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CHILD SOLDIERS: AN INNOCENCE LOST.

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Abstract

There are over 300,000 children being exploited, used as slaves and in combat situations as child soldiers. These children are kidnapped, brainwashed and forced to commit atrocities that are so heinous, most adults cannot fathom witnessing these things themselves. While both female and male child soldiers exist, their roles can be extremely different. Even though we are aware that the experiences and gender roles are different, there is minimal research on the female child soldier experience. This research explores the different gender roles and involvements for both male and female child soldiers. It also explores the lack of research regarding female child soldiers and the possible reasons for this difference.

Introduction

The words child and soldier are not words that normally fit together. However the use of child soldiers is a far too common occurrence in many conflicts around the world. There are currently over 300,000 children in the world today being used as child soldiers (Wainryb, 2011). Over thirty countries across the globe are currently using child soldiers. These countries include: Afghanistan, Burma, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of Congo, Philippines, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Thailand, Yemen, Uganda, Sierra Leone, Iraq, India, Indonesia, Israel, Ethiopia, Liberia, Rwanda, Chechen Republic, Colombia, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Mozambique, Mexico, Honduras, Peru and Myanmar (Child Soldiers International, 2015).

The definition of a child soldier “is any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities” (Child Soldiers International, 2015). The first question many people ask is why would children be used as soldiers? Why wouldn't anyone just use young adults to fight in their wars? There are several answers to these questions. Many of these groups that use child soldiers and war have experienced extreme losses and casualties. The lack of adult resources can result in the use of children as fighters instead. Another more prevalent explanation is that children are much easier to control and manipulate. They are smaller and can be easily forced into undesirable situations. Children are much easier to kidnap or force from their villages and towns. They are easily brainwashed with fear and violence. Most of these victims rarely try to fight back. Children and adults who object or attempt to fight back are beaten or often killed as

example in front of the other children and villagers. Most of these children are threatened or coerced into going with their captors.

Many of these children witness their parent's deaths, or are even forced to be the executioner for a family member or someone they know in their village. This helps alienate them from their family and community because once someone is killed by that child, the child is no longer welcomed back to the village and has nowhere to escape to. Many times armed forces will just go into towns and villages and conduct a "mass roundup" of children of the streets. They frequently gather children from churches, schools, orphanages and any other places where large amount of children may be. Many times in this process, the adults trying to protect them will be brutally murdered. With little or no parents or family members to return to, the children are much less likely to try and escape. Children caught escaping are beaten or killed as an example for the rest of the group. Sometimes, the children are the ones who are forced to beat or kill the escapees under threat of their death to help further the brainwashing. These children have sometimes been forced to drink the blood of their first kill which furthers the desensitization to death and killing. It's a kill or be killed situation; these children are forced with little other options in sight.

There are occasions where the children voluntarily go with the rebels. As described by a child (Singer, 2006):

I joined the army when I was young [at age fifteen] without thinking much. I admired soldiers, their guns and crisp, neat uniforms. I just wanted to fight the way they did in movies and so I joined the army.

– H., age twenty-one

These children see the older soldiers with possessions that are attractive to them. In many places where child soldiers are used, the population and community are poor. Many children

grow up hungry and struggling for their day to day for basic needs. The attraction of being able to have the things they would otherwise never be able to acquire themselves is a strong motivating factor. They see a glorified role as a martyr and they seek the perceived glamour surrounding it. They are told they will have a better life, can earn these possessions and have a new “family” who cares about them. These children may have little actual family or are orphaned and are completely alone with no future prospects. They seek the comradery of “brothers” and having a “family” to come home to. There are also situations where a family or village will give a child up to the rebel groups in order to protect the family or community by supplying a volunteer. Many communities are burned and people are killed when the villages are raided, so supplying children up front is often the only way to keep the community safe. In Maoist (Communist guerilla) areas, the rebels enforce a one-child policy, meaning that each family who has children must provide one of their children to the cause or face severe punishment, usually death. In Afghanistan and other countries, rebels have enforced quotas that require villages to provide a certain number of children or face attacks (Singer, 2006).

