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War, Displacement and Productive Occupations in Northern Uganda

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War, Displacement and Productive Occupations in Northern Uganda

Prolonged war and internal displacement in Northern Uganda forced nearly 90% of the population out of their lives as rural agriculturalists and into displacement camps, where they experienced both occupational change and occupational deprivation. Drawing on data from two applied ethnographic health research studies, one conducted during war time and the second during resettlement, this paper presents an analysis of occupation-related narratives embedded in the primary studies. The dataset included transcripts from interviews and focus groups with 249 respondents, plus researcher notes from prolonged participant observation. Inductive approaches were applied and thematic and comparative analyses performed. Findings demonstrate the profound consequence war and displacement can have on occupation including loss and restriction. Narratives illustrate a myriad of responses to occupational change and/or deprivation including dysfunction and adaptation, and offer further evidence of the occupational nature of humans.

Keywords: War, Internal displacement, Occupational deprivation, Occupational change, Ethnography, Northern Uganda

Following a decade of war in northern Uganda (1986–1996) the government established ‘protected villages’ (internal displacement camps) where the majority of the population was forcibly relocated over another decade of continued conflict. While efforts were made by government and aid agencies to meet the population’s basic needs for food, shelter, healthcare, and education, these efforts were often limited and inadequate (Dolan, 2009). Additionally, a fundamental human need was largely neglected when the Acholi people were confined in camps: they were severely restricted from fulfilling their traditional productive occupations, particularly agriculture. As Dolan (2009) suggested, their right to livelihood was violated.

Theoretical papers and emerging evidence suggest that occupation is a basic human need, critical to health and well-being and that when occupational pursuits are thwarted, there is increasing risk of dysfunction and negative health implications (Hammell, 2004; Helbig & McKay, 2003; Whiteford, 1997, 2000; Wilcock, 1993, 1998, 2007). The occupational impacts of displacement camp living have received relatively little attention, however, researchers such as Whiteford (2005) and Steindl, Winding and Runge (2008), have begun to shed light on these issues through investigations of refugee experiences. In particular, they expand our understanding of the concepts of occupational deprivation and occupational adaptation in persons who have experienced conflict and forced

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migrations. Whiteford (2000) described occupational deprivation as:

A state in which a person or a group of people are unable to do what is necessary and meaningful in their lives due to external restrictions. It is a state in which the opportunity to perform those occupations that have social, cultural and personal relevance is rendered difficult if not impossible. (p. 200)

Occupational adaptation has numerous definitions within the literature (Lentin, 2006), however, Wilcock (1998) offered a descriptor that is particularly relevant to displacement: occupation “provides the mechanism to fulfill basic human needs, essential for survival and to enable people to adapt to biological, social and environmental changes” (p. 13). Occupational change has been defined as “adding, abandoning or altering occupations through the use of adapting, restructuring, refraining and reconstructing strategies” (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007, p. 370). In war and displacement situations, adaptation and change is necessary to cope with restriction, loss and the extreme disruptions in all realms of life.

Occupational deprivation, adaptation, and change are related concepts that help explain how people experience occupation and its influence on their well-being. This paper outlines the results of a secondary analysis of data from two ethnographic studies conducted by the authors, further extending existing understandings of these concepts from the perspectives of Acholi men, women and youth living

through war and displacement in Northern Uganda.

Context

A brief and simplified summary of the Acholi way of life and the complex war in Uganda serves to contextualize the findings. While a final peace treaty was never signed (Machar, 2008) hostilities ceased in 2006 in Northern Uganda after more than 20 years of war. This conflict was initially between the rebel group the Lord's Resistance Army and the Government of Uganda and its forces, but it grew in complexity over the years and civilians were increasingly and intentionally targeted with violence that took many brutal forms: killing, beating, abduction, looting, destruction, predation, rape and a regular experience of fear, lack and loss. Virtually the entire rural population was forced from their homes either fleeing rebel attack or most often because of forced displacement into camps by government troops (Bagenda & Hovil, 2003; Dolan, 2009; Finnstrom, 2006; Refugee Law Project, 2004). The rates of internal displacement mounted steadily over the duration of the conflict in response to military operations and increased insecurity, swelling to approximately 1.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) or 90% of the population by conflict end (OXFAM International, 2008). The displaced persons subsisted in over-crowded camps or protected villages where they were separated from extended family and traditional support structures. Atrocities committed by the rebels continued in camps and were magnified by further predation, coercion and violations (theft, beatings, sexual

