

**Looking Beyond Conflict:**

**The Long-term Impact of Suffering War Crimes on**

**Recovery in Post-conflict northern Uganda**

**Teddy Atim**

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**Looking Beyond Conflict:**  
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**Post-conflict northern Uganda**

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**Thesis**

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## **Abbreviations and Acronyms**

AfBD	African Development Bank
AU	African Union
BTVET	Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training
CADI	Center for African Development Initiative
CPA	Concerned Parents' Association
GoU	Government of Uganda
HIV	Human Immune Virus
HSM	Holy Spirit Movement
IASC	Inter Agency Standing Committee
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICTJ	International Center for Transitional Justice
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IYF	International Youth Foundation
JRP	Justice and Reconciliation Project
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MoGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NUSAF	Northern Uganda Social Action Fund
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PRDP	Peace, Recovery and Development Plan
SGBV	Sexual and Gender Based Violence
SLRC	Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium
SSA	Sub-Saharan Africa
STI	Sexually Transmitted Infection
SWAY	Survey of War Affected Youth
UBoS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics

UGX	Uganda Shillings
UHRC	Uganda Human Rights Commission
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activity
UNLA	Uganda National Liberation Army
UPE	Universal Primary School
USD	United States Dollars
USE	Universal Secondary School
YLP	Youth Livelihood Programme



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## **Chapter 1    Introduction**

### **1.1    A story of two women growing up in northern Uganda's conflicts**

I open this dissertation with a short story of two young women growing up during northern Uganda's conflicts. I share these stories as a way to think about how young people's lives are shaped and reshaped by the extraordinary changes brought by violence, depravation and political and economic marginalization and how these experiences play a role in shaping their lives in the 'post-conflict period'.

Abia was born in 1986 and lived in Acaba, her home village in Oyam District, Lango sub-region, in the northern region of Uganda. She grew up as the youngest child of 10 siblings (eight girls and two boys, three of whom are deceased). The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) rebels started attacking her village in 1994 but would then retreat. In 1996, LRA attacks on the village intensified and, during that time, Abia and her family would sleep in the bush for fear of possible LRA attacks at night.

On the night of November 22, 1996, at 4:00 AM, Abia's home was attacked by the LRA rebels under Commander Opio Matata. Abia, then age 10, and her 8-year-old nephew were captured. The group roamed inside northern Uganda for most of December 1996; during this time Abia was assigned to stay in the home of LRA commander Payera. In January 1997, the group finally managed to cross into southern Sudan under LRA Commander 'Field'. Abia narrated that the walk into southern Sudan took three days and nights without any rest, while also carrying supplies and looted items. The walk was fast, brutal and hard for abductees, most of who were killed on the way. The rebels would ask recruits, "Do you want to rest?" and if one responded, "Yes," they were killed and left to rot or be eaten by wild animals. Abia feared the rebels would

kill her. She kept away any thought of trying to escape because she had seen other abductees murdered for trying.

Inside southern Sudan, Abia was assigned to stay at the home of LRA Commander Vincent Otti as a *ting ting* (young girls at commanders' homes to help with domestic chores and babysit commanders' children). However, after three months inside southern Sudan, Abia was given as a forced wife to a commander. She conceived her first child by age 13 and gave birth on May 9, 1999.

After nearly seven years inside the LRA, in 2002, Commander Otti released Abia with 60 other women and children born of war (i.e., children born of forced sexual relations between abducted females and LRA personnel). At the time of her release, she was eight months pregnant with her second child. Abia was treated at World Vision in Gulu for two months and gave birth at Lacor Hospital, Gulu. She was reunited with her family in August 2002. Unfortunately, her father passed away in December 2002, barely three months after she returned home. After her return, Abia learned that her nephew who was abducted with her was killed during a battle between the LRA and the Ugandan army.

I met Abia in 2002 when the international non-governmental organization (NGO) World Vision brought her to Lira for her reunification with her family (I have maintained my contact with Abia to date). World Vision sought my support because, at the time, I was a local social worker working with young people who had been abducted or forcibly recruited by the LRA. Abia was well received by her family and had support from her mother to raise her children conceived in captivity. However, one of her brothers sometimes said hurtful words about Abia and her children born of war. Yet, to Abia's relief, her mother always defended Abia and her children.

In 2003, with the support of World Vision, Abia enrolled for vocational skills training in Lira town. During her training in Lira, Abia met a man who showed interest in her and they moved

in together in 2004. She lived together with him at his family home near Lira town and had two more children with him. However, after seven years together, she decided to leave him because his family stigmatized and discriminated against her and her children born of war. Abia explained this dislike of his family towards her and her children born of war, “We were not treated as human beings” (Follow-up interview, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2018). The man’s sisters convinced him to withhold any support to Abia and her children born of war as a way to force her to leave. His family wanted him to marry a young woman without children, out of fear that Abia’s son who was born of war would gain future inheritance and land rights.

Upon separating from the man, Abia rented her own house. Here she continued running her small roadside restaurant where she made and sold cassava chips and other grains. She used the income to provide for her children and her aging mother in the village, who at times helped raise her children born of war. Notably, the man denied Abia any right to the children born from their relationship, including the ability to visit them. Even when the children passed by where Abia was running her roadside business, their father forbade them to talk to Abia. She suffered great mental distress over being separated from her young children. Abia’s attempts to get local authorities to uphold her right to visit and see her children were unsuccessful.

Between 2002 and 2015, Abia maintained a cordial relationship with her family back in the village. She also continued to economically support her aging mother. Abia’s eldest child, a girl, received support from an NGO to go to school. However, the girl was enrolled in school in Kampala, a seven-hour bus trip from Lira, and Abia only saw her at the end of each school year.

In 2016, Abia’s relationship with her family worsened. Abia fought with a niece who had come to live with her in Lira and stole money (five million UGX, or approximately USD 1,400)<sup>i</sup> that Abia had saved over the years from her business. Abia had planned to use the money to build a

house on a piece of land she had bought near Lira town. During the incident, her family (including her mother) sided with her niece, which greatly angered Abia. As of 2018, she maintains very minimal contact with her family, including her mother who had previously been her greatest source of emotional support.

Abia continues to operate her restaurant in Lira town and uses her profit to support herself and her son and daughter born of war. The father of her other two children lives with and provides for those two children. Recently, he began to allow the two children to visit and spend the holidays with Abia.

In 2017, following the deterioration of the relationship with her family, Abia attempted to seek the support of her former LRA captor's family to help raise her son born of war. To do this, she first strategically sought her family's support and approval. She then met with the former captor's family. However, her family declined the request from the family of her former captor to let the boy live with them. Without the boy to claim as their own, her former captor's family refused to provide Abia with any help or support in raising him.

Abia now relies on her one supportive sister and her brother-in-law to help raise her son. She also keeps cattle which she bought to help secure her son's future. At the end of 2017, Abia managed to build a house on the land she bought near Lira town and lives there with her son. She also recently met a man with whom she is living. The man is married with his own children, and Abia is his mistress (a common phenomenon in Uganda). Abia insists on remaining on her land and in her house. She has also made it clear that she will not have any more children with him, as she already has four children from her past relationships.

Abia's story mirrors the stories of many young women who were affected by the more than two decades of conflict in northern Uganda. Like Abia, many young women and girls who were abducted by the LRA suffered physical, sexual, psychological and emotional violence. At the



same time, their families and communities also suffered multiple forms of violence: killings, torture, abduction, forced recruitment, slavery and forced marriages, mutilation and war injuries, sexual violence, psychological harm, forced displacement, and lost opportunities (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011).

Like Abia, girls and young women who were abducted by the LRA were often raped and subjected to forced marriages with rebel commanders. The children born of those forced relationships often are the source of problems for the women's relations with their families (Annan et al., 2008, 2010). Like Abia, due to their abduction, young people lost opportunities to continue with their education and build a future for themselves and their children. In the post-conflict period, these people struggle to provide economically for their children and households. Yet they also struggle socially to move beyond their war experience and rebuild their lives in the post-conflict.

I am the second woman in this short introductory story. My name is Teddy Atim. I was born and spent nearly my entire childhood moving between Lira town, where I went to school, and my rural village in Awiny, Apala sub-county, Alebtong District in northern Uganda. Growing up in a traditional and patriarchal homestead, I was socialized into traditional feminine gender roles and responsibilities from an early age: caring for my siblings, cooking, cleaning, collecting water and firewood, washing and all roles expected of a girl and later a young woman. I performed these roles either alongside my two stepmothers (my father is polygamous) or completed these tasks on my own when they were absent or away. While my stepbrothers had more time and freedom to play and be active in public spaces, my space as a young woman was limited to the household and the home compound. The gender hierarchy in my family was clear: my father was responsible for making all major decisions and provided resources for the family needs.

My family relied heavily on our livestock for milk, opening land, and social events such as funerals and marriages. At times we sold or exchanged our animals to meet our basic needs. My family life largely revolved around my paternal kinship and lineage and, in our village, everyone was related either through birth or marriage.

Beginning when I was eight years old, I witnessed and experienced the turmoil and chaos that ravaged northern Uganda, starting with the 1985 overthrow of Obote's II government, and followed by Karamojong cattle rustling, the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena, and later the conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the LRA, in addition to other instabilities. My family's lives changed dramatically starting from the early period of these armed conflicts.

When the Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) led a coup under Brigadier Bazillo Olara Okello and General Tito Okello against Obote's II government in 1985, their fighters took over our house in Lira town. They vandalized and looted all our property. When the National Resistance Army (NRA) under President Yoweri Museveni took power in 1986, my father, our main breadwinner, was arrested and incarcerated for months. Because he belonged to an opposition political party, upon his release from prison my father was forced out of his job as an administrator in Obote's II government.<sup>ii</sup>

Forced out of our home in Lira town, we moved back to our paternal village (my father's home village). Yet even there we were still unable to stay on our family land due to threats by and fear of further attacks by the NRA soldiers. Moreover, armed cattle raiders from northeastern Uganda, collectively known as the Karamojong, began a series of devastating raids throughout northern Uganda. My rural home was repeatedly vandalized, all our property looted, and our livestock rustled by the Karamojong.

My father losing his job, the forced movement, and repeated vandalism and looting caused my family to change its main livelihood strategy. We decided to give up keeping any livestock and to focus on farming and planting trees. My father planted large and beautiful lots of wood trees and groves of orange trees. When my family started planting trees, my father once said, “Now that we don’t have livestock anymore, let them come and cut down the trees and carry them away if they can.” Shockingly, during the fight against the LRA, the Uganda People’s Defense Forces (UPDF) burnt down the wood trees, saying that they harbored the rebels and made it hard for the military to flush the LRA out. (My father replanted and today our family has beautiful and thriving lots of wood trees, orange groves and orchards that provide a steady source of income for my father and stepmothers as they age).

In addition, I endured some of the most frightful moments of my life, including seemingly endless flight from the UNLA coup (1985), NRA takeover (1986), the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena, Karamojong attacks, and the LRA rebels. On several occasions during these flights I was separated from my family, which caused me great distress. For example, during the 1985 UNLA coup, I was separated from my family for nearly two weeks, living with neighbors who took me along while we fled from the fighters. Also, during these times, my education was severely disrupted. I was forced to change schools several times. I was often unable to attend school for weeks or months due to persistent insecurity. When I was able to attend school, attacks could happen at any time, and the other students and I were always on edge. For example, during the Holy Spirit Movement of Alice Lakwena, if we were in the classroom when news of impending attacks arrived, we jumped out the classroom windows and ran off.

We lived in constant fear. After the attacks and fighting were over, it was ‘normal’ to go out into the street to see dead bodies. In retrospect, I now understand how horrifying and disturbing it was for a young girl like myself to have witnessed all that.

Whereas the village was always a place we retreated to for safety during the earlier conflicts, at the peak of the Karamojong raids and LRA conflicts, our family was displaced from our village and into Lira town. During repeated attacks some of my extended family members were brutally killed by the LRA rebels, while others were abducted (some have returned while others we presume are dead).

All these experiences had drastic and long-lasting effects on my family's livelihood, survival, and physical, social and psychological wellbeing. For example, once my father was forced out of his job by the NRA, as children we had to work to raise money to cover our own school costs. However, the education my step-siblings and I received will never be on par with what we could or should have received. My dead relatives will never return. The social breakdown experienced by my family due to the looting, poverty, terror, depravation and stress of the conflicts ensures that we are forever changed by those events. These experiences gave me a firsthand understanding of the long-term impact of armed violence and war on individuals, families and communities. When I look at my family today, I can say that we have not fully recovered from the violence, and, indeed, I don't believe it will ever truly be possible for us to recover our losses.

Working extremely hard, I was able to attend Makerere University, where I graduated with a university degree in social sciences. Upon graduation I returned to northern Uganda as the war intensified. I was among the first to work with former child soldiers in northern Uganda. I was hired by the newly formed Concerned Parents' Association (CPA), a local grassroots organization created by the parents of abducted children in northern Uganda to advocate for the unconditional release of all children held by the rebels and the army, and to support the return and reintegration of these children. In this role, I helped run some of the first education and vocational training programmes for war-affected children and youth, and also managed the first programme to support girls and young women who returned from captivity with children in

Lango sub-region. I worked with the Uganda military to release children who were held in the army's barracks after encounters with the LRA and to trace the families of these returning children in order to prepare them for reintegration. I also worked with parents' networks to prepare them to receive children and youth returning from captivity.

At the height of the war, I worked with Save the Children in Uganda.<sup>iii</sup> There, I ran the first study on and programme with street children in Lira town; the phenomenon of street children was greatly increasing due to internal displacement. It was here that I became aware of the rise in girls and young women who were engaged in sex work. Further, with both CPA and Save the Children, I collaborated closely with other like-minded organizations throughout the war-affected sub-regions of Acholi and Teso and made referrals of cases of children and youth across the region. I maintained contact with some of the women survivors, youth, and children I met during the course of my work. Abia is one of these women.

All these experiences put me face to face with the daily realities of war on individuals, families and communities. I witnessed and experienced how the lives of individuals, families and communities changed in one instance from 'normal' to that of daily uncertainty: living in internally displaced person (IDP) camps, losing children to abduction, having a family member killed in the war, eventually returning home and trying to restart their lives. I saw time and again how these people's lives, Abia and her children's lives, and my own life, would never be the same again.

Yet, despite these experiences and exposure to conflict, I wanted to understand better the complexity surrounding how recovery and rebuilding happens in the *post-conflict* context. It is in this context that the research for my doctoral research on the long-term impact of suffering war crimes on recovery in post-conflict northern Uganda is embedded and framed.

## **1.2. Dissertation Objective**

### **Enhancing the Knowledge of Young People's Post-Conflict Lives**

While there exists a growing understanding of youth in conflict, there is relatively little known about youth's lives in the post-conflict period (Schwartz, 2010; Bodyen and de Berry, 2004). Schwartz (2010) notes that existing scholarship on youth mainly focuses on child soldiers and the demographics of large youth populations in the global south but is limited in understanding youth's actual realities (p. 10). In particular, we do not know enough about the long-term effects of experiencing different and multiple war crimes during conflict on youth's everyday experiences of education, gender relations, inter-generational relations, power relations, survival, and ability to build a future in the post-conflict period (Boyden and de Berry, 2004 p. xvii).

Youth affected by conflict are not homogenous. While some youth thrive, others struggle long after the conflict is over to provide for their family, regain social acceptance, and/or make a livelihood in the absence of skills or education. While they endure daily struggles and vulnerabilities, many also exercise agency. Their lives are far more diverse and complex than a single story could tell. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the longer-term effects of armed conflict to provide a deeper understanding of the environment, challenges and opportunities for youth in post-conflict settings.

In addition, there is limited understanding of the impact of armed conflict on local cultural dynamics that define personhood, identity, belonging and gender, especially in highly gendered and patriarchal settings. In addition, little is known as to how armed conflict shapes youth's post-conflict experiences (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). There is also little understanding of how war crimes and crimes against humanity experienced by youth intertwine with pre-war, active war, and post-war structural conditions and gendered patriarchal norms

and expectations to determine young people's abilities to navigate their everyday lives in the post-conflict environment.

Betancourt and Khan (2008) argue that there is need to focus on coping and the making of meaning for individual children and youth, including the role of relationships, social networks, and the wider socio-cultural context of youth's everyday lives in the post-conflict period. There exists a strong intersection between young people's experiences of war crimes (such as sexual violence) and socio-cultural practices and local gender norms. Yet we know too little about how those dynamics play out in young people's lives. Their experiences—even in the most stressful of situations—are largely mediated by these social contexts and are not merely a factor of the individual's experience (Boyden and de Berry, 2004).

The overall aim of this dissertation is to document and analyse how experiences of alleged war crimes during the more than two decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda (Acholi and Lango sub-regions) affects the ability of young people to recover and rebuild their lives in the post-conflict era. The dissertation explores how multiple forms of challenges (beyond conflict) affect young people's lives in the post-conflict period. I therefore engage with the diversity of experiences among young people affected by conflict – women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children born of war, sex workers, war injured, and those who have experienced other war crimes—to explore how recovery differs for young people and their families and the reasons that underlie these differences in experiences.

The specific objectives of the dissertation are to explore: 1) how suffering alleged war crimes affects educational outcomes among youth in northern Uganda; 2) the factors foregrounded by women involved in sex work in Lira Town, northern Uganda; 3) how women survivors of war crimes of sexual violence respond to and shape their social relationships with their family and community in the post-conflict period; and 4) how changes or disruption to local gender

relations and patriarchal norms shape and influence women survivors' everyday lives, choices, strategies and decisions in their attempts to re-assert and re-negotiate their social status.

The analyses for this dissertation pays attention to the intersection of young people's experience of war crimes with 'prior, during and post' conflict structural conditions and gender patriarchal norms and expectations that define personhood, womanhood, manhood, identity, belonging, morality, sexuality, and inheritance in northern Uganda. I do this in order to provide a nuanced and multi-faceted understanding of youth's experiences of recovery, especially their attempts to gain acceptance and belonging in the post-conflict context beyond their war crimes experiences.

### **1.3. Children and Youth in Armed Conflict and Post-conflict Settings**

#### **1.3.1 Definitions and demographics**

*"Many youth are on weed...the fact is most rural boys smoke marijuana."*

*"These youngsters are a product of Kony's (LRA) war. They were displaced into IDP camps in Lira town and not given education. After the war, their parents went back to the villages, but these boys and girls remained behind. And with nothing to do in a slow-moving economy like Lira, what can they do?"<sup>iv</sup>*

The above quotations are from a WhatsApp online group of mainly elite Langi men and women who aim to promote development in Lango sub-region through education. The exchanges emerged after a local television story reported on the 2016/2017 Uganda Police Crime and Traffic report, which showed that Lira district (one of my research areas) led the



country in overall crime rates.<sup>v</sup> When I posted a question to the WhatsApp group as to what could be driving such high levels of crime in Lira, the immediate replies were the above quotes. These responses reflect the dominant narratives that drive opinions, perspectives, and even policies and programmes on youth, particularly during and after armed conflict: that the presence of idle youth (especially males) equals crime, violence, and destabilisation.

Narratives about youth in northern Uganda, and often internationally as well, are driven by two key interconnected factors, namely a) the lack of a clear definition of ‘youth,’ and b) the idea that a ‘youth bulge’ or high proportion of youth in the population is a source of instability and violence.

### ***Children and Youth Definitions***

The lack of a clear distinction between childhood and youth remains a concern (Utas, 2003; Sommers, 2015; Schwartz, 2010; Bodyen and De Berry, 2004; De Boeck and Honwana, 2005). While a child is defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as “every person below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority it attained earlier,”<sup>vi</sup> there exists no universally recognized definition of a youth (Schwartz 2010; Sommers, 2015). Definitions of youth vary among different institutions, organisations, and governments. To illustrate, the United Nations defines a youth as any person between 15 and 24 years of age,<sup>vii</sup> while the African Union defines a youth as any person between 15 and 35 years.<sup>viii</sup> But even within the United Nations itself, there exists varied age categorisation of youth: child 0 – 17, adolescent 10 – 19, youth 15 – 24, young people 10 – 24, teenager 13 – 19, and young adults 20 – 24 (Sommers, 2015, p. 11). The ambiguities, confusion and conflation of children and youth have resulted in a tendency to include youth in the category of child and to consider youth in line with a child rights perspective—i.e., as vulnerable victims with little agency. This approach obscures youth’s

realities and complex roles and can fail to meet their needs and agency as young adults (Utas, 2003; Boyden and De Berry, 2004; Schwartz, 2010; Boyden, 1990; Honwana, 2005).

‘Youth’ is at times used interchangeably with ‘adolescence,’ which is based on chronological age boundaries defined by physical and psychological maturation milestones<sup>ix</sup> that are mainly western (Schwartz, 2010; Christiansen et al., 2006). But Christiansen et al., (2006) contend that “there is no universal physically or psychologically defined threshold over which one passes from one phase to another” (p. 14). Further, Sommers (2015) argues that “the idea that childhood ends and adulthood begins at eighteen subordinates local definitions of children and youth in different contexts and excludes the youth category altogether” (p. 11). Age-based understandings ignore the fact that childhood and youth are defined and lived differently based on social and cultural contexts. Different societies and cultures possess their own ways of marking and understanding when a human move from one stage of life to another, at times involving a series of different processes to mark these transitions (Honwana, 2005; Sommers, 2012, 2015; Mead 1969 cited in Christiansen et al., 2006, p. 14).

In such contexts, the understanding and meaning of child and youth are fluid and intersect with other social forces of power and authority that are themselves grounded in relationships and social markers, such as the period before marriage, childbirth, or initiations. Practices regarding the movement across life stages are diverse across time and space. In some settings, a person may be well past 40 years of age but, if they not met the social markers of adulthood, they may still socially be considered youth (Sommers, 2015; Schwartz, 2010). Under such social conditions, people can move – and are moved – back and forth between different generational positions that determine inclusion and exclusion (Christiansen, 2006 p.14 - 15). To illustrate, experiences of armed conflicts and other crises such as abduction and sexual violence force young women to become mothers outside marriage. These experiences can alter and affect their lives significantly, forcing them to be single parents and heads of households in a social context

where womanhood and motherhood is defined by childbirth within customary marriage. While these young women may already be mothers they are not socially included, thereby altering their social position within their families and communities.

This dissertation research approaches children and youth from a social perspective, taking into account the social and cultural context in northern Uganda that defines and situates them. Specifically, it explores the different social and cultural conditions in northern Uganda that shape and situate an understanding of personhood: gender, sexuality, roles and relations. These conditions determine the position and place of young men and women within their social settings. The dissertation also contributes to knowledge of how the experience of the more than two decades of armed conflict in the region interrupted or altered the place and position of young men and women within their social landscape and shaped their inclusion and/or exclusion within the social settings in the post-conflict period.

### ***Youth and Demography***

A second dominant narrative about children and youth is the tendency to link a high youth proportion of the overall population to violence, instability and destabilization. This trend is particularly common in regard to countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and the Middle East, which continue to experience a rapidly growing youth population (Sommers 2012, 2015).

This type of sentiment is best captured in Kaplan's (2002) account of youth in West African cities in his book "The Coming Anarchy:"

In cities in six West African countries, I saw similar young men everywhere - hordes of them. They were like loose molecules in a very unstable social fluid, a fluid that was clearly on the verge of igniting. (Kaplan, 2000, p. 5)

SSA remains the youngest region in the world (Diouf, 2003; Sommers, 2015). Filmer and Fox (2014) project that the region will continue to experience a growing population over the next

several decades, with the number of 15-year-old youth increasing by half a million each year between 2015 and 2035 (p.2). While Filmer and Fox (2014) argue that the youth bulge offers an opportunity to provide a working-age labor force, in the absence of sufficient investment in human capital development, the increase in the population of youth presents challenges to governments seeking to fulfill basic rights and needs and can breed frustration. For Kaplan, the hordes of male youth are a ticking time bomb ready to explode in the absence of functional institutions or communities to offer opportunities to this youthful population.

The youth instability thesis focuses on the youth bulge and emphasizes the substantial proportion of youth (particularly redundant male youth) as a potential cause of instability. Particularly, youth with nothing to do are increasingly viewed as potential threats to the stability and security of their communities, nations, and neighboring regions (Goldstone, 1991, 2002; Huntington 1992, 1996; Kaplan, 2000; Urdal 2004, 2006; Collier et al., 2006; Cincotta and Doces, 2012). Huntington (1996) specifically argues that large numbers of youth (20 % or higher in a population) are a threat to stability. Similarly, Collier et al., (2006) assert that the increase in the population of male youth ages 15 – 24 is likely to increase the risks of conflict from 4.7 % to 31.9 % (p. 15). But, overtime, the argument has advanced to address larger social, cultural, political and economic trends (Abbink, 2005; Urdal, 2004; Richards, 1998; Daumerie and Madsen, 2010). A combination of a high youth population and a weak or struggling social, economic and political environment results in limited or no productive activities, high youth unemployment, increased poverty, social exclusion and marginalization, and a lack of education and skills. These factors are believed to breed frustration and anger among youth and to lead to potential violence.

Much of youth instability thesis exclusively targets male youth (because of their perceived violent nature) with little attention to female youth, who are often assumed to be homogenous victims with no agency (Nordstrom, 2004; Abbink, 2005; Barker, 2005; Schwartz, 2010;

Sommers 2006, 2015). Coulter (2009) contends that the proclivity to focus on male youth is shaped by the militarization of masculinities in most social settings. To illustrate, Cincotta et al., (2003) state that “young men (15 – 34 years) are perceived to have more interest and likelihood towards violence and are linked to more than three quarters of violent crimes around the world” (p. 44). The increased visibility of male youth (compared to their female counterparts) either during street protests or on conflict frontlines continues to shape beliefs about their perceived violent and aggressive nature. This is what Abbink (2005) refers to as male youth having a “higher nuisance value, especially young men with nothing to do” (p. 25), or, as noted by Kaplan (2000), “the untamed male propensity” to impulsive physical action (p. 175). Hence, the increase in conflict in many parts of Africa has been attributed to the phenomena of a high male youth population. This concept is shaped by dominant gendered ideas and ideologies that see women as victims, nurturers, or peace makers, while men are seen as aggressors and trouble makers. However, Hilhorst et al. (2018) argue that such tendencies obscure the other realities in which men and women assume the opposite - or more complex - roles during and after conflict (p. 6).

Dominant critiques of the youth instability thesis concern the limitation of these approaches. While some youth are likely drawn into violence or aggression, multitudes of youth are peaceful and are constructively engaged in their communities. They contribute towards their families’ livelihoods, care for the sick or elderly, and are actively engaged in post-conflict rebuilding processes (Schwartz, 2010; Annan et al., 2006, 2009 and 2011; Daumerie and Madsen, 2010). Evidence from northern Uganda shows that formerly abducted male youth tend to be more active citizens and take up more local leadership positions than their non-abducted counterparts. At the same time, formerly abducted female youth also show more pro-social behavior than their non-abducted counterparts. These facts challenge the stereotype of formerly abducted

youth as being violent and potential destabilizing forces in the post-conflict period (Annan et al., 2006, 2009 and 2011).

Schwartz (2010) argues that the exclusive focus of the youth instability thesis on structural processes ignores youth resilience and positive contributions and agency of youth both during and after conflict (also see Boyden and De Berry 2004; Abbink 2005). It also risks presenting youth as devoid of options and choices. Yet studies show that youth are constantly strategizing and making choices informed by their social context in attempt to leverage their situation (Barker and Ricardo, 2005; Carr, 2013). Honwana (2005) notes that children's and youth's actions are "complex and transcend simplistic and moral analysis" (p.48).

Yet without speaking to male and female youth in order to understand their reality, we cannot know enough about them (Sommers, 2015). We can assume that they employ multiple forms of tactical agency to maneuver in the short term or when they are constrained and use strategic agency to realise long-term goals (Honwana, 2005, p. 49). However, we need to understand why some youth make certain choices and not others under extreme conditions.

This dissertation combines two approaches of structural factors and youth agency to explore various aspects that shape youth lives and recovery in the post-conflict period. The dissertation aims to contribute to a better understanding of social and cultural contexts that shape youth choices and lives beyond their conflict experiences, but also the strategies and choices that young men and women in post-conflict northern Uganda utilize to cope with the continuing impact of conflict on their lives.

### **1.3.2 Effects of Armed Conflict: Trauma and Resilience**

Growing up in contexts of armed conflict alters the expectation of what daily life should be as individuals, families and communities confront hardships, violence and instability. The

protracted nature of most of today's armed conflicts makes the experience overwhelming with little hope that life will return to 'normal'.

The unstable and volatile context of armed conflict affects not only physical, social, and economic life, but also the psychological and spiritual wellbeing of those who live through it. Studies show that surviving armed conflict leaves both visible and invisible scars on children and youth, their families and communities (Wessells, 2006). The everyday unpredictability of life in conflict zones can be distressing and exposure to events in the context of conflict can leave damaging impacts.

The fact that conflicts do have damaging physical, emotional and psychological impacts has influenced scholarship in conflict and post-conflict contexts towards a focus on trauma. This focus on trauma continues to influence policy and programme response for the rehabilitation and reintegration of conflict-affected young people in different settings around the world (Schwartz, 2010).

Trauma is understood as "a sense of helplessness in the face of overwhelming danger, or force resulting from life threatening events" and assumes damaging effects on individuals who are exposed to traumatic events (Arroyo and Eth 1996, cited in Wessells 2006, p. 126). The concept of trauma is closely linked to vulnerability, victimhood, powerlessness, helplessness, and a diminished ability to cope with the traumatic event (Betancourt et al., 2013; Sommers, 2015; Bodyen, 2003; Bodyen and De Berry, 2004; Herman, 1997; Wessells, 2006). Derluyn et al. (2004) in their study of child soldiers in northern Uganda found that 97% of those interviewed reported reactions within the range of post-traumatic stress responses. Their findings suggest that nearly all the children were psychologically damaged by their war experience, altering their normal functioning.

Studies show that conflict-affected children and youth who were forced to commit or witness atrocities, such as the murder of family members, may experience traumatic effects in the aftermath, in contrast to those who remained with family members but were displaced to camps. Reaction to traumatic events can manifest in the forms of nightmares, headaches, flashbacks, sleep disorders, somatic complaints, and other reactions. These reactions are considered normal reactions to extremely abnormal events that affect normal functioning and development of an individual. Traumatized children and youth may also experience difficulties in their schooling that affects their performance, concentration, and daily attendance. Some may develop anti-social behavior such as fighting that can lead to school dropout. Some may end up in conditions of bad work, or trapped in cycles of violence, with possible intergenerational effects (Wessells, 2006).

Importantly, studies show that experiences of trauma are also mediated by individual traits and temperament, age, gender, identity, physical condition, duration of exposure, nature of traumatic event, and availability of social support. These factors can exacerbate or mitigate adverse conflict experiences. This variation explains why different people exposed to similar traumatic conditions can react differently depending on the mediating factors that may help them cope with adversity (Betancourt and Khan, 2008; Betancourt et al., 2010; Kohrt et al., 2010).

While some children and youth may show signs of the disabling psychological impact of war, this is usually a minority; the majority show remarkable signs of resilience. To illustrate, a study by Boothby et al. (2006) finds that the longer children were conscripted or abducted, the stronger the effects on their lives as opposed to short-term stays. Similarly, the study by Annan et al. (2008) on war-affected youth in northern Uganda finds that only about 15% of their respondents who reported experiencing traumatic events continued to suffer psychosocially once they were back in their communities. Notably, most of these cases (those who continued



to suffer) were related to extreme exposure to violence and were concentrated among women who returned with children born of war during LRA captivity. Importantly, while children and youth may show resilience, it does not mean they are not impacted by conflict in negative ways. Rather, it illustrates that they have adaptive capabilities despite significant adversity (Wessells, 2006; Boothby et al., 2006; Boyden 2003; Betancourt and Khan, 2008).

Contextual and individual factors play a role in enabling children and youth to cope with the experience of violence and armed conflict. These factors may positively or negatively mediate both their conflict experience and recovery in the aftermath. Armed conflict and resulting experiences of violence disrupt normal development trajectories for children and youth. In particular, conflict often disrupts children's and youth's sense of connectedness to their families and communities, which is often their main source of structure and support. Studies show that women survivors of wartime sexual violence face stigma and ostracization in the post-conflict period, with resulting negative consequences (Betancourt et al., 2010; Annan et al., 2008; Apio, 2016). But their conflict experiences are also mediated by other factors – including daily stressors (Newnham et al., 2015). The absence of supportive mechanisms for children and youth in the aftermath of conflict could result in negative social and psychological consequences, further impeding their resilience (Betancourt Khan, 2008; Zuilkowski et al., 2016).

Resilience is defined as the “attainment of desirable social outcome and emotional adjustment despite exposure to considerable risks.” Resilience is highly dependent on several protective factors and processes embedded within the individual, their family, and larger social surroundings (Betancourt and Khan, 2008 p. 2). Factors that promote resilience are neither fixed nor possessed only by some children and youth (Zuilkowski et al., 2016; Hall et al., 2014). There are multiple sources of resilience for children and youth, including the traits of the individual child, their family, and larger society (Betancourt and Khan, 2008; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Different children and youth possess their own internal capability to overcome adversity. These factors are largely a function of a child's agency, social intelligence, empathy, shared experience, caregiving, connectedness, sense of the future, hope, and growth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Betancourt and Khan, 2008). This explains why children and youth who are exposed to similar situations react and cope differently. Ultimately, it is the combination of interactions between the individual traits and larger social processes that is important for building resilience (Betancourt and Khan, 2008; Hall et al., 2014; Zuilkowski et al., 2016).

The presence of a supportive social systems, particularly attachment with one caring adult, was found to enhance children's and youth's coping and recovery after conflict. Social support (from the family, peers, school, and larger social environment) in the form of care, connectedness, sense of belonging, love, and ties offers structure and functionality to children and youth. These factors help them to process, interpret, and make sense of their experience of conflict and its aftermath (Betancourt and Khan, 2008). In northern Uganda, Annan et al. (2006) found that youth with high family connectedness and social support functioned and coped better, in contrast to those who lacked family support or suffered rejection on return from captivity. Poor social support is likely to predict negative outcomes as exclusion reduces social capital, leading to possible bad behavior and alienation. Lower social capital is also linked with depressive symptoms and functional impairment (Hall et al., 2014). In addition, culture and gender influences how boys, girls, men, and women cope and respond to conflict experiences and stressors in daily lives (Betancourt and Khan, 2008).

Betancourt and Khan (2008) contend that the multiple sources of stressors and/or support could impact positively or negatively on children's and youth's ability to cope in the aftermath of armed conflict. Importantly, as laid out above, they argue that coping does not simply depend on an individual's capability and relationships but is influenced by interaction with larger social

processes that may buffer, support, and enhance families' abilities to care and provide for children and youth.

Critics of an over-focus on trauma note that the social and cultural contexts play a key factor in understanding young people's exposure to and experience of trauma and resilience (Wessells, 2006; Betancourt and Khan, 2008; Kohrt et al., 2010; Boyden and De Berry, 2004). In most of today's conflict or post-conflict zones, people's everyday lives are filled with a mix of anxiety, fear of violence and instability, and the stresses of difficult living conditions (Gregory and Embrey, 2009; Diamond et al., 2013). Diamond et al., (2013) specifically argue that a better appreciation of traumatic reactions in contexts of prolonged exposure and fluidity should be based on actual exposure to traumatic events and an analysis of the factors present in the external environment. Usually, in these states, people's greatest concern is survival: acquiring food and shelter, earning a living, going to school, acquiring skills for self-sustenance, trying to keep their family intact, and preventing social marginalization, isolation, and poverty (Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Wessells, 2006; Boyden et al., 2003; Peters and Richards, 1998; Blattman and Annan, 2010; Annan et al., 2006). Yet these concerns about everyday life seldom inform the thinking and understanding of traumatic measurements – which often work on an assumption that the situation was better or more stable before the traumatic event took place (Gregory and Embrey, 2009).

The conception of traumatic events based on the aftermath of an (often singular) traumatic situation using generalized measurements has been criticized for a failure to account for the extreme and prolonged nature of conflict. In such settings, people often experience multiple, chronic, life-threatening situations repeatedly over an extended period (Sommers, 2015). In many such protracted situations, many children and youth live in conditions of continued instability and threat from an early age (Sommers, 2015; Wessells, 2006).

In northern Uganda, at the height of the LRA/GoU conflict, tens of thousands of children and youth fled daily to sleep in town centers for fear of attacks and abductions from their villages at night. The night flights exposed them to all forms of violence, abuse, and suffering—often beyond that which was posed by the conflict. For example, boys often ended up as street children and some girls engaged in sex in exchange for shelter and food (CADI, 2005). Similarly, thousands of children born of wartime sexual violence experience instability daily, often from the time of their conception, and during their captivity with their mothers. Upon return to their mother's communities, they often continue to experience stigma, ostracization and physical, emotional, and mental abuse from their families and communities (ICTJ, 2015). In these conditions, trauma might not be about specific incidents or events, but rather due to the continued accumulation or prolonged exposure to extremely harmful conditions (Garbrino and Kostelny, 1996). Over time, such prolonged exposure can weaken children and youth's resilience, leading to psychological impairment. Seen this way, a focus on trauma alone undermines attention from these broader needs and realities of children and youth prior to, during, and after conflict (Wessells, 2006).

Finally, the western psychiatric concept of understanding pain and healing is often criticized as individualistic. This approach can be inappropriate in some contexts and cultures where identity is more collective or based on spiritual cosmology (Wessells, 2006). Porter (2013) and Apio (2016) separately worked with women survivors of wartime sexual violence in northern Uganda. Both scholars note that the experience of sexual violence was perceived as a transgression of local values and norms - causing social pollution, tension and disharmony in the community. These experiences can only be made right through localized practices of social healing and repair – for example, through ritual cleansing as appropriate in particular settings. Similarly, studies note that some local cultures in Africa encourage dealing with a painful past by not sharing in public and, instead, by suppressing or forgetting the incidents. This is seen as

a process of healing and gaining community acceptance, in opposition to western counselling approaches which encourage discussion (Wessells, 2006; Annan et al., 2009; Sommers, 2015; Coulter, 2009). However, Sommers (2015) warns against romanticizing some of the traditional practices as being appropriate following conflict. He calls for a critical reflection of their potential implication for human rights standards and principles (also see Baines, 2011).

Understanding conflict's effects on children and youth requires an analysis of broader cultural, social, economic, and political contexts that contribute to vulnerability and resilience. It also includes paying attention to people's own adaptive capabilities, strategies, choices, and decisions in the face of adversities. This can allow for a deeper understanding of what happened to children and youth before, during, and after conflict. This dissertation contributes to an understanding of the long-lasting impact of suffering war crimes on children's and youth's recovery many years after conflict, and how trauma, long-term exposure to violence and depravation, and resilience all factor into attempts at recovery within specific socio-cultural contexts.

#### **1.4. Girls' and Women's Lives During and After War**

Chris Coulter (2009) writes that within the scholarship on "women and war" there is limited attention to the local continuities and social and cultural context that shape girls' and women's lives during and after war (p. 9). In fact, very few studies exist that juxtapose girls' and women's conflict experiences with local cultural dynamics of gender relations, sexuality and social norms (Nordstrom, 1997; Coulter, 2009; Porter, 2013; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Apio, 2016; Luedke et al., 2018). Studying the post-conflict context in northern Uganda, Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin (2014) note that few studies document the impact of the northern Uganda conflict on cultural dynamics. However, they argue that the fundamental challenge of the post-conflict period for many women lies in the disruption of kinship relations and networks

that define respectable womanhood through one's gendered status, relations, and responsibilities to others. Based on ethnographic methods, my dissertation bridges this gap by examining the post-conflict lives of women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children born of war in northern Uganda.

The focus on rape as a weapon of war and sexual violence has gained increased attention internationally. To illustrate, one of the major concerns of the Women, Peace and Security agenda on the role of women and girls in armed conflict focuses on addressing conflict-related sexual violence (Hilhorst et al., 2018, p. 2). Relatedly, rape and other forms of gender-based violence continue to dominate the narratives of scholars and policy makers reflecting on girls' and women's suffering in conflict and post-conflict contexts. For example, Hilhorst and Douma (2018) note that the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has become synonymous with conflict-related sexual violence and has even been referred to by a United Nations (UN) representative as the "rape capital of the world" (p. 1).

