



The State of Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda

Findings from the Survey for War Affected Youth



A Report for UNICEF Uganda

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Executive Summary

Youth are simultaneously the primary victims and the primary actors in the two-decade long war in northern Uganda. Yet, while we know that youth have suffered (and continue to do so), we have not been able to answer with confidence or precision some crucial questions, namely: who is suffering, how much, and in what ways? Moreover, while we know that youth have made up the bulk of the armed rebel group, almost always forcibly, we have little sense of the magnitude, incidence, and nature of the violence and trauma.

One consequence of this state of affairs is that programming is often based on immediate and observable needs, rules of thumb, and possibly erroneous assumptions about what sort of help ought to be provided. With only rough measures of well-being at our disposal, a second consequence is unavoidably crude targeting of services. Those on the ground providing services are extremely conscious of the limitations of this approach, but in responding to the emergency have been unable to conduct the kind of evidence-based programming they would all like to see done. The purpose of SWAY is to work with field professionals to generate new and better programming based on in-depth data and investigation.

This report argues for significant changes in humanitarian aid and protection services in northern Uganda. Current programming is overwhelmingly focused on two activities: meeting the humanitarian needs of the internally displaced population, and “reintegrating” children returning from abduction by the rebel force. New survey and interview evidence, however, make the case for several important shifts in program design and targeting:

- A broadening in focus from children to youth;
- A shift from reception of former abductees to decentralized follow-up and monitoring of vulnerable youth;
- A shift from targeting based on simple and potentially stigmatizing categories (i.e. formerly abducted) to more salient measures of vulnerability;
- A shift from prioritizing psychosocial care to prioritizing age-appropriate education and income-generating activities;
- A shift from broad-based psychosocial programming to more targeted and specific interventions for those with the most severe challenges; and, finally,
- A shift from small-scale income generation towards actively promoting ways to safely return youth to their land.

In short, the evidence argues for humanitarian organizations to maintain a delicate balance between emergency services and a long-term development program. Such a hybrid response is, we argue, the only effective response to what is essentially a hybrid problem: a prolonged emergency. The contradiction in terms is obvious most of all to those living it—an emergency situation stretched over years or even dec-

ades, where inattention to schooling and economic activity risks losing a whole generation to poverty, while inattention to food and sanitation risks losing their lives.

Objectives, Scope, and Approach

The Survey for War Affected Youth (SWAY) is a research program dedicated to bringing new data, tools, and analysis to the task of improving the design and targeting of youth protection, assistance, and reintegration programs in northern Uganda.

Between September 2005 and March 2006, SWAY surveyed more than 1000 households and nearly 750 male youth. Households were randomly drawn from 2002 camp household lists, and youth were selected for interview *based on whether they were living in the household in 1996*—allowing us to capture in the survey youth that had migrated, died, or been abducted and not returned. Those youth that migrated were tracked over the entire country, with 85% tracking success, which ensures that our data are not biased because we are missing a specific group of people. Finally, more than 30 of the youth were selected for in-depth interviews on wide-ranging topics.

For the purposes of this initial phase, we have limited our study to males between the ages of 14 and 30, the traditional Acholi definition of youth. For logistical and security reasons, the study was also limited to 8 sub-counties in the districts of Kitgum and Pader. We believe, however, that the results are relevant to male Acholi youth throughout the region.

Specifically, this report aims to accomplish the following three objectives:

- Assess the dimensions of vulnerability and resilience of male youth in IDP camps by developing specific measures of youth well-being including economic success, physical health, psychological health, and social and family support;
- Assess what individual, family, and community characteristics are most closely associated with resilience and vulnerability; and
- Assess whether the most deprived and vulnerable are being successfully targeted with aid and programs;

The report first assesses the state of youth (in terms of psychosocial well-being, education, livelihoods, health, war violence, and abduction and reintegration), and second develops recommendations surrounding the design and targeting of youth programming in northern Uganda.

Part A: The State of Youth

Part A of the report details the state of youth: their psychosocial well-being, their education, their economic activities, their health, the war violence they have faced, and the reintegration challenges they return to.

The state of psychosocial well-being

- The psychosocial health of male youth is remarkably robust. Two thirds of youth report low to medium amounts of emotional distress—remarkable in a population with an average of 9 traumatic experiences. Over ninety percent reported fairly high levels of positive social functioning and low levels of aggression. Family connectedness is also quite high.
- The Acholi cosmology and spiritual world is central to understanding and aiding adversely psychologically-affected youth. Five percent of youth reported being haunted by spirits (*cen*), with the vast majority of those being formerly abducted. Roughly one-third of those who are haunted report cere-

monies or going to the witch doctor as the solution, with another third reporting prayers or becoming a born-again Christian as the way to rid themselves of *cen*.

- While the one-third of youth who experience high levels of emotional distress or low social functioning clearly suffer from their symptoms, on average these symptoms are not directly related to their educational and occupational functioning.
- Family connectedness and social support appear to be the key protective factors for the psychosocial well-being of youth.
- Peer support is highly valued by youth as a coping mechanism and youth groups are seen as one of the only enjoyable parts of camp life.

The state of education

- The primary school system is effective in at least the most basic sense, achieving high enrolment and literacy among adolescents. Yet a significant minority of youth, primarily young adults, are functionally illiterate, in part because many could not afford primary schooling as children, and because remedial adult education programs are unavailable.
- In particular, while primary school completion is relatively high, few youth make the transition from primary to secondary school, principally it seems because they cannot afford school fees.
- The struggle to pay school and exam fees has led to a widespread pattern of episodic schooling, where enrolment and exam-taking are interrupted frequently by periods of idleness, typically when a student's financial support disappears or dries up. With continuation in schooling so dependent on the ability to raise fees, those youth engaging in 'child labour' have attained a higher level of education when family networks fail.
- Formerly abducted youth have significantly lower levels of schooling, not simply because of the time away from school and the difficulty of returning to school as a young adult, but also because of the impact of abduction on the resources available for paying fees.
- University education is rare, although self- and family-funded (but not NGO-funded) vocational training is relatively common.
- Not only are the economic returns to education substantial, but higher levels of education seems to be associated with less risky and vulnerable income-generating activities for youth.
- Education and vocational training are by no means a cure-all, however, and further study should be taken before a scaling-up of such programs.

The state of livelihoods and the economy

- The economic options open to youth in and out of the camps are, in a word, abysmal. Few youth have access to land, and the principal form of economic activity are *leje leje*, essentially casual labour and small projects. Such work is generally sporadic and unprofitable, and at the median youth have just 7 days of work per month at wages of 55 cents per day.
- The local labour market can be best characterized as an occupational ladder increasing in the skills and capital required. Activities higher on the ladder appear to raise earnings more because of higher employment (rather than higher wages). Activities low on the ladder are not only irregular and poorly paid, but also more risky.

- Military service, while a risky activity, nevertheless appears to be a reasonable (if unfortunate) economic strategy for many young males—it is far better paid than most activities in the camps. It is also a protective strategy—many join to avoid abduction, especially those with low family support.
- Labour market success is closely associated with higher levels of education and vocational training, while labour market failure is associated with poor health and injuries, and poor family relations. In terms of root causes of labour market failure, abduction and orphaning have strong predictive power, while parent’s wealth and education are surprisingly of little or no significance.
- In spite of the labour market challenges outlined herein, few youth leave the region to look for work—primarily, it seems, because of few contacts, fewer resources, no language skills, and an emotional tie to their homes rather than (as sometimes argued) because of active discrimination against the Acholi outside of the north.

The state of health

- Nearly a sixth of youth suffer from a serious injury or illness that inhibits their ability to work and attend school.
- Nearly a third of these injuries were inflicted by the LRA.
- Two percent of youth still have extremely serious war wounds, suggesting that there are thousands of returnees in urgent need of treatment.
- Nutrition is poor, with two-fifths of youth eating just once per day.
- Reproductive health is good and condom usage is high.

The state of war violence and abduction

- Violence experienced is tremendous. On average, the youth in our sample reported experiencing nine of the 31 traumatic events about which we asked. Only three youth experienced none of these traumatic events at all.
- The scale of abduction is also immense—more than a third of all male youth and a sixth of all females taken for at least a day. Two thirds of these abductees remained for at least two weeks.
- While men and women of all ages were taken, the LRA seems most focused on adolescent boys; 65% of abductions were children or adolescents.
- While the abducted experience the most violence overall, the violence experienced by the non-abducted is still tremendously grave.
- Youth not only face a significant risk of abduction into the LRA, but also forcible recruitment into the Ugandan army as well. Seven percent of the respondents ever in the military report say they were drafted against their will.
- LRA abduction is still the most significant risk facing a youth. The number of abductions and the average age of abduction has been rising, suggesting that abduction may have become as much a terror tactic as a means of finding recruits.
- Once with the LRA, not all abductees become fighters, and relatively few are forced to kill.
- Nevertheless, a large proportion of abductees say there was a time they felt like staying with the LRA, felt loyalty to LRA leader Joseph Kony, or felt like an important member of the group. The proportions were greatest for young adolescents, which may be why they were targeted by the LRA.

- Of those that return, the vast majority of abducted males have escaped (rather than been rescued or released). Some report attempting to escape right away, but many report a moment of “awakening” when they suddenly decided staying was no longer worthwhile.

The state of return and reintegration of the formerly abducted

- Half of the youth go straight home rather than pass through formal reception with the UPDF and/or a reception centre.
- Short-term abductees are the least likely to pass through any centre, even though they have on average been exposed to fairly substantial violence in their short time away.
- Most youth that pass through the UPDF child protection unit leave after two days unscathed, but a tenth report long detentions and a tenth report beatings or other abuse.
- The reception at home by family and community is generally strong and positive, and relatively few former abductees report any difficulties.
- Where community persecution does occur, it follows several common patterns which could be addressed through programming.
- We observe mild to moderate psychosocial consequences of abduction, focused primarily on those persecuted by the community, those who have high-levels of self-blame, and (perhaps at a more root level) those who experienced the most violence.

Part B: Implications and Recommendations for Youth Protection

Part B of the report discusses the implications of these findings for the design and targeting of services for youth, especially the need to maintain a delicate balance between emergency-response and longer-term development.

Implications for the focus and design of services for youth

- There appears to be a mismatch between the needs of youth and the programs on offer. Current programming focuses primarily on humanitarian needs and psychosocial support (broadly-defined) with less emphasis on education and economic interventions. Moreover, programs and spending also appear to be more oriented towards children rather than young adults. SWAY data and analysis, however, suggest a strategic reorientation of governmental and non-governmental assistance.
- In general, we advocate a two-pronged strategy: broad-based education and economic support, combined with targeted interventions to the youth facing the greatest social, psychological, and material challenges.
- This programming ought to be more inclusive of young adults, treating them as a central category of concern, rather than an addendum to child support and protection programs.
- In particular, there is an urgent and immediate need to support broad-based secondary and tertiary schooling, support which should target the most able as well as the most vulnerable.
- Further, we argue for an increased focus on (and funding for) youth economic programs. However, the only real economic solution is to return youth and their households to their land and traditional livelihoods. Thus economic programs must include innovative strategies for increasing access to land in addition to the current attention on other income-generating activities.

- In terms of “high-deprivation” youth, one of our most surprising findings was the prevalence of serious war wounds. Such injuries, which have received little attention, should be addressed immediately through emergency medical services.
- We also note the significant number of illiterate young adults, who we feel can be targeted through alternative *age-appropriate* literacy and numeracy programs.
- We argue that psychosocial programming also needs to be more targeted and specific. In particular, psychosocial programming ought to: (i) target highly-affected individuals; (ii) shift from community sensitization to conflict resolution; and (iii) focus on family support and connectedness.
- Finally, we make a case for more evidence-based programming, in particular the formal and informal evaluation of programs.

Implications for the targeting and delivery of services for youth

- The current system for program targeting heavily emphasizes traditional categories of vulnerability, including orphans, child-headed households, and the formerly abducted. Two of the leading mechanisms for identifying youth for assistance are 1) referral by community volunteers and leaders, or 2) identification via reception centre follow-up of former abductees. Survey evidence and interviews, however, suggest several inadequacies of and alternatives to the current system.
- Traditional categories of vulnerability are only partially successful in capturing the most vulnerable youth, and meet few of the criteria of an effective monitoring and targeting system.
- Furthermore, the use of such categories can have unintended consequences, not least of which is stigmatization of former abductees. Following some post-survey interviews and meetings in several camps, we are particularly concerned about the impact of amnesty packages on the stigmatization and resentment of the formerly abducted.
- Targeting is nevertheless important and unavoidable. Targeting based on identifiable, obvious needs, such as illiteracy, war wounds, extreme psychosocial challenges, or an absence of care-givers, may minimize stigmatization while serving the most acutely vulnerable.
- Moreover, broad-based, inclusive support, as we have advocated for education and economic programs, need not create categories or stigmatization, especially when selection mechanisms are transparent and both merit- and need-based.
- Moving forward, identifying and targeting youth via reception centres may be particularly counter-productive—not only does this approach overemphasize the formerly abducted, it misses fully half of all abductees (who never passed through the centres). Reception centres, in their current form, also appear to be better equipped for and skilled at reception than they are at follow-up of abductees.
- Finally, we argue that improved targeting is meaningless unless follow-up is increased. Such increased follow-up, however, is impossible unless humanitarian workers increase their time and presence in the camps. Aid is not effectively delivered if it delivered by outsiders between the hours of 11am and 2pm alone. In the absence of an ability to open offices in individual camps, we argue for more overnight stays and permanent workers based in major trading centres.

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Figure 1: Districts of Uganda experiencing mass displacement of the population due to the northern conflict



Source: Allen and Schomerus (2006), originally obtained from UN OCHA.

I. Introduction

This year, the war in northern Uganda moves into its third decade. The terrible statistics are by now familiar: nearly two million people displaced and impoverished, tens of thousands of youth kidnapped, and untold thousands killed. This report will provide yet more statistics and testimony, some terrible and yet many hopeful, all from a survey of a thousand households and nearly seven hundred and fifty young men and boys in northern Uganda.

“To what avail?” is a question legitimately asked of yet another study on northern Uganda. Our answer is that we hope to provide different data and insights instrumental to policy and programming in the north. From the perspective of providing assistance, while we know that youth have suffered and continue to do so, until now we have not been able to answer with confidence or precision some crucial questions, namely: who is suffering, how much, and in what ways? Answers to simple yet important questions have remained unanswered. Do orphans and the formerly abducted face more deprivation than other youth? How badly has the education system broken down? What proportion of youth returning from the LRA pass through reception centres? These questions represent a fragment of the uncertainty.

One consequence of this state of affairs is that programming is often based on immediate and obvious needs, rules of thumb, and possibly mistaken assumptions about what sort of help ought to be provided. With only rough measures of well-being at our disposal, a second consequence is unavoidably crude targeting of services. Most organizations suspect that vast numbers of vulnerable youth have been overlooked. Better data and analysis provide valuable information for the targeting and design of aid programs.

The Survey of War Affected Youth, or SWAY, is designed to complement the small but growing volume of research that has begun to chart the unknown, from mortality rates to reception centre performance. Our principal contribution is a large-scale quantitative survey of youth in the north, the Survey for War Affected Youth, complemented and enriched by extensive qualitative interviews with youth and community members. While such an approach has several limitations, a population-based survey offers a sense of proportion that has been missing from previous accounts. Covering war experiences, personal characteristics, and economic, psychological, and physical well-being, it also offers the chance to critically examine the popular wisdom that surrounds war affected youth in northern Uganda.

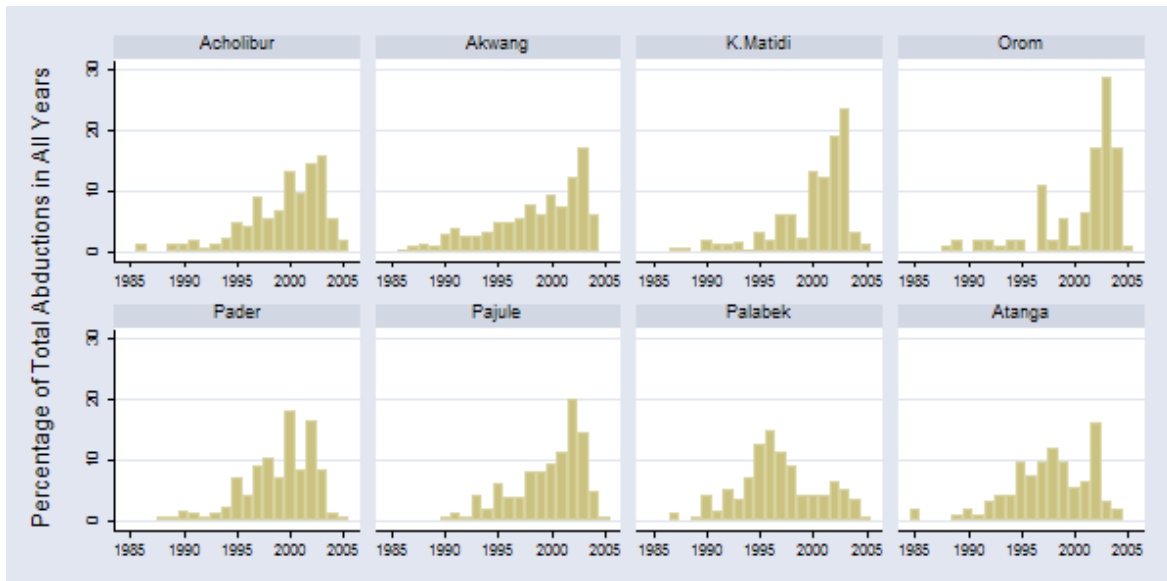
War and Displacement in Northern Uganda

Several excellent histories of the conflict and accounts of the Acholi struggle have already been written, and it is not our goal to recount these events in detail here.¹ There are, however, some important facts that it will be useful to highlight.

¹ See for instance the histories of the conflict recounted by Tim Allen (2005), Heike Behrend (1999), Chris Dolan (2005), and the Refugee Law Project (2004). Allen (2005) and Erin Baines (2005) describe local systems of traditional justice and their capacity to deal with the

The study was conducted in eight sub-counties within the districts of Kitgum and Pader. The rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has been active in these since the inception of the war, but violence, abduction, and civilian attacks only began to escalate in 1994 with the failure of peace talks, the turning of the Acholi populace against the LRA, and the increased support for the rebel group from the Sudanese government. LRA activity, especially abductions, escalated even further in 2002 in response to the Ugandan People's Defence Force's (UPDF) attacks on LRA strongholds in Sudan, known as Operation Iron Fist. Figure 2 below illustrates the distributions of one indicator of LRA activity—abductions—over time in the eight sub-counties SWAY surveyed. Some communities, such as Palabek, began to feel the brunt of the conflict in 1995 and 1996, being located close to a pathway commonly travelled by LRA groups coming down from the Sudan. Others, such as Orom (in the northeast of Kitgum district) were relatively untouched by the conflict until recently, when LRA presence in the district increased and expanded eastwards.

Figure 2: Distribution of LRA abductions over eight sub-counties, 1985 to 2005



Voluntary displacement in Kitgum and Pader commenced in 1997 as villagers from sub-counties such as Palabek and Atanga began to migrate to the sub-county headquarters. Modest displacement began in the other sub-counties under study after 2000, spiking in 2002 and 2003 as the UPDF forcibly relocated those remaining on their land to 'protected villages', or internally displaced person (IDP) camps, as part of their counter-insurgency strategy.² Camps are crowded and in some cases highly unsanitary. Schools have been lumped together and offer, at best, mediocre opportunities to learn. The threat of war violence and abduction defies imagination: one third of the youth we interviewed reported that a parent had died violently, and a third had themselves had a violent encounter with the LRA. Mortality rates overall were recently found to be among the highest of any emergency situation in the world: 1.54 per 10,000 per day overall, and a desperate 3.18 for children under five (WHO, 2005).

While the threat of violence seems to be the primary concern of male youth, competing with it for first place in their minds is the idleness and lack of economic activity in the camps. Youth are prevented by UPDF decree and by fear of the LRA from moving more than two miles from the camps, preventing ninety percent from accessing their land. The Acholi are an agrarian people; land, crops and livestock are tied not simply to an income, but also to manhood, social status, and an entire way of life. Without these things they lose not only their

magnitude of the crimes committed. Sverker Finnström (2003) captures in his book the social and cultural context of the displacement camps and Acholi society within it.

² Displacement was only partial in Orom, and a few outlying communities remain on their land.

wealth, but also parts of their culture and social order. The authors of this report believe that while much can be done for hundreds of thousands of displaced youth, ultimately there is no substitute for returning people to their land. Unfortunately, government policy and fear of rebel attacks currently stand in the way of return. Aid and programming offer little respite, let alone an alternative cure.

Finally, we note that many Acholi feel alienated from the rest of the country. The south surges ahead in growth and development, while the north moves backwards. Discrimination against the Acholi in the rest of the country is thought to be commonplace. While we find evidence of this, it is certainly not universally true. From an interview with an Acholi young man attending university in Kampala:

Q. And do you experience problems being an Acholi?

A. Those are obviously there. Provocative statements are always there. People call you “Kony”. And it always feels so painful. I always keep quiet. That is the most common thing. Always those provocative statements.

Q. Does it happen here in Kampala?

A. No, not yet. Here I always tell them [I am Acholi] as a way of introducing myself. It was in Mpigi [that I experienced problems].

Q. And how do people here view Acholi?

A. They say that Acholi are warriors; that they are bright; that they like interactions and arguments; that they don't easily accept things; that they are hard, not flexible; that they like factual things; are straight forward; and they like challenges.

Youth and Youth Protection in Northern Uganda

While the United Nations defines youth as those between the ages of 15-24, most cultures have slightly differing definitions of youth. The Ugandan National Youth Policy (2004) defines youth as the

“...passage from adolescent to full adulthood. The definition does not look at youth as a homogenous group with clear-cut age brackets but rather as a process of change... It also reflects the reality on ground that the family and extended kinship ties loosen due to the different factors [and that] many young people by the age of 12 years have assumed adult responsibilities.”

Many in northern Uganda use the approximate ages of 14 to 30 to define “youth”, but transition to adulthood is less the passing of an age threshold than it is the acts of taking a spouse and having a child.

It is clear that the situation of youth in northern Uganda is dire; many have lived all or most of their lives in a state of insecurity, poverty and now displacement. Some speak of a ‘lost generation’ of Acholi. However, there has been little data available to truly identify the magnitude of the effects of the war and displacement on youth, and as yet no clear sense of what to measure.

The bulk of media and research attention has been directed towards children abducted by the LRA. Despite efforts to document abductions and human rights abuses, there are few if any records to actually show the scale and magnitude of violence and abduction. This has left the community and program and policy makers with a sense of the horror but with little sense of proportion to guide their interventions.

There have been several studies to assess the well-being of formerly abducted children, and these have primarily focused on their psychosocial well-being.³ While informative, these studies used convenience samples from NGOs making it difficult to generalize to youth in the region. Psychological well-being has seldom been

³ See for instance Catholic Relief Services (2002) and McMullin and Loughry (2002).

linked to education, economic status, vulnerability, and other material factors and concerns. More recent community-wide studies were important for providing a better sense of the overall conditions in the camps. However, there have been only a handful of studies helping to guide program and policy makers in determining the most vulnerable youth and in targeting programs for these youth.

These studies, moreover, reflect a bias in aid and attention towards children and towards the formerly abducted. As we demonstrate in this report, young adults are struggling at least as much as children and adolescents, and in some cases more so. Meanwhile, formerly abducted youth, while on average doing more poorly than the non-abducted, are far from the only individuals experiencing extreme need and vulnerability. Such easy categories of vulnerability and need—formerly abducted, orphans, and so forth—have some predictive power, but are by no means an effective basis for a system of effectively targeting assistance.

Scope and Purpose of this Report

SWAY aims to bring new data, tools, and analysis to the task of improving the design and targeting of youth protection, assistance, and reintegration programs in northern Uganda. For the purposes of this initial phase, we have limited our study to males between the ages of 14 and 30, the traditional Acholi definition of youth.⁴ For logistical and security reasons, the study was also limited to 8 sub-counties in the districts of Kitgum and Pader. We believe, however, that the results are relevant to male Acholi youth throughout the region.

Specifically, this report aims to achieve the following objectives:

- Assess the dimensions of vulnerability and resilience of youth in IDP camps by developing specific measures of youth well-being including economic success, physical health, psychological health, and social and family support;
- Assess what individual, family, and community characteristics are most closely associated with resilience and vulnerability; and
- Assess whether the most deprived and vulnerable are being targeted with aid and programs;

Our approach directly engages UNICEF's goals of (i) using knowledge and research to ensure that government decisions are increasingly influenced by better knowledge and awareness and improved data and analysis on children's rights to protection, and (ii) identifying and promoting "recommended practices" that are substantiated by evidence.⁵ The study further seeks to answer the urgent call for data on children in armed conflict made by the Office of the Secretary General's Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict in 2000.⁶

SWAY is also cooperating in a 2006 global forum organized by UNICEF that is gathering technical experts and government representatives to revise and improve the Cape Town Principles and Best Practices. The Cape Town Principles are a set of guidelines agreed upon by child protection agencies in 1997 in order to provide a harmonized approach to the issue of children involved in armed conflict. While the Principles have been crucial in improving policies and strengthening advocacy efforts in favour of children in hostilities, they now require a thorough revision to integrate the lessons learned over the last decade, especially in terms of monitoring and evaluation.

One lesson learned that will be substantiated by this study is that the focus on child soldiers has led directly to a relative neglect of young adults and non-combatants.

⁴ Planning for a similar study of women and girls is currently underway.

⁵ See the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan, 2006-2009.

⁶ UN (2000) *The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Filling Knowledge Gaps. Draft Research Agenda. A Proposal by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict.*

Box 1: Some key methodological considerations

In retrospect, several aspects of our approach turned out to be central to the robustness and validity of our results, which we highlight here.

Qualitative and quantitative. Many of our quantitative findings would never have been found in the absence of the months of pre-survey interviews and pre-testing, or without the in-depth interviews conducted alongside the survey. Likewise, the quantitative study brought a sense of proportion to findings qualitatively made, and allowed us to test (and sometimes reject) common stories told about northern Uganda.

No skipping of respondents. It is commonplace in survey efforts worldwide to skip households and individuals not easily found, replacing them with a neighbour. Such practices can seriously bias a sample towards the idle, the unemployed, the injured, and the socially dislocated, exaggerating the severity of the situation and missing those factors which contribute to success. After identifying households and youth, SWAY made every effort to track them down, and to gather information on those not found in order to re-weight the sample for any potential bias.

Tracking of migrants. Migration to towns, other camps, or other districts is common, especially among youth. Almost half of the youth we identified in household rosters were not sleeping regularly in the camp. To miss those that have moved away would miss the most successful and the most desperate. SWAY obtained tracking information from the families of all youth identified and attempted to track them down across the country. 85% of all targeted youth were successfully tracked down, and ‘absentee’ surveys were completed with the families of the unfound, giving us demographic details with which to re-weight the data.

Retrospective sampling. In order to capture these migrants, we needed a sense of the pre-war population of youth. To do so, we selected youth from a retrospective household roster completed with current households, a practice that is now being replicated in other surveys in Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Follow-up. SWAY plans to follow-up youth in one to two years time in order to assess changes in vulnerability and well-being, as well as the determinants of these changes. We anticipate success rates of over 85 percent.

Small teams. A common problem with large teams of surveyors conducting rapid surveys is the decline in the quality of data and the difficulty of monitoring. SWAY employed no more than five enumerators at a time, each of whom were highly trained to spot psychosocial and other difficulties and deliver the survey in a sensitive manner. While many data needs will not be met by smaller teams of more carefully trained individuals, we believe it should be the rule when enquiring about war violence and abduction.

Study Data and Methods

This initial phase of SWAY utilized two data collection methods in tandem: a large-scale quantitative survey of 1018 households and 741 young men and boys, and a series of in-depth, qualitative interviews with a sub-sample of survey respondents, their friends, community, and family. A second phase, to include women and girls, is currently being explored. This section describes the study population, design, sampling, and delivery. While there are clear limitations to our approach (some of which are discussed below), Box 1 emphasizes several methodological practices we feel it is important to continue in any surveys of youth or war violence in the north.

Table 1: Average household characteristics in each camp/sub-county

| Characteristic | Acholibur | Akwang | Atanga | K.Matidi | Orom | Pader | Pajule | Palabek |
|-----------------------------------|-----------|--------|--------|----------|------|-------|--------|---------|
| Years household in camp | 3.0 | 2.2 | 7.9 | 2.5 | 2.2 | 3.2 | 3.3 | 8.4 |
| Household head a farmer | 97% | 82% | 99% | 84% | 91% | 91% | 93% | 89% |
| Household head a professional | 2% | 14% | 0% | 12% | 6% | 7% | 6% | 9% |
| Household head a soldier | 1% | 4% | 1% | 4% | 4% | 2% | 1% | 1% |
| Acres of land in 1996 | 27.1 | 30.4 | 25.3 | 22.9 | 21.0 | 25.2 | 26.7 | 22.6 |
| Number of cattle in 1996 | 2.7 | 34.7 | 0.0 | 7.7 | 9.0 | 4.9 | 1.0 | 14.7 |
| Number of other livestock in 1996 | 7.4 | 28.1 | 0.9 | 13.7 | 20.5 | 7.2 | 3.9 | 11.4 |
| % pop in bottom 25% by assets | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.4 |
| % pop in top 25% by assets | 0.2 | 0.6 | 0.0 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 |
| % youth male | 56% | 54% | 54% | 55% | 52% | 55% | 49% | 53% |
| % youth staying in IDP camp | 54% | 62% | 48% | 64% | 62% | 64% | 55% | 62% |
| Avg yrs education (Male youth) | 6.1 | 7.1 | 7.4 | 6.1 | 6.5 | 6.7 | 7.4 | 6.3 |
| Avg yrs education (Female youth) | 3.8 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 3.6 | 4.0 | 4.5 | 5.5 | 3.9 |
| % males 18 to 30 in military | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.04 | 0.08 | 0.03 | 0.01 | 0.07 | 0.07 |
| % youth abducted 3 days or longer | 0.46 | 0.50 | 0.41 | 0.18 | 0.42 | 0.52 | 0.35 | 0.24 |
| % youth died since 1996 | 19% | 18% | 15% | 14% | 23% | 20% | 11% | 13% |

Study population

Our objective is to be able to understand the plight of youth affected by war since the war's inception, and thus is not limited to current residents of the IDP camps in the north. Thus we wanted to capture youth who have moved to town, left the district, become soldiers with the UPDF, have died, or were abducted and never returned. Accordingly, SWAY's population of focus was males born between 1976 and 1992, and thus between 14 and 30 years of age today.⁷

For logistical and budgetary reasons, the study was confined to two of the three Acholi districts principally affected by the war: Kitgum and Pader. These concerns as well as security factors also prevented us from selecting sub-counties randomly, and the eight areas selected were chosen to include sub-counties with IDP camps old and new, large and small, and distant and far from town. Camps were also chosen to have varying levels of LRA activity. Accordingly, while we will be able to make statistical inferences about the populations of the eight camps under study, extrapolation to the remainder of the Acholi population must be done with some caution.