abuses, etc) perpetrated by a range of actors including military troops and fellow camp dwellers (Dolan, 2009; Spittal et al., 2008). The camp services and infrastructure such as food distribution, water, sanitation and hygiene were inadequate, and the population frequently lacked the resources to meet their basic needs (Accorsia et al., 2005; Dolan, 2009; FEMRITE, 2008; OXFAM International, 2008; Refugee Law Project, 2004; UNHCR, 2007).

Prior to war, Northern Uganda had been deeply entrenched in the culture and social structures that supported a rural agrarian way of life. Occupations revolved around physical work communally performed by members of the extended family. Kin relations formed a materially and psychologically interdependent social unit that ensured survival, protection and well-being (Greenfield, Keller, Fuligni, & Maynard, 2003; Kagitcibasi, 2005). Adult women provided the bulk of agricultural and domestic labor including planting, weeding, harvesting, food preparation, water collection and taking care of children (Barrett, 1997; Barrett & Browne, 1993). Adult Acholi males traditionally were heads of family, decision-makers and protectors (Dolan, 2002). Their productive occupations allowed them to provide for their families and included heavy agricultural labor such as opening up the land for planting, building structures (homes, granaries), livestock rearing and increasingly, wage-earning labor. Land and livestock ownership supported the male role/identity of provider and protector. Male and female elders were bearers of knowledge, tradition and morality; they engaged in teaching, guiding and conflict resolution and contributed to domestic work, childcare and agriculture according to ability. Acholi children from the preschool years onwards actively and progressively contributed to familial productivity, carrying out household tasks such as collecting firewood and water, herding animals, caring for younger siblings and assisting with agriculture, particularly during busy periods such as harvest. These occupations predominated in the Acholi region for recorded history (Atkinson, 1994; Girling, 1960; Ominde, 1952). As the war pro-

gressed and more of the population was displaced from their land, substantial alterations occurred in how people lived and provided for their families (Spittal et al., 2008). Restricted to camp living, the population increasingly depended on relief and over the course of the conflict many lost their family resources, descending into economic destitution (Dolan, 2009; Gersony, 1997; UNHCR, 2007).

Methods

The purpose of this secondary analysis was to explore occupation-related narratives embedded in two applied ethnographies. The first was a study conducted July 2004 to June 2005 during active conflict, one year prior to the cessation of hostilities. Its purpose was to document female vulnerability to HIV/AIDS infection in three displacement camps; Palanga, Awer and Pabbo (Spittal et al., 2008). During primary analysis using an inductive approach (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999) the researchers allowed the themes to emerge from the data. Occupation-related themes such as lamenting lost access to agricultural pursuits and the experience of coping with 'redundancy' were noted repeatedly. The primary purpose of the second study conducted June 2009 to May 2010 was to explore the impact of post conflict transition on early childhood health and development in three research sites, both village sites and camps (McElroy, in review). The repeated emergence of occupational issues in both health studies prompted the need for a secondary analysis aimed at better understanding the connections between displacement and occupation.

Population, site and participant selection

Both studies were based primarily in the Amuru district of Northern Uganda (one site in the first study was in the Gulu district) and included ethnic Acholi people. The district was chosen because it was heavily impacted by the war, owing to substantial and prolonged presence of rebel forces. Purposive sampling captured participant variation in both studies. Participants were recruited through local leaders, referral from

respondents and direct recruitment by researchers (following permissions by community leadership—both government and traditional chiefs). From the first study we included 55 semi-structured interviews and 9 focus group discussions capturing the views of 116 female respondents in the analysis. Respondents ranged in age from 14 to 67 years, educational attainment varied from no formal education to secondary level. For the purpose of this occupational analysis, we excluded transcripts of women who were formerly abducted (20 interviews and 4 focus groups), as their experiences were unique compared to those in displacement camps.

