

A troublesome transition:

Social reintegration of girl soldiers
returning 'home'

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Scientific environment

This doctoral research derives from a larger project entitled “Child soldiers, reintegration and the civil society: Models and experiences from eastern Congo, with special emphasis on the reintegration of girls”, which was conducted at Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK) in Stavanger, Norway, from 2009-2012. The project was carried out in close collaboration with the Department of Peace and Development at the Université Evangélique en Afrique and the Department of Sociology at the Université Officiel de Bukavu, both in South Kivu (DRC), and was funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The writing of Paper II and the finalization of the thesis summary took place while working at the Department of Health Promotion and Development at the University of Bergen.

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Abstract

Background

Despite increased attention the last couple of decades, child soldiering continues to be a major global challenge and it is estimated that there is approximately 300,000 child soldiers globally. One conflict which has seen the use of child soldiers is the ongoing armed conflict in the eastern provinces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Diverting from the media image of a child soldier being a young boy with an AK47, girls often constitute a significant number of children involved with armed groups. In many armed groups in the DRC as well as in other conflict-ridden contexts, girls are estimated to count for 30-40% of child soldiers.

Article 39 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child gives children who are victims of war and armed conflict the right to physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration. A successful social reintegration implies that former child soldiers, girls as well as boys, feel part of and are accepted by their family and community. The return 'home' has, however, proven to be troublesome and complicated, not least for female child soldiers who commonly experience more stigmatization than males.

Aim

The main purpose of this research is to investigate and provide insight into how former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience their return 'home' from armed forces and groups. The project starts with a literature review which identifies research gaps and presents existing research knowledge on girl soldier reintegration (Paper I). I then examine whether the girls experience repair (reintegration), stigmatization or tolerance when returning 'home' (Paper II), particularly exploring how stigmatization and social exclusion are manifested in the everyday lives of former girl soldiers (Paper III & IV).

Method

The research design is inspired by phenomenological thinking, and is consequently qualitative in nature, aiming at describing the world as experienced by the former girl

soldiers. The fieldwork took place in South Kivu, one of DRC's eastern provinces, in January and March 2010. The two main methodological tools were individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Individual interviews were carried out with 12 former girl soldiers (and two caregivers), and 17 former girl soldiers participated in three participant-led focus groups. Each focus group met twice. To gain a better overall understanding of the Congolese culture and society, particularly how traditional position of girls and women might impact on the situation of former girl soldiers, I also conducted 13 individual interviews with informants in NGOs and public bodies.

Results

Paper I: Although former girl soldiers recently have gained increased scholarly attention, their invisibility in academic literature persists. The studies that have addressed the different experiences by former boy and girl soldiers point unanimously to the inappropriateness of programs to reach and meet the needs of the girls. Thus, to secure the realization of their right to rehabilitation and social reintegration more gender-specific knowledge is required. The review identifies two sub-groups of former girl soldiers where research is particularly necessary; self-demobilized girl soldiers and forced mothers and their children. Paper I finds that these two groups face particular reintegration challenges; the self-demobilized girls as they are often excluded from reintegration programs (as well as from research), and forced mothers as returning with a child complicates the return 'home' and heightens stigmatization. Research also draws attention to the importance of traditional gendered expectations of women in civilian society, and that former girl soldiers may find it difficult to conform to traditional norms.

Paper II: The analysis in Paper II paints a picture of a 'homecoming' characterized by frequent stigmatization, some repair and little tolerance. For most girls the 'homecoming' was a mixed experience; the return 'home' evokes several types of emotions and responses also within the same family. However, while experiencing repair in one or two relationships, they speak of negative and hostile responses from the majority of family and community members. Verbal insults and name-calling is mentioned more often as coming from the community, but the girls talk more about

insults, discrimination and not being loved and cared for by their family, indicating that stigmatization by family members has a particular detrimental effect.

Paper III: This paper provides a detailed description of the stigmatization experienced by former girl soldiers. Former girl soldiers are perceived as violent, as thieves, as promiscuous and as carriers of dangerous and contagious diseases. Sexualized name-calling, like Interahamwe-girl or military-girl and whore or prostitute, is commonplace. They are thought of as having bad behaviour, a military ‘spirit’ or mentality, and people fear that former girl soldiers may ‘contaminate’ other young people. Hence, attempts are made to limit their social interaction with peers. According to the girls, people are also fearful of them because they think the girls may bring soldiers to their neighbourhoods, thus seeing them as a threat to security. Stigmatization seems to be frequent even years after their return ‘home’, and perhaps surprisingly, women are identified as those most actively involved in the stigmatization of former girl soldiers in eastern Congo.

Paper IV: The last paper investigates deeper into the aspect of social exclusion and finds that social and relational exclusion takes on different forms. Some girls experience rejection by parents and close family while others are “allowed” to stay but experience that they are excluded from social interactions within the family. Two situations of exclusion from social interaction with peers are also identified; peers may be personally reluctant or afraid to socialize with the girls or adults may prohibit former girl soldiers from socializing with children and youth in the neighbourhood. Exclusion from love relationship is also commonplace, often in the form of neighbours gossiping about the girl’s past experiences, causing the young men to stay away. Being excluded from social relationships and interactions thwart the girls’ ability to re-establish a sense of belonging to their families and communities, creating a superficial co-existence rather than a genuine inclusion.

Discussion

Although some research finds little stigmatization of former child soldiers, most qualitative research which includes or solely looks at former girl soldiers coincide with

the present study revealing frequent stigmatization by family and community. Similar to former girl soldiers in several other conflict and post-conflict contexts, former girl soldiers in eastern Congo are disappointed with their ‘homecoming’ and their attempt to reintegrate into family and community life. While family plays a key role and may greatly contribute to a successful social reintegration, family may also be particularly detrimental if not responding in a caring manner towards girl soldiers returning ‘home’. War and armed conflict is commonly accompanied with increased levels of fear and distrust, a weakening of traditional collectivistic values and traditional social networks of mutual aid. This may clearly complicate the social reintegration of former girl soldiers. The girls in my study believe they are stigmatized because people see them as dangerous, thus as a threat to security, and because people perceive them as promiscuous, thus a threat to social norms.

These two local perceptions have clear parallels in two global discourses; that of youthful African ex-combatants as particularly brutal and dangerous, and that of female soldiers as whores or sexually deviant. The discussion draws attention to how these global discourses are reproduced by media, academics and humanitarians alike, and argues that this reproduction of negative and stigmatizing portrayals often happens at the expense of nuanced research in which stories of resistance are given their rightful place. Misleading and exaggerated perceptions of former girl soldiers may have negative implications for how the girls are perceived and treated by their families and communities, thus fuelling local stigmatization. It may also negatively impact on the design and implementation of reintegration programs aiming to assist the girls’ transition to civilian life.

Abbreviations

ADFL	Alliance of Democratic Forces for Liberation
CNDP	Congrès national pour la défense du peuple
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FARDC	Forces Armées de la République Démocratique du Congo
FDLR	Forces Démocratique de Libération du Rwanda
IDDRS	Integrated DDR Standards
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IFESH	International Foundation for Education and Self-Help
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LRA	The Lord's Resistance Army
MONUSCO	Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en RD Congo
M23	Mouvement du 23-Mars
NPDDR	National Programme for Disarmament Demobilisation Reinsertion
RUF	Revolutionary United Front – Sierra Leone
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNDPKO	United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
NGO	Nongovernmental organization

List of doctoral publications

Paper I

Tonheim, M. (2010). Where Are the Research Gaps? Reviewing Literature on Former Girls Soldiers' Reintegration in the African Context. In Mæland, B. (ed.) *Culture, Religion, and the Reintegration of Female Child Soldiers in northern Uganda*. New York: Peter Lang, 13-38.

Paper II

Tonheim, M. (forthcoming). Repair, stigmatization or tolerance? Former girl soldiers' experience of their 'homecoming'. *Conflict, Security & Development*, under review.

Paper III

Tonheim, M. (2012). 'Who will comfort me?' Stigmatization of girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups in eastern Congo. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 16(2), 278–297.

Paper IV

Tonheim, M. (2014). Genuine social inclusion or superficial co-existence? Former girl soldiers in eastern Congo returning home. *The International Journal of Human Rights*, 18(6), 634-645.

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1. Introduction

Despite increased attention the last couple of decades, child soldiering continues to be a major global challenge. It is estimated that there is approximately 300,000 child soldiers globally (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008), naturally varying corresponding to conflict escalations or peace negotiations. Some conflicts see particular high rates of minor combatants. The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), which has been fighting for more than two decades in northern Uganda as well as in neighbouring countries, is comprised of about 80-90% children. The war in Liberia and Sierra Leone also saw an extensive use of child soldiers. Estimates on the rate of children in Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone vary from 40 to 80%.¹ Children and youth are also frequently used in the armed forces and groups in the eastern parts of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011).

Diverting from the media image of a child soldier being a young boy with an AK47, girls often constitute a significant number of children involved with armed groups (cf. Denov, 2008; UNICEF, 2007; Verhey, 2004). According to data drawn from a large range of sources, McKay and Mazurana (2004, p. 21) maintain that girls were present in fighting forces in 55 countries between 1990 and 2003. Girls are estimated to count for 30-40 % in many armed groups, for instance, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in northern Uganda, as well as in some armed groups in eastern Congo (Verhey, 2004; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011). Large numbers of girl soldiers are subjected to sexual violence - rape, gang rape, forced marriage and sex slavery. Many of these girls bear children due to months and years of sexual violence. The phenomenon of girl soldiering is, thus, clearly not a marginal one, but strikes thousands of young girls in war zones. Based on the estimate of child soldiers globally it can be assumed that approximately 100,000 child soldiers are girls. In addition to this number of active girl soldiers, we find thousands who have been released and demobilized through formal channels or escaping on their

¹ The estimates of child soldier rates in the LRA and RUF are derive from multiple UN press releases and reports.

own. Studies indicate that former girl soldiers may run a great risk of being marginalized and stigmatized when returning to their communities (e.g., Burman & McKay, 2007; Betancourt, Agnew-Blais, Gilman, Williams & Ellis, 2010; Coulter, Persson, & Utas, 2008; Verhey, 2004). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) requires ratifying states to implement all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of children who are victims of war and armed conflict (UN, 1989, Art. 39; UN, 2000, Art. 6.3). Social reintegration is supposed to ensure or at least facilitate a second chance in life to children and youth brutally affected by war, and it should also be a process that ensures access to *other* child rights, for instance, safety from harm, the right of family and family support and the right of formal and nonformal education (cf. Tonheim, 2014).

Despite the right to rehabilitation and social reintegration many former child soldiers find themselves without any support when breaking away from armed groups. In 2011 the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers estimated that less than 50% of child soldiers escaping armed forces and groups in the DRC have access to reintegration support, and the organization continues to uphold the critique of the scarcity of reintegration programmes aiming at assisting former child soldiers in eastern Congo (Child Soldier International, 2014). Existing reintegration programmes are “vastly under-funded and too scarce to accommodate demand” (Child Soldier International, 2014, p. 2), and still disproportionate numbers of girls and young women are not benefitting from reintegration assistance.

The aim of this doctoral research is to investigate and provide insight into how former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience their return ‘home’² and social reintegration into their families and communities. It starts with a scoping review to identify research gaps, and continues to empirically examine what attitudes and treatment do former girl soldiers experience when leaving armed forces and groups. The study has a phenomenological and qualitative approach, and the empirical data consists of

² Because some former girl and boy soldiers do not return to their birth family or place of origin I use brackets when denoting ‘home’.

individual interviews and focus group discussions with 17 former girl soldiers in South Kivu, one of the eastern provinces of the DRC.

The Democratic Republic of Congo, not least its eastern provinces, has a long history of armed conflict and armed forces and groups have, throughout the conflict(s), used under-aged soldiers. Because context impact on social reintegration of former soldiers and to give the reader a better understanding of the phenomenon under study, I start by giving a brief historical overview of the war and armed conflict in the DRC and how child soldiers have been use by Congolese armed forces and groups. Thereafter I address children's pathways into and out of child soldiering.

1.1. A gloomy history of war and violence

The history of the DRC is rather gloomy, despite, but also largely because of, its immense riches and natural resources. The DRC (at the time called the Congo Free State) saw the light of day as the private property of King Léopold II of Belgium. King Léopold was one of the most ruthless and greedy rulers in history, and he ruled his personal empire with an iron fist for 23 years (cf. Forbath, 1991). Due to grave accusations of human rights violations, Congo was handed over to the Belgium government. The colonial rule, also brutal and denying the Congolese population social and political rights, continued for 50 years before Congo finally gained their independence in 1960. However, the country was unprepared to govern on their own and the first few years after independence were characterized by chaos, internal conflict and rebellion. In 1965 the military commander Mobutu Sese Seko seized power, and with that yet another era of autocracy and exploitation began for the Congolese people. Mobutu's regime ended as a consequence of the First Congo War (1996-1997). The new head of the state was the rebel leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila. However, Kabila failed to establish peace in the DRC. Despite having been strongly backed by Rwanda and Uganda in the rebellion against Mobutu, Kabila turned his back on his supporters in the east after about a year in power. Being ordered to leave Congolese territory infuriated his former allies and led to the Second Congo War (1998–2003). The Second Congo War was a regional war, also called 'Africa's world war', in which nine African countries were involved either supporting Kabila and the DRC or supporting Rwanda

and Uganda who had invaded eastern Congo. Despite efforts to end the war and the signing of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement in 1999, fighting continued. In January 2001 Laurent Kabila was assassinated in his office in Kinshasa, allegedly by one of his former *kadogos* (child soldiers) from the Kivus, and his son, Joseph Kabila, the DRC's current President, came into power after his father's death. Realizing that Congo would gain little if seen as the main obstacle to peace, he agreed to take part in the Inter-Congolese Dialogue (ICD) in 2002 (Tonheim & Swart, 2015). The ICD talks led to the Sun City peace agreement, signed in South Africa by the end of 2002.

However, like with previous peace agreements, fighting has continued in the eastern provinces. Periodic escalations of violence have occurred time and time again, and Rwanda has on several occasions been accused of invading Congolese territories or supporting armed groups operating in North and South Kivu. There are still multiple active armed groups in the Kivus, not least the FDLR (*Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda*) which is the Hutu militia formerly called Interahamwe,³ and many different Mai-Mai groups. Congo's national army, the FARDC, has launched several military operations, for instance three against the FDLR between 2009 and 2010, the last one in collaboration with UN peacekeeping force in eastern Congo (MONUSCO). More recently, in April 2012, starting with the mutiny of some former CNDP (*Congrès national pour la défense du peuple*) soldiers who had been integrated into the FARDC in 2009, a new rebel group, the M23 (*Mouvement du 23-Mars*), saw the light of day. In the fighting that followed, M23 expanded its territory and in November 2012, to the humiliation of United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO) and FARDC troops, it seized control of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu. The suspicion that Rwanda and Uganda were supporting M23 was later confirmed by the UN Group of Experts (UN, 2012, 2013). The incapacity of the peacekeeping forces to stop the M23 led to the creation of UN's first-ever "offensive" combat force, the purpose being to carry out targeted operations to neutralize and disarm the M23 as well as other Congolese rebels and foreign armed group (UN Security Council, 2013). The UN intervention brigade, with troops from

³ The genocide in Rwanda in 1994 has also greatly influenced war and armed conflict in eastern Congo. For a detailed elaboration see Prunier (2009).

South Africa, Malawi and Tanzania, was central in assisting FARDC's victory over M23 later in 2013.

Military operations conducted by the FARDC as well as fighting initiated by the multiple armed groups in eastern Congo have been accompanied by dreadful abuses against the civilian population (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2009a, 2009b, 2015). Both past experience with war and violence and the current armed conflict in eastern Congo has been characterized by systematic and horrific human rights violations such as looting, killings, rape, child abduction, child soldiering, mutilation and many other types of atrocities (e.g., Baaz & Stern, 2009; Beneduce, Jourdan, Raeymaekers & Vlassenroot, 2006). Abuses and human rights violations are committed by all armed forces and groups, and millions of people have lost their lives in battle or as a consequence of war, making the conflict in eastern Congo one of the world's deadliest (cf. International Rescue Committee, 2008). Yet thousands of others are displaced.

1.2. Child soldiering in the DRC

There is a general consensus that recruitment of children increases along with the duration of a conflict (ILO, 2003; Andvig & Gates, 2010; Høiskar, 2001). The logic is clear and comprehensible; long lasting armed conflicts often experience a diminished stock of adults, which increases recruitment of minors for armed groups to maintain their position and strength. The same logic is also often used when it comes to recruiting female soldiers (e.g., Alison, 2004). When looking at the DRC it becomes apparent that some armed groups have in fact had children in their ranks from the very beginning of their existence. It is, for instance, estimated that more than 10,000 children were recruited and used by Laurent Kabila and the ADFL in the First Congo War (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2002). Some of these children were incorporated into the national army after Kabila came into power. Kabila's new national service scheme established training centres directly targeting *kadogos* ("little ones" in Swahili), and the government was urging youths between the ages of 12 and 20 to enlist in response to anti-government insurgency (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2002, p. 30). Also female soldiers have been common in the DRC since the time of Mobutu Sese Seko and Laurent Kabila (cf. Baaz & Stern, 2013).

The recruitment and use of children as soldiers is a persistent phenomenon in the conflict in the DRC, and it is estimated that children make up 30% or more of some of the armed groups operating in eastern Congo (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011, p.11). It is well documented that all armed forces and groups in the DRC continue to recruit and use children in their ranks (UN, 2010, 2011a, 2015; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011). Recruitment of children is, thus, not reserved for non-state armed groups but is also evident in the Congolese national army (the FARDC) as well as in the Republican Guard protecting the President (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011). As an example, the child protection section in MONUSCO documented the release of 353 children from the national army from January to September 2010 (UN, 2010). More than a hundred of these were recruited the same year.

Some claim that Mai-Mai groups, local defence groups varying in size and motive, have the greatest ratio of children in their ranks (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011, p. 16). Six consecutive annual reports by the UN Secretary-General on children and armed conflict between 2002 and 2009 have listed Mai-Mai groups as among the parties to the armed conflict in the DRC who recruit and use children. Also the FDLR is responsible for numerous recruitments, mainly through abduction (The Coalition to Stop the Use of Children, 2011). In 2010, MONUSCO statistics indicated “a striking increase” (UN, 2010, p. 137) in recruitment of Congolese combatants in the FDLR, most of these being children. An increase of recruitment and use of children was also seen in the conflict escalation in 2012 initiated by the M23. M23 recruited Rwandan children, Congolese refugee children in Rwanda as well as children and youth in North Kivu. Several former child soldiers were also re-recruited during this insurgence, particularly in the territory of Rutshuru.

Many of the Congolese armed forces and groups, thus, continue to rely on children as an important part of their military strength and strategy (UN, 2015). Statistics from MONUSCO reveal a significant increase in officially demobilized children from 2014 to 2015. While 1030 children were separated from armed groups during the entire year of 2014, as many as 1399 children (of whom only 72 were girls) were released between 1 January and 31 August 2015 (UN, 2015). The rise in number of demobilized child

soldiers may of course be a positive sign, signalling greater efforts to release children from armed groups, but may also be an indication of an increased use of children in eastern Congo.

1.3. Pathways into soldiering

When examining current research on child soldiers it becomes clear that, although some children join ‘voluntarily’⁴, a significant number of child soldiers are abducted or otherwise forcefully recruited. This is, for instance, the case with child soldiers in Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar (Becker, 2010), as well as in Sierra Leone (Maclure & Denov, 2006; Denov & Maclure, 2006) and northern Uganda (Annan, Blattman, Carlson & Mazurana, 2008; Wessells, 2012). In northern Uganda alone, more than 60,000 children were abducted by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). To some degree divergent from the majority of studies on child soldiers, the International Labour Office (ILO, 2003) finds that 64% of child soldiers in the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi and the DRC made a personal decision to join (‘voluntary’ recruitment) while 36% were recruited by force. The research project “Child soldiers, reintegration and the civil society” (2009-2012), of which this doctoral work forms part, found that the rate recruited by force among child soldier respondents constitutes approximately 90% among the girls and 40% among the boys. High rates of abduction are also common for girl soldiers in Angola (Wessells, 2010) and in Sierra Leone (Coulter et al., 2008). Brett (2002) distinguishes between conflicts in Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Colombia which has a larger rate of girls joining ‘voluntary’, and conflicts in, for instance, Angola, Sierra Leone and northern Uganda, where many girls are abducted. The high percentage of ‘voluntary’ recruitment (64%) in the ILO study (2003) may perhaps be explained by the low proportion of girls (only 6,6%) included in the study.

Why children join armed forces and groups ‘voluntarily’ has been studied in several post-war contexts, concluding with a rather similar set of reasons for joining. According to Brett and Specht (2004) factors influencing children’s decisions to join include,

⁴ Because elements of compulsion are also seen when children apparently join armed forces and groups voluntarily, I use brackets when using this term.

among others, poverty, loss of parents, lack of economic opportunity, abuse at home, ethnicity, and political belief. Having friends or significant others who join may also play an important role for some children (Keairns, 2002). ILO (2003) reports that children join armed forces or groups because of material needs, a desire for vengeance, a fascination for and/or prestige of the army, and because of fear, ideology, or a feeling of exclusion. Some children, maybe particularly girls, join armed groups to escape from domestic violence and/or sexual abuse (Keairns, 2002; Coulter et al., 2008).

It is important to note that also in cases of so-called ‘voluntary’ recruitment there are most often elements of compulsion (cf. Høiskar, 2001; ILO, 2003). “When seemingly personal initiatives are analysed, it becomes clear that they were taken under duress and in ignorance of the consequences” (ILO, 2003, p. 27). The compulsion is in many cases linked to the war itself, particularly the level of insecurity, poverty and the destruction of young people’s future opportunities.

1.4. Pathways out of soldiering

Children exit armed forces or groups either through an official demobilization process or by escaping on their own (self-demobilization). Official demobilization processes in different parts of the world have typically had a military- and security-oriented approach where the handing in of a weapon may serve as a criteria to be included and supported (Knight & Özerdem 2004; Tonheim, 2013b). While such criteria may exclude men, women, boys and girls alike, it may affect more strongly female soldiers who often have multiple roles and are only partially participating in active combat (Denov, 2008; Verhey, 2004). In the DRC it is believed that the majority of former girl soldiers return ‘home’ outside the official demobilization process (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011). Despite estimates that girls are likely to make up 30-40% of the total number of child soldiers in the DRC (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011; Verhey, 2004), reports from 2006 as well as 2010 reveals that only 12% of formally demobilized children in the DRC are girls (Amnesty International, 2006; MDRP, 2010). Among officially demobilized children between January and August 2015, as few as 5% were girls (UN, 2015).

This situation is not unique for eastern Congo. Over the years many studies from different war contexts have drawn attention to the huge absence of females in official DDR programmes (e.g., Coulter et al., 2008; Mazurana & Carlson, 2004; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Denov, 2008). Denov (2008) contends that “[o]fficials, governments, and international bodies frequently cover up, overlook, or refuse to recognize girls’ presence, needs, and rights during and following armed conflict” (p. 814). Efforts to release children from armed forces and groups, in the DRC as in other countries, often depend on the cooperation of military commanders. However, these men often view the girls as their war booty (Paper III), a form of possession, claiming that the girls are their ‘wives’ rather than ‘child soldiers’ they are obligated to demobilize (Verhey, 2004; Amnesty International, 2006). Hence, girls are hidden when identification of child soldiers is taking place.

Being ignored by the official demobilization process leaves the girls with the alternatives of escaping on their own or remaining with the armed group. While the exclusion of female soldiers in the official process appears to be the main reason why girls self-demobilize, many girls also fear stigmatization and therefore attempts to hide their association with armed forces and groups by returning home on their own (cf. Verhey, 2004; Hobson, 2005). By trying to escape, the girls take great risks; being caught implies severe punishment and sometimes death (cf. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011; Amnesty International, 2008). Demobilizing on your own also impacts on the return ‘home’. Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers (2011) observes that the situation of self-demobilized child soldiers in eastern Congo “remains particularly precarious” and these children often “fail to gain official release certificates (“attestations de sortie”) that would help them gain access to support” (p. 27). Beneficiaries of reintegration programmes are commonly selected from the official demobilization list and former child soldiers are, thus, required to present demobilization certificates to benefit from assistance. As most programmes, for instance in South Kivu, do not attempt to identify and include self-demobilized children,⁵ demobilizing outside the formal process often means no reintegration assistance at all.

⁵ This is confirmed in conversations and interviews with staff in local reintegration programs and the National Programme for Disarmament Demobilisation Reinsertion (NPDDR) in South Kivu.

Since many girls are either excluded from the official process or opt to self-demobilize, their situation is particularly vulnerable.

1.5. Chapter overview

Chapter two presents the conceptual and theoretical framework, starting with international standards of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) process, linking it to both adult and child ex-soldiers, and moves on to elaborate the concepts of stigma/deviance and the theoretical framework of repair, stigmatization and tolerance (Dijker & Koomen, 2007). Chapter three presents a review on research of reintegration, particularly focusing on conceptualization and research on social reintegration, and closes with presenting the project's research questions. Chapter four gives an overview of the research design, the project's methodological reflections and choices, and presents ethical considerations and information on the analytical process. Chapter five gives a summary presentation of the main results as outlined in the four publications forming the basis for this thesis summary, while chapter six discusses the findings in light of other scholarly work as well as through an elaboration of two global discourses closely resembling local perceptions of former girl soldiers. The thesis summary ends with some concluding remarks.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

In order to get a better understanding of reintegration of former girl soldiers, it is crucial that readers are aware of the larger framework of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants in general. The approach to child soldier reintegration, not least what happens in practice, is highly affected by the underpinnings of the wider DDR process.

2.1. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR)

The most broadly accepted and employed definition of DDR for adult ex-soldiers is provided by UN's Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) of 2006. These standards define the three components of the DDR process as follows;

- Disarmament is “the collection, documentation, control and disposal of small arms, ammunition, explosives and light and heavy weapons”;
- Demobilization is “the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups”; and
- Reintegration is “the process by which ex-combatants acquires civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income” (UN, 2006, 2.10, pp. 4-5).

At a minimum, DDR programmes are designed to “contain arms, dismantle armed groups and prevent the recurrence of war” (Muggah, 2009, p. 2). The rationale for using DDR to mitigate security risks lies in the perception that ex-combatants are threats to a fragile security situation and therefore possible spoilers of peace. As observed by Knight (2010), “A large number of ex-combatants who are still in possession of weapons can pose a threat to the security of a state and its civilian population” (p. 32). This is the assumption also with regards to former child soldiers, not least as they, in some conflicts or in some armed groups, make up a large portion of the soldiers and recruitment of children appears to be “the chief means of enabling fighting” (Wessells, 2006a, p. 3).

A security-oriented approach to DDR, also called a minimalist approach, has lately been challenged by a maximalist approach which has a focus “more deeply invested in promoting sustainable development and progressive liberal transformations in the governance sector” (Muggah, Berdal & Torjesen, 2009, p. 270). Both approaches are

supported by important international stakeholders. The World Bank, for instance, advocates a maximalist approach, understanding DDR, particularly the reintegration phase, as an opportunity for development and reconstruction, whereas the UN peacekeeping operations (UNDPKO) have adopted a minimalist security-oriented approach (Knight & Özerdem, 2004, p. 506). As observed by Hazen (2011, p. 116), this has created a situation on the ground where we find military officers perceiving DDR as a short-term security programme, while development agents view it as part of a long-term development approach. Willems and van Leeuwen (2015) contend that the difference between the two lies essentially in whether DDR programmes should “promote comprehensiveness or pragmatism” (p. 318). It is evident that most DDR programmes, often operating within the realm of peacekeeping, have a security perspective and, thus, a minimalist security approach (cf. Jennings, 2008; Hazen, 2011). One consequence of a security-oriented approach, often forgotten in scholarly debate as well as in actual planning and implementation of DDR programmes, is the non-inclusion of female soldiers into DDR programmes (cf. Denov, 2008; Jennings, 2009; see section 1.4.).

