



CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WAR STUDY - LIBERIA

December 2019



CHILDREN BORN OUT OF WAR STUDY

by

Aiding Disadvantaged and Traumatized Women and Girls (ADWANGA)

Research Team

Amelia M. Cooper – Team Leader

Tinatua Calvin Kollie – Research Consultant

Justin Ajavon – Research Assistant

Keren Hallowanga – Research Assistant

Rebekah Bertchi – Research Assistant

T. James K. Nyalla – Field Assistant

Warkapoe Warkanuah – Field Assistant

Table of content

Acronyms.....	i
Executive Summary	ii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background.....	1
Statement of the problem	2
Significance of the study.....	3
Objectives of the study.....	4
2. METHODOLOGY	5
Study Area	5
Research design	6
Population	6
Sampling procedures.....	6
Data collection	6
Data analysis	7
3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT	7
Brief of Liberia	7
History of conflict in Liberia	8
Cause of the conflict in Liberia.....	8
Impact of the conflict	8
4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS	9
Age and gender	9
Ethnic group.....	10
Religion.....	10
Marital status.....	11
Education	11
Household size and role	12
Occupation.....	12
Duration of stay in current location and reason for staying	13
Living conditions for children born of war.....	14
Relationship with person living with	15
Experience of the war	16

Most impactful experience.....	17
Personality and sense of belonging	18
Community relationship.....	20
Most important source of strength and reason	21
Experiences and sense of connection.....	21
Special needs of children born of war.....	22
Needs of families of children born of war	22
5. DISCUSSION	23
Demographic characteristics	23
Condition of children born of war.....	23
Sense of belonging.....	24
Community relationship.....	24
Needs of children and their families	25
6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25

Acronyms

ADWANGA Aiding Disadvantaged and Traumatized Women and Girls

CBOW Children born of war

CO Commanding Officer

FGD Focus Group Discussion

KII Key Informant Interview

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

TRC Truth and Reconciliation Commission

UNICEF United Nations Children Fund

Executive Summary

ADWANGA researchers undertook interviews and household surveys across three counties in Liberia to better understand the experiences of young people in post-conflict Liberia. Researchers conducted 75 interviews exploring issues such as household income, education, stigma and opportunity in the community, impactful memories from the war, and what they hope for in the future. Some of these young people were born to mothers abducted and raped by soldiers, others were themselves abducted by armed groups, and some participants experienced displacement and the tragic loss of family members during fighting. All remain deeply impacted by the war and are left without sufficient support. Factors mediating these challenges include access to education and a sense of belonging in the community.

Mothers of war-affected youth and other key community members were also given an opportunity to share experiences through focus group discussions. Many reported on the difficulties of raising children without support and while dealing with their own trauma, untreated injuries, and community stigma. Mothers indicated a strong need for vocational training and a desire to re-connect with family and community members.

ADWANGA's report makes clear that there is a pressing need for more research into the experiences of war affected youth in Liberia, and more support is required for all those who continue to struggle 17 years after the conflict ended.

This research was conducted in collaboration with the Conjugal Slavery in War partnership project (CSiW) and funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC).

Report available for download at: <http://csiw-ectg.org/>

1. INTRODUCTION

Background

Perhaps a major legacy of the 14 years conflict is the huge population of children of women made victims of forced marriage, who are left unconsidered and not provided for with no institutional program to redress their plight. Post-war initiatives at addressing war-related trauma, especially for women and girls, did not consider conjugal slavery in war and children born as a result of the conflict situation. Emphasis on post-conflict rebuilding had its focus driven mainly by the international community. And so studies were mainly concentrated on security and security-related activities, revamping social services, health and education. Other areas of immediate concern included infrastructure and provision of some basic utilities. But interventions aimed at remedying some of the abuses suffered by the civilian population, especially women, were never prioritized during the post-emergency period and later in reconstruction activities. Programs for these women, most of whom were adolescents or children during the 1990s and early 2000s, have been limited and general in scope. No empirical information was gathered to inform efforts that would mainstream their situation within specific programming tailored to their development processes.

Fifteen consecutive years (2003 -present) of peace have brought about relatively improved and sustained security, infrastructure development, restoration of basic social services, and remedial programs for women and children of war. Nevertheless, competing priorities to restore peace and improve living conditions for the larger population deflected much-needed attention away from addressing the continuing challenges for women victims of forced marriage and the huge population of children born of these coercive relationships.

An international conference that brought together experts on forced marriage in war was held in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo in 2016. The conference highlighted the problem of forced marriage and sexual violence in war, especially as it affects women and girls. The conference launched the Conjugal Slavery in War Research Network (CSiW). Liberia was represented by the organization Aiding Disadvantage and Traumatized Women and Girls (ADWANGA). For the first time, the situation of Liberia's women victims of sexual and conjugal slavery and the corresponding effects on their offspring had the opportunity to be mainstreamed.

ADWANGA is a local nongovernmental organization (NGO) dedicated to working with disadvantaged girls and women. The organization is registered and has operated in Liberia since 2005. It was founded by Amelia M. Thomas Cooper, a professional researcher with deep passion and commitment to working with disadvantaged girls and women. ADWANGA participated in the CSiW conference as part of the expert team on the topic of forced marriage in war. In their work as part of the CSiW partnership,

ADWANGA specializes on the thematic area of children born out of war. The main objective of ADWANGA's assignment is the articulation of children's needs as distinct from their mother's and parents'. In 2018/2019, the organization designed and conducted research on children born of war and produced this comprehensive report.

Statement of the problem

Children born of wartime rape, including through cases of forced marriage, sexual slavery or sexual exploitation, are a particularly vulnerable category of war-affected children because of the stigma they face, and they must be recognized as such by actors engaged in the protection of children's rights in armed conflict and post-conflict situations. In 2012, UNICEF released a documentary, *The Situation of Children and Women in Liberia*, under the theme, *From Conflict to Peace*. An excerpt from the preface of that document authored by Isabel M. Crowley, UNICEF Residence Representative, reads as follow:

During the many years of instability and conflict that plagued Liberia until 2003, the country came to epitomize the impact of such conflict can have upon civilian populations, and particularly upon women and children. Few can forget the many published images of children who became instruments and victims of the conflict...

The appalling treatment of women and children during the conflict period is not unique to Liberia – it is common in conflict situations for armed actors to exploit and inflict violence upon civilians, including women and children, and this often includes sexual violence. Liberia's approach to redressing conflict-related violence lacks strength and impetus in certain areas. Post-conflict initiatives to remedy some of the harms of war fell far short of the expectations of most victims. Beyond the investigation and confession sessions held by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), the government did not put in place any program that could address the issues of stigma and social exclusion experienced by survivors of forced marriage and other forms of sexual and gendered violence.

Thus, the refusal of government to recognize forced marriage and its corresponding impacts carries serious implications for sustaining peace, equity and development. Children born of these coercive relationships face stigma and exclusion from their communities. This is an important concern itself, and may also have an impact on the long-term peace and security of Liberia as youth forced to live on the periphery of society are more likely to struggle economically and legally, as well as socially.

The UNICEF Report (2012) catalogued women and men development, 18 – 35, in Liberia. Once childhood and adolescence are complete, young adults become released or cast off from dependence on parents...No longer the beneficiary of special protection and support services, the adult has to assume

responsibility for him- and herself (2012: 90). The UNICEF report clearly portrays the ideal situation in Liberia for a boy or girl growing up in an ideal family and ideal community. But we cannot say the same for children born in the war era and their mothers whose situations are similar to theirs. The UNICEF report defines the dream of every Liberian parent in these words. The girl of yesterday has become, or will soon become, the wife and mother of today (Ibid.). This implies that any deviation from this parental vision spells failure for a parent who had timed his or her daughter's transition process through education and employment opportunities. The irony is, when other citizens are resettled or compensated for acts of war committed against them in Liberia, women victims of conjugal slavery and their children are not considered.

