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Abstract

While the Lord's Resistance Army has gained notoriety for its brutal tactics and abduction of Ugandan children, little attention has been given to the return and reintegration of these formerly abducted child soldiers. The absence of a formal reintegration program in Uganda has placed the burden of reintegration on international NGOs, but reliance on non-local organizations to successfully reintegrate child soldiers has proven challenging. This paper seeks to evaluate whether the process of reintegration in Uganda has been successful. With an overwhelming lack of up to date and methodologically sound research, variables such as PTSD, domestic violence, alcoholism, violent crime, and primary education rates are evaluated to indicate the current state of Northern Uganda. These variables indicate an unstable environment in Northern Uganda and suggest reintegration has proven unsuccessful in the Acholi region. The successful reintegration of child soldiers is demonstrated to be not merely a Ugandan issue, but an international issue.

Beads of sweat run down her face. She runs as fast as she can, periodically looking back in fear that they have become aware of her escape. As she runs, the recollection of events from the past year overwhelm her tired mind. She remembers the abduction, and being forced to kill her parents after watching her sister die for refusing. She remembers a grueling initiation in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and how she was given to an older soldier as his wife. She remembers nights of torture – being raped and forced to watch the death of new recruits. As she feels the weight of her baby on her back, she remembers giving birth in the bush. These memories are interrupted by the sounds ahead; she has made it to the city. Now, she will turn herself into the police; now, she is free. She will return to her life in her village and try to put the brutal experiences of the past behind her. Will she succeed?

This amalgamated story speaks to a grim reality of many child soldiers in Uganda. With a plethora of traumatic experiences endured during their defining years, the former child soldiers in Uganda must work to return to the routine of their daily lives. When these former child soldiers are released, captured or escape

from captivity, they enter an informal disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration process, which helps them regain the normalcy of their life before their abductions. The process of reintegration proves to be most challenging. The decades long civil war in Uganda has left the Acholi population in Northern Uganda in shambles. While roads, buildings, and homes have been reconstructed in the years since the LRA has departed the country, the people of Northern Uganda have yet to fully rebuild their lives. The Acholi people have suffered dramatically for the last 20 years, and they continue to suffer the consequences of returning ex-combatants. The Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program in Uganda fails to adequately reintegrate former child soldiers in a way that is positive for these children and their communities. As former child soldiers, these children are desensitized and exposed to extreme forms of violence; they inevitably suffer from symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which negatively impacts their ability to continue formal education and advance developmentally. The consequences of their abduction has brought both suffering and chaos to the northern regions of Uganda. As the LRA continues to terrorize other central African states, the issue of reintegrating former child soldiers becomes an international issue with serious consequences, as we see in Uganda. Without a change in the way these children are reintegrated into their communities, perhaps through the utilization of traditional mechanisms of healing and justice, Uganda and its government will continue to suffer.

The Current State of DDR in Uganda

By and large, the government of Uganda has neither a formal nor national Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration program (DDR). The government of Uganda deals with returning child soldiers from the LRA in an unusual way. Disarmament is not a primary concern in Uganda because when the children are discovered and/or captured by the Ugandan army, they are immediately disarmed and removed from the bush - as the majority of these children were trafficked, disarmament is traditionally voluntary. Demobilization is a short process in Uganda. The children are often brought back to the military barracks and then brought to reception centers throughout Uganda, where, the process of demobilization also involves the awarding of amnesty.

Fourteen years after the civil war began, the government of Uganda enacted the Amnesty Act of 2000. This act called for blanket amnesty for all Ugandans that had engaged in armed rebellion against the government since the beginning of 1986.¹ To obtain amnesty, a Ugandan must simply renounce all involvement with

¹ Government of Uganda. *Amnesty of Act of 2000*. Chapter 294.

the armed rebellion, and in doing so, they receive a certificate of amnesty. The act called for 12 years of blanket amnesty, and was extended in May of 2012 to include an additional two years. A provision was made in 2006, however, that allowed the Minister of Internal Affairs, backed by Parliament, to deny amnesty to particular individuals. Although this amendment was made, the provision has never been used. In the first twelve years of the Amnesty Act of 2000, Ugandans granted amnesty totaled 26,232.²

Amnesty was originally supported by the citizens of Uganda, but as time progressed, blanket amnesty became a point of contention. Many citizens believed that returning children should not be punished; they had been abducted and forced to commit many atrocities, and furthermore, many children had been abducted under the watch of the Ugandan military. It appeared that no one could protect the children of Northern Uganda, and as a result, they should not be found culpable. The issue lies with the ex-combatants that return after many years in the bush and are now legally adults. The Ugandan population is divided on this issue. Many believe that because the children were abducted they cannot be held responsible, whereas others believe that when they turned 18, they became responsible for their actions and must be held accountable for the atrocities they committed while in captivity.

