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Walden University

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Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Walden University
2023

Abstract

Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Liberia

by

Nathaniel Benjamin Walker

MPhil, Walden University, 2020

MA, Eastern Mennonite University, 2010

BTh, United Methodist University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human and Social Services—Social Policy Analysis and Planning

Walden University

February 2023

Abstract

The phenomenon of sexual violence against women in Liberia is a disturbing problem. Despite the significant number of individuals who have faced sexual assault in this country, little is known about the roots and long-term implications of this phenomenon within the context of Liberia, as well as the instruments that could be effective in remedying its effects. This study was conducted to understand how conflict-related sexual violence affects women in Liberia and suggest ways to help address it. The research questions addressed the effect of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia and the strategies that are necessary to remedy these effects. Politico-economic theories of war onset and international relations of civil wars were used to frame the study. The exploratory case study approach was used to collect data from 15 participants in Liberia who were familiar with the political, economic, and cultural context of the problem and were capable of relating these issues to discussions bordering on violence in Liberian society. The interview data were analyzed and coded. The findings indicated that the effects of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia could be divided into four categories: physical impacts, mental impacts, short-term impacts, and long-term impacts. The themes related to the ways to address the problem included a strong need for greater governmental involvement, and from a social standpoint, there is a strong need to facilitate micro- to macrolevel transformation. Findings from this research and social change implications could help local and international organizations to develop and implement customized solutions to remedy the implications of sexual violence against women in Liberia.

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Dedication

Two persons pushed me the most to begin this doctoral journey, but both did not make it to see me through. My father, the Reverend Alfred S. Walker, and my late wife, Jande Blay Walker. My dad kept encouraging me to strive to achieve more than he did. Jande stood by me during the first 3 years of my doctoral journey until her death, comforting me, challenging me, and as an advocate for women's rights, even helping with role play for school assignments. I dedicate this work to the memory of both.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables vi

List of Figures vii

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Introduction 1

Background 3

Problem Statement 4

Purpose of the Study 5

Research Question 6

Theoretical Framework: Theories of Civil War 6

Nature of Study 8

Definitions of KeyWords 9

Assumptions 10

Scope and Delimitations 10

Limitations of the Study 11

Significance of the Study 13

Implications for Social Change 13

Summary 14

Chapter 2: Literature Review 15

Introduction 15

Literature Search Strategy 16

History of Violence in Liberia 18

Theoretical Framework 19
Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a War Tool 20
Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a Sustenance Strategy for Patriarchy 21
Wartime Sexual Violence as a Tool for Uniting the Armed Groups 22
Underreporting of Conflict-Based Sexual Violence 23
Rape as a Form of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Liberia 23
Intimate Partner Violence as a Form of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Liberia 25
Impacts of Wartime Sexual Violence 26
Organizations Fighting for the Abolition of Wartime Sexual Violence 28
Challenges to Women Seeking Justice 33
Summary and Research Gaps 35
Chapter 3: Research Method 36
Introduction 37
The Research Design and Rationale 38
Research Question 40
Methodology 41
Possible Types and Sources of Information 41
Sampling Strategy and Size 42
Data Collection Method 43
Instruments 45
Data Analysis 45

Limitations, Challenges, Barriers, and Ethical Considerations 47
Summary 48
Chapter 4: Results 50
Introduction 50
The Setting of the Study 51
Demographics 52
Data Collection 53
Data Analysis 55
Initial Coding 55
Second Round of Coding 56
Recognition 58
Prevention 59
Supervision 59
Coordination 60
Health 60
Determination of the Final Themes 61
Theme 1: Strong Need for Greater Government Involvement 61
Theme 2: Strong Need to Support Micro to Macro Level Transformation From a Social Standpoint 65
Evidence of Trustworthiness 71
Credibility 71
Transferability 72

Confirmability 74
Dependability 74
Results 76
Research Question 1: How Was Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Women Experienced in Liberia? 76
Research Question 2: What Are the Impacts of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Women in Liberia? 77
Research Question 3: What Groups Seek Justice for the Victims of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Women in Liberia? 79
Research Question 4: What Strengths Are Necessary for Remedying the Impacts of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Liberian Women? 81
Summary 82
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations 84
Introduction 84
Interpretation of Findings 84
Recommendations 93
Implications 95
Implications for Social Change 97
Conclusion 97
References 100
Appendix A: Data Collection Protocol 116

Appendix B. Interview Questions 117

Appendix C. Research Timeline 118

List of Tables

Table 1. Distribution of Participants 53

Table 2. Text From the Interviews With Respondents 57

Table 3. Theme 1: Strong Need for Greater Government Involvement 64

Table 4. Theme 2: Strong Need to Support Micro to Macro Level Transition From a Social Standpoint 70

Table 5. Citizens' Participation in Prevention 80

List of Figures

Figure 1. Themes From Initial Coding 56

Figure 2. Themes Observed From the Second Round of Coding 58

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Women have been among the most affected by the civil wars in West African countries. Among the West African countries, Liberia's experience of civil wars provides a better way to understand how the wars led to violence against women. Sexual violence and gender-based violence are examples of how women in Liberia have suffered from the conflicts (Steiner et al., 2018). The civil wars that have occurred in Liberia have exposed women to different forms of sexual violations. Conflict related Sexual violence and gender-based violence (SGBV) is always considered closely because of the nearness in how it took place (Jouriles et al., 2018). For instance, most SGBV acts were committed towards women, giving researchers the idea of studying them together or relating them (Nagel, 2019). However, the two have differences, and sexual violence involves attempts to engage in sexual interactions through violence. Sexual violence can be considered a form of gender-based violence.

Conflict-related sexual violence refers to sexual favors or interactions achieved through violence during a conflict period or because of a conflict. Liberia experienced two civil wars between 1989 and 1996 and between 1999 and 2003 (Okoli et al., 2019; Young, 2022). During this period, conflict-related sexual violence against women peaked in Liberia (Nordås & Cohen, 2021).

However, not all armed organizations engaged in sexual violence against women during conflicts. While recent data may not be available, it would be unfair to make general assumptions when discussing this subject. Therefore, while researching conflict-

related sexual violence against women, caution should be taken against the armed groups related to the conflict. The differentiation of the groups indicates that those in Liberia engaged in conflict-based sexual violence, rendering the place worth study.

Research on conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia has increased due to several factors, such as the long-lasting impacts of sexual violence. Women who are raped or passed through another form of sexual violence have been impacted since the days, and the effects continue today (Atuhaire et al., 2018; Kelly et al., 2018). For instance, trauma is one of the known impacts of sexual violence on women that persists over time (Ades et al., 2019; Potter et al., 2018). Besides the trauma that sexual violence leaves behind, women are left to deal with a variety of health issues (Woldetsadik et al., 2022).

The long-lasting effects of such violence have given rise to advocacy needs in communities to prevent widespread implications (Gausman et al., 2019). This has led the advocacy issue in the Liberian context to encompass national and cross-border concerns with the involvement of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), United Nations agencies, and Liberian government ministries. These agencies have used media organizations and campaigns to provide information on sexual violence. This research also aims to provide more information that could be useful in addressing conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia.

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces the study. It contains the background of the study, problem statement, purpose of the study, and research question. Additionally, I consider the theoretical framework, operational

definitions, assumptions, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study. The chapter concludes with the significance of the study, social change implications, and the study outline.

Chapter 2 contains the literature review and is essential because it shows the research gaps based on the research findings. Based on the research gaps, the justification and need for this study were identified. In Chapter 2 , I will present the method used in this study, focusing on the data collection process, research design, approach, data selection, and analysis process. A discussion will also be held about the sample size, sampling selection, and background. The chapter's goal is to provide an understanding of how the study was conducted. Chapter 4 contains the results obtained from the collected and analyzed data. Finally, Chapter 5 Chater 5 focuses on concluding statements, recommended actions, and implications for social change.

Background

Liberia is a West African country with 4.7 million people, with approximately 60% living in the capital city of Monrovia (Liberia Institute for Geo-information and Statistics, 2019). Residents include citizens from all 15 political subdivisions and citizens of other countries living and working in Liberia. Interestingly, most of the violence involves young people between 18 and 30, who comprise 65% of the population (Onyango et al., 2019). Politicians and people with special interests have repeatedly used these young people as proxies to advance their causes (Bangura, 2019). Although laws and policies are currently in place to address this issue, some Liberians perceive that the

legislative and law enforcement systems are weak, resulting in citizens relying on the informal justice system being comprised of traditional leaders (M'Cormack, 2021).

Addressing conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia requires focusing on rape, among other forms. Rape and other categories of sexual violence during conflicts are used as weapons of war aimed at causing bodily harm and terrifying and humiliating women and their communities (Human Rights Council of Sudan, 2021). Similarly, the widespread conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia warrants study. Jones et al. (2014) detailed that a report by the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that 61% to 77% of Liberian women were subjected to sexual violence during the war. Consequently, the impacts of the war could be devastating because of the large numbers. A study on conflict-related sexual violence would be highly possible in areas where violence was rampant. It would be easier to study the topic in such an area than in those where the violence was minimal. Minimal instances fail to paint exact pictures of the violence.

Problem Statement

The barriers encountered in acquiring gender justice for victims of conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia are significant concerns for the concerned parties. National and international agencies have indicated concern about the lack of progress in achieving justice for the affected individuals. These individuals include those affected by the intergenerational impacts of sexual violence. Because sexual violence can be considered a category of gender-based violence, the challenges encountered in acquiring justice for the victims are similar to those for the latter.

According to Bamidele (2017), the problems of dealing with gender-based violence are among the most difficult compared to other transitional contexts. For instance, advocacy has risen to combat the challenges experienced by justice systems when dealing with conflict-related sexual violence issues in women. Advocacy groups have also resorted to alternative ways to achieve justice for victims due to the failures of the originally used strategies. For example, Nordås and Cohen (2021) argued that most practitioners and advocacy circles call for ending impunity for past perpetrators of sexual violence, considering this the most effective solution to war-related sexual violence.

Rape is the primary demonstration of war-related sexual violence that can be solved through calls for perpetrators to stop impunity (Dawodu & Amadasun, 2021). The campaigns against conflict-related sexual violence have indicated belief in the powers of prosecution to prevent actions for a long time (Dumaine et al., 2021; Olsson et al., 2020). However, they have achieved little through their means. Therefore, addressing the issue would be essential and may result in the design of strategies to address it while offering justice to the victims.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative case study explored how conflict resulted in sexual violence against women in Liberia, the forms of conflict-related sexual violence, the impacts of the violence, and possible solutions. The purpose of the case study was to develop an understanding of the challenge of conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia. The two civil wars were used as the case studies through which the research addressed conflict-related sexual violence in the country. The case study approach was necessary for the

research because it allowed for narrowing down some of the instances that significantly contributed to the violence in the country. The study's purpose also supported the problem statement involving challenges faced in searching for justice for the victims. In this respect, parties involved in the search for justice require a better understanding of the scenario to help them. Therefore, this study was aimed at improving the understanding of the conflict-related sexual violence against women in Liberia to help address it.

Research Question

The primary research question in this study was the following: How was conflict-related sexual violence against women experienced in Liberia? It was adequate to address the causes and the forms of sexual violence against women perpetrated by the wars. The research also addressed other questions, such as the following:

1. What are the impacts of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?
2. What groups seek justice for the victims of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?
3. What strategies are necessary for remedying the impacts of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women?

Theoretical Framework: Theories of Civil War

This section focuses on theories of civil war. Two broad categories of theories of civil war directed the research. The two broad categories can further be divided into various subdivisions.

The first category of theories of civil war that were helpful in this research consisted of theories of civil war onset. The focus of these theories is the causes of civil wars. Researchers have developed various explanations about the beginning of civil wars since the formulation of this theory. From this category arises two subdivisions: politico-economic theories of war onset and international relations of civil wars. . According to Buhaug et al. (2021), ethnopolitical discrimination can create resistance motives. Testerman (2012) noted that politico-economic theories of civil war could have four further subdivisions: the state capacity influence, violent showcasing of grievances, economic opportunity and cost of war, and ethnic, religious, and other divisions as causes of civil wars. The two civil wars in Liberia can fall under any of the four subdivisions, ensuring that any of these theories can be essential in understanding them.

Another group of theories concerning the onset of civil wars consists of international relations theories of civil wars. International theories focus on international organizations' diplomatic and multilateral involvement in civil wars (Hough et al., 2020). Liberalism and realism are two ideas often applied to studying international organizations' participation in civil wars (Paul et al., 2021). International bodies' involvement in civil wars can be viewed from the lens of regional and global economic integrations and political integrations. Most importantly, the theories focus on how international bodies aid the settlement of civil wars and other wars.

The second category of theories on civil wars consists of theories on the persistence of civil wars. Interestingly, these theories focus on the social, economic, and political phenomena during the conflicts' active periods and the days of the settlement

(Rule, 2018). Challenges are faced in identifying when domestic conflicts qualify to be called civil wars and when the tag of civil wars can be withdrawn. This was found to be helpful in the Liberian context because of the period between the two wars. Despite the possibility of the impacts of the first civil war covering the period preceding the second, there should be distinctions in the phenomena before, during, and after a civil war. Therefore, the boundaries outlined by these theories also helped to direct the conduct of the study.

Nature of Study

This qualitative case study was aimed at unearthing the war-related sexual violence against Liberian women, how it took place, its impacts, and possible remedies for the victims. Because this topic involved two specific wars, an explorative case study strategy was helpful in acquiring data. According to Ebneyamini and Sadeghi Moghadam (2018), case studies can capture single complex cases, and the social sciences have developed a method for achieving this. Other fields, such as economics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology, also depend on the technique. Case studies also offer a holistic view of a scenario under study. This is among the reasons why a case study was the chosen qualitative study design for the research.

My analytical approach was to adhere to the process of examining the logical sequence that connects the data to the research questions, leading to a conclusion. To do this effectively, I used the case study approach. The case study approach generally indicates that data can be drawn from multiple sources, including documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, and even physical artifacts (Hollweck, 2016). The

goal of using this exploratory approach and the many sources was to conduct an in-depth study that would narrow a broad field (Shuttleworth, 2021). It should have narrowed the field to the manifestations of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women, the impact of this violence, and possible remedies.

A vital element was the preparatory stage in developing the interview instruments. Open-ended questions were essential during the interviews, as they were appropriate for data collection. The responses were coded into categories to help analyze and simplify the data. Answering the research questions depended on the identification of common themes.

The common themes identified included the manifestations and categories of conflict-based sexual violence in the country. Common themes emerged when the data in a manageable form were sorted to show information from different interviewees that provided similar insight expressed in the form of narratives with concise and exciting examples (Shuttleworth, 2021). The data, findings, and highlights of the significant points gathered through the data collection process and further recommendations are presented in the discussion section of the dissertation.

Definitions of KeyWords

Keywords defined for this study were as follows: *Liberia*, *violence*, *conflict-related sexual violence*, and *trauma*.

Liberia: Meaning "Land of the Freed," refers to a country situated on the West Coast of Africa that is one of the oldest countries on the continent.

Violence: Physical force to injure, abuse, damage, or destroy.

Conflict-related sexual violence: The use of force to acquire sexual interactions with others due to civil wars.

Trauma: Emotional responses to life-threatening events such as accidents, disasters, rape, and others.

Assumptions

Conducting a qualitative study requires assumptions to shape the study. Assumptions on areas such as the researcher's worldview can significantly impact the analysis. Interviews with informants both in the public and private sectors, reviews on government policies, and considerations of another source of information depended on the assumptions. I formulated several assumptions depending on this background to aid me in this research. I approached this study with the belief that honest answers to the questions would be provided and recognized that the informants' perceptions could change depending on political, social, and economic contexts.

