



## Safety, trust, and disclosure: A qualitative examination of violence against refugee adolescents in Kiziba Camp, Rwanda



Laura Gauer Bermudez<sup>a</sup>, Lauren Parks<sup>b</sup>, Sarah R. Meyer<sup>b</sup>, Liberata Muhorakeye<sup>c</sup>, Lindsay Stark<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Columbia University School of Social Work, 1255 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY 10027 USA

<sup>b</sup> Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, Department of Population and Family Health, 60 Haven Ave B-4 Suite 432, New York, NY 10032 USA

<sup>c</sup> Plan International Rwanda, Plot Number 821 in Gasabo District, P.O. Box, Kigali, Rwanda

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Rwanda  
Refugees  
Violence  
Disclosure  
Adolescents  
Safety

### ABSTRACT

Refugee adolescents face increased vulnerability to child protection risks including abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation. The aim of this qualitative study was to examine the nature of violence against adolescents in Kiziba Camp, Rwanda, using an ecological framework to analyze the factors that influence protection risks and abuse disclosure across multiple system levels. In order to understand these issues more comprehensively, a transgenerational inquiry sought perceptions from both adolescents and their caregivers. In April 2016, as part of a larger, comprehensive study on adolescent protection, 19 focus group discussions were conducted with a total of 70 adolescents and 68 caregivers from the Democratic Republic of Congo. A qualitative content analysis identified three salient themes. First, structural protection risks exist for adolescents in Kiziba Camp, with economic insecurity and resource constraints resulting in specific risks such as overcrowded housing and adolescents traveling for firewood collection. Second, intergenerational conflict between caregivers and adolescents was perceived to negatively influence abuse disclosure. Lastly, protection mechanisms and reporting pathways were underutilized as caregivers and adolescents expressed concern over the shame, embarrassment, and social rejection that characterized formal disclosure in Kiziba, often rooted in restrictive and inequitable gender norms. These findings suggest that efforts at child protection should be multi-faceted and address structural aspects of risk; household levels of communication and trust; and societal norms that deter abuse reporting. The study also underscores the need for further research on risk and protective factors in camp settings to better tailor interventions aiming to reduce violence against children.

### 1. Introduction

Of the approximately 22.5 million refugees across the world today, over half are children and adolescents under the age of 18 (UNHCR, 2017c). Refugees face numerous hardships as they seek safe havens for themselves and their families, including but not limited to lack of financial resources, insecure shelter, and disruption of social networks prior to displacement, during flight, and in refugee camps (Miller and Rasco, 2004). Whether residing in urban or camp settings, refugees may experience decreased access to clean water, food insecurity, and limited healthcare and education, often compounded by a precarious legal status (Grafham et al., 2016; Murray, 2016). The stress of forced migration, particularly for adolescents who have been exposed to conflict or violence, is occurring during an already challenging time of maturation and identity formation (Belfer, 2008; Fowler et al., 2009; Meeus, 2011).

While reliable estimates of violence against children in humanitarian settings are lacking (Stark and Landis, 2016), prior research has shown the issue to be of concern, even when active conflict has ceased (Saile et al., 2014; Stark et al., 2017b). Adolescents who have lived in conflict zones may suffer challenges to mental health, including anxiety, depression, and aggression (Vossoughi et al., 2016) with such outcomes influenced by continued exposure to violence within their current communities (Mels et al., 2010; Reed et al., 2012). Adolescents who witness sustained interpersonal or community violence are more likely to suffer a range of negative psychological outcomes (Fazel et al., 2012) including depression (Kennedy et al., 2010) and social maladjustment (Schwartz and Proctor, 2000). Indeed, this cumulative exposure to violence, one that prolongs a compromised sense of safety even after fleeing conflict, can be detrimental to adolescent development and well-being (Garbarino, 2010). At the same time, in contexts where violence is chronic and enforcement systems inadequate, the

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [lgb2123@columbia.edu](mailto:lgb2123@columbia.edu) (L.G. Bermudez), [lauren.r.parks@gmail.com](mailto:lauren.r.parks@gmail.com) (L. Parks), [sm3992@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:sm3992@cumc.columbia.edu) (S.R. Meyer), [Muhorakeye.Liberata@plan-international.org](mailto:Muhorakeye.Liberata@plan-international.org) (L. Muhorakeye), [ls2302@cumc.columbia.edu](mailto:ls2302@cumc.columbia.edu) (L. Stark).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.01.018>

Received 28 July 2017; Received in revised form 13 January 2018; Accepted 15 January 2018  
0277-9536/ © 2018 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

likelihood of abuse disclosure is often limited for fear of social sanctions (Jayasuriya and Gibson, 2013). Research in settings where inter- and intra-household violence is common indicates that reporting abuse to authorities is often rare (Horn, 2010; Stark et al., 2013), demonstrating an underutilization of formal protection mechanisms that typically include law enforcement, social workers and other officials charged with child protection.

Conversely, feelings of safety and security have been shown to mediate the effects of past exposure to violence or abuse (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Overstreet and Braun, 2000). A key factor in an adolescent's sense of safety is the household environment, specifically the relationship between an adolescent and their caregiver. Adolescent and caregiver relationships can fracture in refugee settings as family roles and responsibilities often shift during flight (Miller and Rasco, 2004), a change that has been identified as a major stressor in displacement settings (Deng, 2016; Muruthi and Lewis, 2017). These stressors can lead to increased restrictions imposed by parents and cause intergenerational tensions (Koh et al., 2013). Displaced caregivers also face resource challenges, limiting their ability to meet the basic needs of their children, a limitation that has been linked to both low self-esteem and withdrawal from community and family support systems (Stark et al., 2015). Further, breakdowns in caregiver-adolescent communication that can result during migration and subsequent acculturation processes often disrupt perceptions of safety and security for adolescents (Koh et al., 2013).

