



The Survey of War Affected Youth

RESEARCH & PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH IN ARMED CONFLICT IN UGANDA

SPECIAL REPORT ON WOMEN & GIRLS FOR THE JUBA PEACE PROCESS

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What is SWAY?

SWAY is a research program in northern Uganda dedicated to understanding the scale and nature of war violence, the effects of war on youth, and the evaluation of programs to recover, reintegrate, and develop after conflict.

In this *Research Brief*:

- The well-being of women and girls in northern Uganda
- The impacts of war and displacement
- Recommendations

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A Way Forward for Assisting Women and Girls in Northern Uganda

Findings from Phase II of the Survey of War Affected Youth

Little is known about the short and long term effects of war on youth. Yet without an understanding of who is at risk of violence (and from whom), the factors that affect violence and acceptance, a sense of the long-term impacts of war violence, and a strong grasp of the factors that protect youth, how can we design more effective prevention, protection, rehabilitation and reintegration programs?

While little is known about war affected male youth, less still is known about women and girls. What seems clear, however, is that their experiences of abuse, abduction, violence and return have differed sharply from that of men and boys.

Youth have been both the primary victims and the primary actors in the two-decade long war in northern Uganda. Yet, while we know that youth have suffered (and continue to do so), we have not been able to answer with confidence some crucial questions: who is suffering, how much, and in what ways? While we know that youth made up the bulk of both victims and perpetrators, we have little sense of the magnitude, incidence, and nature of the violence, trauma and suffering. The state of knowledge regarding women and girls is especially lacking.

One consequence of this lack of knowledge is that programming is often based on immediate and observable needs and possibly erroneous assumptions about who needs help and what sort of help ought to be provided.

With only rough measures of well-being at our disposal, a second consequence is unavoidably crude targeting of services. Those providing services are extremely conscious of the limitations of this approach, but in responding to the emergency have been unable to conduct the kind of evidence-based programming they would like to see undertaken. The purpose of SWAY is to work with field professionals to generate new and better programming based on in-depth data and investigation.

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The Government of Uganda (GoU), international donors, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are in the process of making key strategic decisions with respect to reinsertion and reintegration assistance for youth returning from the LRA and for implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP). The purpose of this research brief is to inform these decisions, especially the prioritization of new programs and the general approach to targeting assistance.

This research brief primarily focuses on war affected female youth in northern Uganda, comparing those who have experienced abduction by the LRA and those who have not experienced abduction. It presents principal findings in the areas of economic activities, education, war violence and abduction, forced marriage and motherhood within the LRA, psychosocial wellbeing, health, sexual and domestic violence, and reintegration. Recommendations are also presented.

Summary

The evidence in the SWAY study suggests that, in most respects, the challenges faced by women and girls in northern Uganda are at least as great as those of males.

In particular, the evidence shows wide differences between females and males in literacy, likelihood of continuing to secondary education, exposure to domestic violence, and family and community conflicts. Females demonstrate more difficulties in all these areas.

In a number of these aspects, formerly abducted females, particularly those forced into marriage and motherhood by the LRA, experience more challenges than their non-abducted counterparts. But while girls and women fall behind boys and men in most indicators of wellbeing, there are some signs that in a few areas the gap may be closing. Adolescent girls have more education and less tolerance for domestic violence than women in their late twenties – a rare indicator of hope among a population which has suffered so much.

The Survey of War Affected Youth

The Survey of War Affected Youth, or SWAY, is a research program designed to promote evidence-based programming for youth in northern Uganda. The Government of Uganda (GoU), international donors, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) will make key strategic decisions over the coming months with respect to reinsertion and reintegration assistance for youth returning from the LRA and for implementation of the Peace, Recovery and Development Plan (PRDP) for northern Uganda. The purpose of this research brief is to inform decision making within these policies and processes, especially the prioritization of funding, new programs and the general approach to targeting assistance.

