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*Bringing the Women Home: Rape, Civil Society, and Spirituality in the Democratic Republic of Congo*

Abstract:

In the seven years between 1996 and 2003, over five million people died in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). During this time, the rape rates in DRC became the highest reported rates in the world. Current rape rates in the DRC have been reported as high as 48 rapes per hour. Rape rates continue to be high as a result of ongoing violence in the eastern provinces of DRC. Due to the ongoing violence in the region, the DRC’s government is weakened and not providing health care in many areas. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), both nationally-based and internationally-based ones, are fulfilling the role of primary healthcare provider. They are stepping into this role as a result of their interest in protecting and serving the general populace of the DRC. Some of these NGOs have focused their efforts on treating rape victims. They provide the rape victims with treatment programs that address the economic, physical, and psychosocial issues resulting from the rape. However, the rape victims themselves are framing their major issue from the rape as a spiritual one; they feel spiritually polluted as a result of their rape. The purpose of this research was to determine what, if any, spiritual components NGOs include in their treatment programs. If NGOs are accurately addressing the concerns of the civil society they claim to represent, namely that of the eastern DRC, then they should be addressing the spiritual concerns of the rape victims. Of the four NGOs studied, Heal Africa and Oneness Development Institute are based in eastern DRC while Women for Women International and the Red Cross are international organizations. The NGOs were studied by analyzing their annual reports and mission statements, as well as through interviews. After studying these four NGOs, it was noticed that the two organizations that were based in DRC, Heal Africa and Oneness Development Institute, were the organizations that addressed the spiritual issues of the rape victims. However, this was only a pilot study; more organizations would need to be studied in order to confirm whether or not only DRC-based organizations are addressing spiritual issues.