The Ugandan Amnesty Act of 2000 has “been an effective tool for undermining the cohesion of the LRA,”³ but the issue of whether justice is truly being delivered to the victims of the decades-long conflict remains to be decided. The Amnesty Act has encouraged many children and adults to defect from the LRA; children are told that they can return home without fear of retribution. This has encouraged thousands to leave the rebels and has simultaneously diminished the power of the LRA. Blanket amnesty has, however, posed a problem during the reintegration process. “Victims find it hard to forgive those who perpetrated acts against them without their victimhood being accounted for, which if done right will cool their hearts and tune them to negotiate for reconciliation.”⁴ This presents a challenge in reintegrating ex-combatants.

Reintegration is the last step of the DDR program. This incorporates the treatment and resettlement of returning child soldiers. The Ugandan government provides little in terms of assistance and certainly no comprehensive assistance. The disarmament and demobilization of ex-combatants is the responsibility of the

² Damian Kato, “The Amnesty Commission DDR in Uganda” (presentation, Uganda).

³ Barney Afako, “Undermining the Lord’s Resistance Army: The role of Uganda’s Amnesty Act,” Conciliation Resources, August 2012, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://www.c-r.org/comment/undermining-lra-uganda-amnesty-act-barney-afako>.

⁴ Isaac Okwir Odiya, “Reparation of War Victims: A Challenge for Community Reconciliation,” special issue, *Voices Sharing Victim-Centered Views on Justice and Reconciliation in Uganda*, no. 2 (September 2013): 26.

government of Uganda entirely, but, when it comes to reintegration, it appears the government passes the brunt of the responsibility onto independent NGOs and Faith Based Organizations. The face of the government in the process of reintegration is the Amnesty Commission, which provides some skills training and a one-time reinsertion kit. This is the extent of government aid to the returning child soldiers.

Weaknesses of DDR

The little aid the government presents to ex-combatants has become another point of contention and increases the difficulty of reintegration. While skills training is an absolute necessity for returning child soldiers, the skills training that is offered by the Amnesty Commission (and many NGOs) is not market driven. Approximately 13,000 Northern Ugandans have gone through the DDR process as set forth by the Amnesty Commission and they have received training in carpentry, motor vehicle repair, brick laying, tailoring, and bicycle repair.⁵ The Amnesty Commission is training a vast amount of ex-combatants in the same skills that may or may not be needed within their communities. Giving child soldiers skills that are not demanded by the market in the communities in which they live is not helpful. It becomes a process of frustration for many returning children and adults that cannot find work nor contribute an income.

Furthermore, the one-time reinsertion kits distributed by the Amnesty Commission and several NGOs have caused flagrant resentment within the communities. These kits provide non-food items such as cups, plates, mattresses, and gerry cans; seeds; and 163 USD.⁶ These packages give returning soldiers a foundation to build their new lives. Many ex-combatants find that they are returning to very different communities than those they had left. Many are without parents and relatives, and these packages give them something to start with. The idea of presenting child soldiers with these packages seems honorable and beneficial, but it ultimately creates alienation within the communities to which they are returning.

During the war, Northern Ugandans were forced into Internally Displaced People Camps (IDP Camps) - these camps were breeding grounds for gender-based violence, disease, and starvation. The camps were, in theory, protected by the

⁵ Barney Afako, "Undermining the Lord's Resistance Army: The role of Uganda's Amnesty Act," Conciliation Resources, August 2012, accessed October 4, 2014, <http://www.c-r.org/comment/undermining-lra-uganda-amnesty-act-barney-afako>.

⁶ Margaret Angucia, "Children and War in Africa: The Crisis Continues in Northern Uganda," *International Journal on World Peace* 26, no. 3 (September 2000): 77-95, accessed September 28, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20752896>.

Ugandan army, but they were often raided by the LRA and international food aid was often prevented from reaching these camps. For years, Northern Ugandans lived in terrible conditions and immense fear; they suffered tremendously. For many Northern Ugandans, their suffering goes unnoticed by the government and NGOs. Instead, the perpetrators of their suffering receive material benefits. The emotions that arise because of these perceived injustices are understandable, even rational.

The emotions of Northern Ugandans result in resentment toward children returning from the bush. These children are seen as partly responsible for their immense suffering, the reason they were put into IDP camps, and often, the reason they lost family members. The cause of their pain and suffering returns to their community and is rewarded with material goods and even provided with vocational skills - skill trainings unavailable to them. Undoubtedly, this creates a tension within the community that is both understandable and expected. This tension makes it nearly impossible for returning children to feel welcomed and able to reintegrate. As a result, many children do not report to the authorities or go through the DDR process in an effort to avoid stigmatization and resentment from members of their home community. Choosing to self-demobilize and reintegrate on their own gives these children a way to not be identified as murderers, looters, or corrupt.