The divide between a maximalist/development and minimalist/security approach mirrors in many ways the difference between reintegration and reinsertion (cf. Özerdem & Podder, 2008; Hazen, 2011). The IDDRS (UN, 2006) make a clear distinction between the two; reinsertion being a short-term assistance offered to ex-combatants during demobilization, and, hence, prior to the longer-term process of reintegration. Long-term versus short-term thinking is also visible with regards to planning of the economic component. While reinsertion helps to establish a rapid and often temporary way to earn a living, the goal of reintegration is *sustainable* employment and income (UN, 2005). The reality, however, is that more often than not practical implementation of reintegration programmes resembles short-term reinsertion, not long-term reintegration (cf. Hazen, 2011; Özerdem, 2012).

2.2. Release and reintegration of former child soldiers

Despite a close link to security issues also with regards to young ex-soldiers, the UN standards (UN, 2006) acknowledges that when it comes to children, DDR should be

driven by international legal standards rather than a concern for security. Military aspects are downplayed while social aspects such as family and community are emphasized. Handing in a weapon is by both the IDDRS (UN, 2006, 5.30) and the *Paris Principles on children associated with armed forces and armed groups* (UNICEF, 2007) ruled out as a requirement for assistance. Indeed, “No distinction should be made between combatants and non-combatants when eligibility criteria are determined, as these differences are unclear in armed forces and groups where children, and girls in particular, perform numerous combat, combat support and non-combat roles that are essential to the functioning of the fighting force” (UN, 2006, 5.30, p. 10).⁶ In the IDDRS for children the disarmament phase is, in fact, removed. Rather than calling it disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the process is referred to as *Prevention of recruitment, and the demobilization and reintegration* (PDR) (UN, 2006, 5.30). Also the demobilization phase is defined somewhat differently than for adults. The Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007) call it “release” of children and stress that it includes also “informal ways in which children leave by escaping, being captured or by any other means” (p. 7).

The most recent and detailed principles governing reintegration of former child soldiers is provided by the Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007). This standard defines child reintegration as “the process through which children transition into civil society and enter meaningful roles and identities as civilians who are accepted by their families and communities in a context of local and national reconciliation” (UNICEF, 2007, p. 7). Support for families and communities, family-based care arrangements, supporting children in finding a role in their community and addressing health-related needs are all viewed as important instruments for reintegration. The approach should be both holistic and individual, and involve psychological rehabilitation, recreational activities, education and livelihood opportunities. The IDDRS also emphasize the social aspects of child reintegration, stating that “Child-centred reintegration is multilayered and focuses on family reunification, mobilizing and enabling the child’s existing care system, medical screening and health care, schooling and/or vocational training,

⁶ Contrary to the logic applied to children, the divide between support and combat roles is surprisingly upheld in the UN IDDRS for adult female soldiers (UN, 2006, 5.10; see also section 6.1.2).

psychosocial support, and social and community-based reintegration” (UN, 2006, 5.30, p. 29). Its long-term nature is also made much more explicit in international standards for children, with the IDDRS stating clearly that “Demobilization and reintegration programmes for children should be expected to extend over a period of five years or more” (UN 2006, 5.30, p. 6). Child reintegration must, in other words, be a long-term process that offers children and youth sustainable alternatives to military life and “builds and reinforces community-based solutions and capacities” (UN, 2006, 5.30, p. 3). We may, thus, conclude that the DDR (or the DR) process for children should have a maximalist rather than minimalist approach and it should not be perceived as a quick-fix reinsertion support. Whether this approach actually is what takes place on the ground is, however, debatable (Tonheim, 2014).

2.3. Why use the term ‘child soldier’?

The review of literature (Paper I) revealed a great variation of terms and concepts related to children involved with armed forces and groups. I have in my publications (except in one) chosen to use the terminology ‘child soldier’ and ‘girl soldier’. The use of the term ‘child soldier’ has, however, been criticized for contributing to exclusion of children who are not viewed as ‘proper’ soldiers, hence the change to “children associated with armed forces and armed groups” by the Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007). Using the term former child soldier has also been criticized for contributing to stigmatization and negative reactions from the surroundings. My rationale for sticking to the term ‘soldier’ is to emphasize that the girls perform roles of crucial value to the continuation and overall functioning of armed forces and groups (cf. UN, 2006, 5.30; Denov, 2008), and they should consequently be recognized as full members and therefore also labelled soldiers⁷; equally to modern armies where members are perceived as soldiers irrespective of their role. Combat and support roles most often overlap and are performed simultaneously (Mazurana, McKay, Carlson, & Kasper, 2002; Denov & Gervais, 2007), thus, a divide between the two is artificial, not reflecting reality for many female

⁷ The reluctance to identify girls and women as full members of armed groups has been noted by several scholars (e.g., MacKenzie, 2009, Denov, 2008). The reluctance seems to be linked to that a number of female combatants are combat “wives”, often involuntary, thus often reckoned as “camp followers” and “dependents”. However, being a “wife” is very seldom their only or their main role in the group. A study of female ex-combatants in Sierra Leone by Mazurana and Carlson (2004) shows, for instance, that while 60 percent had been a combat ‘wife’, only eight percent reported this as their primary role.

soldiers. To continue maintaining a distinction between female *soldiers* and females *associated with armed forces and groups*, as done in the IDDRS (2006) for adults, is revealing “reluctance [...] to identify women who participated in war as full members of armed groups” (MacKenzie, 2009, p. 241). To be recognized as a soldier is closely linked to the realization of the right to be demobilized and supported in their reintegration process. This is particularly apparent in literature on female soldiers, where several studies have stressed that without being granted the status of a soldier, girls and women are often ignored and discriminated in DDR processes (e.g., Denov, 2008; Verhey, 2004).

2.4. Stigma, deviance and stigmatization

The notion of stigma was developed by Erving Goffman in the 1960s, and his work is still highly influential in sociology as well as in other fields. Goffman (1963) defines stigma as a “deeply discrediting” attribute that reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (p. 3). In Goffman’s understanding there are three types of stigmas; 1) “Tribal identities” (nationality, ethnicity and religion), 2) “Abominations of the body” (diseases, physical deformities), and 3) “Blemishes to the character” (criminality, addictions, mental illness etc.). Whether it is an invisible stain or a physical mark, visible to the eye, the importance is that it stirs social disapproval. Scholars maintain that stigma or deviance is a label constructed by society in the face of something or someone diverting from what is perceived as ‘normal’. Consequently, stigma does not “reside in the person but rather in the social context” (Bos, Pryor, Reder & Stutterheim, 2013, p. 1). As argued by Becker (1963), social groups create deviance by “making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labelling them as outsiders” (p. 9). Deviance, therefore, is something that occurs because of encounters and interactions between a person and the social systems surrounding her (e.g., family, school, workplace, a community and the society at large). If it were not for rules and norms about what is ‘normal’, established by one or more of these social systems, no person would be deviant.

Dijker and Koomen (2007) define deviance as one or several conditions that are undesirable from a society’s norms and standards, distinguishing between deviance

which reduces the fitness of the deviant individual (e.g. illness) and deviance that threatens the fitness of others (e.g. stealing) (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 16). Stigma and deviance is, therefore, something that typically activates negative emotions. Similarly, Bos and colleagues (2013), contend that stigma “involves a reaction to a perceived *negative deviance*” (p. 2). Deviant behaviour or conditions, or using Goffman’s term, “discredited attributes”, are seen as “objectionable in the sense that they produce the belief that something ought to be done about them” (Archer, 1985, p. 748 quoted in Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 5). Reactions to stigma often manifests itself in stigmatization. Phelan, Link and Dovidio (2008) suggest that stigmatization may have three different functions. It can function as exploitation and domination (“keeping people down”), as enforcement of social norms (“keeping people in”), or as disease avoidance (“keeping people away”) (Phelan, Link, & Dovidio, 2008, p. 362). Through stigmatization a person’s humanity is questioned; he or she is “devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others” (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998, p. 504). Consequently, stigmatization often has huge impacts on individual lives, often linked to less access to protective resources (e.g. community and family support) and fewer positive opportunities (Link & Phelan, 2001).

2.5. Linking deviance and emotional reactions

Dijker and Koomen (2007) argue that two dimensions are sufficient to meaningfully explain emotional reactions to deviant conditions; the active-passive dimension and the dimension of controllability. The first dimension refers to how threatening the deviant condition is perceived to be, while the second refers to “the amount of control individuals are thought to exercise over the onset and/or offset of their deviant condition” (van Alphen, Dijker, Bos, van den Borne & Curfs, 2011, p. 246). Deviant conditions which are active in nature, for instance crime and mental illness, are experienced by non-deviant individuals as threatening and unpredictable, producing a hostile response involving emotions like fear and anger. The purpose of the hostile response is to prevent “threats from materializing into actual injury or harm” (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 30). Conditions perceived as passive, on the other hand, for instance old age and physical illness, are not considered threatening and tend to evoke feelings of love, compassion, empathy or pity, leading to a response of care and support.

Controllability of active deviance denotes the predictability non-deviant individuals have of the deviant individual's behaviour and its consequences. With regards to controllability of passive deviance it refers to the deviant individual's responsibility for her deviant condition(s), distinguishing between responsibility for the onset (blameworthy for the cause of the deviant condition) and responsibility for the offset (the individual's motivation to get out of her deviant condition) (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 42). As maintained by Dijker and Koomen (2007), deviant individuals who are "strongly motivated to get out of their disadvantaged situation" (p. 320) may change how they are perceived by others.

2.6. Deviance and social control mechanisms

People and societies deal with deviance by engaging in social control mechanisms. Dijker and Koomen (2007) define social control as "the process by which individuals and societies attempt to prevent or reduce deviant conditions or their consequences, induce and monitor compliance with their major values and norms, and hence maintain social order and morality" (p. 4). Dijker and Koomen propose three characteristic ways in which societies respond to deviance; repair, stigmatization and tolerance.⁸ A major concern of Dijker and Koomen's theory is how "some societies, social groups, or relationships manage to engage in repair processes with respect to deviance, while others merely tolerate deviant individuals, and still others actively stigmatize and socially exclude them" (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 187). Dijker and Koomen contend that people's and societies' emotional responses to deviance are affected by society's norms, culture and structural factors. They illustrate this by claiming repair as typical for egalitarian, collectivistic and simple societies (groups of kin or small groups of egalitarian hunter-gatherers), stigmatization as most common in hierarchical, collectivistic and moderately complex societies (e.g., European Middle Ages and current developing countries) and tolerance as typical for egalitarian, individualistic and highly complex societies (e.g., modern Western societies). The activation of emotions and

⁸ While Dijker and Koomen's theory takes the perspective of the *stigmatizer*, explaining the stigmatizers responses to deviance, my research in Congo takes the perspective of the *stigmatized* by investigating how former girl soldiers perceive to be treated by others. I still found this theoretical framework to be a rewarding and interesting approach to the situation of former girl soldiers. My research is, moreover, one of exploratory and empirical nature, not attempting to test the validity of their theory.

social control mechanisms are also likely to be affected by temporary factors war, armed conflict, famine and plagues, mainly as such circumstances lead to fear and anger.

2.6.1. Repair

The purpose of the repair response is to ensure cooperation and reciprocal interactions with deviant individuals. In repair processes, people and societies explicitly notice and clearly respond to deviance, the goal being to restore social order and harmony by either changing the deviant individual's undesirable condition or by socially accepting and integrating deviant individuals without such changes (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, pp. 4-6). Some of the major strategies used in a repair process are forgiveness, reconciliation, care, medical treatment or therapy (to cure the deviant individual), but it may also include punishment which aims at changing the deviant individual's behaviour. These strategies allow and motivate deviant individuals to adopt useful social roles (letting them reintegrate), and prevent consequences of deviant conditions (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 4). Anger control is a highly valued moral quality in societies using repair strategies, and when used as a repair strategy also punishment must be motivated by care. Dijker and Koomen emphasize that repair is most characteristic for small groups or societies with individuals who are interdependent and closely connected. They argue that "when preventive activities take place outside the safe environment of a group of closely related individuals such as a family or small community, they may easily result in stigmatization" (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 4). Within the family, the deviant individual is expected to be confident about her belonging to the group, despite sensing the threat of exclusion in repair strategies like withdrawal of attention or ostracism. Repair is essentially a non-aggressive and "balanced" type of social control, "neither too harsh, nor too soft" (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 6), for instance, visible in parents' upbringing of their children. Parents may, for example, punish their child if she misbehaves in any way, but the punishment is largely motivated by love and care and to a lesser extent anger.

2.6.2. Stigmatization

Contrary to repair, the purpose of stigmatization is to exclude a person from a relationship or society. It does so by perceiving and treating the deviant individual as 'essentially' or 'morally' bad, not distinguishing between the person and her deviant

behaviour or condition (see also Goffman, 1963; Crocker et al., 1998). Thereby, people are “withholding giving him or her a ‘second chance’” (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 6). Prejudice or stereotyping is the attitudinal side of this process, while discrimination refers to its behavioural side. The motivational force behind stigmatizing behaviour is negative emotions. That is, stigmatized individuals and groups experience fearful and aggressive responses from others. There is little, if any, trace of tenderness, protectiveness and forgiveness in such stigmatizing responses (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 204). Dijker and Koomen (2007) see stigmatization as “the process by which an individual’s or group’s character or identity is negatively responded to on the basis of the individual’s or group’s association with a past, imagined, or currently present deviant condition, often with harmful physical or psychological consequences for the individual or group” (p. 6). Being stigmatized often implies that deviant individuals are punished in a public, severe and shameful manner. They are exposed as bad examples and others are warned of their bad reputation or dangerous character (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 7). Stigmatizing responses to deviance aim at enforcing punishment and exclusion of deviant behaviour or conditions as well as prevention of future deviance through deterring others from engaging in similar behaviour. Dijker and Koomen (2007) contend that the most characteristic feature of stigmatization is probably “to publicly associate a person with a shameful deviant condition” (p. 7).

2.6.3. Tolerance

A tolerant response to deviance makes the important distinction between the person and her deviant condition; the individual is, thus, not seen as ‘essentially’ or ‘morally’ bad. Societies where tolerance is prominent believe that “it is good to allow others to think and act in ways that one disapproves of” (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 11). Tolerant people and societies typically attempts to ignore, rather than explicitly address, the existence of deviance; “tolerance requires us to look the other way, and interact with the deviant individual as if his or her deviance did not exist” (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, p. 11). If negative personal attitudes towards an individual or a group exist, these are expected to be suppressed because of egalitarian norms demanding equal treatment of every human being, deviant as well as non-deviant individuals. This disapproval or negative attitude must be suppressed, not “allowed” expression. However, such a

situation does not stimulate (personal) interaction and relationships with deviant individuals. It is rather merely a chilly toleration that in fact upholds a separation between the deviant individuals and others. “[W]hile it may be desirable that suppression may result in less aggressive behaviour toward deviant individuals, controlled behaviour associated with tolerance may be interpreted as lack of spontaneity or coldness by the deviant individual” (Dijker & Koomen, 2007, pp. 120-121). One major reason for the impersonal aspect of tolerance is that social control is largely taken over by the state (for instance, in modern Western societies). Dijker and Koomen (2007, p. 13) argue that because tolerance is often associated with negative feelings it may resemble stigmatization, particularly in that it does not fully reintegrate deviant individuals. It is a formal kindness, but one that excludes deviant individuals from interpersonal relationships. According to Dijker and Koomen, tolerance is, thus, neither indifference nor positive attitudes towards deviant individuals. It is rather a self-focused type of pity which exaggerates care without integrating individuals into meaningful social roles.

3. Research on reintegration

Despite the generally accepted definitions of reintegration advocated by international standards such as the UN IDDRS (UN, 2006) and the Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007), there is, among scholars and practitioners, no single agreed-upon definition. Meek and Malan, (2004, p. 12) call reintegration “the Achilles heel” of the DDR process, essentially because of the many variations of how this component is understood and implemented. Practical and theoretical definitions tend to diverge (cf. Nilsson, 2005, pp. 23-24), but there are also several approaches within the two frameworks. Whereas Paper I reviews what research says about reintegration of former girl soldiers, this chapter gives an overview of scholarly conceptualization of reintegration from a broader angle.

3.1. Reintegration: A multi-dimensional process

As highlighted by international standards and scholars alike, reintegration is a multidimensional process. The work of Kingma (2001) has been influential with regards to the conceptualization of reintegration, and several scholars build on his definition when approaching the topic (e.g., Nilsson, 2005; Knight & Özerdem, 2004; Özerdem, 2012; Angucia, 2010). He views reintegration as consisting of several intertwined dimensions; social, economic, political and psychological dimensions. Kingma (2001) defines social reintegration as “the process through which the ex-combatant and his or her family feel part of, and are accepted by the community” (p. 407); economic reintegration as the process by which the ex-combatant’s household re-establish its livelihood; political reintegration as the process by which the ex-combatant and her family become part of decision-making processes; and psychological reintegration as a process of coping with psychosocial problems and changing attitudes and expectations.⁹ While the psychological dimension does not always have a prominent place in literature on reintegration of adult ex-combatants (e.g., Knight & Özerdem, 2004), it is often emphasized in literature on child soldiers (e.g., Betancourt, Borisova, 2010). Many war-affected children “have experienced a series of traumatic events, maybe even daily, within a timeframe that may last for a few months to several years” (Tonheim, Derluyn,

⁹ The above review does not address the political dimension of reintegration, although political reintegration is clearly not unimportant in child soldier reintegration. Political reintegration may, for instance, be crucial for young people to fully renegotiate their status and position in the aftermath of war (cf. Özerdem & Podder, 2011b; see also Maclay & Özerdem, 2010; Porto, Parsons & Alden, 2007).

Rosnes, & Zito, 2015, p. 28). Consequently, it is important to take the psychological impact of child soldiering into consideration both in research and when planning and implementing support programmes (cf. Shauer & Elbert, 2010). The trauma-oriented practical approach has been echoed by a vast body of research on the psychological impact of child soldiering (cf. Paper I). While early research on child soldiers focused largely on psychological trauma, more recent research has included a resilience approach.¹⁰ A growing body of research suggests that many war-affected children, also former child soldiers, fare way better than what could be expected (e.g., Wessells, 2006a; Betancourt, 2012; Fernando & Ferrari, 2013; Vindevogel, Coppers, Derluyn, Loots, & Broekaert, 2012; Blattman & Annan, 2009). Many are not as traumatized as one could expect but show resilience and an amazing ability to cope with their daily adversities (Seymour, 2011; Betancourt, 2012; Blattman & Annan, 2009; Cortes & Jean Buchanan, 2007; Vindevogel, Wessells, De Schryver, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2014; Wessells, 2006a). One needs, however, to consider that resilience is not a statistic ‘resources’; “children who appear resilient in the short term may not be so in the longer term, whereas children who seem more vulnerable initially sometimes grow in competence and resourcefulness” (Boyden & Mann, 2005, p. 18; see also Rutter, 1990).

Another dimension that has received solid attention, not least in the implementation and evaluation of reintegration programmes, is the economic dimension; providing ex-soldiers legitimate ways of earning a living. A decade ago Nilsson (2005, p. 11) observes a shift from a narrow focus on economic reintegration to a wider acknowledgment of its social aspects, but several years later economic aspects still have a stronghold in the conceptualization of reintegration (cf. Muggah & Baaré, 2009; Özerdem & Podder, 2011b; Tonheim, 2014). As noted by Muggah and Baaré (2009), “reintegration is often cast as an economic process linked to gainful employment and acquisition of a stable income” (p. 229). Also much literature on child soldier reintegration highlights the importance of income generating activities (Wessells, 2006b; Blattman & Annan, 2009). In their research on child soldiers in northern Uganda, Blattman and Annan (2009) find that the aspects most negatively impacted by abduction and child soldiering are

¹⁰ Resilience is here defined as “an individual’s capacity to recover from, adapt, and remain strong in the face of adversity” (Boyden & Mann, 2005).

education, wage and livelihood, more so than their psychological and social well-being. Although the gap is reduced over time they argue that “in the absence of significant economic and educational interventions, abduction has led to a persistent gap, or inequality, between ex-combatants and non-combatants in the population” (Blattman & Annan, 2009, p. 116). Boothby’s (2006) longitudinal research on former child soldiers in Mozambique finds that former boy soldiers were doing relatively well economically but that they still indicated that economic difficulties, particularly “their inability to help others when asked for money or other necessities” (p. 174), constituted obstacles to their reintegration. Livelihood opportunities are often connected to better chances of becoming socially accepted (cf. Wessells, 2006b) and increased chances of getting married (cf. Lode, 2013). As observed by Wessells (2006b), “Lasting reconciliation and reintegration occur when local communities see young former soldiers earning a living and filling social roles, supporting family and community well-being” (p. 194).

Nilsson (2005) underlines that characteristics and approaches of the ex-soldier, of the members of her family and community as well as impact of the broader social circumstances have implications for the reintegration process. Reintegration involves, thus, more than just planned and implemented efforts by reintegration programme. In fact he sees reintegration as a social process which often takes places unrelated to a programme (see also Humphreys & Weinstein, 2005). Nilsson (2005) maintains that reintegration assistance is only warranted if there are societal tensions between the ex-combatant and the civilian population, if the ex-combatant cannot fend for herself or if the ex-combatant constitutes a security threat (Nilsson, 2005, p. 28). Özerdem (2012) has a slightly different view. He stresses that while self-demobilization and short-term reinsertion may “be effective enough” (p. 61) if ex-combatants return as war heroes after a short period of armed conflict, programmes with a long-term social approach to reintegration is more effective in a context of prolonged war characterized by social divisions and deterioration of societal relationships and structures. Reintegration of ex-soldiers is, hence, closely linked to post-conflict reconciliation; the reparation of broken relationships.

Recently, researchers and implementers alike have come to recognize and underline the importance of context (e.g., Colletta & Muggah, 2009; Özerdem, 2012; Munive, 2013). As a result of human and social devastations caused by war and armed conflict the situation at home has, in most cases, changed, and it cannot be expected that ex-soldiers “return to some kind of status quo ante” (Boersch-Supan, 2008, p. 12; see also Honwana, 2006; Özerdem & Podder, 2011b). This new situation may, however, also open up new opportunities for renegotiations. Consequently, Boersch-Supan (2008) conceptualizes post-conflict reintegration, or integration as she prefers to call it, as “a process of contestation and negotiation between different societal groups to determine the shape of social structures” (p. 12). In a similar vein, Özerdem and Podder (2011b) emphasize that reintegration involves “a complex series of interrelated processes, through which people who have experienced different things and developed different conceptions and attitudes must renegotiate and rebuild identities and livelihoods” (pp. 6-7). In this situation, it may become necessary for both the host communities and the returnees to “relearn the principles of community living” (Özerdem & Podder, 2011b, p. 7). What used to be the community’s way of life, its norms, values and structure, has to a certain extent been ‘unlearned’ by soldiers and war-affected communities alike. Therefore, a post-conflict situation requires individuals and communities to, first, *unlearn* the ways of the war and, second, *relearn* or reset the rules of a peaceful society. Several scholars warn against a situation where reintegration simply re-establishes the “past structures of dominance and inequality that led to the war in the first place” (Hazen, 2007, p. 1). The risk of reproducing gender stereotypes and gender inequalities through DDR programmes is one example (e.g., Denov, 2007; Denov & Maclure, 2007; Basini, 2013); reproducing generational hierarchies is another (e.g., Peters, 2006; Bøås & Dunn, 2007). Consequently, reintegration should involve a reciprocal ‘readjustment’ by both the individual ex-soldiers and the community (Veale & Stavrou, 2003).

Because of the changed circumstances some scholars prefer the term ‘integration’ to that of ‘reintegration’; seeing the latter term’s implication of re-doing or re-establishing the past as problematic (e.g., Boersch-Supan, 2008; Hazen, 2007). Another inherent problem with the term underlined by several scholars is that it denotes resettling in one’s community of origin. Wessells’ study (2010) on former girl soldiers in Angola, for

instance, finds that rather than moving ‘back home’ after the war, many former girl soldiers opt to settle in a new environment, preferably one in which no one knows them (see also Paper I; Barth, 2002; van Gog, 2008). Similarly, Pugel’s (2007) study of ex-combatants in Liberia found that 42% had not returned to their home community. To avoid a return to a pre-war situation of inferior status and lack of opportunities, some ex-combatants from rural areas choose to settle in urban areas when the war has ended (Maclay & Özerdem, 2010; Stovel, 2008; Podder, 2012). An urban setting may also offer a higher degree of anonymity. While relocating may imply greater economic opportunities and a possibility to reinvent one’s identity, relocating also involves leaving behind one’s social support network which in the end may make reintegration more difficult (cf. Bowd & Özerdem, 2013).

Social support network, not least that of family, is emphasized as especially important for former child soldiers (cf. UNICEF, 2007; UN, 2006). Wessells (2005) identifies four key elements in child soldier reintegration; 1) family tracing, family reunification and assistance to help families to cope with new challenges 2) psychosocial support, including helping children to cope with their war experiences and reconcile with their communities, 3) livelihood support (vocational and life skills training), and 4) education and literacy training. A holistic approach to reintegration assistance, in other words the incorporation of all its dimensions, is prerequisite to success. However, as noted by Özerdem (2012) ‘real-life’ approaches to ex-combatant reintegration is very often not holistic. He identifies three typical ‘real-life’ approaches to reintegration. The first is self-demobilization, where the former soldier returns home without any assistance. The second is reinsertion where reintegration is reduced to a short-term start-up package focusing on immediate income generation. The third is community-located reintegration, where the cherished community-based approach to reintegration is reduced to a community-located approach, in other words largely planned, led and financed by external partners while ex-combatants and communities have little say. Özerdem (2012) argues that none of these real-life approaches captures the complexity and multilayeredness of reintegration.

3.2. The social dimension of reintegration

In settings of prolonged war and armed conflict there are often multiple socialization and de-socialization processes, or as Hazen (2007) calls it, social integration and disintegration processes. When recruited, either ‘voluntary’ or by force, both adult and child experience a process of disintegration of family and community, and begin the integration into the armed group (the so-called ‘war family’). The LRA, for instance, deliberately used recreation of the family unit to socialize and stir loyalty among its soldiers, and junior members of the group often called the commander of their unit ‘father’ or ‘teacher’ and the senior wife of the commander were called ‘mother’ (see Baines, 2014). Soldiers who are demobilized or able to escape need, therefore, for the second time to disintegrate from their ‘family’, this time the ‘war family’. This process overlaps with a new process of social integration, or a process of reintegration, back into the (civilian) community.

Identity transformation from soldiers to civilians is central and emphasized by international standards and scholars (e.g., Wessells, 2006a; Munive & Jacobsen, 2012; Porto, Parsons, & Alden, 2007). Denov and Maclure (2007) call this transformative process the ‘unmaking’ of child soldiers. Torjesen’s (2013) definition of social reintegration has two interlinked aspects; it is a process where soldiers 1) “change their identity from ‘combatants’ to ‘civilian’” and (2) “alter their behaviour by ending the use of violent means and increasing activities that are sanctioned positively by the mainstream community” (p. 7). Similarly, Vermeij (2011) argues that “the effects of [military] socialization need to be reversed to successfully reintegrate” (p. 185).

