THE REINTEGRATION EXPERIENCES OF EX-CHILD SOLDIERS IN LIBERIA

by

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Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Arlington in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

December 2013

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Acknowledgements

Most importantly, I thank God who reminds me that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). I would also like to express my sincere gratitude to Dr. Randall Basham, Dr. Vijayan Pillai, Dr. Maria Scannapieco, Dr. Regina Aguirre and Dr. Karabi Bezboruah for serving on my committee, challenging me, providing support and direction and serving as my co-analysts. Special appreciation goes to my chair for encouraging me to pursue a research topic I am passionate about, Dr. Pillai and Dr. Scannapieco for guidance with theories, Dr. Aguirre for sharing her expertise in qualitative research and Dr. Bezboruah for helping me think beyond social work.

In particular, I would like to express my appreciation to my husband, Rudolph A. Vinton. My dream of completing a Ph.D. in social work only became a reality because of your generous support. I also owe a debt of gratitude to my parents Sarah F. Dorbor, Cooper Dorbor, Myshael Brownell and Addie Brownel, my siblings Rosetta Brownell, Myshael Brownell II, Cecelia Walker, my aunt Edyth Brownell, my uncles Lincoln Brownell and Barclay Dennis and the rest of my family and friends. Their love and support sustained me spiritually, emotionally and physically. I dedicate my dissertation to the ex-child soldiers of Liberia who despite the challenges they face, remain resilient in their efforts to reintegrate and contribute to their families, communities and country.

October 28, 2013

Abstract

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Previous researchers have reported the lasting effects of child soldiering and the difficulties that ex-child soldiers experience as they transition to civilian living. The primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Furthermore, this study explores participants' expectations, perceptions of the reintegration process as well as contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration that helped shaped their reintegration experience within the context of Liberia. A phenomenological research design was used to study the reintegration experiences of 34 (20 males and 14 females) ex-child soldiers. Data analysis uncovered six textural themes: motivation for disarmament, desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, dissatisfaction with reintegration, perceptions of reintegration, powerlessness and perception of future combat participation. It was

concluded that participants in this study were influenced to disarm by external motivators, desired to rebuild their lives through knowledge and skills, were dissatisfied with reintegration, perceived themselves as not fully reintegrated, experienced powerlessness and were unwilling to return to future combat despite economic hardships.

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Chapter 1

The Reintegration Experiences of Ex-child Soldieries in Liberia

Child soldiering is one of the worst practices of institutionalized child abuse (Vindevogel et al., 2011) which affects children worldwide. Historically, child soldiering can be traced to ancient Greece, when children were used as slingers to throw rocks at opponents (McMillan, 2009) to the use of Jewish child soldiers in World War II (Kaplan, 2005; Rosen, 2005) and to recent civil wars in Liberia (Achilihu,2010;Human Rights Watch, 1994), Sierra Leone (Betancourt et al.,2008), Northern Uganda (Angucia, 2009) and Afghanistan (Achvarina & Reich, 2006). Several international treaties have declared child soldering a war crime, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, the Geneva Convention of 1949 and Addition Optional Protocol 2000 (Child Soldiers International, 2008). Nonetheless this inhumane practice of child soldiering continues to prevail (Fontana, 1997; Williams, 2011).

Humanitarians and human rights groups have recognized the use of child soldiers as a global problem and as a result, have undertaken major initiatives to expose, end and prevent the use of young combatants (Rosen, 2007). However, due to the taboo nature of the subject, researchers have difficulties collecting and tracking the number of children affected by child soldiering globally. Researchers estimate that approximately 300,000 children under the age of eighteen currently participate in armed conflicts (Barenbaum, Ruchkin, & Schwab-Stone, 2004;

United Nations Children's Fund, 2007) while an additional half a million children serve in armies currently not at war (Kaplan, 2005). Of the 300,000 child soldiers around the world, 40% are girls (Save the Children, 2005).

Reports suggest that the continent of Africa hosts the largest number of child soldiers (Child Soldiers International, 2012; Integrated Regional Information Networks, 2012) with approximately 120,000 fighting in African countries that lie south of the Sahara, also known as sub-Saharan Africa (Atanga, 2003). Although commonly thought of and portrayed in the media as mainly an African problem, child soldiers have are also used in non-African countries like Afghanistan, Bosnia, Croatia, Colombia, Cambodia, Herzegovina and Palestine (Honwana, 2006; Skinner; 1999; United Nations Children's Fund, 2007). In at least 86 countries, government and armed groups abduct and force children to fight despite a decrease in the number of armed conflicts (from 27 in 2004 to 17 in 2007) which children directly participated (Child Soldier International, 2008). In Africa alone, at least 23 countries either currently engage in, or have emerged from some form of armed conflict in which warlords used children for combat purposes (Achilihu, 2012). The Liberian civil war is notorious for the use of child soldiers in armed conflicts for approximately 14 years.

At the end of their participation in armed conflicts, ex-child solders often experience difficulties returning to their communities and resuming their lives as civilians. There are many variables that make reintegrating to civilian status a

difficult transition. These include ex-combatants' combat experiences, their participation in reintegration programs, educational background and community acceptance. This study focuses on the experiences of ex-child soldiers in post war Liberia. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near the capital city of Liberia. Moreover, this study explores participants' expectations, perceptions of the reintegration process as well as contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration that helped shape their reintegration experiences within the context of Liberia.

Background on Liberian civil war

As a nation recovering from years of armed conflicts, Liberia has three major challenges which include maintaining immediate and long-term security, promoting democracy and good governance and reintegrating ex- combatants, many of which were under 18 during the war (Nilsson & Söderberg, 2005). This study focuses on the third challenge, reintegrating ex-combatants. To understand this social problem in Liberia, it is important to have some information about the civil war. The civil war in Liberia began in December 1989 when rebel leader, Charles Taylor invaded Liberia through Cote d'Ivoire, a neighboring country. Described as one of the bloodiest wars in Africa, the Liberian civil war resulted in ethnic killings and human rights abuses against civilians between 1989 and 1997, and again between 1999 and 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2004). It is estimated

that more than 200,000 Liberians died while a million others were displaced into refugee camps in neighboring countries (United States Department of State, 2011). A chief and disturbing feature of the armed conflicts in Liberia was the extensive use of child soldiers (Amnesty International, 2004; Awodola, 2012; Whitman, & Fleischman, 1994). The war ended in 2003 after the international community intervened and forced rebel leader turned President, Charles Taylor into exile where he was later charged with 17 counts of war crimes against humanity including the use of child soldiers, killings, mutilations, rape and other forms of sexual violence (Ruddy, 2006). The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) helped to establish and maintain relative peace and by 2005, President Ellen Jonson Sirleaf was elected (United Nations Security Council, 2010) and later reelected in 2011. To assist with reintegrating ex-combatants and facilitating peace and democracy, the United Nations and other international and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's), provided funds for a national Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center, n.d.). The following discussion explains the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in Liberia.

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

The main goal of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program in Liberia was to disarm, demobilize and prepare combatants for

sustainable social and economic reintegration, a major component in maintaining peace and security in post war Liberia (Ackerman, 2009) and the rest of West Africa (Somini, 2004). In Liberia, the DDR program targeted ex-combatants including children who served in the national army as well as those who fought with rebel groups such as Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) and Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). To determine eligibility and assess services needed for child or disabled soldiers, representatives of child protection and health agencies individually screened and enrolled ex-combatants in the program regardless of the active or passive nature of their involvement in previous armed conflicts (United Nations DDRR Resource Center, n.d). The disarmament and demobilization portion of the DDR program were administered in three separate phases: with Phase 1 running from Dec. 7, 2003 to Jan 1, 2004; Phase 2 : April 15, 2004 to Sept. 8, 2004 and Phase 3: July 7, 2004 to Oct. 31, 2004 (United Nations DDRR Resource Center, n.d).

During the disarmament phase, ex-combatants turned in their weapons and were transported to DDR sites where they received financial incentives (Hanson, 2007). In the demobilization phase, armed groups were formally disbanded and soldiers were separated from their commanders (United Nations Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Resource Center, n.d.). However, previous research indicates that a significant number of ex-child soldiers remained in the custody of former commanders and were exploited as a source of cheap labor on

rubber plantations and in gold and diamond mines in areas outside the control of UNMIL and the Liberian government (Paes, 2005).

Following the conclusion of the disarmament and demobilization programs, the national DDR program launched the reintegration program to provide ex-combatants with opportunities to pursue formal education, computer training, and vocational skills training such as agriculture and masonry (United Nations DDR Resource Center, n.d). The goal of the reintegration program was to empower ex-combatants with employment skills that would replace the combat skills they had previously relied on for economic survival. By the end of the DDR program in November 2004, it was reported that a total of 102,193 people (67 % adult males, 22% adult females, 9 % male children and 2% female children) were processed and voluntarily turned in 27,000 guns and approximately 6.15 million rounds of ammunition (Paes, 2005). Meanwhile, the United Nations DDRR Resources Center (n.d.) documents that by August 2007 approximately 90,000 former combatants had been rehabilitated and were beneficiaries of the reintegration program.

Criticism of DDR in Liberia

Like the DDR programs in Somalia, the DDR programs in Liberia have been criticized as unsuccessful partly due to vague mandate, lack of funding and lack of research (Hanson, 2007). Paes (2005) investigated the challenges of the DDR process in Liberia and identified the following as shortcomings: (i) less than

28,000 guns were collected, (ii) reintegration opportunities were not provided in an adequate and timely manner (iii) discontinuity in funding, (iv) the lack of adequately strict qualification criteria and (v) the inability to distinguish genuine combatants from fraudulent ones. Paes (2005) also noted that the program lacked reliable data on the number of operational and approved DDR projects and that the reintegration programs focused more on formal and vocational training rather than a more comprehensive curriculum with built-in income generation and overall life skills training. Critics of DDR programs have also condemned the use of money as incentives for participation citing it as the source of riots masterminded by disgruntled ex-combatants (Karen, 2006).

Despite the implementation and completion of the DDR program in Liberia, majority of the ex-combatants claim that the DDR program failed to provide them with sustainable livelihoods in Liberia's post war economy (Ackerman, 2009). Consequently, ex-combatants remain uneducated, unemployed and thus, vulnerable to poverty, illegal activities and re-recruitment for future armed conflicts (Child Soldier International, 2008). Female child soldiers were left more disadvantaged because they were not acknowledged as combatants having served as sex slaves, cooks, or messengers (Ackerman, 2009). Reports show that in 2006 and 2007, former combatants participated in at least two riots during which they rampaged the capital city with weapons (sticks and knives) and demanded monetary settlement for their demobilization (Integrated Regional

Information Networks, 2006 & 2012). Although there have been no reports of recent recruit or use of child soldiers in Liberia, ex- child soldiers are threatened by the possibility of being recruited to fight in wars in neighboring countries (Child Soldier International, 2008).

Child Soldiering Policies in Liberia

According to Kimmel and Roby (2007), the absence of policies, poor enforcement and misguided policy application are major contributors to child soldier abuse. Since 1990, the adoption of legislation concerning children and armed conflicts has received limited attention (Achilihu, 2010). Nevertheless, experts provided cautions to encourage world leaders to develop an effective aid strategy to avoid future generations of violence in a world of child soldiering terrorism and globalization (Singer, 2005). Liberia, is one of the 52 African countries that ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and subsequent Optional Protocol which specifies the minimum age of compulsory recruitment at 18 and established the minimum age of voluntary participation as 15 and higher (Achilihu, 2010). Also, in 2007, Liberia became one of the 45 African countries to ratify the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) (African Union, 2010) and thus, pledged to take all necessary steps to prevent children from being recruited for combat or roles associated with conflicts. According to the Liberian law, children can be recruited voluntarily at the age of 16 but without measures to enforce these laws,

children were used for combat during the civil war by government and opposition military groups (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Attempts to locate published literature on Liberian laws regarding child soldiers, ex-child soldiers or the reintegration process did not yield any fruitful result beyond the DDR program.

In order to provide effective reintegration interventions and assistance to ex-child soldiers, professionals working with this population must be educated about their experiences within their cultural and environmental contexts. Albeit, several studies have investigated the problem of child soldiering in Africa, few of them focus on the reintegration experiences of former child soldiers (Corbin, 2008; Veale & Stavrou 2007; Woodward & Galvin, 2009). Studies on ex-child fighters in African countries including Liberia have several shortcomings. To begin, previous studies examined the military and reintegration experiences of children who were abducted and conscripted forcibly (Denov & Maclure, 2007; Vindevogel et al., 2011). Next, existing studies concentrated on the long term effects combat has on children's mental health in Liberia (Asher et al., 2008; Betancourt, Borisova, Marie, & Williamson, 2011; Denov, 2010; Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, & Adam, 2010) as well as the protective and risk factors impacting psychosocial adjustment (Betancourt et al. 2011). Furthermore, past research on ex-combatants and ex-child soldiers in Liberia were limited to pilot studies (Vonhm Benda, 2010) and program evaluations (Gregory & Embrey, 2009; Lekskes, van Hooren, & de Beus, 2007).

In terms of the data analysis methods, past studies that examined ex-combatants reintegration experiences relied on descriptive statistics and provide counts of the number of ex-combatants who received services from the national program (Pugel, 2006) and as such, have not adequately provided a full picture of the lived experiences and perceptions of ex-child soldiers in regards to reintegrating in post war Liberia using the population's own words. Of the existing literature, only few of the past studies were grounded in theories that can be used in a framework to understand the reintegration of ex-child soldiers in Liberia (Corbin, 2008; Denov & Maclure, 2007; Veale & Stavrou, 2007). Based on the findings of the literature review, previous research was primarily conducted to assess the mental health outcomes of ex-combatants and also evaluate the DDR program outcomes. One study examined the reintegration experiences of former Liberian child soldiers; however the study was conducted in Ghana while participants lived as refugees (Woodward & Galvin, 2009). Previous research conducted exclusively with Liberian ex-child soldiers living in Liberia to examine their reintegration experiences and their perceived meaning of reintegration has not been identified. This gap leads to several unanswered research questions including: What are the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers in Liberia? What is the perceived meaning of reintegration for ex-child soldiers who live in Liberia?

Problem Statement

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Furthermore, this study explores participants' expectations, perceptions of the reintegration process as well as contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration that helped shape their reintegration experience within the context of Liberia.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were operationally defined for the purposes of this study:

Child Soldiers and child Combatants

Any child, (boy or girl) under the age of 18 years who accompanies armed groups or is recruited to directly or indirectly participate in regular or irregular armed conflicts through roles such as combatants, cooks, porters, messengers or sex slaves. (United Nations Children's Fund, 2007).

Combatant

A combatant is an individual who directly participates in fighting during armed conflicts on behalf of a party involved in the conflict (Henckaerts, Doswald-Beck, Alvermann, & International Committee of the Red Cross, 2005). International treaties such as the Hague Regulations 1899 and 1907 recognized that anti- government military groups may consist of combatants and

noncombatants. However, additional Protocol 1 of 1977 defined combatants as members of armed forces of a party to a conflict (excluding medical personnel and chaplains) (International Committee of the Red Cross, 2012).

Demobilized Soldiers or Demobilized combatants

Both terms are used to denote soldiers who were officially disarmed, demobilized and were given identification cards to categorize them as such (Date-Bah, 2003).

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration

Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) are important components of any peace building efforts and each phase must be completed to ensure healthy development of individuals involved in armed conflicts as well as the fragile countries. Thus, ddisarmament involves collecting, documenting, gaining control and disposing of small arms, ammunition and explosive weapons from combatants and civilians (United Nations Peace keeping, n.d.). Demobilization refers to the formal and controlled absolution of active combatants from armed forces and groups followed by short-term assistance. Reintegration is defined as the process through which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income (United Nations Peace keeping, n.d.).

Ex-child Soldiers

Individuals who while under the age of 18 were recruited voluntarily or forcibly and participated directly or indirectly in armed conflicts but no longer have ties with military groups (Researcher developed definition).

Ex-Combatants or Ex-Soldiers

Ex-combatants, also known as ex-soldiers are potentially dangerous individuals who have war-related backgrounds or been directly involved in hostile armed conflicts as soldiers and/or supportive roles irrespective of their loyalties (Date-Bah, 2003).

Significance of the Study

A study that explores the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers in Liberia is important for several reasons. First, it contributes to the existing literature on child soldiers, the reintegration process and aftermath of this problem. Second, unlike other studies that investigate child soldier experiences during and immediately after armed conflicts in Northern Uganda and Sierra Leone (Corbin, 2008; Denov, 2010; Denov & Maclure, 2006; Veale & Stavrou, 2007), this study explores ex-child soldiers' reintegration experiences six years after the Liberia civil war. Furthermore, this research addresses the subject from three theoretical perspectives and by triangulating findings with multiple theories including Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfrenbrenner,1998), Erickson's psychosocial developmental theory (Erickson,1963) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory (Maslow, 1951; 1971) unlike the existing studies on ex-

child soldiers in Liberia that lack theoretical foundation. This study allows for the experiences of ex-child soldiers to be examined through different lenses. In comparison to studies that used quantitative research methods to collect data, this study provides an in-depth understanding of Liberian ex-child soldiers' reintegration experiences in a manner that eludes quantitative studies. Also, this study provides insight into the reintegration of ex-child soldiers based on gender. It compiles a wealth of information about ex-child fighters' reintegration experiences within the context of the Liberian culture that can be used for future interventions, training and policy development. Lastly, this study is significant because it serves as a medium of information dissemination to a broader audience that may not necessarily have a direct link or access to this population.

Significance to Social Work: relevance to Social Workers Everywhere

In order to develop adequate interventions and policies to assist victims of child soldiering, it is important that we understand the context and process of reintegration from the point of view of ex-child soldiers. This study provides this population the opportunity to describe their reintegration experiences in their own words which will lend some insight into the obstacles, needs, perceptions, extent of reintegration, contributing factors and thoughts about future armed conflict involvement. While the study focuses on ex-child soldiers in Liberia, it is important to remember that child militarization is a global problem and thus, it affects children in various countries. Given the increased global interdependence

in our world today, the age and on-going nature of the problem, it is important for social workers everywhere to have some knowledge about child soldiering and the ensuing reintegration experiences for the purpose of working with this population directly or advocating for them on the global level. Since the literature indicates that Liberian ex-child soldiers resettled in Western countries like the United States (Jackson, 2007; Quart, 2007; Somini, 2002), this study extends beyond social workers and professionals working with this population in the context of Liberia. It is also useful to U.S. based social workers who work with refugee and immigrant populations and are likely to work with ex-child soldiers during their careers.

In terms of the study's significance to Social Work as a profession, it is important to note that advocacy and social justice are major themes that permeate through the social work profession both on the national and international levels. Using their Social work knowledge, values and ethics, social workers often advocate for social justice by mobilizing resources, public opinion and directly participating in (National Association of Social Workers, n.d) and challenging the political process to promote policy reforms for the purpose of benefiting vulnerable populations (Schneider & Lester, 2001). Overall, this study is significant for the social work profession on the national and international level as it also ties in with values of both the National Association of Social Workers and the International Federation of Social Workers: service, social justice, dignity and

worth of the person, importance of human relationships, integrity and competence (National Association of Social Workers, n.d), professional conduct and human rights and human dignity (International Federation of Social Workers, 2012).

The findings of this study will help social workers do the following: (i) identify and combat various social injustices this population faces; (ii) understand the reintegration experiences of this population from the members' own perspectives; (iii) recognize and respect the dignity and worth of ex-combatants regardless of their past crimes and (iv), understand the importance of human relationships between members of this population and individuals in their environment. Furthermore, this work contributes to a knowledge base which social workers can use to understand ex-combatants' reintegration within the Liberian context and increase their cultural and professional competencies. Child soldiers and ex-child soldiers are vulnerable populations whose military experiences result in lifelong consequences which create a socioeconomic divide between these populations and their civilian counterparts. Given the nature of this problem, at first glance, it should be a priority for social workers in terms of advocacy and research; however, within the field of social work, the literature on child soldiering is very small. Whereas, other works on this population are scattered across various non-social work professions including the fields of medicine and psychology. Hopefully, this research will contribute to the small but growing body of literature within the field of social work which focus on the

problem of child soldiering and how their reintegration needs can be met through evidenced informed and contextualized interventions.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The purpose of chapter two is to discuss literature relevant to child soldiering, victim's experiences during combat, the consequences of involvement in armed conflicts, reintegration interventions as well as the challenges they face during reintegration. It presents a brief review of empirical findings as well as methods used in previous studies. The last section of this chapter discusses multiple theories that I will use to examine the phenomenon of ex-child soldiers reintegration from different lenses.

Literature Collection Methods

The literature review is based on manual and computerized literature collection methods which included searches of Social Work Abstracts, PsycInfo, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, Medline, JSTOR, text books, autobiographies, publications of national and international organizations and the media. My search on the social Work Abstracts was conducted using the following search terms child soldiering, child soldiers, reintegration, ex-combatants and child militarization. This search produced 357 peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2012. When the search termed was changed to "child soldiers in Africa," 21 articles were found. All 21 articles were related to

child soldiering and policies related to child soldiering in Africa. After reviewing them, 11 of the 21 articles were chosen for further in-depth reviews.

Additional searches were made on PsycINFO. The first entry was "child soldiers" followed by "child militarization" and "reintegration theories." Out of the 490 results, the researcher reviewed and chose 8 for this study. The next search made on PsycARTICLES yielded 363 sources and the researcher selected 23 that were appropriate for this study. Regarding Medline, the researcher used the search term "theories of reintegration" and "child soldiers development" and found 4 articles and after further review found that only 2 were relevant to this study. The researcher also retrieved sources from international organizations, 2 of which are included in this study and also searched for theories on adolescent development and psychosocial needs. The books used in this study covered or related to issues of child soldering and policies regarding child soldiering. Majority of the reports and conceptual papers were retrieved from international and human rights organizations like the United Nations (UN), United Nations Development Fund and Human Rights Watch. Due to the limited literature on child soldiering in Liberia, other regional studies (Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda) were examined to facilitate the understanding of the experiences and current issues ex-child soldiers encounter as a result of past combat experience. I arranged all the literature that employed scientific methods using the following categories: author (s) and year, research questions and/aim, theory, sample size

and sampling method, age and nationality, methodology and findings. The literature review table can be found in Appendix A.

A thorough search of the literature on former combatants and child soldiers in Liberia revealed a dearth in the literature as compared to other African countries where child soldiering has been a problem over the years. The literature on child soldiers in Liberia is mostly limited to news reports, conceptual papers and a few studies conducted by international researchers. Besides capturing child soldiers' experiences through pictures, quotations and drawings (Birke, 2011; Dell'Amore, 2006; Druba, 2002), articles provide information about the Liberian civil war, estimated number of child fighters and expectations of former child fighters' future prospects (Child Soldiers, 2003). While it is important to understand the global issue of child soldiering, this review focuses on the experiences of Liberian child soldiers before, during and after their involvement in armed conflicts.

Factors That Influence Child Soldier Recruitment

Prior to the civil wars, Liberian youths generally led ordinary lives while living with parents and attending school. Research indicates that ex-child soldiers became involved in armed conflicts only after their sense of safety had been threatened, a notion which contradicts previous arguments that suggest youths join armed groups due to idleness and unemployment (Bøås & Hatløy 2008). Reports indicate that by the end of the war in 2003, approximately 21,000 child

soldiers recruited and used by government and rebel groups to further their political agendas needed demobilization and reintegration (Amnesty International, 2004; Child Soldiers International, 2004). Research identifies the following as factors that contribute to children becoming victims of child soldiering: living in poor areas or conflict zones and living in the conflict zones without families (Achvarina, & Reich 2006; Barnitz, 1997). As compared to children who live in disenfranchised sections of society (Peters, 2005), their peers living in wealthy and war-free environments are less vulnerable to being victimized (Uppard, 2003). Since they are often recruited from poor communities, victims of child soldiering sometimes view armed conflict as a potential source of income and at times, they are coerced by desperate family members who in exchange for their children's services, receive money or forms of goods (such as food, medicine, protection etc.) (Becker, 2005; Peters, 2005).

In addition to cultural, ideological and political reasons (Barenbaum, Ruchkin, & Schwab-Stone, 2004; Human Rights Watch, 2008; Peters, 2005), in situations of extreme hopelessness, children are motivated to participate in armed conflicts for security purposes (Human Rights Watch, 2005), to attain power and prestige (Wessells, 2005) which they otherwise lack as civilians. Since children and adolescents are in the developmental stages in which they value peer relationships, it is important to recognize their need to be accepted by their peers, as well as the strong correlation that exist between adolescents' behavior and

those of their peers (Ali, Amialchuk, & Dwyer, 2011). A United States study found that among at-risk Hispanic youths with low socioeconomic status, carrying weapons was a result of peer influence (Dijkstra et. al., 2010). Peters (2005) points out that some children voluntarily participate in armed conflicts to alleviate boredom or as a result of peer pressure.

The literature identifies factors that influence military commanders' decisions to use children in combat and they include their desire to increase the number of soldiers for combat and their perceptions of children as obedient and easily manipulated (Whitman, & Fleischman, 1994). Military commanders who recruit children for combat consider them venturesome, fast learners, cheap labor, a moral challenge for enemies and military assets who are less likely to compete for leadership roles (Peters, 2005). A Liberian working with former combatants states, "Adults need a good reason to take up arms. It is easier to convince kids to fight for almost nothing, with small promises of money and loot . . . They are easy prey for the factions" (Whitman, & Fleischman 1994, p. 65). Scholars note that children often lack the capacity to analyze military groups' competing ideologies to make fully informed choices and decisions without considering the lifelong negative consequences (Cohn & Goodwin-Gill, 1994).

Child Soldiers' Experiences

The literature confirms that child soldiers are often abducted and conscripted though methods involving extreme coercion, violence and fear

(Denov & Maclure 2007; Veale & Stavrou 2007). These themes were recurrent for child soldiers in Uganda (Veal & Stavrou, 2007), Sierra Leone (Denov, 2010) and Liberia (Woodward & Galvin, 2009). For example, a Sierra Leonean ex-child soldier recounts his abduction experience, "The rebels entered our farm and captured my father and mother and killed them in front of me. After killing both of my parents, I was commanded to carry looted items on my head and follow the rebels" (Denov, 2010, p. 4). Similarly, children in Liberia were recruited forcibly and were then given drugs or alcohol by their military commanders before going into battle to make them courageous (Whitman & Fleischman, 1994).The experiences of children participating in armed conflicts vary depending on their sex, age and length of affiliation with rebel groups (Vindevogel et al., 2011) and social network including family, community members and resources available. A study found that on average, ex-child soldiers in northern Uganda were held for 1.5 years and that majority had various war-related experiences such as witnessing (88%) and forced participation in atrocities (76%) (Vindevogel et al., 2011).