Once these forces have children, they are easily trapped into staying. Many groups use chains and guards at first; however, children are forced to use large amount of drugs and other substances which the kidnappers provide. These children quickly realize these substances help with the pain of the reality of what’s happening and if they cooperate they will be provided more. Captors often tell the children that these substances will make them invincible, or impervious to gunshots. “Brown-brown” is gunpowder mixed with either cocaine or heroin and is put directly into the child’s arm with an incision and then bandaged shut after the mixture is packed in. Other drugs are used as well, such as alcohol, tranquilizers, jambaa (marijuana) and crack cocaine. A former child soldier describes the use of these concoctions (Singer, 2006):

We smoked jambaa all the time. They told us it would ward off disease in the bush.

Before battle, they would make shallow cut here [on the temple, beside his right eye] and put powder in, and cover it with plaster. Afterward I did not see anything having any value. I didn't see any human being having any value. I felt light,

-A., age fifteen

These drugs are not just given to the soldiers, but also to the young girls taken as “wives” are given these substances by their “husbands” to help keep them submissive and controlled (Coulter, 2009). Many of these young women that have been interviewed have stated these mixtures of drug and alcohol helped them numb the pain of what was happening to them. Once these children are addicted, they will continue obeying the commanding officers in order to receive more. This system of addicting the children to substances only furthers the control these groups have on them.

Who Uses Child Soldiers?

There are around 30 countries around the world that are currently using child soldiers in combat. There are many groups that have used and continue to use children as soldiers to fight in wars and uprisings. These groups are not limited to rebel groups but can include government, state sanctioned and military forces as well.

Using child soldiers is not a development in recent history. During the final years of World War II, the Nazi government in Germany recruited 200,000 children between the ages of 9 and 17 (Werner, 2012). These children were chosen, however, not kidnapped or forced. To be chosen was a great honor for Hitler youth and only high ranking children were afforded this honor. These children were used mostly as anti-aircraft auxiliaries at Air Force or Marine bases.

Towards the very end of the war, these children were taken off the bases and used in battles. Women of Nazi officers and soldiers then took their place on the bases instead. Children have been increasingly involved in combat situations (Werner, 2012).

While the majority of the research on child soldiers does reference rebel groups, it is important to acknowledge that there are state, government and military forces as well, that still currently use children as soldiers. Table 1 below gives an overview on some of the countries that use child soldiers, what state armed forces and state allied forces in each country uses them. This table does not address non-state allied forces and opposing groups of their use of child soldiers (Child Soldiers International, 2012).

Table 1

	STATES SANCTIONING USE OF CHILD SOLDIERS	NATIONAL ARMY/ ALLIED FORCES	OTHER COMPONENTS OF STATE ARMED FORCES	USE OF CHILDREN IN NON COMBATENTS ROLES DURING CONFLICTS
1	Afghanistan		Police: Afghan National Police (ANP) and Afghan Local Police (ALP)	ANP and Afghan National Army (ANA)
2	Central African Republic	“Self-defense” militias		
3	Chad	Chadian National Army (ANT)		
4	Colombia			Colombian National Army
5	Cote d’Ivoire	Former Defense and Security Forces (FDS) Republic Forces of Cote d’Ivoire Armed militias and “self-defense” groups		

6	Democratic Republic of the Congo	Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC)	Paramilitary force: Republican Guard	
7	Eritrea	Somali armed opposition group: Al-Shabaab		
8	Iraq		Civil defense force/militia: Awakening Councils	
9	Israel			Israel Defense Forces
10	Libya	Libyan Armed Forces	Paramilitary force: The Kata'eb	State armed forces
11	Myanmar	National armed forces: <i>Tatmadaw Kyi</i>	Paramilitary force: Border Guard Forces	
12	Philippines		Paramilitary force: Citizen Armed Forces Geographical Units	Armed Forces of the Philippines
13	Rwanda	DRC armed opposition groups		
14	Somalia	Transitional Federal Government State-allied militias,		
15	South Sudan	Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA)		
16	Sudan	Sudan Armed Forces Pro-government militias Chadian armed opposition groups	Police forces: including the Central Reserve Police and Border Intelligence Forces Paramilitary force: Popular Defense Forces	
17	Syrian Arab Republic			Syrian armed forces and allied armed group, Shabbiha militia
18	Thailand		Civil defense force: Village Defense Volunteers	

19	United Kingdom	British Army		
20	Yemen	Armed Forces of Yemen Pro-government tribal militias	Paramilitary forces: Central Security Forces and Republican Guard	

There are 20 countries, including the United Kingdom, on the table above that list different uses of child soldiers. This may not mean all of these countries use them in combat situations; however, they are still involved in some way with government sanctioned military forces. The following will go into more detail on how rebel groups use child soldiers in combat situations.

