In search for
the road to resilience

A qualitative minor field study on risks, protective processes and efforts to create resilience among former child soldiers in Northern Uganda

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Abstract

The purpose with this thesis was to investigate the recovering process of former child soldiers in Northern Uganda through the perspective of professionals. Data have been collected through eleven semi-structured interviews conducted in the districts Gulu, Pader and Lira. The eleven respondents come from eight different organizations who all work with former child soldiers and their psychosocial adjustment and reintegration. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological development theory we have distinguished different factors affecting the individual at the different system levels (micro, meso, exo and macro). Our results show both risk factors and resilience which are presented in five themes: individual, family, education, community and society. Education, occupation, religion, NGOs presence and amnesty are protective factors invigorating levels of resilience. The family and extended family factors prove to be the most commonly protective, however they can also involve a risk. Fear of re-abduction, lack of trust in government, stigma and the general impact of the war on the Acholi population are found to be the common risk factors.

Keywords: Uganda, resilience, child soldiers, ecological system theory

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1. Introduction

2007 (p. 8), in the Paris principles UNICEF[1] defined "a child associated with an armed force or armed group", more commonly referred to as a "child soldier" as:

> any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking or has taken a direct part in hostilities.

Currently, hundreds of thousands children are serving as child soldiers in wars and armed conflicts around the world (CSUCS 2008). One rebel group which ran this utilization of children to extremes is the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) operating primarily in Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan. The rebel movement almost exclusively used children to fight their war (UN 2004). Thousands and thousands of children were abducted during the conflict to fill the LRA ranks. It is estimated that 90 percent of the LRA consisted of children (Derluyn et al. 2004, p. 861). The armed conflict is now more or less over and LRA is no longer in control of the northern parts of Uganda as they were at the height of their power. However, now critical questions and post-conflict challenges emerge. We will dedicate this thesis to one of them: how will life be for the children who were abducted and used as inter alia combatants or sex slaves and how can these lives be altered in a positive direction? In this thesis will we thus try to examine protective factors and processes that promote the occurrence of resilience and moreover identify the risks that may thwart a positive development.

We are both very interested in posttraumatic resilience, how the concept of resilience can be used by professionals in work with exposed individuals and what efficient treatment looks like for these children and adolescents who are both victims and perpetrators. This study is unable to answer all matters of this magnitude. It is nonetheless a first step for us in our research – and more research on resilience among trauma populations such as former child soldiers is sorely needed in order to develop effective intervention programs, reintegration techniques and treatments (Klasen et al. 2010, p. 1110).

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[1] A complete list of abbreviations can be found in Attachment 2

We are convinced that methods and processes to attain resilience occur, or should occur, on levels all the way from the individual's genetics to a societal level. We have therefore based this thesis on the idea that everything is intricately connected, something which is mirrored in our choice of theory.

2. Purpose

Our purpose is, through interviews, to investigate factors of importance in the psychosocial adjustment and reintegration of former abductees in Northern Uganda. Additionally will we examine if any factor is viewed as more essential than others. We have used the perspective of the professionals who work with the rehabilitation and recovery process from rescue or escape to a life in the home community. Through their stories and the ecological development theory we have identified vital factors and processes. We want to catch the professionals' view on our target group's experiences, since this perception determines the design of interventions with the aim of successful rehabilitation.

We consider knowledge about this field worthy of attention because a deeper understanding for recovery factors are of importance for the work with children afflicted by the civil war in Uganda, armed conflicts in other developing countries and a step towards a more efficient care for this target group. Gathering information regarding risks and resilience-promoting factors in the reintegration process can hopefully explain why some of the people in our target group are better off than others (Klasen et al. 2010), and especially give guidance in constructing future interventions with adequate focus.

3. Questions at issue

- What factors and processes are of importance in the rehabilitation of former abductees and why?
- What areas do the professionals prioritize when designing interventions?

4. Background of the conflict

4.1 Colonial time

In order to fully understand the roots of the LRA insurgency and the reality for those who fought in it, an extensive description of the historical context and the political process is

needed. We first need to go back to the colonial era. The British rulers of Uganda made a division of the country – industries and industrial farming were located in the southern parts of the country whereas the north was exclusively used for its human recourses. The south and east were producers of cotton, cocoa, rubber and coffee, while the northern regions were characterized by unskilled labor, providing the southern regions with workers and most important recruits for the armed forces. The Acholi tribe was simply altered into what Doom and Vlassenroot (1999, p. 8) calls a military ethnography. This division promoted development and prosperity in the south and widened the gap with the less prominent north which instead possessed great military power. An unbalanced scale with wealth contra military power can be partly faulted for the blood stained history of Ugandan.

4.2 In the aftermath of independence

Uganda gained independence in 1962. The first government was formed by Milton Obote's political party (Uganda People's Congress) and the traditional king Kabbaka Yekka's followers. Obote served as prime minister and Kabbaka Yekka as a ceremonial president. After a diversity of opinion between the two parties, troops loyal to Obote attacked the Kabbaka's palace. Now, 1967, Uganda took the step towards a strong presidential rule, using military force. The officer in charge of the assault on the Kabbaka's palace, was not slow in realizing to what extend this armed argument could be used. After his achievement at the palace he was made army commander in compensation for his services. His name was Idi Amin. Strategically after his promotion he put loyal men from his own tribe in key positions within the army; the Acholi commanders who held the positions were discharged or killed. 1971 he overthrew Obote and seized power over Uganda with military means. A time of persecution and mass murder was about to begin. The northern part of the country and the Acholi tribe were especially targeted, since the north was the former president Obotes home region. Idi Amin's infamous rule is common knowledge and his number of adversaries grew swiftly. An armed force called the Ugandan National Liberation Army (UNLA) was established, consisting mainly of Acholis, which together with the Tanzanian army defeated Idi Amin's regime on 11th of April 1979 (Utrikespolitiska institutet 2012). After Amin was overthrown Obote regained power.

1981 a new actor entered the stage, Yoweri Museveni. He formed the National Resistance Army (NRA) and began to fight the government. He was tired of old politics and wanted a new and modern Uganda. In the armed struggle with the NRA the UNLA committed mass

killings. Indeed, Obote was not a popular leader and he was forcefully taken from power by General Tito Okello Lutwa 1985. Both political and military power was now in the hands of the Acholis. Not for long though: in1986 the NRA conquered Kampala and excluded the Acholis for the first time from all kinds of power and influence. The defeated remains of UNLA regrouped in Sudan and joined forces with other opponents of Museveni. Together they established the Ugandan People's Defense Army (UPDA). The UPDA enjoyed support from the Acholi people which distrusted the NRA after a series of atrocities targeting civil Acholis. After initial victories the UPDA could not continue their advance due to lack of arms and ammunition (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, p. 13-15). In competition with the UPDA Alice Auma Lakwena formed the Holy Spirit Mobile Force (HSM). At first the HSM worked together with the UPDA but soon Alice thirsted for more and began to attack fractions of the UPDA. Museveni seized the moment and began launching military offensives. At the same time as he offered amnesty to those rebels who laid down their weapons and returned home. The concept was highly successful. In 1989 the fighting had come to an end and a great number of former UPDA were absorbed into the NRA.

4.3 The end of conventional civil wars

Doom and Vlassenroot (1999, p. 16) consider Alice Auma Lakwena and her movement to mark a breaking point in the Ugandan insurgencies when it comes to tactic and ideology. Alice namely claimed to be possessed by the Holy Spirit of Lakwena, and it was on his orders she formed the resistance. Alice herself has been portrayed as a medium and a prophetess and therefore gained international interest. 1986 she won great a victory and this was considered verification of her powers. The HSM was defeated in 1987 but warrants a closer look. Alice combined Christianity with spirituality, i.e. traditional Acholi beliefs. She offered hope and salvation, surely welcomed elements in the war-torn region. She also based her recruitment on rituals. A recruit should go through initiation rituals before he or she became a full member of the HSM. These rituals consisted of giving the recruits enigmatic powers and were based on the same mix of Christianity and tradition. Alice is furthermore noteworthy from another aspect; she is the cousin of Joseph Kony.