SWAY combines in-depth ethnographic work with large-scale surveys. The SWAY field team surveyed more than 1,000 Acholi households and 741 young men in 2005 and 2006, and 619 young women in 2007, in eight sub-counties of Kitgum and Pader. ¹ By gathering data on youth living in the sub-counties *before* the escalation of hostilities in 1996, the study is able to understand the plight of youth who migrated, died, or did not return from abduction. The data provide a representative and accurate accounting of the eight sub-counties they represent, and provide a strong indication of levels of well-being and vulnerability across the region. The study was designed to facilitate accurate and minimally-biased comparisons of sub-groups of youth with in a region—males to females, formerly abducted to non-abducted, orphans versus non-orphans, and so forth—and we believe that these results and comparisons can be generalized to the larger Acholi region.

Economic Activity

Economic activity in northern Uganda remains low, and improving the range and profitability of income-generating opportunities is a priority of male and female youth. Given the meagre opportunities available, livelihoods development should be the chief priority of government and humanitarian agencies. As with male youth, the principal economic challenges facing most female youth are shortages of skills, working capital, and productive assets such as oxen, farm or business equipment.

Main findings²

- Income and employment reported by female youth are extremely low – most women work less than two days a week and earn less than 1,250 Uganda shillings (UGS) (c. US\$0.75) a day. When they are able to find work, female's wages are comparable to those of men.
- The quality and quantity of employment and earnings depend on skills and finance: youth are able to improve their employment and earnings over time (and diversify their activities) if they can accumulate both types of resources.
- The most common economic activity reported by women is alcohol brewing, followed by agriculture.
- Brewing appears to be dominant because it is a relatively profitable and low risk use of small amounts of capital on an activity which can be performed alongside childcare and household responsibilities.
- Employment among formerly abducted females is moderately lower than that of non-abductees, although daily wages are similar. The employment gap between those who have and have not been abducted, however, is unrelated to length of abduction, forced marriage within the LRA, and forced motherhood or childbearing in the bush.

Education

The primary school system in northern Uganda is currently achieving high levels of enrolment and basic literacy among adolescents, both male and female. The main educational challenges facing young women are (among young adults) high rates of illiteracy and (for those presently enrolled) managing the transition to secondary school. Each of these challenges is shared by young men, but is more acute for young women.

Main Findings³

- One in five female youth have no education, and only one in three are functionally literate.
- This gap in education and literacy is primarily a function of older (20 years and above) females who are far less likely to be educated than their male peers. The youngest females surveyed have levels of educational attainment, enrolment and literacy levels equivalent to that of their male peers.
- While female adolescents easily access primary school, the secondary school transition is made only with great difficulty.
- Only eight percent of female youth undergo any vocational training – less than half the rate of males. Male youth were more likely to pay for their own training, while NGOs are more likely to pay for training for females.
- Tailoring was the most common form of training for female youth, yet few of these tailors actually make an income as a tailor – especially if the training was NGO-paid.
- Orphans and former abductees in general (two of the most widespread “categories” of vulnerable people) have levels of education and literacy almost identical to their peers.
- Long term abductees, however, display lower educational outcomes, largely due to time away from the formal school system.
- Returning from the bush with children is associated with nearly a third fewer years of education, in large part because young women with children are unable, disallowed, or unwilling to attend school.

War Violence and Abduction

The twenty-two year war in northern Uganda has left few if any families untouched. War-making and experiences of war are gendered in that they affect males and females differently, with further variations by age and abduction status.

Main findings

- Males and females perpetrated violence at similar rates. Males reported experiencing (as victims) a higher number of acts of violence than females. In every category measured, abductees witnessed, experienced, and perpetrated violence in higher rates than non-abductees.⁴
- Of the 30 different types of violence measured, females forced to become the wives of LRA members report significantly more violent events perpetrated, witnessed and experienced (an average of ten) than other female abductees (an average of six), including other long term abductees.
- The likelihood of having family problems after return increases with the number of violent acts experienced and perpetrated, particularly for males. The chance of having family problems is also positively associated with symptoms of emotional distress among both males and females.
- Levels of abduction are immense: more than a third of male and a fifth of female youth report abduction by the LRA.⁵
- Females were more likely than males to experience abductions for a short period. However, if held for more than a month, female abduction periods tended to be longer than that of males.
- We estimate that 20 percent of male abductees and five percent of female abductees are dead. This amounts to roughly nine percent of the male youth and one percent of the female youth population alive in 1996.
- Females performed vital combat and support roles within the LRA. The vast majority were not used as sexual slaves.
- Only half of abducted females passed through the Uganda army before returning to their communities and only a third went through the reception centers set up to cater to the needs of the formerly abducted.
- Just under half of abducted males and under a quarter of females had traditional cleansing ceremonies performed for them upon their return. While longer held abductees were more likely to participate in such ceremonies, this finding does not hold true for forced mothers, who participated ten times less than other female abductees in such ceremonies.

