Child soldiers, recruitment process and post-war issues: A case study of Sierra Leone

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Abstract
War creates an atmosphere of insecurity with devastating aftermath. Sierra Leone was plunged into over a decade civil war which resulted in the gross violation of human rights, most importantly the rights of children. This article explores the issue of child soldiers in the civil war as well as the results of the war on the social facilities. In addition, the article examines some fundamental issues that came to the fore after the civil war and how such issues affect the survival of the society. The research found that the civil war resulted in wanton destruction of educational facilities which culminated in inadequacies in school facilities. The research also found that those children recruited into child soldiers were the vulnerable ones, whose parents were not potent enough to send to schools. In conducting the research, I employ the use qualitative methodology by using textual mining to assess data from various sources like internet, library, observation and interview transcripts.

Keywords: Conflict; Recruitment Process; Child Soldiers; Psychological impact

1.0 Introduction

Children are societal jewels that are supposed to be well trained to handle challenges in the future. They are leaders that will pilot the affairs of state in the future and in this case their issues have to be a priority in the national development planning. Sierra Leone descended into civil war for over a decade and such war has rightly informed the globe about the vulnerability of children in time of war. Children were conscripted into war front and were made to face battle they did not understand. This has been the case in many African countries like Uganda, Burundi, Rwanda, South Sudan and Central African Republic. Those recruiting soldiers are attracted to children because they are often more obedient and easier to manage. When children's mind has been manipulated and encouraged to act in a certain manner, they are always unmindful of the consequence of their actions and the dangers involved. Children often cannot differentiate between "death" and "absence". Poverty, lack of education, poor parental training, discrimination, and vulnerability is increasing child participation in wars. Armed groups often target children because they are 'affordable to maintain': the funds needed to recruit, train and arm children is quite lesser than what would be required if they are grown-ups. Children are often recruited in areas enmeshed in long term wars, especially where a lot of causalities have been recorded. They are often recruited to replace the adults that have been injured or killed (Shepler, 2014). The production and availability of small ammunitions has also promoted child soldier enrolment.

Blattman (2007), asserts that enrolling children and youths as combatants gained prominence in the twentieth century. One of the major factors encouraging the enrolment of children as soldiers is the current demographic change in underdeveloped nations. The spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS among adults increases the rate of child abduction and recruitment during war.

Secondly, senior officers, especially those who are Africans, concentrates more on ensuring the children are being trained, monitored and encouraged to fight bravely (UNICEF, 2000). Such action may be because children have limited ability to protect themselves from dangers, as they are vulnerable and shortsighted (Brett & Specht, 2004). The death of child soldiers have increased in recent times than that of adults because they are being used for crucial attacks. The Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008), posits that children are being used for mining and suicide bombing duties because they do not attract much suspicion.

Thirdly, children are better soldiering options because they accept lower pays, and uses less sophisticated weapons to fight. Adolescents and children facing political oppression, poverty and unemployment easily become a soldier as an opportunity to acquire their needs or satisfy their wish. Such persons are recruited with little or no resistance because they see soldiering as a battle for integrity, an opportunity to revenge, and defend themselves against the enemy (Brett & Specht, 2004). Keeping children in groups is easier than maintaining adults. When interviewed, the leaders of the child soldiers stated that children are easy to recruit, they adapt to environments and situations more easily, and comply with instructions without questioning. Rebels of

the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), during interview, stressed that grown persons are often the major targets of the enemies because they are more skilled and trained than the children. Despite being feeble fighters, children still participate in wars because it is not easy for them to run off the conflict scene and they have been brainwashed. The adolescents are often more effective soldiers than the children (Blattman, 2007). Additionally, Somasundaram (2002), avers that leaders of armed groups in Sri Lanka prefer to recruit children because they are usually fearless and too young to comprehend the extent of dangers around them. Thus, the article is divided into three major sections. The first section discussed the recruitment process of child labour with attendant ideological training and indoctrination. The second section discussed the result of being a child soldier and the response of society. While the last section concluded the research.

