

# Why Sexual Violence is a Weapon of War in Jacqui True's Perspective: Learning from Sexual Violence in Congo's Conflict 2021-2024

Ridha Amalia & Avinda Ghaniya

Universitas Sriwijaya

Email: [ridhaamalia@fisip.unsri.ac.id](mailto:ridhaamalia@fisip.unsri.ac.id) & [avindaghaniya28@gmail.com](mailto:avindaghaniya28@gmail.com)

## ABSTRACT

*The use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has become one of the most widespread and destructive forms of gender-based violence. This article explores why sexual violence is used so extensively in the DRC. Using Jacqui True's feminist perspective within a structural violence framework, it examines three main factors: gender norms and patriarchal structures, weak legal frameworks, and socio-economic disparities. A case study of the DRC shows how these factors work together to make sexual violence a strategic tool in war. The authors argue that sexual violence in war is not merely a consequence of conflict but also a symptom of deeper structural inequalities. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of addressing these inequalities to reduce the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and recommends policies focused on gender justice and survivor protection.*

*Keywords: Sexual Violence, Weapon of War, Structural Violence, Feminism, Democratic Republic of Congo*

## INTRODUCTION

The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)'s current conflict has been ongoing since the 1990's, especially in the eastern part of the country. However, in recent years, the resurgence of M23 rebels in North Kivu, intensifying tensions between the DRC and Rwanda, and escalating attacks by the Islamic State-affiliated Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) have exacerbated instability in the region. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 940,000 people has been displaced in DRC since the beginning of 2024 and women are 51 percent of displaced population. Armed attacks and clashes account for more than 80 per cent of displacement (OCHA, 2024). Reports from organizations such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) underline the severity of this issue. In 2023 alone, MSF teams provided care to 25,166 survivors of sexual violence across the country, the highest number ever recorded in their history of operations in the DRC (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2023). These figures reflect the pervasive and systemic nature of sexual violence, particularly in conflict-affected provinces such as North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, where women and children are disproportionately targeted. Sexual violence as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of the 21st century (European Commission, 2023).

Sexual violence in the DRC is not merely a byproduct of war but a deliberate strategy

employed by armed groups, militias, and even government forces. This tactic is used to destroy social cohesion, displace communities, and it still fear among the population. Recent reports reveal an alarming escalation of such violence, particularly among displaced populations in North Kivu. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) documented that in 2023, 91% of victims treated for sexual violence under their care were from North Kivu, where clashes between the M23 group, the Congolese army, and their allies have forced hundreds of thousands of civilians to flee (Medicines Sans Frontiers, 2023). Displacement sites around Goma, housing thousands of these civilians, have become epicentres of sexual violence. MSF treated 17,829 victims in these sites in 2023, with 98% of them being women and girls. A significant portion of these attacks occurred when victims ventured out for essential tasks such as collecting firewood or fetching water. Testimonies from survivors reveal that two-thirds were assaulted at gunpoint, either within the sites or in the surrounding areas where armed actors are omnipresent (Medecins Sans Frontieres, 2023). The presence of armed groups, combined with inhumane living conditions and inadequate humanitarian responses, exacerbates the vulnerability of displaced women and girls (Meouchi et al., 2023).

These assaults are not isolated incidents but are intrinsically linked to broader strategies of conflict. Armed groups exploit the desperate circumstances of displaced women, forcing them into sexual exploitation in exchange for food or aid. Others risk returning to their war-torn villages to access basic resources, exposing themselves to further violence. Survivors have recounted harrowing experiences, such as Gisèle, who was coerced into sexual exploitation to obtain food vouchers, or others who have faced repeated attacks. One MSF midwife described cases involving children under ten whose injuries required immediate medical intervention (Medicines Sans Frontiers, 2023).