The remainder of the DDR efforts are left to NGOs and Faith Based Organizations. The two most prominent are WorldVision and Gulu Support the Children Organization (GUSCO). Many of the existing organizations are neither local nor Ugandan. This in itself presents an issue. For 12 years, IDP camps were a reality in Northern Uganda. During this time, there was an influx in the number of NGOs (nearly 200) in Uganda. When the guns fell silent in 2006, however, all but 30 NGOs left the region, ignoring the many issues that had yet to be addressed.⁷ A primary issue is the rehabilitation and reintegration of returning child soldiers. Non-local organizations are able to provide short-term solutions. They provide material benefits and, sometimes, they are able to provide counseling. Recovery and reintegration, however, are not short-term processes. They are inherently long term and can potentially last a lifetime. These organizations cannot provide the long-term care these children need. As the influx of children entering DDR declined, many organizations began to leave, ending their relationships with the former child soldiers. Without long-term commitment and relationships, ongoing counseling and outreach is impossible. Many of these NGOs engage in group therapy, but they are unable to deliver one-on-one attention - something from which many of these children may benefit.

⁷ Honorable Norbert Mao, "Post-Conflict in Northern Uganda" (lecture, Gulu, Uganda, July 10, 2013)

Another issue with having non-local NGOs handling the reintegration of child soldiers is that, by and large, the organizations are not familiar with the region and its deep history. Consequently, the Acholi culture is overlooked. The communities and families in Northern Uganda know what does and does not work in their situations; it would seem that their involvement in reintegration would be absolutely essential.⁸ With blanket amnesty in place in Uganda, it is important for the Ugandan people to go through their own process of acceptance and forgiveness. During their time in the IDP camps, the Acholi people's cultural values of privacy and self-reliance were infringed upon. After the closure of the IDP camps, the Acholi people pushed for self-sufficiency and a return to cultural norms within their communities.⁹ Both an honoring and respect for cultural practices could be established by re-implementing Acholi healing rituals as part of the reintegration process in Northern Uganda, but because the majority of NGOs in Northern Uganda are not Ugandan these healing rituals are often overlooked, specifically the cleansing ceremony, *mato oput*.

Mato oput is a common cleansing ceremony that was performed during the onset of the war. It is a process of compensation, predominately symbolic, and its goal is peace. Traditionally, *mato oput* is not for capital offenses, but it became the main cultural practice in receiving former child soldiers at the beginning of the war. As the war dragged on, the ceremony became costly and more difficult to perform. It became challenging to identify the victims and for clan elders to come up with a solution that was fair to all parties. *Mato oput* was very important in the beginning of the conflict due to the confessional nature of the ritual. During the ceremony, the perpetrator tells the truth - confessing their crimes and acknowledging their wrongdoing - allowing victims to feel a sense of justice and closure. This truth telling process was quite significant for the grieving community, and it was their way of achieving traditional justice. When the Ugandan government offered blanket amnesty, ex-combatants were no longer forced to disclose their behavior, robbing the Acholi and other neighboring communities of closure. *Mato oput* may not be a solution in every case, but the value and symbolism of this mechanism of traditional justice should be continued. It is imperative that the suffering of the community be acknowledged by the former child soldiers.¹⁰ This acknowledgement could pave the way for easier reintegration into their communities. As long as this recognition goes unnoticed, the

⁸ Patrick J. Bracken and celia Petty, eds., *Rethinking the Trauma of War* (New York: Free Association Books, 1998), 71.

⁹ Chief Jeremiah Muttu, "Traditional Institutions in Acholiland" (lecture, Gulu, Uganda, July 9, 2014)

¹⁰ Chief Jeremiah Muttu.

reintegration process in Uganda will prove unsuccessful, but it is not merely a lack of closure that presents a challenge to reintegration.

Stigmatization is one of the primary obstacles in the successful reintegration of child soldiers. Many returning children were forced to commit atrocities against their own family members, neighbors, and community. Community members know exactly who was abducted and what types of crimes they committed. It is not uncommon for a newly abducted child to be forced to kill their parents or neighbors in public during the raid of a community. There is no hiding once ex-combatants return. The return of children to their community often triggers feelings of resentment on behalf of the families whose children will never return home. It is not atypical for children to be forced to kill their friends, and upon returning to their former homes, they must face the families of those they have harmed. The community generally knows when a child has returned from the bush and is living amongst them. These returning children are unaffectionately nicknamed “Rebel-Children.” They are particularly vulnerable in comparison to all the war-affected in Uganda.¹¹ Rebel-Children are considered burdens of the community. They are stigmatized, alienated socially, uneducated, often have disabilities or health problems, and live in chronic poverty without skill sets that are transferable to jobs.¹²

Addressing the issue of stigmatization is undoubtedly critical, but the NGOs do not do enough to educate the community on the experiences of the children in terms of a flight or fight response. As previously mentioned, the Acholi community divides on the issue of who should receive amnesty. Foreign NGOs do not do enough to bridge the gap between the perceptions of the community and the realities of an abducted child soldier. They also fail to consider that these children are of different social class, gender, and education level. A particular issue with DDR in Uganda is that few females are involved. The challenges that females face are drastically different than their male counterparts. In the bush, the majority of females are sexually assaulted and traditional gender roles are blurred. Upon returning to their communities, females are often a target for further sexual assault, are forced into marriages, or have illegitimate children. The challenges these females face warrant specific attention.