Recruitment Process of Child Soldiering
The most vulnerable children are the ones lacking family care and protection. Many of them become victims of human trafficking, forced labor, armed groups and human rights abuse. Timely intervention often revive the vulnerable children and safe them from danger. This imminently safes the society from insecurity and underdevelopment (Boothby et al. 2012). Ascertaining the actual number of vulnerable children living on the streets has been impossible due to the fluctuating political-economic conditions, and the high rate of rural-urban migration. (UNHR, 2011; Gurung, 2004). Inquiry has distinguished, notwithstanding, some of the various rationale why children that lack family care often make the street their home (Mann, 2003; Filho & Neder, 2001). Some of the factors that makes them turn radical includes

poverty, family disunity due to broken homes, high distress rates in school, child work, natural disasters, war, and displacement (UNHR, 2011). The street based children maintain a close and cordial relationship with their families, some just check up on them periodically, and many simply avoid having any communication with home (Midgley & Conley, 2010). The street children who maintain a cordial relationship with their families are better in character and reasoning than those who do not (Shepler, 2005). Child soldier's recruitment is often done via voluntarily and involuntarily means. The recruitment, exploitation, conscription and use of children under fifteen years old as soldiers are war crimes liable to be punished under the 1998 International Criminal Court's Rome Statue and the 1989 Convention on Childs Rights. Soldiers of war must be at least 18 years old according to the Convention on Childs Rights. Eighteen is likewise the age perimeter set by the 1990 African Charter on Child Rights and Welfare, and the 2002 Optional Protocol to the Convention on Child Rights (Keilland & Tovo 2006:1-11).

Forced Recruitment of Children as Soldiers

Comparative studies of recruitment benefit from the analysis of involuntary enrolment of children, even though studies of recruitment focus on enforced, legal enlistment by countries, in modern wars of the non-voluntary conscription is done illegitimately through coercion or abduction. Additionally, most wars are now fought within nation's borders (Wallensteen & Sollenberg, 2000), and non-state actors including the armed rival factions, rebel groups, militias and paramilitary groups, forcefully enlist children as soldiers to get additional manpower (Brett & McCallin,

1996; Cohn & Goodwin Gill, 1994). Ever since, forced recruitment often happens opportunistically with the fast changing wars.

The Sierra Leone civil war commenced in 1991, partly as an after effect of the Liberian war. The war in Sierra Leone was fought mainly by the Armed Forces of Sierra Leone (SLA) against the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the rebellious gathering known to execute the most awful abuses of children's rights. Associated with the SLA against the revolutionaries are the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), comprising of the Kamajors, a traditional hunter's society and now a paramilitary gathering in rural regions protecting villages against the RUF. Forced by quest for power as well as control over diamonds (Denov & Maclure, 2007). The civil war has produced anarchy and unscrupulous struggling and has killed more than 75,000 individuals. It has also displaced approximately half the populace of 4.5 million people, damaged countless homes and great amounts of infrastructure, augmented severe inflation and poverty, and challenged the world with shocking violence such as rapes and mutilations. More so, many atrocities included child soldiers, as girl soldiers report that they have been forced to serve as sex slaves and raped. Furthermore, youth have been executors of atrocities, as young soldiers in the RUF did many amputations, including the cutting of individual's arms or hands. It is mainly the CDF and the RUF that conscript child soldiers systematically and deliberately. An approximated 5,400 children are connected with the RUF at present (UNICEF, 2000). Subsequent the January, 1999 outbreak on Freetown, approximately 4,000 children were informed missing, and research has shown that 60% of these had been kidnapped by the RUF, which has used

children as below seven years (UNICEF, 2000; Wessells, 1997). However, the methods for conscripting child soldiers in Sierra Leone shows difficulty and differ according to the gathering and the local circumstances.

The RUF enlist children extensively utilizing a mixture of voluntary and forced recruitment. Forced conscription entails kidnapping of either groups or individuals combined with terror and threats strategies planned to discourage escape. In some circumstances, abductees have been enforced to mutilate or kill members of their own community or family. In addition to threatening the people and breaking social trust, this practice is intended to destroy the ties between the community and child, to make the child as a murderer who cannot go back home for the fear of vengeance, also to compel the child to remain with the military for security. In addition, RUF abductees and other soldiers have been served drugs, including marijuana, alcohol, gunpowder, and cocaine, to numb grief, implant bravery, as well as encourage children to fight (Blattman, 2007). According to one ex-child soldier in the RUF, "Our bosses add gunpowder in our food also gave us brown medicines which is known as cocaine to take with our drink. The medications make your heart strong, making you feel that you are not afraid of anything" (Shepler, 2007).