Jacqui True, a renowned scholar on gender and international relations, provides a vital analytical framework for understanding the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war. True's perspective highlights the intersections of gender dynamics, structural inequalities, and the strategic objectives of armed conflict. Her work underscores how sexual violence in war is not incidental but deeply rooted in socio-political and cultural systems that normalize and enable such atrocities. This study explores True's perspective on the use of sexual violence in the DRC, drawing lessons from the experiences of survivors, humanitarian interventions, and systemic challenges. The goal is to provide a comprehensive understanding of why sexual violence persists in conflict and to propose informed solutions

for prevention and justice. Sexual violence in the DRC is a complex issue that demands a thorough examination of its causes, methods, and consequences. This paper will look into how armed groups use sexual violence as a calculated tactic in conflict, the role of gender inequality in sustaining these crimes, and the structural deficiencies that allow such atrocities to persist. By integrating Jacqui True's theoretical framework, this study aims to highlight the human cost of the crisis and advocate for more effective international responses to combat sexual violence in war.

### **ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Jacqui True's feminist structural violence framework offers a critical lens for understanding the systemic conditions that enable sexual violence to be used as a weapon of war. True emphasizes that violence against women is deeply embedded in structural gender inequalities and power imbalances, perpetuated by socio-economic, political, and cultural systems. She argues that these forms of violence are not incidental but are rooted in broader societal dynamics that normalize and sustain them. While True does not explicitly define sexual violence as a weapon of war, her work highlights its deliberate and strategic use in conflict settings to achieve political, military, and social objectives. In this context, sexual violence is a calculated tactic used to terrorize, humiliate, and control populations, rooted in and perpetuated by systemic inequalities (True, 2021).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the DRC's conflict, where sexual violence is systematically used to achieve the strategic goals of armed groups (Maedl, 2011). Drawing on Jacqui True's perspectives, the framework identifies three interconnected factors that sustain such violence: gender norms and patriarchal structures, weak legal frameworks, and socio-economic disparities. These factors do not operate in isolation but collectively reinforce the conditions under which sexual violence becomes a strategic tool in conflict. By focusing on these interconnected factors, the framework offers a comprehensive understanding of why sexual violence occurs so extensively in conflict zones like the DRC. Gender norms, deeply rooted in societal values, regulate behaviors and reinforce power dynamics that normalize violence. True emphasizes that gender norms are inextricable from the norms that regulate violent conflict, with traditional honor codes and expectations of male dominance fostering environments where violence against women is tolerated (True, 2021). In many societies, including the DRC, patriarchal governance perpetuates insecurity and instability, enabling hypermasculine actors to weaponize violence against women as a

means to assert power. This patriarchal system not only normalizes violence but also suppresses women's participation in peacebuilding and governance, further entrenching cycles of insecurity.

The failure of states to establish effective and victim-oriented justice mechanisms is another critical enabler of sexual violence in conflict. The inconsistency across the world in legislating to prevent violence against women and girls leaves women vulnerable to abuse and denies them access to justice. In the DRC, this failure is compounded by pervasive patriarchal attitudes within law enforcement and judicial systems, where limited resources and inadequate knowledge of applicable legislation hinder effective responses. Without strong legal protections, perpetrators of sexual violence act with impunity, further embedding this tactic in the strategies of armed conflict (True, 2021). The link between development and violence against women is undeniable. Poverty and systemic economic inequalities exacerbate women's vulnerability, creating conditions that armed groups exploit in war. True observes that poverty puts women and girls in situations of powerlessness, increasing their likelihood of being abused. In the DRC, socio-economic disparities intersect with gender inequalities to deepen the structural conditions that enable the mass weaponization of sexual violence. Addressing these disparities is essential to dismantling the systemic factors that perpetuate such violence (True, 2021). By integrating these dimensions—gender norms, weak legal frameworks, and socio-economic disparities—this framework highlights the structural roots of sexual violence as a weapon of war. It demonstrates how deeply embedded inequalities, when unaddressed, not only sustain violence but also enable its deliberate and widespread use in conflict settings. This theoretical approach provides the foundation for analyzing the situation in the DRC and proposing actionable strategies for intervention.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a qualitative approach with a feminist lens to analyze how systemic factors enable sexual violence to be used as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). It applies a structural violence framework, drawing on Jacqui True's feminist analysis, to explore the intersections of gender norms, weak legal frameworks, and socio-economic disparities. A single-case study design is used to examine the DRC's specific context, with data drawn from secondary sources such as academic literature, human rights

reports, and international publications. While the study focuses on the DRC, the findings contribute to broader debates on the use of sexual violence in war.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Patriarchal Society in the Democratic Republic of the Congo**