While there is ample descriptive evidence of the conditions and factors underlying the phenomenon of child soldiering in developing countries (Child Soldiers International, 2004; 2008) the gender implications of child soldiering is often ignored (Mazurana & McKay, 2001). Majority of the literature depict the use of child solders as a male child related problem and as a result, neglect to

investigate the effects of armed conflict on girls. Research shows that in Liberia, girls were recruited as both fighters and helpers and were often victims of rape and sexual assault (Child Soldier International, 2004). At least two studies explored the experiences and perspectives of female soldiers in African countries (Denov, 2008; Mazurana & McKay, 2001). Using in depth interviews with female child soldiers from Sierra Leone, researchers explored female child soldiers' perspectives and experiences as victims, perpetrators and resisters of violence during armed conflicts and learned that, female child soldiers actively participated and exhibited subtle resistance and female solidarity in armed conflicts, (Denov & Maclure, 2006).

Consequences of Child Soldiering

Developmentally, military experience tends to have negative psychological, physical (Bracken, Giller, & Ssekiwanuka 1996; Humphreys, 2009) and social impact due to the severe human rights violation (Barenbaum et al, 2004; Jareg, 2005) and widespread sexual violence (Humphreys, 2009) that child soldiers experience. It is important to note that the lack of military participation does equate to a state of normalcy since ex-child solders may likely experience challenges for the rest of their lives (Qiushi, 2010). According to counselors who worked with Liberian child soldiers following the first civil war, many children showed symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) including sleeplessness, nightmares, flashbacks, bedwetting, anxiety and

depression (Whitman & Fleischman, 1994). At least one study conducted in Liberia investigated the health and mental health needs of former combatants in Liberia including their social functioning, exposure to sexual violence, and the prevalence of major depressive disorder (MDD) and PTSD symptoms among former combatants (Asher et al.,2008). Asher et al. (2008) found worse mental health outcomes among female and male former combatants who were victims of sexual violence as compared to noncombatants and combatants with no sexual violence history and that, 40% (N= 1,666) met the symptom criteria for major depressive disorder (MDD), 44% met symptom criteria for posttraumatic disorder and 8% met criteria for social dysfunction. In addition to the contribution this study makes to the small body of knowledge on Liberian ex-combatants, it also dispels the prevalent notion that only male child soldiers participate in armed conflicts and only females experienced sexual violence (Asher et al., 2008). Similar findings from a study that investigated the effects of war on the mental health of former Ugandan child soldiers shows that out of a sample of 330, 33% and 36% of child soldiers had posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder respectively, while 61% had behavioral and emotional problems above clinical cutoff points (Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, & Adam, 2010).

In Sierra Leone, research determined that children who killed or hurt people during armed conflicts reported greater levels of depression anxiety and hostility and that those without caregivers were more vulnerable to depression and

anxiety (Betancourt et al., 2011). In a more recent study conducted in Liberia, Johnson, Asher, Kisielewski, and Lawry (2012), found that former combatants with head injuries are more likely to experience major depressive disorder symptoms, suicidal ideation and attempts, current substance abuse, and are also 2.83 times more likely to have major depressive disorder symptoms, while those with suspected traumatic brain injury are five times more likely to have post-traumatic stress disorder. An article profiling Samaritan's Purse, an organization that provides residential services to ex-female child soldiers near the capital city reports that Liberian girls as young as 11 were abducted and conscripted into the military and consequently, have physical and psychological scars which are manifested through dreams about victims they murdered during the war (Coday, 2004). It is important to note that child soldiers are not the only ones who experience psychological effects from the war. Findings from a study conducted in Northern Uganda determined that approximately 37% ex-child soldiers re-experience traumatic events through nightmares as compared to 25% of youths who were not ex-child soldiers and that, 16% of ex-child fighters reported feeling ''always sad'' as compared to 13% their civilian counterparts (Blattman & Annan, 2010).

Other areas that child military experiences affect include self- identity and relationships with families and communities. According to Qiushi (2010), victims of child soldiering often lack trust in others and live in fear that their families will

be retaliated upon. Additionally, they experience identity confusion stemming from their roles as victims (abductees) versus their roles as perpetrators (child soldiers) (Veale, & Stavrou, 2007). A former Ugandan child soldiers states, "When fighting against the Ugandan Army, I felt partly as army, partly as civilian" (Veale & Stavrou, 2007, p. 285). Bayer, Klasen and Adam (2007) found that Congolese and Ugandan ex-child soldiers with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) symptoms had more feelings of revenge and were more unwilling to reconcile. Another study identified stigma and community acceptance as two major social factors that contribute to child soldiers' psychosocial adjustment (Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams & Ellis, 2010).

Educational Needs

According to Human Rights Watch (1994), child soldiers' educational levels range from no education (one boy could not read or write his own name) to just about a fifth grade level. Dukuly (2003) reports that as a result of the Liberian civil war, approximately 800,000 children were denied their rights to education because they were compelled to flee their homes or become child soldiers. Additionally, Liberian youths (including child soldiers) experienced prolonged absence from school and subsequent difficulties after returning to school having become more familiar with violence rather than academic study (Dukuly, 2003). Findings from a preliminary study which included 1,100 students from 14 junior

and senior public and private schools located in Montserrado County, revealed the following about Liberian students: that they are more receptive to violent behavior than non-violent ways of life, they view warlords as role models and that they lack the necessary skills to diagnose and/or resolve conflict peacefully (Vonhm Benda, 2010). Liberian ex-child soldiers lack the assistance they need to defray their educational cost. In 2005, approximately 3,800 demobilized ex-child soldiers were thrown out of schools for financial reasons (Xinhua News Agency, 2005). Thus, education remains a major need for this population.

Economic Needs

Literature on the impact of child soldiering on human capital and labor market is scant. Only one empirical study conducted in Northern Uganda assessed the impact of combat on the human capital and labor market of former child combatants and found that in comparison to non-child soldiers, child soldiers attain 0.75 fewer years of education, are twice as likely to be illiterate than non-child soldiers, and have an income that is 33% lower than their non- combatant peers (Blattman & Annan, 2010). Ex-child solders experience the following obstacles in post armed conflict periods: homelessness, lack of relationships with family, poor health conditions that require specialized medical services and abject poverty (Qiushi, 2010). As a result of the aforementioned obstacles, ex-child soldiers rely on begging and handouts to survive (Trudeau, 2003). With little or no opportunities to improve their socio-economic status, this population remains

one of the most vulnerable populations in Liberia. According to Human Rights Watch (2008) there is a direct link between ex-combatants' poverty level and the continuing cycle of war crimes among former combatants affiliated with government and military groups in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea. Therefore, assistance provided to this population to meet their economic needs is important because it decreases the likelihood of them participating in future armed conflicts.

Even after nine consecutive years of peace, evidence suggests little or no change in the economic condition of Liberia which had an unemployment rate of 85% and 83.7% in 2006 and 2011 respectively, while 83.7 % of Liberians lived below the international poverty line of $1.25 (Human Development Report, 2011). Although Liberia has made some efforts toward maintaining peace, improving governance, and economic growth, to date, it remains one of the poorest countries in the world (Wodon, 2012). Unsuccessful reintegration and poverty are two major contributors to child soldiers' recidivism that must be addressed to improve their socio-economic conditions and end the cycle of war crimes and the use of children in armed conflicts (Human Rights Watch, 2008; Tamagnini & Krafft, 2010). When a 2008 U.S. Institute for Peace study asked Liberian ex-combatants if they would fight again, two-thirds said "no" while the remaining one-third cited poverty and lack of economic opportunity as their primary reasons for returning to armed conflicts (Hill, Taylor, & Temin, 2008).

Interestingly, female ex-combatants appeared more ready to fight again for economic reasons than males (Hill et al., 2008).

Mental Health Needs

The literature indicates that in the absence of treatment, former child soldiers cope with psychological trauma through alcohol and drug abuse, self-mutilation, attempted suicide and violence (Ligner, 2009). Evidence suggests that rehabilitation programs in Liberia and Sierra Leone neglected the mental health needs of child soldiers (Medeiros, 2007). This neglect can partially be explained by a shortage of mental health professionals. With only one Psychiatrist in each country (Gbla, 2003), only a small number of ex-combatants tend to benefit from mental health services. Thus, Liberia is challenged with identifying and treating former combatants who are psychologically traumatized (Johnson et al., 2012). However, using interviews, participant observation, focus groups, archival evidence, public media, and expert interviews, Abramowitz (2010) investigated mental health in post-war Liberia and learned that efforts like psychiatric care, trauma healing, ex-combatants rehabilitation and gender-based violence interventions are being used to rebuild the social fabric of Liberia.

Social Needs

Another important dimension of ex-child soldiers' reintegration is social acceptance and their return to their home communities (Podder, 2010). A study examined the stigmatization and level of community acceptance that child

soldiers experience while adjusting to civilian status and found that among former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, discrimination is inversely associated with family and community acceptance (Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams, & Ellis, 2010). The study also found that ex-combatants who received higher levels of family acceptance, experienced less hostility (Betancourt et al., 2010). Thus, it is important to empower communities and not exclude them from the reintegration process. Not empowering communities and excluding them from the reintegration process is a practice which Podder (2012) argues has unintentionally promoted animosity between ex-combatants and their communities. Hill et al. (2008) found that ex-combatants who were previously employed and now currently unemployed had difficulty gaining family and community acceptance. In Africa, it is customary for ex-child soldiers to participate in ritual ceremonies that provide opportunities for a fresh start; however, westernized DDR programs do not practice this; instead, ex-fighters receive western style of counseling which is based on trauma recollection, an experience ex-combatants perceived as painful, unsuccessful and a source of separation from their communities (Honwana, 2006). Drawing upon findings from qualitative fieldwork among ex-combatants in Monrovia, Liberia, Jennings, (2007) emphasizes the significance of social context and suggests that reintegration programs incorporate pertinent information regarding conflict histories, socioeconomic conditions and local institutional capacity that impact ex-combatants.

Depending on the particular country and culture, there are many different kinds of community rituals that are important components of the reintegration process and if omitted from reintegration interventions, ex-combatants may view reintegration programs as programs that devalue local tradition and cultural beliefs. Studies show that in order to rebuild relationships between former child soldiers and their communities, traditional cleansing ceremonies are important practices in which community members assist in purifying and accepting ex-child soldiers (Corbin, 2008; Denov, 2010; Honwana, 2006). The ritual ceremonies are performed by key family and community members who also share a meal at the end of the ceremony. It is important to note that these cultural ritual ceremonies involve the use of resources (food, and support from community members) which all ex-child soldiers may not readily have access to. Corbin (2008) provides an illustration of the traditional cleansing ceremony:

> The child steps on that fresh egg, when he steps on the fresh egg, it is believed that all the dirt, all whatever the child has done, wherever he has moved is now on the egg and the child is fresh so he…joins the members of the community. Then also, after doing that, sometimes if the parents can afford, they buy a goat, this goat is meant also to cleanse further because the whole community will eat. They will sprinkle the blood, then the intestines…on their foreheads, this…is simply meant to symbolize that whatever that has been washed [purified]. (p. 324)

In terms of longitudinal studies that investigate ex-combatants' experience during the reintegration process, the literature is almost nonexistent. One longitudinal study (between 1988 and 2004) examined life outcomes of 39 former male child soldiers and found that after 16 years, majority of them became productive, capable and caring adults; however, none of them were truly free from their pasts because they experienced psychological distress and relied solely on themselves, families and friends for comfort and support during times of psychological difficulties (Boothby, 2006).

Reintegration Interventions

Historically, successful reintegration of child soldiers has been considered a difficult and primary challenge (Hill et al.,2008; Mapp, 2008; Shiner, 1996) and more recently, it has been described as the weakest link in the Liberian DDR program (Podder, 2012). Given the Liberian government's limited resources, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have attempted to help fill the gaps where the government is unable to meet the needs of vulnerable groups, including ex-child combatants. By definition, NGOs are private organizations that are based on values, independent from governments and corporations and depend on donors and volunteers to provide basic social services, promote social justice, and protect the environment (World Bank, 1999). Besides descriptive literature on the national DDR program launched by the UN and other international organizations, the literature on the role NGOs play in ex-combatants' reintegration is limited to

one article that features a Liberian NGO. According to Tonpo (2006) the Foundation for African Development, is a local NGO that de-traumatizes and assists ex-combatants in becoming useful citizens through formal education and agricultural skills training. Although there is a paucity of literature on the role of NGOs in ex-combatants' reintegration, findings from a recent study based on focus groups involving 88 ex-combatants, found that NGOs play an integral role in ex-combatants' political participation (Söderström, 2009).

The literature also lacks empirical evidence on the effectiveness of majority of the reintegration programs due to the recent nature of their development, the inconsistencies in intervention methods and the limited research that have been conducted to evaluate them (Fegley, 2008). The absence in professional and analytic literature on ex-combatants' reintegration can also be attributed to the 14 year civil war, a period during which very little studies were conducted and/or published. One study assessed the impact of the national DRR program in Liberia and found that former combatants who registered and completed a course of reintegration training with the national DDR program reintegrated more successfully as compared to those ex-combatants who decided to reintegrate on their own and not participate in the DDR program (Pugel, 2006). Only one study examined the challenges social workers face while working with ex-child fighters involved in DDR programs in African nations (Zack-Williams, 2006). In Liberia, the primary methods of reintegration child soldiers received

were educational support, skills acquisition and family reunification (Awodola, 2012). Similarly, Druba (2002) found that pedagogical interventions aimed at reducing child soldiering typically involve primary education, vocational training, social services and concepts of education for reconstruction and reconciliation. In a post-conflict setting like Liberia, effective peace education plays an integral role in the reintegration of former child soldiers (Wessells, 2005). Wessells, (2005) argues that peace education stimulates empathy, cooperation, reconciliation, and community processes for handling conflict in a nonviolent manner, all of which are important factors in preventing former child soldiers from re-engaging in violence and terrorism. Sam-Peal (2008) suggests the simple process of listening to child soldiers' life stories and dreams as a constructive and meaningful interaction that affirms ex-child soldiers' individual value as they reintegrate into their communities.

At least two pilot studies evaluated reintegration interventions in Liberia (Gregory & Embrey 2009; Lekskes, van Hooren, & de Beus, 2007). The first pilot study evaluated a two week group training and one-on-one companion recovery intervention designed to reduce the symptoms of PTSD in Liberian former child soldiers and found that the model significantly ($p \leq .001$) reduced participants' PTSD symptoms by 33% (Gregory & Embrey, 2009). In the second pilot study, researchers evaluated the effectiveness of two psychosocial interventions (counseling versus support group and skills training) for female victims of war-

related and sexual violence in Liberia and found that while both interventions were successful, counseling was more effective in reducing trauma symptoms as compared to the support and skill training (Lekskes et al., 2007). Jennings (2007) argues that reintegration programs can be strengthened by allocating resources to the development and implementation of open-access job programs, particularly for vulnerable groups such as ex-child soldiers. Mapp (2008) identifies bio psychosocial assessment as a tool that can be used to examine the barriers to reintegration with which ex-child soldiers' are faced. On the biological level, child soldiers may endure combat wounds, malnourishment and limited access to health care, all of which negatively impact their overall physical health. Meanwhile, their experiences of losing loved ones, being forced to murder and/or witness murders are traumatic experiences that are often sources of psychological discomfort. Lastly, on the social level, ex-child soldiers are challenged with rebuilding relationships with hostile family and community members and also pursuing education in environments that may be unsuitable for their current age and past violent experiences (Mapp, 2008).

Ex-child Soldiers Living outside Liberia

According to the literature, not all former Liberian child soldiers currently reside in Liberia. During the war, many child soldiers sought refuge outside Liberia and are currently immigrants in western countries like the United States, where they are challenged with leading normal lives after experiencing

dysfunctional childhoods (Quart, 2007; Somini, 2002). According to Quart (2007), Staten Island is home to about 8,000 Liberian immigrants and therefore has the largest concentration of ex-child soldiers in the United States. Stigmatized by their violent past, approximately one-fifth of Liberian ex-child soldiers residing in Staten Island are resented by other Liberians (Quart, 2007). For many ex-child soldiers, living in a law-abiding society after living in a lawless country is a rather difficult task. For instance, in 2007, a nineteen-year old former child soldier who was seeking asylum in Ireland was convicted of rape and was scheduled for deportation to Liberia after serving his sentence (Jackson, 2007).

Two researchers (a clinical psychologist and geographer) investigated spatial and social barriers that 20 former Liberian child soldiers living in Ghana experience and uncovered the following five principle themes that ex-child soldiers used to overcome barriers to successful resettlement: (1) the significance of geographic desegregation and relocation, (2) the need for education and employment, (3) the desire for psychological counseling, (4) the longing for societal acceptance and reintegration, and (5) issue of security and protection (Woodward, & Galvin 2009). Since it is not uncommon to find ex- child combatants and war traumatized children living in the West, it is important for social workers in the West to understand the phenomenon of child soldiering including the unique needs and possible interventions in the event that they have to provide services to this population. Recognizing this as a need, Zack-Williams

(2006) examines the implications for social work practice and education and suggests that social work curricula be "globalized" to incorporate "other cultures" using Tonnies' dichotomy of "Gemeinschaft" and "Gesellschaft" as a frame of reference. Ferdinand Tonnies, a German Sociologist used the terms Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft to show the difference between two common types of society (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969).The first term, Gemeinschaft means "community" and refers to a society characterized by close personal relationships based on tradition, informality consensus and kinship while the second term, "Gesellschaft" means "society" and refers to a society in which social relationships are formal, impersonal and specialized (Theodorson & Theodorson, 1969). In the case of Liberian ex-child soldiers residing in the United States, they are challenged with adapting to a more formal society than Liberian communities which are more traditional and informal.

Coping During Reintegration

Scant research demonstrates that throughout their combat experience, children fight for survival by exhibiting bravery, strength and resilience in the face of adversities (Veale & Stavrou 2008 & Qiushi, 2010). Examining posttraumatic resilience in former Ugandan child soldiers Klasen et al., 2010) found that despite severe trauma exposure, 27.6% of child soldiers showed posttraumatic resilience as indicated by the absence of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and clinically significant behavioral and emotional

problems. The study also found an association between posttraumatic resilience and lower exposure to domestic violence, lower guilt cognitions, less motivation to seek revenge, better socioeconomic situation in the family, and more perceived spiritual support (Klasen et al., 2010). Another study revealed six narrative themes in the lived experiences and mechanisms that child soldiers used to overcome the effects of war trauma: (i) sense of agency; (ii) social intelligence, empathy, and affect regulation; (iii) shared experience, caregiving figures, and community connection; (iv) sense of future, hope, and growth; (v) connection to spirituality; and (vi) morality (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). It is important that social workers and other helping professionals working with this population avoid pathologizing and labeling ex-child soldiers as they struggle to reintegrate. Rather, they are encouraged to help ex-combatants identify strengths and resources within their social and cultural contexts (Walsh, 2006).

Chapter 3

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this research is to examine the reintegration experiences of Liberia's ex-child soldiers and to provide an in-depth understanding of their reintegration experiences since the end of the war in 2003. Although a lot of attention has been given to the issue of child soldiering, the available literature lacks a theoretical foundation that explains the phenomenon of child soldiering and the unique needs its victims experience based on empirical evidence. This theoretical information will help us understand the relationship between child soldiers' experiences and their current physical, psychological and social needs six years after the civil war. Murphy (2003) argues that due to the complex nature of child soldiers' experiences, the shift in relationships between children and adult relatives, men and women, elders and youths, ritual power and physical force, coercion and persuasion, reciprocity and cruelty, and wealth and military power, more than one theoretical perspective has to be used to understand child soldiering. Additionally, a combination of two or more theories will provide a more thorough explanation of the effect military experiences have on children, families and society in general. Such an eclectic theoretical framework will also serve as a theoretical underpinning for possible interventions that can help children successfully reintegrate. The theoretical framework for the present study is a combination of three theories: Erikson's psychosocial stages of development

theory, Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. The next few paragraphs synthesize these theories and use them to get an in- depth understanding of child soldering, especially children's experience and reintegration needs in post war Liberia.

Child Soldiers' Development: Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development

Since the average age of recruitment for child soldiering is 13 years old (Emmons, 2001), it is important to understand what 13 year olds are experiencing developmentally and how armed conflicts can be a major interruption in this process. In order to do this, I chose Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development for the purpose of this study. Erick Erickson proposes eight stages of psychosocial development and assumes that in each stage, minors face psychosocial crisis that he views as an opportunity and challenge. The fifth stage, identity versus role confusion is significant to adolescence and child soldiering. In this stage, (between ages12 and 18) adolescents' primary developmental duty is to discover and establish a clear sense of identity. However, when this developmental task is not successfully completed, Erickson (1963; 1968) argues that adolescents lack a sense of identity, have difficulty establishing meaningful bonds with others and may also experience role confusion.

As they journey from childhood to adulthood, adolescents experience many significant physical, emotional, cognitive and social transitions (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). Thus, this period calls for guidance and

protection from families, communities and overall society; however, adolescent soldiers experience negative interruptions during this period in the forms of abuse, neglect and maltreatment which are likely to result in developmental delays based on the longevity, type and severity of the disruption. For instance, a child soldier who was used as a cook or messenger may endure different and lesser consequences than a child who was used in combat and witnessed killings and/or forced to kill others. Minors who successfully complete this stage are believed to enter adulthood with a set of chosen values, goals, morals and political ideology while those with negative resolution tend to be confused, shallow and without direction (Scannapieco & Connell-Carrick, 2005). In the case of teenage soldiers, not only are they abused by being forced to fight, but they also endure emotional trauma resulting from the new morals which they are taught as soldiers including, "it is okay to kill the enemy" which is likely to directly contradict morals they were taught prior to their abduction. Furthermore, ex-child soldiers experience sudden transitions: (1) from being a child and student to being abducted from their families; (2) receiving combat training and weapons which change their status from that of child-civilian to child soldiers; and (3) transitioning from a child soldier to a child or adult civilian following the war.

After their abduction, child soldiers are forced to take on new roles as rebels while struggling to maintain their original roles as friends, family and community members usually within the same communities they victimized during

armed conflicts. Using relational identity theory, one study explores ex-child soldiers' contrasting roles as abductees or victims who became perpetrators (Honwana, 2009) while another explore how identity influences the reintegration process (Veale & Stavrou, 2008). According to Shapiro (2010), relational identity theory provides a systematic approach to understanding emotional and identity-based dimensions of conflicts including child soldiers' roles in conflicts. The underlying assumptions of relational identity theory include two motives that explain the association between individuals or groups: affiliation and autonomy (Shapiro, 2010). Affiliation is the degree of emotional connection which can either be distant, included, excluded, positive or negative while autonomy refers to the degree of freedom individuals have to think, feel, or do as they please without any constraints by those with whom they affiliate (Shapiro, 2005). Relational identity theory furthers the understanding of the shame, guilt and confusion about the roles that ex-child reportedly experience during abduction and militarization (Denov, 2010; Veale & Stavrou, 2008).With all the transitions, role shifts and moral and ideological influence affiliated with child soldiering, ex-child soldiers are likely to enter adulthood with some identity confusion since they were not given the opportunity to explore their identities or beliefs.

From Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development perspective, child soldiers experience abnormal stress since they are not given the opportunity to experiment with various social roles (Erickson, 1968). For this reason, they are

likely to grow up into adults who lack the necessary sense of competence and self-efficacy. Unlike their civilian counterparts who have the opportunity to attend school and participate in extracurricular activities where they can learn about themselves, the kinds of people and social situations they like or prefer or even the type of careers they might pursue in the future, child combatants are compelled to affiliate only with members of military groups and thus, their adolescent experiences are limited to the military. As a result, they grow up with only one primary identity, a "soldier" which limits their social development especially when the armed conflicts are over. Without appropriate interventions, ex-child soldiers will have negative resolutions with the identity versus role confusion stage and therefore, will also have difficulty completing the rest of the stages (Intimacy versus isolation—early to late 20s; generativity versus stagnation—late 20s to 50s; and integrity versus stagnation—late adulthood) (Erickson, 1968). One primary identity confusion ex-child soldiers face along with their communities is figuring out whether child soldiers are indeed victims or perpetrators.

Rather than receiving protection and nurturance from caregivers, child soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone experienced a major breakdown of kinship security which led to a transfer in dependency from families to rebel leaders (Murphy, 2003). Because of their status during armed conflicts, rebel leaders offer power, protection, and economic opportunities that were generally provided to

children by families, communities or governments prior to them becoming soldiers (Murphy, 2003). For instance, rebel leaders assumed roles of fathers to young soldiers, especially those who were orphans or were separated from their families due to the war (Murphy (2003). Murphy (2003) identifies the following four models that have been used to conceptualize child soldiers' experiences: (i) coerced youth model (views them as brutally coerced); (ii) revolutionary youth (views them as rebellious); (iii) delinquent youth (views them as opportunists seeking economic gains); and (iv) youth clientalism (views child soldiers as dependents of rebel leaders) (Murphy, 2003). Using Weber's model of patrimonialism, Murphy (2003) analyzed the roles of child soldiers in the Liberian and Sierra Leonean civil wars and identified the structural location of child soldiers as the "staff" or the "clients" and the villagers and citizens of captured territories as "subjects" (Murphy 2003).

Child Soldiers and the Environment: Through the Lens of Uri Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

Child soldiers' environments have significant influence on their overall development and subsequent reintegration experiences. Thus, child soldiering and the effects it has on children can be explained through an ecological systems theory that examines the relationships between individuals and their environment (Gardiner & Kosmitski, 2008). An important concept of the ecological systems theory is the concept of role that denotes the usual behaviors of individuals

occupying particular social positions. It is evident that children who are abducted and forcibly conscripted as soldiers experience significant stress and trauma as a result of role transitions they face, going from children, siblings and students and becoming soldiers during armed conflicts and then ex-combatants or civilians following the war. Uri Bronfrenbrenner ecological system theory emphasizes the role of social contexts in human development and is comprised of five environmental systems, ranging from direct interaction with social agents to the overall general influence of culture (Bronfrenbrenner, 1998). In the context of ex-child soldiers' in Liberia, Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory provides a framework to understand how five environmental systems (microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem can influence child soldiers' development and ultimately their reintegration.

Concisely, the microsystem is ex-child soldiers' immediate setting that involves direct face to face contact between members. Examples of microsystems in children's lives include their families, school peers and church groups; however for ex-child soldiers, their primary microsystem was the military group with which they were involved. Next, mesosystem consists of networks of microsystems and the relationship between them. In the case of a child soldier, mesosystem includes the interaction between microsystems: network between family and school, family and military group, peers and family and so on. The third system, exosystem refers to individual experiences in social settings in

which they do not have active roles and for ex-child soldiers; this could be reintegration programs, the Liberian social welfare service, as well as legal services. The fourth system, macrosystem involves the culture, attitudes and ideologies that contribute to a particular culture while chronosystem is characterized by the patterning of environmental and sociohistorical conditions and transitions experienced over an individual's life-span (Bronfrenbrenner, & Morris 1998). When assessing members of this population's development on this level, it is imperative that we examine the socio-historical context such as the civil war and also take into considerations major life events and role transitions members of this population experience during this crucial period of their lives.

