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International Military Peacekeepers and Sex Offenses Committed in the Central African Republic

Michael Tabung Njong
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

International Military Peacekeepers and Sex Offences Committed in the Central African
Republic

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Dip. Graduate & Professional Studies, WCL, 2004

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in

Criminal Justice

Walden University

August 2023

Abstract

Studies have been conducted on the sexual offending of the local population by peacekeepers, but few have been conducted on the lived experience of professionals providing support and assistance to these victims. This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experiences of experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed in the Central African Republic by international military peacekeepers. The classical deterrence and retributive justice theories guided the study. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling and data collected through face-to-face interviews and analyzed using the Modified Van Kaam method. Two research questions were used to explore the professionals' lived experiences in supporting sex victims and the essence they make of those experiences. The study findings were analyzed and interpreted with some findings aligning with the study theoretical framework and existing literature while others were new and helped in advancing and strengthening the existing literature. The findings of the study revolved around the vulnerability and powerlessness of the victim and the desire for increase justice, and education aimed at empowering them. The study may help various peacekeeping stakeholders in effecting positive social change through reformulating peacekeeping policies that would address sexual offending by peacekeepers as well as protective measures for the vulnerable local population.

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Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my late parents, Pa Michael Tabung Njong, Ma Maria Bernsa, and late son, Laurien Nyuyfoni Njong, whose untimely departure from this world constantly reminds me of the temporariness nature of life. To my late grandmother, Monica Banah, and uncle, Benjamin Viban Banah. Thank you for inspiring endless kindness, love, and sacrifice for the oppressed, weak, and the less fortunate, and for inspiring the seriousness of purpose and hard work in me that has taken me this far.

To my dear wife, Evonne Njong, daughters, Georgiana Njong, and Asheri Njong, and sons, Brian-Mike Njong and Fomonyuy Njong, who have all stood by and supported me unflinchingly throughout life and most especially, their love and sacrifices in seeing me through this long and painstaking PhD journey.

And finally, to all the victims of sex offenses committed by international peacekeepers in the Central African Republic and elsewhere.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of Tables | v |
| List of Figures | vi |
| Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study..... | 1 |
| Background..... | 2 |
| Problem Statement..... | 5 |
| Purpose Statement..... | 8 |
| Research Questions..... | 8 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 8 |
| Nature of the Study | 10 |
| Definition of Key Terms..... | 10 |
| Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations..... | 13 |
| Assumptions..... | 13 |
| Scope and Delimitations | 13 |
| Limitations | 14 |
| Significance of the Study | 16 |
| Summary | 18 |
| Chapter 2: Literature Review..... | 20 |
| Literature Search Strategy..... | 21 |
| Theoretical Framework..... | 23 |
| Classical Deterrence Theory | 24 |
| Theory of Retributive Justice..... | 25 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Literature Review Related to Key Concepts..... | 27 |
| Some Specific Instances of Sex Offences by Peacekeepers in CAR..... | 34 |
| Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Situation in CAR Over Time..... | 36 |
| Policy, Accountability, and Responsibilities | 36 |
| Summary and Transition..... | 53 |
| Chapter 3: Research Method..... | 56 |
| Research Design and Rationale | 57 |
| Role of the Researcher | 58 |
| Methodology..... | 59 |
| Participant Selection Logic..... | 60 |
| Instrumentation | 62 |
| Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection..... | 64 |
| Data Analysis Plan and Steps | 66 |
| Issues of Trustworthiness..... | 74 |
| Credibility | 76 |
| Transferability..... | 79 |
| Dependability..... | 79 |
| Confirmability..... | 80 |
| Ethical Considerations | 81 |
| Summary and Transition..... | 83 |
| Chapter 4: Results..... | 85 |
| Data Analysis | 85 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Step 1: Horizontalization | 86 |
| Step 2: Reduction and Elimination | 88 |
| Step 3: Thematizing the Invariant Constituents..... | 90 |
| Step 4: Checking the Themes Against the Dataset | 94 |
| Theme J: Stigmatization | 115 |
| Step 5: Individual Textural Descriptions | 116 |
| Step 6: Individual Structural Descriptions..... | 139 |
| Step 7: Composite Textural Descriptions | 145 |
| Step 8: Composite Structural Descriptions | 147 |
| Step 9: Composite Structural-Textural Description..... | 148 |
| Findings on the Lived Experiences of Participants..... | 149 |
| Findings on the Essence of the Lived Experiences..... | 151 |
| Summary and Transition..... | 153 |
| Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations..... | 155 |
| Discussion of the Findings..... | 156 |
| Interpretation of the Study Findings | 159 |
| Limitations of the Study..... | 162 |
| Recommendations..... | 164 |
| Implications of the Findings | 167 |
| Implications for Social Change..... | 169 |
| Conclusions..... | 171 |
| References..... | 174 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Appendix A: Participant Interview Questionnaire..... | 188 |
| Appendix B: Participant Interview Questionnaire Translation into French | 191 |
| Appendix C: Data Analysis of Interview Transcripts..... | 194 |

List of Tables

| | |
|--|-----|
| Table 1. Selected Themes | 93 |
| Table 2. Summary of Individual Textual Descriptions..... | 146 |
| Table 3. Composite Structural Description..... | 147 |

List of Figures

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1. Status and Outcomes of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Investigations by Year 6 | |
| Figure 2. Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Assault by Category of UN Peacekeeping Personnel..... | 7 |
| Figure 3. Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Over Time | 36 |

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The United Nations is entrusted with maintaining international peace and security (Jiminian, 2012). Peacekeeping has gone beyond bridging the gap left by the initial collective security system to become the center in conflict management (Jiminian, 2012). Despite these efforts, allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) have threatened to undermine peace operations (Gassama, 2018). International peacekeepers are often accused of engaging in the criminal behavior of sexually offending members of the local population entrusted by their mandated to protect (Salva, 2015). The international peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic (CAR) have also been affected by these accusations (Gassama, 2018). When the United Nations peacekeepers are deployed to dispel armed conflict, the local population believes that the international peacekeepers will protect them from violence and exploitation, but instead they have reportedly exploited and sexually abused them (Genovese, 2018).

It is crucial to examine the procedure involving sexual offences committed by individual international peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations, given the vulnerability of the victims. Consideration should also be given to the existing criminal mechanisms in the handling of related offences in the host country of operations. The notion of criminal jurisdiction is important when handling criminal offences, including when such offences are handled by international criminal jurisdictions. This study could add to the current knowledge of how SEA offences committed by international military peacekeepers are handled. It may also shed additional insights on this procedure's objectivity and transparency. It could additionally shed light on the effective international military

peacekeeper accountability process under the current system for crimes committed in peacekeeping operations. Chapter 1 of this study provides background information, the research problem, the purpose statement, the research questions, and the theoretical framework. It will also present the nature of the study, assumptions, limitations, and delimitations before looking at the significance of the study.

Background

Since the 1990s, the United Nations has led peacekeeping operations in support of many countries emerging from internal armed conflicts (Salva, 2015). Example of some countries that currently or have recently experienced international peacekeeping operations include the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Burundi, Haiti, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Guinea, Sudan, the CAR, and South Sudan (Gassama, 2018). Since its independence in 1960, the CAR has been rocked by successive internal armed conflicts and instability (Okyere, 2021). The UN Security Council created an African Union (AU) led International Support Mission to the Central African Republic (MISCA; kyere, 2021). This new peacekeeping support mission backed by the Operations Sangaris constituted essentially of the French soldiers and the European Union (EU) military contingents deployed to Bangui as early as April 2014. The necessities and exigencies of civilian protection further pushed the UN Security Council in later transforming MISCA into an entire UN peacekeeping operation in 2014 (Okyere, 2021). This led to the deployment of additional military contingents, formed police units and civilian personnel, and the establishment of the current United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic known by its French acronym MINUSCA in

2014. The internal armed conflict in the CAR has therefore been characterized by UN and non-UN international peacekeepers, but with the UN playing a lead role.

Despite this role played by the UN, there is currently a bilateral agreement with the Russians, and the operations are overseen by Wagner Group, a private armed security mercenary group from Russia believed to be funded by the state (Rampe, 2023). From April 1998 to February 2000, the initial UN peacekeeping mission called the United Nations Mission in the Central African Republic (MINURCA) was in existence before it was succeeded by the two-peacebuilding political missions. When the two political missions in the CAR could not effectively build and sustain peace in that country, the other option was for a peacekeeping operations mission with international military peacekeepers to be established. In between the two peace building missions, the UN however created the United Nations Missions in the Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT), which existed from September 2007 to December 2010.

Though international peacekeepers have played an essential role, some have also engaged themselves in sexually exploiting and abusing women and children of the local population in CAR. It is not just the UN mission peacekeepers; previous international peacekeepers from the French Sangaris, and the African Union were also accused of committing sexual offenses against the CAR population (Genovese, 2018). The current Russian armed Wagner group fighters operating on a bilateral agreement with CAR government are equally accused of sexually offending vulnerable CAR women and girls (Rampe, 2023). The French soldiers from the Operation Sangaris, were not spared from these sexual offense allegations (Dubois, 2016). UN sources have confirmed the alleged

involvement of its international peacekeepers in these sex scandals and specifically blamed it on military contingent members (UN Management Strategy, Policy, and Compliance, 2022). The victims were vastly vulnerable women and children of the host, CAR, and most of them lived in internally displaced people (IDP) camps.

The Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) has jurisdictions in carrying out investigations concerning all sexual allegations committed by UN peacekeeping personnel. However, the troops contributing countries (TCCs) according to the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the UN and the TCCs, the investigation and sanctioning of military contingent members is primarily the responsibility of TCCs. For all other international peacekeepers (African Union, Operation Sangaris and the current Russian Wagner Group mercenaries), it is not clear who has the responsibility to investigate and sanction crimes, including sex offences committed by their personnel. The organizational structure of the Wagner Group is obscure, and its uniform personnel has been accused of committing serious human rights violations and other serious crimes that include sex abuses against members of the local CAR population (Serwat et al., 2022). It should also be noted that OIOS's investigations are administrative and not of a criminal nature. This means that OIOS cannot hold the individual perpetrators of sex crimes against members of the local population accountable, even if the investigations are backed by evidence.

The accountability process, most especially for military contingent members, primarily in the hands of troops contributing countries (TCCs) following the memorandum of understanding between these countries and the United Nations (MoU),

has been questioned regarding its transparency objectivity, and accountability. To salvage its image, the UN has taken wide-ranging and sweeping steps in dealing with these allegations, including the repatriation of whole military battalions. This has happened to at least four military contingents in the CAR, including the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Republic of Congo (Brazzaville), in September 2021, the Gabonese military contingent and most recently in June 2023, the UN peacekeeping operations again repatriated sixty Tanzanian military peacekeepers from CAR (Dodds, 2023). The military peacekeepers from the Republic of Congo and the Democratic Republic of Congo were repatriated from CAR in 2016 following the resurfacing of allegations of sexual abuse of children (Ntobong, 2016). Many researchers have focused on the sexual exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers, examining the problem from different angles. Still, few or none have addressed the issue from the point of view of the lived experiences of those working and spending their time supporting and assisting victims of sex offences.

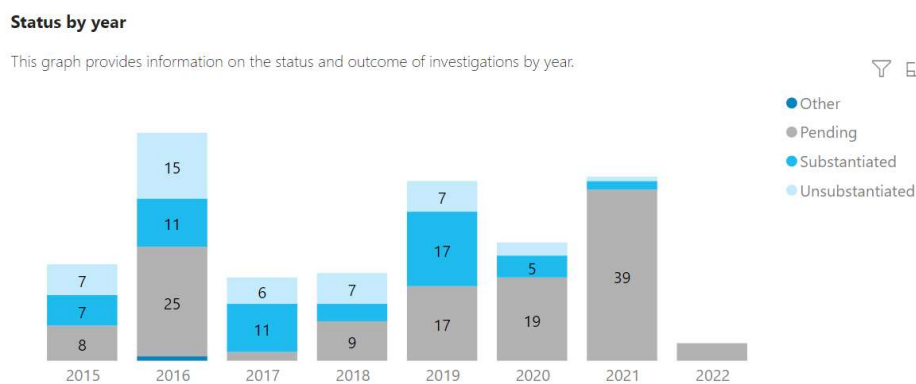
Problem Statement

The social problem addressed in this study is related to sex offences committed by the various international peacekeepers, including military peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations in CAR. The peacekeeping operations that have taken place in CAR include the current UN (MINUSCA) mission, the African Union, and the Operation Sangaris of the French forces (MISCA) as well as the Wagner Mercenary Group, which essentially consists of the Russian private military forces (Rampe, 2023). Concerning the UN, many researchers see the increasing and continuous perpetration of sexual offences by military peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations despite the UN zero-tolerance policy on SEA

and other preventive measures as the reason to question the effectiveness of the current UN accountability procedure for handling sex offences committed by its peacekeepers. Several SEA preventives and mitigating mechanisms have been put in place over the years, but the problem persists and sometimes aggravates, necessitating the search for additional new preventive tools. The current general trend of sexual offences committed in UN peacekeeping mission in CAR (MINUSCA) and the status of the investigations is presented in Figure 1. The situation presented shows that most of the SEA cases are pending investigations and sanctioning. Figure 2 presents a picture of the situation by category of personnel (Conduct in UN Field Missions, 2022). Although the trend varies between the various categories of peacekeepers from year to year, the greatest number of cases have been attributed to the military peacekeepers.

Figure 1

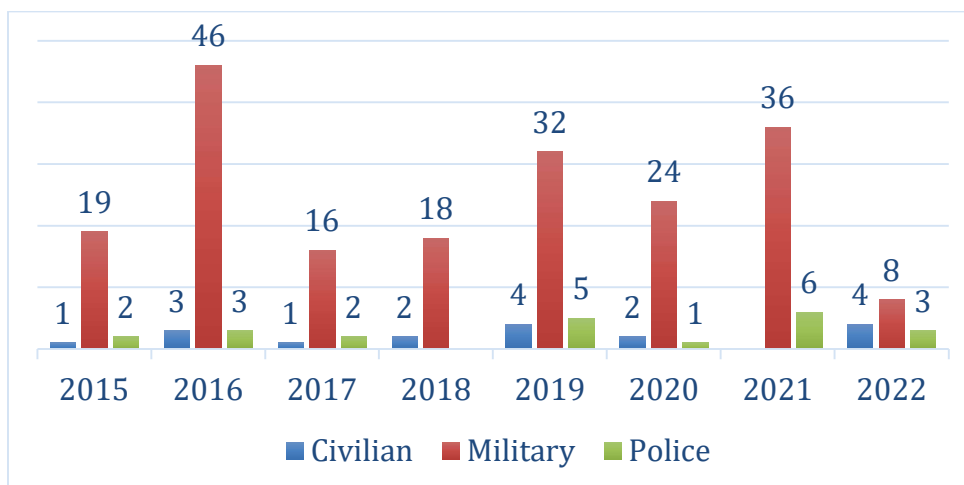
Status and Outcomes of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Investigations by Year



Note. Source: <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>

Figure 2

Allegations of Sexual Exploitation and Assault by Category of UN Peacekeeping Personnel



Note. Source: <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>

Many researchers have conducted research in sexual offending by international peacekeepers, but research has not focused on the magnitude of this situation from the point of view of the people working to provide support and various types of assistance to victims of sex offences. Allegations of sex crimes hurt the host country's population CAR, violate their human rights and dignity, undermine peacekeeping operations, and tarnish the image of international peacekeepers and operations. Understanding the lived experiences of these stakeholders can add knowledge to this area of study. The support and assistance these experts provide is crucial to the survival, recovery, and reintegration of sex crime victims to normal community life. Understanding their experiences may also provide information that could inform the investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of sex offences committed by international military peacekeepers.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic qualitative phenomenological study was to illuminate the lived experiences of experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by international peacekeeping personnel, including military peacekeepers. Understanding the experiences of these workers, as they live, provide support, and assist these victims is crucial in understanding how these victims feel and what they expect from the investigations, prosecution, and the holding of their perpetrators to account for the crimes committed. This is important for the victims to feel that justice has been delivered for the prejudice done to them by the peacekeepers. Information from exploring these lived experiences may also help to inform the decision of the policy stakeholders involved in the conduct of international peacekeepers and peacekeeping operations.

Research Questions

RQ 1: What are the lived experiences of the experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by international military peacekeepers in the CAR?

RQ 2: What essence do these experts make of their lived experiences with the victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers in CAR?

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks in research are important and exist because they increase the objectivity of the study (Peoples, 2021). The theories and concepts that ground this study include a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to qualitative research, which is

focused on the description of the experiential meanings as lived is not introspective but rather retrospective (Peoples, 2021). The chosen approach supports exploring the lived experiences of support personnel.

The applicable theoretical framework used in this study includes the classical theory of deterrence and the retributive justice theory of criminal justice. According to the classical approach, crime is caused by the individual's free will as human beings are rational beings capable of making their decisions freely with an understanding of the consequences (Peoples, 2021). The opportunity to decide whether to engage in committing a crime by alleged international military peacekeepers is the reason why I chose this theory. The classical theory of deterrence indicates that if the punishment of a crime is severe, certain, and swift, a rational person would weigh the potential gains and losses before engaging in committing a crime. The severity of the punishment is implemented by criminal law to encourage citizens to obey the law, and the certainty of the punishment implies the likelihood of applying the sanction if a person commits the crime. Such an individual will be discouraged from breaking the law if they find out that the loss in committing the crime is greater than the gain (Abramovaite et al., 2022).

The retributive theory of criminal justice asserts that any individual who engages in criminal behavior should receive a penalty, which is determined by the courts of law, that is commensurate with the harm caused by the offense (Perera, 2023). Punishing innocent individuals for crimes they did not commit is ethically incorrect, and it is unacceptable to impose excessively harsh or severe penalties that are not justified by the extent of the crime's impact (Perera, 2023).

