishing physical strength and being targeted by molesters. Also, a significant percentage (85%) of the elderly who are 60 and above years old male refugees are physically abused. The possible reason could be their perceived or actual inability to protect themselves because of their reduced energy brought about by aging.

As for sexual abuse, the elderly, 60 and above years old, are the most affected male refugees with 75% of the respondents reporting that they had been subjected to this particular SGBV. It is highly probable that the vulnerability of this group is the reason why the cases are highly prevalent amongst them. The second most affected category is the group of male refugees aged between 18 and 29 years with 72% of the respondents from this group facing related challenges, probably due to higher exposure and mobility within the refugee camps. Thirdly, the group of male refugees aged between 50 and 59 years is significantly affected with 20.8% of the respondents from this category facing related challenges. The reason for this is that individuals within this age bracket are fairly exposed to challenges. The least affected group is the 30-49 years, in which case only 11.5% of the participants reported instances of sexual abuse. This could be attributed to the established self-protection mechanisms and reduced visibility within the refugee camps.

Psychological abuse is highest among the elderly, those aged more than 60 years of age. The reason is that about 90% of the individuals from this group being affected by this type of SGBV. Given that the elderly are highly likely to face significant mental issues, and when these are compounded with physical and sexual abuse, the psychological impact goes up. The group aged between 50-59 years of age falls second with 31.2% of incidences. This statistic can be attributed to the possible growing mental health challenges, supplemented with the targeted psychological torment that the individuals undergo. The least affected groups are the 18-29 and 30-49 age categories due to their ability to cope with mentally challenging situations. Generally, given that the Chi-square test's p-value is 0.0000, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant relationship between age group and the type of SGBV among Congolese male refugees in Kakuma refugee camps.

In addition to age, an assessment of how the marital status of the surveyed male refugees is related to their exposure to different types of SGBVs and the resultant prevalence. The findings are summarized in Table 5, Table 6, and Figure 2

*Table 5: SGBV Prevalence by Marital Status*

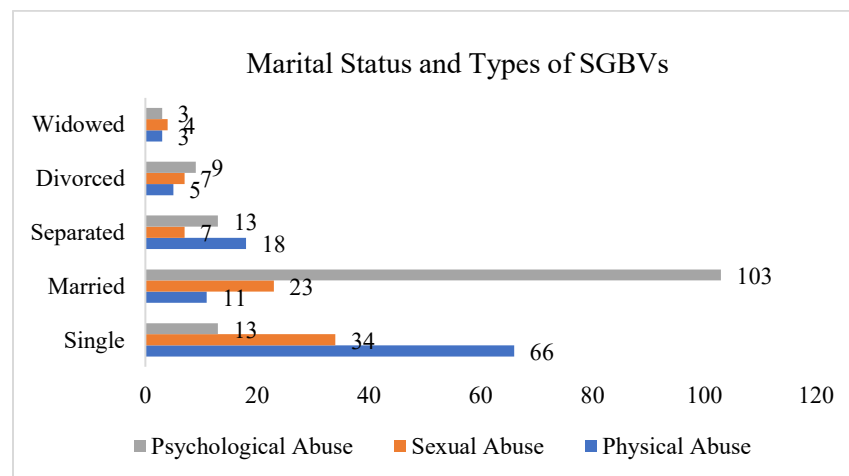
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	113	35
Married	137	43
Separated	38	12
Divorced	21	7
Widowed	10	3

In terms of marital status, married male refugees are the most affected category by SGBVs with 43% of the participants being affected. The singles group follows with 35% of the incidences. The separated male refugees also face significant challenges, with 12% of the incidences of abuse. However, the divorced and widowed group are the least affected with 7% and 3% of the participants indicating that they are affected.

*Table 6: Prevalence of SGBVs by Type*

Type of SGBV	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Physical Abuse	103	31.96
Sexual Abuse	75	23.27
Psychological Abuse	141	44.77

Psychological abuse was the commonest type of SGBV affecting the surveyed refugees when their marital status is factored in. It is followed by physical abuse. Finally, sexual abuse has the least number of cases, as reported by the surveyed male refugees.