Significance of the study

The Liberian crisis, like many war-affected regions, was characterized by sexual violence against and the exploitation of women who, as a result, gave birth to children. Children born under these conditions are often affected by the circumstances that led to their conception. Anecdotal as well as research evidence reveals that children born of war often face stigma, discrimination, abandonment and neglect, as well as a sense of insecurity and statelessness. In turn, this negative treatment on the basis of their origin may affect their behavior and ability to contribute to society. As these children grow older, they become increasingly vulnerable to becoming street children and trafficked.

The situation in Liberia is such that little is known about these children and their plight, their specific vulnerabilities and their implication for the country's development. As these children are now adults, there is compelling need to investigate their unique situations. With this backdrop this study is significant for three key reasons among many:

Firstly, the study will provide an opportunity to illuminate understanding about children born of war related circumstances through strong empirical evidence. The empirical evidence will serve as a baseline for program response development.

Secondly, the study will also present the Liberian perspective as a key contribution to the global debate and efforts to guarantee the rights and protection of children born of war.

Finally, the findings support advocacy for the inclusion of vulnerable groups in the implementation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) recommendations.

Objectives of the study

The overall aim of the research is to generate in-depth knowledge and understanding on children born out of war and their experiences of belonging and kinship in post conflict societies in Africa¹.

Objectives of the study are as follows:

- To gather information on how CBoW and their households live today in their families and communities;
- To assess the impact of war on local understanding and practice of belonging and kinship and how war experiences disrupt such processes to gain a better understanding of stigma, discrimination/isolation experienced by CBoW and their households in the post conflict period;
- To examine the protective factors that promote reintegration of CBoW into their families and communities while reducing their vulnerabilities and risks to better inform policy and programing that target CBoW;
- To gain deeper insight into the factors and determinants that shape CBoW identity, sense of belonging and kinship in their everyday lives.

¹ Similar research studies were also conducted by CSiW partners in Uganda and Sierra Leone. These reports are available at csiw-ectg.org

2. METHODOLOGY

Study Area

This study focuses on children born out of war and their mothers in Liberia. Geographically, Liberia is subdivided into fifteen counties with each county comprising several districts. The districts are further subdivided into clans, cities, townships, towns and villages.

Three of Liberia's fifteen counties (i.e. Nimba, Bong and Montserrado) were featured during the study. The three counties were selected primarily for the intensity of the war and the long tenure of fighters in the counties. With this in mind six districts were selected (two from each Nimba, Bong and Montserrado) based on indigenous knowledge of the area. A town/community was selected from each of the districts for the interview with CBOW. (See Fig. 2.1 and Table 1.1.)

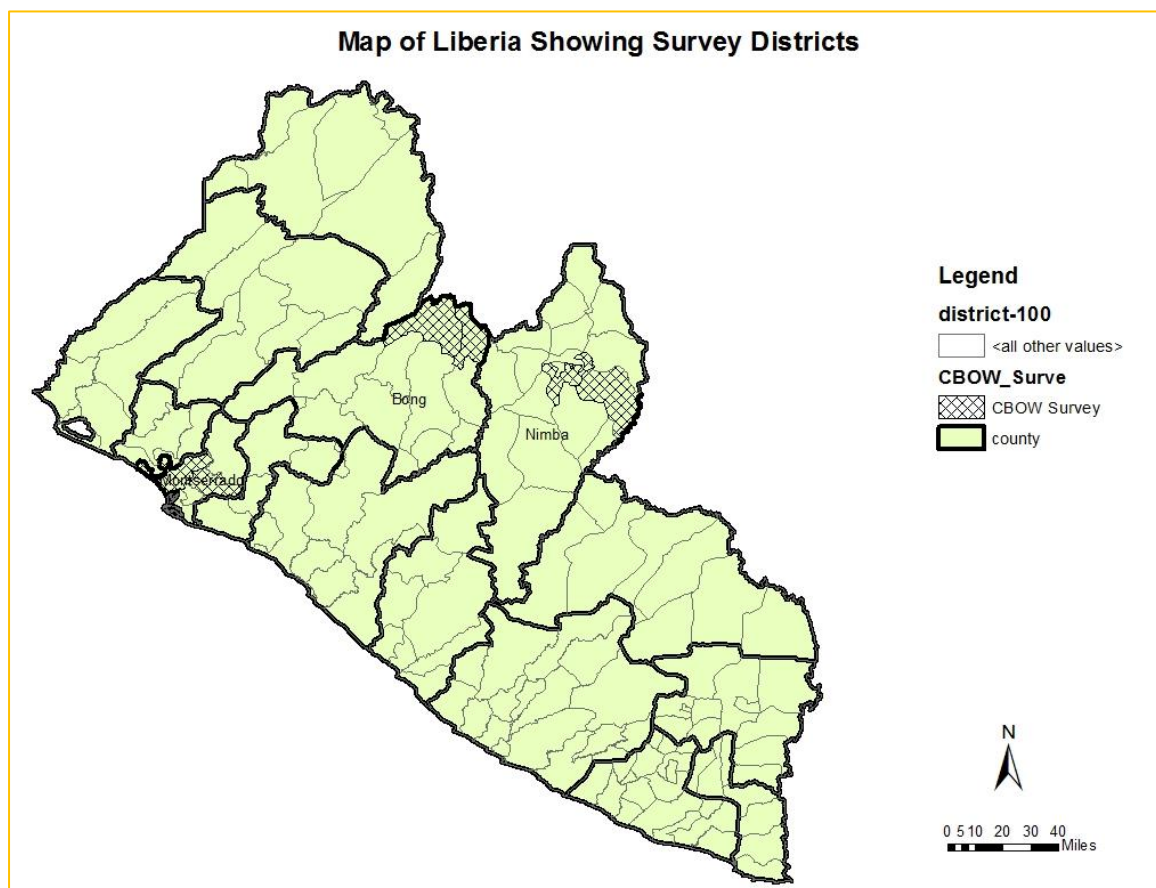


Fig. 1: Map of Liberia indicating Counties and Districts where CBOW were interviewed

Research design

The study employed both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative information was collected through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and Key Informant interviews (KI) with community members. Additionally, quantitative information was collected through household interviews with children born of war. Quantitative tools were designed to allow respondents to supply answers to the questions posed and appropriate answers marked on the questionnaire by trained enumerators. This design was chosen for the study to allow quantifications of responses. The two designs complemented each other such that qualitative information sought to answer the 'hows' and 'whys' for information collected using quantitative tool.

Population

The target population for the study includes war affected communities, children born of war and mothers of children born of war. At the community level, heterogeneous groups participated in Focus Group Discussion (FGD) while community leaders served as key informants (KI). At the community level, mothers were identified and interviewed. Children born of war were also identified at both the rural community level and in the capital city (Monrovia) for the administration of questionnaires.

Sampling procedures

The study used a multistage sampling procedure. The sampling frame which is the county contains populations in districts and communities. Districts were selected purposively because of the intensity and locations of war activities during the crisis. From each of these districts, communities were selected using simple random sampling procedures. From the selected communities, heterogeneous respondents were identified for the collection of qualitative data. Children, on the other hand, were identified and selected by means of snowball sampling.

Data collection

The design of the questionnaire was based on the objectives. After designing the draft instrument, five enumerators were hired and trained to carry out data collection. The data collection process began with training and testing of the draft questionnaire. The main data collection exercise was done by a team of six (one supervisor and five enumerators). Six towns/communities, one in each of the six districts, in the three counties were covered. A total of 75 questionnaires were administered to children born out of war. Eight focus group discussions were done with mothers of children born out of war, boys and girls. Additionally, five key informants representing government and former combatants were interviewed.

Table 1: List of counties and communities where CBOW were interviewed

County	District	Community	No of children interviewed	Focus Group (mothers)	Focus Group (girls)	Focus Group (boys)
Nimba	Zoe-Gbao	Gwehlay	23	1	1	
	Buu-Yao	Nyor-Display	18	1		1
Bong	Panta	Ganmue	6	1		
	Zota	Naama	6	1	1	
Montserrado	St. Paul River	VOA	18		1	
	Careysburg	White Plains	4			
Total			75	4	3	1

Data analysis

The data was collated and analyzed with the aid of SPSS. The analysis is based on the specific objectives of the study and presented in the succeeding sections.

3. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Brief of Liberia

Liberia is located along the Atlantic coast of West Africa. With a total area of 43,000 square miles, Liberia is bordered by Sierra Leone in the East, Guinea in the North and Cote d'Ivoire in the East. Liberia is subdivided into 15 counties with an estimated population of 4.7 million² and 16 local ethnic groups.

² The World Bank Group (2018).

History of conflict in Liberia

Major conflict in Liberia dates back to the 1970s. Liberia enjoyed a relative period of stable oligarchy since its foundation in 1822 up until the early 1900s. By the 1970s, tensions within Liberia were escalating. In 1979 the famous rice riot broke out in the capital - Monrovia. In 1980, one year following the rice riot, there was a military coup that resulted into the murder of the president, summary execution of 13 government ministers and subsequent installation of a military government led by the late master sergeant Samuel K. Doe. Doe's rule which lasted for nearly a decade was also marked by incessant coups and counter coups. In 1985 there was a failed coup led by a former general, the late Thomas Quiwonkpa that plunged the country into turmoil.

In December 1989, Charles Taylor and his National Patriotic Front (NPFL) launched an invasion from Cote d'Ivoire. The war which escalated to all parts of Liberia raged for almost 14 years and involved more than 10 rebel factions and engulfed the entire West African region.

Cause of the conflict in Liberia

According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report (2009), the conflict in Liberia occurred as a result of marginalization, corruption and injustice. For instance, a small number of Americo-Liberian families and their patronage network dominated all aspects of government, economy, and security, governance and social advancement for almost 15 decades.

Dominance of one party characterized by oppression perpetuated itself in the country for long. Lack of education and other opportunities for non-Americo-Liberians and impunity for corruption and systematic abuse were attributes of the Monrovia hegemony of a few families that controlled the wealth of the nation.

Impact of the conflict

Scars of the war are still visible. The TRC reports that all factions of the Liberian conflict committed and are responsible for egregious domestic law violations and violations of international criminal law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, including war crimes violations. Warring factions degraded, abused, denigrated, and committed sexual and gender-based violence against women including rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages and other dehumanizing forms of violations.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Age and gender

Respondents identified during the study range between 14 and 28 years old. Results in the table below show that 33.3% of the respondents are between the ages of 26 – 28 years.

Table 2: Age distribution of CBOW

Age range	Frequency	Percent
14 - 17 years	5	6.7
18 - 21 years	23	30.7
22 - 25 years	22	29.3
26 - 28 years	25	33.3
Total	75	100

In the communities visited female respondents were more inclined and willing to participate than their male counterparts. Out of 75 respondents, 53 (i.e. 70.7%) were female, as shown in the chart below.

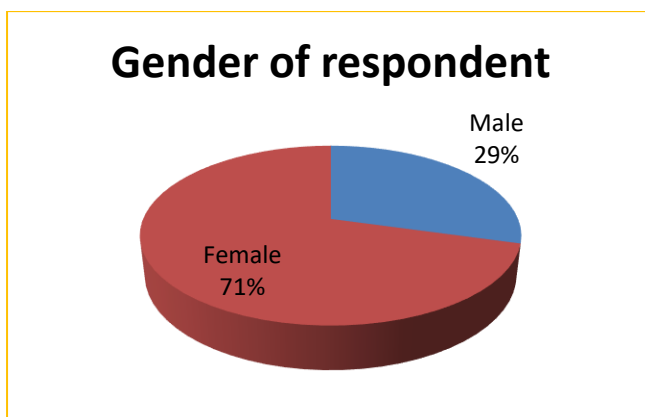


Fig. 2: Gender distribution of CBOW

Ethnic group

Analysis of ethnic background reveals that most of the respondents are from the Gio and Kpelleh ethnic groups, that is 53.33% and 21.33% respectively.

Table 3: Ethnic background of CBOW

Ethnic group	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gio	40	53.33
Kpelleh	16	21.33
Bassa	4	5.33
Mano	3	4.00
Vie	5	6.67
Gola	3	4.00
Lorma	1	1.33
Kisi	1	1.33
Mende	1	1.33
Kru	1	1.33
Total	75	100.00

Religion

Nearly all of the respondents claimed to be Christians. According to the results below 91.9% are Christians.

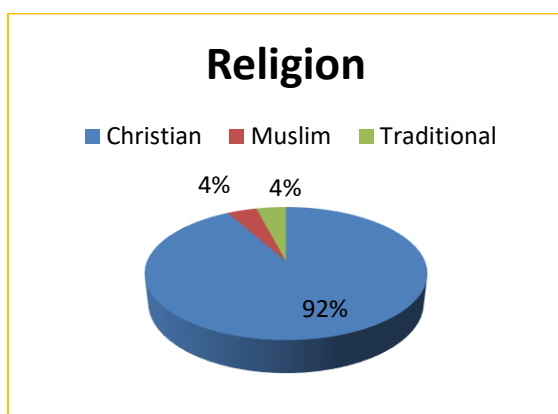


Fig. 3: Religious background of CBOW

Marital status

The figure below shows that 60% of the respondents are single while 33% are cohabitating or living with their partner.

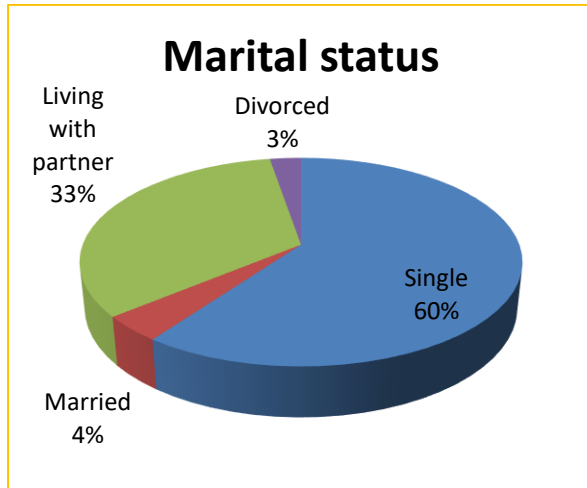


Fig. 4: Marital status of CBOW

Education

The analysis reveals that most of the respondents have completed a junior secondary level or less. Results show 44% and 38.67% attaining junior secondary and primary education respectively. However, 8% attained senior secondary education.

Table 5: Educational background of CBOW

Highest level of education	Frequency	Valid Percent
No formal education	5	6.67
Primary	29	38.67
Junior secondary	33	44.00
Senior secondary	6	8.00
University	2	2.67
Total	75	100