Nature of the Study

To address the research question in this qualitative study, the specific research design will include the hermeneutic phenomenological research and analysis design. The phenomenological method is uniquely positioned to help scholars learn from the experiences of others (Neubauer et al., 2019). Phenomenological studies are conducted to examine human experiences through the descriptions that are provided by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). This research design used open-ended individual interview questions to bring out the lived experiences of the various experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex crimes committed by international peacekeepers, and specifically those committed by international military personnel in peacekeeping operations in CAR. Qualitative interviews promote an ideal interactional style and articulate the researcher's behaviors by which this might be realized (Knapik, 2006). One-on-one individual interviews constitute a valuable method of obtaining insight into people's viewpoints, understandings, and lived experiences of a specified phenomenon and can contribute to in-depth data collection (Ryan et al., 2013).

Definition of Key Terms

In this section I present terms and phrases from the literature review and secondary data for this research study. I define these terms to highlight their meanings and considerations as employed in my research.

Host country: It is a country in armed conflict or post-armed in receipt of an international peacekeeping operation as the beneficiary of international support in ending its internal armed conflict or a conflict in a neighboring country (McGill, 2014).

Local population: These are men, women, and children, including boys and girls, refugees, and internally displaced persons in post-conflict communities of the host peacekeeping country (McGill, 2014).

Operation Sangaris: It was a French military operation in the CAR that backed the African Union peacekeeping from late 2013 to 2016. This French operation ran alongside and backed the African Union peacekeeping mission (Hemez, 2016).

Peace operations: The dispatch of expeditionary forces, with or without a UN mandate, to implement an agreement between warring states or factions, which may (or may not) include enforcing that agreement in the face of willful defiance (Jiminian, 2012).

Peacekeepers: Military and civilian personnel deployed by third-party states, frequently but not necessarily under the authority of a global or regional institution, into a conflict or post-conflict situation for the purpose of stopping the resumption of military hostilities between two conflicting parties and or for the purpose of creating an atmosphere conducive for negotiations between two parties (Nordas & Rustad, 2013).

Peacekeeping operations: A way to help countries torn by conflict to create conditions for sustainable peace process (McGill, 2014).

Peacekeeping personnel and peacekeepers: Refer to all UN mission staff and personnel engaged in UN PSOS, categorized as civilian, military, or police (McGill, 2014).

Sex crime or offense: Sex crimes or offenses are a subset of crimes that typically occur when a sexual act is violent, when one participant to the act lacks consent, or when

someone has intercourse with a person who is incapable of giving consent under the law, like a child (Freedman, 2018).

Sexual abuse: It refers to the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions (McGill, 2014). Sexual abuse, according to the UN, includes sexual assault, rape, and other sexual nature intrusions, which are perpetrated by both individuals and groups (Westendorf & Searle, 2017).

Sexual exploitation: Any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another.

Survival sex: It occurs when a sexual encounter between a peacekeeper and a local person is a form of livelihood for the local participant and her family because it generates income, payment in kind, or leads to access to privileges and resources that are necessary for everyday material survival (McGill, 2014).

Troop contributing country (TCC): Countries contributing troops to peacekeeping operations or UN peacekeeping or assistance missions or offices. At times the term troop/police-contributor has been used instead of “troop-contributing country” (Lundgren et al., 2021).

Wagner group: The Wagner Group is a well-known private military firm (PMC) with close ties to the Kremlin that was established by Russian tycoon Yevgeny Prigozhin (Rampe, 2023). Since then, it has operated in Syria and at least a half-dozen African nations. Wagner is not a single organization but a sophisticated web of companies and

mercenary organizations, whose activities have been tightly correlated with the Russian military and intelligence apparatus (Rampe, 2023). It is reported that it has 5,000 members stationed all throughout Africa, including in CAR, that consist of ex-Russian troops, criminals, and foreigners (Rampe, 2023).

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Philosophical assumptions are derived from a paradigm that guides the research approach (Nhan & Heale, 2019). These encompass ontological assumptions about the nature of reality, epistemological assumptions that relate to what can be known, axiological assumptions that concern what is important and valuable in research, and methodological assumptions that are all about what methods and procedures are allowable within the paradigm. Apart from the philosophical beliefs, the study can also consider the specialization assumptions acquired from the school of thought whose opinion supports the research study. These include presumptions about the kinds of research study that can be carried out within the specialization and topical assumptions obtained from the literature on the specific topic of the dissertation. Lastly, there are the theoretical structures, which are specific hypothesis from within the specialization acquired by a researcher to enlarge on the concepts and variables to be studied and to guide the data analysis.

Scope and Delimitations

Although all categories of international peacekeepers are involved in committing various criminal offences against the population of the host country of operations, the

span of this study is restricted to examining only sex offences allegedly committed by international military contingent members against members of the local population in CAR that constitute sexual misconduct or offences. For international military peacekeepers operating under the UN mandates, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) restrictively governs the handling of conduct related to military contingent members by both the troops contributing countries (TCCs) and the United Nations. The focus of the present research study is the various peacekeeping operations that have taken place or are taking place in the CAR, the sex offences that have been committed by the international military peacekeepers involved in those operations, and the exploration of the lived experiences of the people who have been providing support and assistance to the victims of those offences. The peacekeeping operations therefore concerned by this study are limited to the African Union, the Operation Sangaris, and the European Union, the UN mission and the Wagner Group mercenaries in the CAR. Due to the time constraints and limited resources, including the need to satisfy the Institutional Board Review (IRB) requirement, the study used only open-ended and semi structured interview questions for data collection. Using the phenomenological qualitative methodology in the study also purposely limits the scope.

Limitations

Limits to a research study include characteristics of the methodological design that influenced the interpretation of the results and findings of the survey (Price & Murnan, 2013). Research limitations constitute constraints that bar the researcher's ability to generalize the results of the research. Study limitations further restrict the

applicability to practice of the research results, the method used to establish the internal and external validity, or the results of unanticipated difficulties that resurfaced in the research process. Therefore, it is imperative to identify and acknowledge a study's limitations because this allows the opportunity to make recommendations for further future research (Price & Murnan, 2013).

On the possible methodological limitations, the first potential expected limitation would be the sample size. I intended to use a sample size of between 10 to 15 participants but ended up with six participants as saturation was quickly attained. Another methodological limitation is the lack of available and reliable data as well as lack of prior research studies on this topic. That is why I am considering using an exploratory rather than an explanatory research design (Price & Murnan, 2013).

Another possible limitation would be the design measure used in collecting the research data. Self-reported data may constitute a limitation of this study, as they are limited by the fact that the data cannot be independently verified. This means that the researcher cannot always independently verify what research participants say, be it through interviews, focus groups, or questionnaires at face value. Such biases become apparent if they are incongruent with the data gathered from other sources. These may become evident in the circumstances related to selective memory, telescoping, attributions, and exaggerations.

On the possible limitations related to me as the researcher, I was faced with the difficulty of having access to the participants, the time constraints, cultural and other types of biases. If this access was denied or limited in some ways and for some reasons,

this would have made me incapable of completing the research within the specified timeframes. On the cultural and other types of biases, it should be noted that bias is an inherent part of the human being. Bias is when a person, thing, event, or place is viewed or presented consistently inaccurately. Bias generally is negative, although it also can be positive, in which case it reflects a researcher's reliance on research that supports their hypothesis.

Significance of the Study

It is important to understand the lived experiences of experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex crimes committed by international military peacekeepers against the local people within the framework of the peacekeeping operations in the CAR is of great significance. Understanding the lived experiences of these experts could significantly impact the procedure for the handling of these sex crimes allegations. The information could also be used to improve the investigations, prosecution, and sanctioning procedures of the perpetrators of these offences.

The study is also significant because it could assist in advancing theory and practice in objectivity and transparency in the investigation, prosecution, and sanctioning of military perpetrators of sexual crimes committed against the local population by peacekeepers in CAR. It is vital to reinforce and strengthen the UN zero-tolerance policy against SEA by peacekeepers in bringing positive social change through the promotion and protection of human rights and dignity of the populations in host communities (Smith, 2017). Non-UN peacekeeping operations could as well benefit from the recommendations of this study, especially as their investigation, prosecution, and

sanctioning procedures remain unknown. It is important to always portray the organizations and countries involved in peacekeeping operations as having the interest of the victims at heart rather than trying to protect their own images. Showing this interest and consideration for the victim can only be portrayed by putting in place a system and procedure that is objective, transparent and that holds the perpetrator accountable for the crimes committed. It is only then that the victims of sex offences committed by international peacekeepers will feel dignified, protected, and reintegrated in their communities.

Current legal scholarship has essentially focused on how to reform the protection of the victims of sex offences committed by the individual international peacekeepers generally and the military peacekeepers specifically. The victim protection mechanism must be considered within the framework of the sex allegations investigations, prosecution and sanctioning of the alleged perpetrators of these crimes. No known studies in this area have focused on the lived experiences of the experts providing support and assistance to the victims of sex offences committed by international peacekeepers. Exploring the lived experiences of the concerned experts may shed additional light in better putting the victim at the center of the handling procedures of these crimes rather than putting up policies that are essentially protective of the image and interest of the TCCs and that of the organization responsible for the management of peacekeeping operations. Still only few of these organizations or TCCs have come up with feasible proposals or policies on how to address the criminal responsibilities of these criminal peacekeepers and hold them accountable for offences committed during the operations

(Freedman, 2018). This study addresses how the problem relates to the laws and the current normative framework as well as how it relates to investigations and prosecutions using the lived experiences of the experts providing them support and assistance.

Additionally, the study would make feasible recommendations that would significantly bring positive social change within the host country's population and to the organization and other countries deploying international military peacekeepers into these operations. When implemented, such bids could salvage the tarnished image of peacekeeping operations, restore the dignity of the local people, especially the victims, punish and hold the perpetrators accountable. This positive social change would also restore the appearance of international peacekeepers so they can be perceived as protectors, and not as abusers (Genovese, 2018). Finally, the study may make significant recommendations for the harmonization of the legal principles and procedures for handling and treating sexual offences committed by military peacekeepers, especially regarding investigations, prosecution, and sanctioning of these crimes. This may help to establish a list of possible sex offences committed in peacekeeping operations environment in relation to national laws in TCCs, and how they may be investigated, prosecuted, and sanctioned for the victims and the host country population to perceive objectivity and transparency in holding the perpetrators of these crimes accountable (Freedman, 2018).

Summary

The introductory chapter of this study introduced the purpose of examining the lived experiences of the experts providing support to victims of sex offences committed

by international military peacekeepers in the CAR. The chapter explained how and why the local population becomes targets of SEA. Further, the chapter discussed the theoretical framework under which the study was conducted. Relating to the nature of the study, the chapter presented the phenomenological methodology employed by the analysis using one-on-one interviews to gain insights into their perceptions about the subject matter. In addition, the chapter has considered defining some key terms used in the study. The chapter also explained the philosophical and methodological assumptions related to the survey before limiting and delimiting the scope of the study. The chapter also states that the study may be significant as it might provide some new insights into the existing body of knowledge on the sex offences committed by members of the military peacekeeping contingents in the various CAR peacekeeping operations. The research would effectuate a positive change at the level of the individual peacekeepers, the peacekeeping operations, and the host country of operations.

Following is Chapter 2 of the study, which reviews the literature on sex offences generally and on those committed in peacekeeping operations by international military peacekeepers in CAR specifically. The chapter describes the literature search strategy before developing the study's theoretical framework. It further reviews the study literature on sexual offenses with focus on the current procedures for handling sexual crimes committed by military contingent members in the host country of operations and the accountability mechanisms. The chapter further examines various studies on the subject matter and highlights the identified gaps in the available literature that this study intends to bridge.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Despite the important role played by peacekeepers, some of them have been accused of sexually offending members of the local population in the CAR. Much research has been conducted in this area from different angles and points of views. However, based on the review of the current literature, researchers have not yet explored the subject matter from the point of view of the lived experiences of experts providing various support and assistance services to victims of sex offences committed by international military peacekeepers. First, these service providers have experience that permits them to share the victims' daily challenges of trying to overcome the trauma of having been raped or raised up children resulting from such relationship as a single parent. Secondly, these victims share their plight and desire to obtain justice, reparation, and accountability for the sexual abuses committed against them by the very peacekeepers entrusted to protect them with these service providers. That is why it is important for these support and assistant providers to share their lived experiences of such moments spent in supporting and assisting these sex victims through this study.

Chapter 2 of the study covers the literature review on sexual offences committed by international peacekeepers, with a focus on the international military peacekeepers. The first part of the chapter describes the literature review strategy followed by the theoretical framework for the study. The theoretical framework consists of two theories: the classical deterrence theory and biological and the retributive theory of criminal justice (Abramovaite et al., 2022). Subsequently, I explored the literature review critical concepts and then the accountability process, including the role of the expert service

providers in providing support and assistance in the process. This also considered the part of the TCCs, because they have the primary responsibility in the investigation, prosecution and sanctioning of their military contingent members, the role played by the organization involved in the managing peacekeeping operations, and the role of the host country of operations. The chapter covers the definition of accountability and the barriers and challenges in achieving it. The chapter also highlights the existing gaps in the current literature that my research intends to cover.

Literature Search Strategy

The strategy that I engaged in my literature review consisted of going through academic electronic database searches in the Walden University library for relevant articles to include in my study. I framed my searches through law and criminal justice databases to obtain appropriate and valuable information for the research. I searched through these databases for topics related to sexual crimes, accountability, prosecution, sanctioning, and punishment of sexual offences committed by international peacekeepers. I included relevant phrases and words in my database searches that consist of *sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), local population, international military peacekeepers, peacekeeping operations, host countries, armed conflict, sexual crimes, theories of crime, troops contributing countries, United Nations standards of conduct, serious misconduct, United Nations procedure, investigations and prosecution of international peacekeepers, Office of International Oversight Services, crimes committed by peacekeepers, African Union Peacekeeping operations, Operation Sangaris, and memorandum of understanding etc.*

The databases and sources most searched in this process included but were not limited to Google Scholar, ResearchGate, SAGE Premier, JSTOR, SCOPUS, EBSCO, Conduct in UN Missions website, SpringerLink, and ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis from the Walden University Global database and Google. The latter helped help me to locate and access numerous dissertation samples that used same methodology as mine. I focused my search on recent scholarly and peer-reviewed journal articles and documents from these websites. Through this information-gathering process, I identified the current literature gap and the relevant data that constituted my literature review for the study. Reading through the abstract of articles helped me in deciding which articles were relevant to the study and I saved them my research folder as method or literature review.

Google searches were also important in that I could locate and access some relevant websites, including UN websites, especially the one on conduct in UN field missions, which is a UN management strategy, policy, and compliance website accessible to the public. This website has detailed information on all types of misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse committed by peacekeeping personnel, including military contingent members. The data searched was not only limited to the kind of personnel but also included the country of origin of the military peacekeeper. All other websites through which I accessed scholarly and peer-reviewed articles were searched using Google. Google was also helpful because it led me to other useful academic websites. Although I did not use the Walden librarians that much, they did help me search for a couple of other peer-reviewed articles that I identified and requested them to search for me.

The Walden University resources, including the Center for Research Quality, the Writing Center, and the academic residencies, helped guide my methodology and searches for relevant information through the internet. This led me to gradually narrow down my research and focus on the relevant literature related to the understanding of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers and the procedures through which they are handled. All these search processes and information obtained helped me in gathering enough data that constituted the literature review of my chapter 2. I did not find detailed information for the African Union, the Operation Sangaris and the Wagner Mercenary Group on criminal offences, including sex crimes, committed by their peacekeepers in their various peacekeeping operations in the CAR as it was the case with the United Nations (MINUSCA) operations other than the information published on research papers, which remains limited.

Theoretical Framework

Theory provides the framework and foundation for the research's justification, problem description, purpose, and research questions (Nhan, 2020). It additionally offers a platform for conducting a literature evaluation and, most importantly, a point of reference for methodology and analysis (Nhan, 2020). While there were many theoretical frameworks that I could have used to study the lived experiences of the experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers, I chose the two most suited theories which include the classical theory of deterrence and the retributive criminal justice theory.

Classical Deterrence Theory

The classical theory of deterrence, based on the work of three Hobbes, Beccaria, and Bentham, suggests that if the punishment of a crime is severe, certain, and swift, a rational person will be discouraged from breaking the law, and most importantly if the person finds out that the loss from committing a crime is greater than the gain (Abramovaite et al., 2022). According to the classical deterrence theory, crime is caused by the individual's free will, as human beings are rational and make their decisions freely with an understanding of the consequences (Abramovaite et al., 2022). The classical deterrence theory has been the basis for numerous criminal justice policies in the U.S. history (Tomlinson, 2016). The classical deterrence theory was refined and developed during the 1950s and early 1960s by numerous strategic thinkers. The growth of this theory was nurtured by scholars such as Thomas Schelling, Oskar Morgenstern, William Kaufmann, Glenn Snyder, and Herman Kahn (Zagare, 1996). Modern criminal justice deterrence theories are derived from the classical criminological theory, which are essentially derived from the writings on crimes and punishments by Cesare Beccaria, an Italian economist and philosopher in 1764, as well as from Jeremy Bentham's introduction to the principles of morals and legislation written in 1781 (Tomlinson, 2016). Becker (1968), being the first to apply the economic analysis of crime in the crime and punishment model, argued that the cost of a criminal act also includes the probability of getting arrested and the severity of the punishment.

