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Original Article

### Forced Displacement and Violence Against Children in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement

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**Keywords:**

*Violence Against  
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This study sought to examine the impact of forced displacement on violence against children. Forced displacement relates to the coerced movement of persons because of either natural or manmade disaster, while violence against children refers to the deliberate usage of physical force or power, either threatened or actual, on oneself, another child or a group of children with resultant impact on the child's physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing. The study was guided by three objectives which included examining the causes of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement, examining the forms of violence against children in the Bidibidi Refugee settlement, and examining the effectiveness of existing mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children in Bidibidi Refugee settlement. In this study, the researcher adopted mixed-method research where both qualitative and quantitative data was collected. The researcher also applied descriptive research to carry out the study. The population of the study was 283,000 from which a sample of 399 was arrived at using the Slovene formula for sample size determination. Respondents were sampled through stratified sampling technique for the survey respondents and purposive sampling for the Key informants. Data was collected using questionnaires, interview guides and focused group discussion guides and was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The study found out that VAC is happening in Bidibidi and is being influenced by several factors including separation of children from parents, lack of livelihood opportunities for caregivers, and lack of awareness raising on child rights. The study further found that unaccompanied children (UACs) in foster care, child-headed households, and adolescent girls are the main categories of children at heightened risk of sexual, physical, and emotional violence.

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## INTRODUCTION

A lot of global attention is being placed on child protection with the aim to ensure every child enjoys the right to fundamental freedom in every context, as enshrined in relevant international and national legal regimes, yet global trends on violence against children have continued to rise (ACPF, 2014). This has been exacerbated by increasing trends of displacement caused by both natural calamities and human factors like war. War-related displacement has for instance had the worst effect on both boys and girls across the world. It has been observed that, during conflicts and subsequently displacement, families get separated, community-based protection mechanisms get broken down, and the national protection framework is weakened, resultantly exposing children to the worst forms of violence (UNHCR, 2017). This study sought to examine this influence to develop practical guidance to address the matter.

### Background to the Study

The record of displacement began in pre-history and continues to reoccur even today almost everywhere in the world. The most profound historical examples of forced displacement include the Roman attack on Carthage around 218-202 BC, the Goths attack on 2 Rome around AD 399-405, and conquests by Islamic and Crusader forces 1150-1186. More recently, the process of economic revolution that took place in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries

created a lot of upheavals that resulted in massive displacement of people within (OCR, 2017).

In Africa, forced displacement can be traced to the period following colonial conquest. During this period, many countries that were established and controlled by Europe as colonies went to a violent uprising in the quest for decolonisation (Boyle et al., 1998). These later led to numerous military clashes in many of the new African countries. Which later influenced the scale and lethality of displacement. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates that there are about 65.2 million uprooted people around the world, including both refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). Nearly 80 per cent of them are women and children (UNHCR, 2017).

Like displacement, the whole of recorded history contains references to acts that can be described as violence against children, but professional inquiry into the topic is generally considered to have begun in the 1960s (Monica & Keen, 2013). Throughout the 20th century, until the 1970s, in some Western countries, children of ethnic minority origin were forcefully removed from their families and communities by state and church authorities and forced to assimilate (Griffiths & Hunter, 2014). Since then, violence against children has remained a global issue in both situations of displacement and in normal settings. Over time, violence against children became to be recognised internationally as a serious health, human rights, and child protection concern. Article 19 of the Convention on the rights

of the child (CRC) obligates state parties to undertake all necessary measures to protect the child against all forms of violent exploitation abuse including sexual abuse and sexual exploitation. Available information however, including the United Nations Secretary General's (UNSG) report on Violence Against Children, Indicates that children continue to be exposed to high levels of violence, namely; physical, emotional, and sexual maltreatment throughout the world.

In Africa, Violence against children remains a significant problem. It occurs in the home, in the school, in the street, the workplace, in residential care homes and in penal institutions (ACPF, 2014). Approximately 77 million children under the age of 15 have their lives severely disrupted every year due to natural disasters or armed conflict. Each year, approximately 115,000 children are killed because of these events. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in these emergencies. Children who have experienced armed conflict and natural disasters and their aftermath face multiple risks, such as fleeing for their lives, abandoning threatened homes and communities, or struggling to survive in post-conflict contexts. In these conditions, government structures are often weakened, and families are forced to cope with destroyed livelihoods, separation, and security concerns.

