

The Unheard Narratives of Children Born in the Lord's Resistance Army Captivity in Acholi
Sub-region, Northern Uganda (1987-2025)

By

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Declaration

I, Ochen Patrick, declare that this Research Dissertation is my original work and has never been submitted for an award to any Institution of learning. Statements from other scholars' work have been duly acknowledged.

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Approval

This Research Dissertation titled, "The Unheard Narratives of Children Born in the Lord's Resistance Captivity Army in Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda (1987-2025)", has been written under our supervision and submitted for examination with our approval.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research work to my parents and all children born in captivity during the LRA War and their mothers.

Acknowledgment

I would love to thank Ms. Lorrain Smith for being a mother-figure in my life, walking me through my struggles in life and academics.

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Abbreviations/ Acronyms

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

CBO Community-Based Organization

CBOW Children Born of War

CNN Cable News Network

CSO Civil Society Organization

FGD Focus Group Discussion

GUSCO Gulu Support the Children Organization

GWED-G Gulu Women's Economic Development and Globalization

IDP Internally Displaced Person

KII Key Informant Interview

LRA Lord's Resistance Army

MoGLSD Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development

NGO Non-Governmental Organization

OVC Orphans and Vulnerable Children

PTSD Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

RDC Resident District Commissioner

SDG Sustainable Development Goal

UK United Kingdom

UN United Nations

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Fund

UPDF Uganda People's Defense Forces

USA United States of America

WAN Women Advocacy Network

Abstract

This study documented the unheard narratives of children born in captivity (CBIC) during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda, 1987–2025. The study pursued four objectives: to interrogate the experiences of CBIC; examine the integration programmes and practices affecting them; investigate the challenges encountered in integration; and assess the effects of those challenges on their lives. Guided by a qualitative constructivist approach and an exploratory historical design, the study used one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions, future-oriented participatory workshops, meetings with women's organisations, key informant interviews, and documentary review. The primary narrative sample comprised 58 young adults born in LRA captivity, supported by 30 FGD participants and contextual accounts from 17 key informants and participants in workshops and meetings. The findings show that CBIC experienced violence, deprivation, disrupted family and cultural ties, and persistent stigma during and after the conflict. Integration was not absent altogether; rather, it was uneven and fragmented. Uganda's transitional-justice framework provides a broad basis for social reintegration and reparations, but the policy and documentary evidence reviewed for this study did not show a consistently operationalised, dedicated support package for CBIC. At family and community levels, acceptance varied according to maternal support, clan recognition, cultural practices, education, livelihood opportunities, and individual agency. The main challenges were stigma, family and clan rejection, weak legal identity and documentation, educational and livelihood exclusion, identity disruption, and psychosocial distress. The effects were psychological, social, cultural, economic, and civic, including difficulties in belonging, access to land and services, participation in community life, and engagement with formal institutions. The study concludes that integration should be understood as a long-term process of social, cultural, economic, and civic inclusion rather than simply physical return. It recommends survivor-

centred implementation of transitional-justice measures, improved birth registration and identification support, sustained psychosocial services, educational and livelihood opportunities, community and clan dialogue, and meaningful participation of CBIC in programmes and policies that affect them.

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

This study explored the unheard narratives of children born in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) captivity in the Acholi sub-region in Northern Uganda. It adopted a qualitative approach and a historical design to capture the experiences and voices of children born in the LRA captivity during the conflict and in the post-conflict period. Chapter One focuses on the introduction and background to the study.

1.1 Background of the Study

1.1.1 Historical Background

The phenomenon of children born of war (CBOW) has been recognized across scholarly, humanitarian, and legal discourses to describe children sired as a result of conflict-related sexual violence, forced marriages, or unions between soldiers and local women during armed conflict (Carpenter, 2007, p. 5; Lee & Glaesmer, 2021, p. 96; Mochmann & Lee, 2010, p. 136). Globally, the category gained visibility particularly after the Second World War (WWII), when "occupation children" were born to German women and Allied soldiers, often facing rejection, stigmatization, and identity crises within their communities (Ericsson & Simonsen, 2005, pp. 158–162).

Later, research on conflicts in Bosnia and Rwanda in the 1990s revealed similar patterns, where systematic rape campaigns produced children stigmatized as "children of the enemy," denied social belonging, and confronted intergenerational trauma (Weitsman, 2008, p. 574; Theidon, 2015, pp. 191–192). Across contexts, children born of war (CBOW) consistently experience double marginalization: they are victims of war itself and,

simultaneously, symbols of social stigma within their communities (Carpenter, 2007, p. 5). As Carpenter (2007) emphasizes, "Children's biological origins affect whether their human rights will be secured" (p. 5). Their vulnerabilities are compounded when survivors of sexual violence are psychologically unable to care for their infants, or when humanitarian resources are insufficient to address these gaps: "Death by neglect may also result if rape survivors are psychologically unable to care for their infants and community or humanitarian resources are unavailable to fill the gaps" (Carpenter, 2007, p. 5).

Even when they survive infancy, children of rape frequently face severe stigma: "Children of rape who survive infancy may face severe stigma within their community" (Carpenter, 2007, p. 5). Globally, these labels reflect persistent social marginalization: in Rwanda, they have been maligned as "devil's children", in East Timor as "Children of Shame", and in Nicaragua as "Monitor babies" (Carpenter, 2007, p. 5). Male infants are particularly vulnerable, often viewed not merely as illegitimate or reminders of sexual torture and national humiliation, but as potential fifth-column enemy combatants within their communities (Carpenter, 2007, p. 6). Bulutgil et al. define fifth-column enemy as "citizens and immigrants that parts of the political establishment suspect of cooperating with external rivals against national interest" Bulutgil et al, 2022, p. 73).

This global pattern resonates profoundly in the Northern Uganda context, particularly during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict (1987-2006). Girls abducted by the LRA were frequently forced into "marriages" with commanders, resulting in thousands of children born in captivity (Denov & Lakor, 2017 p. 1135). These children, like their global counterparts, often faced rejection upon return to their communities, as they were viewed as reminders of violence, instruments of the enemy, or socially tainted (Schulz, Denov, & Amony, 2024). Male children, in particular, were sometimes feared as future combatants, echoing Carpenter's observation that male CBOW are often perceived as threats rather than innocent victims

(Carpenter, 2007, p. 6). In addition to stigma, these children faced disrupted familial structures, cultural dislocation, and limited access to education and social support, further intensifying their marginalization (Apio, 2022, p. 3).

The convergence of global patterns and the Ugandan case underscores that CBOW are not only victims of wartime violence but also enduring symbols of social exclusion and vulnerability. Their experiences highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions such as legal, social, and humanitarian that address both their immediate survival and their long-term reintegration into communities (Denov & Piolanti, 2021, p. 1135).

Within this broader category exists a distinct sub-group: Children Born in Captivity (CBIC). These are children born to women and girls abducted by armed groups and held under conditions of long-term captivity, sexual slavery, and forced marriages (Denov & Lakor, 2017, pp. 255–265; Apio, 2022, p. 3). Unlike CBOW in contexts of short-term occupation or sporadic sexual violence, CBIC are conceived, delivered, and often raised entirely within the violent environment of rebel camps, growing up disconnected from community structures. Their early lives reflect not only the trauma of war but also profound cultural and social dislocation, as they return to societies that frequently reject or stigmatize them (Schulz, Apio, & Oryem, 2024, p. 1).

The case of Northern Uganda under the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict (1987–2006) exemplifies this phenomenon. Following the overthrow of Tito Okello in 1986, Joseph Kony mobilized the LRA against the National Resistance Army (NRA), claiming spiritual authority and presenting himself as a prophet seeking to establish rule based on the Ten Commandments (Bogner et al., 2020, p. 12). The conflict soon evolved into systematic violence against civilians, marked by mass abductions of children and forced “marriages” for abducted girls. These unions produced thousands of children entirely shaped by captivity and armed conflict, whose identities were forged in an environment of institutionalized sexual

slavery and forced reproduction (Denov & Lakor, 2017, p. 255; Schulz, Apio, & Oryem, 2024, p. 2).

This Ugandan experience aligns with broader global patterns. After World War II, children born to occupying Allied forces in Germany experienced rejection and social marginalization (Ericsson & Simonsen, 2005). In Vietnam, children fathered by U.S soldiers during the Vietnamese war (1955-1975) often called “Amerasians” faced social exclusion and statelessness (Valverde, 2012). Similarly, children born of systematic rape during the Bosnian war (1992–1995) and the Rwandan genocide (1994) were stigmatized as “rape children” and denied full social belonging (Ingelaere, 2016, pp. 14-23). Across these cases, despite differences in context and scale, CBOW and CBIC share experiences of marginalization, contested identity, and exclusion.

Scholars further emphasize the complex vulnerabilities of CBOW and CBIC. Denov and Piolanti (2021, p. 1135) describe them as experiencing triple victimhood: direct exposure to war violence, inherited trauma from their mothers, and social exclusion. In Northern Uganda, CBIC are often denied recognition in both maternal and paternal clans, compounding cultural dislocation and social marginalization (Apio, 2022, p. 3). Comparative studies in Bosnia and Rwanda show that these children are often treated as living reminders of war, complicating their reintegration (Mukamana & Ingelaere, 2016, pp. 13-14).

The LRA conflict also situates Uganda within regional and international dynamics. By the mid-1990s, the conflict had spread into Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and the Central African Republic (CAR), as the LRA moved across borders to evade military pursuit and rearm (Allen, Vlassenroot, & Titeca, 2022). While international attention focused primarily on child soldiers, scholars highlight those children born in captivity remain an overlooked group in transitional justice frameworks (Baines, 2014; Denov & Lakor, 2017, p. 255; Apio, 2022, p. 3). These children, although not active combatants, bore the consequences

of abduction, stigma, and fractured identities, transmitting trauma across generations (Oliveira & Baines, 2021).

Despite condemnation by global institutions, including UN Security Council resolutions on children in armed conflict and the ICC indictments of LRA leaders, the specific needs of CBIC have remained largely unaddressed, leaving them as a “silent category” in post-conflict recovery (Asvaroğlu & Olkanli, 2021; Nela, 2024). At the grassroots level, these children experience cultural dislocation, social rejection, and invisibility, reflecting a unique dimension of war trauma that is both intergenerational and deeply personal.

By tracing the historical, regional, and grassroots trajectories of children born during armed conflict, this account underscores the need to center their unheard narratives, highlighting the profound social, cultural, and psychological consequences of war and captivity. These children lived experiences reveal not only the legacy of violence but also the urgent need for holistic reintegration, recognition, and support in post-conflict societies.

1.1.2 Conceptual Background

This study explores the complex and largely marginalized experiences of children born in captivity during the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in Northern Uganda. Central to this research are the interconnected concepts of “children born in captivity, unheard” and “narrative”, each of which demands a thorough conceptual unpacking rooted in existing scholarly discourse.

Conceptual distinction between children born of war and children born in captivity

Children Born of War (CBOW) is the broader category used in international scholarship for people conceived as a result of conflict-related sexual violence, forced or coercive sexual relations, forced marriage, or other conflict-related circumstances. Children Born in Captivity (CBIC), as used in this study, are a narrower group: children born to women or girls who were

held in LRA captivity and who were conceived and/or born during that captivity. Thus, CBIC are a subset of CBOW; the two terms should not be used interchangeably.

The distinction matters analytically. Some CBOW may have been conceived during conflict but outside captivity, while CBIC experienced the additional condition of being born and often raised within an armed group's captive environment. The latter circumstance shaped their early socialisation, relationship with their mothers, exposure to violence, access to civilian institutions, and later claims to family and clan belonging. The study therefore uses CBIC when referring specifically to the population investigated and CBOW when discussing the wider comparative literature.

The expression “unheard narratives” refers to experiences and interpretations that have received limited representation in dominant historical, policy and public accounts. It does not mean that CBIC have never spoken or that no previous scholar has documented their experiences. Rather, it identifies a relative imbalance in whose narratives have been recorded, amplified and incorporated into institutional responses. Narrative is consequently treated as a situated form of historical knowledge: participants interpret the past from their present social locations, and their accounts are read alongside documentary and secondary sources rather than treated as isolated or infallible accounts.

The concept; unheard; also intersects with the idea of social invisibility. As Akello (2019) argues, many of these children grow up in post-conflict societies where they are denied full belonging, often experiencing identity crises, disrupted kinship ties, and psychosocial distress. Their narratives remain underrepresented in both transitional justice frameworks and post-war reconstruction efforts (Akello, 2019, p. 264).

Thus, the phrase “children born in captivity, unheard” encapsulates a complex identity category marked by invisibility, marginalization, and interrupted belonging. It compels a re-examination of who gets to be heard in post-conflict recovery, and why.

Narrative

Narrative in this study is both a source of historical knowledge and an analytical orientation. Participants' accounts are treated as interpretations of lived experience shaped by memory, identity, social relationships and the circumstances of the interview. The study therefore does not assume that every remembered detail is independently verifiable. Instead, narratives are triangulated with documentary records, scholarly literature, focus-group accounts, key-informant perspectives and institutional materials. This approach allows the research to preserve participants' voices while maintaining the historical requirement to contextualise and critically assess evidence.

Narrative also plays a therapeutic and political role. For children born in captivity, storytelling can become a mode of reclaiming agency, identity, and historical presence. As McKay (2005) suggests, the act of narrating one's own story especially after being denied the ability to do so is itself a radical act of self-definition and resistance. Moreover, narratives can counter dominant discourses that frame these children solely as "problems" or "threats" to post-conflict stability (Mazurana et al., 2008, pp. 385-397).

The study also recognises that silence, uncertainty, fragmented memory and changes in the way a story is told can themselves be meaningful. The objective is not to force participants into a single authoritative account of the war but to examine how different narratives have been produced, remembered and contested. This is consistent with a social-history approach that gives analytical importance to people whose experiences are often absent from elite political and military histories.

By centering narrative as a critical tool, this study seeks to illuminate how children born in captivity articulate their identities, interpret their pasts, and imagine their futures often in the face of structural silence.

The concept of structural violence was first articulated by Johan Galtung (1969) in his seminal essay “Violence, Peace, and Peace Research.” Galtung distinguished between direct, visible acts of aggression and more insidious, systemic forms of harm embedded within social, political, and economic structures. When institutions systematically prevent individuals from realizing their full potential through inequality, marginalization, or premature death such arrangements constitute a form of violence as real and destructive as physical assault. Structural violence is particularly pernicious because it is often normalized and institutionalized, sustained by cultural assumptions that appear “natural” or inevitable.

Building on the above foundation, Farmer (2003) applied structural violence to global health, demonstrating how poverty, racism, and entrenched gender hierarchies shape patterns of disease, access to care, and survival. Farmer’s work made structural violence empirically tangible, showing that suffering is neither accidental nor evenly distributed but patterned by historical and systemic inequities. While Galtung and Farmer provide indispensable insights, their approaches have limitations. Galtung’s model, though conceptually innovative, remains abstract and less attentive to historically specific post-conflict contexts. Farmer’s ethnographic work, though rich, emphasizes health disparities and leaves underexplored how structural violence operates through memory, identity, and intergenerational trauma.

A significant gap exists in scholarship concerning the experiences of children born in captivity during the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) conflict. Research has predominantly focused on child soldiers, examining forced conscription, exposure to violence, and reintegration challenges, including PTSD and fractured identity (Asvaroğlu & Olkanli, 2021, pp. 21-22). While critical, this focus largely overlooks children born to abducted women, who were born into enslavement and coercion (Akello, 2013, pp. 149-153; Stewart, 2015). The broader social and psychological impacts on these children are profound. They often face severe emotional and psychological challenges, including feelings of abandonment, confusion

regarding their identity, and difficulties in forming a sense of belonging in post-conflict society (Denov & Lakor, 2017, pp. 255-265).

Unlike child soldiers, who may retain some connection to their communities before abduction, children born in captivity often grow up without a clear connection to either their biological or cultural heritage (Denov & Lakor, 2017, pp. 255-265). Their trauma is compounded by the loss of their mothers, who may have been victims of sexual violence or killed during or after the abduction, leaving the children without parental support (Akello, 2013, pp. 149-153). This unique form of trauma growing up in captivity with little understanding of a world beyond the confines of the LRA has long-term implications for psychological well-being, social integration, and overall development (Denov & Lakor, 2017, pp. 255-265; Akello, 2013, pp. 149-153).

Additionally, children born in captivity often struggle with identity confusion, as they are frequently perceived as symbols of the war or as products of violence, complicating their integration into post-conflict society (Denov & Lakor, 2017, pp. 255-265; Akello, 2013, pp. 149-153). This persistent sense of being “othered” in a world that struggles to recognize them as children of innocence, rather than of war, contributes to deep feelings of isolation. The notion of belonging becomes particularly challenging for these children, as they are neither fully accepted by the communities into which they were born nor by the broader national society, leaving them socially marginalized and psychologically vulnerable (Stewart, 2015, pp. 17-18). Unlike child soldiers, these children did not “enter” the conflict; they were born into it. Their identities were shaped by captivity, social stigma, and the disruption of kinship (Stewart, 2015, p. 1). These unique experiences constitute a distinct form of structural violence social, cultural, and intergenerational that has yet to be adequately theorized or documented (Owacgiu, 2017).

In contrast to child soldiers, who often receive attention for their reintegration into society, children born in captivity face a unique set of challenges that are not adequately

addressed in existing literature or policy frameworks. Research has highlighted that these children often experience social exclusion, identity confusion, and marginalization, making their reintegration into post-conflict societies particularly complex (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008 p. 5; Stewart, 2015, pp. 17-18). This study aims to fill that gap by providing a detailed exploration of their experiences and the broader implications of their narratives for post-conflict healing and societal reconciliation. The findings not only contribute to the academic understanding of war's impact on children but also inform policy development regarding the support and rehabilitation of children born in captivity (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008, p. 5; Stewart, 2015, p. 1).

The work of Dominick LaCapra (2001) and Ricoeur (2004) provides crucial theoretical depth for addressing this gap. LaCapra emphasizes the afterlives of violence, showing how trauma persists across generations through silence, repetition, and cultural transmission. He also underscores the ethics of historical representation, highlighting how the narration of history can amplify or silence marginalized voices. Ricoeur complements this perspective by exploring narrative, memory, and identity, demonstrating how individuals and societies make sense of violence through storytelling (Ricoeur, 2004)). Narrative shape's identity and can either entrench stigma or enable healing a framework particularly relevant for children born in captivity, whose self-understanding is often mediated by external narratives of marginalization (Stewart, 2015, p. 1; Akello, 2013, pp. 149-153). Together, LaCapra and Ricoeur historicize structural violence, extending it beyond material deprivation to include symbolic, cultural, and narrative dimensions of harm. Their perspectives underscore the ethical imperative of recovering the unheard narratives of children born in captivity, whose experiences fall outside dominant categories of victimhood (Owacgiu, 2017).

By integrating Galtung's systemic perspective on structural violence, Farmer's ethnographic grounding, LaCapra's insights on trauma and historical representation, Ricoeur's

philosophy of narrative and identity, and research on the policy gap for children born in captivity (Carlson & Mazurana, 2008, p. 6), this study addresses the underexplored experiences of children born in captivity during the LRA conflict. It develops a historically and ethically informed framework that captures both the material and symbolic dimensions of harm, foregrounding the intergenerational and psychological legacies of war. This research expands conventional definitions of war to encompass civilian suffering through stigmatization, exclusion, and disrupted kinship systems, amplifying the unheard narratives of children born in captivity and offering critical insights for post-conflict scholarship, transitional justice, and reintegration policies.