As mentioned earlier, Kingma’s (2001) definition of social reintegration stresses both the aspect of social acceptance and that of belonging,¹¹ acknowledging the need for a deep and genuine re-inclusion into social relationships of family and community. Building on Kingma’s definition, Angucia (2010) defines social reintegration of former child soldiers as the process where children “begin a new life with their families and their community after the bitter experiences of war by creating positive economic and social relationships” (p. 43). Also Özerdem (2012) highlights the social-relational

¹¹ On the human need to belong see Baumeister and Leary (1995).

aspects of reintegration; the re-inclusion into 'natural' social kinships of family and community. In this sense, he restates the view of Kingma (2001) that social reintegration is only successful if former soldiers "feel part of" their family and community. The re-establishment of social ties, observed by Özerdem (2012), is probably "the main guarantee for the sustainability of reintegration experiences" (p. 60). A social and relational approach to reintegration has also recently been advocated by several other scholars (Shanahan & Veale, 2010; Derluyn, Vindevogel & de Haene, 2013). Özerdem (2012) argues that "all other undertakings in terms of economic and political reintegration" (p. 69) should be incorporated into the objective of social acceptance and belonging.

Özerdem's (2012) 'social reintegration' approach and several other scholarly approaches stress the importance of context (social, economic, cultural and political), and maintains that reintegration programmes must address "the level of mistrust and fear that may be present between former combatants and receiving communities" (p. 63). Due to fear and mistrust commonly found in war-affected and post-conflict contexts, reintegration assistance must aim at 'building bridges' between ex-combatants and the war-affected community. Boersch-Supan (2008) contends that social reintegration is about the reconciliation of ex-combatants and the communities into which they are integrating. It is a two-sided process depending both on attitudes and actions of those returning and attitudes and actions by family and community members (cf. Nilsson, 2005). Successful reconciliation and social reintegration requires the generation of trust between former child soldiers and their family and community (cf. Torjesen, 2013; Özerdem, 2012).

Social reintegration is, therefore, largely about mutual readjustment by both former child soldiers and their communities, restoration of broken relationships and re-establishment of social acceptance. The dynamic between former girl soldiers and members of their family and community is, therefore, an important part of ensuring successful reintegration (cf. Meek & Malan, 2004; Özerdem, 2012). To study and consider the attitudes of the ex-soldier, her family and the community is thus of utmost importance (cf. Nilsson, 2005). Children and adults alike may experience hostility because of

atrocities they have committed to family and community members (cf. Blattman & Annan, 2009; Boersch-Supan, 2008; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007). Ex-soldiers who receive DDR benefits may encounter jealousy as others may see this as rewarding ex-soldiers while civilians are left without support (e.g., Knight & Özerdem, 2004; Podder, 2012).

Whereas some research report a large degree of social acceptance of former child soldiers (Boothby, 2006; Blattman & Annan, 2009), there are also those which report non-acceptance and stigmatization (e.g., Denov & Marchand, 2014; Betancourt, Agnew-Blais et al., 2010; Wessells, 2010; Vindevogel et al., 2013). Several scholars stress stigmatization as a particular challenge and obstacle to successful reintegration of female ex-combatants, both children and adults (e.g., Mazurana et al., 2002; Burman & McKay, 2007; Stavrou, 2005; Verhey, 2004; Coulter et al., 2008; Kiconco, 2015). Coulter's research in Sierra Leone (2006) shows, for example, that it was not uncommon that girls and women were seen as "damaged goods" when they returned to their communities. Other studies have found that female ex-soldiers tried to conceal their past and remain invisible to avoid stigmatization (e.g., Wessells, 2010; Boersch-Supan, 2008). Brett (2004) aptly notes that reality seems to give former girl soldiers two choices; speak out and risk stigmatization or stay silent and lead a relatively 'normal life'. Girl soldiering has, thus, clearly social and relational implications.

The overview above stresses the complexity of social dimension of reintegration, perhaps the most complicated dimension of former child soldiers' reintegration process. As noted by Kaplan and Nussio (2015), "social reintegration involves special challenges compared with other aspects of reintegration (political, economic) because of its interactive nature that places primacy on relationships with other actors" (p. 2). Regrettably, few studies have a sole and in-depth focus on former girl soldiers' social reintegration, and hardly any has studied social reintegration of former soldiers through the lens of stigma or deviance (two exceptions should be mentioned; Denov & Marchand, 2014; Özerdem, 2012), while this approach is common in reintegration of, for instance, ex-offenders (e.g., Behrens, 2004; Winnick, & Bodkin, 2008). Because female ex-soldiers appear to experience more stigmatization than male ex-soldiers,

research using a theoretical framework of deviance, stigmatization and social control may be well suited to study girl soldiers' social reintegration.

3.3. Research questions

The main purpose of this research is to investigate and provide insight into how former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience their return 'home' from armed forces and groups. Importantly, the research project seeks to draw a picture of how the girls themselves perceive their return and social reintegration, not how others perceive it. The focus is on their social reintegration, that of social re-inclusion into 'natural' social kinships such as family and community. Literature on reintegration of former boy and girl soldiers indicates that their 'home-coming' is often a difficult one, and because stigmatization has been identified as particularly challenging for girl soldiers, investigating into this aspect is a central interest of my project.

The research design starts with a review of literature to identify what we know already and where research gaps are evident. The first main question is therefore:

- What does the literature tell us about reintegration of former girl soldiers?

The literature review and the research gaps it identified informed the further development of the methodological design (e.g., participatory approach) and research questions (e.g., investigating into stigmatization). The second main question reflects the overall intake to the empirical study:

- What attitudes and treatment do former girl soldiers experience when returning home from armed forces and groups?

First I seek to establish whether the girls are successfully reintegrated into social kinships of family and community. Former girl soldiers have a right to social reintegration and rehabilitation, as stated in the CRC (1989, Art. 39), but is it realized? A successful social reintegration process is defined as one which involves repaired relationships characterized by positive emotions towards and social acceptance of former girl soldiers by family and community. Are the girls met with repair (reintegration), stigmatization or tolerance? Are relationships to family members and

people in their neighbourhoods restored or as they used to be? Do they feel that members of their families and communities care about them? Do they feel socially accepted and included in everyday social interactions?

The project is particularly examining whether the girls experience stigmatizing treatment and whether stigmatization may be a barrier to their social reintegration. The third main question is therefore:

- How does stigmatization unfold in the everyday lives of former girl soldiers in eastern Congo?

I seek to map out what type of insults, name-calling, discrimination and so on former girl soldiers experience. I also look into who is involved in the stigmatization, how the girls react to stigmatizing behaviour and how it impact on their everyday lives.

The first questions is answered through a scoping review, while question two and three are answered through empirical data from individual interviews with 12 former girl soldiers and focus group discussions with 17 former girl soldiers. My understanding of their situation also draws on interviews with 13 informants from different NGOs and public bodies, as well as on interviews with two caregivers.

4. Methodological approach

Research on child soldiers taking place in a context of war and armed conflict involves many ethical and methodological challenges (e.g., Fretheim, 2010; Hart & Tyler, 2006). The context is one of deterioration and mistrust, respondents are young and difficult to access, the topic is of a sensitive nature and most likely painful to talk about and the research interview may, thus, re-activate past traumas. Fieldwork in conflict environments also requires a serious risk assessment (Harpviken, 2009), as it may involve risk to respondents, local research staff, contacts in the field and to the researcher herself. It is therefore imperative to make explicit commitment to the principle of do no harm (Bowd & Özerdem, 2010; Dybdahl, Kravic & Shrestha, 2010). Additional challenges may arise because of unfamiliarity with local culture and language. Prudence, sensitivity and caution are therefore crucial qualities of researchers in the field of war-affected children; when formulating questions, when recruiting respondents, while conducting interviews, while analysing the data and when disseminating the research findings.

4.1. Phenomenological approach to research

There are a diversity of approaches to phenomenological research (see e.g., Dowling & Cooney, 2012; Kafle, 2011), but shared by all is a desire to investigate the phenomenon of human experience as it is. In other words, to present human experiences as “faithful to the original” (Denscombe, 2010, p. 95) as possible. A significant aspect of phenomenology is that it puts the research participants at the core of the investigation and that it elevates and gives respect and credibility to the thinking and reasoning of research participants (Denscombe, 2010, p. 95-96). Consistent with this line of thinking, I investigate how former girl soldiers themselves make sense of their reintegration process. I am interested in hearing *their* version of the story, and value insight into *their* thoughts on why they are perceived and treated in certain ways.

The phenomenological approach taken in this doctoral research is inspired by that of Heidegger (1962) and the view that interpretation and description are inseparable; “The meaning of phenomenological description as a method lies in interpretation” (Heidegger, 1962, p. 37), or as maintained by Finlay (2012), “We experience a thing as

something that has already been interpreted” (p. 22). What we find in our research is also affected by what we seek (Heidegger, 1962). In that sense, interpretation actually “presupposes some prior understanding on the part of the interpreter” (Bradbury-Jones, Sambrook & Irvine, 2009, p. 665). Meaning occur in context, be it the context of the research participant’s life, the context of the researcher’s life and understandings of the world, the context of history or that of social and cultural circumstances (Finlay, 2012). The researcher is, thus, seen as a co-producer of data (Mason, 2002; Crist & Tanner, 2003; Vandermause & Fleming, 2011), and this type of research is, therefore, often referred to as a process of *data generation* rather than data collection (e.g., Byrne, 2012; Lowes & Prowse, 2001). A researcher should not try to do the impossible – to free oneself from all one’s presuppositions, beliefs and prior understanding - but rather come to an awareness of these aspects and how they affect the research process.

4.2. Qualitative interviewing

The perspectives of the former girl soldiers, the story they tell about their return home, is the central focus of this study, and I am thus granting “descriptive and [...] explanatory priority to the ways in which “insiders” on the whole understand their existence” (Schatz, 2009, p. 7) and situation. My research design is inspired by phenomenological thinking, consequently qualitative in nature, and aims at describing the world as experienced by the former girl soldiers (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 26). The underlying principle of qualitative interviewing, as with phenomenology, is one of respect for people’s knowledge, values and experiences. The basis for my research is the perception that former girl soldiers are experts in their own lives, have the best knowledge of their own situation and are competent and capable of developing and expressing opinions about and solutions to their situation. In line with phenomenology, I was more concerned with depth than breadth, and chose to have multiple meeting points (individual interviews, two focus group sessions and one follow-up group interview) talking with the same girls several times rather than having a large sample (cf. Creswell, 2013).

The style of interviewing used in my research is one of seeking nuanced descriptions on what former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience, feel and act (cf. Kvale &

Brinkmann, 2009). This approach, thus, produces rich and concrete descriptions of the human experience, through first-person accounts given in their everyday language (Denscombe, 2010; Finlay, 2012). Qualitative interviewing enables a reflection of the complexity of the social world and sees each research participant as presenting “one possible version of the social world” (Byrne, 2012, p. 211; see also Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

Qualitative interviewing is, moreover, “particularly attractive to researchers who want to explore voices and experiences which they believe have been ignored, misrepresented or suppressed in the past” (Byrne, 2012, p. 210), as is the case with the informants in my research. Former girl soldiers are often ignored when it comes to participation in research as well as inclusion in programmes aiming to assist former child soldiers’ reintegration process (e.g., Denov & Maclure, 2006; Wessells, 2010; see also Paper I).

The qualitative interview methods I employed include semi-structured individual interviews, focus groups discussions as well as group interviews. Semi-structured individual interviews were chosen to ensure sufficient time to explore the girl soldiers’ situation, thus providing detailed and personal information. This method provides, moreover, the necessary flexibility to further explore issues raised by individual informants and to seek verification of whether I had understood the informant correctly if statements were unclear (cf. Vandermause & Fleming, 2011). Individual interviews were supplemented with focus group discussions led by two former girl soldiers. Focus groups were seen as appropriate because of its interactive nature which encourages participants to challenge, reaffirm, adjust and re-develop each other’s opinions (Barbour, 2007). Allowing participants to share and discuss with each other is also likely to result in greater depth than what is found in individual interviews (Smithson, 2000, p. 116). Because I did not personally facilitate the group discussions, this took away attention from the researcher; rather than providing data on what people say to me, it gives data on what people say to one another (cf. Jakobsen, 2015). The last reason for conducting focus group discussions was a desire to “give back or reciprocate with the participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 95; see also Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Focus group discussions may benefit participants as it creates an arena for empowerment and

learning (Linhorst, 2002). It has also been argued that focus groups may have a social support function (Peek & Fothergill, 2009; see also Tonheim, 2013a). The group interviews with the three focus groups and the two facilitators were the last data collection that took place. The purpose of these interviews was to get an understanding of how the girls had experienced their focus groups participation.

4.3. The larger project framework

The doctoral project was part of a larger research project addressing the reintegration of child soldiers, particularly girls, in the DRC. The project was entitled “Child soldiers, reintegration and the civil society: Models and experiences from eastern Congo, with special emphasis on the reintegration of girls” (2009-2012) and was funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was conducted through a cooperative effort between the Centre for Intercultural Communication (SIK) in Stavanger, (Norway), the Department of Peace and Development at the Université Evangélique en Afrique and the Department of Sociology at the Université Officiel de Bukavu, both in South Kivu (DRC). The project, of which I was the project leader, involved in total 12 researchers and students; ten from the DRC and two from Norway. In addition to contributing with new and much needed knowledge about the situation of former girl soldiers in eastern Congo, it was an explicit goal to invest in capacity building of local academics and students. The main outcome of the project was a book published by L’Harmattan (Paris) in 2013, of which I am co-editor. Making results available to students, academics and practitioners in the DRC was important to attain the purpose of local capacity building, thereof the decision to publish in French.

4.4. Fieldwork and getting to know the context

The fieldwork included three locations in South Kivu in eastern Congo - Bukavu (urban), Uvira (semi-urban), and Izege (village) - and the main data collection took place in January and March 2010. In addition to these two fieldtrips, I had regular visits (about two every six months) to eastern Congo from September 2009 to February 2012 in order to work closely with the Congolese researchers in the larger project of which this doctoral research forms part. During this period, I also undertook advisory missions for one reintegration programme in eastern Congo (see section 6.2.1.1.). All these visits evolved around the issue of child soldier reintegration and involved moments of learning

and discussions on matters important to my research. In total I spent about 22 weeks in eastern Congo. Time spent in the field helped me develop “a feel for local life” (Harpviken, 2009, p. 189). It taught me about the culture, about social conditions and everyday life of people in South Kivu, and enabled me to get a better understanding of how the war and the continuing armed conflict affect people’s lives and way of thinking. It also made me feel more at ease about being in a conflict environment and possibly also equipped me with an enhanced sense of possible dangers and risks involved in doing research in this context.

Individual interviews with 13 ‘key’ informants¹² also served to increase my knowledge of the local culture and context. Most of these interviews were, therefore, conducted before gathering data from the former girl soldiers. The interview guide included questions about the conflict in eastern Congo, the Congolese culture and society, the traditional position of girls and women as well as questions on the particular situation of former girl soldiers. The informants were purposively selected due to their knowledge about child soldier reintegration. Most were staff at different NGOs but the sample also include a few from public bodies such as local political authorities and the national reintegration programme for ex-combatants.¹³ I purposively sought to interview women, the main reason being that I expected them to have better knowledge of, and possibly also more considerations for, the situation of former girl soldiers. Unfortunately, due to a huge male-dominance among NGO employees, only four of 13 ‘key’ informants were female.

4.5. Peer-to-peer recruitment of former girl soldiers

The former girl soldier were mainly identified and selected through peer-to-peer recruitment (or snowball sampling). This recruitment strategy is seen as expedient when researching hidden, vulnerable and marginalized populations (Tiffany, 2006; Heckathorn, 1997) as well as for research in conflict environment (Cohen & Arieli, 2011). In the case of my research in the DRC, it also minimizes the risk of an undesirable

¹² The former girl soldiers constitute the real key informants in this study, hence the brackets here.

¹³ Informants were staff at: Bureau pour le Volontariat au Service de l’Enfance et la Santé (BVES), Women for Women International, UNICEF, MONUC’s Child Protection office, Centre d’Assistance Médico-Psychosociale (CAMPS), CONADER, War Child, Laissez l’Afrique Vivre (LAV), Projet Réinsertion des Enfants Ex-Soldats et Autres Vulnérables (PREV / Hope in Action) and within local political authorities.

and premature ending the of girl soldiers' anonymity (Wessells, 2010), this because the girls themselves will better know who is ready to and comfortable with participating in research that might identify them as former soldiers. Another strongpoint of this recruitment method is that it makes children and young people freer to refuse to participate since they are asked by their peers, rather than by a researcher or an important adult in their life. Using peer-to-peer recruitment or snowball sampling in conflict or post-conflict contexts is also beneficial since the researcher is referred to potential research participants by someone they know and trust (cf. Cohen & Arieli, 2011). Peer-to-peer recruitment is, in other words, an ethically sound sampling strategy in research with former girl soldiers.

To start the peer-to-peer recruitment, two girls at each fieldwork location were identified with the assistance of local reintegration programme staff (gatekeepers). I contacted two different reintegration programmes at each fieldwork location and each programme identified one girl who was then asked to recruit two to three additional former girl soldiers among her friends or acquaintances. The recruiters were, thus, purposively selected by the researcher through gatekeepers, whereas the rest of girl soldier respondents were purposively selected by the peer recruiters. This approach to sample recruitment ensured the inclusion of girls who had participated in different reintegration programmes as well as girls who had not received any reintegration support at all. A main rationale to include girls without support was the finding in Paper I that self-demobilized girls, often without reintegration support, were commonly ignored by research. Had I used a different recruitment strategy, for instance, if I had only gone through gatekeepers within reintegration programmes, I would be less likely to have gained access to girls outside the programmes. In that sense, peer-to-peer recruitment may have reduced sampling bias. However, peer-to-peer recruitment involves its own sampling biases, as only research participants from the social network of the recruiters will be approached. Another drawback is that I don't know if some of the former girl soldiers asked to participate refused. I am, thus, unaware of response rate as well as reasons for not wishing to participate in the research.

4.6. Review of the interview and focus group guides

Great care was taken to ensure that questions in the interview and focus group guides had a language style that was easily understandable to the girls, assumed to have little and disrupted education. The mini-questionnaire, the interview and focus groups guides were first composed in French and then translated into Swahili. This was done by the same interpreter who participated in the actual interviews. To ensure that the translated questions conveyed the intended meaning two steps were taken. First, a Norwegian missionary in Bukavu, who has an excellent knowledge of Swahili, was asked to review the first translation. This quality assurance was carried out in collaboration with the interpreter and the three of us discussed alternative translations to ensure a proper contextualization of concepts. The second step aimed at ensuring that questions would be easily understood by the young respondents, and the focus group facilitators played a crucial role in this process. The questions were reviewed by the two facilitators who commented on difficult wordings and difficult questions. However, despite attempts to ensure the understandability of the questions, the focus group transcriptions reveal incidents where this was still not fully attained. The French version of the questions guides are attached in Appendix 2, 3 and 4.

4.7. The data and the data generation

The research project draws on a variety of sources; a mini-questionnaire, in-depth individual interviews, focus group discussions and follow-up group interviews with each focus group as well as with the two focus group facilitators. The two main methodological tools were, however, individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. Individual interviews were carried out with 12 former girl soldiers (and two caregivers), and 17 former girl soldiers participated in three focus groups. Secondary data such as international standards guiding reintegration, UN reports and scholarly literature have also been used to answer the research questions.

4.7.1. Mini-questionnaire

The focus group participants were asked to fill out a one-page questionnaire to provide me with ‘quantifiable’ information such as their age, time spent with an armed force or group, time since returning home, whether having given birth due to sexual violence and so on. It turned out to be quite complicated for them to answer some of these questions,

particularly those which related to aspects of time.¹⁴ Most girls did not know for sure how old they were when they were recruited by armed groups, nor did they know for certain how many months or years they were with the group or how long they had been 'home'. I know this because both I and the interpreter were present when the girls struggled to fill out the questionnaire. Many asked the interpreter for help to fill out the form. Although, there is some uncertainty of the preciseness of the information provided by the questionnaire, it still proved useful to give an approximate description of some research participants characteristics.

4.7.2. Individual interviews with former girl soldiers

All the individual interviews with former girl soldiers were conducted in Swahili in collaboration with the interpreter. Venues were chosen to give privacy to research participants. Interviews and focus group discussions took mainly place in rooms made available to us through the local NGOs of the gatekeepers, while in one location (Uvira) it took place in a hotel. Individual interviews with former girl soldiers lasted between one and one and a half hours. It should be noted, that since the focus group sessions gathered all the girls at once, I tried to conduct most of the individual interviews on the same day in order to not having to ask them to come back another day. This was viewed particularly important for the girls who lived far from the venue of focus groups and interviews. This could, however, have made them more tired during the individual interviews, and, thus, potentially have impacted on the richness of that data.

Transport money was provided former girl soldier respondents (as well as some other interviewees) after individual interviews. The transport money was 1500 Congolese francs. Despite the transport money, many preferred to save the money and rather walk to and from the locations for the interviews. Gatekeepers and peer-to-peer recruiters did not receive any additional material benefits.

I personally transcribe all the individual interviews with former girl soldiers. I believe that this is of crucial importance to the quality or trustworthiness of the data. First, being present and having posed the questions, I would be better able to picture the setting and

¹⁴ This is, however, not uncommon in African cultures which have a different approach to time than the Western world.

non-verbal expressions accompanying the verbal speech. Second, recordings in French were directly translated to text in English, something that demanded great concentration, possibly avoiding a mechanical approach to the transcription of interviews. Third, the process of transcribing allowed me to thoroughly familiarize myself with every single sentence in each interview, which was of great value to and facilitated the data analysis.

4.7.3. Focus groups discussions with former girl soldiers

Three focus groups were organized and each group met for two sessions, the first one in January and the second one in March 2010. The groups were composed of and facilitated by former girl soldiers, and consisted of between five to seven participants. To ensure the natural flow of the focus group discussions it was deemed important that Swahili was the only language used. Consequently, I did not participate, nor was I present, in the actual discussion. Losing control of how the group discussion developed was seen as a small loss related to how interpretation back and forth from Swahili to French during the discussions would fragment and negatively affect the natural flow of the conversation.

Avoiding interpretation also reduced the time of the focus group discussions, which lasted from one hour to one hour and 45 minutes. Each session started with a light meal (snacks and drinks) in which the researcher and the interpreter also were present. This was done to create a relaxed atmosphere and for the girls to get to know both me and each other a little before the discussion started. This is likely to have had a positive impact on the dynamic of the group. Food and drinks was also important because some of the girls had walked for an hour or two to arrive at the venue.

I also used this first part of the focus group sessions to give the research participants information about the purpose of the project as well as their role and participation. And although not present during the actual discussions, the interpreter and I were at all times available outside if the facilitators needed me. The group discussions were tape-recorded and later transcribed and translated to French by the interpreter. The venues were the same as for the individual interviews.

4.7.4. Follow-up group interviews with former girl soldiers

Four follow-up interviews were also conducted; one with each of the three focus groups and one with the two facilitators. Follow-up interviews with the focus groups dealt with how they experienced to participate in the group discussions, while the one with the focus group facilitators addressed their experiences related to their role and responsibility. Data from these interviews are not included in the three empirical papers, but the experiences with youth-led focus groups are addressed in the methodological discussion of this thesis summary (see section 6.2.; see also Tonheim, 2013a). The follow-up group interviews were conducted in Swahili with the help of the interpreter and lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. Also these interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by me.

4.7.5. Individual interviews with caregivers

The research design did not originally include interviews with caregivers. Nonetheless, as I met with a few caregivers during the fieldwork I decided to conduct interviews with a couple of them to see what new information they would add. The caregivers appeared to be very blunt about the dilemmas and challenges of welcoming home former girl soldiers. Even though they only counted two in number, I chose to include the two interviews in the analysis used in the third empirical paper (Paper IV). One caregiver interview was done in French by the researcher, and one was done in Swahili with the help of the interpreter. Both interviews lasted less than an hour, were recorded, and later transcribed by me.

Although more caregiver interviews would most likely have enriched my data, there are also some problematic issues when interviewing several members of the same family. An important part of my research dealt with how the girls were perceived and treated at home, and the girls might not have felt comfortable speaking about stigmatization by family members if they knew I was also going to speak with their caregivers. To avoid loyalty conflicts and other potential harmful consequences, a better strategy may be to interview former girl soldiers and caregivers from different families. That approach would, however, have involved a new round of time-consuming and difficult process of getting access to a new group of research participants. Because the larger project, of

which doctoral research forms part, was coming to an end, there was no opportunity for me to embark on a new data collection at that point in time.

4.7.6. Characteristics of the girl soldier sample

The 17 girls participating in the study were between 16 to 25 years when the fieldwork took place, but all had been recruited by an armed force or group when under 18. Seven girls had been with the FDLR (called Interahamwe by the girls), six had been with a Mai-Mai group, one with the FARDC, one with the CNDP, and two girls had first been part of a Mai-Mai group and then later joined the FARDC. The time they spent in an armed force or group ranged from two days to four years, and time at 'home' after leaving the group varied from one to six years. One girl had, because her father was a soldier, lived with a Mai-Mai group together with her whole family for several years. She left the group after both her parents died. Most of the girls had escaped on their own and had therefore not been part of any official demobilization process. Approximately two-thirds of the young women had received some reintegration support after returning home.

Only the girls being interviewed were asked about how they were recruited. Of the 12 girls two girls stated they had joined 'voluntarily', while the majority had been abducted. Three girls reported having participated in combat. While many of them had tasks such as fetching water and firewood, cooking and the like, they were also used for sexual purposes. Rape is prevalent and experienced by most of the girls. Eight girls had become mothers due to child soldiering experience, and yet another reported a miscarriage during the time she stayed with the group. None of the girls who were forcefully married to a soldier or a commander were currently in touch with their so-called 'husbands'.

4.8. Ethical considerations

The data collection was carried out in line with research ethical guidelines developed by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH). The research design was approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) on the 3 November 2009 (see Appendix 1). However, as underlined by Wood (2006), adhering to ethical guidelines is "not sufficient to ensure adequate ethical judgment" (p. 380). Ethical guidelines may in fact give a false

impression that there is a fairly standard way to conduct ethical research that may be employed regardless of the research project in question, and that all ethical applications may be settled in the early phases of the research (Shaw, 2008, p. 401). This is not the case, as many ethical issues cannot be predicted in advance.

An ethical approach to research depends on and varies according to the research context, the sensitivity of the research topic, the age of the respondents, as well the characteristics of the researcher. If the researcher participants are female rape victims a male researcher may need to make different ethical judgments than a female researcher. Similarly, asking questions about sensitive topics such as child abuse may require different approach if research participants are 15 years old or if they are 40. Different respondents may, thus, react differently to similar questions, making it ethically ok to address certain issues with some respondents while leaving them out in interviews with others. There is, therefore, a demand on researchers to tread carefully, to know the context in which the research takes place, and to read the respondents and their comfortableness talking about different issues. This sensitivity is also underlined by ethical guidelines: “Researchers should be especially compassionate when they ask questions that involve intimate issues and they should avoid placing informants under pressure” (NESH, 2006, p. 17). Questions related to sexual violence is one issue which is likely to cause discomfort, for the respondent and the researcher alike, and researchers tend to avoid asking direct questions about this aspect (e.g., Fujii, 2010). I chose not to sometime include questions in the interview guides on whether they had been sexually abused. Nonetheless, during the interviews several girls would talk about these experiences. Because of their, in a way surprising, openness on the matter I did after a while allow myself to include more direct questions related to sexual violence. For instance, asking a follow-up question on whether they had been forcibly married to a member of the group or whether they were kept as sex-slaves. I do not recall any hesitation when they answered these types of question, however, they did at the same time convey, by not looking me in the eye, rather staring at the floor, that it was difficult or shameful to talk about these things. A few also giggled nervously. I was therefore, very careful and in most cases I did not pursue this topic any further. Avoiding placing informants under pressure does also include that researchers respect respondents when they do not want

to respond to particular questions. The former girl soldier participants were informed about their right to refuse to answer, but only once did this actually happen. The important thing is then to show the person respect by not attempting to persuade her to talk more about it but move rapidly on to the next question to avoid any uncomfortableness.