### **General Objective**

The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of forced displacement on violence against children in the Bidibidi Refugee settlement. The specific objectives of the study were to examine the causes of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement, examine the forms of violence against children in the Bidibidi Refugee settlement, and evaluate the effectiveness of existing mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children in Bidibidi Refugee settlement.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a mixed methods research approach where both qualitative and quantitative mythologies were systematically applied throughout the research process. The study used a descriptive design. A descriptive design is concerned with determining the frequency with which something occurs (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Thus, this approach was appropriate for this study since the researcher was able to collect detailed information through descriptions that were useful for identifying variables and hypothetical constructs.

The target population for the study constituted all refugees resident in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. According to the Office of the Prime Minister of Uganda, there were 283,000 refugees settled in Bidibidi. Of this, a total of 399 individuals were sampled to participate. The sample size was determined using Slovin's method for sample size determination which allows a researcher to sample the population with a desired degree of accuracy (Slovin, 1960). Besides, another 10 individuals were sampled to participate in the qualitative studies. The participants for the quantitative study were arrived at using stratified random sampling. Data was collected using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods including surveys, Focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

After collecting data from the respondents, data was analysed by editing and coding along the main thematic areas to identify inconsistencies and establish uniformity. Data was entered into Kobo Collect, an online survey application. The data was later retrieved and analysed using the MS Excel application. From this, the researcher was able to generate frequencies percentages, means and standard deviations to explain the findings of the study. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis where themes were organised according to the objectives of the study.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Causes of Violence against Children

The table below presents information on the perpetrators, survivors, and causes of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Respondents were asked to give their views on the

main perpetrators, survivors, and causes of violence against children. The responses were ranked on a Likert scale of 1-5, where 1 stood for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. The responses were later analysed from which the mean score and standard deviations were arrived for each of the items in the study, as presented in *Table 1* below.

**Table 1: Respondents' views on the main perpetrators, survivors and causes of violence against children**

Category		Mean	SD
Information on perpetrators	Biological parents	3.4	1.398
	Other caregivers, not necessarily parents	3.7	1.264
	Neighbours	3.5	1.324
	Strangers	2.4	1.1418
	School teachers	2.8	1.37
	NGO workers	2.4	1.399
	Other family members/relatives	3.4	1.453
Information on Survivors	Unaccompanied children in foster care	3.9	1.187
	Child-headed households	3.7	1.275
	Children with biological relatives	3.3	1.374
	Children with disabilities	3.7	1.345
	Adolescent girls	3.8	1.334
	Adolescent boys	3.5	1.321
	Children living with biological parents	3.8	1.339
	Children in school	2.9	1.211
Children out of school	4.2	1.431	
Causes of violence against children	Separation from parents or primary caregiver	4.2	1.147
	Sex of the child	3.5	1.775
	Age of the child	3.4	1.345
	Lack of livelihood opportunities for caregivers	3.9	1.21
	Weak child protection system within the community	3.8	1.272
	Lack of awareness of child rights	3.8	1.324
	Psychological distress by perpetrators	3.6	1.36
	Drug addiction	3.7	1.345
Cultural beliefs and practices that perpetuate violence	3.8	1.41	

(Source: Field data compiled by the researcher)

### Information on Perpetrators

*Table 1* partly presents findings on the perpetrators of violence against children. Accordingly, respondents agreed on the following items as the perpetrators of violence against children: Biological parents (with a mean score of 3.4), other caregivers not necessarily parents (mean score = 3.7), Neighbours (3.5) and other family members (3.4).

However, respondents disagreed on the following as the perpetrators of violence against children; strangers (mean score = 2.4), schoolteachers (mean score 2.8), and NGO workers (mean score = 2.4). Therefore, it can be asserted that biological parents, neighbours, other caregivers not necessarily biological parents and other family members are the main perpetrators of violence against children.