One of the most infamous groups that is continuing to use child soldiers is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). This group is known for its ruthless tactics of recruiting children. Its leader is the infamous Joseph Kony and his goal is to overthrow the Ugandan president and rule the country based on the Bible's Ten Commandments. This rebel group, in particular, is known to be extremely ruthless. During village raids they have been known to remove ears, lips, noses and other limbs of anyone that resists or just happens to be in their way. They use mutilation as a way to instill fear, especially in children. They destroy villages, forcing any surviving men, women and children to come with them. Many times they kill civilians just for being there and without any hesitation. Many of the country's residents have been forced to leave their homes, their land and their villages in fear of these attacks and are now residing in refugee camps and larger towns for safety. The refugee camps have virtually no security, leaving the displaced refugees at the mercy of the group they left to escape in the first place (War Child, n.d.). Leaving their farms and land means they are not only displaced, but poor and have very few options for

making a living to feed their families. All of this puts them in a very vulnerable situation that allows others to take advantage of them.

Kony has only been seen surrounded with adult male soldiers at all time. He denies any use of torture, the use of forcibly taking children from the homes or the killing of innocent civilians, but has been caught on tape saying every child should pick up a gun and fight for their cause and anyone resisting should be put to death (Invisible Children, 2014). The LRA started in Uganda, but has since spread to the Sudan, Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central African Republic. According to the Ugandan TIP report, there have been no attacks from LRA since 2006 (U.S. Department of State, 2014). However, other sources say that there are still child soldiers being used to fight the civil war in Uganda. Despite this discrepancy in information, there are known and documented raids and use of child soldiers in the Congo and Sudan (Invisible Children, 2014).

In Sri Lanka, the Liberation Tigers is a well-known terrorist group. This extremist group was formed in 1976, and their goal was to separate the Tamil homeland from Sri Lanka. Estimates based on fighters killed in battle show that over 40% of this group's fighters are between the ages of 9 and 18 (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2001). Until 1986, the Liberation Tigers or LTTE, had enough adults to fill their units. When children reached 16, they were sent out into the same training and combat as the adults (the age to be considered for combat according to a United Nations Treaty is 18) (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund, 2005). For children under 16, they formed what was called the "Baby Brigade." These children lovingly are referred to as "Tiger Cubs" and received non-military training, primary education and physical exercise. However, after heavy casualties greatly impacted the older

units, the children were used to fill these gaps. The LTTE also requires all soldiers to shave their heads, not only to erase part of their identity, but to also make it easier to spot runaways and deserters.

Half of the actual armed forces of this group consist of women. These women soldiers receive the exact same training as the men do. They are armed with automatic weapons and participate in combat just as many as the men. All the soldiers, men, women and children are armed with cyanide pills because they believe “there is no honor in being caught alive” (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2001). These cyanide pills are to be used when caught by the enemy so that a soldier can end his or her life instead of being captured. They even have what’s known as the Black Tiger suicide squad. This squad is entirely dedicated to sacrificing one’s self for whatever task is assigned to them. Some of these girls do volunteer for these positions in the Liberation Tigers. They go to escape their home life, many of these young girls grow up in poverty and are forced into arranged marriages and they join to escape this fate. Some of the young girls do believe in the cause and they join to help support it. During their time there, they are brainwashed into believing there no greater honor than to die in battle, and to sacrifice everything for the cause including their life. They are encouraged to completely isolate themselves away from their families and friends and to only socialize with members of their group. Many of the young girls and children are used a suicide bombers and spies due to the fact they can infiltrate camps and organizations easier because of their age and gender.

The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) is a rebel group that resides in the country of Sierra Leone that has a reputation for the rampant use of child soldiers in combat situations. RUF is known for some of the most ruthless tactics and violence inflicted on not only the people they fight, but their soldiers and the villages they invade as well. According to Ebbinghaus (2007),

RUF is responsible for the highest numbers of rapes, abductions, mutilations, forced drugging, displacement and other abuses of any other rebel group. This however, is subjective because many of these atrocities go undocumented and unreported do to the stigma attached to these rebel groups. Similar to the LRA, the RUF group would go into villages, ransack and destroy the entire place. Children and young adults were often kidnapped, coerced and forced with threats of violence to go with the soldiers. People who resisted were often killed and their deaths used to inspire fear and cooperation in other members of that village. Children were often forced to kill their families to start the process of desensitization to violence. Attacking the child's own village or family can be highly effective in alienating that child from their home and families. It makes it extremely difficult to return back home after committing such heinous acts of violence against people they know and love.

