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Child Soldier Scenario and Children's Protection Within Armed Conflicts: A Positivist's View

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Abstract

This study underscored a positivist's philosophical stand referring to the status of children as soldiers and children's protection within armed conflict situations from 2013 in Juba, Central Equatoria State, South Sudan utilizing both *quantitative and qualitative data* and *retrospective-prospective designs* as research strategies. The quantitative data on child soldier scenario and children's protection within the armed conflict zones from 362 respondents (20-39 years of age) who had lived in Juba for over 7 years were elicited using validated and tested for reliability researcher structured questionnaires with open and close-ended questions. Record sheets reflected qualitative data from incident reports. The collection of data was matched with follow-up interviews and document analysis. The study employed three sampling techniques namely: stratified sampling, purposive sampling and simple random sampling. The responses on child soldier scenario were in these aspects: under the age of 10 when forced to serve as soldiers; the children volunteered themselves because of societal pressure and were under the impression that volunteering will provide a form of income, food, or security; child soldier recruitment breaking several human rights laws; poor and displaced from their families child soldiers had limited access to education and girl child soldiers were used for fighting and other purposes and were vulnerable to sexual violence. While the data on children's protection conspicuously were in these concerns: accommodation, reintegration strategy, legal aspect, parental care and family life, health facilities and forced marriage. The findings implied peace and conflict resolutions by the relevant peace experts and security contingents.

Keywords: armed conflicts, children's protection, positivist's view

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1. Introduction

This study determined the extent of child soldier scenario and children's protection under armed conflicts with the assumption that the longer the armed conflicts exist the more time it takes for the children to be involved in the civil war and suffer the wrath of being deprived from being protected. The intention of this empirical investigation was to highlight evidence based data as springboards for recommendations that may assist to ease the existing social stress and invasion on children's rights. The prevailing situations very instrumental on why this study was embarked are reflected in the succeeding discussions.

The children within armed conflict zones are not exempted from the consequences and challenges as they have no escape but to be in the same scenario as their parents. When food supplies have run short, it is the children who have been hardest hit, since their growing bodies need steady supplies of essential nutrients. When water supplies have been contaminated, it is the children who have had the least resistance to the dangers of disease. The trauma of exposure to violence and brutal death has emotionally affected generations of young people for the rest of their lives (Save the Children, 2013).

2. Review of Related Literature

Within the context of two theories, this empirical investigation was based to explain the findings: the Conflict Theory (Karl Marx, 1818-1883) that emphasizes the "social, political, or material inequality of a social group" and usually draws "attention to power differentials, such as class conflict, and generally contrast historically dominant ideologies." In short, the conflict theory contests that "social divisions, inequalities and conflicts" are brought about by the societal economic and political structures. The Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975) as the second theory to which this study was based, posits that protection motivation stems from both the threat appraisal (perception on the intensity of the threat and the probability/vulnerability of its occurrence) and the coping appraisal (the desired prevention and intended result). The threat appraisal assesses the severity of the situation while the coping appraisal looks into the reactions/responses towards the situation.

2.1 Armed Conflicts from 2013 (Juba, Central South Equatoria, South Sudan)

Schindler (1979) expressed in his observations that "the existence of an armed conflict within the meaning of Article 2 common to the Geneva Conventions can always be assumed when parts of the armed forces of two states clash with each other." Gasser (1993) explains that "any use of armed force by one state against the territory of another, triggers the applicability of the Geneva Conventions between the two States." The bottom line in the context of these statements is conspicuously translated in real sense in the South Sudan civil war revealing scenarios of wounded soldiers and civilians, incidences of surrender, prisoners of war (Ashford et al., 2000) and warring enemies taking over a territory creating tension, fear, atrocities and violations of human rights and life insecurities.