Previous research shows that the severity of sanctions remains contested and varied. Spengler (2006) comparatively studied the justice systems of states in Germany

and noted that higher conviction rates were linked to lower crime rates rather than to the form, or severity, of sanctions. Recent studies' interpretation of celerity on crime rates shows that a longer wait period to impose sanctions reduces deterrence at some margins for avaricious crime, which typically is not the case with violent crimes (Abramovaite et al., 2022). However, violent crimes motivated on the contrary by emotion and sensation-seeking and not by rational reasoning may not be responsive to harsher sanctions (Van Gelder, 2013).

Theory of Retributive Justice

The theory of retributive justice sees deterrence as the cornerstone of the criminal justice system and essential for upholding law and order. This reason makes the retributive criminal justice theory well suited to exploring the lived experiences of experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers. Hart's theory of retribution comprises at least of three fundamental principles (Bedau, 1968). First, punishment can only be justified if the individual has intentionally committed a wrongdoing. Second, the severity of the punishment should correspond to the severity of the offense. Lastly, the rationale for punishment is based on the ethical principle of retribution for the moral wrong that was willingly committed. Nevertheless, it can be challenging to achieve precise equivalence between the punishment and the wrongdoing in terms of proportionality and severity at times. However, the argument of the retributivist lacks sufficient logical support to persuade skeptics that the only truly just society is one where punishments are enforced for breaking behavioral laws (Bedau, 1978). The prevailing view in the public opinion is

that of retributive criminal justice theory, and it is the notion of justice that forms the basis of the practice of ensuring that offenders receive what they deserve, which is in line with the current study (Willigenburg & Borght, 2021).

Modern interpretations of retributive justice theory focus on rational decision-making and discouragement. The theory suggests that punishments must cause enough pain to outweigh the satisfaction gained from committing the offense. The principle of discouragement is based on the belief that if the punishment is definite, severe, and prompt, people will compare the costs and benefits and then abstain from breaking the law, thereby maximizing satisfaction, and minimizing pain. Discouragement justifies current criminal justice policies that enforce maximum prison sentences and mandatory terms. Initiatives like Scared Straight, which arrange meetings in prisons between juvenile offenders and prisoners serving life sentences, operate on the assumption that intimidation and warnings will dissuade these young offenders from continuing their criminal activities and avoid imprisonment. Boot camps and shock incarceration programs also use fear, strict disciplinary methods, and brief periods of confinement to deter offenders from further criminal activity.

Over the past few decades, policymakers have placed a significant emphasis on intensifying the prosecution and penalties for sex offenders, which aligns with the increased public consciousness regarding sexual violence and the efforts of feminist activists to reform rape laws (Godden-Rasul, 2015). Even though supporters of restorative justice have criticized retributive justice theory in various aspects, they have only minimally tackled the philosophical justifications that retributivists use to defend

their stance (Willigenburg & Borght, 2021). Nonetheless, the criminal justice system is not the solitary legal avenue accessible to rape victim-survivors to attain justice (Godden-Rasul, 2015). Lately, there has been a surge in civil claims brought against affluent and influential individuals and establishments, where sexual misconduct has been disregarded and permitted (Godden-Rasul, 2015). Apart from seeking retributive justice, sex victims could seek redress through civil claims, because it is not difficult to find a ground for liability in tort law for redress for the crime of rape and other forms of nonconsensual sexual contact (Godden-Rasul, 2015). This argument can open other redress-seeking routes for justice for victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in CAR.

There is a duty to punish individuals who have been found guilty of committing an offense as punishment involves intentionally imposing a cost or burden as a response to the wrong committed by the offender as a message of condemnation (Willigenburg & Borght, 2021). Justice is defined as restoring balance by inflicting punishment in response to wrongdoing. But the severity of the punishment should be proportional to the gravity of the offense, and the proportionality is the foundation of justified retribution (Willigenburg & Borght, 2021). However, supporters of restorative justice strive to implement methods that promote reconciliation and rehabilitation rather than mere punishment.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

Sexual offenses are an unintended consequence of international peacekeeping operations. The literature reviewed in this study focused on the sex offenses committed in

international peacekeeping operations. Sex offenses are essentially most of what is known in peacekeeping as SEA. Peacekeeping operations are managed by international and regional organizations and sometimes, individual countries are involved through bilateral agreements. That is the case of CAR, which has experienced peacekeeping by the African Union and the French Sangaris forces, the United Nations, and the Russian Wagner Group. Since 1948, after World War II, the United Nations has been involved in 71 peacekeeping missions. Fifty-three of these happened after 1990 (Sandler, 2017). International peacekeeping operations are not only managed under the United Nations, although majority are under its authority.

On the part of the UN operations today, it has 16 peacekeeping operations, twelve in Africa and the Middle East (Sandler, 2017). In July 2016, the global peacekeeping operations had more than 100,000 uniformed personnel, with contingent members totaling over 85,000 (Sandler, 2017). Though peacekeeping operations have been a welcome relief in terms of the civilian population protection for these war-turned countries, some peacekeepers, including military contingent members, have been accused of sexually offending the same people they have been deployed to protect (Gassama, 2018). Soldiers in international peacekeeping operations have a long history of perpetrating sexual abuses in conflict and post-conflict situations, and rape and sexual violence have taken place on a massive scale in many conflicts in which the UN and other peacekeeping entities have been deployed (Westendorf & Searle, 2017).

The subject of SEA in the UN peacekeeping missions arose in the early 2000s following the widespread allegations involving peacekeepers in the Democratic Republic

of the Congo (MONUC). It became a big scandal widely reported by international news media, and the UN was scrutinized publicly for sexually offending the same vulnerable people they are supposed to protect (Murphy, 2006). MONUC was not, however, the only UN peacekeeping mission to have been marred by allegations of SEA by peacekeepers. Similar reports of sexual offending by peacekeepers had occurred in Mozambique, Somalia, East Timor, and Bosnia and Herzegovina in the 1990s (Murphy, 2006).

Scholarly interest in peacekeeping operations has expanded in the last two decades since the surfacing of these allegations. Some researchers have focused on the efficiency and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations in restoring peace, the rule of law, and the state authority to war-torn countries and regions. However, others have based their research on examining the unintended consequences of such operations, which include misconduct and crimes, some of which are punishable under the host country's criminal law. Some of such crimes committed by peacekeepers, especially military contingent members, are sex offences considered as SEA and constitute international human rights and international humanitarian laws violations. Some are also punishable under the provisions of the national laws of both the TCCs and the host country of operations, in this case, the CAR under study.

Apart from peer-reviewed researchers, international human rights organizations like Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, and international media organizations, have also played critical roles in bringing to light the exploitation and abuse by international peacekeepers, including those in the various Central African

Republic peacekeeping operations. Various researchers have advanced several reasons why peacekeepers, particularly military contingent members, engage in sexually offending members of the local populations in host countries of operations. For example, Gassama (2018) advanced situational and environmental factors under which peacekeeping operations take place as some of the causes of sexual offending by international military peacekeepers. Others like Smith (2017) and Freedman (2018) have both advanced the lack of individual accountability by peacekeepers as a factor in the SEA by peacekeepers, especially when it comes to TCCs.

According to Salva (2015), victims of sexual exploitation are largely influenced by their difficult local conditions of life during and after the armed conflict that make them vulnerable to potential sexual preying by peacekeepers. Victims become vulnerable as they live in abject poverty with little or no livelihood options and are consequently unable to meet basic life survival needs (Salva, 2015). That is why some of them are involved in consensual and transactional sex in exchange of survival means (food and money) from international peacekeepers. Whatever the reasons advanced for the SEA allegations against members of the local host population by peacekeepers, one thing is evident in this research, taking advantage of the vulnerability of women and children in peacekeeping operations constitutes serious violations under international law. Those charged guilty of such misconduct and criminal offences must be held to account for their actions.

The lumping together of all sexual misconducts by the United Nations under the appellation SEA may not however be very helpful in the criminal investigations,

prosecution, and sanctioning of sex offences because some TCCs claim some of the sexual behavior prohibited by the UN do not constitute crimes under their national criminal law and cannot therefore be prosecuted and sanctioned under their judicial systems.

While this argument may sound legally convincing, these same TCCs still drag their feet when it comes to prosecuting and sanctioning those sex violations committed by their peacekeepers which amount to criminal offences under their national laws. Serving peacekeeping operations under an international framework like the UN or any other regional organization requests for a serious undertaking to respect its rules and regulations of conduct and discipline entirely whether they fall under a given national criminal legislation or not. So long as such conduct violates existing international instrument, the violator must be held accountable because this is a violation of international law and international law is higher in the judicial hierarchy than any national legislation.

Additionally, the mere participation in international peace operations requires the respect of all the rules and conduct governing such operations by all the participating individuals and their countries and their violations should be dealt with promptly and severely for the victims to obtain any rightful reparations due. The investigations, prosecution and sanctioning of perpetrators should neither be a formality nor a means to protect the violator and clear the names of their countries or the organization responsible for the operations (Freedman, 2018).

Those sex violations that constitute criminal offences should normally be given proper judicial appellations under international law and prosecuted accordingly because peacekeeping operations fall within that framework and purview of international law (Genovese, 2018). Although the argument that the grouping of all sexual abuses under the umbrella term “SEA”, is helpful in distinguishing this type of behavior from all other forms of abuses, it obscures the important differences in the forms, function and what causes it as well as the dominant forms it takes based on victims’ testimony to better understand the reasons for the policy response ineffectiveness (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). The issue of whether some aspects of SEA constitute a crime under the national law of a TCC or not for it to be investigated, prosecuted, and sanctioned should not therefore be given any consideration.

According to Salva (2015), the United Nations Secretary General's Bulletin "Special measures for the protection from sexual exploitation and abuse" (Doc ST/SGB/2003/13) defines consider sexual exploitation and abuse as separate violations. Sexual exploitation is *"any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially, or politically from the sexual exploitation of another."* Sexual abuse, on the other hand, is *"the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions"* (Salva, 2015). There are therefore no justifications for not prosecuting SEA by UN military peacekeepers under the above pretext because the two definitions here criminalize any form of sexual relations in the context of peacekeeping missions where the personnel take advantage of

the victim and members of the local population regardless of their consent and the victim's age (Salva, 2015).

There is a zero-tolerance policy against SEA in the United Nations Peacekeeping operations. This means there is no impunity for the peacekeeping personnel guilty of any misconducts, including sex offences committed against members of the local population. It is therefore up to all TCCs to include all the individual and collective behaviors considered under peacekeeping operations as violating the norms and conduct of such operations and make adequate provisions under their national laws to hold the individual violators accountable. SEA committed in peacekeeping operations include sexual offences like sexual assault (rape), attempted rape, prostitution, child pornography, and trafficking for sex etc and these offences have been committed in the Central African Republic under various peace operations by those mandated to protect the vulnerable women and children (Genovese, 2018).

The UN Secretary General's zero-tolerance policy and all other regulations in the subject matter encompasses all SEA and this must be applied by all concerned for all the intended purposes as the definitions of the two terms constitute criminal conduct under international law. It is the intention of this research to focus on these sexual behaviors as sex offences committed by peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations in CAR, and further explore it from the point of view of the lived experiences of service providers who provide various support and assistance to the victims of those sex offenses as well as the essence, they make of their lived experiences with the sex victims. Understanding such experiences and their essence maybe useful in informing the investigation, and

prosecution of those crimes to ameliorate the accountability procedure so that the sex victims feel justice being done to her. This is the ultimate purpose of this study.

Some Specific Instances of Sex Offences by Peacekeepers in CAR

Some researchers have presented very glaring and specific instances where international peacekeepers have allegedly sexually abused the vulnerable members of the local population the CAR during various peace operations. In 2015 Human Rights Watch documented cases of rape that included two girls, aged 18 and 14, gang-raped by armed MINUSCA peacekeepers near their camp (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). According to Westendorf & Searle (2017), the older girl reportedly was seeking food or money from the peacekeepers, and she was threatened with death and raped if she resisted, while the younger one was simply walking by the camp. Military peacekeepers are soldiers and reports of peacekeeper involvement in sex offences revolve largely around them being involved in opportunistic situations and planned sadistic sex abuses (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). A leaked internal UN report in 2015 documented regular oral and anal extensive instances of rape perpetrated against children of 8 to 15 in CAR by 26 peacekeeping soldiers from France, Chad, and Equatorial Guinea after the children fled the refugee camp because it was attacked (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). Again in 2016, an additional over 108 allegations of sex offences were investigated including 98 cases of sex abuses against girls by international peacekeepers who had returned to their respective countries and including an allegation that in 2014, a French commander from the Operation Sangaris had undressed and tied up four girls forcing them to have sex with a dog (Westendorf & Searle, 2017).

The underlying cause of some of the sex abuses, especially the transactional sex relationships are the structural conditions of poverty and unequal power dynamics between the peacekeepers and members of the local population creating a permissive environment for criminal sex to thrive. For the French Operation Sangaris soldiers implicated in the sex offences in the CAR, victims did not receive any adequate care and protection and were not followed up most especially as the French Sangaris soldiers were not bound by the UN SEA frameworks, and the French government that opened up judicial investigations did not prosecute the allegations (Westendorf & Searle, 2017). Many other examples of these sex offences by the various peace operations in CAR can be given to illustrate the un-willingness to investigate, prosecute and bring to account perpetrators of sex offences committed against women and children in this country under the various operations by the various stakeholders.

It is difficult to obtain the real situation of allegations of sex offences committed by international peacekeepers in the CAR. However, this researcher was able to obtain some information from the website known as Conduct in UN Field Missions (<https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>) which is a free public website where information about SEA allegations and other misconducts committed by UN peacekeepers is published. The graph below presents the situation concerning related SEA in the UN peacekeeping in the CAR over the years from 2015 till sometime in 2022 by all categories of peacekeeping personnel, civilians, and the military. The information of SEA concerning the African Union and Operation Sangaris and the Wagner Group mercenaries is not well known or documented.

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Situation in CAR Over Time

Figure 3

Sexual Exploitation and Abuse Over Time



Note. Source: <https://conduct.unmissions.org > sea-data-introduction>

International peacekeepers have not only been found to be involved in cases of sex offences. Elsewhere in other peacekeeping operations, and including in the CAR, some international peacekeepers have also been accused of other serious criminal offences involving torture, trafficking in women, and executions of members of the local population in host countries of operations and theft of UN property and exploitation of the host country natural resources (Westendorf & Searle, 2017).

Policy, Accountability, and Responsibilities

The United Nations has a policy framework to ensure accountability for the conduct and discipline of its peacekeeping personnel. This policy presents the roles and

responsibilities of all personnel, including members of military contingents. Members of military contingents are deployed under the memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed between the member states, who are troops contributing countries, and the United Nations. The policy spells out the responsibilities and accountabilities process of stakeholders in addressing personnel matters of conduct and discipline. This also sets out the procedure for the handling of offenses committed by individual peacekeepers, including members of military contingents.

The UN handling procedure for crimes committed by its peacekeepers, consists of a mechanism to ensure accountabilities for all personnel who violates the standards of conduct, regardless of status and category. The policy aligns with the organization's prime objective of ensuring that its peacekeeping personnel uphold the highest standards of integrity and serve the local people with pride. The policy states that all personnel shall be held accountable for violations of these standards, including some of which may constitute crimes punishable under national laws of the host country of operations.

TCCs under the provisions of the MoU signed with the United Nations (UN) have primary responsibility in holding accountable members of their national military contingent disciplinarily and criminally liable, except when the TCCs decide not to exercise that responsibility. The United Nations conducts administrative investigations on its own. In the above connection, member states may also conduct investigations into misconduct, including crimes involving their nationals, in line with the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations. This means the criminal prosecution and sanctioning of members of military contingents are exclusively under the jurisdiction

of TCCs. However, they serve the UN, and the criminal offenses fall outside their national criminal jurisdiction. The set-out procedure is for the managers and commanding officers to report wrongdoing by their subordinates to their civilian or military hierarchy, who will report it to the Head of Mission and his supporting Conduct and Discipline Team or Focal Point. Allegations related to SEA are reported directly to the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). Managers and military commanders are consequentially held accountable for this responsibility.

Although the primary responsibility in handling sex offenses that consist of SEA is the primary responsibility of the troop-contributing countries, it is obvious that the organization is wholly responsible for implementing preventive measures for all personnel, including military contingent members. Principal preventive measures include all contingents' training, sensitization, and risk assessment activities. TCCs are responsible for informing the organization of crimes committed by their soldiers in peace operations and ensuring investigations are conducted promptly and adequately. Following reports, investigations conducted on allegations of sexual offenses are to be completed within six months. The criminal responsibility for the individual military peacekeepers, which includes the judicial investigations, prosecution, and sanctioning through their judicial system, lies primarily with their countries and the expeditious facilitation of settlement claims related to paternity claim, and child support.

In the above procedure, the host country of operations does not play any significant role, even when it comes to misconduct that constitutes crimes under their national laws, as it is the case with sex offenses. The TCCs have the responsibility to

communicate to the organization the findings of their investigations, the results of the disciplinary actions, and the measures taken to ensure criminal accountability and related financial claims. The standard expectation would have been the involvement of the host country of operations, especially for misconduct that constitutes offenses, in the case of this paper, sex offenses, constituting crimes under their national criminal law.

Although for the peacekeeping personnel that are civilians and experts on mission (UNPOL, MILOBS, and other gratis personnel), it is stated that the host country judicial authorities can request that the immunities for those peacekeepers be waived for them to be prosecuted under the national law, such instances, however, have not practically taken place. According to Karim & Beardsley (2016), the allegations of SEA against members of the local population is an endemic problem in peacekeeping operations. SEA allegations constitute gross human rights violations that threaten to challenge the legitimacy of the peacekeeping operations and undermine the promotion of gender equality in host countries of operations (Karim & Beardsley, 2016).