Voluntary Recruitment of Child Soldier
Case study inquiry across the globe and the data on the recruitment of child soldiers in sub-Saharan Africa states that the amount of child soldiers in different militia groups varies considerably. The welfare of the children under different militia groups also varies from one group to another. Majority of the research conducted on armed conflict has been multi-disciplinary and they covered post-conflict rehabilitation and reintegration.

In a different dimension, child soldiers' recruitment study in the social science fields is yet to focus the supply angle of child soldiering. Causes which includes ethno-religious identity, lack of family care, peer pressure, poverty, lack of sufficient education or illiteracy, and the level of security in refugee camps largely determines the accessibility availability of children for recruitment (Goodwin-Gill & Cohen, 1994; Brett & Specht, 2004; Singer, 2006). A misunderstanding or breakdown of negotiation between government and the rebel groups also determines the pace of child abduction and recruitment. Child soldier recruitment is high when the action of government triggers displeasure and the rebels decides to avenge.

Several of the RUF enlist are volunteers, who state various reasons for joining. Many said frustration over the lack of job opportunities and education and testify that the military offers improved life choices than civilian life (Peters & Richards, 1998). Youth volunteers have also stated that joining the armed forces was their best way of gathering vital needs for survival such as protection, food and health care. Yet others reported that their families have joined and they wanted excitement and camaraderie (Richards and Peters1998). It needs to be stated here that some of these children are indoctrinated and drugged to perform the dangerous task of weapons and face opposition. In a way, indoctrination and drug are important viable mechanism that was used during the war to lure those children into taking arms against their would-be opponents. These are discussed below.

Drug Abuse and Training
Using children as soldiers during war is one of the most dreadful act in the universe. Children are participating in wars in about

three-quarter of the world conflict regions and tackling this menace has been difficult for the state's forces. Children are used for different functions like spies, cooks, guards and sexual pleasure. More than 120,000 children under 18 years old are at present partaking in wars within Africa; some of them are as young as 7 years old (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2004). The war in Sierra Leone lasted for over a decade, from 1991 to 2002. During this period, the rebels often make the child soldiers consume drugs in order to boost their fighting abilities and make them fearless. Such drugs include cocaine, marijuana and different kinds of alcohol. The continuous smuggling and circulation of light weapons, as well as the trading and ingestion of illegal drugs protracts conflict (Maclure & Denov, 2006). Most members of local militia movements in West Africa are consumers of illegal drugs. Drug consumption is one of the means of desensitizing child soldiers, especially during prolonged conflicts. It is also a means of radicalizing them to perform better at war. Utas & Jorgel (2008), opined in their 'West Side Boys' report that Sierra Leone soldiers consume drugs like heroin, benzodiazepines, cocaine and marijuana in large quantities during war.

Large amounts of drugs were also consumed by the military. They claim drug intake increases their braveness during war, makes them more violent, and enables them rest well without the fear of being attacked by the enemy (Utas & Jorgel, 2008, p. 502) Drug abuse patients are still being administered hard drugs while they are been treated of PTSD (Shipherd et al, 2005). Abuse of drugs is when one administer medications to self in order to manage trauma-related issues such as emotional problems, hardship and unemployment

(Gear, 2002). Odenwald, Hinkel, & Schauer's (2007), study of Somalia ex-soldiers reveals that most of the combatants engage in drug abuse because they believe it would not make them reminisce the traumatizing occurrences of the civil war. The drugs used are the leaves of khat plant. The leaves contains amphetamine substance like cotinine. Khat intake leads to PTSD and rise in psychotic symptoms like paranoia. In Odenwald et al (2005), cross-sectional family survey, out of the 4,854 people that were randomly selected in Hargeisa, Somalia, 16% of the former child soldiers were discovered to be suffering from chronic psychotic disorders which occurred between 6 and 12 years after war. The result showed that the psychotic disorders were largely caused by drug abuse, trauma related problems and emotional disorders.