I was aware that this study had primary areas of consideration regarding generalization. The collected data can be generalizable, especially in other countries in West Africa, but also note that not all countries in West Africa share the same culture, political, and economic contexts.

Scope and Delimitations

Study of various West African countries could yield nearly perfect explanations of the civil war and its impacts on Liberia. These include countries that had refugees from Liberia during the civil wars. However, Liberia was the chosen country for the research because it was at the heart of the war and witnessed various acts, including sexual

violence. Similarly, the study was conducted using informants in public and private institutions and research articles authored by other researchers focused on the area. For instance, police and hospital reports were some of the documents I reviewed, but I did so with care, as Stark et al. (2013) stipulated an underrepresentation of sexual violence cases involving the perpetrators in police and hospital reports.

The documents reviewed included those detailing outplay of the war in the country. Other documents that I considered for the research were those detailing efforts of international organizations to advocate for justice for related sexual violence victims. Similarly, the documents on the reported cases of sexual violence against women during and after the war were given enough focus. Interviews focused on young and knowledgeable Liberians, primarily those who witnessed the wars. Among the young Liberians, higher consideration was given to female for participation in this study.

Limitations of the Study

Movement within the country posed limitations to the research. Because the research required movement from one area to another, studying regions affected by the war became difficult due to the poor infrastructure in the country. Therefore, the study was focused on Montserrado County areas because the city had representation of all of the other 14 counties. Similarly, some of the locals were unwilling to engage in the research.

Highlighting some potential barriers in at the proposal stage for this study was necessary because it provided a plan for addressing them when they arose. For example, political and tribal affiliations could have interfered with the research, as selected

participants might not have wanted to respond due to their association with a particular group. The Liberian civil war and the present-day violence were fought along these lines. Respondents might have responded to questions based on their bias and affiliation, leading to dishonesty. Loyalty to political sides might have prevented some of the participants from engaging in the interviews. Additionally, some respondents who might have liked to be honest might have felt that providing information that could paint a negative picture of the government might place them at risk. To address these concerns, before the study, I educated participanton the issues highlighted above. The education process included making the participants to understand the intent of the research clear to ensure that the respondents could provide honest responses as they were assured of their security.

Some ethical issues must be considered during the administration of research. For example, the researcher's positionality must be seriously considered. This is important because the researcher's stance can affect the overall research result. One way is to consider the researcher's credibility, which is usually influenced by bias. In this research, I considered myself credible because I managed my bias in a way that did not affect the outcome of the process. For example, I followed academic guidelines to deal with potential biaswhile conducting my research. Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended that researchers take notes of their bias, clearly document their role within their topic, and seek suggestions on handling their preferences. I followed this procedure to ensure that my research contained high-quality information. I also sought guidance from relevant Walden University academic staff regarding the Institutional Review Board procedures.

Significance of the Study

The information presented in the introduction shows that conflict-related sexual violence against women in Liberia is a disturbing problem. Despite the growing number of women who suffer from sexual violence in this country, this issue remains poorly researched. The academic literature does not offer a substantial number of insights into the long-term implications of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia. Furthermore, it remains unclear what forces inside and outside the country are now engaged in the process of developing and implementing strategies to overcome sexual violence. These research gaps prevent stakeholders from adopting effective instruments to remedy the impact of war-related sexual violence in the country. Through the current study, I sought to comprehend the nature and distinctive features of the problem of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia with the purpose of investigating the roots and implications of this problem. The eventual goal of the research is to inform stakeholders in their attempt to remedy the effects of sexual violence against women and prevent its occurrence in the future. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to be valuable both from theoretical and practical perspectives.

Implications for Social Change

The results may promote adherence to the rights of every group in the country. Because findings im at supporting the advocacy groups fighting for the rights of sexual violence victims, the result may be increased respect for individuals' and groups' rights. According to Amnesty International (2018), the fundamental human rights contained in the Liberian constitution do not distinguish between males and females, ensuring that

they have equal rights. However, because of the inequality that has been witnessed with respect to the rights of women during and after the war, the research may result in renewed adherence and respect. The findings of the research may provide valuable information about the implications of war-related sexual violence against women and the existing groups that could assist with addressing this problem. This information could help policymakers, managers of NGOs, and representatives of international organizations to develop and implement customized solutions to remedy the implications of sexual violence against women in Liberia.

Summary

This qualitative study involved a case study. The case study used for the research was the two Liberian civil wars that occurred during different periods. The study identified the ways that conflict resulted in sexual violence against women in Liberia, the results of the violent acts, and the applicable remedies to the affected individuals. This study adds to others that have focused on increasing advocacy for the victims of war-related sexual violence against women. It resulted from the failed efforts of various groups to champion the rights of the victims of sexual violence due to the wars.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This qualitative study aimed to explore how conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia occurred. It addressed factors such as understanding violence in terms of its existence. It also explored the different forms through which the violence occurred, such as through rape and intimate partner violence (IPV). For this literature review, I took current related literature on the topic and examined it through the lens of theories of civil war. For instance, I focused on the persistence of conflicts and the input of international organizations in the search for justice for the victims of conflict-related sexual violence. The literature review addressed a gap in research, in that there is little information regarding Liberian women's experiences of the forms of gendered violence (Bunting et al., 2021).

For the review, I investigated some of these causes of wartime sexual violence and how they are intertwined with the country's social fabric to identify areas for change. There was also a focus on the attempts at reducing war-related sexual violence in Liberia that have previously occurred. These have failed to impact the country positively; they must once again be considered, given the current violence and conflict. Overall, it becomes clear that war-related sexual violence in Liberia has many different causes, and solutions for each of these causes must be found. Of course, the problem of wartime sexual violence in society is not unique to Liberia. Still, the country has some significant political, historical, and social challenges contributing to sexual violence in daily life. Social policies have been formulated and regulated to deal with violence. Unfortunately,

these have not had a permanent or lasting effect on the prevalence of violence in the country. Despite the challenges, there should be recovery strategies that can help individuals resume their everyday lives. According to Berry and Lake (2021), there should be efforts to recover that work together without destroying the others. This implies the possibility of using various tactics to ensure that women recover from the impact of the wars, such as sexual violence.

War-related sexual violence is considered a recurrent condition in most war zones globally. The violence leaves the victims, survivors, and their communities disastrously impacted. Recent studies have given the existence of wartime sexual violence a lot of attention, but in addition, the causes and consequences of conflict-related sexual violence formed the core of the study.There are other research also seek to explore the situation by concentrating on the causes and impacts of the violence. Other scholars have focused on identifying the different forms of wartime sexual violence in Liberia, their persistence, and their consequences. The bottom line for all these scholars is identifying solutions for the problem in contemporary society. This means stopping the continuance of violence and its impacts on society.

Literature Search Strategy

The central research question for this project was the following: How was conflict-related sexual violence against women experienced in Liberia? To address this question, the focus of this literature review was to understand Liberia's culture of violence and its contributing factors to provide background and potential areas for policy

change within the country. The following search terms were used to identify relevant literature on the topic:

- *conflict-related* and *violence*
- *wartime-related* and/or *violence*
- *sexual and gender-based violence*
- *intimate and partner violence*

To identify and retrieve relevant research on this topic, I input these search terms into several academic databases—Google Scholar, ProQuest Central, Policy FILE, and SocINDEX. The inclusion criteria were studies published in English within the last 5 years, even though, in a few instances, the need for specific information led me to go beyond the 5 years when the literature reviewed could not provide me with such information. The exclusion criteria applied to studies published in languages other than English and before the onset of the First Liberian Civil War. I gave preference to studies published in journals with a high impact factor in social policy or social science.

After conducting this search using the four databases identified, I read the first 300 abstracts (based on title relevance) from each of the databases. I then assessed them for relevance to the current research. Excluding repeats, I selected 30 articles to form the basis of the literature review, with additional books and journals used for supplementary information where relevant. I subdivided each of these 30 articles into key themes or codes to create the subheadings used within this literature review and structured the study.

History of Violence in Liberia

The Republic of Liberia is on the West African coast, with English as its official language. It also acknowledges over 20 indigenous languages that represent the country's wide variety of ethnic groups (Hoffman, 2011). Liberia was a settlement of the American Colonization Society (ACS) but declared its independence in 1847, making it the first African country to do so (Hoffman, 2011). Despite being the oldest modern republic in Africa and its close relationship with the United States, Liberia has been plagued by many political and economic problems that continue to impact the country (Hoffman, 2011). The most impactful events contributing to instability and violence in Liberia have been, arguably, the two Liberian civil wars. The First Liberian Civil War began in 1989 and lasted through 1997, and the Second Liberian Civil War started in 1999 and lasted through 2003 (Peters, 2012). The first civil war has also been considered the beginning of conflict-related sexual violence.

Liberia is not the only country in Africa to experience violence; Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire have also experienced political tension, structural violence, and armed conflict (Peters, 2012). The violence in Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire has impacted Liberia. However, the outcomes of war can be similar for all countries that experience it, with a few differences. The prevalence of sexual violence during wars is one of the cases that can lead to different outcomes for war-prone countries.

Charles Taylor, President of Liberia between 1997 and 2003 and now a convicted war criminal, approved the use of blood diamonds and illegal timber exports to fund the

Revolutionary United Front in the Liberian Civil War (Peters, 2012). However, as the crop of new leaders came into government, they started taking stands that supported struggles for eliminating wartime sexual violence in the country. For example, President Weah declared rape and all forms of SGBV a national emergency. This gave the organizations fighting to eliminate the problem an upper hand in achieving their goals.

The Second Liberian Civil War occurred partially due to these actions, as a rebel group launched an insurrection against Taylor (Hoffman, 2011). These civil wars were not the only factors contributing to violence in the country. Young people experienced a crisis in their social roles even before the conflict: "the patrimonial structured states were no longer able to fulfill their promises towards their clients with young people—at the lowest rungs of the patrimonial ladder—becoming the main victims of this failure" (Peters, 2012, p. 879). It is no surprise that these social changes have led to an increased level of violence in the country. This information illustrates that violence in Liberia may not always be due to obvious risk factors; instead, it can occur due to imbalances between people.

Theoretical Framework

Conflict-related sexual violence is an occurrence that affects victims for extended periods, even after wars. The victims feel the impacts of the violence many years after the wars. It is often considered an act of men towards women. However, in other circumstances, there is wartime violence against men. Men have also been faced with several categories of sexual violence in which they have become victims and survivors (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). Similarly, wartime sexual violence has been defined by using

men as the perpetrators against women, obscuring the reality that the violence is on women, men, or LGBTQ+ people victimized due to sexual and gender identities (Doney, 2021). In dealing with sexual violence against men during wars, several authors have indicated that despite the prevalence being unclear, instances of male victimization are more than previously assumed and occasioned by reduced silence on the issue (Edström & Dolan, 2019; Traunmüller et al., 2019). Therefore, studies have pointed out that men, women, and LGBTQ+ individuals can be victims of conflict-related sexual violence. However, this study focused more on sexual violence against women.

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a War Tool

Understanding the causes of wartime sexual violence is necessary for understanding and addressing the situation. Several reasons for conflict-related sexual violence have been advanced. For instance, it has been argued that it arose as a tool of war. Doney (2021) noted that the United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, in a 2019 report, said that wartime sexual violence is "a cruel tactic of war, torture, terror and political repression, and a brutally effective tool of displacement and dehumanization" (p. 1). The perpetrators use it to start or promote violence against specific groups. Unlike other tools of war, sexual violence is cheaper, more efficient, and readily available for the perpetrators' use (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). Sexual violence can be used to instill fear in civilians for collaborating or complying with the perpetrators, humiliating or demoralizing the enemy, or relocating the population from areas of interest to the armed forces. It has also been applied to involve women in war, such as by pledging their allegiance to the commanders who raped them (Nordås & Cohen, 2021).

Therefore, studies have revealed that sexual violence has been an essential tool during civil wars, as it has been applied to gain an advantage over enemies and civilians.

Understanding wartime sexual violence can also be approached by considering the armed groups' use of opportunity and strategy. According to Wood (2018), there is no order or authority in the organization of wartime sexual violence, but it results from leaders' tolerance or failure to punish it. The author argued that the permissiveness of commanders could result in sexual violence of significantly higher frequencies due to socialization among peers and combatants and their preference for rape (Wood, 2018). The combatants can take advantage of the lack of punishment from the authorities to participate in more wartime violence. Nordås and Cohen (2021) added to the argument by stating that a strategic logic is not necessary for wartime sexual violence. Still, it can occur frequently and in more instances without direct orders. In a single sitting, the armed groups can increase their onslaught as they see rape as a strategic military action encouraged by the actions of the military junta's high command.. For instance, in the same territory experiencing wars, the commanders may fail to punish sexual violence, leading to its multiplication. They can also direct the soldiers to participate in acts to afford them an advantage over their rivals. Therefore, conflict-related sexual violence results from the opportunistic and strategic nature of the perpetrator.

Conflict-Related Sexual Violence as a Sustenance Strategy for Patriarchy

Various scholars have studied patriarchy to determine how it has contributed to war-related sexual violence. Nordås and Cohen (2021) noted that sexual violence is gendered and shaped by patriarchy, among other structural forms of sex and gender

inequality. Other studies have also reported that women affected by violence consider it a result of the patriarchal culture in their societies (Kreft, 2019). Patriarchy gives the men in Liberia more power than the women. Studies have addressed how men have used such powers. For instance, they have used their powers to rape women and conduct other forms of conflict-related sexual violence such as gang rape. Similarly, the need to maintain the patriarchal order has been a reason for men's involvement and continued sexual violence. Rape can be used as a weapon to prevent women from assuming the roles of men, as it can frighten them, devastate them, and destroy their psychological well-being.

Wartime Sexual Violence as a Tool for Uniting the Armed Groups

Addressing wartime sexual violence also requires considering the factors that have been instrumental in starting and sustaining it during warring periods. This involves focusing on why the armed groups resorted to sexual violence. It requires considering the individual motives and intragroup norms and dynamics. For example, sexual violence, such as rape, done collectively, increases cohesion among armed groups (Koos, 2017). Koos (2017) concluded that the members of a group collectively feel powerful and superior when involved in wartime sexual violence acts. Research has also explored the average number of members within groups involved in such actions. The groups are not too large to allow the individuals to satisfy their sexual needs in instances such as rape. Similarly, Koos (2017) argued that when the acts are performed in smaller groups, the perpetrators can be sure of secrecy if their actions lead to extreme brutality. This privacy supported by the small groups prevents the cases from coming into the public domain.

Therefore, tackling wartime sexual violence can depend on dealing with the impacts or the fear that the small groups created in the victims.

Underreporting of Conflict-Based Sexual Violence

Underreporting sexual violence is a typical case, whether the violence is conflict-related or not. Discussing the issue, Nordås and Cohen (2021) elucidated that sexual violence is chronically underreported. The scholars considered the police and justice authorities and concluded that because the problems are underreported during peaceful times, underreporting of cases during war periods becomes incredibly high (Nordås & Cohen, 2021). Koos and Traunmüller (2021) explored the sensitive experiences of individuals in administrative data, hospital statistics, and conventional surveys, still showing instances of underreporting. As demonstrated, past research has explored how well-spread information is on the occurrence of conflict-related sexual violence. It is also essential to consider why fewer victims report war-related sexual violence. The fear of stigma is one reason for the underreporting of sexual violence during wartime (Koos & Traunmüller, 2021). Other reasons to be considered as causes of low reporting include fear of feeling ashamed and the consequences of reporting perpetrators. Studies have aimed at knowing the exact reasons why the victims could not report instances of sexual violence against them. Therefore, an analysis of the cause of underreporting of sexual violence during wartime was essential for the study.