The second study included both male and female perspectives, again from a wide range of ages, educational and work backgrounds (with agriculture being the dominant productive occupation). Data were gathered through 31 interviews and 1 focus group discussion with mothers/primary female caregivers, 5 focus groups with fathers, 4 focus groups with elders, and 4 interviews plus 10 focus groups with numerous categories of leaders (both formal and informal) totaling 133 respondents. For this occupational analysis, we excluded data from sibling caregivers as they were asked only about life post-war. Finally, during data collection the experiences, voices and actions of many additional persons were captured through participant observation by the research team. Discussions and observations provided opportunity to explore emerging themes and the authors reflected upon, discussed and wrote about emerging themes as well as their own biases, assumptions and judgments (Ahern, 1999). Interactions and experiences were recorded in field notes thereby becoming part of the dataset that was reviewed for this secondary analysis. Because the primary researcher on the second study was an occupational therapist, her reflections in the field also included observations relating to occupation.

Data collection and ethics

Acholi Research Assistants (4 in the first study, 2 in the second), fluent both in English and the local language of Lwo, were trained to collect data

in both studies. Interviews/focus groups averaging 2 hours were conducted in private locations and audio-recorded, then later transcribed and translated by both the Research Assistants and hired translators. To ensure quality, a second person verified random samples of transcript translations. In addition, the bilingual language skills of the research assistants were assessed prior to commencing the data collection as interview guides were translated into Lwo, back translated into English and compared for discrepancies. Several forms of triangulation were employed in both of the original studies i.e., multiple researchers, multiple data collection strategies and multiple sites, to increase credibility, enhance the richness of the dataset and reduce bias (Harris, Jerome & Fawcett, 1997; Janesick, 2008). Both studies received approval from the University of British Columbia (Canada), Makerere University (Uganda) and the Uganda National Council of Science and Technology. To ensure informed consent from persons of varying literacy, consent forms were read to participants in the local language and consent given either by signing or using a thumbprint.

Secondary data analysis

The analytical process began with an exploration of the first data set in 2008. The occupational theme was noted and this began a process of reflection, which was then confirmed during the second study. For the occupational analysis, we engaged in a process of reading and re-reading transcripts and field notes from both studies, taking an inductive approach focused on descriptions of occupation. Codes (single ideas) were formulated under the broad objective of exploring occupation and once coded, grouped into categories or factors and then ultimately into over-riding domains (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Two of the authors on this paper have an occupational therapy background and consequently view the world through an occupational lens; this clearly influenced the perception of occupational themes and is an acknowledged bias. However, the other three authors come from an anthropological background, offering balance in perspective. Additionally, the research

team reflected both the emic and etic perspectives (from within and outside of the Acholi culture) allowing for rich views, better understanding and interpretations. To complete the higher levels of theorizing we employed a variety of methods used in ethnographic traditions: tallying frequencies (Miles & Huberman, cited in LeCompte & Schensul, 1999), thematic analysis (looking for patterns and relationships), and comparative analysis (comparing and contrasting data from multiple respondents) (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999).

Findings

The findings are presented in two sections: The first captures themes related to perceptions of the occupational environment during prolonged war and internal displacement. This situates the second section, which outlines themes related to occupational adaptation, change, and responses to occupational deprivation arranged by three groups of respondents: adult females, adult males, and children and youth. As these segments of the population had differing pre-war occupations, the implications of war and displacement on occupational adaptation also differed. Productive (sustaining) occupations are the primary focus of the paper, as they tend to dominate the life of the rural agriculturalists.

Perceptions of the occupational environment in war and internal displacement

Before the war, the rural villages where the majority of Acholi lived were referred to as 'gang' (home or village). As war progressed in Northern Uganda, most people were forced to relocate to lands distant and inaccessible from their homes. But even for those whom the distance was commutable, there were restrictions placed on movement and dangers outside of the camp, such as threat of attack or abduction, that stopped or limited people's movements to the village. Consequently during the war, a new word for village emerged in some regions of Acholi-land: 'juka' meaning 'to stop'. The village became 'the place we are stopped from going'. Even today, 4 years after hostilities and restrictions have

ceased, many in this region continue to use the word 'juka' when talking about the villages, their language showing the lingering influence of their forced displacement.