4.4 The Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Joseph Kony started his career in the UPDA and by 1987 he was in charge of the so-called black battalion. Kony seems to have an appealing personality and appears to have noteworthy rhetorical and theatrical skills. Maybe this is the reason why, initially, former

soldiers from the defeated UPDA and HSM joined him and the Lord's Resistance Army. Just like Alice, Kony created a special ideology and rites, including initiation rituals. Such rituals included beating other captives in order to implement toughness in the children. Thereafter the "recruits" were anointed with oil and the symbol of the cross put on various parts of their body (Amone-P'olak 2007, p. 648-649). Kony had a vision of a pure Acholi people and arranged purification rituals. This cleansed people would then with force retake the power and rights to which the Acholis were entitled. Hence can the LRA at this stage be described as a movement with political aims. This however would swiftly change. 1991 the government forces struck fiercely against the LRA and Kony. After failed peace talks Kony, the self-proclaimed spokesman from God and the traditional spiritual leader, altered his tactics. He accused the Acholis of not supporting him and started to launch vicious attacks on the civilian population. It was also by this time that the LRA started using the Acholi villages as pools for filling their ranks and stomachs (Veale and Stravrou 2007, p. 275). Greatest suffering was inflicted on the three northern districts of Gulu, Kitgum and Pader and utmost affliction hit the most exposed, i.e. women, children and adolescents (Amone-P'olak 2007, p. 642). An estimated number of 25, 000 children were according to UNICEF abducted by the LRA. These youths were forcibly used as child soldiers, carriers and sex slaves. 85% of the LRA consisted of these Acholi children (UNICEF 1998). A boy describes his abduction:

> Just when I arrived home from school in the evening, I had no idea that rebels were approaching our village. Before I had completed changing my school uniform, one of the rebels had quietly entered the hut and was pointing a gun to my head. I was paralyzed and scared. The rebels had abducted several boys and girls in the swoop and we were all tied with ropes to one another. Before we had gone far, two of the boys had already been killed because they could not cope with the speed of the rebels. After we reached the rebel hideout, I had lost count of how many had been killed: cut with machete, beaten to death or shot dead. I was forced to kill as well. If I did not kill, I would have been killed. In captivity, many were killed, others died of diseases, and some died of hunger or during raids to loot foodstuff from hostile villages (Amone-P'olak 2007, p. 648).

Simultaneously the LRA gained full support from the Sudanese government in terms of weapons, training facilities and ammunition. The Ugandan government was namely engaged in fighting the LRA in the northern region of Uganda at the same time as the Sudanese government fought the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) on the other side of the border. Both governments used and supported the guerilla of the other country in order to

quell the insurgency in their own country. Consequently the LRA had operational bases in South Sudan, just as SPLA had bases in Northern Uganda (Amone-P'olak, p. 643). Furthermore, the LRA tactic did not stop at the actual abductions; it also endeavored to generate rootlessness for the children and to make the LRA their only alternative in life. This was done by forcing the children to commit ferocious, atrocious crimes in their own villages and against their own families (ibid. p. 649).

The affliction of the northern people was amplified in 1994 when the government forces implemented the strategy of what they called "protected villages". However, it should be mentioned that the strategy proved successful from a strictly military point of view. Since the LRA was dependent on abductees and pillaging, the Acholi inhabitants were forcibly moved into areas where the government army could control them. Approximately 1.8 million people in Northern Uganda were displaced (IDMC 2012), which equals about 90% of the Northern Uganda population (McElroy et al. 2012, p. 138; Spitzer and Twikirize 2012). The conditions in these Internally Displaced Persons camps (IDPs) were rough. As shown by McElroy et al. (2012) the possibilities for sustaining livelihood were strictly limited: for most, there were no ways of accessing the agricultural lands or keeping cattle, upon both of which the Acholi people are reliant. As a result nourishment and income became impossible to adequately sustain. The people therefore developed a dependency on foreign aid due to a lack of other alternatives. Also traditions and roles were shattered, for example for men who could not carry out their traditional duties as head of the family. Overall there was a great frustration and weariness (Betancourt 2012).

2006 the fighting was brought to an end and the Acholi people was allowed to return to their homes. They were a people greatly affected by the war who had suffered heavy losses on various levels. Simultaneously, thousands of former LRA combatants returned to the Acholi region from which they had been abducted. Some are still returning. These former abductees are both victims and perpetrators and their reality and experiences are something unimaginable for most of us. Yet, we argue that comprehension of the conflict and all those affected are fundamental for social work in Uganda and in the work with war refugees all over the world.

5. Previous research

5.1 The field of research

In the 1960s researchers got interested in figuring out why many children growing up under harsh conditions preformed so remarkably well. This can be said to be the starting point for resilience as a field of research. Earlier research focusing on resilience had a tendency to place risks at the center of attention; this is however starting to change. Leading researchers at present further claim that there is no such thing as inherited resilience and the field should be thoroughly investigated on various levels and by various scientific disciplines (Borge 2005, p. 60-61). During the hunt for relevant studies to underpin this thesis we could observe studies coming from a number of disciplines, such a social science, public health, psychology and medicine. Noteworthy though, was the challenge of finding useful research which emanated from the discipline of social work.

5.2 Research preformed in Uganda

We have mainly applied three categories of research areas in our material: resilience, former child soldiers and the insurgency in Northern Uganda. Although there have been several eminent studies made on all these areas (see for example McElroy et al. 2012; Blattmann and Annan 2010; Betancourt et al. 2010; Derluyn et al. 2004; Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter 2012; Doom and Vlassenroot 1999), there have been few which combine these three fields while covering all aspects. Eggum, Sallquist and Eisenberg (2011) discuss resilience among youths in the north of Uganda and focus on youngsters with a mean age of 13-14. These juveniles are not abductees and hence a completely different target group. Bird, Higgings and Mckay (2010) write about resilience and education. Education is furthermore an aspect presented by Corbin (2008) whose study has many qualities regarding areas of importance in relation to resilience. Some investigations aim at the risks and hardships the returnees are facing (Spitzer and Twikirize 2012; Derluyn et al. 2004; Betancourt et al. 2010). One article which has given us much inspiration is Klasen et al. (2010) who have interviewed 330 former child soldiers with yes and no-questions and number-rating questions. In the study 27.6 percent of the returnees proved to be posttraumatic resilient. Though, the researchers state that their study has gaps and they argue strongly that much more research on resilience in conflict and post-conflict areas needs to be done. The findings in previous research show high levels of posttraumatic stress among our target group (Derluyn el al. 2004) as well as high levels of resilience (Klasen et al. 2010). Numerous studies have found stigma as an

issue of prominent risk when reintegrating former child soldiers (Denov 2010; Betancourt et al. 2010; Spitzer and Twikirize 2012) and how education can promote resilience (Annan, Brier and Aryemo 2009; Betancourt et al. 2005; Bird, Higgings and Mckay 2010; Corbin 2008).

6. Theory

The ecological developmental model was created by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the late 70s and is based on the idea that a person's development occurs in various contexts and in interaction with others, i.e. social relationships. The theory belongs to the tradition of developmental psychology and is influenced by concepts from the work of Jean Piaget and Kurt Lewin (Bronfenbrenner 1979). According to the ecological theory, although it is important to study both the biological and the environmental conditions, it is even more important to study the interactions between them (Andersson 1986). Bronfenbrenner states that individuals are not isolated beings or passive in their development. The person is an active actor in the interactions with their environment. Ecological research looks at how a developing human perceives and influences the settings of where she lives and furthermore analyzes the interactions between these dynamic settings (Bronfrenbrenner 1979). These interactions occur in and between different levels or systems. There are four levels of environmental systems affecting the individual: micro-, meso-, exo- and macrosystem. Each of these systems holds roles, rules and norms. The different system levels are usually illustrated as circles wherein the individual is in the center:
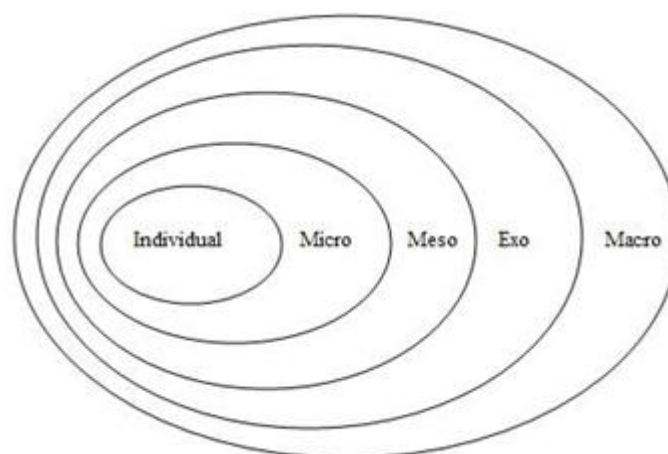
6.1 Microsystem

This is where the individual itself has direct interactions; it is the individual's setting, or the immediate setting (Bronfrenbrenner 1979). The microsystem holds roles, activities and relationships (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 22). The settings change with age and generally increase. Developmental change is improved by involvement in settings that differ from each other in, for example, ethnicity and social class. The settings in a child's immediate surroundings are usually family, friends and school. A small child would for example have its family as its only immediate surroundings, while a child of 10 years would have family, friends and school as settings with which they interact with (Socialstyrelsen 2006, p. 20). In the context for the returnees their micro systems could be settings like their family, their counselor and their school.

6.2 Mesosystem

The mesosystem consists of all the individual's microsystems, i.e. the immediate surroundings interactions and relations. How well the different microsystems communicate and support each other will have a positive or negative effect on the individual (Andersson 1986, p. 27). An example of a mesosystem in our case would be how the counselor and family collaborate. A well functioning relationship between the counselor and the family could lead to the returnee having a strong support from both sides. A lack of collaboration between counselor and family could lead to problems for the returnee. Moreover, in general, a mesosystem tends to provide more positive development for a person, if that person does not enter new settings alone but in company with someone familiar from an already established microsystem. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 211) gives us the example of the mother who accompanies her child on the first day of school.