This rebel group is also known for its rampant use of sexual violence and rape used against women. The sexual violence is strategically used to prepare the children and youths to become accustomed to the widespread violence in the rebel group. It is also used to help dismantle community and social relationships these children have before being abducted. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) addressed the Revolutionary United Front's gender based exploitation, abuse and sexual violence against women. RUF did not address the issues of sexual violence against women and girls to the commission, but actually proceed to state that they were aware of the violations, did nothing to stop it and that many commanders and leaders in the group had openly participated in the horrendous acts of abuse and violence against women and female child soldiers (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2014). This just further illustrates the sexualized, gender-based abuse and violence that many female child soldiers experienced.

Gender Roles and Female Soldiers

There are many countries that have used or are still currently using female child soldiers as combatants in conflicts. In 2002, there were 33 countries that had female child soldiers serving as fighters. This includes, but is not limited to: Uganda, Sudan, Iraq, Turkey, Mexico, India, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2002). Female child soldiers are used just as much as male child soldiers although their jobs are may be different. Forty percent of child soldiers are female. Young girls are often captured and forced into a number of diverse situations. Dallaire (2012) stated that female children were often more sought after because they could do a more variety of jobs to serve the cause. While female child soldiers are put in all the same positions as male child combatants, they are often forced in more specific gender roles as well. Females are more desired because they can also be used as sexual rewards for the men. Most of the time their number one job is to breed more soldiers and be used as a sexual objects and become “wives” of soldiers and commanders.

Rape is something that occurs far too often for these female children. Most of the time, the first rape will occur at the time of abduction. Many women have described multiple rapes and gang rapes out in the open, during the day and night, with people watching and cheering on. Some women have said it lasted for hours or almost a whole day until it stopped. There was no stigma or shame in sexually assaulting a woman or young female child in front of anyone. Sometimes, these female children could be “saved” by their future bush husband. This will happen when at the end of the gang rape a commander or man in a high position will step in and say he wants her for his wife or just for himself. This helps builds loyalty towards him in the eyes of the young girl since he has saved her from the continuing this brutal sexual assault. This young girl is much more likely to remain loyal and faithful only to him now and less likely to run

away. Bush wives often have less chores and tasks to do around the compound as well making this position more appealing to hold on to (McDonnell & Akallo, 2007; Coulter, 2009). Female children and women can also be given away as “wives” of older soldiers, as rewards from commanders. Many times, if they are not picked to be a wife, girls are passed around the group of soldiers they are traveling with. Even with the rampant rape and sexual assault happening in situations like this, there is still a prevalent stigma, even within the camps. The “wives” have much more power, are required to do less work and sometimes help make decisions in the commander's' absence. “Wives” are for the most part, protected from other men besides their husbands. The female child bush “wives” are given more clothes and desirable things, better food and can be subjected to less sexual traumas. These “wives” have also referred to the other unattached women as “riff raff,” loose and so on. Even though they all started out in the same situation, the stigma of having sex with multiple partners, even forcibly, holds very strong for many of these poor young girls. The female children who are not picked by husband, are used as objects for male soldiers. These girls often have many duties, such as finding food and supplies, taking care of the children, elderly and sick and keeping the camp put together and running. They are assaulted often in open public areas and learn quickly that if they refuse to kill a man, they most likely will be killed (McDonnell & Akallo, 2007; Coulter, 2009)..

Everyone living in the bush is exposed to many diseases and health risks, such as; malnutrition, malaria, and cholera, along with the obvious risk of stabbing and gunshot wounds. As a bush “wife” or an unattached girl in the camp, being exposed to sexual abuse is extremely difficult and can be deadly. Many of these women and young girls are exposed to a plethora of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV at alarming high rates (Coulter, 2009). In Sierra Leone

the health workers stated that an estimate of 70 to 90 percent of survivors of rape tested positive for STDs (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2002). Many of the young girls are taken as virgins and the trauma they experience from multiple rapes and gang rapes can cause traumatic fistulas, which is the rupturing of tissues that occur in the vagina. A health worker in Uganda stated:

Women got huge swellings in their private parts whose tips resembled those of pineapples. Perhaps the uterus crumbled and got deformed due to over-penetration by too many men, which also resulted into premature births, abortions and vaginal sores. Many young girls died after being raped and those who survived suffered complications during menstruation, got torn, and some eventually failed to conceive or bear children.