1.1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study is primarily guided by E. P. Thompson's social-history approach, particularly the principle of history from below. Thompson's approach directs historical inquiry toward the experiences, agency and interpretations of ordinary and marginalised people rather than limiting history to political leaders, military commanders and formal institutions (Gregg, 1998). This is appropriate because the central purpose of the study is to reconstruct the experiences of CBIC as historical subjects whose perspectives have been comparatively underrepresented.

The history-from-below approach is applied in three ways. First, it places participants' narratives at the centre of the reconstruction of lived experience. Second, it treats family, clan, community, civil-society and institutional practices as historical processes rather than merely background variables. Third, it asks how power shaped which narratives became dominant and which experiences remained less visible. This makes it possible to connect individual memories to wider changes in war, displacement, integration and transitional justice.

Hobsbawm's social-history perspective complements Thompson by directing attention to the relationship between individual lives and wider social structures and historical change

(Hobsbawm, 1971). In this study, issues such as land, kinship, education, employment, documentation and community authority are considered alongside participants' narratives because they shape the opportunities available to CBIC over time.

Structural violence is used as a sensitising concept rather than as a second overarching theory. It helps interpret forms of harm that continue after direct armed violence has declined, including exclusion from family resources, documentation, education, land, services and recognition. The concept is useful because the study examines how post-conflict institutions and social structures can reproduce disadvantage even in the absence of active warfare.

The framework therefore combines history from below with attention to social structures and structural violence. The combination keeps the study historically grounded and voice-centred while preventing individual narratives from being detached from the social and institutional conditions in which they were produced.

1.1.4 Contextual Background

The Acholi sub-region is located in Northern Uganda, bordered by South Sudan to the north, the Lango sub-region to the south, and the Karamoja sub-region to the east. Administratively, it comprises of districts of Gulu, Amuru, Nwoya, Omoro, Kitgum, Lamwo, Agago, and Pader, and Gulu City. Acholi sub-region lies between Latitude 03°80' N and Longitude 33°00' E with elevations varying between 600 and 1,200 meters above sea level (JICA, 2012). It is bordered by South Sudan in the north, Lango subregion in the south, West-Nile and Lake Albert Crescent in the west and Karamoja subregion in the east. The subregion has a total area of 28,278 km² (11.7% of the total land area in Uganda) (UBOS, 2019; Akongo et al., 2021, p. 66). Land in Acholi is communally owned and inherited through the patrilineal lineage.

The region stretches across vast savannah grasslands interspersed with woodlands, making it suitable for both crop cultivation and cattle rearing. Its geographical location has

historically placed it at the crossroads of trade and cultural exchange, but also exposed it to Uganda's post-independence political instability (Branch, 2011). The Acholi people, the dominant ethnic group of the sub-region, are Nilotic in origin and speak the Luo language, Acholi dialect.

Figure 1: Map showing area inhabited by the Acholi people



Source: Extracted by the Researcher from Google maps

According to Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2016), the Acholi population was 1,470,554 in 2014 (UBOS, 2016, p.71) and 1,941,913 in 2024 (UBOS, 2024, p. 34). The Acholi people are renowned for their rich oral traditions (ododo in Acholi), including folktales, proverbs (caro-lok), dances (myel), and songs (wer), which transmit cultural values, history, and social norms. Their social organization is traditionally clan-based, with leadership vested in the Rwot (chief), who mediates disputes, allocates land, and preserves cultural practices (Atkinson, 1994, pp. 11-12). Family and kinship ties are central, emphasizing solidarity, respect for elders, and collective responsibility.

Economically, the Acholi have historically relied on subsistence agriculture, growing millet (kal), sorghum (bel), cassava (gwana), maize (anyogi), pigeon peas (lapena), beans

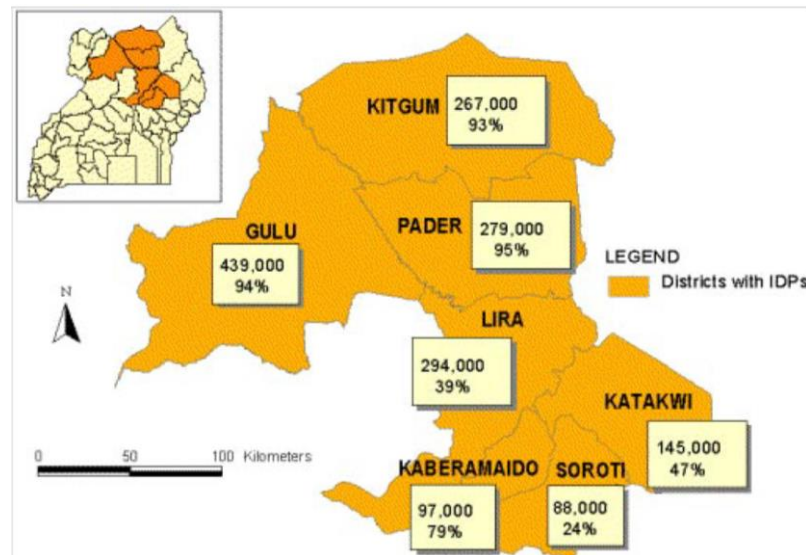
(muranga), and Simsim (nyim), alongside keeping cattle (dyang), goats (single-dyel and plural; dyegi) and fowls, which symbolizes wealth, social prestige, and plays a role in marriage arrangements. Cash crops such as cotton, sesame, and rice were introduced during the colonial period, providing limited diversification of household income. Socially, communal living and rites of passage are critical to maintaining cohesion, while governance traditionally followed consensus-based decision-making, where elders and clan leaders guided collective choices (Finnström, 2008, pp. 210-211).

About 38 years ago the LRA was formed and for more than two decades, Northern Uganda was embroiled in an armed conflict between the Government of Uganda and the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). As a result, it is estimated that more than 1.8 million people were displaced (Anderson et al., 2005), mainly in the Acholi region, with a further 38,000 people abducted, some being forcefully conscripted into the LRA (Pham et al., 2007). Other consequences include the disruption to social services and infrastructure and property destruction. Numerous children were victims of abduction, sexual violence, forced labour and soldiering. More specifically, children born of war continue to be the invisible victim of sexual violence. UNICEF estimate that over 66,000 children and youths were abducted by the LRA to serve as soldiers or sex slaves (Kirabira & Choukroune, 2020).

The region's contemporary history is dominated by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) insurgency, which began in 1987 under Joseph Kony. Initially presented as a movement opposing the National Resistance Army (NRA), the LRA quickly turned to systematic terror against civilians (Allen & Vlassenroot, 2010). Tactics included mass abductions of children for combat, pottering, and sexual slavery; killings, mutilations, and forced displacement into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps; and the destruction of homes and livelihoods. With over 1.8 million people uprooted, this severely disrupted the Acholi social fabric and traditional

governance structures (Dolan, 2009). In Acholi sub-region in 2004, about 1,000 persons were displaced.

Districts with IDPs - numbers and percentage of district population (May 2004)



Source: UNHCR, 2025 & the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), WFP Uganda and Uganda Bureau of Statistics

This study argues that the impact on children born in captivity (CBIC) has been particularly deep. Unlike children abducted and forced to become soldiers, Children Born in Captivity entered life amid extreme violence and coercion. From the moment of birth, many were exposed to traumatic experiences such as the abuse of their mothers, forced marches, and the destruction of community structures. Unlike abductees, who could recall a pre-war identity or family life, these children's earliest memories were framed entirely by war. In Northern Uganda, for instance, children born to mothers held by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) often grew up in rebel camps where food shortages, beatings, and executions were part of daily life. Upon return, they carried the dual burden of being linked to rebel fathers and being perceived as outsiders, which deepened their stigma and exclusion.

Similar patterns emerged in Sierra Leone, where children born to women held by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) were labelled as "rebel children" and rejected by their

maternal families and communities. In both contexts, their identities were forged at the intersection of violence, loss, and rejection, creating long-term challenges for social reintegration and belonging (Asvaroğlu & Olkanlı, 2021; Nela, 2024). Many lacked formal documentation, education, and parental care, rendering them highly vulnerable to neglect and marginalization. The breakdown of traditional support systems, including clan and family networks, compounded these challenges, leaving CBOW to navigate identity formation and social integration largely unaided. Consequently, understanding the geography, socio-political organization, and historical experiences of the Acholi sub-region is essential to situating the narratives of CBOW within the cultural, economic, and historical contexts that have shaped their lives and post-conflict realities.

The LRA conflict, led by Joseph Kony, caused immense suffering for the Acholi people. The group's tactics involved abductions, forced recruitment, and widespread violence, with children being the primary targets. Over 1.5 million people were displaced into IDP camps, where they lived in deplorable conditions, vulnerable to further violence (Allen et al., 2022, p. 56). “The LRA’s brutality encompassed the mass abduction of children, their coercion into combat, and the systemic sexual enslavement of women many of whom gave birth under captivity, with those children facing immediate social exclusion and identity struggles (Denov & Piolanti, 2021, pp. 1135-1147). These children, born into an environment of violence and terror, represent one of the most marginalized groups in post-conflict Uganda.

The demographic makeup of the Acholi population is heavily influenced by the conflict, with a significant proportion of the population consisting of children who were either born in captivity or abducted by the LRA (Denov & Piolanti, 2021; Stewart, 2015; Owacgiu, 2009). These children grew up in the IDP camps or under the control of the LRA, experiencing constant fear and instability (Apio, 2022, pp. 3-6). Among them, children born in captivity are particularly significant. These children were often born to abducted women, many of whom

were subjected to sexual violence, and grew up in environments where violence was normalized. Their experiences of trauma, loss, and displacement are unique and represent a critical area of study in understanding the full impact of the LRA conflict (Apio, 2022, p.10).

While the Acholi community has shown remarkable resilience in rebuilding their lives post-conflict, the scars of war continue to affect the region. The resilience of the Acholi people is evident in their efforts to restore agricultural practices, rebuild homes, and reintegrate former combatants into society (Akello, 2019, p. 266). However, the generational trauma caused by the conflict presents a significant barrier to full recovery. The effects of prolonged violence, displacement, and loss have left deep psychological scars, particularly among those who were directly impacted by the LRA, including children born in captivity. These children often face complex challenges in reintegrating into post-conflict society, struggling with identity issues, psychological trauma, and societal stigma (Denov, 2024, pp. 7-12).

Local perceptions of children born in captivity are shaped by the broader stigma surrounding the war. These children are often seen as symbols of the violence inflicted by the LRA, and their presence in post-conflict communities can be uncomfortable for many. They are frequently perceived as reminders of the trauma and devastation caused by the LRA, which leads to their marginalization (Denov, 2024, p. 12). This stigma, combined with the lack of formal recognition of their unique experiences, has resulted in their narratives being largely excluded from the broader discourse on the war. While much attention has been paid to the reintegration of child soldiers and the rehabilitation of abducted children, the voices of children born in captivity remain largely unheard (Denov, 2024, pp. 6-7). These children, born into captivity and raised in an environment of extreme violence, experience trauma in ways that differ from other victims of the conflict. Their experiences of identity loss, abandonment, and social exclusion remain largely undocumented, further compounding their marginalization.

Understanding the local context and perceptions of children born in captivity is critical for developing more effective post-conflict policies and programs that address the specific needs of this group. Their experiences are integral to understanding the full scope of the LRA's impact on the Acholi people and the long-term challenges of healing and reconciliation in the region.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Children born in LRA captivity occupy a distinctive position within the history of the Northern Uganda conflict. They were born to women and girls who had been abducted and held in captivity and, unlike children who were abducted from civilian communities, they entered the conflict without a remembered pre-war civilian life. Their experiences therefore cannot simply be treated as identical to those of former child soldiers or formerly abducted women. Existing scholarship documents their exposure to violence, stigma, identity disruption and socio-economic marginalisation, but their own narratives have remained less visible than the narratives of adult survivors and former combatants (Denov & Lakor, 2017; Kiconco, 2022; Denov & Piolanti, 2021).

The problem is also institutional and historical. Post-conflict interventions in Northern Uganda developed around categories such as former combatants, formerly abducted persons, survivors of sexual violence and children affected by displacement. Children born in captivity could fall between these categories because they were neither necessarily combatants nor persons who had themselves been abducted. Uganda's National Transitional Justice Policy, adopted in 2019, provides a broad framework for accountability, reconciliation, social reintegration and reparations, but scholarship on children born of war identifies continuing gaps in recognition, documentation, reparations and targeted support (Government of Uganda, 2019; Kiconco, 2022; Kirabira & Choukroune, 2020).

A further problem concerns the production of historical knowledge. Narratives about the LRA conflict have often been produced by commanders, state institutions, humanitarian organisations, researchers, media organisations, formerly abducted women and other actors. These accounts are important, but they do not automatically represent the perspectives of people who were born in captivity. The absence of their voices can reproduce a historical record in which they appear mainly as extensions of their mothers' experiences rather than as historical subjects with their own memories, identities, interpretations and claims. This study therefore addresses a gap in the historical record by placing the narratives of CBIC at the centre while triangulating them with documentary sources and contextual accounts from institutional and community actors.

The study consequently asks how children born in LRA captivity experienced the conflict and its aftermath; what forms of integration were available to them; what barriers limited their inclusion; and what effects those barriers produced in their social, cultural, economic, psychological and civic lives. Addressing these questions is important not only for historical documentation but also for understanding how transitional justice and post-conflict recovery can respond to a group whose circumstances differ from those of other war-affected populations.

1.3 Main Objective

The purpose of this study was to document the unheard narratives of the children born in the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) captivity in the Acholi sub-region.

1.4 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study include:

1. To interrogate the experiences of children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region.

2. To examine the integration programme of children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region.
3. To investigate the challenges faced in the integration of children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region.
4. Assess the effect of the problems of integration on the children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What are the experiences of children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region?
2. What integration programmes have been put in place for the children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region?
3. What are the challenges faced in the integration of children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region?
4. How have the problems of integration affected the children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region?

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Content Scope

This study documented the experiences and narratives of children born in LRA captivity from a historical perspective. It examined how narratives about these children were produced by different actors and how the children themselves interpreted birth, childhood, family relations, identity, stigma, integration and post-conflict life. The study also examined formal and informal integration responses, the challenges encountered, and the effects of those challenges. The focus was therefore narrative and historical rather than clinical: participants' accounts of psychological distress are presented as lived experiences and not as clinical diagnoses.

1.6.2 Geographical Scope

The study was conducted in Gulu City, Kitgum District and Pader District in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda. These sites were purposively selected because they combine urban and rural settings, were substantially affected by the LRA conflict, and provided access to communities, survivor networks, local leaders, civil-society organisations and government actors relevant to the study. The three sites also allowed comparison of experiences across different post-conflict social and institutional settings. The Acholi sub-region remains historically and demographically significant to the study of the LRA conflict; the 2024 UBOS census reports populations of approximately 233,271 in Gulu City, 239,655 in Kitgum and 240,159 in Pader, illustrating the continuing importance of the three study locations within the region (UBOS, 2025).

1.6.3 Time Scope

The study covered 1987–2025. The year 1987 marks the emergence of the LRA insurgency under Joseph Kony and therefore provides a defensible historical starting point for examining the conflict that produced the experiences under study. The year 2025 marks the end point of the study’s fieldwork and captures the contemporary post-conflict experiences of CBIC at the time of data collection. The period was therefore not selected arbitrarily: the first endpoint establishes the historical origin of the LRA conflict in the study area, while the second establishes the contemporary endpoint to which participants’ narratives and documentary evidence were traced. Data collection took place between June and August 2025.

1.7 Justification of the Study

The topic was selected because children born in LRA captivity occupy a distinct and insufficiently documented position in the history of the Northern Uganda conflict. Existing scholarship has generated important knowledge on abduction, child soldiering, forced marriage

and the experiences of formerly abducted women, while more recent studies have demonstrated that CBIC experience stigma, contested belonging and difficulties of integration in their own right (Denov & Lakor, 2017; Kiconco, 2022; Ojok, 2022). A historical study centred on their narratives is therefore justified because it recovers evidence from a group whose experiences can otherwise remain embedded in other people's accounts of the war.

The study is also justified by the need to connect historical knowledge to post-conflict policy. The National Transitional Justice Policy provides a broad framework for reconciliation, social reintegration and reparations, while Ugandan and international scholarship has identified continuing challenges for children born of conflict-related sexual violence, including identity, documentation, land, education, stigma and access to remedies (Government of Uganda, 2019; Kirabira & Choukroune, 2020; Kiconco, 2022). By documenting participants' experiences and examining the institutional responses around them, the study contributes evidence that can inform survivor-centred transitional justice, community reconciliation and longer-term social policy.

1.8 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study hold significant academic, social, and policy-related implications. Academically, the research could contribute to the growing body of literature on the psychological and social effects of conflict on children, particularly those born into captivity. It could provide a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by this group, offering new insights into the broader impacts of war on childhood development, identity, and social integration.

Socially, the study could shed light on the experiences of children born in captivity, providing a voice to a group that has largely been ignored in post-conflict narratives. By amplifying their voices, this research can contribute to healing efforts, challenging stigma, and

fostering greater community acceptance and support for these children as they reintegrate into society.

From a policy perspective, the study has the potential to influence child protection laws and post-conflict rehabilitation initiatives. The findings could inform the development of targeted policies and programs that address the specific needs of children born in captivity, such as mental health support, social integration, and legal recognition. Furthermore, the study could contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the generational effects of war, helping to shape long-term strategies for sustainable peace and recovery in post-conflict regions.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

In documenting the experiences of children born in captivity, this study draws from the following historical theories that help frame and interpret their lives, roles, identities, and traumas.

1.9.1 Thompson, E.P Social History

Thompson helped shape the emergence of Social History in the United States (Gregg, 1998). Historians have been too obsessed with theories of Nationalist conspiracy leaving it unchallenged, and were obsessed with the work of great men, resulting from a conception “of their own recent history, which focuses more on the history of ‘giants’, with insufficient attention to social historical concerns (Gregg, 1998, pp. 419-420). As a proponent of this Theory, Thompson’s theory of social history contributes to historical studies, particularly through his "history from below" approach which studies the experiences, perspectives and feelings of the common people.

It is challenging the Eurocentric historiography which studies history from above, focusing on kings, nationalists and great states men. This has helped to reshape the way

historians think about class, society, culture, and historical agency. This Theory focuses on the everyday experiences of the ordinary people, including marginalized groups like children born in captivity. This approach allows the study to center children's voices and lived experiences rather than only political or military narratives. Gregg argues that, Subaltern Studies could not just be the Indian version of 'history from below' approach; it had to conceive the subaltern differently and write different histories (Gregg, 1998, p. 421).

1.9.2 Eric Hobsbawm Theory of social history

Eric Hobsbawm is very much a constructionist, especially regarding nationalism, culture, and history. Hobsbawm argues that many "traditions" and national identities are invented or constructed often by elites or states to serve contemporary political or ideological purposes. In his work "The Invention of Tradition" (1983), he shows how what people think are ancient, unchanging traditions are often relatively recent inventions designed to create social cohesion, legitimize authority, or shape national identity (Hobsbawm, 1971).