Rape as a Form of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Liberia

An exploration of how wartime sexual violence against Liberian women was carried out can start with analyzing forms such as rape. Rape is one of the forms of

wartime sexual violence that has been widely studied. It is worthy of note that cases of rape in Liberia were increasing or stagnant even after the end of the civil wars. Bamidele (2017) noted that extremely brutal forms of sexual violence happened in Liberia during the civil conflict. Similarly, Zweir (2017) explored two WHO studies that determined that over 77.4% and 64.1% of the participants in the research and been raped and gang-raped, respectively. Rape stands out as one of the most brutal and common forms of wartime sexual violence in the country. Rape during the war took different forms, such as forcefully undressing the victims. It could be used as a tool to control enemies, scare them, and relocate civilians from war zones. However, contrary to some beliefs, rape is not an inevitable effect of warfare. Arguing for this point, Koos (2017) stated,

> The longtime assumption that rape is an inevitable by-effect of warfare has been challenged by recent comparative empirical research, which has demonstrated variations in the prevalence of sexual violence across countries, across conflicts, and even across armed groups within the same conflict. (p. 1936)

This implies that rape can exist in specific wars, such as those in Liberia, while absent in others. It is a choice made by the armed groups involved in the conflicts.

The presence of rape during the civil wars in Liberia is supported by exploring the areas where rape cases were registered. More than a third of all the rape cases in Liberia were registered in Bahn and Nimba County, some of the regions associated with civil conflicts (Bamidele, 2017). Other areas that experienced rape in Liberia included Lofa, Grand Geddeh, and Grand Bassa Counties (Zweir, 2017). This has been confirmed since most research on wartime sexual violence focuses on rape survivors and victims.

Furthermore, focusing on such areas and victims has revealed how such violence occurred. For example, more than two-thirds of rape victims in Liberia show that gang rape was used to violate them. At the same time, abduction was also significant, with almost half of the victims confirming its existence (Bamidele, 2017). Adding to the discussion about rape, Zweir (2017) found that sexual violence in Liberia was against different groups, such as men, women, boys, and girls. The reports point to highly militarized forms of rape in Liberia. It points to the reasons for wartime sexual violence in the country. Therefore, such studies help explore the occurrence of rape in Liberia.

Intimate Partner Violence as a Form of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Liberia

An understanding of IPV is necessary to explore its magnitude and how it was experienced in Liberia as a form of wartime sexual violence. Horn et al. (2016) studied IPV and identified that many cases are not reported. It represents violence within intimate relationships involving a romantic partner or ex-partners. IPV was experienced by one-third of all women in a multi-country study conducted by the WHO in 2013 (Chai et al., 2016). Such results help to understand the widened scope or the increased possibility of IPV in the contemporary world. IPV can take the form of rape, physical violence, and psychological. Meinhart et al. (2021) also promoted an understanding of IPV by focusing on the violence in humanitarian locations. Humanitarian locations such as refugee camps provide the connection between IPV and conflict since it is a post-conflict settlement areas for the victims of wars. Similarly, Sileo et al. (2019) studied IPV in Liberia as a sample of the trauma exposures resulting from sexual violence. The research aimed at ensuring an understanding of IPV and trauma on pregnant women in Liberia. Thus, a

better understanding of IPV is also necessary for exploring how Liberian women experienced wartime sexual violence.

Previous research has also explored the form of IPV in the Liberian context. This differentiates IPV from other forms of war-related sexual violence experienced in areas like Liberia. For instance, the authors discussed physical abuse as one of the common forms of IPV (Chai et al., 2016; Meinhart et al., 2021; Sileo et al., 2019). Apart from physical abuse as a form of IPV, other forms, such as sexual abuse, have been studied. Sexual abuse, including the rate by intimate partners, counts as a form of IPV. Sileo et al. (2019) classified sexual abuse with physical abuse as some forms of IPV experienced in war-prone areas. Sexual assault is considered an infraction of humanity regardless of whether the perpetrator is an intimate partner or not. On the other hand, physical abuse as a form of IPV can include several actions, such as killing, torturing, and forced labor on the partners (Sileo et al., 2019). It becomes effortless for individuals to start and promote such forms of IPV when they live with the victims, such as during marriage. Therefore, understanding the conditions of IPV that exist or have existed in society can inform an understanding of how it played out in Liberia due to the war.

Impacts of Wartime Sexual Violence

Trauma has been the most significant impact of conflict-based sexual violence. Exploring the implications of IPV on women, Kelly et al. (2018) discovered that war-related trauma was experienced by women more than men because of being IPV victims. The study noted that collective trauma has resulted from the violence in the homes even more than a decade after the conflicts have subsided. Psychological and mental trauma

and physical harm are results of war-related sexual violence to the victims (Koos, 2017). The mental trauma experienced by the individuals lasts longer, and there is the possibility of resurfacing after being treated. Nordås and Cohen (2021) noted that retraumatization risks war-related sexual violence and its impacts. Retraumatization becomes a challenge in addressing the issues of sexual violence among individuals. The literature points to the benefits of preventing trauma and retraumatization in the already treated individuals to prevent the widespread impacts of sexual violence.

Studies have been directed at knowing how sexual violence in Liberia affects women. Stigma often surfaces above all other impacts regarding studies on how violence affects women in various societies. Additionally, stigma leads to implications such as shame that removes the victims from interactions with the community as they rarely participate in social events. Studies in other countries with a history of civil war note that the victims and survivors of war-related sexual violence are sometimes intentionally excluded from social activities leading to stigma (Finnbakk & Nordas, 2019). The stigma also affects women in their private spaces. Other scholars have studied the impacts of stigma in ensuring the mitigation of violence and successful recovery of the affected. For instance, studies have explored the effects of wars on decreasing or increasing sex and gender equality (Lindsey, 2019; Webster et al., 2019). The focus remains on how the war and sexual violence related to the stigma experienced by the victims and survivors. However, the studies fail to consider the possibility of the stigma in the survivors arising from other sources. Factors unrelated to violence, such as diseases and lack of self-esteem, can be other causes of stigma in individuals that are not explored in the studies.

Other studies focus on the impacts of sexual violence on armed perpetrators. It has been argued that commanders can depend on sexual violence for cohesion. On this, Nagel and Doctor (2020) found that it is also connected to the fragmentation of the rebel groups. The authors noted that groups built through the perpetration of sexual violence could also swiftly fragment as the commanders are sure of their soldiers following them (Nagel & Doctor, 2020). This happens mostly in cases where the commanders feel that some of the top management may not agree to their involvement in sexual violence acts. It leads to the formation of factions, one that supports the violence and others against the same.

Organizations Fighting for the Abolition of Wartime Sexual Violence

Many studies have concentrated on how wartime sexual violence affected the victims. The studies have been taken from the international stage. For instance, Benson and Gizelis (2019) argued that reports of wartime sexual violence had increased concerns by the United Nations Security Council, which provides resolutions for diplomatic actions. It implies that the United Nations considers conflict-related sexual violence a significant threat to security. Other scholars have studied the impacts of sexual violence when it is no longer a secret and is known to the public. Nagel (2019) found that when sexual violence becomes public knowledge, there is an increased possibility of adopting mediation to prevent further impacts. Similarly, Chu and Braithwaite (2018) noted that increased instances of sexual violence increase the possibilities of negotiations for solutions. The armed groups can use sexual violence to negotiate for other settlements because they know it is a weakness. However, not enough research has focused on how

the perpetration of sexual violence in Liberia has resulted in the help of international associations. It is signaled by the few sources providing information on such.

Women are also at the forefront of finding solutions to the conflict-related sexual violence that faces their counterparts. Researchers have studied the involvement of women in mobilization to respond to instances of wartime sexual violence (Kreft, 2019). Bauer et al. (2016) argued that the participation of women in response to conflict-related sexual violence is a result of the post-traumatic growth experienced by the women. Women who have experienced the same and come out strong are seen as significant members of the groups fighting for the end of war-related sexual violence in their communities. According to Kreft (2019), women who have been through war-related sexual violence understand more the adverse impacts of their actions on others. They are aware of the cruelty experienced by anyone who undergoes the same because of having been in that position. The women tackle the issues by basing their mobilization on a wide range of women's issues and rights affected by the perpetuation of violence toward their counterparts. However, the lack of indication of significant women's organizations fighting for the rights of others affected by war-related sexual violence is a challenge. The challenge also exists due to the lack of information on the milestones made by the women's organizations in their fight against conflict-related sexual violence.

Women have taken up leadership of different programs to ensure peace during the postwar period. Research indicates that participating in these postwar peace work programs has positively affected women and their social statuses (Gallo-Cruz & Remsberg, 2021). Further analysis of the topic indicates that it has been beneficial to

women who are professionally employed (Lawson & Flomo, 2020; Shin, 2020). The studies also focused on the specific gender groups that have been at the forefront of championing the rights of women affected by conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia. For instance, Lawson and Flomo (2020) addressed the establishment of the Gender Committee and its impacts on women's activities throughout the country. Women responded to the committee's creation by establishing the "Palava Peace Huts," a project for helping the victims and survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (Lawson & Flomo, 2020). The "Palava Peace Huts" is one of the many examples of projects started by women to help others who have been victims of wartime sexual violence around the country. The projects focused on the treatment of the impacts of violence, such as trauma, to help the victims. Other aims of the projects include fostering reconciliation between the victims and survivors and the soldiers or the perpetrators of the violence.

The impacts of the peace huts in addressing the challenge of sexual violence in Liberia have been covered by many studies. Lawson and Flomo (2020) studied the legal tensions and transnational justice associated with the operations of the peace huts. It involves a focus on the organization's responsibilities through the trained mediators. They intervene in domestic violence cases, assist parents with child support, counsel trauma patients, and support survivors of gender-based violence (Lawson & Flomo, 2020). Other researchers focus on the preference of legal systems between men and women. A study by Divon and Boas (2017) revealed that the choice to access statutory systems that operate as intended is higher in men than women. It explained why women have resorted to statutory strategies instead of legal ones. The statutory systems benefit women by

ensuring a swift operation to deal with their issues. The same is expected to take longer in the legal system. The reduced costs of solving problems through the statutory methods also explain why women favor them. Therefore, the sources provide crucial information on the operations of women in identifying strategies to address wartime sexual violence.

NGOs have also been essential in addressing conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia. Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) studied the involvement of the NGOs in addressing the issue and noted that the NGOs have depended on their coalitions with the international community to start various projects, including the integration of former child soldiers into society. State honors have also been helpful to NGOs in their involvement as they join in the reintegration process of former child soldiers into the community. Lutheran Trauma Healing Program is one of the organizations operating in the country to help the victims and survivors of violence. Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) also studied the operation of NGOs in the country. They indicated that because of the Ebola outbreak in the country in 2014, a significant number of the organizations retreated, including from the neighboring countries of Guinea and Sierra Leone. The study noted that the milestones in working with women in the country are not enough due to the challenges others still face in dealing with economic security and the recurring instances of domestic violence and rape. Therefore, the literature fails to document the strategies applied by the NGOs to deal with the resurfacing cases of rape and domestic violence, which are forms of conflict-related sexual violence.

Studies have also focused on the strategies employed by the government and NGOs in helping with addressing wartime sexual violence in Liberia. For instance,

increasing the enrollment of children in schools is one of the methods that has been applied by organizations to help deal with the impacts of violence in society. According to various scholars, international governmental and nongovernmental organizations have aided public and private schools in the country with funds to promote the enrolment of girls (Barrios-Tao et al., 2017). The studies indicate that schools have been essential in helping girls address sexual violence in societies. The schools act as reconciliation centers for young women and train them in agricultural and technical skills, which can help them fit back into their communities. Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) argued for some factors affecting the efficient operation of governmental and nongovernmental organizations in their quest to help women. For instance, Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) noted that the failure to renovate most of the schools destroyed during the wars prevented the organizations from having areas that could be used for training women. Also, most women in the country are found in the informal sectors affecting the organizations' effectiveness. Other problems highlighted include the lack of equality in the financial industry and the continued harassment of women.

A governmental organization that has been essential in addressing conflict-related sexual violence in the country is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, created in 2005. It was in charge of investigating the sexual and economic violence during the period covered by the two civil wars. Gallo-Cruz and Remsberg (2021) focused on the commission's involvement in the issues and realized that it reported to the parliament in 2009 with recommendations on prosecuting the perpetrators. The commission was essential in unearthing other cases of violence assumed for a long time. It aimed at

identifying the cause of the conflict that would be essential in getting solutions to the sexual violence during the war period. The causes of the conflict can be associated with war-related sexual violence making it necessary to identify the sources. Therefore, the involvement of governmental organizations, including Liberia's Truth and Reconciliation, has been essential in addressing the causes and course of conflict-related sexual violence in the country.

Similarly, women empowerment through legal aid has been an approach used in Liberia to help them reel from the devastating impacts of war-related sexual violence. For instance, Action Aid Liberia supports the project, *Access to Justice for Women* with partners in three districts in the country (Birchall, 2020). The program considers other strategies apart from legal aid to help women achieve justice and ensure societal change. It aims to increase the population of women willing to access justice formally (UN Women et al., 2018). It also aims at increasing women's understanding of various laws in the country, such as those concerning rape and inheritance. It also aims at expanding the mediation groups which train women to be mediators by imparting them with conflict mediation skills necessary for dealing with violence at home. Such strategies are required for women to deal with their issues through the legal justice system and at home. The result of the design is that they increase women's achievement of justice relating to instances of wartime sexual violence.

Challenges to Women Seeking Justice

Women face many challenges when they want to get justice due to the conflict-related violence they experience in Liberia. For instance, Bamidele (2017) studied the

factors inhibiting women's quest for justice in Liberia. The research concluded that men's strict adherence to gender roles and expectations is associated with the perpetration of sexual violence. It leads to an overbearing of power inequalities in significant social institutions and is a barrier to achieving justice. More men existing in key social institutions such as police departments and hospitals tend to take the sides of fellow men when women report sexual violence. Bamidele (2017) also argued that the changes in the socioeconomic environments have failed to equally distribute the roles between men and women, leading to men maintaining their former positions. Therefore, men fail to support women in their quests as they retain the urge to keep the old patriarchal ideologies. It translates into a situation where men overpower women in vital positions and do not support efforts by the latter to achieve justice.

The inadequate representation of women in critical positions is an important reason why it is difficult for women in Liberia to achieve justice in response to conflict-related sexual violence. Its significance has been noted by the number of studies requiring increasing the number of women in key positions as an approach to ensuring increased equality and justice for women (Birchall, 2020). Functions essential for change include the police as required by the policy reforms that asked for an increase in the population of women police officers to help deal with the institutional gender culture and hegemonic masculinity (Huber & Hudson, 2019). Examples of areas where the increased incorporation of women into vital positions has been successful are necessary for underscoring the need to approach the issue in the same manner in Liberia.

Other studies also focus enough on the factors preventing the achievement of equal rights between men and women in Liberia. Discriminatory norms consisting of multilayer disadvantages such as poverty, ethnicity, disability, geography, and migratory status are also significant barriers to achieving justice for women (Birchall, 2020). The report noted that the most vulnerable women get challenges seeking legal assistance when faced with sexual violence. It implies that the most vulnerable cannot pay for lawyers or cater to other legal requirements that need funding. Since they are not supported by the men who want to maintain the old patriarchal order, the women often fail to get justice. The perpetrators also target the most vulnerable women they are sure are not likely to seek justice or cannot afford it. Women are not included in the informal justice systems and traditional dispute resolutions (Birchall, 2020). It results in male-dominated resolution systems that are often biased against women.