ISIS - Women's International Cross-Cultural Exchange, 1998, pp. 51–52)

These women can also experience uterine deformation and sterility. Many of these mothers are too young to be giving birth which can result in complications and even death of their child or their death. Babies born into this situation often die due to lack of prenatal care and complications of giving birth without any assistance. Self-induced abortions are common because of the risks of carrying and giving birth to a child, not to mention the stigma attached to having children out of wedlock. If the baby is born, that newborn child is at risk of possible infanticide, abandonment, exposure to STDs and being generally unwanted by the mother. The babies who do survive and are kept by their mothers, are often malnourished even though they are breastfed because the mothers themselves are malnourished and starving. Female abductees' babies seen by health practitioners at a hospital in Sierra Leone, were so sick and malnourished that 20% to 50% were dying in the hospital (Mazurana, 2002).

Due to the nature of this sexual abuse, it is even harder for the girls to escape their captors. For those who do escape and returned back to their villages, they are not always welcomed home. The stigma attached to the sexual abuse and assault they have been exposed to, causes many families see the girls as used and unfit. Most of the women often try to leave with their children, making escaping nearly impossible. The children of these women are shunned more often than not and are not accepted into society. There is a large part of a generation of children that are born into a life of violence, displacement and war. These mothers are also expected to support these children on their own, so they cannot attend school because they have to work to provide for their children. These children are referred to as “rebel babies” and are raised by mothers who are often still children themselves and have little or no parenting skills or future prospects due to their lack of education.

Sexual assault was not limited to young girls. Many of the young boys have been sexually assaulted as well however there is much more of stigma attached to raping a young boy. Emmanuel Jal (2010), a former child soldier in the Sudan, described how many boys would protect themselves from sexual predators. The young boys would stuff their pants with newspapers and paper bags at night so when the commanders or older soldiers came to assault them, the noise would wake up the surrounding soldiers. The stigma attached to same sex intercourse prevented the attack while people were awake and watching (Jal, 2010).

Almost always, every child soldier that came into camp was taught how to use a weapon. It did not matter if one was female, male, very young, or a teenager, every soldier learned how to defend themselves and the camp with a weapon, usually a gun. Younger girls and bush wives would often stay in the camps instead of going into the war zone areas even though they knew how to use a weapon. Girls can be highly valued in the military and rebel groups as combatants.

Female combatants were and are often seen as much more ruthless and cruel than their male counterparts. They have been referred to as barbareans, monsters and cold blooded fighters. Coulter (2009). believes this is due to the fact that “fighting is included in the moral universe of men in ways that it is not for women, and fighting women are frequently considered by their very existence to be transgressing accepted female behavior” (p. 2462). Female soldiers are seen as more violent and aggressive because they are constantly trying to prove themselves as warriors to their male equivalents. Female child combatants want to be seen as equal soldiers as the male soldiers. Earning equality in the eyes of the male soldiers can also help reduce the amount of sexual assault the female child soldiers receive. If the male soldiers see that they can defend themselves, they are less like to sexually assault them and instead turn their attention to girls in the camps and villages they raid. Also these female child soldiers are much more equipped to defend themselves against physical and sexual assault however, this does not mean that these female fighters are not assaulted on a regular basis. Often these women are killed by their male soldiers due to resisting sexual advances. No matter what the position held by these female children and young women, the experiences differ greatly due to the rampant sexual abuse and gender based assault that is considered acceptable by these groups.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

Child soldiers face significant challenges in trying to return to normal life (Wessells, 2006). The process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, also known as DDR, is the process which children soldiers go through to become rehabilitated into society. There are many programs that assist with this around the globe. The first step for child and adult soldiers to be able to return to society is disarmament. Disarmament is the collection, documentation, control

and disposal of small arms, ammunition and both light and heavy weapons. This step is pretty self-explanatory as it basically removes the weapons from the hands of the soldiers. The next step is demobilization. Demobilization is moving the combatants out of the rebel forces and military structures. The final step is to reintegrate these children and young adults back into society and to help them find sustainable housing, income and employment. This step can be the hardest process for these children. Many former child soldiers never fully reintegrate back into society (Bass, Annan, Murray, Kaysen, Griffiths, Cetinoglu, & Wachter, 2013; Beah, 2007).