Scholars note that much of the international attention to rape and sexual violence in times of conflict fails to reflect an adequate analysis of the contextual factors that shape and influence war-time sexual violence (Luedke et al., 2018; Apio, 2016; Coulter, 2009; Enloe, 2000). Apio (2016), working in northern Uganda, argues that rape and sexual violence in conflict does not happen in a vacuum, but reflect patterns of specific, pervasive pre-war gender discrimination (Apio, 2016, p. 12). Luedke et al. (2018) also contend that sexual violence during times of conflict in South Sudan is rooted in local practices such as brideprice payments that give men control and claim over women's bodies. Apio (2016) argues that the practice of forced marriage inside the LRA, where abducted women and girls were given out as 'forced wives' to LRA commanders, mimicked local marriage practices in northern Uganda that guaranteed men's control over women's sexuality and reproduction. In the LRA case, the practice of forced

marriage inside the group enabled the continuation and maintenance of the patriarchal practice of marriage – where the commanders forcibly impregnated the women who bore children that were raised as the commanders’ own children (p. 14).

Further, Apio (2016) argues that the practice of forced marriage inside the LRA is similar to marriage in northern Uganda where it is expected that after marriage a man takes his wife and any children born of the relation to his home and they become ‘his’. Through the process of marriage, the man removes control and authority of the woman’s sexuality and reproduction from the woman’s male family members and kin elders. Thus, cases of sexual violence in the LRA draw a clear link between pre-war practices and wartime sexual violence. This link highlights the fact that what happens to people during war is connected to their pre-war social and cultural contexts, and, in particular, to kinship norms, marriage, gender relations, identity and sexuality (Apio, 2016; Coulter, 2009; Porter, 2013).

Rape and sexual violence in times of war are not only singular acts or events, but also a continuity or adaption of pre-war practices (Enloe, 2000; Coulter, 2009; Apio, 2016). Attacking women’s bodies and sexuality is an attack on their families and communities with communal consequences and meanings. In many cultures, women embody the continuity and collective identity of their community through their reproduction and relational roles as mothers (Okello and Hovil, 2007; Manjoo, 2008; Apio, 2016). Through rape and other forms of sexual violence, women and girls can be forcibly impregnated and forced to bear children, thus advancing war makers’ agendas. At the same time, targeting women of the enemy community demoralizes men of the community and labels them as weak and incapable of protecting ‘their women’ (Coulter, 2009; Apio, 2016). Viewed this way, acts of rape and sexual violence in times of conflict against women and girls are not only attacks against their personhood, but also against

their embeddedness in relationally constructed gender and social position as care-givers, mothers and symbols of group purity. Their experience of sexual violence affects their entire community with life-long consequences which, at times, causes ruptures and tensions in the aftermath of conflict.

Porter (2013) argues that sexual violence transgresses local ideas of moral order and sexuality and leads to social tension and disharmony because of the perceived pollution resulting from the experience. Her research with women survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda shows that abduction and sexual violence experienced inside the LRA transgressed Acholi norms of marriage and love that underpin social harmony and morality. She notes that many women on return have experienced social difficulties in both their parental homes and with new husbands. She contends that these women's challenge lies in the action of sex in the 'bush' which is considered inappropriate in Acholi, as opposed to sex at 'home' for creation and to cement a relationship. Sex in the bush is believed to carry cosmological consequences unless cleansed. As a consequent, women and their children born of sexual violence are believed to be outside the 'moral community' and thus suffer rejection that affects their membership in the community (p. 246).

Other studies show that perceived contamination caused by acts of rape and sexual violence breeds stigma, ostracization and rejection among women survivors of wartime rape and sexual violence in post-conflict communities (Mazurana, McKay et al., 2002; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008; Coulter, 2009).

Coulter (2009) writes that women and girls who were part of the rebellion in Sierra Leone had challenges reintegrating back into their families and communities. They faced difficulties



getting married or forming stable relationships in the post-conflict period due to their experiences during the conflict. Particularly, their experience of sexual violence and resultant children complicated their lives. Their participation in conflict clashed with their expected gender and socially ascribed and legitimated roles as women in their society. This, in turn, caused shame and disrespect to their families as it challenged the moral principles of expected women's behaviour in their community.

McKay et al. (2010) also find that girls and women who were part of fighting groups, specifically those who return with children, faced more stigma than males on return. These females were regarded as impure and unmarriageable as a result of suffering sexual violence. In Liberia, Utas (2005) also notes similar accounts among some girls and women who were excluded from their families and communities due to their experience of sexual violence; many of them did not return to their pre-conflict communities because of stigma.

The perceived transgressions of moral and social norms affect women's social place in their families and societies because these transgressions challenge traditional gender relations, roles and patriarchal norms that give meaning to everyday lives, thereby altering all forms of conventional relations expected of men and women (Porter, 2013). Despite these realities, post-conflict reintegration programmes have been criticised for ignoring the linkages of cultural dynamics in shaping women's reintegration (Apio, 2016). However, Coulter (2009) argues that it is important to expand inquiries into women's complex roles and positions while still acknowledging the violence they experience (p. 10). Such inquiries must pay attention to local social cultural dynamics, ideologies around gender, sexuality, morality, relations, and identities and how they continue to shape women's lives and experiences in the post-conflict period.

But Sommers (2015) warns that while local practices and systems are fraught with limitations and problems, they are still widely accepted as the best alternatives without a critical analysis of their application (p. 60 - 61). He notes that, while these local established systems enable the reintegration of some women and youth on the one hand, in some circumstances these local practices are also at the heart of girls' and women's exclusion and ostracization in post-conflict settings. At times this tension cuts off some women survivors' possibilities of returning to their home villages, and instead, they opt to stay in urban settings. However, these practices, beliefs and systems may themselves change, as they are dynamic and evolve depending on the circumstances and overtime (Wessells, 2006).

Coulter's (2009) work with women survivors of wartime sexual violence in Sierra Leone illuminates ongoing tensions in women's post-conflict lives. She finds that women's new identities attained through their participation in the conflict at times clashed with expectations requiring women to be subservient to men and older women. Women who failed to revert to the old order had a difficult time being accepted, with potential implications for themselves and for their families' social status. Their new identity was perceived to have challenged local gender and social norms and expectations of 'good' behaviour and 'proper' womanhood.

Coulter (2009) further found that women who reverted to the old gender and moral expectations were easily accepted, but with consequences for their human rights and agency. These women had to turn to the same spaces of their exclusion and vulnerability – the social norms and gender relations of their society in order to (re)negotiate and reclaim their space and identity. She further found that some women had to (re)negotiate their social place through daily actions and performances to compensate for their conflict experiences: making financial and other contributions to their families, acting pious and religious, showing that they were hardworking and well-mannered, and avoiding the use of bad language (also see Baines and Rosenoff-

Gauvin 2014 and Apio 2016). For these women, return and acceptance into their families and communities do not necessarily mean attaining an equal status and position, but rather accepting subservience and the marginalised pre-conflict low status and position of women (p. 68). At times, the choices and strategies of women in the post-conflict setting magnify the complexity of their everyday lives as grounded in larger local gender norms with dire consequences for their human rights. Such choices may also further entrench harmful gender norms and practices that shaped girls' and women's lives in the first place (see Baines, 2011).

As discussed, acts of rape and sexual violence can alter girls' and women's lives significantly. Importantly, the consequences lie in the fact that rape and sexual violence constitute part of larger ongoing processes that are complex, fluid and transformative. Sexual violence cannot be understood solely based on the particular act but is based on the everyday life of people—their relationships, roles, and positions—which at times may be invisible or unrelated to the act of sexual violence (Coulter, 2009, p. 22; Sommers, 2015). Furthermore, studies show that in the post-conflict period, some of the greatest concerns of victims of sexual violence are the ongoing stresses of poor housing, lack of land, chronic poverty, ill health, social marginalization, isolation, changes to their family structure and functioning, earning a living, and lack of education and skills for employments (Wessells, 2006; Miller and Rasmussen, 2010; Sommers, 2015)

By researching women's everyday experiences in the post-conflict period we can make better sense of conflict's effects on their lives. This dissertation explores young people's experiences of war crimes of sexual violence, abduction, loss of parents, sex work, and experiences of women and girls. It also examines young people's intersections with structural conditions of poverty, broken families, social norms of gender, relations, roles, sexuality, identity, belonging

and inheritance in post-conflict northern Uganda. By studying youth lives, we can also learn who is included, excluded and why? We can learn why some women make certain choices or use certain strategies in the post-conflict period. This dissertation specifically explores how different social dimensions shape young people's lives in terms of their choices, decisions, circumstances, and strategies; how they navigate these social landscapes in their everyday lives and the meanings they make of these experiences, and how their everyday lives and choices transform or reinforce these norms. This dissertation contributes to an understanding of the long-term effects of different war crimes on young people's lives in the post-conflict period. It also makes an important contribution by showing how pre-existing notions of morality, gender and sexuality intersect with women's diverse war crimes experiences to shape their post-conflict lives and recovery.

### **1.5 Organization of the dissertation**

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter two provides a detailed discussion of the quantitative and qualitative methods and data. Chapter three is an introduction to northern Uganda that addresses the pre and post-colonial context in with an emphasis on social and cultural structures and how they shape personhood and status to the present day. It also discusses the GoU/LRA conflict and its impact and highlights the specific context of youth affected by the conflict. In order to understand the impact of the conflict on young women and men, particularly the impact of sexual violence, it's important to highlight the social and cultural context within which they are embedded and how this context continues to shape ongoing discrimination and stigma.

Chapter four focuses on the long-term impact of suffering different forms of war crimes on youth's education in the post-conflict period. The chapter reveals important gender differences in the experiences of war crimes on education, and by those who allegedly suffered war crimes and those who did not suffer any war crimes. Chapter five documents and analyzes the factors

that drive sex work among women in northern Uganda. The chapter discusses how broader social, cultural, and economic conditions were exacerbated by the conflict, and also how women's choices to engage in sex work are influenced by the gender norms, ideologies and institutions of their societies.

Chapter six focuses on women survivors of war time sexual violence and their children born of war in northern Uganda. Here, the dissertation explores the underlying reasons for stigma and discrimination faced by women and their children in the post-conflict period beyond the mere fact of suffering sexual violence. This chapter addresses the role of social norms on gender relations, roles, identity, inheritance, and sexuality. It examines how these social norms intersect with conflict experience and how this intersection in turn shapes the treatment of these women and their children in the post-conflict period.

Chapter seven on the disruption and (re)negotiation of gender relations examines the myriad ways that women survivors of wartime sexual violence regain their social place in intimate relations, their families and communities in post-conflict northern Uganda. The chapter builds on the idea that simple re-entry into one's place after conflict is not sufficient to ensure social acceptance and inclusion. Rather, this chapter argues that social belonging is best understood by examining everyday actions, decisions, choices, and strategies people employ in their interaction with others – in their families and larger society—and how those interactions are deeply shaped by the patriarchal gender norms of their society.

The closing chapter discusses the major findings of the study and outlines these in perspective to the current knowledge on children and youth affected by armed conflict and the long-term effects of war crimes on youth. I also offer recommendations for future research and programming on children and youth affected by armed conflict.



## Chapter 2 Methodology

This dissertation draws on primary quantitative and qualitative data that I collected in Acholi and Lango sub-regions in northern Uganda between January 2013 and December 2017 (Map 1).

**Map 1. Location of Acholi and Lango sub-regions**



### 2.1 Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium, Uganda survey

The quantitative data set is generated by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), Uganda survey, which is representative of the entire population of Acholi and Lango sub-regions, the two most conflict-affected regions in northern Uganda. I participated in drafting and pilot testing the survey and in overseeing survey teams for each of the three panel surveys. I also participated in the data analysis of the SLRC, Uganda survey in 2013 and 2015. This

dissertation uses SLRC, Uganda data collected in 2013 from 1,877 households in the two sub-regions and represents a population of 3.63 million people (Mazurana et al., 2014).

Data from the SLRC Uganda survey is derived from a panel survey carried out in January and February 2013, 2015 and 2018. Panel surveys ask the same questions to the exact same people and households over time, which enables the researchers to track and measure change over time (usually several years) and understand why those changes are occurring. Panel surveys among conflict-affected populations are extremely rare due to the difficulty in tracing the exact same individual and their households over several years, given high rates of displacement, movement and elevated rates of mortality.

The dissertation used the SLRC Uganda survey because, to date, it is the only survey of its kind in northern Uganda that:

- i) is representative of the entire post-war populations in Acholi and Lango sub-regions;
- ii) has a focus on alleged war crimes;
- iii) links those alleged war crimes to people and their households' livelihoods, food security, access to education, health and water, receipt of livelihood or social protection services and experiences of crimes in the last three years;

Furthermore, because I helped to lead the team that designed, oversaw and participated in every step in the data collection, data cleaning and data analysis, I am highly confident in the data and the findings of the SLRC, Uganda research. The SLRC, Uganda outputs have undergone international peer-review prior to publication, and all outputs are available on line. To ensure transparency, all data from the SLRC, Uganda survey is available for public viewing and use, and are hosted on the World Bank's website (see



[http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2256/data\\_dictionary](http://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/2256/data_dictionary)). The SLRC, Uganda survey was funded by the Government of the United Kingdom, Irish Aid and the European Union (for more information see <https://securelivelihoods.org/>).

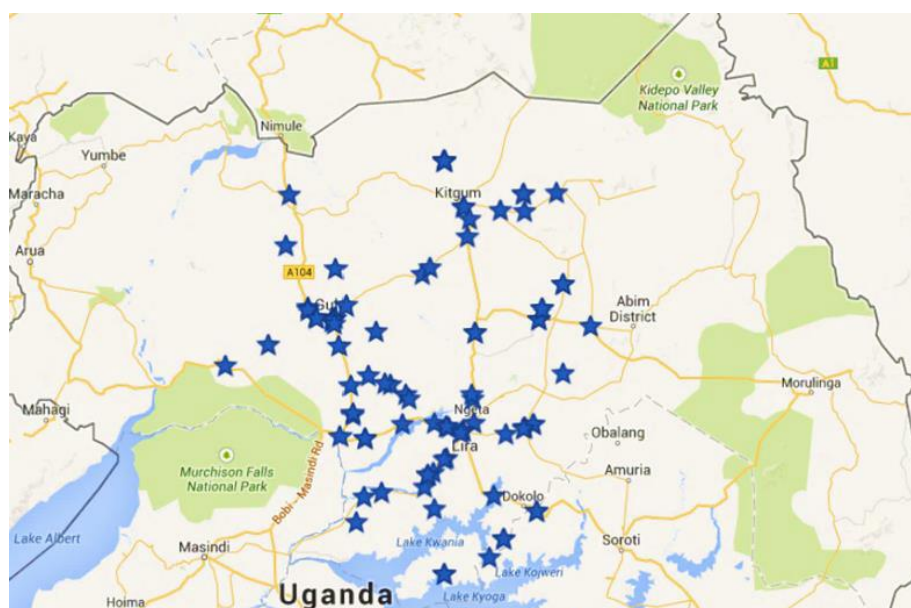
The SLRC, Uganda survey collected data on war crimes suffered throughout the northern Uganda conflict and looks for relationships between war crimes and people's wellbeing; livelihoods; physical and mental health; food security; access to education, health and water; receipt of livelihoods and or social protection services; and experiences of crimes in the last three years. Using the SLRC, Uganda dataset I am able to analyse the experience of war crimes and a variety of indicators around youth recovery in post-conflict northern Uganda.

The SLRC survey used a two-stage randomized cluster sample design. The sample size was calculated using a 95% confidence level and a power of 0.80 for a total sample of 1,844 households. Villages, serving as the cluster, were selected in the first stage and households within those clusters in the second stage. Probability-proportional-to-size sampling was carried out to generate the number of sub-counties to be sampled in each district, for a total of 80 sub-counties or clusters. The sub-counties were randomly selected, and from each sub-county at least one village was randomly selected, for a total of 90 villages. In each village, approximately 20 households were randomly selected by spinning a pencil on the ground to point the enumerator to walk in a random direction for a random number of minutes, at the end of which they visited the nearest household. If no one was home, the pencil was re-spun to randomly select another direction and household. The final sample included 1,857 household observations of which 1,772 captured information on household heads. Attrition occurred at 16% between wave one and two, for a total of 1,552 households surveyed in 2015.

The villages serve as the primary sampling units (Map 2). Probability weights were added to each of the observations based on population numbers extrapolated using the 2002 census population and the Uganda population growth rate. All analysis accounts for the research design effect.

Informed oral consent was obtained from all participants, with opportunities for the interviewee to decline participation prior to and during the interview. Interviews were conducted in private. Data identifying the household necessary for a panel survey were removed and kept separate and secure from the data collected on the household. Every effort was made to ensure confidentiality and to reduce any negative consequences to the participants. Survey participants did not receive any material compensation. All participants were offered a list and contact information of organizations in their sub-region that specialized in services for victims of violence.

**Map 2. Location of Sampled Villages**



The survey contained 186 questions on respondent and current household<sup>x</sup> members including: a household roster that captured age, sex, ethnicity, marital status, and education; data on household livelihood sources and activities, sources of income, food security, assets, shocks and crimes in the last three years; self-reported mental and physical disability, cause of disability, and the effect of the disability on the person's ability to work; war crimes perpetrated by a belligerent party (1986-2013) against all members of the household; access to justice services; access to basic services (health, education and water); and access to social protection and livelihood services. The survey also collected data on perceptions of safety and local and central governance accountability and responsiveness.

In accordance with international law (International Committee of the Red Cross 2012) and based on interviewee self-reporting, the SLRC survey recorded the following as experiences of war crimes when perpetrated against civilians by belligerents during deliberate or indiscriminate attacks: killing; attempted murder; abduction; forced recruitment; forced disappearance; severe beating or torture; deliberate immolation; sexual violence (which included rape, forced marriage, forced pregnancy and childbearing, and sexual enslavement); and being forced to kill or seriously injure another person.

To generate statistical analysis for this dissertation, I wrote up specific questions in line with my research focus on youth and requested the SLRC, Uganda team's statistician to run analysis on these questions. Regression analysis (OLS, logit, and fixed effects) was used to identify links to access to education, food security and health access for war crime and non-war crime populations. Relationships are identified as significant if the p-value is less than 10%. Data were weighted to account for the sampling scheme and population figures for the regions sampled. STATA 13, a statistical analysis tool used for research in the fields of epidemiology,

biomedicine, sociology, economics and political science, was used for all statistical analysis.<sup>xi</sup> I then drew upon my in-depth knowledge of northern Uganda and my qualitative data to help make sense of the findings generated from the statistical analysis. Finally, I used the statistical analysis to further complement data from the qualitative study, as reflected in the chapters of this dissertation that use quantitative data.

## **2.2 Qualitative Methods**

The dissertation also draws upon primary qualitative data drawn from in-depth interviews conducted between January 2013 and December 2017 with 157 war-affected young men and women from Acholi and Lango sub-regions. Participants included those who had alleged experiences of different forms of war crimes. The data also include 18 key informant interviews with local and opinion leaders, police officers, government officials, NGO workers and cultural leaders (for a total of 4 women and 14 men). Detailed qualitative methods for data collection specific to each of the chapters are included in the chapters.

The study used in-depth interviews, at times comprised of multiple conversations and chats, particularly with women survivors, over the course of the study. While this dissertation covers the lives of young men and women affected by conflict in northern Uganda, three of the chapters of this dissertation focus exclusively on the lives of women: two chapters on women survivors of wartime sexual violence and one chapter on women engaged in transactional sex. The choice to focus on the specific experiences of women and girls who experienced sexual violence and sex work was motivated by my understanding and knowledge of the pervasive gender discrimination and structural inequality in northern Uganda and existing studies that show that experiencing sexual violence could further complicate survivors' chances and possibilities in the post-conflict period (Coulter, 2009; Porter, 2013; Apio, 2016).

## **Sample selection and procedures**

The study interviewed 98 research subjects who alleged they experienced war crimes at the hands of parties to the LRA and GoU conflict and 59 who did not report experience of alleged war crimes. I chose not to focus only on one particular war crime, but instead to talk to those with a range of conflict experiences. Thus, I selected participants based on diversity in gender, age, ethnicity, war experience, educational level, family, and rural/urban localities.

I initially selected young men and women who allegedly experienced war crimes whom I knew from my previous role as a practitioner supporting the return and rehabilitation of conflict-affected children and youth in northern Uganda. I did this mainly for female survivors of wartime sexual violence, which is a difficult subject to explore with unknown people. I was then introduced to other women survivors by my initial contacts. I also worked with two female survivors of war crimes as research assistants to reach out to other women I did not know. Some women who allegedly experienced war crimes helped to identify young men who allegedly experienced war crimes whom I did not previously know. I identified most respondents who did not experience alleged war crimes through opportunistic and snowball sampling based on their sex, schooling, different livelihoods, rural/urban locations, and family backgrounds.

In order to examine my main research question, I composed the dissertation around a number of sub-questions that contribute to the main research interest. These sub-questions are noted in the specific chapters.

I conducted all interviews in local languages (Acholi and Lango), in private, and in places selected by the interviewees. I transcribed all the interviews into English.

## **Analysis**

My analysis of the qualitative data primarily takes an emic and inductive approach that pays careful attention to the language, conceptualization, experiences, and perspectives of my interview subjects. An emic approach prioritizes the view taken from inside the social group under study, compared to an etic approach that frames the view from an outsider viewpoint (e.g., external Western experts). I use direct quotes from participants to highlight their voices throughout this dissertation. I complemented an emic and inductive approach with a deep investigation into the interplay of pre-, during, and post-war conditions and broader socio-economic and cultural factors on youth in the post-conflict period.

### **2.3 Ethical and Reflective Considerations**

Before conducting any interviews with study participants, I obtained their informed consent. Aware of the low literacy among the study population, I chose not to have potential respondents sign forms. Instead, I read out the consent script and obtained oral consent before proceeding with interviews. Considering the sensitivity of the subject matter, all data on study participants was anonymous and kept confidential to protect their identity. The research received research approval from Wageningen University and Tufts University Institutional Review Boards.

I also reflected on my position as a native woman doing research (2008 to date) in her native social context, and as a practitioner who worked for years (2001 – 2007) to support the rehabilitation and reintegration of the conflict affected population in northern Uganda. The position of local researchers conducting research in their own locality calls for critical reflection because of its deeply embodied, multiple and complex nature (Jerven, 2016). Throughout my fieldwork, I was aware of my position and how it mattered for the entire research process, from the design of the study to the analysis of information gathered. My position called for both rigor

and a critical and reflective lens to limit any possible bias and tension (Punch, 2012). I kept in the forefront of my mind my delicate position as a native living and working in the context of my study throughout my entire research process.

There were also benefits to being a native. This meant I more deeply understood the culture, language and power dynamics inherent in the local communities. I also did not have to rely on translation to carry out my work (Apio, 2016). Being a native who lived and experienced the context of my study helped me better navigate my place and position as a researcher with respondents – what questions to ask, who to interview, where, when, and how to interview. It also meant I better understood and appreciated participants' narratives about how they got to the place they are in today.

Moreover, even though I had personally experienced the conflict, which gave me a good understanding of the context I studied, I didn't assume that I knew everything. I paid attention to every detail of the participants' narratives of their experiences and in my analysis stayed with the script. Further, I appreciated the fact that people's experiences are diverse and different. I also cross-checked my findings with secondary literature and in conversations with other researchers to ensure I had not overlooked important points or had normalized my experience as a native.

My experience of having lived and worked in the context of armed conflict for years made me aware of the emotional trauma and toll involved in having participants recounting their past experiences of violence. I therefore chose to focus my central research on the impact of the conflict on people's lives *today* – with the understanding that it has enduring impacts. By doing this, the research participants did not have to elaborate and articulate in any detail what happened to them during the conflict, but, rather, how their conflict experience continues to influence their present-day lives and relations in their families and communities. I chose this

path because I understood the effects of retelling violence on people and did not want to cause any additional pain.

Also, by focusing most of my work on participants' present lives, I was able to overcome the fact that past experiences involve a re-presentation and reinterpreting that can present some ethical dilemmas. Thus, I focused on the present and tried to capture current lived experiences, while acknowledging that these lived experiences are "expressed and are also fleeting" depending on the situation and moment in time (Coulter, 2009, p. 20).

To make sense of the data and interpret participants' narratives, I paid attention to specifics as well as general themes in the way they talked about their experiences in order not to emphasize one narrative over others. I also considered participants' narratives in light of information from other sources, including local and cultural leaders, government officials, and against the work of others to refine my analysis (Coulter, 2009; Apio, 2016).

Researchers have acknowledged the challenges involved in working with survivors of sexual violence because of the sensitivity around the topic, as well as the issues of trust, unease and suspicion (Coulter, 2009; Apio, 2016). I designed my research to try to overcome the problem of mistrust in discussing the impact of suffering wartime sexual violence on women and girls. First, I chose to only interview women on this subject and started my interviews with young women I had met from my past work as a practitioner. Second, I only interviewed those young women who knew me and felt comfortable to trust and talk to me about these deeply sensitive and intimate matters. Some of these young women were later willing and able to introduce me to other young women survivors. My local language skills, past work, and knowledge of local context all boosted trust building, understanding, and my credibility in the eyes of the young women. Those who knew me before understood that I had a long history of work on these issues in northern Uganda, and in turn, they were able to trust me to talk to them about these topics.



All my in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted without voice recordings to avoid contributing to participants' anxiety. I hand-wrote my notes with care to protect participants' anonymity and confidentiality. I carried out multiple conversations and follow up with each respondent to capture the diverse realities that were impossible to capture in one interview. I worked with two research assistants (one in Lango and one in Acholi) who were themselves female survivors of wartime sexual violence, enabling me to overcome the trust and difficulty surrounding the subject of sexual violence with young women I did not know. I combined these interviews with observations and occasional chats and hanging out at research participants' work or homes. The multiplicity of approaches enabled me to cross-check contradictions or seek clarification from individual participants that enriched the narratives.

Further, while being a young Luo woman from northern Uganda created a sense of belonging and connection with my study participants (shared cultural knowledge, language skills, gender, etc.), I was still aware of my position as a local researcher in a context with high numbers of international researchers (Ganga and Scott, 2006). I was sometimes seen by the participants as representing those outsiders or carrying other privileges. These perceptions, combined with my previous role as a practitioner, created certain expectations among some respondents, especially in Acholi sub-region which has experienced a heavier international NGO presence. Having worked in northern Uganda over an extended period, I understood respondents' predicament and the problem of research fatigue, especially among women survivors. It also made me further aware of my porous 'outsider-insider continuum:' as a local researcher, I was not automatically welcomed by the fact of being a native. Furthermore, my education, socio-economic status, and researcher position situated me as an outsider and rendered me different from the research participants (Ganga and Scott, 2006). I therefore had to ensure due measures to secure access. For instance, whenever I read aloud the consent script at the beginning of every interview which clearly stated my position, I reiterated to participants that I was a student with no connection to

any non-governmental organization (NGO), and that I was in no position to provide any benefits. However, I included that I would share the findings of my work as my contribution.

In addition, I was aware that my researcher position produced power relations and hierarchies between myself and the participants. I had to constantly try to achieve a balancing act to negotiate my position and overcome this ethical dilemma in order not to be seen as different and more powerful and have this impression in turn affect the quality of data. In order not to reinforce any of the apparent differences, interviews were conducted in participants' place of choice and at a time convenient to them. Throughout interviews, I also remained aware of the fact that participants had other commitments and if they needed to leave there was no problem as I could always come back.

Lastly, while other researchers from the global north have the privilege to retreat to calm environments in their countries of origin to reflect on their work and findings, being a local native researcher means one is constantly present in the context throughout the process. This reality can be challenging. It is hard in this context to give distance and thoughtfulness to the data. Fortunately, I had opportunities to distance myself from the study sites for a month each year between 2014 – 2016, either at Tufts University in the USA or in Kampala, Uganda's capital city, where I wrote most of the dissertation. On the other hand, being a member of one's study site can also be a good opportunity to cross-check inconsistencies during data analysis and write-up. Several times I was able to call respondents or elders to seek clarifications, or revisit study participants to further flesh out specific findings.

### **Chapter 3      Gender and Social Organization in Northern Uganda**

This chapter outlines the historical gender and social organization of northern Uganda, starting with the pre-colonial accounts and moving to the colonial, conflict, and post-conflict narratives, with an emphasis on the GoU/LRA war and its impact on both young people and the wider population.

#### **3.1      A brief history of gender and social organization in northern Uganda**

In this section, I outline the historical accounts of pre-colonial gender and social organization of lives of people in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions. This situates the research for this dissertation in conversations with historical narratives that shaped social lives, gender and generational roles, relations, and kinship ties in Lango and Acholi societies.

The Langi and Acholi are both from the Nilotic ethnic group and are culturally and historically related in their way of life; they are normally classified as one ethnic group, even though they are distinct from each other in many ways. These two groups both speak Luo, a Nilotic language, and occupy northern Uganda, with the Acholi bordering South Sudan to the north and Karamoja and West Nile sub-regions to the east and west respectively. The Lango inhabit the central north, bordering the Acholi sub-region to the north and the Teso and Karamoja sub-regions to the south and east.

As with other Luo/Nilotic groups,<sup>xiii</sup> historically both Lango and Acholi organized their social lives along lineage and clan systems, with villages clustered around single descent groups (Driberg, 1923; Tosh, 1978 Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). Tosh (1978) further specifies, “The Langi were distinguished between two levels of descent group: the lineage (*dogola*) and the clan (*Atekere*), often spread across different localities” (p. 38). Similarly, belonging in Acholi was along lineage, sub-clan, clan and chieftainship (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin,

2014). Often, people of the same lineage and clan lived close to each other in defined (and across) territorial spaces, and shared mutual obligations and responsibilities for land, labour, cattle, and ceremonies around marriage and childbirth (Girling, 1969; Tosh, 1978; Driberg, 1923).

The systems of social organizations were expressions of social relations and determined the most important connections in a person's life, normally along patrilineal lines. Of primary importance was a person's father's lineage and clan, which determined residence at the father's village. Relations also spread across villages through both the mother's and father's lineages and clans. Further, the systems of social organizations and belonging also helped to regulate everyday social life along gender and generational lines over time, including to land, inheritance, and marriages (Tosh, 1978; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014, p. 6).

Even though lineages retained a daily presence in people's lives, patrilineal kinship and loyalty remained firmly rooted within clans. Identity and belonging were embedded in people's relations to each other, and these too were often associated with the clan (Tosh, 1978, p. 39 - 40). Personhood, identity and sense of self was understood through relations and responsibilities to others, including to the deceased and unborn members of the group (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Apoko, 1967; p'Bitek, 1986; Tosh, 1978; Driberg, 1923). A person as a relational being structured everyday life, practices, and meanings, and at times was expressed in rites and ceremonies such as childbirth and marriages. These rites and ceremonies were important for the society's survival and continuation through time.

### **3.1.1 Gender and customary marriage in northern Uganda**

In traditional Lango and Acholi societies, marriage was patrilocal, polygamous, and exogamous, and an important status symbol for both men and women. A man without a wife was not taken seriously, while a woman gained considerable status only after the birth of a child

within the parameters of customary marriage (Driberg, 1923; Finnström, 2008; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Tosh, 1978; Hayley, 1947). Traditional marriages were marked by brideprice payments with cattle, often following long and lengthy processes of courtship (*cuna*) between a man and woman and needed the approval and support of both the families as well as the clans (Tosh, 1978; Hayley, 1940; Girling, 1960; Driberg, 1923).<sup>xiii</sup> Through marriage, a man entered into a lasting relationship not only with his wife, but also with her entire lineage and clan (Tosh, 1978). Families and clans ascertained the suitability of the couple by conducting background checks on either side to ensure they were not related and not enemies or witches.<sup>xiv</sup> The potential bride must also be shown to be a woman of proper conduct who was fertile. Families would then negotiate and fulfil the custom of brideprice payment (Driberg, 1923; Hayley, 1940). Brideprice payments solidified social bonds between the two lineages/clans, transferred rights over the woman's production and reproduction capabilities to her husband's lineage/clan, and legitimated the status of the woman and children born of the union into the patrilineal line (Apio, 2016; Tosh, 1978; Driberg, 1923; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). If the couple had had any children prior to the completion of the brideprice payments, additional payments would be made to legitimate the children into their patrilineal line (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014).

Cattle played a significant role in brideprice and marriage, the purpose of which was to populate the lineage and clan with wealth and assets (Driberg, 1923; Tosh, 1978; Hayley, 1940; Girling, 1960). Through marriage, a woman becomes a member of her husband's descent group, and, by giving birth within the parameters of traditional marriage, she populates her husband's lineage and clan (Tosh, 1978; Apio, 2016). Meanwhile, a father was responsible to provide a wife to his son if he had the means, and the brideprice obtained from the marriage of a daughter of the family was used for that purpose (Driberg 1923 p.155). If the father could not fund a marriage for a son, any other lineage or clan member could contribute cattle towards the

marriage on the assumption that the future wellbeing of the clan was involved (Driberg, 1923; Tosh, 1978, p. 45). Similarly, an orphan boy was provided brideprice by his father's relatives or, if they were too poor, his maternal uncles would normally help him to secure a wife (Driberg, 1923, p. 155; Tosh, 1978, p. 49).

Upon marriage, the woman moved into her husband's home, usually located near his father's homestead. Traditionally, homesteads (*pacu* in Lango or *gang* in Acholi) were headed by men who were responsible for the general wellbeing of the household, including to protect, provide for, and make decisions for the homestead. Women took care of the day-to-day management and survival of the homestead, normally in support of their husbands. Men as household heads made decisions on land, cattle, and farm produce and performed the more physically demanding work of opening land and cutting down trees. Women performed supportive and nurturing roles of cooking, caring for children, and weeding and harvesting crops; all work defined as less physically demanding than the male roles. Driberg (1923) writes that a man built for his many wives their own houses (normally after the birth of a child), cultivated for each woman her separate crops, and erected separate granaries (p. 154). Based on this social organization and construction of roles along gender lines, men held more dominant social roles and had hierarchy over women in their everyday lives.

The family homestead was seen as an ideal social unit in which to raise and nurture a proper child (Apio, 2016). Boys and girls were members of their father's household and lineage until they became of age and started their own families. Girls performed domestic chores such as cooking, collecting firewood, and fetching water until they were married off or bore children at their husbands' homesteads, at which point they took on these responsibilities in their new homes (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). Boys were taught to care for cattle. Upon maturation they would go through initiation rituals (*ewor*, age-set initiation in Lango) that introduced them to full manhood and prepared them for marriage (Tosh, 1978, p. 59; Driberg,

1923). Sons were provided with land to start their own cultivation and to build their homes at the edge of their fathers' compounds (Driberg, 1923).

The lineage and clan maintained responsibilities towards their members even into adulthood (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). This also meant that the clan was responsible for the actions of its members, and these actions in turn affect the entire clan as opposed to just the individual. For instance, if any member of the clan committed a grievous offense, the clan would provide compensation to the aggrieved, with contributions by all members of the clan (Tosh, 1978; Driberg, 1923; p'Bitek, 1986; Apoko, 1960).

In kinship terms, marriage consolidated ties and relations between people, and any abnormality had social consequences for the woman, her lineage and clan. For instance, if a woman was infertile or did not bear children for a man's clan, then this was grounds for divorce. The woman was normally returned to her family and the man's brideprice refunded or another sister given as a wife in her place (Driberg, 1923, p. 164). However, a woman could also initiate divorce for ill treatment (including refusal to cohabit with the wife) or if the husband neglected his duty to provide sufficient food for the woman and her children. In all cases of separation, the man's brideprice would be returned by the woman's family. Traditionally, however, the woman retained custody of the children, which Driberg (1923) notes was a relic of a previous matriarchal constitution of society (p. 163). However, Driberg (1923) added that these practices were changing over time; today men normally retained custody of children in the case of divorce.

Women are constructed as relational beings through marriage and childbirth, which helps to negotiate their social role and status as well as the kinship relations of their lineages and clans (Stephens, 2013; Apio, 2016). To this end, marriage as a form of social control and organization contributed to upholding the social and moral status of not only the woman but also her lineage.

These ideas of social relations through marriage for status, morality, survival, and continuity of a society are important for my understanding of the challenges of recovery for young men and women in post-conflict northern Uganda.

### **3.1.2 Property, labor, inheritance, local governance and dispute resolution**

#### ***Property***

Productive and reproductive property in northern Uganda were traditionally and primarily in the form of land and moveable assets such as livestock. Land for grazing, farming, and water access was held communally by the clan within the territorial boundaries of a village and could be used by clan members as required. Each member of the clan and village had the right to use their own portion of land year after year, normally through a farming group, without infringing on the rights of other members to use their share of land. Allocation of land to members was usually based on agreement and any dispute over land use was resolved by the village headman (Driberg, 1923, p. 170 - 171).

Men inherited land from their father's lineage and clan. Once they married, their father and lineage allocated them land where they could establish their own homestead, often at the edge of their father's homestead. They were also provided with plots of land for cultivation. For women, land ownership was largely negotiated through marriage. Upon marriage, they could utilize the land belonging to their husband's lineage and clan to produce crops for the sustenance of their family. Driberg (1923) writes that in a more limited sense, a man also had property in his wife and unmarried children who helped him in cultivation and daily routines (p. 172).

#### ***Inheritance***

Although moveable property such as livestock were individually owned, the lineage and clan regulated use of these assets among members. For instance, in Lango, all livestock belonging



to clan members were branded with clan totem to demonstrate the significance and importance of these assets to the clan. This was particularly the case for exchange of cattle in marriages that would then populate the clan. Lineage and clan members were expected to make contributions to young men seeking to marry in the form of cattle towards brideprice.

While women could access their husbands' property, women held no property of their own and could claim nothing upon divorce. Upon death, a woman left no inheritance except for her ornaments that would be inherited by a daughter or sold by her husband. In contrast, upon the death of a male head of homestead, his property—including his children, wife or wives, livestock and land—were passed onto the eldest son if he was of age. If no son was of age, a brother of the father or other lineage members would manage the inheritance until the eldest son became eligible. The eldest son would share the property with his other brothers by assisting them to marry. In the absence of any close male to inherit the property, then the property was passed onto a nephew or another male member of the clan.<sup>xv</sup>

Normally, a young widow would be inherited by a brother-in-law or husband's nephew. An older widow could decide to live under the care of her older son. A woman who refused to be inherited could return to her natal family who would then be compelled to return the brideprice. In all cases, the woman could decide on who would inherit her. However, any children born of the new relationship were considered to be part of the late husband's clan because of the initial brideprice payment. Similarly, children born at home or outside marriage were recognized as part of their maternal family, meaning they could inherit land and cattle for marriage from the family.

### ***Labour***

Although social relations were based mainly along patrilineal lines, people (especially men) from different descents belonged to village farming groups (*Wang Tic* in Lango, *Won Kweri*

in Acholi). The farming groups served an economic purpose defined on cooperative labour principles that lineages and clans were unable to fulfill (Tosh 1978).

The farming groups enabled communities to pool their labour, which ensured more work could be done in the peak agricultural season than would have been possible through individual efforts. Every member of the group helped in the fields of other members to maximize their efforts during the labour-intensive periods of sowing, weeding, and harvesting (Hayley, 1947, p. 58 – 59; Tosh, 1978, p. 40).

The farming groups were mainly comprised of married men and fully-grown boys. Women performed routines such as weeding in smaller informal working groups (called *alea*). Tosh (1978) also notes that the farming groups controlled not only labour but also land, since land was of little value without the labour support conferred by membership in the farming group. The elder members of the group approved marking out of new fields and allocated abandoned lands in their villages (p. 41).

### ***Local governance and dispute resolution***

According to Driberg (1923), prior to colonialism in northern Uganda, there were no judicial or administrative bodies to handle cases and govern communal life. Everyday life was governed and managed through informal gatherings of village elders (predominantly male) who arbitrated and settled local disputes and misunderstandings along with the local cultural leader, called '*rwot* or *jago*'. Cases handled included those of civil and criminal nature, such as witchcraft, incest, sexual aberrations, and homicides.

In local understanding, crimes committed by an individual member of the clan such as murder or homicide were perceived to affect the entire clan and, thus, the responsibility for repairing the crime also rested with the entire clan. In such cases, the clan contributed livestock to

compensate (*culo kwor* or blood payment) for the crime in order to restore social harmony with the affected community (Apio, 2016). However, the member responsible for bringing such burden on his or her community faced the wrath of the clan and was temporarily disgraced and reprimanded for the communal consequences. This often included reducing the family's livestock holdings by the amount of total compensation paid out (Driberg, 1923).