Household size and role

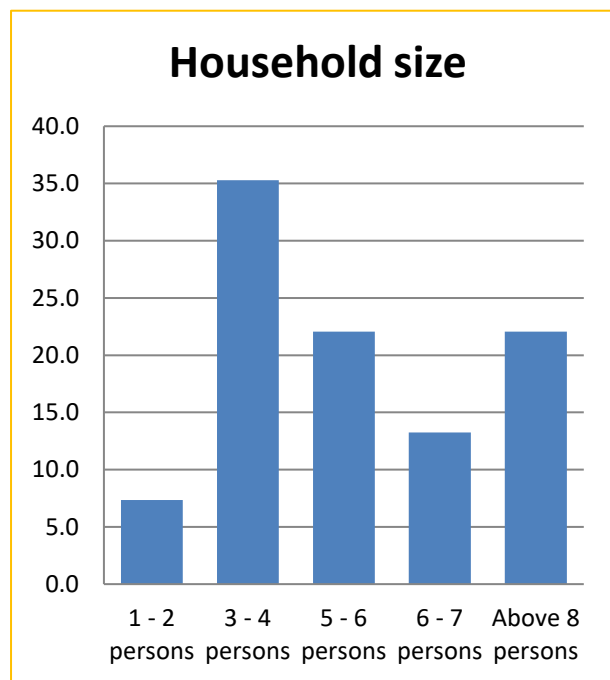


Fig. 5: Persons in households of CBOW

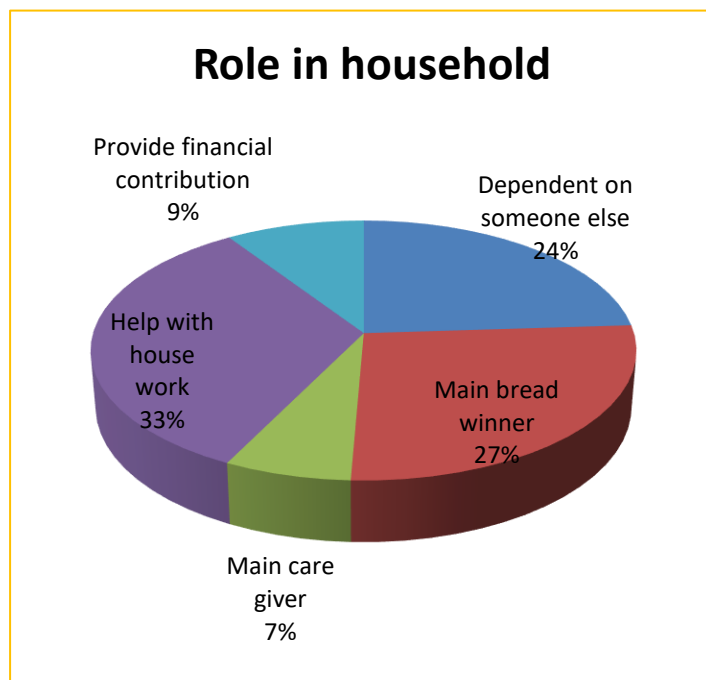


Fig. 6.: Role performed by CBOW in household

Most of the children interviewed are living in households of 3 to 6 people. This is shown by 57.4% according to the Table above. Additionally, 35.3% of children are living in households of more than six people. 32 % of the children are household heads. The results show that children serve several roles in these households.

Occupation

The analysis reveals that most of the children are involved in domestic work, farming and street selling or petty trading as shown by 25.7%, 33.8% and 32.4% respectively.

Result from an analysis of earnings show that participants earn less than 5000 Liberian dollars per month, which is the equivalent of \$26 USD or less. While the majority (78.6%) earns less than L\$2000.00 (\$10 USD), only a few (14.3%) earn between L\$2000.00 – 4000.00 monthly.

Table 6: Livelihood activity of CBOW

Activity	Frequency	Valid Percent
Domestic work	19	25.68
Farming	25	33.78
Petty trading	24	32.43
Street selling	1	1.35
Formal work	3	4.05
Commercial bike riding	2	2.70
Total	74	100.00

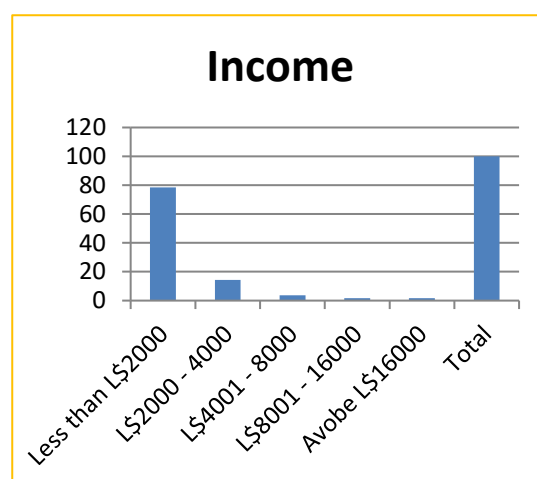


Fig. 7: Income status of CBOW

Duration of stay in current location and reason for staying

As shown in the table below, 28% of those interviewed have lived in their current location for at least six years while 53.3% have resided for 11 or more years. According to the residents, the reason for their choices of residence/location is principally that “they have nowhere else to live”, their families chose to reside there, and it is their place of birth as suggested by 90.08%. Other reasons, however, were work related and marriage/relationship related.

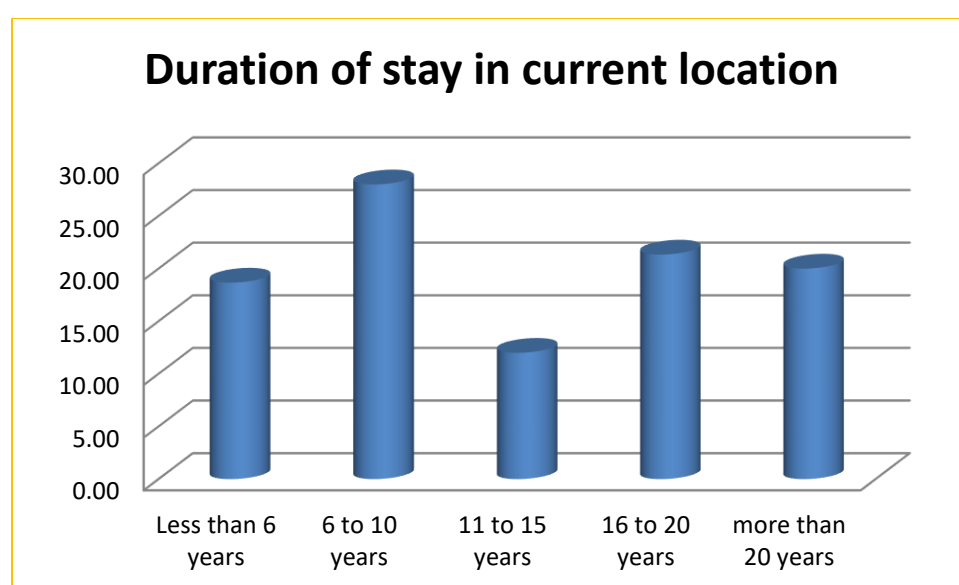


Fig. 8: Length of time spent in the community

Table 7: Reasons for CBOWs' choice of living in their current location

Reason for choosing to live here	Frequency	Valid Percent
Place of birth	16	21.62
My parent settled here	16	21.62
Ran away from the war	2	2.70
I was forced to come here	2	2.70
Nowhere to go	28	37.84
I can earn my livelihood from here	2	2.70
Farming	2	2.70
Marriage (follow my partner)	2	2.70
Because of my children	1	1.35
To help my mother	3	4.05
Total	74	100.00

Living conditions for children born of war

The description of living conditions according to the results of the table below show that 54% of the respondents complained of life being bad at their places of residence. 38.7% however described their life situation as being good while 6.9% see life as neither good nor bad.

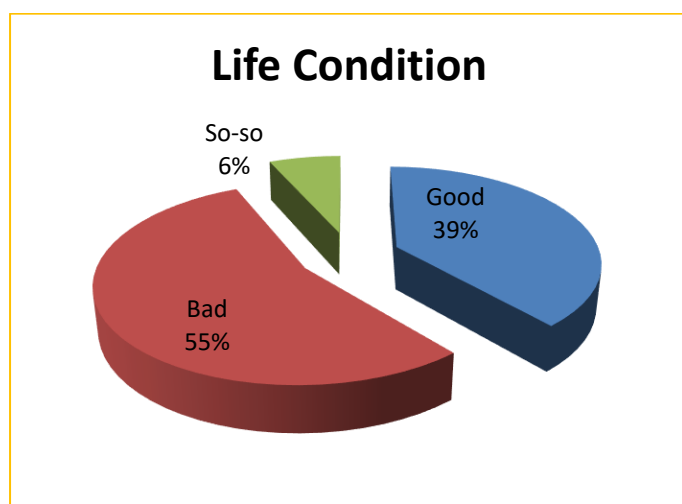


Fig. 9: Life condition of CBOW

According to the results, the bad condition is attributed to lack of means to earn a good living and hardship. On the other hand, those who expressed good life condition attributed their condition to opportunity for them to earn their living and good care. In addition to livelihood activities, 15.1% of the children are also engaged in schooling.