Patriarchal culture in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is deeply rooted in the social and cultural structure, where male dominance is the norm. The lineage from the father remains a guiding principle, causing women to be undervalued in family and community decision-making. This systemic undervaluation extends to laws, traditional customs, and social practices, reinforcing gender disparities and marginalizing women further. Cases of violence against women are rarely reported due to social stigma and a lack of legal protection, with victims of domestic violence or rape often silenced by societal shame (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2014). The persistence of patriarchal culture in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is reinforced by discriminatory laws, traditional customs, and systemic gender disparities. Women face barriers to education, political participation, and economic empowerment, as evidenced by their underrepresentation in tertiary education, where they account for only 31.2% of students. The DRC ranks 151 out of 179 countries in the 2021 Gender Inequality Index (GII), with only 14.3% of parliamentary seats held by women. Similarly, the country scores 0.576 on the Global Gender Gap 2021 index, placing it near the bottom at 151 out of 156 countries. These figures highlight the entrenched inequalities that limit women's roles in society and decision-making processes. Government inaction, coupled with weak enforcement of gender equity policies, exacerbates the marginalization of women and allows patriarchal norms to remain deeply rooted in the DRC's socio-political structure (BertelsmannStiftung, 2024).

At the societal level, gender discrimination is also visible in women's access to education, employment, and social services. Women are more likely to work in the informal sector with low wages, increasing their dependency on men. Women's education is often neglected due to the perception that women only need domestic skills, while boys are considered the future assets of the family. This inequality is compounded by social norms that perpetuate gender role stereotypes, such as the belief that women who are too vocal or independent violate traditional values (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2014). Gender-based violence is a significant outcome of patriarchal culture in DRC. Domestic violence and sexual violence, including rape, are often seen as personal issues that do not require legal intervention. Social stigma against victims worsens the

situation, as women who report violence are often shunned or looked down upon by their communities. In fact, women who become victims of sexual violence often lose their chances of marriage or social participation. As a result, many victims choose to remain silent rather than face further stigma and discrimination (European Commission, 2023).

Furthermore, male dominance in power structures and institutions reinforces patriarchal patterns. The majority of leadership positions in government, the military, and civil society organizations are held by men, which often marginalizes women's perspectives in policy-making. This creates a systemic inequality where women find it difficult to obtain equal representation or access to strategic opportunities. Another striking fact is the low reporting and handling of gender-based violence cases. The weak legal system, lack of protection for victims, and a culture of impunity allow perpetrators, whether from armed groups or state agents, to escape punishment. Patriarchal culture in DRC not only limits women but also perpetuates cycles of violence and injustice, which have far-reaching effects on society as a whole (Meouchi et al., 2023). This dominance and normalization of patriarchal control contribute to the weaponization of sexual violence in conflict.

Masculine dominance is also evident in leadership across various institutions. Although there is no specific data on "hypermasculine leaders," most leaders and decision-makers remain male-dominated. Efforts to reduce this dominance, such as the MONUSCO workshop on positive masculinity, aim to change perceptions of gender among security personnel and civil society. Male dominance in various sectors further emphasises gender inequality. Almost all leadership positions at the government, military, and civil society levels are occupied by men. Although initial steps have been taken to involve women, social and cultural barriers still limit their participation (Kiakuvue et al., 2024).

To address this issue, MONUSCO has initiated programs such as the positive masculinity workshop held on March 31 in Kinshasa. This workshop involved officers from the Congolese National Police (PNC), members of the Congolese Armed Forces (FARDC), and civil society, aiming to promote the role of men as positive role models supporting gender equality and standing against discrimination toward women. Fatou Keita, Acting Chief of MONUSCO Gender Section, emphasized the importance of changing attitudes and behaviours to encourage better responses to gender issues (Escola de Cultura de Pau, 2024).

