Addressing Sexual Violence in Post-Conflict Liberia: Community-Based Approaches

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Project Background

- Liberia experienced two civil wars over the course of 14 years, during which time anywhere between 18-90% of women experienced sexual violence. This broad statistic illustrates the difficulty of measuring the prevalence of sexual violence during conflict and how it is translated into post-conflict violence.
- Post-conflict reconstruction has included the development of a National Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 (a policy tool addressing gender issues), the establishment of Criminal Court E (expediting sexual violence cases), and the creation of a Ministry of Gender and Development.
- In Montserrado County, home to the capital Monrovia, 9% of women experienced sexual violence by fighters during the war. In a 2007 study, 19.4% of women and girls reported experiencing rape outside of marriage, and 72.3% of ever-married women experienced marital rape.
- In spring 2012, the Carter Center expanded its Access to Justice Program to Montserrado County, hoping to provide civic education to various communities. The Community Legal Advisor Project within this program serves to resolve community disputes, including sexual and domestic violence. The Carter Center asked the Emory team to evaluate the project and integrate an educational component on sexual and gender-based violence.

Objective

- To identify post-sexual violence services needs, analyze use of existing services, and identify perceptions of such services in West Point and Peace Island, two of Monrovia’s poorest communities.

Methodology

- Trained 7 Liberian enumerators in project’s research tools and methodology.
- Conducted 12 structured focus group discussions with 120 women and men (6 FGDs in each community).
- Conducted 10 semi-structured in-depth interviews with purposely selected service-providers, community leaders, and security personnel.
- Conducted cross-sectional random cluster survey of 649 adults aged 18+ years (randomly sampled households within enumeration zones in each community, which were designated using GPS coordinates).
- Conducted 8 semi-structured focus group discussions with female UN peacekeepers from various troop-contributing countries.
- Surveyed over 100 female UN personnel.

Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Westminster</th>
<th>Peace Island</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiteracy Rate</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Monthly Household Income</td>
<td>354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Number of Household Residents</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Monthly Household Income</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployment Rate</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age range</td>
<td>18-75 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male she</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% female</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Preliminary Findings

- More community members have contact with security services (LNP or peacekeepers) in West Point than in Peace Island.
- The most common disputes in the two communities were: debt, relationships, and domestic abuse.
- Around 5% of respondents mentioned rape as a problem they have encountered in the past year.
- The majority of UN women in uniform have no contact with local communities in Monrovia.
- The top three responses to what would enable a person to feel like a contributing community member following rape were counseling, peer/family support, and education.
- The top three responses to what would enable a person to feel like a contributing community member following beating by a husband or wife were counseling, peer/family support, and “no services necessary/domestic violence does not change the way a person contributes to a community.”
- The three most commonly reported reasons for not seeking out medical help in an emergency included high cost of care, long waiting times, and prohibitive distance from home.
- Respondents also reported differing levels of vulnerability to SGBV depending on whether or not victim had a disability, and if so, type of disability may also increase vulnerability as well as likelihood of witness or family member to report the crime to police.

Next Steps

- Perform in-depth data analysis.
- Report complete findings to both communities.
- Write final report for the Carter Center.
- Submit report to UN on female peacekeeping in UNMIL.

Project Partners

- The Carter Center.
- Center for Applied Research and Training (CART).
- West Point Women; Peace Island United Women; Peace Island Youth Association.
- Department of Statistics & Demography, University of Liberia.
- Emory project advisors: Pamela Scully, PhD (Women’s, Gender, & Sexuality Studies); Rob Stephenson, PhD (Rollins School of Public Health).
- Funding organizations: Emory Global Health Institute, Emory Institute for Developing Nations, Folke Bernadette Academy.

Progress to Date

- Presented preliminary findings to community members and stakeholders in both communities.
- Created fact sheets on SGBV legal and health services referral systems for the Carter Center’s Mental Health and Access to Justice Programs.
- Provided early-phase logistical and financial support to new Liberian research firm, the Center for Applied Research and Training.
- Coordinated collaborative meetings between the Peace Island Youth Association and the Carter Center’s community legal advisors for the development of a youth civic education program.
- Facilitated collaboration between UNMIL uniformed women and Peace Island United Women for a Quick Impact Project.