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Cover Page Footnote

I would like to express sincere gratitude to my Academic Supervisor, Allison McDowell-Smith, Director of the Graduate Counterterrorism and Criminal Justice Management Chair at Nichols College, for her guidance and supervision throughout the research.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Displaced Children Throughout Terrorist Organizations

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Abstract

Over the years, armed forces have repeatedly recruited and kidnaped children to be used during conflict. Because of their vulnerability, children have become a strategic source for groups such as ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Shabaab. According to the United Nations (2017), approximately 115,000 children have already been released from armed forces globally since 2000. As these children are being released from these terrorist organizations, it raises question about how these children should be integrated back into society after participating in an unknown number of traumatic and criminal events. National governments and international organizations remain uncertain as to whether these children should be treated as war criminals for their crimes or as victims, let alone who should fund rehabilitation programs. If not properly rehabilitated, they can become a threat to public security. Before they become a high-security risk to states, communities, and themselves, it is a necessity to provide proper disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation (DDR) to reintegrate the children into society safely. This research will analyze proper ways in which children can be rehabilitated, as well as provide clarification as to who is considered a child under international law. It will also explore different programs used in past child rehabilitation initiatives and propose a beneficial program that includes physical, psychological, and social reintegration for effective rehabilitation.

Keywords: Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, Child Soldiers, Programs, Children, ISIS, Conflict, Arms, Armed Groups, Communities

Children Involvement and Recruitment

Armed groups are organizations that do not agree with the state and challenge their power. These can range from insurgencies, pro-government militias or community based vigilant groups. Over the years, armed groups have recruited and kidnapped children for their own use in conflict. There are several reasons why children get involved with armed groups. Most of these reasons vary as every culture and group is different. For example, many of the children who join ISIS in Iraq have been kidnapped: “It is estimated that children under 14 account for over a third of the 6,800 Yazidis abducted in Sinjar” and this is only from 2014 (Vale). The same, year, an approximate of “800-900 children [were] kidnapped from Mosul.” Based on recruitment, which mostly comes from the region of Nihawa, a total of 126 children joined ISIL (United Nations, 2019). In Afghanistan a total of 139 children were recruited by the Taliban and 32 children joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant-Khorasan Province, ISIL-KP (United Nations, 2019). Besides kidnapping and forced recruitment, there are other factors that influence children involvement with the armed groups. Many times, it all comes down to: convenience, economic scarcity and impunity (Wessels 32). Recruitment is not always forced, a survey by NATO found that in 4 African countries, 64 percent of the children who joined the group, joined under no threat of violence (Singer 61). Other children “join because of poverty, grievance, desire for revenge, or their particular ideology among many other reasons (Radhika).

Recruitment can be defined as the action of enlisting or convincing someone of joining a group and supporting a cause. For armed groups, recruitment can be straightforward. The

recruitment can range from places such as stadiums and buses to mosques and churches (Singer 58). The lack of education and job opportunity can drive the children into joining the group. Other factors that contribute to their willingness to join are monetary incentives, wanting to be recognized among friends, and a profound belief of what they are fighting for is the right thing (Haer). One factor that Mia Bloom identifies is the moral reward. They are then perceived as heroes by their peers for the affiliation to a group (Bloom). The most frequent and popular targets are orphanages. Their lack of parental supervision makes them an easy target. It is unknown how many children are recruited voluntarily versus forced because of the lack of data being collected, as it is illegal for children to be recruited. For example, Western countries have a set age for adulthood, which is 18 years, but in many non-western countries' rituals, initiations, marriage, and childbearing are used as an indicator of adulthood rather than age. Depending on the country, organization and beliefs, the age of what constitutes a child can change very drastically. According to the Afghan law in 1976, a minor refers to a child between the age of seven years old and thirteen years old and a female can marry once they become sixteen years old. For the boys, the marriage age is a bit different, at eighteen years old. However, in 2005 the Afghan law declared a person under the age of eighteen years old a child. Despite laws being created, groups like the Taliban do not care because the law is barely enacted. In Saudi Arabia the age of adulthood is based in physical signs directed to puberty, declaring fifteen-year old's as the age to become an adult and in Iran the age is even lower, being nine years for females and fifteen years for males.