Findings from the focus group discussions with peace club members revealed that; Biological parents, foster caregivers, neighbours, volunteer NGO workers, petty traders, and truck drivers constitute the majority of perpetrators of violence against children. Children alluded that most sexual violence is perpetuated by other family members, neighbours, volunteer NGO workers, petty traders, and strangers. No case of sexual violence was indicated to have been committed by biological parents. A child in the discussions clarified that;

*Many neighbours and distant relatives take advantage of the trust in the relationship established among families to abuse children. There are relatives who come to visit us. Because of the limited space, they are put together with children. At night, they turn to sexually abusing children. Also, many parents send their adolescent children to share accommodation in the neighbourhood with fellow adolescents of the same sex. Some adults or youths take advantage of girls in such joint communal shelters.*

Respondents from the focus group discussions further alluded that biological parents are seen to be the main perpetrators of physical violence as well as emotional violence. A child was quoted to have said, “Parents take beating and slapping as a normal practice to discipline children. Whenever you do something small, they resort to beating you”. Children added that many parents emotionally abuse children by, for instance, confining them within the homestead as a punishment or to deter them from interacting with friends, hailing insults at them, and belittling their efforts and creativity.

Findings from the key informant interviews revealed that; school teachers, petty traders, and volunteer NGO workers also form part of the perpetrators of violence against children. A practitioner in child protection specified that “Many teachers still lack positive disciplining skills and therefore resort to harsh punishments for child

offenders of school rules and regulations”. A child protection committee member added that teachers camouflage by rolling a stick inside pieces of paper claiming that it is a pointer and use it for kenning children. The worst case of physical violence according to Child protection committees (CPCs) involved where a child was hit on the head and left bleeding.

For NGO workers, participants indicated that community-based volunteers working with NGOs take advantage of sexually abused adolescent girls. This, a CPC member elucidated, occurs mainly because of the financial power that these volunteers have due to the small remunerations. “Some of these volunteers own smartphones and video players. As such, they attract girls to watch while sexually abusing them. Some of them are also able to buy small gifts for adolescents in exchange for sexual favours” This similarly occurs with petty traders, casual workers and truck drivers operating in the settlement. “One girl in this village conceived for a truck driver and when the case was being followed the man ran away”.

### **Information on Survivors**

Table 1 partly shows findings on the category of children at heightened risk of violence in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Respondents agreed that Children out of school (mean score of 4.2), Unaccompanied children in foster care (3.9), child-headed households (3.7), Children with disabilities (3.7), adolescent girls (3.8), children with biological relatives (3.3), children with biological parents (3.8), and adolescents’ boys (3.5) are the main categories of children at heightened risk of abuse. However, respondents disagreed that children in school are at heightened risk of violence. It can therefore be asserted that children out of school, Unaccompanied children in foster care, child-headed households, children living with biological relatives, children living with biological parents, children with disabilities, adolescent girls, and adolescent boys are at heightened risk of violence.

Findings from the focus group discussions further found unaccompanied children in foster care, adolescent girls, child-headed households, children living with biological relatives, and adolescent boys as the main categories of children at heightened risk of abuse. For children in child-headed households, respondents alluded that children heading the households are at greater risk of abuse as they must drop normal schooling and adopt adult-like responsibilities while the younger siblings get to school. Some are engaged in child labour and survival sex (especially for adolescent girls) to meet the basic needs of their siblings. A child was quoted saying,

*“here in Zone III, there is an increased engagement of child-headed households in stone quarrying and engagement in construction sites in order to raise additional support to meet the needs of the household”.*

Younger children in child-headed households face a low risk as they enjoy the support and protection of their older siblings. However, cases of physical and emotional abuse by older siblings are believed to be common.

Information from key informant interviews further indicates that adolescent girls experience a high risk of not attending school as they are expected to adopt some family management roles to support their mothers. Adolescent girls further experience the threat of sexual violence from within the community, their peers, and strangers. According to an elder who participated in a KII, girls from 14 years are (believed to be) ready for marriage and South Sudan culture demands them to get married. As a result, parents start threatening them such that they can get married. He said, “You are eating my food for nothing; you need to get married and produce” once they reach the age of 15 years.

A humanitarian worker specialising in child protection further alluded that children with disability face a great risk of violence from within

the homestead and at school. He added that most violence against children with disability is emotional and goes unrecorded.

*There was a girl here who had a severe mental and physical disability. At the age of 10 years, the girl cannot control her stool. She tries to go to school, but the children usually boo her. She had to get back home. The same girl stays with a maternal aunt. Because the aunty had nobody to care for her once the aunt was out of home, she would tie the girl in the room for fear of disappearance. This was all seen in the community as a normal practice until it came to the attention of a humanitarian worker.*

This and other similar forms of violence are commonly perpetuated against children with disability with little concern from the rest of the population.