War is evidently man-made that should be intervened by mankind himself. "Social stress" is a critical ingredient arising from rival parties' political, religious and

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ethnic tensions in "critical hotspots throughout the world" (Singh & Leffler, 2013). With the escalation of uncontrollable social stress, people become divided and even the officials of the land can fail to settle the country's crisis causing the rise of internal and external antagonists continuously nourishing the incidence of strong frictions between opposing poles. On the contrary, should the social stress is in its isolated form rather than in a collective manner, the loathing is either curtailed, minimized or reduced.

Reverberating in the South Sudan armed conflict are incidences of sexual violence on women, security and safety challenges, non availability of basic services, education and food, the influences of alcohol and drugs at night causing continuous fears, tensions and harassments on women, tribal conflicts and ethnic based hostilities, corruption, forced soldiering of children (young boys and girls) and displacements of civilians. The present conflict in South Sudan has actually slid off not only from ethnic based, government power superiority and intrastate struggle but has seriously aggravated into a deliberate bloodshed-genocide phenomenon.

2.2 Child Soldier Scenario and Children's Protection Within Armed Conflicts

Angola, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia for 30, 17, 11 and 7 years respectively became depressed areas due to prolonged civil war. In chronic events such as in armed conflicts, utilization of child soldiers (below 18 years old) is a threatening scenario. At the beginning, some children did not fight since they were made as drummer boys, foot soldiers or boys working in the ships hence their lives were not evidently at the brim of danger (Yende, 2016). On the other hand, more children were utilized as child soldiers for many reasons such as: (1) being pliant, less afraid of dying; vulnerable due to poverty; non-complaining; can readily be transformed into brutal combatants; can easily be trained to assemble and disassemble lightweight and high-powered armaments (Yende, 2016).

Wheeler narrated that many child soldiers had been deliberately recruited through persuasion, others abducted and some coerced into fighting to protect their families and communities (2015). Yende also affirms that the pressures on children to fight were in the forms of arrests, detention, picked from schools; being drugged and ruthless indoctrination such as witnessing or involvement in massacres and atrocities that marked emotional and psychological affectations (2016). The course of events and tactics related to child soldiers in Cambodia, Mozambique, Sudan and Sierra Leone portrayed exposing the children to terror and physical abuse even on their own relatives and friends. While in South Sudan, the Human Rights Watch, 2015, noted strongly that the child soldiers lived for months without food and witnessed their friends killed in battles. Some children were made outcasts in their villages and were forced to resort to be with the faction of the rebels.

Within the context of armed conflicts, the great challenge is how the children should be protected. Some of the measures taken and consequent challenges included the following: (1) Sudan signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) on January 23, 2015; (2) South Sudan joined the Global Partnership for Education in 2012. This country received a total of US$36.1 million grant from the Global Partnership for the period 2013 to 2016, but continued conflict remains a