Eric Hobsbawm was one of the most influential Marxist historians of the 20th century and a critical social historian whose analytical works focused on the development of modern society, capitalism, and class struggle. His contributions to social history focus on the experiences, lives, and agency of ordinary people rather than elites. The history of society is history as it has real chronological time as one of its dimensions. It focuses on structures and their mechanisms of persistence and change, possibilities and patterns of their transformations, and what actually happened (Hobsbawm, 1971, p. 30).

Hobsbawm views society from a Marxist Lens, and he interpreted history through the lens of historical materialism, seeing class struggle as the driving force of historical change. In exploring historical events, he analyzed how economic structures shaped human behavior and historical outcomes. He argues that, the economic and the social in human society cannot be separated, and form the analytical base of any historical inquiry into the evolution of human

societies (Hobsbawm, 1971, p. 22). He argues that historical development is built in social production (Hobsbawm, 1971, p. 28).

Similarly, the experience of children born in LRA captivity is embedded in their social production. In Hobsbawm's work, social production refers to the way society collectively produces and reproduces material life through how people work, under what conditions, who owns the means of production, and how labor is divided. It is not just individuals making things; it's the social organization of labor, shaped by class relations, power dynamics, and historical context. This includes social relations, such as landlord-peasant, capitalist-worker, or feudal hierarchies central to how production is structured. Therefore, production is seen not just as an economic act, but as a deeply social and political one, shaped by the society and historical moment in which it occurs.

Hobsbawm focused on "History from Below" and championed the idea that history should be told from the perspective of ordinary people rather than kings, generals, or political elites. His works points to the 20th century which was marked by violent upheaval, totalitarianism, world wars, and the Cold War linked to the crises of capitalism and the failure of socialist alternatives. He also unveils what he considered the primitive Rebels arguing that even pre-modern, non-revolutionary movements such as bandits and militarism reflected forms of resistance to dominant economic structures.

Building on Thompson and Hobsbawm's work that study history from below, this study documents the experience of children born in war from the perspective of ordinary people and their own rather than those of the army commanders, government and international organisations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews empirical, historical and policy literature relevant to the four objectives. The review distinguishes CBIC from the wider category of CBOW and from formerly abducted children and former child soldiers. It proceeds from experiences, to

integration responses, to challenges, and finally to effects. Particular attention is given to Ugandan and Acholi scholarship, local civil-society evidence and national transitional-justice policy so that the literature review is grounded in the setting of the study.

2.1 Experiences of Children Born in LRA Captivity

Research on CBIC in Northern Uganda shows that their experiences cannot be reduced to a single outcome such as trauma. Denov and Lakor (2017), in research with children born of wartime rape associated with the LRA, document violence and deprivation during captivity together with rejection, stigma, socio-economic marginalisation, identity difficulties and contested belonging after return. Kiconco (2022) similarly demonstrates that integration is shaped by kinship, patriarchy, clan identity and the attitudes of receptor communities. These studies provide a strong local foundation for the present research.

The literature also distinguishes CBIC from former child soldiers. A former child soldier generally experienced abduction or recruitment after having begun life in a civilian setting, whereas CBIC were born into the conflict and may have no remembered pre-war civilian identity. Their narratives therefore often centre on parentage, clan belonging, identity and the meaning of being associated with an LRA father rather than on guilt for acts they personally committed. Denov and Piolanti (2021) show that identity formation among children and youth born of wartime sexual violence is shaped by the interaction between personal history, social labelling and family and community responses.

The literature identifies stigma as a recurring feature of post-war life. Children have been labelled in ways that associate them with the alleged crimes or identity of their fathers, despite having no responsibility for those acts. Studies by Kiconco (2022), Baines and Oliveira (2021), and Denov and Lakor (2017) show that stigma may operate within families, schools and communities. It can therefore affect not only emotional wellbeing but also access to social relationships, education, livelihoods and cultural recognition.

Family and lineage are particularly important in the Acholi setting. Kiconco (2022) shows that paternal lineage is closely connected to identity, social status and access to land. When the father is unknown, absent, dead or socially rejected, CBIC may experience uncertainty about clan membership and inheritance. This is not simply an individual identity problem; it is a social and institutional problem because family membership influences material resources and recognition.

The literature nevertheless cautions against presenting CBIC only as passive victims. Apio (2022) documents resilience among children born of war in Northern Uganda, while Ojok (2022) shows that educational environments can provide pathways through which CBOW experience belonging and participation. These studies support a more balanced reading in which vulnerability, agency, resilience and social exclusion coexist.

A major gap remains. Although important Ugandan scholarship now exists, much of it focuses on formerly abducted mothers, particular communities, or specific aspects of integration. Less attention has been given to how the narratives of CBIC themselves have changed across the period from the LRA conflict to contemporary adulthood and how those narratives interact with institutional and policy narratives. The present study addresses that gap by combining life-history accounts with contextual and documentary evidence.

2.2 Integration Programmes and Practices

The literature indicates that integration should be distinguished from reintegration. Reintegration commonly refers to the return of a person who was separated from civilian life, whereas CBIC were born within the conflict and therefore did not return from a pre-war civilian

community of their own. Kiconco (2022) argues that the language and design of interventions have often centred the mother or formerly abducted person, leaving children born during captivity insufficiently recognised as a distinct group.

Uganda has developed a broader transitional-justice framework. The National Transitional Justice Policy adopted in 2019 seeks to address accountability, reconciliation, social reintegration and reparations in post-conflict Uganda (Government of Uganda, 2019). The Uganda Law Reform Commission describes the policy as a comprehensive framework intended to promote reconciliation, social reintegration and reparations. The existence of this policy should therefore be acknowledged rather than described as an absence of national transitional-justice policy.

The policy gap identified in the literature is more specific: the broad framework does not automatically guarantee a dedicated, consistently implemented programme for CBIC. Kirabira and Choukroune (2020) identify problems of recognition, identity documentation and integration, while Kiconco (2022) shows how CBIC can remain between institutional categories. This distinction between a general policy framework and targeted implementation is important for interpreting the findings of the present study.

Civil-society and humanitarian organisations have played an important role in reception, counselling, education, livelihoods and advocacy. Allen and Schomerus (2006) document the reception-centre process in Northern Uganda, while Parker et al. (2021) show that the longer-term experiences of people returning from LRA captivity can involve persistent gaps after the initial humanitarian response. Ojok (2022) provides evidence that school-based support can create practical opportunities for inclusion.

Cultural and family mechanisms also form part of integration. Kiconco (2022) demonstrates that family, clan, marriage and land relations strongly influence belonging. Customary and religious practices may create opportunities for acceptance, but their effects

depend on whether wider family and community relations change. A ritual or public declaration of acceptance cannot by itself guarantee everyday inclusion if stigma and material exclusion continue.

The literature therefore suggests that integration is multidimensional: it involves family belonging, cultural recognition, education, livelihoods, legal identity, psychosocial wellbeing, community participation and access to justice. The gap addressed by this study is how these dimensions were experienced together by CBIC in Gulu City, Kitgum and Pader.

2.3 Challenges in the Integration of Children Born in LRA Captivity

The first challenge is conceptual and institutional: CBIC can fall between existing categories of war-affected persons. They are not necessarily former combatants, and they may not have been abducted themselves. Consequently, programmes designed around former combatants, formerly abducted children or survivors of sexual violence may not fully capture their circumstances (Kiconco, 2022; Kirabira & Choukroune, 2020).

The second challenge is stigma. Denov and Lakor (2017) and Kiconco (2022) show that labels attached to parentage can affect family relations, education, community participation and self-perception. Baines and Oliveira (2021) further demonstrate how social repair after conflict-related sexual violence is connected to family and community responses.

A third challenge concerns legal identity. Children born in captivity may lack birth registration and documentation because births occurred outside ordinary civilian institutions. Kirabira and Choukroune (2020) identify birth registration and national identification as important components of addressing the rights of children born of war. Documentation becomes increasingly important in adulthood because access to education, employment, financial services and public programmes may depend on formal identity.

A fourth challenge is cultural and material belonging. In the Acholi context, paternal lineage and clan membership influence identity, land and social status. Where paternal identity is absent or contested, CBIC may face difficulties in establishing a recognised place within kinship structures (Kiconco, 2022). The resulting challenge is simultaneously cultural, economic and social.

A fifth challenge concerns education and livelihoods. Research on Northern Uganda shows that war-affected children and youth can experience disrupted schooling and limited economic opportunities (Atim et al., 2019). Ojok (2022) demonstrates that educational institutions can either reproduce exclusion or provide spaces for inclusion, depending on how they respond to CBOW.

The literature also indicates that challenges are not uniform. Gender, maternal support, paternal recognition, location, education and access to social networks can shape outcomes. The present qualitative study therefore treats these characteristics as contextual factors that may explain variation rather than as statistically tested moderating variables.

2.4 Effects of Integration Challenges

The effects identified in the literature are multidimensional. Psychologically, participants in Denov and Lakor (2017) described distress, stigma and identity struggles. However, the literature does not justify assuming that every CBIC has a clinical mental-health disorder. The present study therefore distinguishes reported experiences of distress from clinical diagnosis.

Social and cultural effects include contested belonging, weakened family relationships and difficulties with clan recognition. Kiconco (2022) shows that the politics of kinship and patriarchy can shape the everyday integration of CBIC. These effects can also become material because social recognition influences access to land, family support and community networks.

Economic and educational effects include interrupted schooling, limited skills and insecure livelihoods. Atim et al. (2019) document broader education constraints in Northern Uganda, while Parker et al. (2021) demonstrate the longer-term consequences of humanitarian and reintegration gaps among war-affected populations.

Political and civic effects are less developed in the literature but are central to transitional justice. Lack of documentation can restrict access to formal institutions, while limited recognition can reduce opportunities to participate in processes through which victims articulate claims. The 2019 National Transitional Justice Policy establishes a broad framework for social reintegration and reparations, making the question of who is recognised and included an important part of the policy discussion (Government of Uganda, 2019).

The literature therefore supports a move beyond a purely psychological account. The effects of integration challenges can be understood across psychological, social, cultural, economic and civic dimensions, with each dimension potentially reinforcing the others. This study contributes by examining these dimensions together through the narratives of CBIC and contextual accounts from families, civil society, cultural actors and institutional respondents.

The principal literature gap is thus not simply that CBIC have been studied too little. It is that their narratives, policy position, cultural belonging and material outcomes are often examined separately. The present study connects these dimensions within a historical account of 1987–2025.

2.5 Conclusion

The literature establishes that CBIC are a distinct population within the wider category of CBOW and that their experiences overlap with, but are not identical to, those of former child soldiers and other war-affected groups. Existing scholarship documents stigma, identity disruption, family and clan exclusion, educational and economic disadvantage, and the

limitations of existing integration responses. Ugandan scholarship and the National Transitional Justice Policy provide an important policy and contextual foundation, but gaps remain in the sustained incorporation of CBIC voices into historical narratives, institutional responses and long-term integration practice. These gaps provide the basis for the present study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Approach

This chapter presents the methodology that used in this study. A qualitative approach was chosen as the overall strategy, aligning with the study's exploratory aims of understanding personal experiences, meanings, and social processes from the perspective of those directly affected. The chapter details the research design, study population, sampling strategy, data collection methods, analysis techniques, and ethical considerations.

The study adopted a qualitative approach because its central purpose was to understand how CBIC and other actors narrated, interpreted and experienced the conflict and its aftermath. A qualitative approach was appropriate for capturing meanings, memories, relationships and contextual differences that could not be adequately represented through numerical measures alone. The study was guided by a constructivist orientation in which participants' accounts were treated as situated interpretations of social reality.

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, which was most appropriate for exploring nuanced personal perceptions, feelings, narratives, meanings and lived experiences (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Qualitative methods enabled the researcher to gather rich, detailed accounts of psychological, social, and cultural phenomena that were not easily quantifiable. In this context, the approach was justified because the research sought to understand how children born in captivity made sense of their experiences and how these experiences had impacted their identities, relationships, and worldviews. Such questions of experience, meaning, and perspective were best answered using qualitative inquiry (Hammarberg et al., 2016).

Additionally, children born in captivity are reported to be a marginalized group with unique stories; a qualitative approach allowed for flexibility and empathy in capturing their

voices and respecting their opinions. This approach aligned with a constructivist paradigm, acknowledging that reality was socially constructed and that participants' narratives provided insight into the social and cultural realities of post-conflict Acholi. By using qualitative methods, the study adapted to the emergent themes raised by participants and probed deeply into areas that a rigid quantitative survey might have missed. Ultimately, a qualitative approach was suited to this exploratory study because it prioritized depth over breadth, giving primacy to participants' own opinion, words and interpretations of their lived experiences (Poth & Shannon-Baker, 2022).

3.2 Research Design

An exploratory historical research design was employed. The design combined oral history and qualitative inquiry with documentary and secondary-source analysis. The historical orientation enabled the researcher to trace continuity and change from the emergence of the LRA insurgency in 1987 to the contemporary endpoint of 2025. The exploratory component was appropriate because the experiences of CBIC remain less documented than those of other war-affected groups.

The design also distinguished primary narratives from contextual evidence. Primary narrative evidence came principally from one-on-one interviews and focus-group discussions with CBIC. Contextual evidence came from key informants, women's organisations, participatory workshops and documentary sources. This distinction addressed the historical requirement to compare different types of evidence rather than treating one respondent group as the sole authority.

Documentary materials listed in the study's archival-materials section were used to establish the historical and policy context. These included *A Hard Homecoming* (2006), the report on forced marriage within the LRA (2008), the African Union Transitional Justice Policy (2019), Uganda's National Transitional Justice Policy (2019), the Secure Livelihoods Research

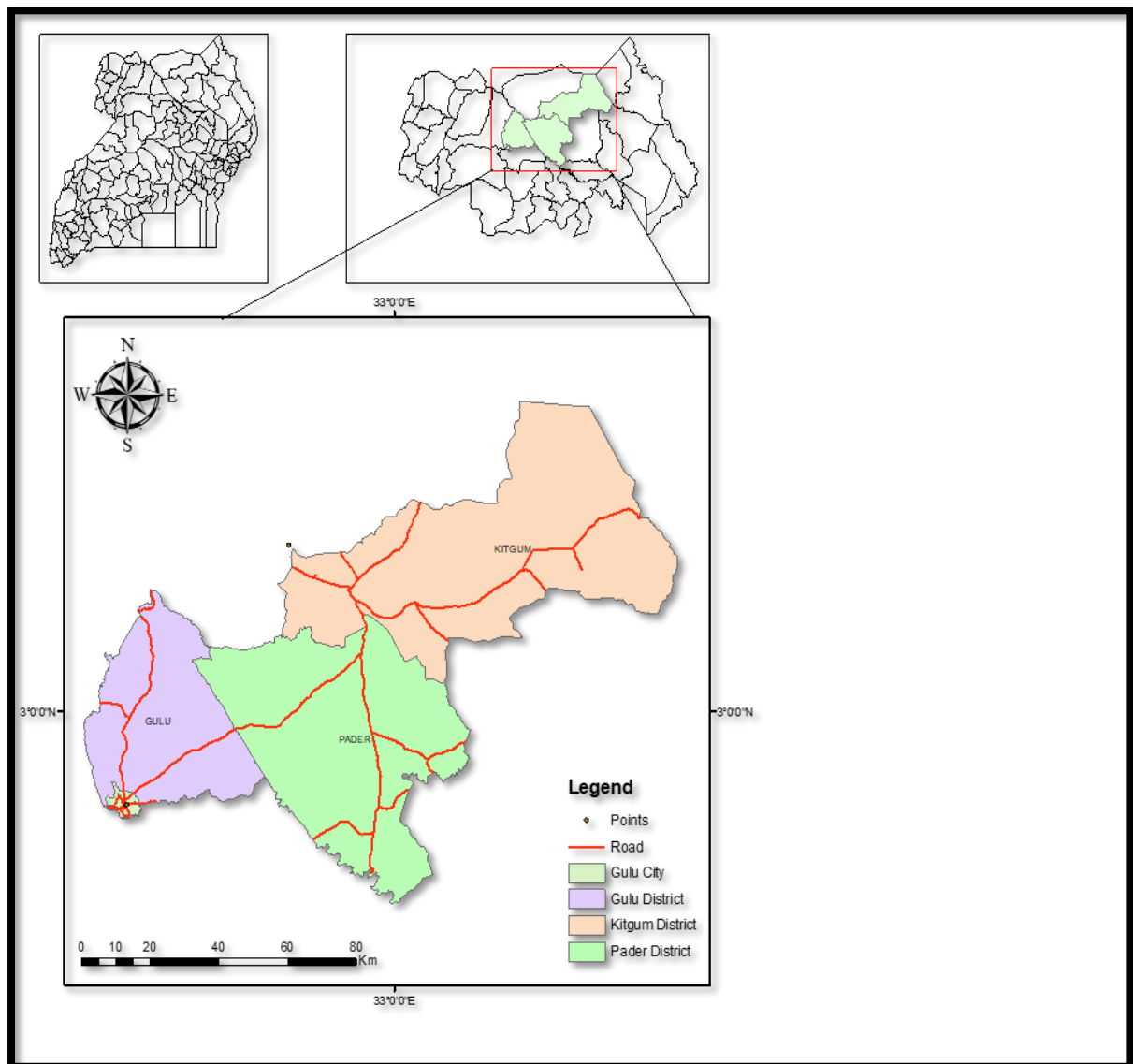
Consortium report on education in Northern Uganda (2019), UN Security Council Resolution 2467 (2019), ICC records concerning the LRA, and the UN Secretary-General's 2022 report on women and children born of conflict-related sexual violence. Documentary evidence was read alongside oral narratives rather than used to replace them.

The resulting design was therefore historical, narrative and qualitative. It was not a statistical study and did not estimate causal or moderating effects. Variation by gender, location, maternal support, paternal recognition, education and documentation was interpreted as contextual variation emerging from the narratives.

3.3 Study Area

The study was conducted in Gulu City, Kitgum District and Pader District in the Acholi sub-region of Northern Uganda. The sites were purposively selected because they combine urban and rural settings, were substantially affected by the LRA conflict, and provide access to survivor networks, civil-society organisations, cultural leaders and government institutions relevant to the study. The three sites also allowed the researcher to examine how experiences of integration differed across settings.

A map of Uganda showing Acholi Sub-region and the area of study (Gulu City, Kitgum District and Pader District)



Source: Extracted by the Cartographer (Kigwee Beatrice)

3.4 Study Population

The study population comprised adults aged 18–30 years who were born to women abducted by the LRA and who were born and/or raised in LRA captivity, together with secondary/contextual respondents who had direct knowledge of their integration. The primary narrative population was CBIC. Secondary/contextual respondents comprised NGO staff,

cultural leaders, local government officials, Resident District Commissioners, councillors, counsellors, community leaders, women's rights activists, mothers and caregivers. These groups were included because the study examined not only personal narratives but also the family, cultural, institutional and policy environments in which integration occurred.