Eight sub-counties, or clusters, were selected for surveying: Akwang, Kitgum Matidi, Orom, and Palabek Gem in Kitgum; and Acholi Bur, Atanga, Pader, and Pajule in Pader. The entire population of these sub-counties has been displaced (except for Orom and Pader Town Council) and either occupies a camp, has moved to a town, or (in a very small number of cases) relocated to another district. Table 1 lists the main characteristics of each camp studied.

The data were generated from the household surveys (discussed below), in which household heads were asked to list all members of the household in 1996, certain characteristics of that household in 1996 (such as major assets), and current information (such as education, location, abduction history, and occupation) for each of the youth identified.

⁷ Boys younger than 14 were considered too different and difficult a population to survey without a specially designed instrument and approach. These youth may be studied in a future phase of SWAY.

Study Design

The study was designed to assess retrospective war experiences and current well-being. The quantitative survey and qualitative interviews were developed after several months of field work in the region, including hundreds of youth interviews and extensive consultations with community leaders, psychosocial counsellors, youth groups, youth leaders, aid agencies, and other researchers.⁸

In the quantitative survey, war experiences were assessed in two main ways. First, detailed information was collected about any time spent with the LRA, including: time, place, duration, and nature of the abduction; initiation ceremonies; the respondent's roles and responsibilities, rank and promotion; methods of control and discipline; and, finally, experiences with family, community, and NGOs upon return. Second, respondents completed a checklist of war experiences with an interviewer based on a version of the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire⁹ that was locally adapted by the Principal Investigators.¹⁰

In assessing well-being, the survey takes a multidimensional approach, covering economic activity, physical and mental health, community participation, social support, and risky behaviour. Several prior studies of psychosocial well-being in northern Uganda were drawn upon extensively for development of the instrument.¹¹ Copies of the survey instruments are available in Appendix A and B.

Sampling Procedures

As noted, the Survey included both a quantitative survey component as well as in-depth qualitative interviews with a small sub-sample of the youth (along with their families, neighbours, and teachers). For the survey, youth were randomly chosen so as to be representative of the sub-county populations. Selection occurred in two stages.

In the first stage, households in each sub-county were selected randomly from World Food Program distribution lists created in 2002 and 2003. Each household had a probability of selection proportional to the number of people listed in its household. As noted above, a roster of youth in the household was developed with household members, including information on each household member's age, mortality, and abduction history, and each youth's present occupation, location, and education.

The pool of male youth resident in the camps today exclude all those that died, were abducted and did not return, or have since migrated away. In order to obtain a random sample of youth living in the region prior to the 1997 escalation of conflict, the household roster completed was a retrospective one—households were asked to recall all youth living in their household in 1996, the year of Museveni's first election.

In the second stage, a random sample of youth was selected for in-depth interviewing from the retrospective rosters. Sampling was stratified by sub-county and abduction experience. The formerly abducted were over-sampled in order to assure a minimum number of respondents. 462 were interviewed in total.

This sampling approach has several advantages. Unlike the majority of surveys conducted in the camps, we did not skip households or youth that could not be found at the home at the time of interview. Rather, camps were returned to time and time again to locate the original households and youth identified. When households or youth had migrated, every effort was made to track them down wherever they might now be. The advantages of this approach were discussed in Box 1.

⁸ One of the Investigators, Jeannie Annan, also drew extensively on her experiences working with youth in the region since 1999.

⁹ Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma (1998)

¹⁰ During this difficult section, respondents were frequently asked if they wished to continue, and were repeatedly given the option of moving on to the next section of the questionnaire.

¹¹ Catholic Relief Services (2001), McMullin and Loughry (2002), and Williams, Obonyo and Annan (2001).

One obvious limitation of this approach is recall error on the part of the respondents. A further limitation of this sampling approach is that we did not have a pre-war census of households with which to work, and thus would have missed any households that have left the region en masse. We believe this number (and the ensuing bias) to be extremely small, however.¹²

Sample size

1,200 households were selected, of which 38 were dropped due to inaccessibility and 144 could not be located, leaving 1,018 households comprising 10,747 individuals.¹³ Of the 2,331 male youth identified in these household rosters, 881 were selected for in-depth interviewing, of which 741 were located. A sub-sample of more than 30 youth was selected non-randomly for in-depth qualitative interviews, as well as interviews with their family, friends, neighbours, and teachers.

Survey delivery

Six highly trained research assistants, all university-educated Acholi youth, delivered the surveys over a seven-month period (September 2005 to March 2006) in camps, barracks, towns, and cities around Uganda. A small team was employed in order to assure the quality of data and the sensitivity of team members to the youth interviewed and the sensitive topics covered.

Migrants were tracked to their new locations across the country. 84% of selected youth were found. Selected youth that could not be tracked were *not* replaced. Rather, their household was interviewed for relevant information about the youth, and the survey results have been re-weighted to reflect any bias from this sample attrition. Of the 140 ‘absentees’, we collected such information on 129.

Structure of this Report

This report is divided into two parts. **Part A** recounts our findings on the state of young males in northern Uganda. Six chapters cover six different aspects of well-being and vulnerability of youth: **Chapter 2** reviews aspects of their psychosocial well-being; **Chapter 3** discusses the state of education and training; **Chapter 4** discusses livelihoods (or the terrible lack thereof); **Chapter 5** covers physical and reproductive health, as well as substance abuse; **Chapter 6** reviews one of the chief concerns among Acholi men and boys—the magnitude, incidence, and impacts of war violence and abduction; and **Chapter 7** discusses the return and reintegration of former abductees. **Part B** discusses the implications of these findings for youth protection and development in the north in two chapters. **Chapter 8** reviews the implications and recommendations for programming, namely changes in focus and design. **Chapter 9** covers the implications for targeting and follow-up of youth—who to target, why, and how.

¹² Discussions with community leaders led us to conclude that the number of ‘missing’ households is extremely small – less than 5% of households (and often far fewer) left in this manner. In the majority of cases at least a handful of family members stay behind, especially parents and the elderly, meaning they have a nearly equal chance of selection into the household sample.

¹³ Perhaps a fifth of these unidentified households were likely “ghost” households.

Part A: The State of Youth



Photograph by Blake Farrington

II. Psychosocial Well-being

The psychosocial well-being of the formerly abducted, orphans and other vulnerable children has been the focus of many programs in northern Uganda. This chapter examines the psychosocial well-being of the youth in the north and discusses key findings based on the survey data and qualitative interviews. Issues in the psychosocial reintegration of formerly abducted youth are covered in Chapter 7.

- The majority of youth report low to medium amounts of emotional distress—remarkable in a population with an average of 9 traumatic experiences. Emotional distress varies little with age, though the youngest in the sample—14 and 15 year olds—do exhibit somewhat fewer symptoms of distress.
- Over ninety percent reported fairly high levels of social functioning and low levels of aggression. Family connectedness is also quite high;
- While those who experience high levels of emotional distress or low social functioning suffer from their symptoms, on average educational and occupational functioning does not appear to be related to these symptoms;
- Family connectedness and social support are key protective factors for the psychosocial well-being of youth;
- Acholi notions of mental and social functioning are deeply rooted in beliefs about the spiritual world;
- Five percent of youth reported being haunted by spirits (*cen*), with the vast majority of those being formerly abducted. Roughly one-third of those who are haunted report ceremonies or going to the witch doctor as the solution, with another third reporting prayers or becoming a born-again Christian as the way to rid themselves of *cen*;
- Relationships between elders and youth are strained but some youth still value their guidance and tradition; and
- Peer support is highly valued by youth as a coping mechanism and youth groups are seen as one of the only enjoyable parts of camp life.
- Alcohol abuse is limited to a small number of youth, although it appears disproportionately disruptive.

The psychosocial impact of abduction and violence is discussed in Chapter 7.

Psychosocial resilience is high among majority of youth

Youth in northern Uganda are exposed to extremely high levels of violence, with the average youth reporting 9 different violent experiences or events. Exposures to 12 of the 31 experiences measured are listed in Table 2. War violence will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

Table 1: Percentage of male youth experiencing violence

| Violent experienced | Never Abducted | Ever Abducted |
|---|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Witnessed beatings or torture of other people | 58% | 89% |
| Witnessed a killing | 37% | 78% |
| Someone shot bullets at you or your home | 41% | 52% |
| Witnessed a battle or attack | 33% | 76% |
| A parent was murdered or died violently | 29% | 32% |
| Witnessed setting of houses on fire with people inside them | 24% | 55% |
| Received a severe beating to the body by someone | 22% | 60% |
| Forced to carry heavy loads or do forced labor | 13% | 87% |
| Someone attacked you with a panga or other weapon | 2% | 26% |
| Forced to abuse the bodies of dead persons | 0% | 23% |
| Forced to kill a civilian (not a family member or friend) | 0% | 18% |
| Forced to kill a family member or friend | 0% | 8% |

This table displays 12 of the 31 measures of violence witnessed or committed by male youth. These measures were adapted from the Harvard Trauma Questionnaire. They asked whether or not youth had experienced specific types of violence, but did not measure the number of times it was

In our sample of 741 males aged 14 to 30, only three reported never experiencing any of the traumatic events listed. From the table we see that the victims are not solely former abductees. Nevertheless, the worst violence has indeed largely been experienced (and sometimes committed) by the formerly abducted.¹

With this amount of violence, compounded with the difficulties of daily living, one might predict vast amounts of psychological distress throughout the north. On the contrary, the majority of youth in the region actually report relatively low levels of emotional distress. Moreover, considering the way war and displacement have affected livelihoods and social roles, most youth report quite high levels of social functioning.

Aggression is also remarkably low among these youth exposed to high levels of violence, with just 7% having been involved in a physical fight in the past month. Social workers in the reception centres, teachers, and community leaders explained that there are few incidents of aggression among the youth and that violence among returnees is rarely a problem. By comparison, acts of aggression among youth in high violence communities in the U.S. have been assessed as high as 84% (DuRant, R et al., 1994).

Box 1: The challenge of measuring psychosocial well-being in the context of war and displacement

When studying the effects of violence on children and adolescents, mental health professionals have considered a wide range of phenomena, from child abuse, to community violence, exposure to war, and experiences as a refugee. Many studies show that the experience of violence predicts the severity of negative effects or psychological morbidity, and, more specifically, that the greater the number of traumatic experiences, the greater the negative effects (Margolin & Gordis, 2000; Smith et al., 2002; Thabet & Vostanis, 1999; Mollica et al., 1998). There is also evidence that there is a relationship between proximity to the event and the severity of symptoms (Pynoos et al., 1993; Pynoos et al., 1987).

Studies examining the effects of war on children or adults exposed to some form of violence are commonly diagnosed with one or several symptoms and disorders; the most commonly measured and diagnosed is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), followed by depression and anxiety. PTSD prevalence in studies with children exposed to violence ranges from approximately 30% to over 90% (Green et al., 1994; Husain et al., 1998, Dyregrove, Gjestad, & Raundalen, 2002; Ajdukovic & Ajdukovic, 1998; Mollica et al., 1997; Smith et al., 2002; Nader et al., 1993). The measurement of these psychological disorders in conflict situations and in cross-cultural research has been widely criticized due to their individual focus, cultural specificity, and lack of clinical validity in many contexts.

¹ Note that these figures may underestimate slightly the true scale of brutality—youth were repeatedly asked if they wanted to refrain from

Finally, familial and relational resilience is also quite high. The death and poverty caused by chronic conflict has obviously stretched social networks, with many community members describing how social roles have changed and how lack of resources causes tensions among relatives. Yet despite these strains, family connectedness is reported as being very high, with 68% of youth feeling very comfortable with their families, having caring families, and reporting rare arguments among family members. Approximately 19% of youth report poor family relations.

Finding a good measure of psychosocial well-being is more challenging than measuring other more observable aspects of well-being such as physical health or economic assets. This is both because psychosocial well-being can be more difficult to observe and because of the cultural and contextual nature of this construct. This study attempted to adapt and create locally-relevant measures. One of the measures was previously constructed by psychologists through focus group discussions with youth and elders and based on established psychological measures (for more information, see Loughry and MacMullen, 2005). In the current study, the measures were further adapted through interviews during the initial fieldwork. Changes were made to adapt to the current living situations in the camps; furthermore, psychosomatic symptoms, such as headaches or chest pain from “overthinking,” were also added because they often emerged in qualitative interviews with youth. Furthermore, new measures were created to more appropriately assess aggression and attitudes toward violence. The construction and evaluation of these measures are discussed in details in Blattman (2006a) and in Annan (2006).

The minority of youth with low psycho-social well-being continue to function

While a significant minority of youth display some psychosocial difficulty, these symptoms are not associated with low achievement in other areas of life.

Minority with high emotional distress

While the majority of male youth—both abducted and non-abducted—have relatively low levels of emotional distress, one quarter of youth suffer from fairly high levels of symptoms. Symptoms of distress are listed in Box 3, and the distribution of the scale is displayed in Figure 3. The scale has been adjusted to have a zero mean and a standard deviation of one. Construction of the scale is discussed in Annan (2006).

Figure 1: Index of emotional distress

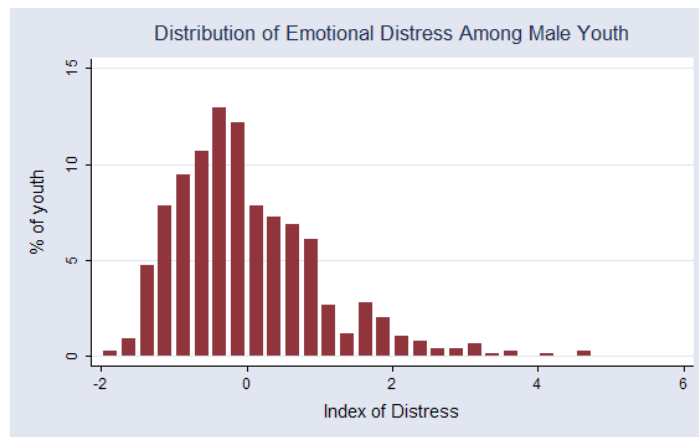
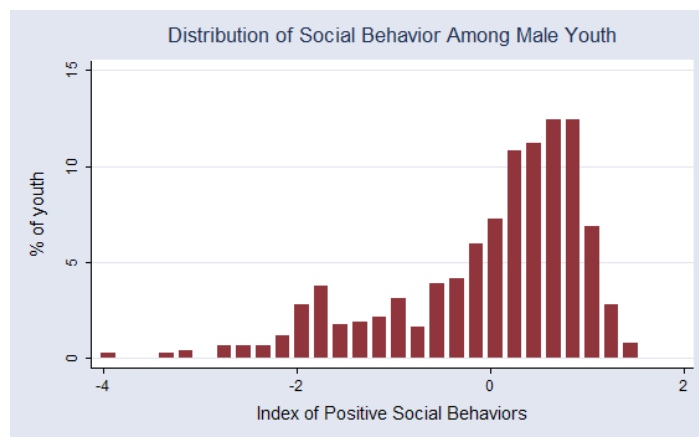


Figure 2: Index of positive social behaviours



answering a delicate question, and ten decided not to complete this section of the survey fully.

Box 2: Psychosocial factors identified

Our psychosocial questionnaire, developed over several months of field work and testing, was adapted from Loughry & MacMullen (2002). The following common factors emerged from our analysis:

Symptoms of Emotional Distress

- Irritability
- Inability to concentrate
- Nightmares and insomnia
- Hyper arousal
- Feelings of loneliness and helplessness
- Feeling unloved
- Feeling sad
- Extreme fear of losing one's family
- Keeping to oneself when worried
- Crying when thinking of the past
- Headaches, chest pain and shaking from 'over-thinking'

Positive social functioning behaviors

- Caring about one's peers
- Sharing feelings and ideas with friends
- Enjoying talking and being with others
- Enjoying doing things in the community
- Being helpful to elders and children
- Sharing with others
- Other youth enjoy associating with him
- Self-confidence
- Having confidence about being responsible for others and about the future

Aggression and attitudes to violence

Attitudes toward violence were measured in an indirect way by proposing scenarios, including:

- 'If a man insulted your neighbor, would it be acceptable for your neighbor to seriously beat him?'
- 'If a man's wife were to argue with him or talk back, would it be acceptable for him to beat her?'

These questions were then followed up with, 'Would you do the same in this situation?' The number of physical fights the youth was involved in over the past month was also assessed.

From Figure 3, one quarter of the youth seem to be experiencing moderate to high levels of emotional distress, with a range of 12 to 19 symptoms occurring 'sometimes' to 'often'. Of course, one would expect most youth to experience some of these symptoms occasionally, even in an area without conflict and displacement. Therefore, the concern is for those who report high numbers and frequency of the symptoms².

Emotional distress seems to vary little with age. While youth aged 14 and 15 report lower levels of emotional distress (roughly a third of a standard deviation), average distress among 16 to 30-year olds appears uniform.

Some of these youth struggle on a daily basis with their thoughts and emotions about a single event (like witnessing a massacre) or about a series of events (such as one's experiences in abduction); others experience distress from their current living situation. This 25 year old male who was abducted for 6 months described the profound affect that one horrifying experience continued to have on his thoughts,

As I live, there is no single day that has passed when I have not thought of what I went through that day. There were, of course, many other problems afterward but this was so much that every day I think about it.

The relationship between violence, abduction, and distress is discussed in Chapters 6 and 7.

Generally high social functioning

Roughly ten percent of youth have greater difficulty with social functioning, with a range of 6 to 13 negative social behaviours occurring rarely to often. Behaviours associated with positive social functioning are listed in the Box 3, and the distribution of the scale is displayed in Figure 4. There is little variation by current age.

Negative social behaviours seem to be especially significant because of their implications for the youth's connection with his family and community. Youth are expected to contribute to the family and carry out responsibilities, as this uncle explains about his nephew:

² The moderate and high levels are not clinical cut-offs since the measures have not been clinically validated. Levels of symptoms are based on comparisons with other standard measures and are used to give a sense of the intensity and frequency of symptoms.

I expect him to help his younger brothers and sisters to study too. He should keep some money in his account to help these young ones to study. If he does this, then he would have helped me too. I also expect him to advice his older brother to stop drinking and plan for his children's future

Low levels of aggression and violence

There is a small number of youth who report higher levels of aggression and more violent attitudes. These behaviours are defined in Box 3.

Seven percent of the youth reported being in a fight in the past month. Meanwhile, one fifth thought it acceptable for someone to physically assault a neighbour if the neighbour had stolen property. Generally, however, reported levels of violence are quite low³. This is also true for the formerly abducted. A technical school teacher was asked to describe their behaviour:

Some are free but others are not really free. None of them has yet portrayed any serious form of indiscipline like theft or physical fights... It's the non-abducted students who are very stubborn [defiant]. There is always some fear in the formerly abducted students but this goes away say after the first year and after this, you can hardly differentiate the formerly abducted and the non-abducted.

A third of youth reported that it would be okay for them to beat their wife if she talked back to them. Interviews suggest that physical aggression against one's wife is not necessarily viewed as domestic violence but can be seen as a 'disciplinary' measure. Some youth argued that it is an obligation for a man to beat his wife if she has done something wrong. However, nearly two thirds of the youth stated that it is inappropriate to beat one's wife, suggesting that these measures are supported by a minority with more violent or patriarchal attitudes.

On average, psychosocial well-being is not linked to educational or occupational functioning

One of the most important questions in assessing psychosocial symptoms is whether they affect a person's daily functioning—for example, whether one's thoughts and emotions interfere with the ability to go to school or be employed.

Remarkably, our data showed that on average, emotional distress, social functioning, or aggression was not associated with school attendance, group participation, or employment. This means that, despite their higher level of symptoms, youth with lower psychosocial well-being are able to function in day-to-day activities in the same way as their peers.

It is important to note that while data show that this is true on average and thus may have implications for targeting programming, qualitative interviews show that there are certainly individuals whose daily lives and relationships are greatly affected by their emotional distress, as this youth describes,

I have nightmares and bad dreams. I dream about the bad things they [the LRA] used to do, like killing people by cutting them into pieces with pangas [machetes]. This normally happens at night then I fail to catch sleep and eventually end up sitting in the night... I think even during the day more, especially when I think about them trying to kill me, so even if I am with my friends, I think about what happened to me and to my friends [long silence]. Sometimes when I sit alone, I think about the [machete] they used to kill people with and other bad things the rebels did. That haunts me and haunts me to an extent that I don't want to see anyone next to me when I think about it.

³ These numbers may be underreported because of self-report bias; however, government officials and community workers report very low levels of violence, even among former returnees.

Risk and protective factors

What are the differences between the majority of youth with fairly high levels of psychosocial well-being and those who are more affected? What are the factors that seem to protect youth from experiencing high distress, low social functioning, or increased aggression? And what puts them more at risk of reduced well-being?

First, as expected, those who were abducted and exposed to more violence were more likely to experience high levels of emotional distress and have more violent attitudes. The relationship between violence and emotional distress later in life is described in Chapter 7 and analyzed in detail in Annan (2006) and Blattman (2006a). Exposure to violence seems to have affected both the abducted and non-abducted in a similar fashion.

Second, those who had high family connectedness and social support were more likely to have lower levels of emotional distress and better social functioning. Self-reported difficulties in family life were associated with a one-third standard deviation increase in the emotional distress scale. Those youth that had lost their father were also slightly more likely to report emotional distress (one-fifth of a standard deviation increase in the emotional distress scale). Interestingly, orphans (23% of male youth) were less likely to have lower psychosocial well-being if they had high family connectedness (likely in part because, if a youth's parents die, the extended family usually cares for him). Many people explain that orphans used to be absorbed into families without any problem but that families are now overstretched with too many orphans due to war violence and disease.

Third, greater household wealth was associated with less emotional distress, indicating that the lack of assets adds a significant daily stressor for youth. Finally, mother's education was also a protective factor—those whose mothers were more educated were less likely to have high emotional distress.

For the youth who were formerly with the LRA, those abducted as adults have slightly worse social functioning than those abducted as children. Community insults upon return were strongly associated with emotional distress and poor social functioning.

Furthermore, those who blame themselves for the atrocities experienced or committed are more likely to experience high levels of emotional distress. It is important to note that these relationships may be bidirectional and that individuals can affect family and community reactions to them as well as the family and community relationships affecting them.

The factors discussed provide some understanding of risk and protective factors for psychosocial well-being; however, they do not explain a majority of the individual differences. This may be both because of individual traits that explain the differences and because of contributing factors that we were unable to measure, such as more in-depth aspects of peer support and social networks as well as other community-wide factors. Further research in these areas is needed to better understand resilience and protection.

Box 3: What constitutes mental health in Acholiland?

In northern Uganda, there is a tremendous amount of importance placed on fitting into one's social role, including behaving like others, obeying elders, and being helpful and respectful. Contributing to the family and living up to family expectations is a major indicator to family members that the youth is doing well. This often includes both completing household chores and contributing economically to the family. Those who are isolated, aggressive, or who don't adequately contribute are seen as having problems and as causing problems for the family.

The emphasis on community and social conformity may contribute to the low levels of aggression even among returnees. However, the pressure to social conformity may also make some youth feel quite disempowered. Several youth discussed in the qualitative interviews that if they had the physical capability or social backing, they would fight back—physically or verbally—when they are insulted. Instead they describe feeling powerless and therefore simply accept what others do to them. For instance, from one formerly abducted boy interviewed:

“Before, if some one was talking to me or quarrelling on me, however much you say something, I could still answer you back in a good way but now if some one says something bad or quarrels I can only keep quiet or start to cry. So I find it has changed my life and the reasons as to why I cry I even do not know.”

Emotional distress among the Acholi has some of its own unique expressions. Physical complaints, such as headaches, chest pain, and shaking are commonly seen as connected to excessive worries or 'over-thinking'. There are also differences in the interpretation of what clinical psychology considers symptoms. Effects on the youth such as nightmares, irritability, and feelings of sadness are similar to symptoms of psychological disorders such as post-traumatic stress disorder and depression, yet there are quite different interpretations among the Acholi of some of the symptoms.

This can be especially true of those youth who are forced to kill. One boy interviewed explained to us the effects of being forced to kill his brother and witnessing his sister's death.

“I started dreaming of [my brother] a week after the incidence and at times I could see him even during the day, how I beat him would all re-surface. When I came back home, I used to again see my sister. She could appear to me and always when she is so worried about me. And when she comes tears just roll down my cheeks. So I used to stay all by myself when I was in World Vision [reception centre] and could not eat even if food is prepared, because I was so worried.”

Nightmares, flashbacks or other 'strange' behaviour outside the social norm are often interpreted as *cen*—ghostly vengeance which can be a result of killing someone, defacing a body, or merely seeing a dead body mistreated or without proper burial.

This makes it essential to consider the spiritual world of the Acholi community to better understand psychosocial well-being.

The spiritual world of the Acholi

Psychosocial health and well-being in the north is inseparable from Acholi cosmology. The spiritual world of the Acholi is covered in detail by Harlacher et al. (2006) and the Liu Institute (2005a). This section identifies some of the key issues as they related to SWAY activities and findings.

Haunting, cen, and nightmares

Five percent of youth reported being haunted by spirits, or *cen*, with the large majority being the formerly abducted. The collective understanding of *cen* is that it can spread from one person to another, polluting a family or community. This has social implications on a youth with nightmares or flashbacks since a community may be frightened of being polluted by him.

A formerly abducted young man describes his nightmares and the reactions of his family:

The only problem I recognized with my in-laws is that they, in a way, doubted my personality saying I might have committed some bad acts while in the bush, and this might still be in my line of thought and one day similar things could happen.

My wife, too, was a little scared, although we were staying together. This was because I used to have nightmares and could scream and jump out of bed thinking I was still in the bush with the rebels. This, therefore, made her ask me time and again if at all I was being haunted by someone's spirit whom I might have killed. But because I know I did not do such a thing, I told her the truth and now I no longer experience such dreams.

Ceremonies

Cleansing ceremonies are performed by elders to cleanse the youth from *cen* and are seen as appeasing the spirit with an animal sacrifice. Baines (2005) and Caritas (2005) describe these ceremonies and their significance in detail.

Just under half of the formerly abducted youth in our study had a cleansing ceremony performed for them. Family members of the formerly abducted explained that it was important for them to know whether the youth killed anyone while 'in the bush', because they worried about spiritual pollution. The aunt of one formerly abducted boy worried that he had not yet allowed such a ceremony:

When he reached home the elders were ready with the goat for rituals but he refused saying that rituals were for those who had done havoc [brutal act] in the bush, but he had not so he didn't need a ritual.

Q. Why do you feel it's so important to perform this ritual?

Rituals will wash him clean. All the bad things he did in the bush will be washed. He already stepped on the eggs and pobo [the trunk of a tree]. It is just remaining the goat to cleanse him.

However, some youth explained that they refused to disclose their acts due to shame or fear of rejection or revenge. One youth abducted youth explained,

Q: Does it bother you to talk about it?

No, it is that sometimes after sharing, people call me a rebel. It can create hatred between the community and me.

Q: The other day when I was talking to the people in the house, they told me that they didn't know you were abducted until you were working together and they saw your scars. Was there a reason that you didn't want to tell them?

If I told them, they could turn it around and use it against me.

Some youth explained that ceremonies performed had rid them of their nightmares while others continued to be haunted (our data showed no significant difference between those who had gone through ceremonies). If still haunted, the next step was often to perform another ceremony or go to an *ajwaka*, commonly translated as either a witch doctor or traditional healer. This uncle of a youth with *cen* described the family's experience:

... the mother went to Gulu and found a witch doctor who said that he [abducted youth] is the way he is because of some "dirt" surrounding his life as per his experiences in the bush. So it has to be removed but the witch doctor asked for a lot of money: 70,000/= [40 US dollars]. That is why we have not yet taken him but we are planning to do so.

With 99% of youth in the north considering themselves Christians (see Figure 5), prayers were also described as a way of healing and recovery from these symptoms. Some youth and families blend traditional ceremonies and Christian prayers while others see them in contradiction.

Still others, as this same uncle describes, seem to have a more pragmatic approach as they seek to alleviate their family's suffering.

...but if this fails, we can try something else like for my other son who ran mad. According to the story I was told, he went herding with another boy and they found a dead body. From that time he has not been well. He was first taken to a witchdoctor but it failed. Now he is 'born again' and he is fine.

Those who are 'saved' often do not want traditional rituals to be performed and some formerly abducted youth explained that certain reception centres tell them not to accept traditional ceremonies.

This became a problem for the youth who did not want a ceremony performed but whose family saw it as necessary. As with the traditional rituals and ceremonies, some youth like this 22 year old explained how the prayers have helped them overcome their nightmares,

I used to have a lot of dreams which disturbed me so much when I had just reported [from the rebels] and was in Gulu. So I was taken to be prayed for and this helped me because I stopped dreaming. But when I came back home here in Kitgum, these [dreams] came back and what I am doing now to help is going to church...

If [the dream] happens [these days] and I wake up, I get up and pray then go back to bed. So if I pray, it doesn't repeat. I sleep till morning.