### ***Information on Causes of Violence Against Children***

Table 1 partly shows the findings on the causes of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Participants agreed that separation from parents or primary caregivers (mean score of 4.2), Sex of the child (mean score of 3.5), Age of the child (mean score of 3.4), Lack of livelihood opportunities for caregivers (mean score of 3.9), weak child protection system within the community (mean score of 3.8), lack of awareness on child rights (mean score of 3.8), psychological distress among perpetrators (mean score of 3.6), drug addiction (mean score 3.7), and cultural beliefs and practices that perpetuate violence against children. It can therefore be asserted that the above listed are the main causes of violence against children.

Information from the KII indicated that separation from parents, a weak child protection system within the community and a lack of reliable livelihood sources for caregivers are the main causes of

violence against children. A child protection worker alluded that separation from parents and primary caregivers denies children of the initial protective nest, thereby exposing children to additional harm. A CPC member added that “when a child is separated, he/she will lack clear guidance and provision, thereby exposing him/her to violence. Besides, many adolescents, especially girls have to concentrate on caring for their siblings, denying them the opportunity to go to school.”

Practitioners in the KII further added that parents without a substantial source of livelihood usually fail to provide for the needs of their children. In turn, such children resort to engaging in adolescent risk behaviours like engaging with men to receive basic needs. According to a CPC member, “Some parents send children to engage in hard labour in construction sites in order to raise money to meet the household needs”. Some practitioners alluded that parents without livelihood sources are at risk of going through psychological distress which increases their violent actions as a response mechanism.

Findings from the Focus group discussion further indicated Drug addiction among perpetrators is a key determinant of a child’s exposure to violence. According to one peace club member, the lack of opportunities for youths and adolescents has made many resorts to delinquent activities like drug and alcohol consumption. This combined with distress caused by other factors to increase their possibility of causing sexual violence. This is exacerbated by a lack of awareness of child rights within the community. Beyond the youth population, there is increased involvement of people in drug and alcohol consumption within the refugee population. This eventually affects their normal functioning thereby exposing children to violence. A child indicated that “Some of these men when drunk, do not mind whether you are a girl or a big woman. They threaten to sleep with you”.

Children indicated in the focus group discussion that while sex may not define the level of vulnerability, it contributes to determining which form of violence a child will face. A peace club member indicated that the majority of the girls are not in school because they are girls. As a result, “most of these girls get married at an early age of about 14/15 years”. This is also attributed to the fact that it is at this age that girls become more sexually active and are, therefore, under pressure from their families. Additionally, they face hardship in accessing basic needs, for example, sanitary pads, towels, and books within the settlements. Also noted within the refugee camp were instances where the parents of young girls forced them to get married for financial gain.

Like sex, age also contributes greatly to determining which form of violence will befall a particular child. As such, it combines with other causes like sex and lack of livelihood opportunities for caregivers to increase a child’s exposure to forms of violence. Sexual violence is seen to be very common among adolescents, while physical violence is very common among children below 12 years. According to a child protection committee member from the settlement, most parents believe children below ten years can only listen with a stroke.

### **Forms of Violence against Children**

The table below presents the study findings on the forms of violence common in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Respondents were asked whether the items listed are common forms of violence in the settlement. The responses were ranked on a Likert scale of 1-5 where 1 stood for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree and 5 for strongly agree. The resultant responses were analysed with mean scores and standard deviations as in the following *Table 2*.

**Table 2: Showing the forms of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement**

Form	Mean	Std Dev
Rape/defilement	3.9	1.264
Beating	4.0	1.161
Neglect (withholding love and affection)	3.4	1.338
Child-to-child sex	3.5	1.133
Hitting	3.4	1.375
Biting	3.1	1.384
Burning	2.7	1.479
Strangulation	2.7	1.440
Chocking	2.9	1.445
Denial of education	3.0	1.450
Kicking	3.2	1.441
Dropping	2.8	1.381
Poisoning	2.9	1.431
Suffocation	2.7	1.374
Sexual exploitation and abuse	2.7	1.621
Survival sex	3.4	1.444
Verbal sexual harassment	3.5	1.397
Forced marriage	3.5	1.353
Denying food	3.4	1.536
Confining	3.2	1.341
Isolating	3.4	1.313
Refusal to register births	2.9	1.162
Lack of protection from harm or exploitation	3.0	1.176
Refusal to provide better shelter	2.8	1.123