3.5 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

Data Collection Method	Target Group / Participants	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
One-on-One Interviews	Children born in captivity	58	Purposive / criterion-based sampling
Key Informant Interviews	NGO staff, cultural leaders, local government officials, RDCs, councillors, counsellors and community leaders	17	Expert purposive sampling
Focus Group Discussions	Children born in captivity (six groups)	6 groups / 30	Homogeneous purposive sampling
Future-oriented workshops	War-affected persons, survivors, advocates and transitional-justice stakeholders	4 workshops / 309	Purposive sampling

		particip ant engage ments	
Meetings with GWED-G and women's groups	Mothers, caregivers and women's rights activists	1 0	Purposi ve and snowball sampling
Total participant engagements		4 24	

The reported study records comprise 58 one-on-one interviews, 17 key informant interviews, six focus group discussions with 30 participants, four future-oriented workshops with 309 recorded participant engagements, and meetings with 10 participants from GWED-G and associated women's groups. The arithmetic total is 424 participant engagements. This figure should not be interpreted as 424 unique individuals unless the attendance registers confirm that no person participated in more than one activity.

3.6 Sampling Procedure

3.6.1 One-on-One Interviews with Children Born in Captivity

Fifty-eight CBIC aged 18–30 years participated in one-on-one interviews. Purposive and criterion-based sampling were used to identify participants who met the study definition of CBIC. Snowball referrals were used cautiously to reach additional participants through community and civil-society networks. The sampling sought variation by gender, age and study location.

3.6.2 Future Workshop Participants

Four future-oriented workshops and transitional-justice meetings were used as contextual participatory sources. The four workshop activities recorded 84, 61, 76 and 88 participants respectively, giving 309 workshop participant engagements. An additional 10 participants took part in meetings with GWED-G and women's groups. These activities were not treated as equivalent to the primary one-on-one CBIC interviews; instead, they provided collective and institutional context, policy perspectives and participant-generated visions of preferred futures.

3.6.3 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Seventeen key informants were selected through expert purposive sampling. They included NGO staff, cultural leaders, local government officials, Resident District Commissioners, councillors, counsellors and community leaders. Their role was to provide contextual and institutional perspectives on integration, transitional justice, service provision and community responses. Their accounts are therefore presented as contextual evidence and not as a substitute for the narratives of CBIC.

3.6.4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Six focus group discussions were conducted, each with five CBIC participants, giving 30 participants. The groups were organised to support safe discussion among participants with shared experiences. The earlier draft incorrectly described five groups; the methodology and appendix should consistently report six FGDs.

3.6.5 Meetings with GWED-G and Women's Groups

Ten participants were engaged through meetings with GWED-G and associated women's groups, including mothers, caregivers and women's rights activists. Purposive and

snowball sampling were used to reach participants with direct experience of supporting or advocating for CBIC.

3.7 Data Collection Methods

Multiple qualitative methods were used to triangulate individual narratives, collective experiences, institutional perspectives and documentary evidence. The methods were selected to answer the four objectives and to reduce reliance on a single source of evidence.

3.7.1 One-on-One Interviews with Children Born in Captivity

Fifty-eight semi-structured one-on-one interviews generated the primary life-history narratives. Questions covered birth and childhood, identity, family relations, stigma, education, livelihoods, coping, belonging and participants' views on government, community and NGO support.

3.7.2 Future Workshop

The four future-oriented workshop activities generated collective reflections on preferred futures, social acceptance, education, livelihoods, land, policy and community change. Their evidence was used mainly to identify collective priorities and proposed solutions rather than to estimate prevalence.

3.7.3 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Seventeen key informant interviews provided contextual evidence from institutional and community actors. Particular attention was paid to local government and other public officials because the Viva Voce panel requested clearer representation of policy and government perspectives.

3.7.4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Six focus group discussions, each with five CBIC participants, explored shared and divergent experiences of stigma, education, land, employment, family acceptance and coping.

3.7.5 Meetings with GWED-G and Women's Groups

Meetings with GWED-G and women's groups captured the perspectives of mothers, caregivers and women activists. These accounts were used to understand the relationship between maternal experiences, children's integration and community advocacy.

3.8 Data Collection Instruments

The instruments were aligned with the four study objectives and were adapted for the different respondent categories. The one-on-one interview guide was the principal instrument for eliciting CBIC narratives, while the KII guide was used for institutional and policy perspectives. The documentary review schedule recorded the title, date, issuing institution, subject matter and relevance of each document.

3.8.1 Interview Guide for One-on-One Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to collect data from children born in captivity (Appendix I). The instrument contained open-ended questions organized around key themes such as identity, experiences of stigma, psychosocial well-being, family relations, and aspirations for the future. Probing questions were included to encourage deeper reflection and ensure that participants could freely narrate their experiences in their own words.

3.8.2 Future Workshop Guide

A structured workshop facilitation guide was used during the future workshop organised (Appendix III). This instrument outlined participatory activities including visioning exercises, group brainstorming, and scenario mapping. The guide ensured that discussions

remained focused on collective imagination of future possibilities, community integration, and desired policy interventions, while also allowing participants to generate ideas through drawings, storytelling, and dialogue.

3.8.3 Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide

A semi-structured KII guide was used with the 17 contextual respondents. The guide covered integration programmes, cultural norms, government policy, transitional justice, documentation, services and gaps. The respondent categories included NGO staff, cultural leaders, Resident District Commissioners, local government officials, councillors and counsellors.

3.8.4 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide

The FGD guide was used in six groups of five CBIC participants. It covered community experiences, stigma, family support, education, livelihoods, coping and recommendations.

3.8.5 Meeting Guide for GWED-G and Women's Groups

Finally, a structured meeting guide was used in discussions with members of GWED-G and affiliated women's groups. The instrument focused on caregiving experiences, intergenerational trauma, community advocacy, and women's strategies for supporting children born in captivity. The guide combined open-ended questions with reflective prompts to ensure that both individual caregiver narratives and collective organizational perspectives were captured.

3.9 Data Analysis

The study used thematic and narrative analysis. Interview and focus-group transcripts, workshop notes and relevant documentary material were first read repeatedly for familiarisation. Initial codes were developed both deductively from the study objectives and

inductively from participants' accounts. Codes were then grouped into themes such as birth and childhood in captivity, stigma, family and clan belonging, documentation, education and livelihoods, psychosocial experiences, cultural inclusion, civic participation and policy responses. Narrative analysis was used to preserve chronology, turning points and participants' interpretations, while thematic analysis enabled comparison across respondent groups. Findings were then triangulated with documentary sources and relevant scholarship.

3.10 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was strengthened through triangulation across individual interviews, FGDs, workshops, key informants, women's groups and documentary sources. The interview guides were reviewed and refined for clarity and cultural appropriateness. Supervisory debriefing and peer discussion were used to interrogate interpretations. Where feasible, participants were invited to clarify or confirm the meaning of their accounts. A reflexive record was maintained so that the researcher could identify how his position, assumptions and interactions might influence interpretation. These procedures strengthened credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability.

Because this was a qualitative historical study, reliability was not treated as statistical repeatability. Instead, consistency was pursued through systematic coding, comparison of themes across data sources, preservation of an audit trail and clear separation between participants' statements, documentary evidence and the researcher's interpretation.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

The study obtained ethical approval from the Gulu University Research Ethics Committee (GUREC-2025/856). All participants were adults aged 18 years and above and provided informed consent. Participation was voluntary, and participants could decline questions or withdraw. Confidentiality was protected through pseudonyms and removal of

unnecessary identifying information. Because the study addressed experiences of captivity, sexual violence, stigma and family rejection, interviews were conducted using trauma-sensitive practices. Participants were allowed to pause or stop interviews, and information on available psychosocial support was provided where distress arose.

The researcher also considered cultural sensitivity by engaging relevant community and cultural actors and by treating Acholi concepts of kinship, clan, land, cleansing and belonging respectfully. Documentary and institutional materials were critically contextualised rather than treated as neutral accounts.

3.12 Limitations of the Study

The study had several limitations. First, some experiences occurred many years before data collection, so narratives depended partly on memory and retrospective interpretation. Second, the subject is sensitive and some participants may have withheld information because of stigma, privacy or emotional distress. Third, access to official records concerning births in captivity, family tracing and programme beneficiaries was limited, making complete population estimates impossible. Fourth, the study covered three locations in Acholi and therefore does not claim statistical representation of all CBIC in Northern Uganda. Finally, some workshop and meeting participants may have participated in more than one activity; consequently, the reported total of 424 should be understood as participant engagements unless the attendance registers establish unique individuals.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the first objective through a narrative and historical account of CBIC. It distinguishes primary narratives from secondary/contextual narratives and documentary evidence. Primary narratives come mainly from CBIC interviews and FGDs; contextual narratives come from mothers, women's organisations, cultural leaders, NGO personnel and public officials; documentary evidence provides historical and policy context. The chapter therefore treats history as a field of multiple narratives rather than as a single story.

4.1 Narratives on Children Born in the Lord's Resistance Army Captivity in Acholi Sub-region, Northern Uganda (1987–2025)

4.1.1 Primary and contextual agencies in the production of narratives

Narratives about CBIC have been produced by returning mothers, families and clans, cultural institutions, civil-society and humanitarian organisations, journalists, researchers and government institutions. The documentary corpus provides institutional and policy context, while the CBIC interviews and FGDs provide the primary narratives. Secondary/contextual respondents—key informants, mothers, caregivers, women activists, cultural leaders and public officials—help explain the social and institutional settings in which those narratives were produced. Local government officials, RDCs and councillors were included so that personal narratives could be connected to the policy and administrative environment. Institutional accounts are presented as contextual evidence and not as a substitute for CBIC voices.

4.2 Lived Experiences of Children Born in LRA Captivity in Acholi Sub-Region

4.2.1 Birth and Early Childhood in Captivity

Children born in LRA captivity came into the world under extreme, perilous conditions. Many participants described being born “in the bush,” meaning in militant camps far from hospitals or safety. One 23-year-old male from Gulu defined children born in captivity as those; “born while their mothers were held by LRA rebels... conceived and delivered under conditions of abduction, forced displacement, and violence, deep in the bush”. From the very start of life, these infants lacked proper medical care, nutrition, and the security of a normal home. A key informant (a humanitarian health worker) confirmed that “...most were delivered without skilled attendants or medicines and many barely survived infancies due to disease and malnutrition” (Key Informant Interview).

Mothers of these children were themselves abducted teenagers forced into sexual servitude. Several women’s group members (former abductees) recounted giving birth in makeshift shelters or forests, often without help. “I delivered my baby under a tree, alone at night,” one mother shared in a GWED-G meeting, “there was no medicine, no cloth to wrap the baby. It’s a miracle our children survived at all.” Such accounts highlight the structural violence surrounding these births, a concept noted by scholars like Carpenter (2010) who describes how war imposes ongoing harm through deprivation and danger at the very start of life. As a result, many children born in captivity began life in conditions of trauma and privation that would impact their development.

Figure 2: Key Informant Interview in Gulu City about birth of CBOW



Source: Field work by the Researcher

4.2.2 Growing Up Amidst Conflict and Violence

As infants grew into toddlers and young children, they were raised in an environment of continuous conflict. Participants consistently described childhoods characterized by instability, fear, and routine exposure to violence. They were constantly on the move with rebel units, often trekking through dense forests to evade the Ugandan army. A 22-year-old female participant from Pader recalled that:

...our early lives were shaped by constant fear and instability, as we had to keep moving with the rebels and our mothers. Many... witnessed acts of brutal violence, including killings and torture... Such exposure at a young age caused deep emotional scars.

In a focus group discussion, others echoed how “...even at age five, we knew how to hide from bullets; we grew up running” (Focus Group 1, Gulu). This is tragically consistent with broader research on child soldiers. Armed groups often socialized abducted children into violence very early. Indeed, some LRA commanders viewed children born in captivity as new recruits to indoctrinate from birth (the “new blood” of the rebellion).

By default, of their birthplace, some children essentially became child soldiers. A 25-year-old male participant from Kitgum explained that:

...some children born in the bush were trained to be child soldiers as early as age five, forced to carry weapons, march with rebel units, and serve as lookouts or messengers. These early experiences robbed us of a normal childhood and exposed us to life-threatening situations.

One youth described in an interview how even his play involved violence: “I thought every child played with sticks as guns. I did not know what a school was” (Male, 20, interview). Such testimony underscores that childhood for those born in captivity was anything but carefree. It was a militarized upbringing defined by survival.

Participants provided harrowing personal anecdotes of the violence they survived. For instance, a 24-year-old man from Gulu recounted a memory of being an infant carried by his mother during a battle: “One day my mother was running with me... there was a boom blast everywhere... she had to jump over dead bodies, blood flowing all over. Those are the bad experiences I will never forget.” (Male, 24 CBOW, Gulu). Daily life in the camps was marked by scarcity and danger. Children often went hungry and lacked shelter. One respondent explained that even basic aspects of life were different in the bush: “People would feed on wild fruits... we made rough grass-thatched huts, not permanent houses like here in the village” (Male CBOW, 27, Gulu).

Additionally, growing up in LRA captivity created a cultural and linguistic dislocation. Some children spent their formative years outside of Acholi, even outside Uganda, and missed learning their native language or customs. In a focus group, a 27-year-old male CBOW noted he spoke only Sudanese Arabic upon return and "...did not know Acholi... I just learned Acholi later" (Male, 27, Gulu, focus group). This left many feeling like strangers in their own homeland. As literature attests, formerly abducted youth often struggle with local language and schooling after years away. For those born in captivity, this gap was even wider. They literally had no 'normal' baseline of life outside war during their early years. Community members sometimes perceived returnee children who spoke different languages or lacked local socialization as almost "foreign", compounding their sense of otherness

4.2.3 Family Separation and Loss

Another common experience for children born in captivity was the loss of one or both parents and resulting separation from family. Many never knew their fathers, who were often LRA fighters killed in combat or entirely unknown to the mother beyond a forced wartime "marriage." Several also lost their mothers to violence, illness, or crossfire during the war. As one interview respondent described, "...most of them came back without their parents... Some lost their mothers who were either killed, died of illness or childbirth complications, or were left behind during rebel movements". Consequently, a child born in the bush might return (or be rescued) as an orphan, or with only one surviving parent.

Numerous participants both youth and older caregivers emphasized that these children often had no knowledge of any extended relatives. One explained, "...many of these children grew up without knowing their extended families, such as grandparents, uncles or aunts, who would have otherwise provided a support system". A 27-year-old male CBOW interviewee illustrated the difficulties this poses, especially for boys in a patrilineal society:

Those who came back with their parents were few... A boy child, if he is to go to his father's family, they will start stigmatizing him. For example, you do not have a father. Since he does not know where to start looking for his father's village... he starts renting in town. Hustling becomes hard" (Male CBOW, 27, Gulu).

This highlights how returning as a war orphan or fatherless child undermines one's sense of identity and belonging. In Acholi culture, lineage and clan are crucial. Not knowing one's father or clan leaves these youth without clear status or inheritance. As the participant lamented, "...lack of identity is a major problem." He felt he had no rightful home, forcing him into a transient urban life on society's margins.

Women in a community focus group confirmed these struggles. One grandmother explained that a child her family took in "kept asking for people I did not know like his mother, father, or any kin. We had to tell him we are his family now, but he felt lost" (Women's Group FGD). Such accounts underline the rootlessness experienced by many children born in captivity even after coming "home," they often remained disconnected from family ties that ground other children.

Figure 3: A women FGD participant who raised a male CBOW



Source: Field FGD session by the Researcher and women FGD

4.2.4 Stigma and the “Children of the Bush” Label

Crucially, participants reported that their suffering did not end with escape from the rebels. Returning to civilian life brought new trauma in the form of social stigma. From the moment of return, nearly all respondents described facing deep social rejection. A 22-year-old female CBOW, for example, recounted that:

Upon returning... we faced deep social rejection. Many were not welcomed by their maternal families or communities because of the circumstances of our birth. They called us ‘rebel children,’ a term that carried heavy stigma”.

In Acholi communities, it became common to refer to these youth as “children of the bush” (lutino pa Kony) in the local language, meaning “Kony’s children” after the rebel leader. One young man explained, “...in the village, they define us as children of the bush... children

born in the bush and not at home... a child born as a result of the war” (Male CBOW, 27, Gulu). While literally true for many, this label took on a derogatory tone. It marked the child as an outsider, as someone not fully belonging to the community or “home” world.

4.3 Discussion of Findings

The narratives show that being born in captivity was not a single event but the beginning of a historical trajectory extending from wartime birth to post-war adulthood. Accounts of difficult birth conditions and childhood insecurity are consistent with the wider literature on CBOW in Northern Uganda (Denov & Lakor, 2017; Kiconco, 2022). At the same time, the present study adds the participants’ own interpretations of how those experiences shaped later identity and belonging.

The comparison with former child soldiers is important. Former child soldiers generally remember a civilian life before abduction, whereas many CBIC began life within the conflict. This difference helps explain why participants placed particular emphasis on parentage, clan identity, stigma and the meaning of “home.” The findings therefore support the panel’s concern that the study should remain voice-centred and should not collapse CBIC narratives into the broader category of war-affected children.

Family separation and uncertain paternal lineage emerged as both personal and structural issues. Participants described not knowing fathers or paternal clans and, in some cases, uncertainty about maternal acceptance. This supports Kiconco’s (2022) analysis of the importance of patrilineal identity and extends it by showing how the absence of recognised lineage can affect everyday social and economic life.

Stigma was the most consistent cross-cutting theme. The labels attached to CBIC linked their identities to the crimes of their fathers or the circumstances of their mothers’ captivity. The historical significance of this stigma is that it converts a circumstance of birth into a

continuing social identity. The participants' insistence that they should be heard in their own right is therefore not merely a methodological preference; it is part of the historical process through which they seek recognition.

Overall, the chapter demonstrates that the experiences of CBIC were shaped by the interaction of war, captivity, family relations, cultural structures and post-war narratives. The evidence supports a history-from-below approach because the participants' accounts reveal dimensions of the conflict's legacy that are less visible in political and military histories.

Perhaps the most consistent theme was stigma, described as the defining lived experience even after returning from the bush. Participants' accounts of being called "children of the bush" or "lutino pa Kony" reflect Goffman's (1963) notion of stigma as a discrediting attribute that marks individuals as outsiders. The findings confirm Apio (2016) and Baines and Oliveira (2020), who documented that CBOW in Northern Uganda are routinely branded with inherited guilt and suspicion. The local narratives of participants echo this literature but add nuance by highlighting how stigma was internalized as shame, affecting self-worth and everyday interactions in schools, churches, and families. Notably, while Denov and Lakor (2017) observed similar patterns in Sierra Leone, our study emphasizes the Acholi cultural framing, where CBOW are sometimes perceived as carrying *cen* (vengeful spirits), a supernatural dimension less emphasized in comparative contexts.

In sum, the lived experiences of children born in captivity reflect a continuum of deprivation, violence, family disconnection, and stigma. These findings strongly align with international literature on children born of war but add depth by foregrounding Acholi cultural constructs and the ways they intersect with identity, belonging, and social rejection. The voices of participants illustrate how these youth were doubly victimized, first by being born into war and later by being marked as perpetual outsiders in peace. This confirms that their lived

experiences are not only personal memories but are embedded within wider social narratives and cultural logics that must be confronted in order to achieve integration and healing.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN BORN IN CAPTIVITY

5.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the second specific objective by examining the integration programs (or lack thereof) that have been available for children born in LRA captivity. The study analyzed data from participants and key informants regarding formal reintegration policies, the role of NGOs and reception centers, informal community mechanisms, and the gaps or missed opportunities in supporting these children.