Ideological Training and Indoctrination
Training is essential for the girl and boy soldiers. Most of the girls stated that they only handled domestic duties when they were first abducted. They were later admitted fully into the rebel groups. Most of the girl soldiers were involved in combatant trainings during the war. Both gender of the child soldiers stated that they performed duties such as spying and fighting at the war front. They were also engaged in other criminal operations such as stealing, burning of goods and properties, murder, torture and abduction of children to be used as soldiers. However, preparing was more exceptional and protracted. In all cases, it was intended to solidify these children with the goal that they could battle courageously and be resistant to the slaying. Teaching children how to use light weapons and involving them in war fights involves a procedure of extraordinary socialization, influence, and preparation (Denov, 2010).

The use of liquor and hallucinatory medications incredibly encouraged the preparation of children and the transmogrification of confused and very naive children into heartless soldiers. Majority of the girls and boys who took part in battle exercises in a courageous and gallantry fashion were either infused with medications or given obscure tablets to ingest. A few children testified that drugs or potentially black powder were put in their nourishment. The children never knew the drugs they were given and in any case, the medications were powerful and gave false confidence and hope to the children to reach for their weapons and kill (Maclure & Denov, 2006).

Children were suitable for propaganda, as they cannot reason, making them appropriate for use in battles by the RUF and the Kamajors. Children enlisted by the RUF are often gathered and encouraged to be part of the ousting of the allegedly corrupt Sierra Leonean government. The brain-washing makes the children more eager to fight. The monetary, social and political benefits been promised to the children also makes them committed to fighting for the RUF. A few different components encouraged children's indoctrination and socialization. One factor was the steady and gradual introduction to brutality, regarded as standard. Thus, Gurung (2004) posited that people who execute demonstrations of savagery and torment on others routinely after some time, start to consider themselves to be playing out an ordinary occupation.

The utilization of peer monitoring, especially among boys, was a viable form of socialization that assisted in recovering from the panic and fright that most of the boys underwent after their first RUF encounter. Coaches that has had a longstanding relationship with the RUF were considered dependable to fill in as good examples; this sufficiently convinced other children to become a member of the RUF or support its environmental work (Maclure & Denov, 2006). Once they are under the control of the RUF, they gradually submit to the RUF's way of life as an essential part of social relations and to become powerful. Boys and few of the girls sees themselves as a genuine RUF fighter. This was indeed a vital "landing" point as community relations and family values were overtaken by the standard set by RUF to the point that some informants called the RUF a surrogate family (Abdullah, 1997).

However, another method for upgrading group solidarity was through tattooing. Inscribing tattoo strengthened the soul of aggressor kinship. Usually depicting words and fierce pictures to restate RUF's brutality as a violent rebel group. On the contrary, the Kamajor boys were being branded. Like the RUF, these brandings were not exclusively utilized as a beginning sign, but as indicated by the children, identification markers, and for instilling a feeling of fellowship among warriors. It ought to be noticed that for boys who belonged to the Kamajors, the initiation process resulted into a strong feeling of strength and solidarity. The in-depth process of joining the Kamajor state force was instituted to defend fighters and protect them against falling into the hands of the opposition forces (Maclure & Denov, 2006). The RUF's guerrilla war started in March 1991 when about a hundred NPFL fighters and the recruited Sierra Leoneans entered the country and seize control of Bomaru town situated in the eastern region known as "Kailahun". The "vanguards" or the enlisted Sierra Leoneans attacking the NPFL were some of the RUF's first child soldiers recruited when Sankoh's discovered that he

would need low-cost soldiers to sustain its manpower during the war. Sankoh thus, in the late 1990, instructed the RUF fighters to look out and force the Liberian and Sierra Leonean detainees around the border of both nations to either fight for them or get executed. Some of the major "vanguard" combatants were just around seven years old. These children "vanguards" were termed the "Small Boys Unit" of the RUF. This served as a guideline for the RUF's forced recruitment of child soldiers during the war.

