

# Surgical Neurology International

Editor-in-Chief: Nancy E. Epstein, MD, Professor of Clinical Neurosurgery, School of Medicine, State U. of NY at Stony Brook.

**SNI: History of Medicine**

Editor  
Miguel Faria, MD

Founder and Editor Emeritus, Medical Sentinel; www.haciendapublishing.com; Macon, GA, USA

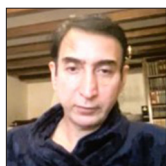
## Guest Editorial

# Sarah Mutomb, the first female neurosurgeon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

Keyvan Mostofi

Department of Neurosurgery, Centre Clinical De Soyaux, Soyaux, France.

E-mail: \*Keyvan Mostofi - keyvan.mostofi@yahoo.fr



Dear Sir,

In Kisangani, Meditz *et al.*,<sup>[9]</sup> there were no women in law, medicine, or government as of 1979, despite being 19 years post-independence. Since the 1990s, there has been significant advancement for women in the professions, including civil service, military, academia, and medicine.

### \*Corresponding author:

Keyvan Mostofi,  
Department of Neurosurgery,  
Centre Clinical De Soyaux,  
Soyaux, France.

keyvan.mostofi@yahoo.fr

Received: 23 January 2025

Accepted: 04 February 2025

Published: 28 February 2025

### DOI

10.25259/SNI\_72\_2025

### Quick Response Code:



Figure 1: (a and b) Sarah Mutomb presenting her thesis defense.



Figure 2: Concluding the thesis defense alongside the jury president and her peers.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 4.0 License, which allows others to remix, transform, and build upon the work non-commercially, as long as the author is credited and the new creations are licensed under the identical terms.

©2025 Published by Scientific Scholar on behalf of Surgical Neurology International

Certainly, there is still marked inequality for African women surgeons, particularly for neurosurgeons in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Female neurosurgeons in the DRC typically experience a lack of respect, are subject to harassment, and are typically offered inferior professional roles and lower salaries than their male counterparts.<sup>[9,10]</sup> Sarah Mutomb [Figure 1], the first female neurosurgeon in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), was born in 1986, completed medical school in 2004, and became the first female

neurosurgeon in the DRC in 2019 [Figures 2 and 3]. Here, we explore her remarkable life.

### LIFE AND CAREER

Sarah Mutomb was born in 1986 in Lubumbashi (i.e., the second largest city in the DRC) to a father who was a surgeon. She received a baccalaureate in Biology/Chemistry in 2004 and went to Medical School at the University of Lubumbashi, receiving her MD degree in 2012 [Figure 4]. The title of her thesis was; “The Management of Post-Partum Hemorrhage.” Between 2012 and 2013, her grandmother required an anterior cervical discectomy/fusion that was performed in Harare as Lubumbashi (i.e., population nearly 2 million/area of 747 km<sup>2</sup>) had no neurosurgeons. This prompted her to enroll in a neurosurgery residency in 2013 at the University of Algiers, a program supported by WFNS, an “Africa One Hundred” initiative, a program for enhancement of neurosurgical education in developing nations (i.e., Africa). Due to racism and harassment, she left that program. Next, Professor Kazadi Kalangu, the head of neurosurgery at the University of Harare in Zimbabwe, helped enlist her in the neurosurgery program at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal. She started her residency in the Neurosurgery Department at the Center Hospitalier National Universitaire de Fann under Professor Seydou Boubakar Badiane; she was the only female in the program throughout its duration. Between 2014 and 2019, she completed the residency



Figure 3: Sarah engaged in a surgical procedure.