The most common reason why armed groups target children is because the “group is unable to recruit adequate adults” (Ozerdem, Alpaslan, Podder, Sukanya, 2011) . Children are an easy target as they do not understand the consequences of joining an armed group. Their minds

can be more easily tricked and manipulated when compared to an adult's (Singer 62). For other groups, "children are more malleable, adaptable and obedient and easier to control and retain" (Haer). For those who are captured, their options are more limited than those who join voluntarily. They must do what their capturer asks for or die. Often, the group will threaten with violence if the child shows resistance, and they have no choice but to join the armed group (Wessel 31). This violence can be directed towards the child's family or the child itself. The group might tell the child that if they do not join, they will kill their family, if they have not already done so. Other times they will torture the child until the child joins "voluntarily." In their eyes this counts as voluntarily joining, though the act of torture clearly makes it involuntarily. Other times the parents must give their children to an armed group because they cannot provide for them (Singer 63). The economic situation drives the parents to offer their daughters as brides. Other mothers find pride in seeing their sons in military uniforms, and the sons who become martyrs, bring pride and fame to the family. Through the literature review, it is inevitable to notice how it is not their best option, but the best way for children to survive in the middle of a conflict. Security is one of the main factors that attract the children to join the forces, during war times (Haer). Their neighborhoods are in the middle of a war, and their environment is not ideal for children. Therefore, they see recruitment to survive and help their families.

Roles of Children in Armed forces

Children in armed groups can be very beneficial to the groups and are used in many different roles. The children can serve as ancillary or in combat roles. In Congo and Chad, girls are recruited to be used in combat, "due to the fact that they will not [be suspected] of engaging in subservice activities, enhancing the element of surprise" (Haer). Children can also serve the group by assisting as cooks, porters, messengers, spies, soldiers, and bombers (Haer). The

children who travel with the group, ISIS, are highly exposed to violent events and the most hostile environment, the front-line. Even kids in communities that do not interlace with ISIS, suffer the consequences of violence. Many children witnessed violence, such as beheadings, public stoning, family members being killed, and the daily acts of violence during war time (Mia Bloom, 2012; John Horgan 2012). Child soldiers can be compared to child trafficking and the role of children as employees for the groups, is child labor. They are both a violation of children rights and the Child Labor Act (Tiefenbrun.) In ISIS, after years of being in the group, the child's rank grows and the aspirations to become a suicide bomber is something the children look forward to as time goes by. Many times, the children must show loyalty to the group by doing acts such as killing a loved one. In an interview with The Frontline, a child tells the reporter how the youngest child was only eight years old. The child also mentions how this is something they want to do, "I want to do the same as them. I want to become a suicide bomber" (Evan.) The children in ISIS's indoctrination is very extreme. They start as cooks and then become soldiers who want revenge against the Western infidels. All these activities create children with PTSD. The issue with this is how they are used and then once they want a different life, they are either killed so they do not share the groups secrets or let free with mental health issues. The problem with mental health issues is that the children's experiences and memories of what they have seen are not left behind with their past. Not all the children who have fought in combat are lucky enough to be accepted into a rehabilitation program. There are many children who struggle with their thoughts every day, thinking PTSD and abuse is normal.

Disarmament, demobilization and rehabilitation

The main goal of disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation is to provide the children with the most peaceful and safe programs for their return to their families and

communities. Disarmament is the first stage and consists of the disposal or destruction of weapons. Dudenhoeffer, mentions how, in many states, they provide programs for friendly disarmament such as Guns for Goats and Bikes for Guns (Dalaire). Though, not all rehabilitation programs offer these services. This is the most kid-friendly program for adults; they provide a monetary reward. The reason why this is the best program for adults is because they are given a choice. Many adults deny rehabilitation because they are heads of family and have the responsibility of bringing food home.

The next stage after disarmament, is demobilization. In this stage, the children are removed from the group either by escaping, or the group releases the children. The most challenging part of this stage is the fact that most of the children perceive the group and their members as their family: "Commanders and peers frequently become the child soldiers substitute family, providing protection and guidance" (Dudenhoeffer). After achieving demobilization, the last stage is rehabilitation. Rehabilitation is the stage in which a child is exposed to therapy sessions and social workers to overcome their past. This is the most complex part of the process as there is not enough programs as well as resources to provide them with the necessary means to rehabilitate properly.