Forced Marriage and Motherhood within the LRA

During the course of the armed conflict in northern Uganda, thousands of girls and young women were abducted by the LRA. Inside the LRA, they were forced to fight, cook, carry supplies, fetch water, and clean for LRA fighters and commanders, including those that organized and carried out their abduction. Many were also abducted to serve as forced wives and to bear children for male members of the group.

Main findings

- Forced marriages were perpetrated in a widespread and systematic manner within LRA-controlled areas in northern Uganda and South Sudan.
- A quarter of all abducted females were given to LRA fighters and commanders as forced wives.
- Nearly half of LRA commanders had five or more forced wives, with lower level fighters averaging two forced wives.
- Half of all forced wives gave birth to children from these relationships.
- Very few forced wives have been released by the LRA or rescued by the UPDF.
- Of those forced wives who had children (i.e., forced mothers) and who escaped, were released or were rescued, half entered reception centres.
- Forced mothers are significantly less likely than other abductees to return to formal education.
- Nearly all formerly forced wives and forced mothers live apart from their captor husbands and do not wish to be reunited.
- Traditional cleansing ceremonies are problematic for some forced mothers and they remain in need of additional services to address psychological and physical ailments.

Psychosocial Wellbeing

Psychosocial wellbeing has been the focus of many programs in northern Uganda and is seen as important given its potential implications for youth's education and livelihoods. Our findings show that a small but significant percentage of female youth struggle with frequent symptoms of distress or with troubled family relationships. While the overall findings show a strong resilience in the community, they emphasize the need to support those with psychosocial problems.

Main findings

- A small percentage of females experience disabling symptoms of emotional distress⁶.
- Overall, formerly abducted youth experience more emotional distress than non-abducted females and this is largely explained by their increased exposure to violence.
- On average, those who were forced wives and mothers in the LRA were more likely to report higher levels of distress than their abducted peers. This is explained by their increased exposure to violence during extended stays with the LRA.
- The majority of females report positive family and community relationships, which are key protective factors against emotional distress. Orphans are not more likely to have high levels of distress unless they have low levels of connectedness with their families.
- However, one in six females report having negative family relationships and 13 percent have experienced domestic violence by a family member or husband in the past two months.
- On average, being abducted did not impact youth's overall social support or have a negative impact on relationships with family and neighbours. While some abductees, including a significant portion of forced mothers, did report substantial problems with families or communities, these most often diminish over time.
- A small percentage of women report drinking alcohol. However, 60 percent report that their husbands drink alcohol and over one-third of these report that their husbands are "often drunk". The frequency of a husband's intoxication is related to a woman's emotional distress.

Health

Physical illness and injury significantly hinder the social, economic and emotional well-being of many youth, adding to their vulnerability and deprivation. The findings point to a strong need for specialized attention to serious illnesses and injuries, many of the latter which are a direct result of the war.

Main findings

- Seven percent of female youth and 13 percent of male youth report serious illnesses or injuries (defined as the inability to complete one or more basic tasks without great difficulty, including walking for three miles, carrying a jerry can, standing-up from a sitting position, etc.). These figures suggest that there are thousands of non-abducted and returnees in urgent need of medical treatment.
- Nearly half of the health problems reported by females were attributed to illness, with TB the most commonly reported infection.
- A quarter of female injuries and a third of male injuries were attributed to the conflict (in most cases to violence inflicted by the LRA). A higher propensity for males to be abducted, as well as injured as a consequence of abduction, accounts for most of the excess in injuries reported by males over females. These figures suggest that two to four percent of youth exhibit a persistent war-related wound or injury. In fact, two percent of males reported still having shrapnel or bullets still in their body.
- Almost one-third of females say that they were unable to work, attend school, or carry out their normal duties because of an injury or illness at least once during the past four weeks; there is no significant difference between abducted and non-abducted females.
- Nutrition is poor, with one quarter of female youth eating just once a day and two-fifths of male youth eating once a day.