Armed adult males are given priority in these programs which put children, especially female children, at a high disadvantage. When children are accepted into these DDR programs, boys are accepted and released at much higher rates than girls. In May 2001, the RUF group in Sierra Leon released 1,198 boys and only 15 girls officially (Betancourt, Borisova, Soudiere, & Williamson, 2011). An issue with DDR programs is that there are no plans in place for the “wives” and the children of the rebel soldiers. These women and children are not considered to be soldiers in the same way as the male combatants and therefore are not given priority. These camps often have little or no supplies for girls, such as clothes or sanitation supplies and are virtually unprotected leaving these girls and their children extremely vulnerable. Many males in DDR programs are given money to help start out their lives after leaving their groups. Women are almost never given these monetary awards to help with living expenses, leaving girls with few options. This can force their decision to stay with their bush husbands or captors to survive. Many of these young girls do not know any other way of life and feel their only real options are to stay with the rebel groups and “husbands”.

It is not uncommon for many former child soldiers to go back to the bush and continue fighting. The rebel group RUF is known for re-recruiting former child soldiers back into their

ranks. (Ebbinghaus, 2007). If they are not re-recruited they have the long journey of recovering from the traumas they faced in the bush. Reintegration focuses mostly on the basic needs of these children which include housing, income and employment. There are not many services the focus on addressing the traumas these children, both male and female have gone through. Many child soldiers both male and female are not accepted back by their families, friends and are not welcomed into their home villages. Soldiers who participated as combatants are feared and seen as violent, dangerous, and unstable (Ebbinghaus, 2007). The fear of being attacked and brutalized again is strong in these communities. These communities have been traumatized by the rebel groups these children have participated in and can be unwelcoming to these returning soldiers. These children have become extremely desensitized to violence and death. Many of these young people do not remember their lives before the bush, do not remember lives without constant violence. These experiences make it very hard to go back into and be received by a society that is afraid of them (Denov, 2010; Derluyn, Broekaert, Shuyten, & Temmerman, 2004).

Most females are viewed as being damaged goods, especially the girls who had husbands and children in the bush (Heartland Alliance International, 2014). They are often times not welcomed even in their own villages at all, if there is a village to come back to. The widespread sexual abuse is clearly known about, but not talked about at all. For a women to not be a virgin before marriage is seen as unfit, even if the woman did not choose to give up her virginity and it was taken by force. Having multiple sex partners, willingly or not, is also seen as extremely taboo. Many of these women receive little or no help or support with their children from their families and communities if they return. They almost never have the opportunity to go back to school and receive an education because they are forced into the work forced to support their

children. Girls that experience this kind of sexual assault often experience loss of dignity, depression, low self-esteem, shame, shock, nightmares, and other PTSD symptoms (Mazurana, 2002). There are very few to no psychological supports put in place for these women when they come back. In a study done in the Democratic of the Congo, 52 women participated in 15 sessions of TF-CBT (trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy). Compared to the control group, all of the women showed highly significant improvement of their symptoms of depression, anxiety, conduct difficulties and prosocial manners after only 15 sessions (O'Callaghan, McMullen, Shannon, Rafferty, & Black, 2013). These programs should be options for women reintegrating society from combat situations no matter what positions they help with their captors. Women and children are forced to try function in a normal world and forget the experiences they have gone through. These young women are taunted by men who label them as "used goods" and do not see them fit to marry. They are thrown back into a society that looks at them as trash and ignores them with no psychological support to help them deal with the horrific situations they survived in.

Awareness, Research and the Future

There are many groups currently working to stop the use of child soldiers around the world. The International Rescue Committee (IRC) is a group that works hand in hand with children and families involved in or displaced due to conflicts in their countries. They have many programs in place in help these families. One of the programs they have focuses on former child soldiers and helping them reintegrate into society. The IRC has helped 1,400 former child soldiers in Nepal go back to school or enroll in some sort of training program. Child Soldiers International is one of several groups and they have focused heavily on research and advocacy

for policy changes surrounding child soldiers. They use research and analysis to help inform and advance international policy. Their research is targeted at ending the use and recruitment of child soldiers and raising awareness to the psychological issues that child soldiers experience (IRC, 2014).