(Source: Field data, 2018)

Table 2 presents findings on the forms of violence against children that are common in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Accordingly, respondents agreed on the following items as the forms of violence against children: rape and defilement (mean score of 3.9), beating (mean score of 4.0), neglect (mean score of 3.4), Child to child sex (mean score of 3.5), hitting (mean score 3.4) verbal sexual harassment (mean score 3.5), forced marriage (mean score 3.5), isolating (mean score 3.4), denying food (mean score 3.4), and survival sex (mean score 3.4). However, participants disagreed on the following items as the main forms of violence against children: refusal to register births (mean score 2.9), refusal to provide better shelter (mean score 2.8), lack of protection from harm or exploitation (mean score 3.0), biting (mean score 3.1), burning (mean score 2.7), strangulation (mean score 2.7), choking (mean score 2.9), denial of education (mean score 3.0), kicking (mean score

3.2), dropping (mean score 2.8), poisoning (mean score 2.9), suffocation (mean score 2.7) sexual exploitation and abuse (mean score 2.7), and confining (mean score 3.2).

Therefore, it can be asserted that rape and defilement, beating, Neglect, Child to child sex, hitting, verbal sexual harassment, forced marriage, isolating, denying food, and survival sex are the main forms of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement.

Findings from the FGD found that rape, defilement, child-to-child sex, beating, sexual harassment, and emotional abuse are the main forms of violence against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. Children during the focus group discussion indicated that there is general acceptance for girls and boys above 15 years to engage in sexual activities and that many men think it is okay for

them to have sexual intercourse even when the girl is not interested. Girls especially those without proper care arrangements, are also forced to engage in sexual activities to meet their daily needs. “This is mainly done with small-scale traders, truck drivers, casual workers and community volunteers working within the settlement”. A peace club member alluded.

Adolescents who participated in the FGDs further alluded that many girls escape to marriage to get a reliable person capable of providing their basic needs, such as shelter, food, security, and secondary needs, such as clothing and cosmetics. However, most of the gender-related challenges women and girls face are fuelled by South Sudanese cultural practices, such as bride price and dowry-related violence and the preference for sons.

Participants in the FGDs further indicated that physical violence is another common form of violence against children. This is mainly administered through beating and kicking with rare instances of burns, bites and hitting. Most parents adopt physical violence as a mechanism to punish

children for harm. A peace club member added that “physical violence is mainly administered by parents within the household. There are also rare cases of physical violence being carried out by teachers in schools”.

Findings from the Key informant interviews indicated similar results to those of the FGDs. However, the KII reiterated the rising cases of emotional abuse in the settlement. According to a child protection committee member who participated in the KII, emotional abuse occurs in the community and is mainly perpetuated by biological relatives and other family members. This usually happens through confining children, insults, denying food, and withdrawal of affection or neglect. However, rare incidences are reported because there is a general acceptance of such practices in the community. According to a practitioner, “emotional or psychological violence has far reached impacts on children’s health, physical wellbeing, and cognitive development. Many of these practices demean children’s self-esteem and expose them to further harm including suicidal tendency”.

**Table 3: Effectiveness of existing mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children**

Mechanism in place	Mean	Std Dev
Training on positive parenting	4.2	1.175
Encouraging children to go to school	4.1	1.158
Awareness sessions	4.0	1.112
Strengthening community-based protection mechanism	4.0	1.100
Linking children at risk and their families to livelihood	4.1	1.168
Training of duty bearers on child protection	3.8	1.138
Establishing child-friendly spaces	4.2	1.072
Meetings with children	4.2	1.100
Training children on critical life skills	4.3	1.077
Strict legal action on perpetrators	3.9	1.240

(Source field findings)

Table 3 above presents findings on the effectiveness of existing mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children. Respondents agreed that the following are effective mechanisms to prevent and respond to violence against children; Training on positive parenting (4.2), encouraging children to

go to school (4.1), awareness sessions (4.0), strengthening community-based systems (4.0), linking children and their families to livelihood (4.1), training of duty bearers on child protection (3.8), establishing child-friendly spaces (4.2), meetings with children (4.2), training children on

critical life skills (4.3), and strict legal action perpetrator.