Our study showed that out of the small group (5%) who felt or were believed to be haunted, approximately one-third

Figure 3: Distribution of faiths

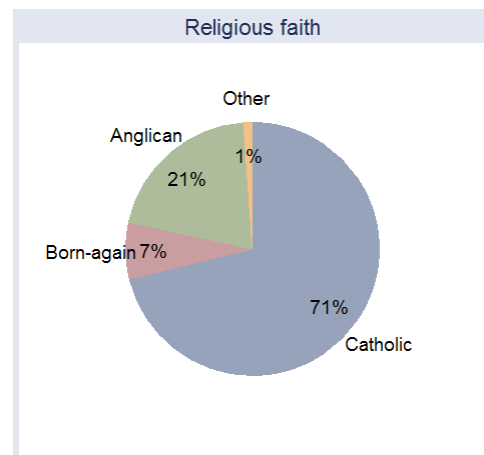
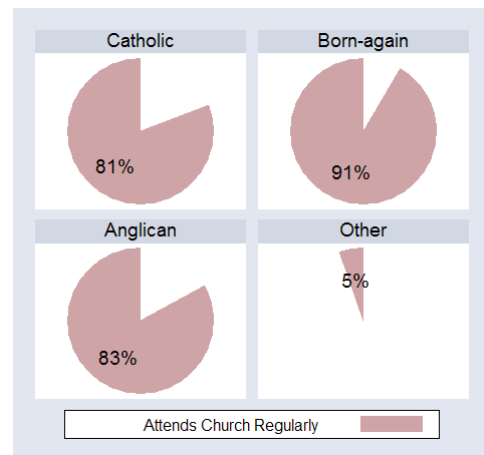


Figure 4: Church attendance by faith



wanted to consult with a witch doctor or have a ceremony conducted while another third wanted to have prayers, go to church or get saved to rid themselves of *cen*. This is an interesting balance in the population of traditional and Christian beliefs. Also interesting is the tension within the humanitarian aid community between those who support rituals and ceremonies and those who support Christian-based prayers, both with the aim of contributing to psychosocial healing.

It seems clear that dictating interventions for youth and their families could be counterproductive and potentially harmful, especially because of the highly spiritual nature of the LRA, where many youth are forced to take part in rituals and practices.

The relationship between youth and elders is strained

War and displacement can also bring cultural loss, which is more difficult to measure in terms of impact. One of the issues that emerged from interviews is the changing nature of the relationship between elders and youth; in the past the hierarchy and roles were much clearer, as this youth describes,

...If you are to compare camp life and village life you will find that camp is spoiling the children. In the past when people were home (in villages), even a person of this size [referring to self] if they find that he has done something wrong they would put him down and beat him but now no elder can even tell me that I have done a bad thing. I can tell him, "Mzee (elder) go away. For you don't have a sound mind". There is no respect now. A youth after drinking comes home and sits like he is the one who bore the father. Other elders don't respect themselves so the youth don't even respect them.

Many community members talked about the gap between the youth and the elders, explaining that the war had changed the social order, that youth were more 'stubborn' than before, or that the elders simply did not understand this new environment. Some elders seemed to express a sense of helplessness because they could no longer provide materially for the youth, and therefore had lost much respect. While generation gaps are common in many societies, it seems it has stretched even more due to war and displacement. The problem is often attributed to the behaviour of the youth (by both elders and youth), that they are not listening or are disobedient. A youth in a camp close to Kitgum Town describes:

Q: How do the youth and elders relate?

I can only speak about my own area. In this area, the relationship is sometimes good and sometimes bad. All of it depends on the response of the youth to the elders – if the youth are obedient to what the elders say, then there is a good relationship but if not, then there is not a good relationship.

Q: Why do you think the youth are sometimes disobedient?

Mostly because of displacement. These days there is no fireplace teaching. In the past, few people if any would disobey parents because of the fireplace teaching. But now a parent hardly gets the time and place to give good teaching because in the evenings, the children have to go to a night shelter and during the day, they got to school.

There is no proper understanding between the youth and elders. There is actually a wider gap because the youth tend to go their way and the elders their own way. And the night commuter shelters are a problem. The youth go their way to the separate night shelters but some lie and just go out for discos or to watch videos.

Some youth have also had to find new ways of relating to their parents or elders, since the social norms have changed. This is at least in part because elders no longer have the economic means to provide for their families the way they used to, which deprives them of some of their status.

The relationship between my father and me now is okay. There is no problem for we both relate well unlike before when I had just dropped out of school and still wanted so much to go back and continue my education. Then, my relationship with him was really sour because I could see other parents struggling to get money and pay for their children in school while the best my father could do was to drink all the time without minding of saving money for my school fees. This used to annoy [anger] me and so we would quarrel all the time....

What I can tell you is that my father and I are now in good terms with each other. This is because, first of all, I have come to realize that my father does not have any way of getting money. This has made me forget about confronting him every now and then, so we no longer quarrel.

Many youth, however, explained that they still listened to and valued the advice of elders. For some, the elders seemed to offer hope because of their long-term perspective:

The elders also tell us not to worry so much about the life we are leading now in the camp because one day everyone will go back to the village when this war ends and life will go back to normal as before when the camp settlement was not even dreamt of..

However, when the elders say this war will end, basing on how they view it, I may not have to refute it because they know why they say so but according to us the youth, we see and feel this war is not ending any sooner because it has now taken over 19 years with such claims of it being ended.

Peer support is seen as an important coping mechanism for youth.

In response to an open-ended question, more than half of youth stated that spending time with friends was their way of coping when feeling distressed. Several youth interviewed in depth discussed the importance of this support, particularly when there is an absence of family support. This youth expresses the significance of this peer support in helping him deal with the difficulties of daily life,

But sometimes I am free, for example, when I am chatting with my friends. But when I am alone, I think a lot especially about how we are living in the camp. I am living with my grandmother. My father died in 1993 and my mother died in 2001. So I am really thinking about how I should survive. It's my friends who advise me about how to survive.

This 20 year old youth who has very poor family relations describes the importance of two close friends,

... These two friends are always there to support me in case I go to them with any problem ... They also come here to visit me and I too go to them after their day's work where we always chat and this has yet kept me going strong, knowing I have friends who care.

Some of the abducted youth explained the importance of having friends who were also abducted, emphasizing that others who had been through similar experiences were the only ones they could trust with the details of their own abduction. They feared that others—whether family or neighbours—might someday use it against them, even if they felt accepted at the time.

Youth groups and recreation provide needed activity for idleness in camp

Just over half of the youth were involved in a formal or informal group in their community with church groups and dance groups being the most common.

The importance of the groups to the youth is best described qualitatively. With few opportunities for employment and education and with restricted movement and curfews in the camps, some youth explain that traditional dances are the only activities that break the monotony of each day. Many Acholi take great pride in

their dances and songs, known to be among the best in the country. This youth describes how his dance group came together,

I for one did not know how to dance 'bwola' and because there is no activity to engage in from morning as I wake up till evening... [When we formed our new group] there were five people who knew how to dance and they were older than us. What brought us together is that we all had no drums and were all beating sticks (laughs and demonstrates with his stick). But now, these five are saying we have learnt and are doing better than before...

What was remarkable was that this youth laughed frequently and described the groups' activities in an animated, playful way; remarkable because he also described his disappointment about being unable to afford the last two years of secondary school, his struggle with his father who drinks and becomes physically aggressive with the youth's mother, and the difficulty of life in the camp. The group seems to give him a place to focus his energy while he searches for options and works on relationships in his family.

The group meets every afternoon to carve their drums from large tree trunks and to practice their dances. They describe the benefits of the group that extend beyond tradition and entertainment: they have established strong, supportive relationships and they share ideas and information. The group members would also like to start income generating projects and feel that being in a group makes it more possible for them to receive outside assistance, if it is available.

Alcohol abuse is disruptive but limited to a small number of youth

Alcohol and other substance abuse are perceived to be major problems in the camps. In the words of a youth we interviewed in Atanga,

The problem of this war is there is nothing the youth can do. They wake up and then wash their faces then something to do is not there. So they go to drink alcohol.

Nineteen percent of the youth in our sample admitted to taking alcohol in the past week. Just 4 percent reported regular drunkenness. Of those that reported taking any alcohol, they reported an average of 2.4 drinks. One third said that they take alcohol in the morning "to help them get through the day".

It seems likely that these estimates of alcohol abuse are too low—in more than one instance a SWAY enumerator listened while an obviously inebriated respondent explained that he had taken no alcohol in the past week. Even so, our enumerators are confident of the sincerity of the majority of our respondents, and so under-reporting seems unlikely to be drastic. With median monthly earnings at roughly 1000 shillings, few youth are likely able to afford an alcohol problem.

Those who drink alcohol were less likely to be in school (although this is bidirectional, as those who are not in school may be more likely to drink). Furthermore, while those who get drunk regularly were less likely to be employed, youth who had taken a drink in the last week were more likely to be employed. This may be because they have money to spend on alcohol.

Though alcohol abuse appears to be a problem only among a minority of youth, it causes disproportionately great difficulties. While social consumption of alcohol is widely accepted in communities and is often part of celebrations or funerals (with the exception of born-again Christians), drunkenness is generally seen as a social ill. Drunkenness is often raised as a major problem in families and communities. Although there are high levels of family acceptance and generally good feelings of connectedness in families, it is not uncommon for youth to discuss a member of the family – most often a father or uncle – who drinks and spends needed money on alcohol or who 'quarrels' with the family because he is drunk. It is seen by both youth and elders to be a pervasive societal problem, so whether the percentage is high or not, it clearly affects people and is a disturbance of the social order. It is often stated that community members who insult or abuse formerly abducted youth are drunk

at the time they do so. The relationship between alcohol and the abuse of former abductees will be discussed in a later section of this report.

As for other substances abused, not one youth in our sample admitted to using illegal drugs. Perhaps alone amongst the many attitudes and behaviours about which the survey asked, drug use is a topic that is truly taboo, and so we should regard this particular statistic with scepticism.

II. Education

Schooling has been especially challenging to obtain in the context of poverty, war, and displacement. Drawing on survey and interview data, this chapter emphasizes several key findings regarding the state of youth education in northern Uganda, including the following:

- The primary school system is effective in at least the most basic sense, achieving high enrolment and literacy among adolescents;
- Yet a significant minority of youth, primarily young adults, are functionally illiterate, in part because many could not afford primary schooling as children, and because remedial adult education programs are unavailable;
- In particular, while primary school completion is relatively high, few youth make the transition from primary to secondary school, principally it seems because they cannot afford school fees;
- The struggle to pay school and exam fees has led to a widespread pattern of episodic schooling, where enrolment and exam-taking are interrupted frequently by periods of idleness, typically when a student's financial support disappears or dries up;
- With continuation in schooling so dependent on the ability to raise fees, those youth engaging in 'child labour' have attained a higher level of education when family networks fail;

Table 2: Quick statistics on education

| | |
|---|----------|
| Percentage of youth with no ability to read or write | 9.5 |
| Percentage of youth capable of reading a newspaper | 75 |
| Average years of schooling among men aged 18 to 30 | 7.8 |
| Chance that a youth has 3 or fewer years of education | 1 in 10 |
| Chance that a youth reached the university level | 1 in 150 |
| Percentage of youth over 15 with at least 2 months of vocational training | 16 |
| Percent of these programs paid for by NGOs | 8 |

- Formerly abducted youth have significantly lower levels of schooling, not simply because of the time away from school and the difficulty of returning to school as a young adult, but perhaps also because of the impact of abduction on the resources available for paying fees;
- University education is rare, although self- and family-funded (but not NGO-funded) vocational training is relatively common; and
- Not only are the economic returns to education substantial, but higher education seems to be associated with less risky and vulnerable income-generating activities for youth.
- Education and vocational training are by no means a cure-all, and further study should be taken before a scaling-up of such programs.

High adolescent enrolment in the primary school system is delivering basic literacy and education

In at least the most basic sense, the primary school system can be said to be working (at least, for adolescent males). Nearly three-quarters of boys and men interviewed have been provided with at least a rudimentary education by the primary school system, in that they report they are capable of reading and writing. While such a modest performance is hardly a cause for celebration (or complacency), it is nevertheless a real achievement in the face of two decades of impoverishment, conflict, and (more recently) displacement.

The survey data demonstrate that most youth have partially completed primary school, and a majority has finished it. Figure 7 displays the distribution of education among youth aged 14 to 30. Ninety two percent of youth have at least a standard four (i.e. fourth grade) education, and roughly sixty percent have reached standard seven. Three-quarters report that they are sufficiently literate that they are capable of reading a newspaper.

Current enrolment among youth aged 14 to 19 is also quite high. From Figure 8 we can see that 95 percent of youth aged 14 to 16 (and 70 percent of those aged 17 to 19) say they are presently in school or vocational training. School enrolment drops off significantly after the age of 19.

While the school system can thus be said to be functioning, it is clear that the schools in the camps were not functioning well. Few children or classrooms had even basic materials, whether notebooks or chalk. On the half dozen occasions when one of the Principal Investigators visited a camp-based primary school (usually unannounced), little actual teaching or learning was evident. Even the teachers in attendance were seldom in the classroom. It may indeed be that adolescents were well served by the primary school system because many of them entered school before displacement. We cannot say how the younger generation of children (who started primary following displacement) are faring.

A significant minority of youth, primarily young adults, are functionally illiterate

While 99% of youth have attended school for at least one year, it is only those youth that have nearly completed primary school (or better) whom appear to be functionally literate. Figure 10 plots the proportion of youth who are able to read a book or newspaper by their educational attainment. Only a fifth of those that complete four years of school are educated well enough to read a book or newspaper. For those that complete seven years, still only 90 percent can read this well.

These rates measure ‘functional literacy’, which we define to be the self-reported ability to read a book or newspaper. Eleven percent of our survey respondents, however, reported that they were ‘completely illiterate’—that is, unable to read or write at all. Complete illiteracy is highest among those with three or fewer years of schooling (although it is not entirely absent among those with more than three years schooling). Roughly a

Figure 5: Distribution of education among youth

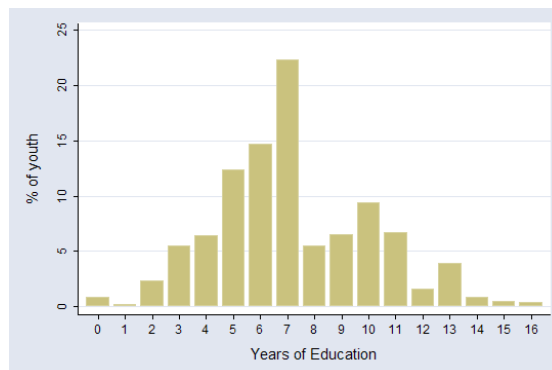


Figure 6: School enrolment by age category

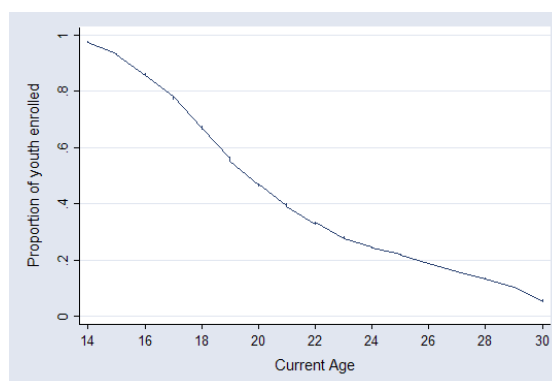


Figure 7: Functional literacy by education level

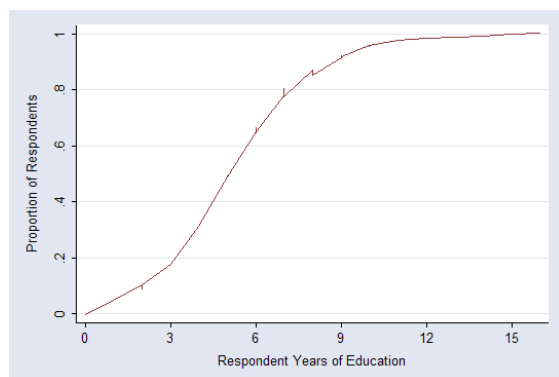
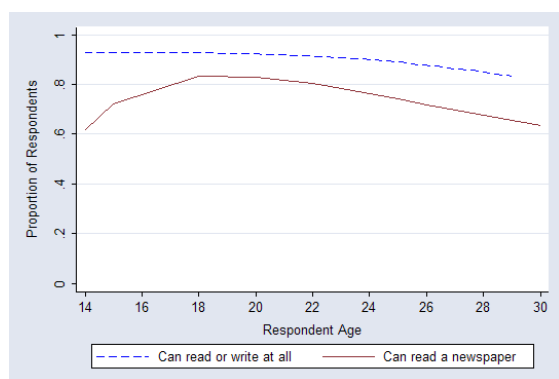


Figure 8: Literacy by age



the intensification of the war and displacement in 2002 disrupted their education more severely than younger generations, a more likely explanation is that Universal Primary Schooling (i.e. free primary education) was only introduced in 1997. As we will see in the next section, the primary reason these youth give for having dropped out of school was an inability to pay fees.

The disproportionate number of poorly-educated and illiterate young adults is worth dwelling upon. Even though many youth in their twenties report they are still in primary school, returning to school is not an easy option for many. From a 19-year old in Kitgum Matidi camp:

If I am to go back to school then I will need to study among adults, not children like in primary [school] because I don't like noisy environments and would prefer studying with adults to help me forget the life I went through as the noise children make only refreshes my thoughts.

Adults may require special attention and facilities. To our knowledge, however, there are no adult education programs that have adult-appropriate curricula at present in Kitgum or Pader Districts.

Wide regional variation in education and literacy levels

Finally, education and literacy levels seem to vary a great deal by location. Figure 11 illustrates the relative education levels of youth originating in each of the eight sub-counties surveyed by SWAY. Each bar indicates the difference between the average level of education of youth originating in each sub-county and the average

third of those who drop out after four years of schooling, and a sixth of those that drop out after five, report that they are unable to read or write at all.

Such poor literacy levels at standards four and five speak again to the poor quality of education in many schools. Unfortunately, the rise in literacy by standard seven is not necessarily evidence of more effective teaching in later levels. Rather, it is quite possibly due as much (or more) to drop-out of the most poorly performing students as it is the occurrence of real learning.

Illiteracy highest among young adults

Complete illiteracy appears to be much more common among adults (those over 18-years-old) than adolescents (those between 14 and 18), as seen in Figure 10. One sixth of male youth between 24 and 30 cannot read or write at all, and one third is unable to read a book or newspaper.

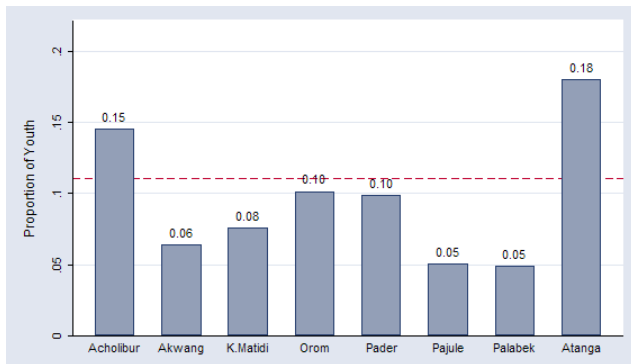
The ability to read a book or newspaper is likewise low among young adolescents, but this appears to be because they are still in the earlier stages of primary education and have yet to acquire these skills in school. The young adults, however, are now generally beyond the reach of the formal school system.

Why are young adults in their twenties less educated than their younger counterparts? While it is possible that

Figure 9: Education by sub-county



Figure 10: Illiteracy rates by sub-county



level of education overall (after adjusting for differences in ages) ⁴ Thus the first bar indicates that youth originating from Acholibur sub-county have 0.86 fewer years of education than the sample average (of 7.35 years), and they have $0.80 + 0.86 = 1.66$ fewer years of education fewer than youth in Palabek sub-county.⁵

Figure 12 illustrates rates of illiteracy (an inability to read or write at all) by sub-county of origin. The dashed line represents the average illiteracy rate of 11% over all eight subcounties. As we can see, there is significant variation around the mean, corresponding quite closely to levels of educational attainment in each sub-county.

Such variation across regions is substantial, and is not easily explained by obvious sub-county characteristics. While Orom is distant and isolated, Acholibur and Atanga are on the busy Kitgum-Gulu road. Akwang is close to Kitgum town, while Palabek is not especially so. Palabek is also one of the longest-displaced communities, with among the highest levels of abduction and violence. Data from more camps would be necessary for an accurate mapping of camp characteristics to schooling levels.

Illiteracy is linked to low parental education and abduction, but in general is poorly explained by observed traits

What are the correlates of low literacy besides age? Not surprisingly, illiteracy closely corresponds to low levels of education. Three quarters of those with three or fewer years of schooling are illiterate, while less than a tenth of those with 4 to 7 years of schooling report such difficulties. Those youth most likely to be illiterate are those whose parents also had little schooling, suggesting an intergenerational persistence of low education. The household's socio-economic position before displacement, in 1997, is only weakly associated with illiteracy, however. Orphans seem no more likely to be illiterate than non-orphans, but those that have been abducted are 2.5 times more likely to be illiterate than non-abducted youth. In spite of these patterns, these factors only explain a moderate amount of the variation in illiteracy, suggesting a large circumstantial component, or idiosyncratic factors not easily captured by a survey measure.

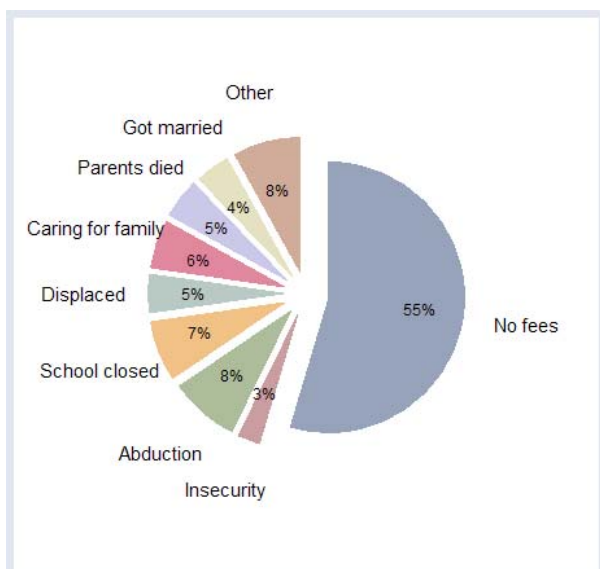
Progression to secondary schooling is rare, primarily because of the financial burden of fees

Another alarming observation is the steep drop in schooling after standard seven (see Figure 7 above). Of those youth that make it to at least standard 6, only 48% make the transition to secondary school. Those that make it to secondary school represent 36% of students overall.

⁴ Education varies by age, naturally, and presenting the data in this form allow us to account for the different age profiles of our sample across sub-counties.

⁵ Note that the categorization is not by current place of residence, but by sub-county of origin—youth were selected for interviews based on whether they were present in the sub-county in 1996, and were tracked to their current locations, be that in other camps, towns, or districts.

Figure 11: Reasons given for leaving school



learning for pupils in your school?

A: Financial problems. Most students report late because of financial problems. They end up missing the beginning of term exams which contributes forty percent to the students' final results. Even those students whose school fees are paid by some organizations usually lack requirements so they are sent back home and they too miss the beginning of term exams.

While we might expect youth to over-report financial need in any interview with a representative of the aid community, the precipitous fall in schooling just as fees must be paid lends credence to the “no fees” explanation. From one young man we interviewed:

You know, there are children of the rich and that of the poor. Those whose parents paid them in school in the past are now paying for their children as well. Therefore the youth have different life styles.

Analysis of the survey data lends only weak support to these accounts.⁶ Youth with households in the bottom quarter of the income distribution in 1996 were a quarter less likely to make the transition to secondary school, but the result is not statistically significant. Higher levels of current wealth, meanwhile, are also associated with increased odds of making the secondary school transition, but it is not clear in which direction the causality runs.^{7,8}

Educational attainment is also strongly associated with the parent’s level of education, even after accounting for the influence of pre-war assets. For instance, a youth with a secondary-school educated father is 2.5 times as likely to make the transition to secondary school. Parent’s education is a proxy for several factors, including wealth, innate ability, and the value placed on education.

Meanwhile, Figure 13 displays responses to the question, “Why are you no longer in school?” The principal reason given for not continuing is “no fees”, while other explanations (e.g., “My parents died”) suggest financial reasons as well. For instance, from an interview with a 23-year old man from Kitgum Matidi:

I still have the interest of going back to continue with my studies but that can only be made possible if there is money to pay up school dues and where to get it is a problem because my father can't afford it since he has no activity to generate some money.

Financial pressures not only also affect drop-outs, but also performance of youth in school. From a teacher at Kitgum high school:

Q: What would you say are the main obstacles to

⁶ Figures quoted come from a multivariate regression of a secondary school indicator on various current and retrospective household and individual traits.

⁷ A one standard deviation in *current* household asset ownership is associated with a nine percentage point increase in the likelihood of making the transition to secondary school.

⁸ While the association between current wealth and educational attainment is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that higher education may be leading to higher incomes and wealth, the fact that historical wealth is associated with making the secondary school transition suggests causation runs from financial means to the ability to attend school.

Schooling is frequently episodic due to financial pressures arising from poverty, insecurity, and lack of family support

Schooling is largely an episodic activity rather than an unbroken or continuous one. Most youth have moved in and out of primary and secondary school as their ability to pay for school fees, exam fees, and other associated costs vary over time. These financial demands appear to be much more important than displacement or insecurity in explaining drop-outs and interruptions in schooling.

One interview with a young man in Kitgum Town is emblematic of this process. His story is recounted in Box 5. As Universal Primary Schooling was only introduced in 1997, he relied on family members for support through primary school. The death of his father due to illness and, later, the violent death of the aunt who supported him through the remainder of school, meant he had to change schools multiple times, with periods of idleness in between. In some years crops could be sold, or kin networks accessed, in order to pay school and exam fees. In others, not.

Such patterns appear to be widespread and, consequently, many youth have dropped out of school entirely. From a teacher, speaking about a 17-year old boy in our sample:

Box 4: Schooling, interrupted

Interview with a 23-year-old man living in Kitgum Town.

I remember I was in [a primary school in the home village]. My father loved me so much. He used to bring for me clothes, my uniform and other things from Lira Town. He became sick in 1990 when I was in P1 and he died in 1993. One day he told me, 'My son, I had wanted you to study but there is no way now. I have to leave this world but you have to stay. If there is anyone who will help you, then let them do that.'...

My mother continued raising me until 1994 when my aunt picked me up [to take him to school in Kitgum]. I lived with her, but she also died in an ambush in 1996, when I was in P6. When she died, I had to come back home and I remember my grandfather saying, 'My son, you are very unfortunate with your education.' But I told him that there was nothing to do about it. And we continued staying together...

When I returned from Kitgum, I went back to study at [a primary school in Pader] in P.6. But I failed to sit for my Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) because I failed to pay the exam fee. I managed to pay the exam fee for the next year in 1998, but after I sat I failed to go to secondary because I had no money to go to secondary. So I had to re-sit PLE. My cousin, who was a teacher in Pajule, told me to go with him and re-sit PLE from Pajule and I did. The first PLE my mother sold some sorghum and paid, and the next one was paid for by my cousin.

When I joined secondary at [a secondary school in Kitgum], I started growing cotton during school holidays to raise money for school fees. But my cousin paid school fees for the first term of senior 1.

I continued studying until Senior 3 when there was no money and I had nothing to do to get money, as everybody was already displaced in the camps where there was no land for farming. So my aunt (the sister to the one who died in the ambush) took me to stay with her. She offered to help me with school fees. She however suggested that I switch schools, so I went to [another secondary school in Kitgum]."

But again there was no money during the period for registration to sit for the Ordinary level national exams. The headmaster, however, told us whoever had failed to raise money on time to wait for late registration. We were 60 in number who registered late and we were sent to sit for our exams...

After my exams, I failed to go for Advanced level because I had no money. So I stayed at home for one year. Last year I tried to go to [a third secondary school in Kitgum] for Advanced level, but I could only afford two terms. I then decided to join the army, but right now I am thinking of quitting because there are no salaries and it's really not helping.

He is bright, although he sometimes performs poorly because he is often discontinued from studying for a while because of school fees.

Of those who have remained enrolled, many are enrolled in secondary and even primary school well into their twenties. In fact, nearly a quarter of youth in their twenties are currently enrolled in school. Of these, 17 percent are still completing primary school, and 45 percent are in secondary school. Only 33 percent of those aged 20 to 30 currently enrolled are in some form of higher education (typically a vocational training program).

Financial pressures, including but not limited to primary school fees, prevented some youth from starting school at all. From an interview with a 20-year old man living now in Kitgum town:

Um...ah...education. [pause] I never went to school because I had no one to pay for my education. My parents separated when I was still young. My father denied me saying I am not his child so my mother took me to her mother, my maternal grandmother, who was already old and could not raise money to cater for me as well as pay me in school. Because my grandmother was very elderly, I was the one who cooked food, fetched water, collected firewood and did any kind of household chores to enable us – my grandmother and I – to survive.

As both this story and the one in Box 5 illustrates, the inability to afford school is often a consequence of the death a parent or other family member supporting the youth through school. Kin relations are of crucial importance to a youth's education and economic status, which is why in a later section we will see that reported low family connectedness is one of the most robust correlates of lower education and earnings.

Child labour may raise long-term well-being

In a context where schooling is so heavily dependent on financial resources, aspiring students often grow crops or work small jobs in the informal labour market (*leje leje*) in order to pay their school fees.

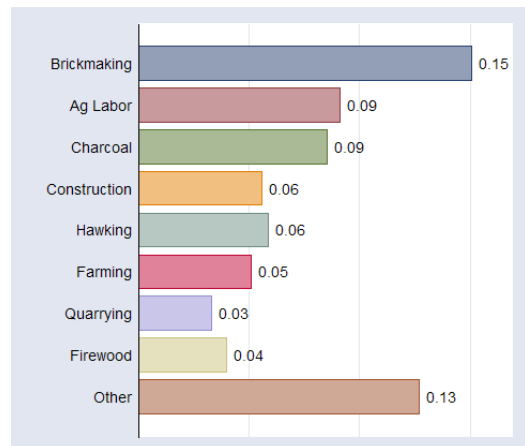
In all, 56 percent of the primary and secondary students in our sample performed some sort of work in the past four weeks. Those who worked did so for an average of eight days in the month, and 79 percent of these youth earned some cash for their activities.