Using the ecological theory lens to examine child soldiers' experiences, Strang, Wessells, and Boothby (2006) found that the family and communities are systems which provide children with support and protection; howbeit, during armed conflicts, they transform into systems which pose risks and developmental damage especially when children are not adequately protected from involuntary recruitment resulting from abduction and/or pressure from caretakers. Research shows a connection between recruitment experiences and reintegration outcomes particularly for child soldiers whose voluntary nature of participation in armed conflicts was largely influenced by the role of identity, ideology, family and community (Ozerdem, Podder, & Quitoriano 2010). Ecological systems theory of child development has also been used as a framework for exploring the

development of African children (Uys, 2009). Drawing upon Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory of development, Kimmel and Roby (2007) suggest a conceptual model for understanding how the interactions between macro and micro factors contribute to child soldiering. Based on the ecological perspective, they argue three macro factors (politics, policy, and culture and beliefs) interact with each other and have gradual influences on three micro level factors (community, family and individual psychosocial factors) that also interact with each other and as a result, have negative psychosocial effects on children (Kimmel & Roby, 2007).

The implication for ecological theory on this population is that the unique needs of ex-child fighters are socially mediated; therefore, interventions should be based on a holistic approach, rallying support from children's environments that contribute to their development and well-being. The ecological theory assists researchers and practitioners working with this population in identifying available resources and interventions within their micro and mezzo levels (family, peers, or community) as well as resources from macro systems (NGOs and government health agencies). In a study on war experiences of child soldiers in Northern Uganda, researchers caution that in order to address potential indirect consequences of child soldiering, support needs to be allocated for the child's network, based on a socio-ecological approach (Vindevogel et al., 2011). The ecological theory provides a framework that explains the influence that systems have on children's physical and mental health and also assist in recognizing the

impact community and policies have on individuals at the micro levels (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).

Reintegration Needs: Through the lens of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory

A key theoretical perspective that helps conceptualize Liberian ex-child soldiers unique needs following their release from military responsibilities is Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory; a theory which posits that individuals cannot achieve their full potential unless their lower needs are met partially if not fully (Maslow, 1951; 1971). Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory is an appropriate theory which researchers and social workers can use to categorize, prioritize and evaluate ex-child soldiers' needs in the years following the war. Because ex-child soldiers lack the resources to meet their basic needs, it is extremely difficult and almost impossible to reach full human potential (Walker & Early, 2010). However, Malan (2000) notes that due to the severity of deprivation and traumatization child soldiers' experience, it is important to meet all the needs on Maslow's hierarchy which normally is a process that may exceed allocated resources. In Sierra Leone, ex-fighters experience extreme poverty characterized by the lack of basic needs, poor environment, destroyed infrastructure, and child labor (Walker & Early, 2010).

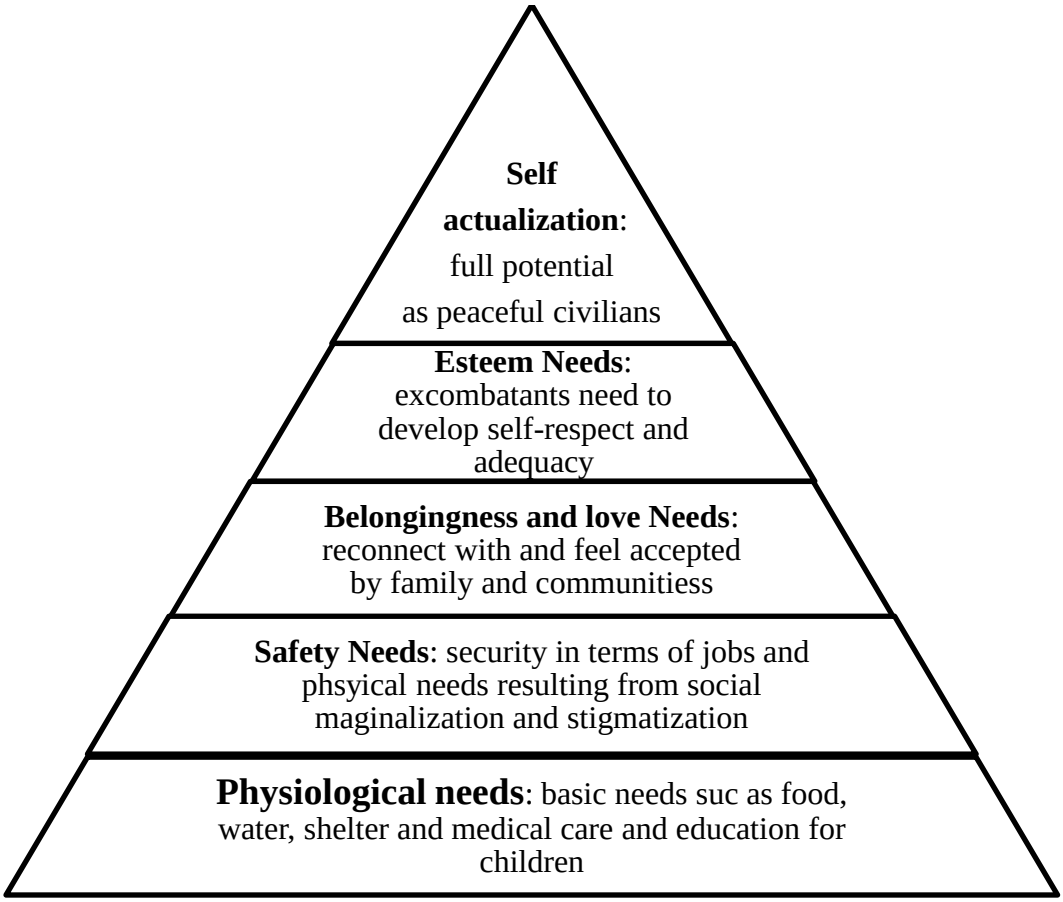

Figure 3-1 Participants' reintegration needs using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory

Conclusion

The purpose of this theoretical framework is to describe factors that contribute to the child soldiers' experiences during reintegration. An important part of this research is to explore ex-combatants' reintegration experiences as they transition to civilian living 6 years post -civil war. Erikson's theory of psychosocial development is used to explain child soldiers' development during

adolescence and how military experience affects their identities. Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory suggests the effects of five systems (micro, mesosystems, exosystem, macrosystems and chronosystems) on reintegration experience. Whereas, Maslow hierarchy of needs theory is used to explain the various needs adult ex-child soldiers experience while adjusting to civilian living. These viewpoints provide helpful theoretical frameworks that clarify the connection between ex-child soldiers' psychosocial development, environment, and future needs which without intervention will result in this population becoming disadvantaged and vulnerable to many forms of social injustices in Liberia.

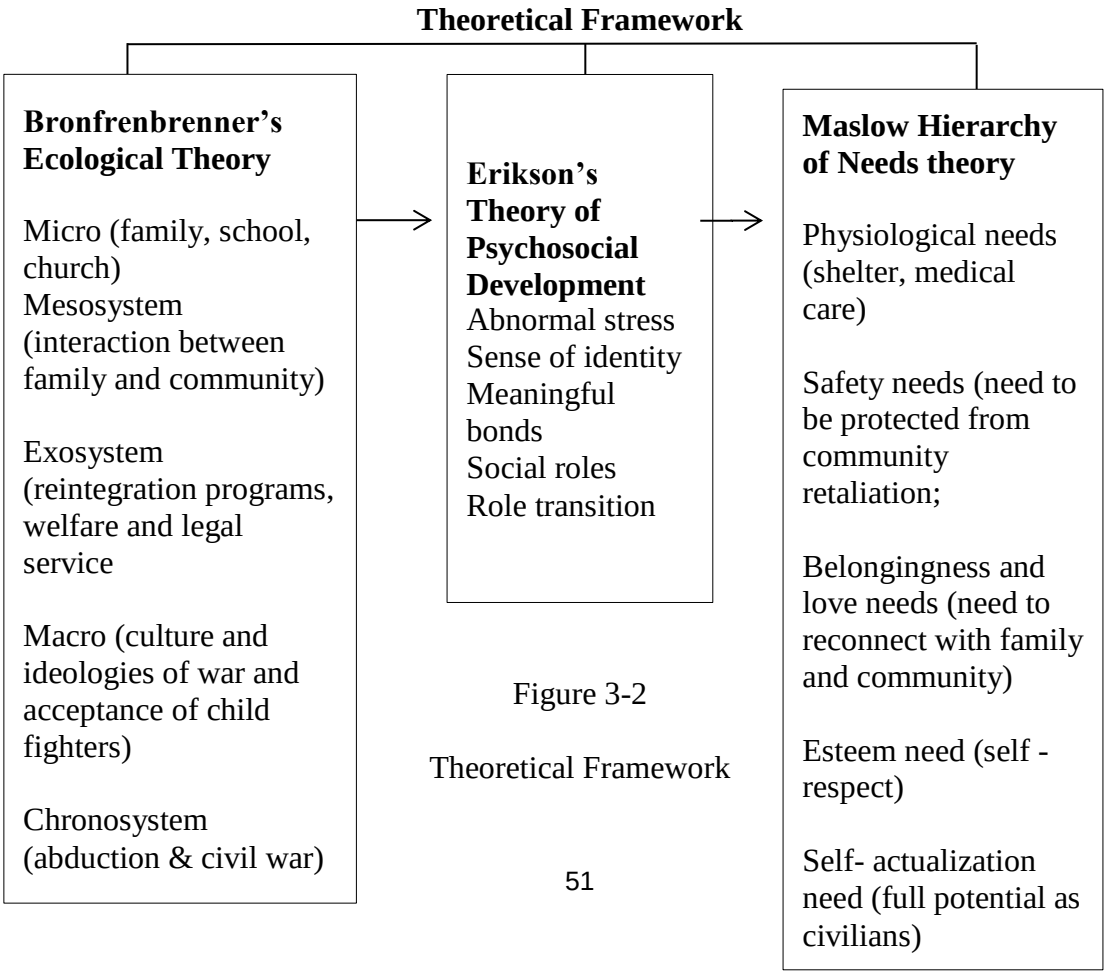

Figure 3-2

Theoretical Framework

Chapter 4

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Furthermore, this study explores participants' motivation to disarm, expectations, perceptions of the reintegration process as well as contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration that helped shape their reintegration experience within the context of Liberia. Although mental health, sexual violence and head injuries have been identified as outcomes of ex-combatants' participation in military conflicts (Asher et al., 2008; Johnson, Asher, Kisielewski, & Lawry, 2012), there is no existing published information on their actual lived experiences during the reintegration phase and their meaning of reintegration. To achieve the purpose of this research, I used a phenomenological research design. In this chapter, I discussed the philosophical underpinning of phenomenology, the reasons its application fits this study, my data source and data analysis method. Furthermore, I explained the steps I took to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. I also provided biographical information about myself.

Phenomenological Paradigm

The term, phenomenology is used both as a philosophy and as a research method (Patton, 2002). As a philosophy, phenomenology seeks to understand a

social phenomenon from the actor's own perspective (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The implication for the phenomenological philosophy is that the most important thing to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world (Patton, 2002). Meanwhile, as a method, phenomenology describes a phenomenon based on the perceptions of individuals who experience it instead of explaining or analyzing it from the outsiders' point of view (Merleau-Ponty, 1974). This means that researchers who use phenomenological methods do not rely on scientific theories to describe a phenomenon; instead, they rely on the subjective truths and understandings of the individuals who experience the phenomena first-hand (Merleau-Ponty, 1974; Patton, 2002). Merleau-Ponty (1974) argues that as compared to scientific methods, the use of phenomenological inquiry provides a more accurate estimation of the truth when it comes to understanding a particular phenomenon as it is experienced, understood and perceived by individuals who experience it. In studies using phenomenological inquiry methods, participants are individuals who share a particular life experience (Padgett, 2008).

In this study, participants are adult ex-child combatants who were involved in armed conflicts while they were under the age of 18. At the time of data collection, all participants in this study were reintegrating as civilians living in various communities following the Liberian civil war. An important dimension of phenomenology as a method is the assumption that there is an essence or essences to shared experience and in fact, these essences are core meanings that

are communally understood by individuals who experience a particular phenomenon (Van Manen, 1990). Using a phenomenological inquiry method allows for the inclusion of "textural description" of participants' reintegration experience as well as "structural description" of the context and settings (Moustakas, 1994) of their reintegration experiences. Both textural and structural description are important concepts that will assist professionals working with this population understand its members better in order to provide context and cultural appropriate interventions at the micro, mezzo and macro levels.

Rationale for Phenomenological Lens

Since I am committed to understanding ex-child soldiers' reintegration experiences and shared meaning of reintegration from their perspective, phenomenology is the paradigm best suited for this study. Phenomenology inquiry employs open-ended questions as data collection methods that provide ample opportunity for researchers to explore participants' perceived meaning of a particular phenomenon. This study explores ex-child soldiers' responses to open-ended questions about their experiences as they return to civilian status and reveal their perceived meaning of reintegration in the context of Liberia. The results of this study include discussion about themes and patterns discovered as a result of the data analysis.

Trustworthiness

To reduce bias, this study will include credibility, transferability, auditability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the degree of fit between participants' responses and researcher's description and interpretation (Patton, 2002). I will code in vivo, to ensure that the participants' original meanings are retained. The transferability of this study, also known as the generalizability of the findings, is important to note since the findings of this study are not generalizable to its sample. To ensure auditability, I documented the study's procedures in a way that is traceable and will lead readers through the research process beginning with the research question and data and through the data analysis and interpretation of the findings (LoBiondo-Wood, & Haber, 2006). To demonstrate confirmability, I illustrated that the findings did not magically appear by linking findings to the data by providing direct quotations from participants to support the findings. Another strategy that I employed to enhance the trustworthiness of the study is theory triangulation which involves the use of multiple theories (Erikson's psychosocial stages of development, Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs) to interpret the data. Furthermore, I compared the findings from this study with findings from previous studies to corroborate or show differences in ex-child soldiers' reintegration experiences. To reduce bias, I relied on bracketing to set aside preconceived notions about former child soldiers and beliefs that may have

influenced the coding process and thus, the findings (Moustakas, 1994). An additional strategy that I used is analyst triangulation and it involved the use of other analyst to review the findings, not to provide an agreement but to contribute to the data being viewed from different angles (Patton, 2002). To ensure the rigorousness of this study, I used the help of my dissertation committee members, one of which has expert knowledge and experience in qualitative research methods and analysis. Throughout the data analysis process, I kept a journal and recorded the code or node development. The code or node development is a process through which raw qualitative data is examined by assigning labels to words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs in an attempt to answer the research question. It is important to document using memos, transcripts and journals to understand the decisions I made while I analyzed and interpreted the data. Lastly, I included a personal biography that provided details about my past experiences as well as my perceptions and assumptions about this population. In addition to the experience I have in analyzing qualitative data using NVIVO 10, I attended a training workshop on qualitative data analysis software called NVIVO to help me prepare further for data analysis.

Data Source and Sampling

The data used in this study derives from previous unpublished interviews of 34 adult ex-child soldiers who were in the reintegration phase at the time of the interviews. The qualitative data used in this study was collected by the researcher

in partnership with a Liberian researcher working with the National Commission on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Rehabilitation (NCDDRR) in 2009. Originally, the data was collected as part of a program evaluation of the Monrovia Vocational Training Center which was contracted by the NCDDRR to carry out the final phase of the national DDR program offering vocational training, psychosocial counseling, human rights education, career counseling and HIV/AIDs awareness programs. The data collection and handling was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Baylor University. The IRB number is 200809053. I received permission from the University of Texas at Arlington IRB in order to conduct this current study. The interview guide was based on information gathered from previous studies as well as experts working with ex-combatants at the NCDDRR in Liberia. The sample for the qualitative data used in this study was made up of 34 adult ex-child soldiers, who participated in the Liberian civil war. It is important to note that the interviews were conducted six years after the last civil war in Liberia.

Recruitment

Thirty-four adult ex-child soldiers were recruited using convenience sampling through the Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC) in Paynesville, a city outside of the capital of Liberia. MVTC is a training institute that NCDDRR contracted to carry out the final reintegration phase of the DDR program. After collecting completed informed consent forms, 34 participants

were interviewed based on their status as ex-child soldiers. The sample consisted of 14 females and 20 males. The average age of the participants was 33.3, with an age range of 19 to42 while the average age of participants at the beginning of the 14-year civil war was 13.8.

Interviewing

The qualitative data used in this study was collected through phone and in-person interviews depending on the participants' availability and access to a telephone. All the interviews were scheduled in advance and majority (11males and 9 females) of the interviews were in-depth and intense in nature; however they were conducted in private to foster trust and honesty. Of the 34 interviews, I interviewed 14 participants (5 females and 9 males) who had access to telephones. During the telephone interviews, recordings were not available; however, I took extensive notes to document the interviews. Standardized open-ended interview questions were developed and used to solicit information that was needed to understand participants' experiences and perceptions of the DDR program. The style and process of interviewing (standardized open ended) were chosen to ensure that the exact same instrument and format was used across interviews, to minimize the difference among interviewers (since two interviewers conducted the interviews), help focus the interview, use time wisely and facilitate the data analysis process by making responses easy to locate and compare across participants (Patton, 2002). Meanwhile, the interview guide was flexible and

allowed interviewers to use follow-up questions as needed. Since very little qualitative research has been published about ex-combatants' perceptions of the DDR program, the interview guide was developed to explore ex-combatants' perceptions of the program, their reintegration experiences and their opinions of resources needed for successful reintegration into Liberian society. The following open ended questions used in the interviews were developed based on the review of previous research (Paes, 2005; Pugel, 2006) and the feedback of experts working with this population in Liberia:

1. Reintegration process

    a. What were your hopes/expectations about reintegration at the time of disarmament?

    b. What were you told would happen (goals, services to be offered, etc.)?

    c. What actually happened (services offered, received)?

2. Contributing factors

    a. What do you think will contribute to your not completing the final phase of the DDR program?

    b. What contributed to your completion of the previous phases (DD) of the DDR program?

3. Results thus far

    a. To what extent do you think you have been reintegrated into society?

    b. What are your hopes/expectations about your future in Liberia?

4. Obstacles and future progress

a. What obstacles to reintegration remain for you?

b. What assistance do you think you need to overcome these obstacles?

c. What do you think you need to do to address these obstacles?

Additionally, the questions aforementioned were pilot tested on a few ex-combatants (5) who provided important feedback that led to the inclusion of an additional question: Given the experience you had with the DDR process, what do you think you will do if given the chance to fight in another civil war? Why or why not? The full interview guide is provided in Appendix B. The additional question was effective in exploring participants' reintegration experiences and perception of their progress as it relates to their future involvement in armed conflicts. There was a minimal psychological risk to participants since the interview could have triggered their combat experiences; however, the interviews were conducted on the premises of a reintegration program where participants were monitored and could receive treatment as needed. To limit risks to participants, the interview questions focused on participants' experience after the war rather than their experiences during the war. Furthermore, participants were encouraged not to answer questions that made them feel uncomfortable and they were reminded that they could end the interview at any time. Participants were interviewed for approximately forty-five minutes to an hour. All the in-person interviews (20) were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. For the purpose of

this study, the transcribed data and notes of telephone interviews will be entered into NVivo 10 for data analysis.

In addition to the interview questions, participants also provided demographic information. This data included information about participants' age, gender, combatant status, participation in previous phases of the DDR program, DRR program completion, education level, vocational skills training, employment, income, marital status and number of children.

Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, I followed the following phenomenological data analysis model that Moustakas (1994) describes as both rigorous and accessible:

1. The first step in Moustakas' phenomenological analysis process is epoche wherein I described my own experience with the child soldiering phenomenon to set aside my personal views about child soldiers and their reintegration experiences. This approach if exercised at the beginning of the study helps qualitative researchers set aside views of themselves and others and concentrate on the participants' views (Moustakas, 1994).
2. Next, I used Moustakas' strategy of horizonalization. I read the transcripts of each interview and viewed each statement as equal while keeping an open mind about ways in which participants' responses related to the purpose and objectives of this study.

3. The third step involved me identifying and highlighting unique statements or expressions from each participant's responses. Moustakas (1994) refers to these unique statements or expressions as invariant horizons or meaning units which are known as nodes in Nvivo. Following the identification of these invariant horizons, I determined whether those unique statements or expressions were important and provided insight about the phenomenon that is being investigated in this study. To conclude this step, I provided short description labels for the statements or expressions that I determined to be unique, important and insightful.
4. At this point, I examined the statements and expressions that I highlighted to determine relationships, particularly similarities. Those statements and expressions that were alike were clustered into themes and I provided a short description label for each theme.
5. I used the identified meanings and themes to build an overall description of how and what each participant's experience was during reintegration. Constructing participants' experiences using identified units and themes is known as textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994).
6. After I constructed individual textural-structural descriptions for each participant, Moustakas (1994) proposes that a composite textural-structural description will emerge. The synthesis of individual textural-

structural descriptions revealed meanings of the shared lived experiences of reintegration in Liberia.

I also explored participants' reintegration experiences based on gender. The numerical results of the demographic questions were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Services (SPSS) 19. I used descriptive statistics to summarize the demographic data. I ran frequencies on categorical data such as gender, ex-combatants status, participation in previous DDR program, completion of previous phases in the DDR program, education level, vocational school, trades studied in vocational school, marital status and number of children. Also, I estimated the central tendency using mean and median for the following variables: age and number of children.

The Role of the Researcher

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) describe the role of a qualitative researcher as an instrument of data collection. In qualitative research, data is mediated through researchers thus, making them active learners and participants as they seek a more profound understanding of a particular phenomenon usually driven by personal interest (Moustakas, 1994). Qualitative researchers are responsible for helping qualitative research consumers understand the role of researchers in the research process. This involves researchers clarifying whether their role is considered "emic" (inside) or "etic" (outside) (Punch, 2005). As an instrument, qualitative researchers should provide some information about their experience, training and

perspectives about qualitative research and, if applicable, details about the funders' of the study as well as personal connections with the participants involved in the study (Patton, 2002). In this study, my perspective is considered an "etic" or outsider perspective rather than an "emic" or insider perspective since the study is based on secondary data which explores the lived experiences of ex-child soldiers' during reintegration, an experience I do not share with the participants in this study. As an outsider, I used my worldview to interpret and construct knowledge from the data, so it is very important to provide readers with some insight about my personal experiences, perceptions and beliefs associated with the phenomenon examined in this study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I provided my personal biography in the next section.

Personal Biography

I am a 29-year old Liberian female, who is currently a Licensed Master Social Worker (LMSW) and a PhD candidate. I received my Bachelor of Science in Sociology and Psychology from Shorter University in Rome, Georgia and in 2009, I earned a Master's of Science in Social Work from Baylor University, Waco, Texas. Throughout my brief social work career, I have worked with at-risk youths and victims of abuse and neglect. The clients I worked with in the United States reminded me of the youths that I volunteered with in Liberia. But, unlike the at-risk youths in the Unites States, the children I worked with in Liberia were victims of the civil war, particularly child soldiering which is considered a form

of institutionalized child abuse. My work as peer educator during high school in Liberia helped steer me in the direction of a helping profession and I hoped to pursue a college degree in that regard. Since social work is a relatively new field in Liberia, I was not exposed to it as a profession and thus, I decided to pursue an undergraduate degree in counseling. In 2002, I moved to the United States to attend college and major in Psychology and Sociology. It was not until my senior year when I interned at Floyd County Department of Family and Children Services that I was introduced to Social Work. At that point, I decided to pursue a master's in social work with the intention of learning some skills to be able to return to my home country and provide assistance to vulnerable populations, particularly ex-child soldiers.

I have always been interested in studying the Liberian ex-child soldier population. Having grown up in Liberia during the civil war that erupted when I was 5 years old and lasted until I was 19 years old, I was exposed to the problem of child soldiering for a significant period of my life. Although we lived in an area where children were actively recruited for combat and sex slaves for military commanders, my siblings and I were very young (under 7 years old) and so we were fortunate in that regard. However, we witnessed and heard about many other children who were abducted and forced to become soldiers. For instance, my mother's teenage sister, who was visiting our family when the war began, was forcibly taken away from us to serve in the role of a domestic help. She remained

in their custody cooking and cleaning for the rebel commanders and later became a wife to one of the rebel commanders. This had a major impact on my family, especially my mother who felt powerless in preventing her teenage sister from being exploited. Throughout my experiences during the Liberian civil war, I sympathized with young soldiers and was concerned about their future. When the war ended, many of them became "street children" and often loitered the communities and were frequently ridiculed, discriminated against and even physically harassed. I formed an opinion that those ex-child soldiers were victims of the war in as much as they were perpetrators during the war.

While in graduate school, I enrolled in a human development course where I learned various theories about the growth, development and behavior of children and wondered how a problem like child soldiering impacted children in my home country. It was then that I decided to dedicate my academic and professional career to understanding and helping this population. I searched for information on ex-combatants and reflected on the differences in adult combatants and child soldiers' experiences and potential life-long consequences. I realized that there was a lack of published literature on child soldiering or reintegration in Liberia. I also sought out organizations in Liberia that provided assistance to this population and established connections with the Director of the National DDR program. To fulfill my course requirement to complete my master's, I conducted a research project on ex-combatants' reintegration in Liberia. The research focused

on the services that ex-child soldiers received from the national DDR program and since my enrollment in the PhD program at UT Arlington, I have learned that the study I conducted at the graduate level is considered a basic program evaluation.

Currently, as a PhD student, I have spent a lot of time researching previous literature on ex-child soldiers in Liberia and because of the limited output; I broadened my search to include studies of ex-combatants in other African countries (Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda). The literature indicates many similarities in the experiences of child soldiers in Liberia and other African countries including abduction, separation and killings of child soldiers' families, and terrible combat experiences followed by rejection from families and communities at the end of armed conflicts, etc. The following are my assumptions based on my personal experience and the literature review I conducted in preparation of this study: (i) ex-child soldiers are victims who society failed to protect; (ii) they feel abandoned by their military groups, the government and are often reproached by communities who were victimized by their actions during armed conflicts; (iii) the economic and social disparity between this group and the rest of society will continue to increase in the absence of appropriate interventions; and (iv) ex-child soldiers are more likely to engage in future armed conflicts if they are not empowered to meet their basic needs.