4.8.1. Information and consent

Informed consent is one of the central norms in ethical principles guiding research with human beings. The issue of consent was debated with Congolese researchers who advised me that written consent could be perceived culturally inappropriate in the Congolese context, particularly in rural settings and among young non-educated respondents. I decided, therefore, to employ oral consent. Because all the research participants were above 15 years of age no consent was needed by parents or guardians (cf. NESH, 2006).

Information was also shared orally, the reason being to avoid embarrassment of illiterate respondents if having problems reading written information. Before agreeing to participate the former girl soldiers were informed about who I was, the aim of my research, and how the results would be used and disseminated. It was made clear that the research results would be shared with reintegration programmes in South Kivu, the aim being to contribute to an improved practice of such programmes. It was emphasized that these potential improvements would not have a direct impact on the girls' personal situation, but hopefully be beneficial for future girl soldiers returning 'home'. Parts of this information was first given them by NGOs staff or peer-recruiters. Respondents were also informed about the possibility to refuse to participate, to refuse to answer particular questions, and to prematurely end the interview or leave the focus group if desired. The information sharing had the form of dialogue, using easy everyday language and included the possibility to ask questions. This approach aimed at ensuring that information was properly understood by the girls (cf. NESH, 2006).

Research participants are also entitled to information about potential risks involved related to research participation. It may, however, be difficult to spot all the risks beforehand; some risks only manifests themselves in the interview setting and some only

after the actual data collection. To know what will happen and to foresee the consequences of research participation may be particularly difficult in qualitative research since this methodological approach allows the researcher to respond and adapt the approach to each particular situation (Shaw, 2008). This methodological adaptability may complicate the researcher's obligation to ensure that the respondents are sufficiently informed about all risks involved. Foreseeing all risks in cross-cultural research and in a context of war, conflict and violence is particularly challenging. Research participants may, in fact, often have a more developed sense of the risks in their areas than the researcher herself (cf. Wood, 2003). Researchers may therefore benefit from a close dialogue with their respondents, as well as local interpreters, co-researchers and other local contacts. Hart and Tyrer (2006) recommend that respondents are "encouraged to identify further risks that the researcher may not have considered" (p. 22). Although, dialoguing with local contacts and the interpreter, I see now that I could and should have involved the girl soldier respondents more in this risk assessment as their knowledge is invaluable. Although not involving them in advance I attempted to be sensitive to their concerns during the fieldwork. Here is one example:

When I first met the girls based in the most rural of my three fieldwork locations I realized that some lived quite far away from where the interviews and focus groups were conducted. Some had actually walked for 2-3 hours to get there. To me, it undoubtedly appeared risky for girls to walk alone in desolate areas in eastern Congo, and I, therefore, proposed to drive them back after the interviews. The girls, however, kindly rejected my offer saying they preferred to walk. I then suggested finding a suitable venue closer to their homes next time we would meet, but they continued to express that they preferred to walk to the original venue. When asked why, they reveal that they are more fearful of the consequences of being seen with a white person close to home because this was likely to create problems and unwanted attention in from their neighbours. Assumed that to know a white person implied financial benefits, neighbours were likely to expect a little something and this situation could cause conflict between their families and others in their neighbourhood. To them, this was a risk that they did not want to take. The risk of walking for a couple of hours was downplayed, as it was common that women walked long distances to get to the markets and so on. Although I personally did not feel

completely comfortable with the decision, I let the girls make the call on how we should proceed for the next focus group discussion.

4.8.2. Confidentiality

Respect for privacy is a core value that is considered fundamental to the protection and promotion of human dignity. Confidentiality is a right for research participants and an obligation for the researcher (cf. NESH, 2006). Consequently, access to personal information, and control and dissemination of such information are of considerable importance to research ethics. To ensure confidentiality means to secure data so that it does not fall in the wrong hands and that personal information collected is not shared or disseminated in such a manner that others may identify the identity of the respondents (e.g., Wood, 2006; NESH, 2006). Personal information includes both personal characteristics like age, culture, religion, life experiences and background like education, employment, health, and so on.

To preserve the anonymity of respondents is in most type of research considered an ethical prerequisite, unless the respondent is a public figure. Without being guaranteed anonymity many respondents would be reluctant to talk openly about their lives and opinions. Anonymity is particularly important when the research topic is of a sensitive nature and when there are risks involved in sharing viewpoints. In line with the NESH guidelines (2006), I did not note the names of the girl soldier respondents. A few other identifiable personal information (for example age, ethnicity) were, however, collected. Since this kind of information can indirectly make the respondent identifiable, these were, however, kept separately from the interview and focus group transcriptions.

Not all methods to collect data are compatible with complete confidentiality. This is, for instance, the case with focus groups. Although the girls and young women participating in the group sessions were encouraged to keep the content of the conversation within the group, I could not guarantee that any of the girls would talk to others about what they had heard. This is the very reason why some scholars argue that focus groups are inappropriate when researching sensitive topics (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 20). Consequently, when employing focus groups, it becomes imperative to minimize the risk of sensitive information being shared outside the group, make participants aware

that complete confidentiality is not assured, and assist them in making a thoughtful choice on how much personal information to reveal.

One way to address the problems linked to confidentiality and focus groups is to use fictitious situations rather than posing direct questions about people's personal experiences. Questions with fictitious persons is argued to "help participants [to] personally distance themselves from what they might wish to reveal in the group" and make them able to "reveal highly sensitive information while not overtly saying they were involved" (Clacherty & Donald, 2007, p. 154). Following this argument, the present study chose to use non-personal questions. Contrary to the questions posed in individual interviews, those prepared for the focus groups addressed former girl soldiers in general, with questions like: "Do you think that former girl soldiers are disfavoured or insulted in any way?" or "How do former girl soldiers you know react to insults?" This gave the participants the freedom to discuss the questions without having to reveal their personal stories. At the beginning of each session participants were made explicitly aware of their liberty to talk about the issues in general terms. The transcripts show that participants sometimes made use of the possibility to distance themselves by addressing former girl soldiers as "they", however, often participants expressed their views by using "I" or "we".

4.9. Literature review as methodology: Paper I

Paper I is a scoping study which aims at giving an overview of and synthesizing existing literature and research on girl soldier reintegration. According to Arksey and O'Malley (2005) there are four main reasons to conduct a scoping study; 1) "To examine the extent, range and nature of research activity", 2) "To determine the value of undertaking a full systematic review", 3) "To summarize and disseminate research findings", and 4) "To identify research gaps in the existing literature" (p. 21). The first and the fourth purposes are the most relevant in my research. The research question guiding the search for literature was *What does the literature tell us about reintegration of former girl soldiers?* The review was limited to mainly studies and literature on girl soldiers in the African context. In the process of identifying relevant studies it became apparent that

literature solely focusing on girl soldiers was scarce, and this led to a broadening of the search as to include research addressing both gender as well as female adult ex-soldiers.

The review included both published literature and grey literature. While published literature often is peer reviewed, hence providing some assurance of its quality, grey literature does not undergo a similar quality assurance process. Inclusion of grey literature may, therefore, be somewhat problematic, particularly in a scoping study which, in contrast to a systematic review, does not assess the methodological quality of the literature included (cf. Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). However, since publications on child soldier reintegration in the DRC at the time of the review were mostly done by NGOs it was imperative to also include this literature.

Levac, Colquhoun and O'Brien (2010) recommend that two reviewers independently of each other review abstracts for inclusion or exclusion, and similarly that two researchers review full papers. This was not done in my scoping study, where I, being the sole researcher in the project, reviewed both abstracts and full documents alone. The literature review was a pilot project to the main research project, separately funded by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and had a short timeframe and a small budget.

4.10. Analysis of the empirical data

Neither qualitative analysis nor phenomenological interpretation begin after the data is transcribed and ready, but is a continuous process of reflection and dialogue on the phenomenon under study. The first round of meaning-making for this study took place during the interviews, in conversations with the interpreter, in conversations with the focus group facilitators and while transcribing the recordings of individual interviews. All these activities involved important reflections and identifications of specific concerns and recurring themes. After the transcripts were completed and available in French and English I used thematic analysis to analyse the texts (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). This approach was chosen because of its flexibility and its focus on themes *across* the entire data set, not within the individual interviews (data items) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis combined both deductive and inductive approaches, and the three empirical papers use thematic analysis at a semantic level, thus, identifies themes based on the explicit meanings of the informants (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). In other words, focus is on what is said, rather than underlying meanings. The papers have elements of both description and interpretation, but while Paper III leans towards description, Paper II and IV have larger elements of interpretation.

The initial phase of the analysis started by carefully reading and re-reading interviews and focus groups transcripts. I already had a relatively thorough understanding of the content of individual interviews as I had been the interviewer and transcribed every interview with the former girl soldiers personally. With regards to the focus group discussions, on the other hand, seeing the completed transcripts was the first time the data was available to me. Consequently, more time was necessary to familiarize myself with the content of the focus groups. As I gained a better sense of the whole, I started to make notes on themes and patterns important to the research question which cut across the data set. Particularly interesting extracts and examples were also highlighted. Only text that was considered relevant to the research questions was coded and included in the analysis (cf. Braun & Clark, 2012). Information on how the girls were recruited, their experiences while with an armed force or group and how they demobilized was crucial to better understand their individual stories and to gain some general characteristics of the sample, but was not included in the analysis.

The analysis did not involve quantification of results; giving accounts of people's experiences "works with words", "not with numbers" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 30). As addressed above, ethical considerations required me to be sensitive as to whether some questions would make the girl uncomfortable or be harmful in any way. Thus, the research participants were not all asked the same questions. The general flexibility of qualitative interviews also makes quantification less appropriate. Not addressing a certain issue does not mean that the research participant does not think it is important or part of her experience. For instance, not saying anything about being called a "prostitute" does not necessarily mean that it never happens. It may simple be an unconscious omission. During the coding process I, nonetheless, made some

calculations of the frequency of each code in each interview and focus group discussion as well as for the totality of the whole data set. Counting was used only to give me an overview of both the individual and the collective data material, in order to facilitate distinguishing between majority and minority sizes. In cases where one or two girls stand out with viewpoints and stories that differ from the rest, this was also noted and addressed in the analysis. The analysis, thus, looked for both similarities and differences in the data material.

4.10.1. Analysis Paper II

The analysis for Paper II is based on the first section of the 12 interviews with former girl soldiers, is informed by Dijker and Koomen's theory and uses *repair*, *stigmatization* and *tolerance* as main themes. Sub-themes were developed partly based on the theory but also on themes emerging through the reading of the interview transcripts. Because there is no absolute or explicit distinction between the three social control mechanisms, it may be challenging to empirically differentiate between repair, stigmatization or tolerance (Dijker, 2013; Dijker & Koomen, 2007). The approach chosen was to look for indications of different emotions (care, fear/anger, and pity) and actions linked to such emotions. Every statement or content-bearing sentence was coded separately. The analysis made a systematic distinction between members of family and members of community. The term family is defined according to the collectivistic perception of the extended family, both because this is culturally more correct but also because most girls currently lived with other family members, not with their birth parents. The coding in Paper II used NVivo software.

4.10.2. Analysis Paper III

The analysis in Paper III is the most detailed and in-depth analysis of the three empirical papers. The approach had an inductive nature, however, although attempting to code the transcripts “*without* trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 83), it is impossible to be completely free of pre-understandings (cf. Finlay, 2012; Malterud, 2001). Thus, my pre-conceptions of girl soldier reintegration and stigmatization deriving from reading literature are likely to have influenced the coding and the creation of themes.

Two codebooks were made, one for the individual interviews with the girls and one for the focus groups. I developed two codebooks because the individual interviews consisted of approximately twice as many questions and therefore provided data on aspects not addressed in the focus group. Several codes in the two codebooks are more or less identical, but the codebook for the interviews has a larger number of codes (see Appendix 5 & 6). The coding of the first interview transcript gave about 40 codes but during the process of coding the rest of the transcripts codes were rephrased, some were dropped or merged, and several new codes were added. The final number of codes applied in interview transcripts arrived at 86 codes. A similar process took place with the focus group transcripts. The codes for the interviews were in first person (e.g., *I'm blamed if things are stolen*), while the codes for the focus groups were in plural (e.g., *We are called Interahamwe-/military-women*).

All the girls were asked about how factors like gender, living in a rural vs urban setting, and returning with a child or not could impact on how they were perceived and treated. This means that also girls without children were asked about how returning 'home' with a child would impact on stigmatization, and these statements are coded similarly to those who spoke about personal experience (using the code: *I'm badly treated because I am an unwed mother/because I have child*). This approach corresponds with the approach in the focus group discussions where the girls were asked about former girl soldiers as a group, not their personal situation. It is also in line with my interest in the girl soldiers' collective story.

Figure 1. Example of coding of Focus group 3 – first session.

<p>Modératrice : Si tel est le cas, pouvez-vous donner certains exemples de défaveur ?</p>	<p>Code 15. We are maltreated and denigrated where we live</p>
<p>Participante : Moi tout d'abord, je vis chez mon oncle maternel, et là je n'ai rien à dire. Toutes les choses que l'on fait à mon égard, qu'elles soient bonnes ou mauvaises, je suis obligé de me taire puisque si j'ose parler on me qualifie de prostituée, on me dit que les militaires ont abusés de moi et c'est pour cela que je ne voudrais pas rentrer chez moi. Tout ceci me trouble. Ils passent tout leur temps à me critiquer sans raison. On me serve une petite quantité de nourriture et on cache le reste. La nuit, ce reste de nourriture est donné aux autres enfants et à moi on ne</p>	<p>Code 3. We keep quite when stigmatized</p> <p>Code 48. People call us whores/prostitutes</p> <p>Code 39. We are unfavourably treated when it comes to basic needs (food, shelter, health)</p>

me donne rien. Je ne suis pas respectée parce que j'ai été dans l'armée, on me prend comme un objet sans importance.	Code 21. Our families don't accept us
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The codes were grouped into the six following themes:

Main themes	Description
1. Fear and prejudices	Statements referring to negative assumptions about and representations of girl soldiers and statements that made mention of others being afraid and perceiving the girls as a danger to family or community.
2. Name-calling and insults	Statements referring to negative verbal expressions of stigmatization.
3. Maltreatment and discriminating behaviour	Statements referring to non-verbal forms of stigmatization.
4. Maltreatment of children of former girl soldiers	Statements referring to both verbal and non-verbal expressions of stigmatization of the girl soldiers' children.
5. Reactions to stigmatization	Statements referring to how the former girl soldiers responded to both verbal and non-verbal expressions of stigmatization of both themselves and their children.
6. Effects of stigmatization	Statements referring to how stigmatization affected relationships and social interactions with others.

4.10.3. Analysis Paper IV

In Paper IV I analysed interview and focus group discussions with the former girl soldiers as well as the two interviews with caregivers. However, rather than analysing the whole data set, Paper IV focused on only the parts which indicated exclusion from social interactions and relationships and the girls' social reaction to (perceived) social exclusion. This approach was informed by theory and Dijker and Koomen's (2007) understanding that social exclusion is the end goal of stigmatization. However, the actual coding had a more inductive approach and aimed at distinguishing between different spheres where social exclusion was experienced. The following four themes emerged; 1) *Rejection by parents and close family*, 2) *Exclusion from social interactions within the family*, 3) *Social exclusion from peer relations*, and 4) *Social exclusion from love relationship*.

5. Results

This doctoral work consists of four publications; one literature review published as a book chapter, two empirical papers published in peer-reviewed journals and one is under review. While Paper II establishes that stigmatization is more frequent than repair and tolerance, Paper III and IV delve deeper into a description of the stigmatization and social exclusion experienced by former girl soldiers in eastern Congo.

5.1. Paper I

“Where are the research gaps? Reviewing literature on former girl soldiers’ reintegration in the African context” (Tonheim, 2010).

The starting point of the doctoral research is a literature review conducted in 2009. The literature review is a scoping study and it aimed at giving an overview of and synthesizing existing literature and research on girl soldier reintegration. Because literature on girl soldiers was scarce, the review also included some studies which address reintegration of adult female ex-soldiers and some which address both boy and girl soldiers. Only recent literature was reviewed, covering the period from 2000 till early 2009. The review included both published and grey literature. As typical for scoping studies, I did not assess the methodological quality of literature included (Arksey & O’Malley, 2005).

The review reveals that the largest bulk of research on child soldiers has typically dealt with trauma and psychological impact of war and violence, often from a Western point of view, while local traditional concepts, beliefs and practices related to healing and cleansing have recently gained increased attention. More attention has also been paid to the contexts in which reintegration takes place. The invisibility of former girl soldiers in academic literature persists, although evidence is gradually increasing. The relatively few empirical studies which address different experiences of boy and girl soldiers emphasize the inappropriateness of current DDR programmes to include girls and take into consideration their particular needs. More gender-specific knowledge is clearly necessary to secure the realization of former girl soldiers’ right to rehabilitation and social reintegration. Although many girl soldiers are excluded from the DDR process against their will, there are also girls who choose to self-demobilize and self-reintegrate

because they fear stigmatization if identified as an ex-soldier. This fear sometimes makes them avoid returning home to their families, preferring to settle in a new place where nobody knows them. This must be taken into account in program planning. The review identifies two sub-groups of former girl soldiers that in particular have received very little scholarly attention; self-demobilized girl soldiers and forced mothers and their children. The needs of mothers and children born in captivity are largely neglected by researchers and reintegration programmes alike. The review also finds that, with the exception of studies from Uganda, there were little research on child soldiers in the Great Lakes Region and hardly *any* on reintegration of former girl soldiers in the DRC (except Verhey, 2004).

5.2. Paper II

“Repair, stigmatization or tolerance? Former girl soldiers’ experience of their ‘homecoming’” (Tonheim, Conflict, Security & Development, under review).

The second paper uses the theoretical framework of social control mechanisms proposed by Dijker and Koomen (2007) and examines whether the girls talk of treatment and attitudes which can be characterized as repair (reintegration), stigmatization or tolerance. Successful social reintegration is conceptualized as one which involves repaired relationships characterized by positive emotions towards and social acceptance of former girl soldiers. The analysis focuses on the first section of the 12 interviews with former girl soldiers, in which the girls were asked to think back to the day they returned ‘home’ and describe how they were welcomed by family members and members in their community.

The analysis paints a picture of a ‘homecoming’ characterized by frequent stigmatization, some repair and little tolerance. Incidents and examples of both repair and stigmatization were mentioned by eleven of the twelve girls. In other words, for most of the girls the ‘homecoming’ was a mixed experience; the return ‘home’ evokes several types of emotions and responses also within the same family. Most of the girls seemed to have one or two family members where the relationship is restored or as it used to be. However, when considering the frequency of repair and stigmatization, there is a clear preponderance of negative and hostile responses as experienced by the former

girl soldiers. About two thirds of the coded data material refers to examples and incidents of negative emotions and stigmatization. Verbal insults and name-calling is mentioned more often as coming from the community, while when looking at all types of negative responses, including being treated unfavourably to that of siblings and being less loved and valued, the girls talk more about difficulties within the family sphere. Despite the importance of family, the girls commonly experienced not being loved and cared for by their family. Although some repair processes are taking place, many former girl soldiers experience to be perceived as a threat to health and safety as well as to social norms. Why is it that people do not respond to former girl soldiers in a more caring manner?

The discussion draws attention to how reactions to deviance may be influenced by structural and temporary features of society. In other words, this paper investigates potential explanations related to the macro-level of the social and cultural context. Dijker and Koomen's three cultural dimensions are addressed; individualism vs. collectivism, egalitarianism vs. authoritarianism and simple vs. complex societies. A particular attention is given to how a context of war and armed conflict may impact on these three dimensions. The paper concludes that it is likely that stigmatization of former girl soldiers in eastern Congo may be partly explained by the devastating imprint war and armed conflict leave on people and societies. War appears to breed more authoritarian values and fearful responses to objectionable or deviant behaviour and conditions. Threatening conditions, whether real or perceived, may discourage people from engaging in a relatively complex and slow repair process. Also collective values of altruism and group loyalty typically found in traditional African cultures may also come under pressure. Fearful responses are frequent even within the sphere of family, which, because of affectionate ties and its small size, is considered as the social group most likely to engage in repair.

5.3. Paper III

“Who will comfort me?” Stigmatization of girls formerly associated with armed forces and groups in eastern Congo” (Tonheim, 2012).

The second empirical paper provides a detailed description of the social reintegration of former girl soldiers, and seeks to bring about in-depth insight on the stigmatization these girls experience. The focus is on identifying what kind of stigmatizing behaviour the girls encounter, the frequency of stigmatization as well as who typically participate in stigmatization of former girl soldiers. The analysis is based on the whole data set (individual interviews as well as focus group discussions), and presents the perspective of the former girl soldiers.

It is evident that families and communities view with suspicion everyone who is or has been part of an armed force or group. Former girl soldiers are perceived as violent, as thieves, as promiscuous and as carriers of dangerous and contagious diseases. They are thought of as having bad behaviour, a military spirit or mentality, and people fear that former girl soldiers may ‘contaminate’ other young people, and hence attempts are made to limit their social interaction with peers. According to the girls, people are afraid of them and see them as dangerous, potentially also bringing soldiers to their neighbourhoods. Fears and prejudices are also translated into name-calling, rejection and different forms of discriminating treatment. Although some girls express that stigmatization slowly reduces with time, discrimination and hostile reactions seems to be frequent even years after their return ‘home’, and surprisingly, women are identified as those most actively involved in the stigmatization.

In this paper I identify and discuss individual factors appearing to reinforce or diminish stigmatization. The first category of factors I call *pre-return factors*, which includes how the girls were recruited, their group belonging, treatment and sexual abuse within the armed group, how they demobilized, length of time spent with the group and whether they return with children. The second category is that of *post-return factors*, which includes the protection of having caring biological parents, poverty, the girls’ behaviour, chances of getting married and whether the girls have a remunerative job. Based on the views conveyed by the former girl soldiers the paper concludes that empowered and financially independent girls are less likely to experience stigmatization. This indicates that reducing stigmatization appears to occur through the young women’s own efforts to prove their families and communities wrong, rather than through families and

communities changing their general perception of girls returning from armed forces and groups.

5.4. Paper IV

“Genuine social inclusion or superficial co-existence? Former girl soldiers in eastern Congo returning home” (Tonheim, 2014).

Influenced by the theoretical framework of Dijker and Koomen’s (2007) where they contend that social exclusion is the purpose of stigmatization, I revisited the interview and focus group transcriptions to identify text which indicated social and relational exclusion. This analysis focuses, therefore, on how stigmatization impact on everyday social interactions and forms the basis for the last empirical paper. The empirical data is used to answer the following two questions: 1) Are the girls socially accepted and included in normal social interactions and relationships? 2) Do they feel ‘belongingness’ to their families and communities or do they simply co-exist at a superficial level with their surroundings?

The research findings reveal social and relational exclusion takes on different forms. Some girls experience rejection by parents and close family while others are “allowed” to stay but experience that they are excluded from social interactions within the family. Two situations of exclusion from social interaction with peers are also identified; peers may be personally reluctant or afraid to socialize with the girls or adults may prohibit former girl soldiers from socializing with children and youth in the neighbourhood. Exclusion from love relationship is also commonplace, often in the form of neighbours gossiping about the girl’s past experiences, causing the young men to stay away. Former child soldiers’ ability to re-establish a sense of belonging to their families and communities seems to be thwarted because of social exclusion and non-acceptance from those in their immediate surroundings, creating a superficial co-existence rather than a genuine inclusion. In the discussion I ask why social acceptance and relational re-inclusion seem so hard to achieve. Paper IV’s main argument is that the social reintegration process of former child soldiers has suffered due to an unbalanced focus on and prioritization of the psychological and the economic dimensions of reintegration.

Given the difficulties former girl soldiers experience socially, the paper a shift towards a much deeper commitment to social dimension of reintegration.

6. Discussion

The aim of this doctoral research has been to investigate and provide insight into how former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience their ‘homecoming’ and social reintegration back into their families and communities. The project started with a literature review which identified research gaps and existing research knowledge on girl soldier reintegration (Paper I). Thereafter, the project examined whether the girls experience repair, stigmatization or tolerance (cf. Dijker & Koomen, 2007; Paper II), particularly exploring how stigmatization and social exclusion are manifested in the everyday lives of former girl soldiers (Paper III & IV). The papers also identified possible explanatory factors at micro (Paper III & IV) and macro (Paper II) levels. In this discussion, I relate my findings to the work of other researchers, and I add possible explanatory factors at the global level by drawing attention to two global discourses that may influence stigmatization.