Description of life condition in place of residence

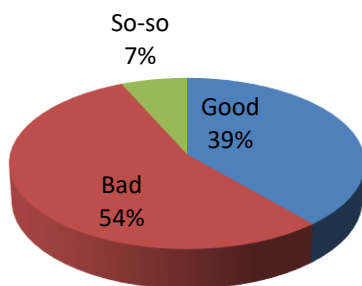


Fig. 10: Life condition of CBOW in place of residence thought about current location

Life condition that makes one feel good or bad living in current location

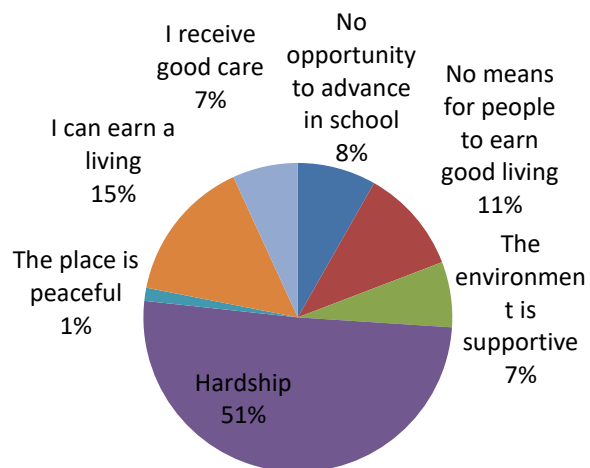


Fig. 11: Life condition that influences thought about current location

Relationship with person living with

Out of those interviewed, 63% described their relationship with the person they live with as being good. On the other hand, 17.8% described theirs as being bad. 20.5% however felt the relationship with the person with whom they live was neither good nor bad.

Description of relationship with person living with

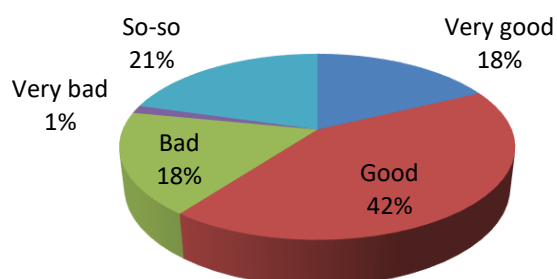


Fig. 12: CBOW relationship with person living or staying with

Experience of the war

Results from the analysis show varying experiences. They include separation from one of the parents; harassment and being forced to flee into the bushes; extreme poverty, hardship and hunger; loss of loved ones; and rape. On the other hand, a few of the children (13.3%) could not recount their experience as they may have been too young to remember, or trauma may have impacted their memory:

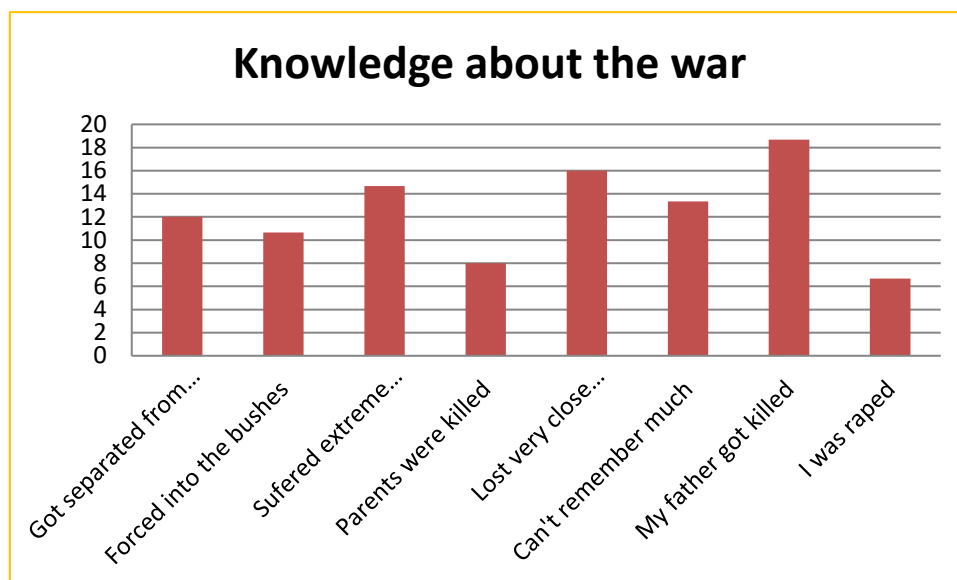


Fig. 13: CBOW knowledge about the war (in %)

Table 8: Crosstabulation of "Knowledge about the war that happened here" and "Age range" of CBOW

Knowledge about the war that happened here	Age range				
	14 - 17 years	18 - 21 years	22 - 25 years	26 - 28 years	Total
Got separated from father	0	4	3	2	9
Forced into the bushes	0	5	2	1	8
Suffered extreme poverty and hunger	0	1	5	5	11
Parents were killed	0	1	3	2	6
Lost very close relatives and loved ones	0	5	2	5	12
Can't remember much	5	3	2	0	10
My father got killed	0	4	3	7	14
I was raped	0	0	2	3	5
Total	5	23	22	25	75

Additionally, for those who could recount their experiences intimated that the war affected them and their families negatively. For example, the respondents narrated that they experienced extreme hardship; their parents and loved ones were killed or missing; they grew up without their fathers; and they suffered humiliation.

Discussion from the focus groups particularly with the women and children, in Nimba and Bong counties, further corroborated these experiences. Participants during the discussions intimated that during the earlier years of their ordeal, they experienced stigma. Some of the women, particularly mothers of the children fathered through conflict-related sexual violence, are even still going through the pains and trauma of their experiences. According to one of the mothers in Gahnmue, she has not been able to keep a stable relationship as a result of her ordeal. People often refer to her as someone who is not committed and does not say no to men who make sexual advances.

Children, on the other hand, are most often bullied by their friends. In Gahnmue, for instance, when these children err, community members attribute their behavior to their belligerent fathers.

Most impactful experience

Reflecting on their most impactful experience, results below show that 79.9% of the children interviewed recalled that their fathers were killed in the war, and they faced extreme hardship, pain and grief.

Table 9: CBOW most impactful experience of the war

Experience	Frequency	Percent
Grew up without feeling loved	5	6.67
Father was killed	18	24.00
Extreme poverty	26	34.67
Pain and grief from the lost of loved ones	16	21.33
Nothing	4	5.33
Made me uneducated	1	1.33
Became soldier's wife and having children at early age	5	6.67
Total	75	100.00

Personality and sense of belonging

In spite of the grief and pain, respondents reflected on their personalities in largely favorable terms. Results in the table below show that respondents perceived themselves as being predominantly intelligent, hardworking, determined and humble. This is suggested by 27.5%, 20.3% 18.8% and 17.4% respectively. According to them, these attributes define their personalities.

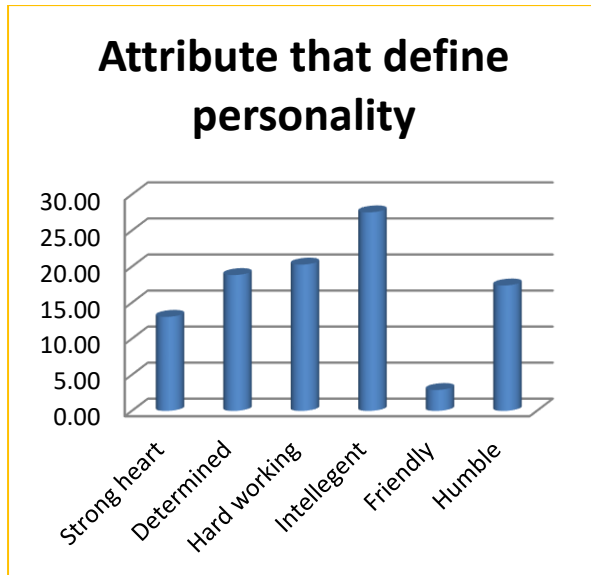


Fig. 14: CBOW personality attributes

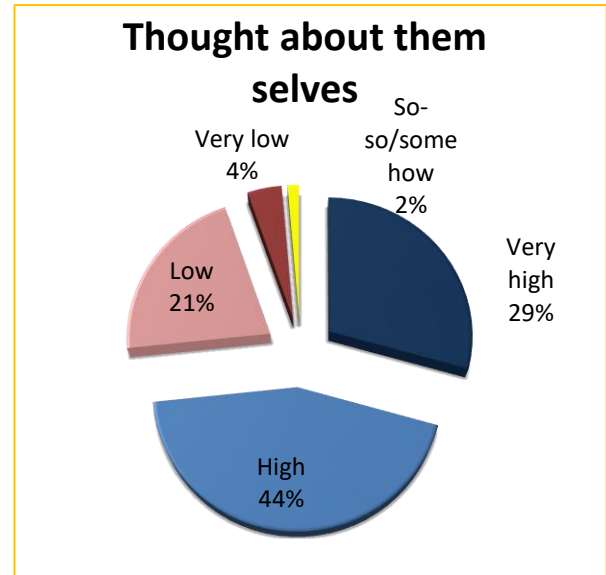


Fig. 15: CBOW thought about themselves

Figure 13 reveals that 73.3% of the respondents think highly of themselves while 25.3% think little of themselves. They attributed these perspectives to self-confidence and hope for a better life (30.7% and 29%).