Over 10,000 children were used as soldiers during the civil war that lasted for a decade in Sierra Leone. The three main grouped involved in this act are: the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The girls constitute almost a quarter of the child soldiers. The experiences of children who partake in the civil war were similar to what other child soldiers are experiencing across the world, although there were couple of things that are peculiar to Sierra Leone. Every major faction in the civil war, such as the AFRC, CDF, RUF and even the state's troops forcefully recruited children as soldiers. The RUF utilized more children in their fold; a significant portion of them who are just around nine years old were sent to fight at the warfront and given other petty duties. The RUF members were both boys and girls. The boys were set in the "Small Boys Units" (SBU's) albeit a large number of young girls, mostly working as "spouses" to the rebels were set in the "Small Girls Units" (SGU) and equipped to fight. The RUF gave the children hard drugs such as cocaine, cannabis and alcohol before releasing them to the warfront; the children's inexperience made them vulnerable (Richards, 2005).

Child Soldering

Across the universe, about 300,000 children under 18 years old are members of violent rebel forces and groups. Despite the high level of risk child soldiers are exposed to during war, not much has been done on fixing their mental health and social integration. Recent research on former child soldiers in Uganda, Nepal, Congo and Sierra Leone provides insight on the aftermath of civil war experiences on rehabilitation and the psychosocial situation (Gartner, & Kennedy 2018). The research opines that experiencing and inflicting violence, younger age participation and extensive interaction with armed groups have unpleasant consequences on the social rehabilitation of young persons and mental health (Betancourt & Agnew-Blais, et al., 2010). Although displacement and death are the usual hazard children suffer during war, child soldiers face more dangerous hazards and threats due to their participation as fighters. Child soldiers were often compelled to commit murder, torture, victimize and sexually harass people. Previous studies have documented the extreme rate of mental health issues, including depression and PTSD among the former child soldiers (Kilpatrick, Ruggiero, et al., 2003).

Psychological Impact

Traumatic stress deteriorates mental health. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a damaging mental ailment that occurs to people who are constantly exposed to human rights violations and conflicts. The "building block effect" brings back the memories of traumatizing experiences and increases the rate of PTSD and depression (Karunakara et al, 2004; Kolassa & Elbert, 2007; Onyut et al, 2009; Schaal & Elbert, 2006; Schauer & Elbert, 2010; Schauer et al, 2003, 2005). Traumatic stress is leading to a rise in

mental-health issues. PTSD patients have created a 'fear network' which comprises of people suffering from trauma-associated conditions. People with traumarelated illnesses often get easily provoked, and are always afraid of having a recurrence of previous bad experiences.

Furthermore, Bayer, Klasen & Adam (2007), inquired into the experiences of ex-child soldiers in Congo and Uganda. Each one of the 169 children within an average age of fifteen years that was interrogated confessed that they were forcefully recruited as soldiers at the age of 12. They also disclosed that they were imprisoned and made to work for 38 months. They experienced many traumatic experiences during this period. 84% witnessed how people were terribly beaten, 92% witnessed how people were been shot, and 89.9% saw people been injured. 54% confessed that they killed, and 28% disclosed that they raped during war. 35% of the ex-child soldiers interrogated were suffering from PTSD. Exploring the experiences of former child soldiers that had once been kidnapped, Derluyn et al (2004), discovered that children within an average age of 12.9 years were kidnapped for about 25 months and afterwards get traumatized. In addition, 39% has killed before and 77% has watched people being killed. AmoneP'Olak (2005), studied the experience of girls who have once been kidnapped or are victims of war, assault, rape, and other related causes of psychological disorder. The findings of the study reveals that 98% of the girls were forcefully raped, 98% thought they will be killed, 99% survived been killed, and 72% were terribly abused by the rebels. 13 year old girls were compellingly converted into wives, 65% witnessed killings, 18% participated in killings, 44% saw how people were being wounded, and 7% were forced to participate in the execution of their family members. The girls suffered many traumatic experiences while in prison. Comparing kinds and rates of traumatic experiences, Annan & Blattman's (2006), 'Survey of War Affecting Youths (SWAY)' detected that 23% of the children soldiers were compelled to sleep among dead bodies during war.