6.1. Discussion of results

While former girl soldiers’ personal motivation and desire to transition back to civilian way of life is undoubtedly important for their social reintegration, reintegration also largely depends on the willingness and ability of receiving families and communities to accept them (cf. Bowd & Özerdem, 2013). The main result drawn from the empirical data reveals that although the former girl soldiers are socially accepted by some individuals (Paper II), their overall situation is characterized by family and community members’ incapacity or unwillingness to genuinely include and accept them (Paper II, III & IV). The former girl soldiers therefore appear to be “discredited” (Goffman, 1963), “devalued, spoiled, or flawed in the eyes of others” (Crocker et al, 1998, p. 504). My finding of frequent stigmatization of former girl soldiers coincide with several other empirical studies in eastern Congo, be it research on child soldiers in general (e.g., Johannessen & Holgersen, 2014), research on former girl soldiers (Verhey, 2004), and research on victims of sexual violence (e.g., Verelst, De Schryver, De Haene, Broekaert, & Derluyn, 2014; Kelly et al., 2011). My findings are also confirmed by a population study in eastern Congo which finds high degree of distrust and fear of former soldiers among the general public (Vinck, Pham, Baldo, & Shigekane, 2008). In this survey of 2,620 respondents, only 42% were comfortable living in the same village, 44% were

comfortable living as close neighbours and as few as 37% were comfortable living in the same household as former soldiers (Vinck et al., 2008, p. 39). These findings resonate well with former girl soldiers' view that many families and communities in eastern Congo are afraid and therefore unable to welcome and support former girl soldiers returning home. The same survey also confirms the finding that former girl soldiers experience exclusion from social interaction (Paper IV) and reduced chances of getting married (Paper III). How the girls in my study experience to be perceived (Paper II & III) corresponds also closely with how Baaz and Stern (2011) find male soldiers' perceptions of female soldiers in the Congolese national army (FARDC). One of their informants, a captain, calls female soldiers "prostitutes/free women [*ndumba*]" and says that "They have joined because they did not get a husband. Or maybe the husband died. They come here to look for men. But they are dirty [*salite*]. They are sluts [*kindumba trop*]" (Baaz & Stern, 2011, p. 579). Consequently, it appears like the perspective of the former girl soldiers in my study is no different than perspectives of other segments of the Congolese population. According to Annan et al. (2011), there are two schools of thought related to social acceptance of former child soldiers "one sees social rejection as widespread and persistent, while one sees it as confined to a minority and improving with time back" (p. 5). Annan and colleagues' research in northern Uganda falls in the second category; finding that 94% of former child soldiers report feeling "very" or "somewhat" accepted by their community (Blattman & Annan, 2009). Among the minority who experience some family or community problems, only a few reported that these problems persisted (Annan et al., 2011). However, most qualitative studies, particularly those which addresses female ex-soldiers (e.g., Wessells, 2010; Coulter, 2006; Burman & McKay, 2007; Denov & Marchand, 2014), including my own, fall into the first category and points to frequent stigmatization which, while slowly being reduced, seems to persist over time (Paper III). Time at 'home' among the girls in my study varied from one to six years and reports about stigmatization by all except one girl indicate that insults and negative attitudes persist also years after they have left armed forces and groups. Also some studies on child soldier reintegration in northern Uganda, both qualitative and quantitative, reveal less optimistic results with regards to social acceptance than that of Annan and colleagues (e.g., Kiconco, 2015; Shanahan & Veale,

2010; Ndossi, 2010; Vindevogel et al., 2013). A recent survey on former child soldiers in northern Uganda, for instance, finds that stigmatization was reported by half the sample (Vindevogel et al., 2013). An important difference between the samples in the surveys of Annan and colleagues and that of Vindevogel and colleagues is that the former had a representative sample of the general former child soldier population while the latter had a sample of child soldiers who had received support from an interim care center. Annan and colleagues (2011) call for more research with representative samples, arguing that for “research to be accurate and comparable, greater attention ought to be paid to representative samples” (p. 26). While this is clearly true, I would argue that we also need more in-depth qualitative research, particularly because social phenomena like social acceptance, stigmatization and social reintegration are highly complex and intricate phenomena to study. Stovel (2008) maintains that genuine social acceptance and deep reconciliation are difficult to measure. In her study on former child soldiers in Sierra Leone, Stovel (2008) presents two types of reconciliation; rational reconciliation, which is about coexisting peacefully, and sentient reconciliation, which requires people to come to terms *emotionally* with what has happened to them. The former is more easily measured, whereas the latter “is felt” (Stovel, 2008, p. 311), therefore difficult to measure. Similarly, to measure social reintegration researchers must investigate into whether former soldiers *feel* part of by their families and communities (cf. Kingma, 2001), and it may be argued that this kind of probing into the feelings of research participants is better dealt with by a qualitative approach (cf. Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

A closer look at what appears at first to be a peaceful co-existence, for instance of former girl soldiers and family members, might expose fear, mistrust and discrimination. Several former girl soldiers in my study reported to be joyfully received when returning ‘home’ and expressed gratitude for being allowed to live where they lived, but when pursuing the matter further they reveal they do not feel accepted, loved and trusted (Paper II & III). Boersch-Supan’s (2008) research on community responses to ex-combatants in Sierra Leone finds that, “At first glance a picture of peaceful coexistence at the community level emerges” (p. 42). However, when she explores which micro-level factors were associated with this coexistence she finds that it was grounded “first and foremost in a collective effort based on pragmatic rather than emotional motives”

(Boersch-Supan, 2008, p. 42). A genuine reintegration and repair process depends on openly addressing (negative) emotions, not simply looking the other way (Dijker & Koomen, 2007). Reintegration or reconciliation motivated by pragmatism, ignoring underlying emotions, cannot be viewed as a genuine repair process as understood by Dijker and Koomen. If a pragmatic response involves suppressing negative emotions as well as a strong cultural norm and obligation to “forgive” (cf. Stovel, 2008), it might perhaps rather be viewed as a form of impersonal tolerance (cf. Paper II; Dijker & Koomen, 2007).

Because of stigmatization and negative emotional reactions, former girl soldiers in eastern Congo are disappointed with their ‘homecoming’ and attempt to reintegrate into family and community life. This is, however, not particular for eastern Congo (Paper I). Disappointment and stigmatization are found in research on female ex-soldiers in Sierra Leone (Coulter, 2006, 2010; Burman & McKay, 2007), in northern Uganda (Kiconco, 2015; Shanahan & Veale, 2010; Ndossi, 2010), in Nepal (Colekessian, 2009), in Angola (Wessells, 2010), and in Colombia (both boys and girls) (Denov & Marchand, 2014). Even studies which find high degree of social acceptance report that females are more likely to experience difficulties than males (Annan, Blattman, Carlson & Mazurana, 2008; Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

Scholarly attempts to explain how former soldiers fare have often addressed micro level explanations, as I do in Paper III. Factors such as age of recruitment and duration of conscription may impact on behaviour and post-conflict adjustment (Özerdem & Podder, 2011c; Betancourt et al., 2013; Betancourt, Borisova et al., 2010). However, research is not consistent. In their study on appetitive aggression¹⁵ in former child soldiers in the DRC, Weierstall, Haer, Banholzer and Elbert (2013) conclude that aggression was more pronounced in those recruited at a young age, while time spent in the armed group did not seem to predict appetitive aggression. As many other studies on child soldiers, the sample in Weierstall and colleagues’ study hardly included any female ex-soldiers (see Paper I). However, also some qualitative studies with female

¹⁵ Appetitive aggression is defined as a type of aggression that “is deliberately perpetrated” and “associated with an increase in positive arousal caused by the exposure to violence” (Weierstall et al., 2013, p. 506).

respondents reveal that post-return behaviour has implications for the reception and reintegration by family and community (Paper I & III; Coulter, 2006; Veale, 2003).¹⁶ Behaving in an aggressive or violent manner, as opposed to what is seen as ‘proper’ female behaviour, causes fearful and insulting reactions from their surroundings.

Whether ex-soldiers participated in hostilities or whether they were part of a particularly abusive armed group are also often emphasized as crucial for how they are perceived when returning (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Derluyn et al., 2013; Betancourt, Agnew-Blais et al., 2010). This may, furthermore, be linked to ex-combatants’ behaviour; Weierstall and colleagues (2013) report that the number of combat actions or perpetration of violence increased appetitive aggression in former child soldiers in the DRC. My study finds that also ethnicity of the armed group seems to matter with regards to former girl soldiers in eastern Congo (Paper III). Being in an armed group which were perceived to be Rwandese (Tutsis or Hutus) appears to increase the level of stigmatization, not least if the girl returns ‘home’ with a child.

Overall, having experienced sexual violence have great implications for how former girl soldiers are perceived and treated (Paper I & III; Verhey, 2004; Coulter, 2006). Returning ‘home’ with a child complicates and increases the risk of family rejection and stigmatization (Paper I & III; Annan et al., 2008; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Coulter et al., 2008). It is also the ultimate sign that the young woman is no longer a virgin. Both because they are no longer virgins and because of their involvement in traditionally masculine spheres of live, former girl soldiers are seen as “damaged goods” (Coulter, 2006). This implies that they have reduced chances of getting married (Paper III & IV; McKay & Mazurana, 2004; Burman & McKay, 2007; Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2013), which appears to add to the stigmatization of these young women. In contexts where it is culturally appropriate and more or less a financial necessity for a girl to marry (Paper III), to be perceived as “unfit for marriage and family life” (Baaz & Stern, 2013, p. 722) may have serious implications. Being a single mom, with small chances of

¹⁶ Also Dikjer and Koomen (2007) emphasize that deviant individuals who “show that they respect the safety concerns of others, thus behaving carefully [and] predictably” (p. 321) will experience reduced anxiety levels in others.

finding a husband, causes their families to see the girls and their children as a financial burden, increasing the risk of family rejection (Paper III; Verhey, 2004).

To be heartedly welcomed by family may have tremendous positive impact on former girl soldiers' social reintegration. In line with Dijker and Koomen's (2007) claim that family is the social unit where repair is most likely to happen, several studies have emphasized the key role family plays when former soldiers attempt to reintegrate (Paper I; Podder, 2012; Karamé, 2009; Hill & Langholz, 2003; Özerdem & Podder, 2011a). Studying ex-soldiers in the Lebanese Forces, Karamé (2009) finds that those who have been able to maintain contact with family because they were going back and forth from the frontlines experienced an easier return to civilian life. Only one girl in my study talked about contact with her family after her recruitment, through her father coming to visit her and encourage her to come home. This was also the girl that had the most positive experience of her return and social reintegration (Paper II). Podder (2012) observes that "While positive reception by the family created a strong protective emotional space within which returning ex-combatants could restart life, loss of family or rejection was a major reason for a slow drift towards living on the street or working with former combatant friends" (p. 194). Also, the girls in my study underlined the important protective factor of having loving and caring biological parents (Paper III).

However, in contexts of war and conflict "systems that are normally sources of support and protection, such as the family, [may] become sources of risk and developmental damage" (Boothby et al., 2006, p. 5). Exclusion from social interaction, insults and discrimination, especially by your own family, is likely to have harmful effects on young people returning from armed forces and groups; brought on them by their loved ones, stigmatization by family is particularly painful (Paper III & IV). My study shows that some girls are downright rejected by their immediate family, and a few attempts to find other housing solutions because it is unbearable at home. But most endure negative and hostile reactions from (extended) family members because they have nowhere else to go (Paper II & III).

Gender is clearly of crucial importance to social reintegration; simply being female heightens the risk and the intensity of stigmatization (Paper I). While boys and men may

strengthen their gender role through warfare, the opposite is the case for girl soldiers. Although former boy soldiers may also experience stigmatization, “Boy soldiers often develop, or have assigned to them, a post-conflict discourse that absolves them from blame” (Brett, 2004, p. 36). In contrast, no such discourse appears to exist with regards to former girl soldiers. As noted by Brett (2004), “even abducted girls who are, or are believed to have been, sexually active, do not appear to exercise such a discourse, nor does society appear to accept their lack of choice and absolve them from blame” (p. 36). This indicates that socio-cultural conceptions of girls and women influence the level and type of stigmatization former soldiers experience (cf. Paper I & III; Verhey 2004; Coulter, 2006).

The process of reintegration (repair) or stigmatization does clearly not take place in a vacuum but is deeply embedded in the cultural, political and socio-economic organization and functioning of a society (cf. Dijker & Koomen, 2007; Colletta & Muggah, 2009). Local understandings, beliefs and practices should be given a central place when planning how to support the transition from military to civilian life and identity. Traditional and cultural approaches to child soldier reintegration and treatment of distress and trauma has gained attention both in research and interventions (Paper I). Several studies have emphasized the positive impact traditional cleansing rituals has on social acceptance of youth returning ‘home’ from armed forces and groups (Annan et al., 2008; Mpyangu, 2010; Boothby, 2006; Wessells, 2006a; Honwana, 2006). The effect is, however, more uncertain with regards to former girl soldiers who return with children (Paper I; Annan et al., 2008).

Furthermore, prolonged conflict often makes it difficult or impossible to tap on past social resources, for example traditional rituals, because either they are weakened or sometimes completely destroyed (Beneduce et al., 2006, p. 41). A wartime (and post-conflict) climate of violence, uncertainty, mistrust and division leads to a weakening of “traditional social networks of mutual aid” (Wood, 2008, p. 555). Broken relationships and weakened social safety nets are likely to impact on family and community’s reception of former child soldiers (Paper II; Derluyn et al., 2013). Although, collectivistic communities of strong emotional ties and reciprocal commitment and

loyalty may bide well for returning former girl soldiers, also these collective values may come under pressure because of increased levels of fear and mistrust accompanying war and armed conflict (Paper II; LeFebvre & Franke, 2013; Green, 1995; Koonings & Kruijt, 1999). War and violence may also lead to stronger authoritarian values (cf. Dyrstad, 2013; Duckitt & Fisher, 2003). People and communities who have experienced high levels of violence, who have had their security threatened, appear to be less willing to accept and reintegrate former soldiers (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Boersch-Supan, 2008). As noted by Boersch-Supan (2008), “those who suffered most were most vocal against the integration of former combatants” (p. 29). People appear, moreover, to have greater difficulties living together with former soldiers who directly caused them harm and suffering (Boersch-Supa, 2008). It is, in other words, more difficult to settle or return to a community in which the ex- soldier has committed atrocities in the past.

The perception that former girl soldiers constitute a threat is quite apparent in my data material (Paper II & III). Importantly, threats may be both “tangible”, thus threatening health, safety and wealth, and “symbolic”, threatening beliefs, values and ideologies (Stangor & Crandall, 2000, p. 74), and former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience to be perceived as both (Paper II). A precarious economic situation may, indeed, create a sense of tension not only in the family but also in the community; “prosperity breeds tolerance, and poverty breeds anxiety” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 205). Shanahan and Veale (2010) maintain that daily frustration and pressures, rather than child soldiering and abduction, may result in stigmatization. Filling social roles and earning a living is, consequently, viewed by several scholars to positively impact on social acceptance (Wessells, 2006b; Peters, Richards, & Vlassenroot, 2003). As maintained by Peters et al. (2003), “productive skills will make youth financially independent or even enable them to contribute to the family income, both of which will facilitate their social acceptance” (p. 26). Shanahan and Veale (2010), emphasize the particularly precarious economic reality of former girl soldiers with children to care for. Also the former girl soldiers in my study perceive economic independence or the ability to contribute financially to the family as an important aspect which facilitates social acceptance and counteracts stigmatization (Paper III). While this is clearly true I would, nonetheless, argue that livelihood support addresses the symptom rather than the *cause* of

stigmatization. The types of stigmatization experienced by the young women in my study reveal that stigmatization is caused by two main perceptions; they are perceived as dangerous and they are perceived as promiscuous. Marginalization and poverty may indeed *increase* stigmatization but I don't find it to be its cause (Paper IV). Poverty is a reality for many families in eastern Congo, in some areas perhaps for most, and former girl soldiers and their families are therefore not necessarily more or less economically marginalized than others. In a context of social, economic and political instability, there is, however, a danger that former soldiers become "scapegoats for a whole host of societal ills" (Boyden, 2003, p. 346).

The functioning of reintegration programmes may also influence social and relational aspects of returning from armed forces and groups. As discussed earlier, although some girls hide in order not to be stigmatized, there is also evidence that programmes exclude former girl soldiers, thus leaving them without assistance when family and community mediation is necessary (cf. Paper I; Denov, 2008; Coulter et al., 2008; see section 1.4.). Another criticism directed at reintegration programmes is that by solely including former child soldiers (Paper I), programmes may in fact complicate social acceptance, *causing* stigmatization rather than reducing it. The rationale for this type of criticism is that when former child soldiers receive assistance while the rest of the community don't, it may cause jealousy and negative reactions from family and community members (Paper I; Derluyn et al, 2013; Knight & Özerdem, 2004; Podder, 2012). Programmes and interventions with a community- and needs-based approach, including other war-affected civilians as well, is, on the other hand, seen as more likely to reduce stigmatization (Blattman & Annan, 2009). In Paper IV I draw attention to yet another weakness of reintegration programmes; how they value and prioritize between the social, economic and psychological dimensions of the reintegration process. Because of social reintegration's complexity, depending on and demanding cooperation of a whole set of individuals and groups who are "ready to forgive and accept" (Peters, 2003, p. 96), this process should be supported and mediated to a much larger extent than what is currently being done (cf. Paper IV; Özerdem, 2012).

The lack of priority of social aspects by reintegration programmes (Paper IV), individual aspects (Paper III) and social and cultural aspects (Paper II) may go a long way in explaining why families and communities do not respond in a more caring way to former girl soldiers. However, explanatory factors may also be found in the global sphere. To complement the previous discussions I will, in the remaining part of the discussion, draw attention to two important global discourses.¹⁷ The first discourse is on youthful African ex-combatants as particular brutal and dangerous, and the second discourse is on female soldiers as adulterous and promiscuous. These two representations closely correspond with two of the main reasons the girls participating in my study believe they are stigmatized; 1) that people see them as a threat, and 2) that people perceive them as promiscuous. The argument I put forward is that these two global representations, often reproduced by media, academics and humanitarians, is likely to influence local representations faced by former girl soldiers in eastern Congo.

6.1.1. Global representations of former child soldiers as dangerous

When reading news and literature on child soldiers it is impossible to overlook the violent behaviour they often are ascribed; they are undoubtedly presented as a social threat. This type of threat narrative is particularly evident in the case of young African ex-soldiers (cf. McMullin, 2013; Denov, 2010). Originating from the thinking of New Barbarianism (Kaplan, 1994),¹⁸ African civil wars are perceived as exceptionally brutal and barbaric. The narrative is, in other words, based on what Aning and McIntyre (2005) refer to as “the notion of the innate African brutality” (p. 77).

In Western media, African ex-combatants are frequently depicted as savage and unnecessary brutal, and the wars they fight are referred to as irrational and barbaric. The news media’s framing of soldiers in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) in Sierra Leone throughout and in the aftermath of war is a prime example, but also accounts of current armed conflicts use the same terminology; the LRA in northern Uganda is referred to as “Africa's most barbaric guerrillas”, Joseph Kony, its leader, as

¹⁷ I call these representations global as they appear to cut across cultural and national contexts, thus, almost appearing to be universal.

¹⁸ For more on the link between New Barbarianism and the threat narrative see for example McMullin (2013) and Munive (2010).

“bloodthirsty”¹⁹, and violence committed in eastern Congo as “savagery that is almost incomprehensible”²⁰.

These portrayals are also visible in scholarly literature. Maninger (1999) describes West African warfare in Liberia and Sierra Leone as “a type of barbarism that stretches the limits of Western imagination” (p. 30), thus, making the questionable distinction between “‘brutal’ wars (‘them’) and ‘civilised’ wars (‘us’)” (Keen, 2009, p. 515). Not only active soldiers but also former soldiers are framed as dangerous, referred to as an “agitated mob” (Hoffman, 2003, p. 296) and a “time bomb that is slowly ticking away” (Mashike, 2004, p. 101). Similar descriptions may also appear in discourses by international NGOs. A former Chief Executive Officer of Plan International, a leading children's NGO, declared in 2008 that “Failure to act will create a ticking timebomb of angry, alienated and traumatised youth whose only skills they have to rely on are those they learnt at war” (Reliefweb, 2008).

Irrational violence tends, moreover, to be linked to young age – the younger the soldier, the more brutal he or she is. This thinking is reflected in accounts of child soldiers acting with “youthful brutality” and “swaggering self-confidence”, stirring “terror in the adult population.”²¹ Such narratives, claiming that violence and brutality are youthful characteristics, portray young ex-combatants as being more frightening than adult ex-combatants. Also, the risk that violence will become normalized is thought to be more likely with regards to children than adult. This is mainly based on three interlinked aspects. First, being surrounded by violence and terror during important formative years, when the child’s brain is particularly responsive, is likely to harm the (moral) development of the child (cf. Boyden, 2003; Shauer & Elbert, 2010). Second, child soldiering may have severe psychological consequences for children (Wessells, 1998; 2006a; Barenbaum, Ruchkin, & Schwab-Stone, 2004) and ex-soldiers with psychological problems is perceived to possibly have negative impact on post-conflict

¹⁹ The Independent, 16 October 2011,

²⁰ Nicholas Kristof, New York Times, 30 January 2010,
<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/01/31/opinion/31kristof.htm>.

²¹ BBC News, 10 May, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/743684.stm>

stability (e.g., Masten & Nayaran, 2012).²² Third, children are seen to be more susceptible to indoctrination and military socialization (cf., Vermeij, 2011; Beber & Blattman, 2013). This socialization involves the development of violent behaviours, because children and adolescents are thought to be more susceptible one may expect that violence, with time, becomes normalized (Maclure & Denov, 2006; Shauer & Elbert, 2010).²³

Because of this (assumed) propensity for violence it is anticipated that former child soldiers will restore to aggressive and hostile behaviour also after they have left armed forces and groups. Honwana (2006) claims that they are “*easily* [...] absorbed into violence” (p. 159 – my emphasis). This line of thinking is also visible in the UN. In a report on DDR the Secretary-General states that youth in post-conflict settings “often find themselves trapped in a vicious cycle of violence” (UN, 2011b, p. 13), paradoxically reproducing the very stereotype of youth as ‘spoilers’ of peace which he later in the same report emphasizes reintegration programmes must work to break.

Young ex-soldiers, especially those whose reintegration has failed, is over and over portrayed by the UN and others as “to pose a threat to security and the overall peace process” (UN, 2011b; see section 2.1.), thus, feeding into the view of young and idle former combatants as dangerous youth, possibly “on the verge of igniting” (Kaplan, 1994, p. 46). The assumption is that unemployed and idle youth are more prone to rejoining armed groups or to association with criminal gangs and networks (cf. Özerdem & Podder, 2011a; Honwana, 2006; Vargas-Barón, 2010). Former child soldiers are, therefore, assumed to constitute a security threat both locally, through stealing and other criminal activities (cf. Paper II & III) and nationally through reoccurrence of war.

Research evidence to support the claim that former child soldiers are particularly angry, dangerous and violent is, however, scarce or inconsistent, and only a few studies investigate child soldier’s resistance of violence in war and in the aftermath of war

²² See Wessells (2006a) for a thorough discussion of the debate on the psychological consequences of child soldiering.

²³ In the West we use terminology like inclined or prone to violence, while local explanations may relate it to being possessed (Boyden, 2003) or having a military spirit (Paper III) which manifests itself through angry, unpredictable and evil behaviour that may harm others.

scarce. While some quantitative research finds support for the claim that former child soldiers become aggressive (e.g., Weierstall et al., 2013) and increase the risk of a new war (e.g., Haer & Böhmelt, 2016), other studies challenge the threat narrative. First and foremost, many child soldiers oppose and abandon military life in favour of returning to a civilian way of life.²⁴ Four fifths of the 500 abducted child soldiers in Blattman and Annan's (2009) study in northern Uganda had escaped, as had most of the girls in my study. The great number of self-demobilized child soldiers, who have risked death by escaping on their own, indicates that child soldiers do not necessarily become more drawn to violence. Taking a risky and personal decision to escape speaks to the contrary. Although some former child soldiers, also some of the girls in my study (Paper III & IV), express a wish to return to the armed group, this is just as likely an expression of grievances (cf. Both & Reis, 2014, p. 350). In my study in South Kivu, the girls who considered going back to military life do so because of the way they are treated by their families and communities (Paper III & IV), not because they want to fight or are more angry or aggressive than their peers. Only two girls say they respond in an aggressive or hostile manner when insulted (Paper III), while the majority calmly and silently endure painful and offending insults.

Evidence also suggests that not all child soldiers 'give in' to a violent way of life while being part of an armed force or group. As maintained by Wessells (2006a), "many child soldiers show moral sensitivity before, during and after their time in armed groups" (p. 143). In their account of child soldiers in RUF Maclure and Denov (2006) report that, although survival depended on obeying commands, some child soldiers still undertook acts of "subtle resistance and extraordinary courage" (p. 81; Maclure & Denov, 2006). While some "became perpetrators of excessive violence" (Maclure & Denov, 2006, p. 131), others "managed to preserve a moral compass" (Maclure & Denov, 2006, p. 129), for instance, through non-lethal shooting in combat and provision of assistance to the civilian 'enemy'. Resistance to perpetrating violence can also be seen among girl

²⁴ Child soldiers who succeed to escape, or are otherwise demobilized, also report on many others who did not succeed in their attempts to run away, but were re-captured and either severely punished or killed (e.g., Maclure & Denov, 2006; Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2011; Amnesty International, 2008).

soldiers who deliberately do their domestic task with the utmost diligence to prevent to be “sent into the bush to shoot and kill (Denov & Gervais, 2007, p. 899).

Boyden (2003) claims that demobilized child soldiers typically show a “rejection of violence” (p. 359), thus, she dismisses the idea that violence becomes part of the children’s nature. Also Blattman and Annan (2009) find little evidence of aggression and hostility among former child soldiers in northern Uganda. They report “low levels of psychological distress symptoms and high levels of prosocial behaviour” (Blattman & Annan, 2009, p.114). Even those former child soldiers who show signs of distress tend to be “quiet and withdrawn rather than aggressive” (Blattman & Annan, 2009, p. 104). And finally, several studies confirm that the great majority of young ex-combatants report they would never go back to war (e.g., Hill, Taylor & Temin, 2008; Bøås & Hatløy, 2008). In other words, the assumption that the majority are drawn to war and violence is questioned.

6.1.2. Global representations of female soldiers as promiscuous

The second global discourse I want to highlight is the one of female soldiers as promiscuous. Although women have been part of war throughout history, the relationship between violence and women continues to challenge gender stereotypes. Women are commonly (or traditionally) perceived to have peaceful and life-giving identities (cf. Skjelsbæk, 2001; Åhäll, 2012), “whereas male identity is seen as life-taking” (Åhäll, 2012, p. 290). Violence and war is, thus, perceived as masculine and when performed by girls or women there is a misfit (cf. Paper III); violent women are seen to ‘go against nature’. Subsequently, the assumption is that there must be something wrong, something deviant about them (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008; Dijker & Koomen, 2007).

Feminist writers have drawn attention to what they call the ‘whore narrative’ (Baaz & Stern, 2011; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008); a sexualized representation of female soldiers they say has consistently been “employed historically and cross-culturally” when making sense of women and violence (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 5).²⁵ The notion that

²⁵ By ‘sexualization’ Sjoberg and Gentry (2008) mean “discourses which attract attention to the sexual dimensions of women and/or their violence, and away from other elements” (p. 8).

female soldiers are promiscuous seems to be prominent in armed forces and groups in every corner of the world, also in Western forces. However, the Israeli military culture appears to be an exception. Sasson-Levy (2003) claims that the ‘whore narrative’ does not reflect the representations of female soldier in the Israeli army, and suggests this might be because “Israeli women are conscripted by law and not by choice” (p. 457).

Two main types of representations of women associated with violence are often identified (cf. Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008); women who (allegedly) have committed acts of violence are perceived to be obsessed with sex (sexual obsession) or sexually dysfunctional or deviant (sexual deviance). In other words, female soldiers are assumed to be drawn to (male dominated) armed forces and groups because of their “insatiable and uncontrollable need to have sex with men” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 13), or because they are “lesbians, [...] infertile, or [...] sexually failing their men in some other way” (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008, p. 14). Based on interviews with female soldiers in several Western, forces King (2016) finds that female soldiers in Anglophone armed forces are subject to a similar classification system used by male soldiers – a binary slut-bitch classification; ‘sluts’ meaning they are sexually available and ‘bitches’ meaning they are sexually unavailable.²⁶ King (2016) identifies a new category which he calls ‘the honorary man’ in which female soldiers are de-sexualized rather than sexualized. In other words, a categorization that erases the woman’s gender altogether. A female soldier must avoid any sexual contact with male soldiers, maybe even friendship, to preserve her status as ‘one of the lads’ (King, 2016, p. 136-137). For male soldiers, on the other hand, engaging in sexual relations with female soldiers may boost their masculinity and status within the group.

Also research in the DRC finds evidence of similar discourses on female soldiers. Researching the perception of female soldiers by male soldiers in the DRC’s national army (FARDC), Baaz and Stern (2011) identify four discursive strategies male soldiers use when they speak about the ‘feminization’ of the armed forces, the last two being of special interest here. The first strategy is to speak positively about the inclusion of women but arguing that the time is not yet ripe (deferral through evolutionary spatio-

²⁶ ‘Dykes’ or lesbians are seen as a sub-category of being a ‘bitch’ (King, 2016, p. 124).

temporality). The second discourse maintains combat as masculine and women as weak and incapable. The third portrays female soldiers as *unreliable whores*; perceiving female soldiers as temptresses. While the fourth discourse masculinize women in the army and thus *denies their femininity*. Because of their involvement and exposure to violence, female soldiers “become like men” (Baaz & Stern, 2011, p. 582)²⁷, and are no longer sexually attractive to male soldiers. Perhaps especially not attractive with regards to marriage.