*Figure 2: Prevalence of Different SGBVs per Marital Status*

As per the results, about 49.6% of the single male refugees experience physical abuse. The results could reflect the increased vulnerability or exposure of such individuals to risky situations because they usually do not enjoy the protection that is associated with having a spouse. However, physical abuse is significantly low among married males at 5.3%. Although it may not be automatic, the results could imply that when one is married, they enjoy some level of protection or stability, and this reduces the risk of physical abuse. On the other hand, the separated male refugees reported numerous cases of physical abuse since 85.7% of



the respondents indicated that they had been subjected to the particular SGBV. The problem could be attributed to the transitional state of the individuals from this group and possible lack of support. Also, the divorced individuals indicated that they face a considerable risk of physical abuse because the problem is evident in 41.7% of the respondents. On the other hand, widowed male refugees indicated that they experience a moderate level of physical abuse (37.5%). The reason for this could be the individuals' solitary status and vulnerability.

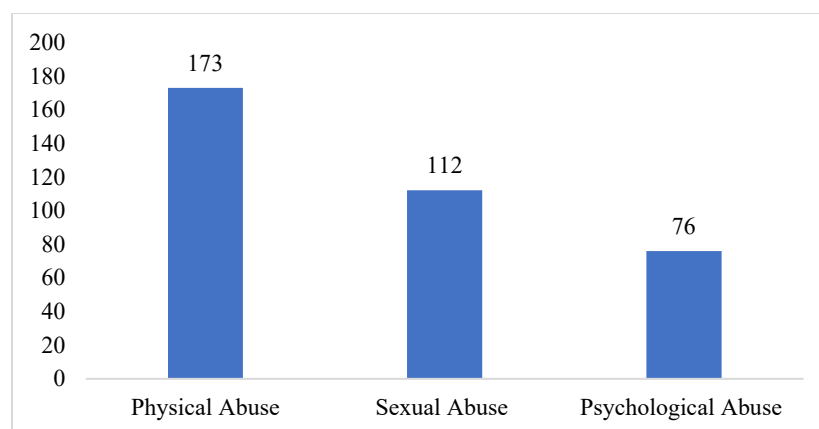
As for sexual abuse, the results indicate that single males experience a significant amount of sexual abuse (25.6%), probably because they are more exposed and active. The percentage of married male refugees that report sexual molestation is relatively low (11.1%), implying that being married might offer some protection against abuse. However, there are high incidences of sexual abuse among separated, divorced, and widowed males, at 33.3%, 58.3%, and 50%, respectively. The implication is that separation, divorce, and death of a spouse increase the risks of separation and exposure to abuse. Therefore, it was found that married male refugees tend to report fewer cases of sexual abuse compared to the other groups of people who do not have a spouse.

On the other hand, it was established that psychological abuse is relatively low (9.8%) among single males compared to other marital statuses. However, married males face the highest number of psychological abuse cases, probably due to the ongoing stress and psychological strain within marriages in the refugee camp context. Although the separated group has a high percentage of psychological abuse (61.9%), divorced males exhibit the highest percentage of emotional and mental distress associated with separation. Similar incidences were exhibited among widowed male refugees, though the prevalence is quite low. The occurrences might be linked to loneliness and emotional trauma that comes with the loss a spouse.

Overall, physical and psychological abuse are most common among divorced and separated male refugees. The reason could be the significant exposure and vulnerability that come with the process of dissolving marital relationships and the mental toll associated with them. It is also noted that marriage tends to offer protection against SGBVs because men strive to sustain their masculinity. However, such individuals tend to face high levels of psychological abuse, probably due to the strain associated with being in a relationship. It was also noted that widowed males are the most exposed to high percentages of all types of abuse. The implication is that men from the group are more vulnerable and could be targeted potentially. Generally, the types and frequencies of abuse experienced by male refugees in Kakuma are influenced by their marital status. Since the Chi-square test's p-value is 0.0000, which is less than 0.05, there is a significant relationship between marital status and the type of SGBV among Congolese male refugees in Kakuma refugee camps.

In addition to age and marital status, it was also assessed whether education is associated with the type and frequency of different types of SGBVs that male refugees experience. The findings are presented in Figures 3, Table 7, and Figure 4.





