Resilience and Coping Strategies of Liberian Former Girl Child Soldiers Living in Ghana

by

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ABSTRACT

Ghana is home to approximately1,400 Liberian refugees who survived one of Africa's most brutal civil wars (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015). Among these refugees are former child soldiers, who were coerced at a very early age into fighting for different factions in the war (Verhey, 2001). These individuals, often perceived as perpetrators without considering the circumstances of their involvement, wrestle with post-traumatic stress, social adjustment difficulties, and reconciliation challenges (Denov, 2010). While existing research has focused on the impact of war on child soldiers, little attention has been paid to the unique experiences of former girl child soldiers in post-conflict environments. The objectives of the study are threefold: to identify specific factors that contribute to former girl child soldiers' resiliency, to identify their specific coping strategies for everyday living, and to identify challenges former girl child soldiers face with regard to their reintegration into society. Using a qualitative research methodology, specifically focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005), the study used Ollenrenshaw and Creswell's (2002) narrative analysis to tell individual stories of the participants as well as following Roper and Shapira's (2000) thematic analysis framework using interviews, non-participant observations, and document analysis to explore and identify resilience and coping resources in 8 Liberian former girl child soldiers. Results indicate that challenges the participants experienced were twofold: the challenges during the conflict in Liberia and those they faced in the Bududuram camp in Ghana. Challenges in Liberia include forced recruitment processes by reluctantly joining groups for their own safety, being victimized for sexual purposes, and witnessing murders. Reintegration challenges in Ghana include psychosocial difficulties, lack of support for basic needs, language barriers, and adjustment difficulties.

Coping resources used by participants fall under three themes: social support, spiritual practices, and beliefs and individual resilience qualities and practices. Social support includes seeking and receiving support from church, neighbours, and pastors. Spiritual practices and beliefs encompass praying, fasting, upholding church rituals and practices, as well as belief in God. Individual qualities and practices incorporate work, self-reliance, positive mindset, and hope. Overall, the results have demonstrated the unique resilience and coping resources utilized by this population. Furthermore, the study demonstrated that this population is resilient in the face of adversity and survivors are not living lives overshadowed by trauma.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Olive Otubea Okraku. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board 1, Project Name "Resilience and Coping in Liberian Former Girl Child Soldiers," No. Pro00052727, December 9, 2014.

DEDICATION

To mama, for loving me, taking care of me, and setting me on the path that has made me who I am.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDC	Democratic Republic of Congo
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration
IDP	Internally Displaced Peoples
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PLC	Progressive Life Center
UN	United Nations
UNCHR	United Nations Commission for Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

> There have been many, many visitors who have come to this camp and many people who have come to visit us, but nobody has ever come to us with such a program that is specially aimed primarily for the former child soldiers (Child soldier, personal communication, February 20, 2008).

In 2006, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF] provided a bleak account of the state of the world's children. Over 2 million children had been killed in conflicts. About 6 million were injured and disabled, and 10 million children had been psychologically traumatized. A further 20 million children had been forced out of their homes (UNICEF, 2006). In 2016, UNICEF in its state of the world's children reported that over 167 million children will live in extreme poverty, 69 million children under the age of 5 will die between 2016 and 2030, and 60 million children of primary school age will be out of school.

In 2015, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR] global report stated that an unprecedented 65.3 million people around the world have been forced from their home. Among them are nearly 21.3 million refugees, over half of whom are under the age of 18. There are also 3.2 million asylum seekers, 10 million stateless people, and nearly 34,000 people who are forcibly displaced every day as a result of conflict or persecution and human rights violations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2015).

Recent reports from UNICEF highlights the involvement of children in armed conflicts around the world: At least 279 children have been killed and 402 injured since the escalation of violence in Yemen, which began in 2015, compared with 74 and 244, respectively, that were reported in the previous year. The number of child soldiers recruited has already doubled from 156 to 318 (UNICEF, 2015). More than 1,300 children have been recruited into armed groups in South Sudan since the beginning of 2016 with an estimated 16,000 children since the crisis began in December 2013, proving more than 17,000 the total number of children used in the

conflict since 2013 (UNICEF, 2016). The Cobra Faction alone in South Sudan has advised UNICEF that they have up to 3,000 child soldiers in their armed group with some as young as 9 years old. In Colombia, more than 250,000 children have been affected by the conflict since 2013, despite peace talks. An estimated 1,000 children were used or recruited by non-state armed groups during the same period; over 230,000 children were displaced, 75 killed, and 180 injured, and at least 180 children were victims of sexual violence (UNICEF, 2016).

UNICEF called for the release of all children forcedly recruited into armed forces and groups in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), especially of young girls, where they are forced to be combatants, labourers, and sex slaves, who are suffering from violence and rape for months and sometimes years. Young girls are rarely released by armed forces and groups. In 2016, UNICEF and partners secured the release of over 2,800 children in the Central African Republic, including 646 girls, from armed groups (UNICEF, 2016). UNICEF continues to co-ordinate and secure releases for thousands of children trapped in armed conflict.

However, children have not only found themselves the passive victims of conflict, but they also experience the horror of active participation in warfare. This perpetration of violence by children is a disturbing notion that many researchers in the field have been reluctant to acknowledge (Mendelsohn & Straker, 1998). Unfortunately, children have been used in military campaigns throughout history, even though such practice has usually contravened cultural morality. As former UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Otunnu (2001) explained, children are mostly innocent; they are the future of any nation so exploitation, abuse, and use of children in conflict leads to destruction of such nations. Although there are no exact figures, and numbers continually change, tens of thousands of children under the age of 18 continue to serve in armed groups. It is estimated that there are currently 400,000 child soldiers

across the globe, embroiled in civil wars (Child Soldiers International, 2012). The problem is global, as well as longstanding. Between 1998 and 2001, child soldiers were deployed in at least 87 countries worldwide (McKay & Mazurana, 2004). Children continue to be recruited and used by armed groups and forces despite widespread political commitment to end the practice (UNICEF, 2016).

Definition of a Child Soldier

As noted in *The Paris Principles* (UNICEF, 2007b), a child soldier is defined as a:

> child associated with an armed force or armed group below 18 years of age, who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities. (p. 7)

These principles define a child as "any person less than 18 years of age" (UNICEF, 2007b, p. 7). Different studies have used various names to describe children who were used as soldiers in armed conflicts. These include former child soldiers (Atkinson 1998; Kohrt et al., 2008), ex-combatants (Bryant-Davis, Cooper, Marks, Smith, & Tillman, 2011), ex-soldiers (Gates, 2002), and bush wives, (Coulter, 2009). I am using the term *former girl child soldiers* because they are no longer child soldiers and at the time of their involvement, they were not yet adults.

Child soldiers have been used extensively in African civil wars (Machel, 1996). Africa is estimated to have more than 120,000 such children (Twum-Danso, 2003) representing 40% of the worldwide total. Africa has the highest growth rate in the use of children in conflict, and on average, the age of those enlisted is also decreasing (UNICEF, 2005). Over the past decade, children have been forced and used in many countries in Africa such as Burundi, DRC), Central African Republic (CAR), Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Uganda, Cote d' Ivoire and many more (UNICEF, 2016). Furthermore, the figures in Africa include children as young as 7 and 8 years

old (UNICEF, 2015). In addition, children in Africa have been used as human shields, and they have been subjected to forced marriages and sexual slavery (Denov, 2006). Although critical enough, the problem goes beyond the lives of those involved in conflict. The issue of warfare that can employ a nation's youth has implications for all of Africa (Otunnu, 2001). In this study, I am concerned with former girl child soldiers from Liberia, a nation that was ravaged by civil war in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s.

During conflict or post-war programming, girls are, for the most part, rendered invisible and marginalized, and the roles that they play during war and post war are frequently seen as insignificant (Brooks, 2012). This is reflected in their families, communities, and even with formal Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) processes, which I explain further in Chapter 2. Despite this profound marginalization, it is clear that girls' contributions are integral and critical to the overall functioning of armed groups, and it is no accident that girls tend to be the last members of armed groups to be released by commanders and leaders (Denov, 2006). Liberia is one of such example and therefore a study of former girl child soldiers from this country would provide insight into this population.

In this study, I examine resilience and coping strategies of Liberian former girl child soldiers who are living in Ghana as they integrate into the society. From the readings (Andvig & Gates, 2009; Boothby, 2006; Brooks, 2012; Denov, 2006, 2008; Klasen, Oettingen, Daniels, & Adam, 2010; Somasundaram, 2002), there seems to be extensive work and emphasis almost exclusively on wartime trauma and its general impact on children. The literature generally implies that children have limited coping abilities and are victims of their circumstances. As such, there seems to be an underestimating of children's abilities to cope with distress and recover enough to function in socially expected roles. In fact, leading authors in the field of

resilience suggest that children and youth may have the capacity to adapt and function reasonably well despite exposure to adversity (Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990). The assumption behind this research is that some formerly recruited children and youth have successfully exhibited resilience as they live as refugees in Ghana. Therefore, this study, sought to understand the challenges as well as coping strategies that influence resilience of former girl child soldiers.

West Africa Migration Trends

West Africa encompasses countries of immigration and emigration as well as those that combine both for different purposes (Adepoju, 2003). The West African subregion has also seen its fair share of conflicts, and this has also had a damaging effect on the people and children of these conflict zones (see Figures 1 and 2). Approximately 168,000 refugees mainly from Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Mauritania, Senegal, and Sierra Leone are dispersed in both urban and rural areas in several West African countries (UNHCR, 2015). As of June 2013, approximately 83,000 voluntary returns had been recorded. Of the returnees 17,000 were Liberians, Ivoirians, and Mauritanians (UNHCR, 2013).

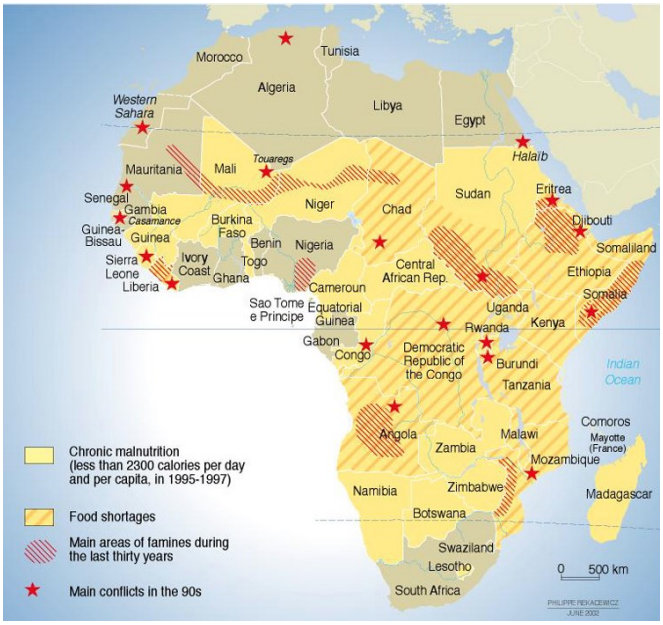

Figure 1. Africa continent and areas of conflict.

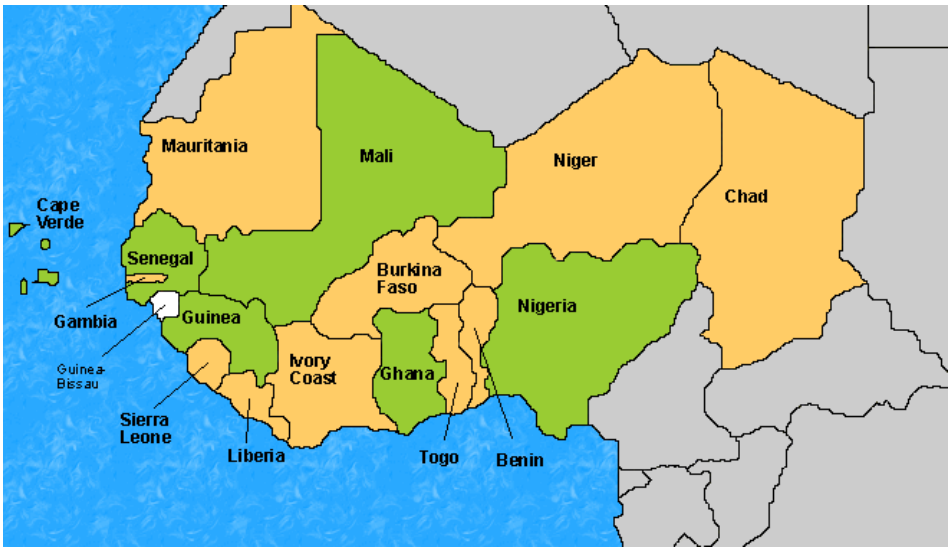

Figure 2. West African subregion.
From "Global trends: Refugees, asylum-seekers, returnees, internally displaced and stateless persons, by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2013 (http:// unhcr.org/4fd9e6266 .html). Copyright 2013 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

The use and impact of conflict on children has been underemphasized. In the Ivory Coast, for instance, it is believed that the liberation forces recruited more than 9,000 children from refugee camps, some of them as young as 8 years old (UNICEF, 2005). In West Africa, the UNICEF's (2005) *State of the World's Children* report identified three main regions where conflict had adversely impacted children: the Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

It is estimated that 250,000 men, women, and children lost their lives, and approximately 1.3 million people sought refuge in neighbouring countries as a result of the atrocious acts of violence committed during the Liberian conflict that ended in 2003 (United Nations Commission on Human Rights, [UNCHR], 2003). Over the course of 15 years of conflict, between 15,000 and 20,000 children were involved in the hostilities. Of that number, about 10,000 of these children were used as combatants, some as young as 6 years old (UNCHR, 2003). According to data collected during the disarmament and demobilization of 1996 and 1997, 18% of combatants of the National Patriotic Liberation Front, one of the factions in the war, were children (UNCHR,

2003). Of those aged 17 and below, the majority (69%) were 15 to 17 years old and had served an average of 4 years; 27% of the remaining fighters under 17 were between the ages of 12 and 14 years old.

Indeed, the West African subregion continues to be rocked by the repercussions of war (Ellis, 1995). The resulting displacement of people has led to Liberian refugees in Ghana.

Ghana Refugee Migration Trends

Ghana has acted as both a destination and an origin of forced migration (Adepoju, 2003). The UNHCR (1951) defines a refugee as

> Someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. (p. 16)

Not only has Ghana produced forced migrants, but also it has received them. Ghana is one of several regional countries of asylum for those fleeing civil wars in Liberia (since 1989), Sierra Leone (since the early 1990s), and Côte d'Ivoire (since 2002). Although the refugee population in Ghana had declined to just 11,800 in 2001, at its peak in 1993, the country provided refuge to over 150,000 persons (Adepoju, 2003).

Liberians are one group of refugees that have prominence in Ghana. The Buduburam refugee camp in Ghana, which is now a town, hosted more than 40,000 refugees from the Liberian conflict, including former child soldiers—although the exact figure keeps changing (Omata, 2012). Since the end of the war in 2003, there have been renewed efforts to send Liberians back to their home country. Rates of repatriation have varied across countries, but in Ghana particularly, the repatriation rate has been relatively slow (Roming, 2007). United Nations (UN) aid has been cut to a minimum, and the local economy is dependent on donations and remittances from abroad. Meanwhile, despite these returns, some refugees do remain in the

country in difficult conditions (Adepoju, 2003). There are still some 1,377 Liberian refugees in Ghana as of August 2016, (UNHCR, 2016). There are currently four refugee camps in Ghana where there is the presence of the UNHCR: Egyeikrom (Central region), Krisan (Western Region), Ampain (Western Region), and Fetentaa (Brong Ahafo Region). See Table 1 for refugees in Ghana.

Table 1

Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Ghana by Country of Origin

Origin	Asylum	Refugees	Total
Liberia	3	1,374	1,377
Cote d'Ivoire	884	11,725	12,609
Togo	279	3,732	4,011
Sudan	226	558	784
Others	656	3000	3,656
Total	2,048	20,389	22,437

From "United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees – Ghana," 2016 (http://www.unhcr.org /ghana.html). Copyright 2016 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Former Girl Child Soldiers

One population that has not been studied well is girls involved in armed conflicts. It is not clear why former girl child soldiers are a group that tends to be easily forgotten, but at a point in 2002, they made up approximately one third of the population of child soldiers involved in international conflicts (UNHCR, 2006). The UN (2002) report pointed out that "between 1990 and 2002, girl soldiers were among fighting forces and groups in at least 54 countries, and fought directly in conflicts in 36 of those countries" (p. 13).

Girls who have been victims or perpetrators of violence in conflicts are therefore subject to all the problems that males may have and more. Unfortunately, the problems of girls who have been former child soldiers tend to be forgotten. This issue is articulated in UNICEF's report (2005), which stated,

> Post-conflict, girls may fall through the cracks, continually marginalized by disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs at all levels. Relatively few girls go through such programs. Instead, many spontaneously return to their communities and never receive formal assistance, leaving them with a host of unresolved psychosocial and physical issues. The specific needs of girl soldiers during these processes are usually not addressed. (p. 43)

Fofana (1997) noted that about 1% of the demobilized child soldiers in Liberia were girls or young women, but many more took part in one form or another in the war. Similar to many males, females joined one of the factions for their own protection. Unwillingly, they became the girlfriends or wives of rebel leaders or members (Fofana, 1997). According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2008), many of these youths remain traumatized, and some are still addicted to drugs they started using while in combat. Even though girl soldiers have been present in almost every international conflict as noted earlier, reports from national DDR programs show very low girl participation, with average levels between 8% and 15%. For example, in Liberia, about 3,000 girls were demobilized in a DDR process that ended in 2004. However, 8,000 girls were excluded, did not register, and received no support (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008).

The Machel study (UNICEF, 2009) was the first commission established in 1996 with the purpose to begin monitoring the impact and situation of children in conflict zones and to mobilize action on their behalf. An important dimension of the study was the attention to gender-distinct effects of armed conflict upon girls and women, which had been neglected in previous UN documents on children. This report (UNICEF, 2009) was one of the first documents to

address how girls and women are differentially affected by armed conflict, especially around the issues of sexual violence.

According to Machel's strategic review (UNICEF, 2009) girls experience purposeful sexual violence in the community, in camps for displaced persons, and during flights to safety. They are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS virus or other sexually-transmitted diseases (STDs). Further, Machel mentioned that the less visible dangers of sexual violence are the stigma of humiliation and anguish due to cultural beliefs and attitudes that may lead girls and young women to withdraw into a shell of pain and denial, or even commit suicide (UNICEF, 2009). This has implications for girls' reintegration into their families and communities.

With few alternatives for economic survival available to them, girls and young women may eventually turn to prostitution or resume activities with armed groups. For example, in Mozambique after the peace treaty was signed in 1992, girls aged 12 to 18 years were recruited into prostitution by soldiers of the UN operation (UNICEF, 2009). Since the end of the war in Liberia, these young people have largely been left to fend for themselves (Maslen, 2002). Many of the former child soldiers still experience a number of problems, since they came away from the frontlines and were brought into the refugee camps. Given the context of their lives, former girl child soldiers who have managed to survive into adulthood, may have something important to teach health professionals and policy makers about coping and resilience in the face of extreme adversity. Understanding what supports their functioning has implications for health, education, and social programming.

Research Problem

Since the end of the Liberian war was officially declared over 13 years ago, former girl child soldiers in the refugee towns in Ghana have not received adequate psychological and

educational supports. The former girl child soldiers face insurmountable problems such as mental health issues and economic and social isolation. Furthermore, these former girl child soldiers, now young adults, are uneducated or undereducated; they have very little skills training and poor social skills, making them unprepared for employment. In addition, most of the former girl child soldiers are ill-equipped and ill-prepared for reintegration into society (Roming, 2007).

Available literature (Denov, 2006, 2008, 2010; Machel, 1996, 2000) highlights how some girl child soldiers experienced unwanted pregnancies through rape and poor reproductive health during the war; they experienced homelessness, and most were kidnapped and forced into sexual slavery. The literature (Denov, 2006, 2008; Maslen, 2002; Somasundaram, 2002; Verhey, 2001) also highlights that they have been victims and perpetrators of violence in conflicts. It is fair to say that former girl child soldiers have suffered similar and even more negative experiences than that of boy child soldiers. One reason is due to gender roles in Liberia traditionally seeing girls as belonging to the home and kitchen and not going to school. Because they have never received any formal education and assistance, this has left former girl child soldiers with a host of unresolved psychosocial and physical issues. In the light of these challenges, there is a need for research that can facilitate the understanding of their experiences and to explore resiliency and coping resources that former girl child soldiers used and continue to use to survive.

Previous research completed in the area of child soldiers has looked at trauma, mental health, and effects of war on the child soldiers. It primarily focuses on their symptoms and the types of traumas they suffered, but not how they cope with their lives or how they survive day by day. There is significant lack of research on former girl child soldiers and the coping resources they use after experiencing traumatic events. There is also lack of qualitative research in this area; therefore, collecting rich descriptive accounts of participants' experiences would provide a

unique perspective and understanding of the mechanism of resiliency and coping strategies former girl child soldiers have used since the war. It is essential to obtain firsthand information from them about their experiences, since most of them have been marginalized, stigmatized, and isolated from society. As such, the objectives in this study were to (1) to explore coping and resilience in Liberian former girl child soldiers and (2) identify challenges they face as they reintegrate into society.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on some of the difficulties of refugees around the world and in Ghana. It also looked at some statistics and issues of children involved in armed conflict in the West African subregion, specifically, those of former girl child soldiers. I briefly discussed how these former girl child soldiers are ignored by institutions and some of the problems that arise as a result of that. The objectives and relevance of conducting this study are made clear in this section. While through this study I explored the barriers that challenge the girls' day-to-day functioning, I also sought to expose the resiliency of these girls as well as their coping strategies that were helpful in managing the challenges.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review, I discuss the brief history of the Liberian civil war and the role of women in the war. I also discuss Liberian refugees in Ghana, the impact of war on women, recruitment, rehabilitation processes, and the psychological impact of these experiences on former child soldiers.

Brief History of Liberia Civil War

The recent civil war that led Liberians to flee to other West African states began in 1989, but the root causes of this conflict were deeply embedded in the formation of Liberia as a country. In 1821, Liberia was founded by interests in the U.S. as a means of resettling liberated American slaves, who were subsequently called Americo-Liberians. These settlers marginalized the indigenous people and ruled the nation as quasi-imperial masters until the late 20th century (Ellis, 2007). In 1980, Samuel Doe, an indigenous military officer, overthrew the Americo-Liberian regime by a military coup. However, Charles Taylor, a former minister with Americo-Liberian origin, who had fled from Liberia to the U.S., established an anti-Doe military movement during his exile. In December 1989, Taylor's army advanced into Liberia from the Ivory Coast to oust Doe from power (Crisp, 2003). Taylor's military incursion marked the opening of the 14-year Liberian war that generated the movement of approximately 750,000 refugees to neighbouring countries (Omata, 2012).

The Liberian civil war was amongst Africa's bloodiest and most brutal in the last two decades. A unique feature of this war was the use of thousands of child soldiers in the conflict, which spanned a period of 14 years across the late 1980s, 1990s, and early 2000s. During this period, many thousands of lives were lost, and more than half of the population became refugees, displaced across West Africa in particular (UNCHR, 2003). Among the displaced Liberians are

significant numbers of former child soldiers. Children Associated with Fighting Forces (CAFF) numbered 12,000 under 18 when demobilized in 2003 (UNCHR, 2003)—a figure that does not include those who became adults at the time of disarmament in 2003 (Medeiros, 2007).

Official tallies of refugees who were formerly child soldiers are hindered by their reluctance to come forward for fear of rejection or retribution (Wessells, 1997). It is likely that they were and remain some of the most disadvantaged victims of the conflict (Mendelsohn & Straker, 1998). Since the end of the war, these children have largely been left to fend for themselves, alone, away from the life they knew as soldiers and as children under the protective love and care of responsible adults. Thus, the number of street children in Monrovia and the number of abandoned infants increased significantly following disarmament (Maslen, 2002). Many of the former child soldiers still experience a number of problems since they left the frontlines and were brought into refugee camps across West Africa. As noted, many of these soldiers were girls, so in order to understand former girl child soldiers, it is important to look at their role and experiences during the Liberian conflict.

Role and Experiences of Women/Girls in the Liberia Civil War

The roles and experiences of women and girls both during the Liberian war and in the efforts to bring about peace in the country have varied with attention given to victims, perpetrators, survivors, and peacemakers (Utas, 1999). Utas (1999) described young females in the Liberian civil war as active agents who alternatively used different tactics in their attempts to cope with the challenges and exploit the opportunities provided by the conditions produced by the civil war. They present as both victims and as perpetrators of the civil war and used different complex tactics to survive during the war.

Women's involvement in armed conflict. According to statistics taken during the disarmament of 1996–1997, between 2% and 4% of the fighters in the Liberian civil war were female (Maslen, 2002). Other estimates hold that, within the rebel movement National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), for instance, 1 out of 10 soldiers were women (Ellis, 1995). During the civil war, women soldiers were known to be at least as fierce as their male counterparts; men and women alike committed atrocities. According to a young Monrovian woman, people were more afraid of the females than the males, because the female combatants had violent tempers (Olonisakin, 1995).

In Liberia, often out of revenge for husbands slain at the hands of the enemy, women fought in the front lines as part of an elite and feared unit unique on the continent (Itano, 2003). An example is the case of Colonel Black Diamond of the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), a rebel group which received worldwide attention in August of 2003. Colonel Black Diamond commanded a group of girls and young women who spread fear, if not respect, among Monrovians. Women in war are generally discussed only as victims, but Black Diamond and her sisters emerged as actors, killers portrayed just as lethal as their male counterparts (Pedelty, 1995). Women also played other roles during the Liberian civil war. For example, it has been documented that during the war, women offered supporting roles such as cooking, cleaning, and often sleeping with soldiers—not always by choice (Bandus, 2009). Later in Chapter 2, I elaborate on this act of being forced to engage in the above roles.

It is clear that while women suffered atrocities during armed conflicts in West Africa, they also performed destructive roles in war situations through their supports of the various armed factions (Bandus, 2009). Interviews with former Liberian girl child soldiers (Utas, 2005), revealed the social navigation tactics of young women in war, which included establishing and

carefully managing relations with boyfriends, commanders, co-wives, peacekeepers, nongovernment organization (NGO staff), and other categories of marginalized civilians. Strategies varied from taking humanitarian aid to taking up of arms at different times and under different circumstances. Many women also engaged in several sexual relationships for upward social mobility and enhanced economic prospects, as the capacity to obtain looted goods increased according to the number of men they commanded.

Utas (2005) further reported that many young Liberian women also participated in the rebel armies or in other areas of the war economy as girlfriends in an attempt to overcome, in their eyes, a profoundly marginal socioeconomic situation. Most female soldiers fought as irregulars and never attended any formal training. A majority of young women who fought in the civil war also got involved through their soldiering boyfriends.

Women in the Liberian peace movement. Although most women were victims as well as perpetrators, the role of civilian Liberian women in bringing about peace cannot be underestimated (Bandus, 2009). They organized street protests, rallies, and demonstrations during these periods to persuade the combatants to stop the bloodshed and surrender their guns in return for gainful employment. Annie Saydee (as cited in African Women and Peace Support Group, 2004) asserted that "we talked to them, they are children to us, and we wanted this fighting to stop. We, the women, bear that pain, so we begged them; Kromah, Boley and Taylor at different times" (p. 13).

It is important to also understand the roles that religious laywomen played as grassroots activists for peace. These women sometimes faced danger from rebel leaders (Bandus, 2009), but they persisted and often reported abuse through the Catholic Church radio (Press, 2010). In February 1994, the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) was founded at a public meeting in

downtown Monrovia. This organization stood solidly behind the West African intervention force (ECOMOG) during the demobilization of the various armed factions that commenced in late 1995 (Bandus, 2009). They engaged in behind-the-scenes as well as high-profile tactics in order to facilitate and participate in the peace process (Bandus, 2009). For example, they initiated food aid and sensitization programs that helped tremendously in alleviating the suffering of war victims, and the LWI also organized prayers and fasting for the return of peace.

Women lobbied to be allowed to participate in peace talks and organized public meetings, petitions, vigils, and marches. Starting with a handful of women in 1994, their efforts expanded to include thousands by the time the war ended (Press, 2010). For example, they held vigils, involving as many as 1,000 women a day, including one at a small, local airport in Monrovia, where several hundred women staged regular day-long vigils, rain or shine, calling for peace. Women were involved in many different areas during and after conflict and fled to neighbouring countries, including Ghana.

Liberian Refugees in Ghana

In response to the influxes of displaced Liberians in the country, the Ghanaian government and the UNHCR founded the Buduburam refugee settlement, now a town, in 1990 (Omata, 2012). This settlement is 27 miles west of the capital, Accra, and hosted over 40,000 refugees from the Liberian conflict; although the boundary of the settlement time has never been defined clearly, some of the residents have been there for as long as 17 years (Omata, 2012).

The camp was originally built for 5,000 refugees, but has since sprawled into a 141-acre permanent settlement due to continuous influxes of refugees from Liberia in the 1980s, 1990s to early 2000. The Liberian refugee population currently co-exists with local villagers in these extended areas. The refugees are permitted to work, but few of the Buduburam Liberians are

employed (Omata, 2012). Over the years, the camp has transformed into a vibrant, dynamic community. The settlement has many amenities, including a police post, a health clinic, schools, shops, a market, a neighbourhood watchdog committee office, recreational facilities for football and basketball, a UNHCR office, and various religious facilities (Dick, 2002). However, the number of educational and religious facilities has been drastically reduced following the voluntary repatriation of some refugees to Liberia in 2004 (Omata, 2012).

The Liberian war ended in 2003, and between 2004 and 2007, UNHCR organized a large-scale repatriation promotion program for remaining Liberians in the subregion and encouraged their return to their country of origin. However, because many Liberian refugees were not prepared to return to the precarious political and economic situation in Liberia (Agblorti, 2011; Dick, 2002), the number of repatriates from Ghana were only 7,000 during this 3-year repatriation program (Omata, 2012). Due to the persistent repatriation pressure from both national and international refugee agencies, at the beginning of 2011, the total number of registered Liberian refugees in Ghana has reduced to about 11,000 out of the over 40,000 (Omata, 2012).

As refugee situations become prolonged, levels of international relief are normally significantly reduced or entirely cut off (Jacobsen, 2005). According to Loescher (2001), in the late 1990s, the amount of funding from donor states for prolonged refugees in Africa had started declining, and refugees in West Africa, including Liberian refugees, were the principal victims of this funding shortage. With a sharply reduced volume of assistance, Hardgrove (2009) noted that after the early 2000s, many refugees have had to fend for themselves without an identified status.

According to Omata (2012), because of the minimal budget available, the Liberian refugees in the Buduburam settlement have to pay fees for fundamental services and items such

as water, electricity, and even for the use of public latrines. Between 2008 and 2009, the only free service in the Bududuram settlement was the provision of a food ration by UNHCR and the World Food Program for targeted vulnerable groups of refugees, such as those who were chronically ill or were HIV positive (Omata, 2012). Given the few benefits of remaining in Ghana as refugees, it is a conundrum for the UN refugee agency to understand why a considerable number of Liberian refugees have not returned to their country of origin (Omata, 2012).

Between 2008 and 2009, Omata (2012) conducted a total of some 300 interviews with about 140 representative households in Ghana to understand why some of the Liberian refugees have not taken the opportunity given by the UNHCR to repatriate back to Liberia. The results revealed the following major obstacles to envisioning a life back in Liberia: (a) lack of security; (b) the risk of persecution in Liberia; (c) seeing those who left come back to the camps; (d) lack of access to accommodation; and (e) the lack of confidence about obtaining any gainful employment in Liberia. The solution of local integration has never gained support from either the host government or from Liberian refugees. A UNHCR (2007) internal document on the local integration of Liberians in Ghana reported that the main challenges in Ghana are the absence of strong or indeed any government support for local integration as a solution.

Many Ghanaians have recently started seeing Liberians as their competitors, and this has led to tensions between the two national groups (Agblorti, 2011). In neighbouring markets around the Bududuram settlement, Liberian refugees are not allowed to trade without paying entry fees to Ghanaian market leaders (Codjoe, Quartey, Tagoe, & Reed, 2012). Even if refugees manage to pay these entrance fees, a number of refugees claimed that they face a discriminatory attitude from locals. For example, Ghanaians do not buy items from refugees after they have

found that they are Liberians, even though they are selling the same items as local traders (Hardgrove, 2009).

According to Codjoe et al. (2012), negative perceptions of the host nation towards Liberian refugees are related to perceived competition for scarce resources as a result of the increase in cost of goods and services (e.g., food, water, health care, education, labour, accommodation, land, housing, transportation, food production and business activities in the region). Others' negative perceptions stem from views that refugees contribute to an increase in social vices (e.g., drunkenness, prostitution, sexual promiscuity, crime, armed robbery, violence, drug or substance abuse, and trade in arms) and degenerative environmental activities (e.g., deforestation).

Psychological and Psychosocial Impact of War on Women/Girls

In many African cultures, women are the primary child caregivers as well as caretakers of the home. They share responsibility with other women for the child's physical and psychosocial development (Brooks, 2012). During and after armed conflict, women hold families and communities together through their key roles in food production, economic activities, and caring for children and other family members (Bennett, Bexley, & Warnock, 1995). Women also act to preserve the social order (UN, 2002). Nevertheless, the perilous impact of armed conflict and its impact on children and women are not often discussed. Continuous work by human rights, women advocacy groups, NGOs, and UN have increased global awareness about the effects of armed conflict upon women. Consequently, women's stories are being told more often than in the past, and increased international attention and action is organized on their behalf.

Machel's (1996) study described how girls and women are especially affected by armed conflict because of their gender and their unequal status in society. Among the specific effects

experienced by women of all ages are displacement, loss of home and property, loss or involuntary disappearance of close relatives, poverty and family separation and disintegration, victimization through acts of murder, terrorism, torture, sexual slavery, rape, and sexual abuse. Other authors have also reported on the impact and experiences of sexual violence on women (Denov, 2006; Denov & Maclure, 2009; Mckay & Mazurana, 2004; Yohani & Hagen, 2010).

Machel's (1996) study is replete with reports and discussion of purposeful sexual violence toward women in multiple settings: in the community, in camps for displaced persons, and during flights to safety. Female children may be raped along with their mothers, and both may be forced (along with other family members) to observe each other being raped. Girls may be ostracized when their mothers have been raped. Adolescent girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual violence because of their smaller size and younger age and because of myths that they are less apt to be infected with the HIV/AIDS virus or other STDs.

In 2000, a review of the first Machel study was conducted to evaluate any changes since 1996. Commenting on the psychosocial impact of sexual violence, this report (Machel, 2000) noted the less visible dangers of sexual violence are the humiliation and anguish that may lead girls and young women to withdraw into a shell of pain and denial, or even to commit suicide. The Machel (2000) study also recognized the integral tie between the reproductive health of pregnant women and girls with the health of infants and children. Lack of food, shelter, sanitation, and safe water jeopardizes girls' and women's reproductive status. In addition, during conflicts, breastfeeding is often interrupted by separation and maternal exhaustion. Girls may experience pregnancies and abortions that their young bodies are ill-prepared to handle, compounded by lack of access to medical care (Machel, 2000).

In the next section, I focus on child soldiers, their recruitment and reintegration in the Liberian war, and mental health issues that may arise in former girl child soldiers as a result of exposure to war, violence, and refugee experiences.

Child Soldiers

Recruitment and reintegration of child soldiers. A number of studies have examined the voluntary and involuntary recruitment of child soldiers (Brett & Specht, 2004; Gates & Reich, 2009), identifying contextual factors, poverty, war, religious or ethnic identity, family (or its absence) and friends as playing a role in making a child willing to join an armed group (Achvarina & Reich, 2006; Andvig & Gates, 2009; Becker, 2009; Brett & Specht, 2004; Goodwin-Gill & Cohen, 1994; Singer, 2009). In addition, children are more easily recruited only on the basis of a promise of future delivery of benefits. For example, in Liberia, children from marginalized economic groups were promised free access to education after the end of the war. This promise was enough to convince some of them to join Charles Taylor's armed forces (Gates & Nordas, 2010). In the DRC, former child soldiers have also reported that they joined to receive payment. Income, therefore, seems to be a strong incentive for children to enlist, particularly in situations where their parents are missing (Achvarina & Reich, 2006).

Contrary to several reports from other war-torn countries that children were being abducted, forcibly recruited to commit violent attacks such as killing and raping, the Guatemala experience for former child soldiers, according to Hauge (2008), seems to be different. Hauge's report on former girl soldiers who joined the United Revolutionary National Guatemala (URNG) showed that none of the girls interviewed had been abducted, and they all deliberately joined the armed movement to escape from atrocities and massacres by the army and that they already had family members in the guerrilla movement. Those interviewed who entered the movement as

children or teenagers gave the impression of having been well taken care of and spoke of their experiences with the armed movement (guerrillas) in relatively positive words.

In contrast to the Guatemalan report of voluntary entry into armed conflict, a number of authors have reported that in Mozambique's 30-year war, the principal method of child recruitment was forced, often coercive, and abusive (Becker, 2009; Boothby, 2006; Denov, 2006; Vines, 1991). According to other authors who have studied participation in wars, the manner of forcible recruitment varies. It may come in the form of armed soldiers entering a refugee camp (Achvarina & Reich, 2006; Lischer, 2009), a school or villages, and forcing children to join their group at gunpoint (Becker, 2009). Alternatively, a group may require all households under their control to provide one soldier; the household thereby decides who will serve or not, but the choice is forced (Becker, 2009). Intimidation and force play a significant role in the recruitment of children. Many groups, indeed, abduct or depend on fear and intimidation as the principal means of recruitment. In Northern Uganda, where the Lord Resistance Army (LRA) has been relying on forced recruitment for two decades, the leadership appears to prefer young recruits, as the average age of recruitment is 14 years old (Boothby, 2006). Other groups have a mixed recruiting strategy. In Sierra Leone, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) was estimated to have abducted 87% of its recruits from schools, villages, and refugee camps (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008).

Liberian child soldiers. Several studies have investigated the recruitment of child soldiers (Brett & Specht, 2004; Gates & Reich, 2009; Singer, 2009) and the many contextual factors that play a role in making a child willing to join an armed group (Achvarina & Reich, 2006; Andvig & Gates, 2009; Becker, 2009; Brett & Specht, 2004; Goodwin-Gill & Cohen, 1994; Singer, 2009). For the purposes of this current study, I focused on Podder's (2009)

research on recruitment that is specific to former Liberian child soldiers. The case of Liberian child soldiers is no different to other regions except that child participation involved push and pull factors during the Liberian civil war.