In their study, Karim & Beardsley (2016) have examined whether the composition of peacekeeping forces along the percentage of women and the records of gender equality in the TCCs can help to explain variations in SEA allegations. The analysis of mission-level information between 2009 and 2013 indicated that incorporating a higher proportion of female peacekeepers in military contingents is associated with lower levels of SEA allegations, as seen in countries having better records of gender equality (Karim & Beardsley, 2016). Improving the representation of women peacekeepers may help reduce

the prevailing SEA in peacekeeping operations, although it may still stop short of addressing the root cause of the problem.

Many researchers who have published their findings on the allegations of SEA by peacekeepers, and most especially those concerning military contingent members, have tended to question the effectiveness of the accountability process by the TCCs. Focusing on the UN procedure for handling sexual offenses committed by military peacekeepers, this accountability process primarily lies in the hands of the TCCs. The TCCs exercise the primary and exclusive criminal jurisdiction over their peacekeepers for sexual offenses committed against women and girls of the local population in host countries of operations. Researchers like Murphy (2006) have concluded that in the handling of allegations of SEA against members of the local population by the UN and other personnel operating in post-conflict situations, there is little the UN can do without the cooperation of TCCs. Every single peacekeeper employed by or affiliated with the UN peacekeeping operations allegedly involved in SEA must be held accountable and prosecuted when the circumstances so warrant (Murphy, 2006).

The policy of sending home whole international military contingents by peacekeeping organizations because of their implications in massive scale SEA allegations may sound great for several reasons but it does not seem to solve the problem. It may bring shame to the TCC and be perceived as a very good punishment for military contingent members who are involved in the sexual offending of the vulnerable members of the local population in CAR. In fact, such a decision protects more the interest of the peacekeeping organization by salvaging its image and discharging it of its responsibility

for these sex crimes rather than protecting the interest of the sex victims. If not, how do sex victims benefit from such a decision? Such action does not alleviate the trauma and tort caused to the victims, neither does it hold the real perpetrators of the sex abuses committed accountable. The victims want to see justice done to them in holding the perpetrators accountable and receiving compensations in their journey to recovery so they can rebuild their lives and move forward. In the same manner, international military contingent members who are good soldiers and effectively engage in protecting the vulnerable civilians should not pay the price for the bad behavior of their few colleagues by being sent back home collectively for no fault of theirs. They should instead be gratified for good behavior and devotedness in carrying out their mandate in good faith.

The Definition and Concept of Accountability

Peacekeepers allegedly involved in misconduct, especially those that constitute criminal offenses under national and international laws, must be held accountable. International peacekeeping operations take place in host countries that are sovereign, independent and have their own laws including criminal jurisdictions instances. They may not function well to be used in trying international peacekeepers for offences committed in peacekeeping, but this does not bar the use of international judicial instances in handling such cases. Members of the military contingents are criminally liable under the primary responsibility of the TCCs but holding them accountable by their respective countries also poses the question of how willing their countries are ready to effectively perform that task. And that is where they are jurisdictionally responsible and must be held accountable for their actions in peacekeeping operations.

SEA in peacekeeping operations constitute a severe criminal offence, especially when it is committed by those entrusted with the responsibility to protect. Anyone in the peacekeeping mission alleged to have been involved in sexually offending women and girls in host countries of peacekeeping operations must be held accountable and prosecuted as required (Murphy, 2006). Understanding the related scope and meaning of accountability is very important. Although Mulgan (2000) ponders on whether accountability is an ever-expanding concept, he identifies one importance of accountability as the one everyone agrees to. According to him, it is that associated with the process of someone being called to account to some authority for his or her actions (Mulgan, 2002). This sense of accountability may be the original or core sense of accountability as it is the most extended pedigree accepted to be relevant in literature and practitioners' interpretation (Mulgan, 2002). This consideration related to accountability takes into consideration several features.

Accountability is external in that the account is given to another person or body outside the person or body held accountable (Mulgan, 2002). Another feature of accountability involves social interaction and exchange, in the sense that one side calling for the account is seeking to obtain answers and rectification, while the side being held accountable is responding and accepting sanctions (Mulgan, 2002). It implies that the rights of authority in the persons calling for an account for misconduct or action asserts the rights of the superior or control organ over those held accountable, including the rights to request answers and impose a punishment (Mulgan, 2002). In practical terms, accountability means holding the perpetrator of misconduct to account for their actions.

The UN's responsibility for peacekeeping crimes is vital, especially concerning offenses committed in its peacekeeping operations.

Additionally, accountability is crucial because it enhances the legitimacy and public trust in the organization and those carrying out its mandate. Without this legitimacy, it is difficult for the objectives of the peacekeeping operations to be attained (Hovell, 2016). It is, therefore, important that people, including victims, do not believe peacekeeping personnel can act and behave with impunity (Hovell, 2016). Complacency in the face of SEA allegations against peacekeepers is not an option for anyone and, worst of all, those heading peacekeeping operations. This complacency led to the unprecedented ousting of the head of mission, the special representative of the United Nations Secretary-General in the Central African Republic, in 2016 (Hovell, 2016).

There are many types of accountabilities (Mulgan, 2002). Alleged perpetrators of SEA in peacekeeping operations are likely subjects to include in the hierarchical and legal accountability (Grant & Keohane, 2005). While hierarchical responsibility requires that peacekeepers be held accountable by their commanders and supervisors within the framework of the applicable disciplinary processes, legal accountability implies their criminal liability with all its legal ramifications (Grant & Keohane, 2005).

The prevailing views and opinions in the literature on international relations of multilateral organizations are that these entities are weak compared to states that form their membership (Grant & Keohane, 2005). Accountability, therefore, implies that some actors own the right and duty to hold other actors to a given set of standards to judge whether they have complied with their responsibilities relative to these expected

standards. The hierarchy or supervisors should impose punishments or take legal action when they determine that these standards and obligations are not attained (Grant & Keohane, 2005).

The concept of accountability, as it stands, presupposes a relationship between allying power-wielders and those holding them accountable within the framework of the applicable rules (Grant & Keohane, 2005). Under the UN procedure for handling misconduct, the mechanisms for ensuring accountability by the TCCs for crimes, including sexual offenses committed by individual military peacekeepers, lies in the MoU and the Status of Model Status-of-Forces Agreement for Peacekeeping Operations (SOFA). Many studies conducted on SEA allegations committed by UN personnel, predominantly military contingent members, have expressed concerns about holding individuals accountable for their actions because of some barriers.

Barriers to Accountability

It is becoming commonplace for international organizations, including the United Nations, to attempt to take the roles of states in ensuring accountability for their field personnel. However, strict traditional accountability mechanisms offer little possibility of holding perpetrators accountable when peacekeepers commit criminal offenses. It is difficult for individual victims to successfully hold international organizations responsible, although actions by the personnel of these organizations impact their lives directly. That is why individuals must rely on the intervention of the state and its institutions, but unfortunately, many states are either unwilling to do so or are incapable of doing it (Freedman, 2018). According to Freedman (2018), for accountability to be

forthcoming, the UN must hold individuals for action or inaction, especially that which leads to the non-accountability for the harms caused in peacekeeping operations, including sexual offenses perpetrated against the very people who need protection.

At the very least, if the peacekeepers cannot fulfill their mission of protecting the local population, they should not, by their action, violate the principle of "do *no harm*" by sexually offending people who are already been rendered vulnerable by the armed conflict. The United Nations legal framework and procedures for holding military contingent members criminally accountable are entirely different from that used for the civilian peacekeepers and experts on mission (Freedman, 2018). The commonality that the two share is that both have the same weaknesses that result in few criminal prosecutions for perpetrators of sexual offenses.

Since its inception in May 1948, the United Nations peacekeeping operations have been touted as one of the most victorious instruments used by the international community to manage complex challenges to international peace and security (Sinha, 2018). Nobody can contest the role of peacekeepers in facilitating the political processes, protection, and promotion of human rights and the assistance they provide in restoring the rule of law. Victories have been achieved in seventy peacekeeping operations, including East Timor, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, Mozambique, and Cote d'Ivoire. However, some have also ended tragically and prematurely, like in Rwanda, Somalia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina (Sinha, 2018). Despite this vital role played by peacekeepers, SEA by peacekeepers amidst other violations have remained a paramount concern.

The publication of the Brahimi report in 2000 supposedly provided a comprehensive review of operations in peacekeeping missions but failed to address the problem of SEA (Odello & Burke, 2016). However, since the presentation of the Zeidi report in 2005, the United Nations has adopted far-reaching measures with administrative and disciplinary repercussions for peacekeeping personnel involved in sexual offenses. These measures are still seen as an inadequate response to the plight of the victims. The adopted measures do not seem adequate in holding accountable peacekeepers accused of committing sexual offenses against members of the local population for ten years since the Zeidi report was adopted (Odello & Burke, 2016).

The Conduct and Discipline Team (CDT) offices in field missions were established in 2005 to conduct SEA preventive training and internal and external sensitization activities and to handle cases of misconduct, including those related to SEA. The related Case Misconduct Tracking System (CMTS), a confidential database system for documenting all misconduct, including SEA, was created only in July 2008. The primary difficulty in handling SEA allegations is effective prosecution of perpetrators by TCCs.

According to the investigations conducted by the United Nations in 2013, sexual offending ranging from rape to transactional sex, sex trafficking, prostitution, and pornography involving women and children by peacekeepers has been the most significant risk and drawback to these peacekeeping operations (Sinha, 2018). Although SEA against women and girls in war-torn countries and regions is not a new

phenomenon. When peacekeepers exploit the vulnerability of those entrusted to them for protection, it becomes a fundamental betrayal of trust and confidence (Sinha, 2018).

Since the first reported SEA cases in the 1990s in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Cambodia, and Timor Leste, several other issues have been repeatedly reported and quite frequently in various other missions around the globe. Despite the organization's multiple efforts, the situation has not actually improved and has even been considered as escalating recently (Sinha, 2018). The recurrence of this conduct by the United Nations peacekeeping personnel undermines the credibility and the effectiveness of the peacekeeping operations. It creates distrust within the local populations, promotes sexually transmissible diseases, increase prostitution, and severely harms the achievement of the UN mandate.

According to Islamia (2020), despite the United Nations policy and procedure for handling and prosecuting these offenses, the organization has been widely criticized as flawed and dysfunctional. The organization has been condemned for the improper enforcement of its resolutions targeting sexual abuses (Islamia, 2020). Secondly, the immunity accorded by UN peacekeeping personnel under the 1946 resolution against their arrest and prosecution has been a barrier to accountability (Islamia, 2020).

Additionally, the military contingent members involved in crimes, including sexual offenses, are under the criminal jurisdiction of their home countries which most often do nothing to hold them accountable legally for these crimes. Some even claim some of these misconducts are not crimes punishable by their national criminal law.

Assistance provided to the victims of these sexual offenses in terms of better medical and psychological support and a complete lack of judicial assistance challenges the accountability of military peacekeepers (Islamia, 2020). As perpetrators are seldom brought to justice, most of the victims are discouraged from stepping forward to report these sexual abuses with regards to the waiving of immunities granted to the peacekeepers, which can be waived for UN officials and experts on mission for criminal prosecution by the UN Secretary General. In fact, these immunities are functional and cover only the acts committed in relation to their official duty.

Immunity is not otherwise applicable beyond this, and their waiving should be evident in matters related to sexual offenses. Still, the reality is that the challenge of waiving these immunities continues to bar the criminal prosecution of these offenses (Odello & Burke, 2016). However, when it concerns military contingent members, the United Nations' power is limited to the repatriation of the concerned individuals and their non-redeployment in future peacekeeping operations. In this instance, waiving immunities is not an option for the UN, even for sexual offenses. This is the exclusive and primary jurisdiction of the TCCs. According to Odello & Burke (2016), the UN should explore other options in the case where the TCC does not want to investigate or prosecute any allegation of sexual offenses implicating its military contingent member.

Immunities and Accountability for Sex Offences by Peacekeepers

Immunities granted to the United Nations personnel were intended to be functional and directly related to protection from acts committed in their official duty. They were never intended to create any jurisdictional vacuum and promote impunity for

private and criminal acts committed by individual peacekeepers against the same vulnerable people they have been deployed to protect. Odello & Burke (2016) believe that these immunities, to avoid creating impunity, should be restricted in nature and only extend to what is functionally indispensable. Sexual offences and other crimes committed by military peacekeepers should undoubtedly be excluded. Still, the governments are seemingly reluctant and not ready to amend the rules governing the immunities of international peacekeepers.

The question, however, remains whether international peacekeepers, especially members of military contingents who commit crimes, including sexual offences and other fundamental rights of victims, can be excluded from the local criminal jurisdiction of the host countries of operation. The status of Force Agreements (SOFA) was intended only to cover military personnel from local jurisdictional prosecution. Still, it should be noted that sexual offenses can never constitute the official functions of peacekeepers. The requirement for immunities to be waived by the United Nations Secretary General should be automatic when it comes to sexual offenses. As opposed to military contingent members, holding UN officials and experts on missions criminally accountable for crimes committed in peacekeeping missions, including sexual offenses, remains difficult too because the UN does not exercise criminal jurisdiction over them, and their state laws are not extraterritorially applicable for crimes committed out of their countries of nationality (Odello & Burke, 2016).

States have avoided painting negative publicity about themselves through investigating and prosecuting criminal offenses committed by their citizens deployed

outside and in peacekeeping operations. But it showed that UN officials and experts on mission are not outside the scope and limits of criminal prosecutions when they commit crimes punishable under the laws of the host country of operations. Such crimes include sexual offenses committed against members of the local population, and immunity should not preclude them from investigations, prosecution, and punishment. The truth, however, is that this does not happen because of several factors, some of which include access to the alleged perpetrator, ignorance of the local judicial authorities about immunities, external pressure, and the dysfunctional nature at times of the judicial institutions of the host country.

Additionally, the UN may be reluctant to waive the immunities of its officials and experts on mission to stand trial in the host country, although it is not required. Reluctance to waiving the UN's immunities may be justified because it will open prosecution and possible sanctioning in the host country, whose judicial system may be highly dysfunctional and does not guarantee fairness and transparency. This, however, creates a dilemma if the state of nationality of the concerned individual does not instigate a legal process. It means the alleged perpetrator will walk away freely. This ends up creating a culture of impunity. If, however, the home state or another country opens a legal proceeding against the UN official or expert on mission, difficulties will still arise as to accessing the victim, witnesses, and the evidence as well as obtaining the collaboration of the country of operations to conduct effective judicial investigations and prosecution as required. In connection with these difficulties, and according to Odello & Burke (2016), several UN General Assembly resolutions have requested member states to

reform their national criminal laws to be applicable to extraterritorial crimes, including sexual offenses committed by their nationals serving in peacekeeping operations.

The United Nations, irrespective of its zero-tolerance policy, has no judicial nor administrative authority to take criminal actions against military members of the national contingents for their sexual offenses while serving in peacekeeping operations. Military contingent members are under the primary and exclusive criminal jurisdiction of their country of nationality and have immunity from investigations and prosecution by the host country of operations. However, they are required under the provisions of the SOFA to respect national and local laws of the host country of operations. Therefore, for individual contingent members to be held accountable, the UN must count on the TCC's willingness and readiness to effectively investigate and prosecute those guilty of sexual offenses against the host country's population. Although the UN can repatriate the individual soldier implicated in the sexual offense, it has no monitoring mechanism over the investigations and prosecution of alleged perpetrators. The UN has no enforcement authority, although the TCCs under the MoU has the responsibility to take such judicial action to ensure accountability when faced with the involvement of their peacekeepers in serious misconduct like sexual offenses. But TCCs have not been forthcoming with conducting criminal investigations and prosecuting cases of sexual crimes against their troop members.

As the basis for peacekeeping personnel immunities is functional, it could render accountability easier if such exemptions are restricted to what is necessary for peacekeepers to carry out their assigned peacekeeping functions. There is, therefore, the

possibility that such immunities accorded members of the military contingents could be restricted to that effect under the Model SOFAs and the MoU.

The Model SOFAs and MoUs are bilateral agreements signed between the TCCs and the United Nations. These agreements can be reformed as required in holding military peacekeepers accountable for sexual offenses committed in peacekeeping operations (Odello & Burke, 2016). In carrying out such reforms, sexual crimes should be expressly excluded from the immunity package accorded to the peacekeepers because such offenses are outside the framework of official duty. This exclusion will allow such crimes to be investigated and prosecuted by the host country of operations. A good example of such exclusion is found in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Status of Force Agreement (SOFA) (Odello & Burke, 2016). Some states may accept such a reform limiting the immunities afforded their soldiers under the MoU and the SOFA. Still, it is a good way to guarantee accountability for crime, especially sexual offenses committed against members of the local population. In the face of such a refusal to accept restrictions to the SOFA and the MoU, the UN will have the choice to deploy or not to deploy troops from that TCC. The UN also could delay the repatriation of the alleged perpetrator of a sexual offence until an adequate and thorough investigation has been conducted. This study believes that prosecuting sexual crimes committed by military contingent members in the host country of operations will severely deter potential perpetrators. Several other factors have been considered responsible for creating a culture of impunity within which peacekeeping personnel commits sexual offenses in peacekeeping missions. Such factors require identification for them to be addressed to

effectuate meaningful and lasting change to peacekeepers' sexual offending of women and girls in peacekeeping operations, including in CAR.

The United Nations has a three-prong focus on its efforts to address SEA by peacekeepers, and all of them are largely perpetrator centered. They consist of prevention, enforcement, and remedial action. Scholar practitioners and experts have identified, within the three categories above, other aspects related to the pre-deployment training, awareness raising and sensitization on gender and culture, and the empowerment of the local communities as aspects crucial to accountability laws and victim support mechanisms. All these efforts have failed to apply robust techniques for criminal accountability that can deter, punish perpetrators, and uphold victims' rights and dignity. Focusing on addressing preventive and protective mechanisms without exploring reforms for accountability is not enough to tackle the underlying causes of SEA by peacekeepers.