Findings from the FGDs showed; establishing child-friendly spaces, training on positive parenting, linking children to livelihood support, and strengthening community-based protection mechanisms as the most effective mechanisms for prevention and response to Violence against Children (VAC). According to children who participated in the focus group discussions, training parents in positive parenting provides parents with information on how to care for and provide for their children. Besides, parents can learn positive parenting skills rather than applying violent mechanisms in administering punishment to children. Similarly, livelihood linkages provide the caregivers with the needed resources and psychological wellbeing to provide for the basic needs of children. Children in the focus group discussions alluded that the lack of financial means to provide for the needs of the family breeds a sense of violence among caregivers as a response mechanism. Such violence usually displaced the children who become vulnerable.

Related to that is the role of strengthening skills among children in resilience building and risk reduction. Children become aware of the risks and threats in their environment and can avoid circumstances that expose them to violence and can advocate for changes in policies and practices that perpetuate violence. Further still, children get to know when and where to report abuse once it occurs for an effective and timely response.

According to key informants, strict legal action does not create a big impact on reducing incidences of violence against children. This is associated with the fact that a decision to perpetuate violence against a child is influenced by several factors which may not be overridden by legal action. According to a member of the refugee welfare council in Zone III of Bidibidi, “some perpetrators have become hardcore criminals and do not mind the legal action. In

fact, they surrender to authorities once they have committed an offence”. However, practitioners in child rights and child protection have maintained that strict and consistent legal action against perpetrators may, over time, result in a culture of accountability which can result in a decline in the number of cases.

Practitioners further alluded that establishing a case management system is effective for response purposes only. According to a child protection expert interviewed,

*These systems must comprise a functioning community structure that is able to identify cases of abuse, a standard operating procedure (SoP) that defines the standard of service to be provided to a child who has suffered from abuse, an effective referral system that explicitly defines who provides which service and where and a system of accountability that hold duty bearers answerable for the actions and inactions.*

Participants indicated that a key objective of case management is to provide personalised care and assistance to children who have experienced abuse or violence through the provision of a range of services, including health, mental health, psychosocial support, etc. “Children who go through the case management process are able to emotionally and psychologically recover from the distress caused by the violence, rebuild hope, get healed of any medical complications and get reabsorbed into the entire community”, another practitioner added.

Needless to mention is the role of child-friendly spaces in the prevention and response to violence against children. According to World Vision’s child protection officer, “A child-friendly space refers to a formal setting during emergency situations to respond to psychological needs of children during humanitarian crises”. While Child-friendly spaces were initially meant for psychosocial support, the

need and operational space have grown over time to focus on the entire protection of children.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Causes of Violence against Children in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement

In this study, the researcher established that violence against children persists within the Bidibidi refugee settlement and is being preserved for several reasons all of which are influenced by displacement-related conditions. The main causes of violence against children included separation from parents and primary caregivers, lack of livelihood opportunities for parents and caregivers, lack of awareness of child rights, cultural practices that perpetuate violence, and psychosocial distress among perpetrators.

With separation for instance, children who are placed under alternative care have been subjected to sexual, physical, and emotional abuse by the caregivers. Similarly, children heading households must assume adult-like roles of taking care of younger siblings, thereby exposing them to further risk including not attending school, child labour and survival sex. These findings correlate with a UNHCR (2017) situational report that indicated that separation causes a breakdown in family structure and impacts children and families not only in economic ways but emotionally as well. The same position was highlighted in the regional framework for the protection of South Sudanese refugees in 2014. Accordingly, the framework noted that unaccompanied children might have to fend for themselves, while children in foster homes may have to fulfil expectations of contributing to the household economy.

With a lack of livelihood opportunities, two situations occur. One is that parents get distressed due to failure to provide for their own, yet the demand from the family continues to rise. As a result, parents naturally adopt violent mechanisms as a response. Secondly, lack of provision forces

children to identify alternative sources of income to meet their needs which may include engaging in child labour, survival sex or petty theft. These findings correlate with a study by Monica and Stefanie (2009) which revealed that when traditional wage earners get a decrease in levels of income, other family members are forced to seek supplementary income from other sources. At the same time, many children, particularly adolescents, may have reached an age where they are physically able to perform the same work as adults. Many are asked to take on greater responsibility for the economic survival of their family or asked to work for no pay within the home to enable other members to work.