Bracketing: Researcher's Perspective, Assumptions and Reflexivity

Regarding ontology and epistemology, as a researcher, my position falls under the constructivist philosophy. Constructivism is a belief that human phenomena are socially constructed rather than objectively "real" (Charmaz, 2006). According to Patton (2002), studies with a constructivist foundation examine the multiple realities individuals construct, the implications of those constructed realities, and their interactions with others based on their constructed realities. I believe that individuals have subjective realities which vary depending on the context, and that those realities and differences across contexts are worth studying and can teach us about particular populations and/or situations in such a way that goes beyond numbers. For instance, ex-child soldiers experiencing reintegration may have different experiences and perceptions about it but, despite the variations in their subjective realities, all their experiences are real and therefore worthy of attention, in this case attention from the social work profession. According to the constructivist approach, a phenomenon is best understood within the context in which they are studied (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Thus, this study seeks to understand the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers within the Liberian context and will not generalize from that context to another.

To conclude, in addition to my constructivist belief, the research question was influenced by my empirical and theoretical analysis of the literature found in

chapters two and three as well as my personal experiences and assumptions of the Liberian ex-child soldiers' population. I recognize the potential influences that my experiences and knowledge acquired from a review of the literature may have on data analysis and so I bracketed not to suspend but to become aware of and set aside my personal experiences and assumptions with the review of theories and previous research in order to prevent biases when analyzing and interpreting the findings (Padgett, 2008). To do this and set aside all preconceived notions, I employed reflexivity, which according to Padgett (2008) is the ability to examine one's self. Throughout the study, I examined the types of biases and also documented my personal and professional reactions to findings in the literature review and data analysis process (Padgett, 2008). By practicing reflexivity, I sought to become self- aware politically, culturally and hopefully own my perspectives as they relate to this study (Patton, 2002).

Ethical Dilemmas

Qualitative researchers face few ethical issues when working with secondary data. This study involves analytic expansion, a type of secondary analysis in which the researcher ventures into new topics using her own data (Thorne, 1998). Although I am unable to return to the study participants for validation purposes (member checks), it is important to note that I am not new to the data. Unlike other secondary data analysis that involves researchers who are new to the data, as a researcher, I participated in the collection of the original data

and as a result, I have adequate knowledge about the original data and participants. Padgett (2008) identified confidentiality of participants as a potential ethical issue and notes that qualitative researchers struggle with providing anonymity. I have taken every effort to ensure that participants' identities are kept confidential and are not linked to the data. Identification numbers were used to link participants with their transcripts.

Limitations

1. This study used a qualitative design drawing upon secondary data hence, the findings of this study are not generalizable.
2. Recall bias may have occurred since participants' responses to questions about the reintegration experiences depended on their memory of a process that had been in progress for at least 6 years at the time of the interviews.
3. Since all the interviews were completed following the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration program, participants' descriptions of their reintegration experiences may reflect the perceptions and views they held at that particular point of time.
4. Since the study is based on secondary data, I was unable to utilize member checking which involves asking for input from participants for validation purposes during the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Dissemination

The results of this study will be published as part of my dissertation and will later be written in a manuscript format to be published in a book or professional journal. I will also present the findings at an appropriate national or international conference on social work, child welfare and peace and reconciliation. Additionally, I will provide the results of this study to boards, administrators, and staff members of various reintegration programs in Liberia as well as key government agencies responsible for developing interventions and policies whicht impact this population in Liberia.

Chapter 5

Results

As noted in chapter three, the method used to analyze the data in this study comes from a revised version of Van-Kaam phenomenology method of analysis presented by Moustakas (1994). In adherence to the requirement of this analysis method, I documented my description of my experience with the phenomenon of child soldiering. The next step involved a strategy Moustakas calls horizonalization. This step involved me reading all the transcripts and treating the data like they were all equal in value and meaning. The second step of this analysis involved condensing the data by identifying what Moustakas (1994) calls meaning units or invariant horizons. The meaning units or invariant horizons I identified were those statements which I found most relevant to the research question. Next, I clustered and related the meaning units into non-overlapping themes that I assigned a descriptive label. I relied on triangulation of analysts to validate meaning units and themes uncovered in the data analysis. Following the use of triangulating analysts, I used imaginative variation to construct a description of participants' reintegration experience. At this point of the analysis, a composite textural description of participants' reintegration emerged and thus, I completed my analysis by developing a composite structural description along with a cognitive map based on the composite structural descriptions of all the participants. Concept maps promote analysis and understanding (Ackerman,

Eden, & Cropper, 1993; Hines, 2000) because they illustrate participants' description of concepts about a particular domain as well as the relationships that exist between concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994).Together, concepts map and composite description identify the essence of shared experiences of the phenomenon of ex-child soldiers' reintegration.

Horizonalization

Horizonalization refers to the step in which the researcher reviews the data without assigning any value to statements. At this stage, all statements in the transcripts are considered as equal in value with unlimited meanings or horizons (Moustakas 1994). In order to successfully complete this step, I bracketed my biases prior to reviewing the transcripts and spend some time reflecting on and reading each transcript word for word. This exercise prepared me to dive in the data without preconceived notions and therefore, I was able to view the data as having unlimited horizons waiting to be explored.

Meaning Units

The meaning units are those statements that the researcher identifies as valuable to the research question (Moustakas, 1994). To identify the meaning units for each question, I read the transcripts several times while carefully considering participants' exact responses for each guiding question. Throughout this continuous process, I identified several meaning units as having the most significance for each guiding question. The following are examples of verbatim

statements I identified as meaning units that were most relevant to the question, "What were your hopes/expectations about reintegration at the time of disarmament?"

- When I went to disarm I was expecting so many things promised like zinc, cement and building materials
- My hope was that after disarmament we should be free and get good job to do and look for living place
- I expected the program to be a very unique program to help us relocate and rebuild our lives
- I was expecting for them to resettle us. Some of our home got burned, we don't have anywhere to stay, we were expecting them to resettle us to build our place and relax there
- Well, we had so many hopes because the NCDDRR gave us so many promises, that they said were going to come to us.
- I was expecting money and some other things to help rebuild my life like were promised
- My hope is that I wanted peace in my country and for me to learn for tomorrow.
- When I went to disarm, the promises made by the people gave me a lot of hopes. They told us that we were going to go to school. As for me, since as a child I haven't been to school and I told them

that, and also that I want to learn trade, which is tailoring, and I told Mr. Gibson, who is the principal for the school

- I expected to learn something and get a job to support my family.
- We were asked what we had before the war, with the expectation that they were going to give us back a new life.
- I expected some benefits like schooling, relocation and building materials.
- As a woman, the earlier part of the war brought all kind of disadvantages. I had to take part because my husband was too afraid since the men were the main targets. We were sent to do all kind of trainings. We went through the war unhurt. Then the time came for disarmament. We were taken to VOA site and were promised a lot of things. When we return to Monrovia, some of us main reason(s) were to come and live with our brothers & sisters
- I hoped that I would be reintegrated so that I can be able to support my family with what I learned and also to be accepted by my community after everything that happened during the war.
- I expected them to put us in the society after the disarmament and gave us our benefit.

Themes

I began the process of themes identification by examining and reducing the meaning units to a number of descriptive phrases. For instance, I reduced the following statement: "My hope was that after disarmament we should be free and get good job to do and look for living place" to the phrase: "Desire for employment and stable housing." Next, I examined the meaning units to determine relationships and similarities between them and then clustered them into non-overlapping themes. Each theme was then given thematic or descriptive label. Initially, I identified 8 themes which were eventually reduced to six based on discussions I held with my triangulating analysts. Another important outcome of the discussions held with my triangulating analysts is the modification of the original thematic labels. The six themes and the meaning units associated with each are as follows:

1. Motivation for disarmament

   Internal motivation, e.g. desire to change and contribute to peace

   External motivation e.g. reintegration assistance such as money, school, shelter

2. Desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills

   Job or petty trade (informal trade conducted on a small scale with small and low-cost goods)

   Reconnect with family and communities

Repurpose combat skills

3. Dissatisfaction with reintegration

   Broken promises

   Obstacles

   Negative case, i.e. satisfaction with reintegration

4. Perceptions of reintegration

   No reintegration e.g. economic hardship, lack of community acceptance, physical disabilities

   Partial reintegration, e.g. vocational skills but unemployed

   One negative case, i.e., full reintegration

5. Powerlessness

   Disadvantaged against DDR program and government

   No reintegration or access to economic mobility, e.g., economic hardship, unemployment; lack of shelter;; war related physical disabilities and lack of medical care

   Yielded to higher powers: God and international community

   Desired assistance, e.g. jobs and education

   Desired to meet children's needs

6. Perception of future Combat Participation

   Not willing to fight again due to maturity, desire to meet family's needs and maintain civilian

Two negative cases: maybe due to needs and protection; yes due to dissatisfaction and poverty

Textural-Structural Descriptions

Due to my sample size, I synthesized the invariant meaning units and themes into what Moustakas (1994) calls, "a description of textures of the experience" with verbatim examples. In Moustaka's phenomenology analysis model, textural experience refers to the "what" of the appearing phenomenon (p. 78). According to Moustakas (1994), textural-structural descriptions bring out a clear illustration of that which was experienced and how it was experienced. To specify, in this study, the "what" are the themes resulting from the description participants provided about their reintegration experiences. In addition, participants shared their descriptions of their hopes and expectations about reintegration, factors that contributed and impeded their reintegration, the extent of their integration and their hopes and expectations about their future. These responses and descriptions contribute to the textural descriptions that were drawn from participants' verbatim transcripts. On the other hand, the structural themes in phenomenological studies are themes derived from "imaginative variation." Moustakas (1994) states, "The task of imaginative variation is to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, different positions, roles, or functions" (p. 97). During this

part of the data analysis, I uncovered the structural themes by reading and reflecting on the transcriptions of the participants' interviews with the intention of finding meaning in their experiences with reintegration. Moustakas (1994) describes texture and structure as being in a continual relationship and notes, "In the process of explicating intentional experience, one moves from that which is experienced and described in concrete and full terms, the 'what' of the experience,"(p. 79) "towards its reflexive reference in the 'how' of the experience" (p. 50). The structural themes uncovered in this study are based on the synthesis of the deeper meaning of reintegration among ex-child soldiers participants in post war Liberia.

I presented my results in three parts. In the first part, I provided a demographic description of the participants. The demographic data included information about participants' age, gender, combatant status, participation and completion of previous phases of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, education level, vocational skills training, employment, income, marital status and number of children. In the second section following the demographic data, I presented a description of the textural themes (Moustakas, 1994) which are the essences of the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers in this study. The textural themes that emerged from the data were reported in the participants' own words and include the following: *motivation for disarmament, desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, dissatisfaction*

with reintegration, perceptions of reintegration, powerlessness, and perception of future combat participation.

In the third section of the results, I discussed the structural themes (Moustakas, 1994) which emerged from the data analysis as well as my experience analyzing the data. In phenomenological studies, the structural themes are used to illustrate what occurs at a deeper level of the experience which according to Moustakas (1994) may include feelings that result from the experience as well as the essential structure of the experience. Since structures underlie and are inherent in textures, the process of developing structural themes and arriving at core structural meanings involves the "conscious acts of thinking and judging, imagining and recollecting" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 79). Following a discussion of textural themes, I provided a discussion of the following structures or underlying themes I identified during my data analysis and reflection on the research experience: *poor administration at program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization.*

Study Participants

As noted in chapter 4, the study included thirty-four adult ex-child soldiers who were recruited using convenience sampling through the Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC) in Paynesville, a city outside of the capital of Liberia. MVTC is a training institute that NCDDRR contracted to carry out the final reintegration phase of the DDR program. After collecting completed informed

consent forms, 34 participants were interviewed based on their status as ex-child soldiers. The sample consisted of 14 females and 20 males. The average age of the participants was 33.3, with an age range of 19 and 42 while the average age of participants at the beginning of the 14-year civil war was 13.8. Approximately 79% of the participants completed previous phases of the DDR program which is the disarmament and demobilization (DD) phase while 21% of the participants did not complete the previous phase. Of the 34 participants, 59% reported an elementary level education, 29% a junior high level education and 12% a high school level education. Approximately 82 % of the respondents were married while 18% were single. On average, participants reported having at least 2 children. In terms of education and vocational skills training, 26 % of the participants were enrolled in a formal academic program while the others pursued vocational skills training in various areas, the top three being tailoring (32%), agriculture (32%) plumbing (12.7). Six percent reported that they learned masonry and only one participant learned about electricity in the vocational skills training. Meanwhile, of the 34 participants, only 1 reported that he was employed.

Textural Themes Uncovered

Textural themes in this study emerged from data collected from individual interviews with ex-child soldier participants. Although the interviews were structured around an interview guide (see Appendix B), researchers used follow up questions to gather additional information as needed. To ensure confidentiality

of participants in this study, I developed a simple coding system using letters and numbers to distinguish male from female participants. I decided to use the letter "F" for all the females and the letter "M" for all males. Since the sample consisted of 14 females and 20 males, I assigned female participants a number between 1 and 14 and accordingly, female participants were given code F1 through F14. Similarly, I assigned numbers to male participants between 1 and 20 and subsequently, male participants were coded M1 through M20. The order of the numbers used to protect the anonymity of participants does not specify any particular order.

The textural themes or the "what" of the experience (Moustakas, 1994) include the following: motivation for disarmament, desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, dissatisfaction with reintegration, perceptions of reintegration, powerlessness and perception of future combat participation.

Theme One: Motivation for Disarmament

> *We came forward to disarm because of what was promised, things like zinc, tools, building materials and money. (M19)*

Participants' responses about what contributed to their completion of the previous DDR phases are categorized into two sub-themes: external and internal motivators. Participants indicated that the international communities and their peers were the major external motivators that encouraged them to disarm and complete previous phases of the DDR program. One participant said,

> Well we had gone through fourteen years war and we were all tire with the war. I felt so relieve to give my arms out for peace, which is why I disarmed, especially when the United Nations became involved into it. (F13)

Recognizing the roles her peers played in motivating her to complete the previous phases, another participant said, "If my friends had not told me to stay, I would have left because all their promises failed" (F5). For others, their drive to disarm and complete previous DDR phases was fueled by the reintegration assistance they were promised at disarmament. For instance, one participant disclosed, "I took part in the program because they said that they were going to help us, that what encouraged me to take part at that time" (F1). Specifying monetary benefits as a major motivation to disarming and completing previous phases of the DDR process, another participant stated,

> I went because after you give your arms you go and get $150.00 after two months you go back another $150.00. Since then they told us that we were coming to attend school, some of used that opportunity to go back to school. (F5)

The second sub-theme, internal motivators were expressed mainly by male participants. For instance, one male participant commented, "This was really a senseless war and I wanted to be a good citizen" (M14). Similarly, another stated, "You see, it was my decision to lay down my arms and forget everything." (M16).

Another male participant expressed what motivated him to disarm and complete previous DDR phases:

> I wanted to change. Since the disarmament time, I left from behind those people. When we were to the containment site for the three days, the people told us that all the friends we had, we should forget about them and try to make new friend. (M20)

Another male participant commented:

> What made me to disarm and demobilize is because of this senseless war that have been going on. We believe that this is our country and such thing is not supposed to go on. We are supposed to live in peace, so when the people came and said these things were not fine, we needed to come to them and erase this thing from our heart. This is what really made me to go and disarm to be reintegrated into society as a normal person. (M6)

Disclosing his motivation for disarmament, a male participant also said, "I was satisfied that the whole war had finished and therefore I turn my arm over to help the process. I disarmed because I was tired fighting" (M7). Emphasizing his role in the peace process, another participant said, "I disarmed because we needed peace, our brothers and sisters were dying" (M8). Similarly, another male participant stated, "It is with a strong desire that some of us have that is keeping us going. We wanted to change and be good citizens" (M13).

Theme Two: Desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills

I expected the program to be a very unique program to help us relocate and rebuild our lives. (F11)

Every participant mentioned something about gaining knowledge and skills for the purpose of obtaining employment or beginning a small business that will enable them to meet their own needs, without help from others. Clearly focused on economic assimilation, one participant stated, "I expected to learn something and get a job to support my family" (F4). In the same way, another participant also commented, "I expected to learn something to help me get a job in the future" (M11).

In addition to gaining employment as a result of the knowledge and skills acquired, participants also mentioned the desire to start a small business or petty trade in Liberia. One female participant stated, "I have the skills but I need tools like sewing machine and some money to start off my small business since I cannot find a job" (F8). Likewise, another ex-child soldier participant reiterated the sentiment that educational and skills trainings acquired during reintegration were essential for employment. He noted that when he could not find a job after acquiring a particular set of skills he sought additional training:

> Well, my hope for reintegration was to learn agriculture. I expected the institution to give us some agricultural equipment that what I expected the government to come in and help us with farming to help ourselves. After

> the training, we graduated and there was not job, nowhere to get job so we had to divert from agriculture to something else. I learn agriculture through the DDR but I had to learn mechanic to survive. (M11)

In addition to becoming empowered to help their families, participants specifically mentioned how gaining new knowledge and skills for employment will also assist them in reconnecting with others. Focused on reconnecting with his family and community members, one participant commented:

> I took part into the program because they said that they were going to help us with school, that what encouraged me to take part at that time. I wanted a new start with myself, my family and my community and I felt school will help with that. By learning carpentry, at least, I could get a job and send my children to school. (M2)

Two other participants connected their acquired job skills to getting a job and becoming accepted by their communities and becoming a part of society respectively: "I hoped that I can use what I've learned to be able to support my family and then also to be accepted by my community after everything that happened during the war" (F8) and "I hoped to learn some job skills and get a job and be a part of society" (M13).

Participants also talked about how gaining education and skills during reintegration enables them to learn new skills other than combat skills. One participant explained:

> They told us if we get out of the force we will get our benefits. Really, I expected to go to school to come out good in society. They told me I could learn trade even if I want to go to academic school, I could go for three years. I wanted to leave the fighting behind and become a heavy duty driver. (M20)

Another participant expressed her eagerness to learn a trade not associated with combat:

> When I went to disarm, the promises made by the people gave me a lot of hope. They told us that we were going to go to school. As for me, since as a child I haven't been to school and I told them that, and also that I want to learn trade, which is tailoring. (F3)

Theme three: Dissatisfaction with Reintegration

After they disarmed us, they carried us on the cantonment site. In the cantonment site, they made a lot of promises, the way people were doing things at the cantonment site, it was dissatisfactory to us and some of us left from there. For me I remained there. Then they sent us to LOIC to take up our trade but the time they put in for, the time was too short. They told us we were going to be there for three month but only one month. After we left the place, there were no tools. Some of us decided to do things on our own. So we left the place and follow friends who know the field and we join them, until the whole process ceased. (M1)

The benefits of reintegration are very important to ex-child soldiers. Overall, participants expressed dissatisfaction with their reintegration and converged around the same issues which led to their dissatisfaction. Two sub-themes emerged and they include broken promises and obstacles. One participant talked about broken promises:

> All the things they promised us like training, counseling, money and even resettlement were all lies. Those who were heading the programs didn't fulfill their promises to us. I am feeling bad. Since we were promised what we were told would be given to change our condition, nothing have been done. (M12)

Echoing this sentiment, another participant stated:

> The $30 USD wasn't given monthly. It was always given after every three months. Even though we were put into school, we weren't transported something which we were told would be done. Though it was a nine month course, we only took six months. Those that were given tools were hand- picked. (F8)

Another participant also stated:

> Well we were promised so many things like bundles of zinc, certain quantity of cement so that we can start something from there, by either building your house, all these things that we heard was never given to us.

So if these things can be brought or tell us how to get them then we all will be satisfy, it will be fine for us. (M5)

Ex-child soldier participants expressed their disappointed with the reintegration program but at the same time, some admitted that they did not always feel that way. One male participant stated:

> They give some and they did not the others. As for me I went to academic school, and some point in time a gentleman who was responsible for my identification card tried to cheat me. He works with the UNDP in collaboration with the NCDDRR, he play on my Identification card and ate my money. This made me to leave academic school, and began paid my own tuition to continue my education. My school principal at that time was Mr. Raymond Tucker of the Zion Academy High School on Benson street. He drove me there, at the NCDDRR office where I met a lady who was responsible for students at Zion high school who said that the person with that id-card was no longer in school.This was not true, I was regular in school and the principal even attested to that, but she said she could do nothing. That is how the id-card business ended, and I did not complete my high academic year. I had to pay my own money to complete my high school. Some people benefited and why others did not, they are grieving in their hearts. (M3)

Similarly, another participant also stated:

> Look, for the five days the counseling was fine, let me admit. We ate 2-3 times a day, breakfast, lunch and supper. With regards to the food it was fine. We were promised clothing but were never received. We were taken to the hospital for checkup before getting to the camp. We went through medical from place to place, we went through testing. The only thing that I never saw tested was blood even went through malaria test and many others. The camp was not conducive for five years or for a month. This is because we were given mats and displaced blankets to sleep on even though they promised that they were going to offer mattresses; we never saw mattresses but rather mats and blankets. (F13)

Noting that there was some sort of fairness in the early part of the DDR process, another participant stated:

> I completed the first two DDR steps to admit they were fair in the process. We went on the cantonment site, they did about five day counseling, at the end they went they give each person $150.00 USD and that money was able to make us to complete the DD process. (F11)

In addition to specifying that his dissatisfaction with his reintegration resulted from broken promises, another participant also mentioned at least one benefit. He said, "I never benefited at all from any of the things they promised us. But I went to trade school and did masonry" (M10). A large part of the broken

promises participants experienced was the irregularities in the training programs. One participant described her experience learning tailoring skills:

> I learned tailoring but I don't know it better. I was not thought the way I should have been taught. I wanted them to teach me the right way but they only give me paper to sew. After sewing the paper for a period of time support stop. After some time they just came out and said that the time was short, and they put us out for graduation and they give us tools, and my machine is hardly good, I still want to learn more. They rushed us because they said that they had more students waiting to join the next phase of the program. (F2)

Another participant talked about how he did not receive certificate or tool kits following his agricultural training:

> We attended the ADA school. The school is in Congo Town, near Charles Taylor house, the former president. We were the 2nd graduate say about 300 persons, and we never got our tool kits and certificates. We all just left the place like that because the man who founded the school, left the country, and that is how everything left, and we did not get anything from there. Since then, we have been pushing forward going there, 300 of us, but yet to no avail. Even the UNDP came in to intervene, they talk to us and we were going to hear from them, and since then we haven't heard from the UNDP. I am frustrated over the idea, but not frustrated in the

> sense to be on the streets. I'm frustrated because of my 10 months of getting into the swamps, in rain boots, felling trees (palm) and doing other things to see myself at the end of the day not getting anything like tools or equipment for myself to carry out any good work. They said that they were going to get back to us and since then they haven't come back to us. (M11)

Another participant explained the irregular reintegration benefits she received, particularly in terms of transportation and tools:

> It was our own responsibility to get to school. Most of the time, we had to walk to school. Several times we had to argue to get our stipend but to no avail. We were sent to a school at New Kru Town call D. Tweh High School. From there we were transfer to MVTC were we were giving various training skills. At MVTC, we had no materials to work with. Looking at what the future some of us think was in store for us, we decided to attend the classes no matter what. We were always begging for support to help us continue our education. Some of us were giving tools after graduation but those tools were not sufficient and durable. We were let loose and left to fend for ourselves. Though I had tools that were given to me by those concern, some were not the right tools for the job I had been trained to do to earn my living. We were not even given the

> opportunity to be sent on job training. We were left to fend for ourselves. NCDDRR did not live up to our expectations. (M17)

One participant explained the irregularities and system inefficiency she experienced while enrolled in the DDR vocational skills training program:

> The nine months we were told that our courses would end was a waste. Teachers irregular, stipend not coming, we left even before the nine months were over. As a result we never comprehended anything. Our names were already in some of the targeted schools. What surprise us was that, though we had the ID Cards, we were already in school. So when we go there, to the school, we were already in school. What a shock. Somebody was benefiting from us. What hurt us most was that we were only cards holders. After numerous complaints, we were not given any satisfactory answers. No one was concern about us. We had nothing to do that will occupy our time.(F7)

The second sub-theme that emerged is obstacles. When participants were asked about obstacles to reintegration, they provided predictable responses such as money, unemployment and disruption in reintegration programs. In addition, participants also identified some unpredictable and interesting obstacles. One participant pointed to the "lack of support from the government" (F8) as an obstacle because it was more difficult for her to reintegrate without government assistance; however, another noted "The government stopped the program but that

did not stop me. I tried to change on my own" (F6). One participant described the sudden interruption she experienced while participating in a government funded reintegration program:

> I was going to agriculture school. The first 250 people graduated and we were the last 150 people but we never graduated. They call the man McIntosh and the school ADA. The school never gave us our benefit. The DDR program was not completed. The government closed the program down because it was not complete. (F9)

Participants explained how disruption in reintegration services left them uneducated and unemployed. One participant commented:

> I still want learn. Because what I learn, is what I will live by. I learn a trade in the 3 month process I went under a friend of mine who said you my brother…I will take you to a shop and you will be there with me and through that man, I am able to get my daily bread from to also get employment to go somewhere that I will be working. That's the major problem and job. (M2)

Another unexpected obstacle participants identified as blocking their reintegration was the "lack of shelter." One participant explained, "I'm not reintegrated because I have no job or a decent place to live" (M14). Sharing her perception about the lack of shelter as an obstacle, another participant stated:

> Well at the cantonment site at VOA, I told them that I wanted to learn and they said that they were going to help me. I was asked whether I had house. I told them my mother house was broken down after she was killed. The land is still there and very bushy and I do not have any support to go there and put something on it. (F2)

Another participant discussed what needs to be done to assist ex-combatants overcome obstacles and overall dissatisfaction. He stated,

> If given land to farm and rebuild our destroyed homes, happiness would come again. The ones responsible for us lied to us. Some of us are living with the dissatisfaction. Others are doing a lot of other things like; Armed Robbery and killing etc. So far, our hopes are on God. Government needs to listen to us like what they are doing to the AFL. (Armed Forces of Liberia) (M18)

To remedy the obstacle of unemployment, few participants disclosed that they "begged" (F2), "did odd jobs for community members" (F8) and "engaged in petty trade on behalf of others" (M8). A female ex-child soldier participant said, "Right now, all I do is to sit down and sell cold water" (F2). Another male participant sought what he termed as "his own creative idea" of "washing cars until he could get the type of support he needed" (M8). In regards to the overall theme of dissatisfaction, there was one negative case. Of the thirty-four participants, only one participant who attended trade school and graduated from

what he called “Electricity Class” reported that he was satisfied with the reintegration program. When asked about the obstacles to reintegration, he commented:

> For me, no obstacles. I have learned the trade electricity and have gone to search for work to help myself. My own effort took me to Liberian Electricity Corporation, LEC. Now with faith and hard work, I am now gainfully employed with a private company. (M13)

Theme Four: Perceptions of Degree of Reintegration

I am still not reintegrated because of hardship, we are moving from here to there looking for survival. Our family needs us. Life is so very difficult. (M12)

In terms of participants’ perceptions of their reintegration, two sub-themes emerged: “no reintegration” and “partial reintegration.” For participants who experienced no reintegration, economic hardship played a major role. One participant said, “Actually, I am not totally back into society yet because I do not feel part of society yet because I need a place to live and work to do” (F1). A primary concern among participants who felt they were not reintegrated was the concept of shelter which is captured by this participant’s remark:

> I don’t feel reintegrated to no extend. No extend. I am just the same old way struggling on my own as you can see. This place in which I live in an unfinished building owned by government and we are living here and living condition is not conducive for us. (M3)

In addition to economic hardship and homelessness, participants also indicated that lack of community acceptance was another major factor in their perception of their reintegration. A female disclosed the following:

> In terms of support, I'm not feeling fine or reintegrated. Because of no support, and my husband being cripple because of the war, I am doing petty jobs to support us. Our kids are not in school. My community isn't friendly towards me and my family. We are always assaulted. We are often asked, what have you achieved during the war? Begging has become some of us habit. One ex- combatant was badly beaten because she went to beg for support. (F8)

Participants also connected economic sustainability with community acceptance in their responses. Another participant stated:

> Well I want for everyone in my community to recognize me as a peaceful citizen 100% but I cannot say that is happening because presently I do not have any job. My husband is not working, I am struggling a lot and I am appealing to them for help to sell or to do something to sustain my family and myself. (F2)

Another male echoed his concern about his community's influence on his reintegration in terms of safety: "I'm still not reintegrated. We are sitting around now trying to fend for ourselves. People are always assaulting us. This is troubling" (M15). Participants also acknowledged the discontinuation of

reintegration services and assistance impacted their perceptions of reintegration. For instance, a male participant stated, "I have not been accepted into the society. Me and my family are suffering. The DDR phases were never completed. We are appealing on the government to come to our aid" (M18). Similarly, another participant stated, "We are still not reintegrated because we were promised $300 as resettlement package, but nothing was given. This should not happen in the future. We need to support ourselves and our families" (F7). Another male participant also expressed his concern about the lapse in reintegration assistance as it pertained to his reintegration:

> I still don't feel part of society and so no reintegration for me yet. We don't know what they are doing. Some of us are praying that there will be no more war. It's been a long time since we were helped. We are getting frustrated. Temperature is rising. We don't want another war. (M14)

Another participant talked about how he did not benefit like some of his peers due to his age at the time of disarmament. He stated, "My 300 dollars they give it to my father because I was a minor. So I was just waiting for that benefit" (M20). The same participant experienced an uncommon obstacle he experienced after he left the cantonment site. He noted, "I did not get the balance services because I lost my ID card. They did not reissue the ID card. I saw others that went to school when they came from the cantonment site" (M20).