Sexual and Domestic Violence

This section details findings regarding female youth's experiences of, responses to and attitudes towards sexual and domestic violence. It shows that while violence is pervasive, female youth overwhelmingly reject violence to themselves and other females.

Main findings

- Formerly abducted females experienced more sexually violent events than non-abducted females and than either abducted or non-abducted males. Forced wives and forced mothers experienced the highest rates of sexual violence.
- Of the female youth who reported that they were beaten and physically abused in the last two months, the majority were beaten by their husbands or domestic partners and family members.
- When female youth are physically threatened in their communities of reintegration, approximately one in four turn to an LC official for help. Another one in four sought assistance from their father's clan. Less than 1 percent report seeking assistance from an NGO staff member, health care worker or a member of the Ugandan armed forces.
- In contrast to physical threats, when females are physically beaten by husbands or domestic partners, they are most likely to turn to their husband's clan leader, an LC official, their father's clan leader or a community or camp leader for help. They are least likely to seek help from a religious leader.
- The vast majority of female youth, over 70 percent, believe that clan leaders or male partners *do not* have the right to beat them. Over 80 percent of female youth said that their male partners *do not* have the right to sex on demand. Younger females show much lower rates of acceptance of violence against females than do their older counterparts (above 18 years of age).

Reintegration

SWAY survey data and interviews suggest that past approaches and programs are insufficient to meet the needs of youth newly returning from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as well as those who have already returned. Ultimately, the evidence points to an expansion of programs that are more targeted to youth with the most serious educational, economic, psychosocial, and health challenges. Such programs would not need to target former abductees in specific, but could target based on self-selecting criteria and easily identifiable needs. A full discussion of these findings can be found in the SWAY Research Brief on Reintegration at www.sway-uganda.org.

Main findings

- Past and present programming for formerly abducted youth is insufficient to meet their needs.
- Only half of male youth and a third of female youth pass through a reception center set up to care for former abductees. Additionally, less than a third of formerly abducted male and female youth have applied for an Amnesty Certificate.
- For the majority of formerly abducted youth, education and livelihoods support are the most pressing needs.
- Health services and psychosocial support for the most severely affected youth are grossly inadequate. This means that a small group of highly-affected youth are without the attention they require.
- Large numbers of youth report difficulties with their families and communities when they first returned home from abduction, yet for most these problems lessen over time.
- Formerly abducted youth do not exhibit higher tendencies for violent behavior than their non-abducted counterparts. They are, in fact, more likely to be active and productive citizens and leaders.
- All youth are struggling and suffering due to war and displacement. Neither abduction itself nor specific abduction experiences are good predictors of vulnerability or types of need.

Recommendations to the Government of Uganda, international donors, UN agencies, and non-governmental organizations

A dramatic expansion of educational opportunities

Support for formal and non-formal education programming for all youth should be dramatically scaled-up, with special attention to expansion of accelerated and age-appropriate adult literacy programs and the transition from primary to secondary school, with particular focus on young women.

- Support for secondary school fees is crucial, especially for young women. Large regional bursary programs could be targeted on both vulnerability and merit. Such bursary programs would provide much-needed funds to a secondary school system in need of rebuilding and retraining.
- Where vocational training opportunities are offered, they should be offered alongside an option of secondary schooling so as to provide choice.
- Alternative education should be accelerated and age-appropriate and offered in afternoons or evenings, with child care facilities provided. Where such programs exist, they are seldom accelerated, are based on primary school (rather than adult) curricula, and serve only a small number of people.
- In all cases, child care (potentially including meals) for the children of students should be provided to enable young mothers to participate.
- Several NGOs are attempting to cater to women who returned from abductions with children by providing education and training combined with child care (e.g., CCF in Pader and Food for the Hungry in Kitgum). These programs appear to be very positive for the individual women and their children. Such programs are limited, however, because they do not work collaboratively with the families and communities where the women experienced problems (and where they will return following the programs). These education programs should be continued, replicated, and expanded, but with more community links, conflict mediation and resolution, and access for non-abducted youth.

Medical attention for persistent war injuries

There is an urgent need to provide medical treatment for the care of serious injuries and illnesses, including war wounds.