5.1 Government integration efforts

Participants unanimously reported that no dedicated government integration program ever targeted children born in captivity as a distinct group. In the immediate post-war period (mid-2000s), the Ugandan government and its partners concentrated on demobilizing LRA fighters and reintegrating former abductees, especially young mothers returning with children. As one key informant (a child protection NGO officer) noted that: “authorities assumed reintegrating the mothers would automatically take care of the children.” This assumption meant that children born of war were simply folded under their mothers’ reintegration.

A 24-year-old male participant from Kitgum explained emphatically:

They assumed that when they reintegrate the mothers... the children would be fine, but that was not the case. Integration of children born in captivity has failed totally... the focus was on the mothers, not considering the children... it was just an assumption and the methodologies used did not accomplish their goal” (Male CBOW, 24, Kitgum).

This reflects a common sentiment that thousands of “bush children” were effectively invisible in official programs.

In Uganda’s Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs, children born in captivity were not explicitly included. Former abductees went through disarmament and reception processes, and young women returnees received some resettlement assistance, but their children were not a focal point of planning. Key informants confirmed that no special budget or unit was allocated for these children. One local government official interviewed commented, “It is true, there was no program for those children. We thought if the mother is settled, the child will naturally integrate... we were proven wrong.” Indeed, participants observed that this “mother-centric” approach was fundamentally flawed.

In many cases, even the mothers’ reintegration was superficial as families and communities often only partially accepted the returning women, and “there was no follow-up,” leaving both mother and child without long-term support (Female participant, 23). This finding aligns with Ladisch (2015) and Neenan (2017), who report that the Ugandan government did not create any special reintegration package for children born of wartime rape. Women returnees with children got the same basic aid as others, with “no additional support” earmarked for their children. The result, as our participants and scholars like Denov and Lakor (2017) note, is that these children fell through the cracks of DDR programs.

5.2 Humanitarian organisations, NGOs, CBOs and the integration of CBOW

Notably, participants credited some initial assistance from NGOs and reception centers, but they stressed its limitations. Many children born in captivity, upon escape or rescue, passed briefly through rehabilitation centers (such as Rachelle Rehabilitation Center in Lira, World Vision’s or GUSCO reception centers in Gulu). These centers typically provided short-term relief such as medical check-ups, a bit of counseling, attempts to trace relatives, and a basic resettlement kit. Participants acknowledged these efforts: “...humanitarian agencies played a

critical role by providing counseling, education, and livelihood support,” said a 25-year-old male from Kitgum, but they uniformly pointed out that such support was short-lived.

One female participant in a focus group observed, “They gave us food and a blanket and then you go. After that, you are on your own.” There was no systematic, long-term plan to ensure these children’s well-being once the initial reception phase ended. This resonates with Allen et al. (2021)’s finding that reception centers emphasized immediate reunion and resettlement without longer follow-up, leaving returnees in limbo. The participants vividly described this gap: “...many of these children were simply dropped off in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps without any sustained support or follow-up. There was little to no long-term planning to ensure their emotional, educational, or social needs were met,” one respondent recounted. Essentially, after the short stay at a center, child returnees and their young mothers “blended into” massive IDP camps or villages, struggling in poverty and anonymity. Without designated support, their trauma and material needs went largely unaddressed.

A few relatively positive cases were shared, illustrating what difference targeted support could make. For example, some mothers who proactively sought NGO help managed to get their children into school or to access healthcare. One participant noted, “For some children, especially those whose mothers survived and managed to access education or support, the journey has been smoother. These mothers were able to advocate for their children, get them into school, and create a more stable environment despite the challenges.” In these instances, it was often the agency of the mother bolstered by an NGO scholarship or counseling program that led to better outcomes. However, participants made clear that such cases were the exception. The same young man added, “...for others, especially those whose mothers died during captivity or shortly after returning, the situation was very different”. Children who came back without their mothers frequently fell under the care of distant relatives or guardians who “did not fully accept them,” leaving the child without a strong advocate to navigate school or

community life. No formal system stepped in to fill that caregiving gap, revealing a critical blind spot in (re)-integration planning.

Overall, the lack of any child-focused formal support left most children born in captivity reliant on whatever their mothers' reintegration could offer. When mothers were absent or struggling, these youth essentially raised themselves or depended on reluctant extended family. The neglect in policy was plainly articulated by a participant in a future roundtable: "Our integration programs are short-lived. Some NGOs bring goats or give us skills training, but no follow-up is done. Many of us end up back in poverty... Without long-term support, we only survive but never truly belong in society." (Female, 26, Future Dialogue). This criticism underscores the need for a sustained, child-centered integration approach, rather than one that treats these youth as footnotes to their mothers' stories.

Figure 4: A future workshop held on 18th February 2025 at Bomah Hotel, Gulu City on the topic of CBOW



Source: Field observation by the Researcher

5.3 Family and Household Integration

The reintegration of children born in captivity (CBOW) into their families and households was shaped by a mix of acceptance, ambivalence, and rejection. While kinship obligations and sympathy for abducted women compelled many maternal families to provide care, stigma associated with “rebel blood” often limited full belonging.

Several children reported that their maternal relatives accepted them reluctantly, often reminding them of their origins. One participant explained: “People in the village whisper when they see me, saying I carry the rebel’s blood” (Female, 18, Pader, Future Workshop). Others described acts of kindness from extended family members. For example, one interviewee stated: “My uncle told me I am his child even though I don’t know my father. That is why I still feel safe in our home.” Such ambivalent responses show both protection and rejection operating within the same household spaces.

Families attempted to integrate CBOW by ensuring they accessed education or shared in daily household activities. Yet this was inconsistent, with some households prioritizing other children. One male participant shared: “People always say, ‘You are the son of Kony’s men,’ and it breaks me” (Male, 26, Gulu, Future workshops).

Figure 5: Youth Dialogue panel at a GWED-G workshop for CBOW held on 19th June 2025 at Bomah Hotel, Gulu City



Source: Participant observation by the Researcher

For many, acceptance depended heavily on maternal resilience and the goodwill of select relatives.

Acholi patrilineal traditions posed structural barriers. Without paternal recognition, many CBOW remained “cleanness,” with no claim to land or inheritance. A female participant emphasized: “Growing up without knowing my father and with my mother always being blamed has left me feeling incomplete” (Female, 18, Pader). Some maternal families attempted reconciliation ceremonies to reduce stigma, but these efforts were not universally practiced or effective.

Mothers and women’s groups such as GWED-G became critical actors in facilitating household acceptance. They provided advocacy and psychosocial support, encouraging maternal families to embrace the children. One participant reflected on the importance of collective efforts: “Being a child born of war means carrying two burdens, the trauma of our mothers and the rejection of society” (Female, 20, Kitgum).

In a nutshell, household integration for CBOW was thus uneven, oscillating between limited acceptance and open rejection. While maternal resilience and support from women's groups mitigated some stigma, persistent cultural norms and the absence of paternal recognition left many children only partially integrated within family structures.

5.4 Community and Cultural “Integration” Efforts

Beyond formal programs, the study found that integration often depended on informal community initiatives and cultural practices with mixed results. In Acholi culture, traditional rituals have historically been used to welcome back returning members of the community. For example, Nyono tong gweno, the “stepping on the egg” cleansing ritual for returnees. Some participants mentioned that cultural and clan leaders made attempts to assist children born in captivity. One interviewee from Kitgum described how clan elders identified the ancestral clan of several children whose LRA fathers were dead or absent and ceremonially allocated them plots of land on ancestral soil, hoping to give them a place in the clan and symbolically acknowledge them. This kind of gesture was well-intentioned, drawing on cultural mechanisms to confer belonging. However, even these efforts often met resistance from ordinary community members. The Kitgum participant lamented: “As I talk right now, the local people are chasing them away from that same place.” (Male, 27, Kitgum). In other words, despite a ceremony granting land, neighbors in the area later drove the youth out, refusing to accept them as rightful clan members.

This illustrates a key insight shared by many respondents that true integration requires social acceptance, not just physical return or symbolic gestures. A one-time ritual or an official announcement by a leader could not automatically erase deep-seated mistrust or stigma on the ground. “A ceremony alone could not overcome community hostility,” the participant noted ruefully, emphasizing how persistent negative attitudes nullified the elders' help. Similarly, a women's group representative recounted how her church organized a special blessing for war-

affected children, including those born in the LRA, “to welcome them in God’s family.” Yet afterward, she observed, villagers still shunned those children in daily life. “They prayed with us on Sunday but would not eat with us on Monday,” she said, highlighting the limit of ceremonial acceptance (Women’s Group Meeting, Gulu).

Participants consistently stressed that, to them, “integration” meant more than a physical reunion or a token inclusion in a ritual. It meant being treated as a full member of family and community. By that measure, they felt integration has largely not been achieved. As a 25-year-old male respondent explained:

True integration requires more than physical return and basic support. It depends on forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing within families and communities. Without these elements, integration remains shallow, and many of us are left feeling isolated and unwanted, despite being back in civilian life.

In his assessment, “...the integration process for children born in captivity has been only partially successful.” Many others echoed this sentiment. For instance, another participant stated plainly that even years after the war, “integration... has not been fully successful. Even when we return to our communities, we are often treated like strangers in our own villages and homes... that deeper integration has yet to happen.” (Male CBOW, 23, Pader). These testimonies reveal that on a community level, acceptance is the missing ingredient.

The perspective of key informants reinforced this point. A cultural leader interviewed noted that while Acholi traditions like Mato oput (reconciliation ceremonies) worked for ex-combatants in some cases, they “were not originally designed for children born in captivity.” He explained that clans struggled to adapt rituals to children whose status (born of forced unions) did not fit neatly into lineage norms. This aligns with Apio (2016), who observed that customary rituals in Acholi were not sufficient to resolve the unique status of children born of wartime sexual violence. Our study’s narratives support that, even where traditional leaders

declared “these are our children” publicly, ingrained prejudices among community members often undermined those declarations.

5.5 Gaps and Missed Opportunities in Integration Programming

By analyzing participants’ stories and suggestions, several specific gaps in integration programs became evident. Firstly, legal identity and documentation for children born in captivity was neglected. No official program ensured that those born in the bush obtained birth certificates or national IDs after the war. Decades later, many of these youth remain without legal identity papers a serious barrier as discussed in Chapter Six. A 19-year-old male in a focus group noted, “Even getting a school exam or a phone line needs an ID, but how do you get one if your birth was never registered?” The lack of documentation is a clear gap that could have been addressed early through a registration drive, but wasn’t. As Neenan (2017) points out, legal recognition is crucial, without it, children born of war remain invisible to the state. Uganda’s failure to adapt civil registration processes for this group is a prime example of an institutional gap that compounded their marginalization.

Secondly, education support beyond the primary level was minimal. Many participants dropped out by secondary school due to poverty or stigma, yet there were no affirmative scholarship programs or catch-up education targeting war-affected youth born in captivity. Unlike former child soldiers who at times benefited from UNICEF or NGO educational programs, these “invisible children” did not qualify for special educational assistance. One key informant (an education NGO staffer) observed that donors funded night commuter centers and school reintegration for abducted children, “but if you were born during captivity, you were not seen as a former abductee, so you got left out.” This gap meant that a whole cohort missed out on building human capital, and as young adults they now struggle with employment, a consequence detailed in the next chapter.

Thirdly, psychosocial support was insufficient in the long term. Some counseling was provided immediately after return (often in reception centers), but ongoing therapy or mentorship was rare. Considering the extreme trauma and stigma these youth experienced, short-term counseling was not enough. Many participants clearly needed continued mental health support into their adolescence and young adulthood, which most did not receive. As one mother in a women's meeting noted, "our children came back quiet, disturbed... but after the initial counseling, nobody checked on their mind later. Even us mothers, we were dealing with our own trauma." The lack of sustained psychosocial programs is a missed opportunity to foster healing. Researchers like Denov et al. (2019) warn that without long-term counseling, war-related trauma in children can persist or worsen into adulthood. Our findings underscore this as participants still report nightmares, anxiety, and anger many years on, indicating unresolved trauma.

Finally, family reunification efforts largely ignored the paternal side. Programs mainly focused on reuniting returning mothers with their own families. Little was done to connect the child to the father's clan or relatives even in cases where the father's identity was known or the paternal clan might have been located. Several participants reflected that no authority or agency ever attempted to reach out to their father's family on their behalf. In Acholi's patrilineal society, this is a critical omission as without paternal recognition, children lack clan belonging and inheritance rights. One key informant (cultural leader) remarked that this was a delicate issue government and NGOs "shied away from" due to the sensitive nature of forced marriages and war rape. However, he believed some clans might have accepted these children if approached properly. The absence of any systematic mediation or tracing of paternal kin was thus a lost chance at securing identity for some youth. A participant summarized this gap: "They helped reunite mothers with their families, but who helped us find our family, our

fathers' people? No one. So, we remain with half an identity.” (Male CBOW, 25, Kitgum, interview).

In reflecting on these shortcomings, participants themselves offered ideas like effectively recommendations for what an integration program should include (detailed in Chapter Eight). They suggested interventions like establishing safe homes or interim care for children rejected by family, providing educational scholarships, creating mentorship schemes, and conducting community sensitization campaigns to fight stigma. The fact that the youth themselves proposed such measures speaks volumes about the inadequacy of existing efforts. It underscores how these young people perceived the voids in support and were forced to imagine solutions to problems that institutions failed to resolve.

The findings show that integration occurred through several overlapping pathways rather than through one coherent programme. Government and transitional-justice institutions provided the broad policy environment, NGOs and civil-society organisations supplied specific services and advocacy, families and clans determined everyday belonging, and cultural and religious practices offered mechanisms for symbolic acceptance. The evidence therefore does not support the claim that there were no integration efforts; rather, it supports the more precise conclusion that efforts were fragmented and that CBIC were not consistently treated as a distinct programme category.

The documentary review is particularly important here. Uganda's 2019 National Transitional Justice Policy establishes a framework for social reintegration, reconciliation and reparations. The problem identified by the study is the gap between a broad policy framework and the practical recognition of CBIC-specific needs. This finding is consistent with Kiconco (2022) and Kirabira and Choukroune (2020), who identify difficulties around recognition, identity, social integration and access to remedies.

At family and clan level, integration was uneven. Some participants described support from mothers, grandparents, uncles or other relatives, while others described rejection or conditional acceptance. The findings confirm that integration cannot be measured only by physical return or residence in a community. It requires social membership, recognition, material security and everyday acceptance.

At community and cultural level, rituals and public declarations of acceptance sometimes created opportunities for inclusion, but participants indicated that symbolic acts did not always change daily relationships. This finding is consistent with the literature on the limits and possibilities of customary approaches. It also shows the agency of cultural institutions: cultural leaders and community actors can contribute to integration, but their interventions require wider community participation and sustained follow-up.

At the household level, integration was highly inconsistent and often contingent on maternal resilience and the goodwill of selected relatives. While some maternal uncles or grandparents embraced children born of war, others subjected them to constant reminders of their stigmatized origins. Participants spoke of being labelled “children of Kony” or carrying “rebel blood,” experiences that denied them full acceptance within their kinship structures. This finding resonates with Baines and Oliveira (2020), who document how patrilineal inheritance in Acholi society obstructs belonging for children without paternal recognition. Our study similarly shows that being “clan less” left many without access to land or identity within the extended family. Although women’s groups like GWED-G attempted to shift attitudes by organizing dialogues and advocating for acceptance, the persistence of stigma constrained household integration. These findings agree with Apio (2016), who observed that customary rituals were not sufficient to resolve the unique status of children born of wartime rape.

At the community and cultural level, symbolic rituals such as nyono tong gweno and mato oput were adapted to welcome returnees, but their impact was limited by persistent

mistrust among community members. While some clan elders allocated land or performed blessings, participants recounted being chased away afterward or shunned in daily interactions. This reveals that integration required more than symbolic gestures. True acceptance, as participants repeatedly emphasized, demanded forgiveness, reconciliation, and long-term community sensitization. This is consistent with Denov et al. (2019), who argue that reintegration must address both psychosocial needs and structural barriers such as stigma and land rights. However, the accounts also complicate the literature by showing that certain community leaders and churches experimented with cultural and spiritual innovations to embrace children born of war, which suggests a degree of agency and adaptation that has been underexplored in existing studies.

CHAPTER SIX

CHALLENGES FACED IN THE INTEGRATION OF CHILDREN

BORN IN CAPTIVITY

6.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the third specific objective investigating the challenges encountered by children born in LRA captivity as they attempt to integrate into post-conflict Acholi society.

6.1 Pervasive Stigma and Social Labeling

Stigma emerged as the single most cited and powerful barrier to integration. Virtually all participants described living under the shadow of derogatory labels and negative stereotypes due to the circumstances of their birth. In community eyes, being a “child of LRA rebels” carries a taint, a presumption of inherited evil or violence, that is extraordinarily difficult to shed. A 23-year-old male participant from Pader explained: “they call us ‘Kony’s children’ or ‘children of the killer’. That stigma follows us throughout our lives. This label ties us to the violent past of our parents... we are unfairly judged and treated with suspicion or fear.” His statement encapsulates how society conflates these innocent youth with the crimes of their fathers or the “dishonor” of their mothers’ abduction.

Such labels like “rebel child,” “lutino pa Kony” (Kony’s child), or even “product of rape” were reported repeatedly across interviews. A 24-year-old female CBOW from Pader described the impact of this labeling on daily life: “In schools, churches, and other community spaces, we were marginalized, bullied, or excluded, leading to feelings of shame and psychological distress.” (Female, 24, Pader). In focus group discussions, participants recounted schoolmates whispering “that one’s a rebel child,” teachers showing open bias, and neighbors avoiding or gossiping about them. These experiences of ostracism were the norm rather than

the exception. One young woman in a workshop shared, “I grew up feeling unwanted, both in my clan and at school. My birth was a constant reminder of violence... people see the war in my bloodline before they see me” (Female, 23, Future Workshop). This poignant testimony illustrates how deeply stigma can penetrate a child’s self-image, being treated as “war-tainted” led her to internalize a sense of being fundamentally unwelcome.

Stigma also manifests in more overt forms of discrimination. One 25-year-old man from Kitgum noted that even as adults, “many children born in captivity continue to be labeled ‘lutino pa Kony’ or ‘children of rape,’ making it difficult for them to fully integrate into schools, churches, families, or social networks.” The phrase “children of rape” sometimes used openly is especially cruel, defining a person by the violent act that conceived them. Such social branding is a devastating psychological burden. It undercuts integration at every turn. Employers might hesitate to hire someone rumored to have “bad blood”; community members may exclude them from gatherings; potential in-laws reject marriage prospects upon learning one’s parentage. Indeed, one female CBOW participant (21, Kitgum) working as a housemaid recounted that she is “never invited to community functions because they know I’m a bush child and think I might misbehave or curse the event.” Though extreme, this story underscores the depth of superstition and bias some villagers literally feared that having a “bush child” at a wedding or baptism would bring misfortune.