In the past decade, a systems approach has gained acceptance as the industry standard for understanding global efforts to protect children from violence, exploitation, and abuse (Wulczyn et al., 2010). Based on the notion that children are influenced by a multitude of factors across system levels – from relationships with parents at the micro level to the functioning of formal protection mechanisms at the exo-level to community norms and attitudes at the macro-level – an ecological systems framework enables scholars and practitioners alike to visualize the simultaneous and interconnected factors affected children's well-being (Bronfenbrenner, 1992). As efforts to address violence against children has become an increasing priority globally (UNICEF, 2014), there is a need for research to contextualize prevention and response pathways, particularly that which conceptualizes the issue as a multi-faceted phenomenon.

Rubenstein and Stark (2017), published one of the first studies to use an ecological framework to examine violence against children in humanitarian emergencies. This study identified literature to support the notion that protection risks for children originate from multiple and interconnected domains, including conflict-induced loss of livelihoods, changing gender roles, and erosion of endogenous protection systems. However, it also highlighted numerous gaps in the literature and issued a call for more complete data on violence against children in humanitarian contexts, including through qualitative methods which can provide rich insight on the complex dynamics that drive violence against children in these settings.

Building upon Rubenstein and Stark (2017), our study analyzes primary qualitative data to examine the nature of violence against adolescents in Kiziba Camp, Rwanda, exploring the risks that exist in the camp and the ways in which residents respond to violence against adolescents after it occurs. The study then employs an ecological framework to analyze the factors that influence protection risks and abuse disclosure across multiple system levels, factors that can inform the design of much needed longitudinal studies on the structural and household-level determinants of violence against adolescents in humanitarian settings. In order to understand these issues more comprehensively, a transgenerational inquiry sought perceptions from both adolescents and their caregivers in order to obtain comparative data on the factors that inhibit or contribute to the creation of a safe and protective environment for adolescents.

## 2. Methods

This qualitative analysis used transcripts from focus group discussions conducted in April 2016 as part of a larger study, *Measuring Impact with a Child Protection Index (CPI)* (Meyer et al., 2017a,b,c). This parent study employed an initial quantitative assessment of adolescent exposures to violence, exploitation, and abuse that was followed by a child protection systems strengthening intervention. Subsequent to the intervention, a second assessment sought to understand the linkages between any changes in the child protection system and quantitative outcomes on the protection of adolescents. Findings from these assessments have been published elsewhere (Meyer et al., 2017a,b,c; Meyer et al., 2014; Meyer et al., 2017a,b,c; Meyer et al., 2017a,b,c). As a component of the larger study, a sub-sample of respondents were recruited for focus group discussions to obtain both adolescent and caregiver perspectives on, among other things, the safety and security of adolescents within the community as well as utilization of formal child protection services, to provide context to the findings from the broader quantitative assessments. This paper presents the analyses of the qualitative data derived from these focus group discussions.

### 2.1. Setting

The study was conducted in Rwanda's Kiziba Camp, which opened in December 1996 in response to conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a result of Ugandan and Rwandan armies entering the country with the aim of rooting out rebel groups involved in the Rwandan genocide. At the time of this data collection, at least 17,329 individuals were registered in Kiziba Camp (UNHCR, 2016b). The majority of the population are Kinyarwanda speakers from North Kivu province, South Kivu province, and Katanga, DRC, who arrived, or are descendants of those who arrived, in 1996. Later refugees arrived in 1998, 2006, and 2012 following various armed movements that displaced many from Eastern DRC (Frydenlund, 2015). Economic opportunities within Kiziba are limited with some families opting to migrate outside of the camp for work or supplement their incomes by selling food rations in the camp market or to the host community (Frydenlund, 2015).

In Kiziba Camp, Plan Rwanda is responsible for the management of child protection cases including the provision of psychosocial support and referrals to specialized assistance such as medical, legal, educational or housing needs. The Child Protection Standard Operating Procedures and referral pathways were developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in collaboration with Plan and other implementing partners.

### 2.2. Participants

Data were collected through focus group discussions in April 2016. The data span 19 focus groups with 70 adolescents (28 M and 42 F) and 68 caregivers (17 M and 51 F) (Table 1). Caregivers in this context were defined as anyone reported to be responsible for one of the participating adolescents and who indicated that they knew the adolescent well. Adolescent participants were between the ages of 13 and 19. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) living in Kiziba camp for at least 12 months; (2) having participated in the quantitative survey conducted as part of the parent study; (3) fluent in Kinyarwanda; and (4) having been displaced from the DRC. After identifying eligible participants, adolescents and caregivers were then purposively selected by Plan Rwanda to participate in focus group discussions with the aim of representing a variety of ages, a range of male and female respondents, and both school-going and non-school-going adolescents. Research assistants, hired as part of the study, approached potential participants and asked if they would be willing to participate in a discussion about topics of safety, services, and well-being in the camp. Adolescent and caregiver focus groups were held independently of one another, were segregated

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/7328407>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/7328407>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)