6.3 Exosystem

In the exosystem the developing individual is not an active actor and the actions in the exosystem do not therefore have a direct impact on the individual. The actions do however have an impact on the conditions of the person in the center of the circles, in our context the returnee, since these events affect (or are affected by) the individual's surroundings or setting (Bronfrenbrenner 1979, p. 25). An example is the parents' working environment and the guidelines of the organizations that offer counseling. This means that the directions a team leader gives to the counselor will affect the way in which the counselor conducts the

counseling and will therefore affect the returnee. Or if the parents are working long and hard days it will have an impact on how they act when they get home.

6.4 Macrosystem

The macrosystem sets the frame for the other levels. What happens at macro level affects the other systems and thereby the constitutions for the other interactions. The macrosystem holds culture, sub-culture and the belief systems and values which give cultural directions (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 26). Hence, in the marcosystem you find elements such as politics and laws. When countries enact laws making it illegal to hit children, those laws also affects the families, i.e. microsystems (Broberg, Almquist and Tjus 2003, p. 43). Since our research is carried out in a place where there has been a conflict rooted in political ideas this level has had a great impact on people's lives, especially historically.

6.5 Ecological- and setting transition

Above we have presented a structure of the ecological development model. Ecological transition on the other hand is a concept of something that could generate developmental change but also could be a result of such a change. More specifically does an ecological transition take place when an individual's position in the ecological environment shifts due to a change in the elements role, setting, or both (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 26). Ecological transitions occur throughout our lives, due to for example the arrival of younger siblings, the marriage of two persons, promotion at work, buying your first house, retirement, etcetera. Bronfenbrenner states that these transitions are both biological changes and altered environmental circumstances (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 27).

Also pertinent for our study is the concept of setting transitions. These occur when an individual enters a completely new environment. The person creates a new mesosystem, one setting meets another. For example a child starts school (Bronfenbrenner 1979, p. 210). Another example could also be the pupil who is dragged out of the classroom along with her classmates, forced to stand in line and march into ten years of captivity.

6.6 Risk factors

In addition to Bronfenbrenner's ecological developmental model will we use theories regarding risk factors, protective factors and resilience. Risk factors are hardships or adversities that can lead to a disadvantageous development. There are different levels of

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these risk factors. Borge (2012, p. 72) differentiates between three main types of psychosocial risk; individual-, family- and society-based risks. Individual risks appear at an individual level and can be congenital problems, personality or temperament. These are elements the individual has a hard time changing on her own, especially if the individual is a child. Family based risks occur in the microsystem and concern the parents and their roles as grownups; general family based risk factors are for example alcohol abuse, mental or somatic health problems and care shortage. Family based risks could also be occurrences in the exosystem, such as things happening at the parents' workplace. Risk factors at a family-based level are usually hard for the child to control (ibid. p. 73.). Risks on society level are risks that occur in the macrosystem, such as war, poverty or natural disasters.

When assessing the seriousness of a particular psychosocial risk factor you have to take into account whether the risk is acute or chronic. Political violence and war, such as in Northern Uganda, are factors that are often seen as chronic, since the disturbance in a conflicted society often lasts for a longer period of time. Acute risk means a solitary trauma, for example the death of a parent. According to Borge (2005), the chronic risk is a greater risk factor than the acute risk factor.

6.7 Protective factors

Which factors that are protective differ for each individual and in different contexts. What all protective factors have in common is that they help the individual to cope with the risk factors and other challenges in life. Since these factors are more complex and more dependent upon the context they are not as easily listed as the risk factors. However, many of them do also occur in levels presented in Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, such as present parents, good family patterns and supportive relationships, for example with friends or adults (Borge 2005). Other phenomena which often come into view and are stated as protective factors for exposed children are: locus of control, good physical health, education, a sense of meaning, social skills and a strong self-confidence (Klasen et al. 2010, p. 1099; Lagerblad and Sundin 2000, p. 212).

6.8 Resilience

Next to the concepts of risk- and protective factors, we find the concept of resilience. Resilience can be described as "the capacity to recover […] from difficulties; toughness" (Oxford dictionaries 2013). It refers to an individual's capacity to bounce back and despite

difficult and traumatic experiences develop in a satisfactory manner. As Borge (2005) explains:

> ...The concept of resilience encompasses the complex interaction between a person and situations that will determine the load of the outcome for the individual (Borge 2005, p.11. Own translation).

For the concept of resilience to be applicable it requires some form of risk. However, it is not the risk itself that determines the extent to which it creates problems for an individual, but rather how the individual manages the risks (Borge 2005, p. 51). The focus of resilience lies not in examining what is harmful to children and then enumerating the different risk and stress factors. The focus lies rather on understanding the mechanisms humans use in order to avoid psychological damage and problems that may arise as a result of psychosocial risk (Borge 2005, p. 64).

6.9 Relevance of theory

The ecological developmental theory looks at the individual's relations within a greater social framework, which we regard to be of great importance, considering the importance of the historical and cultural context in comprehending the returnees' reality and the design of the professionals' interventions. We will use the theory to systematize and analyze our empirics. Some critics say the theory is too wide to be useful (Andersson 1986), but we argue that through this model we can build a deeper understanding for the recovering process by describing how the different systems influence each other and the individual's interactions. We will present and discuss different risk and protective factors that are of importance in the different systems, and the model allows us to capture different dimensions and levels of affects to the returnees' ability to recover and gain a normal life again.

7. Method

7.1 Study prelude

This essay is based on a field study we conducted in Northern Uganda. We were granted a scholarship from Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) and spent eight weeks collecting data for our analysis. The intention of this study is to find out what factors are of importance in the recovery process for the people who returned from living in captivity in Northern Uganda. Our first idea was to speak directly to the target group of former abductees to identify their coping mechanisms and see why some returnees

are more resilient than others. This was not possible because of the research ethics regarding the target group and because of the expected volume of a thesis at the bachelor level. We will therefore delineate the research through focusing on professionals' experiences with our target group.

7.2 Choice of method

Since this study is about understanding the recovery process and the important factors involved, we consider the qualitative method to be the most suitable for the purpose (Meuwisse 2008, p. 38). We have therefore been using semi-structured interviews in gathering the empirics. This interviewing method gives the opportunity to operate within certain frames and themes and facilitates flexibility and catch individual variations (Bryman 2006, p. 301). We have been looking for the respondents' opinions and experiences and according to Meuwisse (2008, p. 37) using semi-structured interviews is a good way to fill that purpose. Bryman (2006, p. 303) also writes that the semi-structured interviewing is suitable when you want the respondent to have the choice to formulate their answer in their own way. This is something we found to be very important in order to make the person participating in the interview comfortable in the situation.

7.3 Selection of respondents

The people we interviewed have been people who are working, or have worked, with former abductees and their recovery process. Our aim with these interviews was to get an insight into what factors the professionals discovered to be important in their work with rehabilitating the former child soldiers and abductees. We claim that professionals can, through the experience and knowledge that they have gained from working with numerous returnees, provide us with useful information. It is hard for us to see that anyone could have better insight into the recovery process from an ecological development perspective, since they are engaged in all levels.

Our goal was to meet people from different organizations to get a broader variation of experiences. The first step when selecting organizations was to identify those organizations that are or have been doing rehabilitation and recovery work with our target group, and then find which of those that would allow us to carry out interviews with their employees. The different organizations we selected where located in different cities and villages in the north of Uganda. Our intention with this was to get the opportunity to capture the eventual

variations in recovery work in different geographic parts of the north. The second step was to find individuals in these organizations to interview. When doing this it would have been preferable that the respondents were chosen randomly (Ahrne and Svensson 2004, p. 42). The possibility for us to accomplish that kind of selection was unfortunately non-existing and we had to settle with those who were chosen for us. Most of the respondents have been assigned to us by the person in charge at each respectively organization and only one has been interviewed without the mediation from the person in charge. According to Ahrne and Svensson (2004, p. 42) this is also a feasible way to conduct the assortment but it is of importance that we are aware of how this might have affected the empirics received.

7.4 Responding organizations

Altogether we conducted interviews at eight organizations. All of these organizations are non-governmental organizations (NGOs), dependent on funding from abroad. Two of them are based in Lira, two in Pader and the remaining four are stationed in Gulu. Three of them have been operational as reception centers, i.e. places for the returnees to stay during their immediate return from captivity.

7.5 Respondents

In total we conducted eleven interviews with respondents from eight different organizations. Nine of these eleven respondents had been or were at the moment working as counselors to the returnees, five of these nine conducted the counseling at reception centers. That means that they were working with the returnees from the very start of the recovery process up until they left the reception center to live in their homes. The other four counselors had been or were at the moment performing counseling with our target group, but not at the reception centers. That means that their counseling started after the returnees moved to a home. One was working as a nurse, mainly taking care of the medical rehabilitation but has had a long working experience with the returnees. We therefore considered that this person had a valid understanding about the recovery process, even beyond the medical part. One respondent was leading an organization working with recovering former child soldiers and other people affected by the war and had therefore been in close contact with the target group.