While Child Soldiers International focuses on research and political avenues for change, Invisible Children (2014) has done a lot of awareness, and direct field work around the issue of child soldiers. They have implemented a LRA Crisis Tracker, which is a digital map that allows the public to use this application to track the LRA's most recent attacks and abductions. It also includes photos, breaking news feed, videos and firsthand accounts from people personally affected by the Lord's Resistance Army violence. Invisible Children has also developed an Early Warning Network. This consists of 85 communities that have access to with HF radios or satellite phones to help warn each other of possible attacks. This system uses this information to update their LRA Crisis Tracker as well. This group has made considerable efforts to encourage soldiers to defect and come home to their families and communities. Invisible Children has distributed 1.4 million fliers printed with 7 languages encouraging soldiers to surrender at safe reporting sites where local authorities will receive LRA escapees. These fliers also have photos of recent escapees showing them reunited with their families to help encourage them.

These groups do wonderful work raising awareness, working directly with survivors and encouraging groups against the recruitment and use of child soldiers. Even the majority of these groups acknowledge that there is not enough research conducted on the experiences of female child soldiers. Few organizations' articles pertain solely to female child soldiers and their experiences. While conducting research for this paper, only two books were found solely about female child soldiers, their experiences and the gender-specific traumas they face (Mazurana,

McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2007; Coulter, 2009). Even though 40% of child soldiers are female, much less than 40% of the research is about them. Many of the articles and books do include a small amount of information on female child soldiers, however, few of them exclusively focus on the subject. The female gender is under researched in all fields of study including this one. The lack of information on female child soldiers has been attributed to the fact that government agencies, United Nations agencies and non-government organizations (NGOs) have focused almost solely on boys in conflicts in the past (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2002). They also mentioned that the feelings of shame and the stigma against girls may inhibit them from disclosing their experiences and clinics that work with these survivors may not disclose what they learn due to confidentiality laws and agreements (Heartland Alliance International, 2014). There are hardly any programs established where women and young girls can go to document the problems and traumas they have faced during times of conflict and imprisonment. Due to this larger gap in research and information we know very little of the degree of severity of traumas women face during and after times of conflict.

Red Hand Day is February 12 each year (Human Rights Watch, 2012). It was established in 2002 and is used to bring awareness to the sensitive issue of child soldiers. There is a treaty known as Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (Human Rights Watch, 2012). It prohibits the forced use of children under the age of 18 or their forced recruitment. According to this protocol, children can volunteer themselves but should still not have any direct part in hostilities. The Protocol does remind countries that children under 18 are entitled to special protection due to their age. This requires that any voluntary recruitment under the age of 18 must have sufficient safeguards included. Parties must also take legal measures to prohibit independent armed groups from recruiting and using children under the age of 18 in conflicts.

When a state or country chooses to ratify the Protocol, they must make a declaration regarding the age at which national armed forces will permit voluntary recruitment, as well as the steps that State or country will take to make sure that the recruitment is never forced. This requirement is extremely important because the Optional Protocol does not establish the age of 18, as a minimum for voluntary recruitment into the armed forces. The volunteer must only be 18 for direct participation in armed conflict. Over 100 countries have ratified this treaty, but there are still about 60 countries that have not ratified the treaty and about 30 countries that are still using child soldiers (Human Rights Watch, 2012).

Conclusion

There are still children in the world today being exploited and used for slavery and in combat as child soldiers. These children are robbed of their innocence and their childhood, and are exposed to severe traumas. They grow up in an atmosphere of violence and death with little or no memories of what life was like or how society functioned before. If they are allowed to leave or escape, these children face a society that is afraid of them and does not accept them back into their communities.

Female child soldiers are usually faced with different PTSD symptoms due to the large amount of sexual trauma that they face (Heartland Alliance International, 2014). Women are specifically targeted and used for sexual exploitation. Rape is something used to not only degrade and humiliate women, but it is also used to help break down that community as well. Communities and families are less accepting of women who have been sexually exploited by these rebel groups regardless of the situation. The programs that are in place do not focus on the specific needs of the young women and girls that they may come in contact with. The proportion

of women accepted into these DDR programs is significantly lower than men. The gender biases for previous studies of child soldiers and the lack of research surrounding females in general could be largely responsible for the lack of information about female child soldiers. The stigma attached to rebels and sexual exploitation could also be a large factor due to lower reporting numbers from female soldiers. Organizations such as Invisible Children and Child Soldier International are working hard towards the goal of eliminating the use of child soldiers. While they have helped make great progress, there are still over 300,000 children involved in armed conflicts today around the world.

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