Figure 14 illustrates jobs performed by youth. Brick-making is the most common method of earning cash, followed by agricultural labour (i.e. working someone else's land, including a family member's land) and charcoal burning. Virtually none of the students worked a full-time job, ran a small business such as a kiosk, or performed a vocation.

Cash earned from these activities is typically used to pay for schooling and associated fees. The excerpts in the box above were one example of this behaviour. Similarly, from a secondary school teacher in Pajule:

The youth who are at school have realised the value of education so they are struggling real hard to succeed. You know the youth have a lot of energy so during holidays like this they struggle to do everything they can to get money. Just yesterday a youth came to me and said he had just finished a brick project for his father and would like to start his own to help him with school fees next term. Others are doing charcoal burning. So despite the fact that they are going through a tough situation, they are still working hard to survive. Even during the rainy season, they plant some crops and do some work in the morning before going to

Figure 12: Jobs performed by students in the past 4 weeks



school and others in the evening after school.

Such “child labour” is not entirely positive, of course. Many of the jobs performed by young, unskilled youth, such as gathering firewood or charcoal-burning, are performed in the bush where the youth are at greater risk of abduction or being mistaken for rebels by the UPDF. These risky jobs are frequently unskilled and require little or no capital, and so are particularly popular among youth. From Figure 14 we see that 9 percent of students burned charcoal and 4 percent collected firewood in the past four weeks. Some, but by no means all, agricultural work also poses risks for youth if it takes them into the bush. Risky work and vulnerability is further discussed in the chapter on economic activity.

Formerly abducted youth have moderately lower enrolment, education, and illiteracy

Life in the bush was not easy. There you lead a soldier's life where you are not free and you cannot depend on anyone. What hurt me most is that they stopped my education and all the time I was there I never benefited anything but was helping them.

- 28 year old, abducted 4 years, had studied until S2

My stay in the bush has really wasted my time and if they had not abducted me, maybe I would have completed my education now.

- 28 year old, abducted 3 times

One of the more significant determinants of lower education is an episode of abduction. On average among the abducted, educational attainment is nearly one year (or roughly fifteen percent) less than that of the average non-abducted youth (including abductees of any length whatsoever). Speaking to the mother of one young boy, who was taken for several months: “He should be in P6 but he is now in P5 [because of abduction].”

The formerly abducted are also half as likely to be currently enrolled in school, they are a third less likely to make the transition from primary to secondary school, and are twice as likely as a non-abducted youth to be fully illiterate. Given the near random manner in which abduction occurred, these effects can be interpreted as causal impacts.⁹

As we explore the impacts of abduction on education, however, we wish to be clear that these are far from the only youth suffering from a lack of learning and skills. Other difficulties, such as the presence of a serious injury, seem to be associated with similarly lower levels of education. Furthermore, as described earlier in the chapter, the state of education for *all* youth is quite low. Finally, as we will discuss in Chapters 8 and 9, targeting the abducted for special assistance may undermine what should be one of our primary objectives: social integration of the youth in the community, free from resentment and stigmatization.

⁹ Blattman (2006a) demonstrates that abduction is unrelated to an individual or household's characteristics other than age and location. In fact, conditional on age and location, abduction is akin to a random event. Interviews with former members and leaders of abduction parties seem to confirm this evidence. This is not a small point, because it allows us to use the non-abducted youth as a counterfactual for the abducted ones to identify the causal impact of abduction on later-life outcomes, such as health, economic status, and education.

Figure 15 illustrates the impact of abduction on the educational attainment of youth. The horizontal axis measures the number of months that a youth in our sample was abducted, on a logarithmic scale that compresses the horizontal spread. The vertical axis measures the deviation of a youth's education from the "age-appropriate" level, where we take the "age-appropriate" level to be that of a non-abducted youth of the same age and sub-county.¹⁰

Non-abducted youth are represented by the solid horizontal line at zero (as they are, by definition, the benchmark case). The dashed horizontal line at -0.92 represents the average impact on years of education attained for all abductees.¹¹ Finally, the downward-sloping line represents the impact on educational attainment by length of abduction.¹²

Up to two to three months, the impact of abduction is almost negligible. For those that are abducted more than six months, the impact of abduction appears to be somewhat less than proportional—an additional year of abduction leads to about half a year less education.¹³

This pattern suggests that longer abductions are most disruptive. Those abducted for two weeks to a year have about a 60% likelihood of returning to school. Those abducted for several years have only a 20% to 30% likelihood of returning to school. Financial reasons are those most commonly given reason why. Abductions are often associated with the looting of the household, and sometimes the death of a caregiver and the resultant loss of wealth may keep the youth from reaching secondary or technical school. Before 1997, it would also have hindered the ability to pay primary school fees. From one respondent:

Figure 13: Impact of abduction on educational attainment, by abduction length

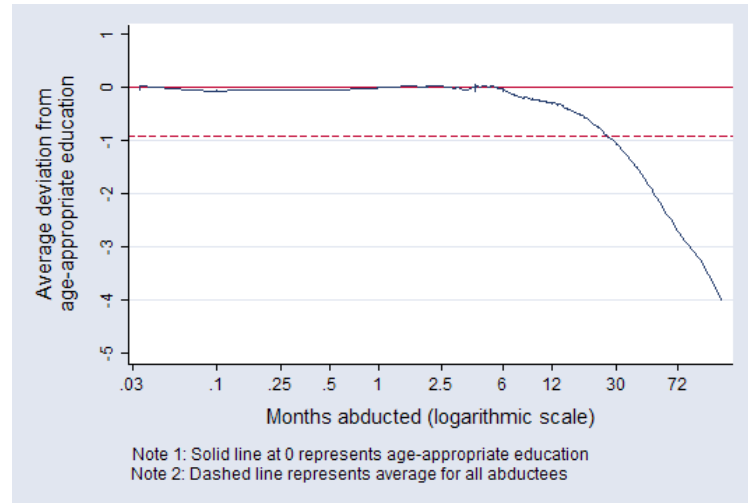
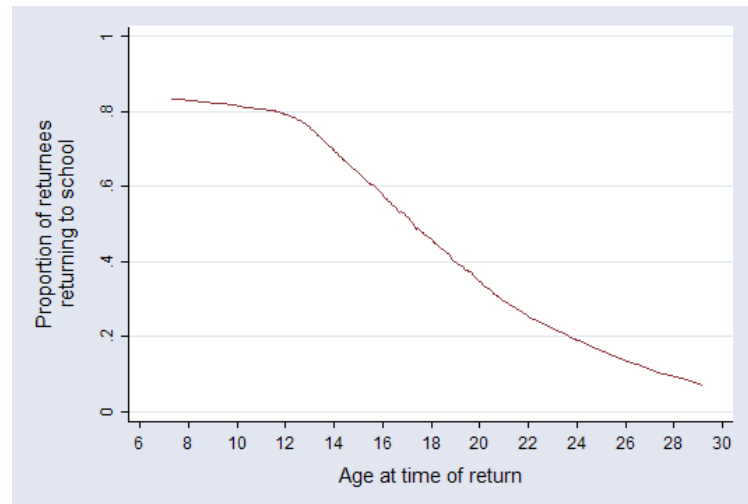


Figure 14: Proportion of abductees that return to school, by age of return



¹⁰ For example, if 20-year old men in Acholibur who have never been abducted have 7.5 years of education on average, then a value of -1 would imply that 20-year old former abductees in Acholibur have an average of 6.5 years of education.

¹¹ The impact on education is statistically significant at the 99% level.

¹² All points on the line are statistically significant at the 95% level, except for those abducted more than 7 years (since there are too few observations in the sample to estimate the impact precisely).

¹³ Note that all youth, abducted and non-abducted alike, have probably lost education relative to their peers elsewhere in the country due to the war and displacement in the north. Figure 15 only measures the incremental damage due to abduction.

I stopped in P7 because I was abducted after completing my Primary Leaving Examination. So when I came back from captivity, I didn't get the opportunity to go back to school.

Those coming back from longer abductions also feel uncomfortable returning to school with youth much younger than them. Speaking to one teacher:

Q. In your opinion, what seems to make the difference between those who adjust well when they return and those who don't?

A. I think one of them is the duration in the bush. Some of them stayed for a long time in the bush and when they came back to school, they found themselves older than the others in class. Such [students] feel inferior and take long to adjust.

It also depends on the circumstances they went through. Some of them witnessed the death of their parents and such things tend to stick in their minds and so they take long to adjust.

Figure 16 illustrates the probability that a returnee will go back to school upon return. Those under the age of thirteen go back to school in 80 percent of cases, but the proportion drops steadily from there.

As we will see in Chapter 5, even short abductions can be extremely traumatic, resulting in physical and psychological damage that could hinder schooling (as the teacher above suggests). Looking at the data, the likelihood of returning to school after abduction does not appear to be related to the presence of a serious injury, or the level of violence experienced while gone. As we have seen elsewhere in this report, however, such traumatic events are related to other measures of reintegration, especially psychosocial well-being.

University education is rare, but self-funded vocational training is relatively common

If reaching secondary school is a challenging task, moving further has been a nearly impossible one for most Acholi youth. Just 7.5 percent of youth completed 12 or more years of education (i.e. completion of secondary school), and less than one percent of the youth reached university.

Speaking to an Acholi youth attending university in Kampala, he explained that there were only a handful of Acholi students on academic scholarship. On why there are so few:

Because of the schools in the north. Some perform okay in O level but in A level, the performance is low. However bright you are, you cannot score high if you are in those schools. Then the environment alone is not supportive for students. Like there are rebel attacks in the town. Those away from the town have it even worse. There is no freedom for reading. You are hearing gunshots. Some of your relatives might be abducted. There are other factors. Most good teachers don't accept to teach there. So you can be bright in S6 but you can't lead the system. The material there is not up to date.

While university education is rare, vocational training is much more common. 20 percent of youth over the age of 16 have had some sort of vocational training, primarily in trades like construction, carpentry and joinery, and driving. Such programs were generally paid for by the youth themselves or their family. Vocation training programs were paid for by an NGO in eight percent of all cases (about 1.5 percent of all youth over 16).

More education is associated with higher earnings and less risky employment

As discussed in the following chapter, youth draw on accumulated capital, skills, and social relations in order to ascend an occupational ladder from low skill, low capital activities such as firewood collection to higher skill and capital-intensive occupations like bicycle repairs and construction. Formal and non-formal education is crucially important in ascending this ladder.

In helping youth ascend the occupational ladder, education serves an important protective factor. Activities low on the ladder, such as hunting, firewood collection and charcoal burning, require moving and working in the bush where youth are at greater risk of abduction by the LRA or attack by the UPDF. Moving up the ladder thus reduces vulnerability.

Education is also associated with higher earnings, asset wealth, and nutrition. In our sample, an additional year of education is associated with a 5% increase in daily wages earned. Those youth with vocational training are more than twice as likely to be involved in higher skilled activities, and exhibit 36% greater wages on average.

Note that we must be cautious in interpreting these education effects as causal. To the extent that more intelligent or entrepreneurial youth were more likely to go to school and earn higher wages, the wage premium for formal and non-formal education may represent their inherent abilities rather than the impact of education in the average youth. Education undoubtedly has a direct and positive impact on vulnerability and economic success; it is simply that the above correlations are likely to overstate this impact. By controlling for other personal and household characteristics in generating our estimates, this bias is reduced, but not eliminated.¹⁴

Yet vocational training is not a cure-all

While those with vocational training are doing relatively well economically, it is not necessarily the case that an expansion of these programs will lead to more meaningful livelihoods to youth. Rather, the association between economic success and vocational training may be spurious—trained youth may be doing well not because of their training, but because they were more talented and entrepreneurial in the first place. A more rigorous evaluation of programs will be required to assess whether vocational training has any positive impact at all.

On the surface, they appear to be successful. Those with vocational training exhibit 36% higher daily gross earnings, and are 4 times as likely to be engaged in high-skill work instead of low-skill (and often risky) work. As they are no more likely to be working than those without training, training seems to be associated with higher quality employment rather than more of it. Yet such programs are hardly a panacea. First, vocational training seems to be unrelated to the probability of finding a job, and nearly a third of those who have received training nevertheless failed to find any employment in the past four weeks (a pattern that does not seem related to the length or type of training received.)¹⁵ Thus vocational training affects the quality of work but not the quantity.

¹⁴ The estimates of the relationship between education and labour market success in this chapter and the following come from multivariate regressions of the economic outcome on education, an indicator for whether or not the individual is currently in school, a measure of pre-war economic status, and measures of current social support, family connectedness, health, orphan status, and indicators for age and location.

¹⁵ Allen and Schomerus (2006) have made the same observation.

Second, as mentioned above, it is quite possibly the more talented and wealthy individuals who are more likely both to obtain training and to perform better in the labour market. To the extent that these other measures of wealth and ability go unmeasured, the correlation between labour market performance and training will

Table 3: Labour market success of youth with vocational training, by source of funding

| | <u>Self-funded</u> | <u>NGO-funded</u> |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| Probability employed in past month | 87% | 44% |
| Days employed in past month | 11.2 | 10.3 |
| Average daily earnings (Ush) | 4725 | 1597 |

Self-funded includes funding from relatives. Youth currently in school or training excluded from the analysis.

overstate the actual causal impact of training programs on economic success. Before controlling for pre-war wealth, orphan status, education and social support, training was actually associated with 50% higher wages. Adding these other measures diminished the “impact” of training on labour market success by a third. Were we also able to measure a youth’s ability, drive, and resources more accurately, the correlation would undoubtedly fall further.

Some support for this point of view comes from a comparison of outcomes of self-funded versus NGO-funded training programs in Table 4. Self-funded youth were twice as likely to be employed and earned three times the wages of an NGO-funded youth. On average, NGO-funded youth perform no differently, in economic terms, than youth without training.

The appropriate conclusion to draw is *not* that NGO training is ineffective. After all, to the extent that NGOs are offering training programs to the most underprivileged youth (which may or may not be the case), bringing the youth to a point where they are economically on par with their peers might be considered a success. Rather, the conclusion to draw is that we don’t know whether, when and why vocational programs assist youth.

The concern is not an academic one. In an informal assessment of a tailoring program offered to young women from the camps, one NGO came to the conclusion that the girls that passed through the program were doing *worse* than those that did not. Those that passed through the program found little demand for their skills in their home camps. Meanwhile, those that did not pass through the program found ways to return to formal education.

That training programs could actually harm participants brings a moral imperative to the need for a study of training’s impacts. Chapters 8 and 9 discuss one possible approach to answering this important question.

III. Economic Status and Livelihoods

The economic options open to youth in and out of the camps are, in a word, abysmal. Our interviews and survey data shed light on the nature of livelihoods, the functioning of the local labour market, and the sources of success and failure. The principal findings discussed in this chapter include the following:

- Few youth have access to land, and the principal form of economic activity are *leje leje*, essentially casual labour and small projects;

Table 4: Quick statistics on livelihoods

| | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Percent of youth out of school that found any employment in the past seven days | 38 |
| Percent of youth out of school that found any employment in the past four weeks | 69 |
| Median number of days in the month these youth worked | 7 |
| Their median earnings for the month | 9,000 Ush (\$4.95) |
| Their median daily wage | 1,000 Ush (\$0.55) |
| Percentage of youth that have access to any land for farming | 27 |
| The fraction that rent or borrow this land | 2/3 |

- Such work is generally sporadic and unprofitable, and at the median youth have just 7 days of work per month at wages of 55 cents per day;
 - The local labour market can be best characterized as an occupational ladder increasing in the skills and capital required;
 - Activities higher on the ladder appear to raise earnings more because of higher employment (rather than higher wages);
 - Activities low on the ladder are not only irregular and poorly paid, but also more risky;
 - Military service, while a risky activity, can nevertheless be a reasonable (if unfortunate) protective and economic strategy for many young males;
 - Labour market success is closely associated with higher levels of education and vocational training, while labour market failure is associated with poor health and injuries, and poor family relations;
- In terms of root causes of labour market failure, abduction and orphaning have strong predictive power, while parent’s wealth and education are surprisingly of little or no significance; and
 - In spite of the labour market challenges outlined herein, few youth leave the region to look for work—primarily, it seems, because of few contacts, fewer resources, no language skills, and an emotional tie to their homes rather than (as sometimes argued) because of active discrimination against the Acholi outside of the north.

Median employment for youth is 7 days of work each month, at wages lower than 55 cents a day

By any measure, employment and earnings among youth are abysmally low. The distributions of daily wages, total monthly earnings, and days employment can be seen in Figures 17 to 19. A third of the youth in our sample had not found a single day of work in the past four weeks. Some of these youth are in school, of course, and so may have little intention or opportunity to work. Even so, just 83 percent of youth out of school found any work in the past 4 weeks, and only 47 percent had worked in the seven days prior to being interviewed.

When work is found, remuneration is typically very low. Median daily cash earnings¹⁶ are 1,000 Ush, or about \$0.55. Even this figure overstates the income earned, since it represents gross earnings— income ignoring expenses incurred in its generation. Nearly half of those earning more than 5000 Ush per day of work did so by producing bricks or charcoal—activities which require a fair amount of cash for inputs. Thus take-home pay is even poorer than this terribly small amount. Unfortunately, we do not have a more reliable estimate of take-home pay as net income was not measured by the survey.

The absence of anything to do is the most common complaint of youth. According to one young man we interviewed:

[The] disheartening thing is that as a person, it is really absurd for one to stay for say a month without holding any kind of cash – not even five hundred shillings [approximately twenty-five cents] as money to spend...

Or from a 25-year old man in Acholibur:

Each day for me is categorized with problems because when I wake up in the morning, I just sit around and do nothing until evening and eventually bed time. There is even no piece of land here in the camp where I can do any little cultivation and the lack of any form of activity to engage in so as to earn some little money escalates my problems more.

Figure 15: Average daily gross earnings of working young men

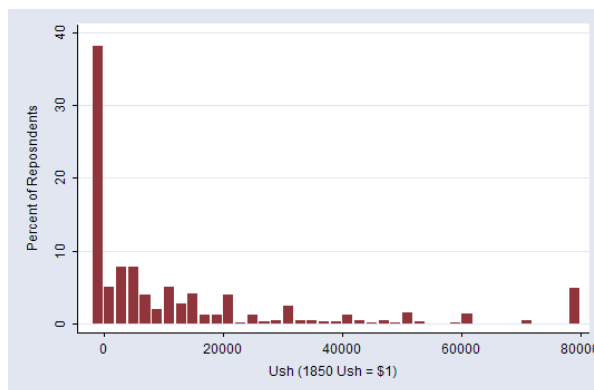


Figure 16: Monthly gross earnings

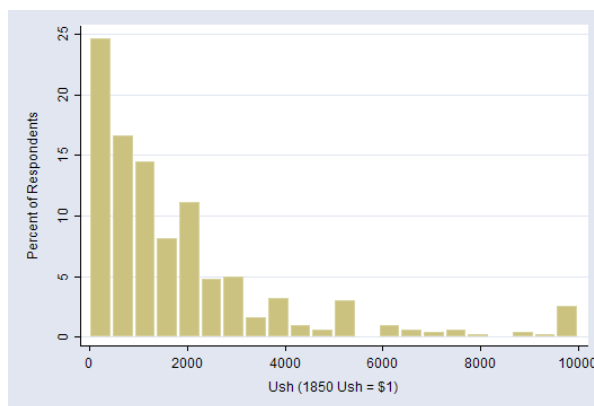
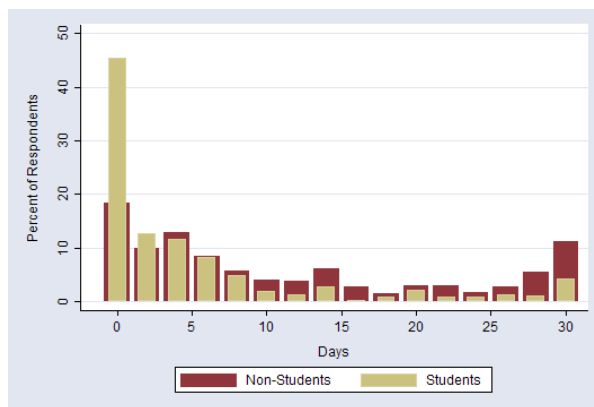


Figure 17: Number of days worked in the previous four weeks



¹⁶ The wage where half are above and half are below – superior to an average measure in this instance, since an average is skewed upwards by a handful of high wage earners.

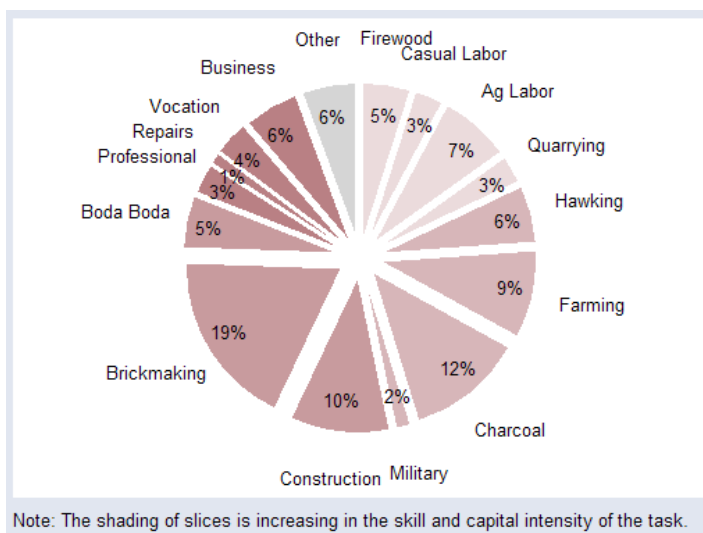
Few youth have access to land, and so livelihoods are made through leje leje, or “small jobs”

Just 27 percent of youth say that they have access to any land for cultivation of crops, and for most of these the amount is quite small—typically just one or two acres. In two-thirds of the cases, this land is borrowed or rented. Those who access land do so primarily through kin networks and neighbours. Others, such as a 15-year old boy interviewed in Orom, obtain land from the local authorities:

When we came to this place, we asked for a small piece of land beyond the sub-county headquarters where we are doing some cultivation... Among the things we cultivated was millet, which has been destroyed by sunshine.

With so little land available for rent or lending, however, agricultural activity is quite modest. Figure 20 lists the primary economic occupation engaged in by youth in the four weeks prior to being interviewed. Omitted are the twenty percent of youth with no employment in the period. From the figure we see that just 9 percent of youth worked on their own land in the four weeks prior to being interviewed, while another 7 percent performed agricultural labour on another’s behalf.

Figure 18: Main occupation reported in the past four weeks (by skill and capital intensity)



Rather, the majority of work performed is in the form of *leje leje*, loosely translated as “small, small jobs”. Two thirds of the youth were primarily engaged in one of these activities—collecting firewood, carrying loads and other causal labour, quarrying, hawking and vending, construction, riding a *boda boda* (bicycle taxi), or making bricks and charcoal.

Brick-making, charcoal-making, and construction activities are the most commonly cited occupations. However, with diminished demand due to displacement and impoverishment, and rising supply as more youth turn to these activities for cash, the impact on prices is predictable. According to the same 15-year old youth from Orom:

We also burnt charcoal, but the price of that has gone down – a sack is now at three thousand shillings.

The more youth who enter these oversupplied markets, the more we are likely to see rewards fall.

Very little of the employment gap is filled by services and what might be termed very basic proto-industrialization. Just fifteen percent of occupations represent more or less regular (and usually high-skilled) employment—operating a repair shop or small business (such as a kiosk), a vocation (including carpentry, tailoring, and driving), or a profession (a teacher, public employee, or health worker).

These are important lessons for the government and international agencies to keep in mind in the event of a scaling-up of vocational training or business development programs. The supply of skills is undoubtedly a constraining factor, but logically, removing this constraint through added schooling and grants can only take us so far. It is far from clear how many more kiosks, drivers, tailors, and brick-makers the economy can bear, but the answer is unlikely to be “thousands”. In the absence of any widespread productive activity—historically the role of agriculture—demand for these goods and services is unlikely to keep up with an enlarged supply.

Our larger conclusion is this: it is difficult to imagine a solution to the problems of Acholi youth that is not economic at least in part, and it is impossible to imagine an economic solution that does not involve returning the majority of youth to the land.

Labour markets in the north are best characterized as an occupational ladder increasing in skill and capital requirements

Limited as they are, it is worth understanding the functioning of local labour markets more systematically. In the data and the interviews, we found that youth follow strikingly similar patterns of occupational choice and advancement over time and place. To obtain regular employment and a reasonable income, youth first begin performing unskilled activities requiring little start-up cash or inputs, and ascend the occupational ladder over time as physical and human capital is accumulated. An interview with a young man with a small repair shop is emblematic of this process:

Q. How did you begin your business?

A. When I was still at home [not in displaced camp], I was burning charcoal but when people came to the camps, I started riding a boda boda [bicycle taxi]... I used to ride as a boda boda on all the roads but when the rebels started killing boda boda cyclists along the way. I left this job and then started studying. ... [Later,] the money that I saved helped me to start this business.

Of the activities undertaken by youth, each have varying requirements in terms of skill and inputs. In Figure 20 above, occupations are shaded in terms of their skill and capital intensity. Lightly shaded activities such as firewood collection or agricultural labour require no capital (i.e. cash or raw materials) and few skills (even literacy). Farming, charcoal-burning, and hawking require some small working capital to purchase inputs, and are more darkly shaded. More capital-intensive still are brick-making and becoming a *boda boda*, while construction requires both capital and skills.¹⁷

The most darkly shaded activities are the professions, vocations, and small businesses, each of which require literacy, skills, and capital (for paying for education, or working capital). As we saw in the previous section, earned income from economic activities is invested in schooling, or human capital, as well as in physical capital. This is particularly true of the twenty percent of youth who have pursued vocational training, and it is the aspiration of many who have not. One boy, asked about his future plans, replied:

If I could study up to Senior 2 then I would like to go to driving school, if I get anyone to pay school fees.

Crop cultivation would historically have been a youth's primary means of earning the cash required for accumulating human and physical capital. Displacement has drastically diminished this capacity. From another of our respondents:

Maybe if I grew some small crops, perhaps I would get some money to start a small business. But this is not possible.

Excerpts from a final interview in Box 6 illustrate these and several other points. First, as the conversation with his elder makes clear, without access to land for cultivation, youth in the camps are "lower on the ladder" than their forefathers. Second, in struggling to find alternatives, some have turned to military service. Military service as a protective and economic strategy is discussed further below.

¹⁷ On brick-making, for instance, one youth complained, "If you choose to lay bricks on that piece of land you have been given, then you will be asked to hire [the land] of which a person like myself can't get fifteen thousand shillings (15,000/=) to hire or rent this land where I can lay the bricks."

Finally, abduction not only robbed this youth of time and freedom, it also destroyed his capital and put him back on the occupational ladder at a lower rung. This aspect of abduction—as a barrier to accumulation—will be explored in more detail below.

Activities higher on the ladder raise earnings firstly because of higher employment and secondly because of higher wages.

Brick-making, charcoal-making, and construction activities are the most commonly cited occupations, but may only occupy a few days in a month. The most regular employment is offered by careers in the military and activities that are skill or capital intensive, such as a vocation, an NGO job, or running a shop or business. As seen in Figure 21, youth engaged in the military or high skill work worked roughly twice as many days as those in unskilled, low skill, and medium skill activities.

With only data on gross income (and not the cost of inputs for activities such as farming or charcoal and brick-making) it is difficult to make wage comparisons across occupations. But daily gross earnings are remarkably similar across skill categories. Thus the higher mean and median earnings among youth engaged in

Box 5: Military service as an economic strategy

Interview with a 25-year old man in Pader

Q: Can you tell us how your life is in the army?

When I was abducted by the rebels in 2003, I stayed in the bush for 6 months and when I returned, life was very hard at home. Since everybody is in the camps, there is really nothing much to do.

You know, when I was abducted, I was a boda-boda (bicycle taxi) but the rebels took my bicycle so I couldn't continue with my work. So I decided to join the army but its not helping me because there is no money. Army work is also very hard and the lack of money in it just makes it harder. Sometimes a person is forced to do certain things like beating people whether the person is a soldier or not which is hard for me.

Q: When you quit the army, what would you like to do?

I think I should start up something that will generate some money to make life easy. For example, construction work or a small business or go to a driving school but I see as if all will be difficult because there is no money.

Q: Do you still feel like going back to *boda boda* cycling?

Not if there is any other thing to do. I am thinking of doing business instead. When I ask my friend about it, he advises me to start a business because though he is a boda boda cyclist, he also runs a small business.

Q: Do you think the elders understand what the youth are going through?

A. They do understand because the old man I always go to tells me how he thinks that life now is very different from how it was in those days.

I remember one day he asked me, "Have you been paid yet?" I remember I told him we had not yet been paid. Then he told me that youth my age those days would not serve in the army. And youth my age used to grow lots of crops and each youth would have bags of sesame packed to the wall and what we are doing now does not match with what the youth are doing now. So I told him that we are doing this because there is nothing else to do.

high-skill occupations and the military (in Figure 22) seems to be driven largely by a higher quantity of work rather than higher remuneration per day employed.

Activities low on the ladder are not only irregular and poorly paid, but also more risky

Another striking pattern we observe is that activities low on the occupational ladder are often riskier for the youth involved. When the mother of one respondent was asked about the major challenges facing youth, she replied:

Lack of money. This is the same reason why the youths go hunting and get problems. Others have to go as far as ten miles to get wood for charcoal. The youths who like digging are faced with land problems.

Risky occupations include making charcoal (12 percent of youth), collecting firewood (5 percent), hunting¹⁸, and cultivating land far from the camp. Youth, especially the formerly abducted, are conscious of these risks and often choose to stay idle rather than venture into the bush:

Q. How is every day like for you? What do you do from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed?

A. Nothing. I just sit because there are many rebels in this area. It's therefore very risky for us who have just returned from captivity to move up to the bush and do work like chopping wood, collecting firewood and burning charcoal.

Others take what meagre precautions they can:

Q: How long do you normally take when you go out to get these logs?

The time we take normally varies. This is because the places we get these logs are quite far and before we set off from the camp, we have to wait until the patrol soldiers are deployed on different routes to monitor the security situation and after we get to these places, we don't just go cutting the logs. We do that consciously minding of the situation to avoid being intercepted by the rebels. We always leave the camp after 10am.