Voluntary Recruitment

According to Podder (2009), being a soldier in Liberia appeared to be traditionally coveted and joining the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) a much-desired career. It was an honour and prestigious to be part of the army (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1994). Becoming a fighter was also a form of freedom, as soldiers had access to free food, free drugs, alcohol, and girlfriends—everything youth often did not or could not have access to during the pre-war period due to low levels of education, high unemployment, and economic dependence. In some instances, the children volunteered to avenge the death of a close family member or to defend their community. More robust reasons for joining were to support political objectives, to protect one's family, to associate with an acquaintance in the group, as well as to bring back food for the family (Podder, 2009). Table 2 highlights responses from Liberian former child soldiers in interviews conducted by Human Rights Watch/Africa (1994).

Table 2

Child Soldiers Reasons for Joining Armed Groups in Liberia

Armed group	Age of child soldiers	Reasons for joining armed groups
United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO)	15 years	To fight for my country
United Liberian Movement for Democracy (ULIMO)	14 years	NPFL killed my mother
National Patriotic Front for Liberia (NPFL)	13 years	AFL killed my brother
Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL)	15 years	For food to stop the hunger

From "We'll Kill You if You Cry: Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone," by Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1994, pp. 25–27 Copyright 1994. Human Rights Watch/Africa.

To learn about armed group organizational dynamics in Liberia, Podder (2009) interviewed 101 former child soldiers using a six-part in-depth semi-structured qualitative questionnaire, five focus group discussions, and 25 key informant interviews with former commanders. Six select communities of Liberia's counties were involved: Lofa, Grand Gedeh, Bong, Sinoe, Montserrado, Margibi, and the capital Monrovia.

Podder's (2009) study highlighted reported responses from former child soldiers providing reasons for and against joining armed groups (see Table 3).

Table 3

Reasons for Joining Armed Groups Voluntarily

Reasons Given For Voluntary Participation	Reasons Given For Involuntary Participation
Security and also life was qualitatively better than hiding in the bush and being in the Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) Camps	Constant fear of being captured, raped, and living in flight in Internally Displaced Peoples (IDP) camps
Followed armed groups willingly as forced labour for safety	To prevent harassment and attack by other soldiers
Overtime, labouring was too exhausting; some would decide to take up guns and fight	To escape the hardship, and abuse that toting (carrying) loads entailed
It is better to hold guns; no one can harm you or beat you with a gun in hand	Exhaustion, hunger and thirst
Girls joined voluntarily to seek soldier men as bush husbands to survive or be safe	The predatory behaviour of other men, thus living at the behest of powerful commanders.
Economic benefits from looting and profit motives	To prevent poverty

From "Child Soldier Recruitment in the Liberian Civil Wars: Individual Motivations and Rebel Group Tactics," by S. Podder, in A. Özerdem and S. Podder, *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (p. 58), 2011, London, England. Copyright 2011 Palgrave Macmillan.

The observation or analyses of the reasons in Table 3 suggest that children often joined armed groups due to the social circumstances or pressures, such as avoiding hunger, seeking safety, and reducing physical exhaustion. Elaborating the voluntary recruitment process further, some groups organized meetings with small boys in villages to encourage them to join, and sometimes group members would meet in a refugee camp to persuade youth to join (Human Rights Watch/Africa, 1994). Occasionally, child soldiers themselves approached former commanders to re-enlist, lured by a promise of pay, benefits of looting, as well as return to Liberia especially for exiles in Guinea, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone (Podder, 2009).

Forced Recruitment

During the Liberian civil war, if one could not escape the fighting or leave the country, there were few choices but to join an armed group, partly on account of threats to physical security and food shortages. In Podder's (2009) study of former Liberia child soldiers, he reported that a larger number of respondents, roughly 30% (24 out of 78 participants) reported being forcibly conscripted. These campaigns of recruitment at gunpoint occurred during raids into video clubs, schools, playgrounds, even in refugee and internally displaced peoples (IDP) camps, where children were simply caught and forced into trucks. A typical raid would involve 20 to 25 rebels entering a village, arresting civilians, looting valuables and food, and ordering young and old to tote the looted load at gunpoint. In other scenarios, able-bodied men and boys were rounded up, beaten mercilessly, and given a choice to either join the group or be killed. There was no room for refusal or resistance; a sheer desire for survival forced many to take up the gun.

Sexual violence, abuse, and exploitation were recurrent themes in the narratives of girl soldiers in relation to forced recruitment (Podder, 2009). Girls would usually be raped or

threatened with rape, subduing all resistance and then taken with the group by force as followers, to cook, clean, or serve as sex slaves. Some would make the transition into fighters or seek solace in the position of wife to a single commander simply to escape sexual abuse at the hands of many (Human Rights Watch, 2003). This strategy of coercive recruitment reinforced the absence of any social order.

In this section, I looked at some of the means through which child soldiers were recruited and some of the factors that influenced the children to join the armed groups. Next I discuss the mental health issues of women/girls and former child soldiers during conflict and how armed conflicts impacted their lives.

Mental Health of Former Girl Child Soldiers/Child Soldiers

The impact of being a child soldier includes physical, psychological, psychosocial, and socioeconomic difficulties (Denov, 2010). A report from UNICEF (2009) highlighted the risk factors associated with participation in armed conflict:

> Children forced into combat or non-combat roles risk being killed, injured or permanently disabled. They may be forced to witness or participate in atrocities. They are deprived of their homes and families and with that, the opportunity to develop physically and emotionally in familiar and protective environments. (p. 151)

The above statement by UNICEF is only one of many statements highlighting the mental health difficulties experienced by this marginalized population.

Psychological Impacts

It has been widely reported that trauma experienced during childhood can seriously affect children's psychological development and adjustment (e.g., Denov, 2008). The work of Cloitre et al. (2009) looked at the relationship between accumulated exposure to different types of traumatic events and total number of different types of symptoms (symptom complexity). This was assessed in a 582-adult clinical sample and a 152-child clinical sample. Childhood

cumulative trauma but not adulthood trauma predicted increasing symptom complexity in adults. Cumulative trauma predicted increasing symptom complexity in the child sample. Results indicated that complex post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms occur in both adult and child samples in a principled, rule-governed way; however, childhood experiences significantly influenced adult symptoms (Cloitre et al., 2009).

Specifically, to former child soldiers, Denov and Maclure (2006) examined the experiences of 36 child soldiers who were victims and perpetrators in the Sierra Leonean war and the resulting psychological effects. They reported a number of important findings. First, most of the child soldiers were forcibly drafted into the conflicts under traumatic conditions. Second, the process of drafting child soldiers also included intense socialization, indoctrination, and military training that were enforced through the consumption of alcohol and hallucinatory drugs. Third, the use of arms in combat brought to these former child soldiers a sense of power over civilians. Thus, they were brought up to see violence and the use of force as a legitimate and desirable means of attaining identity, authority, and prestige. Regarding their post-conflict experiences, Denov and Maclure (2006) reported that most of the ex-child soldiers found peacetime largely disappointing. In their findings, they reported that the impact of child soldiers' experiences includes serious challenges with issues such as family and community rejection, loss, grief, guilt and shame for their participation in violence, physical disabilities, displacement, unwanted pregnancy, and poor reproductive health. The last two issues are particularly significant, especially for girl former child soldiers; they are a group that tends to be easily forgotten, and yet they made up approximately one third of the population of child soldiers involved in the conflict.

The work of Kohrt et al. (2008) in Nepal compared the mental health of 114 former child soldiers and that of 141 children growing up in active conflict settings but who were not conscripted by armed groups. To assess mental health, they utilized the Depression Self-Rating Scale, the Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders scale (SCARED; Birmaher et al., 1999), the Child PTSD Symptoms scale (Foa, Johnson, Feeny & Treadwell, 2001), and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 2003). Both groups displayed substantial mental health and psychosocial problems. However, child soldiers had worse mental health outcomes (symptoms of depression, PTSD, general psychological difficulties, and function impairment) than the comparison groups, with the exception of anxiety symptoms.

Similarly, Klasen et al. (2010) set out to investigate multiple trauma and mental health in 330 former Ugandan child soldiers. The objectives were (a) to report their traumatic war experiences, domestic and community violence, and mental health status; (b) to compare outcomes in former boy versus girl soldiers; and (c) to test the effects of exposure to traumatic war experiences. The authors assessed demographic variables, used the Child War Trauma Questionnaire (Macksoud, 1992), the Youth Self-Report for behavioral and emotional problems (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) and the MINI-KID Child and Adolescent version of the Mini International Neuropsychiatry Interview (Sheehan et al., 1998). Klasen et al. reported that traumatic experiences during abduction and experiences of domestic and community violence posed significant risk factors for all mental health outcomes. Boys reported higher scores in cumulative trauma than girls. Trauma in boys may be higher than girls because the roles assigned to boys during the war may be different; several studies indicate that boys are usually sent to the forefront of violence and various atrocities to earn a higher rank in the group, while girls are tied to more traditional roles, such as cooking and serving as wives to the soldiers.

Somasundaram (2002) observed and discussed the prevalence of psychological problems in a group of adolescents who had suffered or perpetrated violence during the Sri Lankan civil war. His findings were grim. Among the most prevalent psychosocial problems, Somasundaram identified PTSD, somatization, anxiety, depression, hostility, relationship problems, alcohol and drug misuse, functional disability, cognitive impairment, memory loss, loss of concentration, and loss of motivation.

Impact of Sexualized Violence

Throughout history, in times of armed conflict, sexual abuse, including acts such as rape, forced oral sex, mutilation of sexual organs, forced pregnancy, and prostitution have been used as an extension of physical violence (Yohani & Hagen, 2010). Similarly, in recent African conflicts, women and girls have been exposed to sexual violence (Mckay & Mazurana, 2004; Yohani & Hagen, 2010). In contemporary wars, girls and young women may be compelled to seek economic livelihood by providing sexual services. They may be forced into prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation because they need food, shelter, safe conduct through war zones, or require papers or privileges for themselves and their families. Machel's (1996) *Impact of Armed Conflict on Children* study reported that girls as young as 12 years have sexually submitted themselves to paramilitary forces as a means of protecting their families from other groups. Girl soldiers who have been raped or sexually abused can find it very difficult to stay with their families or to believe they have any prospects of marriage due to cultural beliefs and attitudes on sexuality and sexual abuse (Denov, 2006). With few alternatives for economic survival available to them, girls and young women may eventually turn to prostitution (Machel, 1996).

Denov (2006) investigated wartime sexual violence in Sierra Leone and in her qualitative work with three girls who experienced sexual violence. She reported that sexual violence has a profound effect on the mind and body. The consequences are profound and include a long-term sense of insecurity that could be physical, psychological, or socioeconomic in nature. The girls also had fear of continued sexual victimization, distrust of men, and marginalization from society.

To explore further the issue of sexual violence and slavery, Mckay and Mazurana (2004) reported that gang rape and sexual assault by single individuals were reportedly common in recent West African civil wars. As these girls from their interviews in Sierra Leone remembered:

> We were used as sex slaves. Whenever they wanted to have sexual intercourse with us, they took us away forcefully and brought us back when they finished with us. Sometimes, other officers took us up as soon as we were being finished with and subsequent ones were particularly painful. . . I don't even know who might have been the father of my child. (Mckay & Mazurana, 2004, p. 10)

Denov and Maclure's (2009) study of girl child soldiers in Sierra Leone highlighted further the devastating psychological after-effects of wartime sexual violence. Girls reported experiencing anguish, flashbacks, persistent fears, difficulty re-establishing intimate relationships, a blunting of enjoyment in life, shame, and being unable to have normal sexual or childbearing experiences. Girls forced to carry and bear the children of their aggressors sometimes suffered serious mental, physical, and spiritual harm. In the longer term, girls reported depression, anxiety, poor self-esteem, and anger. As one Sierra Leone girl said, "I feel depressed most of the time. I sometimes feel there is no hope for me. . . I just think of ending my life" (Denov & Maclure 2009, p. 10).

Bryant-Davis et al. (2011) investigated sexual assault in seven Liberians in the aftermath of the civil war and reported, among others, victims' grief, living in fear and distrust, anger, numbness, suicidal thoughts, feelings of insecurity, confusion, and inability to express emotion.

Research I have discussed in this section reported former female child soldiers' experiences of sexual abuse, depression, anxiety, trauma-related disorders, financial and relationship difficulties, as well as reproductive problems. In the next section, I discuss rehabilitation and reintegration difficulties of former girl child soldiers and some of the psychosocial challenges that occur during this process.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Former Girl Child Soldiers

Rehabilitation and reintegration may happen on two levels: the individual and broader social programs such as DDR programs. The definition of "reintegration" is a process in which people transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians accepted by their families and communities" (Brooks, 2012 p. 2). The UNHCR's DDR system was established in 2003 to assist child soldiers back into society through programs that enable them to function in the communities that they live. However, reviews on DDR programs have revealed gender differences whereby former girl child soldiers face barriers both with accessing services and with general reintegration. The Coalition to Stop Child Soldiers (2008) report concluded that girls associated with armed forces or groups have been widely excluded from DDR programs.

Machel's (2000) study review stated that during repatriation and reintegration, for example, children are especially vulnerable to conditions that can exacerbate gender-based violence. UNICEF (2009) also addressed the issue of girls, observing that they face much longer and more critical stigmatization within their communities. Denov (2008) noted that the DDR programs in the contexts of Angola, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, and Northern Uganda provided privilege for male combatants at the expense of women and girls in fighting forces. She gave an example of Sierra Leone, where girls reported being ordered to hand in their weapons prior to demobilization and were left behind as their male colleagues were transported to assembly

centers. Other girls indicated that their guns were taken away by their commanders and were given to male fighters; thus, girls did not possess their own weapons and were simply not deemed to be primary fighters to financially benefit from the DDR program.

In post-conflict Mozambique, McKay and Mazurana (2004) noted that few former girl combatants passed through Mozambique's DDR or received benefits. One reason for this was that the government sought to conceal the fact that girls had been part of their fighting forces. In Angola, Stavrou (2004) explained that formerly abducted girl soldiers slipped through the formal DDR process and received little or no support for return or reintegration in the post-conflict period. Moreover, girls were said to be involved with gender-based traditional roles that did not qualify for demobilization benefits.

Next, I discuss some unique challenges for women who were lucky enough to pass through the DDR programs.

Stigma and Invisibility

One of the main problems with the reintegration process is the stigma returning child soldiers often face. For girls returning home, the stigma is even stronger. Many times, the community will believe the girl has lost her value and is unable to marry; therefore, the rejection and isolation for the girl is even more compounded during her reintegration (Brooks, 2012). Barriers within the reintegration system for girls include traditional family structures and community discrimination. For example, there are instances in which children are forced to live outside of their families because they were born children out of rape or through their captivity during the armed conflict (Denov, 2008). Another aspect of demobilization is that girls who self-demobilize are not always allowed into formalized reintegration processes, if they are available (Denov, 2008).

Other problems include the status girls are given upon return. Due to stereotypes for example of being perceived as not marriage material, many girls are not classified as child soldiers and thus do not qualify for programs that might be offered (Denov & Maclure, 2009). Expanding on these social challenges for former girl soldiers, Brooks (2012) stated that girls return home and try to adapt to the political, legal, economic, and social conditions that were different before their involvement in the armed group. Brooks also reported that the systems to which they return are not adequately addressing the problems that these former child soldiers face. The reintegration process is a social issue and the stigma that is attached to girl soldiers in many cultures upon their return, especially when they have given birth, can be hostile and devastating.

Challenges with Appropriate Programming

The main tug of war in current reintegration programming appears to be polarized between the choices of vocational training versus a return to education or catch-up education modules (Peters, 2007). Given that many former child soldiers demobilize as adults or are matured in terms of their personal and social responsibilities with children and family, they often find a return to formal education unremunerative and hence a less preferred choice in light of their economic needs.

Vocational training modules repeatedly have been a major drawback of reintegration programs, namely that training provided is often easier for the program but irrelevant to the context and of little use to combatants in the long term (Peters, 2007). For instance, the DDR program in Sierra Leone overlooked the importance of an agricultural package for providing sustainable livelihoods to returning combatants. Former combatants who were forced to join agricultural activities in light of poor employability in other sectors in Sierra Leone did so

without the implements and tools that would have been at their disposal had they been able to receive help under the DDR program (Peters, 2007). Recent ethnographic research in Liberia reveals former combatants who returned to a rural life and opted for agriculture were over time more self-sustainable and integrated within their communities compared to ex-combatants who remained in Monrovia and opted for vocational training schemes, since skills such as carpentry had limited demand in the labour market (Maclay & Özerdem, 2010). Land redistribution challenges have also problematized post-conflict community rebuilding in El Salvador and in Mindanao, Philippines (Dickson-Gomez, 2002).

Anecdotal evidence gathered in 2008 by a team of psychologists at the Bududuram camp suggested that former child soldiers have not received adequate psychological and educational support. Further, these former child soldiers, now young adults are uneducated or undereducated; they have very little skills training and poor social skills making them unprepared for employment. In addition, most of the former child soldiers are ill-equipped and ill-prepared for reintegration into society (Roming, 2007). These problems have also made former child soldiers reluctant to go back to their home country (Roming, 2007).

Attempts were made by agencies to reintegrate child soldiers into the community after the first civil war in Liberia ended in 1996. Human Rights Watch/Africa (1994) reported that during this time, former child soldiers were tired of fighting and wanted some peace, but there were no programs or guidance for them to facilitate their reintegration into civilian life. This report showed how, without appropriate programming, the reintegration was extremely challenging. Some of the children were not accepted back into their families, some were ridiculed in the community until they left their homes, and others did not want to be told what to do—they did not want rules. The communities are also hostile towards them because they know

the child soldiers who killed their family members. Still, another challenge identified by Human Rights Watch/Africa (1994) was the impact of mental health difficulties. Children who showed signs of immense psychological problems had significant difficulties fitting into the society. With the failure of progress of reintegrating child soldiers, it can only be speculated that these children were likely to join armed groups and fight during the second civil war, thus, setting an intergenerational pattern.

Psychosocial Supports for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Former Girl Child Soldiers

In addition to DDR programs, it is the actual psychological rehabilitation that is very critical. As such, there is the need to combine both programs. In a case of 40 boys who were abducted from their school in Mozambique (Boothby, 2006), traditional cleansing was one of the most important activities that eased them into reintegration. Traditional cleansing is done to purify and wash away any "bad luck" that may befall upon the boy and their family due to the atrocities the boys committed during the conflict (Boothby, 2006). This healing process is performed by a traditional healer and involves the families of the boys who were involved in the conflict and the whole community. The families purchase all the items needed for the ritual, therefore playing an important role in the reintegration process.

According to Boothby (2006), family and community acceptance and spiritual and religious beliefs and practices are so entwined with individual well-being in rural Mozambique, they appear to be the wellspring of former child soldiers' resiliency. Traditional cleansing ceremonies helped to repair relationships with their families and communities and to realign the boys' well-being with the spirit world. The rituals enabled the boys to deepen their sense of acceptance and helped to ameliorate degrees of guilt and shame over past misdeeds. Traditional

cleansing ceremonies also represented a form of protection for community members who worried about what these boys might do once they came home.

In Fancher's (2012) phenomenological research exploring the accounts of 25 individuals on the impact of the war on them and their communities in South Sudan, the research confirmed that spiritual beliefs and practices, especially Christian beliefs, were identified as very important to those who were dealing with the impact of trauma. Similarly, in reviewing crisis, PTSD and spirituality, Margques, Dhiman, and King (2009) identified how spirituality and religion help survivors of trauma develop an openness to spiritual growth by releasing grievances; engagement in spiritual reflection instead of negative rumination and, finally, involvement in faith-based communities provides support, understanding, and love for affected individuals. Reviewing empirical studies on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and posttraumatic growth, Shaw, Joseph, and Linley (2005) also concluded that religion and spirituality can be beneficial to people in the aftermath of trauma and can lead to a deepening of religion or spirituality. Shaw et al. also noted that religious openness, readiness to face existential questions, religious participation, and intrinsic religiousness are typically associated with post traumatic growth.

A Sudanese case study by Halton (2011) showed how former child soldiers' needs might be taken into account within a community-based intervention. Using a community reintegration approach, social work with targeted follow-up and support of individual children was implemented as an important component of post-conflict psychosocial interventions. Behind this approach is the concept that local ownership, local decision-making, and community resources do not preclude special support to children formerly attached to armies and militia groups. With this in mind, UNICEF supported the North Sudan Disarmament Demobilize Reintegration Committee (NSDDRC) to draw up and establish a National Reintegration Strategy adopted in

early 2008 (Halton, 2011). While flexibility remains key, the National Reintegration Strategy has enabled stakeholders of the demobilization and reintegration process to follow a predetermined conceptual road map that, as has been discussed, recognizes that "reintegration of child soldiers should be approached in tandem with community recovery" (Verhey, 2001, p. 1).

One of the more evident challenges for reintegrating children formerly associated with armed forces in Sudan remains the limited capacity of national and local institutions and communities to absorb and facilitate return. Added pressure is applied by the need to support other disadvantaged groups such as returning IDPs. One important finding to emerge from UNICEF's (2007a) work in Darfur in recent years is the low consideration at the federal level to social welfare issues in terms of budgetary allowance, underfunding of the sector, and a chronic shortage of human resources. Initiatives of the UNICEF (2007a) long running Back To School program has enrolled significant numbers of new pupils but highlights the chronic lack of sufficient schools and learning spaces compounded by a limited supply of qualified and trained teachers. Food shortages and needs security is another factor. It is therefore critical that the families and communities of the demobilized children play a central role in supporting these children.

In conclusion, reintegration programs for the former child soldiers, especially girls, have not been very successful to date. Many former child soldiers never had the chance with DDR programs that focused on disarmament because they did not carry their own guns. Other barriers that prevent successful reintegration upon return is discrimination, stigma, rejection by families and communities, and lack of economic freedom. This study is relevant because it highlights the fact that the Liberian former girl child soldiers have experienced rejection not only by the DDR programs but also by their families and communities. Therefore, in this study I explored how

they survived without support, which highlights their resiliency. The study findings will also serve as relevant information for future research and practice and will identify gaps in services provided for this group of women. In Chapter 3, I discuss theories of resilience and coping as psychological concepts that were used in the study along with studies that have been conducted on resilience in child soldiers.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines resilience and coping in the context of former girl child soldiers. Based on the previous review on former child soldiers, there seems to be extensive work and emphasis placed on wartime trauma, and there seems to be less understanding of children's abilities to cope with distress and to function and fill socially expected roles. In fact, many formerly recruited children and youth exhibit resilience when faced with adversity (Masten et al., 1990).

Resilience Theory

Masten (2007) defined resilience as characterized by "good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development" (p. 228), based on three groups of resilient phenomena: (a) at-risk individuals who show better-than expected outcomes, (b) positive adaptation maintained despite the occurrence of stressful experiences, and (c) positive transformation such that the adaptive functioning is better than it was before the experience. Resilience theory will provide the context to understand the influences that contribute to the former child soldiers' resilience. There are four theoretical models of resilience: (a) triarchic theory (Garmezy, 1985; Werner & Smith, 1993); (b) ecological-transactional model (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993); (c) structural-organizational model (Egeland, Carlson, & Sroufe, 1993); and recently (d) the post-traumatic growth model (Tedeschi, 1999).

Triarchic theory. This theory of resilience was postulated by Garmezy (1985) who identified that salient protective factors operating at three levels contribute to a person's ability to adapt and function reasonably well despite exposure to adversity (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000). These include the community, the individual, and the family. The individual protective factors include good cognitive abilities; an easy temperament early in life; a positive view of

oneself, an optimistic outlook on the world, and a belief in one's self-efficacy talents that are valued by self and society; and faith and a sense of meaning in life (Flynn, Ghazal, Legault, Vandermeulen, & Petrick, 2004). The influences of the community include neighbourhood and social support (Luthar et al., 2000), effective schools, a high level of public safety; effective emergency social services; and good public health and health services (Flynn et al., 2004). Family influences also include parental warmth, intelligence and social skillfulness, protection of the child's development fostered by close relationships with adult caregivers, and authoritative parenting, characterized by high warmth, monitoring, and expectations, among others (Flynn et al., 2004).

Post-traumatic growth model. Post-traumatic growth describes the experience of individuals who not only return to previous levels of functioning after trauma but also use it as an opportunity for further individual development (Calhoun, Cann, Tedeschi, & McMillan, 2000). Different aspects of post-traumatic growth may be initiated by somewhat different kinds of traumas or social support contexts, and the routes to post-traumatic growth may involve somewhat different processes for each dimension (Tedeschi, 1999). Examples of positive psychological change after traumatic events are an increased appreciation of life, setting of new life priorities, a sense of increased personal strength, identification of new possibilities, improved closeness of intimate relationships, or positive spiritual change (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998).

Ecological transactional model. Drawing on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1977), Cicchetti and Lynch (1993) conceptualized ecological contexts as consisting of a number of nested levels with varying degrees of proximity to the individual. These contexts and the relationships between contribute to a person's resilience in the face of adversity. The

microsystem incorporates the family environment that children and adults create and experience. The exosystem consists of the neighbourhood and community settings in which families and children live. The macro system includes cultural beliefs and values that permeate societal and family functioning (Cicchetti and Lynch (1993).

Issues of Resilience

There is variability in the definitions of resilience across studies; there has been ambiguity in the definitions and the use of the terminology (Luthar et al., 2000). Resilience has been described as the capacity for successful adaptation, positive functioning, or competence (Masten et al., 1990) despite high-risk status, chronic stress, or following prolonged or severe trauma. Resilience is often operationalized as the positive end of the distribution of developmental outcomes in a sample of high-risk individuals (Rutter, 2006). While these definitions generally are accepted by researchers of risk and resilience, factors defining risk samples and definitions of adaptation and competence vary widely across studies. In part, this variability may be resolved by a shift in research emphasis: from the study of risk variables to that of risk and protective mechanisms and the process of negotiating risk situations (Rutter, 2006).

Resilience literature has contextualized risk and documented a number of relational protective processes that predict positive outcomes, by and large resilience researchers have focused on outcomes that are (a) Western-based with an emphasis on individual and relational factors typical of mainstream populations and their definitions of healthy functioning (staying in school, attachments to a parent or caregiver, forming secure attachments with one partner later in life, etc.); and (b) lacking in sensitivity to community and cultural factors that contextualize how resilience is defined by different populations and manifested in everyday practices (Boyden &

Mann, 2005; Ungar, 2005). As a result, there has been little cross-cultural validation of findings or rigorous inquiry (qualitatively or quantitatively) into culturally determined outcomes that might be associated with resilience in non-Western cultures and contexts. Enough is not known about what resilience means in non-Western populations and marginalized groups such as former child soldiers. As such, there are several dominant definitions that are frequently altered to fit the characteristics of an investigation (Luthar, 2003). Approaches taken to operationalize resilience have varied across culture (Cicchetti & Lynch, 1993).

Working Definition of Resilience for Present Study

There has yet to be presented a coherent definition of resilience that captures the dual focus of the individual and the individual's social ecology and how both must be accounted for when determining the criteria for judging outcomes and discerning processes associated with resilience (Ungar, 2008). Ungar (2008) postulated that resilience is influenced by a child's environment and that the interaction between individuals and their social environment will determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced. Therefore, resilience is variable and a multidimensional construct that is derived from repeated interaction between the individual and the surrounding context (Ungar, 2008). In the context of exposure to significant adversity, whether psychological, environmental, or both, resilience is both the capacity of individuals to navigate their way to health-sustaining resources, family, community, and culture to provide these health resources and experiences in culturally meaningful ways (Ungar, 2008).

In a cross-cultural resilience study with adolescents, Ungar (2008) postulated four propositions:

1. Resilience has global as well as culturally and contextually specific aspects.

2. Aspects of resilience exert differing amounts of influence on a child's life depending on the specific culture and context in which resilience is realized.
3. Aspects of children's lives that contribute to resilience are related to one another in patterns that reflect a child's culture and context.
4. How tensions between individuals and their cultures and contexts are resolved will affect the way aspects of resilience group together.

This current study adopted Ungar's (2008) definition of resilience:

> Resilience is both a process of the child's navigation towards, and the capacity of individuals to negotiate for health resources on their own terms. Here, navigation refers both to a child's capacity to seek help (personal agency), as well as the availability of the help sought. (p. 225)

For example, child soldiers had to navigate their way to safety, find ways to obtain food, and seek protection in armed groups in the environment of war. Most child soldiers also had the capacity to navigate their way to seek refuge in nearby countries that were ready and willing to take them in and provide support.

Ecological Transactional Model

The research exploring child soldiers' resilience will be best supported by the ecological-transactional model (Harney, 2007) of resilience. This model explains resilience to comprise of the individual, the community, as well as the cultural beliefs and values, which from most literature on former child soldiers, play an integral role in their resilience. The ecological-transactional model highlights how resilience is studied within social contexts (Harney, 2007) often asking the question, "Within what contexts do particular processes cultivate resilience for particular people?" Resilience studies have been done extensively on child refugees and refugees in general but just a few on children who were involved in armed conflict, especially former girl

child soldiers. This model can be used to explain and describe resilient experiences of former girl child soldiers.

Microsystems. The microsystem incorporates the family environment that children and adults create and experience. It is the complex relations between the developing person and environment (e.g., home, school, workplace; Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The microsystem focuses on individuals' characteristics developed through interactions with their family as a source of resilience. Biological, genetic, and family factors such as general good health and above-average intellectual skills serve as protective factors (Nielsen & Hansson, 2007). Personality characteristics that foster resilience include but are not limited to a positive view of oneself, an optimistic outlook on the world, and a belief in one's self-efficacy; talents that are valued by self and society; faith and a sense of meaning in life; good self-regulation of emotional arousal and impulses (Flynn et al., 2004); the ability to be self-reflective (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 1997); and self-reliance (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These are some of the characteristics that promote the development of resilience in children.

In a research of formal child soldiers who returned home, Stark and Wessells (2006) showed that children were resilient and they did not want to be treated as victims. Typically, reintegration programs have been conceptualized, implemented, and evaluated by adults. From a resilience perspective, this approach disempowers children and youth, infantilizes them, and regards them as beneficiaries rather than as people who have the capacity to cope and adapt. This approach mitigates against the sense of self-efficacy that supports healing following exposure to overwhelming events (Stark & Wessells, 2006). These girls also reported that lack of education to build certain characteristics and to become economically independent were some of the barriers that were hindering their ability to be resilient. In Mozambique, for example, many

returned youths expressed a desire to earn money in order to get a wife and family (Boothby, 2006), which was a way of being similar to other people of one's age and filling an age-appropriate social role (Stark & Wessells, 2006).

Exosystems. The exosystem consists of the neighbourhood and community settings in which families and children live. The community influences or even determines what goes on in the community. Protective factors encompass (a) the world of work, the mass media, the distribution of goods and services, communication and transportation facilities, informal social networks (Bronfenbrenner, 1977); (b) a high level of public safety; (c) effective emergency social services; and (d) good public health and health services (Flynn et al., 2004). Research focusing on resilience also suggests that a close and supportive relationship with adults and neighbours is important in enabling competence (Walsh, 2002). For example, Krishan (2011) reported that the matrilineal system in Sri-Lanka ensured that ex-female soldiers were nurtured and taken care of; this helped them survive the conflict. The matrilineal society, according to the ex-soldiers, was more helpful and contributed to their resilience than existing DDR programs.

A recent study also illustrates how formerly recruited girls in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Uganda built on girls' agency through Participatory Action Research (PAR; McKay, Veale, Wrothn, & Wessells, 2010). A key finding was that these young women defined reintegration and resilience in highly relational terms. Far from thinking about only their individual mental health and well-being, they reported the construct to mean that "they and their children are accepted, respected and included as contributing family and community members" (McKay et al., 2010, p.117). They discussed also the importance of being contributing family members and also talked about the importance of giving back to their communities.

An enduring lesson from the research is that children's resilience and reintegration depends not only on the returned child but also on the health and well-being of the broader community (Verhey, 2001). From the standpoint of a resilience approach, it is a high priority to build community resilience (Wessells, 2006), which is a collective analogue of individual resilience (Norris, Stevens, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008).

Macrosystems. The macrosystem includes cultural beliefs and values that permeate societal and family functioning. These beliefs and values were instilled from childhood through parenting, through teachers in schools, and through religious services in churches or shrines.

> Macro-systems are conceived and examined not only in structural terms but as carriers of information and ideology that, both explicitly and implicitly, endow meaning and motivation to particular agencies, social networks, roles, activities, and their interrelations. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515)

What place or priority children and those responsible for their care have in such macrosystems is of special importance in determining how a child and his or her caretakers are treated and interact with each other in different types of settings.

A central feature of resilience approaches is that they build upon local assets and modes of coping, at the community level as well as the individual level (Norris et al., 2008). In contrast to Western approaches to healing, which frequently have been imposed from the outside and encounter problems of acceptance and sustainability, a resilience approach uses local understandings to guide the analysis of young people's problems and seeks to identify and strengthen local modes of healing and coping. An example is the findings by Boothby (2006) that family, community acceptance, and spiritual and religious beliefs and practices appear to be the wellsprings of their resiliency for child soldiers.

In many non-Western cultures, people view health and well-being in terms of relationships between individuals and their surroundings, their ancestors, and among themselves

(Honwana, 1997, 1998). Both the causes of illness and the remedies are believed to lie in the spiritual world (Honwana, 1997). The spiritual beliefs and practices are significant means of coping since they enable people to find meaning and restore well-being in their lives after traumatic experiences (Lee & Sue, 2001; Swartz, 1998). For example, girls returning from armed groups in particular areas of Sierra Leone described having *noro,* a form of spiritual contamination or bad luck (Stark, 2006). In rural areas of Sierra Leone where people adhered to traditions, these spiritual afflictions were viewed as communal rather than as individual problems since angry spirits could cause illness in one's family, crop failures, or other problems. Ritual cleansings and other rituals performed by indigenous healers were seen as essential for the girls' reintegration and recovery (Stark, 2006). Similar practices have been documented in Angola, Mozambique, Uganda, the DRC, and throughout sub-Saharan Africa (Boothby, 2006; Honwana, 1997 1998). In Asia, too, people understand many ailments, including mental illnesses, as having spiritual causes and remedies (Gielen, Fish, & Draguns, 2004).

In conclusion, children and youth exposed to war (including child soldiers) can demonstrate resilience if they have the personal characteristics, social, cultural, and psychological resources commensurate with the challenges they face (Wessells, 2007), but marshalling these resources requires an understanding of how trauma-related challenges can present themselves in the lives of children and youth who have experienced war.

In trying to investigate specific coping strategies used by the former girl child soldiers, I also employed the theory of psychological stress and coping developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1984). This served as an additional framework to guide my research question.

Coping Strategies

Folkman and Lazarus's (1980) theory identified two key processes that are critical for survival in the face of stress: cognitive appraisal and coping. This theory identifies these processes as critical mediators of a stressful person: environment relations as well as their immediate and long-term outcomes. Given the information I outlined in the previous topic, the significance of understanding the choice of coping strategies for the former girl child soldiers in relation to different stressful events cannot be underestimated. This theory will serve as a guide to enable me to understand more in-depth individual strategies the former girl child soldiers used to survive.

Cognitive appraisal. According to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), cognitive appraisal is a process through which a person evaluates whether a particular encounter with the environment is relevant to his well-being and, if so, in what ways. It involves two appraisals: (a) primary appraisal, where the person evaluates whether he or she has anything at stake in this encounter; and (b) secondary appraisal, where the person evaluates whether anything can be done to overcome or prevent harm or improve the prospects for benefit. Various coping options are evaluated such as altering the situation, accepting it, seeking more information, or holding back from acting impulsively in a counterproductive way. Primary and secondary appraisal coverage to determine whether the person–environment transaction is regarded as significant for well-being and, if so, whether it is, according to Folkman and Lazarus (1980), primary threatening (containing the possibility of harm or loss) or challenging (holding the possibility of mastery or benefit).

Coping. Coping is defined as the "person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and /or internal demands that are appraised as

taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, p. 141). There are three key features in this definition. Firstly, it is process oriented, meaning that it focuses on what the person actually thinks and does in a specific stressful encounter and how this changes as the encounter unfolds. Secondly, coping is viewed as contextual; that is, it is influenced by the person's appraisal of the actual demands in the encounter and resources for managing them. The emphasis on context means that particular person and situation variables together shape coping efforts. Thirdly, no apriori assumptions are made about what constitutes good or bad coping; coping is defined simply as a person's efforts to manage demands, whether or not the efforts are successful.

Folkman and Lazarus (1980) distinguish between two general coping strategies:

1. Problem-focused strategies are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful circumstances.
2. Emotion-focused strategies are efforts to change one's own reaction in potentially stressful events.

The predominance of one type of strategy over another is determined, in part, by personal style and also by the type of stressful event (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Other factors involved in coping are (a) situational characteristics—the degree to which the individual concerned appraises the situation as controllable, desirable, unexpected, challenging, or threatening (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; McCrae, 1984; Parkes, 1984; Stone & Neale, 1984); (b) environmental factors—the nature of the environment whether psychological or physical in which a particular stressful episode occurs can also influence the types of coping used (Billings & Moos, 1981; Mitchell, Cronkite, & Moos, 1983); and (c) individual differences—the individual qualities and capacities and the constellation of coping skills, which Rosenbaum

(1983) referred to as learned resourcefulness which influences the strategies available for managing a particular stressful episode.

A study by Stark and Wessells (2013) reported the importance of livelihoods, education, cultural and spiritual practices, psychosocial support, agency, and relationships to the development of resilience in formerly recruited children who reintegrate into civilian life. Information gathered showed that the causes of illness and the remedies are believed to lie in the spiritual world (Honwana, 1997).

The spiritual beliefs and practices are significant means of coping since they enable people to find meaning and restore well-being in their lives after traumatic experiences (Lee & Sue, 2001; Swartz, 1998). For example, girls returning from armed groups in particular areas of Liberia and Sierra Leone describe having spiritual contamination or bad luck. This spiritual contamination was attributed to rape and other wartime activities and affected almost every aspect of the girls' lives. The girls believed that bad luck affected their relationships, impeded their ability to get married or find love, and caused bad behaviour, negative emotional states, and negative self-perceptions (Awodola, 2012; Stark, 2006).

