

## DECAY OR RESILIENCE?

THE LONG-TERM SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN SIERRA LEONE

By CARLO KOOS

This article examines the long-term impact of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) on prosocial behavior in Sierra Leone. Two theoretical arguments are developed and tested. The first draws on the feminist literature and suggests the presence of a decay mechanism: victims and their families are stigmatized by their community and excluded from social networks. The second integrates new insights from social psychology, psychological trauma research, and anthropology, and argues for a resilience mechanism. It argues that CRSV-affected households have a strong incentive to remain part of their community and will invest more effort and resources into the community to avert social exclusion than unaffected households. Using data on 5,475 Sierra Leonean households, the author finds that exposure to CRSV increases prosocial behavior—cooperation, helping, and altruism—which supports the resilience hypothesis. The results are robust to an instrumental variable estimation. The ramifications of this finding go beyond the case of Sierra Leone and generate a more general question: What makes communities resilient to shocks and trauma?

## CONTRIBUTOR INFORMATION

CARLO KOOS is a senior research fellow in the Department of Politics and Public Administration at the University of Konstanz. He is interested in the empirical study of gender in the context of conflict, peace building, and development. His current research focuses on the sociopolitical legacies of conflict-related sexual. Methodologically, he combines statistics and field research in South Sudan, Nigeria, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He can be reached at [carlo.koos@uni-konstanz.de](mailto:carlo.koos@uni-konstanz.de).