One female participant described why she did not perceive herself as reintegrated in the following comment:

> They fooled us, they never came back to us because after paying half of the school fees, we were dropped out and when we went to the office to go ask them and they said we will get back to you. At the end they never came back to us. That's why make us to stop the other process, the reintegration process because they never went back to us. (F11)

Among the participants who said they were not reintegrated, many talked about how their war related physical disabilities related to their reintegration. Speaking of her war related physical disability, one said, "I'm still not reintegrated. I am physically challenged with voice impairment. And me and my children live in this abandoned government building we call the mansion" (F4). Another participant commented about war related physical disability:

> I lack certain things because I'm suffering from my eyesight now from the war. My eye was not like this before the war, I holding gun that's what make my eye to be like this. From that time, I'm suffering. I don't get the money to go treat myself. I want someone to help me with money. I think I'm not qualified to live in the society because I can't read and write. (F9)

Not only were participants' perceptions of reintegration negatively impacted by their war related physical disabilities but their perceptions of

reintegration were also influenced by the lack of medical care as a result of the discontinuation in the reintegration programs. One participant stated:

> The things that we were promise they did not do anything for us, so I am not properly placed in to society yet. I was fifteen years old when I started. I have good plans for Liberia, but I am just vex now because the things that were promise me I did not get them. I am a victim of this war. I suffer too much, look at my leg that is from the war, at least if they were going to give what they promise I would have gone to see somebody to look after my foot. (Points to leg) this is a wound from a bullet; I was fired in the leg during a battle. The foot has not gotten better yet, it is still hurting. (M7)

Another participant also stated:

> I feel bad and right now as I am talking with you, some of our friends have lost their arms, legs and eyes. I am also a victim; I need money to go see a doctor to remove a bullet from my body. This bullet has been in me since 1994. The doctor said that the bullet will have to come out by itself, and by God's grace it is coming out by itself. I can show you it right now, it's on my side, no money, I need money to get a fast operation to get it out. (M8)

The second sub-theme (partial reintegration) described participants who although reported being unemployed, considered their reintegration incomplete as a result of the vocational skills acquired. Although not employed, one participant described her partial reintegration: "As for me I can say yes I have been

reintegrated half-way because I learned tailoring which I can use to support myself" (F12). Also highlighting the importance of vocational training in his overall reintegration, another participant noted, "Besides not having a job, I have been reintegrated into society now that I have something in my head, at least I can live by" (M10).

Others expressed that they felt partially reintegrated due to the positive interaction with their community members despite their economic hardships. According to one participant, "I think I am reintegrated in my community because those that I met there didn't bother me. I have comported myself well" (M6). Furthermore, participants attributed their partial reintegration to religion. One participant commented:

> Now I will admit, right after the war, my mother carried me to her church and right there, I started getting back into society from the preaching and now I can say, I'm into society but the rest of my brothers and sisters they are not into society because they are not affiliating with churches and so nobody helping them but personally, I helped myself to get into society without the DDR program. Presently I'm full member of RB Resurrection Baptist ministry. (F11)

Attributing his partial reintegration to his faith, another participant stated:

> For now, first of all I am a Christian, you can't be sitting down and your friends come and take advantage over you. Imaging your friend just come

by and start beating on you, that what made me to join. After we passed through these things, I went back to my church and then I started bringing most of my friends into my church, teaching them about Christianity. Because of my faith, I feel reintegrated. (M6)

There was one negative case in the theme of "perceptions of reintegration." While majority of the participants reported partial or no reintegration, one participant reported that he was fully reintegrated. According to him, he learned about electricity in his vocational program and noted, "I think I'm part of society now 100 percent. I graduated from the school and got my tools and certificate" (M13). Unlike most of the other ex-child soldier participants, this participant disclosed that he received his tools: "I've got two holes on my ID. When we started the school, during our graduation, they bow it, I received tools. Some received tools and sold it. From the day of my graduation, I still got my tools" (M3). He further stated:

I am happy with reintegration because I had the chance to go to school. Some including me came back with skills. Our communities have accepted us. They have realized that we are different. For this I am happy some of us are not harassed. (M13)

Theme five: Powerlessness for All Third-Level Subheadings

What can I do? I don't have any power. I will appeal to those heading the reintegration program. (M12)

Overall, participants expressed powerlessness when asked about their roles in addressing their reintegration needs. One participant said, “I don't know what I can do without money or a job” (M5). Another participant reported, “There’s nothing I can do. Yes, I’ve tried for many days asking for reintegration help that was promised but no response” (M17). Another participant showed in his comment how powerlessness could result into hopelessness. He stated:

> Well the future is like, God has everything because some of us, we are losing hope for what we expected from our own people to do for us they did not do it and are not doing it. Every now and then they will promise us and then lie to us again. (M3)

Another participant described feeling disadvantaged in the following comment:

> Well, this is a government and I alone can’t fight a government, who am I to argue with government, so I have no alternative, the only thing to do is I pray to the Almighty God to be myself. I don’t want to get in trouble with anybody to disturbed me. That is why I ask the Almighty God to bring this thing to light to see why they never fulfill all the promises made at the cantonment sites. (M7)

Another participant discussed his past experience with those in power and how that experience impacted his hope. He said:

> When we try to inquire about our benefits, some of us were threatened with arrest. As for me, I was jailed for challenging. Since then, I have

> decided to pursue no further. I'm praying for long life. I've decided not to ask. Asking the first time took me to prison. It was my father who came from far away Nimba County to rescue me. But if given the chance to attend a new program, I will attend it. (M16)

Some of the reasons participants felt hopeless included having no access to economic resources intended to ensure economic mobility. One participant said, "I tried to credit money to start a business but no one is willing to help ex-combatants right now. I gave up" (F12). Recognizing their powerlessness, participants submitted to what they felt were higher authorities. For example, one participant mentioned that she will "continue praying" (F8).For some, the international community seemed to be a potential source of hope. One participant commented:

> Even though we were told that after graduation help would come and it is not coming, I suggest we wake up and go out to prove ourselves that we are useful again. No one will do it for us. Those who promise have failed us. We should desist from all kinds of trouble. We should look up to the international community for help. (M13)

Although participants expressed a sense of powerlessness, they also conveyed their willingness to learn, work or start a petty trade or small business if given the opportunity. A male participant expressed his willingness to work when he said, "I hope to get a job opportunity soon because I am willing to work"

(M15). Also, one female ex-child soldier participant stated, "I want to do business and go to night school. I can get money from the business to support my children and send them to school" (F2). While another said, "I know I can do business to help myself. I need money, not less than 500 US dollars to start the business" (F10). Similarly, another participant discussed her plan to empower herself:

> The only thing that I will need now is a job. I can use the second hand machine that I have. The money that they promise us let them give it to us to at least do business; my husband does not have a job. (F14)

Another male participant commented:

> Well right now I cannot go back to my own home because my people will be jealous of me, that is why I am here. I was doing agriculture in my county that is why I went to improve myself after I disarmed. I'm only telling God thank you for you people coming to interview me, God brought you people to ask us, our hope to remove this hardship. Your please tell this McIntosh man to give us our certificates. I am tired sitting down. (M4)

Through government assistance, and self-empowerment, participants hoped to empower themselves and their children. One participant noted:

> My hope is that whatever I learn that is part of me now, that is my trade I have to use it to support my children I had five children and four died during the war, and only one is alive; so that is my only hope that I got. I

am fighting to send her to school so that she can be somebody in the future to help me. (M6)

In the absence of external support, another participant said, "I know that maybe I can be creating my own ideas, by washing cars and things until I get the support" (F9). Another female participant detailed her plans to empower herself through networking in the following comments:

> I need to go to find friends over the internet and that is what I'm already in the process of doing, every day I go there. The last time I got a partner from resurrection Baptist ministry in America and we talk whole lot of good talk but he say, he will be coming to Liberia in July then we will be able to sit down and talk better. I tried to seek assistance from pastors but you know Liberian pastors, they cannot help, only my pastor, Pastor Johnson trying to help me to carry me to the Baptist seminary on scholarship. (F11)

Theme six: Perceptions of Future Combat Participation

> *Fight again? No, I can't fight. I am tired. No benefits from war. (M2)*

When asked whether they would participate in future combat given their DDR experiences, majority of the participants said, "no" and there were two negative cases in which the first participant said, "yes" while the second participant said "maybe." A majority of the participants indicated that they were no longer interested in participating in armed conflicts. One female participant

stated, “Not even my daughter or my children will never be friendly with anybody in arm. I’m not willing to fight any war because I’ve gone so far in society” (F11). Indicating maturity, two participants remarked, “No, I will never fight again. I know better now and will not be fooled” (F12) and “I fought for 15 years. But I will never do it again because it not to my taste now because I want to do something better for the future. Like educating other people to what I have achieved” (M1).While participants shared their disinterest in returning to combat in the future, many expressed their concerns about the likelihood that their peers would fight in future armed conflicts as a result of their dissatisfaction with the reintegration assistance they received. According to one male participant, “No I won’t fight again but some of my brothers are in the streets because the resettlement program didn’t go down well. Since 1989, many of us became part of the war” (M19).

Participants also discussed how their peers’ decision to engage in future combat will likely be influenced by the lack of disarmament among some ex-combatants. One male participant commented:

> Me no, maybe others. Our poverty rate is too high. Some of my friends didn’t go to the cantonment site to be disarmed. Though some went and were giving opportunities, many though they went, became displeased thereby holding on to their arms. Nothing was done to attract them. Now they have turned to drugs and stealing to make ends meet. (M13)

Another participant stated:

> I can't fight war again, in my whole life because if I fight war and I die, it will be free. I expected DDR to benefit me so I will be good in society by now I will be working but nothing I know. This time around, they should bring it almost in the same way, as they brought reintegration because most people in society are not demobilize that's why you find people in the street because some people are not demobilize so. (M20)

Another participant spoke about unemployment being a major impetus for some of his peers returning to combat in the future:

> For me I do not think so, but for other guys will think so, they will be thinking that way. The only thing there is that the people responsible for the NCDDRR and the ex-combatants to help us because there is nothing doing. Some people have achieved skills to earn money and no jobs, others are grieving in their hearts. If this is not done a lot of things will happen even when you talk about people going back into the bush to fight, other people will convince them to still fight. So they should come in and solve this problem. (M3)

Similarly, another female participant spoke about how ex-combatants' dissatisfaction with reintegration could be a threat to the stability of Liberia. One female participant stated:

> No I won't fight again but those involve should remember many us now have stayed 17 years fighting and will surely go back if things are not straightened up. The UN forces will not be here forever. Anything can happen. Those who are handling our situation should think twice. (F7)

Another female participant commented:

> No I can't fight again but maybe others because you can see people are robbing and stealing from people area this means that people still have arms in the community. This is happening because people are not satisfied; some people still have their arms. (F5)

Although majority of the participants reported that they will not fight again, there were two participants who said otherwise. The first negative case involves a participant who admitted his willingness to fight again due to his reintegration experience. He noted, "Because of our dissatisfaction, dark clouds are hanging over Liberia. We are so hurt that even if another war comes, we are willing to fight. The armed robbery is some of the dissatisfaction from some of our friends" (M14). In the second negative case, the participant's response did not fall in the "yes" or "no" categories, but rather a "maybe" category. She commented:

> To fight another war, I can't tell you no I can't fight or I can't tell you yes I will fight because the problem about it if it happen like in Liberia here, I won't sit down and john come pull me by my ears, no we all will jump

inside it. But I can't leave from here and go to another country to fight. I'm saying if that in Liberia here and anything like war…..I can't leave my children behind then bullet go hit me. I can't take part in no war now. Except they bring their craziness and do funny thing, myself I won't sit down, I got to protect myself. Safety comes first. (F10)

Structural Themes Uncovered

An important step in Moustakas' data analysis is providing a description of structural themes. In this step of the data analysis, I identified structural themes which provide some level of understanding of the reintegration experiences as well as the meaning of reintegration to the ex-child soldier participants going through reintegration in post war Liberia. The term "structure" as defined by Keen and cited by Moustakas (1994), refers to "that order embedded in everyday experience which can be grasped only through reflection" (p. 78-79). The underlying or structural themes in this study surfaced by way of reflecting on my research experience which included reading the transcripts and notes from the data collection and also analyzing the data. Describing the connection between texture and structure, Moustakas (1994) noted, "the relationship of texture and structure is not that of object and subject or concrete and abstract but of the appearance and the hidden coming together to create a fullness in understanding the essences of a phenomenon or experience" (p. 79). As compared to the structural themes identified in the previous section, the underlying or structural

themes that emerged in this study describe the meaning of reintegration to ex-child soldier participants in a study on a different level. Based on data analysis and deep reflection of my research experience, I identified the following three structural themes of this study: *poor administration at program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization.*

Poor administration at program and government levels

The program did not give us all the benefits and ended all of a sudden. (M3)

Among the study participants, the most prominent and prevalent structural theme that emerged was poor administration at the program and government levels. Every participant mentioned that they experienced inefficient program implementation while enrolled in the DDR program. As a result of poor implementation and perhaps poor oversight of the DDR program, ex-combatants' vocational skills training and reintegration assistance were plagued by irregularities and abrupt disruptions in services. In their accounts of their reintegration experience, ex-child soldier participants pointed out discrepancies between what they were told would happen while enrolled in the DDR program and what they actually experienced. Highlighting the aforementioned discrepancy, one participant stated, "I was thinking they was putting us to a good place for two or three years, for them to make us come to ourselves for good to be good in society, but then again they said 6 months" (M2). Consequently, participants

described feeling abandoned, victimized, frustrated, dissatisfied, unhappy and poor during their reintegration. A child soldier participant recalled his completion of the vocational skills training program, "I graduated from the school. One of the R (reintegration) left. The people never got back to us. They only told us that they were finish with us" (M13). Another participant commented:

> To find job in Monrovia presently is not easy. You do not have a job when you are paying rent, finding food to eat and sending child to school and trying to meet other needs is not easy. I thought the reintegration program and government people was going to help talk to our communities on our behalf. Then at least, let them know we are change and now have some skills. That way, our communities will at least accept us as civilians just like them and maybe after they see our skills, they can even give us jobs in our field. But nothing like that happened. They just left us on our own to find jobs. (M6)

The second type of poor administration that impacted participants' reintegration occurred at the government level. An important aspect of poor administration at the government level is the concept of state associated marginalization. Ex-child soldiers in this study experienced state associated marginalization when the government failed to advocate for their economic and social assimilation or provide reintegration assistance beyond the DDR program. This state associated marginalization contributes to feelings of abandonment

among participants. One male participant stated, “We need to get back to school, return to our villages and so forth, but they in power are not prepared to listen to us. We have been totally abandoned” (M 12). Several participants highlighted the role of the government in their reintegration. One participant said, “I hope the government can come to our rescue or else we and our children will remain in poverty. (F14).

As a result of the poor administration at the program and government levels, participants perceived their reintegration as incomplete. For example, one participant remarked, “If the people don’t come back and have me reintegrated it means that I don’t have hope. I pray to God that some people will come and help to carry on the process, for the process is not completed” (F5). Similarly, another male participant indicated that he was experiencing state associated marginalization because he was “Not receiving benefit from the reintegration program, the government and people in my area” (M17). To remedy state associated marginalization, and help him and his ex-child soldier peers overcome obstacles to reintegration, one male participant stated, “I am only asking the international community to listen to our request. We are begging them to help us get what we were told would be given to us in order to settle ourselves” (M7).

Constrained opportunities

> *Right now, I sit home and do nothing. I hope they will start to treat us better and give us opportunity to learn and get jobs (M17).*

The poor administration on the program and government levels is directly connected to the constrained opportunities they experience during reintegration. As a result of these constrained opportunities that resulted from not receiving reintegration assistance as promised, ex-child soldiers described a state of stagnation wherein they admitted to "still waiting for my benefit" (M20). One participant described being "hopeful" (M20) about his reintegration outcomes prior to participating in vocational training. Majority of the ex-child soldier participants indicated that their reintegration experience consisted of a period of "waiting" for reintegration assistance they were previously promised including the reopening of disrupted reintegration programs, vocational skills training, and assistance in securing employment or starting a petty trade. Expressing anticipation for government assistance during this waiting period, one participant disclosed:

> I am waiting. The day the people from the government bring anything that is satisfying I will appreciate it. Anything like zinc and any building material or they offer me the right job, give me business I will appreciate it. I will need cash. Any amount that they will be willing to give me is fine. (F2)

Another participant described how constrained opportunities generally led to a period of "inactivity" during which ex-child soldiers remain idle and unemployed despite having some vocational skills. He stated:

> What we were told that after demobilization, rehabilitation, they were going to reintegrate us into society by giving us USD$350.00 which will help us to go back to our various homes and start life. Since then, two years have passed moving into the third phase of the DDR program, some other guys have benefited by getting a vocational profession and presently they are doing nothing, they are all scattered all around here doing nothing because nobody to provide them jobs. So if the promises that these guys made are not coming forth than there will be no need to do anything. (M2)

A male participant expressed his involvement with the job market and his community despite obtaining vocational skills training:

> I went to trade school. I learned agriculture but since we graduated from the ADA trade school that McIntosh own and operate we have not gotten our certificates, and I am still sitting doing nothing. We went to the 9th street office. We were 300 persons, and we told them our plight. They send us back to McIntosh and this time he told us to wait. Again and again, we have made frantic effort to get our certificates but to no avail. Since then we can't get job. Nobody employs you without a paper to show that you know the job. Up to this time I am still sitting down. When we told the people at the NCDDRR about our certificate they said that McIntosh is responsible to give us the certificates, we must go to him. We went to him and nothing was giving to us. (M4)

During this period of "inactivity" participants anticipate receiving some form of communication from either the DDR program or government that would end their long period of "waiting" One participant commented:

> They told us that when we start school they were going to provide bus, but we went to school learn the trade and never got any of these promises; up to now we are still listening to the radio to see whether there will be an announcement for the last Reintegration. I did plumbing at the LOIC. We were told that when we completed the training they were going to find job for us. Since then, nothing. If I did not sell used clothing for people I will not eat, just to avoid noise over x-combatants, I advised my colleague to remain calm. They never give any of these things that were promise at the cantonment sites. Nothing has been given, my friends and I are still confused and we are listening to them to say something. (M8)

Participants were also very forthright in expressing their thoughts on what needs to be done to end the period of "wait and inactivity," among ex-child soldiers and hopefully increase their ability to contribute to the labor market and overall society. On male participant commented:

> Well if the government and people in charge can do something for me not to sit down to help me that will be good. Something good like job. If the agriculture field is open, like how Nimba, Bong and Lofa counties have

been set aside for agriculture purpose that will be somewhere like that I want to work. I will need tools. (M4)

Similarly, a female participant commented:

> Right now I am not doing anything good just sitting and waiting. I would prefer those coming to help open training institutes for us to acquire skills that will make us useful. As for me, I'm ready to attend any program or work if I get a job. (F1)

Another participant indicated his desire to contribute to society through employment:

> My hope is that we just praying God that we will get company to come and that daily work, they will be able to bring it and we get money. To be good in society because we still good in society, we don't bother nobody…I believe that things will change, that is everywhere you will get changes, if that's five days, five months, change will come (M2).

Social Marginalization

> *We have not been reintegrated well. I'm not really fine. We were not treated well. Daily passerby insults us calling us names like rebels. Even though I'm in school, I'm paying my own fees. (M17)*

Another important structural theme that emerged is social marginalization. For the most part, participants in this study described feeling ostracized, disconnected and unsupported by community members who were unfriendly

toward them and members of their families. An important aspect of social marginalization is the lack of advocacy for ex-child soldiers to be recognized and accepted as community members, capable of contributing to society through the labor market following successful completion of previous phases of the DDR process. The importance of advocacy in social marginalization is captured in this participant's comment:

> We went through the war unhurt. Then the time came for disarmament. We were taken to VOA site and were promised a lot of things. We were sent to do all kinds of trainings. When we return to Monrovia, some of us main reason was to come and live with our brothers and sisters. But to our outmost surprise, attacks and insults started to rain on us. Everyone started to sideline us. The government didn't help in anyway. Realizing what kind of experiences we were facing, we regretted that we had to disarm. By disarming our respect were taken away. If we had our arm no one will dare do such thing to us. This brought back flashes of the war. (F7)

Participants who experienced less or no social marginalization appeared to have more connections with their community members that translated to employment and community acceptance. For instance one participant indicated some type of positive relationship with members in his community by stating:

I did plumbing at the LOIC, we were told that when we completed the training they were going to find job for us. Since then, nothing. If I did not sell used clothing for people I will not eat. (M8)

Chapter 6

Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the phenomenological study I have conducted and the conclusions of the study based on the results reported in the previous chapter. Also in this chapter, I provided discussions about the findings as it related to previous literature on child soldiers' reintegration experiences in Liberia and relative to the three theories (Erikson's theory of psychosocial development , Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory) discussed in chapters two and three respectively. I closed this chapter by identifying social work implications for practice, policy and research.

Summary of Study

In chapter one, I introduced the issue of child soldiers as a global problem, its prevalence and also briefly discussed the consequences of child soldiering. Since this study investigates the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers in Liberia, I included pertinent background information on the Liberian civil war and noted the reintegration of child soldiers as one of the three major challenges Liberia faces as a nation recovering from years of civil war. Next, I discussed the Disarmament. Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) process carried out in Liberia, including its goals, outcomes and popular criticisms. I also addressed child soldiering policies on the national and international levels. Woodward and Galvin (2009) proposed that ex-child soldiers' health and over-all wellbeing can

be promoted through five areas of intervention (geographic desegregation and relocation, education and employment, psychological counseling, societal acceptance and reintegration and security protection). I could not identify any studies in the literature that examine the experiences in Liberian ex-child soldiers reintegrating in post war Liberia. I explained that the primary purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Furthermore, the study explores how participants' hopes and expectations about their reintegration, contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration, perceptions of the extent of their reintegration and future expectations help shape their reintegration experiences within the context of Liberia. Moreover, I provided definitions of key terms used in this study. I closed chapter one by describing the significance of the study on the national and international levels and by also explaining how knowledge generated from this study may be useful in understanding ex-child soldiers reintegration within the context of Liberia, future interventions as well as developing interventions, policies and trainings for professionals working with this population.

In Chapter two, I provided a report of the literature reviewed for this study which was done in two-fold. I conducted an initial review of the literature and organized it around 5 broad themes: factors that influence child soldier recruitment, child soldiers' military experiences, consequences of child

soldiering, reintegration methods and Liberian ex-child soldiers living outside of Liberia. Although this study was based on secondary data and the literature review did not guide the interview guiding questions, I used the literature to examine previous works which were related to themes that emerged in the results. I also conducted a second review of the literature and again organized the additional information using the five broad themes identified earlier.

In the literature review section, information is presented about the factors that contribute to child soldiering, including living in poor or military conflict communities without families, the need for protection, peer and family pressure and the perception of children as cheap labors who can be easily manipulated. In reviewing child soldiers' military experiences, I provided information on the methods of recruitment, which often included extreme coercion, violence and fear tactics. Military groups would often murder the parents of ex-child soldiers with them as witnesses, and then force them to use drugs and alcohol, upon abduction. I noted that child soldiering is not limited to males alone but that female children are also victims. Furthermore, child soldiers' gender, military training, length of abduction and sexual or marital relationships with their rebel groups were key determinants and consequences of their overall war experiences. Developmentally, the consequences of child soldiering can be categorized into three areas: psychological, physical and social. I also identified child soldiers' needs and presented information on the mental health, educational, social and

economic needs child soldiers endure as a result of past military experiences. I explored reintegration programs and methods used to assist ex-child soldiers return to civilian status in post war Liberia.

Chapter three, provides information about theoretical perspectives which can assist in understanding the relationship between child soldiers' military experiences and their current, physical, psychological and social needs. Due to the complexity of child soldiering and its ensuing consequences, the theoretical framework for the present study is a combination of three theories: Erikson's psychosocial stages of development theory, Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory, and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory. I used these three theories to examine the themes that emerged in the results.

Chapter four discusses the methodological design of my study beginning with the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and explained why phenomenological methodology is suitable for this study. I explained measures I used to reduce bias and increase the trustworthiness of this study. I explained the data source, method used to recruit the sample, data collection methods and the actions I took to protect the confidentiality of study participants. I also described the actions I took to ensure the rigorousness of the data analysis and the data analysis model I used in this study. I concluded chapter four by discussing my role as a researcher and subsequently provided my personal biography. Lastly, I described my perspective, assumptions and reflexivity in order to bracket my

biases about the phenomenon being examined in this study. I closed chapter four by examining the ethical dilemmas and limitations of this study and included future plans of dissemination.