Porter (2013) contends that, based on cosmological understandings, there are wrongdoings that are believed to affect the entire social community of the person involved, not just the individual. The wrongdoing sets in motion social and cosmological forces that affect the entire community and are intergenerational. Through cleansing, however, the consequences can be reversed and social harmony restored.

Crimes of a sexual nature included incest, illegitimate intercourse, or under-age sex, among others. Incest was punishable by death of the male offender however remotely related the parties were to each other. The offenders' relatives would make a payment of goats to the female's family as compensation. The act was considered *jok* (evil) and hence cleansing of the girl was performed to remove the spiritual effects of the harms caused by the sexual act, which were believed to cause 'bad spiritual possession on the girl' (*kelo jok ikum nyako*) unless cleansed (Driberg, 1923, p. 209). Underage sex with a girl was also considered evil because the child was not biologically ready.

Illegitimate sexual intercourse with a girl resulted in the payment of *luk* (compensation) with goats or a bull to pacify the girl's family. *Luk* payments covered sexual intercourse with an unmarried girl or woman, premarital pregnancy, and sex with a married woman. A *luk* payment for sex with a married woman was made to her husband in the form of one heifer; any child born of the sexual intercourse becomes her husband's, but without any stigma attached (Driberg, 1923, p. 212). Illegitimate sexual intercourse that ended up in premarital pregnancy

resulted in additional *luk* payments to the female's family, but the child remains the woman's and her family's. Illegitimate sexual intercourse with a young girl or woman was considered to be violence against the female, her family, lineage and clan. In addition, sex outside of marriage was perceived to undermine the gains bestowed by virginity in brideprice, and hence compensation was owed to the woman's family and clan (Stephens, 2003; Apio, 2016).

Apio (2016) contends that removing control over sexuality and fertility from the lineage and clan of the woman causes tension and quarrels between families and underlies the challenges and stigma women survivors of wartime sexual violence face in post-conflict northern Uganda. This dissertation examines the tension caused by wartime sexual violence on women survivors and their children to understand experiences of stigma, ostracization, and/or acceptance in the post-conflict period.

### **3.2 Colonial and Post-colonial Uganda**

In this section, I outline the colonial and post-colonial legacies on social organization and political systems among different ethnicities in Uganda and the influence of these legacies in shaping Uganda's turbulent political trajectories, including into the present day.

Historical accounts construct Uganda along ethnic and regional lines: primarily the Bantu to the south and the Nilotic to the north. The Bantu groups included the Baganda, Banyoro, Batoro, Ankole, Kigezi, Busoga, Bugiso, and Sebei, while the northern Nilo-Hamitic groups were comprised of the Langi and Acholi in the north, Teso and Karamojong in the northeast, and, in parts of West Nile, the Lugbara, Alur, and Madi groups (Maxon, 2009; Apio, 2016).

Prior to the start of British colonialism in 1894, the different ethnic and tribal groups maintained their independent social organization and political systems. While the southern Bantu ethnic groups, especially the Buganda and Bunyoro, had more organized and centralized authority in

the form of kingdoms, the Nilotic northern-based ethnic groups (the Acholi and Langi) didn't have a centralized authority. Finnström (2008) contends that despite the heterogeneity and complexity in the social life of the many different ethnic groups, colonialism promoted a comparison and homogeneity of these completely disparate groups into a unified single colony of Uganda, thereby creating further discontent within and between the ethnic groups (see Apio, 2016).

Through colonialism, the British authorities created more ethnic cleavages and manipulated pre-existing identities, political systems, and structures. Specifically, the Nilotic northern people were defined in terms of their perceived lack of political systems, rather than any real understanding of how they organized their political life (Finnström, 2008, p. 40). Meanwhile, the British preferred the centralized Buganda kingdom system of administration and sought to replicate this model in places where it had not previously existed; this system made it easier for the British to entrench their leadership along hierarchical lines. Thus, the British created new tribes and chiefdoms and ruled through appointed chiefs (Buganda agents), rather than customary clan heads (Kasfir, 2012; Apio, 2016). Further, the British used Buganda to extend their system of indirect rule over the rest of Uganda, which gave dominance and power to the Buganda Kingdom over the rest of Uganda. The other ethnic groups, including the Nilotic northerners, thus had to contend with not only the British colonists, but also the Buganda loyalists who in their *de facto* authority role also subjugated the rest of the country (Maxon, 2009; Uziogwe, 1982; Finnström, 2008; Apio, 2016).

The British rewarded Buganda loyalty with large parts of Bunyoro county (which became known as the 'lost counties') and, in 1900, signed an agreement that gave the Kabaka (leader) of Buganda over 8,000 square miles of land in freehold (Kasfir, 2012). At around the same time, coffee and cotton were introduced and promoted as crops in Buganda before being introduced elsewhere, giving the Buganda areas a leg-up in valuable cash crops and agricultural

development. Similarly, opportunities in colonial civil service were reserved for those from southern Uganda. These factors all contributed to an uneven developmental path in the country, with the northern region lagging. Instead, Lango and Acholi peoples were seen by the British as 'naturally militant' and were specifically reserved for military and police recruitment, as well as a supply of cheap labour to other regions (Kasfir, 2012; Apio, 2016; Dolan, 2011).

The British colonial divide-and-rule approach further polarized north and south and entrenched ethnic divides that lasted into the post-colonial period. Seeds of division, conflict, and cleavages determined along political, ethnic, religious and economic lines were planted as part of the colonial administration. These aspects continued to shape Uganda post-independence and hampered any efforts at national integration and unity (Kasfir, 2012; Dolan, 2011; Apio, 2016).

The foundations laid during colonial administration along ethnic, political, economic, and religious lines set the path for post-independence political struggles and transition. The first two post-independence presidents of Uganda were northerners, Obote and Amin. Although these two leaders were from different tribal groups, both were seen to favour their own regions and ethnicities, further narrowing any prospects for inclusion and national integration (Kasfir, 2012). Apio (2016) contends that ethnic identities created during colonial rule overlapped with socio-economic opportunities to undermine national solidarity. Thus, any political transition was viewed as a threat by the dominant group, especially the Buganda Kingdom, which constantly competed over various interests with the post-independence central government (p. 63, also see Karugire, 2010). Additionally, the large numbers of Langi and Acholi in the military under Obote, a Lango from northern Uganda, was seen as a move to entrench his political power base. Soon the Obote government became synonymous with northern Uganda and was seen as posing a threat to the rest of the country (Atkinson, 1994; Southhall, 1980).

Post-independence Uganda has been fraught with a series of political changes, military coups, and violent uprising, often along ethnic and regional lines. These began with the overthrow of Obote's I government by Idi Amin from West Nile in 1971, who also went on to deploy ethnic and religious favoritism to entrench his rule (Branch, 2011). Idi Amin was overthrown in 1979 by the joint forces of the northern-dominated Uganda National Liberation Army (UNLA) and the Tanzanian Army. In 1985, Obote's II government fell in a military coup led by Brigadier Bazil Opolot and General Tito Okello, both Acholi (Allen, 1991). And, in 1986, the National Resistance Army/Movement (NRA/M) under Yoweri Kaguta Museveni took power after a five-year guerilla war in the Luwero triangle. The NRA war followed political disputes that continued over the flawed 1980 election.

While commentators note that Uganda has maintained some economic and political stability under the Museveni's NRM government, regional and ethnic cleavages continue to make it difficult to govern the country (Kasfir, 2012). Northern Uganda experienced prolonged and protracted conflicts starting when Museveni took power in 1986 (Dolan, 2002). First, the NRM staged a military campaign in northern Uganda to cleanse the region of UNLA remnants that were part of the past regimes (Apio, 2016; Porter, 2013). The campaign sparked the formation of several armed opposition groups in the north, including the Uganda People's Democratic Army (UPDA), the Holy Spirit Movement (HSM) of Alice Lakwena, Severino Lukoya's Lord's Army, and Joseph Kony's Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). During this time, the Karamojong cattle raiders also destabilized parts of northern Uganda, raiding tens of thousands of cattle and attacking, killing, abducting, and displacing people. The HSM of Alice Lakwena was militarily defeated in 1987, and the UPDA conflict ended through political negotiations in 1988 (Dolan, 2002, p. 58). The LRA conflict is the longest in the country's history (spanning 1986-2006) with enduring impacts on the two most heavily conflict-affected sub-regions of Acholi and Lango, the field sites for the research for this dissertation.

### **3.3 The Lord's Resistance Army and Government of Uganda conflict**

Northern Uganda experienced a protracted conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the LRA rebels that lasted over two decades, spanning 1986 – 2006 (though the GoU continues its war against the LRA until 2018 in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), and South Sudan. The LRA waged a brutal war campaign on the population in northern Uganda, affecting the entire Acholi sub-region, large parts of Lango sub-region, and parts of Teso sub-region (Apio, 2016, p. 74). During the GoU/LRA conflict, the population in northern Uganda suffered multiple forms of war crimes and violations including forced displacement, pillaging, looting and destruction of property, abduction, forced recruitment, slavery, forced marriage, sexual violence, psychological harms, mutilation, killings, torture or cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011, p. 38). Additionally, the conflict also led to the disappearance of family members, targeting and destruction of schools, health centers, trading posts and other infrastructures, war-related physical injuries, emotional distress, destruction of families, and the erosion of trust within communities and between citizens and the state. SLRC, Uganda found that approximately 100,000 people were violently killed during the conflict, with another 60,000 to 100,000 abducted by the LRA and never returned (most of whom are presumed dead) (Mazurana et al., 2014). The experiences of these crimes had differential impacts on men, women, boys, and girls (UN OHCHR, 2007; UHRC and OHCHR, 2011).

One of the most enduring and debilitating feature of the LRA/GoU conflict was the displacement of multitudes of people in northern Uganda into internally displaced people's (IDP) camps, often in squalid living conditions. At the height of the conflict in 2005, there were nearly 2 million people living in over 240 IDP camps – approximately 90 % of the population of Acholi and one-third of the population of the Lango sub-region. The camps were



characterized by a widespread lack of basic services, severe deprivations, and rates of morbidity and mortality above United Nations' emergency threshold levels (WHO, 2005).

Northern Uganda is a predominantly agro-pastoral and subsistence agriculture community. Displacement into IDP camps cut people off from their primary source of livelihoods – agricultural lands and traditional homesteads – and had a devastating impact on their economic status, livelihoods, and social and cultural wellbeing. People were no longer able to produce enough food for their families; instead they were forced to rely on humanitarian aid which was rarely adequate, with significant consequences for their physical health and general wellbeing (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011, p 52). Dolan (2009) described the dire living conditions in the IDP camps as social torture by the government of Uganda.

Some scholars argue that the greatest impact of the war was the destruction of the spiritual, cosmological and cultural way of life in northern Uganda (Finnström, 2008; Dolan, 2009; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Okello and Hovil, 2007). Due to displacement, there was a breakdown in social life which brought extreme strains to all forms of familial relations; this was compounded by violence, insecurity, immobility, lack of productivity, and poverty. Displacement and the resulting loss of livestock and access to land – key markers of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity – neutralized elders' control and power over physical and social reproduction. Elders were unable to exercise their authority to discipline and guide community members or to maintain roles as respected household heads (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014, p. 2). Specifically, they were unable to initiate, sanction, provide and resolve claims for brideprice or compensation (*luk*)<sup>xvi</sup> for illegitimate sexual relationships, impregnation and childbirth. Similarly, young people were unable to maintain their traditional responsibilities,

moral obligations, and dependence on familial social structures (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Schlecht et al., 2013; Apio 2016).

The conflict was infamous for the massive abduction and forced recruitment of children and youth into the LRA ranks. The level of abduction was immense: a conservative estimate finds that 1/3 of male youth and 1/5 of female youth reported abduction at some point over the course of the war by the LRA in Acholi sub-region (Annan et al., 2008; also see OHRC and OHCHR 2011, p. 43). The LRA depended on abduction to fill its ranks and primarily targeted boys and girls between 10 and 18 years of age because they were easier to manipulate and indoctrinate (HRW, 2003; OHRC and OHCHR, 2011). Abductees were forced to perform distinct roles and labour inside the LRA including farming, support roles, portering (loot, ammunitions, and supplies), performing domestic duties (such as cooking, fetching water and, at times, farming), and performing military and intelligence work (OHRC and OHCHR, 2011; Annan et al., 2008).

Studies show that both boys and girls were forced to become fighters inside the LRA. While most male youth were retained as fighters, girls in puberty and young women were given out as forced wives to rebel commanders. The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) study in northern Uganda found that a quarter of all girls and women abducted by the LRA were given out as wives and, of these, half gave birth to children (Annan et al., 2008). The LRA engaged in systematic sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced impregnation, and forced childbearing. Girls as young as 12 years old were given out as forced wives to rebel commanders who were old enough to be their grandfathers, who repeatedly raped and sexually violated them. Prepubescent girls commonly called *ting ting* were held captive to provide domestic labour such as babysitting (Apio, 2016).

Further, several studies show that experiences of forced marriage and childbearing inside the LRA complicate the post-war lives of women and their children born of war because of the associated stigma and ostracization. The SWAY study finds that women and girls who suffered sexual violence during the conflict but didn't have children did not experience as much stigma in comparison to their counterparts who returned with children (Annan et al., 2008). Some community members perceived young women returnees as morally compromised and contaminated, and thus unmarriageable due to their earlier life inside the LRA (Finnström 2008). Porter's (2013) work with women survivors of sexual violence in northern Uganda finds that abduction and sexual violence experienced inside the LRA was seen as having transgressed Acholi norms of marriage and love which underpin social harmony and morality – breeding stigma towards the women and their children. Many of the young women returning with children born of war reported continued discrimination against them and their children (Atim et al., 2018; Mazurana et al., 2013; Apio, 2016).

Moreover, studies show that the population in northern Uganda experienced multiple war crimes and injuries. These include: severe burns, injuries from bullets and shrapnel, retained foreign objects in the body, machete wounds, injuries due to extreme beatings, cut and maimed body parts, broken bones, smashed teeth and jaws, sexual mutilation of genitals and breasts, fistula and other gynaecological harms (OHRC and OHCHR, 2011). According to the SLRC, Uganda survey, 88% of households in Lango and Acholi experienced more than one war crime and 29% of all disabilities in northern Uganda are due to war injuries. The impact of war injuries is massive: fewer livelihoods options, less diversification, less wealth and assets, lower food security, and utilization of more coping strategies (see Mazurana et al., 2014 and Marshak et al., 2017). Some of the girls and women returning from the LRA also reported persistent back pain from carrying heavy loads and children on their back over prolonged periods while in captivity. Some of the war injured had their livelihood productivity reduced by nearly half or

were never able to return to the livelihoods they had before being injured (Mazurana et al., 2014). These experiences affect their livelihoods and productivity in the post-conflict period, with continuing physical, psychological, social, and economic impacts (OHRC and OHCHR, 2011; Mazurana et al., 2013, p. 47). A study by ICTJ (Ladisch, 2015) specifically notes that the way conflict impacts and debilitates the broader community render it unable to care for its own conflict-affected members.

Furthermore, the brutal killings or disappearance of parents or caregivers were noted as having impacts on the surviving family in the immediate and long-term. Particularly, studies show that children and youth find it hard to fulfil their educational goals following the death of their family head or breadwinner. Similarly, many families understand that the conflict cost their children their education and, with it, a sense of security for their future (Mazurana et al., 2013, p. 42-43). The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) finds that male youth who were forcibly abducted possess a larger gap in education outcomes, skilled labour, and wages compared to their non-abducted counterparts. They were also less likely to return to school due to time away. Longer abduction had more significant impacts on education, but these impacts decreased over time since release as some male youth did eventually return to school (58 %) (Annan et al., 2011, p.13; Blattman, 2009). Similarly, many male and female youth were unable to attend classes due to closure of schools during displacement in camps, impoverishment, and loss of livelihoods leading to high school dropout. There were reported cases of alcohol and drug use and a failure by some of the youth to engage constructively in their families and communities. Many are challenged by a lack of appropriate levels of education for their age (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011).

Experiencing or witnessing the type of grievous violations detailed above resulted in serious psychological harms across the region. Studies show that population in the region were forced

to bear witness to the maiming, killing, torture, and humiliation, including rape and sexual violence against loved ones. Some abducted persons were forced to kill or injure and harm their own families and communities through acts including: stepping on dead bodies; beating, cutting, and torturing people; looting and destroying property; and to ‘celebrate’ through dances and cheers the torture and murder of other abductees. The population in northern Uganda who experienced or witnessed such incidents of grave violence report elevated levels of mental health distress (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011, p. 49). The SLRC, Uganda survey found that 5% of the populations of Acholi and Lango reported suffering on-going war-related emotional and psychological injury that affected their ability to function on a daily basis (Mazurana et al., 2014). Some people also reported suffering spiritual attacks from their dead loved ones or from those they were forced to kill or witnessed being brutally killed (UHRC and OHCHR, 2011, p. 50). All these experiences of negative physical and psychological violence are associated with poor mental health outcomes and impaired functionality, affecting people’s livelihoods, schooling, concentration, social skills, self-esteem, and interpersonal relations (Annan et al., 2011; Mazurana et al., 2014; Wessells, 2006).

In 2001, the United States of America (USA) listed the LRA as a terrorist organization, and the African Union (AU) followed suit in November 2011 (Apio, 2016). In 2003, Uganda referred the LRA case to the International Criminal Court (ICC). In July 2005, the ICC issued arrest warrants for war crimes and crimes against humanity for five of the top LRA commanders, including the LRA’s leader Joseph Kony.<sup>xvii</sup> Subsequently, in July 2006, peace talks started in Juba, South Sudan, between the government of Uganda and the LRA, culminating in a peace agreement which included an agreement on accountability and reconciliation. However, while the GoU signed the binding final peace agreement, the agreement was never signed by the LRA leader Joseph Kony. By 2007, relative calm returned to northern Uganda as the LRA moved into Central African Republic (CAR), the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and parts of

Sudan and South Sudan. They have continued to commit grave crimes against the populations in these locations. In August 2018 the GoU announced that it was ending its operations against the LRA and that it considered the group largely defunct and no longer a threat to Uganda.

IDP camps in northern Uganda were disbanded in 2007 and 2008 and reconstruction efforts to rebuild the region were implemented by the GoU under the policy framework of the Peace Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). However, the over two decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda continue to have tremendous impacts on the physical and mental health, psychological, social, economic, and everyday life of the civilian population. To illustrate, while Uganda has made significant gains in poverty reduction, the north continues to lag behind the rest of the nation. Poverty rates in the north are double those in the rest of Uganda. Northern Uganda's Multidimensional Poverty Index,<sup>xviii</sup> is at a staggering 87%, which is higher (i.e., greater prevalence of acute poverty) than any other region in the country (Smith, 2012). The region continues to face the highest probability of dying before the age of 40, the highest rate of children under-weight for their age, and has among the highest illiteracy rates in the country (United Nations Development Program, 2007).

In light of the above discussions, this dissertation addresses the continuum of war to peace. First, I investigate the effects of different experiences of war crimes on youth's education in post-conflict northern Uganda. I compare youth who were affected by different forms of war crimes with youth who did not experience war crimes. Second, I am interested in how the breakdown in the moral, social, cultural, and economic fabric of northern Uganda before, during and after the war shapes young women's post-conflict choices, particularly those women engaged in sex work and women survivors of wartime sexual violence. Third, I seek to

understand how and why conflict experiences continue to shape the post-conflict lives of women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children born of war.

### **3.4 State of youth in northern Uganda**

A youth is defined in the Constitution of Uganda as any person between the ages of 18 and 30 years (MoGLSD, 2013). The country posts a high youth demographic, with 78% of the population below 30 years of age (IYF, 2011) and 53% of the population younger than 15 years, which is above sub-Saharan African's average of 43.2%.<sup>xix</sup> A large economically unproductive youth population constitutes a high dependency ratio in the economy, overwhelming the few available resources and services (UNFPA, 2014, p. 4; Daumerie and Madsen, 2011). In northern Uganda, over two decades of armed conflict exacerbate these already stark figures and present an enormous challenge for the youth of the region. Unemployment and low education opportunities are pervasive and youth services remain wanting.

#### **3.4.1 Youth (un)deremployment**

In Uganda, youth unemployment stands at a staggering 65% and is the highest across sub-Saharan Africa (IYF, 2011; UNFPA, 2014). According to the World Bank, 64% of the unemployed population in Uganda are aged 24 years or under. Large numbers of people (approximately 500,000) enter the job labour market annually, with the majority increasingly younger in age, but only a few are absorbed in the economy.<sup>xx</sup>

In northern Uganda, low levels of education among youth imply they possess low skills, which affects their labour market participation and upward mobility (IYF, 2011; UNDP, 2015). The majority of youth in northern Uganda are engaged in the informal labour markets, a trend that is comparable to youth in the rest of the country. However, there remains a higher number of 'working poor' youth in northern Uganda compared to the rest of the country due to problems of underemployment – in terms of skills, time and wages—all factors influenced by their

conflict experience. On average, youth in northern Uganda earn about UGX 66,000 (approx. USD 19) per month compared to UGX110,000 (approx. USD 31) per month by youth in the rest of the country (UNDP, 2015). A study of youth labour markets in northern Uganda that I co-authored found that most youth are engaged in work that traps them at the bottom of the labour market, often in bad working conditions, with poor or no pay and without any hope of progression (see Mallet and Atim, 2014).

Overall, agriculture remains the main source of income in the north, even though it has registered a decline over the years. Sixty-nine percent of the youth in northern Uganda still rely on agriculture compared to 31.3 % in the rest of the country. Moreover, fewer female youth are engaged in subsistence agriculture compared to their male counterparts of the same age (UNDP, 2015). The scenario of low female rates of engagement in agriculture is likely a result of limited land access and inheritance along patriarchal lines.

Youth unemployment is associated with limited work opportunities, a skills mismatch, and limited or no work experience (GoU, 2001; AfDB, 2012). There also exists a cultural attitude that promotes dependence of youth on their family, especially among female youth. Other factors that contribute to youth unemployment are lack of decent work, limited access to social and financial capital, and the lack of a comprehensive multifaceted employment policy to safeguard entry into conditions of decent work (Mallet and Atim, 2014).

Whereas Uganda continues to post positive economic growth rates over the last decade, the absolute number of people living below the poverty line has increased due to the increase in population size (UNFPA, 2014). It is likely that economic growth does not correspond with an increase in employment, economic opportunities, and poverty reduction. This means that vast numbers of the working-age population are without employment. Unemployment is highly linked to poverty in Africa (Martins, 2013). Youth's inability to earn an income may drive them



to engage in potentially harmful activities such as prostitution, drug use, and criminality. Idleness is also a problem, with large numbers of youth in Uganda engaged in sports betting as an easy way to make money. Similarly, studies show that 73% of prison population are youth under 30 years (the majority being male youth), which is an increase from 63% ten years ago (IYF, 2011; GoU, 2001). There is a huge burden on the country to secure productive employment for its youth population. In response, youth employment is at the top of the country's development agenda.

### ***3.4.2 Education and skills development***

Starting in 1997 and 2007, the GoU introduced free education for all under the Universal Primary Education (UPE) and Universal Secondary Education (USE) programs respectively, thereby increasing access and enrollment country-wide. In northern Uganda, gross enrolment in primary school increased from 2.7 million in 2005/2006 to 4.8 million in 2012/2013. Similarly, secondary school enrolment has also increased in northern Uganda and is higher than in the rest of the country (4.3 % elsewhere compared to 11 % in northern Uganda) albeit with a pronounced gender disparity (more males than females enrolled). This rise in enrolment is attributed to the increased number of government primary and secondary schools in northern Uganda and the introduction of USE (UNDP, 2015).

According to the UNDP (2015) report, compared to the rest of the country, northern Uganda has the highest population with no formal education, with 2/5 of working age adults with no formal education. In Uganda, the likelihood of not going to school at all remain highest in northern Uganda, especially among females. In 2012/2013, the literacy level in northern Uganda was at 48.2% compared to the rest of the country at 65.5%. While national levels put female youth's literacy at 71.9 % to 82.4 % literacy of male youth (2012/2013), in northern Uganda the gender gap is much wider at 44.1 % female youth compared to 73.4 % of male youth (2012/2013). The lack and low levels of education has significant impacts on personal,

societal, and regional socio-economic development. Studies show that completion of secondary school education or higher (especially for female headed households) corresponds with having more wealth and better food security (UBoS, 2016; also see Mazurana et al., 2014). Thus, education remains significant in attaining household wealth, well-being, human development, and human capital.

Education in Uganda faces challenges. While overall primary school enrolment has increased over the last eight years due to universalization, costs associated with attending school still result in dropouts. Other key factors for dropout for girls include early pregnancies and marriages (Schlecht et al., 2013). Primary to secondary school transition rates remain low countrywide, and in northern Uganda this is exacerbated by the low coverage of public secondary schools in rural areas. At the same time, inferior quality education –reflected by poor outcomes in numeracy and literacy and high (un)deremployment – lowers the level of family investment in education in northern Uganda. The relevance of the school curriculum has also been criticised for heavily emphasising theory over practical skills needed to prepare students for the future and job markets (IYF, 2011).

While existing negative attitudes towards vocational skills training are changing with many youths enrolled in skills training, these trainings often also face the same challenge of relevance to the job market (Bidwell et al., 2008; International Alert, 2013). Many vocational training graduates are unable to utilize their skills because they are not employable and not well-matched with the job market. In addition, a concentration of trainings in specific skills can result in a saturation of the labour market (IYF, 2011; Bidwell et al., 2008).

### ***3.4.3 Sexual and reproductive health***

The challenges of everyday life in post-conflict societies can breed risky and unhealthy behaviours among youth such as early and high-risk sexual engagement. According to the IYF

(2011) study, in Uganda, by 18 years of age, 62% of young female and 48% of male youth have had their first sexual encounter. Of these, 26 % of female youth and 74 % male youth reported that they engaged in high-risk sexual behaviours including non-marital sex, transactional sex, cross-generational sex, sex for survival, extra-marital sex, non-consensual sex, and commercial sex for survival (IYF, 2011). Being young and involved in risky sexual engagements endangers youth's lives. IYF reports that 25% of young women first sexual encounter was forced, while another 56% had experienced some form of physical violence during sex (IYF, 2011). Similarly, a report by UNDP (2015) found that HIV/AIDs prevalence among women in northern Uganda (10.1%) is higher than among their male counterparts at (6.3 %) and higher than the national average of 8.3 %. The high HIV/AIDS prevalence among women is attributed to the context of displacement during the conflict where girls and young women were exposed to Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) including rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual violence in the camps. Moreover, some girls and young women were forced into early marriage. To illustrate, countrywide, girls marry at a much younger age compared to boys: 46 % of female youth were married by 18 years compared to only 7 % of male youth of the same age (IYF, 2011). Girls and young women continue to face enormous challenges, in part, because of the social construction of gender relations and roles along patriarchy in traditional societies, requiring women to associate with a male counterpart to gain access and opportunities to basic means of daily life. Further, studies show that due to the desperation caused by the conflict and social breakdown in northern Uganda, some girls and women have taken to prostitution and sex work. Such work exposes females to extreme risks including physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Agiresaasi, 2012). Despite these risks, sex education and access to contraception among young people remains low. Only 11% of female youth are reported to use modern contraception, exposing them to the risks of early and unwanted pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs), including HIV/AIDs. The lack of youth-

friendly and available reproductive health services further compounds the challenge of addressing sexual and reproductive health needs of young people in the country (IYF, 2011).

#### ***3.4.4 Programmes and policies targeting youth***

The GoU has come up with a range of programmes and policies to address the prevailing challenges of its growing youth population. I offer a concise review of youth policies and programmes in Uganda. First, the national youth policy provides an overarching framework to address the plight of youth, with a focus on addressing youth unemployment. Specific emphases include promoting youth inclusion in the labour market through education, training and capacity building; vocational skills training; employment policy; improved literacy; access to credit facilities; and career development (International Alert, 2013).

Second, the national employment policy has an overall goal of generating productive and decent jobs for the population of working age. However, the policy falls short on stipulating the minimum wage, which is important for worker's rights and their ability to earn a living wage, as well as an important safeguard for those seeking or already in employment (International Alert, 2013, also see Mallet and Atim, 2014).

Third, the GoU introduced the Youth Venture Capital Fund to provide access to credit and capital to support viable and sustainable small- and medium-scale youth-run enterprises to create jobs and provide opportunities for mentoring. The programme was implemented in partnership with three banks with funding of UGX 25 Billion (USD7 million). However, few youths benefited from the fund due to the strict funding conditions and requirements that were impossible for the vast majority of youth to meet (International Alert, 2013).<sup>xxi</sup>

Fourth, to promote education and skills development, the GoU established the Business, Technical, Vocational Education and Training (BTVET) under the Skilling Uganda program to address the school-to-work transition for youth. The programme's emphasis, however, is

largely theoretical, too long in duration, and misaligned to the job market. Participating institutions also face challenges of funding, while BTVET graduates struggle to find jobs because the qualification is not recognised in the country (International Alert, 2013).

Fifth, to address the plight of conflict-affected youth in the reconstruction of northern Uganda, the GoU and partners introduced the Youth Opportunities Program (YOP) under the Northern Uganda Social Action Fund (NUSAF). The YOP aimed to raise youth incomes and employment, improve community reconciliation, and reduce conflict through provision of cash transfers to youth groups. The program provided support towards training fees and support to acquire training tools and materials. The design and targeting of the programme has had some positive benefits on youth beneficiaries. However, like most vocational training programmes supported in post-conflict northern Uganda, it also faced the challenge to labour market saturation due to concentration of training in specific skills. In addition, there were not specific strategies to include the lingering effects of war in the design and delivery of the programme (International Alert, 2013, also see Mazurana et al., 2014).

In September 2013, according to the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development (MoGLSD) Youth Livelihoods Programme (YLP) document, a UGX 265 Billion (USD 100 million) fund was rolled out by the government to run over a five-year period to target poor and unemployed youth throughout the country. The programme is run through Youth Interest Groups as a revolving fund to increase outreach and ensure sustainability, meaning beneficiaries are supposed to repay the funds after a set period. The YLP targets three key areas: livelihoods support, skills development, and institutional support among beneficiary youth. However, as part of the access criteria, youth are supposed to provide identification documents or be vetted by their local leaders or elders. However, lack of documentation is common among

conflict-affected youth. In addition, due to stigma associated with their conflict experiences, some youth (and especially women survivors of war time rape and those engaged in sex work) may find it difficult to access these programmes through their local leaders. To add, the elaborate processing and paperwork might prove tedious or impossible for youth without an education. Additionally, many young women who are already mothers within the target group of 18 – 30 years may be left out as traditionally they are considered adults and not youth. Without a specific focus to address the impacts of conflict on northern Uganda youth, such programmes will fall short of closing the gap between youth in northern Uganda and their counterparts in the rest of the country.

## **Chapter 4    War crimes impact on youth's education**

### **Summary**

Armed conflict and, in particular, experiencing war crimes negatively impacts educational attainment and subsequent economic and labour productivity of individuals. This chapter draws on a large-scale survey of 1,844 households in Lango and Acholi sub-regions, northern Uganda. We also use data from in-depth qualitative interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015 with 147 respondents. We find that male and female youth who allegedly experienced war crimes had lower possibilities to enroll in and complete school compared to other war-affected youth. The length of time held in captivity by rebel forces and time since being back does not correspond to youth regaining lost education. Female youth's education and post-primary school transition remain low overall, regardless of the experience of war crimes. These constraints reflect broader nationwide challenges, which were further exacerbated in northern Uganda by the socio-economic conditions in place before, during and after the conflict. Nonetheless, the combination of gender and war crimes experiences presents unique challenges to educational attainment for women in post-conflict periods.

This chapter was co-authored by Teddy Atim, Prof. Dyan Mazurana and Anastasia Marshak. It is yet to be submitted for publication.

## **4.1 Introduction**

Armed conflict impacts economic growth and disrupts development through displacement, undermining property rights, disrupting schooling, and destroying capital and infrastructure (Justino, 2011; Collier, 1999). While some of the impact are obvious, others are less apparent, particularly the long-term cost of conflict on educational attainment (Ichino and Winter-Ebmer, 2004).

An emerging body of literature finds that armed conflict negatively impacts educational attainment, with subsequent negative effects on the economic and labour productivity of individuals and households. Conflict impacts schooling for young people for many reasons, including closure or destruction of schools, absence of teachers, recruitment into fighting forces, physical injuries, fear of insecurity, or being withdrawn from school to contribute to family livelihoods and income (Swiss et al., 1998, Ichino & Winter-Ebmer 2004; Humphreys and Weinstein 2004, 2007; Farhood et al., 2006; Hoge et al., 2006; Annan et al., 2008; Akbulut-Yuksel, 2009; Betancourt et al., 2010; Justino, 2011). The cumulative impact of less and/or inferior quality education affects young people's human capital accumulation and labour market participation as youth and adults.

Studies of conflict's impact on educational attainment, especially in developed economies (see Ichino and Winter-Ebmer, 2004; Akbulut-Yuksel, 2009), emphasize macro-level structural factors, including the destruction of school infrastructures, absence of teachers, limited access to school, fighting, and recruitment into armed forces. While these factors are important, they do not tell us much about the individual or family or the broader social and economic context prior, during and after conflict. In addition, we don't know what the impact of conflict is on overall educational attainment. Specific studies may provide a growing understanding of



conflict's impact at the micro level, but an analysis of the medium to long-term impacts at micro level are still lacking (Akresh and De Walque, 2008; Blattman and Annan, 2010; Justino, 2011; Swiss et al., 1998).

Furthermore, without a comparison between conflict-affected and non-conflict-affected youth and in the absence of a baseline of pre-conflict educational outcomes, there can be only limited analysis of the impacts of conflict on education. While conflict clearly does impact education, a lack of understanding of pre-war conditions means our ability to accurately identify the consequences is limited.

This chapter examines the experience of war crimes on educational outcomes in northern Uganda. We seek to answer the question, "How has suffering alleged war crimes resulting from the conflict affected educational outcomes among young people in northern Uganda?" We compare the education of youth that suffered alleged war-crimes to their counterparts who did not report experiencing these crimes. This allows us to better understand the relationship between suffering a range of war crimes and educational attainment. Further, to provide a more thorough examination of the impacts of conflict in this regard, we interviewed respondents about their educational situation before and after the conflict in our qualitative research.

## **4.2 The impact of armed conflict on youth's education**

Research suggests that armed conflict results in a decline in educational outcomes among young people, with a long-term impact on their labour market participation and productivity. The closure or destruction of schools, fear of insecurity, recruitment into armed groups or the military, or withdrawal from school to contribute to family livelihoods or to cut costs all have negative effects on educational attainment. Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011) observe that the Guatemala conflict (1960-1996) resulted in increased impoverishment and led affected

households to withdraw resources from education to meet other immediate needs. At the same time, conflict can reduce the rate of return on education, lowering the investment in education by families (Justino, 2011; Valente, 2013). For most households, no one dies from not going to school, but people do die from lack of nutritious food, healthcare, clean water, and security (Slim, 2008).

Available evidence shows that violent armed conflicts (even of lesser magnitude) can result in long-lasting negative impacts on individual human capital accumulation, including educational attainment, health outcomes, and labour market opportunities (Akresh and De Walque, 2008; J. Angrist & Krueger, 1994; J. Angrist, 1990, 1995; Blattman & Annan, 2010; Chamarbagwala & Morán, 2011; Justino, 2011). Angrist and Krueger (1994) provide evidence of the long-term negative impact of participation in conflict, resulting in reduced earnings (up to 15% lower) among Vietnam war veterans in the United States. In Germany, children who were of school age at the time of World War II received 0.4 fewer years of schooling on average by adulthood, with those in hard-hit cities completed 1.2 fewer years. These individuals also experienced a six percent reduction in labour market earning compared to those not affected (Akbulut-Yuksel, 2009). Similarly, children who were 10 years of age at the time of the war in Germany and Austria were significantly less likely to proceed into higher education than their peers in countries not affected by war. They also lost 0.2 of a year of schooling on average, and they suffered reduced earnings in adulthood, even up to 40 years after the war (Ichino and Winter-Ebmer, 2004).

Akresh and de Walque's (2008) study of Rwanda found a 18.3% age decline in the average years of education among children exposed to the genocide, with the worst effect on non-poor male individuals (i.e., those who otherwise would have been most likely to access schooling). In Guatemala, Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011) find a strong negative effect of the war on

the education of rural Mayan males and females. They find that the war in Guatemala reinforced poverty and social exclusion of the most vulnerable groups. Males and females who were of school-going age in the period of greatest human rights violations reported completing the least years of schooling. Comparable results of the impact of conflict on education were found by Leon (2012) in Peru, who reported that individuals exposed to violence accumulated 0.31 less years of education by adulthood than their peers who were not exposed to violence.

In Sierra Leone, Humphreys and Weinstein (2004, 2007) found that most combatants were uneducated and poor, left school before the conflict started either due to lack of fees or because schools closed, and lost parents before the war, and were most likely to join the rebellion. This combination of factors resulted in an overall low level of education among fighters (see Rodriguez and Sanchez, 2009; Shemyakina, 2006).

Swee's (2009) study of the impact of the war in Bosnia finds that cohorts of children exposed to the most intense periods of the war were less likely to complete secondary schooling as compared to primary level schooling. He finds participation in the military as the primary driver, with the most adverse effects on secondary school attainment (see Chen Loayza and Reynal-Querol, 2007). In northern Uganda, The Survey of War Affected Youth (SWAY) finds that youth who were forcibly abducted into the LRA possess a larger gap in education outcomes, skilled labour, and wages compared to their non-abducted counterparts. They were also less likely to return to school after captivity. Longer abduction had a more significant on education but decreased with more time back as some male youth eventually returned to school (Annan et al., 2011p.13; Blattman, 2009).

Violent conflict also results in significant gender differentials in individual education outcomes and productivity (Justino, 2010). In northern Uganda, the SWAY study finds that both non-abducted and formerly abducted female youth had worse educational outcomes compared to

their male counterparts. Formerly abducted female youth were less likely to resume school after abduction due to the lack of opportunities for girls' and women's education and skills development. Both formerly abducted and non-abducted female youth were likely to be married at an early age, bear children, and be out of school (Annan et al., 2011, p.15 and 16). However, the research found that the combination of bearing children due to rape during abduction, staying longer in captivity, and returning at 18 years of age or older made it significantly (at the 1% level) less likely for formerly abducted female youth to return to school as compared to those who returned from captivity without children. The research found that only about 10% of girls who became mothers as a result of rape during captivity returned to school upon their release (Ibid, p.17).

Similar findings were also observed by Chamarbagwala and Morán (2011) in Guatemala where females' education was more negatively affected by the conflict than that of males. The gender division of labour in the Mayan society and the fear of violence kept females from attending school. Similarly, Shemyakina's (2006) study of armed conflict in Tajikistan between 1992 – 1998 finds a significant negative effect on the enrolment of girls in secondary schools, which in turn affected their wage earning. In many contexts (especially in the global south), female youth's education, particularly at secondary and tertiary levels, remains low even in the absence of conflict. They are more likely to perform domestic care roles, marry early, have children, and not be in school (UNDP 2015).

Notably, in Rwanda, Akresh and de Walque (2008) found a stronger negative impact of the genocide on males' education when compared to females. However, this result was because female schooling outcomes were lower initially and thus showed less of a decrease after the genocide (p. 11 - 12). Interestingly, Valente's (2013) work on Nepal showed that conflict intensity was associated with an increase in both female and male youth educational enrolment.

The exceptions were those youths recruited by the Maoist forces, which had the reverse effect on schooling.

Studies also make the link between education outcomes and the physical and psychosocial health impacts of armed conflict. Numerous studies, including in northern Uganda, show the negative psychosocial impacts of conflict on young people. Studies show that suffering physical and psychological violence in conflict results in poor mental health outcomes and impaired functionality (Mazurana et al., 2016; Betancourt et al., 2013; Betancourt & Khan, 2008; IASC, 2010, Kohrt et al., 2010). Evidence shows that youth exposed to violence during conflict may experience depression and social withdrawal. This can lead to lowered school performance or premature departure from their studies (Yule et al. 2003 cited in Justino 2010; Wessels, 2006). Similarly, studies of the psychosocial impact of armed conflict find that young people who play direct combat roles or witness violent acts tend to be less social and less confident. They are also more likely to be aggressive and violent and report higher levels of post-traumatic stress that may affect integration and school attendance (Boothby et al., 2006; Wessels, 2006, Derluyn et al., 2004; MacMullin & Loughry, 2002).

This chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of the ways in which pre-war gendered and socio-economic conditions could have been exacerbated by conflict and magnified the war's impact on educational attainment. This chapter draws from the SLRC, Uganda survey data complemented by in-depth interviews exploring the impact of conflict and war crimes on the education of youth. It also explores pre-war educational levels and compares youth who experienced alleged war crimes to their counterparts who did not report such experiences.

### **4.3 Methods**

This chapter draws on quantitative and qualitative data collected by the authors in northern Uganda between February 2013 and December 2015. The Secure Livelihoods Research

Consortium (SLRC), Uganda, of which Atim and Mazurana are the country leads, carried out a population-based survey that collected data in January and February 2013 from 1,877 households in Acholi and Lango. These are the two most conflict-affected sub-regions in northern Uganda and represent a population of approximately 3.63 million people (Mazurana et al., 2014). This chapter draws from data analysed on 4,609 individual youth between 12 and 30 years of age (from the SLRC survey) living in Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

The qualitative data is drawn from interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015 with 147 purposefully selected youth (38 males and 109 females), both those who alleged experiences of war crimes and those that did not, from Lira and Gulu districts (Lango and Acholi sub-regions respectively). We also conducted 14 key informant interviews with local and opinion leaders, police officers, government officials, and cultural leaders (for a total of 3 women and 11 men).

Of youth interviewed, those who alleged war crimes had suffered from abduction, forced recruitment into rebel forces, sexual violence, rape, rape and returning with a child/ren born of war, and various mental and physical injuries resulting from the conflict. Those who reported experiencing war crimes comprised 77 interviewees. We chose not to focus on any one particular war crime, but instead talked to youth with a range of conflict experiences. Youth came from a variety of backgrounds. We interviewed those that did not start or continue with school, those who continued or completed school, those from rural and urban backgrounds, varied family backgrounds, and those working in different forms of labour. The idea was to generate a rich sample to enable us to examine conflict's impact on educational attainment.

To draw our sample, we first selected youth who had allegedly experienced war crimes and were known to the first author; we also worked with two female survivors of alleged war crimes as research assistants to reach out to other youth we did not know. Some female youth who allegedly experienced war crimes helped to identify other male youth who allegedly

experienced war crimes. We identified most youth who did not experience alleged war crimes through opportunistic and snowball sampling based on their sex, schooling, form of labour, rural/urban, and family backgrounds. While the methodology enabled us to reach a broad section of youth, it also poses a limitation on the extent of the representativeness of our findings.

All interviews were conducted in local languages (Acholi and Lango), in private, and in places selected by the interviewees. All interviews were transcribed into English. The lead author Teddy Atim is a native of northern Uganda and has worked many years with conflict-affected youth, including conducting qualitative research with war crimes survivors. The analysis for this paper is based on an understanding of conflict's impact on education and the interplay of pre-war conditions and broader socio-economic factors on education in the post-conflict environment. Comparing the education situations for youth who experienced war-crimes with those who did not allows us to draw conclusions on the extent of the impact of war crimes on education.

#### **4.3.1 Demographic information on youth study participants**

The 147 youth interviewed (38 males and 109 females) for the qualitative study ranged in age from 16 to 38 years. (25 were 15-20 years of age, 27 were 21-29 years of age, and 50 were over 30 years of age.) Ten youth had no education. 101 had dropped out of primary school or did not go past primary seven. 19 had secondary level education. 17 had tertiary education, which included four university degrees and the remainder were diplomas and certificates. Some youth had received vocational skills training from NGOs in different sectors, particularly female youth who alleged war crimes.

Seventy-seven youth interviewed alleged that they suffered war-crimes, at times multiple war crimes. These crimes included abduction, forced recruitment into rebel forces, wartime sexual violence, rape, forced marriage, forced impregnation and childbirth, having their parents killed

in the conflict, and sustaining war injuries due to direct attacks against civilians. Of these, 42 youth had spent over five years in captivity with the LRA and 39 of the females returned with children born from sexual violence carried out by the LRA.

Ninety-six interviewees also experienced family breakdown due to parental deaths, parental separation, violence, and alcoholism of a parent or caregiver. Ten interviewees reported that one or more parents were violently killed by parties to the conflict.

Based on our analysis of the quantitative SLRC, Uganda survey data, youth under 18 years of age account for 45 % of the youth population in Acholi and Lango sub-regions, while those between 18 to 30 years of age account for 55% of the total youth population. Twenty-four percent of households in the two sub-regions were headed by persons 30 years of age or younger. The majority of youth (70.5 %) were unmarried. Forty-three percent of youth were enrolled in primary schools, with fewer than a third moving past primary school in their education.

#### **4.4 War crimes impact on youth's education**

##### **4.4.1 War Crimes**

In accordance with international law,<sup>46</sup> and based on interviewee self-reporting, the authors designed the SLRC, Uganda survey to record the following as experiences of war crimes when perpetrated against civilians by belligerents: killing, attempted murder, abduction, forced recruitment, forced disappearance, severe beating or torture, deliberate immolation, sexual violence (which included rape, forced marriage, forced pregnancy and childbearing, sexual enslavement), being forced to kill or seriously injure another person, and destruction or looting of property. Experiences of alleged war crimes were disproportionately reported by youth in the age category of 18 – 30 years of age at the time of the survey. Overall, youth account for 7



%<sup>xxii</sup> (Acholi 9.6%, and Lango 5.3%) of total persons that allegedly suffered war crimes in the two sub-regions (Table 1). About 20 % of youth headed households allegedly experienced war crimes, compared to 27 % of adult headed households.

**Table 1: Youth demographics by experience of war crimes**

	Experienced war crimes	No war crimes	Total (%)
<i>Sub-region</i>			
<i>Proportions</i>			
Acholi (53%)	13%	87%	100
Lango (47%)	11%	89%	100
<i>Gender/Sex</i>			
Male (49.6%)	12%	88%	100
Female (50.4%)	11%	89%	100
<i>Location/Residence</i>			
Rural (97%)	12%	88%	100
Urban (3%)	19%	81%	100
<i>Age breakdown</i>			
12-17 years (45%)	9%	91%	100
18-24 years (35%)	12%	88%	100
25-30 years (20%)	19%	81%	100
<i>Education level</i>			
No schooling (6%)	17%	83%	100
Primary (65%)	11%	89%	100
Secondary (22%)	13%	87%	100
Tertiary (7%)	11%	89%	100
<i>Marital status</i>			
Unmarried (70.5%)	10%	90%	100

Married (20.2%)	16%	84%	100
Cohabiting (6.5%)	17%	83%	100
Separated/Divorced (2.8%)	20%	80%	100

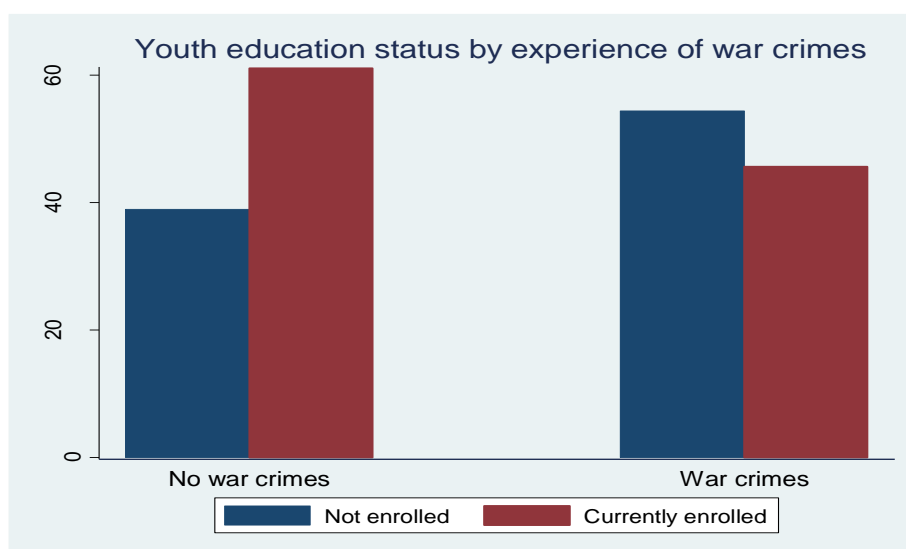
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The SLRC, Uganda survey data show that youth or their household members suffered a range of alleged war crimes (Table 2). The most frequent war crimes that youth alleged suffering during the conflict were having property destroyed or looted (36 %), abduction (10.6 %), torture or severe beating (7.3 %), surviving a massacre (5.8 %), and deliberately being set on fire (4.4 %). The findings were similar for both individual youth and youth headed households across the survey.

#### **4.4.2 War crimes and education**

Overall, 60% of youth were enrolled in school at the time of the survey. Youth who allegedly experienced war crimes were significantly (at the 1% level) less likely to be in school than those who did not report such experiences (compare 46.9 % to 61.5 %). Youth victims of alleged war crimes were also more likely to completely miss schooling compared to their counterparts in the same cohort. Additionally, the proportion of youth who never enrolled in school is significantly (at 5 %) higher for youth that allegedly experienced war crimes (12.4 %) compared to youth who never experienced such crimes (8.5%). Furthermore, youth that allegedly experienced war crimes were significantly (at 5% level) more likely to have no education. For those who did start school, experience of alleged war crimes was correlated with an inability to join higher education; they achieved tertiary level education at only 8.7 %, compared to youth that did not experience war crimes at 12.1 %. However, there was no statistically significant difference in school attendance at primary level, even while controlling for gender.

**Figure 1: Education by experience of alleged war crimes among youth in northern Uganda**



Three war crimes in particular had statistically significant impacts on victims' education: abduction, suffering physical injury, and deliberately being set on fire, and (at 1, 5 and 10 % significant levels respectively) (Table 3). We discuss the impacts of these crimes in more detail below.

**Table 2: War crimes impact on youth education**

<i>War crime</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Err.</i>	<i>Sample Freq.</i>	<i>95% Conf. Interval</i>		<i>Individual population 95% Confidence Interval</i>	
Abduction	12%	1%	299	9%	15%	126,376	208,521
Set on fire	4%	<1%	128	3%	6%	36,481	84,566
Physical injury	4%	<1%	91	3%	6%	36,072	84,976

### ***Abduction***

Victims of abduction were less likely to enroll in primary school. Upon return, they were two times less likely to enroll in and or complete secondary education, even when controlling for age and enrollment. The impact of abduction had irreversible impacts on the education of male youth in particularly. If a male youth was abducted, he was significantly (at the 10% level) more likely to never enroll in primary school. For those who returned to school, they were significantly (at 1%) less likely to complete higher levels of education.

The qualitative data show that very few abducted youth rejoined formal school on return. Those who spent extended periods in captivity were unable to resume school due to time away. Many said they felt too old to resume their primary class level prior to abduction. Abia, who is 32 years old and spent seven years in captivity before returning with two children born of war, explained why she couldn't resume school on return:

[I] was abducted at eleven years of age and had only completed primary four. I spent seven years in captivity and returned with two children [...] I had been away from school for so long and it was impossible to go back to school on return. (Interview, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014)

Her experience was likely compounded by the fact that she returned from captivity with children, but still reflects the challenges in returning to school facing such youth.

We found most (111 of 147) youth had never been to school, stopped in lower primary or were unable to transition into post-primary education. Only a handful of youth had secondary (19) and tertiary (17) level education. Of these, only eight youth (22%) that experienced alleged war crimes had either secondary or tertiary level education. Most youths mentioned that they were unable to start or complete their education due to lack of money to pay school fees.

Some youth expressed that their parents were too poor to afford their schooling, especially those whose livelihoods relied on farming. The impoverishment of most households rendered it hard for them to keep their children in school. With weather vagaries and crop failures, many households that are predominantly farmers (over 80 % of the population) were unable to afford schooling (Mazurana et al., 2014). Crop failure left some households with limited options to afford the schooling of their children. With the little income, most households diverted available resources to meet immediate family needs and did not prioritize the education of their children.

In some cases, some youth had to work to contribute towards the family livelihood which

rendered it impossible for them to start or continue with schooling. To illustrate, Acii, a 38-year-old who was abducted and spent 14 years inside the LRA, returned with two children. She never went to school.

I lived with my parents who were farmers but poor, and we did all the farm work ourselves. I had three sisters and two brothers, but one was abducted and died in captivity. But our father was a drunkard, which made life hard. We would do casual work and brew local beer to get money to meet basic needs. That is the reason I didn't go to school. (Interview, 4<sup>th</sup> September 2013)

Family conditions of impoverishment and alcoholism rendered it harder for its children to start or continue with schooling as in the case of Acii.

Similar conditions were also shared by youth who were abducted for short periods; they too had a challenging time resuming or completing school because of family conditions. Basil, a 25-year-old, recalls that his father farmed, but was an alcoholic and violent towards his mother. In 2003, Basil was abducted by the LRA while in primary three and spent one-and-a-half years in captivity. He was rescued in 2004 and returned to his family. He never made it back to school as he had to focus on making a living and starting a life on his own (Interview, Lira, 19<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Family conditions of extreme difficulties rendered it impossible for youth like Basil to start school after return.

Large family size also makes it difficult for parents to afford school for their children.

(Although primary and secondary tuition is free at government schools in Uganda, families still face prohibitive costs for uniforms, books, teacher fees, and other costs.) Even though schooling is supposed to be free under the Universal Primary and Secondary Education Programmes, there are still hidden cost related that parents must meet to enable their children attend school. Some youth dropped out because there were too many children in the family for the parents to afford the costs associated with education. At times, parents prioritized the

education of their sons over their daughters. This is, in part, due to the relatively low value given to girls' education and the fact that the sons will carry on the lineage while the daughters will be married off (also see Annan et al., 2008; Marshak et al., 2017).

The conflict exacerbated impoverishment and the breakdown of families (due to violence and abuse, alcoholism, separation and death of parents or guardians). Displacement led to the loss of livelihoods, land, and livestock, plunging most families in northern Uganda deep into poverty. Most youth who allegedly experienced war crimes were in families that were either living in difficult conditions in IDP camps or who were struggling to rebuild their lives and livelihoods after years of conflict. Mazurana et al. (2014) find that in northern Uganda households that experienced one alleged war crime were significantly (at the 1% level) more likely to experience several alleged war crimes. We found in our qualitative interviews that the families of youth that experienced alleged war crimes also had family members that suffered multiple war crimes, including having family members violently killed, disappeared or injured. The experience of multiple war crimes negatively affected families' livelihoods and ability to cope. Under such conditions, when immediate needs were barely (or not) met, it was nearly impossible for families to prioritize the education of their children.

Some youth were unable to start school in the first place, and if they had started, were unable to continue after the death of one or both parent or guardian. The surviving parent, in most cases the mother, was unable to fill the gap created by the death of a husband, resulting in children dropping out of school. Alpha, 19 years old, was abducted from his village and spent one year in captivity. At the time of his abduction, his father was brutally murdered, and a brother set on fire by the rebels. Alpha explained:

If my father was here, I wouldn't be living like this. I would have finished my schooling. But because of the war, I only stopped in Primary Seven and couldn't continue because

my mother was unable to raise all the children on her own... I find my life really hard.  
(Interview, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014)

The death of one or both parent had debilitating impact on the surviving household, including their ability to send their children to school.

Access to opportunities, resources, property, land and inheritance are traditionally largely limited to men, leaving women and their households vulnerable once the husband dies. Some of the young adults had to take on the role of household head after the death of their parents.

In the case of Alpha, being the eldest son, he took over the headship of his family.

I now have to plan for many things that demand my attention, but I don't have the means to resolve them. I am expected to farm the land, decide which garden for which crops. ... where to get the seeds to plant etc. But these are hard decisions for a 19-year-old boy. But I have to do it somehow. I just do what I can and leave the rest.  
(Interview, Lira Town, 19<sup>th</sup> February 2014)

Similarly, Cono was abducted by the LRA and spent four years in captivity. Her father died while she was young, and her mother was killed by the LRA.

I am orphan and the first born of five children. I did not go to school as there was no one to pay my school fees. I was the one taking care of our children, and so, I got married at 15 years, before I was abducted. (Interview, 5<sup>th</sup> September 2013)

The task of heading a family at a young age makes it hard for young men and women to continue with their education.

Following the death of parents, female youth are likely to take on reproductive and domestic roles such as care for siblings, cooking, and gathering water, food stuffs, and fuel wood. Male youth mainly take up productive roles, and, in line with masculine norms, are expected to protect and provide for their households by farming or bringing in income. Female youth from poor families often marry young, in part, to draw on the support of a male spouse. An early life of adult-like responsibilities renders it nearly impossible for youth in such circumstances to start, resume, or complete an education.

The difficult economic conditions faced by many households make it hard for guardians to care for extended family members (see Mallet et al., 2016). Elders, opinion leaders, and government officials all noted that the conflict has greatly weakened the extended social support network in northern Uganda. This network is no longer capable of absorbing and supporting additional members to the extent that it was in the past, in part, due to the loss of livestock and increased impoverishment of households across the conflict-affected region.

A notable exception to this trend was apparent in the narratives of three females who experienced alleged war crimes. They had been attending the prestigious St. Mary's College Aboke when they were abducted by the rebels in 1996. They were three out of the 36 (out of total 147) youth who had secondary or tertiary level educations in our qualitative sample. These three females resumed school even after being held captive for up to eight years and returning with children. What distinguished them from their peers is that their families had relatively higher socio-economic status and resources before the conflict and they were already in secondary school prior to abduction. They also returned to conflict-affected but relatively stable and supportive family environments that provided opportunities for them to restart school. Their families helped raise their children born of war while they returned to school. This is the kind of family support most returning youth did not have, in part, due to stigma and the poverty of their households (Atim et al., 2018). These three girls also received consistent external financial support towards their schooling, enabling them to join good schools in Kampala. The quality of education they received boosted their performance and completion of their undergraduate educations, with some going on for master's level degrees.

Nonetheless, even this elite group faced some challenges returning to school. They felt too old to return to their previous class. They had difficulties adjusting and catching up in the first few



years of school due to time away. They also experienced some stigma and cruelty from other students. They worried about the future of their children born of war who were being raised by their families. And, at times, the memories of their conflict experiences negatively affected their ability to concentrate in school. Alibi, a 30-year-old female, was abducted when she was in secondary two and spent eight years in captivity, returning with a child born of war. She shared her struggles in the first few years of returning to school.

I was a lot older in class and learning among young girls was challenging. Eight years away from school was challenging. [...] I could not understand English well, and most subjects were so hard. Sometimes, the students would also say uncomfortable things to us but fortunately, the school administration knew about our history and provided a comfortable environment, even among students. (Interview, 29<sup>th</sup> August 2013).

A break in schooling due to conflict significantly impacts the education of those affected. To catch up requires concerted efforts tailored to support those who need it, especially female youth returning with children born of war. A nurturing and supportive family and school environment play important roles in the process. Unfortunately, most returning youth don't have these possibilities, let alone the financial support to aid their schooling.

Our research confirms findings from other post-conflict contexts such as Sierra Leone, El Salvador, and Angola that show that older youth are caught between a lack of education and feeling too old to return to school due to time away during the conflict. Those who did not go to school at an early age feel too old to enroll in primary yet remain too uneducated to enroll in higher level education (UHRC and UNOHCHR, 2011; Verhey, 2001; Betancourt et al., 2008).

### ***Physical injuries***

Our SLRC, Uganda survey data found that youth that were deliberately set on fire or suffered other physical injuries were significantly less likely to acquire secondary education compared to youth who did not suffer alleged war crimes (at 10% and 5% levels respectively). From our

qualitative work, youth sustained various kinds of injuries due to the conflict: gunshot and shrapnel wounds, retained bullets in the body, harm to chests and backs from carrying heavy loads and children, lingering harm from severe beatings, and head injuries from bomb splinters. Youth with physical injuries due to alleged war crimes reported an inability to return to school because of both the injury and the costs to attend school.

Many of these youths reported living in constant pain, affecting their everyday lives. The meagre funds they and families get are often prioritized for pain medication, as few can afford truly therapeutic treatment (see Mazurana et al., 2014). Jalon, 25 years old, was abducted by the LRA when he was in primary three. He sustained a severe injury to his left leg from heavy bombardment by the Ugandan military. He has a lot of pain since returning from captivity and left his village in 2010 to seek treatment at Lira Regional Referral Hospital. He explained:

Ever since I returned home, I couldn't go back to school because of the injury. Since I didn't go to school much, the only thing I could do in the village is farm the land. But now with my condition, it is impossible. I think of ways to resume school, but there is no way. It is impossible because I don't have any money and I am unwell. Even if I joined adult education, that wouldn't be a problem. But I can't even manage with my condition. I would like to do some skills training, but at least one which is not bad for my condition, something I can manage (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014).

Injured youth prioritized accessing schooling that would prepare them for jobs suited to their physical conditions. However, very few injured youths we interviewed prioritized vocational skills training due to the often physically intense nature of these professions. Some youth who had vocational training were unable to utilize these skills due to pain from their injuries. For instance, some of the young women trained as tailors were unable to work as tailors due to constant backpain. Jalon further elaborated on his situation:

I decided to stay in town because in the village I couldn't farm because of my injury [...] The injury is healed from the outside, but it still pains from the inside. The doctors advised me not to do any hard tasks. I shouldn't climb any tree, ride a bicycle, walk long distances, dig or carry any heavy thing like water. And that I should go for regular

checkup and X-Ray at the hospital...Whenever I perform any heavy task, I experience a lot of pain (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014).

War injuries physically affect youth long after the conflict is over. Pain affects their functionality and everyday life, and many are unable to perform ordinary tasks or accumulate skills for self-sustenance in the long term (See Hollander and Gill, 2014). Being war disabled shapes youths' present and future plans. In Jalon's words:

I had hoped to complete school, get a good job and start a family. But my injury messed everything up. I can't do much, all because of the war. I hope to achieve my plans sometime but maybe much [more] slowly. With my injury, everything might be delayed... The injury will determine what I do in order to see any change in my life. (Interview, 9<sup>th</sup> February 2014)

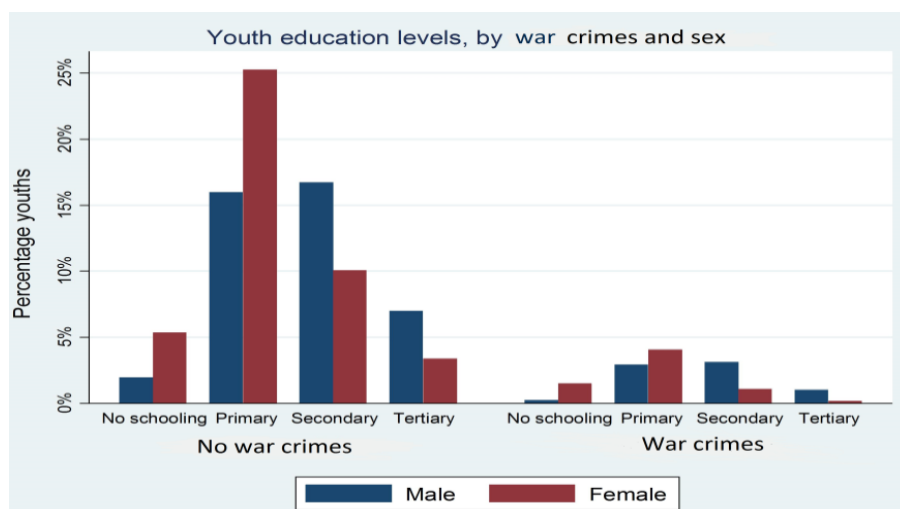
#### **4.4.2 Gender and education**

The experience of alleged war crimes is significantly related with whether male or female youth attended school (Figure 2). As Figure 2 below demonstrates, youth who experienced alleged war crimes were much less likely to attend school at any level compared to youth who did not experience alleged war crimes. For both groups of youth, females made up the majority of those who never attended school and the majority of those who attended only primary school. In both groups, males make up the majority of those attending secondary or tertiary schooling. Yet the comparison between education levels of those who experienced war crimes and those who did not is stark.

Focusing only on females, 22% of female youth who suffered alleged war crimes never enrolled in primary school. This is a 10% difference when compared to female youth who never experienced an alleged war crime (significant at the 1% level). Furthermore, female youth who experienced alleged war crimes had a significantly lower likelihood of completing their secondary education, as compared to their gender and age cohorts that never experienced alleged war crimes (Figure 2 below). Few female youths that experienced alleged war crimes

possessed any tertiary education. Indeed, it was extraordinary for most of them to have completed primary school in the first place.

**Figure 2: Education level by sex and experience of war crimes 2013**



From our qualitative work, female youth overall faced gendered challenges starting, continuing or completing schooling. The gender division of roles and the generally low value placed on girls' education in most of northern Uganda kept girls at home to perform domestic chores in preparation for marriage. In a context where there are rampant early unplanned pregnancies and childbirth, and an overall lack of resources allocated by families towards girls' education, very few girls are likely to complete schooling. A married woman was only seen as valuable to her marital house; thus her education would be a needless drain of resources on her natal family.

Furthermore, for girls who experienced war crimes and returned with child/ren born of war, the lack of child care and limited opportunities for girls' education made it nearly impossible for most to continue their education. Many instead opted for vocational skills trainings that were offered as part of their reintegration packages. Abia shared why she couldn't resume school on return:

[I] decided to do tailoring because the NGO gave me only two options -- returning to school or vocational skills training and I chose tailoring... I had two children I returned with from captivity who I couldn't leave behind because there was no one to look after them. (Interview, 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014).

Some of the vocational training centers run by NGOs allowed the mothers to take their children along, easing the burden of child care while they were trained. Only one school in Pader allows mothers with children born of war to attend and bring their children along, and this was a long and hard-fought exception for the Ministry of Education to approve.

The lack of opportunities to resume or complete schooling or learn viable skills for self-sustenance has an enormous impact on female youths' earnings and ability to raise their children as single mothers. We found that many young single mothers (both those who experienced war crimes and those who did not) now perform odd jobs for survival (see Atim and Hilhorst, forthcoming). Without an education or skills, they can't find jobs to earn an income to support themselves or their children.

However, almost all females who allegedly experienced war crimes prioritized the education of their children. In the words of Aling, a formerly abducted mother from Gulu who returned with two children:

I am not educated, I believed my children should be educated so they can lift my head up, but now it's difficult. I keep worrying about what I should do to help my children get a good education. (Interview, 16 October 2013).

Some children born of war have been offered scholarships to attend schools through a sponsorship program. For some mothers, however, the expected parental contributions to these programs are too expensive. Recipient children are expected to maintain consistent academic progress to maintain their sponsorship. Other single mothers have not been offered these opportunities for support. The struggles of mothers to fund their children's education is likely to compound the inter-generational impact of conflict for children born of war.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

The GoU/LRA conflict had a negative impact on education in northern Uganda. We find that compared to their peers, both male and female youth who suffered alleged war crimes were significantly less likely to enroll in school or complete their education. They were especially less likely to re-start or complete secondary or tertiary education, particularly for formerly abducted male youth. However, there was no significant difference at primary school level. We also found very low transition rates into secondary school for nearly all youth.

These findings confirm studies from other post-conflict contexts that participation in armed groups or captivity negatively affect the likelihood of youth resuming school due to time away and advancement in age (Annan et al., 2008). Our findings also suggest that time since being back from abduction does not necessarily correspond to recovery of lost years of education, especially being able to advance to secondary school. Of great concern, even 10 years after the LRA left northern Uganda, we do not see progressive improvement in gaining access to secondary education for most youth. This was most pronounced for those who had experienced abduction, been set on fire, injured physically, suffered rape, and returned home with children born of war.

The greatest impacts are visible for formerly abducted male youth. This trend is likely due, in part, to the loss of opportunities this group would have had in the absence of abduction. In other words, we see that education is particularly valued for male youth. This means that, in the absence of abduction, these young men were much likely to have been educated than their female counterparts.

Female youths face unique challenges related to gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms and practices. There is low value placed on their education. Furthermore, due to the practice of

brideprice payments, young women are likely to get pregnant and marry early. Overall, girls' educational attainment remains low even in the absence of the conflict. The additional impacts of conflict are likely to have an especially negative, intergenerational effect on the education of children born of war as their mothers are often unable to support them through school.

The low transition to secondary school seems to reflect a country-wide trend. While the universalization of primary education has increased access to and enrolment in primary schools, overall quality and performance remain low in most of Uganda. The low level of government secondary school coverage also affects transitions to secondary school, especially in rural areas in northern Uganda and especially for females (see UNDP, 2015). Hence, while the difficulties youth in northern Uganda face in transitioning to secondary school reflects those experienced throughout the country, in northern Uganda these trends are further exacerbated by the social-economic conditions experienced before, during, and after the conflict.

A ray of hope is seen among a very small number of youth who allegedly experienced war crimes and completed secondary and tertiary schooling after conflict. Looking specifically at the three female youth who were in secondary school prior to their abduction and sexual abuse, we see these female youths came from stable and supportive families and school environment pre-conflict. Upon return, they were also able to get consistent external support towards their schooling, enabling them to attain both quality post-secondary and tertiary education. These findings suggest that a strong socio-economic family environment, attachment, and a reliable and sufficient investment in post-secondary education are necessary to boost post-conflict education beyond primary school, particularly for female youth.

This chapter adds to an understanding of how conflict specifically impacts youth who experienced grievous war crimes (abducted, physically injured or set of fire) who were, in turn,

the least likely to restart or complete secondary education. The findings also suggest that time since return is in and of itself not enough to recover lost education. We found that many youth, including both short- and long-term abductees, were unable to progress with their education, especially into post-primary education.

Finally, our findings suggest that the conflict reinforced existing poverty, gender discrimination, and vulnerabilities of households to meet the educational needs of their children. Some youth had no education before conflict or had left school due to lack of money and death of one or both parents. The conflict often exacerbated these pre-war conditions, rendering it hard for most youth to start and complete schooling, especially among female youth.



## **Chapter 5    Women Engaged in Sex work, Lira town - northern Uganda**

### **Summary**

Scholarly focus on the role of conflict in trajectories leading women into sex work has resulted in insufficient knowledge about the many other drivers of sex work in post-conflict settings. Based on in-depth interviews with 21 women engaged in sex work in Lira, northern Uganda, this chapter delves into these women's understandings of sex work and the pathways through which they became involved. Researchers have primarily described sex work as a livelihood strategy for meeting immediate basic needs, but the women interviewed in this study saw it as a temporary strategy to an independent life. Presence of social networks, friends and relatives were important enabling factors for women to start doing sex work. Additionally, most of the women interviewed had layers of personal life challenges starting from childhood—histories of abuse, family breakdown, violence, poor working conditions, and early experiences of sex and childbirth. These factors were exacerbated by poverty and conflict, as well as patriarchal gender norms, ideologies and institutions, all of which shaped the women's future life courses and contributed to their engagement in sex work.

This chapter was co-authored by Teddy Atim and Prof. Dorothea Hilhorst and will be submitted for publication. It was presented at the African Studies Association, UK (ASAUK), 11 – 13<sup>th</sup> September 2018 at Birmingham University, UK.

## **5.1 Introduction**

The role of conflict in pushing women into sex work has been discussed extensively in the international academic literature, but multiple other factors also contribute to this phenomenon. The present study analysed the narratives of women involved in sex work in Lira, northern Uganda, to investigate which factors women foreground when they tell the stories of how they came to engage in sex work.

Conflict-affected societies are characterised by increased vulnerability and risks related to family and community disintegration, the loss of livelihoods and the erosion of protective social support mechanisms traditionally used in times of adversity. Baines and Gauvin (2014 p. 2) found that the prolonged armed conflict and displacement in northern Uganda strained familial social structures and relations because of violence, insecurity, immobility, lack of productivity and poverty. This disrupted and transformed customary gender and generational roles and relations in the extended family, and prolonged dislocation has been shown to push individuals and families to the edge of survival, where they sometimes adopt negative coping mechanisms (Formson and Hilhorst, 2016; Muhwezi et al., 2011). Humanitarian actors and donors assume that violent conflict is the underlying driver of household's livelihood vulnerability in times of conflict. It puts a strain on economic opportunities available for women to decently make a living, driving them into sex work. Such assumptions drive humanitarian assistance and support that does not acknowledge the long-term effects of conflict, as well as the other factors that are important in understanding vulnerability pre, during and after conflict (see Maxwell et al., 2017 p. 11 - 13). However, internationally, research suggests the importance of taking a broader view. Maxwell et al., (2017 p. 13) contend that other than conflict, multiple factors influence household and community level vulnerability, including: chronic poverty, economic shocks, natural hazards, social class and differences. Other studies also show that earlier life experiences predict engagement in transactional sex (Kaestle, 2012). Specifically, history of

abuse, substance use, violence, poor family functioning, family instability, running away and dropping out of school have been identified as significant risk factors for transactional sex (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Edwards et al., 2006; Patton et al., 2014; Tyler and Johnson, 2006). Other factors associated with sex work include poverty and other influences in the immediate surroundings, such as family and kinship relationships; patriarchal gender norms, ideologies and institutions; and, indeed, conflict (Denny et al., 2016, Formson and Hilhorst 2016; Patton et al., 2014; Kaestle, 2012; Muhwezi et al., 2011; Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This chapter draws on the stories of women involved in sex work in northern Uganda to illuminate the key factors influencing their decisions to engage transactional sex. It is based on in-depth interviews with 21 women engaged in sex work in Lira, northern Uganda, a context that witnessed over two decades of armed conflict. The analysis focuses on women's life-worlds, which are co-shaped by wider societal gender norms, ideologies and institutions. These women's stories reveal multiple drivers of transactional sex, including family breakdown, abuse, violence, harsh treatment of women and bad working conditions. Further, the stories clarify how most of these factors were exacerbated by the conflict.

### **5.1.1 Defining sex work**

Sex work, categorised as either 'transactional sex' or 'prostitution', is the exchange of sex for money or gifts. In transactional sex arrangements, payments are not predetermined and can be in the form of cash or material gifts, goods, services, commodities, privileges or opportunities (e.g. employment) (Chatterji et al., 2005). This kind of sex work has unclear boundaries and is akin to the everyday sexual encounters of 'boyfriend-and-girlfriend' or long-term extramarital relationships. Material exchanges, a central feature of everyday sexual relationships in many cultures, are a defining feature of transactional sex (Atwood et al., 2011; Chatterji et al., 2005; Denny et al., 2016; Formson and Hilhorst, 2016; Hunter, 2002). Prostitution, in contrast, is used

to denote sexual exchanges exclusively for financial gain, and payments are made in cash. Other key features of prostitution are predetermined price negotiations, sex work as a profession and ease of identifying those involved (e.g. by clothing/appearance). Compared with transactional sex, prostitution is less socially acceptable (Hunter, 2002; Chatterji et al., 2005; Formson and Hilhorst, 2016).

This distinction resonates with related concepts used in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), where prostitution is considered different from transactional sex, and the former is not socially accepted (Hunter, 2002; Leclerc-Madlala, 2003; Luke, 2003). However, there are many ‘grey areas’ between prostitution and transactional sex (Formson and Hilhorst, 2016). For instance, both transactional sex and prostitution involve women and girls having concurrent sexual relations with multiple partners. In this article, we use ‘transactional sex’ and ‘sex work’ interchangeably when discussing existing work. When presenting our results, we refer explicitly to how women engaged in sex work perceive themselves and how they are perceived by others.

### **5.1.2 Factors influencing engagement in transactional sex**

Factors known to influence involvement in transactional sex include personal, relational (e.g. family, school and peers), humanitarian conditions and societal/cultural (e.g. gender norms and relations) influences.

According to Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems model, personal attributes (e.g. temperament, intelligence, coping capacity and genetic factors) influence individuals’ interactions with their surroundings and their ultimate outcomes. Indeed, in terms of transactional sex, studies have shown that depressive symptoms are a predictive factor among young people (Atwood et al., 2011; Chatterji et al., 2005; Kaestle, 2012; Patton et al., 2014). Personal attributes vary widely across individuals, even under the same circumstances. This

explains why family members who experience similar levels of adversity show different outcomes. Although personal traits are important for explaining individual outcomes, this is beyond the scope of this article.

A second type of factor explaining engagement in transactional sex involves the immediate relational network, comprised of family, peers and school, and the extended social network. Individuals' relationships in their immediate environment influence their lives, and the quality of such relationships matters: Strong, nurturing and supportive relationships are likely to have a positive influence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In particular, strong relational attachment exemplified by social support, social ties, connectedness neighbourhoods or schools, and belonging to a group is closely associated with positive outcomes (Betancourt and Khan, 2008 p.5).

In a study of transactional sex among adolescents in the United States, Patton et al. (2014) found that school involvement reduced the risks faced by young people and lowered the likelihood of engagement in transactional sex. Out-of-school youth, in contrast, experienced higher risks and higher involvement in transactional sex (also see Chatterji et al., 2005, regarding transactional sex among young people in SSA). Household-level risk factors have also been shown to be closely associated with adolescents' engagement in transactional sex and associated negative outcomes. Specifically, studies of adolescents in the United States have shown those from families affected by: abuse, violence, alcohol and drug abuse, parents died, and those whose parents were divorced, were at increased risk for involvement in transactional sex and associated behaviours (early sex, multiple sexual partners and unprotected sex) (Kaestle, 2012; Patton et al., 2014). Mallet et al. (2016) reported similar findings among youth on the margins of the urban labour market in Lira who had experienced early school dropout and from dysfunctional families.

Conditions in the surrounding environment, including poverty and armed conflict, constitute a third factor influencing engagement in transactional sex. Indeed, in a review of existing work on transactional sex in SSA, Formson and Hilhorst (2016) reported that poverty, marked by extreme deprivation, limited livelihoods opportunities and inadequate resources, was an underlying driver of transactional sex.

Poverty undermines households' ability to meet their basic needs, at times forcing household members to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including transactional sex. Engaging in transaction sex does provide immediate needs but can also grant opportunities and social status that could address the underlying cause of poverty. Chatterij et al., (2005) and Leclerc Madlala (2003) both find that some women use transactional sex to further their education and gain entry into high-level social networks for a better life and can move out of poverty. Sex work therefore gives women some form of tactical agency to navigate their challenging socioeconomic circumstances (Atwood et al., 2011; Denney et al., 2016; Utas, 2005).

The interplay between conditions of poverty and other factors in the household and surrounding environment is also influential. Poverty, coupled with other vulnerabilities in the household or community (e.g. abuse, violence and family breakdown), could drive household members to adopt negative coping mechanisms, including engagement in transactional sex.

Armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies result in deaths, injuries, displacement, loss of livelihoods, and the disruption of socioeconomic and political institutions, gravely affecting people's wellbeing and coping mechanisms (Atim et al., 2018; Muhwezi et al., 2011). Existing work has found high rates of engagement in transactional sex during and after armed conflict and humanitarian emergencies. For instance, Agiresaasi (2012) reported that desperation in post-conflict northern Uganda pushed girls returning from the LRA into transactional sex, and Atwood et al. (2011) found that many young girls in Liberia engaged sex in exchange for money

after the civil war. Similarly, in Haiti, women in desperate economic situations had sex with UN Peace Keepers in exchange for food, employment or other material assistance (Kolbe, 2015), and the conflict in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo forced women to take on the role of providing for their families, sometimes through transactional sex (Maclin et al., 2015).

Armed conflict and its aftermath strain familial relations and kinship networks, gender roles and relations, and traditional support systems (Okello and Hovil, 2007). The government of Uganda–LRA conflict and resulting displacement in northern Uganda rendered parents unable to fulfil their familial roles as providers, disciplinarians and heads of households, and children were unable to maintain their traditional responsibilities, moral obligations, and dependence on familial social structures and relations (Baines and Gauvin, 2014 p.2).

Similarly, Ahikire et al. (2012) found that, after the conflict in northern Uganda, some men remained unable to fulfil their traditional role of providing and resorted to alcohol abuse. Although women step in to provide for their households in the absence of their husbands, they are still expected to maintain a subservient position (Carlson and Mazurana, 2006). The rise in domestic violence in post-conflict northern Uganda is partly explained by these strains and the challenges to gender and generational roles and relationships. This is linked to the normalisation of negative masculinities, where men use dominance and violence to exert their authority and preserve patriarchy and traditional values (Ahikire et al., 2012; Carlson and Mazurana, 2006; Muhwezi et al., 2011).

A fourth factor explaining engagement in transactional sex involves relational networks or societal gender norms, ideologies and institutions, which dictate the access and opportunities available to men and women. Taking this broader view is important for understanding underlying vulnerabilities and available support systems in times of need (see Betancourt and Khan, 2008). To the detriment of women and girls, many traditional societies bestow unequal

positions, power, access, privileges and opportunities upon men and boys (Hunter, 2002). These inequalities are deeply rooted in socio-cultural norms and practices: patrilineal identity and belonging, inheritance rights, assigning higher value to male education and bride-wealth payments. Men's and boys' greater access to vital formal and informal resources reinforces women's and girls' vulnerabilities, limiting the opportunities and power available to them. At times, their only recourse is dependence on their male counterparts, robbing them of agency (Hunter, 2002).