7.6 Procedure

All but one interview have been digitally recorded. We have then divided the recordings and transcribed those ten interviews manually. This was primarily done successively in Uganda

during days when we waited for our next interview. We had some slight challenges with the language barrier – Ugandan rhetoric and usage of the English language differ greatly from the English taught in Swedish classrooms. However, we have both spent one previous semester in Uganda and are used to these expressions and could understand their meaning after some thought and discussion. When we encountered sections in the interviews where we could not hear or understand words we marked them "???". These sections have not been used in our analysis. As for the last interview, the one we did not record, we simply compiled our notes taken during the interview.

After finishing the transcription we once more divided the interviews, this time in order to extract all relevant data we could find to be of relevance in accordance to the systems in Bronfenbrenner's developmental model. This information has in turn been shared between us again, coded and systemized into colored themes, depending on its import concerning risk factors, protective factors, or both, as well as individual factors. We have used the resulting data in our analysis. The reason for sharing our data multiple times between us has been to make sure the both of us know all interviews, thereby avoiding the omission of vital information from the interviews, and promoting idea exchange and discussion.

7.7 Ethical considerations

As previously stated, our first intention was to talk to the child soldiers and abductees that had returned from the bush and a life in captivity to live a normal life. Interviewing this target group obviously involves great ethical intricacy and complexity and the research level on this thesis is not high enough to interview such an exposed group directly. We have therefore chosen another path towards the phenomenon we wish to examine: we have talked to a group of professionals with a good insight into the recovery process, without having to expose anyone from an already vulnerable group.

There are four ethical requirements for research in Sweden that we considered when implementing our research (Bryman 2006, p. 440). The first is the ethical requirement concerning information obligation. This means that we have thoroughly explained the purpose of the interview and our study, and we have furthermore made sure that they understood our intentions correctly. We also made it clear that their participation was completely voluntary and they could decide to end the interview whenever they wanted. The second requirement is about consent. This means that the participating person determines his

or hers involvement. We have not interviewed people without their consent and we have taken great care to ask for permission to record the interviews. This permission was obtained both from the person in charge and the respondent. The third requirement is the confidentiality obligation. Every participant will be anonymous in this written thesis and all personal data have been safely kept away from everyone but us during the writing process, and destroyed afterwards. Moreover, we do not consider it to be relevant to write the respondents' names. Nor do we believe that it is important to print the name of the organization for which the respondents work. It is their professional opinion and experience we want to highlight, regardless of which organization in our area of research they belong to. The omission of names has also facilitated our search for organizations willing to arrange respondents for us to interview. If we had intended to use the organizations' names in demand, we had to seek formal permission and would most likely become more limited regarding the people we were allowed to interview. We have, when we asked for permission to interview, made it clear that we will not use the name of the organization. The fourth ethical requirement is called the utilization requirement. All the data and details we gathered will be used only for this thesis and when finished the information will be destroyed. As have we informed our respondents.

Lastly, in our research we have tried to consequently consider and respect the ethical aspects of the principle of nonmaleficence and autonomy (Beauchamp and Childress 1983, p. 59, 106) in our choice of respondents and questions. Because of the dimensions of the conflict in the north our respondents are not only professional, but also friends and family to abductees. We consider this minor field study to be a unique learning opportunity. However, we have conducted research at the bachelor level in an extremely war-torn environment and our curiosity should promote good, not cause suffering for our respondents.

7.8 Study limitations

The results presented in this thesis should be viewed in light of several limitations. Based exclusively on the professionals, they lack the perceptions of the former child soldiers themselves. We are aware of the fact that the professionals will express their view on what factors are of importance for the children. This means that in this thesis we will not be able to make any conclusions about for example actual resilience strategies among the children. That kind of conclusion would demand another kind of research. However, from their work the professionals will have learned about factors that matter for the children when they are

adjusting from a life in captivity to a life in their community. This fact may entail deficiencies in our findings by comparison to the possible results if former abductees had also been interviewed. A number of our respondents have been further selected by their superiors, something which might have affected the validity of our data. It can also not be excluded that the responding organizations which are reliant on foreign aid may have exaggerated the importance of their own roles in the psychosocial adjustment and reintegration process. Moreover, our results can be generalized to some extent, but they are only truly valid in the context of Northern Uganda with the specific target group of former child soldiers and abductees, also known as returnees.

7.9 Authored headings and work procedure

In this study, all decisions have been made in concert preceded by communication and discussions. Yet, some headings are written by a single author – Katarina has written theme I, II and IV. Harry is the author of following headings: Background to conflict, theme III and V. We would however like to emphasize that both authors have influenced also these sections.

9. Analysis – themes and the systemic levels of risk and resilience

9.1 From abductee to returnee

There are different ways for the abductees to become returnees. The two most common lines of action are escape or getting rescued by the Uganda Army. When these children return they are first of all taken to the Child Protection Unit (CPU). This is because the CPU wants to ask if the returnees have any information about other abducted children, to make their searching easier. After talking to the CPU they are taken to a reception center. A reception center is where the returnees live the first months, before moving to their villages. There used to be several reception centers in the Northern Uganda, however as the number of returnees has decreased, and due to lack of founding, all but a few have closed down. The returnees are divided after age. Children and child mothers stayed in one center and grownups stayed in another. The centers offer different activities planned to help the returnee to process and adjust to a normal life. The activities are e.g. counseling, family tracing, games and sports, vocational training and class orientation.

When the returnees have adjusted to a more normal life and processed the trauma they are reintegrated with their families. The counselors decide whether the returnee is ready to be reintegrated or not; they also take the returnees to her or his respective family. They also communicate with the family while the returnee is staying at the center. The family reunion usually begins with a two weeks home visit, followed by another stay at the center before returning home. Our respondents also told us that they are meant to do follow ups to see how life at home works for the returnees. In most cases this seems to be unfeasible because of the lack of funds.

9.2 Theme I – Individual related factors

In the center of Bronfenbrenner's model over the ecological system theory we find the individual. In our study the individual is identified as a returnee, i.e. a person who has come back from the bush and the rebels. These individuals have different experiences, both from before and during their abduction. Our findings indicate that these experiences have an impact on how the individuals will handle the adjustment to ordinary life. They also indicate some factors which influence the ability to create resilience within one self.

9.2.1 Self-created resilience

People perceive different levels of stress in similar situations; they have different amounts of resistance within themselves, affecting their ability to handle stressors. Inner resources mean "the set and the combination of thoughts, feelings, attitudes, assumptions and other subjective beliefs that are typical of every individual" (Karlsson, 2007, p. 514. Own translation). When we apply this to returnees, we can conclude that the experiences and eruditions these individuals had before they were abducted are of great significance for how they handled their time in the bush, both during and after. Our respondents talk about coping mechanisms and impulsion which some of the returnees show clear examples of (INT2, 3, 7, 9, 10 and 11). They describe it as a volition that helps the returnee to cope and keep looking forward, i.e. strong inner resources.

> If you, if he wants to transform … to change. If he wants to cope... (INT2)

> They made up their mind to go back to school. Some have finished universities. (INT2)

We also heard the opposite description, which also confirms the thought of something intrinsic having an impact on the ability to be resilient and therefore the recovery process. The loss of volition and a feeling of hopelessness when trying to adjust acknowledge the individual's inner resources.

> They feel, they have low esteem, they feel different, they don't want to mix so much with people. They give up. (INT2)

> 'I just can shoot up myself, I get something I commit suicide.' (INT3)

9.2.2 Non-affectable factors

The time spent in the bush appears to have an impact on the recovery process. To be exposed under longer period results in an enhanced risk of being exposed to all risks that life in captivity holds. If someone is abducted at a young age and this person manages to escape when still young, the brevity of time in captivity appears to be a protective factor, i.e. the less time exposed the less risk. The time aspect also concerns the possibility for education and having a childhood, which will be discussed later in theme IV. One respondent also brings up that is easier for someone to readjust to normal life if she/he did not mature in the bush.

> The longer you have stayed in captivity the more traumatic events you have experienced. And the more events you have experienced, the more likely you would develop a PTSD because you have this kind of, there are studies that say that after a certain amount of events you most likely will develop a PTSD. (INT10)

> I've seen that those who stayed long and matured in the bush, they still have a lot of problem. (INT2)

However, being abducted at a young age is additionally considered to be a risk. Betancourt et al. (2012, p. 27) write that being abducted at a young age increases the risk of depression and having a harder time adjusting to an ordinary community. Further, young abducted girls face a physical risk when used as wives or sex slaves, and may end up sick or dying, since their bodies are not yet ready for pregnancy and accouchement.

> She gets pregnant forcefully ... there are some who testified that they also faced the challenges that as a result of pregnancy, during the delivery – being so young – because they were forced in

> to sex and in to unwanted pregnancies they also face the challenges through what? Delivery. Because maybe when that was a period when their body parts were not yet developed, fully developed … And some died. Some they testified that some of their colleagues died in the process. (INT8)

The amount of experienced trauma is also a big cause of problematic recoveries. Some children stayed most of their time in a camp where life is relatively calm while others are forced to take part in front line fighting and atrocities. Being forced to perform or witness abductions, violence or killings, especially if it is in your home area, makes the recovery and reintegration process a lot harder. Being a commander, or the identity of your commander also impacts the amount of experienced trauma.