Summary and Research Gaps

This literature review provides insight into the issue of conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia and its causes and factors preventing women from achieving justice. Despite this, several vital gaps in the literature must be addressed before further progress can be made. One problem is that social policy formation and regulation thus far have failed to completely address the issue of violence, even though the civil war has been officially over for 17 years (Beevers, 2015). Similarly, identifying the experiences of married Liberian women due to the conflict is another gap (Bunting et al., 2021). Married women are also likely to experience violence in the form of IPV.

As noted in the previous sections, there are three major failures in focusing on economic reintegration programs based on these responses. The first is that even though skills are valuable in any society, post-war economies are typically ill-equipped to employ new workers no matter how skilled or educated they are (Berg, 2020). This leads to women always missing from the vital socio-economic positions essential to the achievement of justice. The positions remain primarily for men who use them to increase the urge to return to the old patriarchal roles that discriminated against women. The second issue is that these skill-training programs come at additional costs. One study found that the estimated cost of a single training package to a former child fighter in Liberia is between $1,200 and $4,100, a lot of money for a cash-strapped economy, mainly when the skills gained cannot be used to boost the economy without jobs (Berg, 2020). Unfortunately, women form a significant position of the poor in Liberia, preventing them from being empowered. It leads to a research gap on the strategies that can be employed to ensure women are financially and economically empowered so that they can pay for the legal fees and other financial requirements to access justice.

To conclude, the study brings out some excellent lessons and helps in addressing how the purpose of this research can be achieved. It is clear from the literature how learning about the occurrence of wartime sexual violence and factors preventing justice acquisition can serve the purpose of this study. It is also necessary to conduct this study which will support answers to the central question of this research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This qualitative study explored how conflict resulted in sexual violence against women in Liberia, the forms of conflict-related sexual violence, the impacts of the violence, and possible solutions. I used the case study method, which was appropriate for this study. In the social sciences, the exploratory case study design is the most used qualitative research method for investigating phenomena like the one in the current study. The goal was to understand human behavior and actions in a particular context. The purpose of the case study revolved around understanding the challenge of conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia and understanding how sexual violence used as a tactical weapon has long-term detrimental consequences for human development and social cohesiveness. This is critical to understanding how sexual violence used as a tactical weapon endangers any endeavor to achieve universal, long-term peace. When sexual assault is employed instead of a bullet, the weapon's power transcends the person first targeted by it. While sexual violence has reached epidemic proportions as a weapon of war in contemporary conflicts (Baaz & Stern, 2013), the wounds left by such aggression do not heal quickly (Koos, 2015). The traumas of sexual assault leave lifelong scars on individuals, families, organizations, and ultimately the entire planet; the wounds left by such aggression do not heal quickly (Steiner et al., 2018). Consequently, this case study contributes to a better understanding of the impact of gender on both victims and perpetrators of sexual assault and exploitation in Liberia.

The qualitative research process begins with what the researcher is interested in investigating. My passion for exploring the manifestations and impact of conflict-related sexual violence meant that the perspective of people living in Monrovia was a subject that interested me. I used the qualitative case study approach to gather information on the perspectives of a segment of the population living in Monrovia. This chapter will provide an overview of the design process and the rationale. I will also discuss the boundaries of the tradition, my role as the researcher, and most importantly, the background of the methodology, including how the participants were selected and the anticipated sample size, research strategy, data collection method, analysis plan, and methods. Issues of trustworthiness and ethical procedures will also be discussed in this chapter.

The Research Design and Rationale

As mentioned previously, I conducted this study using the qualitative approach. Yin (2009) argued that the qualitative approach is necessary when the research relates to gathering perspectives on contemporary issues and subjects. Therefore, my analytical approach followed the process of examining the logical data sequence that connected to the research question and led to a conclusion. I used Yin's (2009) case study approach to do this effectively, which indicates that case study data must be drawn from multiple sources. Yin (2009) said that case study research is a linear but interactive process that relies on sources such as proposals, relevant documents, archival records, letters, interview transcripts, and even emails, which can help improve research quality by better illustrating the issues under study (Yin, 2018). Using multiple sources, I established a database by carefully following the logic of evidence, especially when using internet

sources, as Yin (2018) discussed. In addition, I maintained a digital case study repository to integrate all papers created throughout the research, information gathering, and evaluation of the results. The database was easily accessible, and articles were clearly labeled so that, if required, a second investigator could examine the materials. Additionally, this step was beneficial in establishing the trustworthiness of the research.

The case study approach was appropriate for this study because, as Creswell (2009) suggested, the process is an empirical inquiry that examines contemporary issues and subjects related to a real-life situation. Yin (1984) stressed the value of using this approach and added that the method should begin with one or two *how* or *why* questions and one or more units of analysis such as narrative and description. This approach's level of detail and rigor led me to select it for my study. Using a case study approach helps to limit the possibility of bias (Haven & Groote, 2019). Unlike surveys or interviews, case studies give a complete picture of a person's ideas and emotions about a particular topic. By diluting the plan of a single individual, it is possible to get a more comprehensive understanding of the subject at hand while also decreasing the likelihood of bias. When it comes to helping victims of sexual assault, individual interactions with other participants were an essential component of the strategy.

Additionally, the overall data collection strategy included a detailed information assessment from each descriptive survey methodology. Generally speaking, the case study technique permitted in-depth studies of complex issues in real-world situations (Crowe et al., 2011). It was critical to use a case study technique when examining the consequences of war on sexual assault because it is especially beneficial when it is

necessary to gain a comprehensive understanding of a problem, event, or variable of interest in an authentic real-life setting, as is the case when examining the consequences of war involving sexual assault.

Research Question

The study's central research question was the following: How was conflict-related sexual violence against women experienced in Liberia? Addressing this question has the potential to provide light on the origins and manifestations of wartime sexual assault against women. Other questions that were investigated included the following:

1. What are the impacts of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?
2. What groups seek justice for the victims of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?
3. What strengths are necessary for remedying the impacts of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women?

A key element of my research was the preparatory stage, in which I developed interviewing instruments. The research questions were the primary instrument to direct the analysis and frame the study. Therefore, the research questions were the core of the fundamental research (Maxwell, 2013). Consequently, I collected data through interviews using open-ended questions. I coded the responses into categories, which helped me to analyze and simplify the data. At this stage, I looked for common themes until I reached the point of saturation, which assured me that the research questions were answered. Common themes emerged when the data were sorted to show information from

interviewees who were providing similar data. The data and findings will be presented in the discussion section, where I will highlight the significant points gathered through the data collection process and make further recommendations. This primary acquiring of data was necessary because of the prevalence of sexual violence against women. During the data analysis for this project, I thoroughly evaluated the individualized conversation summaries, the reports on SGBV, and my observations to ensure that all of the information provided by the various data collection methods was taken into consideration. Following my assessment of the facts, I considered the views of others as well. The study focused on the civil war-era sexual assault of women in Liberia, which was at the center of the probe. The primary emphasis of my study methods was on this topic.

Methodology

Possible Types and Sources of Information

For this study, I interviewed 15 informants. The inclusion criteria encompassed volunteer caregivers and those who had adequate knowledge of the nature of the study. Additionally, I reviewed related policy documents and reports from experts in violence prevention and policy formulation and analysis of policy documents from government sources, including Liberia's Executive Mansion website, the Legislative Library of Liberia, and other government regulatory agencies. All of these were consistent with the approach outlined by Yin (2018). These sources were reliable, and the human subjects were those directly affected by, and in many cases actively involved in, the sexual violence in Liberian society. Conducting the study among this population in Monrovia

yielded the intended result. Monrovia has good representation in the political and social structures of the people of each of the 15 counties of Liberia. This study yielded the intended results while reducing the time and cost of the study. According to the findings, the research areas had a high frequency of violence against women and girls. Because most domestic abuse incidents are not reported to anyone outside of the victim's immediate family or social network, programs must address this issue head-on to be effective. There is significant underreporting of these well-known offenders in police and patient information. Concerns have been raised concerning the accuracy and validity of specific estimates because of interinterviewer variability and inconsistencies in self-reports from neighbors for some outcomes (Stark et al., 2013). The neighborhood approach may be practical in conflict-affected and postconflict contexts to estimate incidence rates with confidence sufficient for operational aims.

Sampling Strategy and Size

The interviewees were drawn from within the population living in Monrovia, as described earlier. The sample included a fair balance between males and females. The participants were people familiar with the political, economic, and cultural environment and capable of relating these issues to discussions bordering on violence in Liberian society. The goal was to avoid generalization and to focus on gathering knowledge and understanding the phenomenon, as Yin (2012) discussed. Given that there is no specific rule that precedes the determination of sample size, as the size depends upon what the researcher wants to gain (Patton, 2002), I intended to use a small sample comprised of well-informed individuals knowledgeable of the issues surrounding the study. Therefore,

I planned a sample size of between eight and 10 informants. However, I actually interviewed a total of 15 participants as I had more people volunteer than expected. Creswell (2009) indicated that a small sample size is preferable for identifying themes and analytical purposes when conducting case study research. With this, I ensured that the participants were well suited to help in the process of exploring and understanding sexual violence among women in Liberia and the justice pursued. For most of the 20th century, gender-based hostility was considered a sad but inevitable consequence of war rather than a source of conflict (Stark et al., 2013).

Consequently, I looked for significant contributors who would provide critical information throughout the session. People who currently worked or had previously worked for administrations or nonprofit organizations dedicated to reducing SGBV, alerting the public about SGBV problems, or providing assistance to SGBV victims were considered for inclusion. Looking through literature generated by Liberians working on SGBV issues, checking the internet for organizations engaged in SGBV activities, and contacting colleagues who had spent substantial time in Liberia for suggestions were all ways I determined my participants.

Data Collection Method

In this study, I used unstructured interviews instead of other methods, such as participant observations, focus groups, and direct observations. The rationale behind this method resulted from Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias's (2008) argument that because the process does not rely upon a set of predetermined questions, the tool offers enough flexibility that helps to broaden the research topic on whatever the researcher intends to

focus on. As Jamshed (2014) pointed out, an informal interview resembles an informal talk more than an interrogation. It is often seen as a tightly controlled discourse that favors the questioner's intentions. That is why the approach allows for more flexibility and informality in allowing participants to freely express ideas in detail. When utilizing this method, I had the option of asking a question again by rephrasing either to confirm the respondents' previous answers or as a way to seek clarity. In a structured interview relying upon, for example, a yes or no answer, such flexibility is unlikely.

The approach outlined in the previous section allowed for a participatory process where participants were given adequate time to freely express their responses honestly based on their experiences. When conducting unstructured interviews in various formats, I was able to acquire more specific information. Directive discussions, also called unstructured interviews, are used to get detailed information from participants and do not often involve a sequence of questions at the beginning or end of the conversation. A focused interview, in which the interrogator is already familiar with the participant and attempts to redirect the respondent's attention back to the main issue when the respondent deviates from it, is another kind of unstructured interview that may be employed. The other type of unstructured interview is an informal talk, which is based on an unscheduled series of questions that develop as the discussion progresses. Engaging research articipants in such a manner was crucial because of the intensity of sexual assault, its memories, and the sadness associated with interviewing victims. These approaches needed to be implemented to ensure that these techniques provided critical

information that would increase the legitimacy and application of research findings for all stakeholders involved in the issue, including government and policymakers.

Instruments

When developing the interview questionnaire, I utilized my experiences of conducting similar studies in Liberia while relying upon others' views on Liberia's cultural, political, and economic context. I also used the CLEAR tool, which was first developed by the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy and served as a guide to design and administer the questionnaire. The primary reason for using this tool was that it examines the factors that affect citizen participation. It was very useful as it helped validate the study's questions when it came to assessing women's political rights in the country and their connection to addressing sexual violence against women in Liberia. That was necessary to determine the legal processes women pursue to address their problems and seek legal solutions to sexual violence and other related issues.

Data Analysis

I intended to understand the true meaning of the data in this study. The process called for the transformation of the data. As both Creswell (2009) and Yin (1984) indicated, analyzing qualitative data involves transforming, inspecting, and cleaning the data, identifying the themes and information that make conclusions possible. It also consists of a data integration process referred to as a *data spiral* while helping to ensure adherence to concepts associated with understanding and cleaning data (Creswell, 2009).

I conducted this study following the recommendations by Yin (1984), who taught that the collection and storage of multiple data sources should support research. It must

be done comprehensively and systematically to provide references, appropriate format, and a related line of inquiries. This helpful approach guided the conduct of my study. A range of qualitative data analysis approaches is available to researchers in the social sciences, many of which have been actively debated. The first way is to conduct an evaluation focused on a specific phrase or grammatical structure, for example, and then provide feedback. The second technique concerns making sense of the narratives offered by survey respondents, with the investigator attempting to determine the relevance of the information they provide. The reflective technique is intended to assist the researcher in their role in collecting data. Depending on which of these three methodologies is selected, researchers may use traditional or machine-learning-based techniques in their data-processing efforts.

I was able to create a narrative that summarized my observations and outcomes based on the data coding that I completed. The focus was on the substance of the presentation. The content analysis strategy, which was my personal favorite, assisted in data reduction by identifying cores and interpretations in massive volumes of qualitative data, which aided in data reduction. Coding consisted of classifying phrases or paragraphs and associating them with a term corresponding to the individual's natural language use. Initially, I had planned to use computer software for initial coding. For exploratory investigations, this is essential because all transcriptions submitted into the software program will result in a final examination of the material and the classification of distinct phrases or chunks into predefined codes employing the software's capabilities (Welsh, 2002). Despite the value of using such a tool, I coded my data manually, mainly

because of the small amount of data and my desire to personally and carefully examine the data at each stage of the process.

Limitations, Challenges, Barriers, and Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted in Liberia, a country with many developmental challenges. One major challenge was the cost of moving from one part of the city to another, coupled with a typical unwillingness of people in Liberia to participate in research. Another challenge arises related to collecting honest information from some individuals. Furthermore, the high illiteracy rate was a challenge, as I had to reframe some of the interview questions for various audiences to improve their understanding to obtain better results. discovered that those who participated in the research and provided personal health information exhibited concern about their data privacy. According to the study, participants may experience anxiety due to the interview setting, the researcher's uncomfortable or lack of connection with them, or demands in their daily life, among other factors. Participants may also be concerned about things other than the pain they are experiencing as researchers, such as their safety. Participants with low health literacy often misinterpreted the completed questionnaires or interviews.

Furthermore, it is difficult to witness sexual rape and violence in any scenario. Still, it is challenging in conflict zones when infrastructure and social structures have been severely damaged or destroyed (Stark et al., 2013). Because of the extraordinary complexity of the issues at stake, extra care was taken to ensure that there be adequate reporting, social tolerance, and elimination of fear of revenge.

Some ethical issues were considered during the administration of research. For example, the researcher's positionality was taken into serious consideration (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This is important because the researcher's stance can affect the overall research result. One way was to consider the researcher's credibility, which is usually influenced by the bias that the researcher brings to the research. In this research, I thought of myself as credible since I could manage my preference in a way that did not affect the outcome of the process. For example, while conducting my research, I followed academic guidelines to deal with such a situation. Ravitch and Carl (2016) recommended that the researcher take notes of their bias, clearly document their role with and within the topic, and seek suggestions on handling their bias. I followed this procedure to ensure that my research contained high-quality information. I sought guidance from relevant Walden University academic staff regarding the Institutional Review Board's procedures for analysis, primarily since the study was conducted outside of the United States.

Summary

This study was conducted using the qualitative method based on the nature of the study. This dissertation used a qualitative case study approach to examine sexual violence in Liberia, as well as the manner through which the country has dealt with SGBV after the end of the civil war in 2003, according to the author. Following the ending of the civil war in Liberia in 2003, the qualitative case study approach was used for this project because this way of inquiry allowed for a more in-depth examination of how the country has addressed SGBV. This chapter provided an overview of the interpretative paradigm and explains how it was used in this study. The study's objective, purpose, and research

questions were all clearly stated, and the techniques for choosing respondents and receiving information were laid out in detail.