Summary and Transition

A lot of time was spent searching for and selecting scholarly articles relevant to this study. The selected papers helped in drafting this chapter. Chapter two examined and presented relevant past research conducted on the subject matter from several perspectives using the scholarly articles obtained from various databases and websites. The chapter opened with an introduction explaining the trends on SEA and the historical background, as well as the procedure for handling sexual offences committed by military peacekeepers and its intention. Sexual crimes were examined from the perspective of the hermeneutical phenomenological qualitative approach and grounded in two primary criminal justice theories: the classical deterrence and the retributive justice theory.

Literature review and critical concepts were an integral part of this chapter. The study attempted to situate SEA in the historical context of international peacekeeping operations beginning in 1948 after World War II. The recurrence and increasing number of sexual offences committed in peacekeeping operations has sparked scholarly interest in researching the matter for the last two decades. The international media and organizations have helped to bring out the magnitude of the SEA situation in peacekeeping operations and have attracted a lot of attention from the international community and scared forced the UN into putting in additional efforts in trying to address the situation and to hold perpetrators accountable in collaboration with the TCCs. The chapter also presented and examined the definitions of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse from the point of view of the UN standards prohibiting such misconduct. It was noted that these two definitions, especially sexual exploitation, include sexual aspects of sexual abuses that may morally be wrong but do not constitute criminal sex offences.

Examining the policy of accountability under the international peacekeeping operations procedures for handling sex offences, the chapter looked at the procedure in terms of the people involved and the applicable legal norms and regulations signed between the peacekeeping organizations and TCCs. It was noted that the military approach differs from the civilians and experts on mission when it comes to the UN operations. The procedure is not very clear when it concerns non-UN peacekeepers. The chapter examined the importance of holding perpetrators accountable for sex offences from several perspectives, including from the rights point of view of the SEA victims, as

such accountability constituted an attempt to right the wrong done to these vulnerable people by those expected to protect and not to harm.

Barriers to accountability by the perpetrators of sexual offences were examined in this chapter, especially as they create a culture of impunity for international peacekeepers and a lack of confidence in the system by the victims. Special attention was focused on examining the role of immunities accorded to the peacekeepers while distinguishing between the immunities provided to civilians and experts on mission from those accorded to members of military contingents under the SOFAs concerning the UN peacekeepers. These immunities are based on Article 105 (1) of the UN Charter. The immunities were created in 1946 and enshrined in section 32 of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations personnel which entered into force on 17 September 1946.

Chapter three will examine the research methodology. After the introduction to this chapter, the research design and rationale will be presented, including the proposed qualitative research methodology, which is the phenomenological approach. The second part will explain the selection of research participants and the methods used in collecting data, including secondary data collection and interviews. The third part of this chapter will deal with data analysis, data management, the coding process, interpretation, and presentation. The fourth part will describe the role of the researcher in the study, including issues related to the trustworthiness and compliance with ethical standards and procedures of the research. The chapter will conclude with a summary of the significant points examined before transitioning to chapter four.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Despite the shortcomings of the qualitative approach, it was a suitable approach to the exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. It was the best research methodology that allowed these expert service providers to narrate their experiences with sex offense victims. My study explored the international military peacekeepers and sex offences committed in the CAR from the perspective of the experts providing various support services and assistance to the victims of sex offences, including those committed by international military peacekeepers.

I collected empirical data on the magnitude and trends of sex offences committed in the various peacekeeping operations that have taken or currently taking place in the CAR by various categories of personnel and the various factors that impacted the criminal accountability of the perpetrators, especially individual members of military contingents. The data gathered for this study clarify why there is an increase in the allegations of sex offences committed by military peacekeepers and the perceptions of the current procedure for handling such offences from the perspective of the experts providing support services and assistance to the sex victims. Although several studies have been conducted on the sex crimes, including those committed by international military peacekeepers, none have explored the topic from the viewpoint of service providers. Their lived experiences may be useful in informing the investigations, prosecution, and sanctioning procedure of these offences.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, and instrumentation. It further presents the recruitment of participants, and data collection procedures. It also presents the analysis plan, trustworthiness, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The chapter presents ethical strategies before concluding with a summary and the transition.

Research Design and Rationale

The exploratory phenomenological qualitative research approach as a study methodology is used to understand and narrate the general nature of a phenomenon. This research approach allows researchers to investigate participants' daily experiences and how they understand them while suspending the predetermined assumptions about the event (Dykes & Williams, 1999; Greenfield & Jensen, 2010). When researchers use the phenomenological research design, they shed light on the participants' feelings, perceptions, and beliefs to clarify the nature of the event under research. Researchers using this approach bring out the experiences of others in place of actively involving themselves in the incident (Dykes & Williams, 1999).

For this study, I focused on the research questions "What are the lived experiences of the experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by the military peacekeepers in the CAR, and secondly, the essence these experts make of their experiences with these sex victims." That is why the exploratory phenomenological design is well suited to exploring this research study. The strategy explored the lived experiences of participants in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences in general and victims of those offences committed by the

international military peacekeepers in various peacekeeping operations in the CAR. The exploration of these lived experiences required in-depth individual interview data collection and analysis of the procedures involved.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in conducting a qualitative research study is to attempt to access the thoughts and feelings of the research participants (Sutton & Austin, 2015). For this qualitative phenomenological study, I explored participants' behavior, thoughts, and feelings in narrating their lived experiences as I collected data through face-to-face interviews using open ended questions. I focused on understanding how the participants experienced their support and assistance to sex offense victims, especially victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in the various peacekeeping operations in CAR. It is easy for the researcher to influence data collection when carrying out a qualitative study, so researchers must always acknowledge and describe their role in the research (Orb et al., 2004). Qualitative researchers must be guided by the ethical principles of autonomy, beneficence, and justice in addressing the goals of the research as well as the rights of the study participants (Orb et al., 2004). The process in qualitative research is interpretive and involves researcher participation to either collect data through observation or interviews (Creswell, 2014). As such, the researcher's role is to identify their own inherent biases, including any possible ethical concerns that will impact the collection and interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014).

In this study, I accessed the thoughts and feelings of my research participants through face-to-face interviews using open ended questions, collected and analyzed the

data using the Van Kaam design. I had no connection with my selected participants that could have influenced the data collection or the interpretation of the collected data. My participants were selected using snowball sampling. As the researcher, I also gave a lot of consideration to subjectivity and bias, which are inherent threats to the credibility of a qualitative study. To additionally make my study trustworthy, I considered its credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures.

Methodology

I used the qualitative phenomenological approach in conducting this study. Qualitative inquiries involve collecting and analyzing non-numerical data to understand concepts, opinions, and experiences (Bhandari, 2020). There are several flexible approaches to qualitative study, but the one suitable for the current research was the phenomenological approach (Bhandari, 2020). I used this methodology because it is most suited in describing a phenomenon of everyday life experiences. Phenomenology, most significantly, also aims to determine the form and nature of reality as imagined by an individual's experiencing it (Priest, 2002). For these reasons, I found it a good design and used it in exploring the lived experiences of service providers, who are experts in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by military peacekeepers. Phenomenological research is a unique methodology that helps scholars learn from others' lived experiences (Neubauer et al., 2019). The phenomenological approach focuses on how individuals understand the meanings of lived experiences (Fuster, 2019).

The data source is the verbatim transcripts of the participants' interview audio recordings. However, other sources like group discussions, written accounts, or diary entries can also be available in qualitative designs. The research questions for my study was to explore the lived experiences of the experts who provide various support services and assistance to victims of sex offences, including those committed by military peacekeepers in various peacekeeping operations that have taken place or are currently taking place in CAR. Hearing these experiences from their very own mouths provided valuable insights that could inform the procedure of investigating, prosecuting, and holding the alleged peacekeepers accountable as well as taking the interest of the sex victim into consideration.

Participant Selection Logic

Sampling is selecting or searching for participants who can provide rich and adequate data on the event or phenomenon under study (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). Sampling in qualitative research is a deliberate rather than random process. Phenomenology largely employs criterion sampling, in which participants meet predefined criteria (Moser & Korstjens, 2018). For this qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic study, I used the purposive and snowball sampling to determine the professional group from which to select participants. This led me to focus on experts who are service providers, providing medical, psychosocial, and judicial support and assistance to the sex victims in CAR. A participant who met this predefined criterion was chosen for a face to face and one-on-one interview on his lived experiences. Through the interviewed first participant, I used the snowball sampling now to invite and interviewed

the rest of the study participants. Some of the study participants worked for local and international non-governmental organizations, while others worked for religious organizations that supported and assisted victims of sex offenses in CAR in the medical, psychosocial, and judicial domains. The table below present the area of expertise from which the expert service providers were selected.

Table 1

Participants and Area of Expertise Support and Assistance to Sex Victims

| Participants | Profession Area | Area of Victim Support & Assistance |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| P1 | Medical Doctor | Medical Assistance |
| P2 | Social Worker | Psychosocial Assistance |
| P3 | Lawyer | Judicial Assistance |
| P4 | Social Worker | Psychosocial Assistance |
| P5 | Social Worker | Psychosocial Assistance |
| P6 | Coordinator Judicial Clinic | Judicial Support & Assistance |

The table above presents the total number of participants who took part in the study. Participants were selected based on the expertise they provide to the victims and the amount of time they spent in providing support and assistance to the victims. Social workers make up half the number of participants because they spend a lot of time counseling and helping to get the victims out of trauma and at times live with the victims and accompany them to see the other service providers, that include the medical and

judicial assistance. They are more with the sex victims than any other expert service providers and have a deeper lived experience supporting and assisting sex victims.

In qualitative research, achieving data saturation is an important guiding principle used to determine sample size (Saunders, et al., 2018). Data saturation in qualitative inquiry refers to the extent to which no more new information is gotten in the research process (Saunders, et al., 2018). Saturation may help estimate sample sizes for qualitative studies and can also be used to present the grounds on which saturation was achieved (Hennink et al., 2017). The designing of a qualitative sampling plan is done only with estimates. However, for this study, I had planned interviewing between 10 and 15 participants, but ended up interviewing six participants. After interviewing the third participant, I reached the saturation point in data collection as the fourth, fifth, and sixth participants narrated lived experiences kept on repeating almost what the first, second and third had narrated. There was no more new information. At this stage, I stopped interviewing new participants. My participant selection was tailored and focused only on the lived experiences of the CAR experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. This specific focus of my research study required just a small participant sample size with knowledge and experience in the area under the study consideration.

Instrumentation

Research studies have several instruments with which data can be gathered (Sutton & Austin, 2015). Instrumentation is the tools or means by which researchers attempt to measure variables or items of interest in the data collection process (Sutton &

Austin, 2015). The two main types of data collected in research include primary and secondary data. Preliminary data, otherwise referred to as raw data, constitute the first-hand data collected directly from the source of the study. The researcher interacts, analyze, and interprets this data before drawing conclusions. On the other hand, secondary data represents information already collected, structured, and analyzed by one or more researchers. I used both the primary and secondary data sources for my research.

Data gathering instruments include historical surveys, interviews, archival data, case studies, and experiments (Ritchie et al., 2013). Data collected from the secondary sources was supplementary, and it assisted me in broadening the understanding of the lived experiences of the experts providing various support services and assistance to victims of sex offences, including those committed by military peacekeepers in various peacekeeping operations in CAR that I used as my participants.

On the data collection method, interviews should not be conducted generically but rather should be done with a specific research theme and question in consideration using open-ended interview questions. Interviews as a form of data collection are the most used format for collecting qualitative inquiry data (Jamshed, 2014). Most qualitative research interviews are semi structured, lightly structured, or in-depth. Semi structured interviews are in-depth, and the respondents must respond to preset open-ended questions. Such interviews are extensively used as an interviewing tool with individuals or groups (Jamshed, 2014). For the interview data collection to be effectively captured, recording should be an appropriate choice because it makes it easier for the researcher to focus on the content of the interview, which can later be used to generate the verbatim transcript of

the interview (Jamshed, 2014). My research study used semi structured, and in-depth interview questions to collect data from participants through one-on-one interviews.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The research topic was narrowed down in terms of the time frames, resources available, and the participants that I recruited. I used the purposeful criterion and snowball samplings to identify and select participants. Creswell (2014) explains purposeful criterion sampling as allowing for the selection of participants who can inform the understanding of the primary phenomenon of a study. I contacted one potential participant using the criterion purposive sampling by email and followed-up with him through telephone calls to request for his willingness and availability to voluntarily participate in my study interview. Upon acceptance, I then arranged and agreed with him on the interview date, time, and location. We later then met in an arranged quiet study room at the catholic church library that I had booked for the purpose and conducted a one-on-one and face-to-face recorded interview.

Every interview began with a social conversation to enhance trust and set a comfortable tone before settling down to it (Moustakas, 1994). Following that initial interview, I asked the participant before ending the interview, if he knew other experienced expert service providers who would be willing and available to participate in the interview voluntarily. He proposed and shared the names and contacts of those experts with me, and I contacted them, and this is how I proceeded with the rest of participant selection and interviews. The same interview invitations and conditions were

used for all participants and same semi-structured, in-depth, and open-ended questions. All the interviewed participants accepted to voluntarily participate and were non-paid.

The participants before being interviewed were briefed on the nature, purpose, and objective of the interview as the primary source of qualitative inquiries. Interviews are the primary and most common source of collecting data in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). All participants signed an informed consent form and were briefed by me on the confidentiality principle and the handling of the data to be collected before the beginning of the interviews. The briefing of participants and the signing of an informed consent form is an ethical practice for protecting the participants, and that vulnerable participants will not be used in the research project (Ritchie et al., 2013). The participants were not identified during the data analysis and presentation as the data was coded and each of the six participants was given a number that ranged from participant one (P1) through six (P6). I conducted follow-up interviews with various participants as needed. As the researcher, I shared my contact information, email and telephone numbers with the participants as required and in case of any follow-up interviews (Flick, 2014).

Though information collected through participant interviews constituted primary data for the study, secondary data provided information useful for my literature review for the research study. It was by initially reviewing the existing literature that I detected the existing gap which constituted the research topic for this study. Sources of secondary dataset that was used for this study included books, peer reviewed journal articles,

websites, and published records accessible to the public through free the Internet websites.

I first collected my data through face-to-face interviews with participants who were all French speakers, and then translated the collected data from French to English and shared it with a professional translator to ascertain that the translation was authentic. After the achievement of both meaning and data saturation after interviewing the sixth participant, I stopped the interviews and data collection. Upon approval of the authenticity of my interview translations from French to English by the certified professional translator, I proceeded to its manual coding and analysis using the Modified Van Kaam methodology according to the advice received from my peers. Given the voluminous nature and size of the collected data, it required a lot of diligence in handling.

Data Analysis Plan and Steps

Data analysis in qualitative research study refers to the process by which researchers systematically search and arrange the interview transcripts, observation notes, or other non-textual materials that the researcher accumulates to increase the understanding of an event or a phenomenon (Bengtsson, 2016). All data analysis aims to organize and elicit meaning from the collected data in drawing realistic conclusions (Bengtsson, 2016). The researcher must ensure through a transparent process the quality of the data analysis from raw data to results (Bengtsson, 2016). However, in the analysis process, there is always the possibility of human mistakes occurring, and this could happen because of fatigue, interpretation errors, and personal bias (Bengtsson, 2016). For this study, I avoided these human mistakes during my data collection, analysis, and

interpretation, by taking breaks to avoid tiredness and fatigue, read participants interview scripts to avoid errors, misconceptions, and personal bias.

There are six steps in analyzing and interpreting qualitative data collected. These include the preparation and organization of the data for analysis, exploration, and coding of the data, coding to build descriptions and themes, representing and reporting the qualitative findings, interpreting the results, and validating the accuracy of the findings. The qualitative data obtained from interviews, written open questions, and pictures are essentially expressed in words and not in figures. That is why the researcher must use content analysis instead of statistical analysis to give meaning to that data (Bengtsson, 2016).

Coding, as defined by Crosley and Jansen (2020), is a qualitative data analysis strategy where some parts of the data is assigned a descriptive label, allowing the researcher to identify the related content across the collected data. The codes are then used to derive themes and patterns for the data analysis. According to Crosley and Jansen (2020), there are two main approaches to coding, which include the deductive and inductive approaches. Deductive coding uses the pre-established codes developed before the researcher's interaction with the collected data. The pre-established principles are either based on the research questions or are based on previous research. In data analysis, deductive coding helps quickly identify relevant data. Inductive coding involves developing the codes based on what is found within the data collected (Crosley & Jansen, 2020). Inductive coding is great when researching a thing that is not yet well understood, as the coding derived directly from the data assists the researcher in exploring the subject

better. This type of coding is ideal for investigating new ideas and concepts or creating new theories. The researcher can, however, use what is called hybrid coding. It combines the deductive and inductive coding (Crosley & Jansen, 2020).

Whatever the approach adopted by the researcher, there are two steps in the coding process. The first step, known as the initial coding, is to identify the essence of the text and code it accordingly. This can be done using the various qualitative analysis coding software packages. Otherwise, textual data coding can be done using Microsoft Word's comments feature. The main approaches to initial coding are In vivo, process, open, descriptive, structural, and value coding. The second step in coding is line-by-line coding. This step means reviewing data line by line while digging deeper and assigning additional codes to each line (Crosley & Jansen, 2020). Line-by-line coding pays close attention to details as it is helpful to code everything in the data making the coding more thorough and detailed for a much better understanding of the data (Crosley & Jansen, 2020). For this study, I used the hybrid coding approach because the deductive approach helped me to quickly identify the relevant data. In contrast, the inductive approach was helpful in better understanding and capturing the aspects of the data that I had not yet understood relative to the lived experiences of the different participants and that is the reason why I read the scripts over and over to capture these aspects (Crosley & Jansen, 2020).