Figure 19: Days worked in past 4 weeks (by skill and capital intensity of main job)

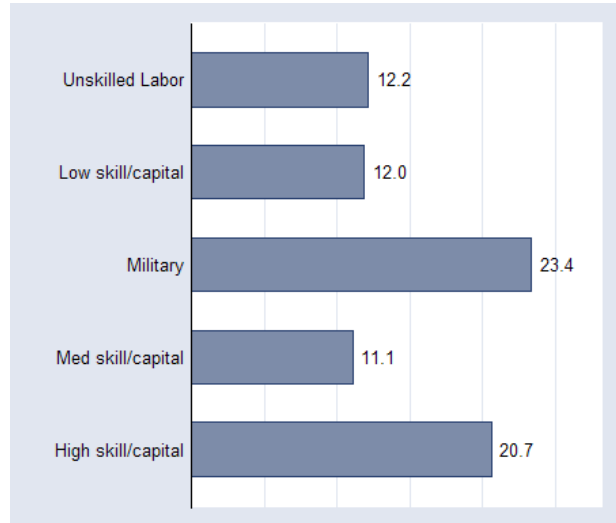
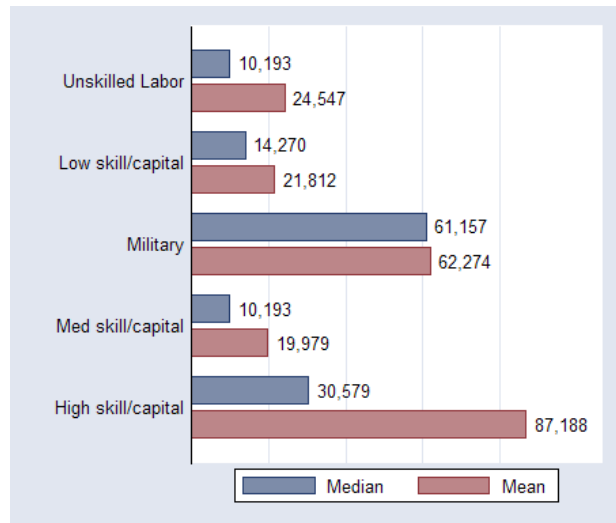


Figure 20: Gross earnings in the past 4 weeks (by skill and capital intensity of main job)



¹⁸ Unfortunately, hunting was not one of the occupations specifically indicated in the survey.

Military service is both a protective strategy and an economic strategy

In all, 7.5 percent of the youth interviewed in the survey (44 in total) is currently or at one time was part of the Ugandan military. Ninety percent of these recruits were part of the militia, or LDU. All but three joined voluntarily. Forcible recruitment by the UPDF will be discussed in the chapter on war violence and abduction.

As evidenced by Figures 21 and 22 above, military work, while poorly (and infrequently) paid, offers substantially higher earnings and employment than most jobs available to youth. As we saw in the interview excerpts earlier, military service may be the only full-time employment option for youth with skills or capital. From another youth in the LDU:

I had joined the army with the expectation of earning money to help my other brothers as well as my grandmother. We were also told that we would be paid 60,000 shillings per month but the money is not yet seen. It was only last month when we were given 40,000 shillings each.

Joining the military seems to be a common response to social dislocation. One young man in our sample returned from the bush only to encounter fear and suspicion from his neighbours:

Q. What were you feeling when people were afraid of you?

A. I kept on asking myself, "now what are these people thinking?" Because they understood I was taken forcefully by the rebels to the bush, when I was here with them [I thought], "what are they trying to tell me, and why are they putting me off their company? What should I do to drive away the fear from them? Should I join the [government] army?"

This thought came because at that moment, there were some forms that were for people who wanted to join the army. I rejected the forms because I wanted to see how people's reactions towards me would change and if they continued the same way, then I would finally join the army.¹⁹

Youth with poor family relations are especially likely to join the military. Respondents who reported low levels of comfort or quarrels with their family were more than twice as likely to have been in the military. Below we will also see that poor family relations are one of the strongest correlates of low incomes and employment. In an economy and society where kin relations are so important to one's livelihood and social standing, joining the military may be the best option for those with troubles at home.

Even so, when our respondents were asked why they joined the military, economic and family reasons took second place to insecurity and protection from rebels. According to one LDU member:

Even if there is no money in the LDU, I think I am protecting people. I am preventing the rebels from coming to do havoc in the camps.

From another recruit:

Q. So did you join the army to take revenge [for the murder of an aunt by the LRA]?

Table 5: Quick statistics on military recruitment

| | |
|--|------|
| Percentage of adult youth that had ever been part of the UPDF or LDU | 7 |
| Ratio of participation in the UPDF to the LDU | 1:06 |
| Of the 44 youth ever in the military, the number that report they were forced to join against their will | 3 |
| In reasons for joining the military, ranking of "Insecurity" and "Protection from rebels" | 1 |
| Ranking of "To earn money" or "Take care of myself" | 2 |

¹⁹ Eventually his neighbours grew less afraid, and he decided against joining.

A. No. I went with the motive of protecting the people because I wouldn't know who exactly killed my aunt from amongst the rebels. Besides, there are some people who could have been abducted after my aunt's death so I couldn't have joined the army to revenge my aunt's death.

Joining the military for many is a protective strategy, one that is taken to resolve social dislocation, fear of the community, and economic hardship.

Former abductees in our sample were not significantly more likely to have joined the military.

Popular opinion in northern Uganda holds that the formerly abducted are more likely to be recruited by the Ugandan army into military service. On the one hand, with their knowledge of the rebels and the bush, they are said to be more able fighters of the LRA. To the extent that returnees have fewer economic opportunities, military service may also be a more common livelihood strategy. Finally, some returnees are said to nurse grudges against the LRA. For instance, according to one respondent's uncle:

You know he joined the army when he returned. He said he was annoyed that the rebels could treat him as if he is not a man.

It therefore comes as a surprise that there is little evidence in our sample that the formerly abducted were more likely to have joined the UPDF and LDU. Both the formerly abducted and non-abducted appear equally likely (or, rather, unlikely) to have ever joined the armed forces.

The correlates of labour market success: family, education, and health

Regression analysis of the survey results reveals that low earnings and employment are associated with low education, poor health and injuries, and poor family relations.²⁰ Note that all of these associations should be regarded as correlations, and not as causal relationships.

Education. As explained in the previous chapter, while higher education is not associated with a higher probability of employment, it is strongly associated with higher earnings, suggesting that it enables youth to obtain higher productivity (and thus more highly paid) work. Indeed, the illiterate and those with low education are, on average, lowest on the occupational ladder.

The relationship between education and labour market success may also be an indicator of ability and individual industriousness, of course, so the correlation must be interpreted with caution. That education favours wages and not employment, however, suggests that the productivity channel may be dominant.

Family relations. Low family connectedness is also one of the strongest and most robust predictors of poor labour market success. Roughly a third of the sample report some discord or difficulties within their family. For a fifth, family connectedness is especially poor. Among these youth, wages and employment are approximately 40 percent lower.

The relationship between family connectedness and labour market success probably works in two directions. On the one hand, youth in Acholi society, like many African cultures, are expected to contribute to the household, support younger siblings and cousins through school, and in general reciprocate for the investments and sacrifices made by the kin group to educate and train the youth. A youth that cannot fulfil these obligations may possess less status in the home, and have more difficulties than others. This is seen in an interview with one young man:

²⁰ The following results come from a regression of labor market outcomes on individual and household traits.

The relationship among us who stay in the household is not really good. This is because... I don't do anything to earn a living. On the days that I manage to bring something home, when my friends might have given me some little money, that day everyone is happy and they really treat you well. But because friends don't give me money every day, the rest of the days you are treated as a nobody. For example, when you happen to go somewhere before taking lunch, you should eventually forget of having lunch because no one keeps food for you.

On the other hand, economic success is undoubtedly driven by strong family support as well. As noted in the previous chapter, when parents cannot pay for schooling, extended family networks take responsibility for youth. For instance, from one youth we interviewed:

Q. Some youths seem to be doing quite well while others are not. What makes the difference?

A. The youth who are coping well have relatives in town who are giving them some assistance. For example they help with school fees. Others had accumulated some money from sale of produce that has helped them start a small-scale business. Others grow vegetables in the swamps during the dry season.

Of the youth that attended vocational school, families paid the fees in half of the cases. Kin can also provide funds for enterprises and training.

Orphans. Those who have lost a father have 25 percent lower daily gross earnings on average. The impact appears to be strongest on those that have lost their father in the past few years, suggesting that after a time orphans may find alternative sources of financial support for schooling and business. Surprisingly, however, those youth that have lost their mother have 20 percent *higher* gross wages on average.

Health. As discussed in the following chapter, roughly one in five youth report serious health difficulties, and in half these cases the injury or illness seriously inhibits their ability to work.

According to one youth:

Q: What is your day usually like for you? What do you do from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed?

A. Nothing. I just sit and the day passes. I don't do any kind of work because of my poor health. I have developed a heart disease and this does not give me any opportunity to do anything since I experience serious pain if I try to do any kind of activity. Secondly, I have a problem with my leg. I stepped on a poisonous herb and it has affected my leg such that I can't even walk properly. I just limp. This has taken some months now. I was admitted in the hospital for two months but the pain is still there and so it doesn't give me time to perform any task.

In an environment where employment options are already so limited, injuries and illnesses even further restrict youth to occupations requiring little physical labour:

What I can do is run a business because if it's something like riding a bicycle as a boda boda, I can't manage due to my poor health of having back pain.

Seriously injured youth are twice as likely not to be employed, and when working they are more likely to be engaged in activities lower on the occupational ladder. Their wages are 20 percent lower on average. It should be noted, however, that these averages hide a great deal of variation, and so they are estimated with relatively poor statistical precision.²¹ Thus the actual relationship between injuries and labour market success could differ from these estimates in the population.

²¹ Generally they are statistically significant at the 80 or 85 percent level.

One third of the injuries reported were caused by the LRA. Bullet wounds, shrapnel, and back and chest pain (from beatings and carrying heavy loads) are most commonly reported. From a 25-year old man abducted for 10 years:

There is nothing I will be doing because I have no energy. It would be easy to tell if I had energy because I would be able to dig, sell the produce and get money but now there is no way. And even if the bullets are removed, you must know that bullets are very powerful for example, the one in my leg broke a bone as well as the one in my arm.

Other determinants of labour market success. Although patterns in employment and earnings can be discerned, in fact the majority of variation in labour market success is not explained by traits we can measure. In part this is due to idiosyncratic factors, and individual experiences and events in the month preceding the interview. Success can also be traced to factors difficult to measure and capture in a survey. One that emerged in the interviews was individual drive and resilience. For example, speaking to one long-term abductee:

Q: Do you have relatives or parents who helped you to start this business?

I started this business on my own with the money that I had worked and saved.

Q: You seem to be fairly successful so what do you think makes the difference between you and other youth who are not doing well?

When I came back, I thought of the time I had wasted. I thought of what I was doing before like making charcoal. I had left my wife when she was pregnant although I didn't know it at the time. So, when I came back, I wanted to work for the lost time...

I thought to myself, 'before I was able to do things, so why can't I do it now?' I don't want things for free. I want to work for them.

Formerly abducted youth are engaged in less skilled work and have lower earnings than the non-abducted, especially those taken as young adults

Q. Do you see any difference between the formerly abducted youth and those who have not been abducted?

A. There is a small difference between the two groups, in that the youth who have not been abducted are engaged in different activities, like business and vocational work like carpentry. They had the opportunity to acquire these different skills while those youth who were abducted were away in captivity. They also have more necessities than the abducted youth, like many clothes to wear—unlike a formerly abducted youth, who might have only one pair that he puts on every day and hardly finds time to wash.

- Interview with a camp elder

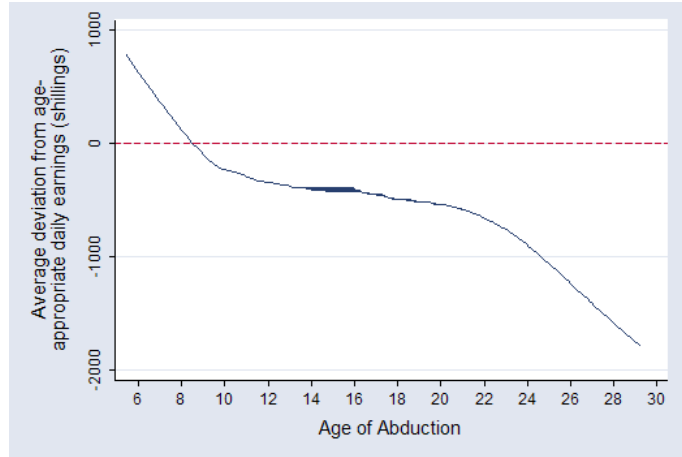
Abduction, by taking time out of school and the workforce, and inflicting in some cases serious injuries and trauma, appears to have long-term impacts on labour market performance. For those who are working, abduction would seem to destroy their accumulated capital, plucking youth off the occupational ladder at one rung, and put them on another lower down. By limiting their ability to finish school or obtain vocational training, it also limits how far up the ladder they can climb.

Therefore, while the formerly abducted are no less likely to be working than the non-abducted, the odds that they are engaged in high- rather than low-capital and skill work is about half that of the non-abducted. Their wages and monthly earnings suffer accordingly. The abducted have on average 24% lower daily earnings.

Strangely, the wage and earnings gap does not seem to increase with the length of abduction. This may be a measurement issue—a consequence of the volatility of earnings (and the noisiness of our measure), making it difficult to estimate effects precisely.

Where earnings do vary is over age of abduction. Figure 23 charts the earnings gap by age of first abduction. The horizontal axis charts the age of first abduction, from 5 to 29, while the vertical axis charts the deviation from “expected daily earnings”. Here “expected daily earnings” is the average level of daily earnings for *non-abducted* youth in the same age group and sub-county. The dotted horizontal line at zero represents this benchmark.

Figure 21: Impact of abduction on gross earnings, by age of first abduction



The earnings gap between the abducted and non-abducted seems to be nonexistent (and possibly even positive) for those abducted at a very young age. The gap turns negative for adolescents, increasing slightly with age but roughly 500 shillings (half of the median earnings) over ages 12 to 20. The gap widens further, however, after the age of 20. There are fewer individuals and abductees at this interval, so the statistical significance of this gap diminishes as age rises. Still, the decline is highly suggestive.

One reason we might observe this fact is the relatively higher rates of return to schooling among those abducted at earlier ages, which we observed in the previous chapter. Other possible reasons include the following: that children are less likely to be held accountable for their participation in the armed group; that children have less to lose by abduction and looting since they have accumulated less physical capital (i.e. they have less distance to fall on the occupational ladder); or that the psychological resilience of children is greater than that of young adults.

Note, however, that as the analysis in this chapter makes clear, the formerly abducted are far from the only youth suffering from low economic activity and few opportunities. As emphasized in Chapters 8 and 9, we feel it would be a mistake to target this group too brazenly or specifically.

IV. Health

Physical illness and injury seriously hinder the social and economic well-being of a tenth of youth, adding to their vulnerability and deprivation. This chapter highlights the following findings:

- Nearly a sixth of youth suffer from a serious injury or illness that inhibits their ability to work and attend school;
- Nearly a third of these injuries were inflicted by the LRA;
- Two percent of youth still have extremely serious war wounds, suggesting that there are thousands of returnees in urgent need of treatment;
- Nutrition is poor, with two-fifths of youth eating just once per day; and
- Awareness of reproductive health issues is good and condom usage is high.

More than a tenth of youth have an injury or illness that inhibits their ability to work

Thirteen percent of youth in our sample possessed an injury that impeded them from earning a living. For five percent, the injury is sufficiently significant that it would prevent them from working the land, the primary form of work in peacetime.

The Survey focused on measuring physical health in a very functional way—youth were asked whether they had any difficulty performing simple daily tasks, such as walking for three miles, carrying a heavy water jug, digging in the fields, and bending over and kneeling easily. A “serious injury” in this approach is thus one that significantly impedes a youth from doing the physical labour needed for most employment in the region.²²

Table 6: Quick health statistics

| | |
|---|------|
| Percentage of youth reporting a serious injury | 13 |
| Percent of ill and injured youth that are formerly abducted | 56 |
| Portion of youth that can till the land with great difficulty or not at all | 1/20 |
| Average number of days of work or school missed in the past 4 weeks among the seriously injured | 6.5 |
| Average days missed by the uninjured | 1.4 |
| Probability an injury was inflicted by the LRA | 30% |

²² A serious injury was defined in this case as an inability to perform any of the daily tasks. This measure coincides very closely with that of an index created from factor analysis of all health responses.

Box 6: Health and family life

Interview with a 20-year old man in Kitgum Town

Q: What is your day usually like for you? What do you do from the time you wake up to the time you go to bed?

A: Nothing. I just sit and the day passes. I don't do any kind of work because of my poor health. I have developed a heart disease and this does not give me any opportunity to do anything since I experience serious pain if I try to do any kind of activity.

Secondly, I have a problem with my leg. I stepped on a poisonous herb and it has affected my leg such that I can't even walk properly. I just limp. This has taken some months now. I was admitted in the hospital for two months but the pain is still there and so it doesn't give me time to perform any task.

Q: If we think back to before you had these health problems, what did you used to do each day?

A: My heart problem has affected me three years now and the leg, three months, and within this period, I have not been able to do a thing. But before I went for medical examination and before the doctor told me of my health problem, I used to do things like sweeping the compound, fetching water and even digging in the garden, although I could not take long. I could spend [only] two hours in the garden because I had already started feeling pain in the chest.

Q: Now with whom are you staying and how do you find the life?

A: In this household, I am living with my stepmother's mother-in-law with whom I have lived for three years now. I started living with her since 2002 when I returned from the bush. The relationship among us who stay in the household is not really good. This is because life in the town needs when you are working where you can earn some money and contribute something for the family welfare and because

I don't do anything to earn a living, on the days that I manage to bring something home when my friends might have given me some little money, that day everyone is happy and they really treat you well but because friends don't give me money everyday the rest of the days you are treated as a nobody. For example, when you happen to go somewhere before taking lunch, you should eventually forget of having lunch because no one keeps food for you. Therefore, if you want to eat, whether lunch gets ready at 3pm, you must sit home and wait, otherwise prepare to take a meal the next day.

Despite this kind of treatment, I have continued to stay here because I have nowhere to go.

The economic consequences of injuries are great. Injuries are associated with moderately lower wages and 6 percent lower levels of employment. Those with injuries also reported more absent days from work—6.5 compared to 1.4 among the uninjured.

Who are the injured? On average, more injuries are reported by those under 18-years-old than those above 18. The most significant predictor of a serious injury is having been formerly abducted. These youth are three times as likely to report a serious health problem as a non-abducted youth.

The injured are a third more likely to report difficulties in the relationship with their family. Box 3 recounts an interview with one young man experiencing chest and heart difficulties since he came back from the bush. As noted in the previous chapter, a youth's social status is tied to his ability to contribute economically to the household. By driving a wedge between youth and their kin, serious injuries increase deprivation, social dislocation, and vulnerability beyond the direct impact on physical comfort and well-being.

It is also worth noting that, while the young man's condition could be unrelated to his abduction, a large number of LRA returnees report the problem of severe "chest pain" (*cora rem*), an expression which encom-

passes torso and back pain as well. Back injuries from carrying heavy equipment and ammunition boxes were commonly reported by returnees. From one formerly abducted young man:

Physically, I am weakened due to carrying heavy luggage from the bush. This has led me to have serious chest and back ache. The pain is triggered more if I carry any luggage or perform a heavy task like digging everyday.

As discussed in Chapter 2, chest pain is also a common psychosomatic manifestation of emotional distress.

Nearly a third of injuries inflicted by the LRA

Of the injuries identified by youth, 28 percent were inflicted by the LRA. These are, moreover, disproportionately former abductees. The quote in the previous paragraph is illustrative of this fact.

War injuries not only create discomfort and inhibit labour market performance, but may also hinder social reintegration. In the opinion of a teacher in Pajule:

Also children who return with some marks from the rebels such as any form of deforming or disability take quite some time to adjust because they are teased and constantly reminded of their experience.

3 percent of youth still have serious war wounds, suggesting that there are thousands of returnees in urgent need of treatment

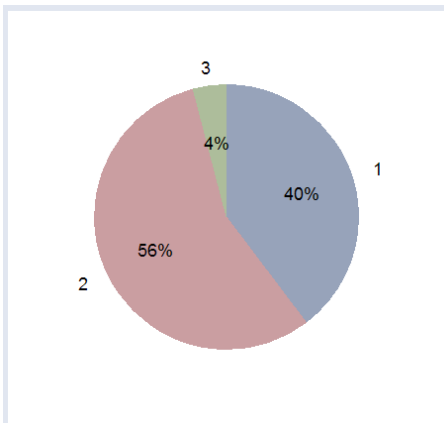
In all, 12 of the formerly abducted youth we interviewed had sufficiently serious war wounds that we referred them for medical treatment. 8 of these were for metal or shrapnel still in their body. The young men represented almost 2 percent of our abducted sample, a number that suggests there may be more than 1,000 formerly abducted youth in the north with war wounds requiring urgent attention.

I still have bomb splinters in my back (lifts his shirt to show bumps and scars). I entered a UPDF ambush. Some of the splinters have come out while others still remain. I was treated in the bush by the rebels after they raided a health centre.

Nutrition is poor, with two-fifths of youth eating just once per day

Income, as we saw in the previous chapter, is extremely low in the region (and in the camps especially), and most youth are dependent on food aid for survival. Even this food aid seems scarce. On average, youth report just 1.6 meals per day. In Figure 25 we see that 40% of youth reported eating one meal per day. Fifty-two percent of youth took no meat or fish in the last 2 weeks.

Figure 22: Number of meals typically taken in a day



Whose nutrition is worst? The asset poor and the illiterate are the least likely to eat well or often. Quarrels and difficulties with one's family are associated with eating less frequently than average. Being an orphan, however, does not seem to make a material difference to the number of meals, suggesting that broader family and social connections are more important than having immediate family.

Awareness of reproductive health issues is good and condom usage among young men is high

Q. What challenges do you think the youth are facing?

A. The first challenge is this disease (AIDS) and the second is this war that targets mostly the youth. This leaves me wondering whether there will be youths in the future because if I go to the village and move here in the camp, I find many youth suffering from the disease (HIV/AIDS).

- 28-year old man in Pader

HIV/AIDS was commonly listed as a chief fear and concern by the youth and community members with whom we spoke, an unsurprising result given that infection rates in the north are estimated (very) roughly at 12%.²³ How many of these young men are sexually active and thus at risk? Just 9 percent of unmarried boys under 18 say that they have had a sexual partner in the past 12 months. Of the unmarried men 18 years and above, 54 percent report that they are sexually active.

Fortunately, there appears to be a youth culture of HIV awareness and testing in northern Uganda. 83 percent of sexually active unmarried men in the sample say that they “usually use a condom” when they are with a woman. Of married men, relatively few use a condom with their wife. This fact is somewhat alarming, since roughly one half of men reported a sexual encounter with someone other than their wife.²⁴ Ninety-one percent of them, however, claim they usually use a condom with these other women.

Table 7: Quick statistics on reproductive health

| | |
|--|---------|
| Chance that a male aged 14 to 17 is sexually active | 1 in 10 |
| Percentage of men between 18 and 30 that are unmarried | 54 |
| Chance that an unmarried male is sexually active | 1 in 2 |
| Percent that agree that "wearing a condom will help protect you from HIV and AIDS" | 81 |
| Percent that know where to obtain condoms | 69 |
| Chance they own condoms right now | 1/3 |
| Percentage of sexually active unmarried men that "usually use a condom" | 83 |
| Percent of married men that use a condom with their wife | 22 |
| Minimum proportion of married men that say they sleep with women other than their wife | 1/2 |
| Chance that they "usually use a condom" with partners other than their wife | 9 in 10 |

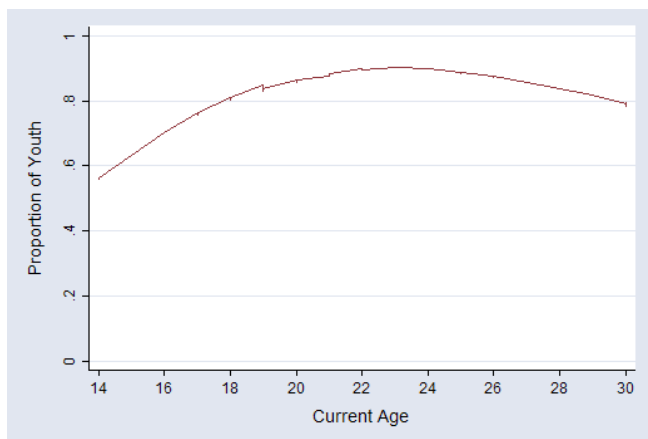
While condom use is high by most standards, still one third of youth do not know where to obtain condoms, and two thirds currently own none, suggesting that good intentions regarding condom use may exceed reality.

Also of concern, only 81 percent of the youth we interviewed agreed that “wearing a condom will help protect you from HIV and AIDS”. Greater wealth was mildly associated with greater HIV awareness. Illiterate youth were much more likely to disagree with the link between condoms and protection from HIV, as were youth currently in school (especially boys 14 and 15 years of age). We can see this in Figure 26. This last finding is a bit surprising given the supposed emphasis on HIV and AIDS education in schools.

²³ Allen (2005b) surveys the evidence on infection rates in the north, suggesting that while HIV infection rates are probably high relative to the rest of the country (11.9% in an antenatal sentinel surveillance at Lacor hospital in Gulu), rates are probably going down, and in fact are probably lowest among youth returning from abduction. Most abductees are denied sexual contact with women (unless they become commanders). Moreover, those women abducted to become “wives” are typically young girls too young to be sexually active (and therefore unlikely to be infected). Indeed, it is said that this is the principal reason for focusing on girls of this age.

²⁴ Rather than ask, “do you sleep with women other than your wife?” we approached the question less directly, asking, “When you are with a woman other than your wife, do you usually use a condom?” Roughly half answered the question, while half responded that they only sleep with their wife. We acknowledge that this may overestimate the number of men with multiple partners.

Figure 23: Proportion of youth that agree that condoms protect against HIV/AIDS, by age



While sources of information about reproductive health and HIV/AIDS were not explored by the survey or the interviews, more than once a youth volunteered the special role of elders in communicating information about appropriate attitudes and behaviours. From a 25-year old male in Acholibur:

At times when we sit among elders, we listen to what they discuss and take their advice that they give us on how the youth could lead a better and meaningful life of not indulging in behaviours that are seen as reckless ways of living like over-drinking, sexual relations, theft, which are all bad habits for the youth.

A number of youth and elders brought up HIV/AIDS as one of the major challenges facing youth, indicating that it is seen as a social problem and associating this with youth's increased sexual promiscuity (in comparison with the past).

VI. War Violence and Abduction

War violence and abduction are by far the chief concerns of the youth we interviewed. The previous chapters focused largely on the indirect effects of the war—the loss of land and livelihoods, the closing of schools, the crowded and unsanitary conditions of the camps, and so forth. This chapter focuses on the direct threat to the life and safety of youth.

A large-scale survey of households and youth offers a chance to see the broader patterns in war violence and abduction. Quite simply, the scale of violence is immense. The perpetrators are not always the LRA, and the victims not solely abductees. Nevertheless, the worst violence has indeed been experienced by the formerly abducted, largely from the LRA. Accordingly, abduction will be explored in some depth.

Specifically, this chapter makes the following main points:

- Violence experienced is tremendous. On average, the youth in our sample reported experiencing nine of the 31 traumatic events about which we asked. Only three youth experienced none of these traumatic events at all;
- The scale of abduction is also immense—more than a third of all male youth and a sixth of all females taken for at least a day. Two thirds of these abductees remained for at least two weeks.
- While men and women of all ages were taken, the LRA seems most focused on adolescent boys; 65% of abductions were children or adolescents;
- While the abducted experience the most violence overall, the violence experienced by the non-abducted is still tremendously grave;
- Youth not only face a significant risk of abduction into the LRA, but also forcible recruitment into the Ugandan army as well. Seven percent of the respondents ever in the military report say they were drafted against their will;
- LRA abduction is still the most significant risk facing a youth. The number of abductions and the average age of abduction has been rising, suggesting that abduction may have become as much a terror tactic as a means of finding recruits;
- Once with the LRA, not all abductees become fighters, and relatively few are forced to kill;
- Nevertheless, a large proportion of abductees say there was a time they felt like staying with the LRA, felt loyalty to Kony, or felt like an important member of the group. The proportions were greatest for young adolescents, which may be why they were targeted by the LRA.
- Of those that return, the vast majority of abducted males have escaped (rather than been rescued or released). Some report attempting to escape right away, but many report a moment of “awakening” when they suddenly decided staying was no longer worthwhile.