Additionally, local masculine discourses, combined with the centrality of transactional sexual relationships (exemplified by bride-wealth payments in some cultures), normalise men's extramarital affairs and multiple sexual partners (Denny et al., 2016; Hunter, 2002; Kaufman and Stavrou, 2004; Moore et al., 2007; Nyanzi et al., 2001). Although women and girls may use sex work to gain some access, power and resources, they have limited possibilities to challenge patriarchal structures in such extremely unequal societies (Kabeer, 1999). For instance, marriage or transactional sex may grant women and girls socioeconomic security and access to vital resources in traditional societies but simultaneously subject them to male authority, control and dominance, including conditions of abuse and violence. The dissolution of relations through divorce or separation comes with socioeconomic insecurity for women, who dive deeper into poverty.

Clearly, an analysis of girls' and women's vulnerabilities to transactional sex should include a thorough understanding of their social relationships (sexual partners, immediate family and networks) and the influence of contextual gender norms, ideologies and institutions (Denny et al., 2016; Formson and Hilhorst, 2016). It is also important to examine the impact of environmental conditions, including prolonged conflict, on the disruption of familial structures, gender and generational roles, and relationships.



## 5.2 Methods

This chapter draws on in-depth interviews with 21 women engaged in transactional sex in Lira, northern Uganda.<sup>xxiii</sup> The focus of the study was influenced by the first author's work with and interest in women survivors of sexual violence related to the conflict in northern Uganda.

### *The study sites*

Lira, a town in northern Uganda, has been affected by the prolonged conflict described above. The height of this conflict (2002–2006) saw massive displacement into Lira, followed by a perceived increase in women's engagement in sex work. Prior to the fieldwork, the first author mapped out sex work 'hot spots' in Lira, building on her local understanding of Lira, as a native of northern Uganda with many years of experience as a practitioner and researcher on the impact of the conflict in the region.<sup>xxiv</sup> Two sites were identified: Kitgum Stage, located in the town centre, and Juba Road on the outskirts of the town. We learned that most women engaging in sex work live in lodges located along Kitgum Stage; others commute from elsewhere.

The Kitgum Stage site is locally referred to as the 'red-light district' of Lira. Located in the middle of town, this area is host to many activities: discos halls, bars and lodges, a taxi and lorry stage, and parking for vehicles traveling to the neighbouring Kitgum and Pader districts. The area is among the few places in Lira that never sleeps; it is always buzzing with activity, making it a strategic location for sex work.

The second study site, Juba Road and Iganga Bar, are known stopovers for long-distance truck drivers between Mombasa, Kenya, and the northern corridor leading to the Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. The area also hosts young people dealing drugs such as khat<sup>xxv</sup> and marijuana, which are in high demand among truck drivers. Distant from the town centre, the activities of women here are less visible. We learned that most women begin sex work at this location and later move onto Kitgum Stage.

### ***Study participants and procedures***

In September 2015, the first author conducted in-depth interviews with 21 women involved in sex work in Lira. We also interviewed seven key informants (two women and five men)—local leaders, police officers, a Senior Community Development Officer of Lira, a cultural leader, and employees of lodges and restaurants where women engage in sex work live and eat.

Initial contact with the women at the Kitgum Stage site was through an introduction to a woman living in a lodge by another woman operating a restaurant near Kitgum Stage. At the Juba Road/Iganga Bar site, the first author spoke to a security guard at one of the bars about women who frequent the place. He introduced her to one of the women who then became a contact to access other women doing sex work in the area. At Kitgum Stage, 10 women were interviewed: six living in lodges and four living in rented houses, coming to the lodges in the evenings. Along Juba Road, 11 women were interviewed (a total of 14 interviews): Three lived in a lodge, and eight lived elsewhere and came to meet customers in the evenings.

Before the interviews, for privacy and confidentiality purposes, appointments were scheduled with the women to explain the purpose of the study and agree on a suitable time and location. All interviews (except these initial meetings) were conducted away from the lodges and in open spaces to protect the safety and confidentiality of the participants and avoid unnecessary attention. The interviews were meant to gain deeper understanding of the drivers of sex work among women. All interviews were conducted in Lango, the local language of the area, by the first author, whose native language is Lango. The interviews were transcribed into English.

To gain a deep understanding of women's stories, we conducted in-depth interviews with the 21 research participants. We identified women engaged in sex work staying in lodges and renting accommodation around Lira, seeking to include different realities and experiences. Nonetheless, this might not have been a representative sample of women engaged in sex work

in Lira. To overcome this obstacle, we tried to talk with the selected women more generally about the situation of women involved in sex work to capture the bigger picture of drivers of sex work among women in the area. The analysis for this article examined the different ways women foreground their experiences when telling or explaining how they ended up in sex work—considering the impact of conflict, poverty, familial and social networks, and gender norms, ideologies and institutions in northern Uganda. The first author also made follow up to seek clarity with the woman about their stories to make sure the analysis and writing represents their reality.

### ***Basic information on the study participants***

The 21 women interviewed ranged in age from 16 to 35 years (three were aged 15–20, 15 were aged 21–29 and three were aged 30 or older). Sixteen reported losing one or both of their parents at a young age (five had lost both parents, and 11 had lost one parent—eight lost a father, and three lost a mother). Eight of the women reported that their parents had separated when they were young, and those who had both parents reported moving in and out of different homes at a young age.

Two of the women had no education, 15 had dropped out of primary school and four had secondary-level education. Only one of the women had some informal vocational skills training (hair dressing). Of the 21 women, 19 had been in some form of marital or cohabiting relationship, and a few had been in two or more relationships, mostly from a young age (some as early as 14 years). All had separated from their spouse/partner by the time of the interview. Seventeen of the women had children, and 11 had two or more. Three of the women lived with their children in Lira and a few said their children remained with their former spouse's family, but most said their children were being raised by the women's mothers or other relatives back in the village.

### 5.3 Women involved in sex work in Lira, northern Uganda

Although there were immediate economic needs and social enablers, the women interviewed explained how they got into the sex work with reference to their life histories, as illuminated by Amony's life story.

#### *Amony's life story and pathway to sex work*

*My father died before I was born, and because of problems over property/land with my paternal family, my mother moved back to her family in Orum, where I was born and lived from childhood.*

*When I was 10 years old, I came to Lira to live with my maternal auntie. I attended school for only a year and dropped out in P.2 because my auntie could not afford to pay for the many dependants in her care to attend school.*

*At 12 years old, I was taken to work as a maid at a woman's home in the Adjumani district. I worked there for four years and was paid UGX. 80,000(USD 23)<sup>xxvi</sup> per month, which was given to my auntie to support the family. I returned at 16 years old because of harassment from the employer's older male children. I lived with my auntie for a while and later found work in a local restaurant where I was paid UGX. 1,000(USD 0.30) per day. I worked there for two years.*

*At 18 years old, I left to look for my biological mother, whom I had never lived with my entire life. I found my mother, but she rejected me. At this time, she was living with some man as her husband. When she rejected me, I rented my own place and found work in a salon where I plaited hair and earned about UGX. 8,000(USD 2.3) per day. I had learned hair plaiting from my first employer, where I worked as a maid. Unfortunately, the salon closed, and I had to look for work in different places: restaurants, hotels, bars.*

*When life got harder, I returned to my auntie again, and there I met a man who showed interest in me. I moved in with him as his wife (although not formally married) at his place of work in Pader, where he was a driver. I got pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, but after four years of living together, he started misbehaving. He was violent, abusive and involved in extramarital affairs, and he neglected his role to provide for the family. At the same time, I also discovered I was HIV-positive, and I decided to leave the relationship and returned to Lira. I am now on anti-retroviral therapy.*

*I went to my maternal family in the village, but life was hard, so I came to Lira. I lived with a friend and tried to go to my mother two times, but she still rejected me. It hurt, but I had to leave her alone and find my own life. I found work in different places, working in bars, a salon and a hotel, but the pay was little, irregular and at times I was not paid at all. I quit my last job at a bar after four months without any pay.*

*I started living with a friend at a lodge in town, sharing the same room while she taught me what to do and how to get men. I worked until I was able to raise enough money to pay for my own room in the lodge. My friend told me to treat men who approach me as my boyfriend. I have been in the lodge for two months now: I have no option at this point. I thought, even if I go home, life is hard; there is no one to help me. I decided to join them and now I am living like this. I get two or three customers each night and earn about UGX. 22,000–40,000(USD 6.2 to USD 11.4) per day.*

*However, I constantly return home to visit my auntie and take them stuff. My hope is to find a good job or raise enough money to start my own business and leave what I do now. To achieve my goal, I am part of a savings group at the lodge. I hope to raise enough money then leave to start a good life on my own.*

### **5.3.1 Prostitution or transactional sex: How do women label their activities?**

When asked what they do, the women acknowledged that they engaged in sex with men who pay, in cash or sometimes in kind. A woman from Kitgum Stage explained, '[...] I simply rely on men [...]; they come to meet me in the lodge where I am paid for the service offered. Some also pay for my room' (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Some women noted that they were sometimes paid in kind (with food, clothing, hair dressing services, etc.). One woman from Juba Road described her experience:

I have men I am used to who help me. I ask them to help me with what I need, and those who are good help me [...] They are many, and I meet different people on different days. When they give me the money, they demand a favour back. At times, they don't give me money; instead they buy what I need like food or clothing. (Interview, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014)

In rare instances, men who spent the night in the lodge with the women also paid for the cost of the lodging. The women engaged in sexual activities that blurred the line between prostitution and transactional sex.

The form of payment differed by location. Women along Kitgum Stage were more likely to be paid in cash—a key feature of prostitution, whereas those along Juba Road/Iganga Bar might also be paid in kind—a feature of transactional sex. This difference is probably determined by the locations themselves and by how long the women have been in sex work. Whereas Kitgum Stage is a central, busy and high-end part of town that attracts many businesses, Juba Road is lower-end, peripheral to the town and not bustling with activities that attract businesses and people who can readily pay in cash. The interviews also revealed that Juba Road is considered a 'learning ground' for relatively newcomers to sex work. Most women used their time in this location to learn how to gain a livelihood through sex work before moving to Kitgum Stage.

Some women lived in lodges along Kitgum Stage or a few along Juba Road. Half of the women interviewed stayed in lodges; others rented houses, sometimes with friends, and came to meet

customers in the evenings. Women living in lodges spent their days sleeping and cleaning their rooms and clothing. In the evenings, they waited for customers in front of the lodge. In a few cases, they also met potential customers away from the lodges, especially regular customers who called or sent someone (normally a motorcycle taxi) to collect the woman for the night.

To make sense of the realities of these women's work, the interviews with the women and key informants also captured local expressions of what the women do and how they are perceived. Some women felt that their work constituted prostitution, as one explained, 'A person who is involved in this kind of sex is considered a prostitute. We are known as prostitutes by everyone' (Interview 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015). The Community Development Officer of Lira noted that families in the community call women who have children out of wedlock names: 'She is considered a prostitute, and some women end up conforming to the labels' (Interview, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2015). Women at Kitgum Stage specifically mentioned that the community knew about their work and treated them as prostitutes. They said people sometimes refer to them as '*apoli*' (referring to a wild game animal resembling the impala that moves from place to place) or '*oboke okwer*' (literally meaning 'bitter leaves that cannot be eaten'), which denotes the highly stigmatised nature of sex work and the social ramifications for those involved.

### **5.3.2 Customer profile, payment terms, risks and agency**

The women had multiple 'customers', including taxi drivers operating within and outside Lira, taxi conductors, traders, travellers, long-distance truck drivers, soldiers, security guards and casual labourers, who met the women at the lodges. The few customers who called to meet the women outside the lodge were mainly Indian supermarket owners or regular customers who did not like to come to the lodge. Regular customers were sometimes called 'boyfriends'. When the women did not make enough money, they got help paying for their food and lodging from their boyfriends. Women noted that the boyfriends were aware of their sexual activities and did not object, as long as they got their time with the women.

Payment terms are agreed upon before going out with a potential customer. The agreement also covers the duration. Whereas women who had spent longer on the streets were more likely to set the payment terms themselves and to demand prior payment, newcomers generally left it to the customer to determine the payment amount. The latter group were likely to be underpaid and were less assertive or knowledgeable about payment terms.

Nightly sex work payments ranged from UGX 5,000 to 30,000(USD 1.4–USD 8.6), depending on the customer, duration and location. Short encounters cost less, and women along Kitgum Stage earned more than those on Juba Road/Iganga Bar. Wealthier customers were also charged more; for instance, Indian supermarket owners paid higher prices. Customers who spent the entire night in the lodge also paid for lodging, which cost UGX 5,000 to 15,000 (USD 1.4–USD 4.3) per night, depending on the location. Some customers also made non-cash payments (for drinks, food, clothes, shoes, transport, salon costs, etc.).

Women noted risks of physical and sexual violence from customers and the public. Many gave accounts of police raiding lodges and taking sex workers into custody. During a follow-up field visit, we found Maria, one of the women we had interviewed, had been imprisoned for six months, supposedly for fighting with a customer over non-payment. Women also mentioned risks of unprotected sex, including early and unwanted pregnancy, unsafe abortion and HIV infection (three of the women interviewed were HIV-positive). Associated risky sexual behaviours included multiple concurrent sexual partners, inconsistent condom uses and the inability to negotiate safer sex. Women also noted the social ramifications of their work for themselves and their families, mostly talking about shame and social stigma. The mere fact that they lived in town is already stigmatising in their home villages. When their work was unknown, community members often referred to them as ‘prostitutes’. Such labelling lowered their marriageability and social standing.

Staying in the lodges was part of a strategy to mitigate the risk of going out with unknown customers to unknown places. Additionally, nearly all of the women interviewed said they claimed to work in bars, lodges or hotels or to do other forms of work for a living. Maria, a 24-year-old woman who had been in the lodge/town since 2013, said,

People don't know what I do in town; they think I still work at the pub. If they knew, I would be treated badly for being a prostitute—as spoiled, and someone who cannot be married [...] I am now seen as a useless *olal oko* [a wasted person]. I would be treated as too spoiled, badly behaved and big-headed—someone who can't be tamed. I cannot go empty-handed [...] because it determines how they receive me at home. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

Several women routinely returned to their home villages and provided material support, which helped to negotiate their standing and identity as responsible members of the family and society.

### **5.3.3 Why do women engage in sex work?**

In terms of motivations for engaging in sex work, first, women mentioned sending money to the village to support their children and ageing relatives. Part of the money was also used to clear land for cultivation to supplement the family's food needs back home. Some women whose children are being raised by their families in the village constantly travel back and forth to check on their families, take needed support, help with garden work and stay in touch. Rema, a 28-year-old mother of two children being raised by her mother, explained:

I go back to the village monthly to help my mother with garden work and to see my children and mother. I also use part of my earnings to rent farmland for my mother because our father refused to give her land after they separated and also because my mother's parental family doesn't allow her to use any family land. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

A second reason to engage in sex work was paying for the women's stay in town (e.g. lodging, rent, clothing, shoes, hair salon and mobile phone). The women said some of the items were necessary to attract customers so they could make more money. Dolly, a 26-year-old, came to town in 2011 after her marriage failed. She described the requirements for sex work:



You should be smart and lively. You know, to get men, one should be tough because sometimes you even grab your friend's man [...] You should have good relations; at times we even smoke and chew khat to keep up with potential customers through the night. (Interview, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2014)

The items they spent money on were not necessarily status symbols, but rather part of the strategy to keep going in sex work.

Third, some women described looking to the future to explain why they engaged in sex work. Most planned to start their own businesses or to acquire land, houses or livestock to help their children in the future. Most of the women were trying to save UGX 200,000–500,000 (approx. USD 57–USD 140) as start-up capital for a business. Abii, who had been in sex work since 2014, said she planned to save UGX 400,000 (approx. USD 114) to start a second-hand clothing business and leave sex work. She had already established a mobile money business worth UGX 300,000 (approx. USD 85) and was close to meeting her next goal: 'I think I only need UGX 100,000 [approx. USD 29], and then I will have enough to start my own business by October 2015 and leave sex work. My business would be my priority. I intend to save any profits to buy my own land' (Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2015). Nearly every woman interviewed saw sex work as temporary, as Maria further clarified: 'We continue but know we will leave someday, but we need to prepare to leave'. These women hoped to leave sex work as soon as they met their goals. Sex work enables them to navigate their difficult socio-economic circumstances, even with limited choices and opportunities.

As part of their long-term strategy, some women living in lodges joined savings groups. They saved UGX 5,000 [approx. USD 1.5] daily payable to each member once a month (total of UGX 200,000 [approx. USD 57]). Some said they use connections made through sex work to seek better jobs, mainly in Indian-owned supermarkets, which they consider better paid, with good working conditions and a decent form of work. A few women hoped to meet men who would marry them and provide for their needs. Abii said she was looking for a good man among her

customers to settle down with—someone who could care for her and help her set up a business so she can leave sex work. For some women, getting married would serve to restore their position in their family. Lela, who was looked down upon by her brother for being unmarried, said, ‘I dream of getting a good man who could marry me. Maybe that will make my brother like me and change his opinion of me’ (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Nonetheless, many of the women felt that it would be hard for them to settle down in a ‘proper’ relationship. Most had past experience of intimate violence/abuse, and social stigma against women who have engaged in sex work complicates settling in a long-term marital relationship.

Most of the women hoped to improve their situation and get out of sex work. However, the possibilities for improvement were limited, as most women barely got by and were not able to save significantly. Their earnings barely covered daily survival needs for themselves and their children/families. Although participating in sex work enabled these women to navigate their difficult socio-economic circumstances, it also damaged their social networks—an important resource for coping and future opportunities—because of stigma linked to women’s sexual purity, limiting possibilities for moving out of their current situation.

#### **5.3.4 Starting out in Lira**

The women interviewed came to Lira to seek ways to survive after experiencing difficulties making an income in their villages. After arriving in Lira, most of the women initially sought different forms of work, usually while living with a relative or a friend. During an interview, Lela said that, after a hard time at home, she decided to come to the town to look for work. She stayed with a relative who owned a local restaurant where she worked, earning UGX 1,000–1,500 (approx. USD 0.30–USD 0.40) per day. However, after having a bad experience, she moved in with a female cousin while continuing her work at the local restaurant. When her cousin moved to the lodge, Linda could not afford the rent, so she shared a room with her cousin at the lodge and continued to work at the restaurant.

The women usually held different jobs before starting sex work. They worked in various places—bars, lodges and restaurants, mainly doing odd jobs that were either poorly paid or not paid at all, and they had bad working conditions, with long hours and harassment forcing them to abandon the work. Rema, a 28-year-old mother of two children, came to Lira and found work in a restaurant, where she earned UGX 3,000 (approx. USD 0.8) per day. This was insufficient to provide for herself, her two children and her mother. She eventually met a friend who introduced her to life in the lodge and taught her what to do and how to negotiate pay with customers. At the lodge, she earned more—about UGX 10,000–20,000 (approx. USD 2.8–5.7) daily (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015).

Most women had tried several options to earn money before resorting to sex work. Women usually started doing sex work through a friend or relative who was already involved. These contacts provided accommodations and introduced the women to sex work, explaining how to approach and negotiate with potential customers, how to dress and how to behave. They also introduced the women to their first customer.

## **5.4 Factors influencing involvement in sex work**

This section focuses on factors driving involvement in sex work and how women foreground these in their stories, paying attention to the influence of immediate relational networks, gender norms, ideologies and institutions in their narratives.

### **5.4.1 Family breakdown**

Having parents who died or separated early in their lives and being born out of wedlock negatively impacted women in their later lives. As was detailed above, most of the women interviewed had lost one or both parents.

A father's death impacted the family's socio-economic status, as their property was taken away by paternal relatives, and the widow and children were sent away. This cut them off

from vital resources—land, housing, and family- and clan-based socioeconomic networks.

Bena, a 21-year-old who lost her father before she was born, described her family's experience after her father's death: 'My mother, who was married in Kitgum, a neighbouring town, was forced to return to Lira, her family home, after the death of my father because of problems she had with her in-laws over property' (Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 2015).

Similarly, Amon, a 27-year-old whose father died when she was a baby, recalled that her paternal uncles constantly harassed her mother after her father died: 'They wanted to take her land and send her away [...] saying she has no control over the land and no male child to inherit the land' (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2015). The vulnerabilities experienced by surviving family members were compounded by patriarchal norms around inheritance rights and unequal access to vital resources. The surviving family members under the care of the mother lost their access and claim to vital resources, exposing them to further impoverishment.

Most surviving mothers had no education, skills or stable source of income. Left with few options, these mothers often returned with their children to their parental families, where they struggled to survive. Interviewees described the hardships they endured after moving in with their mothers' family. Some mentioned dropping out of school at a young age and being forced to work to supplement the family income. Amon explained what happened to her family: 'My mother was only a farmer and couldn't get enough to send us to school, forcing me to drop out in P.4<sup>xxvii</sup> [...] I had to help my mother with gardening and household chores' (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Most women interviewed were pushed into work at an early age to support their families, causing them to drop out of school—harming their chances for future survival and labour market participation.

Some mothers in this situation remarried, leaving their children from the previous marriage in the care of extended family members (mostly maternal uncles, aunts or grandmothers). They

did this to avoid problems related to having children from another marriage in their new relationship. Maria, a 24-year-old who lost her father as a child, said that her mother left to remarry when she was in P.7.<sup>xxviii</sup> She and her siblings were left under the care of her maternal aunt, and she never saw their mother again (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Although remarriage enabled women to access vital resources such as land and social status, their children from previous marriages faced new vulnerabilities. Living without either parent, these children had to work to fill the gap in income, often being forced to drop out of school. Maria, for example, worked in people's gardens to provide for her own schooling and other household needs, because her aunt was unable to afford these things. However, she was unable to afford the cost of secondary education, so she had to drop out. The absence of a strong nurturing and supportive social environment also had a negative effect on these children, exposing them to risky behaviours.

Despite these harms, the nature of the traditional social set-up in northern Uganda reinforced the mothers' choice to leave their children behind. In these contexts, belonging and inheritance rights are based on patrilineal identity, making children from past relationships a burden and threat to future inheritance. In most cases, the new husbands were unlikely to accept—let alone care for—the children of another man.

The high cost of schooling, war and displacement contributed to most of the interviewed women dropping out of school at a young age. The caretakers of many of the women had prioritised sending their own children to school, while these women stayed home to perform domestic labour. For instance, Bena, who lost both parents and was raised by a maternal aunt, asserted that she was kept at home to help with domestic chores and garden work while her aunt's children attended school (Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015). These women were thus a source of free domestic labour, possibly as repayment for being looked after by the family.

Women raised by extended family members also reported suffering abuse and maltreatment. They were treated as unwanted burdens. Eleven of the 21 women interviewed had experienced some form of abuse or maltreatment, including denial of food, not being allowed to attend school/church, overwork, false accusations, severe beatings and other forms of harsh treatment, including sexual abuse. The accumulation of bad experiences from childhood to the teenage years forced some women to leave home.

Several women described running away. Bena, for example, who was mistreated by her aunt, ran away from home at the age of 12, and Acayo, an interviewee born out of wedlock and raised by her mother's family, ran away at the age of 11. Similar accounts were shared by women raised by stepparents. Ebina, a 30-year-old whose father remarried after the death of her mother, reported running away at the age of 15. Although running away was an escape from harsh treatment, these women merely found themselves caught in other forms of vulnerability in the new spaces.

Women who followed their mothers to their new marital homes faced difficulties gaining the acceptance of their stepparents. Acayo described her experience when she tried to follow her mother at her marital home: 'I went to follow my mum, but my stepfather did not like me. He called me names— *'ogwang-ogwang'* [a derogatory term used to refer to children born out of wedlock]' (Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Some mothers were also unwelcoming to their own children in their new marital homes, possibly out of fear of creating problems with their husbands. As described in her life story above, Amony, who lost her father in childhood, tried three times to follow her mother to her marital home after experiencing problems with her extended family: 'I wanted to feel a mother's love, but she did not welcome me [...] She rejected me, for the second time [...] She even told her friends I am not her biological daughter but a stepchild. I felt bad' (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015). This kind of rejection exposed

women to other forms of maltreatment; many moved from one relative to another, but the mistreatment continued.

Displacement and impoverishment caused by the prolonged armed conflict in northern Uganda left many families poorer, struggling to survive with little recovery assistance (Mazurana et al., 2014). Local elders and leaders noted that traditional social networks have broken down because of the impoverishment and damage to livelihoods resulting from the loss of livestock and reduction in land holdings. Social support systems that once protected vulnerable people were eroded. Instead, some extended relatives steal resources from orphans and widows, pushing such families to the edge of survival (see Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014).

Early life experiences of family breakdown following the death or separation of their parents negatively shaped women's teenage and adult lives. These experiences were further compounded by patriarchal and gender norms involving male control, access, privilege and dominance. When a father died, the surviving family members lost their land, housing and clan-based networks, driving them deeper into poverty. In most cases, children were unable to start or complete school, experienced maltreatment and abuse in the extended family, and were pushed into work at an early age. These experiences negatively shaped their paths into later life.

#### **5.4.2 An early life of 'bad work'**

Difficult home life forced women to leave in search of work opportunities, often moving from place to place and between different type of work. Before engaging in sex work, the women in this study mainly performed casual, low-skilled labour, including domestic help and babysitting; serving food, collecting water and emptying trash in restaurants; serving drinks in bars and lodges; gardening; selling charcoal; hairdressing; brewing alcohol and fish mongering. Zena, a 16-year-old who lost both parents and came to live with a maternal uncle in Lira, described leaving home and starting out on her own:

I came to Lira in 2014 to live with my maternal uncle, hoping he would take care of me, but he didn't receive me well. Whenever anything went missing from his home, he accused me of being responsible, even when I didn't do anything [...] so I left for town in June [2015] to look for something to do to make my own living. In town, I started living with a woman, helping at her restaurant: washing plates, collecting water, taking out garbage. In turn, she gave me accommodations, food and paid me UGX. 3,000 [USD 0.80] per day. At her home, I also helped with household chores. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

Although this woman's work provided a means to survive and also offered a family environment, this situation was rare. The majority of jobs did not offer protection and safety, exposing women to additional risky situations.

Women mentioned that their low-skilled jobs offered poor or no pay and had bad working conditions, long hours without food and abusive environments. Most women had worked for months without pay, mainly in jobs that were very exploitative. Ebina, dropped out of primary school and left to find work, described her situation as follows:

I started work with a woman in Gulu after I left home because of mistreatment by my stepmother. I was 15 years old. I worked in her hotel but was so young and small and only helped mop and clean chairs because I couldn't perform hard tasks. I left and worked in hotels, bars and lodgings in Pajule-Pader and in Lira. In Pajule, I was hardly paid, yet overworked. We were only two waitresses who had to serve and do all the work. There was no time to rest despite the poor pay and work conditions. We would have breakfast late, at times about 12:00 pm, and lunch was even worse—sometimes at about 5:00 pm, and we hardly had dinner. The food was also of poor quality. I became weak and lost a lot of weight. When my other colleague left, I got so tired because I was alone running the whole place, so I also decided to leave even though I was never paid for the work. I left and came to Lira, where I worked in another bar and lodge. (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

The women's accounts showed a pattern of moving from one form of bad work to another, without any progression, partly because they lacked the skills and connections required to enter the world of 'good work', which pays relatively well, is regular and has decent working conditions (see Mallet and Atim, 2014 p.13–14). These women moved in and out of poverty in a process marked by high levels of volatility in their livelihoods (see Marshak et al., 2017). This



uncertainty led women to consider alternative ways of surviving, and they were often pushed into riskier circumstances.

### **5.4.3 Early and violent intimate relationships**

Hardships in their youth pushed women into early sexual relationships and marriages, which most saw as paths to a better life. Most women started marital relationships when they were 14–17 years old, and almost all (19) of them had been in some form of marital relationship. Amon, now a mother of four children, married in 2003, when she was 14 years, to a man she met when her family was living in a displacement camp in Lira: ‘I was forced to marry at a young age because life was not easy in the camp’ (Interview, 16<sup>th</sup> September 2015). Amon also recalled her experience as follows:

I lived as a maid with a woman in a peri-urban area in Lira, providing child care for a fee [...] It's there that I met a former neighbour from the village who asked me to help nurse his sick sister [...] He tricked me into becoming his girlfriend [...] and we later lived together as boyfriend and girlfriend. But as soon as I got pregnant, he disappeared and denied responsibility for the pregnancy. I felt so betrayed by him. I was 16 years old at the time. (Interview, 18<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

Raised in a patriarchal setting where women's socioeconomic security and status are predicated on their relationships with men, some women saw these relationships as the way to a better life. Most of the women had children at a young age and faced continued exposure to the risks of increased impoverishment, violence, abuse and disease. Early childhood experiences thus led to multiple risks later in life.

The women who had been in martial relationships had separated and returned to live with their own families. In 13 cases, intimate partner violence led to the separation, and other women were simply abandoned. Abii decided to get married when she was 18 years old because of mistreatment by her stepmother. However, the relationship fell apart after a few years; her

husband mistreated her, had extramarital affairs and did not provide for the family. Like almost all of the women interviewed, she returned to her family home after the separation.

A few of the women had been in relationships that were violent and abusive, exposing them to multiple risks, including HIV/AIDS. Some women noted that their husbands had regularly fought with them; others sold whatever crops the women produced for home use, leaving the household without food security. Lela got pregnant and moved in with the man:

When I was 16, I got pregnant while at home taking care of my sick mother after I had left school because there was no one to pay—our father deserted the family after the war [...] I faced many problems in the relationship after I moved in with the man. He would sell all the crops I farmed, leaving the family without food, yet he didn't support me to farm the land. I returned to my family with my child. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

Some men were reportedly heavily dependent on alcohol, leaving the bulk of productive work to women, most of whom were also young mothers. In-laws, especially mothers-in-law, also sometimes mistreated the women. The women described having limited agency overrunning the household and resource use. It does seem that most men were not able to fulfil their masculine role as providers, often tending to exert their powers negatively through violence and abuse. And as other research has found, the conflict in northern Uganda led to a collapse of masculinity, changes in traditional roles and obligations, and an overall strain on familial networks. In a patriarchal setting, these changes have especially impacted women's and children's access and rights (see Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin, 2014; Dolan, 2009).

#### **5.4.4 Gender norms and relations**

Failed marital relationships forced women to return to their parental homes, usually with their children. Some women left their children with grandparents or patrilineal family or other relatives in the village. Many women faced enormous socioeconomic hardships, harsh treatment and stigma when returning home. Those returning with children, especially, faced hardship in their own families. Many spoke of experiences of harassment and maltreatment

from their brothers, who were ashamed that their sisters had children but were not ‘properly’ married. They feared their sister’s bride-price value was lowered by having children outside of marriage.

Additionally, the maternal family saw the children as an additional burden and a threat to land inheritance. Some of the children were called names denoting their unwantedness and lack of belonging. The experience of stigma towards women and their children was exacerbated when the women were unable to contribute to the family livelihood or to provide economically for their children. Lela further recounted her experience:

I returned to my family with my child but met harassment and rejection from my brother for having a child before marriage. My brother called my daughter all sorts of names because of my unmarried status, saying I will likely not be married or bring any brideprice to the family because I had a child before marriage and that I have burdened the family with my ‘bastard’ child. His treatment of me and my child pained me so much, which forced me to leave the village for town in search of a life on my own. (Interview, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2015)

Women returning to their parental families often faced rejection and stigma for being unmarried. This trapped them in a situation with little option but to resort to sex work for survival (Interview, Community Development Officer, Lira, 21<sup>st</sup> September, 2015).

Women who had lost one or both parents and had family property taken away by the paternal extended family had no fall-back after a failed marriage/relationship. Some women’s parental families simply did not allow them, as women, to use any family land for cultivation or even to stay in the home. Without access to land and because of the general volatility in rural livelihoods, women were unable to provide for themselves and their children. Alobo, 25-year-old who had returned home with three children, described her situation as follows:

In 2014, I came to town because my mother and brother denied me any access to family land to farm for myself after I returned home. My brother dislikes me for being unmarried, which does not benefit him. He even fought me and took away all my property. I felt so lonely even though I was in our home because no one liked or

supported me; even my sisters-in-law told me to go back to my relationship and persevere like other women do. (Interview, 11<sup>th</sup> February 2014)

Gender norms and relations regarding marriage, patrilineal identity and land inheritance complicated women's and children's place in the maternal family, creating additional forms of vulnerability and risk.

## **5.5 Conclusions**

This study was based on the accounts of 21 sex workers in Lira, northern Uganda. Interviews were conducted to understand how these women experienced their lives as sex workers and the factors that drove them into sex work. One reason women engage in sex work is to meet their own basic needs and those of their children. Prior to engaging in sex work, most of the women had been in marital relationships and were single mothers.

However, the women did not experience sex work only as a form of livelihood. All study participants hoped to find a different life, framing their engagement in sex work as a temporary strategy to transition into an independent life. These hopes were often maintained despite their awareness of the difficulty of finding a regular partner for a woman carrying the stigma of sex work. Another exit option from sex work was accumulating enough money to start a reliable and socially acceptable business. However, this was likely impossible for most of the women, who could not even afford to meet their immediate needs.

The women's stories of how they drifted into sex work involved the assistance of social networks, friends or relatives who were already engaged in sex work. The networks provided accommodations and tips on sex work for newcomers.

The vast majority of the women's stories had layers of personal life challenges beginning in childhood: histories of abuse, family breakdown, violence, early entries to work and bad working conditions. The death or separation of their parents was a negative turning point in the

lives of many women. The absence of attachment to a nurturing and supportive adult in childhood was profound. These women were unable to start or complete school; they were exposed to abuses, violence, maltreatment and bad working conditions; and they had histories of running away. These experiences led to other risks and vulnerabilities—early sexual relationships, early and unplanned pregnancies and violence. Similarly, gender relations and norms, and ideologies and institutions relating to marriage, inheritance, patrilineal identity, women's sexual purity and access to vital resources negatively shaped women's experiences. Thus, being poor or having experienced conflict alone was not enough to drive women into sex work, but, when combined with other vulnerabilities, it could push women into this role. However, engaging in sex work only served to reproduce and reinforce the inequalities women were trying to escape.

The study concludes that women's engagement in sex work has multiple drivers: impoverishment, social networks, family breakdown, social networks and structures, and unequal gender norms and relations. These conditions were further exacerbated by the protracted conflict in northern Uganda. Instead of focusing exclusively on the women engaging in sex work, it is imperative to consider and address the broader contexts contributing to women's vulnerabilities overall and to explore women's earlier lives to understand their present choices.



## **Chapter 6      Women survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence**

### **Summary**

Girls and women who bear children owing to wartime sexual violence committed by armed actors face challenges in gaining acceptance on return to their families and societies. This study analysed the lives of women survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence in Uganda. It draws on a population-based survey of 1,844 households in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions of northern Uganda, as well as on in-depth qualitative interviews conducted in 2014 and 2015 with 67 purposefully selected women survivors of wartime sexual violence. The study finds that: stigma is linked to broader gender discriminatory sociocultural norms and practices and changes under different circumstances; women's economic agency is essential to reducing stigma; households with members who suffered war-related sexual violence experienced significantly higher rates of violence post-conflict than did other households; and the passage of time is less of a determining factor in their acceptance and reintegration than previously thought.

This chapter was published as a journal article as Teddy Atim, Dyan Mazurana and Anastasia Marshak (2018) as part of the special issue on gender, sexuality and violence in humanitarian crises. *Disasters* 42 (S1): S61 – S78.

## 6.1 Introduction

The focus on women survivors of wartime sexual violence has resulted in increased attention being paid to its long-term impact on their social acceptance in post-conflict environments. Coulter (2009) and Denov and Ricard-Guay (2013) are critical of the fact that discussions about these women have centred primarily on their marginality and vulnerability, overlooking their agency at times. Girls and women survivors of wartime sexual violence often are treated as a homogenous group; however, studies show that those who return from conflict with children born of war-related sexual violence experience more and different challenges than those who do not (McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Annan et al., 2008; Coulter, 2009).

This chapter situates itself within an emerging subfield that theorises and documents experiences of bearing children owing to sexual violence by parties to an armed conflict (Porter, 2013, 2017; Theidon, 2015). It records and assesses how such girls and women respond to and shape their social relations with their family and community in the post-conflict period in the context of northern Uganda. In particular, it investigates how stigma associated with them manifests and to what effect, and the ways in which they can overcome it. Wartime sexual violence includes forced marriage, forced pregnancy and childbearing, rape, and sexual enslavement by warring parties, in this case the armed forces of the Government of Uganda (GoU) and the rebel Lord's Resistance Army.<sup>xxix</sup>

This chapter adds to the development of existing theory and knowledge of female survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence by applying Holly Porter's (2017) concept of social harmony, yielding a more nuanced understanding of family and community treatment of them in post-conflict northern Uganda. Social harmony refers to widely shared and highly valued ideals that denote 'good' and 'normal' relations among the living and between the living and the dead and seeks to attain moral order, social balance, and spiritual stability. These ideals are norms and underpin what is considered 'appropriate' and 'respectable' ways of life for



members of a society. They are not always just, particularly where they are based on patriarchal structures that subordinate women and girls and privilege broader social considerations over individual rights and lives (Porter, 2017, p. 3–4).

Utilising the first systematic large-scale representative study of war crimes, the chapter adds unique empirical evidence to the study of women and their children born of wartime sexual violence, comparing them to other women survivors that did not have children as a result of such atrocities. Furthermore, it contributes a solid description of the oft-cited stigma associated with these women and their children and their efforts to mitigate it, particularly through economic empowerment.

The research was conducted in northern Uganda, where some two decades of violence and armed conflict (1986–2006) greatly affected the populations of the Acholi and Lango sub-regions of the country. Many acts have taken a huge toll, including: the abduction and forced recruitment of adults and children; the deaths and disappearances of family members; the destruction of families; the erosion of trust within communities and between citizens and the state; forced pregnancy and childbearing within the LRA; massive asset stripping; the targeting and destruction of schools, health centres, trading posts, and other forms of infrastructure; systematic rape; and war-related physical injury and emotional distress (OHCHR, 2007; UHRC and OHCHR, 2011).

## **6.2 Methods**

This study uses qualitative and quantitative data collected by in northern Uganda between February 2013 and December 2015. The Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC)-Uganda, of which Mazurana and Atim are the country leads, carried out a population-based survey that collected data between January and February 2013 from 1,877 households in Acholi

and Lango, the two most conflict-affected sub-regions of northern Uganda, with a population of approximately 3.63 million people (Mazurana et al., 2014).

A two-stage randomized cluster sample design was employed, and the sample size was calculated using a 95 per cent confidence level and a power of 0.80 for a total sample of 1,844 households. Villages, serving as the cluster, were selected in the first stage and households within those clusters in the second stage. Probability-proportional-to-size sampling was performed to generate the number of sub-counties to be sampled in each district, for a total of 80 sub-counties or clusters. The sub-counties were randomly selected, and from each sub-county at least one village was randomly selected, for a total of 90 villages. In each village, approximately 20 households were randomly selected. The final sample included 1,857 household observations of which 1,772 captured information on household heads. Attrition occurred at 16 per cent between waves one and two, for a total of 1,552 households surveyed in 2015.

The villages were the primary sampling units. Probability weights were added to each of the observations based on population numbers extrapolated using the 2002 population census and the Uganda population growth rate. All of the analysis accounts for the research design effect.<sup>xxx</sup>

The qualitative information draws on interviews held between 2013 and 2015 with 57 purposefully selected females who are survivors of wartime sexual violence perpetrated by parties to the armed conflict (30 from Lango and 27 from Acholi), comprising 67 interviews in total. These women were not part of the SLRC-Uganda survey, and were selected to represent diversity in age, ethnicity, and war experience, childbearing, length spent in captivity, and marriage. Women known to Teddy Atim were selected first, and then a female survivor of forced marriage and childbearing was employed as a research assistant to reach out to other

women. While the methodology enabled us to discuss in detail a difficult subject with the women, it also limits the extent of the representativeness of the findings.