In the fifth chapter, I described how the data was analyzed using the revised version of Van-Kaam's phenomenology method of analysis presented by Moustakas (1994). Using this method, I bracketed my experience with the phenomenon of child soldiering and used the strategy of horizonalization to equalize the value and meaning of the data. Next, I condensed the data by identifying the most relevant statements corresponding with guiding research questions. I clustered and related the meaning units into non-overlapping themes and assigned a descriptive label. Through a deep reflection on the data analysis process and my overall research experience, I identified structural themes. I then used imaginative variation to construct a description of participants' reintegration experiences and developed a composite structural description along with concept maps, based on the composite textural-structural descriptions of all the participants. I also noted my reliance on triangulation of analysts to validate meaning units and themes (textural and structural) uncovered in the data analysis.

The secondary data used in this study derived from interviews of adult ex-child soldiers in Liberia who were recruited through the Monrovia Vocational Training Center (MVTC) in Paynesville, a city outside the capital city, Monrovia. I analyzed the verbatim transcripts of the interviews and my data analysis yielded

six textural and three structural themes. The "what" of the experience or the textural themes (Moustakas, 1994) that were uncovered in this study include: motivation for disarmament, *desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, dissatisfaction with reintegration, perceptions of reintegration, powerlessness and perception of future combat participation*. The following are the three structural themes that resulted from my data analysis and reflection: *poor administration at program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization.*

Outcomes

The outcomes of this study are the textural and structural themes which resulted from the data analysis process. In this section, I presented the findings for each theme as they relate to results from previous studies as well as theoretical perspectives identified in the literature review. I also provided concept maps to help illustrate the themes that emerged in participants' responses and also the relationships between concepts.

Motivation for Disarmament

Participants in this study attributed their decision to disarm to both internal and external motivators. All of the participants in this study reported that they were influenced by external motivators to disarm. The external motivators they identified included the international community, their peers and the reintegration assistance (counseling, money, vocational skills training, jobs, shelter through

resettlement, relocation or building materials) they were promised prior to disarmament. I could not pinpoint any scholarly research that investigated factors that motivated ex-child soldiers to disarm. However, one qualitative study found that ex-child soldiers' affiliation with military groups ended abruptly when they were found by United Nations troops and taken to disarmament, demobilization and reintegration camps (Denov & Maclure, 2007). Another study found that of 1,830 Ugandan ex-child soldiers, 82% reported that they escaped through their own initiative while the remaining 18% indicated that they were either released by their military commanders or rescued by members of an opposing armed group (Vindevogel et al., 2011).

Participants in this study said they were encouraged to disarm after DDR authorities promised reintegration assistance ranging from money to material goods with the intention of meeting their basic, educational, economic, mental health and housing needs. There are similarities between the reasons participants in this study provided for agreeing to disarm and the reasons other Liberian ex-combatants stated for joining military groups in a previous study. Pugel (2006) found that Liberian ex-combatants were motivated to fight because of economic incentives such as food, money jobs and non- economic reasons such as family protection and improving the situation in Liberia. The findings are noteworthy because there are similarities between the external motivators that influenced children to fight and the external motivators that influenced them to disarm

(Pugel, 2006). One reoccurring pattern that emerged between male and female participants' responses is that in addition to identifying external motivators that influenced their decisions to disarm, several male participants identified two internal motivators: desire to change and the desire to contribute to peace building in Liberia. Unlike the female ex-child soldier participants,the males seemed to have an internal drive to transform and contribute to the stability of the country in the process. Not surprisingly, unlike the males, female participants attributed their willingness to disarm and reintegrate to exhaustion having participated in combat for several years without receiving any major benefits in addition to the external motivators..

The literature indicates that children who become child soldiers tend to live in disenfranchised sections of society (Peters, 2005), may be coerced by desperate family members who receive money or material goods in exchange for their children's services, or may themselves view armed conflict involvement as potential source of income (Becker, 2005; Peters, 2005). For participants in this study, there is a life course motivational consistency beginning with the economic and security needs they experienced before being militarized and later, the post war or reintegration needs which participants in this study identified as community acceptance, education, employment, housing, counseling, and medical etc. Clearly, before the war, children perceived themselves as having more social constraints and thought they could empower themselves by joining the military.

Still, at the end of the civil war, participants continued to perceive themselves as socially constrained except that this time, they are adults who without education, employment, and support from the government and communities face the difficult task of meeting their basic needs. Without disarmament and reintegration assistance, ex-child soldiers will remain poverty stricken and vulnerable to re-recruitment which is the exact situation that most ex-child soldiers face prior to child soldier recruitment and militarization.

Table 1 Representation of the factors that motivated participants to disarm

	External Motivators	Internal Motivator
Male	1. Peers 2. Reintegration Assistance (money, education, housing etc.) 3. International Community	Desire to change Desire to contribute to peace building
Female	1. Peers 2. Reintegration Assistance (money, education, housing etc.) 3. International Community	Fatigue

Desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills

With 59% reporting an elementary education, 29% a junior high education and 12% a high school level education, it is evident that participants in this study experienced a loss of education. Past research showed that ex-child soldiers experience a loss of education and as a result, education is considered a crucial step in escaping poverty and marginalization (Denov, 2010). Historically, the primary goal of the reintegration process was to assist ex-fighters acquire civilian status and obtain sustainable employment and income; however, a more recent

definition of reintegration recognizes the social and political facets and thus, sees reintegration as a societal process which aims to assimilate ex-combatants and their families into civil society economically, politically and socially (Nilsson, 2005). Participants in this study expressed that prior to beginning the reintegration process they had high expectations and hoped that the DDR program would help them rebuild their lives through the knowledge and skills acquired from vocational skills training or formal education.

The participants in this study also articulated that the vocational skills training assisted them in re-purposing their combat skills. For instance, female soldiers who performed domestic chores like cooking, cleaning and raising children on behalf of adult military leaders (Mazurana & McKay, 2004) were likely to have developed some caregiving skills which could also be utilized in their roles as civilians and in vocational skills training or future job opportunities. Additionally, participants who were involved in combat also received the opportunity to repurpose their knowledge and skills about machinery, agriculture, wilderness survival and to how to lead, work as a team or follow instructions in an organization. The data revealed that after they had acquired vocational skills, all the participants hoped to secure employment, or at least start a petty trade. Drawing upon participants' responses, petty trade for the purpose of this study refers to any trade under the amount of $500.00 United States dollars or $ 38,000 Liberian dollars. This finding is similar to results of a previous research in which

Pugel (2006) reported that 90% of 590 ex-combatants interviewed in a study in Liberia believed that the vocational training they acquired through the DDR intervention programs would guarantee future economic sustainability.

Another important finding is that the participants also viewed vocational skills training as a conduit for reconnecting with families and communities. The findings in this study suggest that when combat skills are repurposed and used appropriately, ex-child soldiers are more likely to become positive contributors to the labor market and their communities. When this happens, community members will see the strives that ex-child soldiers are making and will likely be more accepting of them. This finding is similar to those reported by researchers who found that Liberian ex-combatants who were previously employed and now currently unemployed experienced difficulties gaining family and community acceptance (Hill et al.,2008). Past research showed that for ex-child soldiers in Mozambique, one of the most devastating legacies of child soldiering was the years of lost economic opportunity which often led to difficulties in accomplishing a major life cycle tasks of choosing a wife and building a family (Boothby & Halprin, 2005). Participants in this study reported loss of economic opportunities as a result of child soldiering; but their loss of economic opportunities do not seem to prevent them from choosing partners and building families since approximately 82 % of the respondents reported they were married and had 2 children on average. Although married with children, the participants

in this study experienced difficulties caring for their families as was evident in their inability to provide adequate and stable housing, basic needs and education for their children. Figure 6-1 illustrates participants' desire to rebuild their lives through knowledge and skills acquired from the DDR vocational skills training program.

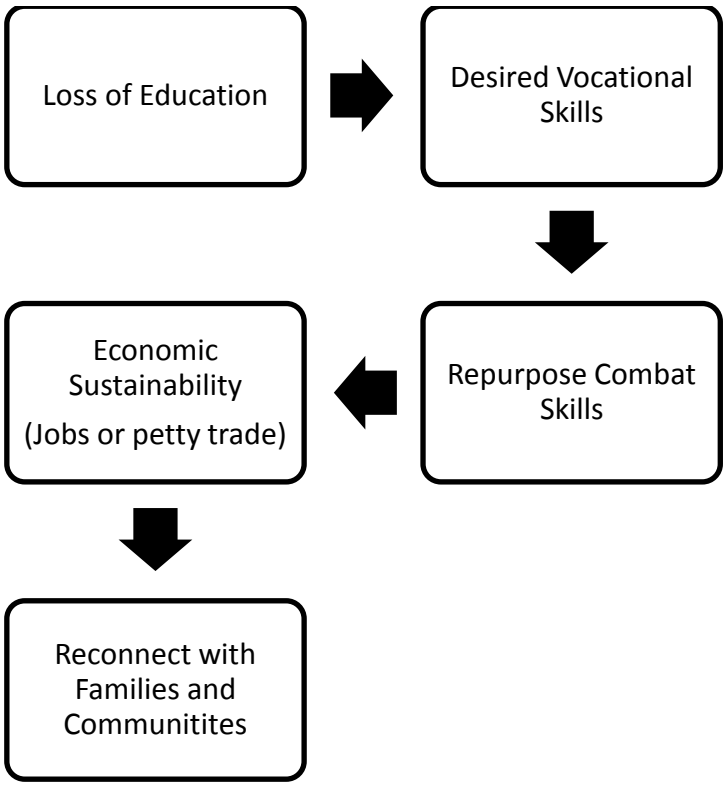

Figure 6-1 Representation of participants' desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, repurposing combat skills, economic sustainability, and reconnection with families and communities

Dissatisfaction with Reintegration

Majority of the participants in this study expressed dissatisfaction with their reintegration. Their dissatisfaction centered around two sub-themes: broken promises and obstacles. Several of the participants reported that they were dissatisfied with their reintegration because they did not receive the reintegration assistance they were promised. Research indicated that in Liberia, the primary methods used to reintegrate child soldiers included educational support, skills acquisition and family reunification (Awodola, 2012). A few of the participants in this study admitted that they initially received some of the reintegration benefits such as the first two stipends totaling approximately $300.00 United States dollars and some vocational skills training; however, they gradually became disappointed after the rest of the reintegration assistance (shelter, tools, stipend, counseling, medical care etc.) were unfulfilled.

Each one of the participants mentioned something about the DDR program irregularities in regards to what they were promised and what they actually received. Almost half of the participants in this study expressed that they spent 5 days on the DDR camps. This finding is similar to reports that the DDR process and ex-combatants' stay at the cantonment site was reduced to 5 days rather than the intended three weeks under the sponsorship of UNMIL (Paes, 2005). According to Paes (2005) the purpose of the cantonment site was to register, provide medical attention, human rights and peace training and career counseling

to ex-combatants. Of the 34 participants in this study, only 3 females mentioned that they received 5 days of counseling; however, they did not specify the type of counseling they received. Majority of the ex-child soldier participants in this study reported that they attended vocational skills training programs while a few of them reported being enrolled in formal academic schools. This finding is consistent with previous research which indicate that in a few other African countries during post-conflict periods, only a small number of ex-child soldiers return to formal school (Denov, 2010; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Stavrou, 2004).

Obstacles to reintegration also play key roles in participants' overall dissatisfaction with their reintegration. The obstacles to reintegration that participants believed contributed to their dissatisfaction with their reintegration are consistent with obstacles uncovered in a previous study in which Qiushi (2010) identified homelessness, lack of relationships with family, poor health conditions that require specialized medical services and abject poverty as major obstacles ex-child soldiers are challenged with during post armed conflict periods (Qiushi, 2010). Participants in this study identified unemployment, homelessness, lack of government support and sudden disruption in the vocational program and reintegration assistance as major obstacles that contributed to their overall dissatisfaction with their reintegration process. The participants felt that these factors kept them in poverty. Pugel (2006) found that Liberian ex-combatants are challenged by their economic situation (42% live on less than US$2/day) and 52%

reported physical separation from their home communities. To overcome their major obstacle of unemployment, some participants reported that they begged, performed odd jobs for community members and also engaged in petty trade on behalf of community members. This finding is comparable to few of the means of survival that ex-child soldiers reported in a previous anecdotal research: petty trading, agricultural labor and odd jobs (Denov, 2010). Additionally, Denov (2010) found that some participants also engaged in prostitution, petty crime, and drugs as means of surviving in post conflict Sierra Leone; however, no participant in this study disclosed engaging in illegal activities. Curiously enough, ex- child soldier participants did not mention their own involvement in criminal activities; nonetheless, almost all of them discussed their peers' involvement in criminal activities due to their dissatisfaction with the reintegration process.

Past research found that in the absence of treatment, former child soldiers cope with psychological trauma through alcohol and drug abuse, self-mutilation, attempted suicide and violence (Ligner, 2009). But in this study, only one female participant admitted to smoking marijuana and drinking alcohol to help her forget her past. Another study found that in Liberia, ex-combatants who were victims of sexual violence had worse mental health outcomes as compared to other ex-combatants or non-combatants who are not victims of sexual violence (Asher et al., 2008). Although participants in this study were not interviewed about their mental health, several of them disclosed that they constantly worried about their

economic situation, including their unemployment status, homelessness; whether they would receive the unfulfilled reintegration assistance they were promised at disarmament and how they will meet the needs of their families, particularly their children's educational needs.

Meanwhile, there was one negative case for the textural theme of dissatisfaction with reintegration. According to the participant in this negative case, he is satisfied with his reintegration because he acquired vocational skills which he used to secure employment in the absence of continued reintegration assistance. While majority of the participants reported being unemployed, the negative case participant was successfully employed with the national electrical company called Liberia Electrical Corporation (LEC) and was utilizing the acquired vocational skills he acquired during his enrollment in the DDR vocational training program. Even though only one participant in this study reported that he used his vocational skills in his employment, a previous study found that more than 50% of 590 ex-combatants in Liberia used vocational skills in the work they performed at the time of data collection while 65% reported that jobs were unavailable and when available, they were irregular and seasonal (Pugel, 2006). Similarly, majority of the areas in which participants acquired vocational skills can be considered seasonal and short term in nature. Participants who studied agriculture, plumbing and masonry complained about the contractual

nature of some of the jobs they had done in the past and how their work or ability to seek contracts were often complicated by the absence of tools.

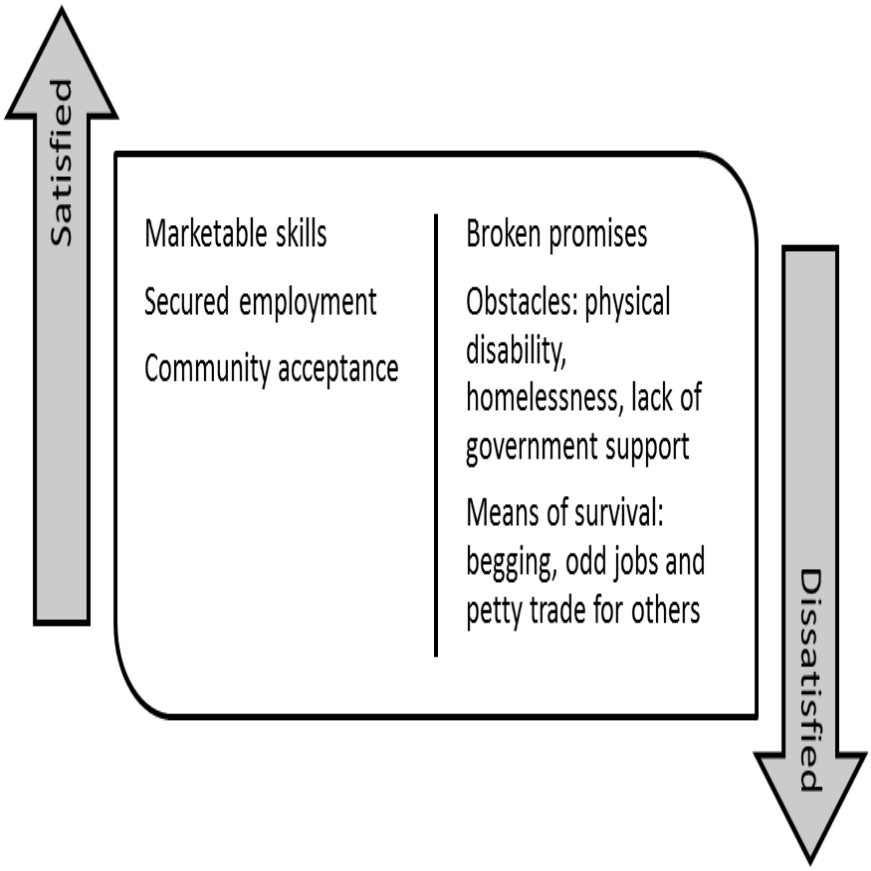

Figure 6-2 Dissatisfaction with Reintegration

Perceptions of Degree of Reintegration

After six years of reintegration and transitioning to civilian living, participants' perceptions about the degree to which they had been reintegrated in their communities fell in two major categories: no reintegration and partial reintegration. According to Ackerman, (2009) the main goal of the reintegration phase of the DDR program was to prepare combatants for sustainable social and

economic reintegration. Participants' perceptions of the extent of their reintegration were heavily influenced by their views of their economic sustainability. Approximately half of 34 participants voiced their conviction that they were not reintegrated due to the economic hardship, unemployment, homelessness and lack of community acceptance. The responses of participants in this study are consistent with a general finding that ex-child soldiers reconnect and are accepted by their communities when they do productive and valued work such as farming or attending school and also when they avoid talking about the past military experiences (Corbin, 2008). Even though all the participants in this study initiated their reintegration to society by enrolling in vocational skills training, majority of them remained unemployed and uneducated after the training ended.

Furthermore, participants who reported no reintegration identified disruptions in reintegration assistance as a major influence on their perception of the extent of their reintegration. This finding is supported by previous research which indicates education and employment as universal needs of ex-child soldier participants who expressed the desire to continue their interrupted education and become contributing members of society either through trade school or college training (Woodward & Galvin, 2009). Participants in this study also specified war related physical disabilities and limited medical care as additional contributors to their perception of not being reintegrated. The findings are similar to those

reported by a previous researcher who found that ex-child soldiers lived with the following after effects of child soldiering: feelings of guilt and shame, severe physical injuries and disabilities, loss of family and disturbing memories of war and violence (Denov, 2010). In this study, almost half of the participants (male and females) reported physical disabilities that resulted from bullet wounds (to the eyes, abdomen, legs and arms), several others mentioned the loss of family members while one female participant disclosed that she experienced flashbacks of her war experience during her reintegration.

Approximately the second half of the participants in this study considered themselves partially reintegrated due to the following reasons: a) having vocational skills but being unemployed; b) being unemployed but feeling safe in their communities; c) being unemployed but religious d) having vocational skills but no certificates or tools. Three of the four reasons participants listed for their perception of being partially reintegrated involved being unemployed. Participants' frustration over their unemployment status were similar to previous findings that suggest Liberian ex-combatants' frustration with employment was associated with the formal employment sector (Pugel,2006). Additionally, few participants articulated that despite their unemployment status, they felt safe in their communities as a result of community acceptance and thus, they considered themselves partially reintegrated.

The relationship I observed between participants' perception of the level of community acceptance and their perceptions of their extent of reintegration are consistent with observations made in a previous study that examined the protective factors that assisted the recovery of war traumatized ex-child soldiers in Sierra Leone (Betancourt, et al, 2010). Similar to the findings in this study, Bentancourt et al., (2010) found an association between improved community acceptance and improved confidence, prosocial attitudes and reduced depression and another association between school retention and greater prosocial attitudes. Given this context, participants who feel safe in their communities are more likely to be self-confident and interact positively with their communities and consequently, perceive themselves as partially reintegrated due to reciprocal relationships between them and their communities. This reciprocal relationship between ex-child soldiers and their environment can be further understood using Uri Bronfrenbrenner ecological system theory which emphasizes the role of social contexts in human development (Bronfrenbrenner, 1998).

An important concept of Bronfrenbrenner's theory is microsystem which refers to the individual's immediate setting that involves direct face to face interaction. For participants in this study, the community is considered a primary microsystem that influenced their perception of the extent of their reintegration. Meanwhile, it is important to note that the literature indicates that during combat, child soldiers are both victims and perpetrators of violence within their

communities (Bentacourt et. al., 2010; Klasen & Adam, 2007). After being physically abused, they witness shootings, ensuing casualties, and are even forced to kill others (Klasen & Adam, 2007) including family members and/or strangers (Bentacourt et. al., 2010). Unfortunately, these atrocities occurred within their communities and when their roles as soldiers are terminated, ex-child soldiers face the challenge of reestablishing relationships with community members who were witnesses or victims of the crimes they committed and thus, face the challenge of accepting them.

Developmental factors also played a major part in participants' extent of reintegration. According to Erickson (1963) adolescents are tasked with exploring social and occupational roles that will define their personas. However, the ex-combatants in this study experienced a major disruption in their adolescence stage when they were militarized and compelled to assume the roles of soldiers. Research indicates that at the end of their militarized roles, ex-child soldiers must then take on new roles as they transition from their child soldiers status back to civilian-a transition often accompanied by challenges due to the abrupt shift in relationships, behavioral patterns and expectations (Denov & Maclure, 2007). Therefore, in addition to the reasons participants provided for perceiving the extent of their reintegration as "no reintegration" and "partial reintegration," participants' extent of reintegration is also inundated by the difficulties of adjusting to their new role as ex-combatants.

Again, there was one negative case for the textural theme of perceptions of the degree of their reintegration. One male participant reported that he was fully reintegrated because he had successfully completed vocational skill training in electricity. According to this participant, he also received a certificate and tools upon graduation. Despite not receiving continuous reintegration assistance or job placement assistance, this participant assumed the responsibility for his job search and relied on self-initiation, faith, hard work and networking skills to secure employment with LEC shortly after his graduation. The characteristics of this participant is similar to six narrative themes revealed in the lived experiences and mechanisms that child soldiers used to overcome the effects of war trauma: (i) sense of agency; (ii) social intelligence, empathy, and affect regulation; (iii) shared experience, caregiving figures, and community connection; (iv) sense of future, hope, and growth; (v) connection to spirituality; and (vi) morality (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007). Unlike his peers in this study who indicated no or partial reintegration, the negative case participant disclosed that he experienced community acceptance from community members who he believed recognized a difference in him after he participated in the DDR process. Research indicated that Liberian ex-combatants who completed reintegration programs are more likely to perceive acceptance from their community at a higher rate (62%) as compared to non-participants (44%) (Pugel,2006). Based on the participants' responses, it is clear that to them reintegration means the process through which

they return to civilian living and meet their needs after they acquire education (vocational or formal education), secure employment (formal jobs or petty trade) , gain community acceptance and receive the reintegration assistance they were promised at disarmament. The following table illustrated the factors that contributed to participants' partial or no reintegration as compared to the one negative case participant who reported that he felt fully reintegrated.

Table 2 Participants perceptions of extent of reintegration

No/Partial		**Full Reintegration**
• vocational skills but economic hardship • unemployed, homeless • no community acceptance • ddisruption in assistance • Physical disabilities	• vocational skills but unemployed • vocational skills but no certificates or tools • unemployed but community acceptance • unemployed but religious	• vocational skills • Certificate and tools • Initiated job search • faith, hard work and networking • employed • community acceptance

Powerlessness

Participants in this study reported feeling powerless against the DDR program and the government of Liberia which are the authorities they believed are responsible for providing reintegration assistance. The ex-combatant participants

felt that they lacked access to reintegration resources that promoted economic mobility and thus, they were more disadvantaged as compared to their noncombatant peers in Liberia or ex-combatant peers in Sierra Leone. A few participants compared the reintegration assistance they received to the reintegration assistance they believed Sierra Leonean ex-child soldiers received. One female participant specifically mentioned that her Sierra Leonean ex-combatant peers received counseling for a few weeks and were then given the opportunity to attend vocational training for a year and a half. According to this participant, her Sierra Leonean peers' reintegration experiences were a far cry from the 5 day of counseling followed by the brief (3-6 months) and irregular vocational skills training she and other Liberian ex-combatants experienced..

Recognizing their lack of power, participants expressed that they yielded to higher powers such as God and the international community. As compared to their male counterparts, female participants reported that they relied on God while male participants reported that they yielded to both God and the international community. The responses of ex-child soldiers in this study are consistent with previous findings that ex-child soldiers' lack of resources resulted in dependency on international agencies or families in the absences of individual and community opportunities for economic sustainability (Corbin, 2008). Despite their powerlessness, participants enthusiastically expressed willingness to seek empowerment through government assistance that if made available in the future

could assist them in obtaining employment and/or starting a petty trade. Overall, there was equal representation for male and female participants who hoped to empower themselves using petty trade. An important pattern to note is that more male participants expressed their interest in using their vocational skills in some form of petty trade while most female participants talked about petty trade free from their vocational skills but in relation to the buying and selling of small goods in their respectivecommunities.

The findings also indicated that participants also hoped to empower themselves through networking with individuals in the local and international community. Participants seemed willing to build and maintain relationships with other individuals in their respective communities. At least two ex-child soldier participants mentioned using the internet and telephone as means of contacting and communicating with members of the international community who they viewed as potential sources of support during the reintegration process. Majority of the participants mentioned how through empowerment, they hoped to meet their needs and empower their children by providing them with education. Despite the extremely high level of adversity, exposure and limited power to improve their economic and social situation during reintegration, it is important to note that all of the participants in this study made some efforts and/or expressed willingness to receive assistance to help them overcome their post war needs. This finding is consistent with previous work that states child soldiers are survivors

who display bravery, strength and resilience (Veale & Stavrou, 2008 & Qiushi, 2010). Overall, participants exhibited resilience in their ability to survive despite not receiving all the reintegration assistance they expected and needed. In a quantitative study, Klasen et al.,2010) 26.6% of 330 Ugandan ex-child soldiers showed resilience in the aftermath of severe trauma exposure.

Perceptions of Future Combat Participation

The participants in this study were very open about their thoughts on whether they would fight in future armed conflicts as a result of their reintegration experiences. According to participants, majority of them have no desire to participate in future combat due to their commitment to maintain their civilian status, their maturity level and their focus on obtaining future goals. This finding is supported by a study which found that overall, two-thirds of 1,400 Liberian ex-combatants said they were unwilling to fight again, while the remaining one-third who were primarily females said they would fight again because of poverty and lack of economic opportunity (Hill et al.,2008). Although the participants in this study reported disinterest in fighting again, the literature suggests that Liberian ex-child soldiers are vulnerable to and have experienced attempts of military re-recruitment by mercenaries from Côte d'Ivoire (Woodward & Galvin, 2007). Participants also expressed concerns that other ex-combatants are more likely to return to combat due poverty and overall dissatisfaction with their reintegration. This finding is consistent with previous literature which reports that ex-

combatants live in abject poverty and as a result, may be tempted to accept recruitment money (Woodward & Galvin, 2007).