The study further found that risk exposure to violence varies from one child to the other based on the child's specific characteristics. In general, unaccompanied children in foster care are at the greatest risk of violence which is perpetuated by either the foster caregivers or the other family members within the foster family. Other categories of children at heightened risk of abuse include adolescent girls, child-headed households, and children with disabilities (CWDs). The study interestingly found out that the specific characteristic of a child further influences the kind of violence perpetuated against a child. Adolescent girls are at a higher risk of sexual violence as compared to boys, while adolescent boys are at a higher risk of physical abuse and child labour. The above findings concur with UNICEF's (2000) study, which indicated that "In some countries, girls are deliberately denied of education due to a culture that prepares them for the traditional role of motherhood" (UNICEF 2000).

With CWDs, the study also noted that children face a specific risk of violence following their disability. Most violence against children with disability is emotional and physical. According to Wolf (1999), Children with specific needs are at higher risk of violence and neglect; premature, mentally retarded children with disabilities and twins have exposure

to violence and neglect. This is further influenced by the cultural context to which a child belongs. Similarly, a study by the NRC (1993) also indicated that while there might be conflicting findings on the importance of mental retardation as a risk factor, there is a general belief that low birth weight, premature birth, illness, physical or mental handicaps in a child interfere with attachment and bonding within the community which exposes the child to abuse and neglect and may make the child more vulnerable to abuse (NRC, 1993).

This study further found that perpetrators of violence against children are varied. Qualitative data pointed out that perpetrators' personal characteristics and environmental factors determine their choice to commit or not commit. The study further noted that most violence against children is committed by persons who are known to the child. These include biological parents, relatives, and neighbours. It further found out that a perpetrator's relationship with a child determines the kind of violence they advance towards children. Parents were found to be fond of physically and emotionally abusing children, while neighbours and other family relatives were found to perpetuate sexual violence. As indicated by Dollard et al. (2013) in their frustration-aggression theory, the displacement robbed families of loved ones, separated children from their loved ones, and lose previous economic stands while in South Sudan. Such individuals now transfer their frustration onto children who become culprits. That justifies why most perpetrators of violence against children are known persons from within the refugee population.

Finally, the study noted that primitive cultural practices greatly influence the level of violence against children. Most of these cultural beliefs perpetuate sexual violence including forced marriage. The above findings concur with a study by Sapiezynska (2018) in the Bidibidi refugee settlement which found that there are two main sources of sexual violence among women and girls from South Sudan: the acute threat of warfare and

Sudanese cultural practices. With culture, there is almost general acceptance among the refugee population for girls to get married.

### **Forms of Violence against Children**

The study found that different forms of violence occur within the community. Some are at a wide scale affecting a large number of children, while others are at a small scale. Most prominent of the forms include sexual violence and physical violence and emotional violence that occurs in the form of confining, verbal abuse, and isolating children.

Sexual violence is the most prominent form of violence taking place and has been taking place throughout the displacement cycle. During the immense displacement phase, children were reportedly sexually abused as a means of warfare by armed groups. During the early recovery phase, sexual violence has been perpetuated by neighbours and distant relatives. Common forms of sexual violence include rape, defilement, verbal sexual harassment, child-to-child sex survival sex and sexual exploitation and abuse. Rape and defilement are commonly perpetuated by neighbours, some of whom are psychologically distressed due to the circumstances of displacement or separation from their marital partners. For survival sex and sexual exploitation and abuse, the study found that this form is commonly perpetuated by community volunteers, petty traders, and truck drivers. Most family members choose to arrange for marriages with the perpetrators of persons who commit sexual violence against children. Study findings also showed low reporting of cases by community members. These findings correlate to a study carried out by WHO (1997) which found that sexual violence is very common during displacement and that there are usually attempts to downplay the prevalence and nature of child abuse

For physical violence the study found that physical violence is very common in refugee settlements. It is perpetuated within families through beating,

hitting, and kicking. The study found that physical violence is so common within the family setting and in schools and is committed by parents, relatives, and schoolteachers. These findings correlate with the study by the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development and UNICEF (2012), in which 91.3% of adults reported having used physical violence against children.

