Were acts of violence committed against Rwandan refugees?

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Since 1994, the Kivu Region of Zaire has been host to more than one million Rwandan refugees. In October and November 1996, a rebellion took place in Eastern Zaire. One of its objectives was to chase away from the border the former Rwandan Army Forces soldiers who were re-arming in the refugee camps. As a result, about half of the refugees returned to Rwanda while the other half fled further into Zaire.

In May 1997, some of these refugees reached the Congo, in particular a village called Ndjoundou where they were cared for by Médecins Sans Frontières. They declared having escaped numerous killings perpetrated by rebel troops.

Between July 17 and July 21, 1997, we conducted an epidemiological survey in order to assess the recent history of the refugees. We randomly sampled families in the list of refugee families present in Ndjoundou. One person per family was interviewed. Each interviewee was asked to describe all family members that had been present in Kivu camps by sex, age and relationship to the interviewee. For each family member, the dates and places he/she had traveled through were requested. When a particular event had happened (repatriation or return to Rwanda, death by killing, accident or illness, loss from sight), the date and place were indicated. Proportions of each event were calculated as well as crude and under-5 mortality rates.

A total of 266 families were selected, representing 3121 persons previously present in Kivu camps, 530 of whom present in Ndjoundou at the time of the survey. Of the 530 persons in the sample, the sex-ratio M/F was 2.6, the median age was 24 years and the proportion of children aged less than 5 years was 7.9% (figure).

According to our survey, of the 3,121 family members present in Kivu in September 1996, 19.7% were reported killed, 59.6% were lost from sight during the flight and 17.5% reached Ndjoundou in May-June 1997, after a 1,500 kilometer-trip. Most losses from sight and deaths took place in Sake, Shanje, Obilo, Tingi-Tingi and Wenji. Between October 1, 1996 and May 31, 1997, the average crude mortality rate (CMR) and the under-5 mortality rate were 15.5 per 10,000 per day and 18.2 per 10,000 per day. The highest rates were seen in November 96 (CMR= 34.6/10,000/d), March 97 (CMR=26.4/10,000/j) and May 97 (CMR=60.7/10,000/d).

From our survey, only a low proportion of the Rwandan refugees who fled Kivu camps in Zaire have reached the Congo. Most of them were lost from sight during the numerous attacks conducted against them. Possible causes of losses from sight may have included repatriation or
killing. Thus, mortality rates, and proportion of deaths due to killing were probably underestimated as only observed deaths were recorded as such. Nonetheless, they were extremely high.

Refugee interviews might have given misleading information. Nonetheless, the places and dates of transit they declared in our survey correspond to those given by other sources. The results can probably not be extrapolated to all the refugee population that was present in Kivu camps. However, the study suggests that acts of violence were committed against groups of Rwandan refugees who fled Kivu camps in Zaire.

Distribution by sex and age of the sample of refugees interviewed in Ndj Jac Congo compared to their initial families in Kivu. September 96 - June

Age (years)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Over 70</th>
<th>65 to 69</th>
<th>60 to 64</th>
<th>55 to 59</th>
<th>50 to 54</th>
<th>45 to 49</th>
<th>40 to 44</th>
<th>35 to 39</th>
<th>30 to 34</th>
<th>25 to 29</th>
<th>20 to 24</th>
<th>15 to 19</th>
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- Families sampled in Ndjoundou
- Initial families in Kivu

Females
Males