Displacement physically separated people from their occupational environments; from the spacious homesteads and wide expanses of agricultural and grazing lands where they had raised their children, cultivated crops and reared animals. These and the other occupations that had previously meaningfully filled their days, nurtured their families and indeed ensured their survival were now either seriously disrupted or no longer viable options. With their loss, so too went the ability to make a living and provide nourishment, adequate shelter and income for necessities such as school fees, clothes, soap, salt.

What the war has brought is poverty for us in a very big way. We have lost people, so many of them. Now that we are in the camp there is nowhere to farm, there is no land, there is no money, there is no way of sending a child to school. Your child gets spoilt. This is what the war has brought. We have lost the strength that we had. – Father, Amuru district, 2009. After living in camps for 11 years this 32 year old father is transitioning back to village life.

The new camp environments were like urban centers, but without the same resources or occupational opportunities. In the larger camps, the round huts with mud brick walls and grass roofs were packed so tightly together that there was space only for footpaths between. There was extremely limited room for humans, let alone for rearing animals (most of which were stolen or confiscated prior to the displacement), and through overuse, the environment immediately surrounding the camp became stripped of fertility and natural resources such as firewood.

They would not allow us to go back to dig [cultivate] within the villages that were far away. The land on the outskirts of the camp was unproductive and would not yield crops adequately because very many people were cultivating there and it was already too

exhausted. Even the crops that you cultivate around the camps would be destroyed by the animals kept in the camps or even by those animals that were coming out from the [national] park-they would also come and destroy our crops and that is why camp life during the war was hard. – Local leader FGD, Anaka District, 2010.

In the face of frequent security restrictions and/or distance to land, many in the population became dependent on aid provided by national and international agencies, however respondents reported almost unanimously in both studies that distributed food and basic supplies were insufficient to meet needs. As the following quote illustrates, the restriction of productive occupations that could yield some means of betterment was often a source of emotional pain made all the worse by physical deprivation.

For me this war has caused a lot of changes in my life. It brought me this problem of bringing me to the camp here. It brought me problems of just always waiting for food until government gives it to us-that is when we eat.... So this war brought us problems of living in the camp and not having proper huts to sleep in and it gave us problems with food, it gave problems of making us not reach our own land to dig, most of us don't have anywhere to dig, so it has really made our lives difficult. –37 year old mother of 6 children under the age of 15, married but in an abusive relationship, Pabbo camp, 2009.

Thus, the occupational context was altered significantly by war and displacement and this in turn, influenced occupation.

The occupational change and adaptation arising from war and displacement

Women and their occupations in war and displacement

Based on the data, it appears that females, widely acknowledged as the primary caregivers of children, were more likely to continue productive occupations that related to meeting family needs and ensuring survival. This included occupations of caring such as collecting distributions, ration-

ing, preparing and serving food, striving to maintain hygiene and sanitation, waiting in long lines for water, leaving the camps to collect firewood, and teaching and instructing children.

Unmet physical needs in the camp environment meant that some family members had to persist in productive occupations within or regardless of restrictions and dangers, and primary female caregivers were frequently, although not exclusively, reported to take on this role. Those who were displaced to camps close to their homeland had some advantage as they could continue to cultivate food, rent their land or sell their produce for income (although their land was degraded over the course of the war and crops subjected to theft). Those who did not have accessible land could, if they had the means, rent or borrow/share land near the camp, travel long distances to their land, find hired labor, and/or sometimes initiate new occupations such as collecting water or firewood for money, brewing alcohol, petty trading, even selling foodstuffs that were distributed to them. While these occupations were often not reliable, due to the unpredictable sociopolitical environment, they were a means of supplementing the household livelihood. Women frequently reported finding themselves alone in caring and providing for children because of death, separation, abandonment or withdrawal by fathers or other relatives. While this was reported to be difficult and stressful, responses indicate the sense of purpose in continued occupation:

I also lost very many children as a result of this war; I lost two young boys. I had a lot of pain because of these two children. I would ask myself, 'how am I going to survive?' I had thoughts of suicide, I would think 'should I live? But if I die, who will take care of my children?' I fought with these thoughts in my mind and then I later began counselling myself. I picked up an axe, and I went and I chopped wood. I began making charcoal. By then, I had one child who was in primary three [school], one in primary seven and others were very young. I would talk to myself 'where can I take my

responsibility? To whom should I take these children?' I struggled with life, without anyone supporting me. I started burning firewood for charcoal. I began earning income. I cultivated gardens, I planted rice and it yielded so well. This made me begin feeling at least happy. This is the money I used for educating my children and when people were told to come to the camp, I found out that very many people had similar problems like mine.-Elder woman, Pabbo, 2009 who lost her husband and several children in the war.