Apparently, the ‘whore narrative’ does not only apply to women in combat roles, but extends to all women who, in one way or another, are associated with violence and war. Women mainly performing supporting roles (e.g., Sasson-Levy, 2003; Sjoberg & Gentry, 2008)²⁸ and girls and women in relationships with enemy soldiers are often also viewed as promiscuous. Norwegian girls and young women who fell in love with German soldiers during the Second World War were strongly stigmatized, typically called German whores (e.g., Papendorf, 2015; Aarnes, 2009). It is, therefore, not necessarily women’s personal involvement in violence, but perhaps rather their *association* with military life and male soldiers that is decisive for how they are perceived.

The existence of a global representation of female soldiers as promiscuous seems to be quite well documented. However, reviewing empirical research it becomes apparent that there is little evidence supporting the claim that girls and young women are drawn to armed groups because of excessive appetite for sex. On the contrary, some girls join armed forces and groups to *escape* unwanted sexual relations. Girls may join to avoid early marriage or domestic sexual abuse, as well as to protect themselves from sexual violence committed by opposing armed force or group (Paper I; Coulter et al. 2008; UNIFEM, 2004).

²⁷ Research shows that not only male soldiers but also female soldiers may “identify with the military masculine ideology and express antifeminine attitudes” (Sasson-Levy, 2003, p. 452), mimicking masculine practices and distancing themselves from, sometimes even mocking, traditional femininity (see also Baaz & Stern, 2013).

²⁸ While women in modern armed forces may have a distinct support role, the distinction between combat and support roles does not reflect the reality for many women in most non-state armed groups (see section 2.3).

Resistance to sexual violence and relations while in an armed force or group may also give counterarguments to the view that girl soldiers allegedly desire to have sex with the soldiers. Although most researchers fail to present a nuanced picture of resistance and agency of girl soldiers, there are some exceptions. The best example is perhaps the research in Sierra Leone by Myriam Denov, and her book (Denov, 2010) as well as several articles revealing a number of resistance strategies used by girl (and boy) soldiers. Denov and Maclure (2006) report that some girl soldiers in Sierra Leone protect and defend themselves by means of violence. Some girls see the possession of a gun as the best manner to protect themselves against sexual harassment and violence (Denov & Maclure, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2004). One of the girls in their study even stabbed a male soldier to death because she was “tired of the sexual harassment” (Denov & Maclure, 2006, p. 80). Whilst becoming a fierce fighter or a commander is one avenue for self-protection, becoming a commanding officer’s favourite ‘wife’ is another (McKay, 2005; Denov & Gervais, 2007; Utas, 2005; Wessells, 2010). Although combat marriage is often without consent and thus also sexual violence (even a war crime), marriages to high-ranking commanders is, at the same time, a strategy to reduce sexual abuse by other male combatants.

Other girl soldiers resist marriage and sexual relations with the commanders they are assigned to for as long as they can (McKay, 2005; Baines, 2014). Strategies to avoid or put off sexual abuse documented by research may, for instance, be pretending to be menstruating (Denov & Maclure, 2006) and pretending to be infected with sexual diseases (McKay, 2005). One former girl soldier in Baines’ (2014) research in northern Uganda tells the following story of resistance: “When I clocked 12 years, the man... turned me to be his wife. The first day he called me and I [refused]. The second time he called, I refused [again]. I stayed for one month and he called me again. I refused to go” (p. 409). After the third attempt to resist the girl was severely punished. In a situation where non-resistance might spare the girl from additional suffering, even save her life, it is obvious that the space for resistance and agency afforded to girl soldiers is severely constrained (Alison, 2004; Denov & Gervais, 2007). The probability that the girls who resisted the most had to pay with their lives is high and the strongest tales of resistance might therefore be unknown and undocumented.

One problematic assumption that seems to be reproduced in a variety of texts is the likelihood of former girl soldiers to turn to prostitution. This issue is most often raised in relation to their need for vocational training and livelihood opportunities. The Paris Principles (UNICEF, 2007, p. 37) note that families expect the returned girl soldiers to contribute to the household, and therefore, if not provided with education, vocational skills training or the provision of alternative economic strategies, the result *may* be sexual exploitation. Similarly, Schroeder (2005), in her study of DDR in the DRC, concludes that if the training they receive does not empower them, female ex-soldiers “*may* be forced to trade sex for necessities or engage in prostitution to make ends meet” (p. 26 – my emphasis). Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2013), researching DDR of former child soldiers in the DRC, notes that “Unable to find a husband and start a family, these women *may* be forced to turn to transactional sex after reintegration” (p. 100 – my emphasis).

I have myself fallen into the same trap, reporting that “the frustration of not having an income *may* push the girls towards activities such as prostitution” (Paper III, p. 294 – my emphasis), although none of the girls were involved in prostitution when the interviews took place. Statements on prostitution being a solution to their difficult economic situation should perhaps rather be interpreted as an expression of grievances and their way of underlining their precarious situation. However, research evidence which supports the claim that former girl soldiers in fact *turn* more often to prostitution than other young girls in impoverished post-conflict environments is, as far as I am aware, inexistent.

6.1.3. Implications of empirical findings

As highlighted in the discussion above, local patterns of stigmatization have clear parallels in global discourses of female soldiers and young African combatants. These dominant discourses seem, moreover, to permeate much of the accounts by the media, but also by NGOs and researchers. McMullin (2013) argues that the portrayal of ex-combatants as threatening may fuel ex-soldier stigmatization and impact negatively on their reintegration.²⁹ Also Blattman and Annan (2009) notice this danger, arguing that

²⁹ McMullin (2013) also presents a second important narrative that communities are likely to resent ex-combatants when they return from war, which, similarly to the one of ex-combatants as threats to security, also impact on ex-

“What is worrisome is that sensational claims and popular beliefs regarding young combatants appear to drive not only fundraising and advocacy but program interventions as well” (p. 103). A perception of former child soldiers as dangerous and violent turns reintegration programmes into being security-oriented rather than child-rights-oriented (Tonheim, 2014). Reintegration then stops being about the reconciliation of the ex-combatant and her family and community; the sole focus becomes “management and mitigation of ex-combatant *threats*” (McMullin, 2013, p. 393).

6.1.3.1. Implications for practice

While graphic accounts of horrible acts of violence may very well be effective instruments to raise awareness of armed conflict and the use of child soldiers and funds to assist war-affected children (cf. Aning & McIntyre, 2005), it may also have negative consequences on how these young people are perceived. Negative and stigmatizing representations of former soldiers, both girls and boys, influence not only the mind-set of people in local communities but may also affect the mind-set of practitioners. As observed by McMullin (2013), “Well-intentioned implementers end up being suspicious of the group they are called to assist, and that suspicion hinders the integrative goal of DDR” (p. 386). The same goes for the whore narrative; the perception of female (ex-)soldiers as promiscuous may permeate the mind-set of practitioners working to assist young women returning from armed forces and groups. Juma (2012) observes that practitioners in the Great Lakes region seem to think that former girl soldiers have “an excessive desire for sex” (p. 381). If practitioners see former girl soldiers as dangerous and promiscuous, how can we expect them to work effectively to reduce stigmatization? Not only must NGOs address these dominant discourses when planning activities and interventions, but they must also make sure their workforce does not reproduce the very perceptions they are supposed to help former girl soldiers overcome.

To attain the difficult goal of social reintegration - that former girl soldiers “feel part of” their family and community (Kingma, 2001) - programmes must have a much stronger focus on social aspects of the reintegration process (cf. Paper IV; Hill et al., 2008;

combatants’ reintegration and stigmatization. He contends that the resentment-narrative also feeds into the threat-narrative as the perception is that “resentment should be minimized because it could ‘lead to war’” (McMullin, 2013, p. 404).

Özerdem, 2012; Bowd & Özerdem, 2013). To improve design and implementation, programming must recognize and take into consideration that stigmatization and non-acceptance is a profound obstacle to former girl soldiers' reintegration. Repairing relationships characterized by fear and distrust is a difficult process and much more attention to mediation, particularly family mediation, is necessary. Because weak family ties is often associated with recidivism (e.g., Kaplan & Nussio, 2016), strengthening of families and family bonds should be seen as a key strategy to attain successful reintegration (Derluyn et al, 2013). Trust-building interventions should begin at family level and gradually extent to include neighbours and other community members (cf. Bowd & Özerdem, 2013). Social bonding and re-establishment of social ties between former girl soldiers and their families and communities is probably "the main guarantee for the sustainability of reintegration experiences" (Özerdem, 2012, p. 60).

6.1.3.2. Implications for research

Also the mind-set of the researcher is marked by local and global discourses. Reading and hearing about brutal acts of violence (allegedly) performed by child soldiers and former girl soldiers (allegedly) likelihood of turning to prostitution, may become part and parcel of our understanding of the context and those subjected to our research. As researchers we need to recognize the fine line between detailed reporting and the need to protect research participants. As noted in the Norwegian ethical guidelines for social science research, "Researchers must protect personal integrity, [...] respect privacy and family life, and safeguard against harm and unreasonable strain" (NESH, 2006, p. 13). Through our accounts and representations we may either promote or threaten human dignity. When disseminating characteristics, experiences and behaviour of individuals and groups, for example former girl soldiers, we are required to be cautious about using descriptions "that give rise to unreasonable generalisation, and which in practice result in the stigmatisation of particular social groups" (NESH, 2006, p. 25).

Researchers must strive to avoid reinforcing stigmatization by critical reflections of the consequences of our accounts and by giving nuanced portrayals of the individuals we study. Stories of resistance should, for instance, be given their rightful place in our portrayals of former girl soldiers. As maintained by Dijker and Koomen (2007), to portray deviant individuals as "strongly motivated to get out of their disadvantaged

situation” (p. 320) may contribute to a changed perception of them. Many of the former girl soldiers I interviewed said that it was the first time they had talked about their painful experiences. Coulter (2010) finds the same in Sierra Leone. Negative perceptions of former girl soldiers are thus “based on rumors and notions of rebel brutality, not on conversations with them” (Coulter, 2010, p. 89). To counteract rumours and to get insider knowledge about their situation, researchers (and practitioners) must pay more attention to the voices of the former girl soldiers themselves (cf. Paper I). Knowledge about a group or an individual is what makes us trust and interact with some but not others (cf. Hardin, 2002), and by producing knowledge that gives an accurate and nuanced view of former girl soldiers researchers may contribute to correct local and global myths and misrepresentations. Misrepresenting the war-affected girls’ experiences and opinions have serious implications, not least because these girls “have little recourse to rectify the misinformation; they have virtually no access to publishing, media, public presentations, formal organizations” (Nordstrom, 1997, p. 37).

Nilsson (2005) notes that most academic attention has so far focused on the security aspect of ex-soldier reintegration, and has to a lesser degree addressed the social aspects of the process (Kaplan & Nussio, 2015; Özerdem, 2012). Consequently, there is a scarcity of research on social reintegration, in particular related to former girl soldiers is still scarce (Paper I; Wessells, 2006a). We still know little about how to support social reintegration of former girl soldiers in contexts with high levels of stigmatization (cf. Wessells, 2010). More nuanced research knowledge about their experiences as girl soldiers and their experiences of returning home is warranted. We need to ask them about what challenges they face in their everyday lives and what they see as potential solutions to those challenges. Research should address why some families manage to engage in repair processes while others end up discriminating and stigmatizing returning girl soldiers. This could, for example, be done through case studies of families which have managed to successfully reintegrate these girls. Such an approach may yield a nuanced understanding of factors associated with a genuine repair process.

Research would also benefit from having a comparative approach, for instance by including control groups. Are former child soldiers more angry, dangerous and violent

than their peers? Are they for example more likely to turn to crime? And are former girl soldiers more prone to turn to prostitution than other young girls in impoverished post-conflict environments, for instance compared to other single mothers? This type of comparative research may produce evidence which counteracts the generalizations of young ex-soldiers as particularly threatening and female soldiers as particularly promiscuous.

Future research must also address the next generation; the children of former girl soldiers. The girls in my study expressed great worry about and revealed much stigmatization of their children by family and community, but these children have so far been largely neglected by researchers and humanitarian programmes alike (Paper I). The number of children born of girl soldiers is unknown, but based on the estimated number of girls in armed groups as well as the frequency of sexual violence reported in many of these groups, we may expect the number of children born of girl soldiers to be extensive (Carpenter, 2007; Mochmann, 2008). There exists very little primary research on the fates of children conceived by rape and born to girl soldiers, and little is therefore known about these children's situation and well-being, how they are perceived and treated by their mothers as well as other members of their family and community.

6.2. Discussion of methodological aspects

6.2.1. Reflections on the research team

The research team consisted of four people; two focus group facilitators, an interpreter and I. The interpreter and the focus group facilitators were viewed as co-researchers and contributed with invaluable inputs and work when preparing for and being in the field. Who we are and what we bring with us into the research project influence what we find, and it is consequently crucial to come to an awareness of our subjectivity and potential biases (cf. Finlay, 2008; Shenton; 2004). To be open about the choices I have made and the consequences these might have had is an important part of ensuring the quality of the data (cf. Malterud, 2001).

6.2.1.1. The researcher effect: Self-reflexivity

Self-reflexivity is crucial, or as Tracy (2010) calls it, "one of the most celebrated practices", to ensure the quality of qualitative research (see also Malterud, 2001).

Researcher characteristics are likely to influence the research question, access to respondents, interview questions, what respondents share with the researcher, as well as the interpretation of the data. As everyone else, researchers are also marked by “their race, class, gender, education level, nationality, and other characteristics” (Gusterson, 2008, p. 96). This applies not least to researchers doing fieldwork ‘away from home’. Often we tend to focus on differences when describing the identity of the researcher, but also similarities should be taken into account (Byrne, 2012, p. 214). Differences like skin colour, socio-economic circumstances and cultural background, but also similarity in gender, influenced, one way or another, how I was perceived and what was shared by research participants. As stated by Gusterson (2008), “In some contexts, aspects of the researcher’s own identity may play a facilitating role; in others they may be crippling” (p. 96). It can be assumed that matching gender between the former girl soldiers and I made them more comfortable sharing about sensitive and painful aspects of their lives.

While cultural differences between the researcher and the research participants may be a communication barrier, the opposite might also be the case. During the follow-up interviews I learnt that the fact that I was not part of their community and culture made it *easier* for them to talk about tabooed issues. It also appeared like it made them trust more the promise to keep their secrets and ensure their anonymity. The fact that I had travelled from far to speak with them also made them feel important, and, thus, perhaps more eager to share their stories and opinions.

Knowledge of the local culture will in any case be of crucial value as culturally accepted behaviour on the part of the researcher may open up doors that otherwise would be closed. In-depth knowledge of the socio-cultural context will also be beneficial for understanding and interpreting the ‘being-in-the-world’ experiences and stories told by the respondents. Paradoxically, being ‘too familiar’ with a culture may also have a *negative* impact on how stories are interpreted. As maintained by Neumann (2008), “If you are a native speaker and know a culture as only a native can, then you do not have that marginal gaze where things look strange enough to present themselves as puzzles. You will also lose touch with your own biases. You become what anthropologists call ‘home blind’” (p. 64).

One aspect that needs particular attention is the fact that I was, at the time of fieldwork, also an advisor in one reintegration programme operating in North and South Kivu, financed by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This dual role, being a researcher *and* an advisor within the same field of work, may be problematic and a reason to question my impartiality. It may, for instance, have impacted on the opinions and information put forward by my respondents if they perceived me as a representative or a donor of a reintegration programme. As observed by Utas (2004) in his research on ex-combatant youth in Liberia: “Inevitably, my association with aid agencies predetermined my relations with those I wanted to understand. Every single person I talked to saw me as a donor, and responses to my questions were tailored to that imagined identity” (p. 216).

My experience in eastern Congo is somewhat different to that of Utas. In the first round of focus group discussions, transcripts show that the girls at times discussed how they thought I could contribute to meet their concrete needs.³⁰ This indicates that they saw me as potential benefactor who could improve their situation, particularly their material and financial situation. I do, however, doubt that their perception had anything to do with my dual role, basically because they were not aware of my association with the programme. In my opinion it was rather linked to the fact that they perceived me to be economically better off and that any Western researcher (or a humanitarian or a tourist for that matter) is likely to experience the same. Interestingly, the focus on material gains from participating in the project was not apparent in the second round of focus group discussions. My interpretation is that the participants had by then a better understanding of what it meant to participate in the focus groups. They had probably also gained a better understanding of the project’s purpose and its limited impact on their individual everyday circumstances. I firmly believe that multiple meeting points with informants that are economically marginalized may reduce their perception of the researcher as a donor or benefactor.

Nonetheless, in planning my research and fieldwork I needed to be particularly aware of certain dilemmas which my role as an advisor might cause. Therefore, I first sought

³⁰ This was close to inexistent in the individual interviews.

to avoid including beneficiaries from the reintegration programme to which I was associated. However, gaining access to former girl soldiers is a complicated and time-consuming matter and in the end I decided to use my contacts in the programme to help me identify one girl at each of the three fieldwork locations (see section 4.5.). A colleague in the programme also helped me identify a second organization working in these three locations, which then assisted me to identify the second peer recruiter. Respondents who had been beneficiaries in the reintegration programme where I was involved constituted in the end less than half of all my girl soldier respondents. Moreover, all of them had finalized their training period within the programme before my fieldwork took place. Most of the girls had also finalized their training with the programme before I even joined as an advisor late 2008, and, thus, none of these girls had met me previously, nor were they informed about my role in the programme. With regards to key informants, only one of 13 informants was connected to the reintegration programme in question.

Being involved in a programme assisting former child soldiers also had positive implications, not least it provided me with practical knowledge of the reintegration process and the challenges faced by reintegration programmes. It informed me on issues that were useful when preparing the interview guides, how to organize the fieldwork, and provided me with already established contacts who could help me get access to girl soldier respondents.

6.2.1.2. *The interpreter and the interpreter impact*

Similarly to the researcher, the interpreter is also an active producer of data, not just a neutral conveyor of messages (Temple, 2002). A careful selection of the interpreter was considered of utmost importance, and it took into consideration aspects like gender, age, personal attributes, familiarity with the topic under study and, to some extent, also ethical competence. As emphasized by Temple (2002) “it is not enough to merely select someone who speaks the relevant language” (p. 850). The interpreter was chosen from among the Congolese participants in the larger research project after a start-up seminar in September 2009. During this seminar I observed the interpreter’s personal attributes and her reflections on the topic under study. I perceived it important that the interpreter had a warm and friendly charisma and behaviour in social interaction with others, as this

was expected to positively impact on the comfortableness of respondents in an interview situation. The start-up seminar introduced her to Norwegian ethical guidelines for social science research, to which the research project adhered to. Although this introduction was deemed crucial, it is impossible to validate people's understanding of ethical principles before seeing them in action. This general familiarity with ethical challenges related to confidentiality and impartiality was nonetheless perceived of critical importance. A contract of confidentiality was signed before the fieldwork began.

The interpreter was from the Rega tribe in South Kivu and lived in Bukavu. Her mother tongue was Swahili and she also was fluent in French. She spoke some Lingala but did not know her tribal language, Kirega. She was at the time a sociology student at Université Officielle du Bukavu, one of the two universities we collaborated with in South Kivu. She was a young woman in her twenties. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic it was seen as an advantage that the interpreter was female. Second, by using a young interpreter I also attempted to limit the impact of hierarchical respect from young to old, which is characteristic in many cultural traditions in Africa. Since the focus group discussions were conducted by the two facilitators with Swahili as the sole language in use, verbatim interpretation only took place in the individual interviews.

Because "concepts do not move unproblematically across cultures" (Temple, 2002, p. 847) it is often impossible to use verbatim translation. A concept or a social reality may even not exist in the local language used in the interviews, and the interpreter may therefore be forced to give descriptions or explanations that are more or less accurate to words and concepts used by the researcher. At other times the concept *does* exist, but the interpreter may fail to remember the exact translation in the heat of the moment. Oral translation does not give the interpreter much time to think and also deprives her of the opportunity to make use of linguistic resources. One measure taken to minimize the altering of intended meanings was to prepare a written Swahili translation of interview guides beforehand (see section 4.5). However, with regards to the rest of the content conveyed to me during the interviews I had to trust the on-the-spot interpretations. As cross-language interviews are time-consuming, poor translation may also occur due to fatigue after hours of interviews. Long interviews are tiring for everyone involved, but

particularly stressful for the interpreter as she must think and communicate simultaneously in two different languages. I sought to address this concern by limiting the number of questions (to some extent also the follow-up questions) so that the interview would not exceed one and a half hours.

Incidents occurred when I wondered if the interpreter was making short-cuts in the translation. At times the translation was brief compared to what the respondent had said in Swahili. In some situations the interpreter herself asked the respondent to repeat some of her reply, other times I would encourage this to happen. In the course of the fieldwork I believe I became more capable of detecting these situations, both because I could read the interpreter better after having worked together for a while, but also because I became familiar with some of the words in Swahili that appeared frequently in the girls' stories. If these terms were not addressed in the translation I would ask the interpreter about it. It should be noted that these incidents of fatigue or interpretation slipups were often characterized by jokes and laughter rather than discontent and seriousness. These moments, therefore, also seemed to somehow ease the atmosphere and the social interaction, particularly since the interviews to a large extent dealt with serious and painful issues.

Despite interpreter-related challenges, interpreters may also have a positive effect on the research process and the quality of the gathered data. There may be an appreciation merely of the fact that respondents can speak to someone from their own culture (Temple, 2002). Local interpreters and co-researchers bring, moreover, with them local knowledge that may be quite useful and at times even essential to carry out the work in the field (Harpviken, 2009). They may serve as door-openers, knowledge providers, mediators, and they often help the researcher gaining trust from potential research participants as well as the wider community. In this line of thinking Edwards (1998) calls interpreters "key informants". Local interpreters (also local co-researchers, like the two focus group facilitators) importantly also increase the probability of "getting under the skin of", and thus heeding to, local norms and practices.

In retrospect, I have realized that certain things should have been done differently. I wish, for example, I had asked the interpreter more specifically about her perspectives

on different issues that came up during the interviews. Although our conversations during long days in the field often evolved around the research topic and the situation and stories of these girls, I did not systematically address her personal perspectives and consequently may not evaluate how her perspectives might have influenced the data generation. This would have been important in order to evaluate her impact on the research (Temple, 2002; Temple & Edwards, 2002). It would also have been fruitful to have small “de-briefing” conversations with the interpreter following each interview where we together could reflect on non-verbal communication and whether there was something that we might not have noticed during the interview. This could also give the interpreter the opportunity to explain more about those things that had been difficult to interpret.

6.2.1.3. *The focus group facilitators*

Two former girl soldiers were selected to be my co-researchers and trained to facilitate the focus group discussions. The two girls had both been assisted by a reintegration programme, although not the same, and lived in Bukavu, which was where I spent most time while in Congo. At the time of the fieldwork the two focus group facilitators were 20 and 22 years of age. Staff from two reintegration programmes assisted me in identifying the two girls. An informal meeting were organized with each of them in order to share information about the project, explain the role of a focus group facilitator, getting to know them a little bit and discuss if they were willing, comfortable and capable to perform the role. It quickly became clear that both girls were eager to participate.

To prepare them for the task ahead I organized two training sessions on how to facilitate focus group discussions. One training session took place at the Norwegian mission station where I had my accommodation, and the other took place at the home of one of the girls. The interpreter was always present and facilitated the communications when translations were necessary. The sessions lasted about two hours and focused on basic rules in focus group discussions and the role of the facilitator. Important topics were how to create a comfortable and welcoming environment, how to guide the conversation and make everyone participate, and how to conclude at the end.

A review of the interview guide and question routes was included as part of the training (see section 4.6.). The facilitators as well benefited from this process as it required them to profoundly familiarize themselves with the wording and content of the questions. This process led to several changes and the two girls contributed to improve the preciseness and relevance of the questions. In addition to initial training sessions, there was a continuous dialogue between the two facilitators, the interpreter and I. Before the first focus group discussion the facilitators signed a confidentiality contract. The facilitators' work, including training sessions, was compensated with 20 US dollars for a full day's work, and all expenses in connection with fieldtrips were covered by the researcher. The two focus group facilitators functioned as 'expert members' of the research team, bringing in personal experiences and a deeper understanding of the situation faced by the other participants.

6.2.2. Ensuring trustworthiness

6.2.2.1. Credibility

Credibility of a study deals with how well do the data represent what is being examined (Shenton, 2004; Creswell, 2013), and there are a number of ways to ensure the credibility of qualitative research. Familiarity with culture and context is one crucial strategy to enhance credibility of the data (cf. Tracy, 2010; Shenton, 2004). The historic and cultural context of the DRC, not least the conflict situation in its eastern parts, is complex and difficult to fully grasp and understand. I consequently do not claim to have full and complete knowledge of eastern Congo. However, my knowledge about the cultural, social and political context greatly benefited from working closely with Congolese researchers. Conversations and previous travels together with a Norwegian colleague who had done work in eastern Congo since early 2000 were also beneficial. The same is true for the experience I had gained from being engaged as advisor in one of the reintegration programmes operating in South and North Kivu at that time. Previous travels and consultations with people with in-depth knowledge of the conflict and the situation of child soldiers strengthened, moreover, my reflexivity and self-awareness, making me more aware of prior and potentially false assumptions about child soldiers, the Congolese context and so on (cf. Malterud, 2001; Lowes & Prowse, 2001).

The start of my work in the DRC was marked by two assumptions, mainly deriving from the news media and films on war and child soldiering. First, I thought former child soldiers might be dangerous and aggressive and that I might have to take some extra precautions. Second, through what I had read I had also come to believe that the conflict in the DRC was a particularly brutal conflict, and consequently maybe not only former child soldiers but also Congolese people in general were somewhat aggressive and potentially dangerous. As I had already travelled a bit on the African continent, I did not completely buy the picture presented by the media, but I was still (unconsciously) influenced by it. Being afraid or sceptical of informants and local people will most surely negatively impact the data generation. Fortunately, I had several missions to eastern Congo before the start of the research project, and these two assumptions were to a large extent corrected. Through my work as a reintegration programme advisor I got the chance to interact with former child soldiers, both girls and boys, prior to the start of the research. And not once did any of them make me feel uncomfortable or afraid. This was an important correction before fieldwork and interviews with the former girl soldiers.

With regards to sample size it is, as a rule, better to have “more data than necessary, rather than less” (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015, p. 27). Compared to many other doctoral projects I recognize that my sample of 17 former girl soldiers is relatively small. Following the tradition of phenomenological research, on the other hand, the sample in my study does not stand out as extraordinary low. Phenomenological research opts for thorough exploration and nuanced and detailed information about a phenomenon, thus leaning towards depth rather than breadth. Polkinghorne (1989), for instance, recommends including 5 to 25 research participants, placing my sample of 17 girls in the mid-section. The data provided through interviews and focus group discussions with the research participants yielded rich data which indicates a sufficiently large sample.