In the case of the girls being stigmatized for having *noro*, in Sierra Leone*,* their ability to have strategies that would alleviate stressful situations, to manage demands, the ability to think and assess the situation and make decisions would lead them to seek and engage in community and family spiritual/ritual cleansing. These girls will be able to survive society pressure and reintegrate back into their society by going through a spiritual cleansing. Traditional cleansing is one of the significant steps to reintegration and also serves as a coping strategy. The resilience theory gives context about the situation of these former girl child soldiers while the coping

theory enhances the resilience theory by providing an in-depth description and understanding of specific means and strategies the girls used to survive.

A study by Denov (2010) investigated coping after war in former child soldiers in Sierra Leone and reported that the children used a variety of post-conflict coping strategies, which included forming peer-support structures, concealing their former Revolutionary United Front (RUF) status, selectively disclosing their wartime experiences, retreating from mainstream society, and taking part in community rituals and prayers. The former child soldiers regarded these strategies as effective means to protect themselves from potential stigma and rejection. In order for these individuals to survive life after war, they used peer support groups as a means of coping. Their peers shared similar experiences, and they were able to understand each other in a way that others may not. They used problem-focused coping by assessing their environmental factors, in this case stigma and rejection. They also appraised the demands of the society and decided to conceal their identities thus preventing situations that could threaten their survival Denov, 2010).

In conclusion, coping styles differs from society to society and personality style. Generally, in African societies, coping is more communal in addition to the use of faith and the supernatural. Since this population of former girl child soldiers had a different experience than ordinary people, it will be interesting to know the coping strategies they used and continue to use to survive.

Conclusion

In Chapters 2 and 3, I discussed the background of the Liberian civil war, the role women played during the war, West African refugee migration trends, Ghana refugee migration trends, the psychosocial challenges faced by former girl child soldiers, reintegration issues as well as the

effect of war on women. Repatriation of Liberian refugees has not been fully successful, and there are still approximately 1,400 Liberian refugees living in Ghana as of August 2016, (UNHCR, 2016). In spite of cessation of support for basic needs, some refugees refuse to go back home due to uncertainty, loss of family ties, and inadequate economic independence. In the case of former girl child soldiers, the literature discusses the challenges they encounter through DDR programs and their communities.

The literature does not identify issues of resilience or any particular coping strategies these young women are using to survive. Current research emphasizes the traumatic experiences they endured during armed conflict and, in some literature, the role they played in the war. The information from the literature also shows that there is a gap in resilience studies in children in armed conflict, especially girls. Former girl child soldiers from Liberia residing in Ghana as refugees are a good fit for this research. They have been victims and perpetrators of violence and managed to navigate their way to a safer and more stable environment. In this current research, I examined the contributing factors and influences of their resilience on their survival. It was an opportunity to also identify the specific activities former girl child soldiers are involved in that help them cope with their present life situation.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY

According to Denzin and Lincoln, (2005) a qualitative approach "is most appropriate when the purpose of the research is to study things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (p. 3) or according to Creswell (2013) "to provide rich thick descriptions" (p. 168). In addition, the results of qualitative inquiry may provide the theoretical framework or identify variables or theory to be tested in subsequent research (Morse, 2007). Furthermore, qualitative researchers use multiple data methods such as interviews, observations, or documentation (Creswell, 2013). Ethnography is both a process and outcome of research, not only to study culture sharing groups but produce written products of that research (Creswell, 2013). As a process, ethnography involves extended observations of the group, often through participant observation and interviews in which the researcher is immersed in the daily lives of participants (Creswell, 2013). As Roper and Shapira (2000) explained, to understand a culture in its totality, the ethnographer must strive for a holistic perspective that captures the activities, knowledge, and beliefs of the group under study.

Focused ethnographies evolved in the field of sociological ethnography and are rooted in classical anthropological ethnography. They concentrate on specific elements of society and are therefore suitable for studying cultural perspectives surrounding specific issues among defined subgroups of society. Focused ethnographies generate specific knowledge to address distinct research questions and are useful in applied research that aims to inform policy and practice. An ethnographic approach is fitting to study resilience and coping strategies among former child soldiers in order to understand resilience in a non-Western context and to improve what is known about their coping strategies.

As discussed earlier in the literature review, not much is known about resilience and coping strategies utilized by Liberian former girl child soldiers. There is a continual need to document the experiences of not only former child soldiers but also refugees in general. Former girl child soldiers experience stigma, psychological distress, trauma and many other psychosocial challenges. It is an area that has not received adequate attention and resources. There is also a dearth of research on ways by which they survive and acquire resilience. These women have had unique experiences, and as such a qualitative methodology, specifically Focused Ethnographies (FEs) (Cruz & Higginbottom, 2013; Higginbottom, Pillay & Boadu, 2013), is best suited for studying this specific population to explore their experiences and also for this study design and analysis.

In this section, I give an overview of the research purpose and objectives, methodological approach, the underlying philosophical assumptions, the theoretical foundational principles of focused ethnography, the suitability of a focused ethnographical approach for investigating resilience in girl child soldiers, methods, data collection, participant selection, data analysis, ethical considerations and methodological rigour.

Research Objectives

In this study, I aimed to explore and examine resilience and coping resources of former girl child soldiers in a post-conflict environment with the objectives: (a) to identify specific factors that contributes to former girl child soldiers' resiliency; (b) to identify specific coping strategies they use; and (c) to identify challenges former girl child soldiers face concerning their reintegration into society.

Research Questions

Using a qualitative research methodology, specifically focused ethnography, I addressed two questions in this study:

1. What are some of the resilience and coping mechanisms former girl child soldiers use to facilitate their reintegration into the society?
2. What are some everyday challenges former girl child soldiers encounter concerning their reintegration into the society?

Definitions of terminologies are provided below to clarify their use in this thesis. This clarification is further intended to enhance the utility of the knowledge presented in the thesis to inform stakeholder discussions and contributions by health professionals and also to improve on assessment of therapeutic approaches in multicultural counselling.

Definition of Terms

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress. It is both a process of navigation towards and the capacity of individuals to negotiate for health resources on their own terms. Here, navigation refers both to a person's capacity to seek help (personal agency), as well as the availability of the help sought (Ungar, 2008). For the purpose of this study, participants were required to have the ability to seek their own resources such as family, community and culture as well as indicate at least one source of social support.

Coping is defined as a "person's constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and /or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the person's resources" (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984, p. 141). Coping strategies could involve problem-solving strategies, which are efforts to do something active to alleviate stressful

circumstances or emotion-focused coping strategies that involve efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of stressful or potentially stressful events.

Reintegration is the process of transitioning from armed groups into civil society. It involves entering meaningful roles in society as well as the ability to control and direct one's own life (UNICEF, 2007).

Qualitative Research Paradigm

Qualitative approaches are diverse and complex, and there are different approaches to conducting qualitative research. Paradigms underlying qualitative research are based on the utility and persuasiveness of the research findings rather than searching for an absolute truth or conclusion (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). According to Creswell (2007), the researchers bring their own beliefs about the nature of reality, philosophical assumptions, or theoretical perspectives, which they acquired through training, journals, and the scholarly communities as a guide to their research study and design. Therefore, it is important to expose these assumptions at the onset and to consider them throughout the research process by using reflexive practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are four assumptions that guide a researcher's beliefs when choosing a paradigm: (a) ontological, (b) epistemological, (c) axiological, and (d) methodological (Creswell, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In the following topics, I present each of these assumptions in light of the research question.

Ontological assumption. Ontology relates to "the nature of reality and its characteristics" (Creswell, 2013, p. 20). Ontological assumptions of qualitative research provide information about the researcher's position on the nature of reality. Paradigms or worldviews shape the research once researchers identify their position on their nature of reality (Creswell,

2013). Each worldview is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action" (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Qualitative researchers accept the notion of multiple social realities.

This study was conducted using a social constructivism worldview (Creswell, 2013). This worldview assumes that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Reality, according to this worldview is constructed because subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically, and these meanings are formed through interactions with others and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives (Creswell, 2013). Rather than starting with a theory, inquirers generate a theory or pattern of meaning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In this light, reality depends on individuals' subjective meanings directed toward certain objects or things. According to Crotty (1998), realities are local and specific in nature and can be shared across groups and cultures. The goal of this research is to accept participants' accounts of their experiences while understanding that these views or perspectives are shaped by personal meanings, historical, cultural, and social experiences (Creswell, 2013).

The social constructivist worldview reflects my assumptions about the reality of former girl child soldiers. For example, the Liberian war ended after 15 years of brutal atrocities, and these former girl child soldiers were both perpetrators as well as victims. Some may have spent several years moving from one refugee camp to another and probably from one country to the other. The experiences for each of these girls will vary because some were forcibly recruited while others may have joined willingly for various reasons. Some may have been lucky to get to safety more easily than others. These varied experiences will generate varied interpretations of coping. Each girl child soldier's pre-migration experiences in addition to their post-migration experiences of survival can also affect their resilience. The strategies they employed from their country of origin as well as during migration will also affect the coping strategies they used to

survive at the Bududuram camp or previous camps before settling at the Bududuram camp. In view of using the social constructivist paradigm, the focus in this research was on the women's subjective experiences and my own understanding of their experiences.

Epistemological assumptions. Epistemology relates to how knowledge is known. Qualitative researchers get close to the participants being studied and gather information through the participants' subjective experiences (Creswell, 2013), which is integral to a study's theoretical perspective and methodology. It becomes important then to conduct studies in the field where participants live and work. Within social constructivism, the following assumptions shape how knowledge is perceived (Creswell, 2013):

1. There are multiple meanings of experiences.
2. Meanings are derived from interaction between researcher and participant.
3. Participants construct meanings of situations through discussion and interaction with others.
4. The researcher's background shapes the interpretation of participants' experiences.

Multiple meanings of experiences assume that meanings are multiple, which leads the researcher to look for the complexity of views rather than narrowing the meaning into a few categories or ideas (Creswell, 2007; Ponterotto & Greiger, 2007). Meaning is derived through the interaction between the researcher and participants (Creswell, 2013). Thus, the constructivist researcher often addresses "the process of interaction among individuals" (Creswell, 2013, p. 25). "Meaning and interpretation is not constructed in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understanding with participants, practices and language" (Schwandt, 2007 p. 198). Questions are more open-ended to allow the researcher to listen carefully to what the participants say, how they live their lives, and how interactions with others shape their experiences. This collaborative

process allows researchers to expose and transform their understandings of the topic of inquiry, thus allowing for new interpretations and information to emerge through consensus and dialogue with the participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Participants construct meanings of situation through discussion and interaction with others, which means that the subjective meanings of participants are not just imprinted suddenly but rather meaning is developed through social interaction with others, as well as historical and cultural norms (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Schwandt, 2007). I recognize that my background shaped how I interpreted participants' information (Creswell, 2013). This will be discussed under reflexivity.

Axiological assumptions. This is defined as "researchers making their values known in a study" (Creswell, 2013 p. 20). This assumption explains that researchers bring certain values to the study and these assumptions, biases, and personal backgrounds will have an impact on the interpretation of gathered information. I also acknowledge how my interpretation comes from personal, cultural, and historical experiences, which may shape the outcome of the inquiry (Creswell, 2013). This will be discussed under reflexivity.

Methodological Framework

This study was conducted using ethnography methodology for the exploration of former girl child soldiers. Ethnography, as a research method, is rooted in human science that uses inductive logic to uncover meaning (van Manen, 1990). Human science, or the study of human experiences, evaluates the purposeful acts of people in various situations to gain an understanding of what human behaviour means and to come to know various patterns (van Manen, 1990). Fetterman (2010) asserted that ethnography is about telling credible, rigorous, and authentic stories in their own local context. Matsumoto (2000) defined culture as "a dynamic system of rules, explicit and implicit, established by groups in order to ensure their survival and

viability over time, involving attitudes, values, beliefs, norms, and behaviors that are communicated across generations" (p. 24). As a qualitative methodology of inquiry, ethnography focuses on entire cultures and subcultures (Creswell, 2013). More specifically, ethnography reveals the meaning of human behaviours within the context of culture and from a personal perspective in the participant's own voice (Fetterman, 2010). Thus, the researcher describes and interprets the shared and learned patterns of values, behaviours, beliefs, and language of a culture sharing group (Creswell, 2013).

Assumptions of Ethnography

Ethnographers start with a theory as to what they expect to discover drawn from ideas or beliefs of the group (Fetterman, 2010). Theory plays an important role in focusing the researchers' attention when conducting studies. As both a process and outcome of research, ethnographers not only study culture sharing groups but also produce written products of that research (Creswell, 2013). As a process, ethnography involves extended observations of the group often through participant observation and interviews in which the researcher is immersed in the daily lives of participants (Creswell, 2013). As Roper and Shapira (2000) explained, to understand a culture in its totality, the ethnographer must strive for a holistic perspective that captures the activities, knowledge, and beliefs of the group under study.

Ethnographic data collection procedures typically involve engaging in extensive fieldwork through participant observation where the researcher takes part in localized activities, observes what is done, and then asks members about their observations (Fetterman, 2010). Data is also collected through many diverse sources of data, including interviews, observations, symbols, and artifacts (Fetterman, 2010). The purpose of making observations and gathering descriptive data is to record the life experiences of people. These experiences are then clarified

by participants through ethnographic interviews with the aim of eliciting meaning (Spradley, 1979). Small sample size is another characteristic of ethnography research (P. Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). The rationale is to generate information rich data and analysis (Higginbottom, 2004).

Unlike quantitative research, data analysis in ethnography does not take place following the completion of data collection; rather, it happens concurrently with data collection using a recursive, or repeated process of analysis, until patterns becomes apparent (Spradley, 1980). The ethnographer relies on the emic perspective (the insiders' views) of the world and reports the perspectives verbatim, which enables the ethnographer to categorize and make meaning of the way the group defines things. In addition, the ethnographer brings his or her etic perspective (outsider's view) to the field of study. The ethnographer uses the emic view of the group and his or her framework to make sense of patterns of behaviour (Roper & Shapira, 2000) and to develop an overall cultural interpretation (Creswell, 2013).

Focused Ethnography

There are various types of ethnography in conducting qualitative research. Most ethnographies today focus on a distinct problem within a specific context among a small group of people. This type of ethnography is labeled focused ethnography (Morse, 1987; Knoblauch, 2005), mini ethnography (Leininger, 1985), or micro ethnography (Spradley, 1980). In this study, the focused ethnographic approach was deemed as appropriate given that the objective in this study is to explore and understand resilience and coping strategies used by former girl child soldiers. This is also consistent with the constructivist perspective that subjective experiences are created in lived historical, personal, and cultural context (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, the

focused ethnographic approach allows researchers to seek a deeper and richer understanding of the context being studied while developing meaning and patterns in behaviours (Creswell, 2013).

Focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005) (a) is problem-focused and context-specific; (b) focuses on a discrete community or organization or social phenomena, (c) involves the conceptual orientation (social constructionism) of a single researcher, (d) involves a limited number of participants, (e) involves episodic participation observation, (f) involves participants usually holding specific knowledge, and (g) is used in academia as well as for development in health care services. See Table 4 for differences between traditional and focused ethnography (Knoblauch, 2005).

Table 4

Differences Between Traditional and Focused Ethnography

Traditional Ethnography	Focused Ethnography
Long-term field visits	Short-term field visits
Experientially intensive	Data/analysis intensity
Time extensity	Time intensity
Writing	Recording
Solitary data collection and analysis	Data session groups
Open	Focused
Social fields	Communicative activities
Participant role	Field-observer role
Insider knowledge	Background knowledge
Subjective understanding	Conversation
Notes	Notes and transcripts
Coding	Coding and sequential analysis

From "Guidance on performing focused ethnographies with an emphasis on healthcare research," by G. Higgingbottom, J. Pillay, and N. Boadu, 2013, (p. 1-6), Copyright 2013 *The Qualitative Report.*

Many researchers will argue that focused ethnography is mainly used for nursing research and cannot be used appropriately with other studies. However, focused ethnography is an applied research methodology that has been widely used in the investigation of fields specific to contemporary society, which is socially and culturally highly differentiated and fragmented (Knoblauch 2005). Examples of such studies include Dupuis-Blanchard, Neufeld and Strang's (2009) study to investigate the significance of social engagement in relocated older adults. Ensign and Bell (2004) also conducted a study to describe the experiences of homeless youth. Higginbottom (2011) researched the transitioning experiences of internationally-educated nurses into a Canadian health care system.

Focused ethnography is particularly useful in evaluating or eliciting information on a special topic or shared experience (Richards & Morse 2007). Knoblauch (2005) noted an increasing interest in the use of focused ethnographies among those whose focus of study is limited to small elements of society. It is of particular value to researchers who emphasize a distinct issue, situation, or problem within a specific context among a small group of people living in a bigger society (Roper & Shapira 2000). They may target shared features of individuals in groups so that they can focus on common behaviours and experiences (Richards & Morse 2007). It is clear that former girl child soldiers are a specific and distinct population who have shared experiences as a result of the Liberian civil war. Given that they are a small and distinct segment of the general population in Ghana, a focused ethnographic approach is highly relevant.

The process of ethnography and qualitative research more generally is inductive (Roper & Shapira, 2000). Although a researcher is guided by a topic of interest and specific questions to

be answered, there are no pre-conceived ideas about the outcome of the study (Morse, 1987). In this current study, I utilized qualitative methodology and methods by nonparticipant observation, semi-structured interviewing, and document analysis to generate patterns and to make meaning of the experiences of the former girl child soldiers. This was done by asking open-ended questions about the women's coping resources and resilience after their experience in the Liberian civil war. Utilizing focused ethnography to explore and examine former girl child soldiers has contributed to my development of knowledge in the area of living with trauma. Not only did I gain knowledge but also, I recorded information that was specific and relevant to my research questions. Therefore, using focused ethnography was appropriate and beneficial in studying coping strategies and understanding resilience in former girl child soldiers.

Data Collection Procedures

Choosing the site. Qualitative study involves the study of a research site(s) and gaining permission to study the site in a way that will enable easy collection of data (Creswell, 2013). According to Marshall & Rossman (2010) selecting a research site is an important step in doing qualitative research and they described a realistic site as being where (a) entry is possible, (b) there is a high probability that a rich mix of the processes, people, programs, interactions, and structures of interest are present, (c) the research is likely to be able to build trusting relationships with the participants in the study, (d) the study can be conducted and reported ethically, and (e) data quality and credibility of the study are reasonably assured.

The selection of Bududuram camp for this study was based on the guidelines of Creswell, (2013). I have, in the past, worked with former child soldiers in the Bududuram camp providing psychological services for them and the community. Due to my previous experiences in the camp, I was able to determine the suitability of the camp for this study. Ghana was chosen

because most of the participants of the targeted sample have lived in the Bududuram camp in Ghana for more than 10 years and have had their new families there. Even though there have been repatriation packages to return to their country of origin, approximately 1,400 Liberian registered refugees are still living in Ghana (UNHCR, 2016).

Bududuram was an ideal place for this study since the majority of its inhabitants are Liberians; the camp is now an extensive town and it has been in existence since 1990. This has given it credibility of time and experience, since it has all the infrastructure a town needs to thrive. This site was also appropriate and important because the women involved in this study have lived there for several years and have endured through different experiences thereby making it most essential to study issues of resilience.

The choice of this camp was practical (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) based on recommendations from the Ghana refugee board and a colleague who facilitated access to gatekeepers (Higginbottom, 2004; Roper & Shapira, 2000). Practical considerations for selecting this site also included geographical location and logistical feasibility of access. This was important since I live about 71 km away from the camp (i.e., about two to three hours) depending on traffic, and easy access to good roads and transport cannot be underestimated. Bududuram is feasible compared to other refugee camps mentioned earlier in the literature.

One other reason for choosing the camp was that I am Ghanaian, and I lived most of my life there; thus, it is easy for me to access the town with limited difficulty. I lived at home and I had the social support which was much needed during the research process. I also had a supportive network from the University of Ghana, Progressive Life Center (PLC), which also helped in guiding the research process.

Prior to data collection in Ghana, I was communicating with one of my colleagues whom I worked with in the Bududuram camp in 2008 regarding recruitment of the refugee women. He connected me to one of the participants from 2008 who still lives in the camp. I communicated with this gentleman via phone about 13 months prior to leaving Canada for Ghana. He seemed to know a lot about the camp. He lived in the camp since its inception, he was a Liberian former child soldier, and he agreed to be a cultural broker for my research. He has been a cultural broker for a couple of my colleagues who sought to learn more about child soldiers. His role was to introduce me to refugee women on the camp.

Gaining entry. Key informants are significant in the generation of ethnographic study samples (Fetterman, 1998). Key informants are individuals who may be gatekeepers and who enable the ethnographer greater access to the study population; they are also able to reflect upon cultural practices and share this knowledge with the ethnographer (Roper & Shapira 2000). According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), involving gatekeepers and informants during the initial process of gaining entry can be conducted at the formal or informal level. Creswell, (2013) asserted that "ethnography typically begins with a gatekeeper, an individual who is a member of and has an inside status with a culture" (p. 154). This gatekeeper is the initial contact for the researcher and leads the researcher to other participants (Hammersely & Atkinson, 1995). "Approaching the gatekeeper slowly and the cultural system slowly is a wise advice for 'strangers' studying the culture" (Creswell, 2013, p. 154).

As Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggested, gatekeepers require information such as (1) why was the site chosen for the study? (2) what will be done at the site during the research study? How much time will be spent at the site by the researchers? (3) will the researcher's

presence be disruptive? (4) how will the results be reported? and (5) what will the gatekeeper, the participants, and the site gain from the study?

Following a meeting with UNHCR representative in Accra, Ghana, the organization could not be of help in accessing the camp because they were no longer providing services for the camp. Furthermore, Buduburam is no longer a camp because they have repatriated the refugees, and the ones remaining in Ghana are on their own. There were no more non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that set up on the camps and Progressive Life Center (PLC) affiliated with my previous school, University of Ghana, was no longer providing psychological services to the refugees on the camp. The relationships I established with some NGOs in the town in 2008/2009 during previous work with the former child soldiers were no longer beneficial due to the closure of their offices.

A brief summary of my proposal, ethics approval from the University of Alberta, and approval from Mr. Tetteh Padi, acting director of the Ghana refugee board, was submitted to Professor Samuel Danquah, director PLC. Professor Danquah was enthused to be involved in my research by providing assistance in the form of therapy after interviews for the participants. The only setback was that PLC no longer worked with the refugee women, and I had to find other means of accessing my potential participants.

I was in contact with the cultural broker, Mr. Abraham Kelly, about 13 months prior to meeting with him in Ghana. We have spoken at length regarding my interest in this population and what I expect from working with this population. Cultural brokers want to assess the costs, benefits, and risks the research will pose; thus, following the recommendations of Creswell (2013) and Bogdan and Biklen (1992), I met with my cultural broker on an informal level to negotiate access to the camp.

We met in Tesano, a suburb in Accra, over lunch at a popular place called Papaye where I introduced myself. During this meeting, we talked about my research objectives, what the research would entail in terms of the methods that would be utilized, and what I intended to do with the results. I discussed my criteria for inclusion for the women. Further, we discussed general issues on the camp, and finally we discussed when I could visit the camp. His thoughts and concern were that refugees on the camp "don't trust people like you anymore" due to promises made to participants by previous researchers such as employment and huge sums of money only to abandon them once they get the information they needed. He explained further that the Liberians have been exploited by researchers, and they gained nothing much from it; thus, people are skeptical and untrusting of any researcher. At this point, I told him all I had to offer in monetary form is the honorarium and what they could gain from the research as documented in the informed consent. I had an open mind and wanted to have access to the women and assess the situation myself.

Establishing a relationship with and securing the support of the gatekeepers—evidence of which was available in a signed letter from the chairman of Ghana refugee board and the involvement of my cultural broker who is one of the prominent people on the camp—likely contributed to the positive response towards participation and support of the study activities on the camp.

Description of the Camp

The Bududuram camp is in the central region in the Gomoa East district 44 km west of Accra in Ghana. The camp was established in 1990 to accommodate the influx of Liberians then fleeing the Liberian civil war to provide temporary shelter for them. Additionally, refugees from Sierra Leone who escaped the ravages of the civil war (1991-2001) were given accommodation

at the camp. The camp before 2007 was served by Liberian and international NGOs and volunteer organizations. The UNHCR began pulling out of the camp in April 2007, slowly withdrawing all UNHCR-administered services; June 2010 was the official cessation of refugee status for the refugees in the settlement. Despite withdrawal of services from the camp, there are a significant number of refugees who live in the camp because the camp is now their home.

I went to the camp for my first visit in December 2014, and from my observation a lot has changed about the camp since I was there in 2008. It seemed busier with less space, and nothing about the place looked like a refugee camp. The entrance has a security barrier that was not manned by any security or police officials like it was in 2008. One thing that cannot be missed though is the entrance; the uphill climb to the entrance is unique, with the hustle and bustle of people selling by the roadside. The entrance also has a taxi station on the left side and a market where people sell cooked food such as bread, roasted plantain, porridge [*koko*], rice and beans, kenkey, second hand clothes [*obroni wewu*], drinks, vegetables, fruits, and foodstuff. On the right side were a couple of men selling fresh coconut mounted on little locally made push trucks. I also observed school children walking to school with their guardians and others walking alone, street vendors selling, and people carrying loads on their heads to and from the camp. See Figure 3 for a photo from Bududuram camp.

Figure 3. Bududuram camp.

Because this road, called Kasoa road, is the main road that leads to Accra and Winneba, it is very busy and frequently mini-buses [*trotro*] stop right at the entrance of the camp shouting for customers. People were also getting on buses, crossing the road to and from the camp. Other vehicles were also using that route to get to Accra and its environs. Some of the vehicles also parked temporarily in front of a filling station that is situated across from the camp to pick customers either going towards Winneba or Accra. It was chaotic but with purpose. Even though it was very early in the morning, the temperature felt like 40 degrees Celsius, and the environment was busy and alive.

When I entered the camp, I noticed people were busy cooking and selling food in open areas, braiding hair in front of their homes, walking, playing football, and sitting in groups under shaded trees. The entrance of the camp was littered with several makeshift homes and kiosks. The camp has one clinic, and I observed that a large part of the camp behind the clinic has been demolished. This was later confirmed by the gatekeeper who made mention that it was part of the plan to drive the rest of the Liberians away to their country.

The road from the entrance was untarred and rough to walk on. But it was even more difficult to drive on it. When I observed the roads that run through the camp, they were rough with deep gullies and gutters. There are several restaurants [chop bars] on the camp where they cooked local made foods and sell alcoholic beverages. Along the roadsides of the camp were countless stands where people were involved in petty trading. There were also hair salon kiosks littered along the roads in the camp. The camp has churches, a mosque, schools, one clinic, few water pumps, a farm, and football fields.

Sampling

Quantitative studies focus heavily on sample size and generalization of results, whereas qualitative research studies involve smaller sizes and characteristic samples that provide the depth and detail to address the research questions and objectives (Higginbottom, 2004; Miles et al., 2013; Patton, 2002). Therefore, decisions regarding the sample size, sampling frame, and strategy used were predicated by the study purpose (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2000).

According to Higginbottom (2004), in qualitative research, the sample size and sampling processes are usually determined by the methodology employed. Sampling in ethnography is determined by the number of participants in the subculture or group under investigation. Focused ethnographic studies are conducted on small sample sizes and generally use purposive sampling. Rationale for the sample size in focused ethnographies is about gathering rich data applicable to a specific population rather than focus on generalizing the results of the study (Higginbottom et al., 2013). “In ethnographic research, the number of subjects is not nearly as important as the availability and willingness of subjects to be observed or interviewed” (Roper & Shapira, 2000, p. 46). Thus, their willingness to be participants overrides the importance of the sample size.

Purposeful sampling is the selection of individuals, groups, sites, events, and artefacts that are information-rich and purposefully contribute to an in-depth understanding of the phenomena and issues under study (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Purposive sampling is common in ethnography where participants are selected based on their membership within the group or subculture being investigated. This strategy is useful for determining and accessing an appropriate sample that provides the necessary information to effectively address research questions (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2002). Liberian former girl child soldiers have specialized experience and knowledge in this area of research, and purposefully selecting them was most appropriate. Purposeful sampling is particularly helpful in consideration of time and funding constraints that characterize contemporary research studies (Higginbottom, 2004).

Using purposive sampling, the inclusion criteria were women who (a) identify as having served as child soldiers in the Liberian civil war when they were under 18 years, (b) identify as former child soldiers who are currently living as refugees in Ghana, (c) indicate at least one source of social support, and (d) are engaged in at least one activity that is self-sustaining. The last two criteria were included as preliminary indicators of resilience according to the operational definition of resilience used in this study.

Participant Selection

The sample comprised eight purposefully selected participants on the Bududuram camp using snowball/chain and criterion sampling. The sampling strategy was to proceed with the big net approach by mingling with everyone (Fetterman, 2010) and then relying on my judgment and research criteria to utilize the types of sampling mentioned above. Knowing that, I had not enough gatekeepers as anticipated prior to visiting the research site.

"Snowball or chain sampling identifies cases of interest from people who know what cases are information rich" (Patton, 2002, p. 243). Snowball samples suggested by (Patton, 2002), indicates that each individual interested in the researcher's study helps select another member either by directly recruiting or referencing. This type of sampling happened on one occasion when after talking to one pastor in the camp about refugees generally he referred about 15 women to see me for screening.

Criterion sampling focuses on selecting participants that meet the criteria for the research study (Creswell, 2013). "Criterion sampling reviews all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance, a strategy common in quality assurance purposes" (Patton, 2002, p. 238). The point of this type of sampling is to be sure to understand participants who are information rich because they may have answers to my research question. This type of sampling was used when the cultural broker and I went to see some potential participants, and I spent some time talking and asking them some questions to be sure they met the criteria for my research.

I have described how I utilized the two types of sampling mentioned earlier to select my participants and to screen and build rapport before proceeding with other data collection activities.

Criterion sampling. On my first visit to the camp, I walked with the cultural broker in the camp. He lead me from one house to the other to meet seven women who were willing to talk to me. The cultural broker introduced me to women who experienced the war generally, not knowing specifically what their experiences were. Prior to the interviews, I spent about six weeks in total, 5 to 6 hours a day, 5 days a week; I visited their homes, followed them to their various churches, and spent time with them while they were working (e.g., selling produce and braiding hair). I spent some time getting to know these women, and we had informal discussions

about their experiences. From these discussions, three of the women fit the criteria for this research study. This time was spent with them only to determine their fit for this research. I later had the opportunity to interview them in February 2015.

Snowball sampling. It was becoming increasingly difficult to identify more participants who fit the research criteria. The cultural broker and I continued to walk on the camp and talk randomly to people. On one of these walks on the camp, we met a gentleman who introduced himself to me as a pastor of one of the churches on the camp. The cultural broker already knew who he was, and our interaction was cordial. I went ahead to tell him about my research study; however, I made sure to stick to refugees but not use the term child soldiers. He informed me that he had several church members who have had experiences in the war so he would refer them to me. We exchanged numbers, and a few days later he called and said he had a few women gathered by his church ready to meet with me. I went there to meet the women and as I was talking to them individually for screening purposes, two of the women called their friends to come for the meeting who were later recruited as participants. Through this strategy, I was able to recruit five more participants. I participated in their daily lives for several hours a day for a few weeks before I commenced interviewing them. Interviews for these five participants took place in February and March 2015. The pastor was instrumental and helpful with this process by informing and organizing the women.

Building trust. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that the nature of qualitative inquiry is such that the relationship between researcher and respondent is paramount and takes precedence over traditional goals such as the quest for the truth. Lincoln and Guba (1985) further asserted that "the building of trust is a developmental task; trust is not something that suddenly appears after certain matters have been accomplished, but something to be worked on day by

day" (p. 257). Therefore, having direct contact and developing closeness to the people increases understanding and the realities of the people (Patton, 2002). Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Patton (2002) saw trust as a developmental process that happens over time and must be worked on every day.

A study by Kreitzer (1998) investigated Liberian refugee women's experiences in planning and implementing programs at the Bududuram camp. She built trust with the refugees as well as the staff in different ways, including "walking in the camp listening to their needs and wishes, joys and sorrows" (Kreitzer, 1998, p. 100). She also started socializing with camp dwellers, for example "eating lunch at a chop bar" (Kreitzer, 1998, p.100) and "having drinks with refugee friends at the local drinking spots" (Kreitzer, 1998, p. 101). She also lived in the camp for several months and facilitated workshops, which only increased a good relationship with the refugees.

Prior to selecting the participants for this study, it became clear to me that people would volunteer to be part of the study only if there was a substantial reward. The first week, especially when walking in the camp with the cultural broker, women would come to me asking for money for food. Some would bring along their sick children pleading for money to take them to the hospital; others complained about the difficulties of the camp. When I tried to explain to them what my research objectives were, they ignored that and continued to talk about their needs.

On one of those days, I was to meet with some of the participants I had selected at the women's center on the camp; when I arrived, I thought there was another program ongoing at this location only to be told by my cultural broker that word had spread that I was going to take them to Australia and Canada. There were over 100 women waiting for me to come and address their issues and offer some monetary assistance. I was surprised at this turnout but saw the

positive side of this. It was an opportunity for me to set the record straight and stop the rumours. I told the women I was a student and I was not there to take anyone abroad but rather to do my research for my thesis. I also informed them that I had the number of participants I needed, but I could take down their names for future purposes. I could not talk about recruiting child soldiers because of the danger and stigma associated with it as discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. This was also to protect the participants I had already selected. The group of women were disappointed but at the same time they told me they appreciated my honesty. After this unexpected meeting with most of the women on the camp, the pressure of talking to everyone I met by the street reduced dramatically, and I was able to concentrate on my participants.

Building trust with the participants was something I did every day slowly, one day at a time. I built rapport and trust using empathic listening, participating in their daily lives and informal gatherings. Initially, all the participants even though they voluntarily agreed to be part of the study, reported that they have been used extensively as participants by many researchers who promised them jobs and a good life and it never happened. I had a group meeting with them and told them specifically what to expect from the research.

Since the issue of what they would gain was at the forefront of our interactions, I clarified and ruled out all their assumptions about "taking them to Australia and Canada, huge monetary expectations" made by others. I took this opportunity to answer all their questions about the study. The cultural broker was worried no one would be willing to take part in the research if I did not promise them anything more substantial than the honorarium. Thus, this is where the problem lies and I was not ready to use deception so they would be part of my research study. The following day, I went around with the cultural broker in order to identify each participant's

house before I started visiting them individually. I had their permission and dates that I could visit them and following their schedule, which fell on every day of the week.

Empathic listening. As an aspiring counselling psychologist, I utilized basic counselling skills such as building rapport, conveying empathy and genuineness, and expressing appropriate verbal and nonverbal behaviour while working with the participants (Gladding, 2009). My visits to their homes were on the one hand exciting because I got the chance to know them at an in-depth level, but on the other hand it was depressing looking at the conditions of their living environment and lifestyle. I listened to their stories; we had sometimes very detailed conversations about their recruitment and escape, difficulties in Ghana, their work, children, and their hopes for the future. These conversations were sometimes humorous and other times emotional. I cried with them and laughed with them.

Socializing. Liberians are known for their strong religious beliefs, and my participants were no different. On several occasions during my visits to their homes, I accompanied them to church, which usually lasted between three to four hours. Since I also abide by the same Christian doctrine, we attended these services and prayed and worshipped together. In their homes, we cooked together, and I was introduced to all their friends and families. I also spent a considerable amount of time at their workplaces. These women are entrepreneurs and had their own small businesses. Some also had the training and skills to provide services for money. For example, one of the participants owned a salon where she braided hair, fixed weave-ons, and provided general hair styling. Another sold grilled tilapia in the late afternoon by the roadside. I participated in their lives in an open way and built rapport slowly as well.

Informal gatherings. On a few occasions, I invited the participants to come together in a group to sit, relax, interact, and get to know each other more. During these informal meetings,

we had a lot of fun, and we ate fried rice, spaghetti, chicken, non-alcoholic beverages. These meetings took place just across the street from the camp in a restaurant/bar. This decision was made because a lot of people wanted to be part of the research as rumours spread that I would take them to Australia. There was no longer privacy for the women I had selected; they reported to me that sometimes other women who were not included in the study came to their homes to ask a series of questions. Thus, to prevent this from happening, I decided to rent a neutral, private, and secure place where we could meet and get to know each other more without others barging in uninvited. The bar/restaurant seemed to be a high profile and popular place for the people who live on the camp. We ate, talked about general issues, and laughed.

All the participants consistently talked about my commitment to the research and my interest in them. They made comments about the distance I travelled every day to see them and the dangerous driving on the roads. One participant for example said:

> I don't know you from anywhere but the time, money to travel here every day all the way from Tema and your presence here means a lot to me. I didn't know that someone will be interested in my story in a way that makes me feel good and safe. I thank God for your life and for bringing you to me.

Many more statements were made of their appreciation when I had an accident with my driver on our way back home from the camp. This slowed down my visits to the camp for about a week and half because the vehicle had to be repaired. It did not stop me from going back there every day once we fixed the vehicle ourselves with no insurance payment from the other driver. I called the women to tell them about the accident, and I received phone calls from each of them every single day until I returned back to the camp. This solidified our relationship and trust for each other. Out of the many comments made one of them said:

> You shall not die oohh but live. You are so caring and anytime I talk to you I feel so good. People come here from America and promise us everything, we tell them all our story and they just say thank you and you never see them again. They don't even come here every day or once a week, they come here when they need information and just

> leave. God brought you for us and for me in particular I am always ready to see you anytime, God is with you and you shall not die.

Although the accident was frightening, it played a very important role because it enabled me to see participants differently as well as to see how important this study was to the participants.

Description of Participants

After informed consent was gathered from the participants, the demographics form was distributed to them. The age range of the eight participants ranged from 24 to 35 years old and with the highest level of education being the secondary level. The participants were involved in skilled and unskilled employments. The number of years participants had been living in Ghana ranged from 12 to 23 years. Some participants lived in other countries for a few years before finally settling in Ghana. The demographics form also asked the participants to select a pseudonym that would be used for the study. Participants chose the names Deborah, Cece, Miss J., Monica, Gina, Patricia, Reese and Tete. Table 5 illustrates the demographic information of all eight participants.