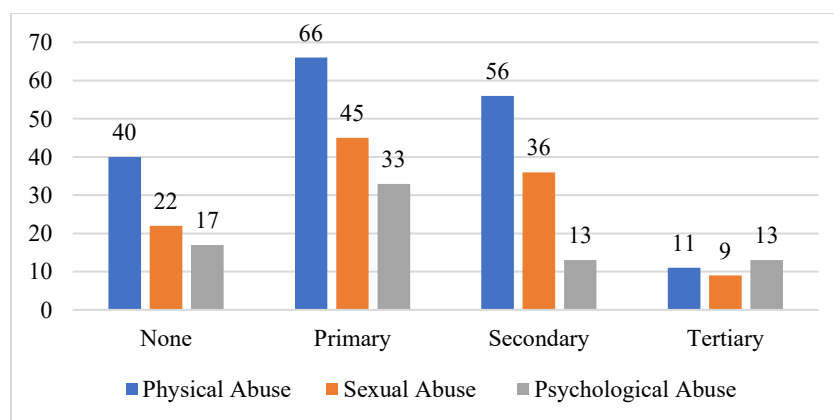
*Figure 3: Overall Prevalence of SGBVs in Relation to Education*

The findings indicate that physical abuse is the most prevalent among male refugees in line with their education. The second most common form of SGBV is sexual abuse. Finally, psychological abuse is the least common type of SGBV among the male refugees when education is factored.

*Table 7: SGBV Among Different Educational Levels*

Educational Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
None	79	22
Primary	144	40
Secondary	105	29
Tertiary	33	9

The findings indicate that male refugees in Kakuma with primary education as their highest level are the most affected with different types of SGBVs, with 40% of them reporting that they are victims. The other group that is significantly affected by SGBV is that of male refugees with secondary school qualifications with 29% of the respondents reporting that they had been subjected to abuse. About 22% of those with no education and 9% of those with tertiary education are subjected to SGBV. Based on the findings, there are mixed assertions about the influence of education on male refugees' vulnerability to SGBV.



*Figure 4: Prevalence of Different SGBVs per Education Level*

A detailed analysis of the data indicated that those with formal education are the most affected by physical abuse (70.2%). It was established that physical abuse tends to decrease as education increases because only 15.3% of individuals with tertiary education reported physical abuse. On the other hand, sexual abuse seems to affect male refugees with no formal education and those with primary education equally. Generally, the magnitude of impact tends to decrease as the level of education increases, with the least affected being those with tertiary education (12.5%). On the other hand, the impact of psychological abuse is somehow similar among those with no formal education and primary education. However, this particular SGBV is quite low among male refugees with secondary education (9.3%). It is also noted that impact of psychological abuse increases slightly among those with tertiary education (18.1%).

Generally, it was Individuals with no formal education experience the highest rates of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse. It is also noted that an increase in education is associated with a decline in the subjection to physical and sexual abuse among male refugees. A unique pattern is exhibited in the vulnerability of male refugees to psychological abuse because the impact is lower among refugees with secondary education level but higher at the tertiary level. In sum it can be said that education appears to be a protective factor against abuse, with higher education levels associated with lower rates of physical and sexual abuse. Therefore, an increase in educational opportunities for refugees may help reduce instances of their vulnerability to SGBV. It should also be noted that although education seems to help reduce psychological abuse among male refugees, other factors could be playing a role in determining the magnitude of exposure among those with tertiary education. Generally, since the Chi-square test's p-value is 0.05, there is a significant relationship between educational level and the type of SGBV among Congolese male refugees in Kakuma refugee camps.

The quantitative findings concur with the results from interviews, which represent the qualitative aspect of the analysis. For instance, the dominant themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews include physical violence, sexual assault, and emotional and psychological abuse.

### Theme 1: Physical Violence

The theme of physical violence emerged prominently from the data, reflecting the severe and often brutal experiences of the research participants. Most participants confirmed that physical violence is rampant. Majority indicated that they have been physically abused. Physical violence was in form of beatings and assaults, physical injuries, as well as witnessing violence to others.

#### *Beatings and Assaults*

Battering and beating is the most common type of physical violence, which leads to aggravated bodily harm. Some of the interview participants recounted how they endured beatings and assaults. For instance, one noted as follows

*"A stick was used to dig a small hole in the soil then I was asked to have sex with it while beating me heavily. Then they took my mother and sisters with them and since that time I don't know where they are now." (IP-3, a male refugee)*

This illustrates the extreme physical and psychological torture that some refugees endure, with violence extending to family members. Similarly, another participant reported:

*"I was beaten heavily by the soldiers while they were asking me to have sex with a stick buried in the soil." (IP-25, a Congolese male refugee)*

The experience of this participant shows how security personnel are often involved in the perpetration of violence, hence making the vulnerability of the refugees even worse.