Women interviewed ranged from 20 to 40 years of age. Thirty-seven of the women had spent more than a year within the LRA. Those abducted before 2001 had lived for five years or more with the LRA, whereas those abducted after 2001 spent a relatively shorter time in captivity. Of the 57 women interviewed, 36 returned with a child or children born of war or returned pregnant and delivered subsequently, and 21 did not return with a child. In Acholi, 23 of the 27 women interviewed returned with a child, whereas in Lango, only seven of the 30 women interviewed returned with a child. At the time of the interviews, 24 women were single (16 in Acholi, 8 in Lango), 9 were cohabiting, 14 were married (5 from Acholi, 9 from Lango), and 10 were separated (2 from Acholi, 8 from Lango).

### **6.3 The effects of wartime sexual violence on girls and women**

Many governments and development partners assume that in the aftermath of armed conflict life will normalise and households will begin a slow but relatively steady upwards progression ('recovery'). The reality, though, is not so straightforward (Mazurana et al., 2014; Levine, 2016; Marshak et al., 2017; Maxwell et al., 2017). Research from numerous countries finds that suffering sexual violence at the hands of warring parties can have lifelong consequences for girls and women, which are magnified when they bear children as a result of it.

The stigma experienced is embedded in the pre-war and war-related gendered social inequalities that exacerbate vulnerability (Utas, 2005; Betancourt et al., 2008; McKay et al., 2010; Theidon, 2015). Unequal gender relations within family and society, the subordinate status of women and girls, and the acceptance of violence against them are grounded in social systems; conflict exacerbates these forms of violence (Fisher, 2010). Coulter (2009) found that women returning with children born owing to wartime sexual violence in Sierra Leone had to assume traditional

and subservient gender roles, as expected of them, to smooth their acceptance into the family and community. Women who transgressed prescribed roles and expectations of a 'good woman/wife' risked punishment and ostracisation. They also risked further discrimination and harm as they lived in a context where women's purity and value were attached to being a virgin, as a prerequisite to being a good woman/wife and hence marriageable. Coulter (2009) discovered that some women attempted to renegotiate their status and position in the family by using their work and income to lessen stigma within their larger communities.

Denov (2010), in a study of youth soldiers in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, found that girls' experienced various forms of rejection and stigma on return to their families and communities. This was more profound among girls that returned with children fathered through wartime sexual violence, given the double shame of their association with the rebels and being visible victims of sexual violence. As with Coulter (2009), Denov (2007, 2010) notes that experiences of wartime sexual violence violated community norms of virginity before marriage, undermined the paternal identity of children in patrilineal settings, and reduced women's potential to marry in the post-conflict period. What is more, wartime sexual violence complicated the future prospects of mothers and their children, particularly as marriage bestows status and access to key resources such as economic security, land, and protection.

Annan et al. (2008) report that, in northern Uganda, one-quarter of all girls and women abducted by the LRA that were kept in captivity for more than two weeks were given as forced wives to commanders and other fighters; of these, one-half gave birth to children. The women and girls who suffered sexual violence during the conflict but did not have children as an outcome of it did not experience stigma at anywhere near the levels of those who did return with children, although both sets of victims found that their experience of stigma lessened over time.

Porter (2013, 2017) underlines that abduction and sexual violence experience inside the LRA transgressed Acholi norms of marriage and love, underpinning morality and social harmony. She finds that many women survivors of wartime sexual violence in northern Uganda experienced social difficulties in both their parental homes and with new husbands (Porter, 2013, p. 246). In part, women's challenges centred on the action of sex in the 'bush', which was seen as harmful and entailed cosmological consequences unless cleansed; as opposed to sex at 'home', which was seen as for creation and to cement a marital relationship. Children born of war-related sexual violence also have ambiguous social belonging in society, as they are viewed as liminal or temporarily in their mother's clan and not belonging to the father's clan owing to a lack of customary exchanges. This complicates their access to burial ground, dispute resolution, and land, key identity markers among the Acholi and Langi.<sup>xxx</sup>

This chapter contributes to this literature pool by using one of the first large-scale, population-based survey of war crimes to explore in detail women who have experienced sexual wartime violence, and it complements this data set with in-depth interviews with such women. It is also among the first works to provide a solid description of the various forms of stigma suffered by these women and their children born of wartime sexual violence, and the ways in which some of them are able to overcome the challenges through economic engagement and by building new socioeconomic networks.

### **6.3.1 Female survivors of wartime sexual violence**

The SLRC-Uganda study estimates conservatively that approximately 20,770 households have members that experienced wartime sexual violence by parties to the conflict (14,601 in Acholi and 6,169 in Lango), with 24,689 individual victims of sexual war crimes (14,346 in Acholi and 10,343 in Lango).<sup>xxxii</sup> The same study also estimates conservatively that 1:50 households in Lango and 1:25 households in Acholi had a member who experienced wartime sexual

violence by parties to the conflict, and that approximately 3,000–8,000 households in the two sub-regions have children born of wartime sexual violence (Mazurana et al., 2014).

### ***Wealth and women's livelihoods***

The SLRC-Uganda survey revealed that households in the Acholi and Lango sub-regions with members who experienced wartime sexual violence were more likely to be in the lower wealth category. Women who were customarily married<sup>xxxiii</sup> were significantly more likely to live within better-off households than those who were unmarried. Notably, the survey found no significant difference in marriage rates between women who were sexually violated by parties to the conflict (57 per cent of whom were married when surveyed) and those who were not (54 per cent). Those who returned with children born of wartime sexual violence, however, were significantly (at the one per cent level of significance) less likely to be married, with marriage rates of around 30 per cent. Importantly, households in which victims of wartime sexual violence were customarily married had better food security than those in non-marital relationships or those who had separated from their husband. This could be because married households have better access to land and receive extra support for food production from their spouse, as compared to unmarried or separated women.

The vast majority of women from rural areas reported that farming was their primary livelihood, alongside other small businesses, such as bead work, brewing alcohol, selling clothes, and tailoring. Women in urban areas mainly performed small businesses for the reason of survival, at times with a rural–urban linkage. Only a few were formally employed. While the multiplicity and diversification of income sources among women exemplifies livelihood resilience, it also points to the degree of economic and livelihood volatility with which most of these women live, as confirmed by the second panel of the SLRC-Uganda survey (Marshak et al., 2017).

Interestingly, vocational skills played a minor part in women's livelihoods. Most women interviewed in the qualitative study had trained in vocational activities (mainly tailoring), but the majority were unable to utilise the skills to support themselves. Most rehabilitation programmes in northern Uganda prioritised vocational training over formal education (Annan et al., 2008). Only five women had salaried employment; all of them had re-entered formal schooling and received training on professional courses. This finding raises questions about the efficacy of short-term vocational skills training in enhancing livelihoods where a multitude of factors affect a woman's ability to use these skills.

Health complications resulting from war-related injuries also affect the livelihood activities of women. Difficulties in pursuing agricultural initiatives were significantly (at the one per cent level) correlated with suffering sexual violence war crimes (Mazurana et al., 2014). The qualitative study showed that women who were trained as tailors (the majority as part of non-governmental organisation (NGO) programmes) complained of constant backaches owing to unhealed injuries due to carrying children and heavy loads of loot over long distances, exposure to bomb fragments, beatings, burnings, and other injuries sustained while in LRA captivity. The situations of these women are compounded by the lack of effective treatment for injuries suffered; many relied on painkillers to relieve their discomfort, and many were unable to receive therapeutic treatment. Consequently, most of the women interviewed looked for livelihoods suited to their poor health conditions. Yet choices are limited, as one woman remarked:

[I] have to concentrate on my tailoring because it's my life, even though I feel a lot of chest pain that affects my concentration when on the machine. In captivity, I carried my first child on my back for nearly four years every time we were in flight or walking. Additionally, carrying heavy loots while in captivity causes me severe back pain to date (Interview, Lira town, September 2014).

The findings in this subsection point to the lifelong consequences of conflict and wartime sexual violence for women's livelihoods and earnings, affecting, in turn, their ability to live in harmony with their families and society. Many women have limited options to engage in

sustainable livelihoods owing to interrupted education, limited viable skills, and ill health. Of the 57 women interviewed, 52 did not return to formal education and only 5 completed secondary school—education level associated with improved household wealth and food security (Mazurana et al., 2014); the majority are engaged in low-paying activities, keeping them trapped in poverty (see also Marshak et al., 2017). Women with children have the additional burden of care, education, and health expenses.

### ***Continued victimisation and discrimination***

The survey found that households with a member who had suffered sexual violence during the conflict were more likely (at the five per cent level) to have experienced at least one or more crimes in the past three years as compared to households without a member who had experienced wartime sexual violence (see Table 1). This relation remained even when controlling for marital status and regional differences. In contrast to other households, those with members who had suffered wartime sexual violence reported significantly more experience of crime in the past three years: disappearance of family members, housebreaking (burglary), land grabbing, livestock theft, physical attack or assault, serious physical harm to a child, and general theft(all significant at the one per cent level); poisoning of a family member (significant at the five per cent level); and rape or sexual assault (significant at the 10 per cent level).



**Table 1. Proportion of households reporting crimes**

	Households reporting war crime of sexual violence			Households reporting other war crimes and not sexual violence <sup>xxxiv</sup>			Households reporting no war crimes and no sexual violence		
Crimes in past three years	Mean (%)	Frequ ncy	Observ ations	Mean (%)	Freq.	Observ ations	Mean (%)	Frequ ncy	Observa tions
Theft	48	24	50	39	236	612	23	175	762
Housebreak (burglary)	36	18	50	28	171	611	12	94	762
Livestock theft	30	15	50	22	136	612	14	108	762
Land grabbing/dispossession	24	12	50	19	119	612	10	74	762
Serious physical harm to a child	14	7	50	7	45	612	4	30	762
Poisoning of a family member	14	7	50	6	34	611	8	64	761
Disappearance of family members	12	6	50	4	24	612	0	6	762
Rape or sexual assault	10	5	50	8	51	611	2	16	762
Physical attack or assault	10	5	50	7	44	612	1	14	762

The treatment of women survivors within their families and communities is attributable to their experience of wartime sexual violence (taboo in local culture) and perceived role in perpetrating violence against civilians as members of the LRA. Both transgressed traditional gender ideals and disrupted social harmony, structures, and support systems, generating new vulnerabilities and risks to these households and the wider society. The consequences manifested in the form of physical and social attacks on households many years after the conflict. These attacks are gendered multipliers of violence, in which past crimes compound and result in present and future crimes and forms of harm (Walker, 2009; Mazurana and Proctor, 2014; International Center for Transitional Justice, 2015; Wako et al., 2015). The finding suggests that the passage

of time is not perhaps as crucial in lessening survivor's experience of stigma as stated in past studies (see, for example, Annan et al., 2008). Rather, other economic and sociocultural factors seem to be more important in explaining re-victimisation.

### *Intimate relations and family life*

Women survivors of wartime sexual violence were significantly more likely to be unmarried as their counterparts who did not suffer such an ordeal (in both cases, approximately one-half were married, and one-half were single or cohabitating). However, the situation was different for women who returned with children born of wartime sexual violence, with only 30 per cent of them customarily married at the time of the interview (as compared to about one-half of females who returned without children).

Women who returned with children described how men (intimates) treated them because of their wartime experiences. Some men used it to abuse the women emotionally, physically, sexually, and verbally, as well as a reason to desert them and their children born of war.

Most women interviewed during the qualitative work shouldered the bulk of daily care and provisioning for the household. The women earn money to pay for food and schooling, to meet rent, and to fulfil medical needs for themselves and their children. As one woman from Lango explained:

My husband never supports me at all [. . .] not even school fees or any household needs does he provide. I do everything on my own [. . .] [he] comes over [at] the weekend [. . .] and goes back on Sunday without leaving any money or anything to run the family. Instead, he will even pick my own money to use for his transport back to town (Interview, Kole, September, 2014).

Marriage and family life is idealised by many in the sub-region as an arrangement that buffers women and their children from vulnerability and supports them in the daily running of the

household. As these women show, though, their relationships often led to additional deprivation, humiliation, and violence entering their lives. Consequently, while women may move closer to an idealised vision of social harmony through marriage, in some cases the lived reality is that the treatment of women in marriage represses their dignity and rights, as well as those of their children.

Some women had multiple sexual relationships, at times bearing children by different men who subsequently neglected them, adding to their burden and vulnerability (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015). One woman from Lango with two children born of rape in the LRA, and on return lived with a man with whom she had more children, noted that:

When my twin children were born and one got sick, the man didn't show up anywhere. And when one died, he did not accept the body or show up at the funeral or provide support. [. . .] My elder brother and family buried the child on our land while I was in hospital with the surviving child (Interview, Oyam, September, 2014)

This example illustrates the ambiguous status of some children born of wartime rape, where even their burial sites are contested.

A lack of alternatives traps some women and their children born of rape in emotionally and physically abusive relationships (Ladisch, 2015). They feel they are neither able to return home nor leave an abusive relationship. As a woman from Lango who has five children and now cohabits with a man put it: '[i]f I had somewhere to go, I would have left long ago, but I stay because I don't have anywhere to go—considering the problems in my family . . . these children would have nowhere to go (Interview, Lira, September, 2014).

Some potential in-laws created problems and eroded the possibility of acceptance and marriage in a non-abusive home. Even when the man is willing to settle down with the woman and her children, his family may pressure him to find a 'better wife.' The perception of these women and their children as tainted is premised on the assumption that persons who lived inside the LRA are affected by *cen*, an evil spirit that desires vengeance. Affliction by *cen* can result from

witnessing or committing violence or even from association with the exposed person. Families fear that the females and their children could turn asocial, amoral, and violent once burdened with this condition, and that it could contaminate the lineage owing to association, effecting social harmony (Porter, 2017, p. 135–136). Although *cen* can be cleansed to restore social harmony, widespread poverty and destitution often make it impossible for families to afford the ritual requirements.

Women frequently spoke of experiencing rejection and poor treatment by their own family members as well. Some parents rejected their daughters outright upon their return from captivity. One female from Acholi said: ‘[m]y parents deserted me . . . when I go to them they would say, “Do we have anything of yours so we give it back to you?”’ (interview, Gulu, September 2013). Another mother of two children born of wartime sexual violence added: ‘I hate home so much. I don’t like to stay home, it’s the reason I now stay here in town’ (Interview, Lira, August, 2013). They claim that this treatment is, in part, what drove them into marriage, cohabiting, or moving away to live in peri-urban areas, detaching themselves from daily humiliation and rejection by their families.

Women mentioned that male relatives were particularly unwelcoming and harsh towards them and their children. Abia pointed out:

My brother told the family he wants no child of his sisters at home, they should go look for their father. When he said that, I left to come to town with all my children and have never gone back to stay, I only go to visit. [. . .] But my mother defended my children saying I had the two children against my will (Interview, Lira, September, 2014).

Some women also stated that their families came into conflict with them over the NGO support they received as part of their reintegration; they became estranged from their relatives as a result. The story of a 29-year-old woman who married because of the frustration she met at home illuminates this point. When she got her amnesty package, which included UGX 264,000

(approx. USD 75), she used it to purchase a few personal items for herself, her daughter, and her mother who had just given birth. She then gave the balance of UGX 150,000 (approx. USD 42) to her father so that he could buy her one cow to keep for her daughter's future. However, the father had expected her to hand over all of the money. He thought that she would only take out UGX 4,000 (approx. USD 1) for her transport. Because she had spent some of the money without his approval, the father became very angry, refused to speak to her, took all the items that she received as part of her reintegration package, and then used the money she had given him to buy a cow for himself. He also ordered her mother not to assist her. She decided to leave: '[a]fter this incident, I realised I had nothing at our home which was mine or my daughter's, so I decided to start a life of my own' (interview, Kole, September 2014).

Male hostility towards these women appears to be linked to cultural customs. Women's experience of wartime sexual violence and having children as a consequence burdens the family and disrupts the practice of a bride price (received by males) owing to the diminished possibility of marriage. Moreover, women learnt self-survival mechanisms during the war, which at times go against traditional norms of male control and dominance, severing social ties. Children born of wartime sexual violence and with an unclear patrilineal identity, furthermore, pose a threat to land inheritance by a mother's brothers. Male relatives have little incentive, therefore, to protect and provide for these women and their children.

### ***Children born of wartime sexual violence***

Married or cohabiting women spoke of the unequal treatment of their children born of wartime sexual violence as compared to children conceived with their partners, such as sending the latter to school, while the former is left at home (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015a). Some men have even tried to sabotage the school support provided to the children by external actors. Male children born of wartime sexual violence have been especially ill-treated and least

accepted by the men with whom their mothers reside, as they viewed them as a threat to resources and the inheritance of land and property. Many families who are struggling to survive see these children as an additional mouth to feed, breeding further resentment towards them (Mazurana et al., 2013).

The children are also a major point of disagreement between the women and their male partners, at times leading to separation (Justice and Reconciliation Project, 2015b). The women have a dilemma: they cannot leave the man who they feel can provide access to resources and status, nor can they send their children away, as often their natal families do not accept or want them. Hence, they and their children endure abuse and humiliation by the husband or domestic partner or strike out on their own.

Children born of wartime sexual violence clearly were seen as disruptions to social harmony and reported mistreatment within the larger family and community. Women mentioned that whenever their children went out to play in the community, other children would call them names, including ‘Kony’s children’ or ‘LRA children’, or depict them as ‘cold hearted’, ‘cruel’, ‘harsh’, ‘troublesome’, ‘violent’, and ‘wild’. In other instances, family members mistreated them, sometimes calling them ‘insane children’. They were blamed for fights and scapegoated for ills that befell families. The children also suffer abuse, discrimination, and humiliation at school. One mother noted that, at times, teachers segregate these children and treat them differently from the rest (Ladisch, 2015).

Children’s identity and access to key resources are based on patrilineal lineage solidified through customary exchanges. Despite the lack of customary exchanges, some women in Acholi have traced their former captor’s family in an effort to give their children access to land and to ensure clan belonging. The majority of Acholi women, though, do not approach their captors’ family, and to the knowledge of the authors only a few have done so among the Langi

(Apio, 2016). As their children often are not accepted at home, some women have left natal homes to settle in urban peripheries where they reside in shanty settlements with their children. Yet, this further distance the children from familial attachment that perhaps they could fall back on in the absence of their mothers. The women's choice to move out of their families and communities reflects the negative effects of social harmony on those deemed to be outside of the moral order.

The identity and association of these children with their LRA fathers and the circumstances of their birth (in the bush) transgresses social harmony and norms. Hence, they occupy an ambiguous social space, neither belonging to the family of their mother nor their father, leaving them facing the lifelong consequences of not belonging and having an unstable identity (Porter, 2013). The fate of the children greatly worries the mothers (see also Ladisch, 2015). Mothers spoke of the gloomy life and future that awaits their children born of wartime sexual violence. Importantly, without an education, land, resources, skills, and a stable source of income, mothers are unsure of what will become of their children. One mother who returned with two children born of wartime sexual violence noted:

I worry about how my children will go to school, if I consider the school fees now and the way I live today, I don't think I can afford it. That is my biggest worry including their future life. If they don't get education, where will they live? They could farm the land but which land? (Interview, Lira town, August, 2013).

The liminal status of the children has lifelong ramifications for their economic and social status.

Ongoing school support for some of these children provided by external sources (usually NGOs) was also said to increase community animosity and resentment. Some community members felt that these females and their children are not deserving of any support, seeing those who were once with the LRA as responsible for their suffering (Annan, Blattman, and Horton, 2006). Some women reported suffering community anger and outrage. One underlined that: '[m]y neighbours are jealous of my [two] children born of war who are being supported to go

to [a] good school, something they cannot afford' (Interview, Lira, September, 2013). Nonetheless, most women see their children as their future, and the children's education as their only hope and means of escape from their present predicament marginalisation and poverty.

Women emphasised that their experiences of abduction, wartime sexual violence, and returning with a child have become central components of their identity in the eyes of other people owing to the transgression of local norms, the disruption of social harmony, and pollution. As one woman put it, '[i]t is as though I have a big writing on my back written "Kony", everywhere I go, it's there, it will never go away' (Interview, Lira, September, 2014). Most of the women interviewed believe that their past thwarts every opportunity to settle down and continue to shape their lives. One remarked, '[t]his problem will never end, it's like a stamp on our body. It also includes the children born of war, any problem on me will also face my child' (Interview, Kole, September, 2014). Furthermore, the consequences that mothers endure are passed on to their children and will continue to be in the future (Walker, 2009; Ladisch, 2015).

### ***Social and communal life***

As women survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence attempt to negotiate their space in communities, they confront continual abuse and victimisation. The long periods of conflict and the resultant destitution and poverty has caused ruptures to social networks that people normally would utilise to function in their families and societies; the result is animosity, competition, and mistrust among some community members (Mazurana et al., 2013). Social networks in traditional societies underpin survival and protection in times of difficulty and vulnerability. The networks offer members access to material and non-material benefits. Inability to draw on them, therefore, can have a devastating impact on network members in a situation where there are limited to no state or external social protection systems in place. However, social networks can themselves constitute a subjugation mechanism, particularly



with respect to women and girls in patriarchal societies where access to them is conditional on people's gendered behaviour and ability to fulfil social obligations. The reality of such contexts forces women and girls without male protection or sponsorship to employ various strategies to negotiate their social space to evade social censure and the risk of being denied the material benefits that accrue from these networks. At times, this means allowing oneself to be abused or exploited, and taking on roles in which women must demonstrate subservience to men to attain wider social harmony at the expense of their own rights and well-being (Kandiyoti, 1988; Coulter, 2009; Ramnarain, 2015).

At times, community members blamed the women and their children for the harm that the community suffered during the war. They asserted that they were responsible for rebel attacks—as the LRA frequently forced captives to lead assaults on their villages—making their life in the villages impossibly difficult. For instance, a woman whose family lives near a massacre site in Lira said that when she had returned from captivity the community talked badly about her, and in one instance she was attacked by a man for allegedly being among those who participated in the bloody events. As a result, she said she cannot go back regularly to her village for fear of possible reprisals from the community.

Even though it is common knowledge that these women were forcibly abducted owing to a lack of protection, and thus are not responsible for what happened to them, they still face rejection and stigma. When families and communities feel that their own needs have not been addressed, it is hard for them to accept and offer support to these women and their children. The absence of appropriate victims' assistance programmes to redress conflict-related violations deepens feelings of animosity towards these women and their children, further fraying existing social and communal ties, and support for their reintegration (Mazurana et al., 2013; International Center for Transitional Justice, 2015). At the same time, the presence of the women and their

children born of wartime sexual violence in their families and communities is a reminder of war's rupture of local norms and disruption of social harmony.

### ***Coping with ongoing challenges: agency and survival***

Women and girls in northern Uganda play a key role in the production and maintenance of their families and communities' social capital through material and social exchanges, day-to-day cooperation, and informal social networks that help to promote wider social order (Mazurana et al., 2013). Despite the post-conflict challenges confronting these women and their children, some of the women exhibit remarkable strength as they struggle with livelihoods and to establish meaning in their lives.

Most women interviewed were engaged in a range of livelihood activities within the informal sector. Some said that they rode on trucks to access local markets to sell goods in villages, while some worked in alcohol and cotton ginning factories, jobs traditionally held by men. Since most live as single mothers, their livelihood activities have enabled them to meet their households' daily needs, and to make choices and take new directions in their lives. For married women, their livelihood activities have allowed them to have their own income and not to have to rely exclusively on their husbands. They underscored that, owing to their earnings, they had more ability to make family-related choices and decisions.

The women reported that their work gave them some pride and satisfaction, providing them with motivation and a purpose in life. Many mentioned that because of their work, they are always busy, which they felt helped them to make good choices about how to spend their money and time. Importantly, their work enabled them to maintain a positive image of themselves despite the negative behaviour of some of their family members and people in the community.

Those who were able to return to and complete school spoke of gaining more knowledge and self-confidence.

The study found that making an income permitted women to be less dependent on social networks and to carve out a more independent life and be seen as assets in their families and communities; the women still were aware of their exclusion at times, however, which was painful. Women said that their livelihoods activities matter in terms of how they are seen and treated in society, and that through their labour, their standing in the family and society is enhanced. Married women specifically noted that their labour improved their relationships with their spouse and family, who saw them as contributing members. A woman who returned from captivity with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) said that:

After my brothers saw I was able to survive on my own [. . .] they now relate well with me. My work has also changed people's feeling towards me. You know people, if you don't have anything and you ask for help no one helps, but now that I have something of my own, they can help and it keeps me close with people (Interview, Oyam, September, 2014).

Some women also used their earnings to extend support to their ageing parents and other extended family members, helping to negotiate their belonging and relations in the family and community and to rebuild social harmony. For those who went to school, their networks and opportunities expanded from new relationships built.

The social and other non-material benefits that accrue from women's work are important. As Carr (2013) notes, livelihoods must be seen as an effort to meet material and non-material needs and are linked to social relations and identities. For these women, therefore, being survivors of wartime sexual violence that carries with it long-lasting harm provides them with a much stronger imperative to engage in activities that can increase their mutuality in kinship and social relationships.

In a handful of cases, women from relatively affluent and educated families had their children born of wartime sexual violence taken over and raised, leaving them relatively free of parental responsibilities. Some families offered land to their daughters and their children, reducing the burden of care on the women. While this is contrary to the experiences of most women interviewed whose families rejected them and their children, the practice upholds the region's past local culture wherein children born outside of traditional marriage were absorbed by the woman's natal family.

Other women who returned from LRA captivity and who were married spoke of relying on the support and goodwill of their husbands for their survival. For example, a few had started their business with the financial support of their spouse.

Some women spoke of belonging to new savings group networks (both in towns and villages) that they can draw on in times of need. These networks remain a vital form of livelihoods support for the women, especially for financing their business ventures and meeting other requirements. For those that lack strong kin support, these groups become their new social and livelihoods support networks. However, not all women belonged to such a group; the poorest women could not raise sufficient income on a monthly basis to contribute to regular group savings and hence were unable to join (Marshak et al., 2017).

Some of the women who participated in the qualitative interviews had left their family homes in the village to live in a town, where they tried to remain anonymous. They noted that here they can live more freely from their past, and build new social networks and relationships, including with men. The new spaces enabled them to limit the kinship and social pressures present in rural settings that define expectations of a 'good wife/woman' that would victimise them based on their experiences. Their relationships with men were sought primarily to secure financial support, to gain access to land, and to receive the status that comes with being married

(the hoped-for goal of many). Furthermore, the choice of some women to live away from their families and communities afforded them the opportunity not to be subdued by repressive patriarchal norms that require them to conform to certain behaviours and ways of life. Disharmony or disinterest in maintaining social harmony with their natal family and community supplied the impetus for these women to claim individual rights and to seek well-being in new spaces.

In rare instances (in fact, there was only one in the study), women returned to their former LRA captor 'husband' or their captor's family (Apio, 2016). Such an action potentially could grant them and their children identity and belonging to their patrilineal family, increasing their chances of gaining access to essential resources, including land. Some of the Acholi women are said to have requested traditional leaders in the area to help identify the families of their former captors for this purpose. The case of a 29-year-old Acholi woman from Gulu is illustrative. Upon return, she cohabited with her former LRA forced-husband's brother in the hope of securing land rights for her two male children born of wartime sexual violence. In her own words, '[w]ith boys, there was no way I could go anywhere with them, so I decided to stay with him' (Interview, Gulu, October, 2014). She hopes that the man she lives with can officially marry her someday even though he already has two other wives and several children. Importantly, we did not find (nor hear of) such cases among the Langi women, who tend to shun their former captors (mostly Acholi) and their families (Apio, 2016). Women going back to their rapists or former captors as the only option to secure resources for their children born of war denotes a situation where patriarchal norms include women violently.

#### **6.4 Conclusion**

Women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children face many challenges in the post-conflict period. Their experience of harm owing to wartime sexual violence can multiply

and amplify over time in the form of alienation, exclusion, a lack of social acceptance, rejection, and stigma, resulting, at times, in new harm. The study confirms earlier findings that women with children born of wartime sexual violence suffer more stigma than do their peers who return without children. It finds too that social harmony functions in ways that can include and/or exclude women and their children born of wartime sexual violence, at times violently.

It is not simply the passing of time that seems to lessen the stigma. Rather, different factors play important roles in mediating the experiences of stigma and acceptance of these women and their children. In particular, some women renegotiate their identity through economic empowerment, so as not to be viewed as a burden on households and social networks. Their improved economic standing enables both material and social mutuality. Others move into new spaces, in the urban periphery where they have created new ways of presenting themselves and their histories, joined new socioeconomic networks, and achieved some level of economic independence and autonomy, negotiating their place and treatment within the family and society.

Relatedly, the disruption and distress caused by decades of war and underdevelopment in the region partly shapes the experience of stigma and rejection of these women and their children. Consequently, wider sociocultural and economic factors should be central to decisions aimed at addressing their plight.

## **Chapter 7**

# **Disrupting and renegotiating gendered social relations in post-conflict northern Uganda**

### **Summary**

This chapter explores the lives of 14 women survivors of wartime sexual violence in northern Uganda and contributes to an understanding of how people regain their social place after conflict. The chapter argues that regaining one's social place after experience of conflict is a continuous process which is deeply grounded in the patriarchal gender norms of society. The process of social repair is (re)negotiated through daily performances and strategies by women to regain their honor and status as respectable members of their society. Social repair can also be disruptive to normative framework when women perform acts outside their expected gender norms and roles. Better understanding the process of social repair requires paying attention to the everyday performances and strategies utilized and how they can either be reinforcing or transformative to patriarchal gender norms.

This chapter was written by Teddy Atim and has been submitted as a book chapter on 'Patriarchy and Gender' in Africa.

## **7.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, I document and analyze the accounts of 14 women who have returned from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) with children born of wartime sexual violence. I document and analyze their everyday choices, actions and strategies in their intimate relations, family, and society. I explore their actions and strategies as expressions of how they understand and attempt to renegotiate their social place that was disrupted and altered by wartime sexual violence.

Scholars call attention to the everyday processes of social repair in post-conflict settings. Social repair refers to the many ways people live with, make sense of, and come to terms with violence (Das 2001 in Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014 p.1). The argument is premised on the fact that war does not only dislocate people physically, but also dislocates them socially from their families and communities. Paying attention to people's everyday actions in the post-conflict enables us to understand how they (re)negotiate intimate and familiar relationships fractured by years of conflict, which is central to the process of social repair (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014).

To understand the processes of social repair undertaken by women survivors, I examine their everyday experiences and struggles inside intimate partner relations, family, and wider society. I also interrogate the extent to which their strategies or choices are shaped by patriarchal gender norms and relations, including how their actions (re)produce, challenge, and/or seek to transform these norms and relations. Certainly, women are not devoid of agency, but are capable of employing strategies and means to resist, transform, or re-organise patriarchal structures and institutions in their everyday actions.

Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin (2014) note that few studies document the impact of the conflict in northern Uganda on cultural dynamics. They argue that the fundamental challenge of the post-conflict period for many women lies in the disruption of kinship relations and networks



that define respectable womanhood through status, relations, and responsibility to others. The everyday challenges women encounter as they try to repair their relationships with others – and through this to remake their own lives – demonstrate the extent to which patriarchal gender and generational roles, relations, and norms are disrupted and transformed by conflict. I pay particular attention to changes or disruptions to local gender relations and patriarchal norms and how they, in turn, shape and influence women survivors' everyday lives, choices, strategies, and decisions in their attempts to re-assert and re-negotiate their social status. I also highlight how women navigate challenges posed by these disruptions to gender relations and kinships norms as their attempts to resist or re-organise these structures and institutions to better fit their realities and goals.

Armed conflict and displacement disrupts and transforms familial and kin networks and customary gender and generational relations and roles. Specifically, abduction, forced recruitment, and experiences of war related sexual violence challenges women's ability to return to their families and communities with the status of a respectable woman. Often after conflict, return is much more than physical re-entry into one's family and society, but about regaining one's social place and belonging (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). The experience of sexual violence against women in times of conflict is not only a crime against them, but also experienced as a rupture within their families and communities (see Stephen, 2013 in Apio, 2016). Sexual violence affects and alters all forms of conventional relations expected of men and women, presenting real challenges to women's reintegration (Porter, 2013). Particularly, the experience of sexual violence is perceived to transgress local ideas of moral order. Such perceptions affect women's social place in their family and society. It also challenges traditional gender relations, roles, and patriarchal norms that give meaning to everyday lives. With this understanding in mind, it is not surprising that women who return with children born of wartime sexual violence struggle to find acceptance for themselves and

their children in their family and community (Atim et al., 2018; Apio, 2016; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Coulter 2009; Denov 2010, McKay and Mazurana, 2004; Baines, 2011 and Porter, 2013).

Some women find that their only recourse is to take on a subordinate status in order to regain their social place (Coulter, 2009). They conform to established patriarchal gender relations and expectations of their society (Baines, 2011; Apio, 2016). Baines (2011) specially notes that resorting to normative behaviors by women survivors to gain acceptance can be “coercive and strips them of moral choices” (479). In such contexts, women’s attempt to restore and gain their status can contradict their human rights and contribute to reproduce harmful patriarchal gender ideologies and practices (Apio, 2016; Coulter, 2008).

### **7.1.1 Customary marriage practices in northern Uganda**

Finnström (2008) writes that the ability to marry with brideprice (paid to the bride’s family in livestock, cash, and other material goods) is a key marker for manhood for northern Ugandans. Meanwhile, womanhood is marked by the ability to marry and bear healthy children within the parameters of traditional marriage (see Apio, 2016 p.104). Finnström (200) contends that in Acholi culture, “a man without a woman is not complete and he will never be taken fully seriously, while Acholi women will only gain considerable status when they have given birth” (235) (see Girling, 1960; p’Bitek, 1986). Similarly, Hayley (1947) writes that in Lango, marriage was consolidated by the arrival of a child (83).

Historically in northern Uganda, traditional customary marriages were patrilocal, polygamous, and exogamous and an elaborate process that involved both families, lineages and clan.<sup>xxxv</sup> Marriages only occurred after lengthy periods of courtship (*cuna*) between the man and woman and after the union gained the approval and support of both families (Tosh, 1978; Hayley, 1940; Girling, 1960; Driberg, 1923).<sup>xxxvi</sup> Families and clans played a vital role in marriages including

ascertaining the suitability of each other by conducting background checks on either side to ensure they were not related or enemies or witches.<sup>xxxvii</sup> Families and clans also negotiated brideprice and fulfilled all marriage customs such as the brideprice payments (Driberg, 1923; Hayley, 1940; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014).

The involvement of families and clan also prepared the way to resolve any future tensions in the marriage. The parents of the bride ensured that their daughters were fully trained and prepared to perform expected gender roles upon marriage (Driberg, 1923; Schlecht et al., 2013; Apio, 2016). Meanwhile, boys were subjected to initiation rites into adulthood as markers of their readiness to marry (Tosh, 1978). However, the expectations placed on boys and girls in preparation for marriage differed.<sup>xxxviii</sup> Driberg (1923) notes that a mother-in-law took keen interest in the suitability of her would-be daughter-in-law and gave her many tests to ascertain her worthiness as a housewife. The marriage was abandoned if the woman failed these tests (156).<sup>xxxix</sup> A woman's marriageability depended on her perceived or proven respectable conduct and behavior as a 'good woman:' honest, hardworking, not greedy, trustworthy and with the potential to become pregnant and bear children.

Customary marriage was a collective process that took an extended period to complete, often occurring after the birth of many children by the couple. Payment for brideprice was paid in the form of cattle and it played a significant role in populating the lineage and clan with wealth and assets (Driberg, 1923; Tosh, 1978; Hayley, 1940; Girling, 1960). Marriages provided economic benefits and helped to guarantee the moral and social status of the woman, her family, and clan (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). Through marriage, a man entered a lasting relationship not only with his wife, but also with the woman's family, lineage, and clan (Tosh, 1978 p. 48). To consolidate the marriage, both lineage and clan exchanged gifts to cement their relationship. These exchanges also symbolized the transfer of control and rights over the woman's sexuality and reproduction to her husband's lineage and his clan (Apio, 2016 p. 96). Further, the

exchanges also legitimated the children born of the marriage into their patrilineal identity - giving them belonging and inheritance rights (Apio, 2016; Luedke et al., 2018).

In addition, the marriage of a daughter furthered the continuation of her own lineage and clan. The brother or another male clan member could pass on the brideprice to marry a wife (Driberg 1923 p.155). Once ready for marriage, a father was responsible to provide a wife to his son if he had the means to do so. In the event he could not afford these expenses, any lineage or clan member could contribute cattle towards the marriage (Driberg, 1923; Tosh 1978 p. 45). Similarly, an orphan boy was provided brideprice for marriage by his father's side or, if they were too poor, his maternal uncles were to give the cattle to secure him a wife (Driberg, 1923 p. 155; Tosh, 1978 p.49).

The governance and social organization of marriage along patriarchal gender relations and norms of hegemonic masculinity and femininity defined access, rights and conformity in everyday life (Connell, 2005). Upon marriage, a man took his wife and any children born of their union to live at his family home. This practice reinforced gender status and social hierarchies between men and women; it marked the man superior status while subordinating the woman (Apio, 2016).<sup>xi</sup> The practice also defined the expected roles, relations, and responsibilities along gender in marriage. It enabled men to maintain their role as household heads, protectors, providers, and decision-makers with access, control and power over household resources and opportunities. On the other hand, women performed reproductive and productive roles.<sup>xli</sup> These included child care and general household management in support their husbands, thereby marking their subordinate status. The social organisation of customary marriage also determined an individual's residence and inheritance along patrilineal lines (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014).<sup>xlii</sup>

Moreover, in northern Uganda, a woman's inability to bear children – or if she bore a stillborn child or child who died shortly after birth – caused shame, grief, and disrepute to her and her family. In contrast, the birth of a healthy child brought status to a woman. A woman who could not produce a live, healthy child would be returned to her family and her brideprice and status revoked. She faced difficulty in remarrying and was considered a misfortune and social pariah (Driberg, 1923).

Although customary marriages are still an important practice, changes over time—including those due to conflict, displacement, reduction in land holdings, and impoverishment—have altered marriage practices. Given the realities of the post conflict era, it is harder to establish and maintain a family and household through customary marriage (Apio, 2016; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Schlecht et al., 2013; Sommers, 2015; Barker and Ricardo, 2005). The inability to customarily marry breeds frustration and brings humiliation and shame to young men and women; in the absence of marriage they are unable to attain the status of 'real' men and women. Patriarchal gender relations and norms of hegemonic masculinity continue to influence perceptions, practices, performances and attempts to restore and maintain social order and status in post-conflict periods (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018).

### **7.1.2 Armed conflict, gender, social norms and institutions**

Armed conflict, displacement and resultant poverty have profound social, economic, moral, and political impacts, with specific outcomes for women survivors, as well as on gender and generational roles and relations within affected societies. Specifically, conflict and displacement results to 'a loss of social control, and the ways people can fulfil their responsibilities, and uphold local moral and social norms' (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014 p. 8). In this section, I detail key areas where conflict has disrupted the social norms and institutions of courtship, marriage and gendered labor roles.

## *Courtship and Marriage*

The over two decades of armed conflict in northern Uganda disrupted courtship and marriage practices, rendering them severely weakened. Particularly, displacement, the loss of livestock, and access to land—all key markers of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity—neutralized elders' control and power over physical and social reproduction. Elders were unable to exercise their authority to discipline, guide, and maintain roles as respected household heads (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). Specifically, they were unable to initiate, sanction, provide for, and resolve claims for brideprice or compensation (*luk*)<sup>xliii</sup> for illegitimate sexual relationships, impregnation, and child-birth. Similarly, young people were unable to maintain their traditional responsibilities, moral obligations, and dependence on familial social structures (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Schlecht et al., 2013; Apio, 2016).

Consequently, there has been an increased proliferation of family formation without the approval and support of families and elders. These included informal marriages, elopement, early and premarital sexual relationships, and pregnancies and childbirth without compensation (*luk*) or brideprice. The loss of livestock and mass impoverishment left elders without any means to invoke brideprice or compensation to legitimate the patrilineal identity and inheritance rights of children and their mothers, resulting in a burgeoning of those with 'illegitimate' status (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014 p.8).

Illegitimacy presented practical and moral challenges to sociality and morality (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin 2014; see Sommers, 2012 and Stites et al., 2007). Without brideprice or compensation to repair their 'illegitimate status', these women and children are unable to claim rights and status to belonging, residence and inheritance. Similarly, young men were unable to exert their claim of control and rights over the women and children born of the relations (Apio,

2016). Falling outside established and accepted norms, both men and women (re)negotiated their status through daily performances, action, and strategies.