Using the phenomenological approach to data analysis, Priest (2002) has described and compared several well-established phenomenological data analysis strategies that helped in understanding the collected data. Priest (2002) descriptively

distinguished separate phenomenological data analyses that include the Modified Van Kaam design approach. This design approach was created by Van Kaam in 1969 and popularized by Moustakas in 1994 (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017). The Modified Van Kaam design is best suited to analyzing and interpreting lived experiences. That is why I used the Modified Van Kaam data analysis and interpretation for this study as I needed to understand and make essence from the lived experiences of the CAR experts providing support services and assistance to victims of sex offenses, including those committed by international military peacekeepers in various peacekeeping operations in that country.

I employed the Modified Van Kaam data analysis design as presented by Moustakas (1994) to conduct my data analysis for this study by adhering to the nine steps approach in handling my raw interview data collected to explore, reflect upon how the experts providing support and assistance lived their experiences with sex victims and the essence they made of those experiences. Through the phenomenological reduction and analysis, I developed the textural and structural descriptions that led me to what and how sex offense victims manage their lives after forcefully going through their ordeal with international military peacekeepers based on the participants narrations. The data analysis consisted of the completion of the nine step processes that include horizontalization, reduction and elimination of horizons to determine invariant constituents, clustering and thematization of the invariant constituents, construction of an individual textural description for each participant, construction of a composite textural description, construction for each participant an individual structural description, construction of a composite structural description, and the developing of a composite textural-structural

description of the essences of the experience representing the groups as a whole. Each of the nine steps in the analysis process is discussed here below.

Step 1: Horizontalization

This is the first step in the Modified Van Kaam data analysis process. At this level, the entire data is treated equally. This means no excerpt is more important than the other. Here I began the process of preliminary coding and putting into groups through the listing of every relevant quote to the phenomenon being investigated. I started by first reading the transcript after reviewing research question and study purpose. I kept on reminding myself of bracketing my views and options from influencing my data process analysis in any way and made sure that I used participants' own words as coming out of their mouths. Each time that I read through each transcript, I made notes on the margins using both emic and etic coding. Emic codes are codes drawn or coming directly from the words of the participants (Moustakas, 1994), while etic codes are those that speak to theory.

For every participant's interview, I completed the horizontalization of the data expressing his or her lived experience. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalization is the process of treating data with equal weight and value. Horizons are the circumstances that give a phenomenon its unique characteristics and enable us to interpret an experience as assertions. I read all through each participant's statement, analyzed, and highlighted significant portions of it as units of meaning potentially helpful in the understanding of the lived experiences of expert service providers regarding the sex offense victims. Moustakas (1994) says horizons are unlimited. I however remained

cognizant of the fact that every unit of meaning must be considered with same equal importance, and I acknowledged this from the very first beginning of my data analysis. This led me to the second step consisting of reduction and elimination.

Step 2: Reduction and Elimination

At this point, I started asking questions on the two criteria below using the list of all participants' expression excerpts. To reach the invariant constituents, I minimized and removed overlapping or duplicated horizons from each data source. The distinctive features of an experience are its invariant components (Moustakas, 1994). They are the phenomenon's established significant and pertinent horizons. Each previously explicated unit of meaning underwent reduction under the scrutiny of two criteria set out by Van Kaam (Moustakas, 1994) as follows: Does it include a crucial and sufficient moment from the experience for comprehension? And can it be abstracted and labeled? An expression was regarded as a horizon of the experience if it satisfied both criteria. I dropped the excerpt if it didn't fit the criteria. Units of meaning that were redundant or overlapping were changed in terms or deleted altogether. What was left were invariant components.

Step 3: Clustering and Thematizing Invariant Constituents

The subsequent stage of data analysis involved clustering and thematizing the invariant constituents. This was achieved by carefully reflecting upon the invariant elements and grouping them into clusters, which ultimately resulted in identifying themes related to the experience. Upon completion of the transcript analysis, I scrutinized the invariant constituents and classified them in a logical manner. The thematizing

constituents were then transformed into themes that were representative of the participant's experience (Moustakas, 1994). At this stage, I began exploring the latent meanings and grouping horizons based on those latent meanings. These groupings of horizons constituted the themes that expressed the experiences of every participant.

Step 4: Checking the Themes Against the Data

Under step 4, after generating the theme, I started validating those themes against the data set. That was to ensure that the themes reflected the participants' experiences and helped to tell their stories. I ended this descriptive process for each data source, by reviewing transcripts, horizons, the invariant constituents, and the themes that told the participants experience and narrated their stories.

Step 5: Creating Individual Textural Descriptions

For step 5, I came up with unique textural descriptors for each of the participants. These consisted of descriptions that made use of the participants' quotations and verbatim snippets. I then created the composite textural description that outlined the themes shared by all participants by combining all the individual textural descriptions.

Step 6: Creating Individual Structural Descriptions

At this stage of the data analysis, I built unique structural descriptions for each study participant. I focused on the analyses of the relationships between the participants' statements on an emotional, social, and cultural level, making sure that, the main analysis of the data was put into use.

Step 7: Creating the Composite Textural Descriptions

Here, I presented all the themes from each participant into the table that I created. This table permitted me to identify the commonalities and key themes among all the participants, because this is what I wanted the most. This combined description gave me the summary of what participants had expressed in their interviews as well as highlighted the recurring themes of their lived experiences with victims of sex offenses as they had been experienced while providing them with the support and assistance necessary for their journey to recovery and the rebuilding of the victims' lives.

Step 8: Creating the Composite Structural Descriptions

I examined the links among participants' emotional, social, and cultural experiences as a whole or in their entirety. At this phase of my data analysis, I outlined the aspects of the participants' experiences that were common to participants, as the participants for the study were drawn from different expertise backgrounds that consisted of medical, psychosocial, and judicial fields of work within the CAR population. What mattered here however was not the common factors that existed among the study participants. The most important thing here is that I took all the elements into consideration. My thoughts and analysis at this stage started focusing on the aspects that factored most in the participants experience and these included as well as the factors that shaped those experiences. The elements that factored into the participants' experiences and informed them the most were abandonment, empowerment, emotionalism, expectations, challenges, justice, impunity, powerlessness, poverty, and sensitization, among others.

Here, the researcher may start to think about what factors influenced the experiences of the participants the most as well as what factors shaped those experiences.

Step 9: Creating a Composite Structural-Textural Description

This is the last of the nine steps of the Modified Van Kaam data analysis design also called synthesis. At this phase, I began blending both the texture and structure of the participants experiences to fully understand the lived experiences of these expert service providers in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses and the essence that they made from those experiences in the light of the two research questions. This is exactly what my practical experience with the studied phenomenon boiled down to.

This is how I practically experienced the Modified Van Kaam data analysis design in this study. Notwithstanding the lengthy nature of this data analysis methodology, it was important and suitable for me as the most appropriate data analysis plan for a phenomenological study because it maintained the integrity of the participants' voices and words as coming directly out of their own mouths. Analyzing my data using this design provided me with a comprehensive understanding of the participants' actual experience of their lived experiences with the sex offense victims without altering their story, experience, or narrative. This data analysis design further suited my study because it allows qualitative researchers to delve deeper into the lived experience of participants and understand the nature of the phenomena through the voice of the experiencer.

Issues of Trustworthiness

In qualitative research methodology, trustworthiness means the systematic rigor of the study design, including the researcher's credibility, the believability of the research

findings as well as the applicability of the study methodology (Rose & Johnson, 2020). I established trustworthiness in this study by engaging with the participants informally prior to and during my interviews by maintaining a relationship of trust and by stating the objectives of my study and my role as the researcher clearly. I explained the purpose of my research to the study participants, as being purely academic. The participants and I as the researcher further strengthened the trust in each other and in the study, when we both understood the necessity and importance that this study could bring to the plight of the victims of sex offenses committed by international peacekeepers. My further, enlisting of participants as co-researchers of the study by asking them to review their interview transcripts and provide feedback also increased the transparency and trustworthiness of the study.

Through the above, trustworthiness was seen as the overall impression of quality linked to the qualitative research study effort, which can be achieved by addressing issues of reliability and validity in alignment with more significant issues of ontological, epistemological, and paradigmatic affiliation (Rose & Johnson, 2020). For the qualitative study to be accepted as trustworthy, the researchers must show proof that the data analysis has been carried out in a precise, consistent, as well as in a thorough manner by recording and systematizing (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher must also disclose the detailed methodology of analyzing the data for the reader to determine if the process used is credible enough (Nowell et al., 2017). The exclusive presentation and discussion of the Modified Van Kaam data analysis, the way I have done above is detailed and conclusive as required of the researcher. Qualitative research intends to generate knowledge

grounded in human experience, consequently establishing a unique place in literature research (Sandelowski, 2004). Given the increasing use, recognition, and valorization of qualitative research, its use must be carried out rigorously and methodologically to bring out meaningful and valuable findings (Attride-Stirling, 2001). It can therefore be asserted that the growth of qualitative research in social and behavioral sciences is a well-noted and welcomed fact, although it remains lacking in terms of the tools to analyze qualitative material (Attride-Stirling, 2001). There is therefore a need for greater disclosure and more sophisticated tools that can assist in carrying out trustworthy qualitative research studies by researchers (Sandelowski, 2004).

Credibility

Credibility is an essential element of trustworthiness in qualitative research. The question is, how can credibility in qualitative research be established? Anney (2014) says credibility is a way of showing whether a research study's findings are reasonably drawn from the data collected and correctly interpreted from the statements given by participants. The strategies for building credibility are identified to include field experience, the sampling approach, triangulation, member checking, field journals, interview techniques, peer review, and establishing authority and structure (Anney, 2014). With regards to these credibility strategies, Shenton (2004) has gone beyond by adding a comprehensive literature review, description of the event, negative case analysis, and review of interview questions for falsehood. According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), the determination of the credibility of a research study occurs when a recognizable experience challenges readers or co-researchers.

The techniques of addressing credibility issues suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1989) include prolonged engagement, data collection triangulation, persistent observation, and researcher triangulation. Triangulation in research occurs when the researcher corroborates evidence (Creswell, 2014). In this study, triangulation was met through the collection of data from multiple sources using a variety of methods. The data sources included the interviews of the six study participants by me, the researcher.

Peer debriefing to provide a kind of external check on the research process to increase credibility is also recommended, and the examination of referential adequacy to check the preliminary findings and interpretation of the collected raw data (Stahl & King, 2020). I established an interpretive community for this study by engaging a peer reviewer and by also working with my committee members before and during data collection, analysis, and presentation of the findings. A peer reviewer with a doctoral degree, conversant with the qualitative phenomenological design of lived experiences provided an external check of my research processes. The external peer reviewer asked the pertinent questions to provoke reasoning, and thought in me about methods, meanings, and interpretations and this extended and exposed my thinking (Stahl & King, 2020). The credibility of qualitative research can also be established through member checking because this will help in testing the findings and interpretations with the study participants (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Regarding this research study, the main strategies used to establish credibility included triangulation, multiple data collection strategies, and the use of peer review. Triangulation is a methodology that is used to increase the creditability and validity of

research findings in qualitative inquiry (Noble & Heale, 2019). Otherwise stated, triangulation means using numerous sources of data or policy from the field to frequently establish recognizable designs or patterns (Stahl & King, 2020). Triangulation through the combination of multiple data sources, theories, methodologies, and investigators in a research study, ensures that the fundamental biases resulting from using one method or observer are mitigated (Cope, 2014; Noble & Heale, 2019; Shenton, 2004).

Triangulation is thus an effort toward exploring and explaining complex human nature using several methods to give a reasonably balanced explanation to literary critics (Noble & Heale, 2019). Despite the richness and clarity of triangulation to research studies, it also has its limitations, that includes the complexity of investigations and time consumption, the requirement of a skilled analyst, and an overestimation of its value in certain studies, among many other limitations (Noble & Heale, 2019).

Member Checking

Member checking is a practice whereby participants are given an opportunity to review and remark their interview transcripts to ensure that accuracy was used to increase credibility (Creswell, 2014). Stahl & King (2020) consider member checking the most critical technique for establishing credibility in a qualitative study. My study participants were considered as co-researchers and given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts. This permitted them to give the feedback on interview transcriptions and this helped me to confirm my data accuracy and minimized the threat of mistakes in my transcripts. Member checking was implemented after the interviews were transcribed. The audio recorded interviews of the study participants were transcribed manually.

Transferability

Transferability in research refers to the generalizability of the inquiry, which concerns only case-to-case transfer (Tobin & Begley, 2004). According to Anney (2014) and Shenton (2004), the notion of transferability, also known as external validity, is the ability to apply the findings of a given study elsewhere. Cope (2014) explicitly states that the transferability of qualitative research is when its results have meaning to people not directly involved in the study and when those who read it can relate their situations to such findings. However, not all qualitative research data is transferable because the researcher intends to focus on the non-transferability of the conclusions of such phenomena or other situations. Anney (2014) recognizes two transferability measures: thick descriptions and purposive sampling.

To permit transferability, Shenton (2004) states that the research study must provide enough details of the circumstances of the fieldwork helpful to the reader as I did in this study using the Modified van Kaam data analysis design, to determine whether the prevailing environment is like another familiar one where the research findings can be justifiably applicable. My study presented a detailed data analysis description, and, with the user research methodology, this made the study transferable, especially with regards to similar studies examining the lived experiences of any stakeholders involved in an event or phenomenon (Anney, 2014).

Dependability

Dependability is another important aspect of credibility. It refers to the study's reliability, also known as data consistency (Anney, 2014; Cope, 2014; Shenton, 2004).

To establish this study's dependability, I ensured that the research procedure was objective, traceable, and well documented (Nowell et al., 2017). The ability of the readers to examine the study procedure makes them better placed to judge its dependability and a way of demonstrating the dependability of a research process is by auditing it (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Anney (2014) confirms audit trails to determine the dependability of research and added stepwise replication, peer review, and code agreement. Shenton (2004), however, pointed out that dependability sometimes can be a problem in qualitative inquiry, although high credibility is related to high dependability. This means that if the researcher and the study methodology used in conducting the study are credible, the study itself should also be dependable (Tobin & Begley, 2004). For these reasons, member checking, triangulation, and peer review are ways of establishing the credibility and dependability of a study and I scrupulously respected these aspects in carrying out this study.

Confirmability

The confirmability of a research is concerned with establishing that the interpretation and the results of the study presented by the researcher are understandably derived from the collected data, necessitating the researcher to reveal how the study conclusions and interpretations were arrived at (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Research confirmability is related to corroborating research findings (Anney, 2014). To Guba and Lincoln (1989), study confirmability is arrived at when credibility, transferability, and dependability are established. On the other hand, Tobin, and Begley (2004) state that those researchers working within the framework of the naturalistic paradigm query the

use of validity, reliability, and generalizability in demonstrating the robustness of the qualitative inquiry. Confirmability and completeness of a study can be demonstrated by triangulation, which also ensures study acceptability across paradigms (Tobin & Begley, 2004). I ensured all the confirmability requirements were scrupulously respected throughout my data collection and analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Qualitative studies, by their nature, entail the interaction of researchers and participants, and this can be challenging ethically, especially as this relationship spans through all stages of the study (Sanjari et al. 2014). Qualitative researchers therefore face ethical challenges at all stages of the research, from design to reporting of the findings. These challenges include anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and researchers' potential influence on the study participants and vice versa (Sanjari et al. 2014). Ethical codes or standards are envisaged to protect research participants from harm. These ethical standards may vary from one profession to another and from one country to another and are also opened to change (Flick, 2014). According to Flick (2014), an ethical theory has four concerns: non-maleficence, beneficence, self-determination, and justice. While non-maleficence means not harming the study human subjects by the researcher, beneficence means the researcher should produce knowledge that is beneficial to the population.

On the other hand, self-determination requires respect for the study participants' values and decisions, while justice means equal treatment for everyone involved in the study. Acceptance to participate in a research study like this one, must be the voluntary decision of the participant following an informed documented consent. I ensured that I

obtained the permission of my study participants through a duly completed and signed consent form available on the Walden University website. This form is essential because it communicates the confidentiality of the data collected and the respect for the privacy of research participants.

Other crucial research aspects covered by the consent form that I considered, included the voluntary participation and reasons for participation, the participation process, the objectives of the research, data collection, storage, and analysis methodologies, the confidentiality nature of the data collected, the audience request, the purpose and use of the research findings, contact information of the researcher, the source of the research funding as well as the time required to complete the study (Flick, 2014). Throughout my research process, I ensured compliance with all the above ethical procedures while respecting and protecting the integrity of the data collected and its sources.

To protect the identity of the study participants, anonymous codes were assigned to each participant, and the list of the codes equating to the participants was separated and safely kept apart from the raw data in a non-electronic form. I locked this form in my research cabinet which I safely kept in my private office in the house. The study participants were made up of persons who do not work for peacekeeping operations, but rather they consisted of expert service providers who provide support services and assistance to victims of sex offences, including those victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in CAR. Participants had the freedom to withdraw their participation from this study process at any time convenient to them if they wanted

to without any consequences. I made it clear that such participants who would choose to withdraw from the study would not have their identities revealed. I also informed all the participants as they opted to participate in the study that their participation was voluntary and non-paid without any other expectations before, during or after the participation ends.

Summary and Transition

Chapter three described the research methodology used in carrying out this study. I selected the qualitative inquiry design for the study, discussed the related concepts, and stated why the method was best suited to my study. Although the chapter mentioned various qualitative research types, I focused on the hermeneutic phenomenological research approach most suited to studying lived experiences and used the Modified Van Kaam methodology in analyzing and presenting my collected data. These approaches are well suited for the study of lived experiences of the CAR expert service providers providing support services and assistance to victims of sex offenses, including those committed by the international military peacekeepers and the essence they make of those lived experiences.