It would make sense that because these former child soldiers experience so many challenges and emotions upon returning to their communities that mental illness care and support would be crucial to their reintegration process. The NGO community and Ugandan government, however, fail to offer this kind of support. NGO and government reception centers generally offer immediate medical care,

¹¹ Wessells, 101.

¹² Wessells, 133.

family reunification, and counseling in the form of “group discussions and advice giving.”¹³ The children stay typically anywhere from one week to months, depending on the length of time they were in captivity. The issue, however, is that a negligible amount of ex-combatants who come through these reception centers receive follow-up care. The Amnesty Commission and Ugandan government offer no follow-up care whatsoever. These reception centers consider their main priority to be family reunification. They assume that once a child is in the care of their family they will be fine because the child’s family knows best. As a result, the majority of former child soldiers receive little to no mental health care, further skill training, or educational support.

Ex-Combatants and Issues of PTSD

It is absolutely imperative that ex-combatants receive mental health care. When young children are exposed to traumatic and violent experiences, they become more vulnerable and may develop over-active imaginations that are incapable of deciphering between fantasy and reality; these conditions are symptomatic of “psychotic features that are frequent in combat veterans with PTSD.”¹⁴ For these children, this leads to social isolation and as they become older, substance abuse and rebellious behavior manifested in physical fights.¹⁵ Furthermore, responses to trauma, when they go untreated, can contribute to cycles of violence and war. War stories that entail gross violence are passed down and encourage fighting and children’s participation in armed rebellion. This leads to the creation of an “other,” a call for revenge, that ignites irrational fears and fuels suspicions which create the illusion of a more dangerous world.¹⁶

While research in the field is lacking overall, much research was conducted during the heightened parts of the war. Unfortunately, after 2006, many NGOs and researchers departed Northern Uganda, leaving an essential gap in the research on returning child soldiers. Much of the research that was conducted was based on interviews with former child soldiers and juxtaposed against children that did not engage in the armed rebellion. This presents several problems. By conducting research through qualitative interviews with relatively small samples, it becomes

¹³ Chris Blattman and Jeannie Annan, “Child Combatants in Northern Uganda: Reintegration Myths and Realities,” In *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War*, 2008. Accessed September 28, 2014. <http://chrisblattman.com/documents/research/2008.DDR.pdf>.

¹⁴ Mark B. Hamner et al., “Psychotic Features in Chronic Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Schizophrenia: Comparative Study,” *Journal of Nervous & Mental Disease* 188, no. 4 (April 2000), accessed October 25, 2015.

¹⁵ Wessells, 128.

¹⁶ Wessells, 130.

difficult to understand the difference between the reintegration of one particular child in a particular community and the reintegration of returning child soldiers as a group. The differentiation between the two is critical when evaluating the success or failure of Ugandan reintegration programs. One particular researcher, Christopher Blattman, explains that the vast amount of studies on child soldiers in Uganda, “suffer from small sample sizes, unrepresentative samples, or an absence of control groups or aural identification.”¹⁷ There was little research and data available on mental health conditions of Northern Ugandans before the war, which has made analyzing the data less reliable.

Despite the lack of prior data, research has shown that there is an increased level of PTSD in children that were abducted and forcibly recruited into the LRA. Specifically, one study, conducted years after children had returned home, illustrated that 48 percent of children that were in captivity for at least a month exhibited PTSD. Thirty-three percent of children that were in captivity for under a month demonstrated PTSD, and as a comparison, 8.4 percent of non-abducted children exhibited PTSD.¹⁸ The number of non-abducted children presenting with PTSD appears high because the IDP camps and fear of being abducted created a traumatic environment for many children. Furthermore, while the majority of children were not diagnosed with PTSD, 82 percent presented with symptoms of PTSD.¹⁹ This means that the deteriorating mental health situation in Northern Uganda is chronic, and because the government and NGOs are not directly addressing mental health during reintegration, PTSD in former child soldiers is failing to be addressed.

The repercussions of untreated traumatic exposure are not only detrimental to the individual that experienced the trauma but to the community as well, and addressing these issues should be the first priority of NGOs and the Ugandan government after attending to physical health. One study determined that former child soldiers struggle with the ability to control their aggressive impulses - demonstrating an inability to handle difficult situations without implementing violence. Furthermore, they exhibit an inability to think of non-violent solutions

¹⁷ Jeannie Annan et al., “Civil War, Reintegration, and Gender in Northern Uganda,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 6 (August 2011): 877-908, accessed October 20, 2014. <http://jcr.sagepub.com/content/55/6/877>.

¹⁸ Elisabeth Schauer and Thomas Elbert. “The Psychological Impact of Child Soldiering.” In *Trauma Rehabilitation After War and Conflict*, 2010. Accessed September 28, 2014. <http://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/doc/doc636752.pdf>.