The final sample size must be considered in relation to the difficulty in getting access to former girl soldiers, not unlike other hidden, marginalized groups. Sample size also depends on the heterogeneity or homogeneity of the social group under study. Although parts of the stories of the study participants were different, for example related to recruitment and time spent in the armed group, their stories about the return home bore

generally more similarities than differences. The story of the girl who had spent only two days with a Tutsi group, were, for instance, surprisingly similar to the story of girls who had been several years with an armed group. This ‘homogeneity’ may indicate that 17 research participants were sufficient to address how they are perceived and treated when returning ‘home’. On the other hand, as qualitative research is more about depth than frequencies and “because each life is unique” one may argue that “data are never truly saturated as there will always be new things to discover” (O’Reilly & Parker, 2012, p. 194). As maintained by O’Reilly & Parker (2012), in qualitative research the focus is more on attaining sample adequacy than on how many participants are included in the sample. What is crucial is that the sample size is adequate to answer my research questions, which I would argue it is.

Adequacy of the sample is closely linked to sample bias, which among other things depends on how the sample was recruited. I started out by using gatekeepers from reintegration programmes to identify the first two girls in the three geographical locations. Using gatekeepers involve certain types of biases. Gatekeepers may for instance think that confident youth are better fit to participate in research, and hence exclude quiet and shy youth. Solely depending on gatekeepers would also lead to recruitment of only former girl soldiers who had received reintegration support while leaving out those with no support. To reduce this bias, I chose to complement the gatekeeper approach with peer-to-peer recruitment. Of the 17 girl soldiers, six were recruited by gatekeepers while 11 were recruited by their peers. This ensured a more diverse sample, particularly as it also includes former girl soldiers who had never been beneficiaries of reintegration programmes. However, peer-to-peer recruitment or snowball sampling involves other forms of biases, for instance, by favouring recruitment of people with wide social networks (cf. Heckathorn, 1997).

To ensure the credibility during fieldwork and data generation I used well-established methods of individual interviews and focus groups (cf. Shenton, 2004). These two methods have been successfully used in past research with former girl soldiers, and my previous experience from conducting individual and group interviews with vulnerable children and adults in Africa made me more prepared for the interview situation with

the girls. Basing the data generation on interviews as well as focus groups ensured some methodological triangulation. The results from the individual interviews and the focus groups yielded similar results, which strengthens the credibility of the results (cf. Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004).

A second form of triangulation which also strengthens the quality of qualitative research is researcher triangulation. The rationale is that multiple researchers may “supplement and contest” (Malterud, 2001, p. 484) each other’s viewpoints and understandings and arrive at better interpretations. Researcher triangulation was first and foremost ensured by involving the interpreter and the focus group facilitators as co-researchers. Involvement by persons other than the main researcher, through brainstorming and discussions, adds insight to the analysis and interpretation of the empirical data and, consequently, strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the data (cf. Crist & Tanner, 2003; Shenton, 2004). The interpreter and focus group facilitators brought with them invaluable local knowledge. The two focus group facilitators also brought with them personal experiences and a deeper understanding of the situation faced by the other former girl soldiers. I do acknowledge that an even better approach would have been to also include them in the data analysis, however, due to language barriers and geographical distance this was not done.

Shenton (2004) emphasizes, moreover, the potential to assure quality through peer scrutiny and debriefing sessions with supervisors or project coordinators. As the current project is a Dr. Philos I did unfortunately not have a supervisor. Throughout the project, I have oftentimes missed to have this *one* discussion partner who knew my project inside out. The coding of the data also bears the mark of a ‘lonely’ process and I was the sole coder of the data. I do recognize that this may have negatively impacted on the credibility of my study and that it would have been far better to have another researcher to review the analysis, or someone to conduct an independent coding of the material and then together arrive at the final coding through comparison of the two results.

That said, the research design, the analysis and the papers have been presented and discussed with different academics at several points in time. Debriefing has particularly been safeguarded by being part of a larger research project which gave me easy access

to Congolese academics and students with whom to discuss difficulties met along the way. The larger project also organized two seminars with Congolese practitioners in the field of reintegration; one in July 2010 and one in March 2011, both in Bukavu. Through these seminars, we ensured feedback and comments on preliminary findings and interpretations. I have also presented and discussed the research results with co-workers in the reintegration programme in eastern Congo where I was involved (see section 6.2.1.1.). Peer scrutiny has also been safeguarded through a workshop presentation of Paper I, research group presentation of Paper II, and conference presentations of Paper III and IV. The four papers have, moreover, been subjected to peer review before publication, the book chapter as well as the journal articles.³¹

The empirical papers include thick descriptions of the data; allowing the voice of the girls significant space in the finding sections. Shenton (2004) argues that without these insights “it is difficult for the reader of the final account to determine the extent to which the overall findings “ring true”” (p. 69). Because of long distance and difficult access to research participants, the girls were, regrettably, not given the chance to verify the accuracy of quotes and results presented in the papers. Such member checking is an acknowledge measure to ensure the credibility of the research (cf. Creswell, 2013; Shenton, 2004), and a lack of such can thus be seen to reduce the study’s trustworthiness to some extent.

The last credibility measure I will address is related to how to ensure that informants are open and honest (cf. Shenton, 2004). Using interview venues which ensured privacy, promising confidentiality (see section 4.7.2), encouraging the girls to be frank and using an interpreter who was female and did not know any of the girls or their families were steps taken to get honest information. The small meal served at the beginning of the focus groups sessions also contributed to building rapport among the former girl soldiers as well as between the participants and the research team. To build rapport and trust is particularly important but also particularly difficult in contexts characterized by war and conflicts (Fujii, 2010). In addition to fear and distrust commonly found in war-ridden contexts, victims of sexual violence often also suffer from shame and ostracism (Wood,

³¹ Paper II is currently under review in *Conflict, Security & Development*.

2008; Denov, 2006). The participation of the three Congolese young women in my research team appeared to have a positive impact on gaining trust and building rapport, particularly the involvement of the two former girl soldiers. The particular rich data in the focus groups indicate that their presence and facilitation of the focus groups made the girls feel more comfortable and confident about sharing their personal stories (cf. Denov & Maclure, 2006; for a discussion of benefits and challenges in using youth-led focus groups in research with former girl soldiers see Tonheim, 2013a). My young co-researchers enjoyed an insider perspective that I would not be able to access on my own. Leaving the girls and young women to talk among themselves facilitated self-disclosure and brought about a unique insight into their world. It provided a richer and more detailed data than if I had facilitated the focus groups myself (cf. Hart & Tyrer, 2006, Denov & Maclure, 2006). By actively participating in the discussions the two focus group facilitators helped the others open up and talk about their current situation and past experiences. By reducing the effect of an outsider-filter that a white European researcher would bring into the research process the youth-led focus groups not only enriched the data, it also reduced the discrepancy in power and status between young research participants and researcher (cf. Thomas & O’Kane, 2000; Clacherty & Donald, 2007; Hart & Tyrer, 2006).

However, being comfortable about telling their stories does not necessarily mean that the stories are accurate. How can I be sure that they tell the “truth” and that they don’t exaggerate? And did I *want to* believe them so badly that I became blind to information that may in fact be false? Hammersley (2006) draws attention to the tension between “trying to understand people’s perspectives from the inside” and “viewing them and their behaviour more distantly” (p. 11). To distance oneself emotionally is perhaps especially difficult when researching a topic which involves human rights violations like child soldiering and sexual violence. Being a woman myself made it perhaps easier to put myself in the shoes of former girl soldiers. Did my empathy with the girls cause me to overlook exaggerations of their suffering and stigmatization? Did my eagerness to give voice to, draw attention to and attempt to improve the situation of former girl soldiers make me short-sighted? As argued by Vlassenroot (2006), to have sympathy

for the victims may cause the researcher to have strong faith in the truthfulness of victims' statements (see also Fujii, 2010).

The view that what marginalized people say must be taken as face value, or what Vlassenroot (2006) calls the “syndrome of sympathy” (p. 198), may cause systematic errors (cf. Hammersley, 2006). Could it be that the girls in my study used “victimcy” (Utas, 2005) as a form of tactic self-representation? Did they, for instance to get sympathy or in the hope that I could improve their situation, present themselves as being more vulnerable and more stigmatized than they really are? I would argue that this is unlikely the case. The main argument is that the stories they told when talking to each other in the focus groups had even more detailed and vivid descriptions of suffering and stigmatization than the individual interviews conducted by me. I firmly believe that if one girl exaggerated her story chances are that she would be corrected by the others in the group. However, there is no sign of such reactions in the transcripts. I also actively sought to reduce tactic victim representation through informing the girls prior to interviews and focus groups that the results of the research would not improve their personal situation. It rather aimed at improving reintegration programmes in the long run and, through that, hopefully improve the situation of former girl soldiers in the future.

When dealing with the truthfulness of the stories of the former girl soldiers it is also important to ask; true for whom? Fujii (2010) argues that “People’s beliefs about how the world works, for example, cannot be subject to truth test” (p. 234). Oral testimonies have a “*different* credibility”; “there are no ‘false’ oral sources ... ‘wrong’ statements are still psychologically ‘true’” (Portelli, 1991, p. 51 – referred to by Fujii, 2010, p. 234). My research presents the reality as perceived by former girl soldiers, and it values their stories for what they are and believe that their stories contribute to a more complete understanding of social reintegration and returning home from armed groups. Not least because the voice and stories of former girl soldiers oftentimes have been ignored.

6.2.2.2. Dependability

The dependability of qualitative research is about giving sufficient details about the design and the implementation as to allow another researcher to repeat the same research

(cf. Shenton, 2004). To strengthen the dependability (or reliability) I, therefore, have strived to provide detailed information about the research participants and the research context (cf. Shenton, 2004). While the ideal is to present a complete description of all the contextual factors that may impact on the research (cf. Guba, 1981), it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to ascertain a complete description (and understanding) of this in complex conflict or post-conflict settings. Also, the research design have been explained in detail, for instance the choices made related to recruitment of the sample, the development of the interview and focus group guides and the methods used to generate and analyze data (see section 4). The measures taken to improve the credibility, as discussed above, will also strengthen the study's dependability (cf. Shenton, 2004), for instance method triangulation (cf. Guba, 1981). The likeliness of finding exactly the same result is, however, questioned in qualitative research, because social phenomena and social contexts are continuously changing.

6.2.2.3. Transferability

A relatively small sample, like mine, will of course impact on the transferability (or generalization) of the research findings. Similarly will transferability of findings from one specific, hence unique, context be somewhat problematic, only having a tentative character. Some practices are locally based, and, thus, some forms of stigmatization or repair may be typical for one local context while not existing in another. This is not only the case when investigating country contexts, but may also matter on the regional level and related to the rural-urban distinction. To increase transferability of my research I sought to “maximize the range of information uncovered” (cf. Guba, 1981, p. 86). This was done by recruiting participants from three different environments (one rural village, one semi-urban town, and one town) and by using peer-to-peer recruitment to also access former girl soldiers who had never been part of a reintegration programme.

Despite transferability having a tentative nature, I still believe the results are relevant and useful for the reintegration of former girl soldiers in other war-affected contexts. For instance, my findings have several similarities with findings on former girl soldiers in Sierra Leone (Coulter, 2006) and Angola (Wessells, 2010), as well as findings on former child soldiers in northern Uganda (Vindevoel et al., 2013). Annan and colleagues, on the other hand, find little stigmatization and high degree of social

acceptance of girls and boys having been abducted by LRA in northern Uganda (Annan et al., 2008; Blattman & Annan, 2009). Transferability must, therefore, be considered with caution. While I can suggest contexts where my findings may be transferable, “it is the reader’s decision whether or not the findings are transferable to another context” (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004, p. 110). To allow the reader to make this decision I have attempted to provide thick descriptions of the phenomenon and the context (cf. Shenton, 2004; Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Thick descriptions of the research context are requisite “in order to make judgments about fittingness with other contexts possible” (Guba, 1981). The detailed description of how some former girl soldiers in eastern Congo experience their return ‘home’ provided in this doctoral work may, at least partially, contribute to a deeper general understanding of stigmatization and social reintegration of former girl soldiers. Hopefully, it may also encourage further exploration of stigmatization faced by girls in similar situations elsewhere.

6.2.3. Methodological implications

Researching social reintegration of former girl soldiers requires ethical sensitivity in every step of the research design and implementation, if not researchers risk doing more harm than good. As many researchers before me, I experienced peer-to-peer recruitment as both a sensitive and effective strategy to recruit marginalized research participants to whom access is challenging. Three advantages are particularly visible. First, peer-to-peer recruitment gives access to former girl soldiers outside reintegration programmes. Second, it is easier to say no to participate when asked by a peer. Third, peer-to-peer recruitment is a discrete manner to approach potential research participants. Many former girl soldiers do not want to draw attention to themselves, and this is better taken into account when recruited by their peers.

An additional advantage of peer-to-peer recruitment is the fact that research participants become more involved in the research, possibly giving them a somewhat higher degree of ownership. This brings me to another methodological issue, that of using participant-led focus groups. This approach was beneficial on many levels, to the research itself but also to the former girl soldiers. Research designs which aim at giving participants meaningful participation may create opportunities for learning and empowerment.

While focus group discussion may in itself provide learning opportunities, this potential will be even greater when involving (some) participants as focus group facilitators and co-researchers. The two former girl soldiers in my research team contributed with invaluable inputs to the question guides, and brought with them an insider perspective that helped create an atmosphere of openness in the focus groups. While my research in eastern Congo had important elements of a participatory approach, I recommend researchers to strive to attain even deeper participation, for instance, by also involving researcher participants in the process of analysis or by using the approaches of Participatory Action Research. Research on marginalized groups like former girl soldiers should aim to empower research participants.

Research into social phenomena like social acceptance, stigmatization, reconciliation and repair/reintegration would greatly benefit from having a longitudinal approach. It would be fruitful to document changes over time, for instance with regards to stigmatization, and get more knowledge about why changes occur. Because stigmatization and social acceptance are highly complex and intricate social phenomena to study, in-depth qualitative longitudinal research may be particularly appropriate. I would also advocate for multiple meeting point with the same research participants as it may take time for former girl soldiers to feel comfortable and safe enough to talk about their experiences.

7. Conclusion

This doctoral work has presented evidence of a troublesome transition back to civilian life with family and community. Former girl soldiers in eastern Congo do not feel accepted and socially included and their social interaction often involves insults and denigration from family and community members. The stigmatization they experience in their everyday life has many forms. Name-calling like Interahamwe-girl or military-girl and whore or prostitute is commonplace. It also takes the form of accusation of being a thief and a criminal. They are blamed for having a dangerous and unpredictable military mentality, one which they are likely to pass on to other girls and young women. Others need, therefore, to be warned about their bad character. They don't seem to have many friends and their peers sometimes don't want to and sometimes are not allowed to hang out with them. People, also family members, are fearful of former girl soldiers. It may be dangerous to be associated with them. Their 'military-husbands' or 'soldier-friends' may turn up. And if a man approaches a former girl soldier in a romantic way, her neighbours will gossip about her past: She doesn't behave like a proper woman. She may get aggressive and violent. She is not a virgin, and she is likely to be infected by Aids. "*All this eats away our hearts*" (former girl soldier).

Stigmatization appears to be linked to two main perceptions; former girl soldiers experience to be perceived as threatening and as promiscuous. These local discourses, resonating closely with similar global discourses, produce harmful generalizations about former girl soldiers. Misleading and exaggerated perceptions of former girl soldiers do not only have implications for how the girls are perceived and treated by their families and communities, it may also have implications for local design and implementation of reintegration programmes.

Rather than being perceived as victims, having the potential of activating care responses, they are perceived as potentially dangerous, causing fearful and hostile responses by their families and communities. As long as former girl soldiers are perceived as threats to security and threats to social norms, people are discouraged from engaging in relatively complex and slow repair processes. Reintegration programmes must, therefore, aim at building bridges between former girl soldiers and their families and

communities. Programmes must invest more time and efforts in facilitating the healing and restoration of affectionate and trusting relationships.

Former girl soldiers who remain socially excluded and stigmatized are *not* successfully reintegrated. Excluded from normal family and community life they will have limited life opportunities. A life characterized by stigmatization and negative emotional reactions, makes former girl soldiers in eastern Congo disheartened and disappointed with their ‘homecoming’ and social reintegration:

“They should have left us alone fighting in the army rather than demobilize us and bring us back to our families without assistance. They deceived us, and they promised us to always be by our side, to bring us somewhere, but they have done nothing. [...] If you promise to do something for a child, then do it properly. Do not promise things you're not going to fulfil, just to make others think you know what you talk about. I've never liked liars” (former girl soldier).

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Appendix



Milfrid Tonheim
Senter for interkulturell kommunikasjon
Postboks 226
4001 STAVANGER

Vår dato: 03.11.2009

Vår ref: 22811 / 2 / LMR

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILRÅDING AV BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 19.10.2009. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

22811 *Barnesoldater, reintegrering og det sivile samsunn. Modeller og erfaringer fra Øst-Kongo, med særlig vekt på reintegrering av jenter*
Behandlingsansvarlig *Senter for interkulturell kommunikasjon, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig *Milfrid Tonheim*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, vedlagte prosjektvurdering - kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/-helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.09.2010, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henriksen

Linn-Merethe Rød

Kontaktperson: Linn-Merethe Rød tlf: 55 58 89 11
Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering



Prosjektet er en internasjonal multisenterstudie hvor Senter for interkulturell kommunikasjon er behandlingsansvarlig institusjon. Deltakende institusjoner er Université Evangélique en Afrique (UEA), Bukavu, og Université Officielle de Bukavu (UOB), Bukavu.

Personvernombudet forutsetter at organisering formelt er avklart mellom institusjonene og anbefaler at det utarbeides en avtale som bl.a. omfatter ansvarsfordeling, ansvarsstruktur, hvem som initierer prosjektet, bruk av data og ev. eierskap.

Når det gjelder deltakende land utenfor EU forutsettes det at de respektive institusjoner avklarer eventuell meldeplikt i forhold til sitt lands regelverk.

UTVALG

Utvalget vil bestå av to hovedgrupper:

- 1) Nøkkelpersoner fra statlige etater, nasjonale og internasjonale uavhengige organisasjoner (NGO), kirker og trossamfunn, og personer i nærmiljøet.
- 2) Tidligere barnesoldater, både gutter og jenter/menn og kvinner. De fleste vil være mellom 15 og 25 år, men det kan også bli aktuelt med intervju av barn under 15 år dersom denne aldersgruppen utgjør en vesentlig del av målgruppen.

Det forventes at prosjektet totalt vil ha ca. 385 respondenter.

DATAINNSAMLING

Data samles inn via spørreskjema, personlig intervju, observasjon og gruppeintervju.

Det behandles sensitive opplysninger om helseforhold og seksuelle forhold, jf. personopplysningsloven §§ 2 pkt. 8 c) og d).

FØRSTEGANGSKONTAKT

Det er etablert kontakt med organisasjoner fra ulike områder i Sør Kivu, som er aktive i arbeidet med reintegrering av tidligere barnesoldater. Forskningsprosjektet vil benytte seg av disse kontaktene ved rekruttering og trekking av respondenter.

Foruten rekruttering gjennom nettverk i praksisfeltet, vil et par av prosjektets kvinnelige forskere benytte seg av snøballmetoden for å identifisere og rekruttere tidligere jentesoldater.

INFORMASJON

Samtlige i utvalget informeres muntlig om prosjektet og samtykker muntlig til deltakelse. Vi forutsetter at utvalget informeres om formålet med prosjektet, metode(t), hvilke opplysninger som samles inn, hva opplysningene skal brukes til, hvem som vil ha tilgang på opplysningene, konfidensialitet, at det er frivillig å delta, at de kan trekke sitt samtykke underveis, ev. at et nei til deltakelse eller senere trekk fra studien ikke på noen måte får konsekvenser for vedkommende, dato for prosjektslutt og sletting av data, samt kontaktopplysninger for de som er ansvarlige for studien.

Prosjektleder opplyser at det er viktig å få frem lokale varianter, og at navn på ulike landsbyer derfor oppgis i sluttproduktet. Enkelte tidligere barnesoldater/deres familier kan derfor være identifiserbare i den ferdige rapporten. Videre kan informanter som er i sentrale lederposisjoner være identifiserbare. Vi forutsetter at samtlige av informantene som kan være direkte eller indirekte identifiserbare i den ferdige rapporten gis eksplisitt informasjon og bes om særskilt samtykke til dette.

Appendix 2 – Guide d’entretiens individuels – filles ex-soldat

1. Est-ce que vous habitez dans la maison familiale avec les parents ou ailleurs?
2. Est-ce que c’est votre propre choix d’habiter là où vous habitez aujourd’hui?
3. Êtes-vous contente de là où vous habitez ?

Traitement par la famille

4. Comment avez-vous été accueillie par vos parents, vos sœurs et vos frères et autres membres de la famille le jour de votre retour ici?
5. Le traitement que vos parents vous réservent aujourd’hui est-il différent de celui qu’ils vous donnaient avant votre participation dans un groupe armé ?
 - a. Si oui, décrivez ce changement et donnez des exemples.
6. Comment êtes-vous traitée par vos parents par rapport à vos frères et sœurs qui sont restés avec eux?
 - a. Si vous vous sentez défavorisée, quelles sont, selon vous, les raisons ?
7. Comment êtes-vous traitée par vos sœurs et frères ? Est-ce qu’ils vous traitent différemment qu’avant votre participation dans un groupe armé?
 - a. Si oui, décrivez ce changement et donnez des exemples.
8. Est-ce que vous vous sentez acceptée par votre famille?
 - a. De quelles manières votre famille a-t-elle montré qu’elle vous accepte ou qu’elle ne vous accepte pas ?

Traitement par des membres de la communauté

9. Comment avez-vous été accueillie par les membres de la communauté le jour de votre retour ?
10. Comment êtes-vous perçue et traitée par des membres de la communauté (vos pairs, vos enseignants, des membres de l’église, les voisins, etc.) ?
 - a. Les attitudes et comportements à votre endroit, ont-ils changé après votre retour du groupe armé ?
 - b. Si oui, décrivez ce changement et donnez des exemples.
 - c. Selon vous, quelles sont les raisons pour ce changement d’attitudes et de comportements?
11. Est-ce que vous vous sentez acceptée par d’autres membres de la communauté ?

- a. De quelles manières les membres de la communauté ont-ils montré qu'ils vous acceptent ou qu'ils ne vous acceptent pas ?

Par qui, la fréquence, l'impact :

12. avez-vous entendu que des filles ex-soldat aient été insultées ? Quels sont les insultes les plus courants ? (Par exemple, avec quels mots, par quelles attitudes et dans quelles circonstances ?)
 - a. Avez-vous personnellement été traitée de cette façon?
13. Dans quelle fréquence avez-vous subi ces insultes et traitements? (Chaque jour, quelque fois par semaine, de temps en temps...)
14. Quels sont les effets de ce type de traitement sur votre vie quotidienne?
15. Existe-t-il des personnes qui se comportent d'une façon plus insultante que d'autres? (vos parents, vos frères et sœurs, vos pairs, vos enseignants, des membres de l'église, vos voisins, etc.)
 - a. Si oui, quelles seraient, selon vous, les raisons qui pousseraient ces personnes à ne pas vous accepter ?
16. Y a-t-il une différence entre la façon dont vous êtes traitée par les hommes par rapport aux femmes ?
 - a. Si oui, quelles sont, selon vous, les raisons pour cette différence entre les sexes?

Facteurs importants

17. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qui influencerait la façon dont les autres te perçoivent?
18. Expliquez-moi si la manière dont les filles ex-soldat sont traitées est pareille pour toutes les filles ou diffère d'une fille à l'autre ?
19. Pensez-vous que vivre en ville et non dans ce village changerait la façon dont les filles ex-soldat sont perçues et traitées ?
20. Est-ce que des garçons ex-soldat sont insultés de la même manière que des filles?
 - a. Si non, explique cette différence ?
21. Pensez-vous que le fait d'avoir eu un enfant pendant la captivité dans le groupe armé, a-t-il une influence sur les attitudes des membres de la communauté vis-à-vis de vous ? Si oui, pourquoi ?

Les stratégies de coping

22. Selon vous, avez-vous gagné quelques compétences ou aptitudes utiles à votre vie actuelle ?
 - a. Si oui, quel genre de compétences? Comment utilisez-vous ces compétences aujourd'hui?
 - b. Comment ces capacités peuvent t'aider à faire face aux insultes ou aux mauvais traitements ?
23. En général, comment réagissez-vous quand quelqu'un vous traite mal ou vous insulte ?
24. Vos réactions diffèrent-elles selon qu'il s'agit de vos parents, frères ou sœurs, un membre ou un pair de l'Eglise ou de la communauté ?
25. Quels sont les effets de vos réactions?
 - a. Est-ce que vous atteignez des résultats souhaités ?

Des efforts par des programmes de réinsertion

26. Avez-vous fait partie d'un programme de réinsertion après ton départ du groupe armé?
27. Quelles sont les mesures et les efforts mis en oeuvre par ce programme de réinsertion pour contrebalancer des insultes envers les filles ex-soldat ?
28. Quels sont les effets des ces mesures?
29. A votre avis, quelles sont les mesures les plus efficaces ?

Avez-vous d'autres choses que vous voudriez bien ajouter ?

Appendix 3 – Guide des questions - Focus Groupes – Séance 1

1. Comment les filles ex-soldats sont-elles perçues et traitées à leur retour des forces armées et des groupes armés ?
 - a. Des attitudes et comportement des membres de la communauté (leurs familles, leurs pairs, leurs enseignants, les membres de l'église, leurs voisins, etc.) vis-à-vis d'elles, ont-ils changé après leur retour des forces et groupes armés ?
Donnez des exemples.
2. Pensez-vous que les filles ex-soldats sont défavorisées ou insultées ?
 - a. Si oui, de quelles manières ? Donnez des exemples (quels mots, quels traitements ?)
 - b. A votre avis, quelles seraient les raisons de ce traitement?
3. Selon vous, quel est l'impact de ce traitement sur la vie de ces filles ?
4. Quels sont les facteurs qui influencent la façon dont les ex-soldats sont perçues et traitées?
5. Quelles sont les réactions habituelles des filles ex-soldats que vous connaissez face aux insultes qu'elles subissent ?
6. Que peuvent faire les filles ex-soldats pour diminuer des traitements défavorables ou insultants dont elles sont victimes.
7. Que peuvent faire les programmes de réinsertion faire pour diminuer un défavorable traitement envers les filles ex-soldat ?
8. Que peuvent faire les membres des familles pour faire diminuer ce traitement défavorable dont sont victimes leurs filles ex-soldats ?
9. Que peut faire la communauté (les églises, les écoles, les ONGs, la chefferie, les autorités locaux, etc.) pour faire diminuer le traitement défavorable envers les filles ex-soldats?
10. Selon vous, qu'est-ce qu'un comportement stigmatisant ? Donnez des exemples.
11. Avez-vous des éléments que vous voudriez ajouter pour enrichir cet échange ?