Table 5

Summary of Participants' Demographic Data

	Participants by Pseudonym							
	Deborah	Cece	Miss J	Monica	Gina	Patricia	Reese	Tete
Age	24	35	36	32	35	32	31	34
Marital Status	Single	Single	single	Single	Single	Single	Widowed	Single
Number of Children	2	1	3	1	0	2	3	2
Age of Recruitment	6	10	17	13	10	8	14	13
Years in Ghana	16	16	15	12	24	19	15	16
Education Level	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Primary	None
Employment	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed	Self employed
Skilled Training	Hair styling	Hair styling	Hair styling	Hair styling	Plumbing	Hair styling	Hair styling	Hair styling

Income per month (CAD)	$31-$93	$31-$93	Below $31	$31-$93	$31-$93	$31-$93	Below $31	$31-$93
Mode of Accommodation	Living with Friends	Own House	Living with Friends	Renting	Renting	Own House	Own House	Own House

Data Collection Activities

Qualitative studies typically rely on multiple sources of data such as interviews, observation, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell, 2013). According to Roper and Shapira (2000), the vast majority of ethnography studies have been conducted on data obtained from participant observation, interviews, and documents. I used non-participant observation, interviews, and review of documents in conducting this research. Interviews helped validate observations and provided directions for future observations (Higginbottom et al., 2013).

Non-participant observations. This study used the non-participant observation, which is not as time-intensive or formal as that of the participant-as-observer (Roper & Shapira, 2000). There is reduced participation as observations are made (Knoblauch, 2005). Observations took place at the Bududuram town where the former girl child soldiers reside, beginning at 7:00 a.m. and ending at 5:00 p.m. Prior to these non-participant observations, I had individual discussions with the participants about the purpose of the observations. Participants were encouraged not to change any aspects of their behaviour, daily activities, or decision making because the purpose of doing the observations is to have in-depth knowledge about what a typical day looks like in their life and have a better understanding of their challenges and coping resources. We also then discussed the most convenient time to visit. Some were able to schedule multiple dates, and others telephoned me regarding when their schedule was best for the observations.

On arrival at their residence, I sat with them, in their homes and sometimes walked with them in the community to observe what they do or not do throughout the day. This included observing them cooking, cleaning their environment, working, going to church or the market,

and selling their products with them on the camp. Observations included, where appropriate and convenient, documenting how the participants interacted with people in their social context such as family, friends, and other individuals. Observations also focused on other lifestyle activities such as chores, decision making processes, and choices (Patton, 2002).

I also observed their non-verbal communication such as how they dressed and how they expressed affection, provided support, and showed emotional distress. The participants were quite vocal when it came to decision making and did not waste time expressing their thoughts or emotions. Through probing, the participants made it clear being direct had been rewarding, thus they continued to use it. Their body language also provided me with information regarding hostility (Patton, 2002). Through non-verbal observations, I was also able to recognize when the participants had overcome some particular difficult challenge.

Document analysis. Consultation of existing documents is pertinent to every ethnographic research (Roper & Shapiro, 2000). Gathering documents such as policies, procedural documents, epidemiological and census figures, maps, photographs, patient records and biographical materials can be used to confirm or contrast interview and observation findings (Knoblauch, 2005; Roper & Shapiro, 2000). Documentation review for this current study began while preparing the literature review; it included a search of all statistics regarding refugee migration in Ghana. The UNHCR (2016) statistics did not comment specifically on former child soldiers but rather on the general Liberian refugee population. The participants' socio-economic activities, data on their family (e.g., children born or any death in the family) were documented during interviews and non-participant observations.

To obtain an additional in-depth understanding and information about cultural and contextual activities, I used arts-based approaches. The participants were asked to share pictures

of themselves engaged in their daily activities that represent their life as refugees in Ghana. The participants opted to allow me to take pictures of their daily activities either at home or in the community working. With verbal permission and written consent, their pictures were taken which I used to confirm as well as contrast interview and observation findings. The participants were also asked to pick one to two objects that represented strength or symbolized resilience. Objects the participants selected ranged from the Bible, pictures of their children, their business, or themselves. Having access to these documents was useful in understanding the participants and enhanced perspectives of their experiences.

Interviews. Focused ethnographies often use a variety of recording equipment such as video recorders, tape recorders, or cameras (Roper & Shapiro, 2000). In this study, information was gathered using a digital audio recorder. This recording produces a large amount of data in a relatively short period, which compensates for the time spent during field work (Knoblauch, 2005). When observations with or without recordings are incorporated, field notes or journals provides contextual observations and offers a heightened perspective of the data (Knoblauch, 2005). To have a complete and more meaningful data, in addition to the interviews, documents, and my observations of the participants, field notes and memos were also kept in a research journal. Field notes were also voice recorded depending on activities, time, and the convenience of the setting. As articulated earlier, when referencing Knoblauch (2005), field notes captured all the verbal and non-verbal observations in addition to my questions and uncertainties. This helped contextualize meaning during data analysis and also allowed for others review.

Interview Activities

Interviews with participants. "Interviews explain and put into a larger context what the ethnographer sees and experiences" (Fetterman, 2010, p. 40). Ethnographic researchers wish to

validate participants' observations and also to gather information that may not have been observed, that cannot be observed, or that cannot be reliably ascertained during observations (Roper & Shapira, 2000).

An in-depth formal semi-structured interview was undertaken using an interview guide containing six research questions and associated probes (see Appendix A). These questions were specific to my research topic and were designed to obtain certain information from the participants. Informal interviews are also often used throughout an ethnographic study to discover categories of meanings in a culture and to compare individuals' perceptions with the community (Fetterman, 2010). I used informal interviews with participants whenever I had the opportunity to spend more time with participants in some of their activities.

The formal interview started with informal questions to ease the participant into the interview. Moving from general to specific is often appropriate, with descriptive (e.g., "What gives you strength since resettling in Ghana?") contrast questions (e.g., "What is the difference between living as a child soldier and your present life in Ghana?"), complemented by probes (e.g., "Could you tell me more about that?" or "What do other community members do?") to gain depth of exploration (Spradley, 1979). The same interview protocol and guide was used for all the participants. Probing was done where appropriate or necessary. The interviews were recorded using a digital audio recorder.

Procedure. Before commencing with the interview, I first obtained the participants' consent and to make sure they were willing to participate voluntarily. I met each participant in person and provided further description of my study, the purpose of the interview, plans for using the results, and participants' level of involvement. The contents of the informed consent (see Appendix B) were verbally explained to all participants. Participants were given the

informed consent form and the demographics form to read and sign. As expected, two of the participants could not read; therefore, I read the consent form out to them, and they were helped to complete the consent forms.

Participants were informed that their names would not be included on the audio recordings and that their self-selected pseudonym would be used to represent their interviews. I also encouraged any questions or concerns they had before, during, and after the interview. The amount of time needed for the interview differed from person to person. Some of the interviews lasted approximately for 1 hour 45 minutes while others took several hours in a day leading to a second interview scheduled for another day. In discussion with the participants, I rented a classroom where we had all the interviews. Time was also scheduled to obtain clarification of the initial interview. I focused on communicating emerging themes and patterns during our subsequent meetings to enable participants to be involved in the interpretive process and to validate their quotes and communicate appropriate meanings (Knoblauch, 2005).

I was also aware that recounting these experiences could be traumatic; therefore, I encouraged participants to stop any time during the interview when the process was too painful for them. For example, all participants got very emotional when recounting some of their challenges and pain. Together we sat with these emotions and sometimes had a moment of humour and then continued when they were ready. PLC was ready to provide psychological services for all the participants, and they were to be referred there automatically to address any psychological issues due to the contents of the interview. All participants refused this offer and maintained that they could handle the interviews and are now past the traumatic state. They added that their struggle is ongoing, and one cannot sit and wallow in pity; therefore, they are coping really well with their lives.

Language and use of translators. I proposed to use translators in my study where necessary. Regardless of the participants' proficiency in English, they were given the option of having a translator present during the interviews. Despite the fact that participants were able to speak English, the levels of fluency varied. All participants refused to have a translator due to lack of trust and issues relating to stigma. When the women were asked about the language I often heard them speak in the camp, they said it was pidgin called *Kru*. This pidgin they spoke had some English words in it. According to Duitsman, Bertkau and Laesch (1975), Kru is a form of Liberian dialect but this is beyond the scope of this study to examine in further detail. Therefore, I spent a couple of months, trying to understand this pidgin so that I could understand the true meaning of what they expressed. I did this by listening to them intently, practicing and asking questions when I did not understand. I also encouraged them to speak pidgin when I was around. When their English was not clear during the interviews, the time I had spent to understand their pidgin was useful.

Data Transcription and Analyses Process

Data analysis in focused ethnography begins concurrently while data is being collected as the researcher discovers additional themes for more in-depth investigation until patterns become apparent (Knoblauch, 2005; Roper & Shapira, 2000; Spradley, 1980). Interviews were transcribed verbatim from the digital audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Different guidelines have been postulated and used by different ethnographers (Fetterman, 2010; Morse, 2007). While none of these guidelines are the same, they share common characteristics, which include (a) data analysis is driven by the data, (b) analysis is done concurrently while collecting data, and (c) methodological strategies are to verify data and validate conclusions reached by the ethnographer. I utilized narrative analysis and thematic analysis to make sense of the data.

Narrative analysis. This analysis followed a modified version of Ollerenshaw and Creswell's (2002) model for narrative analysis. A chronological approach was also taken in the analysis of their narratives (Denzin, 1989) where the participants' events described were arranged in a chronological order. Each participant had a unique story; therefore, narrative analysis was more appropriate. The narrative analysis began by participants sharing their stories from pre-conflict in Liberia, conflict in Liberia, to life in the refugee camp in Ghana. Personal stories were collected from participants during informal conversations, non-participant observations, and interviews.

I prompted the participants to expand on the various sections of their stories (Creswell, 2013). After transcribing and familiarizing myself with the transcripts and field notes, I analyzed the data and then organized the participants' stories into larger patterns and meaning from their narratives (Creswell, 2013). Finally, the participant's biographies were reconstructed to determine the challenges they experienced as well as the factors that have contributed to their development of resilience (Creswell, 2013). These themes were then rewritten into a chronological sequence while incorporating the setting or place of the participants' experiences (Ollerenshaw & Creswell, 2002).

Each narrative described their unique experiences and each story was written to describe the themes by introducing the participants, their early life and war experiences in Liberia, and their life as refugees in Ghana, highlighting the coping resources they utilized in the face of difficulties. The participants' introductions highlight (a) the processes in the individual's lives that contributed to their challenges and resilience, (b) the different contexts that relate to these experiences, and (c) the unique and general features of their lives (Creswell, 2013). After

completing the narrative analysis, member checking were done by sharing the results with the participants for validation and clarification.

Thematic analysis. This research utilized Roper and Shapira's (2000) systematic approach to guide, analyze, and make meaning of the data. This process began by familiarizing myself with the data by reading the transcripts and all the field notes. Observations, informal conversations, document examinations, and transcribed recorded interviews were converted into field notes. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and checked for accuracy shortly after each interview (Richards & Morse, 2007). Areas needing further investigation through follow-up interviews were identified through simultaneous analysis of transcripts with ongoing data collection (Miles et al., 2014).

Coding began by assigning descriptive labels to segments of words, sentences, or paragraphs (Miles & Huberman, 1994). While reading through these data line by line, I coded and examined the coded labels individually. Ongoing coding facilitated the process of sorting the relevant data segments into categories and subcategories where appropriate, based on similarities or differences, "things that are alike or unlike each other" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 248). Further analysis allowed the identification of potential associations between the categories (Roper & Shapira, 2000) and encouraged reflection on how these associations were relevant in addressing the research objectives (Miles et al., 2014).

Further analysis also led to the identification of patterns and relationships within and across the different categories, which supported the development of the major themes recurring in the data. Identifying outliers or negative cases that contrasted the majority of participant responses (Richards & Morse, 2007; Roper & Shapira, 2000) was also important to broaden the range of perspectives as well as compare the information with the rest of the data. Findings of the

study were connected to existing relevant theories to provide a rich and complex data. To generalize findings about the cultural world of the study, linkages were found between the emic view of participants and my etic interpretations to make meaning and then I constructed a theoretical understanding that takes both perspectives into account.

Coding was organized and completed using Atlas.ti.7 computer software. This software enhanced the integrity and rigor of data analysis and provided clear linkage between interpretations and the data (Roper & Shapira).

Memoing: Reflective remarks. Memos are a form of coding that is done while collecting data, and reviewing interviews, relevant documents and observations. They may be questions you ask yourself or "little conceptual epiphanies" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 74) that later lead to a theoretical understanding (Roper & Shapiro, 2000). During the current study, I recorded my ideas, insights, and reflections about the data; this was helpful to me in making connections between all the information I gathered. These reflections occurred during all stages of the research and provided a basis for deep meaning and understanding of the data. Some of the thoughts and insights helped me to further explore the study and supporting literature. It is important to note that the above guidelines for analyzing focused ethnographic data did not happen in a linear order but moved back and forth between coding, memoing, sorting patterns, and generalizing (Roper & Shapiro, 2000).

Ethical Considerations

"Ethics is a set of moral principles that aim to prevent research participants from being harmed by the researcher and the research process" (Liamputtong, 2010, p.31). Ethical and moral responsibility is essential in any research, but when it comes to multicultural research with

marginalized groups, it is even more important as researchers may deal with individuals who have been exploited (Liamputtong, 2010).

A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues during the research process, and this is even more crucial when it comes to former girl child soldiers. Lipson (1994) categorized ethical issues into (a) informed consent, (b) deception or covert activities, (c) confidentiality, (d) benefits or risks to the participant, and (e) whether the researcher shares similar experiences. This research did not utilize any deceptive or covert activities; therefore, I would not expand on that. This study fulfilled its ethical responsibilities by first being reviewed and received ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Board I at the University of Alberta. The study proposal in addition to the clearance from the University of Alberta was submitted to the refugee board in Ghana where it received another clearance before the study commenced.

Informed consent. Participants were invited to participate in the research study by distributing a letter of information (see Appendix C). The letter of information articulates the purposes of the research in written form; however, the information was also read verbally to all participants. Taking into consideration that participants were limited in their reading ability to understand fully the process of the research, I explained the nature and possible consequences of the research at this crucial stage. This initial contact was done through face-to-face conversations with all participants. To promote individual autonomy, participants were encouraged to take their time and think about the information they had been provided and agree to participate voluntarily without any psychological coercion.

Informed consent was not limited to the process of the research and consequences alone but also representation of data and the publication of findings. In this way, I discussed with participants how data would be represented in journals, conferences, and workshops, and who

would own the data. Participants agreed to how data would be represented and wanted to have copies of their interview transcripts. During this consent procedure, participants were informed that they had the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage of the research process without any negative consequences. They were also asked to voluntarily agree to participate in the study or not without any consequences or penalty. I made sure to clarify all questions and information to help all participants to understand the process of the research before signing the consent forms.

Confidentiality. Participants were made aware that all interviews and data collected would be treated with the utmost confidentiality and kept locked in a safe place. They were informed I was using a password and encrypted computer to store all the data. This study did not use research assistants, transcribers, or interpreters; therefore, a strict code of confidentiality was between me and the participants. All data were aggregated and analyzed and presented back to participants to confirm or change any information in the data. Anonymity was also ensured through self-selected pseudonyms in all documents so that readers could not identify the participants.

Risks. The risk posed by the present study was considered minimally harmful. The participants have had traumatic experiences, either as witnesses, victims, or the perpetrators. There were important risks to consider. Sharing potentially traumatic and painful events could evoke varying levels of distress in participants; thus, sharing details of events could heighten their anxiety. Some individuals might have been afraid to share their stories due to the stigma. Although the focus of my research was to understand their resilience and coping strategies, it was inevitable that they had to share some of these traumatic stories. Due to this, support structures and arrangement with PLC was made for all participants to be referred there

automatically to see a psychologist after the interviews. All participants declined this service. In order to uphold the principle of causing no harm, I used my clinical judgement to assess when the participants could no longer continue with the interview; I also conducted a debriefing with them after the interviews. None of the interviews required to be discontinued or cut short because any participant was in distress.

Benefits. While there may be limited direct benefits for participating, I believe this research added to the evidence-based trauma work with women refugees and child soldiers. The participants expressed their gratitude of having a platform to share their experiences and also mentioned the empowering and cathartic experience. This study also provided in-depth information and clarified any ignorant assumptions people might have about refugees and this marginalized population. Participants were not paid but given snacks and an honorarium of $20 CAD after interviews.

Establishing Quality and Rigour

Focused ethnography uses triangulation as a main source of evaluating data. I used Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluating criteria to establish rigour and quality in the study: (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) confirmability, and (d) dependability.

Credibility. I used triangulation, memoing, member checks, and peer/supervisory methods to ensure the quality and trustworthiness of my research findings. In focused ethnography, triangulation is used as a method to enhance the credibility of research, which can involve multiple methods of data collection (Roper & Shapira, 2000). For this study, triangulation was achieved through the three methods of non-participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. This was done by using data from each source to judge the credibility of the other sources (Silverman, 1997) to compare findings (Muecke, 1994). In addition, since I had

used a social constructivist framework, the main purpose of triangulation was to enhance perspective and appreciate different meanings in participants' experiences.

Member checks is one of the hallmark strategies used in focused ethnography to establish credibility. The researcher interprets data based on the participant's emic and the researcher's etic view. Therefore, to test the overall interpretation, participants' views and researchers' views are taken into consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Member checks involved providing participants with preliminary results for them to test the overall interpretation, provide feedback, and ensure accurate representation of the information collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility was also maintained by an ongoing practice of memoing. Memoing was used to examine my thoughts, questions, data interpretation, and observations during the study. Since this was recorded on the right side of the transcribed data, anyone who picks up the data will understand the process as well as how I made decisions. Memoing was also used to help clarify personal biases and assumptions as much as possible (Fetterman, 2010). Memoing helped me to monitor my understanding of the knowledge gathered from existing literature with the collected data.

Credibility was further maintained by supervisory review of all my decisions and interpretation and asking me for their interpretation of the same data. Denzin (1989) described this supervision process as investigator triangulation. During my study, my supervisor was in regular contact to discuss ongoing data collection processes. She asked questions and provided information that added to the expansive nature of looking at the same phenomenon.

Transferability/applicability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined transferability as the reader's ability to transfer the findings of their research to their own practice and to other settings. The purpose of this study was not to generalize findings; however, the findings will

inform policy makers of Disarmament Demobilize Reintegration (DDR) programs, research, and practice with former child soldiers across the world. The findings of this study will provide information for NGOs, the research community mental health practitioners, and especially UNHCR because their main objective is to ameliorate suffering, ensure safety, and provide basic needs for refugees. The mental health community, especially in Western countries, could also be exposed to some coping resources used by former child soldiers, which are acceptable and sustainable in their culture. This study provides some knowledge for Western mental health practitioners when planning therapeutic interventions for this refugee population. Coping strategies leading to resilience may be generalized to the greater refugee population. Furthermore, they have the opportunity to define resilience in this specific context and compare it to the existing mental health literature.

Dependability and confirmability. In qualitative research, consistency is defined in terms of dependability. Guba and Lincoln's (1989) concept of dependability implies traceable variability that can be ascribed to identify sources. Guba and Lincoln (1989) described the audit strategy as the major technique for establishing confirmability in qualitative research. In this study, supervisory examination was used as an external audit to understand how and why certain decisions were made and the process of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

An organized in-depth database helped my supervisor and me to review the evidence. To ensure dependability and confirmability, strategies for database documentation in the current study followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) outlined categories: (a) raw data (field notes and audio recordings), (b) data reduction and analysis products (condensed notes), (c) data reconstruction and synthesis products (thematic categories, interpretations, inferences, memos), and (d) process notes (procedures and design strategies, trustworthiness notes).

For this study, the raw data consisted of field notes and memos stored electronically. Field notes are the researcher's observation of people, events, description of conversations with and among people, analyses, and thoughts for further questions (Roper & Shapira, 2000). These observations helped me to identify categories and behaviour patterns that are of interest to the study. Analytic themes through field notes helped to explain connections between behaviour and the information received during the entire study. I recorded what participants said as well as made notes of non-verbal behaviours. The process and design for the focused ethnography was documented and organized in a systematic way that will help other researchers to follow how I came to my conclusions in the study.

Throughout the documentation process of this study, all the information gathered—documents, interview recordings, transcripts and codes, field notes, memos, data analysis—were stored in a locked storage. In order to ensure credibility and dependability, these documents were organized in a way that will enable external investigators to follow and trace the evidence of the research findings. Participants' names are anonymized by replacing their names with pseudonyms to protect their identity and privacy. Backup was developed for all the recordings and computer files (Creswell, 2013).

Reflexivity – Researcher's Positioning

Qualitative researchers need to "position" themselves in their writings (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). This concept is called "reflexivity in which the writer is conscious of the biases, values, and experiences that he or she brings to a qualitative research study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 216). Within social constructivist, the researcher's background shapes the interpretation of participants' experiences. I recognize that my own background could affect my interpretation as I

became familiar with and immersed myself in the personal, cultural, or historical experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2013).

First, there are my direct experiences with refugees. My first experience with refugees prior to working with former child soldiers was when I was about 13 years old in 1992. Our neighbouring country, Togo, had a civil war and Ghana opened its borders to the refugees and built camps for them. In my neighbourhood, there were about 35 Togolese refugees, and out of these my mother provided shelter to eight males and two females for some years and others for several months. It was very exciting to have them in our home with the endless cooking and all the stories I was hearing. My recollection of the refugees is thoughts and visions of sadness, grief, and hopelessness. I witnessed the screaming in the night, crying, anxiety, depression, and sadness from both men and women, which I came to understand later on in my training as expressions of trauma and grief. From our guests, I learned about the experience of being forced to leave one's homeland and the impact this can have on people. I became interested in child soldiers in 2008, when I worked as a voluntary research assistant for an NGO. Prior to this, I had heard of child soldiers fleetingly in the news, but I did not have adequate information about them until 2008 when I visited the Bududuram camp. We worked in the Bududuram camp to identify the social, psychological, and spiritual needs of the former child soldiers. Our research team subsequently provided individual and group therapy for them.

The visit to the Bududuram camp was an eye opener for me, and I had several questions about these former child soldiers, once I started listening to their experiences from their trauma in recruitment to life in the camps in Ghana. We met various factions on the camps, and they were all males. I remember our professor's question about whether the former girl child soldiers also lived on the camps. Interestingly, they were all in a room chatting just metres away from

where we were sitting under the trees. They were not invited to sit with us and talk, and the research team did not push for that. I have always wondered what the girls' experiences were and how different or similar they were from our study results. From all the literature and my personal experience, it is clear that former girl child soldiers need their own platform to share experiences, share their needs, and receive the intervention or help that they deserve. They are usually not included in conversations or even in officially established DDR programs by the UNHCR. Clearly, they are a marginalized group within the refugee population.

Second, my bias may also stem from anger about child soldiers being misunderstood and blamed for everyone's suffering during the war. I see them more as victims who are traumatized than perpetrators, and I also do envision them as resilient. It was important for me to recognize their strengths and resilience rather than leaning toward their victimization. Not only did this encourage the women in this study to continue to tap into their resilient qualities but it also helped them to heal through identifying their strength. This study also provided information to professionals to recognize that these women can overcome adversity and can adapt and live productive lives such as engaging in income generating activities, learning new skills, or having a family. These assumptions and biases led to some expectation of certain responses from the participants.

Third, another bias or assumption I had about the former girl child soldiers is that they are women and therefore weak as opposed to being strong and resilient. This is because gender roles in several African communities see women as dependent and weak. Girls and women are expected to be calm and seek protection from men. The literature confirms how the girl child soldiers were angrier, stronger, and tougher on the battlefields than the male soldiers. I believe this was because the girl child soldiers wanted to shed the assumption society has about them and

prove that whatever the males are doing, they could equally do the same and even more. The participants made it clear that they are resilient as demonstrated in the results of this study, and this assumption could not be generalized.

Finally, growing up in Ghana, I did not witness any wars or conflict in my country or violence in my home. My country has received refugees from neighbouring countries, including Togo, Sierra Leon, Senegal and Liberia, and recently from Cote d'Ivoire. Not having any exposure to violence possibly affected my level of understanding of the former girl child soldiers initially. I recognized that I was emotionally involved with their stories, and it was of utmost importance to set my emotions aside, give myself space to deal with my own emotions, and sometimes make it known to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Approaching this study in a non-judgemental way allowed me to suspend my personal evaluation of the cultural practices of the former girl child soldiers. This study gave me the opportunity to write rich thick descriptions of the participants' perspective and also shed light on the resilience and coping strategies. To ensure I monitored my emerging biases and views, I kept a research journal as a way of ensuring I was aware of how they may influence my thoughts, feelings, and understandings during the research.

As a counselling psychology student, I am interested in understanding resilience and coping strategies in this population. In examining all the literature, it was interesting to note that former girl child soldiers are not given the necessary resources and support they need. They are bypassed by programs that boy child soldiers have had the benefit of receiving. Most of the literature is also focused on trauma in these individuals, and very few studies focus on how they are surviving and living life. This focus on impact limits capacity to develop interventions and programs that build on what has been working in the lives of these survivors of war.

This research is an opportunity to integrate my refugee experiences both in my home and the camps in Ghana with my interest in counselling psychology. From the counselling psychology perspective, multicultural counselling encourages therapists to account for cultural and contextual factors that impact therapy outcomes when working with minority and special groups. As a therapist, having an interest in multicultural counselling, this study has contributed to multicultural theory and practice approaches by acquiring an in-depth understanding of the life challenges of former girl child soldiers and how these challenges foster resilience.

As I became familiar and immersed myself in the participant's everyday life, I made interpretations of information I gathered with the intent to interpret the meaning (Creswell, 20013), which is an important process when inquiring about coping strategies that have contributed to the resilience of former girl child soldiers. The overview of the literature emphasized their traumatic experiences, and this empowered me to undertake this study to explore and understand their coping strategies and be able to describe their survival experiences. Since their coping methods had not been acknowledged by the literature, giving the women a platform to tell their stories of coping in the camps in Ghana has broadened or enhanced not only my knowledge of former girl child soldiers but also knowledge for the academic and mental health communities.

Data Representation/Knowledge Transfer

Focused ethnography is represented in many forms. Ethnographers use embedded rhetorical devices such as figures of speech or "tropes" such as metaphors, vignettes, illustrations and storytelling (Fetterman, 2010; Hammersley & P. Atkinson, 1995). Writers can incorporate details or "write lushly" (Goffman, 1989, p. 131). They also depict scenes (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995) and can also incorporate "thick" descriptions that show the feelings and experiences

of the participants (Denzin, 1989; Fetterman, 2010). In addition, ethnographers present dialogue or rely on characterization such as acting, talking and relating to others (Emerson et al., 1995). In this study, the document was presented using thick rich descriptions of the participants' coping resources and events to enable readers not only to have an in-depth understanding of their issues but also to provide a potential basis for informed compassion and ethical interventions (R. Atkinson, 1998) that will enhance the recovery and long-term well-being of former girl child soldiers. As presented, I have incorporated art forms, such as the incorporation of images with stories, as an additional method of presenting the results**.**

This study employed End-of-grant Knowledge Translation (KT) strategies. End-of-grant Knowledge Translation covers any activities aimed at diffusing, disseminating or applying the results of a research project (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, [CIHR] 2012). According to Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR, 2012), methods appropriate to translating research findings range from simple communication activities (diffusion, dissemination) to more intensive knowledge application efforts, such as workshops, academic detailing, and tool development. KT for the academic community has already began through the strategy of diffusion such as giving oral and poster presentations at conferences in Canada. Publishing findings in international and national journals is underway. Participants have also been provided with transcripts of the document through member checks while PLC in Ghana has been briefed about the outcome of the study. Most activities of data representation and knowledge transfer will take place after the defense of the study outlined below:

To reach policy makers, KT will be in the form of diffusion, which will be utilized to inform policy and practice through national and international workshops. Policy makers like the UNHCR, UNICEF, UN, as well as other government agencies will be presented with briefs

about the study that could influence future policies. Another target audience is practitioners such as mental health practitioners and other health care providers. To reach this audience, workshops will be conducted to ensure that findings are shared through health services and refugee centres across Canada to improve services for former child soldiers. Information for practitioners is in the form of practical suggestions for better procedures, reform of existing practices, and information about understanding clients better who were former girl child soldiers (Richardson, 1990).

Conclusion

This focused ethnographic study explored resilience and coping strategies used by Liberian former girl child soldiers while living in Ghana. Data collection through observation, interviews, and document review revealed the coping strategies they used to minimize their challenges and how this contributed to their resilience. Data analyses and interpretation was done by using both the participants' views and the researchers identified framework, namely resilience and coping. Data analyses was also done by documenting the participants' stories in narrative. Ethical considerations also discussed informed consent, confidentiality, risks as well as benefits of being part of the study. Processes that were used to establish quality and rigor include triangulation, member checks, field notes, and memoing. These processes helped to ensure credibility, dependability/confirmability and transferability of this research.

CHAPTER 5 FINDINGS: I KNOW WHERE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE: VOICES FROM FORMER GIRL CHILD SOLDIERS

Part I – Participants' Stories

Eight former girl child soldiers participated in this study. They arrived in Ghana at different times and have their own unique stories about how they got to the Bududuram refugee camp. This chapter provides narratives about each participant. Each narrative describes their unique experiences/themes by introducing the participants, their early life and war experiences in Liberia, and their life in Ghana, while shedding light on their resilience in the face of difficulties. The themes that represents participants' collective experiences are shared in Chapter 6.

Deborah

> It had rained heavily the previous day and most roads in the camp were muddy and untarred resulting in some cars getting stuck in the mud. Deborah arrived to walk me to her house at about 7:00 a.m. She was dressed in capri jeans, a T-shirt, a blazer and had a scarf on. Next to her house were men and women smoking marijuana, drinking, arguing, listening to loud music and yelling. The noise levels were extremely high and deafening due to the loud music and people screaming. My cultural broker made me aware prior to my visit that Deborah's neighbourhood was "very dangerous" and police frequent that area to make arrests. When we entered her house, 90% of her living space was flooded and she reported she spent most of the night collecting the water and resting in the chair periodically. The area was waterlogged so when it rains water permeates from the ground for days even after the rain stops.
>
> During my visit, Deborah not only demonstrated her daily activities but also how she solves other unforeseen difficulties. She was able to combine a grueling schedule of church activities that spread out between 4 a.m. to midnight and yet was able to make appointments that fit her clients' schedule. For several hours, I observed her styling clients' hair at the same time collecting the rain water from the floor in between these appointments.
>
> Deborah's determination and resilience were evident in her words and actions. For example, when I asked her how the rains had affected her usual activities, she shrugged it off and indicated that it's difficult but at the end of the day it's "just water, a season and won't last forever." Deborah's resilience shows in her unrelenting nature to continue working towards better quality of life. Her customers' continual visits to her home despite her poor environment attest to her skill as a hair stylist. The bad weather did not deter Deborah considering the many challenges she has experienced as a refugee woman. (Research Journal: June 15, 2015)

Deborah is a 24-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has two children aged 7 years and 2 years old who live with their father. Her highest level of education is the secondary level, equivalent to Grade 12. She lives with some friends and has her own room. Her income is on average GHC 300, equivalent of about $93 CAD a month by braiding hair. Deborah has lived in the refugee camp for 16 years. She arrived in Ghana at the age of 8 years. She does not have any family in Ghana and does not have contact with family members. I interviewed Deborah on February 10, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 5 and June 15, 2015. I also visited Deborah on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal interactions and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present. See Figure 4 for photo of Deborah cooking

Figure 4. Deborah cooking.

Meeting Deborah. I first met Deborah through a pastor who also introduced me to most of my participants. Subsequently, through other group meetings, I observed that Deborah was always well dressed and had different and colourful hairstyles. She appeared fashion conscious and always wore make-up. She seemed friendly and relaxed around the other women. From my observations, she has a reserved personality and takes pride in her work.

Deborah's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Deborah was 7 years old when the war broke out, thus she does not remember explicit details about her family. She has two siblings, a brother and a sister, both older than her. She recounted that before the war started, everything was fine with her family. She was going to school and she had a happy life. Her mother was an administrative assistant and her father was a teacher. "My father had a big house and my father and mother were all working." In terms of her relationship with her siblings, she said they were always together. Deborah's siblings were in school when the war broke out in their town. While Deborah and her parents were running into the bushes escaping the violence, they were stopped by rebel groups. Unfortunately, her siblings were in school on that day and there was no time to get them, so her parents had to make a tough decision to escape with Deborah alone. Her parents were captured and taken to an unknown place where they were subsequently killed. She was then abducted by the rebels.

Deborah stayed with the group for 11 months; it could have been longer but she is not entirely certain. She is unsure whether at some point she had been sexually molested or not. Her role in the rebel group was doing chores. If she was lucky, she would be given some food; otherwise, she went hungry and had to fend for herself. This is indicated in her statement:

> Sometimes when they are eating they will give me sometimes they won't give me, I will go around and pick food from the floor or the bush. They will leave us and go, when they come back sometimes they will bring animal, sometimes they will bring human being and fix (cook) it like food and we eat. Sometimes they beat us the whole day for giving them bad luck.

She was able to escape when the war intensified and was left behind by the group. A woman found her and took her with her to Ghana.

Deborah's life in Ghana. Deborah has been living in Ghana for the past 15 years. She described many challenges and ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties. Before Deborah became independent and started living on her own, she had three women who were

helping her at different stages of her life. The first was the woman who brought her to Ghana. According to Deborah, initially the woman could not afford to send her to school because she had no money and was going through her own difficulties. She found a man who helped with Deborah's education for a short period and he left for the U.S., meaning Deborah could not continue with her education. She started helping the woman to sell charcoal and other things for a year and from that money she restarted school. Deborah also had to work after school as stated:

> When I come from school I will go to the various houses and work for people. I will go and wash, help people to cook, if the people have children I will braid their hair and they give me small money. The woman told me that she was not my mother and she was doing favour for me so I should also help her. So, I was helping her so that she will send me to school.

Unfortunately, the woman became very ill and entrusted Deborah to her friend. She died shortly afterwards. The second helper could not take Deborah to school because she had no money. However, she provided food and shelter for her. Deborah stayed at home and helped her with house chores. The woman left for Liberia and could not take Deborah with her. For the third time, a neighbour was willing to take care of Deborah.

With the third helper, everything changed for Deborah because she was sent to school. She even went to Nigeria with the woman to live there for a while where Deborah continued her education, which is where she discovered her talent as a beautician. The woman brought Deborah back to Ghana and lived with her until the woman had to leave to join her family in the U.S. Before she left, Deborah was old enough to take care of herself. The woman left all her possessions to Deborah, and she continued to work as a hair stylist to survive. She eventually acquired a partner and had children in the camp. In her continuous struggle to survive, Deborah reported going hungry for as long as a week in Ghana because of lack of business and subsequent lack of money. In times like these she prayed:

> Sometimes when I am hungry like that, sometimes I pray asking God to provide sometimes I just pray and sleep, when I am hungry I don't want to be outside, I will just be inside.

Deborah's partner left with their children for Liberia during a UN repatriation program. Because she was not willing to go back due to her past, her partner left in anger. She knows her children are with their father in Liberia but she has no knowledge of their whereabouts. She constantly prays that one day, her partner will contact her and she can be in touch with her children.

Deborah's resilience in the face of difficulties. In my visits and conversations with Deborah, she sometimes thinks about her parents and siblings and longs for her children. She has a strong work ethic, and, from my observations, she is a very popular beautician in the camp. She turns these lonely and difficult times around by going to church twice every day all week. Deborah gets sad when she thinks about her family, and she copes with this by crying and being reclusive. She reported that sometimes working and keeping herself busy helps her cope and manage stress.

Identified themes. The themes that were identified as sources of resilience from Deborah's formal and informal interviews, non-participant observations, as well as her interaction with me are: (a) Receiving support from others, (b) Work, (c) God as a Source of Strength, and (d) Hope.

Receiving support from others. Deborah seeks counselling from her pastor when she is going through tough times. She considers this act as the best way she copes and receives support, which she uses to further build strength. The pastor provides counsel in two forms; prayer and normalizing techniques. The pastor prays for her and whenever she tries to resist receiving the peace and strength, the pastor explains some things, for example:

> The counsel is better because the pastor counsels me and prays for me when I put up resistance. The way he counsels me and talks to me takes my problems from my mind. Sometimes he begins to explain to me that I am not the only person having these

> problems, some people's problems are worse than mine and they are still living and they are coping with it so I have to let go of the past and move on with my life.

Deborah notes that receiving counseling is the best way she survives and copes. She is self-reliant, determined, and has a positive outlook on life. She also has the ability to seek and receive help whenever she needs to; as well, she receives different levels of support from people she met initially as strangers.

Work. Another theme that came out during my interactions with Deborah was her devotion to her work. After receiving support and care from three main sources, she particularly pointed out that she received strength and encouragement to learn a trade from one of the women. She stated that this woman spurred her on and said since she has no family, her trade will help her succeed. Her work appears to be one of the most important pillars to her strength. With personality characteristics, she values her talent and so does her community on the camp. She proved that she has the support from her community to thrive and also has the internal strength to use work as a way of coping with and avoiding past memories: "My work helps me to cope with life because when I am busy the whole day, I don't think about problems."

God as a source of strength. Another theme identified during my non-participant observation and interviews with Deborah is her belief in God. Culturally, Deborah was taught about the power of the supernatural. She receives resilience from something that she believes is greater than she is, "God." She seeks protection and provision from God, and she does this by praying, going for devotions every day, and making petitions to God. She believes and relies on the supernatural to receive the strength to continue living, saying:

> First, I will say God gives me the strength, in Him I have strength. God gives me the strength and gave me a talent that I can live on. The trade that I learnt is one way I survive in Ghana. So now if I don't braid hair, I don't have money but God gave me that talent.

Hope. Another theme that was evident in Deborah's experience is her sense of hope. She relies on hope as well as a means of survival. She believes that being alive is an indication that things will fall into place and life will be better in the near future. This was evident in her statement: “Where there is life there is hope.”