Masculinity is 'a way of being that men must constantly perform and assert' (Sommers, 2015, p. 69 - 70). In northern Uganda, men assert their being through provision, care, and protection of their households. They only attain the social status of 'manhood' through proper marriage within the parameters of their tradition (Finnström, 2008). As part of post-conflict recovery, Levine (2016) notes that young men in northern Uganda prioritize meeting their marriage obligations through the payment of brideprice. The young men engaged in different forms of work to raise income to buy livestock for brideprice to legitimate one or more of their currently intimate unions. But as discussed above, it takes time to attain the resources and consent of the woman's parents to be properly married.

Meanwhile, women had to comply and perform expected womanhood and motherhood roles to restore their status and that of their children. Particularly, women survivors of wartime sexual violence who faced difficulties in reclaiming their status relied on the patriarchal gender norms to restore their status, moral, and social belonging. Apio (2016) writes that abduction and wartime sexual violence hijacked the productive and reproductive rights over women's bodies from their families and clan, creating social tension that negatively affected their reintegration (174).

To overcome these tension, most women returned to their natal families to reaffirm their familial and clan identity. They also performed acts within the normative framework of gender relations and patriarchal norms of their society, even when it stripped them of their dignity. Some sought marriage within the parameters of their tradition, with some mothers tracing the patrilineal lineage of their children born of war and seeking to marry within this lineage in order to gain belonging and inheritance rights (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014). But some

mothers shunned their former captors and their families (Atim et al., 2018; Carlson and Mazurana, 2008). Some mothers formalized relationships with their former captors, while, at the other end of the spectrum, others concealed their experiences of sexual violence from potential suitors and/or had their children born of war adopted by their families to enable them marry. However, most women entered informal marriages and evoked local expressions of 'husband' to refer to men with whom they were cohabitating (Apio, 2016). In the local tradition, unmarried women cannot access or inherit land. This means that, upon the death of an unofficial spouse or failure to be married, their only alternative would be to buy their own land and live independently (Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018).

The tensions caused by wartime sexual violence and continued stigma in the post-conflict period caused some women to leave their home villages to live anonymously in urban areas. Moving away from their rural setting enabled women 'to get away from the controls and expectations that tradition and older generation lay on young people' (Sommers, 2015 p.95). In the new spaces, some women managed to forge stable relationships and networks, enabling them to make a new life on their own or with their children. Some women left their children born of war with other relatives to raise while they start a new life. Some women eloped or had informal relationships that resulted in more children, while others resorted to prostitution to support themselves. These strategies are precarious and may further complicate women's future opportunities through additional stigma, potential HIV/AIDs infection, and additional children of 'illegitimate status' that may add to a woman's vulnerability and marginalization (JRP, 2015; Apio, 2016; Ladisch, 2015; Atim et al., 2018). Yet I argue that these strategies by the mothers are expressions of their struggle to overcome war experience and create a new identity and means of presenting themselves (see Apio, 2016; Atim et al., 2018).



### ***Labor roles***

Following the conflict, over a third of homes in northern Uganda are headed by widows, single mothers, divorced, or separated women (Mazurana et al., 2014; also see Esuruku, 2011; Ahikire et al., 2012). In the absence of a male household head, these women must perform both their prescribed gender roles as well as those that are expected of male heads of households. At the same time, as a result of conflict, women living with a spouse may find that some men are unable to perform and fulfill their traditional gender roles and obligations (Ahikire et al., 2012).

Women fill the gap caused by the absence or inabilities of men: they take over household provision and are empowered to demand more rights within the household and society (Ahikire et al., 2012; Carlson and Mazurana, 2006). But even with these changes, some men still resist the transformations in household gender roles. Such shifts in gender roles may be seen as a threat to men's social hierarchy and gender identity – i.e., as failure of masculinity (Dolan, 2002; Lwambo, 2011). In conflict and post-conflicts contexts, studies document increased cases of alcohol use among men and sexual and gender-based violence committed by men in part to cope with their emasculation; these are forms of negative masculinity and authority (Ahikire et al., 2012; Dolan, 2002; Carlson and Mazurana, 2006).

Nonetheless, the increased presence of women in predominantly traditional male roles signifies the changing context or re-organization of gender and generational roles and relations grounded in hegemonic masculinity and expectations. It also signifies the effects of decades of conflict on familial and kin-based networks and social structures, effects which can render them incapable of supporting members in post-conflict contexts and leave women unable to draw on male familial and kin-based support (Apio, 2016).

## 7.2 Methods

This chapter is based on in-depth qualitative interviews carried out between 2013 and 2017 with 14 purposefully selected women survivors of wartime sexual violence who returned with children born of war (5 from Lango and 9 from Acholi).<sup>xliv</sup> It also draws from interviews with eight (8) formerly abducted men and one interview with a cultural leader from Acholi.

The study builds on chapter six (Atim et al., 2018) with women survivors of wartime sexual violence who returned with children born of war resulting from the GoU/LRA conflict.<sup>xliv</sup> From the study, it was clear that women who returned with children born of war were likely to suffer stigma and discrimination and faced challenges forming marital relationships in the aftermath.

No standard method was used to generate the sample, but the author set out to explore how women survivors navigate and maintain their relationships amidst the stigma related to their war experiences and discriminatory patriarchal gender norms. I conducted in-depth interviews with a small number of women who returned with children born of war to gain a deeper understanding of their everyday life in the post-conflict period.

To explore in-depth a difficult and challenging subject, I first selected women (six women) who were known to me from my past work as a practitioner (2001 – 2007) supporting the return and rehabilitation of formerly abducted youth in northern Uganda, and as a researcher since 2008. I spent long hours hanging out at their homes or work places or having informal chats that provided me deep learning outside traditional interviews.<sup>xlvi</sup> I then worked with a woman survivor of forced marriage and childbearing inside the LRA as a research assistant to reach out to other women who were unknown to me.

Women interviewed were in their early to late 30s. Five women were single or separated (4 in Acholi, 1 in Lango), seven were cohabiting (3 in Lango and 4 in Acholi), 2 were married (all in Acholi).

Among the men, one former LRA man acted as a guide to reach out to the rest of the men interviewed (I had met him before and had a working relationship with him). Men interviewed ranged in the age of 32 – 40 years. Nearly all were in marital relationships; three were in relationships with their former captor wives (one had partly customarily married, but two had not yet married), one was customarily married to a woman survivor of wartime sexual violence, three were in relationships with non-abducted women they met on return, and one had not yet married. Of these, two men were in polygamous relationships (one wife being their former forced wife) and one had four wives.

Field interviews were conducted in Luo, the local language of the area, by the author who is also a Luo native speaker with experience working and conducting qualitative research with survivors of conflict. Later, all interviews were transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts allowed for analysis of the diverse ways that the women and men expressed their post-conflict lives in reference to their conflict experience and wider social cultural norms and values of their society.

I interviewed both men and women affected by conflict to highlight the specific ways in which suffering wartime sexual violence complicates women's ability to regain their social place after conflict. By examining the experiences of both men and women, I am able to show how women's challenges are rooted in the social and cultural norms and values that regulate sexuality, reproduction, marriage, kin relationships, and access to productive resources.

### **7.3 Motherhood, marriage, relationships and everyday live**

#### **7.3.1 Motherhood**

Most women found strength in their ability to provide for their household and children. Nearly all women interviewed lived with their children, both those born of war and children they conceived after returning. Among my sample, there were no instances in which women had left

their children with their family or other relatives. Women's ability to care for their children defined their sense of motherhood. They worked hard to create and maintain a stable home for their children and provide for their daily basic needs.

Through their daily actions and choices in caring for their children and maintaining their homes, women were able to re-invent their identities and, in turn, gain some social status as productive members of their society. Their everyday actions were shaped by societal expectations of a 'good mother and woman', seen as responsible, respectable, and productive. To realize these expectations, women made different choices and actions in their everyday lives.

Two mothers told how they traced the paternal families of their children born of war to forge a relationship with these relatives. Abia, a 32-year-old mother from Lira who returned with two children born of war, contacted the paternal relatives in hopes of getting help to raise her teenage son, whom she believed needed the influence of a paternal male figure.<sup>xlvi</sup> Her former captor's family were invited to meet her family for a discussion, but her family declined to let the son go live with them. Abia explained, "My sister told me there was no reason to give up a fully-grown child (he is now about 15 years) to the paternal family who were never there through his childhood and have not paid any compensation to our family for the child". Though she has two children born of war (a boy and a girl), Abia had no intention to introduce her daughter (who is older than the boy) to her former captor's family.

After Abia's family refused to accept support from the family of her former captor, she turned to her brother-in-law and sister to help raise her son. She sends the son every holiday to live with her sister and husband. She does this with the hope that having her son spend time in a family with a male figure will improve his behavior. She hopes her brother-in-law will be a good influence in her son's life and teach him skills and expected male gender roles. Abia's actions in this regard strongly reinforce patriarchal ideas about raising well-behaved boys, i.e.,

that they require the presence of an adult male. The perception holds that women (especially single mothers) are incapable of raising male boys successfully; such boys are perceived to develop behavioral problems.

Abia's actions, choices, and strategies reflect her attempt to (re)negotiate and restore her status and that of her children in the post-conflict era. First, by making her family responsible for reaching out to her former captor's family and deciding whether her son could live with them, Abia invokes the authority of her family over her and her children born of war. This helps to (re)negotiate and restore the place of her parents and siblings in her family. In turn, her family claimed their right over her and her children by adhering to traditional practices which dictate that, without payment to legitimize the child, the boy must stay with his maternal relatives.

Second, Abia's attempt to reach out to her former captor's family was motivated by the need to gain her son access to productive resources and identity. She is fully aware of the challenges her son will face in the future and devised strategies to overcome those challenges – especially in terms of access to land since he cannot inherit from her family. At the same time, Abia holds onto her daughter born of war and saw no need to give her away to her paternal family, possibly because of the perceived benefits women bring to their family through brideprice.

Furthermore, by turning to her sister's husband to help raise her son, Abia invokes normative masculine ideas and expectations of how to raise a well-behaved and successful son. These norm and expectations assume that well-behaved and successful children can only be raised within a "normal family" adhering to hegemonic masculine and patriarchal values. She conforms to these normative expectations to avoid any future problems with her son's behavior, which can have negative repercussions for her and the boy. Abia knows she could be harshly judged for her son's future behavior and have this be blamed on the absence of an influential male figure. Further, being a child born of war, any misbehavior could easily be blamed on the

circumstances of his birth and his perceived rebel blood and associated contamination. Abia makes strategic efforts to raise a well-behaved and responsible son who knows, conforms to, and performs the expected masculine ideals of his society.

Abia's actions, strategies, and choices demonstrate how some women feel they have little choice but to reproduce normative frameworks to reclaim their and children's social and moral place. However, she is keenly aware of the limitations within the normative framework for her and her children (unmarried and without a patrilineal identity). Abia therefore plans for her son's future by buying a piece of land close to Lira town and building a house on it. She also bought livestock which she keeps with the brother-in-law to secure the future of her son. Thus, while her actions partially reinforce normative patriarchal expectations, she also seeks to re-establish her identity as a responsible mother and a productive member of her society. At the same time, she independently secures land and livestock, something traditionally done and controlled solely by men, to ensure that her son can meet gendered normative expectations as he nears adulthood.

### **7.3.2 Seeking marital relationships**

Most women I interviewed sought marital relationships once they were back home from captivity. Most stressed that such relationships were important to restore and secure their respect and honor in their family and community after the war. Aber, 33-year-old from Gulu town who returned with one child born of war, explained:

I wanted to keep my honor and respect to myself by getting a man who I could live with and have all my children with him except for the one I had in captivity. Because if a woman has children with different men, she is not respected and honored traditionally, it shows she is a reckless and weak person. (Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

Gaining customary marriage bestows honor and respect to women and safeguards their children's place and future.

The women interviewed engaged in marital relationships with two types of men. First were those who were either their former captors or other men who had also returned from the LRA (though this took place only for women in Acholi sub-region, not in Lango sub-region). Second were those whom women met after return from the LRA; these men had not experienced abduction or forced recruitment. Of the women interviewed, one lived with her former captor husband who had partially paid her brideprice; three were with men who had been in the LRA (one was customarily married, two cohabited, and one had lived with a former captor before separating); five were cohabiting with men they met on return; and five lived alone as single mothers after separating with men they met on return. Cohabiting, similar to elopement, refers to a situation when a man and woman live together and/or bear children in a marital-like relationship without fulfilling brideprice payments. Without customs being fulfilled, any children born of the relationship are considered illegitimate and can only be legitimated through the payment of compensation (*luk*) to the woman's family (Apio, 2016 p. 112). Without compensation, it's impossible to claim rights of these children to inheritance, residence, or patrilineal identity and belonging. This leaves the women and her children in a potentially insecure position in a patriarchal and agrarian society.

### ***1) Relationships with former captors or other men formerly with the LRA***

In this section, I focus on women's relationships with former captors or other men who were formerly with the LRA (here after referred to as 'former LRA men'). Women who resumed relationships with former captors or former LRA men in Acholi deliberately chose to live with men who had had similar experiences to them. For some, they already had children with these men (as their former captors) and raised their children together. Alyek spent nine years in captivity and now lives with her former captor. She explains:

After I returned and my forced husband also returned, he followed me... my parents refused to let me come with him. But then our child born of war got sick and my father

sent me to bring the child to his family for treatment, but he didn't allow me to go back after the one month. My father followed me and withdrew me until he could pay dowry... My family demanded: three cattle, 10 goats and four million UGX (approx. USD 1,150).<sup>xlvi</sup> My husband has so far paid the cattle and goats but hasn't paid the money. He was only able to pay those things after my father put enormous pressure on him, or else my family would have taken me away. He has asked my family for time to look for the money so he could pay, but if he does not pay, then I will go back to my family again. You know, we are three sisters, and I am the oldest of them. All the other two were not married and the community around made fun of our father that his daughters are just wasted and not married which pained him a lot... My father said, I stayed for free with him in captivity, it is not possible to continue staying with him for free again, he should marry me. (Interview, Gulu, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Most of these women wanted to restore their honor and that of their family. They also wanted to secure their children's rights to their patrilineal identity, belonging, residence, and inheritance.

Other women found that, when compared to non-LRA men, the former LRA men were accepting and did not stigmatize and discriminate against them and their children born of war.

Akumu, a 31-year-old who spent nine years in LRA captivity, returned with two children and lives with a former LRA man. She explained:

[I] am presently living with a man who was also formerly abducted. At least he is [more] understanding than men we find here. Men returning from the LRA accept our children born of war more than men we find at home. (Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

Abwot, who returned with three children born of war and cohabits with a former LRA man, said:

[T]he new man I stay with now is also a formerly abducted person, but I decided to stay with someone who knows my past... He is also HIV positive and on medication just like me. He accepted me as I am with my children (Interview, Gulu, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Women who live with former LRA men or their former captors emphasized the importance of acceptance of their past conflict experience as the main reason for their choice.

The women stressed that men who were previously in the LRA take care of their families, even caring for and raising children who are not their own. They contend that former LRA men are receptive to these children because the practice inside the LRA upheld communal living and



responsibility to each other. Akumu further emphasized her choice to stay with a former LRA man:

[I]n the LRA, they took care of their wives and children. But here at home, no man wants to take care of us or another man's children. (Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Some women already knew these men from their time in captivity and it was easier to form relationships with them than with men they didn't know. Ayot is 35 years old and has one child born of war. She is now customarily married to a former LRA man. She explained:

[I] met my husband who is also a formerly abducted person on return because he knew me while we were still in captivity. Probably he had seen that I was properly behaved while I was in captivity, so he showed interest in being with me. (Interview, Gulu, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

In this case, the pair knew about each other's past and character from their time inside the LRA, which helped to create trust in forming the relationship, something women in relationships with men they meet on return often say they lack.

However, there were also exceptions, including violent relationships with a former captor. Abwot explained that she lost all her front teeth due to the violent and abusive nature of her former captor husband who she initially reunited with upon their return from the LRA. He also infected her with HIV. Furthermore, her former captor husband sold the child she had on return just after she had given birth. However, after several efforts by an organization in Gulu, her baby was recovered and she was reunited with her child. Abwot subsequently left her former captor husband and now lives with her children (three born of war and one born on return) with another former LRA man. She is his second wife but she feels happy with her current relationship (Interview, Gulu, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017). Abwot's account shows that remarrying or living with a former LRA captor or combatant is not necessarily a safeguard for women, and these relationships can still be violent and abusive.

While it's possible that some LRA men accept and care for children who are not necessarily their own, some of the women appeared to hold an idealized notion of a 'good' husband based on their war experience as opposed to life in a non-conflict environment. Some women expected that these men would somehow be able to adhere to the system inside the LRA where access to goods was dependent on rank. Under this practice, men benefitted from looted items and were able to provide for multiple wives and children. However, the reality in the post-conflict period is very different and requires demanding work; some men find it challenging to meet the basic needs of their households without a reliable source of income. Some of the women's choices to remarry their former captor or former LRA men may not necessarily meet the reality of post-conflict life.

The choice by some women to turn to the very source of their exclusion (sexual abuse by former captors) in an effort to achieve inclusion speaks to the disruptive effects of the conflict. In particular, this illustrates how the experience of sexual violence impacts perceived morals and status, with negative outcomes for the social place of the women and their children. At the same time, marrying or cohabiting with a former captor or former LRA man as a way to reclaim their status as a good woman and mother normalizes and legitimates the violence that was perpetuated on them during the conflict. Additionally, their choices and strategies demonstrate the extent to which experiences of wartime sexual violence interweave with local demands to conform to normative behavior or gender roles and relations under patriarchal norms which subordinate and limit women's possibilities in the post-conflict period.

## **2) *Relationships with non-LRA men on return***

### ***a) Informal relationships and/or cohabitation***

In nearly all cases, women in relations with non-LRA men were living as mistresses to men who already had another wife/wives and children. Most had moved in with the men without the

payment of brideprice or compensation for children born from these relationships. The relationships were also often formed without the support or involvement of either family and were disconnected from family and social networks in the women's home villages. In most cases, these women were formally introduced to the man's family only after living together for some time or after the birth of a child.

At the same time, living away from their families and villages enabled the couple to escape the social pressures and minimized the woman's exposure to stigma and scrutiny from the man's family due to her war experience. However, the non-payment of brideprice and minimal family involvement created social insecurity for the woman and her children born of the relationship. These children are unlikely to be able to claim productive rights and identity in the patrilineal family unless brideprice is eventually paid.

Some women who were mistresses said that the men vanished after getting them pregnant, leaving them to raise the child alone. Arach, a 34-year-old from Acholi who returned with three children from captivity, could not trace the family of the man she met on return and who left her pregnant. They met in Gulu town, but the man left after she became pregnant with the child who is now four years old. She was never introduced to his family and his unable to locate him.<sup>xlix</sup> Such experiences further fracture women's place in society. In a similar scenario, Aber from Gulu narrated her experience:

On return, I met some man who I told the truth of what happened to me and he had no problem with it. We met twice and I became pregnant, but when I told him, he refused to take responsibility for the pregnancy saying there is no way I could get pregnant after only two meetings with him. He accused me of having other relationships that got me pregnant. I was so hurt because ever since I had been back home, I didn't try to have any relationship with anyone, he was the first person I related with, but he disappointed me...I felt the pregnancy took away my honor and status as a woman. Getting pregnant by a man who rejects you could mean you are a prostitute or sexually careless. (Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

An important dimension of local gender and patriarchal norms pertains to women's behavior and morality as markers of potential marriageability. Returning from the LRA with children or having additional children outside marriage raises questions about women's morality. These women may find greater challenges in attracting and keeping a man for a long-term commitment and/or customary marriage. This situation creates insecurity for women and their children born of these relationships and adds to their burden and vulnerability as single unmarried mothers with their 'illegitimate' children.

I heard from women that some men expect them to first conceive and bear a child to demonstrate their reproductive capacities and to 'prove' their commitment to the relationship. Apiyo, 35-year-old in Gulu, told me that the man she lived with accused her of deliberately aborting the three pregnancies that she miscarried. "He thought I was aborting the pregnancies, yet these were miscarriages, but he told me off in my face" (Interview, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017). On the other hand, some women thought having children with men would cement their relationships and eventually lead to customary marriage. Once children were born, the woman's family could claim compensation (*luk*) or brideprice from the man and his family. But, in nearly all cases, there was no brideprice or compensation paid. Instead, having more children complicated the women's situations – they ended up with more 'illegitimate' children, at times from different men, further negatively impacting their and their children's standing in the moral and social order.

To navigate such contexts, some women had only one or two children or, in some instances, refused to bear more children. Some women avoided pregnancies by concealing their use of contraceptives from their men. Others prioritized commitment from the man through customary marriage and the payment of brideprice before having more children. Children from these relationships were thus used to negotiate with men about possible customary marriage, and/or the future of the woman and her children.

While association with a man should buffer and provide for women and their children, most women interviewed were in relationships with men who were unable to fulfill their traditional role as male household head. Most men left the bulk of the household burden, including the financial responsibilities, to the women. Apiyo explained:

[H]e never supported me as a man should to provide food, household needs, clothing, medical care. He didn't care about it. I got pregnant (it was a difficult pregnancy). I miscarried thrice, but I went to the hospital alone, he never accompanied me. Even when I asked him for money to go to the hospital, he never gave me...he instead sent me to his family in the village to get local herbs for the over bleeding I was experiencing. (Interview, Gulu, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017).

In some cases, the men's failure to meet hegemonic norms of manhood went so far as to expect that the mistresses would care for the man's children from other women.

#### ***b) Abusive relationships***

Most women in relationships with non-LRA men characterized these unions as abusive and harmful. They endured these situations to secure their status and re-establish their morality and proper place in society. Some women explained that living with a man was helpful to boost their own and their family's image. This was the case even outside of customary marriage, as Apiyo states, "My family said I should stay with him even if he is not helpful as long as he is there as a man" (Interview, Gulu, 20<sup>th</sup> September 2017). Having a man in the household protects the women's image in the public eye, and they are not regarded as 'prostitutes' for having children without a father.

Some women make the choice to endure abusive relationships to maintain their informal 'marital' status and receive the even minimal respect bestowed through a relationship with a man. Aber described her relationship with the man she lives with and with whom she has a child:

[T]he man I live with today is a bad man and controls me a lot. Whenever I go back after 5pm from my tailoring work, he accuses me of having extra-marital affairs. On

Sundays, I only have one hour to be in church and anything over an hour, earns me the accusation of engaging in extra-marital affairs. Even though he controls me so much, he does not even provide for the family. If he controlled me and provided for the family, I would not have any problem staying at home. But every time he makes money, he goes to eat in a hotel and drink heavily or spends it with other women. He gives me so little towards family upkeep, yet I am raising three of his children from other women plus three of my own children (one from captivity, another I got on return – and the one child I had with him). And even though I live with him, he is still engaged in extra marital affairs. I also heard from his family members that he has several other children with other women – maybe about five more children. I can't be with such a man. But I still live with him, although it gives me a lot of heartache living like that. I worry most about my daughter born of war who is now 16 years old. He can easily try to have sex with her since he likes women so much – that is my biggest worry now... I worry about her safety being with this man. I sometimes think I should just leave and raise my children alone than be with this headache, maybe I will be happier. But I also wanted to be *honored and respected* by being with a man, even though he has not yet married me traditionally by taking anything to my family. (emphasis added, Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

Despite the very negative aspects of this relationship, Aber is reluctant to leave because she hopes that one day he will eventually marry her. If she were to be customarily married, she would be able to take brideprice to her family and gain the respect and status expected of a proper Acholi or Langi woman. Her story demonstrates that women's experience of conflict-related sexual violence intersects upon their return with traditional patriarchal notions of morality, often at great personal costs to the women. In trying to gain acceptance and status for themselves and their children, women repeatedly and knowingly compromise their wellbeing, limit their choices, and discard their rights in order to fit and be seen as 'respectable' members of a patriarchal society.

### **7.3.3 Owing or renting a home**

In a context of stigma, discrimination and abuse, some women are carving out their own lives in new ways. I interviewed four women who had men move into their own houses, instead of the normative model in which the woman moves into the man's home.

While one woman was renting, I found three women (two in Gulu and one in Lira) who had bought land and built a house. The women lived in their homes with their children and

current spouse. Though not customarily married, Abia told me she could have gone to live on the family land of her husband. However, she insisted on living on her own land so her children can live peacefully with her, and because the man already has another wife and children.<sup>1</sup> Abia is cognizant of her unmarried status, and by buying her own land and building her own house she is actively securing her and children's land rights and future.

Abwot rents her own house where she lives with her four sons (three of whom are born of war) and current spouse. She explained:

He came to live at my house since I already have children instead of having to go to his house with my children. He has no problem with it. But he has another wife with children too. We are not traditionally married, but he visited my family and we live together. (Interview, Gulu 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Having their own home safeguards women and their children from cases where men are reluctant or unwilling to accept or raise the child(ren) of another man in their home. In a woman's home, the man is unlikely to raise an objection about her children's presence. In addition, a woman living in her own home is less likely to face pressure from her in-laws about her past and the presence of children born of war. Additionally, women reported to have more control and decision-making abilities in their own households over production and reproduction as compared to being in the man's home.

To illustrate, Abia explained that she is not interested to have any more children and wants to focus instead on providing for those she had before meeting her current partner (two children born of war and two she had with another man after return). Since the man already has his own children and wife, she preferred to keep the relationship for companionship not reproduction. A similar explanation was given by Abwot who cohabits with her current intimate partner in her rented home:

We agreed I can't have more children because I already have four children born of war who I raise alone. Besides, I suffer a lot from pregnancy related complications when pregnant. In addition to my HIV status, it [pregnancy] can't be good for my health. If

I risked my life to have one child I could fall sick and die. Who will take care of my children then? (Interview, Gulu, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

It seems that maintaining their own homes gives these women an edge in negotiating their place and reproductive decisions with the men in their lives. They are thus able to assert themselves and make demands in the relationship outside the norm and experience of most of women respondents.

Even though women who experienced wartime sexual violence face enormous challenges regaining their status in the post-conflict period, some of their choices and strategies do transform normative expectations and unsettle gender norms and hierarchies. In one case in Gulu, Acayo was able to retain the home and the children born of the relationship after the relationship ended. This contrasts with the much more common scenario, in which the woman would leave both the man's home and the children (because children belong to the man). The non-binding nature of relationships with men that have not paid brideprice combined with a degree of economic independence seem to make some room for women to maneuver and, in some cases, to (re)negotiate their place and status. In particular, it seems that in situations where women are able to control their own land and homes they were also able to retain both production and reproductive rights.

#### **7.3.4 Own living**

Women face challenges maintaining stable intimate and family relationships, in part due to continued stigma and discrimination related to their war experiences. After failed attempts at relationships, four of the women interviewed opted to live on their own with their children, both born of war and those they had after return. Alanyo, who spent 11 years inside the LRA before returning with three children in 2011, explains why she chose to remain alone with her children born of war:



Even those who try to get men break up because they constantly have problems. They point fingers at us and say bad things about us which makes life hard. In-laws are bad too, they always don't want their sons to marry a woman returning from the LRA, saying we are possessed by evil spirits from captivity. Even over small things we are accused of behaving so due to abduction. Because of all these, I haven't even tried to get any man to live with. I live alone with my children I returned with from captivity because I know it will not work even if I got a man. (Interview, Gulu, 12<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

While staying alone may provide women and their children with independence, it accentuates the splintering effects of decades of conflict on familial, kin networks, and social institutions. These women and their children are often unable to draw on familial support and are likely to get cut out of the traditional kin systems, presenting more challenges for their recovery and reintegration. Their choice indicates the failure of the normative strategy to adapt and adjust to the post-war realities and to create ways to include them and their children as valued members of society.

### **7.3.5 Alternative ways of being a woman**

Some women created alternative ways of being a woman. These women sought and found value in being seen as responsible and contributing to the survival of their household instead of waiting on a man to provide assistance. Two women who were not customarily married still took pride in being known by the men's family as helping to groom and provide better guidance to their partner. Abwot explained, "His family likes me because I care for him and keep him on a straight path and guide him when he goes wrong" (Interview, Gulu, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017). These women took pride in their hard work and contribution to their household—foundations to being a good woman.

Further, some of these women's views of womanhood were not rooted in traditional expectations of 'a good woman' but were more about what they brought to the relationship.

Abia from Lira who cohabits with a man she met on return explained:

The man I live with now takes pride in the fact that I am independent and hardworking. He supported me to supervise the construction of my house, and I also support him to

manage and plan for his family – his first wife and children. Whenever my co-wife is sick or has a sick child, I offer support to nurse and care for them in hospital. (Interview, Lira, February 2018).

Her worth gives her an edge in the relationship, but also, she is able to negotiate her place and status with the man and his other family members. Importantly, she has been able to have him agree to her wish not to bear children by him.

These women's perceived role as hardworking, contributing, independent and dependable earns them respect and value – helping to (re)negotiate their social place in family and society. They do not have to prove their capacity for womanhood as defined through childbirth and or being subservient. Some of women's choices, strategies, and actions expand the idea of womanhood outside traditional gender expectation. They positively engage and contribute to their households, at times challenging the place and role of men as household heads. This is what Sommers (2016, p.71) notes as embracing 'social transformation' by taking on new meaning and ways to present one's self as a woman – productive and contributing, and not merely based on one's identity under traditional ideal and expectations.

## **7.5 Men on courtship and marriage**

To better understand the situation of women survivors of wartime sexual violence in the post-conflict, I also interviewed one male traditional leader and seven former LRA men about their post-conflict lives and interactions with women after leaving the LRA.

None of the men interviewed expressed experiencing stigma or discrimination due to their wartime experiences, in sharp contrast to the female survivors. Regarding forming marital relationships, however, all the men acknowledged struggles and difficulties in fulfilling customary marriages in the post-conflict period. They emphasized that the high cost of brideprice made marriage very difficult to achieve, especially because they must work from scratch to raise an income after many years away in captivity and no economic foundation.

Rwot Yusuf Adek, Rwot Ker Kwaro Pageya, one of the leaders of the cultural institutions in Acholi noted:

Today, most people are poor and don't follow tradition. They are money-minded when it comes to marriage practices which is more like buying a woman, people are after money. (Interview, Gulu, 18<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Layibi, a former LRA interviewed had fulfilled customary marriage, but had to work for many years with his wife to save the resources needed. To redeem their social place, the former LRA men, just like women survivors, must make daily performances, actions, and strategies to navigate daily life.

Most of the men acknowledged that they cohabit with women but explained that they meet the woman's family in recognition of the relationship while they work together with the woman to secure the resources for customary marriage. They also noted the importance of maintaining a good relationship with their wife as security for their relationship. Akena, age 35, spent 16 years inside the LRA before returning with his former forced wife. He noted:

I returned with my wife and now we live together, but I have not yet married her customarily. I met her family because you can't stay with someone's daughter without meeting her family, but I hope to fulfill the marriage requirements when I get the means. (Interview, Gulu, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

For many of the men, their primary focus is to re-establish themselves and raise the resources for marriage. The absence of family or kin-based support makes this task difficult.

Conflict had a severe impact on the physical, economic, social, and psychological wellbeing of individual men and pushed back by many years their ability to afford brideprice and formalize marriage. On return, most men prioritize meeting immediate needs, securing land, and building a home. All these are important markers of masculinity and help the men to renegotiate their status in their family and community. Koch, a 39-year-old from Gulu who returned from the LRA with multiple injuries after 11 years in captivity, explained why he has not completed customary marriage to date:

I am weak due to war injuries [...], I want to build iron roof house before I die. I have already built a decent toilet, so next will be a good house... Because I am not educated, I am forced to perform physically demanding work unsuitable to my current health condition... I can't get all the things needed to properly marry under Acholi tradition. They demand many things, nearly eight million Uganda shillings (about USD 2300),<sup>li</sup> livestock and other things that I can't afford. Because of these, I am not yet married and it takes time to get those requirements on my own as there is no one to support me. Importantly, I also prioritise meeting immediate and current needs. (Interview, Gulu, 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

The combination of high costs of brideprice and the debilitating impact of the war on former LRA men complicates their ability to accumulate and mobilise the necessary resources to fulfill customary marriage.

Additionally, the social pressure to support an extended family—required as is part of hegemonic masculinity in the traditional society—constrains the ability of many former LRA men to fulfill traditional marriage. At least two men I interviewed noted that their inability to marry was, in part, related to their obligations to support their extended families. Olum, a former LRA man, explained:

I have a wife but not yet married customarily because I don't have the resources to marry with. ...I lost both parents before my abduction, also lost three brothers and two sisters to HIV/AIDs and now have to take care of all their children including those of my elder brother who was killed by the LRA. (Interview, Gulu, 11<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

However, without customary marriage, household relations are affected and men's status in the eyes of their family and community remain in balance.

The challenges to fulfilling customary marriage are not unique to former LRA men, even though the effects of war complicate this possibility. Such challenges are experienced by most men in northern Uganda. But some former LRA men felt that the hardship and perseverance endured inside the LRA conditioned them to withstand and manage their present lives in a way that some non-war-affected men lack. Koch explained:

The hardship to marry is experienced by both formerly abducted and non-abducted men equally, except the hardship we experienced in captivity makes a difference on abducted persons. Non-abducted persons mainly drink and cannot persevere hard

work, but in captivity we were not allowed to drink alcohol so most of us don't drink. The knowledge we learnt from captivity helps us with our present life, we can persevere many things – hunger and hard work which many youths back at home cannot manage. In captivity, we were required to be clean and those are the skills we bring back in taking care of our homes. Go around here and see other people's home and compare to those of former LRA men, we are more organized and clean because in captivity, it was part of our daily life, otherwise you would be penalized. (Interview, Gulu, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017).

The art of survival inside the LRA seems to have taught some of the men skills which continue to shape, and, in their perspectives, even enhance their present-day lives.

I also found that most former LRA men were amenable to raising children who were not their own or didn't mind if a woman had children from other relationships. Some also believed in men's entitlement to multiple wives, as expressed by Atiak, a former LRA man who spent 16 years in captivity:

I don't mind that she has another man's children, a man is supposed to have many women. I already have two wives at home, but one just left. If she comes, I will have four wives. (Interview, Gulu, 15<sup>th</sup> December 2017).

Such views may have been shaped by their war experience, as polygamy and communal living based on patriarchal gender norms were highly promoted inside the LRA - as existed in the past in northern Uganda (see Apio 2016). Nonetheless, some former LRA men were aware that, without customary marriage, their relationship to a woman is temporary because she can leave or be withdrawn by her family. Similarly, without the payment of compensation to legitimate their children (including those born of war) it is impossible for the men to claim these offspring. All of these affect men's social status and identity in the family and community, causing them emotional anguish due to the struggle to maintain a place as 'real men.'

While most men interviewed still held strongly to traditional roles of men as providers, protectors, and decision-makers of households, some men also emphasized women's equal engagement and contribution towards the household. These equal relations were discussed in terms of ideas, resources, and labour, as explained by Layibi:

I told my wife, [a formerly abducted woman he met on return] I want a woman who is strong headed and assertive, who can speak her mind and challenge me, not just one who simply accepts everything I say. I want a woman who can challenge me and positively engage in the household. Even if we sometimes disagree or have fights over it, it makes our live in the home more meaningful and engaging. (Interview, Gulu 13<sup>th</sup> December 2017)

The viewpoints are contrary to traditional gender expectations and promote the idea of an empowered woman that bolsters a different kind of man and masculine identity.

However, a key difference emerges between women's and men's accounts of their post-conflict challenges to reclaim their social place. While most men seem to struggle with economic challenges to provide for brideprice, they don't face the same social challenges related to their conflict experience to the extent of women who returned with children born of war. None of the men interviewed expressed any challenge forming marital relationships due to stigma related to their war experience. At the same time, nearly all men emphasized the importance of attaining economic independence and their capability to provide for their household and extended family, in addition to maintaining a peaceful non-violent life to disassociate them from their past lives inside the LRA. These different strategies are fundamental to regain their status as men in the post-conflict period.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

Return into one's family and community for most women survivors of wartime sexual violence is a continuously negotiated process through varied performances, choices, and strategies that enable them to maneuver the social landscape in the post-conflict period. Most women used strategies, actions, and choices in line with patriarchal gender norms. The choices, actions, and strategies to re-negotiate their social place spanned multiple realms: womanhood, motherhood, marital relationships, independence, and own life/home. Some entered relationships with former captors or former LRA men, while some cohabited with other men they met on return.

Women sought ‘marital’ relationships to re-establish their honor and respect as defined by the patriarchal gender norms of their society. But doing so had some women stuck in abusive and violent relationships. I contend that some women turned to the very place of their exclusion for inclusion because some of their choices, strategies, and actions further contributed to entrench their victimization and abuses.

But also, some of women’s actions, choices, and strategies to repair their social place were both disruptive and transformative. While some women simultaneously performed acts that conformed to gender and patriarchal norms and expectations, they also resisted or curved ways to re-organise these norms and expectations in their everyday life. Some of the women had men move into their homes as opposed moving into the man’s house; they bought own livestock (traditionally owned by men); they owned land and built their own houses. Own lives and spaces provided more independence and control to such women, including over their productive and reproductive rights. The acts, choices, and strategies enabled them to exercise some agency within the limitations of their social circumstance and context. Women renegotiated their social place, but also disrupted the norms in their everyday actions, strategies, and choices.

These findings highlight how the experiences of wartime sexual violence interweave with patriarchal gender norms, relations, roles, and expectations to constrict women’s choices in the post-conflict period. But these findings also accentuate the continuous attempts by women to reinvent their social lives through maneuvering around the limitations of their social place. An understanding of women’s re-entry into the social place after conflict must pay attention to their everyday lives as defined by the patriarchal gender norms of society. It also calls attention to the disruptive and transformative effects their actions have on the normative framework of society.





## **Chapter 8 Conclusion**

### **8.1 Summary of research findings**

This research explored the long-term impact of the experience of war crimes committed by the LRA and the Government of Uganda on the recovery and lives of young people in post-conflict northern Uganda. Specifically, I explored how suffering alleged war crimes affects young men and women differently.

The specific research objectives were to examine: 1) the effects of suffering alleged war crimes on educational outcomes among young men and women in northern Uganda; 2) the factors that drive young women's engagement in sex work in Lira town; 3) the effects of war crimes of sexual violence on women survivors' ability to respond to and shape their social relationships with their family and community in the post-conflict era; and 4) how wartime sexual violence disrupts and alters women survivors' social place and belonging.

#### **8.1.1 Impact of suffering alleged war crimes on educational outcomes**

Studies in northern Uganda show clearly that completing higher education (secondary and above) is strongly associated with improved household wealth and food security (Mazurana et al., 2014). Past studies by Annan et al. (2011) and others (Humphreys and Weinstein, 2004, 2007) found that some war crimes do negatively impact the educational attainment and labor market participation of young men and women survivors. Specifically, longer periods of abduction or participation in military activity was found to have the greatest impact on education due to the extended time away from school. Yet Annan et al. (2011) argued that the negative effect on schooling would improve with time back as things normalize, enabling young people return to school.

This research found similar trends on the impact of alleged war crimes on young people's education in northern Uganda. It considered eleven (11) different kinds of war crimes, in

contrast to most past studies (except Annan et al., 2008) that lumped together all experiences of war-affected children and youth together. The research found that some war crimes, particularly abduction and forced conscription, assault that resulted in physical injuries, and being set on fire significantly affected youth's educational outcomes. Youth who suffered these war crimes were more likely than other conflict-affected youth to never enroll in school or, if they did attend school, they were unable to continue to higher education or post-primary education, with negative outcomes for their future productivity and earning potential.

Particularly, abduction and forced recruitment had a significant impact on the education of male youth, most of who were unable to continue schooling once they returned from captivity. On the other hand, the majority of female youth that suffered war crimes had challenges starting, continuing, and completing school, due in part to the pervasive gender discrimination that exists in northern Uganda. With low or no education, these young men and women struggled to be productive in the labor market. Their engagement in sustainable livelihoods was hampered, with negative impacts on earnings and overall wellbeing. These patterns in turn had negative repercussions upon their ability to provide for their families and children's schooling, bringing possible intergenerational effects.

This research challenges the finding (Annan et al., 2011) that schools restart after conflict and that almost everyone has the opportunity to resume their education. I found that neither time since returning from captivity nor time since the end of conflict were significant factors in regaining lost education or returning to school. The research was carried out seven years after the conflict had ended, and even with this length of time many survivors of war crimes had been unable to return to or complete school. This research demonstrates that it remains difficult for youth to recover lost time and regain their education in the post-conflict period.