- There is a need for a war surgeon, or small team of such professionals, to remove shrapnel and bullets from the bodies of youth (primarily, but not solely, formerly abducted males). Perhaps one to two thousand such cases exist.
- Treatment for serious back and chest injuries (from carrying heavy loads) should also be investigated, given the prevalence of these conditions in both male and female youth.

Targeted mental health interventions

Mental health programs should specifically target the minority whose distress levels interfere with daily functioning. Such programs would not need to discriminate according to abduction experience, but by default would include a disproportionate number of abductees and those who experienced the most violence.

- To date, there seems to have been a great deal of investment at the community level to train lay persons with skills to visit and provide social support to those who are seen as vulnerable in the community. The impact seems to have been generally positive.
- There is an urgent need, however, for an appropriate referral system for those with severe psychological or social problems. Presently there are a small number of trained counselors able to provide in-depth individual or family counseling for those highly affected, and only a handful of specialists trained in psychiatric care. Clear systems of referral and capacity building for this higher level of care are needed.

Targeted and specialized conflict resolution interventions

Targeted interventions are needed for the minority that continue to experience family and community conflicts.

- Family-based interventions are needed for those with family problems—both the abducted and non-abducted. Because the majority of male and female formerly abducted youth are eventually accepted back into their families when they return, those who have problems could be identified, the conflicts explored and supportive family interventions conducted.

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These programs could exist in parallel to family-based programs for non-abducted youth with family discord. Interventions could include problem solving and mediating around core issues, including resource sharing within families and alcohol abuse.

- Efforts should focus on local conflict resolution and mediation mechanisms targeted towards those experiencing family and community conflicts—again, for both abducted and non-abducted youth. Targeted conflict resolution programs could likely (1) speed and smooth the painful transition back into families and (2) help resolve the most persistent cases that do not resolve themselves over time.
- Several community institutions—including LC1s, LC3s, camp commandants, local police, clan elders, women leaders, and community volunteer counselors—have proved effective in preventing and responding to aggression, insults, and other conflict. The capacity and accountability of these institutions should be broadened and strengthened. At the same time, we should recognize that high levels of domestic violence has persisted under (and potentially been enforced by) government and clan leaders. Strengthening these institutions should go hand in hand with efforts to reduce perceptions of the acceptability of gender-based violence.
- With the completion of the peace process, many parents who have been hoping that their children will return will realize their children are dead, and may exhibit and act upon strong feelings of resentment. Some current conflicts within communities observed in our study had just such a source. Community-based mechanisms of helping these parents cope with their grief and loss will thus be important.

An end to targeting based on abduction experiences

Programs should be targeted to youth with the most serious educational, economic, psychosocial, and health challenges. Beyond basic reinsertion support, abduction status should not be a special category, determinant, or precondition of aid.

- An abduction experience or Amnesty eligibility is a coarse measure of needs and vulnerability given the heterogeneity of the impacts of abduction. The Amnesty criterion is especially problematic, given that most eligible abductees do not appear to have applied for Amnesty. For the same reasons, a one-size-fits-all approach to services does little to meet the actual needs of returnees. Moreover, a near exclusive focus on returnees leaves out thousands of youth who were never abducted but who have suffered terrible impacts of war.
- Programs that target based on specific and identifiable needs—literacy, secondary or adult education, child care and feeding during school hours, treatment of serious war wounds, conflict mediation with neighbors, family reunification, severe emotional distress—are likely to be less stigmatizing and more inclusive, self-selecting, and effective than targeting based on categories such as “formerly abducted” or “orphans”.
- Furthermore, such programs are less likely to create resentment or stigmatization as the provision of literacy for the illiterate and surgery for those with war wounds targets specific needs and encourages self-selection. Based on our findings, we anticipate that the formerly abducted will self-select into such programs at a higher proportion than the non-abducted.

Address the needs and rights of females directly

Finally, programs implemented through NGOs or the PRDP must be conscious of addressing the needs and rights of women and girls.