Table 1: Violent trauma ever witnessed and committed by abducted and non-abducted youth

| Violent experience | Ever Abducted | Never Abducted | Difference |
|---|----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| Someone took or destroyed your personal property | 81% | 79% | + 2 |
| You heard gun fire regularly | 78% | 74% | + 3 |
| Another family member or friend disappeared or was abducted | 69% | 65% | + 4 |
| You witnessed beatings or torture of other people | 89% | 58% | + 31 |
| Another family member or friend was murdered or died violently | 61% | 47% | + 14 |
| Someone shot bullets at you or your home | 52% | 41% | + 11 |
| A family member received a serious physical injury from combat or a landmine | 44% | 38% | + 6 |
| You witnessed a killing | 78% | 37% | + 41 |
| You witnessed an attack by the LRA or battle with UPDF | 76% | 33% | + 43 |
| A parent was murdered or died violently | 32% | 29% | + 2 |
| You witnessed the setting of houses on fire with people inside | 55% | 24% | + 32 |
| You received a severe beating to the body by someone | 60% | 22% | + 38 |
| You witnessed a massacre | 63% | 18% | + 44 |
| You were forced to carry heavy loads or do other forced labor | 87% | 13% | + 73 |
| A parent disappeared or was abducted | 19% | 13% | + 5 |
| Someone you know betrayed you and put you at risk of death or injury | 26% | 11% | + 15 |
| You received a serious physical injury in a battle or rebel attack | 44% | 9% | + 35 |
| You were tied up or locked up as a prisoner | 63% | 9% | + 54 |
| You were forced to steal or destroy someone else's property or possessions | 55% | 6% | + 49 |
| You witnessed the rape or sexual abuse of a woman | 21% | 3% | + 18 |
| Someone attacked you with a panga or other weapon | 26% | 2% | + 23 |
| You were forced to betray someone who was not a family member or friend | 10% | 2% | + 8 |
| You were forced to kill an opposing soldier in battle | 13% | 0% | + 13 |
| You were forced to step on or otherwise abuse the bodies of dead persons | 23% | 0% | + 22 |
| You were forced to have sex with a woman | 2% | 0% | + 2 |
| You were forced to beat or cut a civilian who was not a family member or friend | 20% | 0% | + 20 |
| You were forced to kill a civilian who was not a family member or friend | 18% | 0% | + 18 |
| You were forced to beat or cut someone who was a family member or friend | 12% | 0% | + 12 |
| You were forced to kill a family member or friend | 8% | 0% | + 8 |
| You were forced to betray a family member or friend | 7% | 0% | + 7 |

Measuring the magnitude and incidence of war violence

Youth in northern Uganda have experienced tremendous amounts of violence. In addition to measuring the incidence and length of abduction, our study attempted to measure direct acts of violence experienced (described in Box 8). Table 9 lists the percentage of youth responding that they have experienced one of these violent traumas, by abduction status. These traumatic events range in intensity from mild

Box 1: Measuring violence

Through our many semi-structured interviews, we constructed a scale of 31 events to represent the most common as well as the most brutal and traumatic acts of violence experienced, and also gave youth an opportunity to identify a violence event not mentioned in the list.

There are admittedly several limitations to the approach we use to measure violence, however. For instance, this scale does not distinguish between different levels of intensity of (or length of exposure to) certain types of events. Thus we cannot distinguish between someone who was shot at on a single occasion versus someone who was shot at weekly.

Furthermore, ours is obviously not a comprehensive list of the violence experienced by youth. Omitted are domestic abuse, verbal abuse, forcible displacement (experienced by essentially the entire population) and the immense structural violence associated with daily living in the camps. Some of these come out elsewhere in our analysis, however.

Finally, we did not ask who the perpetrator of the violence was. From our qualitative interviews, we feel comfortable saying that in most cases the violence was perpetrated by the LRA. Nevertheless, there were indeed cases where the violence (being beaten, property stolen, shot at, and so forth) was perpetrated by the UPDF, or a community member.

The measure does, however, give us an indication of incidence and magnitude of violence, one that will help us understand how the traumatic events of this war impact the well-being of youth.

(hearing gunfire regularly) to deeply traumatic (the violent death of a parent, or being forced to kill). On average a youth in our sample experienced 9 of these events, and only 3 respondents experienced none.

More than a third of male youth and a sixth of females have been abducted

Using the data from the household rosters, we are able to estimate abduction levels and ages not only for male youth, but also for men and women of all ages. A typical abduction might see all able-bodied members of a household captured and forced to carry looted goods some distance, perhaps for several days. After this time most of the family is released, often with only the adolescent boys detained.

The scale of abduction is simply immense. The survey data suggests that 44 percent of the sample (i.e. male youth living in these eight subcounties in 1996) have experienced an abduction of any length. The household survey also suggests that 15 percent of females have had an abduction experience. In Box 9 we consider the implications for the number of youth abducted overall in the course of the war.

Why are these numbers so high? First, there is the possibility that abductions are falsely over-reported. Box 10 discusses the specific risks and the measures taken, and argues that they are unlikely to be overstated by more than 5 percentage points.

Second, a large number of the reported abductions are extremely short in length. Figure 26 breaks down the distribution of abduction length for males and females separately. Nearly 11% of male abductions (and 26% of female abductions) are only one or two days in length. Moreover, 28% of male abductions are less than two weeks in length. This suggests that one third of male youth present in 1996 had an abduction of two weeks or longer.

Finally, the abduction rates include male youth who have not returned. Tragically, we estimate that 20% of male abductees never return. This amounts to 9% of the population of male youth alive in 1996.

With these considerations, the rates of abduction estimated appear more plausible.

The abducted experience by far the most violence

Returning for a moment to Table 9, what is most apparent (aside from the amazing scale and frequency of violence) is the disproportionate degree to which the formerly abducted have been witness to, and in some cases committed, acts of violence.

To those working with youth in the region (and of course the youth themselves), this scale of violence comes as no surprise. Yet until now we have had little sense of proportion. It is tragically common to hear a story of a former abductee being forced to kill a family member or friend to “bind them to the group”. Yet we have had little sense so far whether such experiences are the norm or the exception. Our survey suggests that the truth is somewhat closer to the latter. Far from all abductees become fighters, and only a minority of abductees is forced to actually commit violence. While even a small number is too high, the numbers are thankfully lower than some have feared.

Looking at the incidence of violent acts in Table 9, we see that the vast majority of abductees have had violence inflicted upon them – typically beatings, imprisonment, forced labour, and witnessing of killings. Tales of extreme abuse like the following, from a teenage boy abducted for 4 months, are common:

We were all told to pinch the ear of the dead man and skip over [the body]...Some of the rebels kill people and then lick their blood so that they don't get haunted by their ghosts and its true they don't get haunted...After training, pangas [machetes] were heated and used to make signs of the cross on each of our backs, and afterwards we were told that we were then soldiers of the LRA...

Figure 1: Abduction length for males aged 14-30

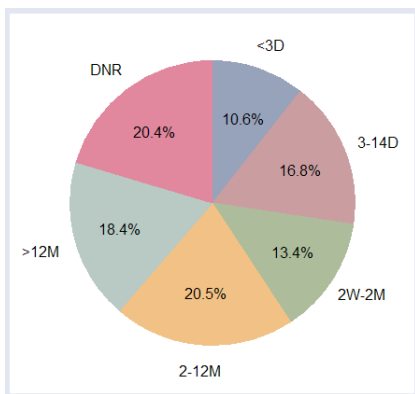
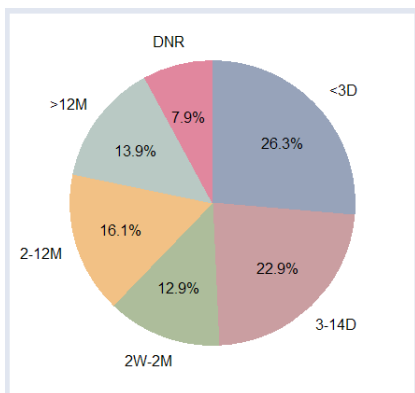


Figure 2: Abduction length for females aged 14-30



DNR= Did not return

A fifth to a quarter of youth, meanwhile, were forced to attack or kill strangers, both in and out of battle. Perhaps surprisingly, several long-term abductees for the most part avoided extreme violence. From Figure 28, we see that not all long-term abductees were given a gun. While most received a gun within two months, not all did (often because of scarcity) and not all were allowed to keep the gun (at least not right away).

The number of battles experienced is also lower than expected—3 on average for those gone 3 to 12 months, and 10 for those gone more than a year. Only a third of youth gone longer than a year report being forced to kill. From the mother of a 14-year old abducted for 1 year:

I asked him if he did anything wrong while he was in the bush but he insists that he did not do anything wrong. He was given to the LRA leader, carrying his gun, luggage and babysitting. He said he never killed. When the man [leader] was killed, he tried to run away and throw away the luggage, but he wasn't successful. Later in Palabek, when there was fighting, he was able to escape.

Since these experiences are self-reported, it is probable that the worst experiences are under-reported. It was our experience that most youth spoke freely of their time in the bush, however, and we are confident of the main message to emerge from the analysis: that the majority of abductees were witnesses and victims to violence, but not necessarily perpetrators.

Yet by any measure, non-abducted youth experience dramatic violence

War violence experienced by the abducted can receive more attention than violence experienced by other youth. Yet violence experienced by those never taken by the LRA is substantial by any measure. From Table 9, we see that three-quarters have been robbed, two-thirds have had a family member disappear, another two-thirds have witnessed a beating or torture, and a third had a parent die violently.

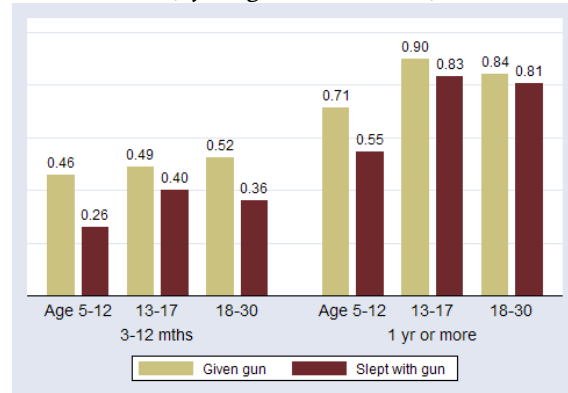
Even when rebel attacks do not harm a youth directly, the fear and restriction are still substantial. We interviewed a group of youth in Pader following four days of intense rebel activity around the camp. From one young man:

Before these last four days, life was at least fair because we could move or sneak home and harvest crops like cotton from the garden. But now there is no way of going home [to their village] to pick the crops from the garden. Yet these are the things from which we get some money to help ourselves. For example, we sell this cotton to get money for school fees, and also bricks. These activities have been cut off due to insecurity, as we can't now move to the village to do them.

From another young man:

...for the past four days we have not had a good life at all because we can not move [go] anywhere. You know, for us, if you don't move then you can't get anything to eat. Unless you move then you will not find something to eat. So for the past four days life was difficult because of the killings that were being done around the camp here.

Figure 3: Proportion of abductees ever given a gun (by length of abduction)



Box 2: Have we underestimated total abductions in the north?

Based on the number of children passing through reception centres, the UN has estimated that 20,000 to 25,000 children have been abducted. Counting the abducted is a difficult task, at best an exercise in educated guesswork. Survey evidence from SWAY, however, suggests a more accurate framing and estimate may be at least 66,000 youth between the ages of 14 and 30.

Without including those abducted for less than a week, survey responses from eight sub-counties suggests that only half of male returnees passed through a reception centre (see the discussion in the following chapter). Moreover, we estimate one fifth of males never returned. Finally, at least one fifth of abducted youth are not children but between 18 and 30 at the time of abduction. These figures suggest that for every 3 children in the official count, 10 youth were actually abducted. Such higher numbers seem consistent with the high proportion of youth ever reporting an abduction—a third of males and a sixth of females. These estimates are described in more detail throughout this chapter.

Note that these estimates are based on working backwards from UN figures using estimated proportions of youth not observed in the UN count. An alternate method would build up from the rates of abduction reported in the survey. If the lowest rate of abduction from the eight camps were applied to the population of young, rural, Acholi males, the estimate would likely exceed 66,000, suggesting this number is a floor. Note also that the emphasis on abducted youth (rather than children) is important, as young adults appear to be underserved by NGOs (see Chapters 8 and 9).

Finally, a young woman in the group describes the dangers of moving outside of the camp:

And then when you move any short distance then 'pap' then 'pap' [mimics gunfire]. So we now gather in the camp and this is what make the youth grow small.

Box 3: Is abduction over-reported?

A concern often raised is that not all those taken by the LRA are necessarily “abducted”. This is not so much a debate about the willingness of the individual to go with the LRA, but rather the recognition that many are released or escape immediately. A second concern is that youth who were never with the LRA at all falsely report abduction in the hopes that they will receive assistance from an NGO.

What constitutes abduction is an important question to some abductees. From one respondent:

The formerly abducted people I know who are here in Acholibur are about 75 [in number], but some people just claim they were. Some of them were just taken from the garden and asked to direct the rebels for a distance of about 6 miles and then told to go back home. Such a person also claims he/she was abducted but when he has not reached the core where we have reached. Such a person, when asked, cannot tell you the sufferings we have gone through.

The questionnaire deliberately tried to capture these short abductions, asking youth if they ever went with the LRA for any length of time. Youth were then asked whether they were released, rescued, or escaped on their own, data which help us determine the nature of their abduction and the rebels’ intent at the time. These short abductions are especially important to capture because they often included a large amount of violence. Moreover, in most cases it seems that the intent of the rebels was to keep the youth for as long as possible. Less than five percent of male youth reported they were released—in almost all cases because they were either “too young” (under 11), “too old” (over about 23), or too injured to walk. Thus if male adolescents and young adults remain with the LRA for only a matter of days, it is likely because they escaped rather than were released. Accordingly, for the purposes of this report we consider any time with the LRA—regardless of length—“abduction”, but will try to explore impacts by length of time spent with the group.

There remains the second concern, that youth may be falsely reporting abduction in the expectation of benefits. We guarded against this in several ways. First, we initially asked household heads about who in their household had been abducted, before asking the youth directly. Second, detailed information was gathered on all abductions from the youth, making detection of any inconsistencies more likely. Misrepresentation would be challenging as former abductees were asked twenty to thirty minutes of questions on their abduction, return, on the composition of the unit, their commanders, discipline, movements, and so forth. Third, our enumerators were careful about checking for inconsistencies.

In all, roughly ten percent of reported abductions appeared suspicious due to discrepancies between the reports of the household head and the youth. In half of the cases this occurred where the abduction period was very short (such as a single day) or when the youth had left the household some years before. Still, we regarded these reports with some scepticism. In these cases we are inclined to give the youth the benefit of the doubt.

In the remaining cases (less than 5 percent of all abductees) the youth’s report is sufficiently divergent from that of the parent that our suspicions are aroused, and it possible that abductions are overstated by this amount. It is also possible, however, that parents sought to conceal abductions. Fortunately, the estimates of the impact of abduction presented in this document do not change materially when these youth are re-classified as “non-abducted”.

Forcible recruitment into the Ugandan armed forces is a moderate risk for youth

Three of the 741 youth whom we surveyed (plus a fourth youth interviewed casually) reported that they were forced to join the military against their will, out of a total of 44 youth ever in the military. This suggests that 0.6% of all youth aged 18 to 30 (or 7.3 percent of those ever in the military) were forcibly recruited by the UPDF. It should be stressed that these are within-sample estimates only; with so few observations, it is impossible to generalize to the entire population with any degree of precision. The true range of youth forcibly recruited could range from zero to five percent.

How and why were these youth pressed into service? One reported that he was arrested for hunting; the others were forced by local commanders looking for new recruits. All three were pressed into the LDU, and all were from the same camp. Two were former abductees. Their current ages are late teens to early twenties. One had lost his father, and another his mother. They are still serving in the military, although their cases have been brought to the attention of the authorities (with their permission).

Our approach may actually underestimate the number of forcible recruits. The questionnaire first asked “Have you ever been part of the UPDF or LDU?” If they responded affirmatively, we asked “Did you join voluntarily?” followed by, “Then how did you join?” During the in-depth interviews with the sub-sample of youth, however, we found that one of our survey respondents had been arrested by the military and made to join the army. As he escaped during training, he did not consider himself ever having been a soldier, and thus was not recorded in the survey as ever having been in the UPDF or LDU. He was 16 or 17 at the time.

This boy’s story is provided in Box 11. It has several important messages. First, he was under 18. Second, he reported that it happened to many boys at the same time, suggesting this was not an isolated incident. Third, he was actively guarded by other soldiers to ensure he did not escape. Fourth, it happened in the context of an arrest for a violation of camp rules. Fifth, he was forced to perform labour, and his treatment at their hands was extremely harsh: “A new recruit was treated harshly,” he explained “more than one in the bush [with the LRA].” Finally, and perhaps most significantly, his forcible recruitment was a direct consequence of his vulnerability. He was forced into service for having violated the UPDF ban against hunting, an activity he was engaged in because he could not afford school fees that semester, and because he had few other economic opportunities. As an orphan and a former abductee, he had few family members from whom he could ask for fees. The uncle, with whom he now lives, has many wives and children and has been unable to support the boy’s schooling.

LRA abduction patterns and experiences

While UPDF recruitment needs to be addressed, forcible recruitment by the LRA is perhaps the greatest human rights abuse being committed in the north. As the remainder of this section details, the scale of abduction is immense, and is targeted at adolescent boys most of all. While we believe all, or all but a very small number, are taken unwillingly, some of these forcible recruits become willing fighters. By no means all do so, however, and even those that become soldiers are not necessarily ever made to kill. This section covers the experiences of abductees up to the time of escape, and the following chapter deals with return and reintegration.

Box 4: Abduction by the Ugandan armed forces

Interview with a 17-year old boy in Pajule camp

Q. I was told something happened when you went hunting with your friends, that after you were forced to join the army. Is this true?

A. Eee, it happened [laughed]. Did he [his uncle] tell you?

This was in 2003 when we had gone home for holidays. At the end of the holidays when we were preparing to come back for school, we were told there was no money for paying fees that year [2004]. I therefore decided to spend my holidays there [at home].

When dry season came, which is hunting season, people were told not to go hunting in the bush, but I went with some people and eventually came back. At that time, new people were being recruited into the army. About one hundred were needed. Unfortunately, few people turned up for the registration and this angered the army commander.

We went hunting the second time, but this time luck was not on our side as on arrival back to the camp, these soldiers came and arrested us. They took us to their barracks, and there they told us that they would take us to be registered as new recruits into the army whether we like it or not. They told us since we went hunting, we shall no longer do that again, but rather become soldiers because we proved stubborn [defiant] as they told people not to go hunting but we defied the order and went.

My uncle came to see me, on hearing that I was arrested... he told me there is nothing he can do because if he is to ask for my release, the other boys with whom I was arrested will feel bad. Hence all should be released, which was impossible. He therefore suggested that since I have been arrested, if I am asked to serve in the army, I should go and serve because there is nothing he could do to help.

This upset me and I thought of escaping from the barracks, as I had escaped from the rebels in the bush. I never wanted to become a soldier, and here I am being forced into becoming a soldier [voice lowered]. My plan of escape, though, had no successful prospect, as the soldier put to guard us was paying much attention to me. All the time he was looking at me, even staring in my direction if we went bathing.

We stayed one week in the barracks, and they told us we shall be taken to [the training place]. Inside I kept praying for the vehicle not to come for us so that we would be released, but in vain [smiled]. I pleaded with them to allow me go home to my uncle before going. They gave me an escort [a soldier] to go home with me. Afterwards we left for ...a training place for the division.

In [the training place], we had a rough time [deep sigh], a really rough time. We stayed for another one week with training throughout, and all this time I kept on wishing I could escape. This dream came true when I escaped while we were at the training centre. I went to a relative and he gave me money for transport back home [smiled].

Q. Did the soldiers try to track you?

A. Aaa, not at all. Many people also escaped after I left them. The training was harsh in that we could go for training from morning till 6 o'clock in the evening without food. A whistle is blown and if it's blown before you have eaten, you won't eat. The food is always hot, but if you continued eating after the whistle is blown, you are punished. Usually you are told to do press-ups [push-ups] on a rough surface. We used to have only a meal per day.

While there, we built up huts, latrines. Actually we set up a barracks. A new recruit was treated harshly, more than one in the bush [with the LRA].

Timing, incidence, and age of abduction

As we saw in Figure 2 of Chapter 1, abductions have escalated over time and were greatest in 2002 and 2003. This spike follows the government’s (UPDF) 2002 offensive against the LRA, Operation Iron Fist. Looking, however, at the distribution of abductions over time, we can see that abductions were already on the rise in most of our sub-counties prior to Operation Iron Fist.

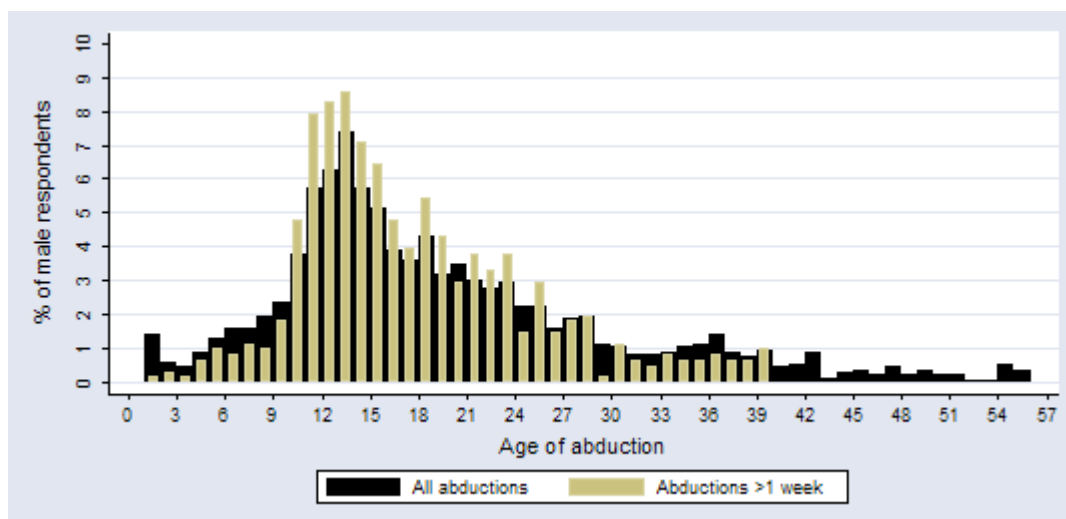
Most abductions occur at home, with less than a quarter occurring outside the camps or villages (i.e. on the road or in the bush or fields). These proportions have stayed roughly constant over time. Only in 2005, with the camps better guarded, do we see an increase in the proportion of those abducted from the road or bush. The number of 2005 abductees interviewed is sufficiently low (only 8) that such a conclusion must be made with caution, however.

Figure 29 displays the distribution of age at the time of abduction. By far the most heavily targeted group appears to be adolescent boys. The rebels seems especially focused on boys aged 12 to 16, although this is in part a function of the population distribution—over the course of the war there were generally more adolescents in the population than young adults. Blattman (2006b) discusses the logic of the LRA’s focus on underage recruits, attributing it not only to demographic patterns but also fighting ability and ease of manipulation and indoctrination.

Popular wisdom has it that the LRA is made up of 80% abducted children. Like many of the numbers in the north, it’s not clear that it is based on fact and has been questioned by many (see for instance Allen and Schomerus 2006). Evidence from SWAY suggests that 80% is not far from the mark, however. Of those males abducted before the age of 30, two-thirds were under 18 and three quarters under 21. The pattern for those abducted longer than two weeks is similar.

Interestingly, the average age of abduction has been rising steadily since the mid-1990s. Restricting ourselves solely to abductions of those 30 or younger, the average age of abduction rose from 15 in the early and mid 1990s to nearly 19 by 2003 and 2004. The rise is even steeper if we include all abductions. This is likely a consequence of the increased scale of abduction after 2002—there are only so many young adolescents available. Moreover, abduction may have been used as a weapon to terrorize the population, rather than as a pure recruitment tool.

Figure 4: Distribution of age at time of abduction (males only)



Agency of abducted youth

Several researchers and commentators have challenged the notion of pure victimhood when dealing with child and youth soldiers, stressing that however forcible the recruitment, some agency remains with the child or young adult. The survey evidence appears to support this point of view. Survey responses suggest that nearly half of abductees became willing recruits, at least for a time. As illustrated in Table 11, of those taken for more than two weeks, 40 percent felt like an important member of the group, and 44 percent report having felt “allegiance” to Kony at some time.

We can observe patterns by age in Figure 30. Adolescents appear slightly more likely than young adults and children to have ever felt like staying with the LRA, be considered a “dependable” member, or feel allegiance to Kony.

Interviews with participants suggest that loyalty and dependability is at first a protective mechanism, but as time passes the goals and objectives of the LRA can be internalized. For instance, from an interview with a young man in Acholibur, abducted twice for a total of two years:

I became like a real soldier. I was spying for them... There you do things just for survival. I started staying like any of them but I knew in the back of my mind I was just doing it for survival. But for a point I forgot the survival and became a part of them.

More than simply seeking to survive, some report that life in the bush was not all violence and misery. From a man from Palabek Gem, now 30, abducted for two months:

You know, when we are together, at least someone will do something funny and thus you end up laughing. So there were things we laughed about. Even dancing, we used to if we are together as that would make us happy and at that particular time, we often felt there is peace.

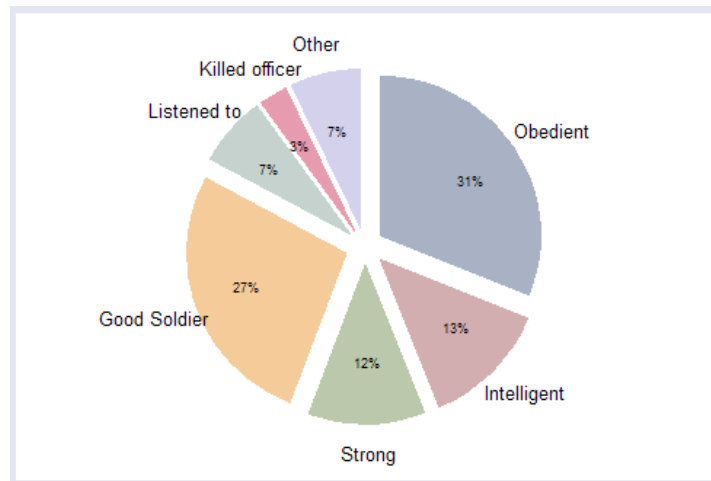
Those that stayed with the armed group for longer than 6 months were reasonably likely to be given a rank (54%), although few of these report ever “leading other fighters” (less than 10%). Reasons for promotion, illustrated in Figure 31, were often related to their skill and obedience as recruits.

While often convinced for a time, however, many of the youth we spoke to had a moment of awakening, often spurred on by the magnitude of the violence and the futility of the cause. From a male abducted for 2 years:

Table 2: Quick statistics on abduction experiences (for abductees taken longer than two weeks)

| | |
|---|-----|
| Median number of months after which an abductee received a gun | 2 |
| Average number of battles seen by a youth abducted for 3 to 12 months | 3 |
| Average battles seen by an abductee gone longer than a year | 10 |
| Percent of long-term abductees that “often felt like an important part” of their unit | 40 |
| Percent that ever believed they had magical protection from bullets | 0.8 |
| Percent that professed “ever feeling allegiance to Kony or the LRA” | 44 |
| Percent that still do | 0.5 |

Figure 5: Reasons given for promotion within the LRA



When I was just abducted I was optimistic that we would win this war because the commanders kept on telling us that we would overthrow the government soon. But after seeing what atrocities these rebels were doing like killing many civilians, looting and continuous fighting without any success, I realized the rebels are wasting time and we'll not overthrow the government. This made me think of escaping which I eventually did and came back home.

Others show remarkable agency and were able to resist the violence in a passive way, although these instances seem rare and sometimes to little effect. From a male abducted one week:

When I was just abducted, they told me to kill others. When I was in the bush, there was a lady who was digging her cassava. I was supposed to kill her but I told her to run. When she did, another group of rebels caught her and killed her... This issue of the woman still bothers me.

Escape

Of those who come back, the vast majority escape from the LRA rather than being released or rescued (see Figure 32). Of the minority released by the LRA, the reasons given are either that they were too young (typically 12 years or less in age), too old (mid-twenties or older), injured and unable to walk, or simply beaten and left to die. From an interview with a young man abducted 2 years:

The second thing is the time I tried to escape with my friends. Unfortunately, those people followed us and took us back. So when we reached the camp where the other rebels were, they picked four kadogos [small boys from the group/newly abducted] and ordered them to go and kill us by beating us with sticks. The kadogos took us and beat us badly until we became unconscious and they went away thinking we were dead. But God is great. We found ourselves getting up with the early morning breeze.

Figure 6: Loyalty and dependability by age of abduction (data only for abductees taken longer than two weeks)

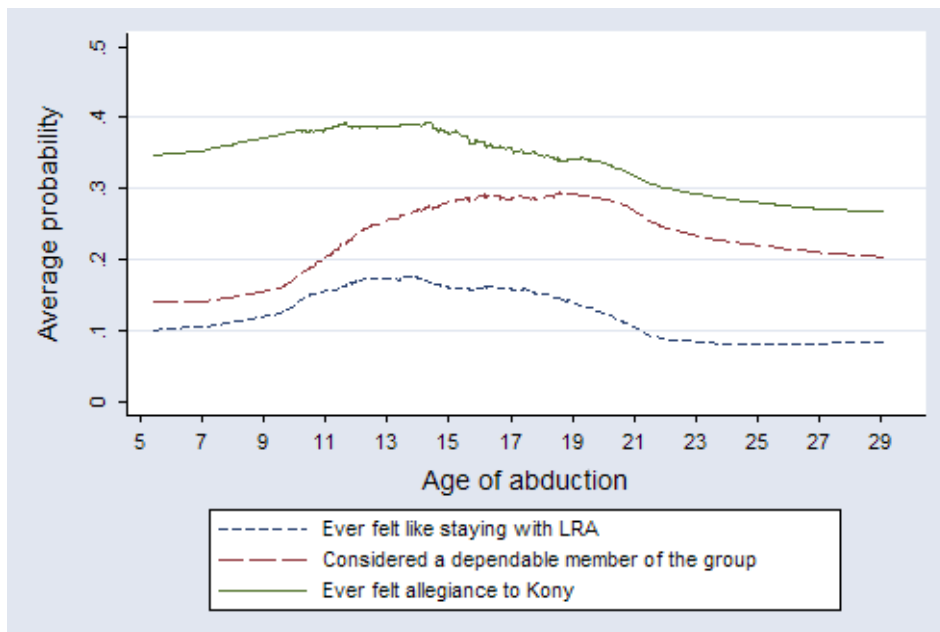


Figure 33 lists the manner of escape. Of those that escape, nearly a third do so at night, sneaking away while their captors were sleeping. Roughly a third also report sneaking away while being left alone. Many of these youth report being sent to loot goods, dig up cassava, or fetch water, and walking off into the bush when they realized they were unsupervised.

Finally, nearly a third report that they escape in the confusion of a battle or ambush. From a young man taken 2 months, “I escaped when [a UPDF commander] laid an ambush on us.” Or, from an 18-year old boy taken 3 years:

In the morning we continued moving and met with the UPDF who fired at us ... By around 6pm, we had scattered so I decided to walk away.