Appendix 4 - Guide des questions - Focus Groupes – Séance 2

1. En général, comment est-ce que les femmes/filles sont vues dans votre milieu ?
 - a. Quelles sont leurs positions et valeurs par rapport aux hommes ?
2. Quels sont les facteurs importants pour être respectés par les autres membres de la société ? Donnez des exemples.
 - a. Les hommes et les femmes sont-ils respectés de la même manière ? Si non, pourquoi ?
3. Est-ce que vous vous sentez respectées en tant que femmes ?
 - a. Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?
4. Pensez-vous que vous avez le droit d'être respectées, en tant qu'être humain ?
(Indépendamment de votre situation passée et actuelle)
 - a. Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?
5. Avez-vous estime de vous-mêmes ? (Estime de soi)
 - a. Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?
 - b. Comment pourriez-vous augmenter votre estime de soi ?
6. Pensez-vous que les autres personnes dans la communauté ont le droit de se moquer de vous à cause de ce que vous avez vécu ?
 - a. Pourquoi ou pourquoi pas ?
7. Quand les gens se moquent de vous, est-ce que vous vous sentez coupable de ce dont ils vous accusent ?
 - a. De quelles choses pensez-vous qu'ils ont le droit de vous blâmer?
8. Discuter si les filles ex-soldats sont innocentes, des victimes ou au contraire des coupables et des délinquantes. Donnez des explications à vos opinions.
9. Par rapport à la culpabilité, est-ce qu'il y a des différences entre une fille prise par force par un groupe armé et une autre fille qui a décidé elle-même (volontairement) de s'enrôler ?
 - a. Quand quelqu'un a été forcé de faire quelque chose ou a vécu quelque chose par force, est-ce que cette personne est quand même coupable de ce qu'elle a fait ou vécu?
10. Les entretiens individuelles ont montré que plusieurs filles sont rejetées par leurs parents biologiques mais accueillies par d'autres membre de leur famille élargie ou ailleurs. Pensez-vous que des parents biologiques rejettent leurs filles retournant d'un

groupe armé plus souvent que d'autres membres de la famille ou ailleurs ? Si oui, pourquoi ?

a. Est-il plus facile pour des parents biologiques d'accepter et d'accueillir un garçon ex-soldat qu'une fille ex-soldat ? Si oui, pourquoi ?

11. Quelques filles ont dit que lorsque les parents sont divorcés et remariés, elles préfèrent aller habiter chez d'autres membres de la famille. Est-ce que vous pouvez expliquer un peu pourquoi les filles trouvent cette alternative préférable?

a. Quels sont les problèmes potentiels si vous habitez chez une mère ou un père qui est marié avec une nouvelle personne ?

12. Qu'est-ce que les filles ex-soldats, elles-mêmes, font ou pourraient faire pour diminuer les moqueries et les discriminations envers elles dans leurs familles respectives ?

13. Qu'est-ce que les filles ex-soldats, elles-mêmes, font ou pourraient faire pour diminuer les moqueries et les insultes des voisins ?

14. Qu'est-ce que les filles ex-soldats, elles-mêmes, font ou pourraient faire pour diminuer les moqueries et les insultes de leurs collègues ou amis ?

Appendix 5 – Codebook: Individual interviews with former girl soldiers

1. Warm initial welcome by family and neighbours
2. I was not warmly received when I first returned
3. I don't feel loved as before
4. People are afraid of me
5. I'm blamed if things are stolen
6. People see me as a criminal (delinquent)
7. People see me as dangerous
8. People fear soldiers will come for me
9. People fear that I'll bring soldiers to kill them
10. People think I have a dangerous disease
11. People think I have a military spirit (bad temper, possessed)
12. People call me "demob"
13. I'm called "raped woman"
14. I'm perceived as promiscuous
15. I'm not seen as "normal"
16. My parents eventually rejected me
17. I prefer to live with others because my parents are divorced
18. I prefer to live with others or alone because of the way I was/is treated at home
19. I feel accepted by my family
20. I don't feel accepted by my family
21. I don't feel accepted by my neighbours
22. Some accept me, others don't
23. I feel accepted by people in church
24. My parents/caregivers don't pay my school fees but pay for siblings/peers in the family
25. My parents/caregivers won't pay my child's schooling
26. My parents/caregivers buys items and cloths for siblings but not to me
27. I or my child are unfavourably treated when it comes to basic needs (food, shelter, health)
28. My siblings insult me/their behaviour has changed
29. I'm called Interahamwe-/military-girl
30. I'm called whore/prostitute
31. I'm called fille-mère (unwed mother).
32. I'm called a witch
33. My child is called bad names, such as Interahamwe-/military-child
34. I'm perceived as a financial burden to my family
35. My child is perceived as a financial burden
36. People see me as having a bad influence on peers
37. I'm sometimes prohibited to interact with peers
38. I have kept old friends and made new ones
39. My past as a child soldier has negatively affected my social life
40. My child is prohibited to interact with peers
41. I have to fend for myself
42. My past makes it difficult for me to marry
43. Poverty increases stigmatization and chances of rejection
44. Those having been with a 'Rwandan' group are less accepted and more stigmatized.
45. Not having/living with biological parents increases chances of being badly treated
46. I'm badly treated because I am a former child soldier
47. I'm badly treated because I was raped/the "wife" of one or many soldiers
48. I'm badly treated because I am an unwed mother/because I have child
49. People have the right to insult me because of what I've done
50. I'm mistreated and insulted by women, including motherly caregiver
51. I'm insulted by peers
52. I'm insulted/gossiped about by neighbours
53. Stigmatization happens not so often
54. Stigmatization happens frequently
55. Stigmatization happens when there is a dispute/conflict of some sort
56. All or most former girl soldiers are insulted
57. Better to hide to truth/enjoy anonymity – less stigmatization
58. I stay silent when stigmatized
59. I tell them it wasn't my fault
60. I get angry and may threaten people if they mock me
61. I withdraw socially when stigmatized
62. It makes me sad/it breaks my heart
63. It doesn't break my heart/I'm strong enough to endure it
64. I have to endure it because I have nowhere else to go
65. I receive more understanding from women
66. I receive more understanding from men
67. I believe former girl soldiers are more stigmatized in rural than in urban areas.
68. People are more afraid of former boy soldiers
69. Former girl soldiers are insulted and stigmatized more than the boys

70. Former boy soldiers are similarly treated to girls
71. Former boy soldiers are accepted/not insulted.
72. The way I'm treated makes me consider returning to the armed group
73. The way I'm treated makes me consider becoming a prostitute
74. The way I'm treated makes me consider bringing my child to the father
75. The way I'm treated makes me consider ending my life/not want to live anymore
76. Getting a remunerative job is the solution to my situation/ becoming socially accepted
77. Education for my child is important to improve my situation
78. My situation would improve is I could go to school
79. I don't see marriage as a solution to my situation
80. Time does not seem reduce stigmatization
81. With time stigmatization seems to be reduced
82. Time with the armed group doesn't matter on how you are treated.
83. Girls who join 'voluntarily' less stigmatized than those who have been abducted
84. Others copy how the family treats the former girl soldiers.
85. Better to tell the truth.
86. Stigmatization will be reduced if the girl/young woman is quiet and respectful.

Appendix 6 – Codebook: Focus group discussions with former girl soldiers

1. We are stigmatized because we are angry and upset
2. We may get angry and fight or mock the people that mock us
3. We keep quiet when stigmatized
4. We tell them it wasn't our fault or to leave us alone
5. We suffer tremendously from the insults and maltreatment after our return
6. The way we're treated makes us not want to live anymore
7. People think we have a military spirit/mentality
8. People think we have the spirit of a criminal (delinquent)
9. We endure the maltreatment because we have nowhere else to go
10. Learn a trade and get a remunerative job is the solution to our situation
11. We need help to diminish our anger and sorrow, so we may forget and become 'human'
12. Poverty (personal and in the family) makes it more difficult and rejection and stigmatization more likely
13. Parents may reject their daughters and ask them to return where they came from
14. Death of parents makes the return more difficult
15. We are maltreated and denigrated where we live
16. Our children are not cared for by the family where we live
17. We worry about the future of our children
18. That our children have unknown/rebel fathers makes life difficult
19. The child makes you remember all the suffering you've experienced
20. Those having been with Interahamwe (or other 'Rwandan' groups) have a more difficult return.
21. Our families don't accept us/don't love us
22. The way we are treated makes us consider going back to the armed group.
23. Our children are called bad names, such as Interahamwe-/military-child
24. We are called Interahamwe-/military-women
25. We suffered tremendously and were raped by many men
26. People fear that we'll bring soldiers to kill them
27. People reject us and don't want us to stay in the neighbourhood
28. People think/say we have a dangerous disease (HIV/Aids)
29. Schooling will make people accepts us more / reduce our 'military mentality'
30. That our children could go to school would improve our lives.
31. People call us "demob"/demobilized
32. People think we have a bad influence on other/peers
33. We don't have many friends
34. We withdraw socially when stigmatized
35. People don't want to hang out with us
36. The way we are treated makes us sad/makes us cry
37. We're badly treated because we come home with children / are unwed mothers
38. We are socially excluded
39. We are unfavourably treated when it comes to basic needs (food, shelter, health)
40. People want us to get rid of our children
41. We would like that someone build us a house/to live independently
42. Sensitizing family and community members so they will respect us
43. Others copy how the family treats us
44. We are insulted and gossiped about in the community
45. It's better to move and live in anonymity
46. People are afraid of us/our behaviour
47. People think/say we smell bad/are dirty/ look ugly.
48. People call us whores/prostitutes
49. We are not seen as good marriage material
50. The way we live makes us consider turning to prostitution
51. We're badly treated because we were raped/the 'wives' of one or many soldiers
52. Not living with biological parents makes it more difficult
53. We need guidance (conseil) and preaching
54. The stigmatisation make us remember about all our suffering

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University of Bergen

1980	Allen, H.M., Dr. philos.	Parent-offspring interactions in willow grouse (<i>Lagopus L. Lagopus</i>).
1981	Myhrer, T., Dr. philos.	Behavioral Studies after selective disruption of hippocampal inputs in albino rats.
1982	Svebak, S., Dr. philos.	The significance of motivation for task-induced tonic physiological changes.
1983	Myhre, G., Dr. philos.	The Biopsychology of behavior in captive Willow ptarmigan.
	Eide, R., Dr. philos.	PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS AND INDICES OF HEALTH RISKS. The relationship of psychosocial conditions to subjective complaints, arterial blood pressure, serum cholesterol, serum triglycerides and urinary catecholamines in middle aged populations in Western Norway.
	Værnes, R.J., Dr. philos.	Neuropsychological effects of diving.
1984	Kolstad, A., Dr. philos.	Til diskusjonen om sammenhengen mellom sosiale forhold og psykiske strukturer. En epidemiologisk undersøkelse blant barn og unge.
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1985	Hellesnes, T., Dr. philos.	Læring og problemløsning. En studie av den perseptuelle analysens betydning for verbal læring.
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	Jellestad, F.K., Dr. philos.	Effects of neuron specific amygdala lesions on fear-motivated behavior in rats.
1987	Aarø, L.E., Dr. philos.	Health behaviour and socioeconomic Status. A survey among the adult population in Norway.
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	Vollmer, F.C., Dr. philos.	Essays on explanation in psychology.
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	Sequeira, Sarah Dorothee Dos Santos	The effects of background noise on asymmetrical speech perception
	Kleiven, Jo, dr.philos.	The Lillehammer scales: Measuring common motives for vacation and leisure behavior
	Jónsdóttir, Guðrún	Dubito ergo sum? Ni jenter møter naturfaglig kunnskap.
	Hove, Oddbjørn	Mental health disorders in adults with intellectual disabilities - Methods of assessment and prevalence of mental health disorders and problem behaviour
	Wageningen, Heidi Karin van	The role of glutamate on brain function

	Bjørkvik, Jofrid	God nok? Selvaktelse og interpersonlig fungering hos pasienter innen psykisk helsevern: Forholdet til diagnoser, symptomer og behandlingsutbytte
	Andersson, Martin	A study of attention control in children and elderly using a forced-attention dichotic listening paradigm
	Almås, Aslaug Grov	Teachers in the Digital Network Society: Visions and Realities. A study of teachers' experiences with the use of ICT in teaching and learning.
	Ulvik, Marit	Lærerutdanning som dannning? Tre stemmer i diskusjonen
2010	Skår, Randi	Læringsprosesser i sykepleieres profesjonsutøvelse. En studie av sykepleieres læringserfaringer.
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	Lunde, Linn-Heidi	Chronic pain in older adults. Consequences, assessment and treatment.
	Danielsen, Anne Grete	Perceived psychosocial support, students' self-reported academic initiative and perceived life satisfaction
	Hysing, Mari	Mental health in children with chronic illness
	Olsen, Olav Kjellevoid	Are good leaders moral leaders? The relationship between effective military operational leadership and morals
	Riese, Hanne	Friendship and learning. Entrepreneurship education through mini-enterprises.
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H	Hauge, Lars Johan	Environmental antecedents of workplace bullying: A multi-design approach
	Bjørkelo, Brita	Whistleblowing at work: Antecedents and consequences
	Reme, Silje Endresen	Common Complaints – Common Cure? Psychiatric comorbidity and predictors of treatment outcome in low back pain and irritable bowel syndrome
	Helland, Wenche Andersen	Communication difficulties in children identified with psychiatric problems
	Beneventi, Harald	Neuronal correlates of working memory in dyslexia
	Thygesen, Elin	Subjective health and coping in care-dependent old persons living at home
	Aanes, Mette Marthinussen	Poor social relationships as a threat to belongingness needs. Interpersonal stress and subjective health complaints: Mediating and moderating factors.
	Anker, Morten Gustav	Client directed outcome informed couple therapy

	Bull, Torill	Combining employment and child care: The subjective well-being of single women in Scandinavia and in Southern Europe
	Viig, Nina Grieg	Tilrettelegging for læreres deltakelse i helsefremmende arbeid. En kvalitativ og kvantitativ analyse av sammenhengen mellom organisatoriske forhold og læreres deltakelse i utvikling og implementering av Europeisk Nettverk av Helsefremmende Skoler i Norge
	Wolff, Katharina	To know or not to know? Attitudes towards receiving genetic information among patients and the general public.
	Ogden, Terje, dr.philos.	Familiebasert behandling av alvorlige atferdsproblemer blant barn og ungdom. Evaluering og implementering av evidensbaserte behandlingsprogrammer i Norge.
	Solberg, Mona Elin	Self-reported bullying and victimisation at school: Prevalence, overlap and psychosocial adjustment.
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	Moltu, Christian	Being a therapist in difficult therapeutic impasses. A hermeneutic phenomenological analysis of skilled psychotherapists' experiences, needs, and strategies in difficult therapies ending well.
	Myrseth, Helga	Pathological Gambling - Treatment and Personality Factors
	Schanche, Elisabeth	From self-criticism to self-compassion. An empirical investigation of hypothesized change processes in the Affect Phobia Treatment Model of short-term dynamic psychotherapy for patients with Cluster C personality disorders.
	Våpenstad, Eystein Victor, dr.philos.	Det tempererte nærvær. En teoretisk undersøkelse av psykoterautens subjektivitet i psykoanalyse og psykoanalytisk psykoterapi.
	Haukebø, Kristin	Cognitive, behavioral and neural correlates of dental and intra-oral injection phobia. Results from one treatment and one fMRI study of randomized, controlled design.
	Harris, Anette	Adaptation and health in extreme and isolated environments. From 78°N to 75°S.
	Bjørknes, Ragnhild	Parent Management Training-Oregon Model: intervention effects on maternal practice and child behavior in ethnic minority families
	Mamen, Asgeir	Aspects of using physical training in patients with substance dependence and additional mental distress
	Espevik, Roar	Expert teams: Do shared mental models of team members make a difference
	Haara, Frode Olav	Unveiling teachers' reasons for choosing practical activities in mathematics teaching

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	Melkevik, Ole Rogstad	Screen-based sedentary behaviours: pastimes for the poor, inactive and overweight? A cross-national survey of children and adolescents in 39 countries.
	Vøllestad, Jon	Mindfulness-based treatment for anxiety disorders. A quantitative review of the evidence, results from a randomized controlled trial, and a qualitative exploration of patient experiences.
	Tolo, Astrid	Hvordan blir lærerkompetanse konstruert? En kvalitativ studie av PPU-studenters kunnskapsutvikling.
	Saus, Evelyn-Rose	Training effectiveness: Situation awareness training in simulators
	Nordgreen, Tine	Internet-based self-help for social anxiety disorder and panic disorder. Factors associated with effect and use of self-help.
	Munkvold, Linda Helen	Oppositional Defiant Disorder: Informant discrepancies, gender differences, co-occurring mental health problems and neurocognitive function.
	Christiansen, Øivin	Når barn plasseres utenfor hjemmet: beslutninger, forløp og relasjoner. Under barnevernets (ved)tak.
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	Roness, Dag	Hvorfor bli lærer? Motivasjon for utdanning og utøving.
	Fjermestad, Krister Westlye	The therapeutic alliance in cognitive behavioural therapy for youth anxiety disorders
	Jenssen, Eirik Sørnes	Tilpasset opplæring i norsk skole: politikeres, skolelederes og læreres handlingsvalg
	Saksvik-Lehouillier, Ingvild	Shift work tolerance and adaptation to shift work among offshore workers and nurses
	Johansen, Venke Frederike	Når det intime blir offentlig. Om kvinners åpenhet om brystkreft og om markedsføring av brystkreftsaken.
	Herheim, Rune	Pupils collaborating in pairs at a computer in mathematics learning: investigating verbal communication patterns and qualities
	Vie, Tina Løkke	Cognitive appraisal, emotions and subjective health complaints among victims of workplace bullying: A stress-theoretical approach
	Jones, Lise Øen	Effects of reading skills, spelling skills and accompanying efficacy beliefs on participation in education. A study in Norwegian prisons.

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	Horverak, Jøri Gytte	Sense or sensibility in hiring processes. Interviewee and interviewer characteristics as antecedents of immigrant applicants' employment probabilities. An experimental approach.
	Jøsendal, Ola	Development and evaluation of BE smokeFREE, a school-based smoking prevention program
	Osnes, Berge	Temporal and Posterior Frontal Involvement in Auditory Speech Perception
	Drageset, Sigrunn	Psychological distress, coping and social support in the diagnostic and preoperative phase of breast cancer
	Aasland, Merethe Schanke	Destructive leadership: Conceptualization, measurement, prevalence and outcomes
	Bakibinga, Pauline	The experience of job engagement and self-care among Ugandan nurses and midwives
	Skogen, Jens Christoffer	Foetal and early origins of old age health. Linkage between birth records and the old age cohort of the Hordaland Health Study (HUSK)
	Leveresen, Ingrid	Adolescents' leisure activity participation and their life satisfaction: The role of demographic characteristics and psychological processes
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	Strand, Mari	Emotional information processing in recurrent MDD
	Veseth, Marius	Recovery in bipolar disorder. A reflexive-collaborative exploration of the lived experiences of healing and growth when battling a severe mental illness
	Mæland, Silje	Sick leave for patients with severe subjective health complaints. Challenges in general practice.
	Mjaaland, Thera	At the frontiers of change? Women and girls' pursuit of education in north-western Tigray, Ethiopia
	Odéen, Magnus	Coping at work. The role of knowledge and coping expectancies in health and sick leave.
	Hynninen, Kia Minna Johanna	Anxiety, depression and sleep disturbance in chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). Associations, prevalence and effect of psychological treatment.

	Flo, Elisabeth	Sleep and health in shift working nurses
	Aasen, Elin Margrethe	From paternalism to patient participation? The older patients undergoing hemodialysis, their next of kin and the nurses: a discursive perspective on perception of patient participation in dialysis units
	Ekornås, Belinda	Emotional and Behavioural Problems in Children: Self-perception, peer relationships, and motor abilities
	Corbin, J. Hope	North-South Partnerships for Health: Key Factors for Partnership Success from the Perspective of the KIWAKKUKI
	Birkeland, Marianne Skogbrott	Development of global self-esteem: The transition from adolescence to adulthood
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	Mortensen, Øystein	The transition to parenthood – Couple relationships put to the test
	Årdal, Guro	Major Depressive Disorder – a Ten Year Follow-up Study. Inhibition, Information Processing and Health Related Quality of Life
	Johansen, Rino Bandlitz	The impact of military identity on performance in the Norwegian armed forces
	Bøe, Tormod	Socioeconomic Status and Mental Health in Children and Adolescents
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	Hegelstad, Wenche ten Velden	Early Detection and Intervention in Psychosis: A Long-Term Perspective
	Urheim, Ragnar	Forståelse av pasientaggresjon og forklaringer på nedgang i voldsrater ved Regional sikkerhetsavdeling, Sandviken sykehus
	Kinn, Liv Grethe	Round-Trips to Work. Qualitative studies of how persons with severe mental illness experience work integration.
	Rød, Anne Marie Kinn	Consequences of social defeat stress for behaviour and sleep. Short-term and long-term assessments in rats.
	Nygård, Merethe	Schizophrenia – Cognitive Function, Brain Abnormalities, and Cannabis Use
	Tjora, Tore	Smoking from adolescence through adulthood: the role of family, friends, depression and socioeconomic status. Predictors of smoking from age 13 to 30 in the "The Norwegian Longitudinal Health Behaviour Study" (NLHB)
	Vangsnes, Vigdis	The Dramaturgy and Didactics of Computer Gaming. A Study of a Medium in the Educational Context of Kindergartens.

	Nordahl, Kristin Berg	Early Father-Child Interaction in a Father-Friendly Context: Gender Differences, Child Outcomes, and Protective Factors related to Fathers' Parenting Behaviors with One-year-olds
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	Skotheim, Siv	Maternal emotional distress and early mother-infant interaction: Psychological, social and nutritional contributions
	Halleland, Helene Barone	Executive Functioning in adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). From basic mechanisms to functional outcome.
	Halvorsen, Kirsti Vindal	Partnerskap i lærerutdanning, sett fra et økologisk perspektiv
	Solbue, Vibeke	Dialogen som visker ut kategorier. En studie av hvilke erfaringer innvandererungdommer og norskfødte med innvanderforeldre har med videregående skole. Hva forteller ungdommenes erfaringer om videregående skoles håndtering av etniske ulikheter?
	Kvalevaag, Anne Lise	Fathers' mental health and child development. The predictive value of fathers' psychological distress during pregnancy for the social, emotional and behavioural development of their children
	Sandal, Ann Karin	Ungdom og utdanningsval. Om elevar sine opplevingar av val og overgangsprossessar.
	Haug, Thomas	Predictors and moderators of treatment outcome from high- and low-intensity cognitive behavioral therapy for anxiety disorders. Association between patient and process factors, and the outcome from guided self-help, stepped care, and face-to-face cognitive behavioral therapy.
	Sjølie, Hege	Experiences of Members of a Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Team. Personal history, professional role and emotional support in a CRHT team.
	Falkenberg, Liv Eggset	Neuronal underpinnings of healthy and dysfunctional cognitive control
Mrdalj, Jelena	The early life condition. Importance for sleep, circadian rhythmicity, behaviour and response to later life challenges	
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2015 V	Hauken, May Aasebø	« <i>The cancer treatment was only half the work!</i> » A Mixed-Method Study of Rehabilitation among Young Adult Cancer Survivors
	Ryland, Hilde Katrin	Social functioning and mental health in children: the influence of chronic illness and intellectual function
	Rønsen, Anne Kristin	Vurdering som profesjonskompetanse. Refleksjonsbasert utvikling av læreres kompetanse i formativ vurdering

	Hoff, Helge Andreas	Thinking about Symptoms of Psychopathy in Norway: Content Validation of the Comprehensive Assessment of Psychopathic Personality (CAPP) Model in a Norwegian Setting
	Schmid, Marit Therese	Executive Functioning in recurrent- and first episode Major Depressive Disorder. Longitudinal studies
	Sand, Liv	Body Image Distortion and Eating Disturbances in Children and Adolescents
	Matanda, Dennis Juma	Child physical growth and care practices in Kenya: Evidence from Demographic and Health Surveys
	Amugsi, Dickson Abanimi	Child care practices, resources for care, and nutritional outcomes in Ghana: Findings from Demographic and Health Surveys
	Jakobsen, Hilde	The good beating: Social norms supporting men's partner violence in Tanzania
	Sagoe, Dominic	Nonmedical anabolic-androgenic steroid use: Prevalence, attitudes, and social perception
	Eide, Helene Marie Kjærgård	Narrating the relationship between leadership and learning outcomes. A study of public narratives in the Norwegian educational sector.
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	Dahl, Berit Misund	The meaning of professional identity in public health nursing
	Røykenes, Kari	Testangst hos sykepleierstudenter: «Alternativ behandling»
	Bless, Josef Johann	The smartphone as a research tool in psychology. Assessment of language lateralization and training of auditory attention.
	Løvvik, Camilla Margrethe Sigvaldsen	Common mental disorders and work participation – the role of return-to-work expectations
	Lehmann, Stine	Mental Disorders in Foster Children: A Study of Prevalence, Comorbidity, and Risk Factors
	Knapstad, Marit	Psychological factors in long-term sickness absence: the role of shame and social support. Epidemiological studies based on the Health Assets Project.
2016	Kvestad, Ingrid	Biological risks and neurodevelopment in young North Indian children
V	Sælør, Knut Tore	Hinderløyper, halmstrå og hengende snører. En kvalitativ studie av håp innenfor psykisk helse- og rusfeltet.
	Mellingen, Sonja	Alkoholbruk, partilfredshet og samlivsstatus. Før, inn i, og etter svangerskapet – korrelerer eller konsekvenser?
	Thun, Eirunn	Shift work: negative consequences and protective factors

	Hilt, Line Torbjørnsen	The borderlands of educational inclusion. Analyses of inclusion and exclusion processes for minority language students
	Havnen, Audun	Treatment of obsessive-compulsive disorder and the importance of assessing clinical effectiveness
	Slåtten, Hilde	Gay-related name-calling among young adolescents. Exploring the importance of the context.
	Ree, Eline	Staying at work. The role of expectancies and beliefs in health and workplace interventions.
	Morken, Frøydis	Reading and writing processing in dyslexia
2016	Løvoll, Helga Synnevåg	Inside the outdoor experience. On the distinction between pleasant and interesting feelings and their implication in the motivational process.
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	Øyeflaten, Irene Larsen	Long-term sick leave and work rehabilitation. Prognostic factors for return to work.
	Henriksen, Roger Ekeberg	Social relationships, stress and infection risk in mother and child
	Johnsen, Iren	«Only a friend» - The bereavement process of young adults who have lost a friend to a traumatic death. A mixed methods study.
	Helle, Siri	Cannabis use in non-affective psychoses: Relationship to age at onset, cognitive functioning and social cognition
	Glabek, Mats	Workplace bullying and expulsion in working life. A representative study addressing prospective associations and explanatory conditions.
	Oanes, Camilla Jensen	Tilbakemelding i terapi. På hvilke måter opplever terapeuter at tilbakemeldingsprosedyrer kan virke inn på terapeutiske praksiser?
	Reknes, Iselin	Exposure to workplace bullying among nurses: Health outcomes and individual coping
	Chimhutu, Victor	Results-Based Financing (RBF) in the health sector of a low-income country. From agenda setting to implementation: The case of Tanzania
	Ness, Ingunn Johanne	The Room of Opportunity. Understanding how knowledge and ideas are constructed in multidisciplinary groups working with developing innovative ideas.
	Hollekim, Ragnhild	Contemporary discourses on children and parenting in Norway. An empirical study based on two cases.
	Doran, Rouven	Eco-friendly travelling: The relevance of perceived norms and social comparison
2017	Katisi, Masego	The power of context in health partnerships: Exploring synergy and antagonism between external and internal ideologies in implementing Safe Male Circumcision (SMC) for HIV prevention in Botswana
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Jamaludin, Nor Lelawati Binti	The “why” and “how” of International Students’ Ambassadorship Roles in International Education
Berthelsen, Mona	Effects of shift work and psychological and social work factors on mental distress. Studies of onshore/offshore workers and nurses in Norway.
Krane, Vibeke	Lærer-elev-relasjoner, elevers psykiske helse og frafall i videregående skole – en eksplorerende studie om samarbeid og den store betydningen av de små ting
Søvik, Margaret Ljosnes	Evaluating the implementation of the Empowering Coaching™ program in Norway