CeCe

> I arrived at Cece’s neighbourhood at 7:00 a. m. She was dressed in a colourful print T-shirt with capri pants and flip flops. I observed her as she carried a bucket to a communal tap, joined the queue and fetched water. I accompanied her as we walked to her house. As always, she was excited to see me. Cece lives in an abandoned school building. This building is next to the KVIP (toilets) therefore due to the stench, flies and mosquitoes, she couldn’t open her windows for fresh air. The windows were barred with solid plywood and all spaces around it covered with cloth. Her room is large and divided by curtains into a kitchen and sleeping area. There was a TV, one-burner cooker, 2 plastic chairs with a mattress placed on the floor. Her room was stuffy, extremely hot and dark despite the light being on.
>
> During my stay, it was evident that Cece was self-reliant, hardworking and a caring mother. She demonstrated this by cooking her daughter’s lunch and we walked together and delivered the food during her lunch break. I met Cece’s daughter and was impressed by how well-groomed and well-mannered she presented. Her daughter’s teacher reminded Cece of the outstanding fees for books and tuition. Following this, I observed her impressively call out for people passing by as well as on the phone to get their business to do their hair at a discount. Fortunately, she persuaded 2 customers and proceeded to do their hair for several hours with great skill, precision and speed. Cece is clearly resilient especially knowing that she has no one to depend on. She was resourceful in finding ways to generate some income to provide for her child and herself. She also had good relationships with people in her community fostering a stronger support system for her. She is a single mother and works hard to make ends meet despite the continuous challenges. (Research Journal: July 2, 2015)

CeCe is a 35-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has an 8-year-old daughter. Her highest level of education is the secondary level, equivalent to Grade 12. CeCe and her daughter live in a single rented room. Her income is on average GHC 150 the equivalent of $55 CAD a month obtained through plaiting hair and going from house to house performing services such washing people’s clothes and cleaning their compounds. CeCe has lived in the refugee camp for 16 years. She arrived in 1999 at the age of 19 years. She has no family in Ghana and

neither does she have contact with family members back in Liberia. I interviewed CeCe on February 17, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 17 and June 16, 2015. I also visited Cece on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal conversations and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting CeCe. I first met CeCe through a pastor who also introduced me to most of my participants. Subsequently, through other group meetings, I noticed that CeCe was always punctual for the meetings and well dressed. During the screening interviews and all our group meetings, I observed that CeCe had a more reserved personality, which distinguished her from the others. However, simultaneously, I also observed her asserting herself within the group.

CeCe's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Cece does not remember many details about her family prior to the war breaking out as she was only 10 years old. She remembered that financially, her family was doing well and her father was the driver of the late president Doe as she stated, "My parents had properties and they were very caring. They took very good care of us."

Her mother was a homemaker and together with her siblings, they lived with their parents. Cece and her seven siblings were all enrolled in school at the time. "Together with other adopted children, my parents sent us to school and paid our school fees; they encouraged us and loved us." She also recounted how she learned how to be resilient from receiving strength from siblings through togetherness, stating, "When someone is feeling down and doesn't want to go to school you get encouraged by your siblings and once you receive encouragement nothing can stop you."

Cece reported that her mother also taught her the importance of literacy, which increased her knowledge in the world of business. She would go and sell in the market with her mother. Through this experience, her mother inspired all her children to take education seriously:

> I learned how to work and take education seriously and never gave up through my mother because she worked hard and I learnt how to be resilient from her because she caters to our needs.

Due to the tribal nature of the war, their household was often a target by the rebels as they did not belong to the prominent tribe in their neighborhood. As a result, her father and mother were killed, and her siblings were taken away by rebels. During this raid by rebels, she was dragged to the nearby bushes and raped by two men. After she was raped, one of the men burnt her thigh with a cigarette. The scar is indeed large, and for Cece, this is a constant reminder of her past experiences. As everyone fled the war, CeCe's neighbour decided to take her along together with their own surviving family, and they joined other groups of people who were fleeing the violence.

During their journey, the woman cleaned her wounds from the sexual assault using traditional herbs. However, in the midst of their attempt to escape, they were captured by the rebels. When asked about her time with the rebels, Cece explained that while the woman's daughters were sleeping with the rebels as a means of survival, she was mainly in charge of chores (cooking, washing, cleaning). She stated that at one point, she had to pretend to be in love with one of the rebels and treat him as a lover just to survive.

As the war intensified, there were inter rebel group fights. In one of these attacks, the captured girls and women "scattered" (ran in different directions), but the woman who had taken CeCe under her wing was unfortunately killed. She then decided to find another family to travel with. Cece was lucky to find another mother figure. This woman was already living with the

rebels, and therefore CeCe stayed with her new-found mother in the rebel group for a couple of months.

Eventually the rebels escorted them to the country's border with Ivory Coast where they crossed for safety. According to Cece, living in Ivory Coast was a challenge since one could not walk on the streets without a passport. Her mother figure also died, and she ended up living among a group of girls. She stayed in Ivory Coast from 1990 to 1999, stating,

> During my stay in Ivory Coast, I was washing clothes, braiding hair and helping people in the community. When it became very difficult to cope I followed my friends to Ghana hoping for a better life.

So far, in trying to get to safety, Cece's life has been filled with adversity.

CeCe's life in Ghana. CeCe has been living in Ghana for the past 16 years. She described many challenges and ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties. The initial challenge was that she was unable to afford the bus fare to travel from Cote d' Ivoire to Ghana. She had to sleep with a man she met at the lorry station who in exchange paid for her bus fare to Ghana. She also had challenges not having any help and adjusting in an unknown place in Ghana:

> I never had shelter. The friends that brought me, I only stayed with them for 3 days, they threw my things out. They said you have already gotten here, you have to find your own place, I didn't know where to go.

CeCe could not afford food and shelter and would go hungry for days on end. She reported that at one point while in Ghana, she walked barefoot for several months because she could not afford to buy flip-flops. However, somehow, she started surviving by braiding hair. When she did not have customers for a while, she would sleep with men who gave her money for food. See Figure 5 for CeCe's home.

Figure 5. CeCe's home.

Cece's resilience in the face of difficulties and loneliness. In my interactions with Cece, she has no idea if any of her relatives are still alive. Her determination, perseverance, and self-encouragement enabled her to become independent and self-reliant. She is hard working and always found innovative ways of creating an income. Cece is a devout Christian and spends time to further her relationship with God. Her belief in God gives her a sense of hope for her future.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength and coping skills from Cece's interviews, non-participant observations, her interaction with me and others are: (a) Self-reliance, (b) God as a Source of Strength, (c) Hope, and (d) Seeking Emotional Support.

Self-reliance. This quality was demonstrated in the manner in which she handled and solved some of the many problems she encountered in Ghana. She was in a relationship that became abusive when her boyfriend began physically abusing her and occasionally evicted her from their room. The humiliation, frustration, and the will to leave this behind her pushed CeCe to travel to Tema (different town). She slept on the streets while she braided hair in the market for days until she had saved enough money to find her own place on the camp and got out of that abusive relationship.

CeCe became pregnant, but her boyfriend left her when the pregnancy was one month old. When she was left alone, she survived by braiding hair and going from house to house to

provide service in people's homes, washing their clothes, cleaning their compound, and cooking to generate income and take care of her daughter. When her daughter was sick, she would braid hair and do chores for other people in the camp in order to buy her daughter the medication she needed. Her determination and will to survive is evident in the choices she made when faced with challenges.

Seeking emotional support. This was another theme that was evident during my interaction and observation with Cece. In my conversation with her, it was clear that she longs for a family of her own, and she talked about feeling very sad and lonely with no relatives. She however turns this around by acquiring mother figures in her church, and she looks to them for guidance and emotional support when she needs it. She seeks support in areas of her life where she feels she needs the most support:

> I see people appreciating their mothers in church. Sometimes I appreciate people's parents. Because I don't have parents, I buy gifts for them and I appreciate them. I take them as my mother and I go to them when I am stressed. I go to the people I trust and I explain my situation and they give me advice.

As a single mother, living in a refugee camp with no relatives, Cece was determined to succeed and seeking emotional support from others was one way of achieving her goal.

God as a source of strength. Another theme through my interviews and non-participant observation is Cece receiving strength from God. Cece receives and builds resilience through church activities such as prayers, church devotions, and encouragement from her pastors. Cece makes time and attends church services not only at dawn but in the middle of the day. She describes:

> Only God gives me strength, the Bible says the joy of the Lord is my strength; So, the joy of God is strengthens me every day. When I see myself in the presence of God, I get strength. I go for prayer meetings and devotions. No matter the situation I find myself in, I thank God because I have life.

She believes that God is her source of strength; therefore, she sacrifices bodily pleasures and fasts and prays to strengthen her relationship with him.

Hope. Having a sense of hope is another theme identified in Cece's interviews and non-participant observations. Cece strongly believes that as long she is alive, there is no giving up because she is hopeful for better days ahead. She also believes that despite the challenges, there is no need for negativity because she is grateful to be alive. She sees her daughter as her rock and a symbol of hope and encouragement on days that she feels discouraged:

> I trust and believe that once I have life I have hope despite the situation I find myself in. That is why the frustration I find myself in I still can't complain because I have life which means hope. Sometimes when I cry my daughter will say, "mama don't cry everything will be alright one day". Then we start playing and she will be tickling me. She makes me happy.

Cece was able to cope with the many frustrations she encountered because she had hope indicated by being alive and also because she had her daughter

Miss J

> It took me about a month to have the opportunity to spend the day for non-participant observation with Miss J. On this day, I got to her house at about 7:50 a.m. She invited me with a smile and enthusiasm wearing a multi-coloured maxi dress with a headscarf. We exchanged pleasantries and she invited me to sit with her in her open kitchen (see Figure 6) while she prepared breakfast for her pregnant daughter. Her house is built with plywood, cement and some aluminum roofing sheets with an outdoor open kitchen. She invited me inside her well organized one bedroom – which had a bed, bags of her belongings, a fan, chairs and a radio. She introduced me to her pregnant daughter and the care and attention she provided her daughter while I was there showed the devotion she has for her daughter and the depth of relationship they share.
>
> During my visit, Miss J demonstrated some of the activities she engages in on an average day. Several people came to see her for advice/counselling and support regarding their life struggles. She invited me to her church where she was clearly an active and well respected member including one of the worship leaders. She didn't rest after the church service, and went straight to work, providing pedicure and manicure services to a bride to be. Miss J's day is full and in many ways enriched by the many relationships she has as a community member, service provider and mother. Her resilience was evident despite the hard life she has had and the ongoing struggles of living in poverty and as a displaced woman. (Research Journal: June 17, 2015)

Miss J is a 36-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has three children: two daughters aged 16 years and 17 years and a 15-year-old son. She lives with one of her daughters and has contact with her younger sister who lives in Ivory Coast. However, she does not know the whereabouts of her son, brothers, and mother. Her highest level of education is secondary level, equivalent to Grade 12. Her income averages GHC 50-100 the equivalent of $20 to $30 CAD per month obtained by training others in cosmetology such as pedicure, manicure, and makeup. Miss J has lived in the Buduburam camp for over 15 years. Miss J was rescued by Economic Community Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) and went to Nigeria where she lived for over 5 years. During her stay in Nigeria, she reported that she experienced serious trauma and could not work.

Figure 6. Miss J's open kitchen area.

My initial contact with Miss J was in December, 2014 when a pastor introduced her to me as a potential participant for my research. Subsequently, I met her on several occasions in our group meetings with the other participants. I also visited Miss J on several occasions in her home but not to spend the day with her. I interviewed Miss J on February 16, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 6 and June 19, 2015. I also visited Miss J on a weekly

basis to have informal conversations and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting Miss J. I first met Miss J through a pastor who also introduced me to most of my participants. Compared to other women I met in the camp, Miss J appeared mature in her demeanor. Her command of English and her perception of life reflected this maturity and confidence. I observed subsequently, through other group meetings, that the women communicated with Miss J differently. For example, the tone of voice they used and their demeanors indicated a lot of respect. She was always well dressed, smiled easily, and was always friendly to me and the other women. From my observations since I gradually got to know her, she has a reserved but confident personality.

Miss J's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Miss J was born in a small town in Liberia. She came from a very loving family from a humble background and expressed that she really enjoyed her childhood. Her father had another wife; therefore, her mother raised all of them and gave them their needs and received love and care from her mother and grandmother.

She got married traditionally in Liberia at a very young age of 14. Miss J's husband had his own two children who were very young when they married. She had no experience with outside life in her community before she got married and expressed her lack of readiness for an arranged marriage: "Not my own desire but that was what my families want." She was unhappy with the choice of her family for not allowing her to choose someone she loved.

Despite being unhappy, she succumbed to her family's demands and accepted the marriage. Miss J explained that her religion and family culture had early influences on her, stating that she is from a Christian background and would rather get married (and also her parents made sure she got married) than to have pre-marital sex. Her grandmother took care of

her from the age of one, and also, she became an influential figure in her early life. She mentioned that she used some of her grandmother's advice during tough times.

Miss J emphasizes the importance of having good attitude in life. After finishing Grade 12, she worked as a nanny for Caucasian families in Liberia during the day and attended school in the evening, and this is how she was able to learn independence and save money to improve her life:

> I always wanted to learn. One thing my mother taught me to give me strength is to care for other people, give to people when they are hungry. Don't rely on a man to take care of you but work with your own hands, make money for yourself, take care of the home and family.

Miss J was 17-years-old when the war broke out. She stated that she was abducted while in school and forced to stay on the school compound with the rebels and other abductees. Miss J stayed with the rebel group for 11 months; it could have been longer but she is not entirely certain. She was in the group mainly doing chores particularly cooking and was also used for sexual purposes. She also stated that while living in the rebel group, the best way for one to survive was to "act as a fool and remain quiet." This is because people who were not submissive to the demands of the rebels were all killed. She said she acted as a fool and "killed her feeling" meaning any emotion she had was not expressed. She said she relied on God and her positive mindset to survive. Miss J and other girls were rescued by ECOMOG during one of their rescue missions at which time the rebel group "scattered" (went into hiding).

Miss J's life in Ghana. Miss J came to Ghana in the year 2000 (she is not sure) purposely to look for her family (mother, brothers, children, and others). After being rescued by ECOMOG, she was taken to Nigeria where she lived for over 5 years and according to her, she did nothing. She continued to be "miserable every day in Nigeria" searching for her family and was informed that there was a bigger camp in Ghana where Liberian refugees were. She was

financially assisted to travel to Ghana by her Nigerian host. Years later, she found her daughter and sister who came to the camp from Ivory Coast searching for the rest of the family. Her brothers, mother, and her son are still missing.

Miss J describes the psychological effects of this war by pointing out how lonely she feels and how she misses her children and family. She wonders most of the time if her family members are still alive and safe. This is indicated in her statement:

> Being lonely and having nobody around makes me think too much because at least when the children are around I will be talking to them. So sometimes I sit down and think about whether they are still alive, strong or they have gone back home.

In Ghana, Miss J initially spent her days and nights in the church in the camp praying and she was not interested in working. She had an awakening or awareness when someone challenged her and talked about scriptures in the Bible where an individual is instructed to work before they eat and also God will increase whatever effort you put in work. Even though she was struggling with possible depressive symptoms she did not succumb but used prayer as a means of coping. That was the beginning of Miss J's journey to building emotional strength and changing her mindset. She describes this in her statement:

> I will go to church and stay there the whole day and one day someone saw me in the church and said that "J have you read the Bible well?" I said, "Yes, of course." And he said, "Do you see the chapter that God said He will bless the work of your hands?" I said, "Yes." Then he said, "But you sitting inside here the whole day will not solve any problem." That's how I woke up and accepted the challenge and I began to move. I got together with somebody who helped me to join her business and started to train others on how to use beauty products.

Miss J talked about her low confidence from the time she was rescued by ECOMOG to beginning a new life in Ghana where she was unable to have a voice in anything or give an opinion. She also lamented how she was not receiving the respect she deserved from the trainees she worked with in Ghana because she lacked confidence. She also bemoaned her physical appearance as she felt her presentation (clothes, etc.) was very poor. Furthermore, she stated that

she was scared of voicing her opinions due to the trauma she suffered while in the rebel group where she was not allowed to even speak but just follow orders. She felt that she suffered depression due to this suppression. Having the position of a teacher in cosmetology in Ghana was a challenge not due to lack of the required skills but because she had previously experienced the suppression of her voice in a traumatic way. She put this in a statement:

> In the rebel group, soon as you open your mouth to say something, they will just shout and say, "Shut up your mouth." So, for me to even speak out, no way . . . everybody see me as a dummy because I can't say anything to anyone. So, that's where the suppression came from and I became depressed.

Sometimes she would go hungry for days and turns that into a 'compulsory fasting." She had the opportunity to learn and worked hard for her boss in Ghana who owned a beauty training school and cosmetics business by selling products. Through her hard work, her boss decided to train Miss J further without charging the fee of $1,500, which is the required tuition fees for other students.

Miss J's resilience in the face of psychological distress and loneliness. In my individual visits and informal conversations with Miss J, she sometimes thinks about her children, siblings and parents. She is well respected in the camp and seems to be an inspiration to the youth and young women. She relates to people in a very humble and warm manner, and probably her ability to remain humble while being a leader with many skills to train people is what commands her respect among the Liberian community. Miss J is a devout Christian and spends her time either working or being involved in church activities.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength and coping skills from Miss J's interviews, non-participant observations, her interaction with me and others are: (a) Source of Encouragement to Others, (b) Faith in God, (c) Work, (d) Self-regulation of Cognition and Behaviour, and (e) Self-regulation of Emotions, and (f) Hope.

Source of encouragement to others. During my visit at very short intervals, I noticed that people would come and see Miss J for about 15 to 20 minutes at a time talking. She excuses herself and goes to talk to them in a very low tone of voice. I asked her about her relationships, and she mentioned that all the five people I saw that morning came to seek advice either about their marriage, children, or their business. She stated that "they need advice and I have been counseling them. I try to encourage them and also teach them how to do certain things."

It was clear to me that Miss J does not only encourage herself but also provides encouragement to others as well. She emphasized that since finding her voice from suppression, teaching and talking to people is her passion and strength. Sometimes she organizes motivational talks for about 100 people at a time.

Faith in God. Another theme during my participant observation is Miss J's faith in God. She believes that God is "faithful" and always "fulfills his promises." She has come to believe that relying on God is worth it. After about 3 hours in her home, she invited me to join her at her church. Together, we walked to the church. The megaphone was loud, and women were leading the worship singing while other members were praying and clapping. The church had about 38 people by the time the service was over. We were in the church for about 3 hours, and during this time Miss J joined 4 other women as backup singers to lead the service. People were singing, praying, and following the direction of the solo singer and the pastor. After the worship, the pastor preached; we gave our offering, and the service was closed. On our way back, I asked her what she gains from going to church, and she stated:

> I love going to church because it gives me new strength and reminds me about all the things God continues to do for me. God has seen me through the most difficult times and given me something to look up to. Without Him I don't know where I would be by now so I don't joke with my service and church programs.

We walked back to her house and I sat with her while she prepared their evening meal and continued to tell me about how she overcame difficulties.

My interactions with Miss J reveals that she receives and builds further resilience/strength from God and her church activities such as performing daily prayers, worshiping, and reading the Bible. She believes God is greater than anything, and he makes all things possible.

Self-regulation of cognition and behaviour. This theme was dominant through interviews, informal interactions, as well as non-participant observations with Miss J. She has the ability to turn her negative thinking into a positive one through cognitive reconstruction. She uses positive self-talk, restructures her automatic negative thoughts, and proceeds to do something worthwhile with her time and skills. She stated,

> Have a mindset that no matter what the situation, you will make it and there is always a second chance. Yes, you just work on the mind because the mind can frustrate you and gather all the stupid things that happened in the past. But when the mind is set that this is what you want to do, the pictures, the images and the photos (flashbacks) can be coming but you tell yourself it can't happen. Leave the past behind and move forward.

The biggest tool that has helped Miss J develop resilience is her self-taught cognitive restructuring abilities indicated in her statements above.

Self-regulation of emotions. In this theme, Miss J trusts herself and has a positive view of herself; she encourages and relies on her own ability to naturally soothe herself. She uses some emotional regulation skills in addition to challenging negative thinking to have a realistic and positive interpretation of events as indicated:

> When the thinking is not right, somebody can bring a billion dollars for you, it won't work. Anything you do you should be able to calm yourself down because nobody is going to do it for you. So, what I did was I put myself together, controlled my emotions and added the word of God and I stood up physically.

Hope. Having a sense of hope is another theme that was identified in Miss J's experience. She recognizes that for her to be successful in searching for her family and making progress in her life, she needs to have hope and take care of her physical, emotional, and cognitive well-being. She indicated:

> Because I know where there is life, there is hope so what I had to do was gather myself and put myself together and be hopeful. Because if I am looking for my family and looking for my children and I want to see a better life, without life I can't do it.

Miss J realized that she needed to be alive to achieve her goals.

Monica

> I arrived at Monica's house at about 7:30 a.m. in the morning. She was eagerly waiting for me at a nearby roadside and she walked me to her house. She then took me directly to her bedroom. It was a one bedroom with a mattress on the floor, a television on a stand and a place to keep her cosmetics. Her room was very dark without any windows. Her bathroom and kitchen were also in the same room divided by curtains. Her room is cramped, smelled like bathroom and kitchen but seems clean. She asked me to enter her bathroom and tell her how it felt. As I did, I couldn't move in the bathroom because it was very small and moldy. Her room felt more like a dark storage room than a living space.
>
> She showed me several pictures of her daughter who appeared happy and talked about her most of my visit. While we were sitting outside, Monica brought out samples of some of the products (e.g., watches, earrings, sunglasses) she was selling. She cooked rice and fish during my visit, saved some for her daughter who was in school and shared the rest with three friends. I thought that was very kind of her to share her food considering how expensive food is on the camp. Monica and her friends added that they support each other. After the meals, Monica put all her goods on a tray and we set off to sell on the camp. We moved from one customer to the next and business was brisk. After selling for about two hours we returned to her house. Her daughter arrived from school about 15 minutes after our return to the house.
>
> While her daughter was eating, I asked her how each day contributes to her strength and she immediately showed me two things. She pointed at the remaining products on the tray and her daughter. She said, "These two things, my daughter and my business gives me everything because without this business we can't survive and each time I see my daughter, I become stronger." (Research Journal: March 4, 2015)

Monica is a 32-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has a 10-year-old daughter. Her highest level of education is the secondary level, equivalent to Grade 12. She lives

with her daughter in a one-bedroom suite. She makes on average GHC cedis 100-300, the equivalent of $31 to $93 CAD a month obtained by buying and selling cosmetics and jewelry as well as occasionally plaiting hair. Monica has lived in the refugee camps in Ghana for 12 years. Prior to coming to Ghana, she lived in Ivory Coast for several years. She arrived in Ghana at the age of 24 years. She does not have any family in Ghana, and she does not have contact with family members. I interviewed Monica on February 10, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 10 and June 18, 2015. I also visited Monica on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal conversations and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting Monica. I first met Monica through a pastor who also introduced me to most of my participants. Compared to the other women, I observed that Monica was always dressed provocatively but stylishly. She related well to me and the other participants. However, at times she appeared to be under the influence of substances, which she later confirmed to be alcohol. She was always punctual for the meetings, was friendly, and seemed to be the first participant to voice her opinions in a humorous way therefore not causing offence. From my observations as I became acquainted with her, she has an extroverted and very friendly personality and particularly liked talking about and making money.

Monica's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Monica was 13 years old when the war erupted in Liberia. Her father was killed by the rebels who then captured her. After years of searching for her mother when the war ended, her mother was located in a remote village. She paid $80 USD to travel from Monrovia to her mother's village. She stated that no one knows what happened to her father and her two brothers. She was reluctant to discuss her family in detail, which I respected; therefore, I gathered only the information she was willing to share. She

noted that before the war started, everything was unremarkable, and she was attending school and having a happy life with her family and siblings.

Monica estimated that she stayed with the rebel group for about a year. Within the group, she was performing chores such as cooking, cleaning, running errands, and was also used as a spy. She also stated that on many of those errands, she was unaware of what she was carrying and was not allowed to ask any questions. She was also sometimes physically abused by some of the rebels who were under the influence of illicit substances. She noted due to her work ethic, it was difficult for the rebels to harm her as she was seen as an asset to the group. She stated,

> I used to work hard and I never used to sit down. Because of my hard work and by the Grace of God, they wanted to harm me but they couldn't do it.

She does not remember whether she had been sexually assaulted by the rebels. However, one rebel physically attacked her by biting her hand, and he was subsequently shot dead by other rebels in her presence. I observed the evidence of the bite mark on her arm. She stated,

> He started to bite me on my hand and I started shouting, and the other rebels came running. He bit me, the men came and they got angry and they slapped him and they started to argue and the man shot him in front of me.

Monica also stated that she felt she had no choice but to stay in the group after this incident. She was young and circumstances did not give her a choice. She stated,

> I was just forced to be with them because if I look left or right, I can't see anybody. They are the same people I see, in the morning when I get up and in the evening. So we were just working together.

Monica was rescued when a woman with the Red Cross helped her to escape.

Monica's life in Ghana. Monica has been living in Ghana for the past 12 years. She described many challenges and ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties. After being rescued by the nurse from the Red Cross, she escaped to Ivory Coast and lived there for many years. When she heard Ghana was a safer place, she travelled there with a gentleman who

assisted her. This gentleman then abandoned her a week after they arrived in Ghana. As she stated,

> After one week, he told me he will be leaving to Monrovia so I should leave the house. So I said, "Why don't you leave me in the house? I will pay for the place so take me to the landlord." He said, "No I am not going to take you to the landlord. I want you to leave the place." So, I said, "Ok."

She moved from house to house begging for a place to stay on the camp. She finally found a young lady she befriended and begged to share her space and pay rent. Monica formed friendships and got into relationships with men, and one of them helped her to secure the accommodation she currently resides in. As she stated in her interview:

> God sent one man my way so each time when he comes around, he ask me my problem, I explain my problem to him. He was helping me with rent, taking care of me and my daughter.

Monica noted that it was difficult for her to adjust in a new country. It was also challenging to find means to survive. She also said in her interviews that it was difficult finding romantic relationships because most of the men she was dating were all married. The man who impregnated her later abandoned her and she does not know his whereabouts. She had to cope with the difficult pregnancy alone.

> I don't know whether he exist or he doesn't exist, I don't know because there is no communication again. I went through difficulties with my little girl, we call her [child's name], and I thought I was going to die in that pregnancy.

Monica was abandoned and yet she found the courage not to give up.

Monica's resilience in the face of difficulties. In my visits and through informal conversations with Monica, she thinks about her family and wonders about where her father died. She also wishes she found a resting place for him. Monica did not disclose much about her family. Although she is unaware of her siblings' whereabouts, she is happy her mother is alive. From my observations, Monica enjoys working because she has to sustain a certain lifestyle. She

was abandoned by the man who brought her to Ghana. She is a single mother, struggling to support herself and take care of her daughter in this difficult situation.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength and coping skills from Monica's interviews, informal interactions, and non-participant observations are: (a) Work, (b) Support from a Friend, and (c) Strength from her Daughter.

Work. With this theme, Monica is able to recognize what products are in vogue and focus her attention in that area to make money. She relies on her work for strength. She copes with life's difficulties by generating income and taking care of her daughter. She turns monetary gifts into businesses (see Figure 7) because as she stated, 'I don't have anyone to send me money from America." She also mentioned that her business started when a man she was in a relationship with gave her $300 USD. She stated, "I told you earlier that a man gave me $300 USD. So, that money I changed it that's how I got all this."

Figure 7. Products that Monica sells to support herself and daughter.

Support from a friend. Monica experienced an existential crisis when her very close friend died after an illness. Since her death, Monica noted that she started to develop faith, hope, and she derived strength from her friend's experience. As she indicated,

> The thing that made me get the strength to survive everyday . . . was my friend, she came from Nairobi [crying] she gave me strength. When J passed away, that is how I came to build my faith more and more. So, I started getting stronger and stronger. I said to myself if my friend can die, then what about me? Then who am I going to leave my little daughter with? So, I started to forget everything and be strong, that's how I am moving on in my life.

Losing her friend brought her closer to God and reminded her that life is worth living.

Strength from her daughter. In this theme, Monica made it clear that most of the decisions she made as she went through the difficulties on the camp was because of her daughter. She stated,

> My daughter is everything. Everything I do is because of her. All my hard work is because of her and not even for myself. She gives me so much strength not to give up. She keeps me moving and gives me all the hope I need.

It seemed that Monica's drive and desire was to succeed and to make life better for her daughter and see her happy.

Gina

> My first visit to Gina's house was scheduled for 8:30 a.m. There were several people sitting on her porch when I arrived. After calling her on her phone, she invited me in to her bedroom which was large, smelled fresh and was very clean. She had a TV, big suitcases in one corner and cosmetics arranged neatly on a table. Her toilet and bath was located in one big space and was also very clean. She then showed me pictures of her nephew. She has been her nephew's guardian since he was 8 months old.
>
> Minutes later, we walked to her friend's place and spent the day there discussing her business strategies until it was time to pick up her nephew. During phase one of my non-participant observation (December-March, 2014) Gina was productive. She was braiding people's hair to enable her save money to buy a barbecue grill and other equipment to start a business. During this time, I noted she was introverted and not very personable with many people. However, seeing her for the second phase of the non-participant observation (June-July, 2015) was an eye opener. She presented with more confidence and she was observed to be excitable and warm towards others. She had started her grilled tilapia business and the transformation I observed was incredible.
>
> Gina was observed to display qualities of resilience through her hard work—grilling fish for hours while entertaining and welcoming the many male customers in a chaotic and busy environment. She also had to continuously deal with sexist remarks and rude gestures from men who were patronizing her business. Her demeanor towards these gentlemen was firm but respectful and I watched as she served many customers in a very

> enthusiastic way making money and delicately demanding some respect. (Research Journal: June 18, 2015)

Gina is a 35-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has no children. Her highest level of education is secondary level, which is equivalent to Grade 12. She lives alone in an apartment, which is bigger compared to the other participants. Her income is on average between GHC 100-300, the equivalent of about $93 CAD a month obtained by either selling grilled fish or sometimes braiding hair. Gina has lived in the refugee camp for 24 years. She arrived in Ghana at the age of 11 years. She does not have any family in Ghana, and she does not have contact with family members.

I interviewed Gina on February 9, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 4 and June 15, 2015. I also visited her on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal interactions and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting Gina. I was introduced to Gina by the cultural broker. It took over 3 weeks to make arrangements and meet with Gina. When I finally met her, she was apologetic for not having a strong mobile signal. Gina is the only individual that I was aware of who called herself a child soldier. Each time I met her, she was always calm and usually dressed in African attire with no make-up. She presented as friendly and relaxed in the company of the other women. She is dark in complexion. As I got to know her, she likes to be alone and seems to enjoy her own company.

Gina's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Prior to the war breaking out in Liberia, Gina recounted that everything was fine and her family was living peacefully. She was in school together with her other siblings. There was harmony in the family and everyone had a good relationship with each other. Gina's father was in the military, and her mother was in the

business of selling. She reported that they all attended church regularly and that her faith helped her during difficult times. She also remembered how she helped her mother in the kitchen cooking and running errands, which equipped her in developing some of the basic skills as a woman.

Gina was 10 years old when the war broke out, and she stayed with the rebels for a year (1990-1991). She became part of the rebel group after the rebels killed her parents. She said,

> After they killed my father and everybody scattered in the house. They tortured me and because of their advantage I became part of the rebels. If I didn't join them they threatened to kill me.

The rebels killed her father because he was in the military, but her mother and siblings were taken away and she does not know where they are to this day. In the rebel group, they used her for sexual purposes, among other things she was unwilling to discuss. She had to beg the rebels for food when the rebels looted goods from other people, and if she was lucky, she would eat; otherwise, she stayed hungry.

Gina's life in Ghana. Gina has been living in Ghana for the past 24 years. She described many challenges and ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties. Before she found her freedom, she reported that there were intra rebel fights. She then managed to escape, met a woman who had five children and begged her to take her along the journey. She told the woman her situation and the woman agreed to bring Gina along with her to Ghana.

When they arrived in Ghana, Gina was 11 years old. She had to work day and night performing house chores and taking care of the woman's five children. She was not enrolled in school unlike the woman's children. She sometimes went hungry, continued to work while the woman's children ate and sat around doing nothing. According to Gina, she recognized the opportunity to learn and be strong instead of dwelling on the difficulties she was experiencing. She also stated that she was not shown any love and yearned for the love the woman was

showing her children. She managed to enroll in free education on the camp, and she would sometimes leave the house and go to school despite all the challenges. This is reflected in her statement:

> That woman never showed me any love. She showed love to only her children. I used to sleep in the parlour and the children sleep in the room because early in the morning I have to wake up, clean and get the children ready for school. But I used to force myself, to go to school. School was giving me knowledge, so I had gain knowledge. I can't be in the house to be a house girl, and only do house work no.

The family Gina was living with in Ghana left for Liberia without informing her, and she started fending for herself saying, "I was able to stay strong, I had to be strong for myself and I stood for myself."

Gina started braiding hair, from town to town and sometimes would travel to the nearby communities. She slept on the streets and would wake up and continue braiding hair for income. She noted that it was physically demanding on her health due to chronic stomach problems as result of repeated rape at the hands of the rebels. Thus, she decided to use the profit from braiding hair to start a new business of selling "roasted fish," which required minimal commuting. After making money selling, a friend stated that she wanted to assist her to do business and ended up defrauding Gina. Due to this, Gina lost a lot of money and had to start from scratch. When her roasted fish/braiding hair business is down, she would go to some friends for food or go hungry if her friends did not have anything for her.

Gina has not had many romantic relationships. She is not keen on relationships because of her experiences with the rebel group where she was used for sexual purposes amongst other things, which has put her off relationships. Currently, she sells grilled fish at the camp at a location near a drinking bar in the evening. She stated that it is a very lucrative business, and she appeared content and more confident.

Gina's resilience in the face of difficulties. In my informal interactions, non-participant observations, and interviews it was evident that Gina lives a quiet and lonely life and occasionally thinks about her parents. She previously coped with these emotions by going in her room and crying herself to sleep. However, she reported that over the years, her life has improved with no emotional difficulties because she has gained strength.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength and coping skills from Gina's interviews, non-participant observation and informal interactions are: (a) Acceptance, (b) Self-reliance, (c) Faith in God, and (d) Work.

Acceptance. One of the themes during my interview with Gina was acceptance. According to Gina there was no need to keep holding on to the past but rather to accept the situation as she indicated below:

> I just have to accept it even when it is difficult. It's just time, it's just a condition when conditions come I just have to accept it. I know that one day everything will be okay.

She used acceptance of her circumstances as a means to resilience.

Self-reliance. Another theme during my interaction with Gina was her relying on herself and her abilities. She uses self-reliance as a major part of her resilience by drawing strength from herself. She has no family and she does not have expectations of people. She encourages herself and explores means to develop her skills to survive: "So I have to do something with my hand otherwise how will I survive? I did wood joining, plumbing and carpentry and now I am selling roasted tilapia."

When participants were asked to pick an object that gave them meaning and strength, Gina asked for her picture to be taken (see Figure 8) and stated:

> I love myself because I fight for myself and work for things for myself by the Grace of God. Every strength I have, is from within me. I don't know where I will be if it wasn't for who I am. Everything is from me so I choose me.

Figure 8. Gina finds strength and meaning in herself.

Gina demonstrated her abilities to navigate and negotiate for resources by seeking support from her friends when everything else failed. She reciprocates the favour when her friends are also in need. When she has no money for food, she sleeps in the streets in the market during the night and wakes up very early to braid hair for customers to make some money. She trusts herself to have the skills to make money and is successful in doing so. If sleeping on the streets does not pay off, she turns her hunger into fasting and prayers to strengthen her spirit and relationship with God. Therefore, even hunger is turned into something positive, and Gina feels she gains rather than loses.

Gina proved that she has the personal characteristics to navigate her way in search of resources and also receive support from others when necessary. She is mostly self-reliant and has the confidence to rely on herself for her needs.

Faith in God. Another theme identified in Gina's story was her belief in the supernatural. She made me aware that culturally, she was exposed to beliefs that God is the beginning and the end and the giver of life. Therefore, she recounted that in her life, strength to survive comes from God first before herself. She said she receives support from God who is greater than anything

else. She calls on God for emotional, physical, and social needs. She sums it all briefly as, “God first.”

Work. The theme of work was the most influence I observed in Gina. The theme of hard work was identified in her determination to live a good life, seeking and navigating her way to find the resources. During my participant observation with Gina, it was clear that she showed a different personality, seems happier, and was influenced by her success in her work. She stated,

> I am very happy now because my business is very good. I don’t worry about rent, food or hospital bills. I am taking care of myself and I love what I do. When I wake up I have energy to go through the day and I feel I am able to stand on my own and rely on myself. The work provides my needs.

Gina’s knowledge and passion for business was clear, and she derived strength from being able to take care of needs.

Patricia

> It took me about six weeks to schedule our meetings. Patricia was very excited about the observations when I arrived at 8:00 a.m., a little late due to traffic congestion. She reported that she started cooking at 6.00 a.m. and the food was almost ready for selling. Patricia was wearing leggings and t-shirt, her natural hair was coloured blond and cut very short. She also had a cross-body bag where I observed she kept all the money from the food she was selling. She introduced me to her mother and some of her siblings who were in and out of the house throughout my visit. The environment was fun, active, loud and in an open space. Her house is a concrete structure with aluminum roofing. Five people currently live in the room.
>
> While Patricia was preparing the food, her mother humorously shouted occasionally, “It’s ready, don’t mind your wife” to attract customers. When the food was ready, people were coming around to buy. She was also selling t-shirts at the same time. Patricia sold clothes during the rainy season instead of food all due to the lack of infrastructure for the food business. She would shout and describe the clothes she was selling to attract the attention of potential buyers. She did this with so much enthusiasm and finesse. Most people passing by felt compelled to check her clothes mainly due to her description of what she was selling.
>
> During my visits, Patricia demonstrated how hard she worked on an average day. She also had good relationships with people. When one of her businesses was not making a profit due to the rainy season, she was able to diversify to a more profitable and safe one to sustain her family. Her days are busy as she plays many roles of income provider, a mother, a daughter and a sister. Her ongoing struggles of living as a refugee and seeking

> resilience manifested in many ways as described earlier. (Research Journal: March 3 and June 11, 2015)

Patricia is a 32-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has two children aged 14 years and 9 years who live with her. Her highest level of education is secondary level, equivalent to Grade 12. She lives in a one bedroom with five other people. Her income is on average between GHC 100-300, the equivalent of $30 to $93 CAD per month obtained through selling food and clothing on the streets. She is a trained beautician as well.

Patricia has lived in the refugee camp for 19 years. She arrived in Ghana at the age of 14 years. She lives with her son, mother, a sister, and two brothers. I interviewed Patricia on February 16, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 3 and June 11, 2015. I also visited Patricia on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal interactions and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting Patricia. I first met Patricia through my cultural broker who also lived in the camp. Before the appointment was made, we had visited Patricia's house, but she was unavailable; therefore, we contacted her via telephone on a few occasions prior.