Additionally, the procedures for evaluating the data were thoroughly described. The chapter discussed the approaches for establishing confirmability and a list of the bare minimum ethical concerns for doing the study in question. Essentially, the study will bridge a significant research gap by answering questions related to sexual violence among Liberian women. That covers organizations working to bring justice to these victims in Liberia and remedies to the effects of war-related sexual assault on Liberian women.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The exploratory case study method was used in this qualitative study to enable a deeper exploration of human behavior among women from Liberia. The research specifically examined how women in Liberia experienced conflict-related sexual violence. Apart from the central question, I also sought to find out the impacts of war-related sexual violence, identify the groups that sought justice for the victims, and identify the strengths that were relevant in remedying the effects of the conflict-related sexual violence against the Liberian women. Therefore, the purpose of the case study was to develop new insights into this phenomenon, enabling the challenge of conflict-related sexual violence in Liberia to be investigated from the experiences of women from the country. Furthermore, I aimed to gain more understanding regarding how sexual violence can be used as a tactical weapon, examining its adverse repercussions on both social cohesiveness and human development. Based on the reasoning, the research questions that guided this study were as follows:

RQ1. How was conflict-related sexual violence against women experienced in Liberia?

RQ2. What are the impacts of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?

RQ3. What groups seek justice for the victims of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia?

RQ4. What strengths are necessary for remedying the impacts of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women?

The chapter will present an in-depth discussion of the settings of the study, the demographics, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study in relation to the research questions.

The Setting of the Study

I received IRB approval to conduct this study on August 22, 2022 (# is 08-22-22-0738973). I immediately started the final study beginning with the recruitment of participants, which lasted for 2 weeks. The rest of the process went on smoothly according to my plan of actions.

This study was conducted in Liberia, a West African country with a population of 4.7 million. The country is surrounded by Ivory Coast, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and the Atlantic Ocean. The research setting was very significant when it came to the outcome of the study because it impacted the type of data collected, as well as the interpretation, analysis, and results (Leon & Davis, 2009). Because of this, I selected Monrovia because there is a full representation of all of the counties residing in the capital city. Additionally, many of the respondents of this study worked with NGOs. NGOs and the government could easily be reached because they all had offices in Monrovia, the capital.

The study included 15 respondents who participated in the interview. This statistic reflects an increase from the 12 respondents that I originally intended to interview. The initiation of the data collection process started with stakeholder mapping, which identified the various people who were affected by the project. The next stages in the

process included qualitative content analysis of relevant documents, including experts' reports regarding sexual violence, carrying out semistructured interviews, and making meaningful observations. The respondents in the interview included five representatives of the adult population, five representatives of the women group, three knowledgeable representatives of the civil society, and two local community leaders, all of which summed to 15 participants. The data collected were then transcribed and translated to yield meaningful information. During the interview, I met with the participants in their offices and any area that was convenient for the informants. We agreed to avoid public places, such as restaurants and entertainment areas, to avoid interference and distraction.

Demographics

There was a total of 15 respondents who participated in this study. These participants came from a variety of backgrounds and institutions. When considering gender, there were 10 females (66.7%) and five males (33.3%), with the average age of the respondents being 35 years (see Table 1). Most of the respondents had had the opportunity to work for various organizations and institutions that were working towards preventing and responding to SGBV. Specifically, participants had worked in or were currently working in government institutions, civil society organizations (CSOs), and NGOs. These institutions all had one thing in common: they were working toward eliminating rape and sexual violence in the country of Liberia through various means. Table 1 gives the detailed distribution of each respondent.

Table 1

Distribution of Participants

Institution	Frequency	Frequency: Male	Frequency: Female
Government	4	2	2
NGO	3	0	3
Private	2	1	1
CSO	6	2	4
Total	15	5	10

As Table 1 shows, there were six participants who worked as CSOs, two being male and four being female. Four of the participants worked at government institutions, two of whom were male and the other two female. Three participants—all females—worked at an NGO, while finally, two of the participants worked in the private sector. This included one female and one male.

Data Collection

For the purpose of this research, face-to-face interviews were most often employed during the period of the fieldwork. However, for those respondents whom I could not meet due to their basic schedule, arrangements were made for us to have the interviews conducted by telephone. Nevertheless, I sought consent to record the information conveyed in the interview for the purposes of future analysis. The purpose of the research interview was to explore the views, experiences, and beliefs of the

individuals on the subject matter. This was meant to measure the overall understanding of the gender-based and sexual violence that women suffered during the conflicts.

This qualitative study was undertaken among people who had had the opportunity to interact or work with entities that are helping to prevent SGBV in Liberia. A series of nine open-ended interview questions were distributed to the participants in the study. Three of the open-ended questions asked the respondents to explain the short- and long-term consequences of this SGBV while also asking them about practical strategies for preventing the problem of sexual violence against women in Liberia. The results were analyzed using themes and frequency tables. The questions below were asked of the respondents during the interview.

1. Do you think that war-related sexual violence is a disturbing problem in Liberia?
2. Did you talk to people who suffer from sexual violence in Liberia?
3. In your opinion, what are the main roots of this problem?
4. Do you believe that this problem could have been prevented? How?
5. Which people were especially likely to become victims of sexual assault? Why?
6. What are the main consequences of sexual violence against women in Liberia? Could you please elaborate on short-term and long-term consequences?
7. What are the main groups that are engaged in this process? Could you please describe the role of local communities, government entities, nongovernment

organizations, international organizations, and other stakeholders in preventing sexual violence against women and remedying its impacts?

8. Could you please offer practical strategies for preventing the problem of sexual violence against women in Liberia? What could be done from the short-term and long-term perspectives?
9. Could you please comment on the role of different stakeholders in these strategies?

Data Analysis

Initial Coding

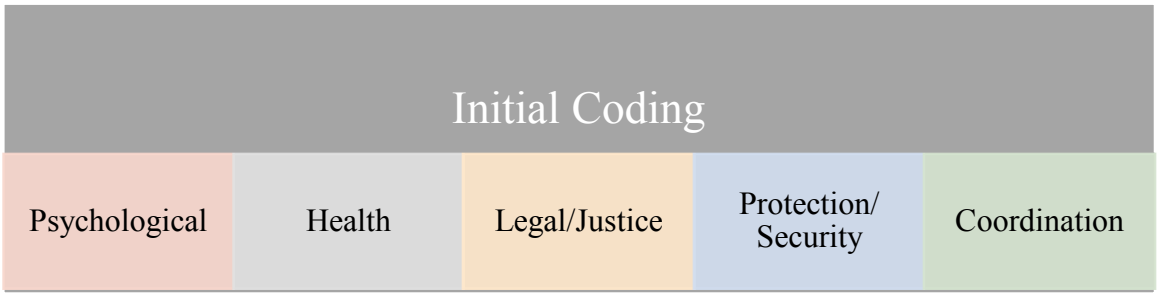
The process began with the identification of reoccurring similarities relevant to the study's research questions. Audio recording was done during the interviews. Contrary to the initial arrangement of applying NVivo software in the coding process, manual thematic analysis was applied. This was necessary as it helped me to personally and carefully examine the data at every stage. According to Javadi and Zarea (2016), a thematic approach is a flexible analysis form in qualitative research that entails extracting ideas and meanings from data and comprises pinpointing, evaluating, and recording themes. In this case, the data used were the interview transcription conducted. I further applied Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to perform the thematic analysis. The six phases in the process included becoming familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining themes, and coming up with the final write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Javadi and Zarea (2016) in their studies

emphasized that researchers must differentiate between codes and themes. Most importantly, they should know that the coding process is what generates themes.

The five main areas that appeared repetitively throughout the interview in the initial coding activity were psychological, health, legal/justice, protection/security, and coordination. An estimated 73.3% of the respondents highlighted these areas. Any other salient details identified in the interviews during the initial coding were recorded in memos to facilitate follow-up action. The information was then used later in the analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. Some of the excerpts from the qualitative study were as follows.

Figure 1

Themes From Initial Coding



Second Round of Coding

The second round of coding involved the identification of more detailed themes that may have been present in the initial coding. The determination of themes for the studies occurred through the use of direct quotes from the participants during the interview. The identified themes included recognition, prevention, supervision,

coordination, and health. Table 2 represents the selected texts from the interview and the identified themes emanating from these quotes.

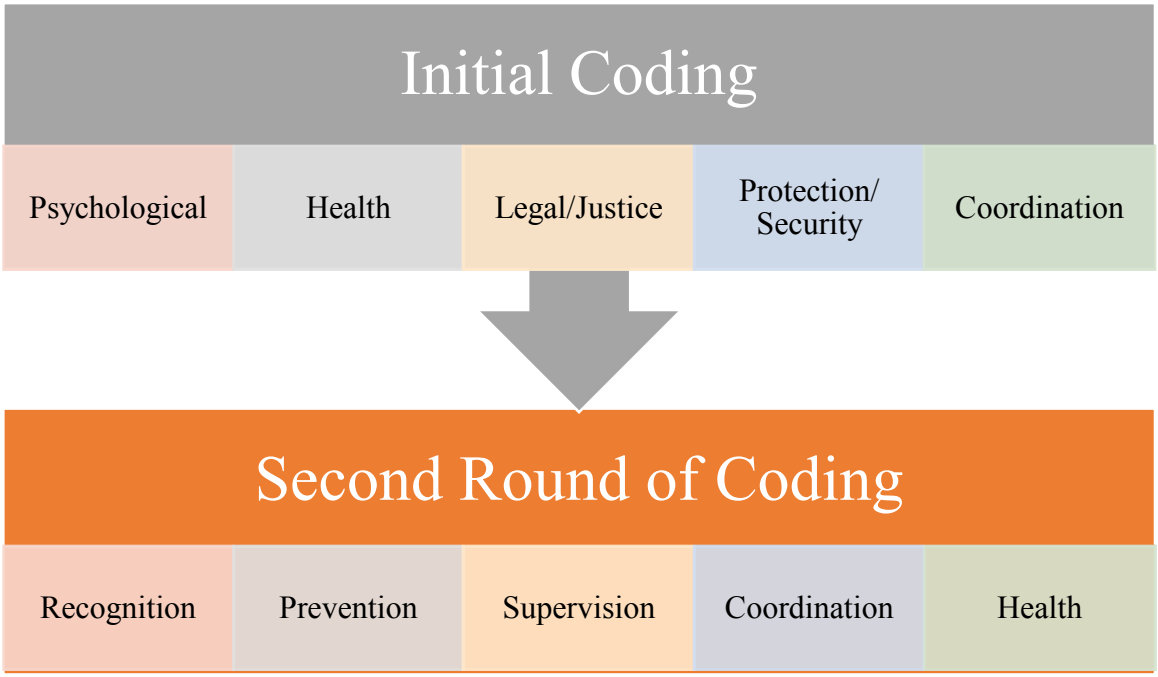
Table 2

Text From the Interviews With Respondents

Direct quotes from the interview	Thematic description
… We have interacted and worked with a lot of the victims, and some are suffering even after the end of the conflict. Some were fortunate to travel abroad as a result of the various resettlement programs in countries like America, Australia, and Canada	Recognition
… the big fighters themselves were committing sexual violence, so they could not talk to the people they were commanded to stop the rape and other sexual violence	Prevention (war-related sexual violence)
… leaving your children alone to go out and sell without he/she being supervised is another cause for sexual violence	Supervision
… want government and partners to work with the locals in all project implementation (total participation of the citizens)	Coordination
… government is helping with free medication, but this is not visible in the community.	Health

Figure 2

Themes Observed From the Second Round of Coding



Recognition

Overall, the respondents expressed that the issue of sexual violence must be recognized as the serious conflict that it is, with people throughout the communities and country acknowledging the damaging short- and long-term impacts that this violence can wreak on its victims. Research conducted by Carvalho and Schia (2011) shows that programs related to sexual violence are always disconnected because they do not fundamentally address the needs on the ground. As a result, fragmentation of these vulnerable issues takes place, and aspects such as rape take all the attention at the expense of other cases. It is important to note that the consequences of SGBV affect not only the victims of sexual violence, but also the family members of these survivors, as they all are likely to be shunned by the community and stigmatized. However, many

people may turn a blind eye to their suffering, denying that the problem even exists. Therefore, the respondents stated that increased awareness of this issue—including its overall effects on victims, their families, and communities in general—must be an ongoing goal. Prevention and redress efforts can only be developed if people in the community and country take this SGBV seriously, understanding the immense harm that comes from it.

Prevention

Another key theme that was identified through examining the responses to these interview questions was prevention. The respondents clearly expressed their belief that prevention was a key goal that needed to be achieved as soon as possible. If this SGBV can be successfully prevented, its incidence throughout the community and country would significantly decrease. This subsequently would help to also prevent the short- and long-term consequences of SGBV. Furthermore, prevention efforts should also focus on war-related SGBV, as many of the perpetrators of these crimes are fighters in these wars and conflicts.

Supervision

A huge risk factor that all respondents identified for SGBV is a lack of supervision. Children who are very young are being allowed to roam the street alone, unsupervised, and unattended. This increases the chances that these children will be snatched off the street and either sold into sexual slavery or raped/sexually assaulted. Even worse, some of these children are actually being sold by their families. In a study by Tayler Smith et al. (2012), half of the victims were children 13 years and below,

comprising toddlers and infants, which calls for extra protection for this vulnerable group. When victims are so easy to find, it makes the perpetrators of these heinous crimes feel secure in being able to not only carry out their crimes, but also get away with them. They may think these children are just uncared for, so no one will be upset if they go missing or are assaulted.

Coordination

Coordination is another theme that was identified in the responses to the interview questions. This theme was geared toward ways to prevent SGBV rather than as a root cause or contributing factor for this violence or a short- or long-term impact stemming from it. Instead, the respondents felt that a coordinated effort between governments, CSOs, NGOs, and other organizations was needed to successfully address and prevent SGBV. Furthermore, communities must also get involved, collaborating and working together to create strategies, methods, and policies to reduce the incidence of SGBV within the country.

Health

Finally, the last identified theme was health. This was considered a short- and long-term impact of SGBV, as well as a possible prevention method. First, the respondents all agreed that victims experienced both short- and long-term adverse health effects due to this SGBV, whether experiencing unplanned pregnancies, being exposed to and contracting a sexually transmitted infection/disease, or suffering from mental health issues like depression. These victims need increased access to health services, both in the immediate aftermath of an assault as well as over extended periods of time. They may

suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, or other mental health consequences, not to mention physical ailments that may lead to temporary or even permanent disability.

Determination of the Final Themes

The final themes were obtained from the specific themes that were identified in the second round of coding. The themes related to the manner of addressing the research problems comprising two main themes. The first is the strong need for greater government involvement, and the second is the strong need to support micro to macro-level transformation from a social standpoint.

Theme 1: Strong Need for Greater Government Involvement

Overall, the participants reported feeling that the government played a key role in addressing sexual violence. Specifically, they expressed that sexual violence could be significantly reduced, if not outright eradicated, if the government was able to address each of the identified theme areas, including recognition, prevention, supervision, coordination and health. In this way, it would be able to meet the needs of survivors more effectively and completely. These survivors include women and girls who are vulnerable to GBV, sexual exploitation and abuse.

