

The impact of serious crimes during the war on households today in Northern Uganda

Key messages

- 55 percent of households in Acholi and 28 percent in Lango report having at least one member who has experienced a serious crime. Most households experienced more than one serious crime.
- Households with members experiencing serious crimes are more likely have on-going war-related injuries, less food security, less wealth, worse access to health care, education and water, and feel that local and central government does not represent their priorities.
- The more serious crimes experienced, the worse off the household today.

The [Secure Livelihoods Research Consortium](#) (SLRC) is an eight-country¹, six-year research programme funded by DFID, Irish Aid and EC investigating how people in places affected by conflict make a living and access key services such as healthcare, education and social protection. The SLRC Uganda team is led by the Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, partnering with Overseas Development Institute, African Youth Initiative Uganda, and Women's Rural Development Network Uganda. The overall question guiding the research is: **"How are people surviving and recovering from conflict and what role does internal and external interventions play in supporting their recovery?"**

In 2012/13, the SLRC implemented the first round of an original sub-regional panel survey in Uganda, designed to produce information about:

- People's livelihoods (income-generating activities, asset portfolios, food security, constraining and enabling factors within the broader institutional and geographical context)
- Their access to basic services (education, health, water), social protection and livelihood services
- Their relationships with governance processes and practices (participation in public meetings, experience with grievance mechanisms, perceptions of major political actors); and
- The impact of serious crimes committed by parties to the LRA/GoU conflict on households' livelihoods, access to basic services and relationships with governance processes.

¹ Countries included in the study are Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and Uganda,

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We present here the SLRC Uganda survey findings on serious crimes. Our survey produced **the first representative findings from all of Acholi and Lango subregions** on the number of households and individuals who experienced serious crimes, as well as the first representative picture of the **impact of those crimes on households' livelihoods, wealth, access to basic services, experience of crime in the last three years, and perceptions of government at local and central levels** across the two sub-regions of Acholi and Lango.

Methods

The SLRC Uganda survey is **statistically significant at the study level and representative of the Acholi and Lango sub-regions** and at the local level (i.e., village and peri-urban center). Acholi and Lango are the two sub-regions most affected by armed conflict between the Government of Uganda (GoU) and Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), and home to approximately 3.63 million people.² Fieldwork was conducted in January and February 2013 in 90 different survey locations (villages and peri-urban centers) and we collected data from 1,887 households.

Recognizing that the two sub-regions were widely war affected, we were interested to learn what if any relationship existed between a household having members who experienced serious crimes and the impact on that household overall. Drawing from international law and the context of the GoU and LRA armed conflict, **the following were categorised in our survey as experiences of serious crimes when they were perpetrated by parties to the conflict:** destruction and/or looting of property; abduction; forced recruitment; forced disappearance; severe beating or torture; being deliberately set on fire or put in a building on fire; being a victim of and surviving a massacre; being attacked with a hoe, panga or axe; sexual abuse; returning with a child born due to rape; being forced to kill or seriously injure another person; being seriously wounded by a deliberate or indiscriminate attack; and suffering emotional distress that inhibits functionality due to experiencing or witnessing the above. These crimes were recorded if they were perpetrated by parties to armed conflict, which included government forces, militias, LRA rebels, and Karamojong raiders.

Key Findings

How many households experienced serious crimes?

13 percent of people in Acholi sub-region and 11 percent in Lango experienced at least one serious crime. We estimate

that, in total, between 212,401 and 289,638 individuals in Acholi sub-region and 144,481 to 234,781 individuals in Lango sub-region experienced at least one serious crime.

Extrapolating from our representative sample, we found that **over half (55 percent) of all households in Acholi** – somewhere between 147,211 and 179,597 households -- **report having at least one member who has experienced a serious crime.** In Lango, 28 percent -- or 67,555 to 104,403 households -- report at least one member of the household having experienced a serious crime. In addition, of the households that experienced serious crimes, **the majority experienced more than one serious crime.** Our study finds that households in Acholi experienced significantly more crimes per household than those in Lango sub-region.³

How many people were violently killed by parties to the conflict or were forcibly disappeared and have not returned?