### **Physical Injuries**

Often, due to violence, some of the participants reported that they suffered physical injuries, which had dire impacts on their present life. One participant in particular gave the following account.

*"Today I am jobless due to the physical injuries I sustained and currently I depend on handouts, yet I used to work and could provide for my family." (IP-7, a Congolese male refugee)*

This statement highlights the long-term impact of physical violence on the refugees' economic stability and ability to support their families.

*"The beatings I received have left me with injuries that make it difficult for me to move around or work, and this has severely affected my ability to provide for my family." (IP-42, a Congolese male refugee)*

This quote emphasizes the debilitating physical consequences of violence, which hinder refugees' daily functioning and economic productivity.

### **Witnessing Violence**

Apart from those who suffered the violence, there are those who witnessed it perpetrated on others, often with similar impacts on their wellbeing. For instance, one participant narrated as follows:

*"We had finished having supper when we had a sharp knock on our door before even opening it the gunshot did and in no time these men began undressing my wife, as her husband, I had to fight them back in defense and in the process, I was bitterly beaten, tied on our bed and was sodomized too." (IP-9, a Congolese male refugee)*

This account demonstrates the traumatic experiences of witnessing violence against loved ones and the physical assault that follows when attempting to protect them.

These quotes above from the participants highlight the physical violence faced by the refugees, often leading to severe injuries and long-term consequences that affect their livelihoods and mental health. The brutality of these acts, combined with the ongoing threat of violence, underscores the harsh reality of life in the refugee camp.

## **Theme 2: Sexual Assault**

There was a convergence of views among the participant that sexual assault against male refugees is a huge problem. Many participants shared stories concerning various forms of sexual assault that they endured. These include rape and sexual violence, coercion, forceful actions, and their psychological and physical impacts.

### ***Rape and Sexual Violence***

Many male Congolese refugees have experienced the horrifying horrors of rape and sexual assault. These crimes cause severe psychological damage in addition to bodily harm.

One participant recounted,

*"I was raped by several men. One by one, by one man after another, unable to remember their faces" (IP-1, a Congolese male refugee).*

This emphasizes the traumatizing effect of the severe and frequent sexual assaults that some migrants have to endure. The trauma is considerably harder to understand and recover from because the inability to recognize the attackers' faces exacerbates the sense of helplessness and terror.

Another participant shared,

*"They made me have sex with my own hands. Every day, they would beat me and force me to do it" (IP-18, a Congolese male refugee).*

This experience serves as an example of the severe and dehumanizing sexual assaults that are occasionally employed as a kind of torture. In intentional acts of dehumanization and humiliation, the use of items in sexual assault attempts to rob the victim of their humanity and dignity. The daily repetition of this agony is indicative of a trauma and abuse cycle that lasts a long time and leaves severe emotional and psychological damage.

Besides, some men experienced sexual assault while trying to defend their family members from harassment. As one participant recounted,

*"I was sodomized too when I tried to protect my wife from being raped. They tied me and took turns" (IP-33, a Congolese male refugee).*

This emphasizes the horrific sexual violence that takes place in the context of attempting to defend family members as well as direct assaults. Failing to protect one's family can lead to additional emotional burdens and bizarre power relations, since defending loved ones might result in victimization. Because this type of assault combines personal violation with the failure to perform protective tasks that are expected of men, it exacerbates the trauma.

### ***Coercion and Forced Acts***

Many participants lamented that they have endured coercion and forced acts in relation to sex and rape. Those who survived these acts were subjected to threats and intimidation. One participant described the experience he endured:

*"They told me they would kill me if I reported the incident. The constant threats and intimidation make it difficult to feel safe" (IP-211, a Congolese male refugee).*

This statement shows how threats and compulsion silence victims and discourage them from seeking help. Terror from death and intimidation keeps victims silent and abused. Insecurity exacerbates trauma and makes rehabilitation harder.

Another participant explained,

*"I was forced to perform sexual acts on them. They threatened to harm my family if I refused" (IP-329, a Congolese male refugee).*

This quote shows how threats against loved ones coerce victims into cooperation. Family members as a bargaining chip put the victim in an impossible scenario where compliance is the only option to protect their loved ones, adding to psychological anguish. Coercion that leaves victims feeling weak and guilty leaves deep psychological wounds.