Our findings on stigma strongly resonate with academic analyses. Studies across contexts (Uganda, Sierra Leone, Nigeria) have observed a near-universal phenomenon of children born of wartime sexual violence being demonized as bearers of “enemy blood.” In Northern Uganda specifically, Apio (2016) and Baines and Oliveira (2020) both identify stigma as the primary barrier to integration for these children. Community labels such as “Kony’s children” perpetuate collective guilt by association, essentially punishing the child for a parent’s crimes. This fulfills Goffman’s classic definition of stigma as an attribute that deeply

discredits an individual in society's view. Here the "attribute" is simply their birth origin, yet it leads to life-long marginalization. One key informant, a cultural leader, explained that some in the community even regard these children as cursed or possessed by cen (vengeful spirits), believing their very presence might bring spiritual pollution. Such beliefs add a supernatural layer to the stigma, making it even harder to dispel through rational dialogue.

Participants' voices vividly illustrate how stigma is experienced personally. "We are blamed for a past we did not choose," one youth lamented during a focus group, a sentiment met with nods from others (Focus Group 2, Pader). Another young man in a workshop said, "People always say, 'You are the son of Kony's men,' and it breaks me" (Male, 20, Future Workshop). The psychological toll of being constantly seen as "the other" has been enormous. Many described feelings of shame, anger, and isolation stemming from how others treated them. As detailed later in this chapter, that internalized stigma has led to identity crises and mental health struggles. In short, stigma is the linchpin challenge. It underlies and aggravates most other difficulties, from family rejection to school dropout. Any effort to improve these youths' integration must confront this pervasive social labeling and find ways to "change hearts and minds" in the community.

6.2 Rejection by Family and Community

Closely tied to public stigma is the painful reality of rejection by family and clan, the very people who, in an ideal world, should have been a support system for these children. In Acholi society, one's extended family and clan are the primary sources of belonging, identity, and material support such as land inheritance. Yet children born of war frequently lack welcome in both their paternal and maternal families.

On the paternal side, it is common that the father is absent, deceased, or unwilling to acknowledge a child born from forced captivity. None of the participants reported being accepted by their biological father's family in cases where the father was known. More striking

is the rejection on the maternal side as many shared stories of their maternal relatives as the child's own grandparents, uncles, or aunts rejecting the mother and child upon return from captivity. One cultural leader from Kitgum gave a powerful example:

A boy returned from the bush with his mother, only to face rejection by his own maternal family. When they came back, the elders of the home refused to accept him, arguing he did not belong to their lineage since he was born during captivity and his father was a rebel. Despite being innocent, he was treated as an outsider.

This anecdote, which was recounted in a key informant interview as well (by an NGO worker familiar with the case), illustrates that stigma within the family can be as severe as in the broader community. The maternal family in this case viewed the child as a living reminder of their daughter's abuse and of the enemy. Grandparents who had suffered the loss of a daughter to abduction sometimes saw the returning child not as a grandchild, but as "the rebel's blood" reincarnate.

Consequences of family rejection are profound. Some young mothers were even told by their own parents to "leave that rebel child behind" if they wanted to be accepted back home (Women's Group testimony). A 24-year-old female CBOW participant from Gulu tearfully recounted being "chased away" by her husband's family when they discovered she herself had been born in captivity (meaning her in-laws found out she was a "bush child"). "They feared the 'bush blood', so to speak," she said, and her marriage engagement was broken off once her background came out. This shows how the stigma can carry into the next generation. Not only did her mother's family initially reject her, but even as an adult she faced rejection in marriage due to her birth status.

A major practical consequence of being rejected by both paternal and maternal kin is landlessness and homelessness. In Acholi tradition, children inherit land through their father's

clan. If the father is unknown or his family refuses the child, that child has no claim to ancestral land. Meanwhile, if the maternal family also rejects or only tolerates them, they may not be allowed to settle permanently in the mother's village either. Participants stressed that this cultural norm puts them at a huge disadvantage:

One of the most significant challenges we face is lack of land rights. In many communities, land is inherited through the father's lineage. Since many of us do not know our fathers or our paternal clans and our maternal families often reject us, we are left without any recognized claim to land." (Male CBOW, 25, Kitgum).

Without land in a rural community, a person has no secure place to build a house or farm, undermining both economic stability and social identity as land ownership is a key marker of adulthood and belonging. One 27-year-old male interviewee contrasted the situation for males versus females:

A male born of war has no father's clan land to claim and may not be permitted to settle in his mother's village either whereas a female might marry into another family, though even that can backfire if her origin is discovered." (Male CBOW, 27, Gulu).

He concluded that many young men like him end up "just renting and hustling in the city" due to having no rightful rural home, whereas young women often end up in precarious informal unions or single motherhood if marriage prospects collapse.

These patterns of family and clan rejection are well-documented in the literature. Apio (2016) and Atim et al. (2018) note that Acholi clans are often reluctant to accept children "not of the clan," especially those born of rebel fathers. The patriarchal lineage system means if the father's identity is absent, the child is effectively kinless on the patrilineal side. Our participants' experiences put a human face to these observations as numerous firsthand stories

of being denied land, denied clan names, or treated as second-class within households. Opiyo (2015) similarly reported that within host families, these children are often segregated or treated as servants, precisely as some of our respondents described (e.g. being given the most menial chores and excluded from family events). The institutionalized exclusion runs so deep that even love and marriage do not escape it as seen in the case of the woman whose in-laws rejected her.

In essence, the challenge of family/community rejection leaves many youths effectively family-less or in extremely tenuous living situations. Some are raised by sympathetic distant relatives or foster families, but with the constant risk of mistreatment or expulsion if resources run short or prejudice intervenes. By adulthood, quite a few have chosen self-reliance away from their home villages. In a focus group of male youth, nearly all agreed with the statement: “If your family doesn’t accept you, you have to become your own family.” Several mentioned migrating to towns as a coping strategy to escape clan stigma (Focus Group 1, Gulu), although as we will see, urban life brings its own hardships.

6.3 Legal Identity and Documentation Barriers

The participants who included the mothers of CBOW and the CBOW themselves noted that among others they were being requested to produce short or long birth certificates, and their baptism cards which by the circumstances surrounding their birth while on the run in the bush, were not available. Because so many of these children were born in clandestine conditions during the war, their births went unregistered by civil authorities. Decades later, this bureaucratic invisibility has turned into a significant integration hurdle. A female respondent disclosed that she was abducted at the age of 10 years and was taken on by Dominic Ogwen as a wife. Her first son was born in a thicket in Northern Uganda and the second son was born in South Sudan just before they crossed to the Democratic Republic of Congo. But when she returned with her sons, the hospitals and schools requested for her children’s birth certificates.

At church they also requested for their baptism cards which was easier to get by registering the children for baptism. A CBOW ridiculed that the authorities had forgotten that LRA was traditionalist and not a Christian movement.

Another frequently mentioned challenge was the lack of official identity documentation, particularly national identity cards (IDs). Participants explained that in Uganda, obtaining a National ID, which is required for things like voting, getting a mobile SIM card, enrolling for formal employment, processing a driving permit, and accessing government programs typically requires a birth certificate and parental information including the National ID numbers of the parents. “In the biodata forms, they need the NIN of your father and mother... but some of our parents are dead or unknown, so we have no one to provide that,” said a 27-year-old male from Gulu. As a result, many youths born in captivity have struggled or outright failed to acquire their National IDs. Some have managed to obtain an ID only by “using tricks”. For example, providing the name of a supposed father or with the help of a sympathetic person who may grant you access to use his or her information. Another participant confided that: I paid my friends uncle 10,000 to get a copy of his National ID to process my own. Others remain without any ID at all. “I still have no National ID because I cannot fill in the form properly,” a 22-year-old female (Pader) admitted, “I have no birth certificate and I don’t know my father’s name to put down.” Without a birth certificate, even getting school-leaving exam registration was problematic for some, as they recounted.

The absence of legal identity effectively marginalizes a person in modern society. As participants pointed out, not having these documents impacts education, access to social services like the Youth Livelihood Fund or other government schemes, and formal employment since employers require ID for contracts and benefits. One participant summarized: “If I do not have a National ID, I cannot take part in government programs... it is a very big challenge to children born in captivity.” Another noted that even something as simple as inheriting property

or opening a bank account can be impossible without identity documents. In their words, “We remain invisible in the eyes of the state, invisible citizens of Uganda,” echoing a phrase used by a workshop participant (Female, 19, Future Symposium) who said, “we were never registered at birth... the state doesn’t acknowledge us officially. Without it, we remain invisible citizens”.

This challenge of documentation is one that became more apparent over time. In the immediate post-war years, few realized its import, but as the children grew into youth and needed to engage with formal systems, the lack of papers became a critical barrier. Neenan (2017) emphasizes legal recognition as a crucial step, arguing that without documentation, children born of war cannot fully exercise their rights as citizens. Our study finds this to be true on the ground that lack of ID constrained participants’ civic participation and economic opportunities. Encouragingly, some policy discussions in Uganda have started acknowledging this gap, with proposals to relax documentation requirements for those with missing parent information. However, participants reported that on a practical level, little has changed yet. Only a few had heard of any special provisions for unregistered war children.

A key informant from a legal aid organization noted that there is an avenue to swear an affidavit to get a delayed birth certificate, but it requires a tedious process and awareness that many rural youths do not have. She said, “We have tried to help a few to register late, but it’s case by case. There is no blanket policy.” Thus, this challenge remains largely an unresolved, structural one. The state’s bureaucratic systems inadvertently reinforce exclusion by not adapting to accommodate those without normative birth records.

In summary, being “undocumented” compounded the marginalization of children born in captivity. Already socially stigmatized, they also became legally invisible. This dual exclusion of social and administrative left many feeling that they exist outside the full protection and opportunity offered to other citizens. It is a stark example of how integration

challenges operate on multiple levels as personal prejudice and impersonal bureaucracy can together sideline an already vulnerable population.

6.4 Discrimination in Education and Employment

Even when legal and familial barriers are overcome, children born in captivity often face ongoing discrimination in schools and workplaces, stemming from the stigma discussed earlier. Many participants recounted painful experiences in the education system. In primary and secondary school, bullying and isolation were common. Classmates would call them derogatory names or refuse to befriend them. Some teachers were complicit or indifferent with a few even openly called these pupils “rebel children” in reprimands, according to one respondent. A 24-year-old female from Pader shared that being labeled in school led to “hostile learning environments that made many of us drop out early.” She said that after constant teasing and a teacher’s open scorn, she left school in senior two, unable to endure the environment.

Focus group discussions confirmed that early dropout was a recurring outcome. Youth from both focus groups (male and female) spoke about either themselves or peers leaving school due to a combination of factors such as bullying, lack of fees when caregivers did not prioritize their education, and their own lack of motivation after internalizing negative treatment. One participant in the male FGD remarked,

By seventh grade, many of us were gone as dropped out. Some left because of money issues, but even those who had sponsorship would sometimes leave because they felt they didn’t belong in school. When everyone calls you ‘son of a rebel’, you lose interest in learning (Focus Group 1).

Indeed, several interviewees mentioned they or their friends “dropped out of school due to bullying, financial hardship, or lack of support” (Female CBOW, 22, Pader). Dropping out, in turn, limits future job opportunities, creating a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion. This aligns with broader research as Annan et al. (2008) found that war-affected youth in Northern

Uganda especially former girl abductees had lower educational attainment and subsequent earnings than their peers. Children born in captivity, being children of abductees, likely face even greater hurdles, as our data suggests.

Even for those who persisted through schooling or obtained training, discrimination often awaited in the job market. Participants spoke of subtle but hurtful biases as local employers hesitating to hire someone once they learn the person's parentage for fear of "character issues" or community backlash. One young man from Gulu said he was passed over for a security guard job when the manager realized he grew up in an IDP camp as a "rebel child". The manager later admitted he worried the community would not trust someone with that background guarding property. Additionally, the lack of social networks since they were often alienated from clans and villages meant these youth missed out on informal referrals that many rely on to get jobs. A participant noted, "When jobs or scholarships come, no one thinks of us. We don't have uncles or clanmates lobbying for us." In a sense, being excluded socially also meant being excluded from opportunity structures. A 26-year-old male from Gulu put it plainly:

Because of stigma and negative perceptions, many view us as unstable or unworthy. We are overlooked for scholarships, jobs, and other forms of support
(Male CBOW, 26, Gulu).

This was echoed by others who felt that even NGOs sometimes unintentionally left them out – for instance, programs targeting "former child soldiers" might not include those born in captivity if they were not themselves fighters.

Additionally, as mentioned earlier, not having documents like an ID or education certificates due to interrupted schooling further disadvantages these youth in the formal job sector. Thus, many end up in precarious informal work such as casual labor, street vending, domestic work, riding boda-boda, etc., even if they aspire to more stable careers. One

participant's frustration was evident when he said, "Life just stagnates. You come out of S.6 (high school) and you are still a nobody" (Male CBOW, 24, Gulu). By "nobody," he referred to lacking a job commensurate with his education due to who he is.

In summary, discrimination in education and employment remains a critical challenge, largely as a downstream effect of stigma. The youths' reputations precede them, so to speak, sabotaging their efforts to integrate into normal educational and economic life. This challenge perpetuates the cycle of marginalization as those who drop out or can't secure good jobs remain economically disadvantaged, which can reinforce societal stereotypes that "these children are failures or deviants," when in fact it is society's rejection contributing to those outcomes. One insightful cultural leader (key informant) noted, "It becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as they are excluded, then they struggle, then people point to their struggle as proof that they are 'no good'. We need to break that cycle." Breaking it would require interventions in schools and workplaces to ensure inclusion and zero tolerance for harassment, as well as supportive programs to help these youth catch up academically and professionally.

6.5 Identity Crisis and Mental Health Struggles

Finally, participants underscored that beyond external hurdles, they grapple with significant internal challenges that make integration difficult. Foremost among these is an ongoing identity crisis and feelings of not belonging. Growing up amidst social rejection and uncertainty about family origins has bred deep confusion and insecurity about who they are. Many described a sense of being "in-between" not fully part of any family or community. A 22-year-old woman from Pader confessed that:

A common and painful struggle for me is an identity crisis. I do not know who my father was... This lack of clarity about parentage creates confusion, self-doubt, and a feeling of not truly belonging anywhere.

Her use of “not truly belonging anywhere” captures the essence of liminality that these youth experience. They often inhabit a space on the margins neither accepted as full members of their maternal clan, nor connected to paternal clan, nor viewed simply as ordinary citizens by society. It is a life of social betwixt-and-between, which in anthropology is termed liminality (Turner, 1969) indeed, one might say they are in a permanent liminal state, never fully reincorporated into the social order.

Participants gave numerous examples of how this identity limbo affects them. One young man from Kitgum said even after finishing school, he “still cannot fill in the blank for ‘clan’ on job application forms,” which makes him feel like a non-person (Male CBOW, 25, Kitgum). Another interviewee said when peers ask “where are you from?” or “who are your people?”, she freezes because she doesn’t know how to answer. The absence of a clear lineage or home village she can claim leaves her constantly anxious in social settings (Female, 20). Some described feeling envy or sadness when they see others who take their family name or clan identity for granted something’s they themselves lack. As one put it, “I have a name, but it has no roots.” The term “rootless” came up repeatedly. One participant in a workshop summarized:

Participants described experiences that they associated with trauma, including nightmares, intrusive memories, fear responses, anxiety, sadness and anger. These accounts are important evidence of lived psychosocial distress, but the study did not conduct clinical assessments and therefore does not diagnose PTSD, depression or other mental disorders. The appropriate historical conclusion is that participants reported enduring psychological distress associated with wartime experiences and post-war rejection.

Her eloquent statement highlights that identity for these youth is not a mere personal confusion but it has tangible impacts on their social functioning and opportunities.

Accompanying the identity struggles are mental health challenges such as trauma, depression, low self-esteem, and sometimes maladaptive coping behaviors. Nearly all participants indicated that the traumatic events of their early childhood combined with the later “trauma of peace” (i.e., stigma and rejection in peacetime) left deep emotional scars. They reported symptoms akin to Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): nightmares, flashbacks, hyper-vigilance, and anxiety, as well as pervasive sadness or anger. A 25-year-old male CBOW (Kitgum) noted that “many experiences recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and signs of PTSD due to the violence they witnessed or endured.” Another participant shared that even years later, sudden loud noises such as a car backfire or a thunderclap trigger intense fear in her, as it reminds her of bomb blasts from childhood (Female CBOW, 22, Pader). These are classic trauma responses.

Beyond acute trauma symptoms, the long-term emotional toll of social rejection was emphasized. Being called illegitimate, evil, or cursed by one’s community inflicts a kind of slow-acting psychological harm: shame, chronic insecurity, and sometimes self-loathing. One female participant (22, Pader) powerfully stated:

Many of us carry deep emotional and psychological wounds. We experience deep shame linked to the circumstances of our birth... This shame is reinforced by community rejection and discrimination, making it difficult for us to feel accepted or valued.

This shows how external stigma becomes internalized. Indeed, some youths come to blame themselves or view themselves as cursed. A participant from Kitgum observed that:

Some grow up feeling cursed or inherently different, as if their very existence is a reminder of pain... They carry a heavy sense of guilt, even though they had no control over the circumstances of their birth.

Such internalized stigma or guilt is noted in psychological studies. Major & O'Brien (2005) have discussed how persistent societal rejection can lead individuals to adopt negative beliefs about themselves. Our participants sadly exemplify this pattern years of being told they are "bad" or "don't belong" has, for some, resulted in deep self-doubt and depression.

These mental and emotional struggles form an invisible barrier to integration. Even if tomorrow all external discrimination stopped, many of these young people would still struggle to trust others, to build healthy relationships, and to participate confidently in community life because of the psychological scars they bear. As one male participant insightfully noted, "Even if society was perfectly welcoming, a lot of us would still struggle because the war continues inside us." (Male CBOW, 23, Gulu, focus group) a statement that captures the idea that their battle with trauma and identity is ongoing internally, regardless of external changes. This was echoed by a participant in a transitional justice dialogue that "the war may have ended in gunfire, but for many of us, the war continues inside and if we do not address it, it could quietly shape the next generation." (Male CBOW, 23, Future Dialogue).

Some external behaviors noted by participants also point to these internal struggles. For instance, a few mentioned peers who "act out" with anger or aggression when they feel threatened or rejected the behavior that outsiders interpret as delinquency, but which the participants said is "a reflection of the inner turmoil they carry, not just a lack of discipline" (Male CBOW, 25, Kitgum). Others isolate themselves, avoiding social contact to preempt hurtful treatment, which in turn limits their integration. In several cases, the youths turned to negative coping mechanisms like substance abuse or early pregnancies as an escape or a misplaced attempt to find belonging.

Figure 6: GWED-G & Women's Groups workshop held o 18th June 2025 at Bomah Hotel on Identity and Mental Health Struggles



Source: Participant observation by the Researcher

6.6 Negative Coping Mechanisms and Risk Behaviors

In connection with the above internal challenges, participants discussed how some youths have resorted to negative coping behaviors in response to their struggles. On the one hand, these behaviors are effects of integration failure yet on the other, they can become new challenges in themselves, creating further barriers to successful integration.