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challenge for girls' education; (3) South Sudan signed an Action Plan (2009, 2012 and Recommitment Agreements for ending grave violations against children on June 24, 2013, but implementation remains a major challenge based on several factors including continued armed skirmishes; (4) more than 1000 boys and girls released by an armed group aligned with the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) in 2015 and benefiting from reintegration program; (5) the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and its partners continued Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) Program that benefited more than a thousand children; (6) ongoing monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children by the United Nations Country Taskforce; (7) more than 50,000 SPLA officers and non-commissioned officers benefitted from child protection awareness raising program; (8) the establishment of a Child Protection Unit within the SPLA General Headquarters and deployment of child protection focal point with the various divisions; (9) ongoing vaccination campaigns for children under five years of age; (10) promotion of girl education campaigns led by the government with direct support of UNICEF and its partners; and the (11) the establishment and endorsement of the Child Act 2008 by the Government of South Sudan.
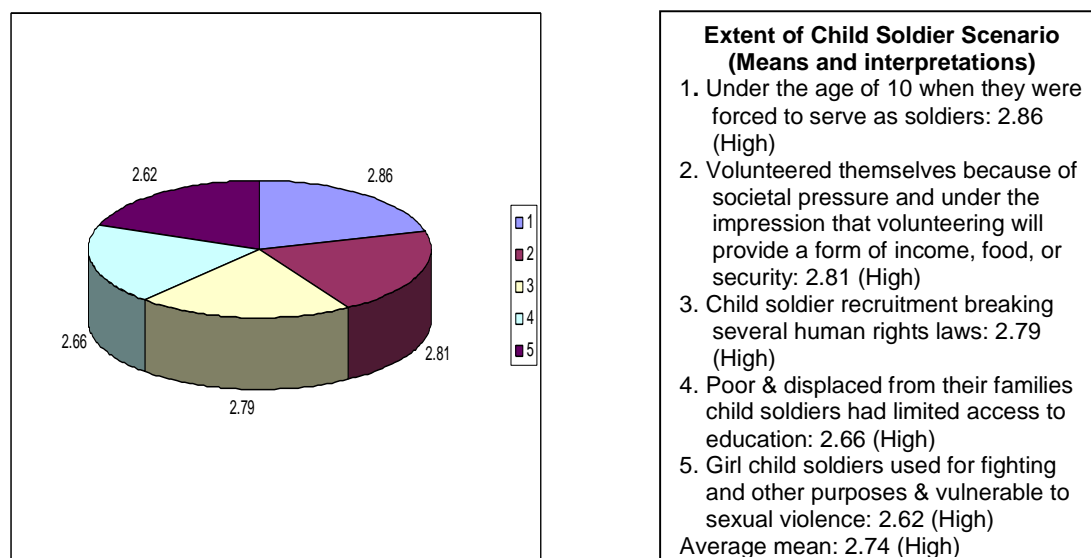
3. Methods and Techniques

Utilizing the mixed explanatory research strategy, past and present information (ex-post facto/retrospective-prospective) were elicited from 362 respondents who had lived in Juba for over 7 years and majority of them were 20-39 years of age. *Quantitative data* on children's protection were gathered through a researcher-structured questionnaire with open and close-ended questions that was initially and scientifically tested for these validity and reliability tests: construct validity=.743/good (Hutcheson & Sofroniou, 1999); Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient=.917/good (George & Mallery, 2003)**.** Record sheets were used to reflect *qualitative data* from incident and document analyses. Probability sampling techniques specifically stratified sampling and simple random sampling were employed to arrive at the qualified informants under an inclusive selection criteria (purposive sampling). Statistical data on the extent of child scenario and children's protection were calculated in means encapsulated in an item analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Extent of Child Soldier Scenario (Juba, Central South Equatoria, South Sudan, 2013)

Figure 1 conspicuously reflected the responses on the extent of child soldier scenario in Juba, South Sudan which was generally high. The findings revealed that, in the last 15 years, the use of child soldiers had spread to almost every region of the world and every armed conflict until the current conflict from 2013. The UN estimated about 9,000 child soldiers recruited (Conflicts in South Sudan, 2014). While an exact number was impossible to define, thousands of child soldiers were illegally serving in armed conflict around the world. Children who were not forced to be soldiers willingly joined the group for reasons of income, food and security.

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Biel (2003) anticipated that the war in Sudan will take a long time to re-establish its socio-economic, educational and health system. Therefore, the current tension in South Sudan involving child soldiers' destiny in life will mean serious international assistance and interventions. In view of the December 15, 2013 ethnic and political conflict in South Sudan, the country is facing food scarcity/crisis that may not be resolved unless the armed conflict ends (Oxfam International, 2014).

**Extent of Child Soldier Scenario
(Means and interpretations)**
1. Under the age of 10 when they were forced to serve as soldiers: 2.86 (High)
2. Volunteered themselves because of societal pressure and under the impression that volunteering will provide a form of income, food, or security: 2.81 (High)
3. Child soldier recruitment breaking several human rights laws: 2.79 (High)
4. Poor & displaced from their families child soldiers had limited access to education: 2.66 (High)
5. Girl child soldiers used for fighting and other purposes & vulnerable to sexual violence: 2.62 (High)
Average mean: 2.74 (High)

Figure 1: Child Soldier Scenario *(Juba, Central South Equatoria, South Sudan, 2013)*
Legend

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
2.51-3.25	Agree	High
1.76-2.50	Disagree	Low
1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

4.2 Extent of Child Protection (ECP) within the Armed Conflicts

The six constructs (reintegration strategy, accommodation, legal aspect, parental care and family life, health facilities, forced marriage) reflected in Figure 2 obviously portrayed overall high mean ratings on responses referring to the extent of children's protection within the war situation.