There were two negative cases related to the themes of perceptions of future combat participation. In the first negative case, one male participant admitted that he is willing to fight again in another political conflict because he feels hurt and dissatisfied with the reintegration process. In the second negative case, a female participant disclosed that although she does not want to return to combat because she has to care for her children, she would participate in future combat for the purposes of protecting and providing for her children. This finding is similar to previous research which found that Liberian female ex-combatants were more likely to fight again for material goods as compared to their male counterparts (Hill et al., 2008). Granted that the data for this study was collected 6 years post- civil war, only one of the 34 participants reported being employed, reintegrated and satisfied with his degree of reintegration. Equally important to note is that reintegration can be a life-long recovery process. One longitudinal study examined life outcomes of 39 former male child soldiers after 16 years of reintegration and found that majority of them became productive, capable and caring adults but nonetheless, they were not truly free from their pasts because they experienced psychological distress and relied solely on themselves, families and friends for comfort and support during times of psychological difficulties (Boothby, 2006).

The following two conceptual maps represent the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldier participants in this study. Figure 6-3 illustrates the reintegration experiences of participants as revealed through the six textural themes found in this study. The second conceptual map (Figure 6-4) illustrates how I conceptualized the components of full reintegration and overall reintegration experiences as identified by the negative case in this study and the relationships between concepts as the only male participant who reported full reintegration transitioned from soldier to civilian. Additionally, this conceptual model exemplifies the components that are necessary to achieve full reintegration which promotes the overall well-being of ex-combatants and essentially discourages them from returning to combat. I propose that these themes must exist for ex-child soldiers to not only reintegrate but to also break the cycle of war crimes among ex-combatants affiliated with military groups in Liberia and other neighboring west African countries.

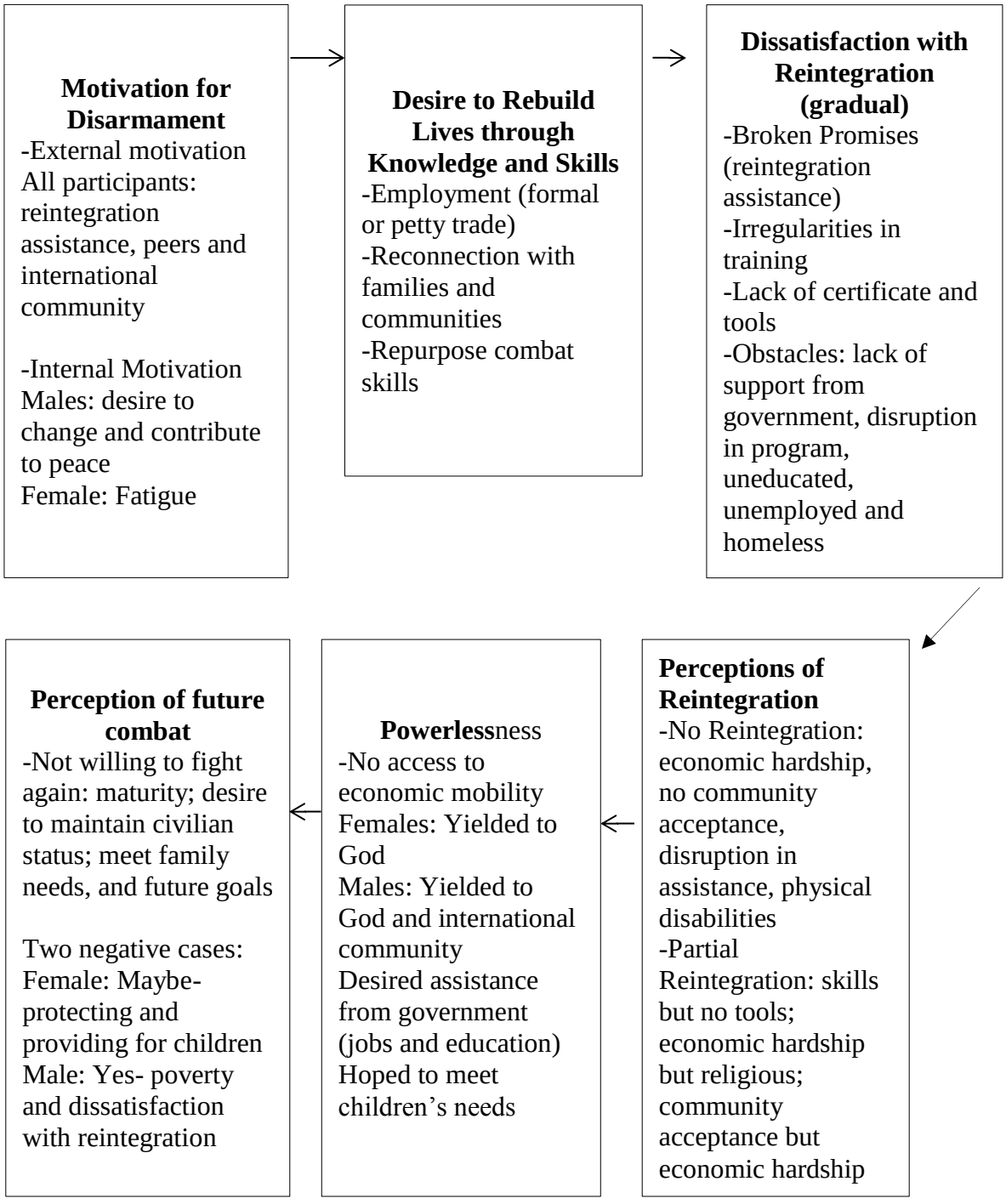

Figure 6-3 Participants' reintegration experience

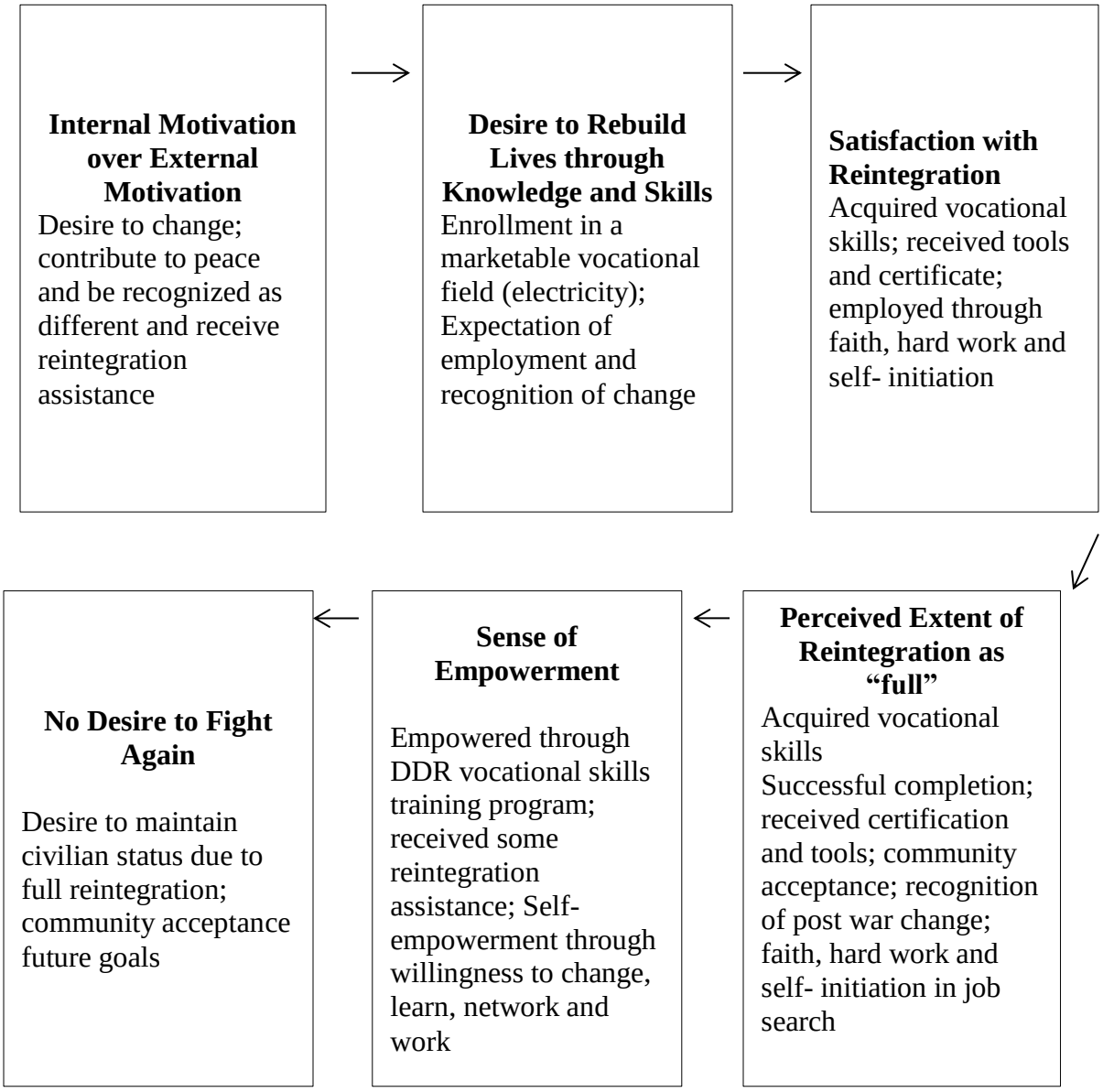

Figure 6-4 Conceptual map of full reintegration

Structural Themes

The structural themes that emerged from this study during my analysis and reflection include *poor administration at program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization*. Every participant in this study experienced poor administration at the DDR program and the government levels. At the program level, participants experienced program irregularities and disruption of reintegration assistance while enrolled in vocational skills training. Participants also expressed feeling abandoned by the Liberian government due to the lack of advocacy for ex-child soldiers' economic and social assimilation. This finding is similar to previous literature that argues that when it comes to reintegrating child soldiers, the primary challenge for the international community is overcoming the legacy of bad governance in Liberia (Paes, 2005). Other weaknesses of the DDR process identified in previous research that were also evident in the findings of this study include, the fact that reintegration opportunities were not provided in an adequate and timely manner and some discontinuity in funding (Paes, 2005). Together these weaknesses in the administration directly impact the quality and length of reintegration assistance that ex-child soldiers experienced in this study.

The structural theme of poor administration at the program and government levels can also be understood further using Bronfrenbrenner's Ecological systems theory. This theory provides a framework for understanding

how participants' reintegration experiences are influenced by their system, particularly the macrosystem which in this case is seen in the culture attitudes and ideologies of the DDR program and the government in terms of the quality and length of the reintegration assistance they made available to ex-child soldiers in Liberia. A good example of a conceptual model for understanding how the interactions between macro and micro factors contribute to child soldiering shows how three macro factors (politics, policy, and culture and beliefs) interact with each other and have gradual influences on three micro level factors (community, family and individual psychosocial factors) (Kimmel & Roby, 2007).

Ex-child soldier participants also experienced constrained opportunities during reintegration which were tied to unsuccessful completion of vocational skill training, lack of certification and tools, subsequent unemployment and lack of support from the government. An aspect of constrained opportunities that was noted by participants was an "indefinite waiting period" during which they anticipated the fulfillment of reintegration assistance previously promised. Research indicates that since April 2004, several thousand ex-combatants have been waiting for reintegration benefits (Paes, 2005). During this waiting period, ex-child soldiers rely on God, family members, humanitarian agencies, local and international communities; and it is this reliance Corbin, (2008) suggests "may lead to a breakdown of appropriate social responsibilities around self-sufficiency" (p. 322). This is consistent with the findings in this study because with the

exclusion of the participant who was employed, all of the other unemployed participants admitted that they relied on family members or engaged in petty trade on behalf of community members as a means of livelihood.

These findings can be explained further by Erickson's theory of psychosocial development. Generally, ex-child soldiers are militarized during stage five of Erickson's life cycle. Since they experience abnormal stress during armed conflicts, ex-child soldiers are not given the opportunity to experiment with various social roles (Erickson, 1968), which limit their identity to that of a "child soldier" even when the armed conflict has ended. Erickson (1968) posits that individuals' inability to master the tasks of identify versus role confusion stage impacts how they resolve tasks in subsequent stages. Participants in this study are currently in the intimacy versus isolation phases (early to late 20s) and generativity versus stagnation phase (20s to 50s); where they are tasked with developing close and committed relationships with others and also contributing to the world by being active in their homes and communities. Constrained opportunities negatively impact participants' current developmental stage in that overall, participants experienced a lack of productivity during this waiting period that characterizes their reintegration. Since nearly all of the participants in this study were unemployed, they felt that they were not contributing to their communities and as a result, they felt detached from their communities.

Research on female ex-child soldiers in Angola found that reintegration did not end after ex-child soldiers returned to their communities but rather, it also involved recovering or establishing a new identity, defining new guiding social values and establishing relationships based on kinship, socio-economic interests, and shared experiences and circumstances (Stravou, 2004).In terms of social marginalization, participants perceived themselves as disconnected from their communities both economically and socially. Participants felt that their unemployment and overall poverty situations created a divide between them and their communities. They considered this divide a major obstacle that prevented community members from recognizing and accepting ex-combatants as reformed community members. These observations are consistent with those of Veale and Stavrou (2007) in a study of ex-child soldiers in Uganda. Their findings suggest that while some child soldiers are accepted back in their communities, many others experience silencing and disenfranchisement (Stavrou, 2007).

Participants in this study expressed that they had some knowledge and skills they acquired from vocational skills training and added that they were willing to contribute to their communities if given the opportunity. However, in the midst of social marginalization, ex-child soldier participants are prevented from reconnecting with and contributing to their communities. This finding is similar to a previous study in which Stavrou (2007) through interviews with community members, found that social marginalization of ex-child soldiers could

be a loss to their communities given the observations of teachers that some ex-combatants were stronger, more confident, and had more leadership skills than youths who were not child soldiers. Social marginalization can further be understood using stage 6 of Erickson's psychosocial development theory (Erickson, 1968). During reintegration, participants in this study report having difficulty establishing lasting and meaningful relationships with members of their communities. Together the textural and structural themes uncovered in this study help to fully understand the phenomenon of reintegration that ex-child soldier participants experienced in Liberia. Figure 6-5 illustrates how together the textural and structural themes could be used to understand the lived experiences of ex-child soldiers' reintegrating in post war Liberia.

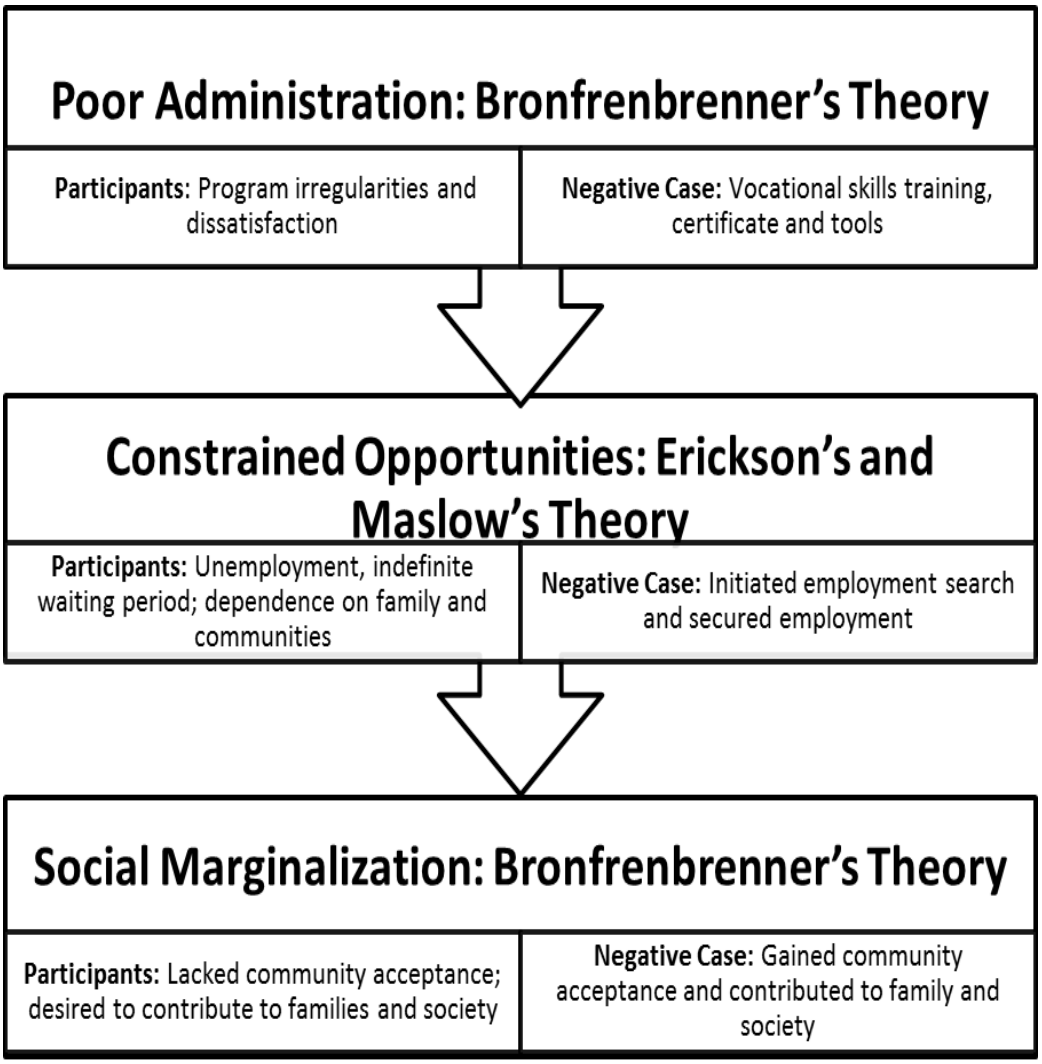

Figure 6-5 Participants' reintegration explained by textual and structural themes

Overall, participants in this study perceived themselves as not reintegration or partially reintegrated as a result of education loss, economic loss and social marginalization. Consequently, participants had difficulties meeting their basic needs including food, shelter, health care, education etc. The results of this study seem to resonate in several ways with Maslow's hierarchy of needs

theory (Maslow, 1951; 1971), Erickson's psychosocial development theory (Erickson, 1968) and Uri Bronfrenbrenner ecological system theory (Bronfrenbrenner, 1998) but do not explain these concepts relative to the design of the DDR program or its outcomes. Many of the findings of this study are similar to others who studied ex-child soldiers' reintegration experiences (Corbin, 2008; Veale & Stavrou 2007; Woodward & Galvin, 2009) and found that that ex-child soldiers lack the resources to meet their basic needs which makes it extremely difficult and almost impossible to reach full human potential (Walker & Early, 2010). Nevertheless, many aspects of child soldier reintegration are waiting to be explored in future studies. In an upcoming section, I explored several research implications.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding about the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near the capital city of Liberia. Through qualitative data analysis of secondary data, this study also explored participants' expectations, perceptions of the reintegration process as well as contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration that helped shaped their reintegration experience and their perceptions of future combat participation within the context of Liberia. Overall, responses from male ex-child soldier participants and those provided by female ex-child soldier participant were very similar.

One notable difference between male and female participants was their motivation for disarmament wherein only male participants expressed being influenced by internal motivators: desire to change and contribute to peace building in Liberia. Also in terms of powerlessness during reintegration, one difference between male and female participants is that female participants reported yielding to God while male participants identified the international community in addition to God. There was also some gender differences in regards to participants' perception of future combat participation. While majority of the participants expressed an unwillingness to fight again despite their dissatisfaction with their reintegration, one female participant said maybe she would fight again, citing safety and protection needs as her primary reasons. One male participant however specifically said he would fight again due to poverty and his dissatisfaction with the reintegration process.

The ex-child soldiers in this study were clear regarding their extent and meaning of reintegration. Many of their descriptions of their motivation for disarmament, desire to rebuild lives through knowledge and skills, dissatisfaction with reintegration, perceptions of reintegration, powerlessness and perceptions of future combat participation suggest that in the context of Liberia, reintegration is a process through which the DDR program and the government aims to assimilate ex-combatants and their families economically and socially. This is also similar to Nilsson's (2005) definition of reintegration as a societal process which aims to

assimilate ex-combatants and their families into civil society economically, politically and socially. With the exclusion of political assimilation, the shared meaning of reintegration that permeated in the reintegration experiences of the participants in this study include the following: that reintegration is a lengthy process through which ex-child soldiers are able to return to civilian living and meet their basic needs after they acquire education (vocational or formal), secure employment (formal jobs or petty trade) , gain community acceptance and receive the reintegration assistance they were promised at disarmament. It is important to note that participants shared meaning of reintegration stems from the reintegration obstacles they face such as unemployment, homelessness, lack of government support and sudden disruption in the vocational program and reintegration assistance.

I have concluded from the study results that participants believe that they have not successfully transitioned to their civilian status as ex-child soldiers. All of the participants in this study indicated that they did not receive adequate assistance from the DDR program or the Liberian government that ensured a smooth transition from soldiers to civilians. They noted that at the beginning of the DDR program, they received some financial and vocational training assistance at the beginning of the reintegration process but it was not consistent during reintegration. Participants proposed that the DDR program and government resume reintegration assistance in the forms of vocational skills training,

scholarships for their children, monetary assistance to start petty trade, employment assistance, relocation and resettlement assistance and advocacy for a smooth transition into their various communities.

I was motivated to conduct this study to learn how ex-child soldiers reintegrate into the Liberian society, what reintegration means to them and to also understand how the lessons learned from my study can contribute to the development of reintegration programs and/or improve existing ones. Drawing upon what I have learned from my readings and research, I believe that ex-child soldiers are victims of armed conflicts and also agree with Mapp (2008) that bio psychosocial interventions play an important role in the reintegration process. Based on the outcomes of this study, I believe that when implemented correctly, reintegration assistance has the potential to benefit ex-child soldiers. These benefits include vocational knowledge and skills, economic sustainability, connection and relationships with community members and contributions to overall society.

In the case of the ex-child soldier participants in this study, their reintegration experience was structurally characterized by poor administration at program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization. When combined with the textural themes, these structural themes help explain why majority of the participants in this study experienced dissatisfaction with the reintegration process and perceived themselves as either

not or partially reintegrated. However, despite the poor administration of the DDR program and subsequent limited reintegration assistance, the findings showed that ex-combatants can become successful when the following conditions are met: they are internally motivated to change and contribute to societal development; they successfully complete vocational skills training and receive certificates and tools. Drawing upon the experience of the only participant who reported full reintegration, the findings suggest that participants are likely to obtain full reintegration when they build connections with community members and perceive acceptance and recognition from community members who recognize their post war change and behaviors. The participant who reported full reintegration expressed that he believed his community members viewed him as a reformed individual due to his participation in the vocational skills training and subsequent contributions as an employee of LEC. Based on the outcomes of this study, there are several implications for the social work profession. I have categorized these implications based on their significance to social work practice, policy and research.

Implications

Social Work Practice

It is important to consider the outcomes of this study in the context of social work practice. Social work practitioners are encouraged to seek knowledge about the phenomena of child soldiering, the background of the Liberian civil war

and the subsequent efforts made to help reintegrate child soldiers. Social workers working with this population should learn about the cultures and the diversity of Liberian child soldiers and the communities with which they are trying to reconnect. Findings from a qualitative study among ex-combatants in Monrovia, Liberia emphasizes the significance of social context and suggests that reintegration programs incorporate pertinent information regarding conflict histories, socioeconomic conditions and local institutional capacity which impact ex-combatants (Jennings, 2007). Henceforth, when working with ex-child soldiers on the micro level, social workers should be mindful of western approaches which usually involves encouraging individual to recollect and talk about past trauma. Past studies of ex-child soldiers identified key contributors to psychological healing as avoidance of talking about trauma in Uganda (Corbin, 2008) and reliance on families, friends and themselves in Mozambique (Boothby, 2006).

Guided by the NASW code of ethics and the statement of principles provided by the International Federation of Social Workers, social workers are to conduct themselves professionally and with integrity. This means that social workers ought to treat clients with respect and without discrimination regardless of their backgrounds (culture, ethnicity, age, political beliefs, physical or mental disability etc.) which in the case of Liberian ex-child soldiers include past military experiences. Therefore, social workers working with ex-child soldiers should avoid pathologizing and labeling ex-child soldiers during their reintegration. For

instance, in past literature, several authors used the term "lost generation" to describe ex-child soldiers in Liberia (Kanneh, 1996; Kinkolenge, n.d; Paintin, 2007).But recently, Liberia's current president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf refuted this term and argued that ex-child soldiers be called the "opportunity generation" who are in need of education and vocational training in order to meet their developmental needs (Parley, 2013).

Recommended Terminology

Drawing upon the findings of this study, I too have joined the argument against the use of the term "lost generation" but rather than support the term "opportunity generation" I propose that the following terms be used to describe the generation (including ex-child soldiers) impacted by the Liberian civil war: The first term I propose is "Liberia's delayed generation" which will also be known as "Liberia's generation D."Liberia's delayed generation or Liberia's generation D describes individuals born in Liberia between 1979 and 2003. Liberia's generation D includes individuals whose childhood was interrupted as a result of the Liberian civil war which occurred between 1989-2003. During these years, generation D was exposed to various challenges with life- long effects including but not limited to malnourishment, lack of education and healthcare, separation from care-givers through displacement or death etc. These wars induced challenges which resulted in delays in their development and acquisition of human capital as compared to peers of their chronological age cohort. They

also compared poorly to those who lived in other countries where there were no disruptions due to civil wars.

The next term, “Liberia’s delayed generation X”, describes a subset of Liberia’s delayed generation with affects compounded by being combatants in the civil war and is therefore referred to as “Liberia's delayed generation X” or “generation DX”. This term describes individuals born in Liberia between 1979 and 2003 who were direct or indirect participants in armed conflicts in roles of child soldiers. Like Liberia’s generation D, Liberia's delayed generation X also experienced a delay in preparing themselves for the job market because they were unable to acquire adequate education, skills and experience due to the limited opportunities and challenges they experienced as child soldiers. Additionally, Liberia's delayed generation X also face major delays due to poor administration at the program and government levels, constrained opportunities and social marginalization they experienced during the reintegration process. In addition to the civil war and child soldiering, Liberia’s generation D and generation DX were further delayed by post war economic conditions which have led Liberia to be called one of the poorest countries in the world (Wodon, 2012) with an unemployment rate of 85% (Human Development Report, 2011).