> We would find out that maybe they were staying for a very long time in captivity but still the events were maybe less because they were in a different position. (INT10)

> …the level [of stigma] would not be as high as that one who came and caused what? Atrocities in his own community. (INT11)

> [Some] they never went like fighting out, going somewhere they didn't. They were always rotation within the camp, with in the area that they were in. (INT3)

Moreover are physical injuries common among the returnees and are found to be a risk factor in the innermost microsystem, the human body (Ungar, Ghazinour and Richter 2012). Physical injury jeopardizes the individual's possibility to participate and contribute to their family and community and hence increases the risk of stigma and isolation. Injuries can therefore be described as a liability when moving forward with the mental process of recovering. An additional aspect in this context is the financial fact that not all can afford to seek medical care for their injuries and will therefore be living with pain that prevents them in their process (INT2, 4 and 7). According to the Survey for War Affected Youth (UNICEF 2006, p. 6) one sixth of the youths in Northern Uganda suffer from a physical injury that aggravates their capability to work or assimilate education, and a third of these have injuries inflicted by the LRA.

But for peace to be sustainable, to be real, it can begin when humans physical and emotional pain controls. When the physical and psychological pain is too much, when the historical pain is not addressed. (INT7)

Making peace a reality to people who needed peace, who needed to get out of pain. (INT7)

9.2.3 Counseling and personal beliefs

Receiving assistance to adjust and process experiences and trauma through counseling is by our respondents considered to be an essential helping factor (INT1, 2, 3, 5, 8 and 11). It provides guidance and support for the returnee. By receiving counseling the returnees have access to informational support and support regarding values. These two different types of social support have been shown in research to be important in dealing with stress and hardships (Karlsson 2007, p. 521). Our findings point consistently to the significance of counseling. The valuative support contributes to their feeling of self-worth, and our respondents state the returnee need to have professionals who guide her or him to a good self-image despite the atrocities and adversities in which the individual has experienced and taken part. The informational support includes advice and help to cope with situations that are difficult to handle (ibid.). For those who have returned from the bush many unfamiliar and often difficult situations occur that they need help to tackle.

…when they receive the counseling, they can adjust very fast. (INT2)

Most commonly in Uganda counseling involves God and faith in addition to providing guidance and support. Religion for many returnees is a fundamental part in the ability to create resilience and in the recovery. In Uganda religion and faith is something most people have, and this helps them establish a sense of higher meaning to their experiences. This is a protection factor for children being exposed to war and violence (Borge 2005, p. 150). One topic that recurs connected to God in counseling is forgiveness (INT2, 5 and 7).

They feel if you can forgive, God will also forgive you. (INT5)

Our respondent describes it as a way of finding forgiveness for one-self and for others. For those who have lost their faith, the counselors help them to find it again through talking, reading the Bible and praying together. Believing in God and a higher purpose can also be of

help when creating a meaning to what the individual has been through (Borge 2005). It seemingly helps the returnees to handle and process the hardship they have experienced.

9.2.4 Closure theme I

The individual is the very center in the ecological developmental model, and as Bronfenbrenner describes active and able to affect its surroundings. There are however elements that are non-affectable for the individual at the stage of starting a recovering process, e.g. age and physical injuries. In this theme we have emphasized what affects the initial point for the individual when entering microsystems. Resilience is seen as both something the individual has within herself, and something that can be created through input from other outside factors. Receiving counseling and having religious beliefs are examples of factors that can help the individual to become resilient.

9.3 Theme II – Family related factors

An individual has different microsystems at the micro level. Consequently, an individual has several relationships in different contexts which together form systems that hold roles and activities, of which the person himself takes part. The family is one of these systems and the role of the family is of fundamental importance for all individuals included in it (Evenshaug and Hallen 2001, p. 213). The family consists of reciprocal relationships where the action of one part has an effect on all the others. Losing a child to the rebels and then having that child return is a big transition for the family. The transition for the returnee, going from life in a family, to captivity in the bush and then back to the family life is also considered to be major. When children are small the family functions as a link between community and the individual (ibid.). The family in our research context holds the same role for the returnees since they have been living cut off from the rest of society. This is also why having an immediate family is a great protection factor and a breeding ground for resilience (INT1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 and 11). It can support and help the returnee to cope with life in many different aspects.

9.3.1 The family as a foundation of support

The family helps to provide the means to cover the basic need of instrumental support, i.e. the practical help individuals need such as shelter, food and medical care. Fulfilling the returnees' basic needs is of primary concern. Our respondents mean that the sooner the

returnees have food, shelter and are medically taken care of, the sooner their recovery process can start (INT1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11). Instrumental support is a helping factor that proved significant in both our empirics (INT1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 11) and in research about stress and hardships (Karlsson 2007, p. 522). The reception centers will help provide this in the beginning, but when the returnee move back home the family are expected to give this kind of assistance. The family also provides emotional support. This is the most important type of social support and involves "kindness, friendship, love, empathy and trust" (Karlsson 2007, p. 521). For the returnees, this is of great importance when they recover from their life in the bush. Hence, to have a family or other close personal is a protective and resilience-promoting factor. Betancourt and Khan (2008, p. 321) emphasizes the importance of the family and the social support in the reintegration of former child soldiers. They write that "those who had high family connectedness and social support were more likely to have lower levels of emotional distress and exhibited better social functioning" (ibid.). The parents' health is therefore relevant in the context of their ability to support their children, both emotionally and instrumentally (ibid p. 322). A prerequisite for the parents to give a helping support is that they themselves are in a competent state. If parents for instance have substance abuse problems or mental health problems, their impact on the child could be negative for its coping mechanisms (Dyregrov 2010, p. 87) and thus also the returnee's recovery process. One protective factor is therefore to have healthy and mentally stable parents (Betancourt and Khan 2008, p. 322).

The loss of parents is a risk factor in any context (Borge 2005) and studies illustrate the importance of the family regarding a child's development. After going through the kind of hardship the former child soldiers and abductees do when in captivity it is crucial that they have someone in their near surrounding to support them both emotionally and materially. Eight of our eleven respondents talk about the risks involved for a returnee to not have their parents alive when they return home; the remaining three does not mention the subject. Losing both parents affects the individual adversely in many ways. It is emotionally hard because of the process of grief, which alone is a difficult process. According to our respondent it also gives the returnees a feeling of hopelessness (INT1). It is as if their hope for a bright future is taken from them when they no longer have the support of their parents.

> …very many of them have come back and found when their parents are no longer alive so when you take them back home, even at the center they say so what is now my future my all that… (INT1)

The local conditions indirectly affecting the individual are found on exo level. This means that the activities taking place in the exo level are not something the individual himself easily can influence through direct actions. Especially the returnees who are already in an exposed situation can have a struggle affecting the circumstances on the exo level. Families' ability to receive and accept their children affects society's attitude towards those who returned from the bush. Our research indicates that it is easier for those who have a family they can stay with to reintegrate into society, than for those whose family is killed or, in the few cases we met, where the family (or relatives in case of the parents being deceased) refuses to accept their children (INT12).

9.3.2 Extended family

The system in Northern Uganda is based on the idea that if the parents have passed away the responsibility for the children goes to the distant relatives (if there are any). Three of our respondents talked about the risk that may occur when the situation requires living with distant relatives after coming back from the bush (INT1, 5 and 12). The respondents state that the distant relatives are not taking care of the returnee as if he or she were their own child; they are not trusted and in some cases not wanted. Many of them cannot afford to pay the school fees or have not got enough land to share and because of this they find the returnee to be an extra burden (INT1, 5 and 12). If the returnees spend a long time in the bush, the communities tend to get suspicious to whether the returnee can be trusted or not. One of our respondents commented the difference between receiving you own children home and receiving someone else's children (INT5), and meant that with your own children – no matter what they have done – they are still your children and you are happy that they are back.

> …if your real biological child, you excited. Definitely. If like maybe just a relative, they find as if additional burden. (INT 5)

The extended family is, despite the contingent risks involved, mostly viewed as a protection factor according to our respondents. They are the obvious choice of where to go if your parents are dead, or as an elongated support to the immediate family (INT1, 2 and 5). In

parts of Northern Uganda the clan system is still active, and one respondent spoke of how they have used the clan system when the parents were nowhere to be found (INT5). After researching important factors in the recovery process for the returnees we can conclude that it is of importance that the assistance provided should include the family to create a breeding ground for resilience and healthy recovering.

9.3.3 Collaboration between microsystems

To facilitate big transitions it is helpful if the individual's different microsystems collaborate and thus enhance the levels of resilience. In this context this means it will be helpful for the returnee if the reception center and counselor work with the family regarding the returnee when it comes to recovering and reintegrating. The meso level is all about different microsystems' relations between each other. Since family, reception center and the contingent education/training are the microsystems that have the biggest role in the returnees' life, their collaboration is crucial. According to our respondents the reception centers try to work in close association with the family (INT1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11). They do this by talking and counseling the family before they meet their child, to make the family prepared. Then the counselor arranges for the child to meet the parents at the reception center, and eventually the counselor accompanies the returnee when it is time for home visits.