The items in the questionnaire that were negatively stated were reversed in terms of interpretation meaning that, the higher the means, the lower the extent of children's protection within the armed conflicts zones while those items positively stated, no reverse interpretation was done. In view of this angle, these observations were realized: high ratings for the items under the reintegration strategy construct, parental care and family life, health facilities and forced marriage implied low extent of children's protection while the constructs on accommodation and legal aspects underscored high extent of

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children's protection. However, the overall high means for the children's protection within the armed conflicts notably reflected a low extent.

Within the context of the aspects found to be contributory to the low extent of children's protection, international measures tried to reduce the hunger crisis/famine, peace and order issues, health challenges, shattered markets and trade networks, abuse and violence. The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) saved hundreds of lives; the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) moved to end the hostilities while generous funding of over 60% were from the United States, United Kingdom and the European Union (Oxfam International, 2014). The inevitable crisis in South Sudan will not stop not until the war is ceased. The affectation of the crisis on the children and the youth of the future of South Sudan cannot be underestimated. The following particulars with relevance to each construct are highlighted in means and interpretations.

Reintegration Strategy (Average: 3.06/High)
Disintegration of families and communities (mean=3.17/high)
Displacement of populations and the destruction of educational and health services, water and sanitation systems (mean=3.10/high)
Adequate rehabilitative care, such as the provision of artificial limbs for injured or permanently disabled children, should be ensured to facilitate the fullest possible social integration (mean=3.02/high)
Disruption of food supplies (mean=3.00/high)
Destruction of crops and agricultural infrastructures (mean=2.99/high)
Accommodation (Average: 2.96/High)
Vacant hospital beds in double rooms may not be used by parents (mean=3.12/high)
In acute care rooms, a sleeping surface was available, enabling two parents to stay with their child overnight (mean=3.08/high)
NGOs normally provided accommodation to all displaced persons (mean=2.95/high)
Each child must sleep in his or her own hospital bed or crib to allow nurses to reach him or her easily (mean=2.85/high)
In critical care units, one parent may stay overnight (mean=2.78/high)

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Legal Aspect (Average: 2.92/High)
There was a definite lawyer for every group of people (mean=3.13/high)
I have a lawyer to defend atrocities committed against me (mean=3.00/high)
I know what to say before my lawyer (mean=2.92/high)
The government provided legal defense for free to all (mean=2.86/high)
Ensuring that health and nutrition, psychosocial well-being and education are priority components of humanitarian assistance was the best way to ensure children's physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration (mean=2.68/high)

Parental Care and Family Life (Average: 2.88/High)
During fighting some parents neglect their children for their dear lives (mean=2.90/high)
Children normally take care of themselves during the war (mean=2.85/high)
Women do not have enough time to breastfeed their children (mean=2.80/high)
There are designated places where parents meet their children (mean=2.78/high)
Children do not meet their parents after the war (mean=2.68/high)