Challenges of Rehabilitation

Reintegration. It can be difficult because there may be perpetrators and victims who have to reconcile and learn how to co-exist in the same neighborhood, making rehabilitation particularly challenging. (Dudenhoeffer) Education regarding the topic is essential for the community to be able to support the children in the best means possible. In many cases, "The International Criminal Court, ICC, acts as a mediator and helps to prepare the community for the return of the

child" (Rivard.) The reintegration is very challenging to complete yet is the most crucial part of the process.

Family. It is proven family can be very helpful and reduce stress and PTSD of the children.

Family environment helps the children assimilate change by providing comfortable environment for the children: "Protective factors such as family support and community acceptance would be associated with a decrease in symptoms" (Betancourt 2013). The feeling of acceptance from family and community members can make the child become more comfortable during reintegration. This can be an obstacle if the family holds resentment against the child as well as if the family does not understand to the fullest the needs of the child during the rehabilitation and reintegration. Love and appreciation are generally needed so they can feel comfortable back in their houses.

Overall, many factors can impact the children's rehabilitation process. There are some that can affect the children a bit more than others, such as family and community. It is vital to focus on the child's needs as well as help them to reconnect not only with family members but with the community as well. It is possible to achieve a soft reintegration through "community involvement, sensitization, and reconciliation" (Dudenhoefer.) But there are many things to consider in order for it to be possible.

Considerations for Rehabilitation

There is a need to bring in consideration cultural relativism to the programs (Rivard 2010). By doing so, the programs can adapt better to the children's culture, and the results can be outstandingly beneficial to the rehabilitation. Every culture and community is different. This is why there is a need to create specific programs that can target specific communities. To use the same programs for all affected communities around the world will not help the children. In order

to help the children and provide an outstanding program, one should have in consideration to create a specific program for each child or community. Next addressed will be some considerations that can apply and will beneficiate most of the children no matter where the program is being provided. These are some essential considerations.

Education

Many children prefer to receive vocational training because many teenagers are already head of families or need to provide for themselves. For this reason, it is better to go to vocational training, which allows them to get a job after they learn the skills needed to adapt to the civilian life (Gamba.) Vocational programs benefit the children by helping them rejoin society once again. By learning a skill, the children have a better opportunity of obtaining job after rehabilitation. Depending on their age and support from the program, other children prefer to go back to school. This option depends on whether the child can afford the time to receive an education. Education is one of the most crucial parts for the child rehabilitation as it will help them pursue a better future. It is important to fund money to provide for this children so they can stay couple at least three to six months in vocational school. Having an education and stable job will decrease the child probability of returning to a terrorist organization.

Mental and Medical Health

Mental health assistance is important, as well as medical aid, as many of the children suffer from sexually transmitted diseases such as STDs. Some girls are pregnant, and proper medical support is necessary. Many girls also need psychological help as they live with the stigma of having been raped and they believe their reputation has been ruined forever, which limits them from returning home. Children in Democratic Republic of Congo suffer from malaria and yellow fever, and the need for medical assistance is urgent (Curtiss). Many times, the

assistance cannot be given as the countries lack the necessary medicine supplies, as well as doctors. There is a need to create a rehabilitation program that includes a proper health care program. Many of these communities have poorly health resources. They are also understaffed and underfunded. Afghanistan is one of the countries that struggles with health care. Due to the ongoing Afghan war, many volunteer medics prefer to go to Africa instead. These communities do not only need medical health and assistance, they also are in desperate needs of social workers. Social workers are also very important during the rehabilitation and reintegration phase. Social workers help reconnect families and communities with the child after rehabilitation. Social workers make the change from a facility to back home as smoothly and easy as possible. There is a need to work with the community beforehand as many adults hold resentment towards ex-members of militant groups. By doing so before the child returns, it can improve the community to decrease its stigma regarding children involved in combat as well as teach how to deal with children who suffer from PTSD. An approximate of 5% need a follow-up with a social worker (Betancourt). On the research done by Denov and Shevell, the authors provide support evidence regarding the necessity of social workers with war affected children. Social workers focus mostly on working together with the child to provide recommendations to ensure their personal growth as well as strengthen their capacity and identity perception (Denov, M. Shevell, Meaghan.)