> We explain the conditions we heard from the child … make this family aware that when we bring
> this boy or girl back these are the kind of things that you might experience within the few period
> of brought back. (INT9)

When it comes to the family's role in the recovery process of the returnee on the meso level, our respondents mostly talked about the relation between the reception center/counselor and family. But the extended family also plays an important role. Not only due to the fact that they take care of the returnee in case of the loss of immediate family, but also because they have a supporting function to the immediate family. Evenshaug and Hall (2000, p. 235) write that in particular parents of children from vulnerable groups need the support that the extended family provides. There is a connection between the support parents experience from friends and relatives and the parents' ability to provide good care for the child.

> Some helping factors for the children. It's a combined input from both the child and the social
> worker and then the surrounding community. (INT9)

9.3.4 Closure theme II

Our results show family to be a salient factor. The family is the base for the other systems that the returnee will be involved with when reintegrating and recovering. Even in the other systemic levels the family plays a central part, and a good collaboration is helpful for all actors. The conditions for the family is set on macro- and exo-level, and the attitude of the community where the family lives also influences the possibility of a stable and healthy recovery process.

9.4 Theme III – Education and economic opportunities

Education is commonly regarded as a factor which protects the person in question from trauma and increases the levels of resilience in exposed individuals (Borge 2005). The idea of promoting education or the opportunity to obtain skills training or vocational training pervades all represented organizations in the study alike and they all have interventions comprising formal education or vocational trainings. Why attribute education with such significance? Our findings indicate that education generates psychological resilience and offers a more solid social and financial ground for the returnees to build their future.

9.4.1 What may thwart the prospect on pursuing an education?

Starting at a micro systemic level – as Bronfenbrenner (1979) illustrates – is school itself a microsystem. Therefore, when organizations support the returnees and open/re-open the door for them to attend school, they also open the door to another microsystem in which seeds of numerous resilience-promoting processes are planted such as friendship and growing self-esteem. Yet, at an exo-systemic level, many children were abducted when they were in school and the fear of re-abduction may hinder them from attending school. As Spitzer and Twikirize (2012, p. 72) write were re-abductions common in the past. Our interviews do not testify about any great number of re-abductions, but have informed us about a definite fear of being re-abducted.

> Most of these children they feel like possibly they could get re-abducted one time because they escaped from captivity. (INT1)

> That fear actually is one of the risks, they fear to go to school. They say "when I was abducted I was in p1 or I didn't even study". So they fear to go back to school. (INT3)

Other, for us, encountered risks regarding educational prospects are found in the Ugandan macrosystem, namely how difficult it can be for the returnees to accomplish their education without financial support from NGOs. The complexities appear to originate in the Ugandan education policy, i.e. governmental politics; the Ugandan schools have school fees for their students, school fees particularly burdensome for the families in the war-affected north to pay. This is clearly reflected in INT2 where the respondent states:

> …our education is very expensive. At least primary schools can be afforded but secondary and university here is becoming tedious, too much money is paid. (INT2)

Thus, the macrosystem educational policy might aggravate the homecoming for the formerly abducted. Our results further indicate that the educational risk factor can give strongly negative micro-systemic echoes. As stated in for example INT1 are children, who do not upon their return to the community have any living parents, more likely to be considered an additional and unwelcomed load for the distant relatives who have to look after him or her. And as previously described it is the family who are primarily responsible for covering the child's basic needs and areas such as for example school fees.

9.4.2 Education as a source to resilience

> I think for this group, formerly abducted, many of them of course have lack of education because they stayed away for a long time so they could not go to school. (INT10)

Here we see the time aspect discussed in theme I once more in function although in an educational context. Again it can be both a risk- and a protective factor. Shorter time in abduction means less altered social ecology: the child can return to school. However, for those who spent longer time in duress, school as a microsystem is incrementally scattered. Consequently, for those who stayed with the LRA until adulthood, the system is nonexistent, the transition into pupil is no longer possible and hence is a key developmental context lost. For the concerned former child soldiers interventions therefore are adjusted into ensuring a new adult microsystem through skills trainings and vocational trainings: work.

> That is what we found, because we worked with clients who received vocational training, and we had a study were we interviewed them in the beginning and after some time. And after some time we could actually see that some of them would improve over time. So I think the factor itself, that

they received vocational training, they had something to do and at the same time a prospective for

their life I think is a protective factor. (INT10)

The aim of these trainings is thus to generate an income for the returnees and to implement self-reliance (INT2). As shown by Blattmann and Annan (2010) this is an area which needs to be especially addressed, since the abduction has especially negative impacts especially on the returnee in terms of education and qualified market labour. Again, the time aspect frequently mentioned in our interviews is of importance in order to understand the dilemma – time spent in the bush means the creation of a completely new ecological environment and the transition to this environment can hardly be described as anything other than a developmental havoc. Those who manage to escape back to their old settings have the ability to make transitions into familiar settings and ecological systems. However, for adult returnees, a microsystem like primary school attendance is no longer an alternative. Compared to nonabducted children returning youths therefore tend to have inferior reading skills. According to Blattmann and Annan (2010, p. 889), illiteracy is almost twice as common among returnees than nonabductees.

Nevertheless, our interviews imply that these obstacles are not prohibitive. As stated in INT10, vocational training not only offers an economic opportunity, it may also offer psychological resilience to a more profound extend. We argue that these increased levels of wellbeing can be understood through roles, activities and relationships at a micro-systemic level. The ideas and possibilities of receiving a vocational training are brought into being at an exo-systemic level; the positive outcomes for the individual are however primarily found at a micro-systemic level. Firstly, cognizant and skilled returnees may accomplish a role transition into for example secretaries, carpenters, hairdressers or even more qualified professions (INT2, 3, 4, 8 and 11). Secondly, the training means a chance for the returnee to dedicate his or hers time to meaningful activities such as learning, and may later result in an income generating activity which additionally can promote self-esteem and community acceptance. Thirdly, consequential self-esteem and community acceptance addresses building constructive and developmental helpful social relations. If you have a role your community can benefit from you are more likely to be accepted, and also, we have the encouraged protective factor of fitting in the society expressed in INT2, 6, 8, 9 and 11 – to blend in, to "be normal".

For those who have the age and opportunity to attend school and attach this microsystem the reality is, according to a majority of our interviewees, conversely different. After they made the transition home, they unlike the older returnees make a natural role transition into pupil (depending on financial means), hence a transition into something considered by the general Ugandan population to be normal. Our results suggest the protective factors and processes of attending school are several and very similar to the protective factors for those who obtain vocational training. Roles have already been mentioned along with normality. Attending school and vocational training are noteworthy activities: a child whom acquires formal education opens up a world of prospect opportunities and does so with the help of studying. Finally, intimately entwined with activities, school can be viewed as a place of significant importance for the formerly abducted children to foster social relations (Betancourt et al. 2008, p. 9).

Focusing on activities, although regulated in all systems, we have mainly encountered them at the very bottom of the microsystem and then involving solely the individual. In summary the foremost protective and resilience building factor here according to six of our interviews is for the returnee to "be busy" or to have something "to do" and education seems to be a preferred thing to be busy with. The protective process is dualistic, it helps the returnee to be accepted, but the emphasis also lies within the fact that being occupied makes you forget.

> You know when someone has something to do, made up her mind and actually acts […]. It helps you to forget many things, because at least you try to fit in to the society. So the choice the person has made, whether it's to do skills training it work very hard and at the end you'll be self reliance. (INT2)

> Mentally they [the formerly abducted] have been so disorganized, there have been killings. Some of them had not killed but witnessed killings. So mentally they are not what? They are not stable. So we try to look around for activities that can make them what? That can make them really, that can make them forget of the past. That can make them focus. That can try to tune them in to a living. (INT8)

9.4.3 Closure theme III

In conclusion it is thus plausible to claim that resilience, protective- and risk factors can be illustrated on various levels regarding education. Processes of risk and resilience occur when the individual enter the school microsystem. They are operational in the relation between

school, family, work and community. They propose risks at an exo-systemic level due to the intentional tactic of fear from the rebels; and educational conditions are shaped at a macro-systemic level. Furthermore, schools and education appear to be essential in the psychosocial adjustment and reintegration process as knowledge makes the returnee more useful to his or her family, community and society. This usefulness seemingly diminishes the rates of stigma and vilification. Simultaneously, schools offer a positive environment where the child gets the chance of simply being nothing other than a "normal" child. They can undergo transitions into "pupil" or "student" and grow friendship and social relations. Education and vocational training further seem to have profound potential of generating a good economic situation for the returnee, which in turn results in a more accepting social environment. Lastly, our findings imply that education and vocational training are activities which may intrinsically increase the individuals feeling of well-being due to the distraction which follows from being occupied.