Now that I am alone, and coupled with the fact that my parents are now old and unable to dig, I am solely responsible for finding food for the family. The biggest problem is in supporting the children in school. It has become very difficult for me to raise any money. The child who has passed to Senior 2 [2nd level of secondary school] is at home now because there is no money to pay school fees. I am currently concentrating on the eldest boy... We women face a lot of problems. Men [fathers] are not of any help. All they do is drink. When they wake up in the morning, they go straight to look for beer. They don't bother to team up with their wives to support the children. Today, all child up bringing is left to the women. As a woman, you feel that your child should not go to bed on an empty stomach, so even if you have no money, you will go to provide casual labour to a friend for pay. – 44 year old mother of 5, Awer camp, 2005.

Men and their occupations in war and displacement
Reports suggest that war and camp life rendered many males unable to meet their pre-war responsibilities and/or cultural expectations. Males generally did not share child care-giving roles in traditional Ugandan society and traditional male occupations such as agricultural work, livestock rearing, hunting and waged labour were often impossible under the restrictions of the environment. Males may have also experienced greater confinement in camps because they were at higher risk of violent repercussions (abduction,

beating, killing, maiming) if outside, owing to perceptions of males as a greater threat to security or an asset to the armies.

People were so mixed up in the camps; there were many responsible men in the past in the villages, but when they reached the camps they became foolish and began to drink alcohol so much because of frustration since they did not have any work to do. And if a man tried to go back to the village to dig to get some food for his family, he may never come back or he may come back with wounds, very terrible wounds caused by the people in the bush [rebels] or those in the regime [military]. It looks like the soldiers from both sides hated to see the faces of the men because if they found you in the village digging, if you were a man they would not spare you. If they did not kill you, they would leave you with a fatal [terrible] wound. It was fair at least with the women. They would sometimes excuse them, so the men used to just keep on roaming around in the camp drinking alcohol. So the men's lives were extremely spoiled and life was generally difficult. – Local Council Leader FGD respondent, Anaka, 2010.

Culturally, men were providers but they could not provide during displacement; traditionally, they were protectors but they could not protect in a war where they were frequently victims themselves. Traditionally, they were teachers of their children, but respondents reported widely that children in camps no longer listened. To fill the void of traditionally valued occupations, reports suggest that many men sought to escape worries, feelings of being burdened, frustrated, bored or hopeless through alternative occupations such as drinking alcohol, hanging out with friends, playing cards and going to bars or video halls. One 42 year old father, in an informal discussion, talked of how women persisted to find ways to cater for their children, but men found ways to distract themselves from the situation. This sentiment was echoed by other respondents:

Most of the men if they fail to perform their duties, what comes next is the heart is

bleeding [distressed/aggrieved] and that is what makes him go out to make himself forget by passing time among his friends and his friends will teach him to drink badly/excessively. That is the thing that happens-52 year old father, lived in displacement camps for 13 years, Amuru District, 2009

Some of us, we did not used to drink, but when we came to the camp we began drinking because of a lot of worries that we had and then because we were idle and we had nothing to do. So to forget what was happening I would drink. Father in Pabbo camp, 2009.

In the face of this occupational deprivation, economic destitution and temptation offered by the camps, a myriad of socially dysfunctional responses were reported (predominantly but not exclusively by adult males): physical, sexual and verbal violence; domestic quarrels and disharmony; using dominance to actively hinder family welfare by taking extremely limited household food or money; extramarital affairs; and/or complete withdrawal from families, abandoning women and children.

Quarrels are caused by many small things... You may have sold your labour for cash or in-kind payment. If you got some money, say, from sale of cassava, your husband will demand that money so that he can use it for drinking. Even when your husband does something wrong, you cannot talk about it because if you do, you will start up a big quarrel... In the past, men were so helpful and useful. The men did garden work and planted food for the whole family. However today, even that little that UN gives, the man wants to sell it away and drink up the money. Those of us whose husbands do not have salaried jobs are in problems because the men have no source of income. So they do not help in providing for the family... A man will look at the responsibilities in his own house and the burden in supporting so many children. He then leaves to find a single, unattached

woman with no or few kids and leaves his own wife. - 35 year old mother caring for 8 children, Awer camp, 2005.