¹⁹ Schauer, 323.

and alternatives.²⁰ Researchers believe that this reflects an absence of “adequate social skills” due to having spent their years of critical development in the bush.²¹

The deterioration of the mental health of former child soldiers is responsible for an oversimplified understanding of good and bad. These children experience cognitive distortion and employ simplistic models when discerning between good and bad behaviors. They struggle to see a grey area in their world of black and white. They also struggle with forming a personal and collective identity.²² In the bush, child soldiers were taught to put the group first; the collective group was the most important unit in their life. When they return home, this military identification does not simply disappear. The importance of the collective group becomes manifested in their moral sensibilities. The children understand what is good and what is bad but their emotions and morals are inappropriately confined to the “in-group.” For them, a dichotomy exists between themselves and their personal relationships and the other. Their existing morals do not apply to everyone - only to those they have built relationships with. The children are capable of having values and morals; they do not, however, understand that these morals and principles apply to all people. The ease in which these children are able to create an other and the impulse of violence should be of grave concern to those studying the levels of PTSD in Northern Uganda.

While untreated PTSD presents an array of long term issues developmentally for former child soldiers (all of which negatively impact the communities into which they are reintegrating), the failure to continue education is compounded upon by the effects of PTSD and presents another critical issue in Northern Uganda. While in captivity, education for children is brought to a halt. When children are reintegrated into their communities, they return to school. This is a difficult transition for many former child soldiers. PTSD makes it incredibly difficult to concentrate in school, causing frustration for many former child soldiers and leading them to drop out. The prevalence of PTSD among former child soldiers affects their ability to continue their education. Education is a critical component to livelihood in Uganda. Without education, many of these former child soldiers find themselves in a position in which they are unable to move on from their tragic experiences. The two largest voids child soldiers experience are in education and their livelihood, and these never fully close.²³ Blattman argues that these are the most prevalent issues amongst returning child soldiers, not physical and psychological issues. It appears, however, that they are very much

²⁰ Schauer, 333.

²¹ Schauer, 335.

²² Schauer, 337.

²³ Blattman, 205.

interconnected. The psychological issues that children experience contribute to their inability to obtain their education and maintain a job, and as this generation of child soldiers ages, these psychological issues will undoubtedly continue to plague their relationships with those in their community and their ability to be productive members of society.

Yet, how to best address the deteriorating mental health status is still unclear. While PTSD is generally understood as a disorder that has no cultural bounds, its treatment is thought to differ within cultures. There is a significant amount of research and case studies on PTSD in industrialized countries, but little is known about treatment methods in non-industrialized countries.²⁴ While the Western culture addresses PTSD with therapeutic modalities that include one-on-one therapy and techniques such as EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), these techniques are not yet proven to be effective treatment in developing and non-industrialized countries such as Uganda.²⁵ In order for these therapeutic modalities to be recommended in developing countries, more methodologically sound and rigorous research must be conducted.

Evaluating Uganda Today

Despite the fact that the guns fell silent in 2006, Northern Uganda is still in turmoil. There are several pressing needs in Northern Uganda. Education and livelihood support are at the top of the list. Children need secondary school scholarships, and there needs to be an accelerated adult education program. Child care is a necessity in Northern Uganda, as many females have returned from the bush with children, and because these new mothers are so young, many do not know how to properly care for an infant. Health services in the form of psycho-support are absolutely critical. As previously discussed, there is little to no follow-up care in Northern Uganda, and many former child soldiers will battle with PTSD symptoms for the remainder of their lives. A significant population suffering from mental health disorders will have dire consequences in the many years following reconstruction.

The overall lack of research on the reintegration of former child soldiers makes it incredibly difficult to assess whether the makeshift DDR program in Northern Uganda is working. Essentially no recent research has been done to assess the situation in Northern Uganda. The civil war gained a significant amount of international civil service organizations attention during the 1990's and early

²⁴ Thomas Harlacher, "Traditional Ways of Coping with Consequences of Traumatic Stress in Acholiland: Northern Ugandan Ethnography from a Western Psychological Perspective" (PhD diss., University of Freiburg, 2009), 82.

²⁵ Nilamadhab Kar, "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Review," *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment* 7, no. 1 (April 2011): 167-181. Accessed October 25, 2015.

2000's. But when the war left Northern Uganda for other central African countries, the interest in the subject matter ceased. What research that does exist is largely case based: in the format of qualitative interviews with former participants. Thus, there is no research to indicate what works and what does not work, and more importantly, what should be done.

The current and past efforts to reintegrate former child soldiers in Uganda has been based on immediate needs; rules of thumb, according to what has worked in other countries; myths and assumptions.²⁶ The situation in Uganda, however, is drastically different than underage recruitment in other African countries. The LRA does not recruit children; it forcibly abducts children and employs heinous initiation rights in order to obtain blind devotion and desensitize the children. The situation differs from other countries in that there is no national DDR program; the government has done little to help in the reintegration process and little to protect the children from abduction in the first place. The issue in Uganda is essentially seen as a regional issue instead of a national one. For this reason, Northern Ugandans exhibit disenchantment with the government for its lack of effort in protection and recovery.