### ***Psychological Impact of Sexual Assault***

The psychological effects of sexual assault are extensive and varied, affecting a broad spectrum of feelings and mental health issues in survivors. One participant articulated,

*"I developed feelings of intense fear of losing my life, powerlessness, feeling dishonored and emasculated as well as strong feelings of shame, guilt, helplessness, anger, and anxiety" (IP-4, a Congolese male refugee).*

Sexual violence has a tremendous psychological and emotional impact on victims. Survivors develop PTSD, sadness, and anxiety from the complicated mix of dread, powerlessness, and shame. Emasculation and disgrace are particularly devastating because they touch on strongly rooted societal masculine ideals.

Another participant noted,

*"Most survivors feel a lot of anger more than their female counterparts. Anger is more of a 'masculine' way to deal with trauma" (IP-8, a Congolese male refugee).*

This quote highlights gendered emotional responses to sexual abuse, with male survivors often coping with rage. The social expectation that men should show anger rather than vulnerability can prevent them from showing grief or anxiety, which can impede healing. This gendered trauma response reflects cultural conventions that limit men's emotional expressiveness, frequently to their cost.

### **Theme 3: Emotional and Psychological Abuse**

When asked about the emotional and psychological abuse, participants noted that they endure these kinds of abuse, which is manifested through coercion, threats, and emotional distress, often leaving the victims with deep psychological scars. Consider the following account by one participant:

*"I developed feelings of intense fear of losing my life, powerlessness, feeling dishonored and emasculated, as well as strong feelings of shame, guilt, helplessness, anger, and anxiety" (IP-16, a Congolese male refugee).*

Survivors carry a huge psychological weight. Fear, powerlessness, and deep-seated humiliation show how the abuse affected their mental health and emotional well-being.

Cultural standards have a big impact on how people react emotionally, and male survivors frequently use anger as a way to communicate their sorrow. As one participant noted,

*"Most survivors feel a lot of anger more than their female counterparts. Anger is more of a 'masculine' way to deal with trauma" (IP-10, a Congolese male refugee).*

This shows how social norms affect male trauma's emotional outlets. Cultural standards affect how males process and express their suffering, as anger is expressed over other emotions.

Shame, guilt, and self-blame are prevalent among survivors, contributing to their isolation and reluctance to seek help.

*"The feelings of shame and confusion about their situation, guilt, and self-blame, and the subsequent fear of negative reactions and the resulting isolation in the community are typical symptoms of rape victims" (IP-5).*

Cultural stigmatization makes survivors feel ashamed and rejected by their relatives and communities, compounding these emotions. As another participant expressed,

*"The cultural norms and the stigmatization surrounding rape have left many of us humiliated and rejected by both our families and communities" (IP-2).*

These survivors' emotional and psychological anguish are exacerbated by the rejection and isolation they endure, which makes it difficult for them to get help and recover.

The ongoing psychological impact of abuse also affects personal relationships and self-esteem. One survivor lamented,

*"I always imagine the fact that my wife knows that I was also sexually abused; worst still is the fact that I can't perform very well sexually as I used to do since" (IP-13).*

This comment shows how survivors' intimate connections and masculine perceptions change over time. The failure to meet sexual expectations and their partner knowing about the abuse increases emotional pressure.

One of the findings of the study was that male Congolese refugees experienced physical, sexual and psychological violence at the Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya. These main types of SGBV are related to the findings of past studies on the experiences of SGBV by refugees worldwide and in Eastern Africa (Roupetz et al., 2020; Lugova, Samal & Haque, 2020; Badurdeen, 2023). Roupetz et al.'s study engaged with female Syrian refugees in Lebanon and found out that SGBV was as much a problem for women as it was for men.

Moreover, Lugova, Samal and Haque studied male victims of SGBV among Congolese refugees in Congo and discovered that SGBV was a weapon of war which caused victims extreme levels of psychological trauma. For its part, the study by Badurdeen on Somali refugees in the Dadaab Refugee Camp, Kenya, determined that SGBV was a continuum. Therefore, addressing the problem means that governments and NGOs ought to go back to the conditions that necessitated war in the first place. As such, addressing the

problem of SGBV in the case of the male Congolese refugees requires strategies that center their conditions before they became refugees. As is evidenced in the current study, most victims of SGBV are the young adults of the 18-29 age bracket, and who have specific forms of vulnerabilities such as illiteracy (Tolonen, 2023, p. 24).

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