Chapter three further detailed how the study participants were recruited, the use of open-ended, and in-depth interview questions, and how the data collected was analyzed, interpreted, presented, and used to inform the research problem and questions. The detailed participant sampling design and size were also discussed in this chapter. The issue of trustworthiness in qualitative research inquiries was examined with a focus on the credibility and transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study. The chapter ended up with a discussion on the ethical considerations, measures, and

procedures that I used to address them in the appropriate manner so they would not harm the study. Upon approval of this research study by my committee and the university IRB, I immediately embarked on the preparation, collection, management of the study data, and presentation of its findings.

Chapter 4 presents the results and findings of this study. It submits the description of data collection, analysis, and related information management. Chapter 5 discusses the study findings, interpretations, and how they impact social change. This chapter also presents the implications of the study, recommendations for future research and the limitations or challenges faced in conducting the study.

Chapter 4: Results

With the use of the phenomenological qualitative study design, this research project explored the international military peacekeepers and sex offenses committed in the CAR by examining the lived experiences of expert service providers providing various support and assistance services to victims of sex offences. The significance of this topic rests in the fact that no researcher has examined the topic of sex crimes committed by international peacekeepers from the standpoint of the lived experiences of expert service providers providing the victims with support and assistant services. For this study, we used the interpretative phenomenological design and the Modified Van Kaam data analysis approach which are best suited for the exploration of participants' lived experiences of a phenomenon (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017). The interpretative phenomenological approach investigates the everyday experiences of human beings while suspending the researchers' preconceived assumptions about the phenomenon. The phenomenological research therefore studies lived experiences to gain deeper insights into how people understand those experiences. The Modified Van Kaam's data analysis on its part, permits qualitative researchers to deeply explore the participants' lived experiences and understand the essence of the lived phenomenon through the voices of those who lived it (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017). This chapter presents an overview of data description, transformation, analysis, and presentation.

Data Analysis

I collected the data from interviews with participants in the French language, translated it into English, and shared it with a professional language translator who

reviewed and approved the translation as authentic prior to my data analysis. Using the Modified Van Kaam data analysis methodology, I transformed, analyzed and presented the data according to the nine steps prescribed by this methodology. These nine steps include horizontalization, reduction and elimination, thematization of the invariant constituents, the checking of themes against the data, the individual textural description, the individual structural descriptions, the composite textural descriptions, the composite structural descriptions, and the composite structural-textural descriptions. Each of these steps is described here below as the data from the six participants are discussed and analyzed under each of them.

Step 1: Horizontalization

Horizontal integration involves assigning equal significance to every statement or perspective obtained from each interview, regarding the subject matter or the researched inquiries (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118). A horizon is essentially a crucial phrase taken from the transcription that expresses some significance or offers some perspective on the experiences of a participant (Greening, 2019). A thorough and thoughtful reading of the participants' interview transcripts is necessary for horizontalization.

A few rectifications were done to the transcripts after reading them back to the study participants. The peer-debriefer and I both read through the interview transcripts multiple times regarding them as having one value. It was then that both of us agreed that all the transcriptions of participants' interviews were fair and accurate for the research. To better understand the experiences of the participants in view of validating the data

processing, I and the peer-debriefer had regular meetings to further discuss our understanding of these transcripts.

To avoid personal bias and suppositions, I used bracketing as I read through the interview transcriptions (Greening, 2019). I gained a conscious awareness of the participants' lived experiences through the increased reading of transcripts multiple times (Greening, 2019). I did member checking with some participants in face-to-face meetings and with others, over the phone. I read back to them in French my English version translations of their lived experiences so they could verify and authenticate the validity of the translation as well. Triangulation was also achieved through this process.

Through the descriptive narratives of the lived experiences of the six research participants, I learned not only about their lived experiences providing support to victims of sex offenses, but also about their perspectives of justice for these victims. The six participants presented a total of 805 horizons. Though some of these horizons were related to the phenomenon under study, others transited beyond the boundary of the lived experiences of providing support to victims of sexual offenses committed by international peacekeepers in the CAR. Conscious of keeping the experience within the conceptual and contextual relevancy of my research, I maintained constant awareness of the purpose of my research and the main research questions eliciting the understanding of the lived experiences. The diversity of the horizons presented in the narrations of the lived experiences ranged from case management procedures to the difficulties achieving justice for the victims of sex crimes in CAR.

Step 2: Reduction and Elimination

Upon completion of all the transcript reviews, I started the reduction and elimination. In the reduction and elimination step of data analyses, I employed Occam's razor to reduce participants' horizons just to their lived experiences. Occam's razor is a concept that is frequently credited to William of Ockham, who asserted that if two theories compete to explain the same occurrence, you should prefer the easier or simpler one (Borgqvist & Palmer, 2022). Using Occam's razor, I streamlined and reduced the participants' interview narratives to the relevance of each participant's lived experience. I was guided by the fundamental questions of the research design: Is the experience described, relevant to understanding the lived experiences of victims of sex offenses perpetrated by international military peacekeepers in CAR? And is this description of the lived experiences repetitive?

Re-reading and evaluating each participant's narrative to find expressions or words that best capture a particular experience's primary components is the process of reduction and elimination. The process of reduction and elimination of the listed experiences of the participants is based on the following questions: Is the experience listed important to the lived phenomenon? And secondly, can the lived experience be reduced to its latent meaning? If the listed experiences did not affirm one or both two questions above, it was eliminated, and the listing of the lived experience was re-ordered as in this section. I checked each participant's list of horizons to make sure no sentences were repeated, overlapped, or had no relationship with the experienced narrated (Moustakas, 1994).

Through the elimination and reduction process, the horizons presented by the six participants were reduced from 805 to 657. All six participants experienced diverse reduction and elimination of horizons with the horizons varying between three and 55. Participant 1 presented the least reduction and elimination of horizons with only three horizons; Participant 6 presented the highest number of elimination and reduction by presenting 55 horizons. The rest of the four participants eliminated and reduced as follows: 12 horizons for P5, 13 horizons for P3, 28 horizons for P4, and 33 horizons for P2. Participants 6, 2, and 4 experienced significant reduction due to the elimination of high volumes of irrelevant horizons presented during their interviews.

While engaging in the process of elimination and reduction, I came to a personal realization of modes of human experience, the lived mode, and the communicative mode. The lived mode is the human phenomenological experience, and the communicative mode is the vocalization mode of the human lived experience. Although the communicative mode is the mode of transmission of the human lived experience, the two modes of experience are not the same. The communicative mode as the vocalization mode of human lived experience is clouded with redundancy, repetition, verbosity, and the human tendency to engage in trivial and anticlimactic of the lived experience. Borrowing from Husserl, the researcher must employ epoche or reductionism to bracket the descriptive narrative of human experience to the lived experience of the phenomenon (Lubcke, 1999).

Step 3: Thematizing the Invariant Constituents

The thematization of the invariant constituents of participants' lived experiences was achieved through the filtering of participants' descriptive narratives of those lived experiences. Each unit of participants' descriptive horizon was subjected to a two-question test, which are related to whether the quote is important to the participant's lived experience of the phenomenon and whether the quote can be reduced to its latent meaning (Greening, 2019). I categorized and grouped participants' descriptive narratives of lived experiences following latent or hidden units of meanings (Sumskis & Moxham, 2017). The groupings created the themes that represented each participant's experience (Greening, 2019).

In pursuing thematization, I repeatedly read through the experiences of all the six participants in search of themes that defined the lived experience of providing support to victims of sexual offenses committed international peacekeepers in CAR. I also explored the lived experiences and searched for commonly shared horizons among the participants. This process led to the identification of 10 major themes: victim care procedure, expectation, challenges, abandonment, emotionalism, empowerment, justice, powerlessness, sensitization, and stigmatization. These phenomenological themes are also the horizons of understanding and the expressive conduits of the shared experience of providing support to victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers.

All the themes are contextually defined within the framework of this study. Challenges as a phenomenological unit of expression was defined in context as the

difficulties encountered in providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses in CAR. Expectations as a phenomenological unit expressed participants' projections of a better victim support from the phenomenological context where justice is served to the satisfaction of the victim, her family, and society. Through the thematic of expectation, the research participants projected their aspirations for justice, change in victim perceptions, and in the ethics of international peacekeeping in CAR. Expectation symbolized an expression of personal aspirations for a new phenomenology of international peacekeeping in CAR.

The participants' descriptions of procedure reflected their phenomenological expressions of victim support. In the context of this study the theme procedure therefore symbolizes the everyday processes participants described as an integral part of the lived experience of providing support and assistance to victims of sexual abuse in CAR. Consequently, the theme procedure is used in the study to describe the logical sequence of actions participants described as essential for professional delivery of victim support.

The theme of abandonment is contextually defined in this study as a phenomenological state of neglect and relinquishment. In other words, the theme of abandonment is employed to capture the complexities of the phenomenological expressions of victim rejection and relinquishment, and the subsequent anguish that characterizes this victim lived experience. In this regard, the theme abandonment expresses the lived experience of the psychosocial, medical, and legal neglect and the subsequent anguish that characterizes the phenomenological conditions of victims of sexual abuse committed by international peacekeepers in the CAR.

Emotionalism in the study describes the communicative and phenomenological mode of the research participants describing the post-rape existential mode of victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in the CAR.

Emotionalism expressed the psychological and traumatic experience of providing support services and assistance to victims devastated by the post-rape reality of feelings of worthlessness, rejection, abandonment, isolation, persistent sadness, and the consequent resort to alcohol and drug abuse that characterize the life of the victim post abuse.

Victim empowerment in the study is a phenomenological mode of expression describing what research participants perceived as capable of rebuilding and strengthening emotionally, psychologically, economically, and socially the lives of victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in CAR. Participants perceived justice as a powerful tool of psychosocial healing and empowerment of the participant. The desire for justice was expressed by the research participants as that aspirational phenomenological mode that would result in some form of emotional self-healing. Consequently, the expressions of justice in the descriptive narratives of the participants reflected their desires for phenomenological mode of existence in which victims of sexual offenses are treated equally with fairness and the perpetrators of the abuse legally tried in the presence of the victim, her family, and the community where the sexual crime was committed.

Sensitization as a theme of the study was employed to capture the need for community awareness and education expressed by the participants as the desired phenomenological state that would result in the elimination of victim stigmatization and

social isolation post-abuse. Participants also described this phenomenological mode as one in which awareness raising and education of victims of sex offenses on their human rights and justice procedural matters result in optimal gain. Victim stigmatization was the participants' expressions of the phenomenological conditions of existence of the victims of sexual offenses in the larger community and family contexts. In their own voices, participants described the phenomenon of stigmatization as characteristic of the behavior of the CAR community and victim's family post-abuse. Participants described this behavior as the revictimization and psychological traumatization of the victim. Stigmatization according to the research participants is descriptive of community and family perception of the victim, a perception that is nourished by the feeling that the victim somehow invited the mishap upon herself.

After gathering and organizing the selected 10 themes from the shared lived experiences of the six participants involved in this study, I alphabetically presented them in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Selected Themes Common to Participants' Shared Experiences

| Themes | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 |
|----------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Abandonment | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Challenges | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Emotionalism | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Empowerment | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Expectations | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Powerlessness | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Procedure | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Justice | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Sensitization | X | | X | X | X | X |
| Stigmatization | X | X | X | | X | X |

Step 4: Checking the Themes Against the Dataset

Themes are features of participants' accounts characterizing lived experiences and or perceptions that the researcher sees as relevant to the research question (Greening, 2019). Themes validate participants lived experiences by enabling traceability matching between the themes and the lived experience described by the participants in the dataset. I started the checking of the themes by condensing and grouping the transcribed data into categories that reflect the units of meanings or horizons that identify and describe the essence of the lived experiences. This stage of the data analysis therefore entailed checking the themes against the experiences described by the participants in a way to provide context to the lived experiences as described by the participant.

Theme A: Procedure

Procedure in the context of this research relates to the method used by the participants to provide victim assistance. This theme featured extensively in participants' description of their lived experiences. They wanted me to know their experiences with victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers as lived in the context or within a systematic procedure that avoided participant becoming part of the problem. In the context of this study procedure therefore means the steps or logical sequence of actions employed by the participants to alleviate the impact of the sexual offense committed by the perpetrator on the victim.

Regarding the procedure in providing support and assistance services to victims of sex offenses, each participant presented the procedure from the specific type of support

and assistance service each of them provides to the sex victim. P1 stated from the psychosocial point of view that,

In case of sexual abuse, the first thing to do is to give medical care to the victim. If she is weeping, you have to allow her cry to relieve herself of the emotional torture. After sending the victim to hospital for medical care, we then try to reinstate her into the society.

P2, on the procedure from the legal point of view said,

I interview the victims, write complaints, deposit, them with the legal department, or at the Special Unit for sexual abuses, and I do a follow up to the tribunal for hearings. ... sometimes, it happens that I initiate a legal procedure with a victim.

P3 on the procedure from the medical standpoint stated that:

We prescribe tests to be carried out in the laboratory. ... When she comes a bit above 72 hours, we give her a peel and some drugs and ask her to come the next day. When we interpret the results, and the pregnancy test is positive, we enable her to start prenatal consultation. When the test is negative, we give her moral support by letting her know that it is not her fault.

P4 on the procedure said, "I start by giving them psychological support to enable them have psychological balance." P5 describes procedure in this way:

The ideal first, is to save the victim's life. First, we finish at our own level, which is psychosocial and then send the victim to the hospital for medical treatment.

After medical care, we then know from the victims if they will want the matter to

go to court, then a complaint will be drafted by a legal firm for the hearing to take place to the satisfaction of victims.

P6 said,

For victims of sexual abuse, we take legal action but, the first thing is that we register the cases, interview the victims, write a report, and send the victims to health units for medical care ... If the victim accepts, we file a complaint and justice takes its course in the courts.

Theme B: Expectations

All the six participants in the study expressed their lived experiences within the context of the theme expectation. Expectation summarily here refers to all that the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers wanted to achieve, request and accept to receive from the services of the support and assistance expert providers. The expectations of the victims of sex offenses as stated by P1 are: *“The expectations of the victims are usually medical care, judgment, and condemnation. Sometimes they expect to be compensated..... We expected the parents to give their consent for legal action for immediate legal action or in the future,”* in case of minors. The expectations for P2 were *“What the victim expects, is for the perpetrator to be judged and punished. Even if the soldier is only judged and punished without compensation to the victim, the victim will have a calm mind, and that is already something better”*. On the expectations of victims, P3 said *“Normally, when they come to us, they expect us to give them medical and psychosocial care till they can take care of themselves. For those who are pregnant they think that we must assist them through*

delivery and take care of their children..... They expect the perpetrators to first recognize the pregnancy, and later take care of them to continue their education if she were a student.” P4 who prefers to call victims, survivors, said: *“Survivors’ expectations are documented, and they expect to be given legal assistance. For majority of the cases, the victims, wish to follow up these cases in court, and be part of the judicial process”*. Lastly on the expectations of the victims, P5 stated that: *“Sometimes they want the matter to go to justice, and in that case, we send them to the legal assistance”*. On the expectations of the sex victims, P6 narrated that *“The specific expectations of the victims are of different levels. First of all, medical care, and secondly, legal action is taken against the perpetrator for sanctions to follow, There should also be compensation for damages. But people expect sanctions to be immediate so that the atrocities do not repeat themselves....”*.

Theme C: Challenges

All participants expressed challenges in their lived experiences in providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in various peacekeeping operations in CAR. Some participants mentioned challenges that were similar, but some presented challenges that were specific to the type of support that they give to sex victims, while some simply state their resilience despite those challenges. On the challenges experienced in providing support to victims of sex offenses, P1 said *“It is true that it is really difficult, but we have to withstand the challenges”* and on challenges linked to the identification of the perpetrator, he said: *“You can imagine that the victim does not know whoever committed this act and*

sometimes medical diagnoses reveal that the survivor has contracted AIDS..... This is very painful and difficult for the victim to receive and manage such medical diagnoses. It is difficult to reveal this information to the victim, and to the parents.” P1 has this to say on the request of parents’ consent concerning minor victims: “We expected the parents to give their consent for legal action, for immediate legal action or in the future, but the parents refused legal action for fear of reprisals by the Russian forces.