Without appropriate and thorough research, it is difficult to determine what is working and the true numbers of mental illness in Northern Uganda. Each study that evaluates PTSD and other mental health illnesses reports different numbers. While these numbers do vary, it is clear that mental health is an issue and that the children who were held in captivity by the LRA exhibit a higher likelihood of exhibiting PTSD symptoms. It is also clear, that the NGOs and government do little to ameliorate these conditions, and with minimal research, it is impossible to advocate for specific therapeutic modalities or critique those being used in Uganda.

Because of a lack of current and up-to-date research, the efficacy of reintegration in Uganda is difficult to evaluate. The negative effects of PTSD are known to be both serious and far reaching.²⁷ These negative effects can effect an individual's education, relationships, health, substance abuse, and occupational functioning.²⁸ Without up-to-date research on the reintegration process, variables such as the rate of domestic violence, alcoholism, school drop-out and crime are the most indicative of how Uganda is fairing post-conflict. By evaluating the trends in data, it will be clear whether DDR, more specifically the reintegration process, is working or if the effects of children in the bush are resonating throughout Uganda over time. It is important to note, however, that the population

²⁶ Blattman, 104.

²⁷AnxietyBC, "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder," accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.anxietybc.com/parenting/post-traumatic-stress-disorder>.

²⁸ Ibid.

of child soldiers in Uganda is a small percentage. The generally accepted number of children who have been abducted is 40,000; yet, the population of Uganda is approximately 35.9 million people.²⁹ When we look at the number of war-affected Ugandans, it is a much more larger portion of the population. Approximately 1.6 million Ugandans were forced into 218 IDP camps during the height of the civil war.³⁰ This leaves approximately 4.5 percent of Ugandans directly impacted by the civil war. This is a vast percent of the population that has been affected, and considering, they are all confined within the same geographic region, this issue becomes more significant. Furthermore, in Uganda, community life is vital. Communities live in close proximity and neighbors develop close-knit relations. When one or several members of the community are negatively impacted, a ripple is created throughout the whole community. Thus it is fair to say, this small percentage of the population has a great impact on the livelihood and communities within Acholiland.

When looking at rates of domestic violence in Uganda, the data is sparse. There exists no comprehensive research on domestic violence in Uganda over the years. The U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor releases a Country Report on Human Rights each year. Using these documents, the fluctuation in domestic violence can be evaluated. These reports, however, are solely based on "factual reporting" from U.S embassies, and no methodology is given. Thus, these reports are merely based on what countries choose to report, and the reports cannot ensure accurate data.

As one looks at the trends in data over the years, discrepancies are revealed, but a clear increase in gender-based violence is uncovered. These numbers do not consistently reflect the reported increase or decrease of domestic violence. It is also worth noting that within these country reports, rape is separated from the reports of domestic violence. It is only following 2009 that the number of rape cases begin to be consistently mentioned. The country reports also mention data taken from various surveys accessing gender-based violence in Uganda. These surveys suggest that the number of cases reported are grossly underestimated. In an undisclosed survey, 70 percent of all women in Eastern and Northern Uganda reported they had been victims of domestic violence.³¹ Notably, these are the two regions that were most affected by the LRA. According to the 2006 Uganda Law Reform

²⁹ "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency, last modified June 20, 2014, accessed November 1, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html>.

³⁰ "Global Appeal: Uganda," United Nations High Commission for Refugees, 2006, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://www.unhcr.org/4371d1ab0.pdf>.

³¹ Department of State, *Human Rights Report: Uganda*, 2008.

Commission study, domestic violence is most common in northern Uganda, where it is reported to have occurred in 78 percent of homes.³²

The percentages according to the surveys show an increasing or continuous amount of sexual violence, while at times, the State Department reports decreasing numbers. It is fair to conclude that the domestic violence situation in Uganda is not improving. While the criminalization of domestic violence was a step in the right direction, it is widely known and understood by Ugandans that it is not enforced. Human Rights Watch reported in its 2010 country report that discrimination and violence is flagrant in Uganda against females particularly in Northern Uganda. Their report outlines that women with disabilities (many of which can be attributed to the LRA) experience the worst discrimination and violence. They are the most likely to be targeted for sexual assault, as are returning female ex-combatants, and they experience obstacles when it comes to participating in their community and government.³³

With a large portion of the northern population in Uganda having been subjected to IDP camps, mass violence, and/or forced into the LRA, finding a method in which to cope with these traumatic experiences is necessary. One of such coping mechanisms is the consumption of alcohol. Increased rates of alcoholism following the civil war are indicative of a society that is failing to recover from the traumatic events of the civil war. Alcoholism in Northern Uganda is flagrant. It is rare to walk through the streets of Gulu, one of the towns most effected by the civil war, without seeing an Acholi drinking a beer, Ugandan gin, or the local brew. According to the WHO Global Status Report on Alcohol in 2004, Uganda was the world's leading consumer of alcoholic beverages and had the highest per capita intake of alcohol. Uganda led the world with an average of 19.47 liters. This was nearly four times the world average in 2004.³⁴ The 2014 report, which uses data from 2010, reported that this has risen. The average per capita intake of alcohol in Uganda rose to 23.7 liters. This data is based on Ugandan citizens aged 15 and above.³⁵ While there are no sufficient regional data, it has been reported that alcoholism in Northern Uganda is quite high.³⁶ Alcoholism in

³² Department of State, *Human Rights Report: Uganda*, 2013.