Based on Q#3 of the interview, the majority of the respondents attributed the root cause of war-related sexual violence due to bad governance, abuse of power, and lack of Justice. Whenever laws and orders are broken down in the country, it results in armed conflict, and this gives rise to war-related violence and crime. Armed men become the rulers of the day, leading to all sorts of crimes being committed. Sadly, sexual violence is

one of the most common of these crimes. Some of the primary root causes of SGBV highlighted by respondents are as follows:

- Cultural implications of forcing young girls to marry elderly men far older than themselves
- Lack of supervision by the parents. Most parents do not prioritize supervising their children, and most often, in the community, young girls and boys are left unattended or unsupervised.
- Compromising rape cases by the family members, and in some cases, the courts and the police also compromised sexual-related cases, including rape.
- Religious leaders also compromise these cases of sexual abuse, which is a contributing factor to the root causes of the violence. In most cases, when a member is being accused or involved in sexual violence, they try to protect the culprit. This may compel the victim's family to not take appropriate action.

Overall, based on the responses to this question, the participants believe that the root causes of this gender-based violence can be summed up as bad governance; lack of laws and order; families leaving children unattended and unsupervised; children being sold; and compromising of rape and other sexual violence cases by police, courts, religious leaders, and family members.

In regards to Q#4 of the interview, all the respondents believed that the issue could have been prevented if some measures had been implemented. For example, sexual violence related to war could have been prevented if the leaders of the various armed group had taken more serious action against any of their soldiers involved in rape or other

forms of sexual violence during the war/conflict. Prosecuting culprits and setting up mechanisms to deter soldiers and other people in their control areas from engaging in the crime would be a huge and potentially effective measure to prevent this sexual violence against women.

On the other hand, the responses from Q#8 revealed that the respondents claimed that the government helps in the following ways to combat crimes:

- enactment of rape law and domestic violence bills
- setting up of criminal court to prosecute the SGBV case
- a special unit at Ministry of Justice and Gender specifically for SGBV
- free medical support from the Ministry of Health
- provision of a safe home
- survival support

The UN agencies and CSOs, are helping with many issues as well, such as providing food and non-food items and counselling. They also help to empower victims, offering family mediation where applicable. Also, they are helping with programs such as the spotlight initiatives in five counties, which aim to prevent and respond to SGBV. Almost all of the respondents stated that for the communities to play any meaningful role in combatting SGBV, there is a need for the government and other stakeholders to get the community involved and empowered to help in the fight.

According to one of the respondents from the side of the government answering Q#9, some of the practical steps taken by the government involve collaborating with the UN Partner to launch the Spotlight initiative in five counties. These include Monsterrado,

Cape Mount, Lofa, Nimba, and Grand Gedeh. The aim of this project was to prevent and respond to cases of sexual violence in the country. Another step taken by the government is setting up inter-ministerial committees and working with everyone in all sectors to eliminate violence. Table 3 represents the strong need for greater government involvement in relation to the root causes of SGBV.

Table 3

Theme 1: Strong Need for Greater Government Involvement

Root causes of SGBV concerning the government	Social causes of SGBV resulting from bad governance	Government efforts in combating SGBV	Collaboration of the government, the UN agencies and the CSOs to combat SGBV
Bad governance	Cultural implications	Enactment of rape law and domestic violence bills	Providing food and nonfood items for the victims
Abuses of power	Lack of supervision	Setting up of criminal court to prosecute SGBV cases	Counseling and empowering victims
Lack of justice	Compromising rape cases by family members	A special unit at the Ministry of Justice and Gender specifically for SGBV	Family medications
Lack of law and order	Religious leaders compromise sexual abuse	Free medical support from the Ministry of Health Providing a safe home and survival support	Interministerial committees to eliminate SGBV

Theme 2: Strong Need to Support Micro to Macro Level Transformation From a Social Standpoint

Participants observed that the use of rape as a weapon of war and gender-based violence has a long-term impact on not only the victims specifically but also society in general. If their needs are not addressed adequately, survivors suffer physical and mental consequences, even after a conflict has ended. Responses on #Q5 revealed that the categories of people who are most likely to be the victims of sexual assault include, persons with disabilities, especially females, children who are unsupervised or left unattended for long periods of time, single-parent households, street children, adolescents, old age mothers, women/girls travelling alone over long distances.

According to the data yielded from Q#1, all 15 respondents agreed that war-related sexual violence is s serious issue in the country. They admitted that it has a profound negative impact on not only individual victims but also societies in general. They provided examples of the results of war-related sexual violence, including physical harm, trauma, and loss of virginity if the victim was a virgin. Another participant answering the same question stressed the issues of gang rape, emotional imbalance, and low self-esteem as a result of the actions carried out by the perpetrator. In some cases, a child soldier forcefully raped a lady of high reputation, with the woman becoming unable to seek redress even if the culprit is known. Another participant also mentioned the issues of sodomy carried out during the war.

Another important point that was highlighted by most of the respondents was the issue of rehabilitation. After the war, most of the victims of sexual violence during the

war were not rehabilitated. As a result, they continued to live with that trauma for the most part of their lives because authorities have failed to address their needs adequately. Many communities shun and exclude women and girls who have been raped because of the shame associated with sexual violence. In the eyes of their families and societies, they have lost their honour. As a consequence, most women have withdrawn from the societies and even suffer from lost income. Finally, the respondents all agreed due to the failure of the authorities to rehabilitate and reintegrate victims into the community and society; most victims continue to suffer both physical and mental consequences even after the war/conflict has ended.

In reference to question #4, the majority of the respondents highlighted the following as some of the proper ways to prevent SGBV.

- proper supervision of children, making sure that children are never left unattended
- need to enforce our laws
- create more courts, especially for SGBV
- train more police, especially in ways to handle sexual-related violence cases
- more awareness of sexual-based violence at the community level
- setting up of community groupings to explain to them the dangers of gender-based violence and how to eliminate it in societies, as well as its impacts and how it damages the victims' self-esteem
- speak out against all forms of SGBV

Overall, these prevention efforts need to focus on various aspects associated with SGBV, such as properly supervising children. Parents and caregivers should never leave their children unattended but instead keep a close eye on them at all times, especially for children who are very young. Another prevention effort is to enforce the existing laws in the country while also creating additional courts that specialize in SGBV. This ensures that victims and their families get the representation they deserve. Furthermore, more police need to be trained in how to manage these sexual-related violence cases, showing respect to the victims while not blaming or stigmatizing them.

The respondents also expressed that increased awareness of the issue of SGBV was needed. This recognition was most necessary at the community level, ensuring that people within the community were aware of the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of SGBV. Furthermore, community grouping was recommended, as this would enable more people in the community to become aware of SGBV and its dangers while also exploring ways to eliminate it. These community groupings would also promote awareness regarding how SGBV adversely impacts victims' self-esteem. Finally, the respondents said that people within the community needed to speak out against all forms of SGBV, letting their voices be heard.

On the other hand, the participants explained the main consequences of wartime sexual violence involve the attitudes of the societies and community members in Q#6. For example, these community members are extremely likely to shun and exclude women and girls who have been raped. This, unfortunately, causes the victims to lose their self-esteem while also suffering from mental health problems. The majority of the

respondents agreed that the following could be the short- and long-term consequences of sexual violence:

The identified short-term consequences included sickness/diseases such as sexually transmitted infections and diseases (STIs/STDs), unwanted pregnancies, trauma, rejection by families, harassment by peers, shame, shock, suicidal thoughts, ideations and attempts. The identified long-term consequences included death, victims remaining silent due to fear and stigmatization, victims developing unproductive attitudes, flashbacks and nightmares, depression and shame.

In #Q7, all 15 respondents agreed that there is no special class of people who are involved in sexual violence. Any person is capable of rape and violence, no matter their age, gender, race, or ethnicity. Nonetheless, there are some categories of people who have historically been found to engage in sexual violence against women. These include fathers raping their own daughters, other family members and/or caregivers, pastors and imams.

In Q#10, for the short term, 11 out of the 15 respondents believed that more robust advocacy is needed to address this violence. Furthermore, there must be total involvement of the community members (male and female) in whatever activities are being carried out to eliminate sexual violence. Secondly, the respondents also expressed that immediate intervention by the government and partners is needed to help these victims. Some of these immediate interventions were speedy trials, psycho-social counselling for the victims, and access to medical care without delay. From the long-term

perspective, almost 73% of the respondents stated that government should formulate policies to arrest any parents whose children are abused.

These policies must also ensure that there are ongoing investigations regarding why children are left unsupervised or unattended. Lastly, in Q#11, about 85% of the respondents agreed that stakeholders need to collaborate and work together to make sure that whatever strategies are adopted, they ensure that SGBV is eliminated. These response mechanisms must be both efficient and effective. To involve stakeholders and identify their different roles, they suggested the use of focus groups, workshops, group discussions and seminars. To ensure that all stakeholders are involved, the respondents suggested that there be a structure that promotes participatory approaches. This structure would also take into consideration local beliefs and traditions, determining how they can be aligned with programs and initiatives aimed at preventing Sexual Violence.

Table 4

Theme 2: Strong Need to Support Micro to Macro Level Transition From a Social Standpoint

Potential victims in society	Potential consequences	Short-term effects	Long-term effect	Solutions to combat SGBV from a social standpoint
Persons with disabilities	Stigmatization	Sickness/diseases such as sexually transmitted infections and diseases (STIs/STDs)	Death	Community grouping to create awareness and fight SGBV
Single-parent households	Physical harm and loss of virginity	Unwanted pregnancies, trauma, and rejection by families	Victims remain silent due to fear and stigmatization	Training police to handle SGBV cases
Unsupervised children, adolescents, and street children	Emotional imbalance	Harassment by peers	Victims developing unproductive attitudes	Enforcing laws and more courts for SGBV
Old-age mothers	Low-self esteem	Shame and shock	Flashbacks and nightmares	Encouraging proper supervision
Women traveling alone	Shunning and exclusion	Suicidal thoughts, ideations, and attempts	Depression and shame	Focus groups, workshops, group discussions, and seminars concerning SGBV

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Validating was a crucial factor in ensuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the data. Creswell (2009) indicated that validation helps demonstrate the extent of the accuracy of the information generated and is usually generalized in the general population. This critical validation process can be done internally and externally (Yin, 1984). For my study, I considered both internal and external factors.

According to Sorsa et al. (2015), postprocessing should be done before and during the execution of unstructured interviews to increase the rigour of the research. Investigative teams are constantly faced with decisions regarding what information to share with respondents, how they should react when a story is offered, and whether or not to delve further or shift the conversation in a specific direction, according to the authors. They argued that these decisions need consideration of the research upon which they are founded. Crafting appropriate responses amounts to grouping in terms of what they choose to reveal to respondents and what they intentionally conceal from them throughout the survey. However, to ensure that the data is credible, I confirmed that the reported information reflected the most authentic expressions of the research subjects. I shared the transcripts of the interview with the respondents. Before conducting the interview, I discussed the study's explicit intent and anticipated outcome with the respondents.

Transferability

In a qualitative study of this nature, it was essential to consider transferability issues. Transferability relates to how the research findings can be applied or used in other contexts or settings. In contrast, confirmability relates to how other researchers can confirm the results. A researcher must first check that the qualitative technique is carried out following widely accepted standards for a particular design before proceeding. The quality of impartiality is associated with the quality of consistency. They are required to safeguard the inter-subjectivity of the data. The judgment should not be based on the participant's personal views and experiences but rather on objective information.

A significant emphasis of this section is the evaluation step, which is a critical component of the research process. An accounting method is a technique for guaranteeing the consistency, precision, and dependability of information or data. Detailed records of all research decisions, research team talks, free-thinking, surveys, research papers utilized, the appearance of the findings, and understanding of data management techniques and procedures are all vital for the researcher to keep. Therefore, the examiner will be able to determine whether or not the investigation trail is still active (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). The research conducted will help to determine the level of transferability. Still, in many instances, I assume that transferability is possible, considering that the patterns of civil war in West Africa appear to be a primary root cause of the widespread sexual violence against women and other types of aggression among young people in Liberia.

There is data to imply a relationship between civil war and sexual assault. In recent years, conflict-related sexual assault has emerged as a critical human security problem, and the amount of research being conducted on the subject has increased dramatically. The majority of the research has focused on establishing the root causes of sexual assault in conflict. As hostilities continue, some have started investigating the ramifications of sexual assault on those involved (Nagel, 2019). People were often slain due to the violence that erupted during the recent Liberian civil war.

In general, I created a strong argument. It was vital to develop a trail of evidence to guarantee that another researcher could independently validate this study's conclusions. So that another researcher may replicate this study, I have explained all of the processes above in great detail. In addition, I maintained meticulous records of everything I did, from reading the literature to collecting data to evaluating the results. It is important that the files are clearly labelled so that another researcher can assess the documentation if required and that the material is easily accessible. This phase was the first step in determining the reliability of the research. When considering all of these factors, the transferability feature of this study makes it valuable in society, mainly when it is implemented in conflict-torn areas to assist in the prevention of sexual assault or the prevention of such incidents recurring in Liberia by adopting evidence-based measures backed by research findings. For example, the results of this research may aid Liberian women in documenting wartime violence against women in their communities and in establishing a specialized program to reduce violence against women in Liberia, according to the authors.

Confirmability

To ensure confirmability, I confirmed that bias, which, as suggested by Connelly (2016), undermined confirmability, which was minimized. The first step to reducing bias was to strive to recognize it. Even though it was not possible to eliminate all discrimination, steps were taken to minimize its impact on the study. My awareness, plus other guidance that I hoped to seek throughout the research process, helped. I ensured that the findings met confirmability standards by providing that the conclusions truly reflected the interviewees' responses. Their true-life experiences related to war-related sexual violence instead, in my opinion, were used to conclude the study's findings.

Dependability

Keeping thorough notes of one's findings and analysis while doing qualitative research is prevalent among qualitative researchers. Researchers in the qualitative sector may meet with one another for debriefing sessions to discuss their research results, notes, and standard practice. These discussions helped prevent the study from being biased by the opinion of a single individual. The researchers may additionally do member-checking with survey respondents or other relevant individuals, depending on the nature of the inquiry. When Nickasch et al. presented their findings at a national conference, they received feedback indicating that the issues they identified were similar to those experienced by other nurses, as was the case with their conclusions (Connelly, 2016).

In this study, dependability in the complete sense of the word was not possible. Liberia is a country that faces numerous challenges because of civil war. Despite this, I strived for dependability in the context of the quality of my study. Transparency was also

a crucial factor. I carefully documented the process and the findings to make further research feasible. The research and its outcome met dependability standards in that it was clear enough that other researchers were asked to conduct separate inquiries. To ensure that this is done in an orderly manner, I established a dissertation reference group comprising professional colleagues who offered advice that would help to ensure dependability. In light of the devastation caused by civil war and sexual assault perpetrated against women, fostering an atmosphere of trust and transparency was critical.

It has been reported in practically every corner of the world that sexual assault against women and girls occurs during armed warfare. However, even though conflict-related sexual violence has been reported in several past armed conflicts, the prevalence of sexual violence utilized as a wartime strategy seems to be increasing in contemporary armed conflict. Accountability and openness are now more critical than ever before, and there is a compelling need for them. This might be due to improvements in reporting and documentation, or it could be due to the success of international advocacy efforts in increasing awareness about the problem. These factors, however, are inadequate to account for the exponential increase in the price of commodities. It is widely known that gender-based and sexual violence has become weapons of war (M'Cormack, 2018) and that there has been an epidemic of sex-based violence throughout the history of conflict. Women's safety in Liberia may be improved by depending on and being honest. That may serve as a model for other countries in the battle against sexual abuse and exploitation of women.

Results

Research Question 1: How Was Conflict-Related Sexual Violence Against Women Experienced in Liberia?

The responses from the interviews indicated that many women in this country had been subjected to SGBV, with children also being a common target. The perpetrators may be fathers of daughters (or other relatives), although they may also be pastors and Imans as well. While the respondents did not classify the characteristics of a common perpetrator, they did mention that many men fighting in wars were guilty of committing these crimes. These men are not only fighting for their lives, but they see atrocities committed against other human beings on an almost daily basis.