A Need to Stop the Recruitment of Children

It is vital to end the conflict. Even if the best program is created, it will keep failing as long as the conflict continues in their society. Stephanie Hanson makes a very good point in her research of DDR in Africa. According to Hanson, the problem is to try and help the child with programs and resources before the conflict has ended. The children leave the group with no

means of support and they return to their hometown, where there is still a scarce of job opportunities and they are sent back to the unsafe places they were once recruited at, making it easier for the groups to recruit the children once again.

A Need for More Jobs.

There is a lack of job opportunities in many of the states that these children inhabit. Many teenagers age 12 to 17 years old join military groups seeing it as a job because they receive monetary rewards. At this age, many of the teenagers are already fathers or heads of their families, and the need for money can be a factor for which they do not leave the groups. For those whose groups dismantle, they tend to migrate to other regions in search of other active groups (Hanson 2007).

In an article by Jakkie Cilliers for *The Conversation* in 2017, the author explains why many African kids join armed forces. Poverty is one of the push factors of why children join armed groups in Africa. This is not to say poor people are more violent. However, poorer states do not always ensure laws are being followed and obeyed. It is expected for Africa's poverty to decrease, however, that is not likely to happen until 2030. As of 2017, 460 million lived under the poverty line, and as of today, that is 37% of Africa.

According to research by *Bloomberg*, the African government debt has gone up, making it to 55% of GDP in 2018, that the government will not be able to sustain the African people neither provide programs to help the citizens (Cilliers 2017). Africa will have an approximate of 90% of the world's poor by 2030. This will create more conflict among citizens and will be a push factor for many young to involucrate themselves with armed forces to provide income for their families.

Reintegration Recommendation.

One can say by combining an individual and community approach the child will have a lower chance of once again re-joining the armed forces. The most accurate way to do so is to change the environment the children was once living in. Many of the children who were part of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, known as FARC were required to move. This depended on circumstances. They were required to move to another city and change their names. Many times, these children had to live under a government institution until their families were relocated as well. Other times they were adopted or sent to live with a family member far from where they could not be recognized. This prevents the community from creating a stigma for the child as well as provides the child with a fresh start. Relocation can be beneficial for the children and the community.

Another consideration to increase the rehabilitation among the children is to create recreational areas in which the children can play under adult supervision. The only issue with this is how in the past groups such as ISIS, have taken control over educational institutions making them unsafe. Another program that should be incorporated is government jobs exclusively for ex-combatants. By doing so there will be less in the way of teenagers and adults not being able to obtain jobs. Lastly, a need to retrain the children and teenagers to behave in public and socialize. Emotional intelligence education will be necessary for a proper reintegration. PTSD can make the children more combative which might be an obstacle once they reintegrate with society.

A Need for Research. Through the research it is inevitable to notice the lack of data from programs offered on the past and being offered currently. Because of this, it is difficult to know how beneficial these programs are for the children. Without the data it is impossible to create an ideal program for the children as there is no data to back up the successful programs. There is

also a need for data on how the children manage to continue with their lives. This can be difficult as many of them prefer to leave their past behind and maybe even change their names. However, if kept anonymous data could be archived.

Lastly, many communities are considered a tribe. They are very old fashion and they lack technology. Many of these places do not have running water or electricity. They do not bother to count the children who are born and those who have died under the influence of an armed group, whether it is a terroristic or governmental group. This also affects the data being recorded as the true number of children recruited and murdered is unknown. It is very important to obtain this data. This data can help to create new programs that can be more successful in the matter of demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration. Without data, many children won't be able to obtain a proper rehabilitation program. Many children receive programs that do not cover all their needs to rehabilitate and reintegrate. There is a need to provide programs that can adapt to the children, instead of making the children adapt to programs.

Overall, there are many issues within the recruitment of children for armed forces that must be solved. The children being recruited are being used for others advantage. More laws need to be passed to defend children's rights within countries battling to reduce the recruitment of children. There is also the need to create more jobs that require minimum skills to support teenagers. But, before these issues can be solved there is a need to solve the bigger issue, which is the conflict within the state. Problemed children is just one of the problems wars are causing. Children can go through a perfect disarmament, demobilization, and rehabilitation program but if the society they are going back to is unstable the program will not be of much help. These children have been in war and have seen things that destroy their childhood. They have seen things they do not even understand. It is crucial these children receive aid and treatment because

no one who suffers from PTSD or mental issues deserves to be mistreated and left alone to deal with their thoughts. If they were to not be given proper treatment the war aftermath can leave a lasting affect that could harm the children itself or their community.

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