A few participants admitted that some of their peers at times, they themselves turned to alcohol or drugs to numb their pain. “A number of us had turned to alcoholism or drug use, or early relationships, as a way to escape feelings of isolation,” one young woman from Gulu reported candidly. Excessive drinking was mentioned particularly among young men who felt they had “no future” and no family support. This reflects a wider trend observed in post-conflict settings as Akello et al. (2019) found that many former child soldiers in Uganda resorted to

heavy drinking or risky behavior as a coping mechanism for unaddressed trauma. Allen et al. (2021) similarly noted that poorly integrated youth were more likely to report alcohol use and other social problems. Our study's accounts align with these findings the "lost" feeling of these youth sometimes translate into substance abuse or other self-destructive habits.

Another coping or survival strategy reported was early sexual relationships and pregnancies. Lacking family acceptance, some young women sought affection or economic security through relationships with men, sometimes much older. This led to cases of teenage pregnancies and even exploitation. A male participant described, "some girls, having been rejected and left destitute, were forced into prostitution as a means of survival, exposing them to further exploitation and trauma.". Female participants confirmed hearing of or knowing girls who ended up in transactional sex or abusive relationships because they had nowhere else to turn. This repeats a cycle of marginalization to a girl born of war, stigmatized and unsupported, becomes a young mother herself in difficult circumstances, thereby possibly passing on disadvantage to her child.

Baines & Rosenoff (2014) have discussed how returning girl mothers and their "war babies" disrupted the Acholi social order and faced double stigma. In our context, girls born in captivity who become mothers very young face a similar double burden stigmatized as "rebel child" in youth, then as "spoiled" or struggling single mothers in adulthood, often without family backing. It is noteworthy that these patterns are gendered such as male youth more often described turning anger outward in fighting, drinking, whereas female youth often internalized pain or ended up in vulnerable domestic situations. Both genders, however, experienced immense hardship and few healthy outlets for their distress.

6.7 Discussion of Findings

The challenges identified in this chapter are interconnected rather than isolated. Stigma can contribute to family rejection; family rejection can reduce access to land and support;

documentation problems can limit education, employment and access to services; and prolonged exclusion can intensify identity and psychosocial difficulties. The evidence therefore supports a structural and relational interpretation of integration rather than a view that locates the problem within individual adjustment alone.

The findings also demonstrate variation. Not every participant experienced the same degree of rejection, documentation difficulty, educational disruption or psychosocial distress. Gender, location, maternal support, paternal recognition, educational opportunity and access to supportive networks shaped the pathways participants described.

The policy dimension is equally important. The 2019 National Transitional Justice Policy provides a broad national framework for reconciliation, social reintegration and reparations, yet participants' accounts indicate continuing difficulties in translating broad commitments into accessible support. The issue is therefore one of implementation, recognition and inclusion rather than the complete absence of a national transitional-justice policy.

Taken together, the challenges show why integration must be understood as a long-term process. The evidence points to the need for measures that address legal identity, education, livelihoods, psychosocial wellbeing, family and clan relations, community attitudes and meaningful participation in policy processes at the same time.

Another prominent finding is the bureaucratic exclusion stemming from lack of legal identity and documentation. Participants explained how being born in clandestine conditions left them without birth certificates or national IDs, making them “invisible citizens” unable to access education, property rights, or government services. These findings reinforce Neenan’s (2017) argument that legal recognition is critical for children born of war to fully exercise their citizenship rights. They also echo Apio’s (2016) observation that Uganda’s reintegration programs overlooked the unique documentation needs of this group. However, our findings go

further by showing how this gap worsened over time: as children matured into adulthood, lack of documents became a more visible barrier to employment, inheritance, and civic participation. While some policy discussions in Uganda have recently acknowledged this issue, participants in this study made clear that practical change on the ground has been negligible.

Finally, identity crises, mental health struggles, and negative coping mechanisms emerged as critical internal challenges that interact with external exclusion. Many participants described feeling “rootless” and trapped in liminality, never fully accepted within any social category. This resonates with Turner’s (1969) anthropological concept of liminality, and with Denov et al. (2019), who found that unresolved trauma and exclusion often manifest as long-term psychological distress in war-affected youth. Participants in this study reported symptoms akin to PTSD, depression, and low self-esteem, echoing the psychological analyses of Major and O’Brien (2005) on the internalization of stigma. Gendered patterns also emerged, with young men more likely to turn to alcohol or aggression, while young women were pushed into early pregnancies or transactional sex-patterns consistent with Akello et al. (2019) and Baines and Rosenoff (2014). Importantly, while resilience was also noted, participants cautioned that outward strength often masked unresolved trauma, reinforcing Denov and Lakor’s (2017) warning that the absence of sustained psychosocial support risks producing a “silent crisis” among this population.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EFFECTS OF INTEGRATION CHALLENGES ON THE LIVES OF CHILDREN BORN IN CAPTIVITY

7.0 Introduction

This chapter addresses the fourth specific objective, assessing the effects that the above integration challenges have had on children born in LRA captivity as they grow into adolescence and adulthood.

7.1 Psychological Trauma and Emotional Distress

One of the most significant long-term effects is the persistence of psychological trauma and emotional distress among children born in captivity. Nearly all participants indicated that the trauma from early childhood exposure to war violence combined with later life stigmatization has left deep emotional scars. Many continue to experience symptoms associated with PTSD and chronic anxiety or depression, even 20 years after the conflict.

For example, a 25-year-old male CBOW from Kitgum shared that “many of us experience recurring nightmares, flashbacks, and signs of PTSD due to the violence we witnessed or endured”. Sleep disturbances such as nightmares of being back in the bush and hyper-vigilance are common, which he attributes to having spent formative years in constant danger. Another participant a female CBOW, 22, from Pader has revealed that sudden loud noises still trigger panic in her, because they remind her of the bomb blasts from her childhood. This indicates how deeply ingrained the fear responses are, a classic hallmark of PTSD where traumatic memory is easily reactivated by sensory cues. These testimonies align with clinical research: Amone-P’olak et al. (2014) found high rates of PTSD and emotional distress among war-scarred youth in Northern Uganda, especially those with cumulative trauma exposure.

Children born in captivity certainly fall in that category, “cumulative trauma” from early life violence plus subsequent social trauma of ostracism.

Beyond PTSD-like symptoms, participants heavily emphasized the emotional toll of social trauma of being unwanted or hated by their community. This has manifested as enduring feelings of shame, sadness, and loneliness. One respondent described it as carrying “deep emotional wounds” and “a shame... reinforced by community rejection” that make it hard to ever feel accepted or valued. Another explained that some of them grew up essentially believing they were “cursed” or “inherently different” due to how others treated them. This internalization of stigma leads to what psychologists call toxic shame and low self-worth. Indeed, participants reported pervasive low self-esteem; some questioned whether they deserved good things or love. A youth from Gulu said he long felt he “didn’t deserve to be happy” because of the guilt and negativity he absorbed about his birth of a heartbreaking outcome for someone who was merely a baby when the “sin” of being born occurred.

Not surprisingly, many participants also identified depression and anxiety as part of their lives. They spoke of feeling hopeless about the future, trapped in cycles of negative thoughts, or anxious in social settings due to fear of judgment. One young man (20s, Gulu) admitted he had contemplated suicide in the past, feeling that “if everyone hates what I am, why continue?” Though he ultimately found support from a peer counselor, his story underscores the severe emotional despair some have faced. This echoes findings by Denov and Eramian (2017) in Rwanda, children born of genocidal rape often experience a “fractured sense of self” and social death due to ostracism. In our context, being labeled “Olum-Olum” (people of the bush) encapsulates how these youth are treated as something outside the social norm leaving them psychologically adrift.

An important aspect participants raised is that most have not received adequate mental health support to deal with these issues. Initial counseling was brief for those who got it, and

ongoing therapy is rare. Therefore, many feel their psychological wounds have been left to fester. As one participant put it, “the war continues inside us” an eloquent phrase that a young man (23, Pader) used during a future scenario workshop. He and others expressed that even as they smile and try to move on, “inside we are still fighting those battles.” This suggests that without targeted psychosocial interventions, the emotional and mental health effects may be long-lasting or even permanent for some.

In conclusion, the psychological impact of integration failures is profound: lingering trauma, deep-seated shame, and unaddressed mental health needs. This not only causes suffering for the individuals, but can impede other areas of life (relationships, work, among others). It highlights the urgent need for long-term psychosocial support as a core component of helping this population (as will be recommended). The emotional scars of being born into war and then marginalized in peace are not things that simply heal with time; they require acknowledgment and healing processes.

7.2 Identity Crisis and Lack of Belonging

Hand-in-hand with the psychological distress is an enduring identity crisis experienced by many children born in captivity. As discussed in the previous chapter, these youth often lack a clear sense of who they are or where they belong. The effect of this, over time, is a persistent feeling of rootlessness and social isolation that limits their ability to integrate and thrive.

The participants in the FGD 2 (Female CBOW) described reaching adolescence or adulthood and realizing they still cannot answer basic identity questions; “Who am I? Where is my home? What is my clan?”, questions they reported remain painfully unanswered for a number of them even in their twenties. One participant called it a “sense of being in-between or outsiders our whole lives.” They have been told explicitly or implicitly that they do not belong anywhere, paternal family denies them, maternal family is ambivalent or rejecting, and

the community labels them as others. Thus, they inhabit a liminal identity, neither fully accepted in any group that typically provides identity like family, clan, community.

The effect on self-concept is severe. Participants say they often feel like “non-people” or invisible. For instance, a participant from Kitgum noted that even after attaining an education, he feels he has no social identity to fall back on, he cannot proudly say, “I am from clan or village X” on job forms or in introductions. As a result, he often avoids questions about his background, which in turn makes him seem aloof or suspicious to others, feeding a vicious cycle. Another interviewee mentioned that she sometimes “envies or imitates” friends’ traditions such as clan dances or totems just to feel part of something, but knows it’s not truly hers which makes her feel even more of an impostor. This kind of identity void can lead to what one researcher termed “identity statelessness” a concept Carpenter (2010a) used to describe children born of rape who exist in a liminal state without full belonging to either side of their parentage. Our data illustrates this vividly in the Ugandan context.

Notably, some participants internalize the derogatory identities given to them. Being called “evil spirit child” or “bad blood” repeatedly can warp one’s self-identity. A few youths admitted there were times they wondered if they truly did have “bad blood” or a curse. This showcases how the identity crisis can sometimes slip into self-stigmatization. Major & O’Brien (2005) note that chronic stigmatization can cause individuals to accept negative societal labels as part of their identity. For example, one young man said he used to jokingly introduce himself as, “I’m just a nobody from the bush”, but realized he had started to believe it. Only through peer counseling did he learn to assert a more positive identity as a citizen.

The lack of belonging was reported to have affected participants’ social behavior and choices, as some mentioned that they withdrew from community activities because they felt they had no rightful place. Others navigated their social space by being outgoing, a desperate strategy for acceptance. One female CBOW participant said she got involved in a church youth

group primarily because it was the only setting where she felt labeled as a “youth” and not a “rebel child”. She clung to that desperately for a sense of belonging. Still, in her heart, she felt different from the other youth. This kind of social estrangement can contribute to depression and loneliness, reinforcing the psychological effects described above.

In essence, the long-term effect here is a generation of young people with fragile or fractured identities. They often lack the confidence and social anchoredness that comes from knowing one’s roots and place in society. This has implications beyond individual well-being: a person who doesn’t feel they belong may not actively engage in community development or trust their neighbors, which can perpetuate mutual suspicion. In transitional justice terms, this reflects a failure of reconciliation that these youth remain “outside the fold” of post-war social life. The findings echo those of Kiconco (2022), who described children born in captivity as inhabiting “two parallel worlds, the bush world and the ‘normal’ world,” never fully transitioning to the latter. In the FGD 2 with female CBOW, a participant summarized the experience of CBOW as, “Being labeled ‘spirit children’ and excluded from social and cultural life has left us feeling unwanted and emotionally abandoned.” If unaddressed, this identity and belonging crisis can persist into the next generation, as we discuss under intergenerational effects.

7.3 Behavioral Outcomes and Coping Mechanisms

The various challenges and pressures faced by these youth have, over time, influenced their behaviors and coping strategies, for better or worse. As noted earlier, some have engaged in negative coping mechanisms like substance abuse or risky relationships, while others have shown resilience and positive adaptation. These behavioral outcomes are effects of their difficult circumstances, but they can also create new cycles of hardship.

On the negative side, participants in FGD 2 with female CBOW reported that, some youth turned to alcohol and drug use as a form of escape. A female participant during a one-

on-one interview with CBOW in Gulu mentioned that: “a number of us turned to alcoholism or early relationships to escape isolation”. This indicates that heavy drinking, smoking marijuana, or even sniffing fuel have been issues within this population. Community informants, a rehabilitation counselor we spoke to, observed that many young men in Acholi’s towns who abuse alcohol have backgrounds tracing to wartime displacement or being born in camps suggesting a correlation between war trauma and substance abuse. The participants’ narratives confirm that unhealed trauma and social alienation often found an outlet in these harmful behaviors. Unfortunately, such behaviors can reinforce negative stereotypes such as, if a “rebel child” becomes a drunkard, it “proves” to prejudiced eyes that they are deviant, thus feeding back into stigma.

Another concerning outcome is early and risky sexual behavior, particularly among young women. As discussed, some ended up in exploitative relationships, or even commercial sex work, as a result of having few resources or support. A male participant recounted cases where “girls resorted to prostitution as a means of survival after being rejected and left destitute”. Participants emphasized that these were not choices made frivolously; they were often last resorts for shelter or food. Nonetheless, the consequences are severe, exposure to abuse, HIV/STIs, unwanted pregnancies, and further social stigma, now as “prostitutes” or “immoral women”. The literature on war-affected youth, such as Apio (2016) and Atim et al. (2018), notes that girl returnees with children often ended up in precarious economic situations, sometimes trading sex for survival. Our findings indicate that the daughters born in captivity now adolescents or young adults tragically follow a similar pattern if no interventions occur.

The cycle of marginalization thus continues, a young woman born of war, unsupported and stigmatized, may become a teenage mother in poverty, whose own child then grows up with layers of vulnerability. Indeed, a few participants who are now mothers worried aloud about what they could provide for their children. One said, “I fear my daughter will grow in

the same stigma I did, because I have nothing and people still call me a rebel's woman” (Female, 25, mother of a 2-year-old).

On the other hand, many participants demonstrated remarkable resilience and positive coping. Several shared stories of how they refused to be defined by their past and worked hard to carve out a better life. We heard examples of youths pursuing education against all odds, learning trades, or becoming peer mentors to others. For instance, a young man born in captivity put himself through university, studying counseling psychology by doing odd jobs and never giving up on his studies. A young woman started a small business of selling second-hand clothes after being rejected by her family, and today she employs two other war-affected youth. Such instances highlight an important nuance not all outcomes are bleak, and individuals have agency. Many participants voiced pride in how far they had come despite everything.

7.4 Socio-Economic Consequences (Education and Employment)

The dual nature of behavioral outcomes, some destructive, some constructive suggests that with the right support, negative trajectories can be redirected. For example, one counselor noted that several youths who had drinking problems became sober when they joined a church or got steady work. The resilience many have shown, studies like Betancourt et al., 2010, also found protective factors can improve outcomes for war-affected youth which indicates there is hope if interventions strengthen those protective factors such as family support, education, peer support, etc. Conversely, if left unsupported, the risk is that more youth will fall into harmful coping patterns that entrench their marginalization like conflict with the law, health issues, etc.

7.4 Socio-Economic Consequences (Education and Employment)

The social and psychological challenges discussed have had clear ripple effects on the educational and economic trajectories of children born in captivity. The period between 2024 to 2025 when the study was conducted, most participants were in their late teens or twenties the age where one would expect them to be finishing school, pursuing higher education or

vocational training, and entering the workforce. However, a considerable number have found themselves lagging behind or locked out of these opportunities.

Education deficits are a prominent consequence. Many participants admitted they attained a lower level of education than peers their age from non-conflict backgrounds. Dropping out of school, as previously described, was common and sometimes as early as primary school for some, more often in early secondary. Among our interview sample, only a handful had completed A-level (Senior 6) or beyond. Most had an incomplete secondary education or only primary education. This limited schooling has left many semi-literate or without employable skills. As one participant bluntly stated, “We missed out on school because of things we couldn’t control, and now that leaves us with very few options.” (Male, 26, Gulu). Another remarked that while some of their age-mates are now university graduates or skilled professionals, “we are still trying to sit O-level exams or learn how to use a computer”.

Research by Annan et al. (2008) found that formerly abducted youth, especially girls, tended to have lower educational attainment and income levels than never-abducted youth. Children born in captivity, being children of abductees, have likely faced even greater educational disruption since their mothers were out of school and they had unstable early childhoods. Our findings confirm that, the obstacles such as stigma, poverty, lack of documents, etc. translated into interrupted or truncated schooling for many. The economic reverberations of that are now being felt. As participants reach working age, those without education or vocational skills find themselves confined to low-paying, informal sector jobs if any.

Under-employment is thus a serious effect. A considerable number of our participants were unemployed or underemployed at the time of data collection. They described doing casual labor like digging in fields for a daily wage, brick-making, riding motorcycle, Pottery work or piecemeal work like selling petty goods on the street. A few women worked as housemaids or

in similar domestic roles. While these jobs provide some income, they are typically low wage, insecure, and carry little social status. The sense of stagnation and frustration was palpable. “Life would just stagnate. You come out of S.6 and you are still a nobody,” said one young man, highlighting how even those who finished high school struggled to find meaningful work. Another participant from Gulu said, “I have papers, but when I look for job, I cannot get because of my background. I’m doing street vending now.”

A 26-year-old male participant illustrated the systemic nature of exclusion: “Because of stigma and negative perceptions, many view us as unstable or unworthy. We are overlooked for scholarships, jobs, and other forms of support.” This reveals that it’s not just individual capacity like lack of education but also ongoing discrimination that hinders economic advancement. Employers might pass over someone known to be a “rebel’s child,” as earlier noted. Additionally, lacking family networks means no one vouches for them or gives them a “leg up,” which in tight-knit communities can be crucial for finding work.

The lack of land or inheritance also plays in here whereby without land, those in rural areas can’t farm effectively or have a home base, pushing more into precarious urban lives. Participants who ended up in towns often lack capital or credit to start businesses, and without assets like land, they have no collateral or safety net. As one put it, “Those who cannot farm or build in their ancestral villages often end up in slums, with little capital to start businesses.” (Observation from key informant, NGO worker, Gulu).

7.5 Political, Civic and Cultural Effects

The effects of integration challenges also extended into civic and political life. Participants described difficulties associated with documentation, recognition, access to government programmes and the ability to participate on the same terms as other citizens. These experiences are significant because legal identity is not only an administrative matter; it affects access to public institutions, employment, financial services and other forms of

citizenship. The findings therefore connect the personal narratives of CBIC to the wider question of how post-conflict states recognise people affected by war.

The cultural effects were equally important. Participants' accounts showed that clan identity, paternal lineage, land, naming, language, family ceremonies and community acceptance are closely connected. Where participants lacked recognised paternal lineage, they could experience uncertainty about where they belonged and whether they had legitimate claims to land or other family resources. These findings are consistent with Kiconco (2022), who demonstrates the importance of patrilineal structures in shaping the integration of CBIC.