9.5 Theme IV – Community

The community as a microsystem for an individual is where many activities and a lot of ecological transitions are happening, because of the large number of actors of which it consists. It is in the living-community the returnees are expected to find other people than the family members with whom to build social relationships. Our respondents highlighted the importance of a welcoming community, and accentuated the risk supplied with arriving to a community whose behavior exclude to the returnee. The attitude of the residents has a considerable effect on the returnee. A collective key factor in the perception about yourself is how others perceive you (Karlsson, 2007, p. 574), hence will a positive attitude be helpful and a negative attitude damaging for the returnees self-image. Our results show, in accordance with what we earlier mentioned that how a returnee is being received by the community has a significant influence on their recovery and reintegration process (INT2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11), regarding both self-image and the relation to others. There are communities where the returnees are well received and welcomed through traditional cleansing rituals or through prayers and the majority of the residents are happy that the person is back. But there are people returning home that are ostracized. For different reasons the residents actively oppose the returnee.

9.5.1 Stigma

A risk the returnees meet in a non-accepting community is stigmatization (INT2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11). This is manifested differently depending on context but the collective for stigma is the creation of a gap between the community and individual, and it therefore disturbs the protective processes in the microsystem which are fundamental in the individual's life. Stigma and exclusion hamper the rehabilitation process and a relatively common reaction for the individual is self-isolation. Our respondents explain that the individual blames himself and accedes the self perception that the residents have created, and therefore does not want to get in contact with other people (INT2 and 8). Self-isolation can also be motivated by not feeling understood by the other community members when struggling with for example flash backs. These are a unfavorable and negative relationship in which the returnee is being bullied, depressed and finds it difficult to acquire the self-confidence and inner strength needed to fully recover from a life in captivity (INT2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11). There are even respondents talking about returnees committing suicide as a last resort from living a miserable life, excluded from the community. Lack of social support and isolation in itself is something that affects a person negatively, regardless of the causes underlying the phenomena. While social support from friends and family have a positive effect on health, lack of social support has the opposite effect. This is due to the fact that social support satisfies some of the most important human needs, such as safety (Karlsson 2007, p. 522). According to our results there are one group among the returnees who meets a higher risk of stigma and exclusion compared to the others (INT4, 5, 6, 8 and 11). They are called child mothers and are those who gave birth in the bush and then manage to bring their children with them when they returned. The fathers of these children are said to be commanders of the LRA, who used the girls as wives and the children are therefore also seen as rebels.

> And that are the child mothers that they say they are isolated. They are not wanted. (INT8)

> Maybe she came back with 2-3 children you find that that family does not want to welcome her basing on those other children which belongs to … the rebel leaders. Some children are called names, given names. Even their own family members are giving them such names… (INT8)

In order to create acceptance in the community and in doing so provide a foundation for resilience, the social workers efforts to sensitize the community. They operate in the

returnees' mesosystem when talking to the elderly, the local leaders and the residents in the community. They also give the returnees an opportunity to anticipate how life in their community will be so they can handle the adjustment more easily. To be accepted the returnee has to adapt (INT1, 2, 3, 5 and 6). Our respondents describe it as easier to fit into society if the person is working, adjusting and behaving normally.

> … behave normally in the society and people will forget. (INT2)

> Some helping factors for the children. It's a combined input from both the child and the social worker and then the surrounding community. (INT9)

Having a family increases the chance of persuading an ambivalent community to become inclusive: since the residents see other people trusting and accepting the returnee, the residents also dare to accept them. In accordance with Bronfenbrenner (1979) the ecological transitions facilitated when different microsystems cooperate, and consequently have a well-functioning mesosystem. The same applies for the linkages between NGOs, social workers and the community. These are all microsystems for the returnee and when they collaborate they form the mesosystem. A well-functioning mesosystem connotes good conditions for the individual to have good relations at micro-level.

9.5.2 Social relationships

Several respondents have told us about the importance of building relationships and being accepted in the community. At the reception centers and in the communities, social workers work actively to provide opportunities for the returnee to establish an identity outside that of a former child soldier. Through activities like games, sports, traditional dancing and drama the returnees will take part in social activities that are of assistance in building friendships with other individuals in their own age. These activities are, when conducted at the reception center, intentionally carried out together with children from outside the reception centers to reduce the xenophobia between the returnees and the children who never were abducted (INT1, 2, 5, 6 and 8). There is also a convalescing function in these activities. This is a known coping strategy called distraction, which is an adaptive coping strategy that involves looking for that which inspires well-being: behaviors and situations that are pleasing. This is for example sports, literature and cinema; "to get some breathing room in their stressful experiences" (Karlsson, 2007, p. 512). The children are given a time when they can rest their

minds from processing the past. The respondents say that it is good for the returnees to forget about the past through keeping busy and being "normal" children (INT2, 5 and 8).

> You know when someone is busy that person cannot have time to think of what? Of the past. (INT8)

9.5.3 Closure theme IV

The community, i.e. the returnees surrounding when returning home plays a big part in the process of recovering and reintegrating. It can conducive to the process by encouraging resilience through acceptance and letting the returnee be equivalent with the other residents. It can also have the adverse impact. Stigma ostracizing the returnee can lead to self isolation and in a worst case scenario suicide. Our findings indicate that having a well-functioning mesosystem means that different microsystems influence each other in a way that is beneficial for the returnee. They also show that the social worker and family have a strong influence over the attitude towards returnees in the community.

9.6 Theme V – Society

This societal theme can be described as an umbrella theme since phenomena under this heading to a large extent belongs to the macrosystem. The theme contains the elements which color the Ugandan societal context and thus colors the frames in which the rehabilitation- and reintegration process take place. We will in this section try to identify what wider concepts can be considered as risks for a healthy development for the returnees and what concepts promote furthermore resilience.

9.6.1 The entire north is affected by the insurgency

It is not only families with formerly abducted children who face hard realities when it comes to paying school fees and other grave challenges; the problem is widespread and the Acholi people have seen a lot of depletion of its assets at various, if not all, ecological levels.

> A lot has been happening in Northern Uganda and a lot of killing has been done. (INT3)

When the abducted children make the ecological transition into returnee, they return home with expectations (INT2). Alas, for more than a few, these expectations are too high due to the harsh reality and the history of the north. Here we find previously discussed micro-

systemic issues and factors of great importance, like for example if the returnee has parents who are alive or not. Can someone satisfy their basic needs? Can anyone pay for their education? Is the family scattered and cannot be found? Etcetera. Even the nonabducted children have been deprived of education and security and have been sleeping in the bush since the traditional Acholi villages are extremely exposed to raids (Blattman and Annan 2010).

> This war a very desperate life, a desperate life form – struggling with your own future, your security. You don't have schools, teachers are abducted, teachers are being killed, and schools get burned. There was total sense of hopelessness. (INT7)

9.6.2 The role of the government

The complexity of this macro-systemic factor is extensive. Our data, though, crowns the Ugandan government's indifference and idleness perceived by the Acholi people as core issues and risks for a favorable development for the former child soldiers and for the Acholi people in general.

> The reason was that people lost trust in the government, there was no protection, the state couldn't protect the people. And you would wonder: where is the government if we year after year are running and sleeping in the bush. […] I saw government lack of protection, he [the respondents brother] was taken when the government forces was 50 meters away from him. (INT7)

As described in the introduction of this thesis did the government use a tactic of so called "protected villages". However, it seems clear that the more straightforward reason for these forced relocations was to suffocate the rebels' assets in terms of recruits and food (Doom and Vlassenroot 1999, p. 31). The consequences were severe – estimations say that at least 80 percent of the population was displaced in the affected areas and the camps were all but healthy for the people, especially children, living there (Spitzer and Twikirize 2012, p. 69). The matter of displacement appears to complicate the tasks of the professionals

> Some of them do not even know where their homes are because they were abducted when they were still very young. So as they were going to the bush they were picked from their villages, but as they return all the villages was packed into IDP camps so it was really very hard for them to trace where their villages are. (INT9)

Although several interviews report lack of trust in the government, the government has also been praised in others. For example INT9 contradict other statements completely when the respondent reports that the government *had* provided security for the people. Further, according to our empirics, the amnesty offered by the government is a crucial legal component on the macro-systemic level for promoting resilience and reconciliation within individuals and the society. As early as 1988 Museveni and his forces (back then NRA) offered amnesty to those rebels in the UPDA who laid down their weapons. In INT1 the concept of amnesty described as a "grand forgiveness". This grand forgiveness which embraces all returnees (Blattman and Annan 2010, p. 883) seems to be nothing less than a necessity for the rehabilitation and reintegration to take place. Our findings therefore give great credit to the amnesty, since it enabled the abducted to return home and allowed the reception centers to function (INT1, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10 and 11).

Based on our interviews the government also made a vital humanitarian decision when they allowed NGOs to operate in the north. The division appears to be that the government forces take responsibility for transporting the child soldiers they have freed from the battlefield (or otherwise encountered) to the reception centers. These reception centers are NGOs which mainly receive funding from foreign donors. Our findings suggest the NGOs has been, and are, a crucial key player for the returnees in their reintegration and recovery process. It is at the centers services like family tracing, reunion, medical rehabilitation and counseling are provided for. The presence and existence of reception centers and other NGOs are controlled at a macro-level, but at the same time the centers and organizations in themselves are immediate settings for the returnee, hence microsystems, with the sole purpose of facilitating the ecological transition of returning home.

9.6.3 Religion

In research focusing on resilience religion holds a prominent position (Borge 2012). Although religion exists in all ecological systems it is in the macrosystem that the religious conditions of a society are established. The context for our study is no exception to the subject of the importance of religion. What is noteworthy, however, is how religion is used as an instrument by the professionals.