It is important to note that these reports were by no means universal; some men persisted in the role of provider, protector and/or teacher despite the living conditions and the very serious risks.

Children, youth and their occupations in war and displacement

The loss of productive occupations also had generational implications. Traditionally children and youth were mentored into occupations from a very young age. Before war, the productive occupations they mastered under the supervision and tutelage of the extended family would continue to serve them in the future, as most of them would follow in the footsteps of their parents. Their future livelihoods would be dependent on knowing the occupations of an agrarian society: how to cultivate and process food, rear animals, conduct small-scale trade, manage a household and care for children. The majority of their pre-war time was therefore spent in the homestead; they contributed significantly to the family's production and often earned some small funds themselves to meet their own needs. However due to the restrictions of war, combined with their parent's efforts to protect them from rebel abduction, children and youth were often left in the camps during the day and thus did not get the same opportunities for mentorship and practice in occupations that were valued by their culture.

So the child does not go to the garden, does not even hold the hoe. For the girls they would cut the millet fingers and some of them today do not know how. Cutting the sesame stems they may not even know how to do now, and now, grinding is not being done now that people are in the camp... Even grinding millet some of the girls do not know. There are even some women who are now 20 years old who do not know how to grind millet-56 year old male farmer married to two women, caring for 6 children (3 grandchildren), lived in camps for 6 years.

In addition to the loss of traditional occupations, in the first half of the war when people were still fleeing rebel attack in their villages, there was a breakdown in the educational system with schools frequently closed, abandoned, re-located or even destroyed. When school was in session, it became difficult for students to concentrate and learn when living amid insurgency. During these years, children of school age often did not achieve the level of education they aspired to; a fact lamented by respondents. As children aged they were less willing to return to lower level classes.

Fighting has destroyed the development of so many children and me personally as I speak, I feel that the war has also destroyed my development because I never went to school. If the war was not there, perhaps I would have been educated... you cannot grow with a sound mind because sometimes you have to hide in the bush when it should be time for being in school. – 25 year old male focus group respondent in Anaka district.

As war persisted and more people were displaced, schools were established in or close to camps to ensure children could receive or resume education. In fact, a number of parents and leaders reported that a positive aspect of camp living was the increased cultural value placed on educational attainment for both male and female children; a value evident in today's parents. Nonetheless, the poverty brought on by loss of productive occupations meant that parents often could not afford formal education for their children. While Uganda has free universal primary education, there are additional costs for books, uniforms, and exams. While most managed these smaller costs, education beyond primary level required fees and other costs that were frequently prohibitive to parents who did not have the steady access to income-generating occupations.

When you reach primary seven in your education, your parents may fail to afford your further education. So if you repeat the same class and fail to proceed further due to lack of (school) fees, you will eventually get frustrated and drop out of school, incapable

of proceeding further with your education. – Adolescent girl in Awer camp, 2005.

There was now a cumulative issue for children and youth in terms of their occupational potential; the lack of practical or agrarian skill development, lack of alternative income generating possibilities due to confinement in camps and the context of war, and limited educational attainment. These factors represented situations of occupational deprivation that respondents felt had negative implications for the present and future productive lives of children and youth.

The lack of opportunity to provide for themselves through culturally valued productive occupations, combined with a lack of fulfillment of basic needs such as food, clothing, soap or sanitary pads, resulted in numerous reports of youth engaging in survival occupations; many of which were viewed by adult respondents as serious breaches of traditional values and/or potentially dangerous to the youth themselves. These activities included stealing to fulfill their needs; going out to the bush to make charcoal or do casual labour, putting themselves at risk of abduction or violence by soldiers; joining the fighting forces; and for girls in particular, turning to occupations of courting, i.e. spending time looking for men to act as providers and engaging in sex or marriage as a means of providing for themselves, and sometimes for their parents, siblings or children as well.

