

Survivors of Rape in Conflict Should be in School

Victims of Sexual Violence Need More Support to Continue Education.

[Human Rights Watch](#)



Armed groups are using rape in a brutal, calculated way to punish and terrorize women and girls. Every day, survivors live with the devastating aftermath of rape, and the knowledge that their attackers are walking free, perhaps holding positions of power, and to date facing no consequences whatsoever.

In 2015, as conflict raged in the Central African Republic, Evelyne (not her real name) was returning from selling cassava leaves near Boda, in the country's southwest, when an anti-balaka fighter threw her on the ground, raped her, and left her bleeding. She was around 14 years old.

Two months after the rape, Evelyne realized she was pregnant. Orphaned by the conflict, she sold cassava leaves to afford necessities in preparation for the baby, but mostly she wanted to study. "I was very angry because I couldn't go to school," she said. "My aunt refused. She said I need to give birth first."

Civilians continue to bear the brunt of the war triggered in late 2012, when the largely Muslim Seleka rebels began a campaign of violence and terror to seize power, which led to reprisal attacks by groups of "anti-balaka" that formed in response. Both sides have engaged in systematic and widespread sexual violence and sexual slavery as a tool of war.



Angèle, 27, holds her child in Bangui. Seleka fighters killed her husband and parents, and later captured her near Bambari in June 2014, she said. They held her in sexual slavery for nine months with five other women and girls. Multiple fighters raped her repeatedly.

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For Evelyne and other girls I interviewed in the Central African Republic, rape not only had far-reaching physical and emotional repercussions, it interrupted their education. This year's 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence campaign urges communities to "Leave No One Behind." It is a good reminder that loss of access to education is one of many devastating consequences of sexual violence for girls.

Some girls never return to school after rape because of stigma and humiliation. Others said that either they were too afraid or family members, fearing for their safety, wouldn't permit their return, especially if sexual violence occurred on their way to or from class.

Sexual violence survivors who do return to school often lack support to continue their education. Evelyne ultimately returned to class, but, with no family to care for the baby, she struggled. "I am not at peace," she said, "When I go to school, I think about the baby at home."

Governments, donors, and service providers should commit to improving access to education so girls who suffer sexual or other gender-based violence in conflict are not further victimized. They should support girls' return to school by providing medical, psychosocial, and socioeconomic help, and combat stigmatization of rape survivors and pregnant students through community education.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/12/05/survivors-rape-conflict-should-be-school>

These girls should not be left behind.