³³ Human Rights Watch, *As if We Weren't Human: Discrimination and Violence against Women with Disabilities in Northern Uganda* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2010), 24-40.

³⁴ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Alcohol 2004*, 2004.

³⁵ World Health Organization, *Global Status Report on Alcohol 2014*, 2014.

³⁶ Sarah Tumwebaze, "The Mental Health Burden in Northern Uganda," *Saturday Monitor*, last modified October 23, 2014, accessed December 20, 2015, <http://www.monitor.co.ug/artsculture/Reviews/The-mental-health-burden-in-northern-Uganda/-/691232/2496010/-/wcdahxz/-/index.html>.

this region has been linked to the high incidence of suicide, mental illness, and domestic violence.

Similar to the spread of alcoholism, primary school completion remains a large hurdle in Northern Uganda. Ugandan children are failing to progress throughout the education system, and this contributes to a lack of higher education in Uganda, a wilting economy, and an increase in street youth. The rate of completion fluctuates from 2005 to 2011. In 2005, the completion rate was 57.5 percent and in 2011 it was 54.94 percent, the lowest rate since 2007.³⁷ There is, however, no clear trend to suggest that drop-out rates have been on the decline since the end of the civil war in Uganda. According to this data, they have been on the decline since 2009. In 2010, UNESCO released a report in which Uganda had the lowest proportion of children completing primary school, and the following year, another report declared Uganda as having the highest rate of drop outs in Eastern Africa.³⁸ The situation in Northern Uganda, however, is much different and much more complex than the situation in the rest of the country. Teachers do not want to teach in Northern Uganda, and the drop-out rates are significantly different.³⁹ While drop-out rates are not published by region, one rural school in Acholiland explained in 2013 that they had 150 children in Primary One and only 48 Children in Primary Seven.⁴⁰ That yields a 68 percent drop-out rate for that particular school. The school principal attributed this high rate of drop-outs to several causes. Because the LRA is currently operating outside of Uganda and has decreased the number of its soldiers (and in particular the number of abducted Ugandans in its ranks) the drop-out rate is not indicative of the number of children that were abducted or were killed in the violence - although a decade ago, this would have been the case as schools were often operating within IDP camps. The principal also stated that this number does encompass a large number of children who did not return to school after the war. Instead, this particular drop-out rate is reflective of a vast number of females becoming pregnant and married early. Some of these pregnancies and marriages were a result of forced marriage and having children in the bush.⁴¹

³⁷ "Uganda — Primary Completion Rate," Indexmundi, accessed October 20, 2014.

³⁸ Conan Businge and Chris Kiwawulo, "School Dropout Rate Worrying Experts," New Vision News, May 25, 2011, accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/12/755638>.

³⁹ Eric Odong, interview by author, Uganda, July 12, 2013.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

According to a recent UN report, conflict and violence is twice more likely to occur in countries with education inequalities.⁴² While the high drop-out rate of primary schools in Northern Uganda can certainly be attributed to the Civil War, the consequences of a general lack of education afflict the region - arguably contributing to the high levels of violent crime. Since the dissipation of IDP camps in 2006, the north has been plagued with land disputes. Conflict over ancestral land has continued for the last eight years, and the disputes often turn violent. Violent crime as a whole has been an issue for Acholiland.⁴³ Crime waves in the northern region have hit periodically throughout the last four years. In the past year, organized crime in the form of gangs has appeared in the region. Armed robberies and murders of boda boda drivers have become increasingly frequent.⁴⁴ In 2010, Uganda Radio Network reported that the district of Gulu had the highest number of criminal activity (murder, theft, rape, and defilement were amongst the most common crimes) in Northern Uganda. Furthermore, Human Rights Watch 2014 Uganda reports a plethora of street youth that are experiencing violence both from law enforcement and their communities. In Lira, a town in Acholiland, there have been reported murders of street children by mobs.⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch also reports, "The forced disarmament operations in the remote northern Karamoja region and its consequences of death and loss of livelihoods for the local populations also continue to fuel an influx of street children into Kampala."⁴⁶ The United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security has rated the crime in Uganda as "critical."⁴⁷ It is clear that violence is increasing in Northern Uganda and the object of this violence tends to be ex-combatants from the LRA.