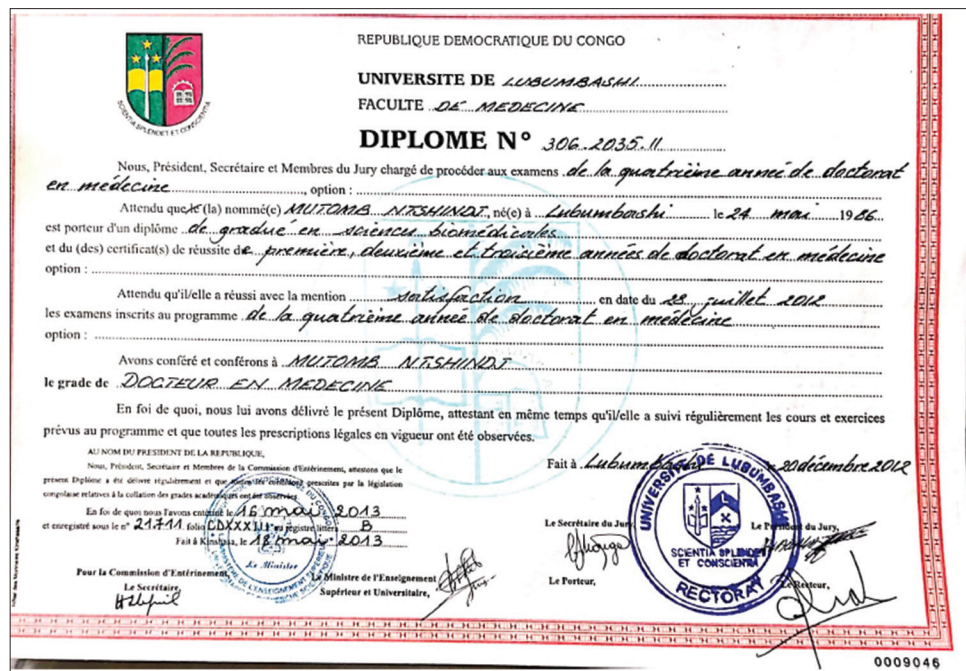


Figure 4: General medicine diploma.



Figure 5: Specialty diploma.

after writing a dissertation [Figure 5], “The Management of Giant Intracranial Aneurysms in Dakar.” Nevertheless, once in neurosurgical practice in the DRC, many patients were hesitant to trust her. They often openly questioned, “How can a woman perform surgeries, particularly at such a young age?” Her father recommended she be patient, and do her job. Two decades after commencing her studies at the DRC University of Lubumbashi, she returned to the same neurosurgery faculty in the DRC as an educator, furthering her specialization in neuroendoscopy.

## DISCUSSION

The DRC is the second largest nation in Africa, with a population of 111 million; 51% are women, and 48% are under the age of 15.<sup>[4]</sup> In a male dominated society, 27% of women in the DRC are subjected to multiple discriminatory work practices.<sup>[1,5,15]</sup> Notably, Articles 5, 14, and 15 of the DRC Constitution assert that a husband possesses rights over his wife’s property, regardless of any stipulations in their marriage contract.<sup>[2-4,7,9,16]</sup> Furthermore, women must secure their husband’s consent

before accepting any employment opportunity.<sup>[6,9,12,14]</sup> Since the 1990s, women have made notable strides in the workforce but continue to experience under-representation in senior roles and typically receive lower wages than their male counterparts performing the same jobs.<sup>[17,18]</sup> Interestingly, females now represent 30% of all physicians in the DRC; nevertheless, only two of the 19 DRC neurosurgeons are women.<sup>[8,11,13]</sup> Sarah Mutomb, the first pioneering female neurosurgeon in the DRC, overcame many obstacles throughout her education, including racism, gender bias, and outright discrimination, to become the extraordinary professional that she is today.

## CONCLUSION

Sarah Mutomb, the first female neurosurgeon in the DRC, overcame multiple personal and professional obstacles put in her way to become the consummate neurosurgical professional that she is today.

**Acknowledgment:** The author would like to express his sincere gratitude to Dr. Sarah Mutomb for generously taking the time to respond to his inquiries through WhatsApp on multiple occasions. Furthermore, he is grateful to her for providing him with the pictures that he has included in this paper.