Patricia was very charismatic, and from the onset, I realized she was also honest (straight shooter). As I listened to her talk, I immediately recognized that she fit the criteria for this study. The only challenge for me was that it was difficult understanding her at times, and I had to clarify some of her statements. Subsequently, through other group meetings, I observed that Patricia was outspoken but respectful towards others. She always presented as well dressed with fashionable clothes, make-up, and colourful hairstyles. From my observations as I got to know her, she is a very likeable person in her home and community. She has a strong social support system.

Patricia's early years in Liberia and war experiences. In her early life in Liberia, Patricia was attending school and everything was fine. Her father was working for the Ministry of Information and had a steady income. She had a very good relationship with her siblings and parents. She reported on several occasions that she knows that the friendship, connection, openness, and the ability to discuss everything with family built her resilience. She also stated that going to church with her family provided her with qualities that built her strength as she indicated: "Church was one of the main strength when I was a child; it helped me to forget about everything about the war. Without church, I don't know where I would have been."

Patricia was 8 years old when the war broke out. As the violence escalated, Patricia and her family ran away from home. During the attempted escape, she was abducted and forced to live with the rebels. She lived with this first group for 2 years. They had the opportunity to escape but unfortunately, they were captured by another group, and she lived with them for a while and subsequently another group for years. In total, Patricia stayed with three rebel groups for about 7 years. She talked about some of the impact of being forcefully recruited in an armed group:

> When I was among them I will not lie and say I killed, I didn't kill, they used my body and I cooked for them. I was living with one group for 4 years. I drank alcohol, I smoked marijuana but I didn't do hard drugs because I know how it affects people.

Patricia adopted the "raw attitude of rebels," being aggressive and having an uncaring attitude. She also stated that she found it difficult to speak good English due to the lifestyle of living in the "hills" with the rebels for many years.

Patricia's life in Ghana. Patricia has been living in Ghana for the past 19 years. She described many challenges and ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties. She came to Ghana with her mother, sister, and two brothers. Her younger sister and an older brother died during the war. Patricia's life and challenges in Ghana have been characterized by the

difficulties in finding basic necessities (food, shelter) and dealing with the psychological effects of her experiences with the rebels. She also had to prostitute herself in order to take care of her children and family. Anyone they knew from Liberia who they met in Ghana in a somewhat better living situation could not assist them until they had found their feet. She indicates this in her statement below:

> When I came to Ghana things were very difficult. I came with my mother, brothers and my sister. At the time, we were staying at a place across the road with friends we knew from Liberia. We stayed there for one week. But one week was too much for them to host us.

Patricia knew someone who introduced her to some men. She initially relied heavily on prostitution to afford food and shelter. Patricia was able to purchase what they needed, including a mattress and food, and she was also able to create a water selling business for her mother. She also took the opportunity provided by the UNHCR to learn a trade to supplement her income. This indicates that when she gets an opportunity to get income through other means, she would not resort to prostitution. Patricia was driven to prostitution due to her circumstances, and she felt she was left with no other option. This is reflected in her statement:

> Yes, I go out. What else would I do? Because I am not doing business, so I have to go on the street one or two times. That's how I was able to buy one mattress, T-shirts, foodstuffs and started life. I bought a sack of mineral water and I told my mother to start selling them. I started because when I came to Ghana, I didn't know how to fix hair or anything, so UN came and I had opportunity to learn a trade.

Life is particularly difficult for Patricia because she has her family to support, which is part of the traditions and values of Liberians. She is the one of the eldest children, and in her culture, the responsibility rests on her. Patricia initially relied on her own abilities and thoughts to seek value and provide for her children's basic needs, their education as well as her own education through prostitution. The UNHCR do what they can when they can, but it is obviously not enough leaving the refugees to find other ways of making a living.

Patricia's resilience in the face of difficulties. In my visits and informal conversations with Patricia, she reported feeling lucky to have some of her family living with her in Ghana; however, she sometimes thinks about her siblings who died during the war. She witnessed her brother's death and her little sister who was 12 years raped by rebels. She became pregnant and died as a result of the complications from the pregnancy. She also reported how she used to have flashbacks about her experiences and the struggles to survive in the rebel group.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength from Patricia's interviews, informal interactions and non-participant observations are: (a) Self-Reliance, (b) Support from Mother, and (c) Work.

Self-reliance. One major theme that came out from interviews, conversations, and non-participant observations with Patricia is her self-reliance. Patricia relies on her skills and resilience she built from her childhood and through her experiences with the rebel groups to survive in Ghana. She was able to recognize opportunities, take them, and improve and add value to herself by learning a skill she believed would sustain her in the long term. With personal characteristics such as determination, perseverance, and self-efficacy, she is able to transform monetary gifts into a business in spite of the amount. She has a positive view of herself and has belief in her skills that she can be very successful in business with a little bit of help. Patricia told me during our time together that

> Do you know I am able to continue with this clothing business because of the money you gave me after the interview? I added just a little from my barbecue business and purchased these clothes and started this business.

She was talking about the $20 honorarium. This attests to Patricia's ability to make use of any opportunity as insignificant as it may be.

Support from mother. Another theme that was identified in Patricia's experience was support from her mother. Patricia receives support and emotional strength from her mother. Her

mother reminds her of all the difficulties they both encountered and encourages her to persevere and never to give up. Patricia takes heed of her mother's words, and this has a calming effect on her. Because of her mother, she would stop drinking and prostitution and focus on her daily work to make some money indicated in her statement:

> The strength that I depend on is my mother, because she is the one with me. Anytime I try to fall she brings me back. She says to me don't give up move on as long as you have life, there is hope, don't give up just continue. Sometimes I just want to go astray. She will talk to me that I shouldn't give up, be strong, and continue living.

Patricia's mother has a positive influence on her. Her mother encourages her not to give up hope.

Work. Another theme identified as a coping resource for Patricia was work (see Figure 9). She relies heavily on her business as a source of resilience. She cooks, sells, then saves money to expand her business. She also started buying and selling second hand clothing from the profits of selling food and the honorarium she was given as a participant in this study. She seeks to build on the foundation to make it bigger and better. She is building this business so that going on the street becomes the last option for her as she stated:

> Business is everything to me aside from my mother, God gives me strength. Business is what keeps us alive being able to make money and buy water and food. I have stopped going into the streets since I started cooking to sell. I have my peace of mind and I don't have to sleep with strangers to eat and buy my family food. I like my business it is very good for me.

Figure 9. Patricia preparing meals to sell in the camp.

Reese

> I arrived at Reese's house by 7:15 a.m. She was dressed in an old, faded t-shirt with local print cloth tied around her waist. Her hair was plaited and her face was covered in sweat, the temperature was around 34-36 degrees even though it was only 8 a.m. She was sweeping her compound while watching her three kids at the same time. Her oldest daughter (8 years) was bathing her 3-year-old sibling in a big plastic bowl which is used as a bathtub skillfully while having fun. Reese was exchanging pleasantries with people and dedicated quite some time talking to them as they walked past her compound.
>
> On this day, Reese was preparing breakfast, cleaning her compound and getting two of her children ready for school. We walked the children halfway to school while she carried the 3-year-old on her back. Reese helps her neighbor who runs a "chop bar" (restaurant) and in return, she and her children get free food. I observed her prepare and cook 4 different dishes for the "chop bar". The food she prepared for the restaurant was on a large scale and I am not sure even four people could do that job without getting fatigued by the end of the day and yet she did it alone. The owner of the restaurant arrived around 2 p.m. and I observed that she trusted Reese as a good cook and custodian of her business. The owner dished some food for Reese which she saved for her children. People also started lining up to buy their favourite meals.
>
> Reese's life is difficult as a widow and single mother of three young children. She finds ways of taking care of her children not only by working hard but making sure she has good relationships "investment" to fall on in times of need. Her life as a refugee is difficult; however, she finds strength in her children, work and herself to keep going. (Research Journal: June 17, 2015)

Reese is a 31-year-old single woman of Liberian descent and has 8-, 5-, and 3-year-old children. Her husband died in April 2014. She has no formal education. She lives with her children in the makeshift house she built with her husband. Her income is on average GHC 50, the equivalent of about $20 CAD a month, which she gets by working for her neighbour to operate a small chop bar (restaurant) where she cooks and sells food.

Reese has lived in the refugee camps for 15 years. She arrived in Ghana at the age of 16 years. She does not have any family in Ghana and neither does she have contact with family members back in Liberia. I interviewed Reese on February 10, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 2 and June 17, 2015. I also visited her on a weekly basis for

some few months to have informal interactions and continue to build trust and rapport. There were also some group meetings where she was always present.

Meeting Reese. I first met Reese through the pastor who introduced me to most of the other participants. I observed that Reese was unkempt, not very friendly with the other women, and she had a stern look on her face. However, subsequently I noticed that she always had a frown on her face, even while expressing pleasant emotions. Reese's English accent was particularly difficult to understand. Her tone lacked clarity and was usually muffled when she spoke. It took me a couple of months to clearly understand everything she said.

Reese's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Reese was 15 years old when the war broke out, and she was captured by the rebels at the same age. She stated that prior to the war, she did not know her biological mother and she lived with a woman who insisted she call her "aunt" because she was not her biological mother. She is unsure whether she has any siblings.

Reese's aunt was not married and had two children. Her aunt was a business woman who traded in different goods. Reese stated that her relationship with her aunt was "okay" but she cared more about her children than her. For example, her aunt would cook very nice meals for her children but would at times give Reese bread only. She also said that her aunt did not send her to school. She assisted her aunt with selling products in the market. Reese recounted how these experiences equipped her in developing different coping skills. She also stated that she always went to church to pray to God to deliver her from her aunt and maltreatment. She said that these hardships would later enable her to cope better when she was abducted by the rebels.

Reese, her aunt, and her aunt's children were escaping the war when Reese was captured by rebels. Reese stayed with the rebel group for 7 or 8 months. Her roles in the group were doing

chores such as washing clothes, cleaning, and cooking. She also reported that she was coerced and used for sexual purposes. This is indicated in her statement:

> I was with them for some time, I think for over seven months and they were maltreating me, and having sex with me and I was very young at that time. I was forced to do a lot of things against my will.

On a typical day, the rebels left her and to go and fight the war. Upon their return, she would cook and after eating they would have sex with her. Reese also stated that she did things against her will in order to survive as she clearly said in this statement: "Yes, is just for me to survive, a means for me to survive." She was able to escape when the rebels left her at their hide-out alone. During the escape, she met a group of people also escaping the war so she joined them and that is how she arrived in Ghana safely.

Reese's life in Ghana. Reese has been living in Ghana for the past 15 years. She described her challenges of trying to integrate into society characterized by the loss and lack of basic needs. She also described ways in which she has survived despite these difficulties.

When Reese arrived in Ghana, she was receiving assistance from a woman she had met, and shortly afterwards this woman died. Reese's struggles intensified; she would go days without food and relied mainly on the UNHCR, which did not provide enough to meet her needs. She met her husband and they decided to co-habitat. They had nowhere to stay; therefore, they slept rough outside of people's houses for several months. Her husband worked odd jobs outside the camp and sometimes was able to acquire short contracts that lasted a few weeks. Reese used some of her husband's money in addition to what she had earned to open a shop where she sold basic food items like canned drinks, milk, and bread. She went from house to house cleaning, washing clothes, cooking, as well as braiding hair to supplement her husband's income. Her shop business failed because when her husband's contract finished; they dipped into their business money to purchase their food. They have three children together and life became increasingly

difficult. Her husband fell sick for about three months and died shortly after that. Reese said that they had no money for medical care, and he died as a result of lack of treatment. These are confirmed from statements she made during interviews:

> In my neighbourhood I braid hair for people, I get GHC 2 or 3. Sometimes I also go and help my friends or somebody that I know. I go to their house, I wash for them and they give me money. I use that money to buy food for my children to survive. For my husband, things were so hard, he was sick, there was no money to take him to the hospital so he died after three months.

Her statement shows a woman who was clearly trying her best to make ends meet but couldn't do it all.

Reese's resilience in the face of loss and other difficulties. In my observations, during conversations and visits with Reese, she is overcome by the stress of taking care of three little girls and herself. Reese continues to work hard and provide for her children's basic needs, their education and health needs.

Identified themes. Reese's resilience is demonstrated in different themes: (a) Self, (b) Faith in God, (c) Support from Neighbours, and (d) Hope.

Self. Firstly, Reese seeks strength from herself by demonstrating courage and determination to survive. Reese ventures from house to house seeking to provide services such as chores and be paid for it. She does not sit idle or give up and has the ability to seek help and recognizes that the source will be able to provide that need. She uses her best attributes, which are her communication and persuasive skills as well as maintaining good relationships with others to gain trust for people to allow her into their circles. She reported,

> The style I use to survive is I learned to talk to people and when you know how to talk to people they will always help you. Because of the way I live in the community with people, it can be easy to embrace me and help me. I go to people's houses and when their clothes are dirty, I go and wash for them. When I go, I say; "sister I have come to visit you today do you have dirty clothes for me to wash for you?"

Reese also uses her intelligence to help her through difficult times. She is able to use monetary gifts of about $20 worth to start a small water selling business. She used the honorarium I gave her to purchase bags of water and started selling them for profit, and I have witnessed this. She stated,

> We buy the sack of water for GHC 2. If I sell 2 sack per day, I will be getting GHC2 profit. It can't buy rice which is GHC 2.50, so if I sell the three sack, I buy a cup of rice and maybe we would just eat it dry without any sauce and go on like that for that day. So the goods you saw was from the money you gave me that day.

Reese is able to use the $20 honorarium to start a little business; this shows participants resilience and the lengths they will go to survive.

Support from neighbours. Reese is quite resourceful evidenced by her barter trading. Her neighbour was willing to provide an opportunity to help her take care of herself and her children. She assists this woman in her neighbourhood to prepare and sell food in return for food, stating,

> I have my neighbour who I help. When I help to cook for her chop bar [restaurant], she gives me food for my children and myself. I don't know what I would have done without this exchange. This is easy for me because I don't have to carry my children in the sun going around cleaning and washing.

Reese is not paid any money for the cooking for her neighbour's restaurant (see Figure 10) but instead receives food for her children and herself.

Figure 10. Reese's kitchen area and where she cooks for her neighbour's restaurant.

Faith in God. Another theme identified through interacting with Reese is her faith in God. She receives resilience, courage, strength, and hope to survive from God:

> God gives me the energy and the strength to wake up in the morning. I thank God and say I present everything into your hands, you can do everything possible for me. Because when I wake up I don't have 5 pesewas in my house but before the day ends God will choose somebody and that person will come and bless me.

Reese seeks strength from a source she deems more powerful than she is and draws courage from this source. She does so by going to church, going for daily morning devotions, reading the Bible, and praying.

Hope. Another theme identified was Reese having a sense of hope. As part of document analysis where she chose an object and what it means to her, Reese chose the pictures of her children. She stated, "My children mean everything to me. I don't have parents and I lost my husband. These children give me strength not to give up and to keep having hope." She also believes that being alive is an indication that things will fall into place and life can only get better in the near future. As she reported, "Where there is life, there is hope."

Tete

> On this day, I arrived in the camp at approximately 7:15 a.m. and went directly to Tete's shop as originally planned. Tete was dressed in white splashed multi-coloured jeans and orange blouse and had orange-red hair in curls. She gave me a warm welcome while she smiled as she usually does. I observed her while she arranged cosmetics and hair extensions in the shop. She also swept the floor and dusted the furniture. I asked her about her opening hours and she indicated that its closure and opening times were not set in stone and depended on the weather, how busy it was and the type of hair styles. It could open as early as 6 a.m. and close as late as 10:00 p.m. The shop is made out of wood and concrete right in front of a gutter with all kinds of litter as well as sewage. The strong odour from the gutter permeated into the shop. There was also a ceiling fan which made my visit slightly more comfortable as the temperature was 36^0C.
>
> During this observation Tete was pleasant, engaging and quite interactive with me as well as all her customers. Tete introduced me as her sister to her customers which felt good. About eleven people (males and females) came to see her for advice and other times to vent about their hardships. She was direct, firm but friendly and pleasant during her interactions with them. She attributed this to her honest nature. Tete asked me to advise her 15-year-old daughter about education as her daughter passed by the shop. Tete has

> the desire to continue to take her children to school despite the challenges. However, her daughter doesn't see the value of education and this particularly upsets Tete. Tete is a skilled hair stylist and that is obvious due to the influx of customers into her shop. She derives hope and strength from her work. She is a dedicated single mother who cares about her children's education and well-being. She is also a valued member in the community evidenced by her close relationships with her neighbours and others on the camp. People value her opinion and as I left her shop about 5 p.m. people were still streaming in to see her for a quick chat. (Research Journal: June 12, 2015)

Tete is a 34-year-old single woman of Liberian descent who has a 15-year-old daughter and a 7-year-old son living with her on the camp. She does not have any formal education. She makes on average GHC 300, the equivalent of $93 CAD a month, by plaiting hair. She has lived in the refugee camp for 16 years. She arrived in Ghana in 1999 at the age of 18 years. She does not have any family in Ghana and she has established contact with her brother after several years of searching. I interviewed Tete on February 11 and17, 2015, and spent 2 days of non-participant observation on March 11 and June 12, 2015. I also visited Tete on a weekly basis for some few months to have informal interactions and continue to build trust and rapport.

Meeting Tete. I first met Tete in the same small group meeting through the pastor who introduced me to the other women. She was well dressed and somehow stood out from the rest of the girls. I pulled Tete aside and we talked informally mainly about the camp and her life. This enabled me to screen her for her appropriateness of my study. She began crying while I also struggled to keep my composure. I tried hard without success to prevent tears from streaming down my cheeks. She stated that she had no idea someone would be interested in listening to her story. I said I was very much interested and I explained my study of which she had no hesitation in agreeing to be part of. We then exchanged telephone numbers.

Subsequently, I observed that Tete has a warm personality, always had a smile on her face, treated people with respect and loves to dress flamboyantly. She is of chocolate brown

complexion and from my observations since I familiarized myself with her, her personality varies depending on the circumstances or the environment.

Tete's early years in Liberia and war experiences. Tete was 13 years old when the war started in Liberia. She stated that prior to the war, life was ordinary and growing up was unremarkable. She had seven siblings and the girls weren't sent to school due to financial difficulties. She stated that, her mother convinced them that it was beneficial for the boys to go to school and later take care of them. Tete said she wasn't very keen on persuading her mother to send her to school because her father abandoned them and that her mother was working very hard yet life was still difficult. Instead of going to school, she assisted her mother in the market to sell goods. This is how she developed her strong work ethic and being accountable for decisions she makes regarding sales in the market.

According to Tete, rebels specifically came to their home looking for her father who worked for the government as a school principal. She recounted that as the rebels questioned her regarding her father's whereabouts, she explained to them that her father had abandoned them and they had no knowledge of his where he was. During the interrogation one of the rebels suddenly took out a knife and cut a big chunk out of Tete's ear. She recollected the pain and how she was bleeding profusely. They tied her mother and siblings and took them away. To this day, she has not found any of them except one brother.

Tete stayed with the rebel group for about five years. Her role in the group included running errands to and from two countries (Guinea and Liberia), cooking for the rebels, engaging in combat, walking for miles spying for her rebel group and working as an informant as well as being used for sexual purposes. For example, she traveled to Guinea to exchange looted goods for ammunitions, money or food. She witnessed people being killed and tortured, indulging in

cannibalism. She was also tortured and suffered psychological abuse through imprisonment. She lost confidence and any sense of independence she possessed. Furthermore, she had fear for men due to the emotional, psychological and physical abuse she suffered:

> You know when you live with rebels, you fear nothing. You can talk to anybody anyhow. No respect. Yeah, you see human being like it is nothing to you. Because people are dying in your presence every time. You can be sitting and eating and then one bullet comes from nowhere and hit the person you are eating with. You just see the person lying before you in blood.

Due to her experiences with the rebels, she learned to dehumanize people and therefore had no respect for human beings.

Tete's life in Ghana. Tete has been living in Ghana for the past 16 years. She described many challenges and strategies she had utilized to survive despite these difficulties. She found it difficult to adjust to the new environment and embrace the lifestyle in Ghana. The weather was too hot for Tete, she could not adjust well to the hot and humid temperatures. Furthermore, she could not come to terms with the fact that one needs to buy water to do everything. She also lamented the lack of Liberian food in Ghana and even when she does find it, it is very expensive and unaffordable. She struggled to support her daughter and herself because her boyfriend abandoned them about three months after coming to Ghana: "He just called me one day and said he is not responsible for me anymore and left."

She struggled to find basic needs for her daughter and herself. She started working for a woman free of charge as a means of advertising her skills of hair braiding. She worked day and night to establish a saloon only for her to be robbed and looted by armed robbers. It has been difficult to start again from scratch, and Tete was unable to work for a couple of years due to fibroid operation. She depended on the kindness of her neighbours and church members to survive and take care of her children: "Because of the operation, I can't stand too much. I feel numbness in my legs walking around and when I stand, it's hard."

Tete's resilience in the face of difficulties. In my conversations and interviews with Tete, she expressed bitterness towards her father for not sending her to school even for basic education. Furthermore, she blames him for her siblings' and mother's torture because he worked for the government. She reports the sadness she feels caused by the fact that she has no idea of the whereabouts of her mother and the rest of her family. She coped with her frustrations by drinking alcohol as a way of avoiding the emotional pain and also prayed daily for peace from God.

Identified themes. The themes that came out as sources of resilience/strength from Tete's non-participant observations, interviews and informal interactions are: (a) Faith in God, (b) Work, (c) Receiving Support from Pastor/Others, and (d) Self.

Faith in God. One theme during our interviews is her strong belief in God. Tete believes that God is the only one she could rely on and make certain demands. She also stated that her troubled past was not a source of frustration anymore because seeking and receiving God's intervention has enabled her to forget about her past and receive healing. She seeks God's involvement through prayers, going to church, working in the house of God and trusting Him. This is reflected in her statement:

> Because right now I pray every day and anyway life comes, I accept it, I have no choice but to accept it. I am so grateful to God because I went through all these experiences and still He kept me alive. That means God kept me alive for a purpose. He wants me to be a testimony in somebody's life. That's what I believe, maybe my testimony can change somebody's life.

Tete also expressed gratitude for the life she has which she sees as a sign from God to be able to help others through her story.

Work. Another theme identified in Tete's experience is her hard work. Tete is self-dependent and draws resilience from her work. During my visits to her house (see Figure 11) and her shop, she was constantly busy scheduling appointments with customers and braiding their

hair. Her passion and pride in her work was obvious and this was reflected in her punctuality and professionalism. She worked tirelessly to take care of herself and her children. She noted,

> It's was like an advert. Where did you do it? Where did you do it? I did someone's hair and everybody on the camp was looking at the hair. Where is this girl who did this hair coming from? Somebody said; "She is from Ivory Coast." I said; "Oh no I am from Liberia." They said; "Only people from Ivory Coast can weave this hair very well." That's how I started getting people and I started getting money and other things to take care of myself.

Tete had a strong work ethic and from our interactions, work was one of the main support systems that gave her the strength to survive.

Figure 11. Tete's home.

Receiving support from her pastor and others. Through interviews, informal interactions and non-participant observations, I discovered that Tete also received support from others through her church activities. She served as an usher in her church and spent some of her free time cleaning in the church. Due to her commitment to helping maintain the church, she usually receives monetary gifts from the pastor of the church. Tete also received words of encouragement from the pastor from time to time as well as prayers indicated in her statement: "Sometimes the man of God will just call me encourage me and pray for me."

Tete also received support from a lady she considers her "only friend." This lady previously lived as a refugee on the camp with her. She immigrated to the USA but has continued encouraging Tete not to give up on life. She communicates with her several times a

week and Tete acknowledges her as a main pillar of her resilience and determination. In her statement: “She is my one person I always rely on.”

Part II – Summary of Overall Themes

Having completed the narratives of participants, the second part of this chapter presents common themes identified among all eight participants. This study aimed to explore and examine resilience and coping strategies of former girl child soldiers in a post-conflict environment with three objectives: (a) to identify specific factors that contribute to former girl child soldiers’ resiliency, (b) to identify specific coping strategies for survival, and (c) to identify challenges former girl child soldiers face concerning their reintegration into society. Two key questions examined and explored in this study were (1) What are some of the resilience and coping mechanisms they use to facilitate their reintegration into the society? and (2) What are some everyday challenges former girl child soldiers encounter concerning their reintegration into the society?

This second part will present the 12 themes that emerged from the data gathered from eight participants. These themes reflect the main challenges and coping resources used by the participants during two time periods; conflict and post-conflict. A description of each theme is provided with excerpts from participants’ responses during interviews, non-participant observations, and informal interactions. The following presenting themes allows the reader to capture the co-existence of challenges (e.g., psychological difficulties) and coping resources (e.g., friendships) in each of the two-time periods. In the first section, I briefly discuss the six main themes of challenges experienced during conflict in Liberia as well as the post-conflict period in Ghana. In the second section, I focus on the six coping resources participants utilized during conflict and post-conflict. Together, these 12 themes will be used in the discussion

chapter to understand resilience and coping in the former Liberian girl child soldiers who participated in this study.

Table 6

Summary of Themes During Conflict and Post-Conflict Period

Descriptors	Conflict (Liberia)	Post-Conflict (Ghana)
Challenges	Trauma of Recruitment	Lack of Support for Basic Needs
	Abuse in Rebel Groups	Psychological Difficulties
		Learning to Adjust in a New Environment
		Lack of Social Supports
Coping Resources	Friendship/Love	Social Supports
	Acceptance While Biding Time	Individual Resilience Qualities/Practices
	Submission to Authority	Spiritual Practices and Beliefs

Challenges During Conflict in Liberia

In this current study, the themes noted by participants during this period are as follows: (a) Trauma of Recruitment, and (b) Abuse in Rebel Groups.

Trauma of recruitment. As described in the literature, armed groups recruited participants through voluntary and involuntary means (Brett & Specht, 2004; Gates & Reich, 2009). This theme describes examples of how the participants were recruited by rebels. Responses from participants indicated that they were all committed to these groups involuntarily under circumstances that were highly traumatizing. Forced recruitment and torture of families were sometimes motivated by tribal targets. Some of the participants were recruited at gun point while at school, while others after their parents/family were killed, and for some during flight to safety. One participant reported that she joined a rebel group after her parents were killed and

she was forced to join. All eight participants reported how they were recruited and these ranged from sexual violence, murder of parents, and displacements to struggle for survival. Below are some examples of how participants were recruited.

Deborah was 6 years old. Her parents were killed by the rebels who subsequently forcibly took her away with them. It was difficult for her to have a clear recollection of what had transpired during her abduction because of her age:

> The only thing about Liberia I can remember is when they killed my mother and father. I had one brother and one sister but before we started running they were in school. I asked my mother; "Where are we going?" And she said; "They are fighting war?" On our way, rebels caught us and put us in a queue. So later on, a certain woman came from the same direction where they took my parents so I asked her; "Where are my parents?" I couldn't see my parents and she told me that; "They killed your parents." So, I said; "If they killed my parents who am I going to go with? I don't know where I am going." The same people who took my parents [and killed them], are the ones who took me.

Patricia had encounters with three different rebel groups. In total, she spent about 7 years with the rebel groups. She was 8 years old when rebels captured her and her family during flight to safety. She described her experience with the first rebel group:

> We were crossing from the capital of Monrovia and before you come to XX you pass through XX, that's where the rebels captured us. Hmm it wasn't easy. When the boss saw me with my Maa [mother], the boss told my Maa, that; "You have to leave your daughter here or I will kill your sons." My mother said; "No the little girl is small I beg you she is just 8 years old." The guy said; "5 years old is what we even want, so I have to take your daughter". They kept me and my Maa and we stayed with those boys in the bush for 2 years.

Tete was almost 13 years old when she was forcefully captured by the rebels who had raped her mother and took her siblings away. Tete points out that her family was targeted due to her father's position as a principal. She has extensive history with some of the rebel groups. One of her ears was cut off by the rebels, and she explained how that had happened during the process of recruitment to her primary rebel group:

> XXX [name of rebel group] are the ones who cut my ear. I have been using this wig for long because I am ashamed of my ear. After they took my mother, the rebels came in

> asking me questions about where my father was. I told them I don't know where my father was. So, they began to torture me. I was in a room with my auntie when we heard. . .. what they were doing to my mother. Before they took me, one of them said they should kill me. The commander came from outside to tell them not to kill me because I am now part of the group. The other rebel just used the blade on the AK gun, and cut the whole ear off . . . you see it . . . you see it [shows researcher her ear]. I started bleeding and bleeding my whole body was soaked with blood.

Abuse in rebel groups. All eight women commented during interviews on the abuse they had suffered at the hands of the rebels. Therefore, this theme refers to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse the women endured as girls while they were with the armed groups. The participants described a sense of hopelessness and helplessness while they were in captivity. Some of the abuse was difficult to endure; however, with time, the women often described becoming somewhat "numb" to the torture and abuse they endured. Next are the descriptions of some their experiences:

Sexual abuse, emotional pain, and witnessing killings were common experiences in these rebel groups. Miss J detailed her experience:

> The punishment is that when the rebels come from the war front with blood or whatsoever on them, they grab you sometimes two to three persons at a time and sleep with you. When they finish, they will say you should get up and salute them and they make fun of you. Yes! because if I don't do it, they will kill me. I saw one of my friends killed because she didn't follow orders.

Participants not only experienced gang rape and hard labour but were also deprived of necessities such as food and clean water. Gina described her experience:

> Sometimes when they need a woman, they just take anybody and sleep with you. They can be 2 or 3 together and sleep with me. When they are ready they would say; "you, today carry ammunition bags." I would carry it and be walking barefoot for sometimes the whole day. You don't drink running water or well water, you drink stagnant water. When they bring food, you have to beg and if you are lucky they would give you some.

Participants' roles in armed groups also spanned from cooking, being used for sexual purposes, and running errands as described by Patricia:

> I don't want to remember, we did plenty things [emphasized]. When they are at the war front, they would tell you to carry drugs to the people and be cooking for them. You carry drugs, you carry foods, you carry alcohol and when they get drunk, they sleep with you. Some of the rebels will say; "You are a little child so I want to be with you so wait there." With all these drugs, do you think they will sleep with you normal? No, they don't.

The psychological impact of the activities within and outside of these armed groups was quite significant in participants' responses. Tete detailed watching people being killed and witnessing the gory sight of cannibalism:

> After I escaped from the rebel's prison, I went to Guinea border it was raining heavily and bullets were shooting kpa kpa in the bushes and villages. That day, I accidentally found some rebels who captured me. Government officials denied not sending people to fight in Liberia but that was 100% true because they almost arrested me at XX [name of place]. XX [rebel group] were slaughtering people and eating them. They caught one [opponent rebel group] boy in my group, laid the boy down and they slaughtered him using the small hand power saw. His head was lying at a different place with the eyes opened and the body was stretching like chicken. His chest coming up down and the blood pumping out. His body was jumping while the head was somewhere. XX [rebel group] was a wicked group, their killings were too wicked. For me, I was not with XX [rebel group], but I was with XX [rebel group] and I went through my own torture.

These experiences described by participants are horrific and disturbing. However, they managed to find coping resources to survive through these difficulties.

Coping Resources During Conflict in Liberia

In order to survive the atrocities and the pain and to protect their lives, participants utilized a number of survival tactics to live each day. Coping resources in conflict refers to the individual skills and coping strategies participants employed to protect themselves from being killed during their stay in the rebel groups. Enduring humiliation and physical, sexual, and psychological abuse demonstrates the individual coping resources these participants possess. At very young ages, some participants were able to assess the dynamics in the rebel groups, reluctantly accepted the practices, and only escaped when it was safe to do so. All participants pointed out having hope and the belief that their suffering would eventually end. Some also

believed that God kept them safe; therefore, all the suffering would lead to something greater. Some participants asked questions such as: Why am I still alive? The things that I have seen and gone through, why did I survive? They believe they continue to live for a particular reason of fulfilling their destiny or purpose on earth.

The following themes reflect the common coping resources participants employed while they were within the rebel groups: (a) Friendship/love, (b) Acceptance while biding time, and (c) Submission to authority.

Friendship/love. Some of the participants described how they maneuvered, assessed the group dynamics, and found ways to stay on good terms with the rebels. They also discovered a way to establish relationships with the rebels to reduce the number of men who raped them daily. According to some accounts of the participants, it was better to have one soldier to have sex with regularly than be gang raped. Cece detailed the strategies that facilitated her survival in the groups instead of being killed. She recounted,

> When I joined this woman with her children after my parents were killed, some rebels took us to a certain village. I was small at that time so the woman's daughters were sleeping with some of the rebels. Because of the past rape with the other rebels who killed my parents, I wasn't well so I was cooking and serving them. I had to pretend I loved one of the rebels. It was not an easy task. I attached myself to one and I pretended to love him, always pampering him rubbing my hands in his hair and other things. Just for us to survive; because if you say you don't want them, they will kill you. So, we spent several months in that village.

Participants who had some experiences with a couple of rebel groups understood the importance of establishing relationships with rebels in case they needed them in the future. Tete stated,

> I made friends while I was running errands for rebels between Liberia and Guinea and other towns. They put me on the canoe with looted goods and I cross to sell in Guinea and the other rebels in Guinea put me back on the canoe to Liberia. I made friends with some of them for the future problems that will come. That's how I made friends with some of them who saved me later when I thought I was going to die.

It is interesting to note that even at very young ages, the participants found clever and complex ways to cope and stay alive.

Acceptance while biding time. Acceptance refers to acknowledgment by participants that they have no power in their current situation and to protect their lives by not fighting back. Acceptance for all the participants also meant that they had no authority and/or rights but to succumb to the situation to avoid being killed. Tete thought about her access to basic necessities and decided to stay with the group:

> I was given freedom after many years but where could I go? I continued sleeping with them, I have to follow them before I eat and wash their clothes before I eat. They have to kill and loot people's things like rice, from people's farm and kitchen and we the surveillants [informants, spies] will prepare food for all of us.

Monica also described her helplessness:

> If I look right, if I look left I don't have anybody. They are the same people I see, in the morning when I get up and in the evening. So, we were just working together. I was looking for survival, yes . . . [emphasized] because I didn't even value my own life because sometimes I thought I would just die. Because people died in front of me, someone would just sit with me today we just talk and before they go to fight and come back, he is gone. So, I just accepted it and I was there until God helped me to escape.

Acceptance occurred on many levels. After years of serving in the armed groups, some participants had the freedom to leave the group. However, due to fear for their safety, they stayed in the group until the opportune moment.

Submission to authority. This theme refers to participants being compliant to the demands and practices of the rebel groups. Participants described how they submitted to the rebels using different means to keep themselves alive. They made it clear that tension was palpable within the groups and one had to be careful not to be killed. Miss J stated,

> With rebels, you don't use your own mind but act like you are not sensible; be stupid, a donkey and a dummy. That's the life I lived to be safe. I did not act as if I am smart, I acted stupid and God was on my side. During the times of the crises, you don't do things your own way, you do things their way. You don't share your feeling there, no no, no feeling. You kill that feeling.

Patricia spoke of her experiences and how she eventually accepted and became part of the rebels until she had the chance to escape:

> From 1990 to 1998 when Charles Taylor was there, there was no safety, you can't say anything bad about Charles Taylor and the rebel groups. When you stay among the rebel group anything they do, you do with them. After my first capture when I was 8 years old, we managed to escape after some years. Now I was 12-13 years and got that rebel attitude, it was hard times because we lived with the rebel for so many years. The killing sleeping with children and use of drugs were on a high rate so I just stayed there until things were calm and I could escape.

According to the participants, being submissive to the rebels and their demands was another means of staying alive. It took some of the participants years to finally get the opportunity to escape, but they waited. This shows the tenacity of the participants.

Post-Conflict Challenges in Ghana

Participants experienced several challenges and common experiences when they arrived in Ghana, as reflected in these four themes: (a) Lack of Support for Basic Needs, (b) Learning to Adjust in a New Environment, (c) Lack of Social Support, and (d) Psychological difficulties. The first theme has two subthemes, which elaborate on the specific challenges they faced in an attempt to integrate into the Ghanaian society.

Before discussing the lack of basic needs reported by all participants, it is important to note that participants arrived in Ghana at different times. This is significant because assistance was available for some few refugees during very brief periods and not through the entire crisis. Some arrived in Ghana at the time when the UN was no longer providing basic needs, while others also stated that even tents provided for shelter were of poor quality when they had to seek shelter during the rain. It was difficult to sleep on bare floors with tents in the harsh weather. Food rationing was significantly decreased sometimes resulting in refugees having to wait for a few days and even weeks for food. When it did arrive, they had to fight for it, queued for hours among other challenging issues. At one point, only refugees labeled as "vulnerable" received any

food rations. Taking this into consideration is very crucial in understanding the integration challenges participants experienced. Participants have been living with no assistance from the UN or the Ghanaian government for several years because they were expected to become self-sufficient.

Lack of support for basic needs. This theme describes the challenges of inadequate/non-existent basic needs such as food and shelter. This issue was of great concern for all the participants and classified into two subthemes, including difficulties finding food/lack of food and difficulties finding shelter.

Difficulties finding food/lack of food. This subtheme was very common among participants. They experienced significant challenges of lack of access to food due to financial difficulties. In the refugee camps, some of them had to go hungry for days because they had no source of income, money, or family to rely on in meeting their basic needs. Some found it difficult to work because they had no skills or education as they were recruited at very young ages during the war in Liberia. These accounts of lack of food were not only experienced as they became new refugees in Ghana but for some participants a continuous struggle until this present day. The following excerpts express participants' experiences of hunger as refugees in Ghana. Deborah recounted going hungry for long periods:

> Sometimes if I don't have customers, I won't mind, I go hungry for days. This past month, I wasn't getting customers. I can say we went for one week without food. Sometimes I will eat raw gari (cassava grains), and sleep. And when I am hungry like that, sometimes I pray asking God to provide and sleep.

According to Patricia, one can only understand what hunger means and what it does to your physical being only through experience. She described her experience of hunger:

> I went hungry at one time me and my family, Olive no pesewa to buy water to drink. I felt hunger, hunger, hunger . . . has it ever happened to you? When you are hungry ask the doctor what happens to your stomach. You can feel your intestines tearing. Olive even when you see the food, you won't be able to eat, your body will be trembling. When

> they give you the food to eat you have to take two spoons and lay down for that food to settle down in your stomach before you can eat a little more. You feel like you are dying. I have been hungry on this camp for more than one week.

The participants turn hunger into spiritual activity by declaring a fast. According to them, fasting plays a big role in strengthening the human spirit as well as drawing a person closer to God. Unless a person is clearly resilient, who would think of using a negative experience of hunger and turn it into a positive one? Miss J reflected on her experience with hunger and fasting:

> It was a challenge to get food and even breakfast or something small to eat. Even if I don't have food today, I do compulsory fasting with no problem. Compulsory fast is when you don't have food then you start to fast. You don't want to fast oh, but because the food is not there you need to use it as a fasting to get close to God.