..You know, with Africa religion is inseparable, even to children. When they are brought up they know with prayer you can solve your problem. […] most schools say that if you can forgive one another, even if someone does this to you, you have to forget, you have to forgive. (INT5)

Our findings suggest that religion in the Northern Ugandan context can be divided into two aspects. First, the societal- and cultural level: Uganda is a country where religion is a natural part of the daily life. Even though traditional religious practices still exist to a great extent, people consider themselves to be Christians, to such a degree that at the community sensitizations and family talks religion plays an essential part in the reintegration process. Our empirics even imply that religion is used as an instrument of power. The child's immediate settings simply must forgive, it is the will of God.

Yes, so I think religion play a big role in their rehabilitation as well. And also in we go to the community, we talk to them. We tell them the importance of forgiveness and you know that God requires that we forgive one another. (INT9)

Religion can moreover seemingly be used as a coping strategy for the individual. A connection all the way from the outer macrosystem to one of the smallest elements of the microsystem is therefore obvious: activity, i.e. prayer. Prayers proved to be a useful instrument in captivity in order to cope with hardship and cruelty. They prayed for their families, and for a possibility to escape. The prayers and the belief additionally became a support and a source of strength during the escape itself (Amone P'olak 2007, p. 651). Moreover, Annan et al. (2009, p. 659) claims that the conviction that the abduction, the survival and the return were the will of God increases the degree of resilience in the aspect of meaning. The returnees relate the violence they have perpetrated to God, not themselves. As a consequence, for example levels of survivor's guilt decreased and nightmares were less painful. The latter is consistent with our results:

So every morning when we are going for morning devotion we would actually pray […]. So that is one of the areas that has been helping a lot because there are certain issues, like when someone is having nightmares every day we have been praying for such cases we have even been writing summons of God. So, that spiritual aspect has been so, so good for them and for their healing. (INT11)

9.6.4 Closure theme V

This theme consists mostly of factors functional at a macro-systemic level. These factors nonetheless influence even the smallest microsystem and setting for the returnee. This is highly relevant when discussing what developmental environment the former child soldier returns to since, generally, they return to a context heavily affected by war and poverty. They might be the most affected individuals, but all Acholis have suffered greatly and the challenges of for example school fees weight the same for all families. The role and the perception of the government are according to our findings multifaceted. There seems to be a lack of trust in the government which permeates all ecological levels, at the same time as a number of interviewees perceive the government efforts and interventions as extensive. What seems clear, though, is that the amnesty has enabled the former child soldiers to make the transition home, and consequently the role transition into returnees. This transition has been facilitated by NGOs which took responsibility for psychological counseling, psychosocial readjustment and reintegration, etcetera. The last encountered societal sub-theme religion is, exactly like above mentioned occurrences, active in all systems. However, religion holds a prominent position as encouragement for resilience considering how often and how extensive it is spoken about in our interviews. A unique aspect regarding religion is also that it with the use of prayers can be seen as an individual coping strategy for the returnees (and also during the time of duress).

10. Discussion

The aim of this qualitative thesis have been to illustrate and comprehend the rehabilitation process for former child soldiers and possible paths to resilience through identifying and naming fields and factors of prominent importance. The major fields, by us presented as themes (the individual , family, community, education and society), are largely consistent with previous resilience focused research with the same or similar target groups (Klasen et al. 2010; Betancourt et al. 2010; Betancourt et al. 2008; Denov 2010; Annan, Brier and Aryemo 2009; Amone P'olak 2007; Cobin 2008). The successful roads to resilience are hence to be found on various systemic ecological levels in these fields. The fundamental factors we have encountered and acknowledged to either invigorate resilience or risk thwarting a successful reintegration, are presented in the table.

Factor	Risk/Protective	Ecological system
Time in captivity	Both	Micro
Family	Both (although most commonly protective)	Micro
Extended family	Both (although most commonly protective)	Micro and meso
Fear of re-abduction	Risk	Micro and exo
Occupation ("to be busy")	Protective	Micro, meso, exo and macro
Lack of trust in government	Risk	Micro, meso, exo and macro
Amnesty	Protective	Macro
Stigma	Risk	Micro, meso, exo and macro
NGO presence	Protective	Micro, meso, exo and macro
Religion and personal belief	Protective	Micro, meso, exo and macro
Entire Northern Uganda affected	Risk	Micro, meso, exo and macro
A driven personality	Protective	Micro and meso

We claim, after analyzing our data, that several (if not all) of these factors and systems are intricately linked. The more active and functional protective factors and processes are, the more likely are a prosperous result for the individual will be. For example is a prominent risk factor according to our findings the widespread existence of stigma. Family is indicated to be the main factor to counteract the stigmatization and socialize the returnees in their communities. The level of community acceptance is also as shown dependent on how well the returnee fit in and behaves, and how useful the returnee proves to be for the community. The returnees' worth for their communities is furthermore amplified by factors such as education or skill training. These factors generate occupation and income and the returnee therefore becomes an asset instead of a burden. Education is as Stichick Betancourt (2005) states an effective instrument in preventing stigma. However, it ought to be mentioned that education cannot be considered as a panacea. To assimilate education or vocational trainings, the exposed individuals need for example to receive psychological counseling simultaneously in order to deal with their experiences and to be able to gain from the education (ibid.). In sum, our results distinguish three factors for a successful psychosocial adjustment and the reintegration for formerly abducted children: family, education and religion. We believe these three factors to have been so vividly and frequently discussed

since they reflect areas which the professionals can alter. An intervention like family tracing will for example enable instrumental- and emotional support for the returnees. Providing support for school fees will increase the probability of a bright future. Etcetera. Furthermore are they extensive factors. Religion, for example, provides the individual with coping strategies at the same time as it is a factor active in all ecological systems and thus promotes resilience on several levels simultaneously. However, this study can merely conclude these factors to be of profound importance and to have wide-spread influence on how the professionals design their interventions. It cannot prove them to be more important than other presented factors.

10.1 The way forward

The complex task of reintegrating the formerly abducted children is indicated to be extensive for the interviewed counselors. The challenges in implementing resilience in the context of returned abductees are plentiful and interventions are needed in all ecological systems affecting the returnees. However, after looking at our findings we argue that the key to a felicitous reintegration and psychosocial adjustment most likely lies in efficient social support, which also will generate a higher probability for the returnee to receive emotional support from his or hers surroundings. A sustainable and reliable social support targeting the returnees' entire developmental ecology, addressing all above presented factors is from our view a grieve challenge. A challenge which is fueled by the withdrawal of NGOs and foreign aid since the need for immediate assistance is reducing. The need for adequate interventions is nevertheless still current, but has changed from basic needs as food, shelter and family tracing to income generating activities, sensitizing communities and psychological counseling. When NGOs recede they leave a gap no one seems to fill. This has an impact, not only on the returnees still in need of support, but on entire community which has acclimatized to their presence. Many communities lack the needed recourses to provide for their inhabitants. An explicit example appearing in our research is the attempt to do follow-ups to see how the returnees have been able to settle at home. Due to of lack of founding the NGOs have been unable to address ensuing problems with assimilation among returnees. We find follow-ups to be a possibility for the returnees to fully reintegrate and recover. The gap should according to us preferably be filled by governmental efforts in order to further diminish the discrepancy between the northern and southern parts of the country. The lack of trust towards the government, and a feeling of being forgotten is something we repeatedly encountered when conducting our research. We therefore advocate for the NGOs

to stay, for now; adapt and change along with the community. As long as the need is still present, social workers should be able to provide sufficient social support for the returnees and their surrounding and enhance the likelihood for a positive development.

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Attachment 1

Battery of questions

Our plan is to have three different themes with a few suitable questions in our interviews.

The themes and the question shall be arranged in a flexible order (Bryman, 2006 p. 305).

This to make it easy for us to adjust the interview to the different people we meet.

- Theme 1: Background and the respondents meeting with the target group
    - Can you please tell us your education and background?
    - When, where and how do/did you get in contact with the clients?
- Theme 2: The respondent work with the client
    - Please describe used methods in your work.
    - How do you work in order to help the client?
- Theme 3: Resilience
    - What would you describe as important factors and strategies in the recovery process? Why?
    - What factors are from your perspective to be considered as risks respectively protective? Why?
    - What would you say characterizes successful work with former abductees?
    - What do you think your clients regard as positive respectively negative with your organization/your intervention program/professional meetings? Please motivate why.

    ***

    Anything else concerning the rehabilitation and resilience you consider to be of importance and think we should know about?

Attachment 2

Abbreviations

CPU – Child Protection Unit

CSUCS – Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers

HSM – Holy Spirit Mobile Force

IDPs – Internationally Displaced Persons camps

IDMC – International Displacement Monitoring Centre

LRA – Lord's Resistance Army

NGO – Non-governmental Organization

NRA – National Resistance Army

SIDA – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency

SPLA – Sudanese People's Liberation Army

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – United Nations Children's Fund

UNLA – Ugandan National Liberation Army

UPDA – Ugandan People's Defense Army