However, efforts to combat patriarchy are not enough by simply raising awareness. Legal reforms are needed to strengthen protection for victims of gender-based violence,

along with early gender equality education to change the mindset of future generations. Additionally, women's empowerment through access to education, economic opportunities, and leadership positions must be prioritized. Strong law enforcement is also crucial to ending impunity for perpetrators of violence, whether from armed groups or state agents. With this holistic approach, it is hoped that the patriarchal culture in DRC will change, creating a more inclusive and equitable society.

### **Weak Legal Framework**

The weak legal framework in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a major factor contributing to the high levels of impunity for sexual violence cases. In a context of prolonged armed conflict and political instability, institutional weaknesses not only hinder access to justice for victims but also perpetuate a culture of impunity that is difficult to dismantle. Sexual violence often goes unresolved due to significant shortcomings in the legal and judicial system, as well as social pressures faced by victims (Ardhita et al., 2021). The DRC's judicial institutions are severely under-resourced, lacking financial, technical, and human capacity. Many cases fail to progress due to a shortage of trained prosecutors and judges. A report by the UN Joint Human Rights Office (UNJHRO) found that between 2010 and 2013, only 187 cases of sexual violence led to convictions, illustrating the limitations of the legal system. Furthermore, the reliance on military courts, which have exclusive jurisdiction over human rights violations, often shields high-ranking offenders. Military prosecutors are unable to independently investigate or hold senior officers accountable, further weakening the fight against impunity (UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCR), 2014).

In addition to institutional failures, social pressures on victims exacerbate the problem. Victims of sexual violence in the DRC face significant stigma and are often blamed or ostracized by their families and communities. This social rejection discourages many from reporting their cases. In addition, the fear of retaliation from perpetrators or armed groups further deters victims from seeking justice. These combined factors create an environment where silence is often preferred, and impunity remains deeply entrenched (UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office, 2023).

Recent cases of unresolved sexual violence highlight the critical deficiencies in the legal system. For example, In 2020, Doctors Without Borders reported that nearly 11,000 survivors of sexual violence in Kananga required medical and psychological support.

However, the vast majority of these cases were not pursued through legal channels. Victims faced severe trauma but were unable to access adequate psychosocial assistance. The local judicial system lacked the resources to investigate these cases properly, further hindering justice for the survivors (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2006). In addition, sexual violence has been systematically used as a weapon of war by armed groups across the DRC. This strategy is employed to instil fear, punish perceived disloyalty, and weaken societal cohesion. Despite the widespread occurrence of these crimes, no trials have effectively prosecuted the leaders of prominent armed groups such as the Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and Mayi Mayi factions. This failure underscores the systemic weaknesses in holding perpetrators accountable (Kiakuvue et al., 2024).

Even in more stable regions like Katanga Province, where sexual violence occurs, survivors face similar challenges in accessing justice. Survivors in these areas often do not report their experiences due to societal stigma and a lack of trust in the legal system. For example, in Katanga Province, victims from local communities face similar barriers to justice as those in conflict-affected areas. This demonstrates that the issue of sexual violence extends beyond zones of active conflict and reflects deeper structural problems within the judicial system (Medicines Sans Frontiers, 2023). For instance, in North Kivu, one of the regions with the highest rates of sexual violence in the country, victims often do not have access to essential medical care or legal recourse. A notable example occurred in 2012, when members of the Congolese armed forces (FARDC) were implicated in mass sexual violence in Minova. Despite substantial evidence, the legal system failed to adequately address the involvement of high-ranking officials. This case highlights the systemic impunity that persists within the military and judicial structures of the DRC (Milián et al., 2024).

The legal framework in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has numerous deficiencies that render protections for women and children ineffective. These issues stem from inadequacies in legislation and institutional inefficiencies, which perpetuate impunity for sexual violence. The legal framework in the DRC is fraught with numerous deficiencies that render protections for women and children largely ineffective. One of the key issues is inadequate legislation. While domestic laws such as Loi No. 06/018 of 2006 and the 2009 Child Protection Law exist, their implementation is severely limited. These laws impose strict penalties for sexual violence offenders, including long prison sentences. However, enforcement is frequently undermined by systemic corruption and a lack of resources. Courts



often lack the necessary infrastructure, and judicial personnel are underpaid, which makes the system vulnerable to bribery and inefficiency (Udit et al., 2021).