It is remarkable to notice the degree of resilience these participants possessed because even when they did not have food to eat, they did not dwell on it but rather found other means to benefit from it.

Difficulties finding shelter. This subtheme refers to the struggles participants experienced by not having a safe and comfortable shelter to sleep. Participants described significant challenges with friends, abandonment, and the establishment of friendships and romantic relationships in order to secure shelter when they first arrived in Ghana. The lack of shelter was common among all participants, and during this study some participants were still struggling to find safer as a well as affordable housing on the camp. There are no enforced laws stopping other individuals from renting and selling plots to their fellow refugees. This has resulted in other refugee "landlords" renting their rooms at exorbitant prices making it difficult for others to afford such places. Other refugee "landlords" were also selling plots to their fellow refugees, which is illegal but still ongoing in the camp. The following accounts express participants' frustrations at not having shelter as refugees in Ghana:

> Reese: When I came to Ghana, I had nowhere to sleep, so I used to sleep by someone in their house but when things went wrong, I started sleeping outside.

Gina also had an experience of sleeping in the streets:

> When I came to Ghana, I used to go to town to do hair and I used to sleep outside in front of the stores in the Markola and Malata market which was very bad and dangerous.

While some participants slept outside and on the streets, others got into relationships just to secure their accommodation. Cece shared her experience:

> The boyfriend I was sleeping with didn't care for me so the plan was that I wanted to stay in his house. Because when I came to Ghana things were very hard even for me to get money to rent a place was very very hard.

The participants' stories show how desperate they were and how challenging it was to find a place to stay as refugees in Ghana.

Psychological difficulties. This is another theme that refers to the challenges related to participants' loneliness while living without their families, memories, and experiences during the war, stressors they faced in the past in Liberia and currently in Ghana. Participants experienced and reported significant psychological concerns as they tried to integrate in the Ghanaian community. They expressed these difficulties as follows:

> Cece described the psychological difficulties she experienced being in a new country:
>
> Sometimes I cry and I feel like taking medicine to commit suicide. Because I don't have parents and I don't have any relatives and hmm . . . having a child is a burden. One time, I took a knife and I wanted to kill myself because life in Ghana wasn't easy, I was suffering too much. I never even had slippers, my slippers were torn so I put knife in fire and I used it to mend it [long silence, crying]. Sometimes, I feel lonely, frustrated, sometimes you know when I sit alone and I don't see my parents and my siblings, my mind will go back.

Some participants were angry about how the war impacted them and their families. As Patricia narrated her experience, her anger and sadness was obvious:

> One of the things that made me vex (angry) was, my little sister died. Charles Taylor's rebels slept with the little girl and she got pregnant. She died with the pregnancy because her womb . . . [crying] was too small for a child she had to die. That kind of life [crying].

> . . I always say you don't know the lives that we have passed through and the things that we have seen. We have done things that nobody will even think that we are human beings.

Miss J expressed her loneliness and the stress of not having any income. She also described how her thoughts bring back a flood of memories:

> Very lonely, very lonely. When I wake up I look around I can't find nobody, I wish I had children but then no one is around me. And then secondly, I don't have a job. So sometimes when I wake up, my head is tensed. When I am alone, my mind begins to visit all those memories and all that I passed through. It's like a cassette it will be playing in my head and replaying, replaying, the same thing. That is when I feel my heart beating fast and my body begins to shake. Sometimes I sit down and think about whether my family are still alive and strong or they have gone back home?

These psychological difficulties although not prominent in the participants cannot be dismissed. The participants continue to deal with some psychological stressors such as missing their loved ones.

Learning to adjust in new environment. This theme highlighted that participants found it difficult to be accepted as refugees in Ghana. Furthermore, it was tough for them to get accustomed to their new environment and find ways to cope in a new system. All participants discussed extensively through interviews, informal conversations, and during non-participant observations, the challenges they experienced during their early stages as refugees as well as their continuing struggles in Ghana. They noted several concerns while they were trying to integrate into the Ghanaian society. They described their experiences as follows:

Gina pointed out the difficulty in adjusting to Ghanaian food:

> I was not used to Ghana's food at that time. To get Liberian food here was difficult and even the food was very expensive at that time and I was not able to adjust myself to this system easily. Yes, finding myself and establishing life was not easy.

Cece noted the language barrier in Ghana as a significant and challenging issue. She believes she was and is still treated differently or discriminated against because of her Liberian accent:

> Life here is still not easy because I am not fluent in the language; I cannot speak Twi, When I go to the market, as soon as I say hello, they say; "Eii Liberia," they raise their prices up. When a Ghanaian goes to buy, their prices are reduced.

Participants were observed to have adjusted to the Ghanaian weather; however, they prepare and eat Liberian dishes and complain about discrimination in the market. The topic of discrimination in the market place is very important for participants because it limits their opportunity to expand their businesses beyond the borders of the camp.

Lack of social support. As described by participants, lack of social support is evidenced by receiving very little to no help, taking care of their children, and being abandoned by their significant others. Tete reported how the father of her child terminated their relationship:

> He just called me one day and said he is not responsible for me anymore. I said, "Oh wow, what are you talking about?" He said, "Oh yes." I said to him, "You brought me this far to abandon me this far where I don't know anyone? I don't even know Accra, I don't even know where to turn. You brought me in this camp, you want me to die in a foreign land?"

Monica struggled through difficulties during her pregnancy and having her baby when she was abandoned by her partner. She described how stressful life became until she decided she could not cope anymore:

> I went to the Catholic church to see the priest. He said, "Monica what is going on? What is happening again?" I said, it's not easy priest, things are not fine." He said, "So what do you want to do?" I said, "I want to give you the baby so that she can be for you or help me so that I can take the child to the orphanage. He said, "What will I do with this baby here?" So, he said, "No, you are the mother so don't worry things will be fine. When you don't have food to eat, come to the church but don't give the child to anybody. Let the child be with you because that child is the one who is going to help you one day." So, when the priest talked, my heart calmed down. She was 3 then but now she is 10 years.

These women had to take care of their children by themselves with no financial or emotional support from their partners. However, these children have been described by participants as their source of hope.

Post-Conflict Coping Resources

In this section, I touch on the coping resources participants used to facilitate their integration into the Ghanaian society. I also explore how these coping resources contribute to their resiliency and survival and how these resources facilitated their integration into their new environment. Participants suffered horrendous experiences during their recruitment and stay within rebel groups during the war in Liberia. Others had to endure months and in some cases years of horrific experiences of sexual, physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. The participants travelled via other countries and faced significant challenges before finally arriving in Ghana.

As refugees in Ghana, they were met with unexpected challenges such as work and general discrimination. In spite of all these problems, they found coping resources that worked for them, which demonstrates their ability to seek as well as use their personal agency to survive. Some of these coping resources they utilized were instilled in their childhood by their families and communities while they were in Liberia. Participants shared similar and common themes of post-migration coping resources. The themes are categorized into: (a) Social Support, (b) Individual Practices, and (c) Spiritual Practices and Beliefs. All three themes have subthemes, which further describes specific coping resources participants used to facilitate integration into their new environment.

Social support. This theme refers to participants' ability to seek and receive assistance while trying to resettle in the Buduburam camp. This theme encompasses two subthemes, which are: (a) Receiving Social Support from People, Pastors, and the Church, and (b) Seeking Support from Neighbours, Pastors, and Church members.

Participants recognized the importance of social connection, and they had the desire to seek, form, and maintain relationships. They achieved these relationships through various means such as being an active participant during camp activities, being a good neighbour, and displaying their good qualities to attract good people into their lives. Particularly in seeking support, some highlighted the tactics they used in affiliating with the people who have some financial stability to be able to benefit from the relationship. All participants emphasized the importance of social support and how that contributed to their resiliency.

Receiving social support from people, pastors, and the church. All participants expressed their gratitude and relief for the various resources they received from people and their community when there seemed to be no hope. These social supports provide financial assistance, emotional support, moral guidance, and health-related support. For instance, one participant, Reese, does not have family members in Ghana, and as a widow with three children, Reese recognizes the importance of social supports, and she surrounds herself with people she can rely on in times of need:

> My late husband's friend comes around and helps me with my children with food and money and my neighbour also helps and shares with me. When you have children especially, you don't have the time to choose who to be nice to, you need every one because you don't know what tomorrow brings.

During interviews and informal conversations with Tete, she pointed out how she received tremendous support from her church, pastors, and friends and how they contribute to her strength:

> When the church members see me with my children, they give the children money, so that's how we survive. Sometimes the man of God will just call me because he knows my situation and give me money and pray for me that God give me strength. I also have this friend if she doesn't hear from me in a day, she will call me and she will make sure if even if she doesn't have anything for me she will send something to the children for lunch. She always encourages me.

Gina recounted that she received tremendous support from the church and her neighbours when she had a caesarean section. She is a single mother and was abandoned by her partner when she became pregnant:

> I went through operation [C-section] for my little girl. Things were not fine with me, I went through problems and my pastor, neighbours and the people I fellowship with, were the ones who helped me and my little baby. My church gave me money, they bought me food, rice, milk, soap and other things. I used the money to sustain myself and that enabled me to look for small things to sell to help myself.

Participants received financial support from church members and pastors, spiritual support from their pastor, and other times emotional encouragement from their friends. These supports contributed immensely to their coping in the camp.

Seeking social support from neighbours, pastors, and church members. Participants clearly demonstrated resilience not only by being available and ready to receive support but also by having the personal agency to navigate towards resources. They sought their own coping resources through the community, neighbours, and meaningful relationships. Here I include some excerpts from interviews and non-participant observations relating to the women's own resourcefulness.

> Cece discussed how she seeks assistance from her neighbours for child care:
>
> Sometimes it is not easy for me. When I am going early to the shop, I ask some people around my neighbourhood to help with my daughter or I leave her with friends in the community. Sometimes people will call me to go and plait their hair with no notice so I find people who are free then I leave my daughter with them. When I get my money then I come back home. That's how we have been living since 2007.

Due to the difficulties acquiring basic needs, Gina finds a way to sustain herself on the camp through reciprocity. Gina seeks support from her friends for food and money and reciprocates the gesture because she is well aware that she may need their help in the future. She assists her friends when they are in need and likewise her friends would return the favour.

> Sometimes I go to my friends and ask them for help and food and if they have it they give me. They also come to me when things are not fine for them and I give them because I might need them again.

Deborah recounts how she meets with her pastor to seek spiritual counsel in times of stress:

> When I think of my problems, it makes me feel bad and sad. Sometimes the whole day, three to four days if I think too much I go to church and tell the pastor that, I am thinking too much so please pray for me. So, he will counsel me and pray for me. He will give me some encouraging words.

People resort to all kinds of measures and find different means to enable them to cope with their stress and frustrations. The participants showed that they sought assistance during stressful times from their pastor, neighbours and friends.

Individual resilience qualities and practices. This theme refers to the qualities each participant possesses that contribute to her resiliency. These qualities equipped each woman to deal with the problems she encountered in the camp. Some of these characteristics and practices were modelled from family and community values as well as the hardships they had to endure from the Liberian war. All participants demonstrated these characteristics as part of their coping resource to survive in the camps. Individual qualities/practices consisted of four subthemes: (a) Work, (b) Self-Reliance, (c) Positive Mindset, and (d) Hope. See Figure 12 for a photo of some of the participants.

Figure 12. Picture of some participants.

Work. The first subtheme, work, reflected the hard work, determination, and perseverance of the participants in making their lives better in the refugee camp. It was a difficult journey for most of the participants when attempting to find work and start providing for themselves and their children. However, each participant highlighted the benefits of work and how that served as a coping resource. The following participants shared their stories.

Monica demonstrated the value of work ethic instilled by her mother by working hard to provide for herself and her daughter. She was able to transfer the knowledge of business and hard work to her present life. Monica narrated:

> The only thing that I know is business. When I was growing up, my mother would make us carry things to the market and sell it when we were even small about 10 and 11 years. When we come back from school, we would go to the market and help her to sell. Sometimes, she would leave us and we stay behind and sell everything. So now in Ghana, I wake up usually 4:00 in the morning. I go for devotion and I go to the market. Some of the things I buy them for GHC 10-20 and sell them in the camp for GHC 40-35 so I make profit and save.

Another participant, Gina, worked tirelessly, saved money and had intentions of investing in a more lucrative business only to be defrauded by her friend. However, she was undeterred by this experience; instead she discovered other ways of acquiring income, saving money again until she was able to start a new business. I was a witness to this transformation, and I saw the progress she made from the many months I spent with her in the camp. Gina explained,

> One of my friends was going to Liberia so I bought goods with all my savings and gave them to her to sell for me. She didn't send my money back so things went down for me. I started to sell on the road again and when I saved a little money, I invested it in my tilapia business. I saved to buy my grill and I wake up at 3:00 a.m. to go to the market and buy the tilapia, come back clean and spice it before 6:00 a.m. During the day, I get the place ready and start grilling in the evening for my customers.

Deborah's hard work provided an opportunity for her to learn a trade without incurring financial costs. Deborah details her experience:

> I learned my trade through a certain lady who took me to Nigeria for one year. She had a salon and I used to go and help her. She told me she would teach me how to do hair and

> she did. Now I can fix lashes and hair. With hair, it depends on the hair I fix or the length. Sometimes, when I start in the morning I will finish about 4.00 in the evening. This is how I survive for instance yesterday I did someone's lashes for GHC12.00 and braided hair for GHC7.00 so I will use that for food tomorrow and keep the rest.

Learning a trade and committing to the cause payed off handsomely for Deborah. Income from hair styling enables her to afford her basic needs.

Self-reliance. This subtheme refers to how participants utilized the personal qualities they embodied, which include self-belief, hard work, courage, self-encouragement, determination, and perseverance to overcome the struggles they experience in the refugee camp. Participants pointed out that these qualities that encapsulate self-reliance were developed from their childhood, living with rebels during the war, and in the refugee camp in Ghana. According to Gina, it was important to be self-reflective and derive emotional support from herself. She describes:

> Nobody can make you happy except yourself so I just take my mind off all the problems. Sometimes I go to visit friends and come back home and still encourage myself. When we were in Liberia other people didn't make it, people died. So, if God gave me life I have to encourage myself whether good or bad.

Patricia talked about her experience of relying on herself:

> I am not looking for a life of the street (prostitution) but sometimes when things get difficult, I go out that's how I paid my school fees, my children's and that's how I graduated from high school. Life is just up and down like a wave sometimes it goes up, sometimes it gets down, it's not permanent. Now I sell barbecue on the camp. I don't want to go in the street again I am tired with that.

I observed during this study that all participants relied on themselves first and did not expect others to help them. When they received help from others, they were appreciative and surprised.

Positive mindset. This subtheme refers to participants interpreting and predicting their life events in a positive manner. It is their ability to appreciate the good and expect good things in spite of the challenges. It also refers to their thoughts and behaviour in an environment that was challenging. Positive mindset for one participant, Tete, was not only about acceptance and

what she can feel but about having the idea that her belief in God is her support and that she is not alone. Tete explained,

> Anyway, it comes, I accept it and I am so grateful to God because I went through all these experiences and He still kept me alive. That means God saved me for a purpose. He wants me to be a testimony in somebody's life. That's what I believe, maybe my testimony can change somebody's life. Always remember that you have God. Keep yourself well and make yourself look good because you don't know what tomorrow brings. Enjoy life.

It appears that having a positive mindset facilitated stable emotions in participants and led to appropriate and desirable behaviours. For example, Miss J described how she challenged her negative thinking and began to see life from a realistic and positive perspective:

> Calming myself down was the first thing I learned a long time ago before anything else. Despite all the challenges in the camp, I can tell you that I am strong. Don't sit down just like that and say life is difficult. Be strong, keep moving and don't stop. What I did was set a goal and have the mindset that no matter what the situation, I would reach that goal and forget the past. So, if you want to become somebody, no circumstance should stop you to be what you want to be. Even if they put you inside a hole and rape you, so long as your mind is set on your goal you can make it even if it is left with one second for the world to end.

Believing in one's abilities to succeed and having a can-do spirit encouraged Gina to enroll and train in skills that women do not typically train in. She had the attitude to break barriers, and she was ready to achieve her goals. She stated,

> I did plumbing, wood joining and carpentry for 10-11months. Even though I am good, 10-11 months is not enough so I want to train for about two to three years, to be excellent in the field. XXX gave me training and I want to advance myself so that tomorrow I can stand free as a woman. I encourage everyone to continue to learn because learning helps a lot.

Positive mindset, according to the participants, includes acceptance, emotional regulation, and desire to learn to prevent living in the past and promoting self-development.

Hope. The theme hope refers to participants' aspirations, desires, wishes, and expectations of something beneficial in the future; they were prepared to trust in and wait for

something positive to occur in their lives. All participants acknowledged that having a sense of hope contributed and propelled them this far. For example, Cece talks about the Bible chapter:

> In Ecclesiastic [Bible Chapter] it says there is time for enjoyment, there is time to live and a time to die. So, I know my time will come one day so I trust and believe that once I have life I have hope despite the situation I find myself in. That is why the frustration I find myself in I still can't complain because I have life.

Patricia describes her difficulties as she pointed out that she has another chance at life because she is alive. Secondly, she will continue to persevere because she believes that something positive will occur in the future. Having a sense of hope enables her to cope with her difficulties. She said,

> I cope within myself not my physical self. Within myself I believe that as long as I am still living and not dead, I know there is an opportunity for me. With my physical self, I won't lie to you sometimes when I wake up I dream, sometimes about the things that happened to me and then I will drink and sleep and just forget about that day. But I can tell you that I am very satisfied and okay for now. I am happy that I am still strong and moving on because I have hope my life is going to change for the better.

As humans, our reason for being ceases once we die. Most of the participants expressed their reason for being alive in order to have hope. Living is what gives them the chance to achieve their goals and dreams. Without life, there is no hope.

Spiritual practices and beliefs. This theme refers to intentional and regular activities participants engaged in to develop, establish, improve and/or grow spiritually. All participants had a belief in the supernatural realm, transcendence and reverence towards God, as well as the continuous quest for sacred meaning. These beliefs and practices were demonstrated by all participants, and they had an extreme sense of this belief. They also confirmed that the main reason for their being is due to God. Families and communities modeled a strong spiritual lifestyle, which they believed would serve their children well. Due to modelling these practices in their childhood from their families and communities, all participants were observed to take this aspect of their life seriously and were disciplined in carrying out activities without fail.

Participants verbalized extensively about how that contributed to their resilience. Therefore, four subthemes that emerged were: (a) Faith in God, (b) Prayer and Fasting as Practice, (c) Engagement in Church Activities, and (d) God as a Source of Strength.

Faith in God. Individuals have faith in God because they have the belief that whatever they wish for would be granted. The subtheme faith in God refers to having trust and believing something to be true without seeing it. Participants strongly believed that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Participants said they needed faith to test God and subsequently found the evidence when their requests were granted, which in return solidified their faith in God. For example, Reese describes her faith in God:

> Sometimes when I wake up I don't have 5 pesewas in my house but before the day ends God will choose somebody in the community to bless me with money for the children. That's something that God is always doing in my life.

All participants talked about the difficulties they encountered at the same time acknowledging the role God played in their lives. As part of document analysis, I asked participants to pick an object that gives them strength. Cece picked the Bible and made the statement,

> The Bible means a lot to me, it gives me strength in times of difficulty. Whenever I feel frustrated and I ask God for direction, then he will send me to a scripture in Psalm 37, vs 5-6. Commit your will to the Lord Trust in Him and He will direct your path. That gives me strength. Then I read Jeremiah, then back to Joshua 1-8. These verses encourage me and makes me courageous, because without God I cannot succeed.

Participants also reported that sometimes the only one who can help their situation is God. They may have some supports in the camp but there are certain things that are impossible for a fellow human being to provide for them. Miss J described how she used faith to recover and find strength during her difficult times:

> My life was terrible, so what I did was I put myself together and with the Word of God I started to function. It was challenging but the Grace of God makes it possible. At the end of the day, I wait for what God has for me tomorrow. That's how faith has been keeping me up to stay on my feet and carrying me on.

During my informal conversations with the participants, they often spoke about how faith has built them up and given them hope to succeed during their most vulnerable moments.

God as a source of strength. This subtheme refers to participants' belief in God's superintending power, authority, and loyal love. All participants are Christians and of Pentecostal denomination. They strongly believed that there were many instances in the Bible whereby God was the source of strength for people. Participants therefore used God as their stronghold in times of need. This subtheme is an important coping resource for all the participants. Miss J recounts how God restores her strength:

> Sometimes when I am braiding people's hair, I feel so suffocated, suppressed and shaky because I was suppressed most of my life. As the day goes to an end, I go to church and that relaxes me when I hear the word of God it keeps me calm then I go back home.

Reese reported how God serves as a contributing factor to her resilience:

> God gives me the energy and the strength to wake up in the morning. I thank God, and I present everything into His hands because He can do everything possible for me and before the day ends we find a meal and we make it.

Patricia also recounts the unpredictability of life and how she receives strength from God:

> Yes, life is not stable, it's just up and down like this [hand gesturing a wave] but the strength of God is in me. I don't look at hard times, I don't look at anything, I just believe that one day God will make my life free again.

All participants believed that as a Christian suffering is unavoidable. They believed that God permits some suffering for a purpose as well as to show glory and majesty when the suffering is taken away.

Prayer and fasting as practice. All participants believed that the divine power of God provides their needs; therefore, participants engaged in some of the principles that can make their desires and wishes a reality. There are many principles that guide their beliefs and doctrine. This section focuses on the principles of prayer and fasting. According to participants, prayer is making a request or communicating appreciation to God, and fasting is abstaining from food or

certain types of foods or other activities. Deborah provided an example of what she says in her prayers as well as fasting for herself and her family:

> Every month, I pray and fast. I write my petition and I tell God that this month of February you are my only hope I have nobody else to depend on. I pray and I say that; "God you know my heart, you know me better than I do so wherever my children are, help me to communicate with them. May your Holy Spirit guide them for me, and please connect me to them. Because I know that there is nothing too hard for you, you make impossible things possible so I know that you can do it. And I also I pray for help in 2015 that, bring me a helper…." [crying-long silence]

Some participants reported the important role prayer has played in their lives. Reese recounts her use of prayer during her most vulnerable moments in the rebel group. She believes God helped her to escape from the rebel hideout. Reese reported,

> In the rebel group, I used to pray and ask God to protect me from being killed. That was my prayer every day I didn't want to die. So, one morning they left me alone to find food, so I escaped. So, I thank God, he listened to my prayer and I was able to escape from that group.

Tete also stated,

> For me, I told God I don't want to go on the street [prostitution] to support myself and my children and He helped me. When day breaks, I will tell God, "you gave me this child, feed her, provide for her". Sometimes we would be walking in the camp and somebody will just bless me with about GHC10. Ah... I will worship [emphasized] God.

Participants reported they fasted to strengthen their relationship and bring them closer to God. They also fasted and prayed to have "breakthroughs" in their areas of struggle.

Engagement in church activities. This subtheme refers to activities such as going to church and participating in church activities that participants embodied in order to build their resilience. In my non-participant observations, participants were actively involved in these activities and sometimes prioritized church activities instead of their work, which left me somewhat bemused. When I talked about my bemusement with them during our informal interactions, they responded stating that despite wanting money to provide their needs, they do not want to lose the foundation on which they were raised. They also did not want to prioritize

their physical needs above their spiritual ones. They also talked extensively about how the church members, activities, and pastors contribute to their resilience; therefore, it is paramount to place these activities at the forefront. Cece describes her activities of the day:

> I go for devotion in the morning and Bible studies during the week. Sometimes I go for prayer meetings so the joy of the Lord is my strength. Whatever I will pass through I sing. If you are not careful, you will say, "that girl is crazy", but it's God who gave me a song to give me strength, to encourage me that there is hope for tomorrow. No matter the situation I find myself in I thank God.

I observed Deborah go to church about three times during one of my non-participant observations. She was going to church and braiding her customers' hair in between church services. I accompanied her to all three church services, and I felt this required a lot of mental and physical energy. The focus was solely on prayer and worship. This schedule was grueling, yet she made it look easy. She was reluctant to rest, and she informed me as I left the camp that she had about three more church services that day before her day's end. Deborah described her devotion:

> My relationship with God I will not say that it's 100% perfect, but I got baptized and I took Him as my Lord and my personal Saviour and I hope from Him for provision. I go to church at dawn, morning and in the afternoons. I also go from Monday to Friday depending on what we are doing in the month. For instance, Thursdays are for prayers, and Wednesday to Friday is for fasting.

Tete described briefly how attending church and engaging in church activities have helped:

> When I came to this camp, I was always in church service praying day and night, we will be in service praying and praying. That's how I started forgetting my past and being strong.

The participants showed their devotion to God through their spiritual practices. They engaged in these practices consistently without fail. Regardless of their circumstances, their belief and hope in God was steadfast.

Summary of Chapter

Chapters 5 focused on the results of this ethnographic study. The first part of this chapter discussed the narratives of all the participants. Participants' stories were presented in chronological order: pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict experiences. Through their stories, their challenges were highlighted as well as their individual unique themes that emerged as influences to their resilience. The second part presented the overall common themes of the participants. The common themes showed that participants suffered psychological difficulties, social problems, as well as the lack of support for basic needs during conflict and post-conflict periods. However, the participants utilized resilience qualities they fostered in their families (e.g., spirituality) and in rebel groups (e.g., perseverance) to survive. The participants continue to struggle with the lack of support for basic needs in the camp; however, they have made it clear they have the resilient qualities to survive these struggles.

CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION – RESILIENCE IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED FROM FORMER GIRL CHILD SOLDIERS

This study aimed to explore resilience and coping resources of former girl child soldiers in a post-conflict environment in the Bududuram camp in Ghana. Using a qualitative research methodology, specifically focused ethnography, the study answered two questions: (a) What are some of the resilience and coping mechanisms former girl child soldiers use to facilitate their reintegration into the society? and (b) What are some challenges former girl child soldiers encounter concerning their reintegration into the society? The study captured each participant's perspectives on factors that contribute to their resiliency and coping resources that have been beneficial for their survival, as well as the challenges they continue to face trying to integrate into society.

In this chapter, I discuss five major findings: (1) Trauma and Adversity, (2) Ongoing Struggle for Survival in the Camp, (3) The Role of Spirituality and Religion, (4) The Importance of Social Support, and (5) Individual Resilience Qualities and Practices. Trauma and adversity and ongoing struggles in the camp are examined to understand their crucial role in identifying resilience in participants. Spirituality and religion in former child soldiers, which have received minimal research attention, were critical in the lives of the participants in developing and remaining resilient. Social support as well as participants' individual practices were also significant in their development of resilience. It is noteworthy that the themes are interrelated and complementary, instead of being detached from each other, and this is an important aspect of an ecological transactional approach to understanding resilience.

This chapter situates the research findings within existing literature on former child soldiers' mental health (e.g., Denov, 2010) and utilizes the ecological-transactional model of

resilience (Lynch & Ciccheti, 1998) to discuss the results. Discussions and comparison of themes are made based on current results and literature. Finally, implications for health professionals such as counselling and clinical psychologists and mental health therapists, as well as educators and policy makers are addressed. The limitations of the research as well as directions for future research are also outlined.

Developing Resilience Within an Ecological-transactional Model

An understanding of former girl child soldiers' resilience is best supported by the ecological transactional model of resilience (Lynch & Cicchetti, 1998). As a reminder, this model highlights the interplay of individual, society, community, and cultural factors as well as family functioning within three ecological contexts: microsystem, exosystem, and macro systems. Lynch and Cicchetti (1998) conceptualized these ecological contexts and relationships as nested levels with varying degrees of proximity to the individual, which contribute to a person's resilience in the face of adversity. The ecological-transactional model also guides how resilience is studied within social contexts (Harney, 2007) to understand which particular contexts and processes cultivate resilience and for which people.

Figure 13 illustrates the interaction of how resilience was fostered and developed during the pre-conflict, conflict, and post-conflict periods for all participants.

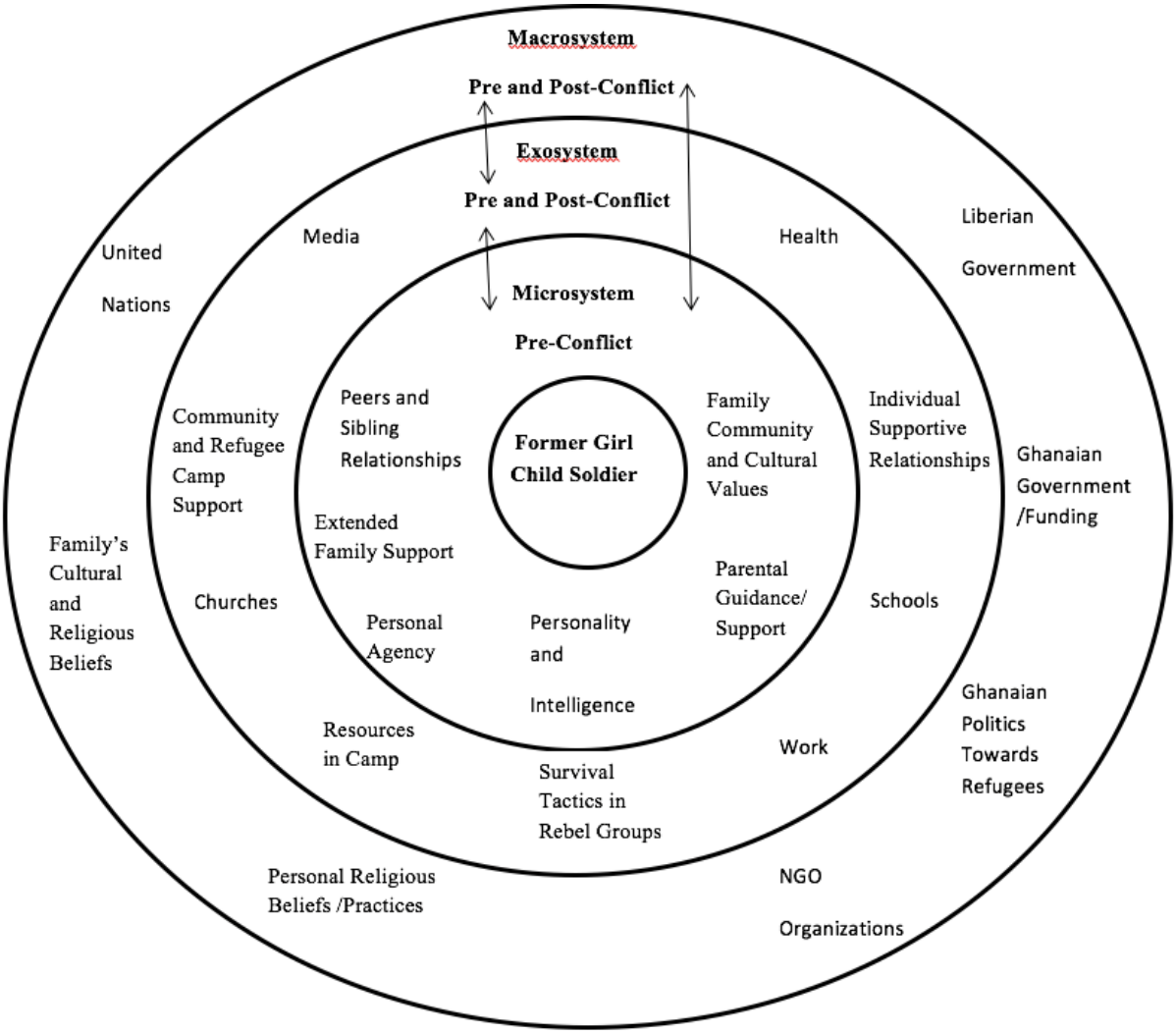

Figure 13: Fostering and development of participants' resilience at microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem levels

As the diagram shows, at the microsystem level, before the war in Liberia, the participants received family support, guidance and instillation of community, and cultural values from their guardians. Resilience at the microsystem level was developed by the participants observing and later modelling their parents' behaviours, including learning social networking, seeking out supports in time of need, and applying the work ethic their parents used to function in their communities. The participants also developed their own qualities such as self-reliance and a positive outlook in life through interaction with their siblings, caring for their siblings, and

household chores. The early microsystem supports were later complemented by an exosystem in Ghana that was marked by the availability of refugee camp resources such as schools, hospitals, community, churches, and religious leaders. These resources fostered resilience and created the opportunity for participants to create their own support systems and practice their cultural and religious beliefs that exist at the macrosystem level and which had initially been instilled during childhood.

Participants also developed survival tactics during their stay in the rebel groups such as being disciplined and forging necessary relationships that served as support when needed. As such, this study's former child soldiers' resilience was also developed in the exosystem in Liberia during their time in the rebel groups. These survival tactics were also critical in forming relationships and for ongoing perseverance living in the refugee camp. My findings in this study confirmed the interrelatedness of all the systems in the model. This model is particularly important and appropriate due to its emphasis on cultural beliefs and practices to further explore what resilience consists of or its implication for non-Western cultures.

Trauma and Adversity

In order to appreciate and have a strong grasp of participants' resilience, it is important to understand their life circumstances in the period during conflict and post-conflict. In this case, exposure to severe childhood trauma as well as ongoing struggles for survival are the adverse childhood experiences the participants faced from the time of their recruitment, between ages 6 and 14 years, living with rebels in Liberia, to ongoing challenges as adults living in the refugee camp in Ghana. Participants described in detail the horror, torture, and psychological pain they experienced at the hands of rebels during recruitment, their stay in the rebel groups, as well as their experiences during flight to safety. Grave violations of child human rights during their time

with rebel groups, as reported by participants, include being raped, taking part in cannibalism, being forced to walk for long distances without food or water, being forced to carry unwanted pregnancies, being subjected to fear and humiliation, and witnessing their neighbors, friends and others being killed.

The traumatic memories of what happened during recruitment seemed to be more vividly described by participants, in relation to other experiences, as they related to brutal and humiliating severing of ties with families, with Deborah summing this up well: "I was just six years old but the only thing I remember very well is how they killed my mother and father." All eight participants lived with families before the war and were forcibly recruited under traumatic circumstances, consistent with previous research with child soldiers (Denov, 2008; Podder). As a reminder, Deborah was 6-years old, when her family, in the midst of the violence, ran for safety, leaving behind her siblings who were in school on that day. Her parents tried to protect her, but the rebels captured them, killed her parents, and took Deborah with them.

My findings in this study resonate strongly with Denov's (2008) research on girls in armed conflicts in Angola, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Northern Uganda, where many girls were forcibly abducted into armed groups through kidnapping and seizure. Denov (2008) noted that girls are highly valued by armed groups as they are perceived as easily manipulated and therefore ensure a constant pool of free labour. While three of the participants described participating in direct combat, most of the time spent with rebels was used as domestic labourers and for sexual purposes. Therefore, in a similar manner to patterns in other African conflicts (see Yohani & Larsen, 2014), the acts of brutality, often involving sexual violence and murder, served to terrorize the participants' communities, sever bonds, and force them into submission at the hands of the rebel groups.

As noted in the previous example, the traumatic circumstances under which these children were recruited also involved sexual abuse trauma during recruitment and this, along with other forms of physical and psychological abuse, extended into their stay in the rebel groups. Throughout history, in times of armed conflict, sexual abuse, including acts such as rape, forced pregnancy, and sexualized humiliation have been used as an extension of physical violence and for domination (Yohani & Hagen, 2010). The Liberian civil war was no exception (UNICEF, 2009). Except for one participant, who reported she could not remember, all participants were exposed to sexual violence in the context of captivity and forced labour—including repeated gang rape at the hands of the rebels and being forced to bear the children of their aggressors as reflected in the literature (Mckay & Mazurana, 2004). For example, Patricia became pregnant at 13 years old and does not know the father of her child due to being raped by several rebels over an extended period of time.

It should be noted that these children were not helpless victims as they were engaged in various survival behaviours that sustained them, including acceptance of their situation while biding their time, submission to authority, and forging friendships and romantic relationships that helped them to survive. For instance, Cece described how she forged a romantic relationship and pretended to be in love with one of her captors to save her from repeated gang rape and torture by the other rebels. Tete also described how after assessing the group dynamics, she made friends and established relationships in the rebel groups in order to receive help when she needed it. Other approaches included consciously engaging in sex in exchange for protection. For example, Patricia lived with multiple rebel groups from the young age of 8 years old. She was forced into prostitution after a couple of years but made it clear that her ultimate goal was to get her mother and herself to safety. Together with her mother, they stayed with different rebel

groups until they were escorted to the nearest border to cross to safety. Machel's (2000) report on the impact of armed conflict on children also described how children are sometimes forced into prostitution for safe conduct through war zones and for privileges for themselves and their families as a means of protecting their families from other groups.

The literature is clear on the impact of childhood trauma and points to the fact that severe childhood trauma and adverse childhood experiences have an impact on the overall mental health and development of the child as well as in adulthood. Physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, and traumatic separation from a parent are typical examples of childhood interpersonal traumas that have a negative impact on self-concept, cognitive development, and emotional development (Cloitre et al., 2009). Further, children who have undergone such multiple traumas are at higher risk of experiencing more severe psychological maladjustment, PTSD, and self-regulatory disturbances (Cloitre et al., 2009). Indeed, psychological and psychosocial problems have been documented in former child soldiers in Uganda (Klasen et al., 2010), Nepal (Kohrt et al., 2008), and Sri Lanka (Somasundaram, 2002).

The current participants are clearly adults who have survived multiple childhood traumas over an extended period of time. Similar to other studies, they reported symptoms of trauma such as flashbacks, lack of concentration, hypersensitivity, and lack of motivation. In addition to the trauma symptoms, some participants also reported reproductive health problems and psychological difficulties such as depression, anxiety, relationship problems, grief, guilt, shame, loneliness, and sadness. All participants described the more active trauma symptoms such as flashbacks for past trauma, ongoing thoughts of experiences of humiliation, pain and loss, concentration difficulties, and hypersensitivity as being more prominent until the time they arrived in Ghana. While still present at times, these are less pervasive. Likewise, all women

interviewed in this study did not report significant challenges with depression, anxiety, severe interpersonal difficulties, or general difficulties in their daily functioning at the time of the study. Indeed, I also observed this; most were able to talk about their experiences of loss, grief, and past shame, yet were also functioning within their communities, had social relationships, held odd jobs, and maintained a positive outlook. Although studies of children growing up in conflict zones and former child soldiers indicate that they do have the propensity to develop substantial mental health and psychosocial problems, the eight women in this study appeared to be coping fairly well as adults, suggesting that not all former child soldiers go on to live severely dysfunctional lives.