Is the timing of escape based only on opportunity? When asked why they did not attempt escape earlier, youth responded that they had not had the chance (36%), that they were too well guarded (24%), that they were fearful (17%) or that they were tied or in the Sudan (9% each). Even so, as noted on the previous page, the motive for escape seems to be a mixture of opportunity and willingness. From an 18-year old boy abducted 8 years:

We used to do things and still believe him [Kony] because we thought this could happen [Kony over throwing the government] but the commanders knew he was not overthrowing the government. Kony used to say his soldiers are young people because the adults always escaped. So when I grew up and started seeing that whatever Kony says was not true because if it were really true then the government could have been overthrown. I also saw that the people he abducted before me had all escaped. This made me think of escaping which I finally did.

Figure 7: Escape, Rescued, or Released?

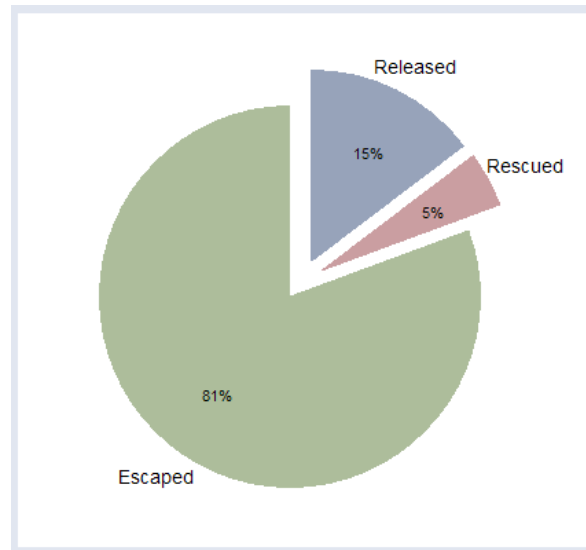
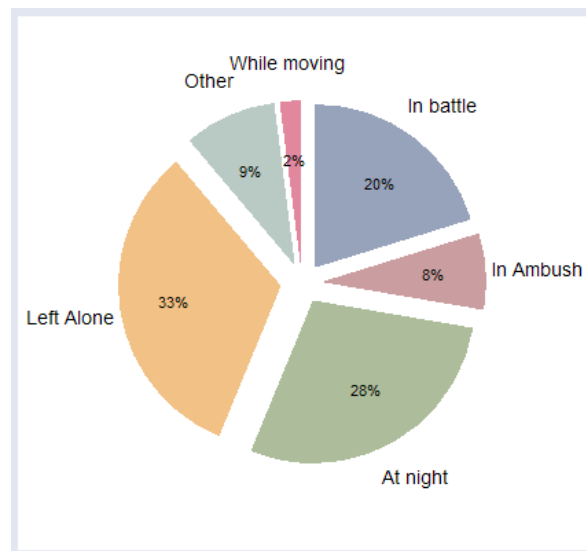


Figure 8: Manner of escape



VII. Return and Reintegration of Former Abductees

Much of the focus of child and youth protection in northern Uganda has been centred on the formerly abducted, and the majority of the funding and interventions for this group seems to have been through the reception centres. These centres provide a place to physically heal, relocate family members, and receive advice and information from centre staff. Allen and Schomerus (2006) emphasize that the most important role played by reception centres is a place in which to transition between two worlds, that of the bush and that of the village (or, in more recent years, the camp). The reception centres have also been the primary mechanism used for monitoring the protection and vulnerability of former abductees.

It is remarkable, therefore, to note that less than half of the youth abducted reported passing through a reception centre, and less than half reported receiving any other assistance from an NGO or the government. Specifically, we find the following:

- Half of the youth go straight home rather than pass through formal reception with the UPDF and/or the reception centre;
- Short-term abductees are the least likely to pass through any centre, even though they have on average been exposed to fairly substantial violence in their short time away;
- Most youth that pass through the UPDF child protection unit leave after two days unscathed, but a tenth report long detentions and a tenth report beatings or other abuse;
- The reception at home by family and community is generally strong and positive, and relatively few former abductees report any difficulties;
- Where community persecution does occur, it follows several common patterns which could be addressed through programming; and
- We observe mild to moderate psychosocial consequences of abduction, focused primarily on those persecuted by the community, those who have high-levels of self-blame, and (perhaps at a more root level) those who experienced the most violence.

Table 3: Quick statistics on return

| | |
|---|---------|
| Chance that a returnee taken for more than two weeks did not go to a reception center | 1 in 2 |
| Percent that passed through the UPDF after leaving the LRA | 54% |
| Proportion of these that report being beaten by the UPDF during capture or custody | 1 in 10 |
| Percent of those kept in UPDF custody longer than 2 weeks | 10 |
| The median length of custody for a returnee, in days | 2 |
| Percent that go home after return | 95 |
| Chance that a child returnee goes back to school upon return | 1 in 2 |
| Chance that a returnee receives basic NGO services after returning home | 1/3 |

Over half the youth go straight home rather than through formal reception

To the NGOs operating in the region, and the reception centres themselves, it has long been obvious that some youth do not pass through the official reception system. The system is such that youth are first picked up and processed by the UPDF Child Protection Unit, whereupon they are ushered to one of the several reception centres operating in the north.

Exactly how many returnees have skipped the reception process, however, no one could say. Our survey suggests that, for those taken at least two weeks, only two-thirds of male abductees pass through the UPDF and half reach a reception centre.

Figure 34 breaks down the rates of passage through the UPDF or reception centre by age of return, and Figure 35 does so by length of abduction. The numbers passing through a reception centre are lower than generally believed. Abductees returning before the age of 14 appear much less likely to have passed through the system, a fact that seems to be driven by their higher likelihood of being released shortly after abduction.

Those taken for a short time are much less likely to pass through the reception system—in Figure 35 we see that the probability of passing through a reception centre quadruples from 20% following one-month abduction to 80% after two- or three-year abduction.

Figure 36, meanwhile, charts passage through a reception centre by year of return (with separate curves for those abducted less than one month, one to three months, and more than three months). We see that, for those abducted more than one month, rates of passage through the formal system have been rising over time. By 2005, 80% of these long-term abductees were passing through the reception centre. Those that were abducted and returned in the early and mid-nineties had a low probability of passage through a centre, probably because the process was still in its infancy.

Figure 9: Percent of youth passing through a formal reception process (by abduction length)

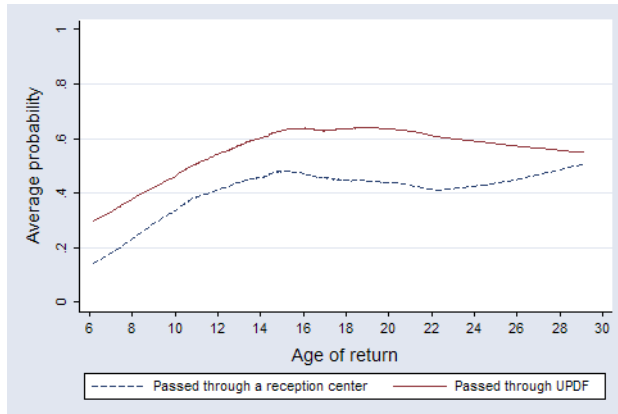


Figure 10: Percent of youth passing through a formal reception process (by abduction age)

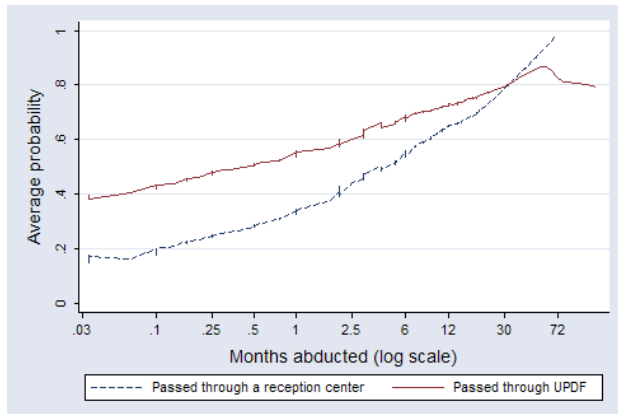


Figure 11: Percent of youth passing through a reception centre (by year of return and abduction length)



The low rates of passage through the system for short-term abductees may be a cause for concern. As we saw in the previous chapters, even short abductions seem to have substantial educational, health, and economic impacts. What's more, a short abduction, even one less than two weeks in length, can be a terribly traumatic experience: compared to the non abducted, those youth abducted for less than two weeks were 1.8 times as likely to have received a beating and 1.5 times more likely to have witnessed a killing. Furthermore, 8 percent of these short-term abductees report that they themselves were forced to kill. Of those short-term abductees that were forced to kill, only 70 percent passed through the UPDF, and less than a third went on to a reception centre.

Reasons for not passing through the centre include fear of the UPDF, fear of stigmatization, a desire to put the past behind them, or simply a belief that no assistance is required. Speaking to one youth that chose not to go through the official system:

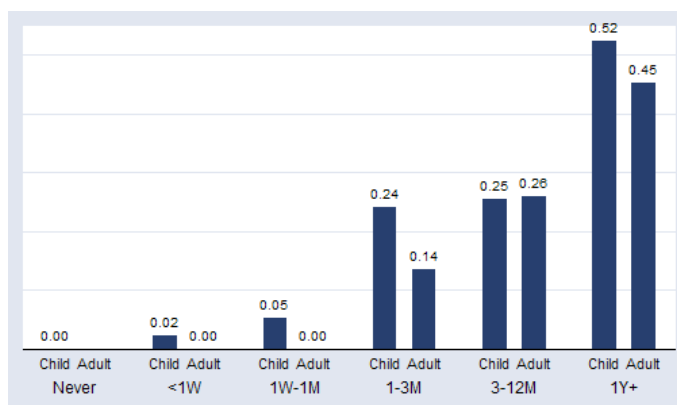
I thought if I were to go to the reception centre I would put myself into more trouble. I was also afraid because some rebel collaborators told us that if you escape and you are caught for the second time then you will be killed.

Or, from another interview:

This is how I escaped: it was at night when everyone was sleeping due to exhaustion from a long walk, and I did not sleep because I had planned to escape. I moved on the main road and found my parents in the garden [fields]. The garden in which I found my parents, I didn't personally know, but I found myself running into them. This really made me happy because I had longed to see my people back home. We were all happy to see each other. They [my parents] then took me home and I had a bath. They then told me there was no need to see the local council for registration. After all, I have come back home and the best I can do is to forget of whatever experience I went through.

One consequence of not passing through the system is that the majority of abductees do not possess an amnesty certificate (see Figure 37).

Figure 12: Proportion of youth that received an amnesty certificate (by age and abduction length)



A tenth of those passing through the UPDF Child Protection Unit report long detentions and abuse

Returnees are fearful of the UPDF, in many cases with good reason. While returnees stayed with the UPDF for only 2 days at the median, of those that passed through the UPDF Child Protection Unit nearly a tenth were detained for more than two weeks, and a similar number report abuse at the hands of the army. For instance, we spoke to one youth who escaped the LRA after an abduction of three years:

It was unfortunate that when I was just about to cross the Padibe road, I met with the UPDF mobile group. They opened fire at me, so I lifted my gun up and threw it down and headed towards

them. At that time, I was no longer afraid. I just put it in my heart that if I was going to die then it will be God's will. They had already shot at my trousers and tore it with bullets. When I reached them, they were very aggressive. They beat me up so badly and tied me up. They said I was a typical rebel that should just be killed but some of them said that I shouldn't be killed.

The proportion reporting abuse at the hands of the UPDF was close to 15% in the mid-1990s, fell to 5% in the late 1990s, and has been rising since back to 15%. The average time an abductee is detained has been falling over the period, suggesting fewer long detentions.

The vast majority of returnees go back to their homes, where they generally receive a warm welcome from family and acceptance from the community

Most returnees (95%) report that they returned home after abduction with only five percent going to settle elsewhere upon their return. This runs counter to what many in reception centres and programs expected (see Allen & Schomerus, 2006).

Family acceptance is remarkably high. Only 1% of youth report that their family was unhappy or unwelcoming upon their return. Over 94% of the youth report being accepted by their families without insult, blame or physical aggression. From a 23-year old who was abducted for 2 months:

When I just came home, I was really happy to be home. I couldn't realize whether people hated me or not. Life in the bush was not for people but for animals. I found life good at home. Both of my parents were alive. No neighbours said anything bad to me.

The reception from the community, while typically strong and welcoming, was not nearly so unanimous. While almost no one reported that their community blamed them for the things they had done, more than a quarter of returnees said that they were insulted by community members upon return, or that community members were afraid of them. Even so, these insults and fear were not detrimental to their reintegration: 94% reported that they felt "very" or "somewhat" accepted by their community at the time.

Persecution of formerly abducted youth by the community takes specific forms and follows regular patterns

Our qualitative interviews revealed that, where community persecution did take place, several common patterns emerged. First, very often alcohol is part of the problem. Youth often experience the most verbal abuse from drunken community members.

Second, returnees were least accepted and sometimes persecuted by the parents and families of those who were abducted but had not yet returned. Returnees tell us that the relatives of unreturned youth would angrily ask them why they returned when their children were not so fortunate. From a youth abducted for three years:

When I returned, some people used very bad and unkind language because some of them whose sons and daughters were abducted but child did not return felt bad that I returned.

Third, these insults also seem to occur more frequently when there is rebel activity in the area. Unable to react against the LRA, the community seems to displace their anger and fear onto the youth who have already returned. Insults targeted toward returnees are also triggered by arguments over material goods, and alcohol seems to be frequently involved in these disputes.

Fourth, children who return with some marks from the rebels such as any form of deforming injury or disability take quite sometime to adjust because they are teased and constantly reminded of their experi-

ence. Those who exhibit abnormal behaviour that is labelled as spiritual pollution (*cen*) seem to be more stigmatized as well.

Finally, particular youth are targeted and insulted when the community knows or suspects they were involved in raids or killings, as this 18-year-old youth describes,

I think they are talking like that because when I was abducted, the rebels beat me and asked me to show them where goats could be got so I showed them the neighbour's goats because we didn't have goats of our own.

So ever since I returned, the owners of these goats are on my case and some have very bad thoughts about me and I think some of them can even kill me. And I think that if it were possible, I should not continue staying in [my camp].

A social worker from a reception centre later disclosed that this youth was actually known to have killed some members of the community and that they had discussed several alternative living situations for this youth. He also described how recent attacks made the situation worse for him,

...In case you heard about the recent ambushes on Pader and Pajule roads, it took place last week but its making life very hard for me. Because wherever people see me, they say 'look at the murderer. There he is passing.'

Figure 13: Relationship between violence and emotional distress

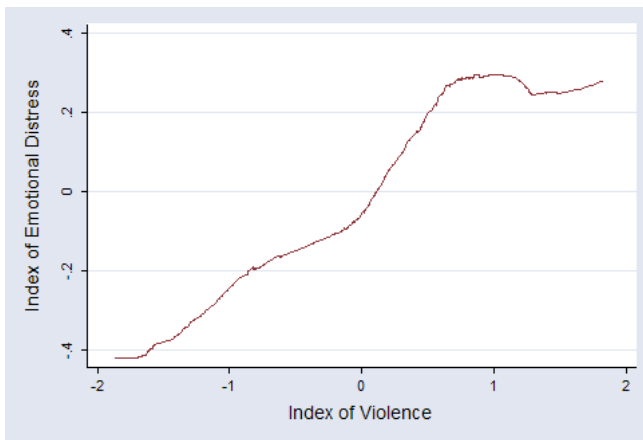
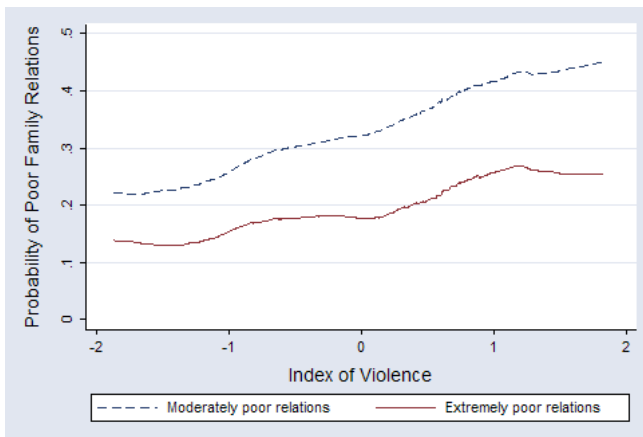


Figure 14: Relationship between violence and family relations



The effects of abduction and violence on psychosocial well-being

In previous chapters we saw substantial adverse impacts of abduction on youth's education and economic activity, even when including very short-term abductees. In contrast, by most our measures of psychological well-being and social support, we see only mild differences on average between the abducted and never-abducted. In this section we will see that it is the level of violence rather than abduction itself that is the principal determinant of poor psychosocial adjustment.

Recall from Chapter 2 that abduction is associated with only moderately higher levels of emotional distress. The average impact of abduction is somewhat greater on the measure of family connectedness: the formerly abducted are more than twice as likely to report serious discomfort or quarrels with their families.

The crucial link between abduction and psychosocial well-being appears to be mediated through violence experienced. High

levels of violence committed and violence experienced are associated with substantial increases in emotional distress, as well as poorer family relations. Figure 38 plots the relationship between our indices of emotional distress and violence. Both indices have mean zero and unit standard deviation. We observe an almost one-to-one relationship between the two measures.

Meanwhile, Figure 39 plots the probability of having poor family relations against the same index of violence. Youth that report feeling somewhat uncomfortable with their family or having occasional fights with their family are classified as having “moderately poor” relations; those that report frequent fights or feel completely uncomfortable are classified as “extremely poor”. In both cases we observe clear positive relationships.

In contrast, the relationship between violence and measures of economic and educational success are much more muted. How to explain these patterns? In Blattman (2006a), it is argued that abduction, by pulling youth away from work and school, adversely affects educational attainment and occupations. Abduction has a milder impact on psychological health because not all abductions are fraught with violence. Emotional distress and family difficulties are concentrated in a smaller group, especially those exposed to the worst violence.

Box 5: Social dislocation

Interview with a formerly abducted youth

... [takes a deep breath]. I feel it [abduction] has changed my life because before my abduction, I used to have many friends with whom I could be with, and we trusted each other so much. Now, we are not meeting since I came back.

I used also to stay freely without worrying of anything, and I was fat, but now I don't feel fine. I have a lot of worries, and I am not meeting all my friends. I therefore find it has changed my life so much.

Before, if some one was talking to me or quarrelling with me, however much they say something, I could still answer them back in a good way. But now if someone says something bad or quarrels I can only keep quiet or start to cry. So I find it has changed my life, and the reasons as to why I cry even I do not know.

Before my abduction, I used to go visit my friends but these days I find even just getting up to go is a problem and I do not do it. That is why I say the abduction has changed my life. I feel always that I should go and visit my friends but I feel I am scared of moving because I feel as though people will say I was the one who was so arrogant and who performed the worst atrocities. But if I am amongst my kin this fear is not there. The problem is when I move from home.

Self blame and community insults are risk factors for the psychosocial well-being of returnees

Community insults

The fraction of youth who are insulted or blamed often state that this is an extremely painful experience for them. Those who were insulted by the community were 3 times more likely to have negative social behaviours and high emotional distress even when the insulting had ceased. Many, however, discuss how a relative or some community member would stay with them and tell them to ignore those who insult them. This seems to be a main message given at the reception centres as well. Another key message that many youth have internalized is that they were forced to be with the LRA, that it was not their choice, and that it could happen to anyone. These messages seem to give them some protection against these insults.

In one notable case, the community went beyond insults and became physically aggressive. The researchers were in the camp when this situation occurred,

People surrounded the fence and shook it violently, demanding for the boy who had

just returned [from the rebels]. They said they wanted him out so they could burn him. They were using very bad language so one of the staffs of CCF called the army commander. The commander sent soldiers who surrounded the fence and chased people away.

While this incident seemed rare (we do not have any quantitative data on such incidents), it does show that the returnees can have more to fear than just being called names.

Another youth explains his difficulty with a woman in the community,

She was saying I was the one who brought the rebels to our home area and I made her children to be abducted so I know why her children are not there, although I was lucky to have come back....

His family took the case to the LC (Local Chairperson) and it was settled. He explains that he is no longer insulted but is still uneasy about how people feel about him,

After this there hasn't been any confrontation by anyone saying such things but the way people feel is not good and others still say words though not right in my face. So people who feel happy for my coming back home come and [they] tell me to be alert because what others say away from me is threatening and can easily harm me.

... and I am more scared that if people go back home to the villages something bad might happen.

Self blame

Those with high self blame were more than twice as likely to have high emotional distress and low social functioning. While only a small percentage of the abducted are forced to kill family or friends, many of them seem to struggle with a tremendous amount of self-blame. This young man's powerful story explains,

When it had just happened, I kept thinking that since [my brother] looked at the way I was beating him till he died; I therefore saw that it was my entire fault. I should have refused to do it so that we were all killed. And if I had known that I wouldn't be killed, I would not have done such a thing.

When this thought became so stuck on my mind, I then ruled out that it was not in my interest that I did such but I was forced by the rebels to do it. That time, I used to dream a lot about him and one night I got up and prayed then asked him to forgive me. I told him that "please forgive me; I did not do this because I wanted it. You and I used to stay together from home and if anyone disturbed you, he would have disturbed me as well. So this was in my interest but I was forced. So after I prayed like that, he never appeared again.

Part B: Implications & Recommendations for Youth Protection



Photograph by Blake Farrington

VIII. Implications for the Design and Focus of Programming

The findings discussed in the previous seven chapters suggest that there is currently a mismatch between the needs of youth and the programs on offer. Current programming focuses primarily on humanitarian needs and psychosocial support (broadly-defined) with less emphasis on education and economic interventions. Moreover, programs and spending also appear to be more oriented towards children rather than young adults. SWAY data and analysis, however, suggest a strategic reorientation of governmental and non-governmental assistance.

- In general, we advocate a two-pronged strategy: broad-based education and economic support, combined with targeted interventions to the youth facing the greatest social, psychological, and material challenges.
- This programming ought to be more inclusive of young adults, treating them as a central category of concern, rather than an addendum to child support and protection programs.
- In particular, there is an urgent and immediate need to support broad-based secondary and tertiary schooling, support which should target the most able as well as the most vulnerable.
- Further, we argue for an increased focus on (and funding for) youth economic programs. However, the only real economic solution is to return youth and their households to their land and traditional livelihoods. Thus economic programs must include innovative strategies for increasing access to land in addition to the current attention on other income-generating activities.
- In terms of “high-deprivation” youth, one of our most surprising findings was the prevalence of serious war wounds. Such injuries, which have received little attention, should be addressed immediately through emergency medical services.
- We also note the significant number of illiterate young adults, who we feel can be targeted through alternative *age-appropriate* literacy and numeracy programs.
- We argue that psychosocial programming also needs to be more targeted and specific. In particular, psychosocial programming ought to: (i) target highly-affected individuals; (ii) shift from community sensitization to conflict resolution; and (iii) focus on family support and connectedness.
- Finally, we make a case for more evidence-based programming, in particular the formal and informal evaluation of programs.

Targeting and delivery issues are discussed in the following chapter.

Current programming has focused primarily on humanitarian needs and psychosocial support (broadly-defined) but has tended to neglect interventions to support war injuries, education, and economic activities

Current programming by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and the United Nations in northern Uganda is overwhelmingly focused on meeting the humanitarian needs of the IDP population. In addition to the basics of food, water, sanitation, shelter and medical care, the primary area of focus has been protection (including child protection and especially the protection of former child soldiers). Given the emergency orientation of most agencies operating in the region, less attention has been paid to sectors that are associated with the longer-term development of the region, including economic development and education.

The strengths of the programs in place lie in the provision of basic humanitarian needs for a very large displaced population and for the formerly abducted children and young adults who pass through the reception centres. Organizations have been successful at providing food, water, shelter, and basic sanitation to a very large part of the population.

Under the umbrella of protection programs, a number of NGOs have developed programs addressing the psychosocial needs of former child soldiers. Ideally, formerly abducted children (whether they have served as child soldiers or not), would receive counselling soon after returning from captivity at a “reception centre”. After being returned to their families, reception centre staffs are expected to make periodic follow-up visits to check on reintegration progress. In addition, some NGOs have psychosocial programs addressing the needs of individuals who have been referred by community leaders or community volunteer counsellors.

Also supporting the psychosocial well-being of young people are various youth activities supported by NGOs. Peace clubs aim to build the capacity of youth to resolve conflict within their community, while other youth clubs are focused on preserving the Acholi cultural traditions of music and dance. Finally, sports and recreational activities have been developed in the major town centres. Football leagues have become especially popular, but have very limited presence beyond the major towns.

Programs by NGOs in the education sector are few. Several NGOs have basic support for the operation of primary schools. One NGO pays school fees for secondary students in financial hardship, and one reception centre supports formerly abducted children with educational scholarships. Most reception centres do not offer any educational support for children who have passed through their centre.

Economic development programs are being run by several NGOs, but their scope and impact have been quite limited, and tend to focus on supporting vocational training for small numbers of youth. In the past, some vocational training has been ill-conceived, such as a program that trained many women to be tailors despite the fact that the need for tailors is quite small (partly because cheap second-hand clothes are widely available).

Little is known about the effectiveness of such training and economic support programs. There are anecdotal successes and failures. It is worth recalling from chapter 3 that less than half of those emerging from NGO vocational training programs find work, and that their earnings and employment levels are little different than youth with no such training. Of course, if NGOs are tending to help the worst off, then even this level of performance may be a victory, as it has brought the worst off up to the group average. In reality no agency has any idea whether or not this is the case.

Finally, we note that the psychosocial, educational, and economic interventions that do exist have tended to focus on children, following both the international focus on children and the emphasis on child soldiers in northern Uganda. While a number of these programs have been community-based and therefore include adults, the focus of these community-based programs remains the children.

Programming should be more inclusive of young adults

One concern with current programs is the overwhelming emphasis on children, defined as those under 18-years-old. Some NGOs have stretched their funding to include young adults through their early 20s, because many of these youth were under the age of 18 when they were abducted. This is in part a donor-driven response to the crisis. Representatives of some local NGOs admitted that it was far easier to obtain funds for war-affected children, and to then extend the programs and services to young adults somewhat surreptitiously. Programming for young adults is thus treated as the exception, not the rule.

This child-centred approach is problematic because, as this survey has demonstrated, along most dimensions young adults are doing no better than children and, in some instances, such as literacy and education levels, young adults are doing much worse.

The child-centred approach is problematic from a reintegration perspective as well, if only because so many returnees are not children. As we have described in this report, a quarter of abductees were over 18 at the time of abduction, many of those abducted as children returned as adults, and at least half are currently over 18. Furthermore, as we saw in Chapter 5, those abducted as young adults have actually struggled more in economic terms than those taken as children.

The emphasis on children has meant that some young adults are treated as children, which was apparent from the language used by some social workers working with youth. They often referred to them as ‘formerly abducted children’ and talked about them as dependent and helpless, when many of them are in fact parents themselves and taking care of their families.

Increase focus on and funding for age-appropriate educational interventions—including targeted literacy programs, and broad-based secondary schooling

Our analysis of education identified three critical challenges facing youth. First, a small minority have little or no education and are essentially illiterate, severely restricting their economic prospects. Second, there was a steep drop-off in educational enrolment after Primary 7 due to an inability to pay fees. Third, vocational training programs are growing in number, but it is far from clear that NGO-sponsored interventions have made the recipients better off. In fact, we identified one case where the program seems to have been detrimental.

We propose a renewed focus on age-appropriate educational interventions for adolescents and young adults. First, remedial education programs for young adults should be piloted in order to assess interest, take-up, and outcomes. The 11% of youth who are illiterate are almost all unschooled young adults, and it has severely reduced their earnings opportunities. To our knowledge there are no fast-track literacy and numeracy programs in operation in the north. Most youth who missed out on primary school have no other option than to rejoin primary classes with children many years younger. The sole adult-oriented program in existence, which uses the government adult literacy curriculum, serves the young adult population but uses methods and materials geared towards primary students. It also moves at the same pace as regular primary school—one year for each standard—a pace that few adults can afford given their financial, parental, and social obligations. Rather, we advocate a fast-track primary school equivalency program.

Second, opportunities for youth in northern Uganda to progress beyond primary school should be expanded. The overwhelming government and NGO focus has centred upon the primary school system. This effort has been successful in that levels of enrolment and basic literacy are high, but has failed in that the average quality of schooling is quite low. While naturally we advocate continued attention to primary school enrolment and quality, the data and analysis suggest that the transition from primary to secondary school is currently the one most difficult to make. Smart and talented students are completing Primary 7 only to find themselves unable to afford even the least expensive secondary schools. The north will need an educated business and professional class if it is to thrive economically and in national political life; there is a clear need for increased numbers of

secondary school and university enrolment. A moderate sized-scholarship program is a relatively inexpensive, easy short-term solution, supporting students to attend school in the north or in nearby districts. In the medium-term, reconstruction and repair of schools destroyed or damaged during the war could provide valuable work and work-study opportunities for youth. Local leaders, school administrators, teachers, parents and youth will have additional ideas and need to be included as an integral part of this program.

Third, we advocate a fundamental re-thinking of the way vocational training is conducted. The failure of the tailoring training program discussed in Chapter 3 sends a clear message—that individuals themselves may be better judges of what skills and opportunities suit their own skill set, interests, and local demands. The women given the structured tailoring program performed worse than the women left to their own devices, who instead found more ‘optimal’ activities to perform. One option to consider is a voucher program, whereby vulnerable youth are given a voucher for programs of their own choosing, which they can then use towards an NGO program and/or potentially pre-selected or certified programs in the private sector. A voucher program would encourage more efficient matching of individuals to programs suiting their abilities and community needs. It would also ease two of the constraints on the scaling up of any vocational training program: one, the logistical and organizational difficulty NGOs would face in ramping up training services to more youth; and two, the challenge of “picking winners”—identifying skills for which there is sufficient local demand.

There may also be need, however, to explore creative options beyond the traditional trades. Many youth say that they want to become tailors or carpenters, seemingly because they have heard of few other training programs or trades. To the extent that there is uncertainty over whether such a program would work better than previous models, we would recommend a formal evaluation of a pilot exercise. The lessons learned would be valuable not only in this context, but in emergency situations Africa-wide.

Increase focus on and funding for youth economic programs

Our analysis of economic livelihoods illustrates the important protective role played by income generation. First, when given meaningful alternatives, youth will steer away from risky occupations that bring them into the bush or into the armed forces. Second, income is frequently directed towards health and educational investments, not only for the youth, but for the children following him in the family.