Another critical issue is the absence of a national reparations fund for victims of sexual violence. Survivors rarely receive compensation or adequate psychosocial support, leaving them to cope with the trauma and economic consequences of their experiences without institutional assistance. While there have been recommendations to establish such a fund, these efforts have stalled, leaving victims without a critical form of compensation. The justice system in the DRC is heavily reliant on international support, particularly for mobile courts. These courts, often funded and facilitated by international organizations, bring judicial services to remote areas. However, without this external assistance, access to justice would be nearly impossible for many victims. The dependence on international funding underscores the lack of sustainability and capacity within the DRC's judicial infrastructure (UN Security Council, 2024).

The inefficiency of the military justice system is another significant challenge. Military courts have exclusive jurisdiction over crimes committed by armed forces, including sexual violence. However, this system lacks independence, as it operates under the military hierarchy. Decisions are often influenced by political or military interests, which can lead to a lack of accountability for high-ranking officials. This structural issue prevents fair trials and perpetuates a culture of impunity, particularly within the armed forces (REDRESS, 2019).

### **Socio-Economic Diparities**

Widespread poverty in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is a significant factor exacerbating women's vulnerability to sexual violence. According to data from the World Bank, more than 70% of the population in DRC lives below the poverty line, with over 27.3 million people facing food insecurity. In such conditions, women are often trapped in strong economic dependence on men. Their inability to meet basic needs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare, forces them to rely on men as primary providers. In many cases, women in poverty-stricken situations feel they have no choice but to endure sexual exploitation or harassment, either from their partners or others who have power over them (Democratic Republic of the Congo, 2006).

High levels of poverty lead to women's helplessness in accessing decent work or opportunities to achieve financial independence. As a result, they become trapped in unequal

relationships that often involve sexual violence. For example, women working in the informal sector, such as in subsistence agriculture or sex work, are at high risk of sexual violence. Data from UN Women shows that 400,000 women in DRC fall victim to sexual violence each year, with poverty playing a significant role in worsening their vulnerability to sexual abuse, both in daily life and in conflict settings. Limited access to education and skills training reduces women's ability to change their socio-economic status, making them more susceptible to sexual coercion or exploitation (UN Security Council, 2021). Underpaid work for women in the DRC is a problem that exacerbates gender inequality and increases their vulnerability to various forms of violence, including sexual violence. Women in DRC are often trapped in low-paying jobs, particularly in the informal sector, such as subsistence agriculture, domestic work, and small-scale trade, which are often unregistered in economic statistics and not governed by labor laws. As a result, they receive much lower wages compared to men performing the same work (Kiakuvue et al., 2024).

The lack of access to education and skills training limits women's opportunities to secure better-paying and financially independent jobs. This inequality in employment opportunities makes women more dependent on men, both in family contexts and social relationships, which often leads to sexual exploitation and harassment. Data from the World Bank shows the labor force participation gap between men and women is relatively small, with only an 8% difference. However, the earnings gap is significantly larger where women earn, on average, 77% less than men nationally, and this disparity is even greater in the private sector, reaching nearly 80%. This highlights a critical issue of income inequality despite similar workforce participation levels (World Bank, 2021). This economic dependence worsens women's position, reinforcing patriarchal dynamics that force them to accept unfair conditions. Additionally, women trapped in low-paying jobs often face difficulties accessing adequate healthcare, which worsens their physical and mental health. The lack of social and legal protection also increases their vulnerability to sexual violence, as they feel they have no alternative or protection if they report the abuse they have experienced. The low wages women earn create a vicious cycle of inequality, where they become increasingly isolated and dependent, and vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

Unemployment is another factor that significantly increases women's vulnerability to sexual violence in the DRC. The high unemployment rate in the Democratic Republic of

the Congo (DRC), which is around 46% overall, with women being disproportionately affected, exacerbates economic dependency that leads to sexual exploitation. Employment opportunities for women are extremely limited, particularly in the formal sector, forcing many women to work in the informal sector with low wages. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO), many women in DRC are involved in unsafe and undervalued jobs, such as domestic work, subsistence farming, or even sex work. Inequality in job opportunities forces women to rely on men as the primary breadwinners, often opening up opportunities for sexual exploitation as a form of repayment or coercion (Physicians for Human Rights, 2024).

