

SYNOPSIS

BACK YARD WOMEN

By

MARTINA BACIGALUPO

Burundi, Bujumbura, Roi Khaled hospital
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Obstetric fistula is a pathological communication between the bladder and vagina which results in a permanent and uncontrolled loss of urine from the vagina. It is a frequent complication associated with long and difficult labour, when the head of the foetus blocks the lower genital passages during childbirth in poor conditions.

According to the WHO, more than 2.000.000 women suffer from fistula throughout the world, most of them living in emerging countries. It is estimated that there are more than one thousand new cases of fistula every year, of which between one and three cases for every thousand births in certain poorer countries.

In more than 95% of pregnancies leading to fistula, the babies are stillborn because of the trauma suffered during long and often unassisted labour.

More than 80% of women with fistula are rejected by their husbands. The odour of urine and the constant and uncontrolled leaks explain this repudiation to a certain extent. The social problems created by this illness are often compounded by the lack of financial resources needed to treat these women, living on the margins of the community, rejected by their husbands, families and friends.

In Kirundi, fistula is called "Ingara Yo Mukigo": "the sickness of the back yard".

We followed the back yard women during the operations which they underwent at Bujumbura Hospital, with the help of Gynécologues Sans Frontières and support from Handicap International Belgique.

We followed these women before, during and after the operation. They had all lost their baby during childbirth. Since then, they had been living in complete or partial isolation, the luckiest ones still with their husbands, the others forced to move back in with their parents. They all want to get back to a normal life : work in the fields, have a family, children, sharing all that with a man.

They were scared of the operation. Some even trembled. One of them said to me, already in the operating theatre, "I'm afraid, but I'm proud to be here".

Most of the countrywomen of Burundi are afraid of the capital city and prefer to stay at home, suffering, rather than going for the operation.