Our study contains the **first representative data** for all of Acholi and Lango on the number of people violently killed by parties to the conflict and disappeared at the hands of parties to the conflict that have not returned. We found that **14 percent of households had members violently killed during the war by parties to the conflict.** We estimate that this amounts to 67,747 to 99,941 people violently killed. We also found that **13 percent of households had members forcibly taken by parties to the conflict and never returned** – also referred to as forced disappearance or 'the missing' – which we estimate accounts for 63,826 to 99,180 victims.⁴ Thus, we estimate that between **131,573 and 199,121 people in Acholi and Lango sub-regions were violently killed or disappeared by parties to the conflict and have not returned.**⁵

Of those violently killed by parties to the conflict, **87 percent were male and 13 percent were female, and 10 percent were children** under 18 years of age, 33 percent were between 18 and 29, 57 percent were 30 years or older. In other words, 10 percent were children and **90 percent were adults.** These figures represent the best published data to date on total numbers violently killed and their sex and age at time of violent death for the overall population of Acholi and Lango.

Of those **forcibly disappeared and who have not returned, 82 percent were male and 18 percent were female.** Additionally, 48 percent were taken when they were under 18 years of age, 27 percent were taken between 18 and 29 years old, and 25 percent between 30 and 70 years old. In other words,

² The current population statistics for Acholiland are based on the population of 1.17 million in the 2002 census, then extrapolated to account for yearly 3.57 percent population growth (see <http://www.indexmundi.com/g/g.aspx?c=ug&v=24>) to reach a 2012 estimated population of 1,502,451. For Lango, the population estimate in the 2002 census was 1.5 million, extrapolated to reach a 2012 estimated population of 2.13 million. Throughout this briefing note, the error of estimation is approximately 1% in each direction with a probability of .95. Rather than present the median figure, we present the range of the estimated total affected population.

³ This difference was expected, given that nearly all of Acholi sub-region was affected by the conflict and for longer time periods, as compared to Lango, where the conflict arrived later and affected some districts more than others.

Social protection includes: free food or household items; school feeding programs; old age pension; feeding patients in hospitals; retirement pension; and any other money payment from the government or other organisations.

⁴ The Rome Statute defines 'enforced disappearance of persons' to mean 'the arrest, detention or abduction of persons by, or with the authorisation, support or acquiescence of, a State or a political organisation, followed by a refusal to acknowledge that deprivation of freedom or to give information on the fate or whereabouts of those persons, with the intention of removing them from the protection of the law for a prolonged period of time.' Rome Statute, Art. 7(2)(i) and Uganda ICC Act (2010), Art. 7(2)(i).

⁵ This figure does not include people who died due to harsh living conditions, poor health and sanitation, the spread of disease during the conflict, or people who were killed by persons not parties to the conflict.

at the time of their disappearance, 48 percent were children (under 18), while 52 percent were adults. Most previous representative studies either neglected sex and age at abduction or focused primarily on children or youth, thus these figures represent the most accurate, representative published data to date on age and sex at time of abduction and forced disappearance for the overall populations of Acholi and Lango.

What role do serious crimes play in people's food security, livelihoods, wealth, access to services and perceptions of governance today?

Our findings show that **experiencing serious crimes is significantly correlated with having worse food security today**. In addition, the higher the number of serious crimes the household experienced, the worse their food security.

The same was true for household wealth, and the correlation was stronger for particular crimes. We found that households had significantly lower household wealth⁶ if they had a household head that had been taken or abducted by the LRA or GoU, had been set on fire or been put in a building purposely set on fire, or where someone in the household had been sexually abused.