## REFERENCES

- Addati L, Cattaneo U, Pozzan E. Care at work: Investing in care leave and services for a more gender equal world of work. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO); 2022. p. 62, 186.
- Assemblée nationale. Constitution de la République Démocratique du Congo. Kinshasa; 2006. Available from: <https://media.unesco.org/sites/default/files/webform/r2e002/30fc959de50075fb86d6f23e93148d2f48056a21.pdf> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- Bleck J, Van de Walle N. Electoral politics in Africa since 1990: Continuity in change. Cambridge, Royaume-Uni: Cambridge University Press; 2019. p. 283-4.
- Cordell DD, Wiese BM. History of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. United States: Britannica Encyclopedia; 2025. p. 352-3.
- International Labour Organization (ILO). Assessing the current state of the global labour market: Implications for achieving the Global Goals; 2023a. Available from: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/assessing-the-current-state-of-the-global-labour-market-implications-for-achieving-the-global-goals> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- Jesuyajolu DA, Okeke CA, Obuh O. The challenges experienced by female surgeons in Africa: A systematic review. World J Surg 2022;46:2310-6.
- Journal Officiel de la république Démocratique du Congo. Code de la Famille. Loi n 16/008 du 15 juillet 2016 modifiant et complétant le Loi n 87-010 du 1<sup>er</sup> août 1987 portant Code de la Famille. Available from: <https://www.leganet.cd/legislation/codedelafamille/table.htm> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- Kabulo KD, Mutomb NS, Yengayenga K, Mudegereza SP, Neba GN, Beltchika A, *et al.* Neurosurgery in the Democratic Republic of Congo: A historical review. Egypt J Neurosurg 2024;39:73.
- Meditz SW, Merrill T, Library of Congress. Federal Research Division. Zaire: A country study. Washington, D.C.: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress: For sale by the Supt. of Docs., U.S. G.P.O; 1994. Available from: <https://www.loc.gov/item/94025092> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- Muswamba RM. Le travail des femmes en République démocratique du Congo: Exploitation ou promesse d'autonomie? Paris, Unesco, coll. Les classiques des sciences sociales (version numérisée par Jean-Marie Tremblay. Canada: CEGEP de Chicoutimi; 2006. p. 129-30.
- Pachi D, Barrett M. Perceived effectiveness of conventional, non-conventional and civic forms of participation among minority and majority youth. Human Affairs 2012;22:345-59.
- Plan International, Bridging the Digital Divide; 2023. Available from: <https://plan-international.org/qualityeducation/bridging-the-digital-divide> [Last accessed on 2023 May 28].
- Radio Opaki. Kinshasa: Les femmes médecins dénoncent la non-représentativité de la femme à tous les niveaux. Available from: <https://www.radiookapi.net/2022/03/08/actualite/societe/kinshasa-les-femmes-medecins-denoncent-la-non-representativite-de-la> [Last accessed on 2022 Mar 08].
- Sur Parline: Plateforme de données ouvertes de l'UIP. Available from: <https://data.ipu.org/fr/parliament/CD/CD-UC01/elections/historical-data-on-women> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- UN Women Africa. Democratic Republic of Congo; 2024. Available from: <https://africa.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/west-and-central-africa/democratic-republic-of-congo> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- United Nations Development Programme, report on human development; 2023/2024. Available from: [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-10/hdr23\\_full\\_report\\_0319\\_fr\\_v2\\_0.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2024-10/hdr23_full_report_0319_fr_v2_0.pdf) [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- World economic forum, Global Gender Gap Report 2023; 2023. Available from: <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2023> [Last accessed on 2025 Jan 17].
- World Health Organization's Global Health Workforce Statistics, OECD, supplemented by country data. Physicians (per 1,000 people)-Congo, Democratic Republic; 2018.

**How to cite this article:** Mostofi K. Sarah Mutomb, the first female neurosurgeon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Surg Neurol Int. 2025;16:70. doi: 10.25259/SNI\_72\_2025

## Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Journal or its management. The information contained in this article should not be considered to be medical advice; patients should consult their own physicians for advice as to their specific medical needs.