As a study by Anholt (2016) explained, it has been known for some time that sexual violence is more likely to occur during war. Unfortunately, it took horrors like the Rwandan genocide and the dissolution of Yugoslavia for this issue to receive international attention (Marsh et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 1999). According to the UN Security Council Resolution (2008), sexual violence is considered a war tactic, where civilians are targeted purposefully to spread panic or as a systematic attack. However, some research has instead discovered that sexual violence may not be an intentional war strategy but rather is usually simply tolerated by armed groups (Arieff, 2010; Balcells & Stanton, 2021; Cohen et al., 2013).

In addition to physical forms of sexual violence, participants also reported virtual sexual violence. For example, some victims were being subjected to having their assaults recorded, with the perpetrators sharing stories of image-based sexual violence. During the

interviews, one respondent detailed how a victim experienced non-consensual recording during sex and sharing of her nude pictures. This is just another form of violence, causing the victims even more pain and suffering.

Research Question 2: What Are the Impacts of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Women in Liberia?

No matter the reason why men commit sexual violence against women and children, there are significant short- and long-term impacts of this violence. The participants explained that victims experience stigma in Liberia, with these judgmental views also impacting their family members. This can cause anxiety, stress, depression, and other mental health concerns, reducing the quality of life while also contributing to poorer health outcomes – both physical and mental (Jewkes et al., 2022; Shahali et al., 2016). In fact, this stigmatization ultimately reinforces the trauma that these rape and assault victims have suffered (Jaff, 2020; Schmitt et al., 2021). They may experience posttraumatic stress disorder, with horrible recurring nightmares of the assault, predisposing these victims to feelings of shame, shock, depression, and even suicidal thoughts and ideations (Alix et al., 2017; Chivers-Wilson, 2006; Kuwert et al., 2014). Cases of PTSD and its symptoms are common in rape victims from war-torn countries, especially when the victims are from civilian populations (Musisi & Kinyanda, 2020). These psychological short- and long-term impacts do not even consider the physical consequences of SGBV, such as becoming exposed to and contracting as sexually transmitted infections and diseases (STIs/STDs) or even unintended pregnancies (Ajayi & Ezegbe, 2020).

Another theme in the responses of the participants was the discrimination and stigma that most victims had to contend with after their assault. After being forced to engage in sexual activities, most of the victims expressed fear and distress of others, with them being labelled as a victim and shunned by their community and society. In fact, not only are the girls shunned but so too are their family members. Victims also frequently suffer from physical health impairments if treatment is not sought within a reasonable time period.

In the short- and long-term, overall, participants felt that more advocacy was required. Furthermore, all members of the community must play an active role in addressing SGBV, with the government intervening immediately to provide support and aid to these women and children. Again, as mentioned, they require additional support, such as access to medical care and psycho-social counselling. While these strategies do not do anything to prevent the atrocities being committed against women in the country, they do help them to survive these traumatic events. Furthermore, the services and resources provided to these victims can enable them to not only survive but thrive in the aftermath of sexual assault and rape, enabling them to get the mental and physical care they need. Only then can they have any hope of going on with their lives and enjoying a good quality of life.

Despite the fact that sexual violence is on the increase even after the end of conflict/war, some respondents still have a low awareness of sexual violence. For example, they do not consider it to be a social problem in our country. This was a

disturbing finding, as some of the respondents in this study failed to acknowledge this prevalent issue.

The respondents stated that victims expressed stigmatization related to rape and sexual violence, which significantly hindered them from seeking help from others. They also stated that the justice system is failing to adequately protect these victims. One of the respondents shared a story of a victim who tried to report his case to the police but did not get any support. Most of the respondents agreed that prevention measures must begin from the individual level, going out toward the community and the country at large.

Research Question 3: What Groups Seek Justice for the Victims of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Women in Liberia?

While there are some groups seeking Justice for these victims in Liberia, both resources and support are in short supply. There is a significant need for government and non-government organizations, in partnership with those throughout the communities, to come together to try and remedy these potentially life-threatening impacts of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women. Because there should be no mistake made: this SGBV is costing lives. Both women and children who do not succumb to their injuries during these assaults may eventually find the stigma, stress, and strain of their traumatic events to be too much for them, leading to suicides. The severity of this issue cannot be understated. Therefore, another sub-research question this study aimed to address was what strategies could be used to address these short- and long-term impacts.

The researcher asked about the role of many different stakeholders in preventing SGBV. Some of these stakeholders include local communities, government entities, non-

government organizations, and international organizations. Even if sexual violence cannot be prevented, evidence-based methods are needed to help combat this crime. Many participants explained that rape law and domestic violence bills need to be enacted while also establishing a criminal court E to prosecute these cases specifically. Furthermore, the short- and long-term impacts of sexual violence also need to be successfully addressed, with the participants mentioning the need for the Liberian government's Ministry of Health to provide free medical support along with other survival support.

Thirteen of the respondent (86.6%) agreed that prevention must start from the community level, climbing up the ladder to the highest level. Citizens must participate in all stages of prevention activities and engagement.

Table 5

Citizens' Participation in Prevention

Citizens' participation in prevention	# of respondents	Percent
Agree	13	86.6
Disagree		
Not sure	2	13.3
Total	15	100

This means that almost all of the people interviewed for this study reported the need for community engagement in order to effectively address and prevent SGBV. Although the government, police, and courts play a huge role in perpetuating this

prevalent issue, it will take the entire country to rectify it. The respondents also made several recommendations for addressing this SGBV, such as a collaborative effort being made by governments, partners, and CSOs. All groups must work together to conduct a comprehensive survey on sexual violence in order to develop prevention strategies that address the issue. Furthermore, instead of downgrading our traditional practices, it is important for stakeholders to explore how culture and religion influence SGBV. Religious leaders and faith-based organizations should be factored into what prevention engagement will help to reduce the likelihood of sexual violence taking place in the community.

Research Question 4: What Strengths Are Necessary for Remedying the Impacts of War-Related Sexual Violence Against Liberian Women?

The participants also stated that some practical strategies could be implemented to help stop sexual violence against this population. For example, increased awareness is needed throughout the country, with more and more people recognizing not only that SGBV exists but also that it can cost lives. The consequences, both in the short- and long-term, are severe. Again, similar responses were given, with the participants stating that more courts specifically geared toward these cases and crimes should be established throughout Liberia. Within communities, taskforces may also be assigned, with better organization of the police force. Over half of the respondents listed some of the practical strategies for preventing sexual violence in Q#9. The mentioned strategies are as follows:

- more awareness of the danger of SGBV
- distribution of the simplified version of the domestic violence bill

- speedy and adequate justice for victims
- creating more He4She advocacy; men advocate
- provision of more logistics for police to respond to an incident of sexual violence
- creation of more SGBV courts in the counties
- organizing SGBV policing in the community
- creation of a GBV task force throughout the country, especially at the community level

Summary

The data gathered in this qualitative study provided a significant understanding of the sexual violence committed in a conflict setting or wartime. As indicated in the introductory section of this chapter, the research question was intended to investigate how women experience sexual violence in Liberia, considering its forms, impact, and well as understanding who are fighting to help victims seek Justice.

The document review and the interview transcripts of nine questions which were generally open-ended, asked 15 participants who responded after signing the consent document (form) and provided in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. The analysis of the study included two coding processes and a final determination of the final themes of the study. First, the researcher used a thematic analysis guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guides to code the transcribed interview data and present the dominant themes in the study. The first theme was the strong need for greater government involvement, and the second was the strong need to support micro to a macro-level

transformation from a social standpoint. From all indications, there exists a need for further research, which will help in increasing the scholarly voice on the subject. Discussion on this and implications for social change are elaborated upon in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

In the following chapter, I analyze the key findings within the context of the original research questions and objectives guiding this project. The chapter begins with interpretation of the findings collected from 15 participants' feedback regarding sexual violence in Liberia, including the impact on victims, the efforts of different actors to combat the violence, and the strengths that are necessary for alleviating the impacts of sexual violence against women. Over the course of this interpretation, key intersections and departures from the literature review will be detailed. Following the first section, the chapter will segue into recommendations for future research based upon the findings of this original study, while accounting for the limitations that may have partially precluded optimal results. In addition, the recommendations for future research will be grounded in the literature analyzed for the context of this study. The recommendations section will transition to the implications of the significance of the study, alongside potential benefits that may be realized in terms of positive social change, especially when accompanied by the implementation of empirical recommendations for practice. The chapter will close with a succinct summary of the key findings of the chapter alongside the research project.

Interpretation of Findings

A total of 15 total participants from Monrovia participated. As mentioned previously, Monrovia was selected as the site for sourcing participants due to the social and political structures available that provide a reasonable portrayal of individuals who live across the nation, especially given that six in 10 Liberians reside in Monrovia. The

participants also had ample exposure to NGOs and other organizations accustomed to assisting victims of sexual violence, which in turn enabled them to provide substantive insight into the research questions guiding this project.

The responses to the strengths necessary for combatting the impacts of sexual violence against women across Liberia were particularly robust, especially when accounting for the array of criticisms geared towards the government and pervasive social attitudes. In this regard, the responses to the interviews not only provide ample contributions to the significant gaps in research regarding sexual violence in Liberia, but also provide recommendations for the most appropriate policies to be undertaken in the future.

The first research question pertained to the various impacts of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia, and the commentary of the respondents could be roughly divided into four categories: physical impacts, mental impacts, short-term impacts, and long-term impacts. In this regard, the respondents demonstrated clear alignment with the literature review, in that the literature review also covered a broad array of impacts that victims of sexual violence are likely to feel as time progresses. These different impacts certainly overlapped with one another in several situations, given that the mental impacts often carried significant short- and long-term consequences.

The respondents were highly familiar with individuals who had suffered from rape, sexual exploitation, and several other forms of SGBV and abuse, which resulted in an array of highly negative effects; their commentary was echoed by the summation of United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres regarding the “brutally effective”

tool of dehumanization mentioned in the literature review. The most immediately apparent effects tended to be physical in nature, especially when accounting for unwanted pregnancies, a highly common occurrence during times of wanton sexual violence.

In addition, other negative physical impacts include acquiring STIs and STDs, which, left untreated, carry deadly consequences, drifting into the territory of long-term impacts. A slight disconnect with the literature review arose when the respondents generally did not provide insight into other negative effects victims of sexual violence might suffer, including visible bruising, lacerations, and other forms of violence, though the fact that respondents did not mention these observations does not mean they were not present. Moreover, the respondents did not provide significant insight into the offspring of victims, in spite of the fact that this offspring would have a strong future effect on virtually all elements of the victim's life.

Aside from the clear physical traumas associated with sexual violence, several psychological impacts were also present in the victims, as observed by the respondents, which represents a clear intersection with the literature review. As scholars in this field have amply observed, it is not uncommon for victims to experience shock following the violence, as well as suicidal inclinations or ideations when they find themselves harshly rejected by society for an incident over which they had limited to no control. Mental anguish, in other words, constitutes a large reason why victims continue "suffering even after the end of the conflict." Indeed, in the long run, it is not uncommon for victims of sexual violence, especially those who are unable to reintegrate successfully into society, to feel a strong sense of long-term shame. It is not uncommon for victims to maintain

continuous silence, especially when accounting for the "fear and stigmatization" that often accompany their experience with sexual violence.

An additional element of the sexual violence that was not explicitly addressed by any of the scholars pertains to the ways in which cellular phones were also weaponized: It was not at all uncommon for assailants to take recordings of the violence committed against individuals, which further amplified the trauma endured by the victims. The negative effects against the victims were amplified considering that the leaders in the violent organizations, or the "big, big guys," were often perpetrators of sexual violence themselves, "so they could not talk to people they were commanding to stop the rape and other sexual violence." On the contrary, it was and remains completely common for the ringleaders of groups to use rape and other forms of sexual violence as weapons of war, although this effectively institutionalized violence carries with it extremely negative effects for society in the long run.

Interestingly, many of the respondents discussed not only the impacts of sexual violence upon women themselves, but also the ways in which these negative impacts carry deleterious effects on society as a whole in the long run. One of the most immediately apparent ways in which sexual violence undermines society begins right within the home, especially as parents may justifiably feel unsafe leaving their children alone while they go and make a living, as one respondent indicated that "leaving your children alone to go out and sell without he/she is being supervised is another cause for sexual violence." Moreover, it is not uncommon for children to witness various forms of violence, including sexual violence, from a young age. Problematically, exposure to

violence desensitizes younger individuals to abuse despite the long-term negative effects the abuse ultimately brings to its victims. These issues are further magnified by the fact that it is fairly common for younger girls to marry "elderly men far older than themselves," a fairly common cultural norm, albeit one that can bring about significant ramifications for the young girl. Nonetheless, the acceptance of younger girls marrying much older men sets the stage for greater social acceptance of more unpleasant activities committed against young, vulnerable women and children. However, respondents noted that the victims of violence extended beyond children and adolescents, as divorced, separated, widowed, or otherwise single women are also highly vulnerable to being targeted. In addition, disabled individuals and elderly women also serve as major victims during times of protracted civil conflict. Even in cases where individuals do not directly experience violence, they often have "family members who were a victim of sexual violence," thereby deepening social distrust and unrest.

The second research question focused on the different groups that pursue justice for the victims of war-related sexual violence against women in Liberia. Unlike the responses to the first and third research questions, the responses were not as forthright into this particular question, in large part because the efforts that have been undertaken are significantly deficient relative to the true need of the situation. In this regard, the respondents provided ample insight into the different legal means of obtaining justice, detailing some efforts undertaken by governments, partners, and CSOs. Some of these groups include He4She advocacy, which also helps to address persistent issues regarding gender inequities. Major international agencies, such as the United Nations, were

recognized for the concentrated efforts undertaken to assist in five counties: Lofa, Nimba, Monsterrado, Cape Mount, and Grand Gedeh. However, even though different local and international organizations have partnered to address the worst impacts of sexual violence, they are stymied by society's generally dismissive view of sexual violence and its deleterious effects on social unity and cohesion. For this reason, some respondents indicated that a few victims "were fortunate to travel abroad as a result of the various resettlement programs, in countries like America, Australia, and Canada," which are also known for having a different attitude towards gender equality and women's empowerment in general. Consequently, when carefully interpreting the findings against the research questions and literature review, it becomes clear that the responses offered the most limited amount of information with regard to the efforts made to combat the worst effects of sexual violence in Liberia.

The relative dearth of commentary regarding the second research question provides strong insight into why the respondents were the most detailed in their recommendations regarding the strengths necessary for remedying the impacts of war-related sexual violence against Liberian women. In general, the respondents offered a broad array of recommendations, though these recommendations could be generally divided into two categories: From a political standpoint, there is a strong need for greater governmental involvement; from a social standpoint, there is a strong need to facilitate micro- to macrolevel transformation. At the governmental level, some respondents did provide credit to the government for some actions that it had taken. For instance, the respondents mentioned that, through the Ministry of Health, the "government is helping

with free medication, but this is not visible in all the community." Aside from its efforts to help the victims, the respondents also indicated that the government had taken favorable actions from a legal standpoint, including the "setting up of criminal court E to prosecute SGBV case," as well as creating a "special unit at ministry justice and gender specifically for SGBV." The government has made some efforts, in other words, towards combatting the worst effects of sexual violence in society, although it was clear from the feedback from respondents that it was generally desired for the "government and partners to work with the locals in all project implementation."