Households experiencing at least one serious crime had **worse access to and less satisfaction with basic services including health, education and water**. Households whose members suffered greater numbers of serious crimes during the war had significantly greater difficulty accessing necessary health services; they reported more barriers to access due to travel time, cost, and transport. Furthermore, the more serious crimes a household experienced, the more time they reported having to travel to reach a health centre.

Experiencing more serious crimes was also correlated with being **more dissatisfied with children's education**. This could be because households that experienced serious crimes may be more likely to live in more isolated locations today, and therefore have a harder time accessing education; however, the relationship remains significant when controlling for location and other variables.

We also found that the more serious crimes a household experienced, the greater their travel time to reach a water source.

Importantly, in all of these areas, **the greater the number of serious crimes a household experienced, the worse off the household**.

Finally, our findings show that households that experienced serious crimes are **no more likely to receive livelihood or social protection assistance in the last three years** than other war-affected households whose members did not experience serious crimes (those households are also extremely unlikely to receive such support). In other words, livelihood and social

protection services are not reaching those who are the worse off and hence need it most.

Victims of sexual violence as a serious crime

It is difficult to collect data on experiences of sexual violence of any kind in Uganda, and surveys are not the ideal tool for collecting information on highly stigmatised and taboo subjects such as sexual violence. As a result of these factors, we believe we have under-reporting on sexual violence in our survey results. Nonetheless, based on our data, we can conservatively estimate that in **Lango, 1 in every 50 households and in Acholi 2 in every 50 households have a member that experienced sexual violence as a serious crime during the conflict** (meaning sexual abuse, rape, forced pregnancy, forced child-bearing, and or forced marriage by parties to the conflict). In addition, due primarily to the practice of forced marriage by the LRA, we conservatively estimate that in the two sub-regions approximately **3,000 to 8,000 households have children who were born due to rape by parties to the conflict**.

One of the most important findings regarding sexual violence was that **households that had a member suffer sexual violence as a serious crime were significantly more likely to experience a variety of crimes in the last three years**, compared to households that suffered serious crimes other than sexual violence, or that did not suffer any serious crimes at all. The relationship remained the same even when controlling for marital status and regional differences. Suffering multiple crimes in the past three years was highly correlated with that same household suffering serious crimes of sexual abuse at the hands of parties to the GoU/LRA war. Most frequently reported crimes experienced in the last three years in households reporting war-related sexual abuse were **housebreaking (burglary), disappearance of family members, serious physical harm directed to children, theft, land grabbing, physical attack, and livestock theft** (all significant at 1 percent), **poisoning** of a family member (significant at 5 percent), and **sexual assault (rape)** (significant at 10 percent). Among the different crimes a household could report as experiencing in the last three years,⁷ households that had members that suffered sexual violence as a serious crime due to the war were between **two to 10 times more likely to experience those crimes** than households that did not experience any serious crimes.

Further, individuals who experienced sexual violence were more likely to **suffer physical, psychological and emotional injuries** at the hands of parties to the GoU/LRA conflict that **limit their ability to work**. Most of these people **never received effective treatment**.

Compared to non-sexual violence serious crimes households, households that reported their female member(s) were sexually abused in the past reported higher levels of gender

⁶Household wealth was calculated using the Morris Score Index (MSI), a weighted asset indicator that weighs each durable asset owned by the household by the share of households owning the asset. This means that those households that own items that most other sampled households do not own are considered better off. The MSI includes all assets: productive and household.

⁷Theft, housebreaking (burglary), theft of livestock, land-grabbing, serious physical harm to child, poisoning of family member, forced disappearance of family member, sexual assault or rape, physical attack or assault.

related threats at the time of the survey in February 2013 (significant at 10 percent). In Lango, households that reported sexual violence at the hands of parties to the conflict were significantly more likely to record threats of sexual assault in the last three years. Further, women that reported sexual violence in the past were more likely to feel unsafe (than safe) in their neighborhood now compared to individuals that never experienced sexual violence in the past.