- Females have a history of being underserved by DDR and development programs alike. The above evidence suggests that the challenges faced by women and girls in northern Uganda are at least as great as that of males in most respects. Moreover, in certain areas—such as literacy, the secondary school transition, the psychosocial impacts of violence, the incidence of domestic violence, and family conflicts upon return—women and girls are more likely to experience difficulties.
- Past experiences in other regions affected by conflict indicate that mainstreaming gender and promoting gender equality in policies and programs requires strategic planning to meet the particular needs and vulnerabilities of women and girls. Specific programs are required to overcome gendered obstacles in education, livelihoods, health, relationships, and access to justice. These challenges will not be appropriately addressed through programs designed upon *assumptions* of the needs of women and girls. Rather, our study highlights the urgent need for programs that are *targeted* to the real needs of female and male youth with the most serious educational, economic, psychosocial, and health challenges.

- Based on our findings, a needs-based targeting strategy should result in at least equal and in several categories a disproportionately greater level of assistance to women and girls. Failure to observe such a pattern will be a clear and early indication that females are not being adequately served.
- Consequently, funds, policies and programming that focus on the needs of and vulnerabilities particular to women and girls are likely necessary to achieve the objective of targeted assistance and intervention.

Endnotes

¹ The data and methodology for the survey of males is discussed in the Phase I report by J. Annan, C. Blattman and R. Horton (at www.sway-uganda.org) and the data on females will be discussed in detail in a forthcoming Phase II report by J. Annan, C. Blattman, K. Carlson and D. Mazurana in March 2008. Survey instruments are also available at www.sway-uganda.org.

² Economic activity varies by season, and SWAY II results reflect dry season incomes and activities. We do not compare the economic performance of young men and women in part for this reason; young men were interviewed during rainy season in 2005/06. Moreover, by 2007, security conditions, land access, and economic activity had improved. Thus a comparison of employment or income between SWAY Phases I and II is not meaningful.

³ Note that male and female youth were interviewed in different years—males in 2005/06 (SWAY I) and females in 2007 (SWAY II)—and so any comparisons must be made with caution. Since education and literacy accumulate over time (and fluctuate relatively little) we may be confident in the comparison of the SWAY I and II samples. Characteristics such as current school enrolment are more variable, however, and comparisons must be made with more caution. Nevertheless, since young women report lower levels of education than young men, and since security and economic conditions improved between 2005 and 2007, we can assume that any education gap we see between men and women is the *minimum* gap. That is, if there is risk of bias, it is of understatement and not overstatement of any gender imbalances that exist in education.

⁴ *Violent acts witnessed or received* included: Someone took or destroyed your personal property; You heard gun fire regularly; A parent disappeared or was abducted; Another family member or friend disappeared or was abducted; You witnessed beatings or torture of other people; Another family member or friend was murdered or died violently; Someone shot bullets at you or your home; A family member received a serious physical injury from combat or a landmine; You witnessed a killing; A parent was murdered or died violently; You witnessed the setting of houses on fire with people inside; You received a severe beating to the body by someone; You witnessed a massacre; You were forced to carry heavy loads or do other forced labor; You received a serious physical injury in a battle or rebel attack; You were tied up or locked up as a prisoner; You witnessed the rape or sexual abuse of a woman; Someone attacked you with a panga or other weapon; You were forced to have sex. *Violent acts committed* included: You were forced to steal or destroy someone else's property or possessions; You were forced to kill an opposing soldier in battle; You were forced to step on or otherwise abuse the bodies of dead persons; You were forced to beat or cut a civilian who was not a family member or friend; You were forced to kill a civilian who was not a family member or friend; You were forced to kill a family member or friend; You were forced to betray a family member or friend.

⁵ Based on the number of children passing through reception centres, the UN has estimated that 20,000 to 25,000 children have been abducted. Counting the abducted is a difficult task. Survey evidence from SWAY, however, suggests a more accurate framing and estimate for Acholiland may be at least 66,000 youth between the ages of 14 and 30. Moreover, we estimate that one fifth of males never returned. Finally at least one fifth of abducted youth are not children but are between 18 and 30 at the time of abduction. These figures suggest that for every three children in the official count, 10 youth were actually abducted. These higher numbers seem consistent with the high proportion of youth ever reporting abduction—a third of males and a fifth of females.

⁶ This study was not designed to determine any clinical cut-off (i.e., stating that people are clinically depressed or have PTSD), and therefore levels indicate approximations based on other psychological instruments widely used with similar populations. One of the challenges of measuring psychosocial wellbeing is that levels of severity can differ across countries and cultures and, therefore, this should be considered merely an estimate of levels of symptoms in the region.