Adolescent girls in this camp are not allowed to go and cultivate far from the camp. You find that they may not even have money for hiring the gardens, so they can be forced to go and get money from soldiers or even business men. Some parents may not be in position to get money so that they satisfy their children's needs. This really forces adolescent girls to go and look for other means of getting all those things.... Some un-serious men can start to say that, 'there is no use of studying. I can give you every thing you need, so do not think of going back to school'. In the end you find that a girl is

even pregnant. – 44 year old mother of 5 living in Pabbo camp, 2005.

They are attracted to soldiers because they get salaries and hence have money. So you don't have to rely on waiting for WFP (World Food Program) rations whereas you may, if you get involved with a boy whose family hasn't enough food. So you will always have to worry about what to eat. If WFP delays to distribute food, so a girl will opt for the soldiers who earn a monthly salary. So she will have something to eat without having to sweat for it. – Adolescent girl in FGD, Awer camp, 2005.

Furthermore, there were many reports of youth roaming around idle or engaged in new occupations based on uncontrolled exposure to adult-oriented time use patterns. In the camps there was contact with movies, discos, alcohol, and more close personal interactions with peers and strangers than had ever been possible in the village environment of the past. Many were lured into these new occupations, often to the dismay of parents who felt they were losing the traditional ways/values and becoming uncontrollable.

You find that girls have also become undisciplined. They want to even go for video shows. They no longer follow the time of staying at home like we used to do in the past and it has made it difficult for us now to instruct them-Focus group of older influential women, Palenga camp, 2004.

As was the case with the other groups of respondents, the situation for youth was not applicable to all; some were actively engaged in helping with childcare and household chores; traveling out to gardens with their parents to cultivate or collect firewood despite the risks; or finding ways to engage in labor to earn money for school fees or to help meet the family's needs.

Because if you do not have a parent, there will be no one to pay for your education. Also if for example your father dies, and there are young children, you will think that you should better concentrate on caring for

them. Because in the camp here, the people who provide better care for the children are the girls as opposed to the boys. – 19 year old girl living in Pabbo camp, dropped out of senior one due to lack of fees.

Discussion

Respondents of these two studies conducted during and after war in Northern Uganda described how their traditional productive occupations were often deeply changed or even thwarted altogether when their environments were ravaged by prolonged war and displacement. Whether war and displacement represented a situation of necessary adaptation or deprivation and resultant dysfunction appears to be related to the occupations the individual could still maintain, along with the purpose, identity and fulfillment related to performing those occupations.

A group who largely reported occupational adaptation and at least partial maintenance of traditional occupations were the female caregivers. Impelled by the cultural and perhaps innate or biological imperative to care for and preserve their families, they maintained and sometimes even expanded their occupations under exceedingly difficult conditions. In addition to care and household activities, many sought ways to earn money or food through hiring out their labour, brewing alcohol or venturing out to their gardens, sometimes at great personal risk (McElroy, Spittal, Atim, Tebere, & Muyinda, 2010). In addition to preserving family survival, these occupations may have proffered some meaning or purpose, a finding supported by other studies. Artazcoz, Benach, Borrell, and Cortes (2004) concluded that the nurturing roles played by women buffered mental health dysfunction in a study of unemployment and mental health in Spain. Whiteford (2004), in a case study of Kosovar refugees, noted that the occupations involving helping others assisted in coping and could be described as "both a pragmatic and occupational strategy" (p. 86). The occupations involved in caring for other people offer a purpose, a reason

to continue in the most trying of circumstances and may contribute to preventing some of the dysfunction seen in those who did not or could not continue with pre-conflict occupations. Further research is required to directly explore this relationship.

The data suggest that continuation of occupation contributed to positive outcomes, yet also revealed the reverse: that idleness and the lack of purpose brought on by occupational deprivation could contribute to diminished well-being and coping through behaviours that the local culture considered dysfunctional, morally inappropriate or dangerous. Respondents' reports suggest that adult men and youth may have been hit particularly hard from being unable to fulfill productive occupations. These findings are supported by other research. The Survey for War-Affected Youth conducted with over 1000 young males (14–30 years) in Northern Uganda in 2005/06 reported: "The economic options open to youth in and out of the camps are, in a word, abysmal" (Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006, p. v). A recent report by Mutto et al. (2010) stated: "Camp life was associated by many people with idleness, apathy, unemployment, excessive drinking and high rates of domestic and gender based violence" (p. 17).