The war wounded

10 percent of the population of Acholi and Lango are war-wounded (defined as physical, emotional or psychological injury that impairs functionality), with people in Acholi significantly more likely to be injured. The more serious crimes a household experienced, the significantly more likely that the household has members with war-related injuries which impair their ability to work. Households that have war-wounded members are significantly more likely to be female-headed, older, poorer and have very low levels of education. **Furthermore, war-wounded households are significantly more likely than households with no war-wounded to have suffered serious crimes, have lower wealth, fewer assets, suffer food insecurity, employ more coping strategies, and have a less diversified livelihood portfolio.** The majority have not received effective treatment for their injuries.

As the war wounded are a group we focused on within our research we have produced a specific briefing note on this populations (see below).

Conclusions and implications

Households' experiences of serious crimes during the conflict today continue to have a significantly detrimental impact to their livelihoods, wealth, assets, access to basic services and perceptions of governance. The more serious crimes a household experienced during the war, the worse off they are. Surprisingly, in the last three years, households that have experienced serious crimes are no more likely to receive livelihood or social protection services than others. In fact, it's the better off households that are receiving these services.

Policy and programs aimed at adding recovery in the north need to reconsider the belief that general economic development programs and livelihood and social protection services serving the better off households will improve life for most people in northern Uganda in general, and the worse off households in particular. The apparent policy and programming shift from a focus on poverty reduction and vulnerable populations to general development and a focus on services and resources for "viable," better off households is detrimental for recovery, justice and perceptions of state legitimacy in the eyes of many northern Ugandans.

National policy that seeks to directly respond to the disproportionate impact of serious crimes on individuals and their households is not only legally justified⁸ but is warranted

on these households current poor conditions and greater exposure to crime (particularly for victims of sexual violence), as compared to other war affected populations that did not experience serious crimes.

While a national transitional policy has been drafted, to date few government programs target victims of serious crimes for services. The continued policy and programming neglect of these households does not bode well for attempts to rebuild citizen/state relations in the aftermath of the war. The GoU and its supporters should ensure a meaningful policy and programming framework that prioritizes support to those who experienced and continue to be impacted by serious crimes. The continuing physical, emotional and psychological injury suffered by many victims of serious crimes requires specific and targeted health programmes. Specialized healthcare and livelihoods assistance should be made available to these individuals and their households, particularly focusing on the most vulnerable, including female-headed households that suffered serious crimes and survivors of sexual violence as serious crimes.

The immense scale of abduction and disappearance of civilians is one of the defining features of the two-decade-long conflict between the GoU and LRA. There is a need to facilitate processes by which families can make peace with the reality of disappearances of loved ones in their lives, enabling them to handle the endless uncertainty and absence of remains, and helping them to re-engage with family, community and their own future. Serious consideration needs to be given to organising a national registrar for family members of the disappeared to be able to file cases for the purpose of state recognition of individuals who have disappeared during the GoU-LRA conflict. Gender-sensitive outreach processes, as part of larger transitional justice processes, should include registration of families of disappeared and their next of kin, and be responsive to the economic situation of the many female-headed households among the families of the disappeared.

Further resources:

Report: Surveying livelihoods, service delivery and governance: Baseline evidence from Uganda: http://www.securelivelihoods.org/publications_details.aspx?ResourceID=295

Briefing Paper: The war-wounded and recovery in Northern Uganda: http://www.securelivelihoods.org/publications_details.aspx?resourceid=299

Briefing Paper: Recovery in Northern Uganda: How are people surviving post-conflict? http://www.securelivelihoods.org/publications_details.aspx?resourceid=297

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⁸ For a review of legal justification in Uganda for victims of serious crimes committed by parties to the GoU/LRA conflict to receive remedy and reparation see United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Uganda Human Rights Commission. 2012. *The Dust Has Not Yet Settled: Victims View on Remedy and Reparation in the Greater North, Uganda*. OHCHR: Kampala and Geneva: <http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Press/WebStories/DustHasNotYetSettled.pdf>