

Case study from Uganda

Stella



Stella (right) with her younger sister in the Casualty Department of Mbale Regional Hospital

Stella is 16 years old, a member of the Karamojong ethnic group in the Nakapiripirit district in eastern Uganda.

In 2005 she was living in a small village of about 30-40 people, farming sheep and cattle with her husband. She has not had any formal education, as is common to this pastoralist semi-nomadic community. Conflict persists in her community, as cattle rustling between different tribes is extremely common in this area.

Many of the weapons used are leftover military-grade assault rifles, readily available due to the continuing armed violence in southern Sudan, northern Uganda and eastern Kenya.

One evening in July 2005, around 6 pm, a group of armed men from the Pokot tribe attacked Stella's village. She attempted to flee the area with her husband for the bush. One of the combatants shot at them, using what appeared to be an AK-47. A bullet struck her husband, killing him, and passed through his body, hitting Stella in the upper back, and coming out through her chest on the right side. She fell to the ground and lost consciousness.

Family members found Stella within a few hours, and she was sent in a government vehicle to the Mbale Regional hospital. She received IV fluids, and two units of blood. No x-rays were done, as the machine was out of service at the time.

She underwent an operation to repair the entrance and exit wounds, but was left with impaired function of her right arm and hand.

After two days, Stella fled from the hospital during the night, as she was unable to afford to pay for her medical care and the antibiotics necessary after the operation.