Further, one may assume that the suffering of alleged war crimes is what drives the detrimental effects on young men and women's schooling and education. Yet the findings point to other important, larger social and economic factors within the family and society. Social economic conditions of poverty, dysfunctional families due to death or separation, and the breakdown of larger social support systems exacerbated by the conflict greatly affected education, as did the historically low rate of secondary school transition for most northern Ugandans. Some of the youth, primarily young women, had left school before being affected by the conflict. Of the women who had their education disrupted by the conflict, those who managed to make it back to school after the conflict only did so due to the presence of strong, educated, and supportive families and external support that funded their schooling.

This research finds that the re-establishment of educational systems in post-conflict northern Uganda needs to carefully consider the real effects of war crimes on young people's educational futures, the wider social and economic conditions exacerbated by the conflict, the reconfiguration of many families due to injury, death, and abandonment, and the gender disparity facing young women in accessing and completing a secondary education in the post-conflict period.

### **8.1.2 Realities facing women survivors and their children born of wartime sexual violence**

This research finds that women that experienced wartime sexual violence, and particularly those who bore children, are subjected to long-term negative consequences of these war crimes. Because of their wartime experiences of sexual violence, they struggle to form stable marital relationships and gain social belonging in the post-conflict era. The research confirms the work of other scholars (McKay et al., 2010; Coulter, 2008; Porter, 2013; Apio, 2016) who found that the stigma and ostracization faced by women survivors of wartime sexual violence are deeply

rooted in the pre-war gender inequalities. The conflict exacerbated and transformed these inequalities and they continue in both old and new forms in the post-conflict period.

Girls' and women's experiences of sexual violence in the conflict transgressed patriarchal gender values and ideals, putting them outside societal harmony. Consequently, these young women experienced new vulnerabilities and challenges in the post-conflict period, as the past harms of wartime sexual violence multiplied and amplified over time. The research under SLRC, Uganda found that households that reported having a member who had experienced sexual violence by a party to the conflict were significantly more likely to experience more crimes (of all kinds) in the three years prior to the survey (Atim et al., 2018).

To smooth their post-conflict lives and gain acceptance, young women who had experienced war crimes of sexual violence had – at times—to repress their dignity and rights (as well as that of their children). Some women refused to do so and went against traditional expectations of proper female behavior, thus severing their social ties and belonging. They and their children were often cut from family and clan social networks that are important for survival and access to resources in traditional societies.

The research found that the extent of time back from captivity did not necessarily improve how survivors of wartime sexual violence were treated by family and community members. The findings contrast with the findings of past studies that found and predicted that time back would lessen stigma and improve acceptance of women who returned with children born of wartime rape (Annan et al., 2008).

Instead, this research found that economic independence and the ability to contribute to their family's incomes were the most effective means of ensuring social harmony for women in the post-conflict period. Further, women's ability to create and maintain their own space, in the form of home and/or land ownership, was one of the keys to ensuring they maintained control

over their money, resources, reproductive choices, and sexual health. This independence was also one of the primary ways they protected themselves and their children from abuse and marginalization. The research found that economic independence, self-sufficiency, owning a home and land, and the ability to control who stays and who goes in your household are the keys to enabling women and their children born of war to lead lives of dignity and acceptance in the post-conflict period. Notably, these circumstances are rare for most women affected by conflict in northern Uganda.

### **8.1.3 Factors that drive women into sex work**

A simplistic assumption regarding armed conflict and sex work is that the strains placed on families by the armed conflict are at the heart of what drives girls and young women into 'survival sex' and sex work. This research finds that young women's engagement in sex work has multiple, inter-connected drivers: impoverishment, family breakdown, social networks and structures, and unequal gender norms and relations, all of which are influenced by the violence and deprivation of armed conflict.

The research found that some of the key conditions that heightened young women's risks of engaging in sex work were embedded in personal life challenges that started during their childhood. These included abuse and violence, family breakdown in the form of divorce or separation of parents, early entry into work with poor working conditions, and histories of running away. The lack of a nurturing and supportive relationship within the young woman's immediate family environment was particularly important. Thus, no one factor was the main driver for sex work, but a combination of factors led women to take up sex work. Most of these factors were further exacerbated during the more than two decades of conflict that ravaged northern Uganda.

Sex work seemed to provide an avenue for young women seeking to escape the violent and controlling patriarchal constraints that many found in their childhood. However, my research finds that young women's engagement in sex work put them right back into the very constraints they were trying to escape. In northern Uganda, the idea of a 'good woman' is predicated on a woman's sexual purity and morality, which determines her potential marriageability. Engagement in sex work brought shame to and increased stigma towards a young woman and her family. In turn, her potential marriageability was jeopardized, and her and her family's social status fell further. Cut out of the traditional, normative ways of inclusion that grant access to vital socio-economic resources for a young woman – mainly through marriage – she would face additional vulnerabilities arising from a lack of access to land and housing as well as an absence of her children's rights to inheritance and belonging.

Sex work is a livelihood and survival strategy for girls and women in conflict and non-conflict settings alike. The research finds that young women considered sex work a temporary strategy and means to a more economically independent life. Some young women envisioned meeting potential customers who would marry them (unlikely given the high stigma of sex work) or that they would make enough money through sex work to start a viable and socially accepted economic activity. However, the stark reality was that the young women's livelihoods were highly precarious and volatile, characteristics which pushed them into further risky and unstable circumstances.

Understanding and offering alternatives to sex work requires addressing the underlying vulnerabilities and risk factors faced by children and youth, both in their families and those embedded in the gender norms, ideologies, and institutions of society. While armed conflict undoubtedly heightens abuses, violence, risks, and vulnerabilities, we should be aware of the social, cultural and economic contexts that drive young people into risky behaviors. At the same

time, we must keep in mind that most young women engage in sex work as a pathway to try to meet their larger goals of economic independence and social acceptability.

#### **8.1.4 Disrupting and renegotiating social belonging after wartime sexual violence**

Social belonging and networks are essential to people's ability to function, recover, and move forward. I found that the experience of wartime sexual violence can negatively impact social belonging and disrupt the social networks of young women survivors and their children born of war. My research confirms other studies' findings (Coulter, 2009; Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2014; Porter, 2013; Apio, 2016) that young women survivors of wartime sexual violence must continuously renegotiate social belonging even a decade after the conflict.

I argue that young women's ability to remake and regain their social status can best be understood within the context of gender and patriarchal norms that govern not just their war experiences but also their everyday lives. The perceived transgression of normative gender roles and expectations due to their experience of sexual violence causes social tension and disrupts social harmony (Apio, 2016; Porter, 2013; Coulter, 2009). Young women's experience of sexual violence coupled with the normative framework further constricts their choices and lives in the post-conflict period.

In order to (re)negotiate their social place and status in their post-conflict families and communities, some young women relied on the very system of their exclusion (gender and patriarchal norms) for their inclusion. Indeed, most women sought marital relationships, at times with their former captors or other former LRA men, while some women endured abusive relationships in the name of 'marriage' to gain acceptance and status. Young women also invoked the status of motherhood and womanhood within the parameters of traditional gender expectations, thereby reproducing normative expectations. Yet at times these options and strategies stripped them of their dignity and rights, seemingly validating their wartime

experiences as taboo, disgraceful, contaminated, and dangerous, which could in turn further increase their vulnerability in the post-conflict.

Indeed, while women who experienced war crimes may appear—at a snapshot in time—to be able to re-enter their families and communities, this once-off glance provides little insight into conflict's long-term effects and disruptions. In reality, these women are constantly (re)negotiating access and belonging to these spaces. To do so, many young women feel they must conform to damaging and discriminatory gender and patriarchal norms. Achieving social belonging in this way therefore does little to address women's empowerment, rights, or their continued long-term social, political, cultural and economic marginality in northern Uganda.

On the other hand, aware of the inherent limitations of the normative framework for their social and cultural inclusion, some young women sought to reclaim their status outside these norms after the conflict. Economic independence and the ability to own livestock, land, and homes created an avenue for some young women to redeem their social status outside traditional expectations of male authority and female subservience. These alternative strategies appeared to bolster the self-worth of these women, and such young women seemed better able to gain both productive and reproductive rights in their households. Young women who contributed economically and socially in their everyday lives said that their contributions gave them an edge in decision making and increased their happiness in their marital relationships.

Young women's attempts to regain their social place after suffering war related sexual violence ranged from re-enforcing to disrupting and transforming local gender and patriarchal norms of their society. On one end of the spectrum, many young women turned to the normative framework to claim their social place and reproduced and strengthened these systems in how they lived their lives. On the other end, some young women sought ways around the confines of the normative framework to claim acceptance and their social place. In so doing, they



challenged these frameworks and contributed to transforming them. By paying attention to the everyday processes, strategies, decisions, and choices that women make in the post-conflict period we gain a better understanding of their lived realities.

## **8.2 Theoretical Reflections**

### **8.2.1 Recovery after conflict**

A central assumption that drives post-conflict policies and interventions is the idea that armed conflict is the primary driver of vulnerability. The presumption is that as soon as conflicts end, life will normalise and households will begin a slow but relatively steady upwards progression (i.e., ‘recovery’) (see Maxwell et al., 2017). But the reality is different. Often individuals, households, and communities endure lifelong consequences of the violence, long after the conflict has ended. My research found that those who suffered different and multiple forms of war crimes during conflict (survivors of sexual violence, children born of war, and those with war injuries) do not easily or smoothly recover from the effects.

Take the case of Abia, the young woman I introduced at the start of my dissertation. Nearly 14 years since her LRA captivity, she still struggles with the effects of wartime sexual violence on her and her children’s lives. She moves back and forth between rejection and acceptance in her family and she has formed a variety of ‘marital’ relationships in the post-conflict period, none of which has suited her. On her immediate return from captivity she had a good reception and received support from her family, with her mother supporting her and children born of war. Today, Abia is no longer able to rely on their support. In the same way, Abia has recurring difficulties forming long-term intimate relationships, in part due to repeated rejections of her children born of war. Similar trends in intimate relations existed for most female interviewees who had suffered wartime sexual violence. Most of these women cited the continued effects of this violence as the primary reason for the failure of their relationships. Their lives indicate patterns of volatility and uncertainty, in which they attempt to move forward but find they have

fallen back, only to struggle with real difficulty to move ahead again. Hence, this study does not support the idea or assumption that recovery is based on steady, consistent, or linear progress.

It takes a long time to recover from conflict; indeed, the impacts can be lifelong and intergenerational. Evidence from the research on the effects of conflict on education show that, due to war-related injuries, young men and women who are now parents themselves do not possess adequate skills and earnings to invest in the schooling of their own children. In particular, many women survivors of wartime sexual violence are unable to provide schooling for their children born of war. These trends create generational impacts on their children's future life productivity. The stigma and pollution of wartime sexual violence is passed onto their children. Similarly, young women engaged in sex work are barely able to make enough to provide for their basic needs and those of their children. They are unable to save enough to begin a less risky and more socially acceptable venture. Here again the findings of this dissertation do not support a clear linear relationship between the end of conflict and recovery. However, humanitarian assistance all but ceased within months of the conflict subsiding inside northern Uganda's borders. Today, development and recovery interventions largely fail to take into account the varied ways in which conflict affects people in the long term.

While conflict clearly does matter, the tendency to over-emphasize conflict's effects as the main cause of vulnerability can eclipse important broader social, economic, cultural, and political factors. This research finds that the lives of young women and men in the post-conflict period were largely shaped and influenced by pre-conflict gender and patriarchal norms and stereotypes. Additionally, most individual narratives of the young people interviewed for this research include long histories of abuse and violence, poverty, broken families, poor socio-economic factors, and confining gender norms, ideologies and institutions; all of which intersected with and were in part shaped by experiences of conflict. Thus, young people's

experiences are part of on-going, complex processes that are fluid and continually influence their lives long after the conflict is over.

### **8.2.2 Gender and patriarchy**

Gender and patriarchal hierarchies and norms poorly position young women and men in northern Uganda, complicating their ability to gain a respected place in their families and acceptance in the post-conflict society. For young women, the norms and expectations regulating their productive and reproductive rights can either smooth or confound their potential acceptance and harmony within their family and social networks. This is particularly evident for women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children born of war and women engaged in sex work. As the research demonstrated, a careful, contextually and culturally based analysis of these norms and expectations is needed to help create a more comprehensive picture of the factors that influence and shape young women's and men's recovery in the post-conflict period.

A focus on experiences of wartime sexual violence often misses the nuances of deeply embedded patriarchal gender norms within a society. The patriarchal gender norms determine the ways in which young women and men renegotiate their place in their families and society. These norms determine what access, opportunities and resources are available to these young people to navigate their everyday lives and plan for their futures in the post-conflict period. This research found important differences among young women's and men's post-conflict lives. While most young men seem to struggle with economic challenges, they don't face the same degree of stigma and ostracization related to their conflict experiences as young women survivors of sexual violence, and especially those who returned with children born of war. Similarly, young women who suffered wartime sexual violence and returned with children born of war also face more challenges forming marital relationships (and achieving the status and

accessing the resources that come with this) than their female counterparts who either did not return with children or did not suffer sexual violence.

Gender and patriarchal demands place different expectations on young men and women, often requiring sexual purity and morality of young women for marriageability. Through marriage, productive and reproductive control over young women's lives is exercised. Her family and clan gain brideprice and relinquish their control over her body, while her husband, his family and clan acquire rights over her. Thus, the perceived pollution resulting from wartime sexual violence and engagement in sex work complicates young women survivors' lives in ways it does not for young men. Notably, even the LRA system of social organization via forced marriage practices relied on the systems of gender inequalities that exist in Lango and Acholi societies. The LRA system regulated women's sexuality, production, and reproduction, and maintained their subordinate role. These trends persist in the post-conflict period, possibly pointing to a continuum of gender and patriarchal hierarchies and divisions.

I suggest that young women's post-conflict challenges should be viewed with consideration of a continuation of pre-existing structural inequalities, and not merely as a factor of their wartime experiences. Consequently, in the post-conflict period, young women's attempts to regain their honor and social place in their families and society must comply largely with socially acceptable means and standards. Through marital relationships within the accepted parameters of their society, young women's families and clan gain from their control over their daughters' production and reproduction. Customary marriage enables a woman to establish social honor and status bestowed by respectable womanhood and motherhood. And yet many young women's wartime experience of sexual violence and post-conflict lives involving sex work clash deeply with these expectations. Most young women respondents interviewed were unable to form long-term marital relationships, in part due to the stigma of the sexual violence which lessened their marriageability, as they were seen as spoilt and polluted.

Local gender discourses that moralize women's sexual purity before marriage is at the heart of women's exclusion and discrimination in the post-conflict period. In particular, the perceived social pollution and moral transgression resulting from experiences of wartime sexual violence caused social disharmony. Women's conflict experiences clashed with societal gender and patriarchal expectations of respectable and honored members of society. Women who were unable to meet these expectations are closed out as social pariahs. Some young women were stuck in abusive relationships, while some sought marital relationships with their former captors or other LRA men to gain the social honor and belonging of respectable womanhood and to legitimize their wartime experiences. This research finds that many women who survived wartime sexual violence moved away from their families and old social networks to live in the urban periphery. Similarly, many young women who experienced hardships and social fractures in their families from childhood ended up as sex workers in Lira town. In such circumstances, young women have limited opportunities and access to resources vital for recovery. The lack of ability to draw on family and kin-based support is a clear indication of the lingering and long-term impacts of conflict, gender discrimination, and patriarchy.

This research shows that entry back into one's family and community after conflict is an insufficient indicator of successful reintegration and recovery. Often in these circumstances there is little meaningful social acceptance and inclusion or a sense of belonging and sharing of resources. Such acceptance is fragile. The research highlights the limitations and harmful nature of gaining social belonging within acceptable patriarchal norms and expectations. In such cases, attempts to gain inclusion and belonging can further strip young women of their human rights, dignity, and moral choices. At the same time, failure to gain inclusion along established gendered norms further stigmatizes women and cuts them off from support systems. It is at this site of tension that we encounter important insights into young women's struggle for agency and dignity.

### **8.2.3 Young women's agency**

The research set out to understand how experience of war crimes during armed conflict affects young people's post-conflict lives and recovery. The study found that despite considerable social, cultural, economic, and educational challenges in the context of most young women's lives, there still exists room for maneuvering.

Aware of their plight, many young women strategized and took action based on an informed understanding of their situation. The young women, no matter how dire their situation, were never entirely helpless, they had choices and were capable of resisting and embracing the structures that surrounded them (Giddens, 1984). This research went beyond accounts of young women's vulnerabilities and experiences of violence and marginalization to explore accounts of their own strength and agency to shape their lives in the post-conflict context.

I found that some young women strategize, pushed back, resisted, and found spaces to maneuver to reclaim their dignity and status and attain belonging. There were accounts of young women seeking marital relationships, at times with their former captors, other LRA men, or customers (in the case of sex workers), as a way to reclaim belonging and honor within the parameters of their society. These women had to rely on patriarchy and clan-based approaches to reclaim their status and belonging. Some of them involved their parents in the decision to contact their former captors to demand brideprice. Marrying their former captors would also legitimate the children born of war within the paternal family and clan.

Yet due to the limitations of inclusion within patriarchy, some women created alternative ways of presenting themselves and their histories in the post-conflict period. They built economic independence and created their own physical spaces where they were able to renegotiate their inclusion. Women also provided economic support towards their children, aging parents, and family members back in the village as ways to negotiate their identity. These young women's

choices and strategies were shaped by wider gender and patriarchal norms, but their attempts also disrupted these norms. This findings emphasis the importance to explore not just women's vulnerabilities (as is often the case), but also their agency within the limitations of their circumstances and context.

### **8.3 Limitations and future research**

The research for this dissertation primarily focused on the long-term impact of suffering alleged war crimes resulting from the over two decades of armed conflict in the sub-regions of Lango and Acholi, northern Uganda. In both sub-regions, only a small population of young people were reached in a few districts. It might be beneficial for future research to target more youth affected by conflict in other post-conflict districts and sub-regions of northern Uganda as there might be some important differences across the districts and other sub-regions.

Secondly, this study focused on youth in general with an emphasis on the experiences of sexual violence and sex work on women lives in the post-conflict period. Future research could explore broader impacts of the over two decades of armed conflict on women's social place in post-conflict northern Uganda. Studies show there has been an increase in women's roles in their households and economic life following the conflict (see Ahikire et al., 2012). It would be interesting to explore if these changes to women lives are sustainable and transformative and if they provide greater social recognition and acceptance in the long term.

Additionally, the research for this dissertation suggests that war crimes of sexual violence resulting from the conflict have possible intergenerational impacts on the children born of these relationships. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of these war crimes on the children born of war and could examine the specific intergenerational impacts and manifestation as these children grow older.

Lastly, this dissertation focused on the lives and recovery of young people in post-conflict northern Uganda with an emphasis on education and social inclusion for women survivors of sexual violence. I did not explore to what extent ongoing post-conflict recovery programmes contribute to renegotiate youth's recovery in their families and communities. It would be beneficial for future research to explore to what extent existing and future programmes contribute to enabling youth post-conflict recovery in northern Uganda. I also suggest that future research could explore youth's opinion of existing norms, what should/could be done, by whom and their active role in the process of post-war recovery.



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## **Summary**

Studies show that youth who experienced or witnessed war crimes, especially those who suffered multiple war crimes, find it hard to regain lost education and experience more challenges maintaining good relations with their families and society in the post-conflict period (Annan et al., 2008). Similarly, strict gendered patriarchal norms and expectations render it challenging for conflict-affected youth to reintegrate into their families and society. These gendered norms inhibit survival strategies, limit choices, constrain decisions around rebuilding lives following conflict. These challenges are particularly felt by women survivors of wartime sexual violence and their children born of war (Coulter, 2009; Porter, 2013; Apio, 2016).

This dissertation studies the experiences of alleged war crimes during the armed conflict in northern Uganda (Acholi and Lango sub-regions) and the multiple challenges these experiences present to youth attempting to recover in the post-conflict period. In addition, the dissertation examines the extent to which the diversity of youth lives in the post-conflict period relate to different experiences of war crimes. I also examine other potential factors that may complicate youth recovery and rebuilding. These factors include structural conditions – poverty, social, cultural and economic marginalization—and local patriarchal gender norms and expectations that shape youth’s everyday experiences.

This research examines four specific areas: 1) youth educational outcomes in post-conflict northern Uganda, 2) women engaged in sex work in Lira, northern Uganda, 3) women survivors of war crimes of sexual violence and their social relationships with their family and community in the post-conflict period, and 4) women survivors of wartime sexual violence

everyday lives, choices, strategies and decisions to re-assert and re-negotiate their social status in the post-conflict period.

This dissertation draws on primary quantitative and qualitative data collected in Acholi and Lango sub-regions in northern Uganda between January 2013 and December 2017. The quantitative data set was generated by the Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium (SLRC), Uganda survey, which is representative of the entire population of Acholi and Lango sub-region, the two most conflict-affected sub-regions in northern Uganda. This dissertation uses SLRC, Uganda data collected in 2013 from 1,877 households in the two sub-regions and represents a population of 3.63 million people (Mazurana et al., 2014). The dissertation also draws upon primary, qualitative data drawn from in-depth qualitative interviews with war-affected young men and women, local and opinion leaders, police officers, government officials, NGO workers, and cultural leaders from Acholi and Lango sub-regions.

This dissertation is comprised of eight chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction and grounds my work in the relevant current literature on youth and armed conflict and sexual violence and conflict. Chapter two provides a detailed discussion of the methods used to conduct this study. Chapter three is an introduction to northern Uganda that addresses the pre- and post-colonial context in northern Uganda and how war complicated the context. Chapter four through seven presents the main findings of this dissertation along the four key areas outlined above. The final chapter discusses the major findings of the dissertation in perspective with the current knowledge on children and youth affected by armed conflict, and the long-term effects of war crimes on youth post-conflict recovery.



The findings of this dissertation were situated in the context of other studies to understand the impact of war crimes on youth recovery and lives in the post-conflict period.

The findings showed that there does not seem to be a linear relationship between the end of conflict and recovery. Rather, recovery takes a long time and can even be intergenerational. Specifically, even years after the conflict ended, young people who suffered multiple war crimes have not recovered lost education. This affects their productivity, livelihoods, and earning potential– with impacts likely passed on to their children. Similarly, the experience of sexual violence both during and after conflict complicates the lives of women and breeds stigma which often persists over time. Such stigma is, in part, due to the perceived transgressions and taboos around sexual violence in a society based on patriarchal gender norms. These norms underpin and determine the nature of morality, marriage, identity, sexual purity, and access to vital socio-economic resources. Consequently, women's lives showed patterns of moving back and forth, but often in volatile and precarious socio-economic situations without making any real forward progress. Improvement in most young people's wellbeing and recovery in the post-conflict period are small or intangible, including for their children. Progress will likely take generations. This dissertation challenges the idea that 'recovery' is linear or that the end of conflict 'normalises' experiences of war crimes.

Second, this dissertation finds that while war crimes suffered during conflict do impact youth lives and recovery, broader social, cultural, economic, and political processes also greatly matter. The ability of young people to recover from conflict seems to be largely linked to broader patriarchal gender norms of their society as well as their degree of impoverishment and the broader environment. In many instances, conflict exacerbated cleavages based on poverty and gendered norms, further complicating the recovery process. We must explore these broader processes along with a focus on war crimes if we are to understand the challenges to post-conflict recovery; this dissertation attempts to do just that.

Lastly, while recovery from conflict is clearly challenging, some interviewees were able to effectively and positively maneuver even within the limitations of their circumstances and context. Particularly, when women were able to have some economic independence and claim physical space for themselves they were better able to negotiate their inclusion and acceptance in post-conflict society. That said, while some of the women's choices led to positive outcomes, others had negative impacts, particularly when attempting to challenge patriarchal gender norms. Ultimately, while it is critical to understand the impacts of armed conflicts and the experiences of suffering war crimes, scholarship should pay greater attention to people's personal agency within their context and circumstances.

This dissertation provides empirical insights into the challenges of recovering from war crimes in the aftermath of armed conflict. It also provides an in-depth examination of and highlights linkages across several broader factors, including how patriarchal gender norms, social, cultural, economic, and political processes affect youth recovery.

This research set out to understand the impact of alleged war crimes on the lives and recovery of young people after over two decades of armed conflict between the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) and the Government of Uganda (GoU) in northern Uganda. It also aimed to explore to what extent young people's post-conflict challenges reflect their conflict experience or of broader factors. This dissertation sought to understand the everyday challenges young people encounter as they try to recover and rebuild their lives. But it is also grounded in the belief that young people are active agents, constantly remaking meaning in their lives and their surroundings. The analysis examined the intersection of young people's conflict experiences with multiple factors that are embedded in their socio-cultural and economic landscape.

To shed light on young people's post-conflict reality, this dissertation calls attention to events beyond the war experience, including the socio-cultural and economic environment prior, during and after conflict. Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin (2014) argue that the fundamental legacy of the conflict in the northern Uganda of today is the lingering disruption of kinship relations and networks that define personhood, often through one's gendered status, relations and responsibilities to others. These norms define morality, manhood, womanhood, kinship, identity and belonging before, during, and after the conflict. Paying attention to these norms provides a rich insight into young people's complex lives in post-conflict northern Uganda. Finally, the dissertation shows that despite the vulnerability brought by violence and conflict, young people are able to maneuver within their social context to reinforce, give meaning to, challenge, or transform local systems in their everyday lives. Future studies on the long-term impact of war crimes on children born of war will be necessary to provide in-depth knowledge on the intergenerational effects on their lives and how they cope with these challenges as they become adults. I also suggest that future research could explore youth's opinion of existing norms, what should/could be done, by whom and their active role in the process of post-war recovery.

**Teddy Atim**

**Wageningen School of Social Sciences (WASS)**

**Completed Training and Supervision Plan**



Wageningen School  
of Social Sciences

Name of the learning activity	Department/Institute	Year	ECTS*
<b>A) Project related competences</b>			
Qualitative data analysis: Procedures and Strategies (YRM 60806)	WUR	2012	3
Political Theory (ENP 35306)	WUR	2012	6
<b>B) General research related competences</b>			
Introduction course	WASS	2013	1
Information Literacy for PhD including EndNote introduction	Library, WUR	2013	1
Security Training	RDS, WUR	2013	1
Interpretive Methods and Methodologies	WASS	2013	4
Writing research proposal	RDS, WUR	2012 - 2013	6
Systematic Literature Review	WASS	2013	2
NVIVO Training	RDS, WUR	2013	0.3
Qualitative Research training: data analysis and writing	SLRC	2015	2
Strengthening research capacity in conflict-affected states	SLRC	2012	4
Periodic review meetings of SLRC partners, London and Nairobi	SLRC	2013 - 2016	2
SLRC Gender Task Force and Gender Peer Review of Reports	SLRC	2013 - 2016	0.5
SLRC Uganda Survey Trainings and Supervision	SLRC	2013, 2015 and 2018	3
'The War Wounding of Civilians: Health, Education and Livelihoods Implications from a Panel Survey.' <i>What Should We Do Differently?</i>	Overseas Development Institute, London, U.K	2017	0.5
'Children born of war in post conflict northern Uganda'	Summer institute on 'Men's and Women's Relations in Coercive Settings,' Conjugal Slavery in War Project, Kampala, Uganda	2017	0.5
'War crimes and their health and food security consequences for individuals and	International Humanitarian Studies Association Conference, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia	2016	1

households in northern Uganda: A panel cluster survey study'

'Who recovers? Who doesn't? Lessons from northern Uganda'

Nordic Africa Institute biennial conference on Gender and Change: Global Challenges for Africa, 2016, Uppsala, Sweden

2016

1

'Service delivery in fragile settings, the case of northern Uganda'

Leave no one behind: Building resilience by 2030, Stockholm Forum on Security and Development, Stockholm, Sweden

2016

0.5

'Post-conflict northern Uganda: How is recovery going?'

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Oslo, Norway

2015

1

'Youth, education and disability in northern Uganda'

(Re)Building Inclusive Societies: Critical Reflections on Disability and Global Development, Halifax, Canada

2015

1

'Children and Youth: Necessary Transitional Justice Mechanisms, Processes and Outcomes.'

International Conference on Children and Youth affected by Armed Conflict: Where to go from here? Kampala, Uganda

2013

1

### C) Career related competences/personal development

'The War Wounded of Northern Uganda'

National War Victim's Conference, Kampala, Uganda

2014

0.2

'Advancing gender justice and accountability for sexual crimes through transitional justice mechanisms'

High level conference on the effective operationalisation of the draft National Transitional Justice Policy for Uganda, Kampala, Uganda

2014

0.2

'Reparative Justice priorities for victims of gender based violations'

Interface meeting for women's groups and policy makers on the development and implementation of gender sensitive transitional mechanisms, Lira, Uganda

2014

0.2

'Implementing victim centered transitional justice mechanisms'

Enhancing Civil Society engagement in the implementation of the Transitional Justice mechanisms in Uganda, Kampala, Uganda

2014

0.2

'Developing children and youth oriented transitional justice measures for Uganda: Limits and possibilities'

Round table meeting on the development of child and youth sensitive transitional justice process for Uganda, Kampala, Uganda

2016

0.2

**Total**

**43.3**

\*One credit according to ECTS is on average equivalent to 28 hours of study load

## About the Author

Teddy Atim, was born and raised in northern Uganda and has worked as a practitioner and researcher in the region since 2001. Her research focuses on the effects of the more than two decades of conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda. She focuses on recovery from conflict looking at themes of: remedy and reparation, accountability for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity, traditional justice mechanisms, gender and youth.

She has carried out research and worked closely with local, national and international organisations and partners in Uganda, advising on the national transitional justice policy and national investigations into alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity committed during the war. She has also worked with donor groups to recommend and manage support for humanitarian aid, recovery, peace building and transitional justice in Uganda. She has also offered support to victims' groups in northern Uganda on issues around documentation of alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity resulting from the conflict, remedy and reparation.

Atim has co-authored numerous publications on the effects on the conflict in northern Uganda. Presently, she is a researcher at the Feinstein International Center (FIC), Tufts University, USA. She is also a research collaborator on a multi-country research project: the Conjugal Slavery in War (CSiW) project, working in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, where she leads the research theme 'Children Born of War.' Prior to her research work, Atim worked as a practitioner with conflict affected population in northern Uganda, supporting the rehabilitation and reintegration of children, youth and wider community affected by conflict.

Atim started her doctoral studies on the topic of youth and war in northern Uganda in September

2012 at Wageningen University, Netherlands. She holds a Masters of Arts in Humanitarian Assistance from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy and the Friedman School of Nutrition Science, Tufts University, USA. She also holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Sciences from Makerere University, Kampala – Uganda.

Teddy Atim can be reached via [atimapunyo@gmail.com](mailto:atimapunyo@gmail.com) or [teddy.atim@tufts.edu](mailto:teddy.atim@tufts.edu)

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> 1 USD at UGX 3500/=

<sup>ii</sup> After his release, the NRA government asked him to return to his job, but he refused on account that his arrest was a form of intimidation and harassment, and he wouldn't want to be part of such a government.

<sup>iii</sup> Was a consolidation of Save the Children Denmark, Norway, UK, Sweden; with Save the Children Norway as the lead organization.

<sup>iv</sup> Chats from a WhatsApp group, 18 July 2018.

<sup>v</sup> The Uganda Police Annual Crime Report 2017. Retrieved August, 17, 2018. See p. 4, Table 4: Districts with highest number of reported crimes. <https://www.upf.go.ug/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ANNUAL-CRIME-REPORT-2017.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> The United Nations, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," A/RES/44/25 of 20 November 1989. Retrieved July 13, 2018. [www.un.org/documents/ga/res/a/44](http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/a/44).

<sup>vii</sup> United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Division for Inclusion and Social Development. Retrieved. August 17, 2018 <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/what-we-do/faq.html>

<sup>viii</sup> African Youth Charter. Retrieved August 17, 2018.

[https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033 - african youth charter e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/treaties/7789-treaty-0033_-_african_youth_charter_e.pdf)

<sup>ix</sup> See Hall, 1904; Feud, 1969; Erikson 1965.

<sup>x</sup> A household was defined as the group of people eating from the same pot

<sup>xi</sup> STATA is a statistical software package that allows the user to manage and analyze data: <https://www.stata.com/stata13/>

<sup>xii</sup> See Evan Pritchard, *The Nuer*, 1940

<sup>xiii</sup> In early days, marriage followed the initiation rites of boys into adulthood, which indicated their readiness to marry (Tosh, 1978).

<sup>xiv</sup> Background checks on the woman or man to ensure s/he comes from a good family; are not relatives, hardworking, welcoming, friendly; and are not enemies, witches or wizards. During interview with Rwot Yusuf Adek, a traditional leader in Acholi noted that once some interest was established between a boy and a girl, aunties on either side investigated about the family (girl's auntie investigates the boy's family and vice versa) to make sure the family are not related, they are respectful, have no history of witchcraft, are hardworking, welcoming, happy, active, and friendly before agreeing to any marriage proposal 18/12/2017.

<sup>xv</sup> A man whose maternal uncles married for him a wife because his paternal family could not afford would move to live in the maternal village; or if a man inherited his uncle's wife (maternal brother), he would change residence to the maternal village. Such change of residence often resulted in the man and his offspring being absorbed by the maternal family descent group (See Tosh, 1978 p. 49).

<sup>xvi</sup> Luk is offence for illegitimate intercourse or impregnation of unmarried woman or girl and is compensated with livestock, money or other material things. Luk payment rectifies the offence, and provides economic benefit to the woman's family and legitimizes the child as a member of the father's clan (Apio, 2016, p. 112, 115; Driberg, 1923, p. 212).

<sup>xvii</sup> Situation in Uganda. Retrived August 18, 2018. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/uganda>.

<sup>xviii</sup> The Multidimensional Poverty Index seeks to measure acute poverty and complements income-based poverty measures by measuring indicators for health, education and living standards to investigate the multiple deprivations people face at the same time.

<sup>xix</sup> Empowering Uganda's Youth to Be Job Creators. Retrieved August 18, 2018.

<http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2015/08/04/empowering-ugandas-youth-to-be-job-creators>.

<sup>xx</sup> Ibid



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<sup>xxi</sup> The fund stipulates a host of requirements for youth to fulfil: Comply with their local business licensing requirements; own enterprises that must have been in operation for a minimum of three months; present a business project that is able to provide employment to at least four people by the end of the loan period; present at least two guarantors who must be persons of good repute within the local community; if approved, be willing to receive advice and be ready to participate in financial skills training and mentoring for proper business management; provide proof of age; provide proof of nationality and residence; acquire a credit reference bureau card, on approval of application, from the participating bank by making a once-only payment of UGX 50,000/= (approx. USD 14) for individuals and UGX 60,000/= (approx. USD 17) for companies/partnerships; present copies of certificate of registration, incorporation or partnership deed (for companies/partnerships); and present a certified memorandum and articles of association (for companies/partnerships). International Alert, November, 2013.

<sup>xxii</sup> Estimate  $\pm 1\%$  margin of error with 95% confidence

<sup>xxiii</sup> The research for this article was part of a larger study by the Overseas Development Institute on the social and economic lives of young people living ‘in the shadows’ or ‘on the margins’ in Lira, northern Uganda.

<sup>xxiv</sup> She worked for Save the Children in Uganda from 2005 to 2007, during which time she was involved in conducting research on street children in Lira, a phenomena that increased during the displacement of the population. Prior to this (2001 – 2005), she worked for a local organisation called the Concerned Parents Association, Uganda, and since 2008 to date, she has been conducting research in northern Uganda.

<sup>xxv</sup> Khat is the leaves of some plant that are chewed as a stimulant, supposedly, it helps to keep people awake for longer periods. It is commonly required by long distant truck drivers.

<sup>xxvi</sup> 1 USD to 3500 UGX

<sup>xxvii</sup> Middle level of primary education in Uganda

<sup>xxviii</sup> Highest level of primary education in Uganda

<sup>xxix</sup> The authors could not locate women who experienced these crimes at the hands of the GoU forces, particularly those pertaining to forced marriage, pregnancy, and sexual enslavement. Consequently, the study focuses on women victimised by the LRA.

<sup>xxx</sup> Relationships are identified as significant if the p-value is less than 10 per cent. Data were weighted to account for the sampling scheme and population figures for the regions sampled. The analysis was carried out using the STATA 12 software package.

<sup>xxxi</sup> See Theidon (2015) for similar dynamics in post-war Peru.

<sup>xxxii</sup> Although the survey enquired about male and female experiences of sexual violence, respondents only revealed sexual abuse of females. See United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner and Uganda Human Rights Commission (2011), citing the Refugee Law Project, for findings concerning male experiences of wartime sexual violence in northern Uganda.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> Customary marriage is an indigenous practice in Acholi and Lango cultures, normally marked by the payment of a bride price and accompanying payments to the family of the bride by the groom’s family. Acholi and Lango practise polygamy.

<sup>xxxiv</sup> War crimes that had a significant impact on household livelihoods included abduction, attempted murder, deliberate immolation, and severe beating or torture.

<sup>xxxv</sup> No one married a relative however remotely connected by blood they are on either the father’s or mother’s side (Driberg, 1923, p. 156).

<sup>xxxvi</sup> In early days, marriage followed the initiation rites of boys into adulthood, which indicated their readiness to marry (Tosh, 1978).

<sup>xxxvii</sup> Background checks on the woman or man to ensure s/he comes from a good family; are not relatives, hardworking, welcoming, friendly; and are not enemies, witches or wizards.

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During interview with Rwot Yusuf Adek, a traditional leader in Acholi noted that once some interest was established between a boy and a girl, aunties on either side investigated about the family (girl's auntie investigates the boy's family and vice versa) to make sure the family are not related, they are respectful, have no history of witchcraft, are hardworking, welcoming, happy, active, and friendly before agreeing to any marriage proposal 18/12/2017.

<sup>xxxviii</sup> At the time of writing (revising) this paper, I had a telephone conversation with one Lango elder to check on the facts about marriage preparation for boys and girls in the past. He reiterated that more attention was given to the preparation of girls because they were the foundation of their family and clan, so they were treated more specially and differently than boys (Telephone call with Mzee John David Okello, Otwal Sub County, Oyam District, June 2018).

<sup>xxxix</sup> For example, as part of the test, the girl is invited to her mother in law's house to help in the housework and is tempted with food to ascertain that she is honest and prudent, not wasteful and greedy (Driberg, 1923, p.153).

<sup>xl</sup> In case of any separation, the woman cannot take the children, but leaves them with the man.

<sup>xli</sup> A woman performs roles such as cooking, child bearing and care, cleaning, and tending to crops.

<sup>xlii</sup> The villages are organized along lineages, sub-clan and clans within the same geographic areas, and expressed one's social relations (Baines and Rosenoff-Gauvin, 2013)

<sup>xliii</sup> Luk is offence for illegitimate intercourse or impregnation of unmarried woman or girl and is compensated with livestock, money or other material things. Luk payment rectifies the offence, and provides economic benefit to the woman's family and legitimizes the child as a member of the father's clan (Apio, 2016 p. 112, 115; Driberg, 1923, p. 212).

<sup>xliv</sup> All names used in the paper have been anonymous to protect the identity of interviewees.

<sup>xl</sup> See Atim. T, Mazurana. D and Marshak. A., 2018, "Women Survivors and Their Children Born of Wartime Sexual Violence in Northern Uganda," *Disasters: The Journal of Disaster Studies, Policy and Management* 42 (S1): S61–S78

<sup>xlvi</sup> Whenever in Lira, I hanged out and at times had my meals from one of the women's restaurant where we spent long hours chatting and talking about her life, family and children. I learnt deeply from those chats. The same in Gulu, I hanged out with two of the women at their homes and work or had telephone calls to consult and talk about different spheres of their lives. These moments provided the most insightful learnings for me.

<sup>xlvi</sup> She called me on several occasions to discuss about her son's behavior and what she could do to help him. She later called to seek my opinion on whether or not she could contact her former captor's family to help her raise her son into a responsible person. But I told her it was her decision to make and I will support whatever she sees as best for her and son. The calls were between 2016 and 2017, and she and I maintain regular contact to check on each other. The last time we met, she took me to see the new house she built near Lira town and told me about the new 'man' in her life. She plans to introduce me to him the next time we meet.

<sup>xlvi</sup> 1 USD to UGX 3,500

<sup>xlix</sup> Interview with the woman, 16<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

<sup>1</sup> Follow up chat at her restaurant in Lira. She later took me to see the land and house she built (February 2018).

<sup>li</sup> 1 USD to UGX 3,500

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