However, despite the government's fledgling efforts to address the crisis, several criticisms also emerged, especially when accounting for the reality that the government's strategy has been largely reactive rather than preventative. As indicated by one respondent, "prosecuting culprits and setting up mechanisms to deter soldiers and other people in their control areas from engaging in the crime would be a huge and potentially effective measure to prevent this sexual violence against women." In this regard, the respondents clearly underscored the importance of prevention, which may well supersede retribution in terms of long-term favorable impacts to society. Moreover, multiple intersections with the literature review emerged when the respondents detailed how victims were often shunned by society, especially as they endured serious issues with reintegration: It is not uncommon at all for "community members … to shun and exclude women and girls who have been raped," which aligns with the findings of several scholars mentioned in the literature review. Even more problematically, "most of the

victims of sexual violence during the war were not rehabilitated," thereby setting the stage for future issues and trauma within society.

In addition to the government, the respondents also placed a heavy emphasis on the importance of the community adopting different attitudes, including the social realization of the trauma of sexual violence. In general, most respondents indicated that bad governance, power abuse, and insufficient justice constituted the root causes of sexual violence, and justice is especially insufficient when accounting for the sexual violence that is committed against victims who are known to the perpetrator. Indeed, similar to the literature review, the findings of this research reveal underreporting to be a serious issue, especially considering the widespread "compromising of rape cases by the family members, and in some cases, the courts and the police also compromised sexual-related cases including rape." One way in which the respondents differed from the findings of the literature review was the manner in which they detailed the prevalence of sexual abuse within the religious community, as the literature review focused primarily on sexual violence committed against family members, intimate partners, and others, though not explicitly pastors or imams. However, both pastors and imams emerged in the commentary of the respondents, who indicated that "religious leaders also compromise these cases of sexual abuse, which is a contributing factor to the root causes of the violence."

The research findings demonstrated a clear connection to the theoretical framework of this study. Two broad categories of theories of civil war directed the research. The two broad categories can further be divided into various subdivisions.

The conflict in Liberia resulted in war that saw an increase in violence, including sexual violence. Theories of civil war onset were helpful in this research as they demonstrated how the emergence of the Liberia civil conflict created unfavorable conditions for adequately addressing all forms of violence, including rape. As Buhaug et al. (2021) indicated, ethnopolitical discrimination can create resistance motives. Strangely, based on those motives, intergroup violence in all forms was committed against noncombatants. Testerman (2012) also discussed how politico-economic theories of civil war can have four further subdivisions: the state capacity influence, violent showcasing of grievances, economic opportunity and cost of war, and ethnic, religious, and other divisions as causes of civil wars. These were drivers to some of the violence committed during the war. For example, in many instances, sexual violence was committed as a means of reprisal, just as many other forms of violence were committed along ethnic lines. The state's capacity to take actions was nonexistent during the war and limited even after the war, thereby contributing to the increase in rape. Equally so, the research addressed the role of international organizations in seeking ways to help victims recover from the effects of violence, which relates to international relations theories of civil wars, where the focus is on ending war and helping to rebuild (Hough et al., 2020). Liberalism and realism are two ideas often applied to studying international organizations' participation in civil wars (Paul et al., 2021). As international bodies' involvement in civil wars can be considered in terms of regional and global economic integrations and political integrations, regional and international organizations are key actors in civil war. Regional organizations such as the Community of West African States

(ECOWAS) and global organizations such as the United Nations and other NGOs were recognized as some of the organizations helping victims both to seek justice and receive support. They were also exerting efforts aimed at ending the war, which by extension stopped open violence, but not necessarily sexual violence. The persistence of civil war theories focuses on the social, economic, and political phenomena during the conflicts' active periods and the days of the settlement (Rule, 2018). Rape and other forms of violence increased as the civil war persisted and beyond due to the prolonged period of war and the broken-down system of various institutions, including the justice system.

Recommendations

In general, this research project was besieged with several potential issues from the onset. The presence or threat of civil war certainly impedes the possibilities for effective research, especially when accounting for the general reticence of Liberians to participate in research projects. For Liberians who are interested in participating in a research project, concerns regarding the collection of honest information are almost invariable, though accepting this risk to a certain degree is necessary for conducting primary research in the area. Moreover, various political and tribal affiliations could have interfered with the quality of research, though such incidents, fortunately, did not occur. Consequently, the results of the methodology provide strong insight into the numerous ways in which the findings intersected with the literature review while also providing insight into future areas of research. In doing so, this research will work towards efforts that are designed for “ensuring that people within the community [are] aware of the prevalence, risk factors, and consequences of sexual- and gender-based violence,”

especially when accounting for the ways in which the responses of the participants coalesced into the context for recommendations for future research.

Collectively, virtually all respondents directly stated or strongly inferred that the government of Liberia needs to do more in terms of combating the worst impacts of sexual violence against women, especially when accounting for the significant deficiencies in terms of prevention of sexual violence and reintegration of victims into society. While some respondents admitted a few distinct efforts, the government has taken to address the worst outcomes of sexual violence; others indicated that these efforts were not remotely sufficient enough to combat the true impact of sexual violence, especially the long-term psychological implications that may have a highly deleterious effect on society. However, the respondents did not fault the government entirely, as they also clearly indicated that serious efforts were needed to combat violence beginning from the ground level up in the local community. Specifically, the respondents noted that the issue with sexual violence in Liberia is not only the insufficient efforts on behalf of the government but also the generally pervasive negativity towards victims of sexual violence in society. Specifically, society generally holds a dismissive attitude towards sexual violence, especially relative to societies in Australia, the United States, and other nations that have taken in refugees who experienced sexual violence. Nonetheless, in spite of this dismissive attitude, victims are judged more harshly than perpetrators, leading to a broad array of social issues in the long run, especially with regard to a continued absence of parity between the genders in terms of parity and opportunity.

One of the major ways in which the findings of the interviews differed somewhat substantially from the literature review occurred when evaluating the degree to which respondents focused on prevention and the degree to which the literature review does not mention prevention explicitly. Indeed, the review does not focus on any prevention efforts at length, potentially due to the fact that such efforts have not even arisen to be evaluated. Nonetheless, prevention is certainly implied in the literature review in terms of raising advocacy and awareness, though the specific dynamic of reaction versus prevention is not discussed. Consequently, a potential avenue of future research includes evaluating the ways in which prevention may foster the most effective response to reducing the impacts of sexual violence in the future. Essentially, this study helps a significant research gap by answering questions related to sexual violence among Liberian women. That covers organizations working to bring justice to these victims in Liberia and remedies to the effects of war-related sexual assault on Liberian women, as detailed in the subsequent sections.

Implications

Overall, the findings of this study have potentially favorable implications for society, especially if elements of the recommendations are embedded in real-world policy decisions. Demographic analysis to assess individuals most likely to suffer from assault, bearing in mind the vulnerabilities of children, single women, and other groups that are frequently exploited during conflict. From “children being sold” to otherwise abused in some way, it is clear that the concerns addressed by this project number among some of the highest order concerns of the United Nations and other major international agencies.

For this reason, this research project, in conjunction with the other scholarship that has contributed to this dialogue thus far, serves not only to provide additional theoretical insight into the issue of SGBV in Liberia, but also to provide salient recommendations for moving forward in future research, and, by default, policymaking efforts. Specifically, much greater research should be devoted to reintegration efforts of the victims of sexual violence, with special attention paid to the victims who return with children born from sexual violence, as they may face additional discrimination due to the additional responsibilities and financial costs associated with children. In addition, a deeper examination of the ramifications for mental health with regards to sexual violence is crucial, especially as mental health remains a notoriously unsupported research endeavor relative to physical health in much of the world, including the most advanced economies. Efforts towards evaluating reintegration efforts, including reintegration efforts for children born of sexual violence, will also be crucial for building future social cohesion.

Furthermore, more substantial scholarship regarding the implementation of effective prevention programs, including the best means of spreading awareness of SGBV, will constitute another important avenue of research, especially for purposes of policymaking guidance. These prevention efforts might be best undertaken by a combination of international and local governmental efforts, especially when crafting best practices that may be transferable, at least to a degree, between different nations for reducing the most negative effects of sexual violence for society to heal and move forward. Still other areas of potential research, or empirical research practice, including a

comparative evaluation of sexual violence in Liberia with sexual violence in East African nations, may also offer value, especially when accounting for international NGOs needing guidance to address the unique needs of specific communities within specific nations in particular regions across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Implications for Social Change

The research would promote adherence to the rights of every group in the country. Since it aims at supporting the advocacy groups fighting for the rights of sexual violence victims, the result would be increased respect for individuals' and groups' rights. According to Amnesty International (2018), the fundamental human rights contained in the Liberian constitution do not distinguish between males and females, ensuring both have equal rights. However, because of the inequality that has been witnessed in respect to the rights of women during and after the war, the research would result in renewed adherence and respect. Findings of the research could provide valuable information about the implications of war-related sexual violence against women and the existing groups that could assist with addressing this problem. This information could help policymakers, managers of non-government organizations, and representatives of international organizations to develop and implement customized solutions to remedy the implications of sexual violence against women in Liberia.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the findings of this study contribute to the substantial gap in scholarship regarding sexual violence against women in Liberia. The gap is all the more remarkable considering the urgent, pressing need to address the myriad of issues

associated with sexual violence in Liberia, in particular, the issues that can arise when trauma remains untreated, and society continues to disintegrate due to the division and distrust sowed in violent civil conflict. Thus, the methodology and research design of this project enabled original, recent contributions from individuals in the field directly subjected to the aftermath of sexually charged violence against women. In some cases, systematic literature reviews may be the most valuable for garnering a broad swathe of information on a given topic, but the general scarcity of literature regarding sexual violence against women in Liberia warranted the need for crafting an original research design that would account for new, original insights from different respondents previously unrecorded in scholarship. While each respondent had their own unique viewpoint regarding a number of different matters, all respondents generally reached a consensus on some key points, from which a foundation may be derived for a future framework to address and ideally prevent, sexual violence in the future.

By enhancing the scholarly dialogue regarding sexual violence against women and other vulnerable individuals across Liberia and other areas of the world that have been underserved by researchers, global society as a whole will benefit from a greater degree of equity that comes at a cost to no one, aside from the time invested in researching, learning, and recommending appropriate steps forward for reducing the prevalence of sexual violence against women across the nation. Moreover, an increased level of scholarship and participation from local and international partners will also provide insight into the best response for traumas against the population. While international organizations may have the capital and visibility to make a large impact,

local organizations also have local knowledge, including particulars of intertribal interactions and other critical elements of society not immediately available to researchers, which is necessary for ensuring relatively flawless implementation of various programs designed to help populations suffering from a significant prevalence of past or present sexual violence. While much work remains to be completed, much progress has also been made, with additional research efforts in this field anticipated in the future. As the discussion regarding sexual violence grows, so too will awareness, which will ideally engender a future era in which the prevalence of sexual violence is significantly reduced across Liberia and all other regions where women and children are exceedingly vulnerable.

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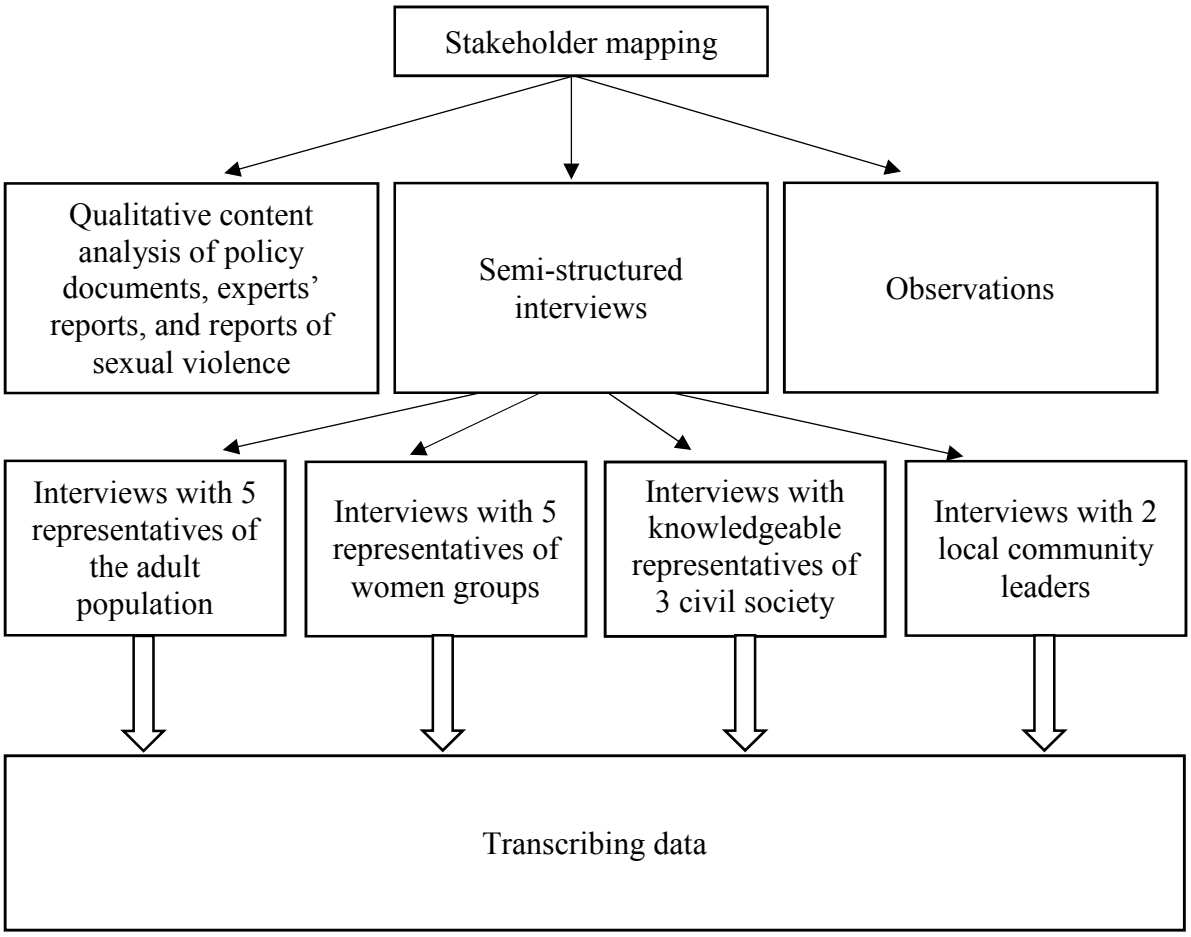
Appendix A: Data Collection Protocol



Appendix B. Interview Questions

1. Do you think that war-related sexual violence is a disturbing problem in Liberia?
2. Did you talk to people who suffer from sexual violence in Liberia?
3. In your opinion, what are the main roots of this problem?
4. Do you believe that this problem could have been prevented? How?
5. What people were especially likely to become victims of sexual assault? Why?
6. What are the main consequences of sexual violence against women in Liberia? Could you please elaborate on short-term and long-term consequences?
7. What are the main groups that are engaged in this process? Could you please describe the role of local communities, government entities, non-government organizations, international organizations, and other stakeholders in preventing sexual violence against women and remedying its impacts?
8. Could you please offer practical strategies for preventing the problem of sexual violence against women in Liberia? What could be done in the short-term and long-term perspectives?
9. Could you please comment on the role of different stakeholders in these strategies?

Appendix C. Research Timeline

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
Formulating research objectives																										
Collecting literature																										
Analyzing literature																										
Completing a research methodology chapter																										
Finding eligible respondents																										
Recruiting 40 respondents																										
Interviewing young adults																										

Interviewing members of women groups																									
Interviewing local community leaders																									
Interviewing members of civil society organizations																									
Transcribing the data																									
Analyzing the data																									
Writing the results and conclusion chapter																									

Writing the introduction chapter																									
Writing an abstract and proofreading the research																									