Socio-Economic Impact of Child Soldiering

Researchers of economic development have contended that civil war can have a harmful impacts on future economic execution. Conflict damages infrastructure and physical capital and upsets human capital accumulation, and it may also destroy organizations by generating political instability, damaging the social framework and threatening civil liberties (World Bank, 2003). Understanding conflict's impact on growth is mainly significant for Sub-Saharan Africa, where two-thirds of all countries feel pain from armed conflict through the 1980s and 1990s. The spread of armed conflict in the world's poorest county ask the question of what part war may be playing in Africa's economic implementation. However, the net long-run outcomes of war are vague from the idea of economic theory. To the degree that civil war effects are restricted to the damage of capital, the neoclassical model foresees fast economic development post-war, converging back to stable state development. Many current papers that analysis civil war impacts including in Japan (Davis &Weinstein, 2002) and Vietnam (Miguel & Roland, 2005) find insufficient persistent local effects of U.S. violence, with violently bombed regions facing quick recovery to pre-war people as well as economic trends. This is in coherent with the neoclassical model if conflict's foremost result is to

destroy capital. Collier (1999) asserts, that economies develop on the average of 2.2% slower during civil war than their past grow path would predict. The noticeable cause for this is: "Civil war damages physical and human capital, and lowering investment that may redevelop both. Civil war instantly decreases the physical capital supply through the obliteration of public infrastructure such as roads and productive capital" (Flores & Noorduin 2006, p.4). Humphreys (2002), claims that in addition to the obliteration there is also a decrease investment in capital by public and private actors. He says that civil war often causes a capital breakout leading to a reduced investment in physical capital by private actors. According to, (Humphreys 2000) the investment in human capital decreases due to a war for the reason that: "During conflict, schools are closed and are damaged, teachers and often student join armies and rebellions. These impacts decrease investment in human capital" (Humphreys 2002, p.10). Even though most current researchers agree that civil war causes economic decline. Various researchers assert that post-war circumstances bear the prospective for supra-natural development. While others state that the negative impact of civil war are long lasting and destroying economic growth after the war has ended (Flores & Noorduin 2006).

Sierra Leone was first established by ex-service men who wage war for the British in the American independence conflict and later re-settle in Africa. Since then the nation has worked as a refuge for numerous released slaves. This led the growth of a several intellectualism relating thinking from all over western Africa in Freetown but also to a durable difference between the "new" urban as well as the native rural populace. Because of this the nation has an extensive history of violence amid the diverse gathering in the nation the 1890s. The difference between the gatherings augmented as the country established an increasing patrimony to protect incomes from natural resources exports particularly diamonds for the political elite. (Richards, 1996). By the end of the 1970s payments from minerals dropped abruptly as many of the top mine were operated out and the nation became seriously dependent on foreign assistance, this aid is often guaranteed to structural programs which deny the patrimonial idea numerous government administrators had to help in order to keep their own occupations. (Richards, 1996). For the reason that it was missing the vital payments from mineral exports as well as international aid the economy deteriorated and disparities became a more and more persistent worry. Thus when the RUF, a very small gathering of revolutionaries, arrived the country in 1990 they found an extensive assistances amongst the rural youth and what began as a small rebellion of protestors from Liberia grew to a conflict that endured a decade and displaced nearly half of the people. (Richards, 1996). In 1990 Sierra Leone was one of the deprived nations in the world and much of its economy was demolished during the civil war before it ended in 1999, so economic recovery was very significant in the outcome of the civil war (HDI 2010).

Conclusion

The article focused essentially on the recruitment dimension of child soldiers and the aftermath of the war in Sierra Leone. In addition, the article assessed the implications of the war on the child soldiers in the country as well as the response of the society towards them. It has been established that it is a very difficult situation

for the child soldiers to be accepted back into the society as most of them have been stereotyped as criminals. In this manner, the sierra Leonean society and people in general have forgotten the condition under which these children were recruited. As some of these children were forced to engage in war, the society should accept them back without prejudice. It has also been observed that the post war period witnessed massive destruction of social amenities like schools and hospitals. As these condition prevailed it is difficult to accept all students back to schools as the ration of population to school space is abysmally limited. In this way, government is incapacitated to respond to the educational request of all. As some of these children are suffering from psychological trauma. All stakeholders should cooperate to restore them back to normal position.

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