This limitation not only worsens women's dependency on men but also hinders them from seeking legal protection or receiving support for the sexual violence they experience. Women trapped in unemployment and economic inequality often feel unable to respond to or report sexual violence due to fear of losing their livelihood or the accompanying social stigma. This dependency creates an environment where perpetrators of sexual violence can act with impunity, as women are often unable to seek justice or protection without jeopardizing their economic survival. Social stigma surrounding victims of sexual violence in the DRC further exacerbates the issue, creating a cycle of silence and impunity. The stigma surrounding sexual violence victims in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) significantly worsens the lives of women, creating a vicious cycle of violence that is difficult to break. Sexual violence, both in the context of conflict and in everyday life, is often viewed through a patriarchal lens, further deteriorating the position of women. According to data from Human Rights Watch, women who become victims of sexual violence in DRC are often socially punished—they are ostracized by their families and communities, and they frequently do not receive adequate medical or psychological support. The strong stigma against victims makes many women afraid to report the crimes they have experienced, fearing that they will be seen as shameful or even blamed for the violence that occurred (Dewi, 2023).

In many communities, women who are victims of rape or sexual violence face social exclusion, making them even more vulnerable to repeated violence. For example, in many rural areas, women who report sexual violence are often labeled as "dishonorable" or "tainted," and are forced to withdraw from social life, further exacerbating their inequality in society. UNFPA reports that many women who reveal their experiences of sexual violence

experience profound shame, which prevents them from seeking help or protection (True, 2021).

This stigma creates a situation where perpetrators of sexual violence feel that they can act without fear of punishment, while victims have no space to seek justice or recovery. Sexual violence in DRC, often ignored or deemed unimportant by society, becomes easier to perpetrate in an environment where victims are ostracized and do not receive the support needed to confront the perpetrators. Poverty, unemployment, and stigmatization play a significant role in exacerbating women's vulnerability to sexual violence in DRC. Women trapped in poverty, with economic dependency on men, become targets of sexual exploitation, while unemployment and limited job opportunities further deepen gender inequality and their vulnerability to violence. Additionally, the social stigma against victims of sexual violence hinders efforts to report and obtain justice, perpetuating the cycle of violence in society. Addressing these issues requires a comprehensive approach that includes empowering women economically, changing societal attitudes, and strengthening legal protection systems for victims of sexual violence in DRC (Amnesty International, 2024).

## **CONCLUSION**

Sexual violence as a weapon of war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is a long-standing problem based in structural inequalities. This article has shown that patriarchal societal norms, weak legal frameworks, and socio-economic disparities create an environment where sexual violence persists with impunity. Patriarchal culture normalizes gender inequality, marginalizing women in education, employment, and leadership while reinforcing male dominance in both public and private spheres. These dynamics enable systemic violence against women, silencing victims through stigma and exclusion. Weak legal frameworks further exacerbate the issue, as under-resourced judicial systems, reliance on military courts, and widespread corruption hinder accountability for perpetrators. The lack of legal protections and reparations leaves survivors without justice or support, perpetuating a culture of silence. Meanwhile, socio-economic disparities, including poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education, increase women's vulnerability to exploitation and violence. Economic dependence on men traps women in unequal relationships, while societal stigma discourages reporting, allowing violence to persist unchecked.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive approach is needed. Legal reforms must strengthen protections for victims and ensure accountability for perpetrators, particularly within military and judicial institutions. Efforts to empower women economically, through education, skill development, and access to fair employment, are essential in reducing their vulnerability. Furthermore, societal attitudes must shift to dismantle patriarchal norms and combat the stigma surrounding sexual violence. International and domestic collaboration is crucial to creating sustainable solutions that prioritize justice, equality, and the rights of survivors. Ending the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war in the DRC requires more than addressing its symptoms—it demands tackling its structural roots. By confronting the intersecting issues of patriarchy, impunity, and economic inequality, it is possible to disrupt the cycle of violence and create a more just and equitable society.

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