Characteristics of Liberia's generation D include: illiteracy, semi literacy; graduating from high school at an older age; limited opportunities to pursue college education and limited job opportunities with an unemployment rate of

85% in Liberia. Similarly, Liberia's delayed generation X has the following characteristics: illiteracy, semi literacy; graduating from high school at an older age; limited opportunities to pursue college education; limited job opportunities with an unemployment rate of 85% in Liberia; stigmatization, social marginalization possible discrimination as a result of past combat history and vulnerability to being re-recruited for future armed activities. Although interrupted, all is not lost. Liberia's delayed generation D and generation DX are resilient groups who are willing to learn, work and give back to their communities. Figure 6-6 shows the evolution of the terms used to describe Liberian youths affected by the civil war including me

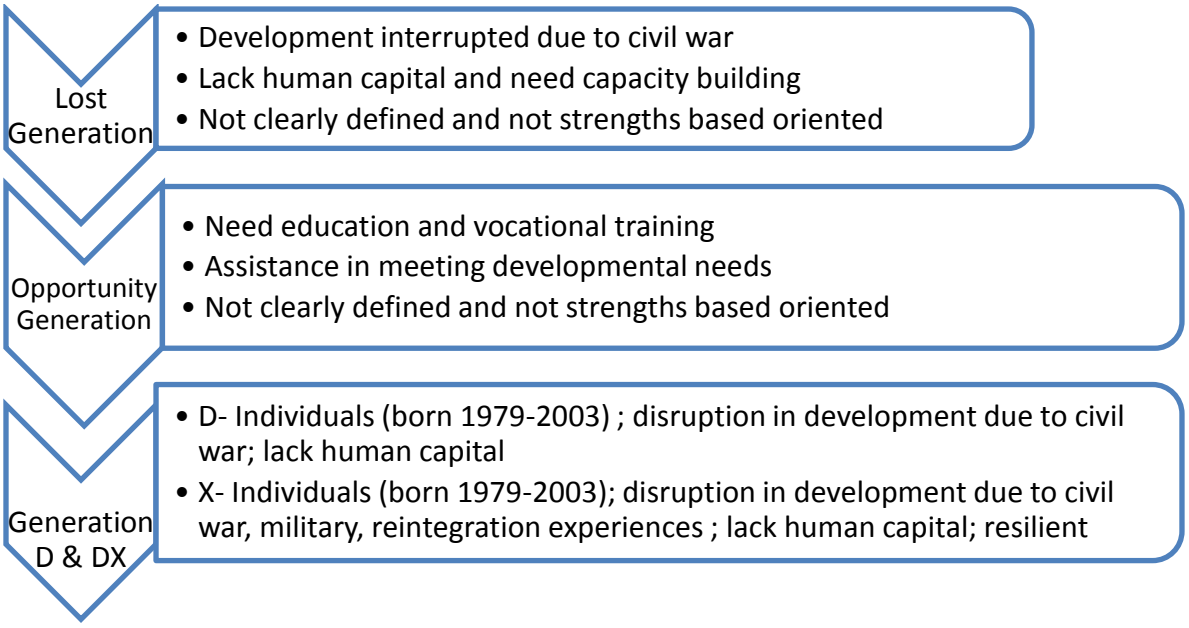

Figure 6-6 Descriptions of Liberian youths affected by civil war

I argue that if given the opportunity, Liberia's delayed generation D and generation DX will have the chance to play "catch up" to some extent. I recommend the use of evidence based interventions geared toward empowering these generations economically and socially, taking into account the current economic conditions and the roles the community plays in the development of these individuals. I also recommend that ex-child soldiers' spiritualty and religion be taken into account since many participants in this study reported yielding to a higher power in the midst of their powerlessness. Professionals working with members of these populations are encouraged to develop interventions that will assist individuals of both generation D and DX increase protective factors such as family and community support, positive interaction with others, opportunity to seek education and career opportunities and the desire to achieve and succeed.

When members of generation D and DX receive interventions and increase their protective factors, their overall well-being will improve and they will have a chance to contribute to their families, communities and country. At the point, I propose that President Sirleaf's term , "Opportunity generation or generation O" be used to describe members of generation D and DX who with appropriate interventions and protective factors, are exposed to more opportunities in terms of education, careers and contributions to society. Based on the definitions of the three proposed terms (generation D, DX and O), I will like to point out that I was a member of Liberia's delayed generation; however, unlike

many of my peers in my generation D cohort, I had some protective factors (resources to flee conflict areas, educated parents) that prevented me from being recruited as a child soldier. Although delayed by the war, I received some interventions (scholarships, support from family and community members) that enabled me to continue pursuing an education and exploring career future career goals when many of my peers could not. As a result, I am now educated and therefore, I am now a part of the Opportunity generation with a higher chance of contributing to my community and the development of Liberia through the social work profession. Similarly, I will argue that the negative case participant in this study was a member of generation DX since he was a child soldier during the civil war. However, he is now a part of the Opportunity generation since he expressed that he was fully reintegrated due to the interventions that he received through the DDR program where he learned electrical engineering knowledge and skills, received tools and a certificate, secured employment and is now a productive civilian. Figure 6-7 illustrates Liberia's generation DX as a subset of generation D.

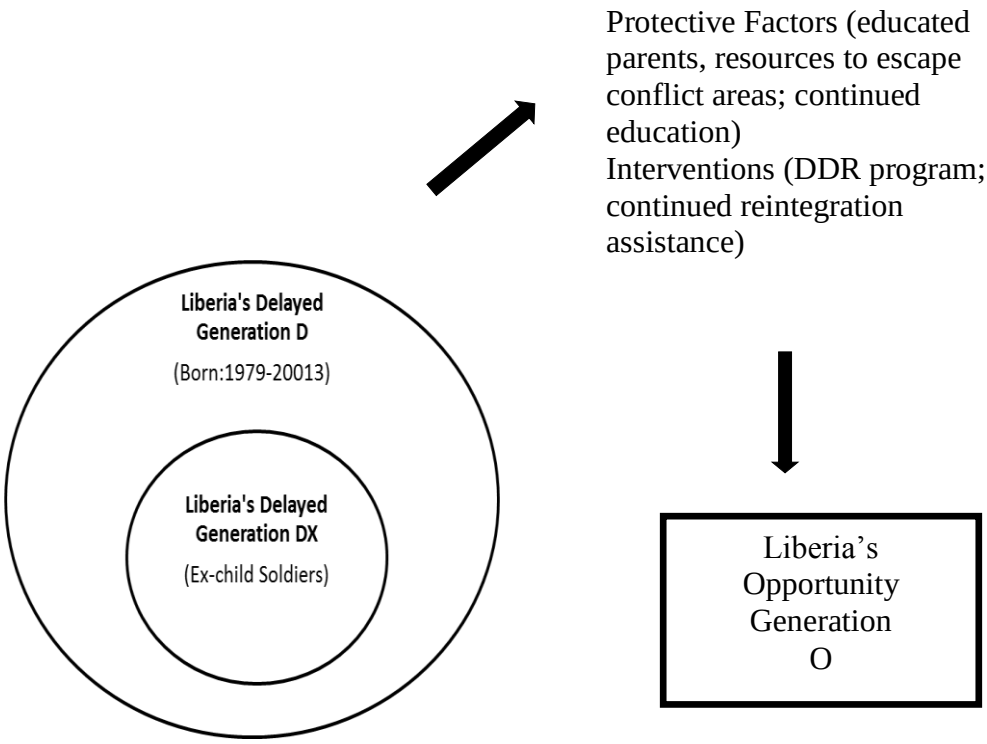

Figure 6-7 Liberia's Delayed Generation D X

Walsh (2006), suggest that social workers help ex-combatants identify strengths and resources within their social and cultural contexts. For instance, social workers could work with this population to identify those combat skills that could be repurposed and used positively in various areas of their reintegration including home life, interaction with community members and contribute to the society through formal employment or petty trade. Social workers can also assist ex-child soldiers through small groups, specifically mutual aid, psycho-educational, self- help and task groups. Social workers could use mutual groups to create a helping environment for ex-child soldiers who are struggling with reintegration , psycho-educational groups to provide knowledge to ex-child

soldiers about specific knowledge of the effects of armed conflicts and child soldiering that ex-child soldiers can use to avoid re-recruitment and or their children becoming child soldiers in future armed conflicts; self- help groups to help build social support among ex-child soldiers and perhaps a task group to assist ex-child soldiers accomplish tasks or advocate for reintegration needs.

Another practice implication is the need for community outreach for purposes of sensitizing and educating ex-child soldiers and their communities about the bio psychosocial effects of child soldiering on the individual and community levels. This community outreach approach will simultaneously facilitate and encourage ex-child soldiers to work hard during reintegration and promote efforts from community members to recognize and support the efforts ex-child soldiers make during reintegration. Using this community outreach approach, social workers will provide case management to ex-child soldiers and also serve as liaisons between ex-combatants and their communities with the goal of reducing the structural theme of social marginalization. Additionally, the literature emphasize the role that cultural practices play in re-establishing relationships between former child soldiers and their communities (Corbin, 2008; Denov, 2010; Honwana, 2006).Thus, I recommend that professionals educate themselves about the cultural practices of Liberian ex-child soldiers and incorporate them in reintegration interventions.

Social workers assisting this population are encouraged to use Erikson's theory of psychosocial development to help them understand child soldiers' development during adolescence and how military experience affects their identities, Uri Bronfrenbrenner's ecological theory to identify available resources and interventions within ex-child soldiers' micro and mezzo levels (family, peers, or community) as well as resources from macro systems (NGOs and government health agencies) and Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory to identify and understand the various needs adult ex-child soldiers experience while adjusting to civilian living. Not only do these findings have implications for social work practice in Liberia, but its implications are also relevant to social work practice and education in the West including the United States. Denov (2010) argues that social work curricula need to prepare social workers with appropriate knowledge skills and competencies needed to provide services to ex-child soldiers seeking asylum in western counties.

Policy Implications

In terms of policy, the findings of this study show a lack of policies that provided funding and action plans for additional reintegration assistance following the conclusion of the national DDR program. Therefore, there is an urgent need for policies geared toward providing reintegration assistance to ex-child soldiers as well as a structural basis for adequate implementation of reintegration programs. Such reintegration programs should be based on evidence

such as this study, which will help policy makers understand the reintegration experiences of ex-child soldiers in the context of post war Liberia. While there are several international and national policies that prevent child soldiering in Liberia (Achilihu, 2010; African Union, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2004), there are no policies in Liberia that empower ex-child soldiers to prevent them from being re-recruited, especially since Liberian ex-child soldiers remain vulnerable to being re-recruited for future armed conflicts as a result of the poverty they experience (Child Soldier International, 2008).

Consequently, funding needs to be allocated for additional reintegration services including but not limited to education (ex-child soldiers and their children), employment (formal or petty trade), housing, community outreach, medical and mental health that will allow for ex-child soldiers to have a smoother transition from soldier to civilian status. Policy makers also need to focus on policies that will ensure that ex-child soldiers and their families are safe from discrimination and physical abuse. Policies of this nature will reduce the fear that ex-child soldiers have of their families being be retaliated against (Qiushi, 2010). Taking into account Liberia's current economic conditions and the funding allocated for reintegration services, policy makers and practitioners are encouraged to develop and implement reintegration interventions goals that are realistic, can assist ex-child fighters acquire marketable employment skills and also create economic opportunities which would empower ex-combatants to meet

their basic needs. Since the original definition of reintegration include political assimilation and participants' experiences did not include political assimilation, perhaps DDR policies need to reflect participants meaning of reintegration at the program level and at the government level, policies need to reflect ex-child soldiers' rights as citizens of Liberia despite their military past.

Research Implications

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the reintegration experiences and meaning of reintegration as perceived by ex-child soldiers located in or near Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia. Furthermore, the study explores participants' hopes and expectations about their reintegration, contributing factors and obstacles to reintegration, perceptions of the extent of their reintegration and perceptions of future combat participation within the context of Liberia. No other studies of this nature have been identified in the literature. Hence, this study should be reciprocated with a group of ex-child soldiers outside of Monrovia for comparative purposes.

In addition to replicating this study with ex-child soldiers in other parts of Liberia, the study could also be replicated with a larger sample. Future studies could focus on how ex-child soldiers in rural parts of Liberia experience and perceive reintegration and how their meaning of reintegration influences their reintegration experience and vice versa. The findings of such a study will contribute to the knowledge base and increase the understanding of ex-child

soldiers' reintegration experiences within the cultural and environmental context of other parts of Liberia. Furthermore, this study will likely inform those seeking to do more objective measures or to survey programs for specific outcomes. Since participants' experiences and meaning of reintegration did not include political assimilation, there is need for some investigation as to how that was omitted from the DDR program in Liberia and how that impacted their overall experience. Furthermore, members of this population could also benefit from studies that would benefit from a comparison study of ex-child soldiers in Liberia and ex-child soldiers in other countries such as Sierra Leone and Northern Uganda. Such a study could provide a basis for comparing reintegration interventions and could provide some evidence and learning opportunity for the countries involved in the studies as well as countries that will be in need of reintegration interventions in the future.

The participants in this study described similar motivational factors that led to their decision to disarm and participate in the vocational skills training program. Future researchers replicating this study could include questions to explore other areas of education or vocational skills training which ex-child soldiers are interested in learning based on their strengths, available resources and current post war economy. A future study could focus on an in-depth case analysis of the male in the negative case in this study who reported full reintegration and satisfaction with reintegration. This type of future study could

explore those attributes and characteristics that differentiate him from the rest of the participants and its findings could be used to develop interventions that could teach or encourage these attributes and characteristics to other ex-child soldiers to facilitate their reintegration process.

Not only should future qualitative research be conducted on ex-child soldiers' reintegration but there is also a need for studies using mixed methodology. For instance, studies could utilize guiding questions based on or derived from the ones used in this study but also incorporate instruments to measure social indicators of how effectively ex-child soldiers are reintegrating and this include constructs related to stress, aggression, bio psychosocial adjustment and economic sustainability accounting for the current economic conditions of Liberia. A longitudinal study of ex-child soldiers in Liberia would provide invaluable information and help us understand the long term experiences of ex-child soldiers as they transition to civilian status. In addition to understanding what reintegration looks like on a long term basis, this study will provide evidence of the life outcomes of ex-child soldiers in Liberia. A study of this nature will also measure the effectiveness of helping efforts over a long period of time and the most efficient use of scarce community resources geared toward helping ex-child soldiers reintegrate. Building a knowledge base from this effort will inform and serve other ex-combatants in other parts of the world

Appendix A

Literature Review Table

Authors and year	Research Question Or Aim	Theory	Sample Size and sampling method	Age, nationality	Methodology	Findings
Veale & Stavrou 2007	Examined reintegration experiences of former Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) child abductees and perception of adults in those communities of reintegration	Relational Identity Theory	10 former Ugandan child soldiers Convenient Sampling through a psychosocial rehabilitation program	7 young men & 3 young women; Northern Uganda No economic status reported	Semi structure interviews; focus groups with family and community members Grounded Theory	Three major themes: Pre-abduction and the impact of abduction on families and communities Military experience included abduction, initiation, training, spiritualism, surviving and coping strategies -Experiences upon return and reintegration included welcome; rehabilitation centers; desire to fit in; coping strategies, fear of reabduction, feelings of loss of

						future, and inability to think of future
Denov 2010	Explored girls' and boys' life histories and recruitment into armed conflict, their experiences and coping strategies, as well as the long-term effects of participation in war.	Not reported	80 children formerly associated with Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front	40 boys & 40 girls (between 14 and 21 years old)	Two sets of in-depth audio-taped interviews with each participant	Whether as victims or as perpetrators children's involvement in armed conflicts had profound consequences: living with severe physical injuries and disabilities, loss of family, disturbing memories of war and violence, as well as feelings of guilt and shame and coping with rejection by their families and communities

Denov & Maclure 2007	Examined how participants became implicated as combatants in Sierra Leone's civil war, the manner and degree to which they assumed a militarized 'identity', and their subsequent efforts to re-adapt to civilian life in a context of post-war demilitarizatio n.	Erik Erikson's theory of human developm ent	2 former Sierra Leonean child soldiers	(1 boy & 1 girl)Late Teens; Sierra Leonean No economic status reported	Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews A life-history approach	Child soldiers experiences indicate vulnerable children are coerced into joining militarized social groups and as part of their aftermath experience, must struggle to discard their identities as combatants and strive to assume new noncombant roles and identities
Corbin, Joanne N. 2008	Study examined the subjective resettlement experiences	Bio ecologica l model	11 former child combatants and 11 adult community	6 males& 5 female former soldiers (between	Participants were recruited by word of mouth in the	overarching impact of ongoing armed conflict on

	of 'formerly abducted children		members in Northern Uganda	the ages of 14–25) Adult community members consisted of 9 males & 2 females (between the ages of 22–73) No economic status reported	camp with the aid of a Ugandan human service consultant. Audiotaped face-to-face interviews Grounded theory	returnees' lives, the important role of the family in supporting children's resettlement, the harassment of former child soldiers by community members, and the community's inability to support systematically the returning children in tangible ways.
Woodward & Galvin 2009	Examined reintegration experiences of former Liberian child soldiers to determine spatial and social barriers to successful resettlement and the	Kunz's kinetic model of displacement	10 Liberian former child soldiers	Nine males and one female between the ages of 23-37 years Liberian No	Convenient Sampling Individual interviews using a structured set of open- and closed-ended questions Qualitative	Five principal issues emerged from these interviews: Attention to geographic location; the need for education and employment; desire for psychological counseling;

	prospects for overcoming these obstacles. communities of reintegration			economic status reported	deconstructionist methodology	longing for societal acceptance and reintegration and issues of security and protection:
Pugel, 2006	To obtain a mid-point assessment of the impact of the DDRR program and measure reintegration and reconciliation	Not Reported	Randomized sample, of 590 adult former fighters	18 above Liberians	Individual interview using intake questionnaire (based upon Humphreys and Weinstein instrument for ex-combatants in Sierra Leone	Ex-combatants who registered with the national DDR program and completed a course of reintegration training have reintegrated more successfully than those ex-combatants who chose not to participate and reintegrate on their own.
Vindevogel, Coppens, Derluyn, De Schryver, Loots &	What are the experiences of child soldiers in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)	a socio-ecological approach	Secondary data socio-demographic information of 10785 former child soldiers	Less than 18 years old Northern Uganda	Secondary Data Analysis descriptive statistics,	Participants were held in captivity spent on average 1.5 years in capacity; (88% witnessed and

Broekaert, 2011	in northern Uganda				analysis of covariance and regression analysis	76% forcibly participated in atrocities; . Variations in exposure to warfare were associated with age of abduction, duration of captivity, location of captivity, being military trained, and being a rebel's wife.
Asher, Beadling, Johnson, Lawry, Panjabi, Raja, & Rosborough, 2008	To assess the prevalence and impact of war-related psychosocial trauma, including information on participation in the Liberian civil wars, exposure to sexual	Not reported	of 1666 adults aged 18 years or older, conducted during a 3-week period in May 2008 in Liberia	Liberian ex-combatants 10 years or older	Cross sectional study Data analysis using structured interviews and questionnaires	Former combatants in Liberia were not exclusively male. Ex- combatants (Males and females) who experienced sexual violence had worse mental health outcomes than noncombatants and other former combatants who

	violence, social functioning, and mental health.					did not experience exposure to sexual violence
Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, & Adam, 2010	Examines the effect of war and domestic violence on the mental health of child soldiers	Not reported	330 former Ugandan child soldiers (age: 11–17 years, female: 49%).	Ugandan child soldiers (age: 11–17 years, female: 49%).	regression analysis also by using a Poisson regression approach linear regression analysis.	All children had experienced at least 1 war-related event and 78% were additionally exposed to at least 1 incident of domestic violence. Prevalence of posttraumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder were 33%, and 36%, respectively. Behavioral and emotional problems above clinical cutoff were measured in 61%. No gender differences were

						found regarding mental health outcomes. War experience and domestic violence were significantly associated with all mental health outcomes.
(Betancourt, Borisova, Marie, & Williamson 2011	examine both risk and protective factors in psychosocial adjustment.	Resilience theory	N=309	Sierra Leonean ex-combatants between 10 and 18 years	Descriptive statistics and summary statistics for continuous measure were reported as mean and standard deviation; dichotomous measures were reported as percentages along with associated counts Multiple imputations	Ex-child soldiers who were rape victim had higher levels of anxiety; hostility ad also demonstrated greater confidence and pro-social attitudes at follow-up. In terms of potential protective resources, improved community acceptance was associated with reduced depression at

					Paired T tests Multiple Linear regression	follow-up and improved confidence and prosocial attitudes regardless of levels of violence exposure.
Betancourt, Borisova, Marie, & Williamson, 2011	To examine associations between war experiences, mental health, and gender		A total of 273 former child soldiers (29% females)			
Johnson, Asher, Kisielewski, & Lawry, 2012	To examine associations between Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration, previous head injury, and mental health symptoms among former combatants in Liberia	None reported	A cluster-sampled national survey of the adult household-based Liberian population N= 549 (113 former child combatants and 436 former adult	Adult Liberian ex-combatants	Secondary Analysis of cross sectional study data Logistic regression model	Former combatants with head injury are 2.83 times more likely to have major depressive disorder symptoms, and those with suspected traumatic brain injury are five times more likely to have post-traumatic stress

			combatants)			disorder
Blattman, & Annan 2010	Assesses the impact of combat on the human capital of Ugandan youth, the consequences for lifetime labor market performance, and lessons for the economic recovery of civil war–torn countries	None Reported	Random sample The 741 former combatants	Male ex-child soldiers	Pre and post test weighted least squares (WLS) regression Logistic Regression	Approximately 37% of former abductees report re-experiencing traumatic events through nightmares versus 25% of non-abducted youth. ; 16% of abductees report feeling ‘‘always sad’’ compared to 13% of their non-abducted peers
Bayer, Klasen & Adam, 2007	To investigate the association of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms and openness to reconciliation and feelings	None reported	Convenient Sample 169 ex-child soldiers	11-18 years at the time of data collection; 141 (83.4%) were	cross-sectional field study data was analyzed using Spearman ρ correlations and, if normally distributed,	On average child soldiers reported being violently recruited by 12.1 years of; had served a mean of 38 months, and were exposed to a high level of potentially

	of revenge in former Ugandan and Congolese child soldiers.				Pearson r correlation. Differences between subgroups were tested using Mann-Whitney U tests or t tests	traumatic events ; 92.9% reported witnessed shooting, 89.9% witnessed someone wounded, 84% were seriously beaten (84%) while 54.4% reported having killed someone, and 27.8% reported that they were forced to engage in sexual contact. Also, (34.9%) of the 169 interviewed had a PTSD symptom score higher than 35 and those with more PTSD symptoms had significantly less

						openness to reconciliation ($\rho = -0.34$, $P < .001$) and more feelings of revenge ($\rho = 0.29$, $P < .001$).
Vonhm Benda, 2010	To investigate the culture of violence among Liberian youths	None Reported	1,100 students from 14 junior and senior public and private schools	Junior and Senior high school aged children	Cross sectional study baseline survey in	Students in Liberia were more receptive to violent behavior than non-violent ways of life, they view warlords as role models and they lack the necessary skills to diagnose and/or resolve conflict peacefully
Hill, Taylor, & Temin 2008	To explore ex-combatants'' view on social and economic reintegration and the likelihood and	None reported	1,400 ex-combatants	Adult ex-combatants	Cross sectional study	13 % might consider fighting again in the future for some sort of material benefit 14 21 had difficulty being

	potential causes of ex-combatants' return to combat					accepted by family, whereas of respondents percent of unemployed respondents can conceive of fighting again, compared with only 10 percent of those who are employee 21% had difficulty being accepted by family, whereas of respondents
Gregory & Embrey 2009	To examine the effects of a companion recovery model design to reduce PTSD among ex-child soldiers	None reported	130 former child soldiers in Ganta, Liberia.	Male and female participants conscripted between 6 and 13 years	Pre post- test design	participants showed significant ($p \leq .001$) recovery from profound catastrophic trauma (PCT).
Lekskes, van Hooren, &	To test the effectiveness of two	Not Reported	154 Liberian women		Mixed Methods study;	Qualitative results suggests that the

de Beus, 2007	psychosocial interventions targeting female victims of war-related and sexual violence in Liberia		Liberian women who were victims of sexual violence during the war Qualitative interviews with directors and counselors of local and international NGOs		qualitative and quantitative methods Pretest post test General Linear Model (a method for statistical analysis)with repeated measures was used.	participants of both interventions were positive with regard to the help provided. Quantitative analyses revealed that counseling was effective in reducing trauma symptoms as compared to the support and skill training and to a waiting list control group

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Appendix B

Interview Guide

Background information Form

1. Age:
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Are you an ex-combatant? Yes or No
4. Did you participate in previous phases of the DDRR program? Yes or No
5. Did you complete those previous phases of the DDRR program? Yes or No
6. Education Level: elementary, junior High School, High School
7. Vocational School: yes or No If so which trade?
8. How many weeks have you been employed during the past six months?
9. Approximate monthly earnings?
10. Married: Yes/No
11. Children: Yes/No If yes how many?
12. Reintegration process
    a. What were your hopes/expectations about reintegration at the time of disarmament?
    b. What were you told would happen (goals, services to be offered, etc.)?
    c. What actually happened (services offered, received)?
13. Contributing factors
    a. What do you think will contribute to your not completing the final phase of the DDRR program (RR)?

b. What contributed to your completion of the previous phases (DD) of the DDRR program?

14. Results thus far
    a. To what extent do you think you have been reintegrated into society?
    b. What are your hopes/expectations about your future in Liberia?
15. Obstacles and future progress
    a. What obstacles to reintegration remain for you?
    b. What assistance do you think you need to overcome these obstacles?
    c. What do you think you need to do to address these obstacles?
16. Given the experience you had with the DDR process, what do you think you will do if given the chance to fight in another civil war?Why or why not?

Appendix B content goes on this page.

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Gracie Edhaglo Brownell attended St. Teresa's Convent High School in Monrovia Liberia. In 2002, she moved to the United States in pursuit of higher education. She received a Bachelor of Science in Psychology and Sociology from Shorter University in Rome, Georgia in May 2006. The following year, she worked as a residential counselor and therapeutic aide with St. Joseph's Children's home and Acute Child Psychiatry Services in Louisville, Kentucky. In 2007, she moved to Texas to attend graduate school and in May 2009, she graduated with a Masters in Social Work from Baylor University. She was accepted in the Ph.D. program at University of Texas Arlington School of Social Work but deferred her enrollment for a year. Following graduation, Gracie worked as a Licensed Master Social Worker and Intake Counselor at Methodist Children's Home. In August 2010, she entered the Ph.D. program at The University of Texas at Arlington.