Call for Change

While it is obvious to those who carefully examine the situation in Uganda that it is deteriorating, it is not nearly as obvious what should be done. It is impossible to conclusively call for a particular action to be taken based on the lack

⁴² UNICEF, "Does Horizontal Education Inequality Lead to Violent Conflict?" April 2015. <http://learningforpeace.unicef.org/media-center/stories/conflict-is-twice-more-likely-in-countries-with-education-inequalities-says-new-unicef-report/>.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security, "Uganda 2015 Crime and Safety Report," April 15, 2015. <https://www.osac.gov/pages/ContentReportDetails.aspx?cid=17446>.

⁴⁵ Human Rights Watch, "Where Do You Want Us to Go?" *Abuses against Street Children in Uganda* (USA: Human Rights Watch, 2014), 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 18.

⁴⁷ United States Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security.

of research that is available on ex-combatant reintegration. Yet, it seems that incorporating traditional coping methods for exposure to traumatic stress would be beneficial, and it certainly wouldn't be harmful. The Acholi have several traditional healing methods and forms of traditional justice.

For instance, *gomo tong* is a symbolic ceremony conducted in an effort to bring clans and communities together to acknowledge the end of violence, and it suggests if the peace is broken the aggressor will be harmed. Both *gomo tong* and *mato oput*, discussed earlier, are two of the best known traditional cleansing rituals associated with former child soldiers in Uganda. In fact, the UN has stated that these types of traditional justice mechanisms best serve the children.⁴⁸ The two rituals are independent of another, but they are often performed side by side. *Mato oput* places an influence on telling the truth and demonstrating remorse. This is incredibly beneficial to the Acholi community in the wake of the LRA, as they feel that they have been largely ignored. Thus, the acknowledgement of the crimes committed against them and distributed compensation attempt to remove the resentment the community feels toward these former child soldiers.

These traditional rituals not only bring cathartic relief to the ex-combatants, but they also address the grievances of their communities. Traditional Western therapeutic modalities may not be the most appropriate forms for treating PTSD in Northern Uganda, but these traditional forms of justice seem to have positive results.⁴⁹ Though they are beneficial, performance of these ceremonies has declined because the clan must have the money and resources to perform the ceremony (which often involves monetary compensation and the slaughtering of a goat) and the victim must be identified. The communities have been devastated by the civil war and do not always have the financial means to have a ceremony for each transgression, and many former combatants do not know the names or clans of their victims. While the latter issue may not be solvable - other than adapting these rituals to accommodate each particular situation - perhaps the government of Uganda and the NGO/FBO community within the country can provide the financial means to enable these rituals to continue.

The Government of Uganda likes to frame the issue of returning child soldiers as a Northern Ugandan (Acholi) issue, but simply confining the issue to Northern Uganda ignores the large scale effects of the LRA and reintegration process. Improper and unsuccessful reintegration effects the entirety of Uganda,

⁴⁸ UNICEF, "Addressing The Potential and Limits of 'Mato Oput' Process as A Basis for Accountability, Justice and Reconciliation for Children in Northern Uganda," 22. <http://www.unicef-irc.org/files/documents/d-3712-Addressing-the-potential.pdf>.

⁴⁹ International IDEA, "Northern Uganda: Tradition Based Practices in the Acholi Region," in *Traditional Justice and Reconciliation after Violent Conflict: Learning from African Experiences*, 2008. Accessed December 20, 2015. http://www.idea.int/publications/traditional_justice/upload/Chapter_4_Northern_Uganda_tradition-based_practices_in_the_Acholi_region.pdf

and as the LRA has moved through Sudan, Central African Republic, and Democratic Republic of Congo, the citizenships of other countries have been negatively impacted as well. As one prominent Ugandan lawyer and politician, Norbert Mao, stated, “The Lord’s Resistance Army has the potential of becoming the sub-saharan al-Qaeda.”⁵⁰

As is seen in the current state of Northern Uganda, the traumatic experiences child soldiers are exposed to during their formative years have dire consequences. The increase in domestic violence, violent crime, alcoholism and lack of primary school completion post-conflict suggest that the Acholi region and Northern Uganda have not recovered from the war. It suggests that former child soldiers have failed to be successfully reintegrated into these northern communities. When high rates of domestic violence, violent crime, alcoholism, and a widespread lack of education occur in conjunction in a small geographic region, a country and its population cannot be expected to thrive. Lack of education can lead to gender inequality, and this can lead to both violent crime and domestic violence. Alcoholism only further perpetuates these negative processes. These issues compound each other and lead to turmoil and poverty. Many believe the war has left Uganda - that the LRA is no longer of immediate concern, but war does not simply end when the guns fall silent. As Uganda’s history has shown, a country must diligently work to address the reintegration of child soldiers. If a country fails to reintegrate these children properly, a generation is created in which animosity, poverty, and violence is simply inevitable. All of which are consequences that are not merely confined to that country’s borders; these are consequences the international community will have to deal with, whether it be financially or militantly.

⁵⁰ Norbert Mao

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