Contrary to some aspects of Denov and Maclure's (2006) investigation into the experiences of Sierra Leonean child soldiers, participants in this study did not demonstrate feeling empowered by using guns or attaining identity, authority, and prestige. Participants reported enjoying their peacetime and did not yearn for conflict to feel empowered. There could be some reasons for this finding. For example, all participants, with the exception of one, came from stable homes prior to the conflict in Liberia. Their parents provided for their needs; they were taught principles and values that held community, culture and religious faith in high esteem. Participants expressed sadness and regret during this study at the thought of helping rebels to harm other people by being spies and cooking for them. Another reason may be the unique experiences with the rebel groups and personal perceptions of these eight participants. In reflecting back on their experiences during their time in rebel groups, three of them reported they participated in direct combat, and the others were mostly used as domestic labourers, porters, and essentially sexual comfort women. They spoke of finding ways to survive while coping with feelings of helplessness and powerlessness during the period they were soldiers. Finally, the

circumstances of the Sierra Leonean participants in Denov and Maclure's (2006) study may have been different, and the time the investigation was conducted after the Sierra Leonean war could also affect the responses of their participants.

In addition to the traumatic experiences during recruitment, their life in the rebel groups, and flight to safety, the participants in this study also shared some ongoing adversity they experienced and continue to experience since they arrived in the camp in Ghana.

Ongoing Struggle for Survival in the Camp

In addition to the common challenges of adjusting to weather and language differences in a new country, the participants described lack of support for basic needs, lack of social and institutional support, and psychological difficulties as challenges they experienced when they arrived in Ghana. They emphasized how having access to these were crucial to their survival.

The participants arrived in Ghana at different periods and there were no Disarmament Demobilization Reintegration (DDR) programs for youth and young adults who were former child soldiers and neither did they receive services specifically for former girl child soldiers. The UN in Ghana did not have suitable facilities for appropriate training programs to equip the participants for employment. Others have also noted that the vocational programs available (e.g., soap making) were not economically relevant for the environment of these refugees (Denov, 2008; Denov & Maclure, 2006). Formal education for example was suitable for younger participants but not for the young adults who had young children.

Furthermore, there were no regular food rations from the UN in Ghana, and this was eventually stopped. This observation is consistent with Denov's (2008) report that girl child soldiers were largely invisible and marginalized by DDR programs in post-conflict contexts. Participants provided examples of what the UN provided for them. The UN helped Monica on

one occasion by paying part of her daughter's hospital bill while Patricia stated that she was given a tent but she had to find her own appropriate shelter. In addition, all the participants were initially given $150- $200 CAN and that was all the assistance they ever received.

Basic needs and resources were identified as lacking, with the lack of food and shelter seemingly extremely important. The lack of these resources prevented participants from acquiring certain skills and being involved in attempting to fulfill their potential as they focused on survival needs. Further, most participants lacked the skills and experience to acquire employment while others had inadequate or no education or skills that could help them acquire jobs. Therefore, as refugees, the participants were not able to work outside the camp, even though they were permitted to do so. This in turn affected their ability to provide adequate food and shelter for themselves and their families.

The age of participants was also important to consider in explaining why the participants had no regular access to food and shelter. Some of the participants arrived in Ghana when they were very young (e.g., 7 years) and were not mature enough to possess certain skills that could provide income while they lived in the camp. For example, Cece stayed in the corridors of homes of the strangers with whom she had travelled from Liberia. Later, Cece endured domestic abuse at the hands of a man because leaving the man would mean she would have no accommodation. When the abuse escalated, she returned to sleeping on the streets in another town, made some money through braiding hair, and rented her own place, demonstrating resilience. Other participants had to sleep on the streets in nearby towns for several weeks to several months and work odd jobs to afford shelter.

Although participants could have gone back to Liberia during the period of repatriation, they reiterated that they could not do so due for fear of being persecuted, having no family back

home, and lacking security in Liberia at present. These reasons were all consistent with Omata's (2009) investigation on Liberian refugees' refusal to go back to Liberia. Despite the challenge of not having food and shelter, participants persevered for several months to 1.5 years to learn the skills that were necessary and in demand in order to survive in the camp. All participants learned hairstyling and added other esthetician skills as time progressed. It took time to master these skills as reflected in their narratives, but the skills are what sustained them to this present time.

Lack of basic needs is an ongoing struggle. The difference now is that participants know how to make money through petty trading, hairstyling, and engaging in business that is sustainable to meet their needs. The challenge is having the customers to patronize their services. Since the Liberian war ended and most Liberian refugees went back to their country, business has been slower than usual in the camp, which has affected the economic gains of individuals. However, they continue to reinvent themselves and find suitable means to meet their needs. This ability to build skills and engage in small businesses in the absence of training and adapt to changing contexts is evidence of these former child soldiers' resilience.

While it was previously noted that participants were faring fairly well and thriving considering their circumstances, it should also be noted that they do continue to struggle emotionally and especially in relation to missing and longing to see their families. It is likely that nostalgic memories of themselves with their families and the emotional pain of their losses will always be present for these women.

Stigmatization and marginalization continues to be a problem and is another cause of emotional challenges. From my early experience with former boy child soldiers, there seems to be a gender difference in how the boy and girl child soldiers are treated by their communities. For example, my cultural broker, who was a former boy child soldier during the Liberian civil

war, is well respected and liked in the camp. This was contrary to what some of my women participants experienced. Gina stated, "If people find out, no one will like to come near me and they will even harm me," referring to the stigma and danger that former girl child soldiers continue to experience.

Resilience

Based on my interviews and observations with the women, resilience in all eight participants can be observed in their courage, perseverance, sense of hopefulness, tenacity, the ability to seek resources on their own terms, being able to stay with a positive mindset and seek safe and protective support from spirituality and religion as well as trustworthy individuals. The women themselves attribute their ongoing strength and survivorship to spirituality and religion, social supports, and individual resilient characteristics/qualities. These characteristics that I saw from the participants, and what they reported as contributing to their resilience, are a combination of what they learned before conflict from their families (e.g., belief in God), what they learned from the rebel groups (e.g., courage, tenacity), and what they learned about themselves as individuals after conflict in Ghana (e.g., hard work, positive mindset).

This observation of resilience is similar to Ungar's 2008 definition of people adapting well in the face of adversity, negotiating for health resources on their own terms, and having the personal agency to cope with challenges. It was clear during this study that in terms of health resources in this context, the participants were addressing the spiritual and psychosocial component of health more so than the physical aspect of health.

The role of spirituality and religion. Studies on the relationship between religion, spirituality, and post-traumatic growth, showed that religion and spirituality can be beneficial to people in the aftermath of trauma as well as deepen their spirituality (Shaw et al., 2005).

Likewise, the participants from this study emphasized the critical role their belief in the supernatural and their spiritual practices within the Christian faith played in tremendously fostering the development of their resilience.

Spiritual practices and belief in God included: (a) having faith in God, (b) prayer and fasting as practice, (c) engagement in church activities, and (d) deriving strength from God. The reason for believing and engaging in spiritual practices were summarized and expressed by the majority of the women as "God first." Remarkably, even when participants experienced extreme violence at the hands of rebels and endured abusive situations, they had the fundamental belief that God would deliver them, and they attributed their survivorship to their own faith in God. This belief in deliverance from challenges extended into their post-conflict lives when they lacked significant basic survival needs when the women arrived in Ghana. Described as a transaction or covenant of sorts, the women believed that once they did their part of the "deal" in having faith in God, praying and fasting, and engaging in church activities, God will also do "His" part by providing for their needs and "make the impossible possible." Their belief in God instilled and practiced in their families at the microsystem level was supported by the churches and people with similar beliefs at the exosystem level.

As such, it appears that the participants drew on their spiritual beliefs to make meaning of their past trauma and current life circumstances, and they engaged in spiritual practices that facilitated ongoing coping with challenges and strengthening of their trust in God. Consistent with Margques et al.'s (2009) research, spirituality was helpful in the spiritual growth, making meaning and the release of pain in Tete's and Miss J's assertions. Despite their difficult and horrific experiences, they believed it was God's plan and purpose for their lives to suffer and highlight their struggles in order to save others and become compassionate individuals. They

used this explanation of the purpose of their existence to make meaning of their suffering. And in making meaning of their life circumstances, perhaps they could let go of their anger and blame for others and gain a better understanding of selflessness and human suffering.

The participants' trust in God and spiritual practices were entrenched to the extent that Miss J, Gina, Patricia, and Deborah could turn their hunger, due to many days without food in the camp, into a spiritual practice of fasting. A common assumption is that when one is hungry, searching for food would be the most sensible thing to do. However, the participants during their weakest and painful moments used the opportunity to worship and strengthen their relationship with God and wait for the benefits of fasting. From observations and conversations, it was also evident that they were able to persevere without food for extended periods having had similar experiences of going hungry for days while living with rebels. The personality and personal characteristics the participants developed and fostered at the microsystem level enabled them to endure hunger and seek strength in the macrosystem, which are their spiritual beliefs.

Participants seamlessly weaved their everyday spiritual practices into their daily lives in a manner similar to Hill and Pargament's (2003) remarks that

> Religion and spirituality are not a set of beliefs and practices divorced from everyday life, to be applied only at special times and on special occasions. Instead, religion and spirituality are ways of life to be sought, experienced, fostered, and sustained consistently. (p. 68)

That is, the women ensured that when they had the opportunity to engage in work; they also continued to allocate time for their church engagements on a daily basis. It was also interesting to observe that none of these participants had received any formal psychological counselling. In fact, when it was offered, as an ethical option with the interviews, all of them refused. Instead, they appeared to be using spiritual practices and informal counselling from trusted people such as their pastors as their main healing mechanism. Further, this took place on

a regular basis through daily attendance at church and regular contact with their supports. Therefore, these findings are consistent with others on former child soldiers (Boothby 2006; Fancher, 2012; Lee & Sue, 2001), and previous research (Fancher, 2012; Honwana, 1997) that demonstrate Western, Central, and Southern African people's view that health and well-being lie in the spiritual, physical surroundings and their ancestors. Both the causes of illness and the remedies for and relief from pain are believed to lie in the spiritual world (Honwana, 1997). The spiritual beliefs and practices are significant means of coping since they enable people to find meaning and restore well-being in their lives after traumatic experiences (Lee & Sue, 2001). Spiritual beliefs and practices, especially Christian beliefs, are important to those who experienced trauma (Fancher, 2012).

Ecological influences on spirituality and religion. As explained earlier, the microsystem and exosystem influenced their development of macrosystem spiritual beliefs. Participants had observed their parents and communities engage in activities such as going to church on Sundays, praying to God at home, fasting, and trying to live a "Godly" life, which they believed would serve their children well. Due to modelling these practices in their childhood from their parents at the microsystem level and having the resources in their communities at the exosystem level, all participants were observed to take this aspect of their life seriously and developed a discipline and practice of carrying out activities without fail.

Participants' accounts also suggested that when they found refuge in Ghana; their religious beliefs and practices were supported by exosystem resources such as church venues, pastors, and other people who had similar beliefs. For example, after spending the day in church with Miss J, she stated that the church is where she "refuels and restore[s] [her] strength to continue living." Studies have also revealed the importance of religion as a coping resource by

providing adolescents with a sense of protection, optimism, meaning, coherence, increased self-awareness, and self-efficacy (Raftopoulous & Bates, 2011) and that refugee children and adolescents observed their parents' use of religion as a way to find motivation and drive in the midst of their own challenges (Gunnestad & Thwala, 2011). Therefore, this research highlights how participants from this study developed their spiritual and religious beliefs and practices not only as a result of adversity and trauma but also from the influences of family and community before the conflict.

The importance of social support. Social support has a positive relationship with resilience and predicts lower levels of hopelessness and depression (Mo, Lau, Yu, & Gu, 2014). People with good social support benefit from associated possible experiences of identity, predictability, stability, recognition of self-worth, felt protection from stress, and strong feelings of belonging (Mo et al., 2014), making social support a very important contributor to resilience.

All participants in this study emphasized the critical role social support played in contributing to their resilience. Participants seemed to recognize the importance of social connection, and they had the desire to seek as well as receive that support. Results from this study also revealed a variety of means participants used to attain support and receive support. They were also active participants in seeking support when it was not readily available. The literature highlighted the need for social support as a contributing factor to developing resilience (Luthar et al., 2000). Social support is especially significant in providing healing, meaning, and acceptance by the community for former child soldiers (Boothby, 2006). The experiences participants shared in this study encompass two general areas of social support: (a) receiving support from people, pastors, church; and (b) seeking support from neighbours, pastors, and church members.

Receiving support from people, pastors, and the church. The first area of social support for participants was the ability to receive support, which they cultivated at the microsystem level from their parents and guardians along with the exosystem community resources to support its development. Participants learned to create social supports at an early age through their community resources such as school and observed their parents interact and function within social contexts such as the church. Results from this study demonstrate how participants learned how to use this skill to function in rebel groups and presently in Ghana as refugees by engaging in what they observed during their childhood. They observed their parents establish positive relationships and engage within their communities by being homemakers, teachers, and traders in small goods.

Participants were able to build meaningful relationships in the refugee camps, which influenced their resilience. They engaged in camp activities, attended church programs, and built respectful relationships with people living in their neighbourhood. However, this is not an instant occurrence. As postulated by Ungar (2008), resilience is influenced by repeated interactions between individuals and their social contexts, which will determine the degree of positive outcomes experienced. The participants tried several means to build safe relationships by connecting with different organizations, people, and groups to find the safety they desired before the relationships were established. Due to their known status, as former child soldiers (which they worked hard to conceal), it was especially important not to simply receive just support available but support that was protective and trustworthy.

All participants were careful throughout the years in the camp to hide their history as former child soldiers in the war. Their resilience is evident through their invention of stories to hide their identities to avoid stigma and rejection by the camp community. Some participants

narrated stories of other people who were shunned and sometimes harmed when they were recognized as former child soldiers in the war. As a result, many hid their identities. This result is consistent with the findings of Denov (2010), which revealed that children used a variety of post-conflict coping strategies, including concealing their former status as child soldiers. Similar to Denov's (2010) findings, this selective disclosing of wartime experience was considered effective means to protect themselves from potential stigma and rejection. There were also examples where Gina, Deborah, and Monica received basic needs from their chosen friends on the camp. However, they returned the favour when their friends also needed food, thus demonstrating interdependence with each other. The majority of participants received financial support as well as psychological and spiritual help from their pastors and the church members.

Seeking support. This study's results demonstrate how participants model their parents' behaviours at the microsystem level and utilized it at the exosystem level to actively seek out support from others.

Participants had essential networking and communication skills. These two relational skills that remained intact despite various relational abuses helped participants to identify and maintain relationship with their neighbours, pastors, and church. Such relational skills were also developed while in the rebel groups and likely contributed to their survival. For example, CeCe found ways to seek her own support by observing women in her church who could be mother figures to her. She was careful in looking for some specific qualities such as life experience, kindness, and someone who could support her during emotional stress. After finding the person she wanted to act as a mother figure, CeCe began to relate to her by playing the role of a daughter, and she eventually built a strong relationship with this woman, which continues to

flourish. As such, these former child soldiers utilized relational skills developed in childhood and during the conflict to establish relationships in their post-conflict environment.

Previous research has indicated that livelihoods, education, psychosocial support, agency, and relationships are important to the development of resilience in formerly recruited children who reintegrate into civilian life (Stark & Wessells, 2013). This is consistent with the results of this study and demonstrates one example of the coping resource participants utilized in surviving in the refugee camp. The findings also revealed the interrelatedness of the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystems. Seeking spiritual, moral, and emotional support from their pastors was a regular occurrence among participants. Having social connections and relationships were not the only important things in terms of social support. Community resources, safety, and having the freedom to be autonomous in a secure environment were also very important to participants.

Individual resilience qualities and practices. One of the most salient themes of resilience for participants was their individual qualities such as: (a) a positive mindset, (b) self-reliance, (c) an exceptional work ethic, and (d) a sense of hope. As evidenced by research (e.g., Cicchetti & Rogosh, 1997; Flynn et al., 2004; Nielson & Hansson, 2007), individual characteristics do not develop in isolation and are often developed at the microsystem level, which participants modelled from their parents and other important supports. In addition to the personal characteristics, faith and a sense of meaning in life are some of the attributes that promote the development of resilience in children and adults.

Participants evidenced various ways they developed and used these characteristics in their current life in Ghana. All participants were self-reliant, which required some level of courage, determination, and perseverance. Their self-reliance was tied to being able to provide

their basic needs not only for themselves but also for their children. The participants also had a strong work ethic and were determined to survive. It was and still is not easy to find work in the camp or in surrounding towns; however, all participants were able to start their lives by doing odd jobs, going from house to house cleaning, and washing clothes for people. The ones who were younger became domestic helpers to be able to afford food. As they became adults, they started to save money, enrolled in vocational schools, and started businesses on the camp that were lucrative. They also saved and worked to enroll their children in school. They relied heavily on work as a coping resource that provided some of their basic needs. As Monica summarized, "Without my business I don't know where I will be or what will happen to me."

In addition to hard work, the participants in this study also maintained a sense of hope in the face of adversity. Literature on hope was not reviewed earlier due to the limited amount of research on trauma and hope in children and adults. However, all the participants in this study expressed having hope through their work, determination, positive attitude, and their beliefs, prompting me to review some hope studies in refugees and children who experienced trauma.

Bronfenbrenner (1992) identified hope as an example of a powerful emotion that acts as the energy in an individual. This energy or fuel was observed in all participants each day during this study. Despite the struggles, the participants continued to connect and build relationships daily. They had the motivation to work and take care of their families as well as engage in church and social functions, which according to Farran, Herth, and Popovich (1995) are key relational attributes in enabling people to make it through difficult experiences in life. They did not sit in despair or blame their circumstances but rather coped well with their situation. Some of the participants were able to name hope explicitly as a coping resource saying, "I have hope for

tomorrow," while others implied other sources of hope such as "my neighbour is always there for me" as an important role of promoting/enhancing hope.

Research with 10 refugee and immigrant children's perception of hope and hope-engendering sources during early years of post-war adjustment (Yohani & Larsen, 2009) described their sources of hope to include self-empowering activities, secure relationships with important people, and a relationship with the natural world. All participants in this current study mentioned that for a person to have hope, he or she first needs to be alive, as most of them put it, "Once there is life there is hope." Similar to the children in Yohani and Larsen's (2009) study, they believed that being alive is already a sign that there is hope and should not be taken for granted.

Benzein, Saveman, and Norberg (2000) discussed the importance of the relationship between hope and trust, which was consistent with what participants reported. The participants explained that hope has a connection to their belief in God, and without trust they cannot have belief in God. God gives life, and since they have life, they cannot give up because they trust that there is a second chance to achieve their goals. Participants also demonstrated their hopefulness through their profound positive outlook in life. Miss J summed it up in one of her many remarkable statements as "having a positive mindset is very important, without it if they give you a million dollars, your problems will still be the same."

Participants also indicated that having hope did not mean that their struggles are over, but hope can be present despite ongoing challenges, which is consistent with what was discovered in Yohani and Larsen's (2009) study that they had at least one secure relationship (i.e., God) that is a source of hope. Participants also engaged in prayer, which they described as a source of hope, and they selected and gave meaning to places and objects as important links that contributed to their sense of hope and well-being. It is noteworthy that participants' hope in the future has

brought them this far. It was the trust and hope that gave them the ability to have courage, persevere, and seek life. This sense of hope is not eradicated by self-doubt or discouragement since they can co-exist. Hope was built on their fundamental belief in God, which gave them the strength and contributed strongly to their ability to overcome life's difficult challenges. Therefore, this study suggests that hope appears to play a significant role in expanding the participants' personal sense of a meaningful and engaging future, which has been suggested to contribute to recovery from trauma (Yohani & Larsen, 2012).

Thoughts and Issues of "Voluntary" Recruitment

In researching and reviewing the literature on recruitment of child soldiers, significant studies (Podder, 2009; Becker, 2009; Gates & Nordas, 2010; Brett & Specht, 2004; Gates & Reich, 2009; Singer, 2009) utilized the word "voluntary" to refer to when children joined armed groups to participate in war willingly.

The literature describes the willingness of children to join these rebel groups due to the prestige and notoriety of the army. Additionally, it was to relinquish the stigma of poverty, material resources (e.g. food), provide economic relief, desire for vengeance, ideology and fear. Throughout this process and spending time with the participants in this study, they all reported that they were forced to join the armed groups. The circumstances under which these participants joined the groups involved their choice and free will. However, participants were children when they were forcibly recruited. Thus, when a child is coerced into making a difficult choice between joining rebel groups or rebels killing his/her parents and/or siblings, dying of hunger and thirst, exposure to sexual abuse and gang rape, would their choice of joining the armed groups be considered voluntary? Was participant's decision a voluntary one or they made a choice based on the circumstances, for their own survival as well as the safety of their families?

The participants in this study reported that, they accepted the circumstances and "lived the rebel life" for their survival until they had the opportunity to escape. These participants voiced the idea that "voluntary" recruitment of children is not really voluntary. These children were faced with making a difficult decision between two things that were equally unpleasant. In essence, they were left between a rock and a hard place. For this reason, I encourage researchers in this field to re-evaluate the language they use to describe how children get involved in armed conflicts. We also have to remember that these are children who make these decisions out of fear or under duress. Careful analysis, consideration and compassion ought to be given to the context and the circumstances under which children become part of armed groups.

Implications of the Study

First, this study highlights different perspectives of what resilience means for this marginalized group. This study also provides a better understanding and rich descriptive account of participants' experiences, first-hand information about their pre-migration perspectives as well as post-conflict experiences. Second, it was clear that participants had several challenging experiences when they arrived in Ghana with no appropriate resources and programming. Since it is not a secret that children are used extensively in conflicts in Africa, the UNHCR and other policy makers could be more helpful by paying more attention to this particularly vulnerable group.

International/national agencies and policy makers. There is a need to understand the uniqueness of child soldiers as a subgroup of refugees. This is not to minimize the adversities of refugees who are not child soldiers, but the literature is clear that child soldiers have greater mental and physical health needs than people who were not child soldiers. Furthermore, due to the stigma, shame, and fear surrounding being a child soldier, policy makers are encouraged to

implement and provide services that are discreet about the identities of this vulnerable group. To protect this group, questions can be asked about their experiences during the war, and through that it would be evident that they are former child soldiers without asking directly. This strategy initially worked for me during this research, and I had more participants than anticipated to be part of this study. This could also be done by investigating their pre- and post-migration experiences, which may lead to an implementation of specialized interventions for this group. This may be labour intensive but may end up saving and providing for thousands of children who would otherwise fall through the cracks again.

As evidenced by this study, there was no program in place for former girl child soldiers when they arrived in Ghana, and this is the same in receiving countries like Canada. Programs that were available in Ghana for example could not retain and maintain support for this particular group for many reasons discussed earlier.

It is therefore recommended that international and national agencies focus on providing opportunities for former girl child soldiers to learn skills that are economically relevant, in demand in the context, and that promote independence. Self-sufficiency was important to the participants during this study. Agencies could conduct their own needs assessment in the country receiving the former girl child soldiers and based on the results equip them with the necessary tools that would help them to survive in that environment and promote independence. For example, former girl child soldiers in Ghana changed business ventures on a few occasions, depending on the demands in their community and the season.

This study also adds to the assertion that conducting needs assessments and paying attention to what this population really needs and considers safe is important. It is imperative to start by asking the right questions (e.g., What do you need now, and how would you like to

receive it?). Literature on refugees emphasizes the importance of making resources and services available. However, I discovered throughout this research that attention has to be paid to services and resources that children from armed conflict consider safe and relevant for their survival. This can be done by asking them the questions and giving them the option to choose what they consider to be safe.

Educational institutions/educators in Canada. It is important for educators to understand what being a former child soldier means and not what is occasionally published or what is seen when refugees arrive in the receiving countries and meet important public officials. Their stories are much grimmer than the brief excerpts heard and seen through the media. The pre-migration experiences and flight to safety have tremendous impact on most refugees, and understanding this will be very beneficial when educating individuals at all levels.

There are thousands of students, including refugees and very likely former child soldiers, who come from all over the world to live and pursue their academic dreams in Canada. As the transition from one school to the other is challenging for Canadian students, the transition for former child soldiers may even be more difficult. Former child soldiers bring their personal backgrounds and habits with them, which impact how they navigate new social and linguistic practices. If educators seek to promote wellness, a cultural change by educational institutions towards refugees might be needed by shifting the expectation that students must adapt to schools instead of schools accommodating diverse students and embracing their dispositions and unique features (Meuleman, Garett, Wrench, & King, 2015).

As a receiving country, educators are encouraged at their institutions to add their voice to effect change by conducting more studies in this area and endorsing policies that will benefit this marginalized group. From this current study, it is known that former girl child soldiers are

resilient and find many coping resources that promote growth and their survival, but not much is known about that aspect of their lives. Researching and publishing more in the area of child soldiers may make their stories known and information about former child soldiers more easily accessible in the hope of effecting change in political and international organizations such as UNICEF, UNHCR, and NGOs.

Educators are also encouraged to take an advocacy role for their students whereby they liaise with the students, professors, supervisors, committees, and other relevant institutional groups to help students transitioning into and adapting to a new environment. Although resilient, unfamiliar educational demands may still be stressful for students who are former child soldiers. Therefore, allocating a 3- to 6-month period to slowly introduce them into the Canadian system may be very helpful. Universities changing their culture to meet the needs of this already marginalized population may go a long way to minimize dropout and prevent stress-related difficulties for their students.

Psychologists, mental health therapists, and other health professionals. Mental health practitioners who offer services to refugees in the community and schools first need to have training in multicultural counselling. This study is aimed to enhance counselling theories and practice with refugee women as well as to impact therapy outcomes when working with minority and special populations.

It is important for counsellors working with former child soldiers not only to focus on symptoms and strategies with which they are familiar but also to look at the root causes of their presenting problems, which may include cultural loneliness, being the outsider, and not fitting in (i.e., “otherness”) due to complex experiences associated with being a child solder. Likewise,

counsellors need to be open to adaptive coping strategies learned during trauma and adversity and how this can translate into new contexts for former child soldiers.

As such, there are a few things mental health and other health professionals have to keep in mind when supporting refugees. Social support is an important coping resource for participants. However, it is noteworthy that not all supports are perceived as safe by this population. For example, participants took a long time to know people very well before developing relationships, sometimes forging relationships in order to protect themselves and not accepting services/resources because they are available but rather first assessing whether it was safe. These survival tactics can be easily missed by mental health practitioners because that is not the information available about resilience. Mental health practitioners may provide support that may be perceived as safe from their perspective; however, it may not be perceived as safe from the client's view due to his or her previous experiences. Therapists are encouraged to be aware of what participants describe as safe through probing and asking about what support means to them and how they can access and benefit from it.

It is also crucial for health professionals to know the definition and experiences of a child soldier and how children are recruited. This will allow them to identify if the client was a child soldier without having to ask directly. During recruitment of participants, I was able to identify who was a child soldier through informal conversations until they trusted the process before a couple of them used the term "child soldier." Also, be cautious that some call themselves soldier's wives/girlfriends.

Health and mental health professionals should understand clients' post-migration experiences (e.g., discrimination, academic demands/expectations, basic needs, language barrier). While a trauma framework can be used, be cautious not to adopt the victimizing

discourse and miss important diagnostic symptoms. The participants from this study were not observed to be traumatized but resilient; however, they continue to struggle with the lack of support for basic needs as well as sometimes think about their past, as expected. Participants were more interested in having employment as well as access to basic needs and less so with their psychological well-being. It was observed that they find support for their psychological and emotional well-being through their spiritual beliefs and practices. Therefore, mental health practitioners can guide and help their clients acquire the skillset they need to be employed or be independent, while collaborating with clients as to how to include their spiritual beliefs and practices in their therapeutic work.

Mental health practitioners are also encouraged to recognize their client who is a former child solider as resilient and empowered and not be clouded by their horrific experiences. It is very important to build on participants' resilience and encourage their independence. For example, during this study participants were always finding ways to add value to themselves and their work by improving their services to their customers and learning new skills. Each day I visited, they would have some new ideas they wanted to explore and, in fact, I observed some of their ideas implemented.

In addition, there needs to be recognition of how clients' religious and/or spiritual beliefs and values affect their worldview, psychosocial functioning, and expressions of distress. Culturally competent practitioners are often encouraged to pay attention to seek consultation or refer clients to appropriate indigenous healers as needed. This is particularly important because spiritual and religious practices are very important coping resources for participants in this study. For instance, when they need emotional support, they go to their pastor for counselling and they also find time in their schedule to engage in church activities. These beliefs and practices are the

foundation upon which other coping resources such as hope, courage, self-reliance, determination, and seeking and receiving support are built.

Limitations and Considerations for Future Research

This study was exploratory in nature and was designed as an in-depth analysis of the lives of former girl child soldiers. A qualitative focused ethnography methodology was used to gather information from participants while finding gaps in the literature in order to generate future research. As such, this study may not generalize across other circumstances. In addition, the findings of this study should be viewed in light of additional limitations, which I outline next.

The findings are limited to a particular place and time in the Bududuram camp in Ghana. The experiences of the participants are unique to this setting and also at a time where there was no government, international, or private agency involvement due to repatriation. Having lived in Ghana for several years, the participants have become accepting of the differences in cultures and in some cases embraced the lifestyle of Ghanaians. Agencies and policy makers are encouraged to consider the impact of cultural differences when establishing regulations and policies. It would also be fascinating to conduct a resilience study on a group of former child soldiers who have not been living in a refugee camp for decades to identify if there are some differences or similarities with this current group of participants.

As outlined in the Methodology chapter, I recruited participants primarily through a pastor and a cultural broker. Half of the participants who participated were from the pastor's church. This selection bias may have led to filtering of child soldiers who are well-functioning and may be at low risk of trauma and distress. It may also lead to the participants' bias towards the focus on spirituality and religion. This selection bias may have provided the study with

individuals who were coping well with their life situations. Future researchers could expand their pool of participants for more diverse accounts.

Language barrier was another limitation. Although English is the second language for all participants, they all understood and spoke it. However, their English was mixed with pidgin. Interpreters were offered, but participants declined stating that they preferred to conduct the interviews in English due to safety and trust issues. Therefore, in order to have the participants be authentic and honest as much as possible, I spent some time to understand their language. It is possible that some subtleties in the communication were missed due to language barrier. Of note, participants did not report verbal misunderstandings following the interviews and during subsequent member checks. This limitation was reduced by the fact that when prompted, participants were able to speak English during interviews with as little pidgin as possible. I transcribed all the interview data with no help to ensure participants' safety. For future researchers, it is crucial to spend the time and understand the nuances and cultural expressions of this group and provide a safe and calm environment for the participants. The time spent is worth it because I was able to build trust more easily with the participants, which may not have happened otherwise. I was mostly engrossed in their conversations and culture, which improved my communication style, relationship, and bond with them. I also did not need a translator and got rich descriptive information directly from the participants.

The difficulty in obtaining participants for this study was another limitation. Participants reported that they have been "deceived and promised good living" by many groups and individuals to take part in research only to be left with "nothing." Prior to this study, potential participants were keen to hear promises about how they would benefit from the study. At one point, the cultural broker advised if I refused to inform them about lavish plans such as take them

abroad or provide employment, I would not get people to participate in the study. I had to take an ethical stand and let them know that I had nothing except for what I had told them in the informed consent, and they had a choice to be part of the study or not. I also asserted that this pressure could lead people to make false promises. Together with the participants, we had a discussion about the benefits of this study as outlined in the informed consent.

The refugee population in Ghana is focused on travelling abroad for a better future, money, employment, and food. Therefore, researchers should be honest and make their research intentions clear from the onset to prevent future disappointments. For this reason, I believe the women who agreed to participate in this study were telling their truth. They made a personal informed decision to share their stories and experience in order to, as Tete put it, "help other girls who are in my situation and encourage them not to give up." It is my hope that I have achieved this through this dissertation.

Conclusion

Using a qualitative focused ethnography method in the current study, I explored coping resources that promote and contribute to eight former girl child soldiers' resilience and also identified the challenges they experience while in the process of integrating into society. The findings I have discussed support the conviction that it is beneficial to understand the trauma and adversities experienced by child soldiers. It is vital to be aware that experiences encountered by former child soldiers may pose significant risk factors for mental health outcomes that are often worse than children who have not suffered from or perpetrated or experienced violence in conflict. However, the attention should also be paid simultaneously to the resilience and coping resources the groups utilized to survive and how researchers and practitioners could make available, improve, or strengthen those resources identified. I found the participants in this study

to be resilient and not completely overcome by their traumatic past. Through the ecological transactional model, the participants demonstrated that their coping resources were developed and fostered throughout their childhood and while living with rebels, and in turn these were applied as strategies in the Bududuram camp.

As observed in the findings, this study provided information and discussion of some of the challenges the participants faced and continue to face in the camp. The results exemplify the need for careful assessments and implementation of programs to facilitate the adjustment and integration of former child soldiers. It is hoped this study will give international, national, and local agencies that provide services for refugees an insight into what to focus on when providing these services and what matters most to former girl child soldiers such as food, shelter, training in economically relevant vocations, and facilitation to spiritual beliefs/practices and social support—all of which would help them to adjust with less difficulty. It is also anticipated that this study would encourage the implementation of more DDR centres and promote former girl child soldiers' participation in reintegration programs.

This study adds its voice to the little that is known about the marginalized population of former girl child soldiers. Participants had unique experiences; however, the commonalities cannot be ignored. Their stories may be unique but echo those of thousands of other former child soldiers. It is therefore imperative for health and mental health professionals, NGOs, and policy makers to pay particular attention to what matters to this group of refugee women. This would in turn lead to decisions that would provide better services and outcomes for this population. My hope is that groups and organizations would be culturally sensitive when working with this special population because these women's spiritual beliefs and practices may be the biggest motivating factors that enable them to persevere.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Could you tell me what a typical day is like for you?

2. What gives you strength to survive since resettling in Ghana?

   Probe: Who/What are your sources of support?

3. What areas of your life did and/or do you have challenges with since resettling in Ghana?

   Probe: Could you tell me more about these specific areas of your life - family, social life, personal?

4. What is the difference between living as a refugee in Ghana with no camp restrictions and living in the camp as a refugee?

   Probe: Could you tell me more about how each one was/is for you?

5. What is the difference between living when you were a soldier in Liberia and presently in Ghana?

   Probe: Which would you say was/is more beneficial to you? How so?

6. What are your ways of coping with life after your participation in the civil war?

   Probe: What ways of coping do you think are/were beneficial to you?

7. Is there anything that you would like the world to know about your life and experiences that would be helpful to other young women in similar situations?

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Agreement to Participate

This research will explore more about the experiences of Liberian former girl child soldiers who are refugees living in Ghana. The study wants to learn about coping strategies these refugees use in their day to day lives and how that contributes to their resilience. This study is being done by Olive Otubea Okraku, a PhD student at the University of Alberta working under the supervision of Dr. Sophie Yohani. Her study will help counsellors to acquiring an in-depth understanding of the experiences of former girl child soldiers and from this, use the appropriate strategies to facilitate their change or healing.

If I check off all of the boxes and sign this form, it means I understand these things about the study:

- For the interview, I know I will meet with Olive by myself for one to two hours and I can talk to her in English, any Ghanaian language or Liberian language with the help of an interpreter of my choice.
- I know she will record what I say and then type it out.
- I know that she will use a false name for me during the interview and that I can choose this false name.
- I know that she will remove any information that may reveal who I am from the interview data, reports and any other writings.
- I understand that information gathered during observations will be used to guide the interview where necessary.
- If I have a lot to talk about, Olive and I will meet again for one to two hours.
- I know she will keep everything from the interview (the tape, observation notes) in a locked filing cabinet in her office.
- I know she may make presentations, publications and write about the study, that if she uses my words, nobody will know I said them because she will use the made-up name.
- I know that if I feel stressed or worried when I talk about my experiences, I can get free help if I tell Olive.
- I know that I will receive $20.00 CND if I have to stay home and away from work to be interviewed and observed.
- I know that even if I sign this form, I can still stop taking part in this study at any time without questions/problems.
- If I have questions or concerns about this study, I can send an email to[email address] I can also call her supervisor, Dr. Sophie Yohani, at the University of Alberta at [telephone number].
- I know that the plan for this study has been reviewed by the Ethics Board at the University of Alberta that makes sure people taking part in research are treated properly. This Board is called Faculties of Education, Extension and Augustana Research Ethics Board (EEA REB).
- If I have any questions about my rights as a person taking part in this study, I can call the head of the EEA REB at (780) 492-3751.

Participant's Name (please print) _____

Signature _____
Date: _____
Signature of researcher _____ Date: _____

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APPENDIX C: LETTER OF INFORMATION

Resilience and Coping in Liberian Former Girl Child Soldiers
LETTER OF INFORMATION
Dear Ladies,
My name is Olive Okraku and I am a PhD student at the University of Alberta in the Counselling Psychology program. For my research, I want to explore your experiences of resilience and coping skills in Buduburam refugee camp, Ghana. My objective is to find out/explore how former girl child soldiers coped with barriers and challenges when reintegrating into society and how that contributes to their resilience. I would like to gain this understanding from you as former child soldiers.
The purpose of the research is as follows:

(1) To learn about your experiences as a Liberian former child soldier in Ghana
(2) To learn about your coping strategies that are helpful to your wellbeing.
(3) To learn about what contributes to your resilience.
(4) To learn about your coping strategies that helped to facilitate your reintegration in Ghana.

You can take part in this study if you are:

(a) A woman/girl who identifies as having served as a child soldier during the Liberian civil war when you were under 18 years,
(b) A woman/girl who is currently living as a refugee in Ghana.
(c) 18 years and above

If you choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to take part in some activities. The first activity will involve an interview/talk with Olive and you will be asked questions about your experiences as a former girl child soldier. This interview/talk may be done on two different occasions. If you will feel more comfortable talking in your own language, an interpreter of your choice will be provided for you. You will also be observed in your homes, or environment to document some of your daily practices about how you live and cope. The interview will be about one to two hours at a time and place that works best for you. Even though, there may be no incentive in participating in this study, you will have the stories to keep and also your stories will help other girl child soldiers. You will also be given an amount of $20.00 if you have to stay at home to be observed and interviewed.
If you want to take part in this study, please call Olive at [telephone number] or email her at [email address].

Sincerely,