Health Facilities (Average: 2.87/High)
Special attention should be directed to primary health care and the care of children with chronic or acute conditions (mean=3.07/high)
During conflicts, governments and non-state entities should be encouraged to facilitate "days of tranquility" or "corridors of peace" to ensure continuity of basic child health measures and delivery of humanitarian relief (mean=2.85/high)
Child-focused health needs assessments involving local professionals, young people working in conflict situations and should take into account food, health and care factors and the coping strategies likely to be used by the affected population (mean=2.82/high)
Parties to a conflict should be obliged to maintain basic health systems, services and water supplies in communities should be speedily carried out by organizations (mean=2.79/high)
Parties in conflict should refrain from destroying food crops, water sources and agriculture infrastructures in order to minimize disruption of food supply and production capacities (mean=2.81/high).
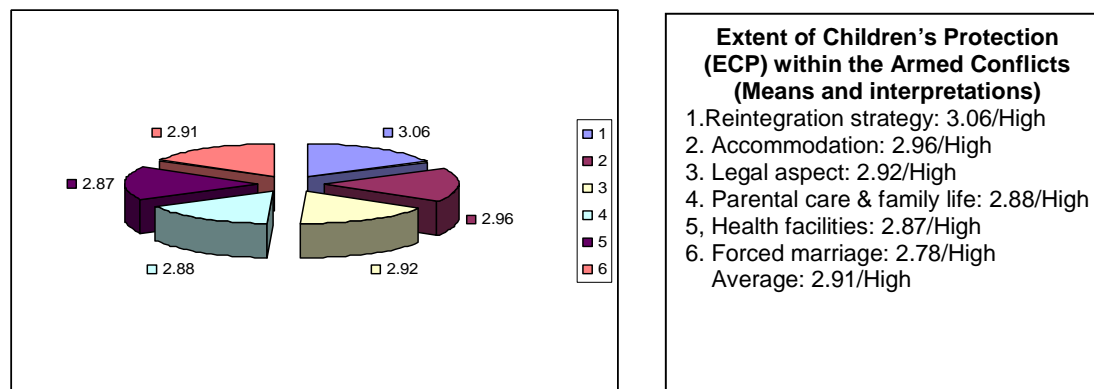
Forced marriage (Average: 2.78/High)
The fighters forcefully indulge into sex with whoever they meet (mean=3.04/high)
Life-threatening complications during pregnancy and childbirth (mean=2.77/high)
Strangled to death if one resisted to get married (mean=2.77/high)
Poverty and conflicts were the keys to forced married (mean=2.72/high)
There was no option but to marry any man (2.59/high)

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Extent of Children's Protection (ECP) within the Armed Conflicts (Means and interpretations)
1. Reintegration strategy: 3.06/High
2. Accommodation: 2.96/High
3. Legal aspect: 2.92/High
4. Parental care & family life: 2.88/High
5. Health facilities: 2.87/High
6. Forced marriage: 2.78/High
   Average: 2.91/High

Figure 2: The Extent of Child Protection Within Armed Conflicts *(Juba, Central South Equatoria, South Sudan, 2013)*

Legend for Reverse Interpretation (Negatively Stated Items)

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree	Very low
2.51-3.25	Agree	Low
1.76-2.50	Disagree	Very High
1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	High

Legend for Items with no Reverse Interpretation (Positively Stated Items)

Mean Range	Response Mode	Interpretation
3.26-4.00	Strongly Agree	Very High
2.51-3.25	Agree	High
1.76-2.50	Disagree	Low
1.00-1.75	Strongly Disagree	Very Low

4.3 Findings from Interview

The study respondents spelled out the following: the girls made up an estimated 10 to 30 percent of child soldiers used for fighting and other purposes. They were especially vulnerable to sexual violence. The recruitment of child soldiers broke several human rights laws. The children who had committed crimes as soldiers were looked upon more leniently; crimes committed voluntarily were subjected to justice under the international juvenile justice standards.

Interviewed local authorities stated that the root causes of internal conflicts among Southern Sudanese from the past governments to this present government of South Sudan were based on an unfair allocation of positions (question of power) and resources on geographical and ethnical basis. One single tribe had always maintained a dominant role over other tribes. South Sudan is a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society with more than sixty (60) ethnic groups. The rampant corruption and nepotism, which was the making of the so-called land grabbing, money laundering, denial of job opportunities and the selective promotion of SPLA officers and other security organs

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were based on this kind of setup where checks and balances were not relevant at all levels of the Government of South Sudan (GoSS)

5. Conclusions
5.1. Validated theories and Supposition/Assumption

The Conflict Theory of Karl Marx (1818-1883) is proven to be correct as revealed in the findings where this study was conducted. It states that human behaviour results from competing social groups. Different social groups have different powers yet they all are competing for the same limited resources. The low extent of child protection in South Sudan may continue to be challenging not unless the ethnic influenced arm conflicts be resolved. Therefore, the longer the armed conflicts persist the more the child soldiering and children's protection become perpetual challenges.

The Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975) contends that individuals protect themselves through threat appraisal (seriousness of the situation) and coping appraisal (response to the situation). The child soldier scenario and children's protection within the armed conflicts in South Sudan are evidently identified by the respondents as critically alarming and adapting to the inevitable challenges of reintegration, parental care and family life, health facilities and forced marriage imply a long standing painful endurance under the current civil war.

5.2. The Positivist's View

Based on objective observation, measurable or quantifiable approaches, the empirical evidences in this study adhere to the fact and truth that the current civil war in South Sudan has fostered the scenario where the children as early as 10 years old are either forced, trained or volunteered to be soldiers sacrificing their need for parental care and rights for education. Based on the findings, the children's protection during the tribal based war is generally low. If the challenges on high child soldier scenario and consequent low children's protection have to be aborted, the internal conflict has to end.

6. Recommendations

The recommendations that follow are underscored in view of the major findings:

Child soldier: The Government of South Sudan should ensure that accountability measures for child recruiters are established and implemented as a deterrent measure.

Reintegration strategy: A credible legal framework must be established in South Sudan. The capacity of judicial institutions and of law enforcement should be enhanced and their independence respected. Should the government prove unwilling or unable to pursue genuine accountability, a special or hybrid tribunal with international involvement should be considered.

Accommodation: The African Union Commission of Inquiry may compile information to assist in identifying perpetrators of human rights and humanitarian law violations and

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make recommendations on credible mechanisms to promote accountability, reconciliation, and healing.

Legal aspect: The government of South Sudan should create/adopt a Prevention Wing, a group of Invincible Defense Technology (IDT) experts. The size of the Prevention Wing would be in the hundreds, approximately the square root of 1% of the population of the country.

Parental care and family life: South Sudan's security apparatus, including the South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) and SPLA, must be reformed and restructured to ensure that they operate under constitutional order and in accordance with international best practice. Such reform efforts should include a vetting process that ensures these institutions are led and staffed by suitably qualified personnel and exclude alleged perpetrators of serious human rights and humanitarian law violations.

Health facilities: The South Sudan government may have to provide more health facilities. The post conflict South Sudan has huge challenges in delivering health care to the population. The challenges include: severely damaged health facilities, disabled public health mechanisms, insufficient qualified health practitioners.

Forced marriage: There is a need for civil education on the dangers of early and forced marriages of girl children based on customary practices in both urban and rural settings. The government of South Sudan should employ several approaches in ending early child marriages and this should include accountability measures to deter would be violators. A thorough revision and amendment of the South Sudan Child Act 2008 is suggested as well as for the government to establish monitoring and reporting mechanism of child early marriages and link the reports to the legal system for redress as a deterrent measure. Further, the government should work with traditional and religious heads to ensure that the code of conduct that prevent girls from early marriages are developed and signed as part of the appointment or selection processes for choosing a leader.

The following require high level government commitment and leadership and urgent attention: peace and security, basic nutritional needs, water and sanitation, education, shelter, employment, and gender empowerment of women and girls. The military of South Sudan has an opportunity to overcome the cycle of war by deploying a scientifically verified technology of defence that neutralizes social stress. This new technology is based on the unified field of all the laws of nature, the most fundamental and powerful level of nature's functioning. The technology accesses and enlivens this unified field through subjective technologies of consciousness, thereby creating a profound influence of coherence and harmony throughout society that results in measurable reductions of crime, terrorism and war.

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