Third, to youth in Acholiland, economic activities are more than simply vehicles for income-generation—they play a critical role in the ensuring social support and status. Young men are traditionally expected to be net contributors to the household, supporting those coming after them as they themselves were supported as children. Strained kin relations, low social support, and family disconnect are thus a consequence as well as a cause of the idleness of young males.

Our analysis likewise demonstrates how youth climb an occupational ladder of entrepreneurial activities, ascending in skill and capital intensity. Our best strategy may be to support them in this climb through programs that increase their access to skills, equipment, and working capital (i.e. start-up and operating funds).

Recently, a pilot program of community-driven and owned self-help groups has demonstrated remarkable success in helping northern Ugandan youth start and sustain small enterprises. The program is described in more detail in Box 13. Another successful program has established a series of savings and loan associations, operated solely by women. Finally, a new pilot program aims to re-establish cash crop production in several locations. These projects all have the virtue of devolving decision-making responsibility to the individual, supporting them through training, advising, and in material terms.

Such programs represent an important start. But whether these programs succeed, in what ways, and why is not clear. Accordingly, we feel that the formal evaluation of alternative programs (and evaluations of variations in program design) will be an important complement to the scaling-up of livelihoods programs. Evaluation strategies are discussed in more detail below.

Box 6: Harnessing Entrepreneurship

One income-generating activity (IGA) program has demonstrated a new means to harness local knowledge and entrepreneurial capacity. The program promotes business development via self-help groups, by initiating community connections and providing modest start-up resources and training.

In one trial, 30 female youth were brought together for a brief workshop. They were encouraged to discuss local needs and analyze their own abilities with a view towards starting an income-generating activity (such as opening a kiosk, or producing items for sale). Ideas were proposed by individuals, with comments from the group. The young women also received business skills training, including how to calculate profit and evaluate alternative projects. Sent home with no further assistance, the participants were asked to return in a month's time. Remarkably, upon return, more than half had already started their own micro enterprise.

This unaided response demonstrated an amazing and unexpected capacity for innovation and industry in the camps, and the program sought to encourage it further. Those youth that had started something (from literally nothing) identified cash or equipment needs, and were given a small grant. Those that had not started something were coached by the more successful on start-up strategies, and some were lent small amounts of cash where appropriate.

Within months, the vast majority of youth had a sustainable small enterprise, very modest in scale but still a great step up from the past. The youth continued to give assistance to struggling members of the group, and indeed the group connection was seen as one of the most valuable aspects of the program.

Unfortunately, little formal evaluation of outcomes has been performed, so the size, nature, and distribution of benefits are not known. The downstream impact on non-economic outcomes is also unclear. Efforts were made to direct new earnings towards savings, health and education, yet few means existed.

Fundamentally, however, the only real economic solution is to return youth and their households to their land and traditional livelihoods

The promotion of entrepreneurial activities is but a short-term solution, and a partial one at that. The survey evidence suggests that most youth earn only a meagre income from the casual labour and odd jobs that form the basis of employment in camp economies. Increasing the supply of these services by scaling-up of vocational training and business development programs will soon run up against an inevitable constraint: a lack of demand. It is far from clear that camp economies can support more kiosks, more tailors, more charcoal production, or more bicycle taxis. The economics is simple: as these services increase, prices will fall, making such activities unprofitable for all.

The traditional Acholi livelihood is an agrarian one. Animal husbandry and cash crop production were the economic bases of the economy, supporting demand for other products and services. A return to the land is the only realistic economic option, not just for the long term, but now. For young men, land, crops and livestock are tied not simply to an income, but also to manhood, social status, and an entire way of life. Without these things they lose not only their wealth, but also parts of their culture and social order.

The obstacles to return are of course fear of rebel attacks and government decree. We feel it is not clear which of the two is more influential. Given the opportunity, Acholi might reasonably choose to return to their land. With mortality, morbidity, and poverty rates as high as they are in the camps, it seems reasonable to say that the rebels pose less threat to life and liberty than camp life itself.

The prevalence of serious war wounds, which have received little attention, should be addressed immediately through emergency medical service

Two percent of our respondents were discovered to have serious war injuries, often bullets or shrapnel still in the body. While on the face of it this number seems small, extrapolated to the population of Acholi youth, it implies thousands of adolescents and young men live with serious war wounds.

A disability of this nature sets off a chain reaction of vulnerability and deprivation: serious injury leads to an inability to work, an inability to work leads to strained kin relations, a lack of income and poor family connect- edness can mean lower nutrition, less access to medicine and treatment, and further declines in health. Treating these injuries is thus a critical need.

Unfortunately, the issue has received little attention, and continues to languish. Emergency medical treat- ment for these youth has been hampered by an absence of dedicated government and NGO resources, the breakdown of the child protection system in the camps, and the absence of any youth protection system. Which government agencies and NGOs have the mandate to support critically and seriously injured youth, in particular war wounds, is also far from clear. This uncertainty and lack of accountability has slowed efforts to deal with the issue. For instance, youth identified by the SWAY as needing urgent attention, and reported to the child protection agencies, took several months to be followed up. Some still await treatment.

While specific solutions to this challenge are beyond the scope of this report, recognition of treatment of se- vere injuries and war wounds as a strategic priority and assignment of clear roles and responsibilities in tackling this challenge are a clear first step.

Psychosocial programming needs to be more targeted and specific

There has been much discussion and debate at the national and international level about psychosocial pro- grams. Are psychosocial interventions essential in emergencies? Who should they target and how? And, fun- damentally, *what* are they? The psychosocial programs in northern Uganda range from reception centres for the formerly abducted; ‘counselling’ (often simply advice-giving); training of volunteers, teachers, and soldiers; rec- reational activities; and supporting rituals and ceremonies. Educational support and income generating activities also seem to occasionally fall under the psychosocial umbrella. Some would argue that psychosocial program- ming is actually an approach rather than a specific activity. It seems clear that some clarification of the objec- tives and scope of psychosocial programming would benefit the key actors and potentially the clients.

While many youth seem to have benefited from these programs, the findings described in Chapter 2 suggest a shift in focus towards the minority of youth with the greatest needs: youth with severe symptoms of psycho- logical trauma; youth still being harassed by community members; and youth estranged from their families. Doing so, however, may take more specialized interventions, as these cases seem to call for a different type of intervention than the wide scale community-based programming that has been taking place.

Targeting highly affected individuals

Given that many youth seem to be coping and that there is fairly wide acceptance of returnees, there is a need to identify and develop services for those with the minority who are experiencing the most extreme levels of emotional distress, impaired social functioning, and aggression.

These youth seem to be beyond the capacity of the current general psychosocial programs and network of helpers. It is clear that these services need to be culturally-relevant and draw on local resources; however, indi- vidual symptom-reduction interventions may be appropriate for some of the most extreme cases that have not improved with the available social networks and interventions such as ceremonies, prayers, or recreational ac- tivities. There are currently a handful of diploma-level counsellors who have been trained in mental health

interventions; however, a number of them are working in full-time positions in other capacities. Each of these counsellors has a full caseload of serious cases and yet they are only able to meet with their cases on occasion due to travel and time constraints. Building the capacity and reach of these counsellors as well as increasing the number of counsellors able to provide interventions for those with the most severe levels of symptoms would help to reach this population.

Shift from community sensitization to conflict resolution

As mentioned, the high level of acceptance among the community members is quite remarkable. The messages that have been pushed by reception centres, NGOs and religious leaders—that the youth did not choose to be abducted and that it could happen to anyone—are often repeated by those in the community as the reason for acceptance. To this extent, it seems that large-scale community sensitizations have been successful, at least on the surface level (although we have no direct data to support this).

It seems that the problems arising call for targeting the problem at a deeper level. Five reasons for stigmatization emerged out of our qualitative research: 1) children of community members have not returned and their grief is targeted at the returnee; 2) the youth is known to have committed particular atrocities; 3) people are envious of the benefits the returnees receive and feel it is unjust that they, the victims, do not receive benefits while the perpetrators do; 4) there is LRA activity in the area and this triggers anger against returnees; 5) there is a dispute over material goods and the youth is insulted in the conflict.

While we do not have representative data to make strong statements that these are the main reasons for stigmatization of youth in the north, these more in-depth issues should be explored. Rather than large-scale sensitization campaigns, in-depth conflict resolution interventions would address the issues that are emerging. The first three points above bring up issues that are not deeply addressed by the message that abduction is no one's fault. These issues of loss and inequity, which may be exacerbated by the amnesty package and any programs specifically targeting the formerly abducted, should be addressed both for the current conflicts and for the future when people return home.

The reception centres' messages to the youth and community—emphasizing that they were abducted and that this experience was not their fault—have helped youth to cope with community blame and harassment. Youth often report that they respond to harassment by repeating this to themselves and their accuser, and it seems to be both a way of coping themselves as well as a way to deescalate potential conflict. Equipping them with further understanding of some of the reasons for the insults may help them find ways of dealing with conflicts when they arise.

More attention ought to be given to evaluating program impacts and design

Governmental and non-governmental agencies are among the first to lament that they do not know the real impact of their programs on the people they are trying to help. As a result, many successes are continually re-discovered and many of the same mistakes made over again. Rigorous evaluations can provide clear results that inform the choice of programs and program design. They tell us not only the average impact of a program, but why it was successful, in what ways, and for whom.

Evaluations do not need to be expensive, nor do they necessarily require expert analysis or up-ending the design of programs in order to accommodate evaluation. Three main factors should be kept in mind when conducting qualitative or quantitative studies of a program's impacts.

First, while qualitative study (i.e. structured interviews and focus groups) offers rich and important insights, quantitative surveys are becoming easier and cheaper to implement and can be an invaluable complement to qualitative study. A sufficient number of surveys have been conducted in the north that agencies now have available a battery of tried and tested survey instruments on many different outcomes. SWAY surveys are avail-

able for download at www.SWAY-Uganda.org, and SWAY can help agencies access other survey instruments used in the north upon request.

Second, evaluations should measure baseline (pre-program) characteristics as well as post-program outcomes. Knowledge of baseline characteristics aids in understanding differential program impacts (based on gender or initial age, income, skills, and health, for instance). It also allows us to evaluate the *change* observed as a result of the program. The change in incomes, health or schooling as a result of the intervention is the primary object of interest, not their particular level at the conclusion of the assistance.

Third, assessments should include non-beneficiaries as well as beneficiaries. A relevant comparison group should be sought out to try to understand the alternative outcomes that program beneficiaries would have obtained outside of the program. In essence, one wants to compare the change over time among program participants to the change over time in comparable non-participants. This “differences in differences” approach keeps us from confusing general trends in the population with program effects. It also leads us to evaluate the program not against “no program”, but rather against the participant’s best alternative option—a far more appropriate benchmark for program performance.

The more comparable this comparison group, the better the evaluation. Randomization of treatment is the gold standard of evaluation, but it is not strictly necessary or recommended for the vast bulk of evaluations. Reasonable comparison groups can usually be developed by interviewing non-beneficiaries in the same age and location with similar baseline characteristics. Randomization may be appropriate, however, under two sets of circumstances: (i) in pilot programs used to fine-tune a large-scale intervention; and (ii) in interventions that risk having detrimental impacts or unintended consequences on beneficiaries (i.e. long term training programs). Randomization is not only functional but fair when program demand exceeds the supply: entry (or timing of entry) into the program can be conducted by lottery, with the comparison group being drawn from losers of the lottery. Strong evaluations of programs that show impact on recipients can often bring increased funding to expand the program for those who were unable to receive it the first time.

The authors are currently conducting formal evaluations of post-conflict youth training, business development, and peace-building programs in Kosovo and Ingushetia, and have recently conducted evaluations of child health and education interventions in Kenya. Further details and information on how to conduct such evaluations can be obtained by contacting the authors.

IX. Implications for Program Targeting & Delivery

The current system for program targeting heavily emphasizes traditional categories of vulnerability, including orphans, child-headed households, and the formerly abducted. Two of the leading mechanisms for identifying youth for assistance are 1) referral by community volunteers and leaders, or 2) identification via reception centre follow-up of former abductees. Survey evidence and interviews, however, suggest several inadequacies of and alternatives to the current system:

- Traditional categories of vulnerability are only partially successful in capturing the most vulnerable youth, and meet few of the criteria of an effective monitoring and targeting system.
- Furthermore, the use of such categories can have unintended consequences, not least of which is stigmatization of former abductees. Following some post-survey interviews and meetings in several camps, we are particularly concerned about the impact of amnesty packages on the stigmatization and resentment of the formerly abducted.
- Targeting is nevertheless important and unavoidable. Targeting based on identifiable, obvious needs, such as illiteracy, war wounds, extreme psychosocial challenges, or an absence of care-givers, may minimize stigmatization while serving the most acutely vulnerable.
- Moreover, broad-based, inclusive support, as we have advocated for education and economic programs, need not create categories or stigmatization, especially when selection mechanisms are transparent and both merit- and need-based.
- Moving forward, identifying and targeting youth via reception centres may be particularly counter-productive—not only does this approach overemphasize the formerly abducted, it misses fully half of all abductees (who never passed through the centres). Reception centres, in their current form, also appear to be better equipped for and skilled at reception than they are at follow-up of abductees.
- Finally, we argue that improved targeting is meaningless unless follow-up is increased. Such increased follow-up, however, is impossible unless humanitarian workers increase their time and presence in the camps. Aid is not effectively delivered if it delivered by outsiders between the hours of 11am and 2pm alone. In the absence of an ability to open offices in individual camps, we argue for more overnight stays and permanent workers based in major trading centres.

Traditional categories of vulnerability are only partially successful in capturing the most vulnerable youth

The current form of targeting appears to categorize youth based on an experience or set of circumstances—i.e. by the loss of a parent, the absence of an adult in the household, a former abduction by an armed group, the bearing of a child to a rebel, and so forth—rather than by the youth's specific level of deprivation or their actual

vulnerability. Such circumstantial categories are optimal tools for targeting if they meet certain criteria, namely: (i) they are reliable predictors of underlying deprivation and vulnerability (i.e. an acceptably low number of false positives and false negatives); (ii) they are easier to observe and measure than the underlying deprivation or vulnerability itself; and (iii) there are few adverse unintended consequences. Unfortunately, the evidence in Chapters 2 through 7 suggests that none of these criteria are met.

First, while children and youth in the two most common circumstantial categories—the formerly abducted and the orphaned—are indeed doing worse than their peers by most measures, we saw that this performance gap is neither large nor universal. Targeting based on these simple categories would appear to miss more than half of the most vulnerable youth: the severely injured, the illiterate, the unemployed, those estranged from their families, or those with severe symptoms of emotional distress. In fact, the proportion of acutely vulnerable youth inside these circumstantial categories only slightly exceeds the proportion outside of them; hence the predictive power of this method is exceedingly poor.

Second, several of the most acute deprivations and vulnerabilities are relatively straightforward to identify; youth with severe injuries, illiteracy, severe psychological distress, and community harassment can and have been effectively identified and referred to assistance through the network of community volunteer counsellors. The principal failing of the referral system seems to be its patchwork quality and implementation. Of course, for some of the most acute needs, an identification and referral system may not be strictly necessary; youth without these ailments have little incentive to falsely report them, principally because they would yield little benefit from the remedy. Thus self-screening programs for acute needs could, in some instances, eliminate the need for an elaborate system of targeting and referral.

Third, as discussed below, one unintended consequence of targeting based on abduction status has been community resentment and, in some cases, further stigmatization of the youth. The remainder of this chapter discusses in more detail some of the implications of the SWAY data and analysis for improving the targeting and delivery of services to youth.

Targeting without creating categories or stigmatization

Resentment appears to run high in communities over the targeting of the formerly abducted for aid and assistance. While the survey did not address community attitudes and perceptions directly, post-survey interviews with individual youth, as well as community meetings with both youth and elders in eight camps, suggest that the targeting of former abductees continues to upset and offend many community members. Stigmatization rather than reintegration may be the unintended consequence of such an approach to service delivery.

The Amnesty package is one example of how targeting a particular category of people can bring negative effects.¹ For instance, following several LRA attacks in Pader County, our field team sat with some community members listening to a radio discussion about the Amnesty Commission and packages given to former LRA combatants. Those listening at the time insisted that if the Amnesty Commission opened an office in their sub-county, they would “burn it down”. They then continued to discuss how unfair it was that the returnees—abducted or not—benefited from services while those who are merely victims were left with nothing. Similar sentiments were echoed in meetings in several communities, arousing by far the more intense emotions and discussion of any issue in the meeting.

Furthermore, several youth explained that it is difficult to watch the top commanders be ‘rewarded’ when they are not receiving packages. Few youth or community members understand the criteria for the packages. This youth who was with the LRA for 10 years explains:

¹ There are many questions surrounding the use and appropriateness of the Amnesty Act, many of which have been addressed by Allen & Schomerus’ (2006) report.

... So, sometimes the thought comes as to why it is that we are not getting any assistance. Not even 50 shillings and yet the former LRA leaders who did more evil are being paid money and for us we are living like dogs. The government does not think about us but about those leaders. This makes me to think a lot....Lastly, I would like to know why some formerly abducted who took a short duration in captivity, like 5 weeks, are now getting assistance but some like us who took over 10 years are not getting anything from the government. And in case of giving packages to us, the formerly abducted people in the future, will there be any criteria or differences in giving these packages depending on the duration one took in captivity?

Thus former abduction status not only appears to be a poor predictor of need, but can also make reintegration into the community more challenging for the youth.

Targeting based on identifiable and obvious needs can be more effective and less stigmatizing

Moving from a system of circumstantial categorization to one based on specific, easily identified, and acute needs promises more effective and less stigmatizing targeting of assistance. By default many of these categories would capture the orphaned and formerly abducted most in need of assistance. The categories suggested by SWAY data and analysis include the following:

Youth with serious injuries. In Chapter 5 we saw that 14 percent of male youth have physical injuries that interfere with their ability to work or go to school, including approximately 2% who possess serious war wounds requiring emergency attention. Serious injuries were associated with lower employment, incomes, and (perhaps as a consequence) lower family support. Since most of these injuries would inhibit a youth's ability to work the land, their relative deprivation is only likely to increase once households return to their land. Health programs targeted at some of the more common serious ailments (such as war wounds, severe back and chest pain, serious head injuries, loss of limbs, etc) would be inherently self-selecting.

Youth still being insulted by their communities. Chapters 2 and 7 indicated that 6 percent of former abductees report community harassment of some form, harassment typically related to either a youth's psychological distress (and the resulting collective fear of *cen*), or a specific conflict with specific neighbours. In our experience, such youth appeared to be easily identified through community and religious leaders. Assistance to these youth, whether they take the form of counselling, spiritual ceremonies, or conflict resolution with neighbours, would likely be strongly supported by the community.

Youth with severe psychosocial symptoms. As discussed in Chapter 2, there is a minority of youth who suffer from psychological symptoms and while the survey instrument was not designed to make clinical psychological assessments, qualitative interviews show that there is a small percentage of youth whose daily functioning is impaired by their symptoms. Furthermore, five percent of youth describe being haunted by spirits, reportedly manifested through nightmares or "abnormal" behaviour. As discussed in Chapter 2, this can have a significant affect on individual functioning as well as on relationships with family or neighbors because of fear of "pollution" by the spirits. These youth may benefit from spiritual or religious rituals or prayers, which are at times supported by NGOs. They may also benefit from psychologically-based interventions—focused at individual, group or family level—aimed at reducing the symptoms.

Furthermore, almost one percent of the youth we sampled were unable to complete the questionnaire due to what the field staff perceived as severe mental illness or emotional distress. While full assessments were not made, it seems likely that these relate to developmental disorders or brain injuries rather than any reactions or

symptoms as a result of abduction, violence, or daily stressors (although these may certainly have exacerbated the problem).²

Illiterate and poorly educated young adults. 11 percent of the interviewed youth were incapable of the most basic reading and writing skills, and a further 6% have basic literacy but have less than a standard 4 education. Three-quarters of these poorly educated youth are adults. Such illiteracy and low education are associated with riskier occupations, poor health, low earnings, and poor nutrition. There are several alternatives for targeting these youth. The accelerated adult literacy and numeracy program advocated in the previous chapter, for example, would be inherently self-selecting. Targeting for more broad-based educational initiatives are discussed later in this chapter.

Youth estranged from their families. Finally, 20 percent of the young males we interviewed reported poor family relations. Because family connectedness seems to be a strong protective factor for all areas of well-being, it would make sense to use family estrangement or the lack of a caregiver as a vulnerability factor (perhaps rather than the more simplified category of orphan). This would have to be assessed from multiple data points because there is a danger of youth complaining about family members in order to receive aid, as has been experienced by at least one NGO in the area. Neighbours and community leaders may be very helpful in determining this vulnerability as family members may not feel as open to sharing this. Due to the close living quarters in the camps, community members are often aware of the youth who are being marginalized or mistreated. This is potentially a sensitive area to assess and intervene in and yet seems crucial for reaching the most vulnerable youth.

Broad-based, inclusive support, as we have advocated for education and economic programs, need not create categories or stigmatization, especially when they are both merit- and need-based.

As discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, the educational level and economic activity of youth in northern Uganda is sufficiently low that it calls for broad-based programs that aim to increase the quantity and quality of education. Thus, rather than advocating for the targeting of vulnerable groups for educational and economic activities, it seems imperative to improve the systems on a wider level. Increasing the educational reach and quality and improving the economic activity in the north would greatly benefit a large number of youth and their families.

In addition to structural support for education and economic activities, targeted programs that are both merit and need-based would be positive in several ways. First, it would provide a system of rewards for those who work hard and make it through primary school. As shown in Chapter 3, many of those who struggle to succeed in primary school are unable to continue in secondary school because of school fees. Providing merit-based scholarships may provide incentives for children to stay in school and succeed even amidst terrible conditions. Furthermore, community members often state that educational support should be provided on both a need- and merit-based level. When families can only afford to send one child to school, they choose to send the one they feel is most likely to succeed and subsequently be more able to provide for the family. A similar scholarship system that takes both vulnerability and merit into account, together with improvements on a broad level, would be welcomed by the communities.

² These youth were referred to MSF and UNICEF for further follow up, as were all study participants who were identified as extremely vulnerable.

Targeting with transparency will improve community acceptance and support

Community members also consistently complained about the lack of transparency in targeting. With criteria for selection poorly communicated or completely obscured, corruption and favouritism was all but assumed. To counter such sentiments, service delivery in all sectors will need to be communicated more clearly, including information about the services available and who will receive them.

Improved targeting is meaningless unless follow-up is increased. Decentralization of service provision is a necessary step for increased follow-up.

With the flood of children and young adults returning from the bush over the past four years, the focus of NGOs and reception centres has largely been upon reception and family reunification. With so many new abductions and returnees, by 2005 only a minority of youth had been followed-up. For instance, only 31 of the 415 youth interviewed by Allen and Schomerus (2006) report having been revisited by a reception centre. As the flow of returnees into the centres has declined, the emphasis on follow-up has been growing. Yet far too little follow-up is currently taking place.

Extensive and effective follow-up is hindered by several constraints. Primary among these, we feel, is the centralization of aid services in towns, combined with the decentralization of the vulnerable into dozens of scattered camps.

Historically, the principal limitation to improved support and follow-up was the continuing insecurity throughout much of northern Uganda, compounded by the failure of the UPDF to adequately protect those living and working in the camps. As a result, aid organizations based themselves in the district capitals. Since many of these offices ran programs in as many as 20 different camps, each camp was reached by the agency perhaps once every two weeks.

Follow-up activities have been extremely difficult under this arrangement. As a consequence of late starts, long drives, and (too often) early departures, NGO workers have typically been limited to three or four hours a day in the camps at best. Town-based workers have also been wholly dependent on local networks of volunteers and leaders to help identify and track youth, rather than direct knowledge of the situation of youth in the camp. Youth who are mobile during the day or have migrated are completely lost in such a system.

As security conditions improve, some organizations are beginning to follow the example of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in finding ways to stay overnight in the camps for several days at a time. These organizations, however, remain in the minority. Without an ongoing or frequent presence in each camp, it is difficult for organizations to reach much of the population on a regular basis. Due to these limitations, tracing and follow-up of formerly abducted persons or other beneficiaries has been very limited.

We feel that decentralization of service provision is now not only possible, but imperative. Creative ways to improve access to the IDP camps need to be found immediately. There are at least three alternatives: (i) permanent stationing of follow-up staff in camps; (ii) temporary stationing of town-based follow-up staff in camps for days or a week at a time; and (iii) permanent stationing of staff in trading centres closer to the camps requiring services.

The main challenge raised to permanent or overnight stays in camps is that of insecurity. This safety claim, however, is dubious – it is far from clear that staying in camps is more dangerous than moving daily at high speeds, on bad roads, through territory with a strong LRA presence. In fact, in conducting the survey, we judged our research assistants and ourselves to be more effective, productive, and safe moving weekly to a camp and staying several nights. What's more, this continued presence in the community created a sense of trust, and led to more valuable and insightful information, than the work conducted in a rush between the convoys at 10am and 2pm.

Moreover, by these methods we reached a tracking success rate of 85% of the youth we selected for our study. The 15% of youth not found were typically those that had migrated outside the region. Our tracking success rate was roughly 50% for out-migrants, but close to 100% for youth still present in the district. Box 14 discusses the lessons learned in follow-up that will be useful to NGOs.

Box 7: Lessons learned from follow-up activities during Phase I of SWAY

Follow-up can ultimately be highly successful—SWAY located 85% of targeted youth, including youth that had migrated to other districts and cities. Moreover, most of those unfound were not necessarily ones that would be of concern from a vulnerability perspective.

By proportion, we found 70% of youth to be “easy” to find, and 30% “difficult”. “Easy” youth, of which nearly 100% were found, included the following:

- Youth that lived in the camps and seldom left;
- Youth whose families had been in the camp for some time;
- Youth who were in school under the name given by the household representative; and
- Migrated youth who had left behind a contact phone number, even if not their own.

“Difficult” youth, of which we found roughly half, included:

- Youth who worked outside the camp and left frequently.
- Youth who no longer lived in the camp (for any reason);
- Youth who had moved to a town and then shifted residences within that town;
- Youth who had recently moved to the camp (as few people knew them);
- Youth who were in school but had changed their name or moved to a different school; and
- Youth who had joined the military, especially the UPDF (as they were frequently relocated in the country or on patrol).

Finally, critical success factors and lessons learned by our field staff included the following:

- Develop good working relationships with individuals in the camps who know the community well and can help locate individuals (i.e. Community Volunteer Counselors (CVCs) and Block Leaders);
- Use caution regarding incentives for these community members to help you track youth. While it makes sense to motivate and remunerate people, too much of a reward creates an incentive to cut corners or even falsify data on the part of people conducting the follow-up;
- Communicate with those people at least one day before arriving in the camp, so they can alert the specified individuals (if necessary), and so they are ready to assist you.
- Establish a system of recording and updating the respondent’s location data (including phone numbers) and information on their friends and relatives (especially people who know where the person might move to, which is especially important with planned resettlement activities).
- Many youth spend part of their time in one location, and part in another, so be sure to have clear protocols to deal with this in the recording of location and contact information.
- Give people in the camps a means to find or contact you at your base of operations if you miss someone in the camp and they come to town; and
- Train personnel conducting the follow-up so that they understand both the difficulty and the importance of follow-up, and how to deal with common follow-up situations.

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About the Authors

Jeannie Annan, PhDc

Jeannie Annan is co-founder and co-Director of SWAY. She is a presently a PhD candidate in the Department of Counseling and Educational Psychology at Indiana University at Bloomington. Jeannie has been working in psycho-social program management and program evaluation in the conflict affected areas of northern Uganda, southern Sudan, and Kosovo since 1999. From 2002 to 2004 she designed an internal monitoring and evaluation system for a psychosocial program for child soldiers in northern Uganda, training social workers in assessment, follow up and database management.

Jeannie has also worked as a mental health counselor with at-risk youth and families in the U.S. many of whom were recovering from abuse and trauma. She is concurrently working on a study of how ethnic identity and the process of attribution, or how people make meaning out of the outcomes of the war, affects individuals' decision-making and engagement in their community.

Jeannie will complete her PhD in 2007, and has recently joined Bellevue Hospital in New York counseling international victims of torture.

Christopher Blattman, MPA/ID, PhDc

Chris Blattman is co-founder and co-Director of SWAY. He is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Economics at the University of California at Berkeley. He also holds a Master's in Public Administration in International Development from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

Chris has designed and run several household surveys for the purpose of program evaluation in India, Kenya, and Uganda, including a study tracking 8,000 children and youth across Kenya over five years following a randomized primary school healthy intervention.

Chris will complete his PhD in 2006, and is presently working with the World Bank on randomized evaluations of post-conflict youth programs in Kosovo and Ingushetia (Russia). The study is designed to assess the changes to economic and social well-being of youth, including inter-ethnic attitudes and violence, resulting from business development, vocational training, and peace-building programs for young adults.

Roger Horton

Roger Horton was the survey and research manager for SWAY. He holds a Master's Degree in Public Affairs from Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

Roger has worked as a youth leader and educator in Kenya, Kosovo, and Bulgaria. He created and led a youth program for orphans in western Kenya, and helped to plan and lead an innovative camp for vulnerable youth in southern Kosovo. He was a teacher in south-central Bulgaria for two years and organized a youth environmental awareness event there that continues to be held annually. From 2003 to 2005 he managed a home-

less shelter in the New York City area, leading efforts to implement a statewide Homeless Management Information System and co-founding a regional Poverty Action Network.

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Blake Farrington is a San Francisco based photographer. He graduated from the University of California at Berkeley, earning his BA in Interdisciplinary Studies. Blake's career as a documentary photographer has enabled him to work both domestically and abroad on important issues of our times. Blake's major documentary projects include the transitioning former Yugoslavia, a photographic journey through the United States, the 'Night Commuter' children of northern Uganda, and AIDS, orphans and education in eastern Uganda.

Most recently, Blake has reported on the effects of civil war in northern Uganda and southern Sudan by looking closely at social issues such as health, direct and indirect conflict, child soldiers, children without parents and basic human rights. He plans to continue to shed light through his documentary work on significant social issues in the region in the years to come.

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