Cultural practices were not presented only as sources of exclusion. Participants also described cultural leaders, churches, women's groups and community actors attempting to create acceptance. The historical significance is therefore one of contestation: the same social institutions that can reproduce stigma can also provide pathways to recognition and reconciliation when their practices are adapted to the circumstances of CBIC.

These political and cultural effects demonstrate why the study should not be interpreted as a purely mental-health study. The effects of integration challenges include psychological distress, but they also concern citizenship, civic participation, family membership, land, cultural identity, education, livelihoods and intergenerational relationships.

In short, the integration challenges have translated into economic marginalization for many of these young people. Lower education leads to limited employment, which reinforces poverty and social exclusion, which in turn perpetuates stigma which is a vicious cycle. It validates what one participant said: "...they are repeatedly excluded from opportunities that other children take for granted". This systemic exclusion is not just unfair to the individuals; it represents a loss of human capital for the region. Fortunately, participants also had ideas on breaking this cycle such as scholarships, vocational training, and hiring quotas.

7.6 Intergenerational Implications

A sobering effect that emerged from participants' reflections is the intergenerational impact of these integration failures. While most participants are youth, a few are already parents themselves, having children in their late teens or early twenties, and many others are at the age where they will soon start families. There is a palpable fear that the trauma and marginalization they have experienced might be passed on to their children if not addressed.

One interviewee thoughtfully noted: "The war may have ended in terms of gunfire, but for many of us, the war continues inside us and if we do not address it, it could quietly shape the next generation.". This comment underscores that unresolved trauma and social challenges have temporal ripple effects. If an individual carries untreated PTSD or deep mistrust, it can affect how they raise their children, perhaps being overprotective, emotionally distant, or struggling with anger. Indeed, psychological research on intergenerational trauma like, Danieli, 1998 has shown that children of trauma survivors can exhibit effects of that trauma even if they didn't experience the original events, through mechanisms like parental behavior and family environment. In Northern Uganda, Acirokop (2010) warned that the children of former child soldiers might inherit unresolved trauma and social disadvantages of their parents. Our study suggests a similar warning for children born to child soldiers, now that some are becoming parents, their difficulties could transmit further.

There are anecdotal examples already. One participant who had a baby noted that she struggles to form secure attachments, "I find it hard to show love to my child... I never had a father's love, and my mother was so traumatized. I'm scared I'll be a bad mother because I don't know how to give what I never got." Such heartfelt confessions point to the need for parenting support and mental health intervention, lest the cycle of emotional pain continues. Another participant feared that because he has no land or stable job, "my children will grow up

in the same poverty and be looked down on too.” This highlights the risk of perpetuated economic disadvantage.

There is also a social dimension that if communities continue to harbor stigma, the children of children born in captivity might also face prejudice by association like “that child’s mother is a rebel child”. Some participants expressed anxiety that their offspring might be indirectly stigmatized because the community knows their parentage. This is not far-fetched in tight-knit rural areas where family background is well-known. It illustrates how, without reconciliation, the shadow of the war can extend to those not even born during the war.

On a community and societal level, the failure to fully integrate this population has implications for peace and social cohesion. Transitional justice scholars argue that leaving a significant group of war-affected individuals disenfranchised and resentful can sow seeds of future conflict or social unrest (Pham et al., 2010). While our participants did not threaten violence, some community elders worried that persistent marginalization could lead to anger and anti-social behavior in the long term. A key informant, a local leader said, “If these youth remain feeling like second-class citizens, it’s a risk to lasting peace. They must feel they have a stake in society.” This sentiment aligns with what Neenan (2017) and others have posited, failing to address children born of war’s needs not only violates their rights but can also have intergenerational consequences for community harmony.

In summary, the effects of integration challenges are not confined to the current generation of children born in captivity, they threaten to cascade into the next generation and beyond. Psychologically, socially, and economically, today’s unhealed wounds can become tomorrow’s inherited struggles. However, this is not inevitable if action is taken. Many participants voiced hope that with proper support, “our children can have a different life.” They do not want their offspring to bear the same burdens of stigma and neglect. This is a powerful motivator for them and should be a clarion call for policymakers.

7.7 Discussion of Findings on Effects

The effects of integration challenges were multidimensional. Psychological distress was prominent, but the evidence also showed effects on family relationships, cultural belonging, education, livelihoods, documentation and civic participation. The findings therefore do not support reducing the effects of integration challenges to mental health alone.

The psychological findings require careful interpretation. Participants described nightmares, fear, anxiety, sadness, anger and intrusive memories, but the study did not conduct clinical assessments. These are reported as lived experiences of psychosocial distress rather than as clinical diagnoses.

The social and cultural effects were evident in contested clan identity, land and inheritance concerns, family rejection and uncertainty about belonging. These findings are consistent with Kiconco (2022), which shows that integration in Acholi is closely connected to kinship and patrilineal structures.

The economic effects were reflected in disrupted education, insecure employment and limited access to livelihood opportunities. Documentation barriers and weak social networks could reinforce these disadvantages. The findings therefore show how social exclusion can become material exclusion.

The political and civic effects emerged through difficulties in obtaining documentation, accessing formal institutions and being recognised within transitional-justice processes. The 2019 National Transitional Justice Policy provides a national framework for social reintegration and reparations, but the narratives indicate a continuing implementation and recognition gap for CBIC.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.0 Introduction

This chapter summarises the findings according to the four specific objectives, draws conclusions directly from those findings, and presents recommendations linked to the evidence and relevant policy and institutional actors.

8.1 Summary of Key Findings

8.1.1 Objective One: The experiences of children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region

The first objective was to interrogate the experiences of CBIC. The study found that participants' narratives were shaped by birth and early childhood in captivity, exposure to conflict and insecurity, family separation, uncertain parentage, cultural dislocation and stigma after return to civilian communities. These experiences differed in important respects from those of former child soldiers because CBIC did not enter the conflict from a remembered civilian childhood. The findings therefore support the need to treat CBIC as a distinct historical category while recognising their place within the wider history of CBOW.

8.1.2 Objective Two: The integration programmes and practices affecting children born in the LRA captivity in Acholi sub-region

The second objective examined integration programmes and practices. The study found that integration occurred through a combination of government and transitional-justice frameworks, humanitarian and NGO interventions, family and household support, women's organisations, cultural institutions and community initiatives. Uganda's 2019 National Transitional Justice Policy provides a broad framework for social reintegration and reparations.

However, practical support for CBIC remained fragmented and broad policy recognition did not consistently translate into a dedicated, long-term package for this group.

8.1.3 Objective Three: The challenges faced in the integration of children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region

The third objective investigated integration challenges. The main challenges were stigma and social labelling; rejection or conditional acceptance within families and clans; uncertain paternal identity and land or inheritance claims; birth registration and national identification barriers; discrimination and interrupted education; limited employment and livelihood opportunities; and identity and psychosocial difficulties. These challenges interacted with one another rather than operating independently.

8.1.4 Objective Four: The effects of integration challenges on children born in the LRA captivity in the post-conflict Acholi sub-region

The fourth objective assessed the effects of integration challenges. The effects were psychological, social, cultural, economic and civic. Participants described emotional distress, identity disruption, weakened family and community belonging, educational and livelihood disadvantage, difficulties in accessing formal institutions, and concerns about how unresolved problems may affect the next generation. The findings do not establish clinical diagnoses or statistical causal effects; they document the patterns and meanings reported by participants.

8.2 Conclusion

The study concludes that children born in LRA captivity constitute a distinct historical and social category whose experiences have been insufficiently incorporated into dominant accounts of the Northern Uganda conflict. Their marginalisation cannot be explained by wartime violence alone; it has continued through family relations, cultural expectations, documentation systems, education, livelihoods and post-conflict institutions.

The study further concludes that stigma is a central mechanism through which the circumstances of birth continue to influence everyday life. However, stigma does not operate alone. Its effects vary with family support, clan recognition, education, documentation, livelihood opportunities, community attitudes and institutional responses.

Integration should therefore be understood as a long-term process of social, cultural, economic and civic inclusion. Physical residence in a post-conflict community is not sufficient. Meaningful integration requires recognition within families and communities, access to legal identity and public services, opportunities for education and livelihoods, psychosocial support, and participation in processes that shape policies and programmes affecting CBIC.

The study also concludes that the voices of CBIC are central to historical interpretation and future intervention. Their narratives should not be used merely as evidence of suffering. Participants demonstrated agency by identifying problems, proposing solutions, forming support networks and imagining preferred futures. A survivor-centred approach therefore requires their meaningful participation in research, programme design, implementation and monitoring.

Finally, the policy issue is one of translating broad transitional-justice commitments into practical inclusion. Uganda's National Transitional Justice Policy provides an important national framework, but the evidence from this study points to the need for implementation measures that explicitly account for the circumstances of CBIC. The historical record will remain incomplete if these experiences are treated as an appendix to the stories of other war-affected groups.

8.3 Recommendations

The recommendations below are organised around the study findings and identify the policy or institutional direction to which each recommendation relates.

Government and transitional-justice institutions should develop an explicit, survivor-centred implementation pathway for children born of conflict-related sexual violence, including CBIC. This should connect the National Transitional Justice Policy to practical measures for recognition, reparations, social integration and referral to services.

NIRA and relevant local authorities should strengthen accessible birth-registration and national-identification procedures for people born under conflict-related circumstances, including mechanisms for cases in which parental information is incomplete or unavailable. Legal-aid organisations and local leaders should be involved in awareness and referral.

The Ministries and local authorities responsible for education, youth and livelihoods should develop targeted opportunities for war-affected youth who experienced interrupted education, including scholarships, skills development, vocational training, livelihood support and pathways into further education. Programmes should use transparent criteria and should not reproduce stigma.

Health and psychosocial-service providers should strengthen long-term, community-based support for CBIC and their families. Services should be trauma-informed and voluntary, and should recognise that not every participant experiences the same form or intensity of distress.

Cultural institutions, local governments, religious leaders and community organisations should support sustained dialogue on family, clan belonging, land, stigma and social acceptance. Cultural mechanisms should be adapted through consultation with CBIC themselves so that symbolic reconciliation is linked to everyday inclusion.

Government, civil-society organisations and researchers should strengthen documentation and monitoring of CBIC. Data collection should be ethical, confidential and survivor-centred, and CBIC should participate in defining the information collected and the programmes developed from it.

8.4 Areas for Further Study

- i. A longitudinal study of the socioeconomic, psychosocial, cultural and civic trajectories of children born in captivity as they move through adulthood and parenthood.
- ii. A comparative study of children born of war in different Ugandan regions and in other post-conflict contexts, examining how kinship systems, transitional-justice policies and community practices shape integration.
- iii. A study of paternal kinship, land, documentation and clan recognition, including the perspectives of cultural leaders and families where paternal identity is known, unknown or contested.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Interview Guide

Opening Remarks

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am interested in learning more about your life experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to understand your story in your own words. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Questions:

1. Can you tell me about your birth and early childhood as you know it?
2. In what ways has being born in captivity affected your life and identity?
3. Have you ever felt rejected, stigmatized, or treated differently in your family or community?
- 4.
5. How have these experiences influenced your sense of belonging?
6. What coping mechanisms or strategies have you developed?
7. What support do you think the government, community, or NGOs should provide to children like you?

Appendix II: Future-Oriented Workshop Guide and Participatory Activities

Opening Remarks

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am interested in learning more about your life experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to understand your story in your own words. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Questions:

1. Imagine a future where children born in captivity are fully accepted. What would it look like?
2. What kind of opportunities (education, jobs, land, relationships) would you want available in that future?
3. What role should government, NGOs, and communities play in creating this future?
4. What cultural or community practices could be changed to reduce stigma?
5. If you had the power to design a program for children like you, what would be its key components?

Appendix III: Key Informant Interview (KII) Guide (NGO Staff, Cultural Leaders, RDCs, Local Officials, Counselors)

Opening Remarks

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am interested in learning more about your life experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to understand your story in your own words. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Questions:

- 1.
2. What integration or reintegration programmes currently exist, and how effective have they been?
3. How have cultural norms and clan structures affected the reintegration of these children?
4. What role has government policy or transitional justice played in addressing their needs?
5. What gaps still exist in policy, programming, or resource allocation?
6. What recommendations would you make for improving reintegration and reducing stigma?

Appendix IV: Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Guide (Six Groups)

Opening Remarks

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am interested in learning more about your life experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to understand your story in your own words. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

Questions:

1. How would you describe your everyday experiences of living in your community?
2. Have you faced discrimination or stigma because of your background? Can you give examples?

3. What kinds of support have you received from family, schools, or NGOs?
4. What barriers do you face in accessing education, land, or employment?
5. How do you cope with the challenges of stigma and rejection?
6. Do you feel fully accepted in your community, or still marginalized?
7. What should be done differently to improve your lives and futures?

Appendix V: Meeting Guide for GWED-G and Women's Groups (Mothers, Caregivers, Women Activists)

Opening Remarks

Thank you for agreeing to participate. I am interested in learning more about your life experiences. There are no right or wrong answers. I just want to understand your story in your own words. You may choose not to answer any question and can stop the interview at any time.

1. As mothers or caregivers, what challenges have you faced raising children born in captivity?
2. How has the community treated you and your children since returning from captivity?

3. What strategies have you used to support your children emotionally, socially, and economically?
4. How have women's groups, NGOs, or community structures supported you in this process?
5. What challenges remain unresolved (e.g., land, stigma, school fees, healthcare)?
6. What role can women's organizations play in advocating for the rights of children born of war?
7. What recommendations would you give to government, NGOs, and cultural leaders for better reintegration support?

Appendix VI: Documentary Review Schedule

The documentary review schedule recorded the document title, issuing institution, year, type of source, historical or policy issue addressed, relevance to the study objectives, key provisions or findings, and points requiring triangulation with oral narratives.

Appendix VII: Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: The Unheard Narratives of Children Born in the Lord's Resistance Captivity in Northern Uganda (1986-2025)

Principal Investigator: Patrick Ochen

Institution: Gulu University

Phone Number: 0786436313

Email: patrickochen92@gmail.com

Introduction

You are being invited to participate in a research study about the life experiences of children born during the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) conflict in Northern Uganda. Please take time to read or listen to this form carefully before you decide to participate.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to document the unheard narratives of children born in captivity during the LRA conflict. Your experience and voice are important in helping us understand the challenges you have faced and how support can be improved.

Procedures

If you agree to participate:

- You will take part in an individual interview or focus group discussion lasting approximately 20-30 minutes.
- With your permission, the session will be audio-recorded to ensure accuracy.
- You may choose not to answer any question.
- You can stop the interview or withdraw from the study at any time.

Risks and Discomfort

Some questions may bring up painful memories. You are free to pause, skip a question, or stop the discussion at any time. Support and referral information will be made available if needed.

Benefits

While you may not receive direct benefits, your participation will help amplify the voices of children born during the war and could influence policies, support services, and public understanding.

Confidentiality

All the information you provide will be kept strictly confidential. Your name will not appear in any report. A code or pseudonym will be used instead. The audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and only accessible to the research team.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can choose not to take part or to withdraw at any time without any consequences.

Consent Statement

Please tick the box to indicate your consent:

I have read (or have had explained to me) the purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits of this study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time.

I give permission to be audio recorded.

I agree to participate in this study.

Participant's Name (printed): _____

Participant's Signature or Thumbprint: _____

Date: _____

Researcher's Name: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix VIII: Map of the Study Area



Appendix IX: Introductory Letter

GULU

P.O. BOX 166 GULU



UNIVERSITY

TEL: +256471432922;

OFFICE OF THE DEAN, FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND HUMANITIES

05th August 2025

TO : WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to introduce to you Mr. Ochen Patrick (Reg No. 23/U/4072/MAH/PS) a student pursuing a programme of study leading to an award Master of Arts in History, Gulu University, Master of Gulu University.

He is undertaking research on the Topic:

**THE UNHEARD NARRATIVES OF CHILDREN BORN IN THE LORD'S RESISTANCE
CAPTIVITY IN NORTHERN UGANDA (1987-2025)**

Which is in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award.

Any assistance rendered to him in relation to this research work will be highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

Dr. Denis Thaddeus Ofoyuru

Dean, Faculty of Education and Humanities



Appendix X: GUREC Clearance Letter

GULU

P.O. Box 166, Gulu (U)
Website: www.gu.ac.ug
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UNIVERSITY

Tel: +256 471 432 096
Fax: +256 471 432 913
Mob: +256 772 964 491
+256 776 812 147

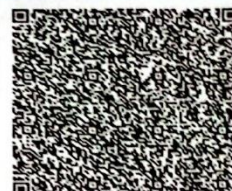
RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

01/09/2025

To: *Ochen Patrick*

0786436313

Review Type: Initial Review



Re:GUREC-2025-856: UNHEARD NARRATIVES OF CHILDREN BORN IN CAPTIVITY AMIDST THE LORD'S RESISTANCE ARMY CONFLICT IN NORTHERN UGANDA

I am pleased to inform you that at the **126th** convened meeting on **15/05/2025**, the Gulu University REC meeting voted to approve the above referenced application.

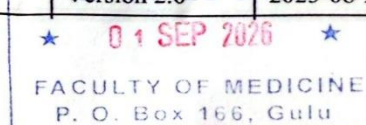
Approval of the research is for the period of **01/09/2025 to 01/09/2026**.

As Principal Investigator of the research, you are responsible for fulfilling the following requirements of approval:

1. All co-investigators must be kept informed of the status of the research.
2. Changes, amendments, and addenda to the protocol or the consent form must be submitted to the REC for re-review and approval **prior** to the activation of the changes.
3. Reports of unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or any new information which could change the risk benefit: ratio must be submitted to the REC.
4. Only approved consent forms are to be used in the enrollment of participants. All consent forms signed by participants and/or witnesses should be retained on file. The REC may conduct audits of all study records, and consent documentation may be part of such audits.
5. Continuing review application must be submitted to the REC **eight weeks** prior to the expiration date of **01/09/2026** in order to continue the study beyond the approved period. Failure to submit a continuing review application in a timely fashion may result in suspension or termination of the study.
6. The REC application number assigned to the research should be cited in any correspondence with the REC of record.
7. You are required to register the research protocol with the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST) for final clearance to undertake the study in Uganda.

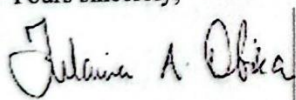
The following is the list of all documents approved in this application by Gulu University REC:

No.	Document Title	Language	Version Number	Version Date
1	Assent form	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
2	Assent form	English	Version 2.0	2025-08-22



3	Assent form	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
4	Assent form	English	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
5	Assent form	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
6	Assent form	English	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
7	Informed Consent forms	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
8	Informed Consent forms	English	Version 2.0	2025-08-22
9	Data collection tools	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
10	Data collection tools	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
11	Data collection tools	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
12	Data collection tools	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
13	Data collection tools	Acholi	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
14	Data collection tools	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-22
15	Translated consent	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
16	Informed Consent forms	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
17	Informed Consent forms	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
18	Informed Consent forms	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
19	COVID-19 & EBOLA risk management plan	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
20	Community Engagement plan	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03
21	Protocol	English	Version 2.0	2025-07-03

Yours sincerely,



Julaina A. Obika (PhD)
For: Gulu University REC