For emotional violence, the study found that emotional violence is common in all settings. Emotional violence is majorly committed against children with disabilities and occurs through confining, isolating, and verbal abuse. Emotional abuse is seen to diminish children's self-esteem and cognitive development by imparting a feeling of inferiority and lack of self-worth. The above findings confirm the WHO (2002) study on violence against children, which found that physical, emotional, and sexual violence are the most common forms of violence against children.

The study also found that most violence against children goes unreported because it occurs within a family setting and is therefore viewed as a normal practice. The most common forms of violence that are not reported include emotional abuse, physical abuse, forced marriages and sexual violence by a parent or close relative. The study found that where a perpetrator is a person of influence in the community, there is usually a general tendency to conceal the information. This correlates to the findings of a study by the Ministry of Gender, labour, and social development and UNICEF (2012), which indicated that violence in children is underreported due to the popularisation of violence.

### **Existing Mechanisms to Prevent and Respond to Violence Against Children**

The study further found that different mechanisms have been established by humanitarian agencies with the help of the local communities to prevent and respond to violence against children. Some of these have been very effective, while others have

been less effective. The most effective mechanisms included strengthening family support systems, building skills and resilience among children, and establishing child-friendly spaces. The less effective included training of duty bearers, awareness sessions and legal action.

With building capacities within children, the study found that when children are empowered, they can know when to report cases of violence, where to report, and how to support peers. This finding correlates with a joint study that was conducted by World Vision and the University of Columbia on empowering children as peacebuilders in peace building and child protection-ECAP- (A program module that seeks to empower children as peace ambassadors and advocates for their own protection). The study found that; the module provides children with basic skills in peacebuilding and protection. Children who were within the program area were more resilient and at lower risk of violence as compared to those who were in control.

Findings from the study further found that child-friendly spaces are effective mechanisms for enhancing the protection of children against violence. These findings correlate with a joint study conducted by World Vision International, UNICEF, Columbia University and Save the children (2015). According to the study, children overwhelmingly reported increased protection and psychosocial wellbeing because of the child-friendly space. From the study, caregivers, regardless of their child's involvement in CFS, reported a greater sense of protection for children and a heightened awareness of support structures for their protection within the settlement area over the evaluation period and CFS helped to bolster resources (assets) supportive of children's development and to create a buffer against influences otherwise leading to the decline in children's social and emotional wellbeing.

The study also found that no mechanism can work in isolation. For maximum results, there is a need to

apply a combination of mechanisms as they reinforce each other. The study further indicated that the effectiveness of some of the mechanisms had been affected by the level of coordination among humanitarian agencies, thereby breeding duplication and low coverage in other areas.

## CONCLUSIONS

It can conclusively be asserted that forced displacement is a key factor that exacerbates violence against children. Foremost, displacement breaks the initial community-based structure that provides protection to children; displacement results in the separation of children from their families and thereby making children assume adult-like roles that expose them to more harm and abuse. For the few lucky children who have moved with their parents, the situation is almost similar as the parents have lost their initial livelihood sources and therefore cannot adequately meet the needs of the children. Some have turned violent as a response mechanism to the stress of lack of providence. This has been worsened by the existence of a traditional culture that breeds impunity and violence against children.

Further to note, there are varied forms of violence perpetuated against children in the Bidibidi refugee settlement. The most prominent are sexual violence that occurs in the form of; rape and defilement, verbal sexual harassment, survival sex and sexual exploitation and abuse, physical violence informs of beating, hitting, and emotional violence that is perpetuated through confining children, neglect or withdrawal of affection and verbal abuses. These forms have a direct correlation to the circumstances that children and perpetrators have gone through. Besides the commonly known forms, there are silent forms of violence that are being practised with almost a general acceptance within the community. These forms of violence have far reached impacts on the physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing of children and their families.

Lastly, it is right to assert that several mechanisms have been established to prevent and respond to violence against children in Bidibidi ranging from the family support system, building capacities within children's groups, and institutional capacity building, among others. All listed mechanisms have been considered effective in curbing violence against children though the effectiveness varied from one mechanism to other depending on the level of coordination among partners, the level of involvement of community members, the risk factors a child is facing and the type of perpetrator in question. Overall, mechanisms that strengthen the family and community systems have proved more viable and sustainable. These range from establishing community-managed child-friendly spaces, training families on positive parenting and building capacities within children's groups, among others.

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