Table 10: Reason for thought about oneself

Reason	Frequency	Percent
No one to help me	11	15.49
Backward in education	7	9.86
Self confidence	23	32.39
Good character	7	9.86
Love for people	4	5.63
Hopeful of a better life	18	25.35
Having children by different fathers	1	1.41
Total	71	100.00

Figure 16 further shows that the respondents' experiences influenced their thoughts. 91.5% confirmed that their experiences influenced their thoughts. However, through their circumstances, they claimed to have built resilience. During the focus group discussions in Montserrado and Nimba Counties, both boys and girls intimated that their conditions made them strong.

Responding to the question on change in their lives as a result of their past experiences, 97.2% confirmed that their experiences changed their lives. These experiences were mainly the hardship (58.5%) and setback in school (18.5%). There are also a few cases where children were exposed to sex at a very young age as suggested by 4.6% of participants.

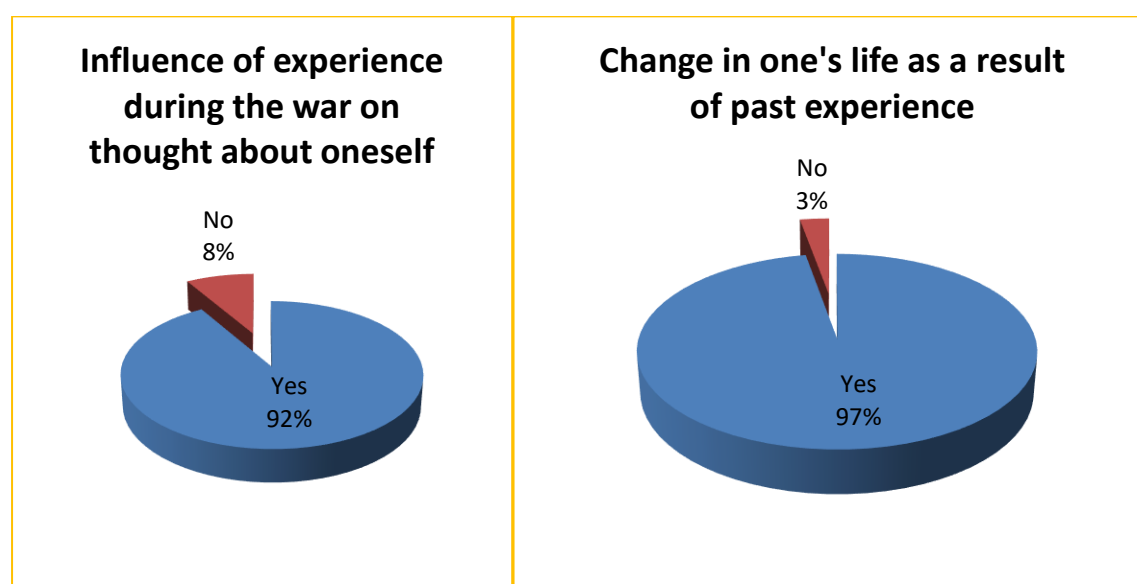


Fig. 16: Influence of experience on thought

Fig. 17: Change in CBOW's life as a result of past experience

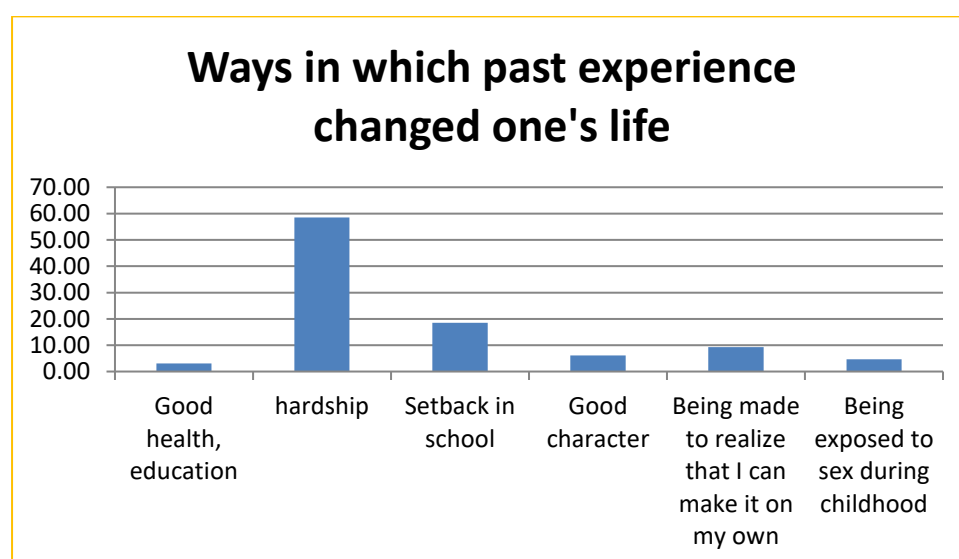


Fig. 18: Ways in which past experience changed CBOW's life

Community relationship

Results in the Figure below, show that 54% of the respondents described the relationship and reception from the communities as positive while 25.7% described the reception as negative. The rest 20.3% however see neither positive nor negative reception.

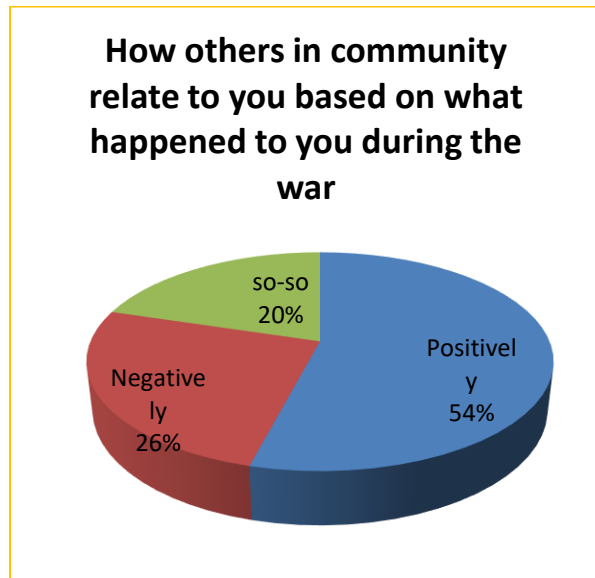


Fig. 19: Community members relationship with CBOW

The results also show that the respondents being alive, able to work and having hope in God as some of the good things that make them feel worthwhile. Conversely, the hardship and/or bad condition, death of their fathers and inability to go far in school, make them feel bad about themselves.