Researchers of occupation have demonstrated that lost ability to perform important occupations can reduce self-perceptions of being competent, capable, valuable or useful (Hammell, 2004). Those respondents of this study who experienced occupational deprivation, or even just diminished ability to perform certain occupations reflected these self-perceptions. Furthermore, as Reed, Hocking and Smythe (2010) highlighted, occupations are closely linked to identity and "not being able to perform an occupation changes people's identity and their self image" (p. 141). Loss of role and identity was observed in some men in the present study and supported by other research. For instance, Dolan (2002) described the link between acts of violence and interrupted masculine identities in Northern Uganda arising from inability to meet personal and societal expecta-

tions and the consequent feelings of resentment, oppression, humiliation and anger. Helbig and McKay (2003) have outlined connections between the lack of meaningful occupations, boredom and addictions, a pattern of occupational mal-adaptation also supported by the findings of this analysis.

In addition to current social and individual dysfunction reported, the study respondents feared that the changes and deprivation of occupation in war and displacement could have future implications. Typically, children are indoctrinated or socialized into their cultures. In an innate process of watching, mirroring, learning, doing and gaining proficiency, they increasingly function as contributing members of their societies (Bonder, 2007; Kostelny, 2006; Lee & Johnson, 2007; Nsamenang, 2008). In war and displacement, adults have limited opportunity to mentor children into the meaningful occupations of the culture, educational and economic opportunities can be disrupted, and new occupations introduced that may not mesh well with traditional cultural values. This alters the occupational potential of children and youth, defined as "what might be in the future beyond what is in the present; a combination of capacity, opportunity, resources, and social structures that enable engagement in occupations" (Townsend & Polatajko, 2007, p. 372).

Lost occupation is clearly a loss of much more than the loss of physical acts of doing, it is the loss of meaning, purpose, identity, control, value, and potential. Displacement into a situation where meaningful engagement is severely restricted and idleness tolerated as part of an overall situation can have very serious consequences to the population. Northern Uganda is reported to have high rates of mental health issues including both post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Bolton et al., 2007; Roberts, Ocaka, Browne, Oyok, & Sondorp, 2008; Vinck, Pham, Stover, & Weinstein, 2007). In addition to severe levels of conflict-related trauma, this study suggests that the day-to-day experience of occupational deprivation is also harmful to well-being and likely a

contributing factor to poor outcomes. Research and programming has begun to highlight this critical issue for refugees and/or people impacted by war (Algado & Burgman, 2005; Steindl et al., 2008; Thibeault, 2001; Whiteford, 2000, 2004, 2005) but more work is needed. Evaluation of programs offered by organizations such as Save the Children or the World Food Programme, which provide food or other incentives to individuals performing community work building infrastructure, is one example of occupational focused research opportunities. Human beings are occupational beings, and there is much that can and should be done to assist in the preservation of this aspect of humanity during prolonged displacements. While an ambitious and creative challenge, it has potential for significant impact on human health and dignity.

Hostilities in northern Uganda ceased in 2006 and over the course of the second research study, many people returned to their villages. While the process of re-building was intense and difficult, the potential for healing in the resumption of occupation could be observed during resettlement transitions. This is another worthy area of research focus.

There are limitations to this analysis. Data were drawn from research studies that were not designed to elicit data on occupation and as such did not have the depth of a primary study. However, the fact that descriptions of occupation and well-being arose from studies purposed on different research questions indicates the relative importance of occupation in conflict and displacement.

Respondents were largely female and this gender imbalance may have biased the conclusions drawn.

Conclusions

War and displacement removed or severely diminished the previous legitimate ways of participating in occupations of daily life in Northern Uganda. When occupational deprivation is combined with pervasive need, socially and personally unhealthy occupations can be the only available alternative (Thibeault, 2002; Whiteford, 2000). While there is detriment to being deprived of or restricted from performing occupations, as this analysis suggests, engagement in meaningful occupation can preserve some sense of control, routine, purpose and well-being. More research and programming attention is needed that directly explores and addresses the basic human need for occupation in situations of prolonged displacement.

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