**Community perspectives on survivors of sexual violence:**

A qualitative study of perceived pathways to reintegration in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo

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**Abstract (150 words)**

Survivors of sexual violence often report that community exclusion and shame is a major challenge. In this paper, we examine the community perceptions towards survivors of sexual violence in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Based on focus group interviews, we find that perceptions towards survivors are negative and difficult to overcome in the relational sphere (community, husband, family) and relatively neutral and hence easier to overcome in the professional sphere (market, job). To hide what happened or to try to get married are seen as the survivor’s options to overcoming stigma and be reintegrated. Finally, there is a difference in civilian and soldier perpetrated rape and the prospects for reintegration; given the characteristics of civilian rape it may be “easier” for a survivor to achieve the reintegration options. We conclude that more focus on attitudes in the community is necessary to counteract stigma for sexual violence survivors.