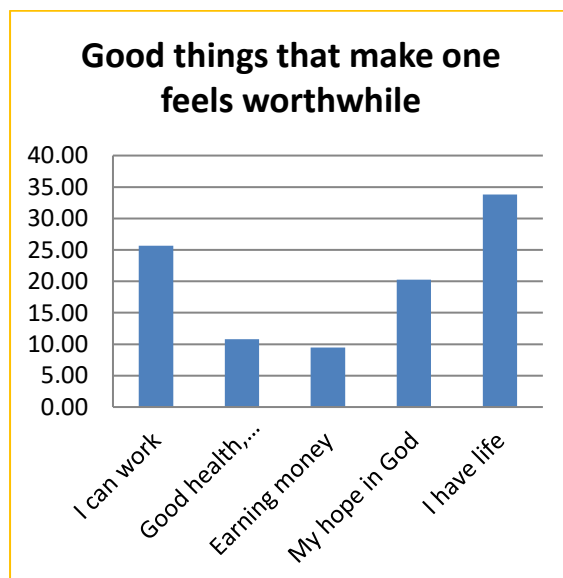


Fig. 20: Things that make CBOW feel worthwhile

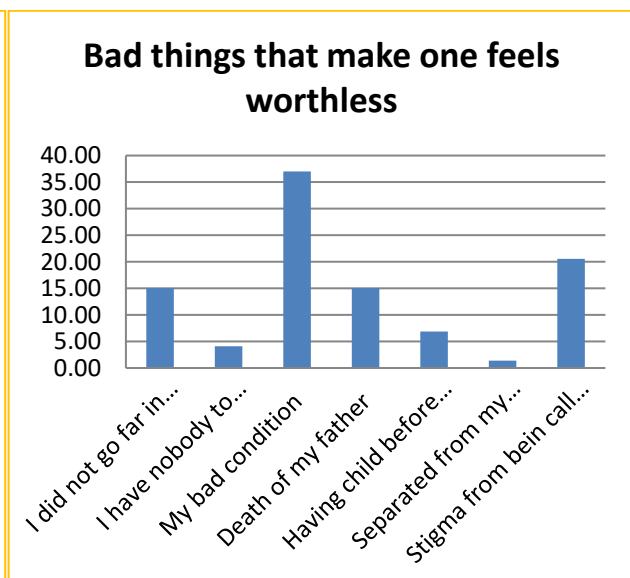


Fig. 21: Things that make CBOW feel worthless

Most important source of strength and reason

According to the Figure 22 respondents draw strength mainly from religion and family members. According to them, these sources give them hope as they are convinced that God can make a way for them.

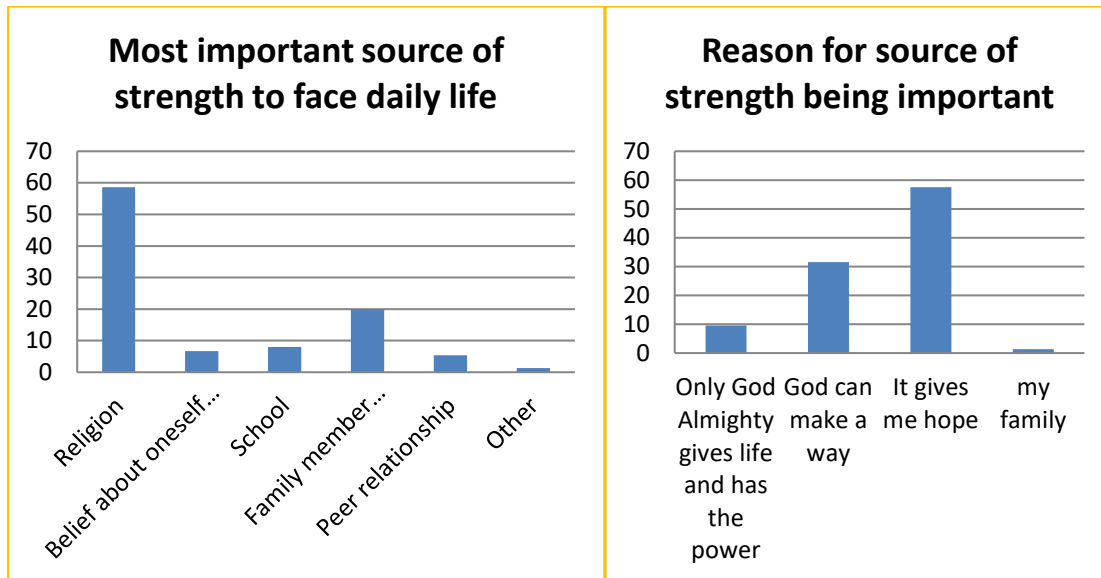


Fig. 22: CBOW source of strength

Fig. 23: Reason for source of strength

Experiences and sense of connection

Additionally, the respondents shared experiences that make them feel connected. According to the results, involvement with church, families, friends and schools are strong connecting factors.

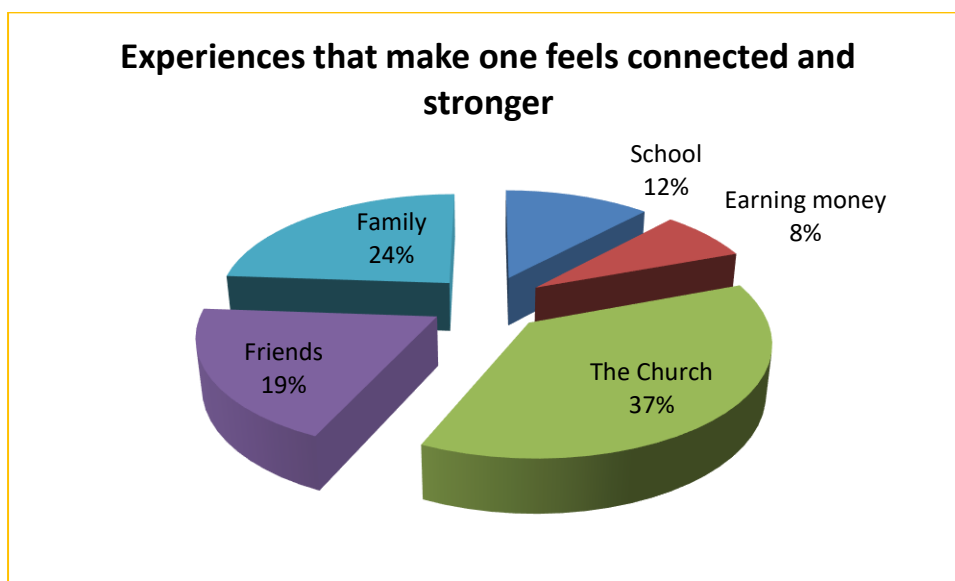


Fig. 24: Experiences that bind CBOW together

Special needs of children born of war

Respondents identified education, skills, counseling, care and community support to be the major needs of children born of war. In terms of awareness of support programs, nearly all (85%) of the respondents did not know of any program that supports children born of war. This was corroborated through a key informant interview with a representative from the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection Coordinator in Bong County. According to her, there are no programs that target children born of war.

Needs of families of children born of war

According to the analysis in Fig. 4.1.20, 63% of the children interviewed identified financial support as the most needed for their families. This was followed by 22% who identified food and shelter as their most pressing needs. The remaining respondents listed skills training and counseling as most important.

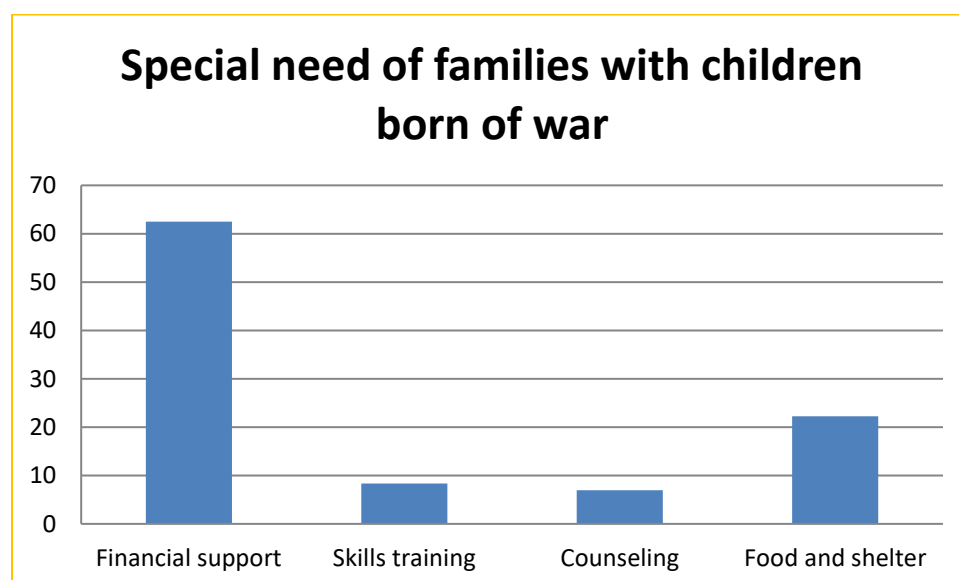


Fig. 25: Special need of families with CBOW

The suggestions from the children were also reinforced by mothers of some of the children during focus group discussions in GborGwehlay, Gahnmuie and Naama in Nimba and Bong counties. The mothers intimated that since their ordeal, they have faced severe hardship. They have had little or no financial support, they were stigmatized, they do not have contact and support from the families of their children's fathers, and they do not have skills to earn a livelihood. The majority of them rely on farming and menial labor. The mothers expressed that they needed help especially financial help and skills to care for themselves and their children. For example, in Naama, the women suggested that they are interested in learning how to make soap, do pastry, and tie and dye. According to them, any such program should be locally based: i.e. the training should be in Naama so that a larger number of them can participate.

5. DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics

Children born of war in Liberia are currently within the ages of 14 to 28 years old meaning that they are youth. The average age range in our study is 18 and above which suggest that the children were born during the early 1990s and 2000s. These were two peak periods of the 14-year Liberian civil war. A majority of those interviewed were female and predominantly from the Gio and Kpelleh ethnic groups. This follows the path of the war as conflict began in Nimba, home to the Gio and Mano ethnic groups, and spread toward other parts of the country. Bong, which is home to the Kpelleh ethnic group, was occupied by one of the leading fighting groups for many years; many youth from the Kpelleh ethnic group conscripted into the rebel army. For example, Naama was a famous military barracks for the government and later became a base for the NPFL rebel group.

Findings from the discussions with mothers of these children reveal that apart from the loot, the fighters captured these women and forced them into relationship as “C.O. women” or “C.O. wives”³.

Most of the youth interviewed are lagging behind in their education. For those in school, they are over aged for their classes. For instance, 82.67% of the youth are at primary and junior high school levels. While most of the youth are single, a significant proportion (33%) are cohabitating. Most of the youth live in households that are relatively large i.e. more than four people. These youth help immensely in these households especially as breadwinners or with housework. This is so because those youth livelihood activities are predominantly domestic work, farming and petty trading.

In spite of the livelihood activities, these youth struggle with poverty as most of them earn less than L\$2000.00 per month.

Condition of children born of war

Children born of war are a reflection of some of the negative impact of war. Besides, for as long as the children live, the pain and grief continue to linger. Their mere existence continues to remind them and their mothers of the war. Although it has been 14 years since the war ended in Liberia, the situation of children born of war still remains a deep scar that society cannot ignore.

Findings from the analysis and focus groups reveal that the affected children who are now youth, still vividly remember their ordeals during the war. These reflections of their experiences during the war

³“C.O.” is the short form of “commandoes, commanders or commanding officers” commonly used during the war to refer to fighters or soldiers.

make them feel bad about themselves. They recalled painful experiences such as extreme poverty and hardship, grief and pain from the death of their fathers and loved ones. Being branded as “war children” and suffering the stigma therefrom, these children recalled growing up especially during the early years of the cessation of the war.

While the findings reveal a somewhat mixed reaction among the children concerning their life condition, it is important to point out that for the children who regarded their condition as bad attributed their situation to the hardship and difficulty in earning livelihood. In contrast, those who see their conditions as being good, recalled being able to earn a living, having opportunity to go to school as reasons. Understandably, the resilient nature of these children as expressed by their determination and humility, coupled with prolonged stay (at least six years) and their location being predominantly their places of birth, choice of settlement by their mothers, or family, could be factors.

Sense of belonging

Despite their conditions, children born of war think highly of themselves and profess to be intelligent, hardworking, determined, humble and strong-hearted. Their allusion to the fact that their experience during the war influenced their thought and changed their lives, suggests that irrespective of their condition, they were poised to making the best out of the situation. According to findings from focus group discussions with both girls and boys in GborGwehlay and Nyor Display, it is clear that despite the setbacks, the children were hopeful of a better future when provided assistance. Religion plays a significant role in building the resilience of these children and their mothers. According to them, they draw strength from their religion as their involvement with church activities unite and inspire them.

Community relationship

Results from the analysis of the children’s relationship with the community suggest that over the period of 14 years since the war ended, communities have to an extent transformed in the way they relate to children of war. According to testimonies from mothers and the children, when they initially settled in these communities, they were ostracized. They were called all sorts of names: “rebels babies”, “C.O. children” “war children” and many more.

While some of the mothers, for example in Naama, still reflect on their experiences, many of the mothers and children recalled positive relationship with community members. In Gwehlay for instance, the Town Chief (Mr. Peter Manbiah) intimated that he and his elders were very receptive to these women and their children to the extent that they provided them land to carry out their farming activities.

Needs of children and their families

The results from the analysis reveal that children do not have a access to the requisite education and skills to cope with life. Nearly all of the children interviewed are far older than their current level in school and almost all of them are not in school. Nevertheless, the children expressed optimism for the future. This draws attention to the needs expressed by these children and their families.

Over-aged children (now youth) who stopped in lower grades preferred skills acquisition and start-up capital. For those who are still desirous of pursuing their education, they wanted to be provided opportunity to enroll in school. Counseling and care were also strongly suggested by both the children and their mothers as something they needed.

In the case of families of the children, financial support, food and shelter, and skills training were identified as major needs of families. Localization of skills training according to the mothers should be given keen attention in order to yield maximum benefit.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite nearly a decade and a half since the cessation of the war in Liberia and relative peace, there are scars of the war that are visible. Conjugal slavery and its byproduct (i.e. the children born therefrom) are excruciating scars that do not seem to easily go away. The fact that little or no attention is paid to this segment of the population leads CBOW in a vicious circle of poverty, deprivation and marginalization. Results from the analysis show the poor socio-economic characteristics of the CBOW (e.g. low educational attainment (Junior high or less); 84% of the children are either living with a sexual partner, married or divorced; more than two-third of the children earn less than LD\$2000.00 or an equivalent of US\$12.80 per month). This thus reveals the severity of the problem hence the need for action. Drawing from the findings the following recommendations are proffered:

Further research: The need to further investigate issues surrounding children born of war cannot be overemphasized. Liberia being predominantly youthful and with a history of prolonged conflict, there is a need to delve deeper into this subject. This study has opened a page and paved the way to deepen knowledge and understanding of children born of war and the challenges they face.

Identify and implement programs based on the specific needs of children: The children and their mothers were clear about their needs. Recognizing these specific needs and working towards them are paramount. The Government of Liberia through the ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection must take the lead in developing programs and rallying the various actors to supporting CBOW.

Raise awareness: Lack of awareness among policy makers on the one hand, and community dwellers on the other, continues to exacerbate the problems that CBOW face. A highly sensitized population will help in creating a support base for these children. A well-structured awareness campaign will afford decision makers and local community dwellers the opportunity to better understand the plight of CBOW and therefore garner support psychologically, morally and physically.

References

Bunting, Annie (2012). "Forced Marriage in conflict Situations: Researching and Prosecuting Old Harms and New Crimes". Canadian Journal of Human Rights (2012) 1:1.

Carpenter, C. R. & Assistant (2018). "War's Impact on Children Born of Rape and Sexual Exploitation: Physical, Economic and Psychosocial Dimensions".

Carpenter, C. R. (2005). Protecting Children Born of Sexual Violence and Exploitation in Conflict Zones: Existing Practice and Knowledge Gaps. Findings from Consultations with Humanitarian Practitioners (December 2004 – March 2005).

Mochmann, I. C. (2008). Children Born of War. Revista Obets 2 (2008).

Mochmann, I. C. (2010). "The Human Rights of Children Born of War: Case Analysis of Past and Present Conflict". Historical Social Research Vol. 35 No. 3: 268 – 298.

Republic of Liberia (2011). An Act to Establish the Children's Law of Liberia

Republic of Liberia (2009). Truth and Reconciliation Report of Liberia Final Report Vol, II.

UNICEF (2012). The Situation of Children and Women in Liberia: From Conflict to Peace.
https://www.unicef.org/liberia/SITAN_LBR2012-2017.pdf

Appendices

Photo Gallery

Video Gallery