On P2’s own lived experiences regarding challenges: *“Given that the children were still young, they fear responding to the French officials..... During the questioning of children from 6 to 14 years they were afraid to respond to questions asked by the French whites.... Sometimes interpretation had to be done by a Central African officer from the local language into the French language... The French soldiers were recalled back to their country, and the procedure ended here as such.....Even at the level of CAR the dean of Judges did not interrogate the suspects. In France the examining magistrate could not continue the cases, because of lack of enough evidence.”* On challenges linked to negotiated settlements and fear of reprisals by the sex offenses victims *“Sometimes, it happens that I initiate a legal procedure with a victim, and the victim later withdraws, because in the quarter there has been a friendly arrangement behind my back. There are also cases where the victims have the will to report, but once they appear before me, they desist. There are many cases where the victims desist from continuing the legal procedure for fear of reprisal”* On challenges related to perpetrations by the blue helmets, P2 further stated that *“Concerning the blue helmets..... No legal procedure was initiated in CAR at all.”* On the justice challenge of sending back international

military peacekeepers, perpetrators of sex offenses to be tried in their home countries P2 said *“If it is a peacekeeping soldier, the perpetrator will not be judged in the Central African Republic according to the bilateral agreements which protects them by specifying that in case of sexual abuse they will be judged in their home country”*, although the offenses are committed in the CAR. On the challenge posed by revictimization on the judicial cooperation of the victim, P2 stated that *“You should never accuse the victim of complicity because it will re-victimize her, and she will not cooperate”*. Another related challenge that surfaced in the participants’ sharing of their lived experiences in supporting the victims of sex offenses is related to lengthy judicial procedures and P3 narrated that, *“The judicial procedure takes time, and sometimes the victim has to stop her education to move from one office to another, and this becomes discouraging, and in this case justice cannot continue.”* P3 also found the appellation “victim” quite challenging and instead prefers the word survivors by presenting some specific justifications. *“For quite some time now we have been working with these victims, whom I prefer to call survivors having lived this situation, they have succeeded in coming out of this danger after receiving assistance from us even if they are not compensated. We also prefer to call them survivors because, they have had psychosocial assistance, and this has helped them to come out of the situation thus enabling them to build their resilient capacities, and we also prefer to call them survivors, because the word victim is more pejorative”*. P4 on his part finds similarity in culture of international military peacekeepers with that of locals to be a challenge: *“And the fact that the culture of some of the MINUSCA forces is similar to those of the local community, this facilitates*

their relationship with the girls of Central African Republic” P4 equally points to the attempt in covering up sexual atrocities by international military contingent commanders a challenge “..... *but these officials of contingents create a network to cover such atrocities.*” The challenge of having little resources for their support to victims was expressed in the lived experiences of P3 in these words “*We work with the little resources that the Non-Governmental Organizations give us, given that the state structures are not viable*”. One additional challenge that also appeared in the expression of the lived experiences of a participant was that of victims not wanting to report sex offenses as P5 said “*The problem to me is more at the level of the victims because they do not want to report*”. The nomadic style of life of sex offenses victims also surfaced as another and P1 said “*We wanted to approach the parents to know their opinion about taking legal action. Unfortunately, the parents had changed to another part of the country given that they are nomads who move from place to place.*” P6 also saw the refusal or delay in treating their sex offense victims a challenge as P6 said “*Recently, the justice department did not do its work as expected, because I sent files, and they were not treated. This makes the victims to be discouraged*”. P1 expressed the challenge presented by shame as responsible for the victims’ reticence as well as some persons benefiting financially from the sex offenses “*Poverty and shame are also responsible for such reticence #48. i.e., some benefit financially from the relationship*”. The challenges faced in providing support to the victims span across all aspects. The investigation in CAR, which was overseen by a Canadian judge, drew attention to “unconscious delays” in providing the kids with protection, shelter, food, and basic medical care (Kleinfeld, 2018).

Theme D: Abandonment

The theme abandonment featured in the presentation of the lived experiences of all the six study participants. P1, considers abandonment to be a family decision that puts the support professionals in an obligatory position to search for alternative lodging for the victim while dialoguing with the family to accept the victim back into the family “*When families abandon the girls, we have to search for lodging facilities and #17. to later on dialogue with the parents for them to accept the wives or female children.*” According to P2, when the perpetrators peacekeepers return to their home countries, their sex victims are abandoned on their own: “*When the perpetrators are sent back to their countries, and the victims remain abandoned in CAR, and not aware of what is done to the perpetrator in his country of origin, it becomes laissez-faire*”. P3 perceives the return of peacekeeping perpetrators to their countries of origin as leaving behind pregnant minor victims giving birth to children without the opportunity of knowing their fathers “*and when the perpetrators leave the country, nothing is heard about them, #55. and they leave behind pregnant minor victims who give birth to children, #56. and their fathers are not known.*”. To P4, the notion of abandonment refers to the husbands of victims of sex offenses by international military peacekeepers being abandoned as impure and banished by their husbands “*It suffices for a husband to hear that his wife has been sexually violated by a group of soldiers or by a foreigner in uniform, and the wife will be abandoned and banished from the community even if she had ten children with the husband, because according to them the woman has become impure*”. On abandonment, P5 said “*....and these children are abandoned on their own because their fathers have*

returned to their home countries. P6 considers linked the feeling of abandonment by the sex victims with the state responsibility to protect its population, failure of which amounts to frustration “The victims feel abandoned. It is the state that is supposed to protect the population. When they are not protected, they feel frustrated.”

Theme E: Emotionalism

All the six study participants expressed different manifested aspects of emotionalism in their lived experiences with the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. The emotionalism revealed in the P1’s lived experience was related to the victims’ crying where P1 cautioned *“If she is weeping, you have to allow her cry to relieve herself of the emotional torture.”* And further on revealing the medical diagnosis to the victim, P1 said *“This is very painful and difficult for the victim to receive and manage such medical diagnoses”* P1 further narrated aspects of the lived experience of the case of a victim of sex offense who was going out with a peacekeeper in this way: *“There is the case of a victim who was going out with a UN peacekeeper. The girl gave her consent in the sexual act and got pregnant. The girl and parents realized that the perpetrator of the pregnancy was no longer in town. The girl attempted abortion using traditional concoction and died. We took part in accompanying the corpse from hospital to their residence. P2 on his part narrated his lived experience of emotionalism in this way: “The victim is brought to us several days after the act is committed, and the victims are usually unable to talk, and they are influenced by their parents to talk, or the victim starts talking, and it is the parent who continues by explaining that it was a case of sexual abuse.”* P3’s aspects of emotionalism are narrated

in relation with testing victims for illnesses after the act is committed “*We prescribe tests to be carried out in the laboratory. These tests are intended to enable us to ascertain whether the victim is HIV positive, is infected with a sexually transmissible disease or is pregnant. When she comes a bit above 72 hours, we give her a peel and some drugs and ask her to come the next day. When we interpret the results, and the pregnancy test is positive, we enable her to start prenatal consultation. When the test is negative, we give her moral support by letting her know that it is not her fault. She was not psychologically prepared for this embarrassment, so, we do this in order not to let her feel stigmatized as is often the case in the community.*” P4 narrated the lived experience of emotionalism this way: “*Sometimes the victim comes to us sad. Sometimes the victim comes to us crying, and in such a case, we allow her to cry until she stops crying. Then we ask her whether she can now continue narrating her story for us to understand and find a solution to it*”. On the lived experience of emotionalism, P5 stated that “*At the beginning, the victim is nervous. It is never easy, but at the end the victim thanks us for the psychosocial assistance*”. P6 in handling victims would try to be discreet and put the victim in a comfortable position “*I ask questions in a discreet manner. I also make sure that the victim is at ease, and comfortable in terms of reception, venue, and time to enable the victim to express himself or herself freely.*”

Theme F: Empowerment

With regards to the theme empowerment, all study participants narrated aspects of it in their lived experiences with victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. Empowerment of the victims was expressed in various ways by

the participants. Some narrated it as training, others compensation, education, or sensitization. P1 perceived empowerment of the victims in terms of procedure, or information that the victim needs to know. *“The victims need to know the procedure. Unfortunately, in majority of the cases the victims are never given any information. Normally they are supposed to be given an idea about the criminal procedure code. The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse..... Where they need to channel their complaints etc”*. and further stated the role of the government and NGOs *“Government and Nongovernmental organizations should be involved in giving support, should play this role”*. On the sensitization of the public, P1 said *“The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse. Where they need to channel their complaints etc.”*

P1 also believed that the empowerment of the victims should start from the revision of the law to enable judgment of the perpetrator to take place in situ. *“The law should be revised to see to it that suspects of these crimes are judged in the presence of the victims, parents, the community etc. .and judgment pronounced in the country where the act was committed by the peacekeeper.”* P1 also said empowerment can be done through the compensation of the sex victim. *“Empowerment through compensation: . Sometimes they expect to be compensated.”* According to P2, the empowerment of sex victims can be done by assisting them judicially as well as through the interpretation from French to the local languages *“I took part by assisting them during the questioning of the victims. Given that the children were still young, they fear responding to the French officials. Sometimes interpretation had to be done by a Central African officer from the local*

language into the French language. During the questioning of children from 6 to 14 years they were afraid to respond to questions asked by the French whites, but, because of my presence as a lawyer, they answered the questions without fear. We need to assist the victim at all levels that is, psychosocial level, medical level, and judicial level where the victim should be involved. So, it requires holistic assistance, and the victim and perpetrator should appear in court in the CAR for hearing and judgment. I will also propose that there should be prevention instead of only waiting for crimes to be committed, and we start looking for solutions. P3's perception of empowerment is related to learning a trade "Very often, we initiate her into learning a trade. After the psychosocial and medical assistance, we are therefore obliged to send the victims to stakeholders that render protective services, so that after protection, justice can then takeover. P3 further sees empowerment as having the assistance of a lawyer "Sometimes, some families of victims take legal action and hire a lawyer'.

On the side of P4, empowerment is related to sensitization, and punishment of the perpetrator to enable victims report sex abuses including those that happened in the past. *"We also sensitized them that such acts were not only punishable by the local laws. We also educated them that such acts linked to the conflict were also punishable by the peacekeeping authorities. This is when the population started reporting such acts, and even those acts that had been committed, and were hidden, now started being reported. P5 sees the empowerment of the victim as linked to the financial assistance to the victim "On the cases concerning international military peacekeepers, I will recommend that when the report is forwarded to the officials of the international peacekeeping forces,*

financial assistance should be given to the victim to enable the victim to have a house, and to also be able to send the child gotten out of this criminal relationship to school because most of the victims are stigmatized in their communities”. On the empowerment through the sensitization of the local population against sexual relationship with the international peacekeepers, P5 stated that *“It requires that the government of CAR does sensitization of the local population using community radios and the local media.”*

According to P5, the peacekeeping organizations should also sensitize the peacekeepers against engaging in sexual offenses against members of the local population in CAR. *” The peacekeeping organizations are also supposed to sensitize the local population against sexual engagement with members of the local population, because their role in CAR is to bring back peace, #40 and not to aggravate the situation by adding to the burden of the people. P5 further added that the peacekeeping organizations should always follow-up on the sex victims thereafter. “... they should come back to find out how the victim is fairing and give support to the victim by providing her a house or give her financial assistance to let the victim have something doing like a trade that can generate her some income”.* P6 on the importance of empowering the victims of sex offenses committed by peacekeepers stated that *“Personally, I am a member, and president of the local human rights group. In this capacity I feel happy giving them assistance, because, I make them to know their rights and responsibilities in the midst of such atrocities, and to understand that when we are victims of something like this, we have to defend ourselves, not with weapons, but in an orderly and peaceful manner so that such atrocities should not repeat themselves either to you or others”.*

Theme G: Justice

The theme of justice of expressed variously in the lived experiences of all the six participants in this study. P1 expressed the theme of justice in his lived experience as a legal difficulty related to impunity *“Another difficult aspect is the legal aspect. #19. Sometimes parents deposit complaints at the Gendarmerie or Police, but to have justice done to the perpetrator is difficult. Imagine that you deposit a complaint against a perpetrator and, you see the perpetrator move freely, and even pass in front of your house”*.

On theme of justice, P2 from the lived experience stated *“Concerning victims of crimes committed by peacekeeping soldiers, I have received victims of sexual abuses committed by French soldiers. When the public prosecutor made these abuses known and gave instructions for these cases to be forwarded to the courts, unfortunately, these instructions were not followed to the end. Looking at the theme justice from the point of view of war crimes and crimes against humanity: “If it concerns war crimes or crimes committed in CAR against humanity, for example attacks and so on, then the international court of justice can judge them. But if it concerns a few isolated cases of sexual abuse, they should be judged here in CAR”*. Examining justice from the point of Impunity: P2 stated *“However, I heard about a case of sexual abuse committed in Bambari by Congolese soldiers and no legal procedure was initiated in CAR at all. The Congolese soldiers were called back to their country, and that was all.”*

Looking at justice from the side of the perpetrator, P2 stated *“Concerning perpetrators of sexual violence in the quarter, they should also be judged because, if they*

are not judged they will continue to commit the crimes with impunity. Rape is a crime; sexual abuse is also a crime. When a young minor goes to the peacekeepers for exchange of gifts before having sex, and this takes place over and over, we can say that it is prostitution. When it concerns mature women who go to them for exchange of gifts for sex, it is prostitution which is also punishable by the Central African criminal procedure code.....when the perpetrators entice the children with something to have sex with them.....it is sexual abuse, which is punishable by the Central African criminal procedure code. Rape is when force is used..... Fellatio, sodomy are all crimes of rape. To us, it is also a crime, because there is contact of sexual organ even if it is with the mouth.”

On the issue of consent when it comes to sex crimes, P2 said *“There is consent, but it is prostitution, and prostitution is against the criminal procedure code and is punishable by the law in this country. On using justice to encourage the sex victims and as a deterrence to potential perpetrators, P2 stated “Legal action should be followed, and the perpetrator judged here in CAR. In this case, the victims will be encouraged to report, and if the perpetrators are punished here, it will deter others from indulging into such sexual abuses.*

P3 from the lived experiences saw the justice procedure as taking time and discouraging to the sex victims, *“The judicial procedure takes time, and sometimes the victim has to stop her education to move from one office to another, and this becomes discouraging”*. P3 also lived justice in the following terms when it comes peacekeeper perpetrators *“.....and when the perpetrator goes back to his country of origin, the case*

cannot continue. On justice from the point of view of investigations, P3 stated:

“Concerning investigations, I can say that investigations are done but Victims do not participate in it, and when the perpetrators leave the country, nothing is heard about them”. P4 presenting justice from the lived experience of the victims’ interest, stated that *“The fact that the perpetrators are to be judged in their countries give the impression that the interest of the victims is not considered”*.

P5 lived the experience of justice when victims expressing their wish n seeing the crimes go to court: *“Sometimes they want the matter to go to justice, and in that case, we send them to the legal assistance and later find out whether they went there and were received.”* On justice regarding sex crimes, P6 stated that *“If it concerns a member of the United Nations peacekeeping mission, MINUSCA, we report the matter to appropriate quarters, and that “For victims of sexual abuse, we take legal action but, the first thing is that we register the cases, interview the victims, ,,,,,,, We build a case file with the victims’ consent, and then forward the file for legal action so that sanctions can follow”*.P6. added that *“Recently, the justice department did not do its work as expected, because I sent files, and they were not treated..... We need a justice system that is fast so that compensation can be paid to the victims and perpetrators sanctioned”*.

On the work of the justice department, P6 stated *“If the justice department does not do its work the way it is supposed to be done, the victim will feel that his/her rights are not respected, and that there is no justice, no equality in terms of human rights*. P6. also added that *“The national forces cannot arrest the peacekeeping forces”*. For the justice on the sexual offenses committed by the international peacekeepers P6

recommends that *“Such cases should be handled by the two judicial systems, that is, the local and international. The sanctions should send a message to the whole world so that such atrocities are not committed again. Let there be justice in such a way that if peacekeepers are sent to other countries for such missions, they should respect ethics and norms of their profession”*.

Theme H: Powerlessness

The theme of powerlessness in the lived experiences of participants as they provide support for the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers was expressed in various ways. Powerlessness to P1 was expressed in terms of fear of reprisals by the perpetrators *“...but the parents refused legal action for fear of reprisals by the Russian forces.”* P1. Also experienced the victim’s powerlessness when it comes to accessing the military bases of international military peacekeepers *“Not just anybody can be allowed to get into their military base”*. P1 also lived the experience of the sex victims’ ignorance of the CAR criminal procedure in these terms: *“..... but experience has shown that the victims never know where judgment starts and where it ends.”* P1 also lived the experience of lack protection as one of the factors rendering the victim of sex crimes committed by international military peacekeepers powerless. *“On the part of the parents, some of them divorce their wives or abandon or stigmatization and sometimes”*.

According to P1, when sex victims are accused of being accomplices of their own sexual abuse, it also renders them powerless.: *“.... the girls and women are even accused of being accomplices or being the cause of sexual abuse or rape”*. *The abandonment and*

refusal to accept by the parents and families these victims of sexual offenses add to their vulnerability and render them powerlessness according to P1: “When families abandon the girls, we have to search for lodging facilities.....to later on dialogue with the parents for them to accept the wives or female children. P1 also see the difficulty of identification of their perpetrators and the positive diagnosis of some of the victims of sex offenses with sexually transmissible diseases including HIV and AIDS as a vulnerability and powerlessness: “They know that the act is committed by the Russians, but they cannot have detail information about their identities apart from the fact that they know them as Russian soldiers..... You can imagine that the victim does not know whoever committed this act and sometimes medical diagnoses reveal that the survivor has contracted AIDS.”

The difficulty of having justice done to the perpetrators of these sex offenses adds to the list of vulnerability and powerlessness of the victim as deduced from the lived experience of P1: “.... but to have justice done to the perpetrator is difficult. Imagine that you deposit a complaint against a perpetrator and, you see the perpetrator move freely, and even pass in front of your house”. P2 on her part express her lived experience of powerlessness of the victims of sexual offenses committed by peacekeepers in this manner: “You know very well that this issue deals with the moral and intimacy of the victim, and the victim tells herself that if she reports the matter it will go to court and the public will listen to the hearings,.....there will be stigmatization, and if in the end the perpetrator is not arrested, and justice does not take its course, the Perpetrator can come back for revenge”. According to P2 this powerlessness of the sex victims is further

enabled by lack of legal preventions: *“There are no preventive provisions in the criminal procedure code of the CAR to dissuade potential perpetrators from engaging in these crimes.”* The fear of foreign officials by minor sex victims is another factor adding to their powerlessness as P2 further puts it: *“I took part by assisting them during the questioning of the victims. Given that the children were still young, they fear responding to the French officials.”* P3 sees the fear of sex victims being taxed as accomplices of what happened being a factor in the powerlessness of the victims: *“Generally, the victim is ashamed for fears of being judged for complicity”*.

Another big factor rendering the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers is poverty. The victims are generally poor people, and some take the opportunity of incidents of these sex crimes to obtain some financial benefits. P3 on this stated that *“Poverty and shame are also responsible for such reticence i.e., some benefit financially from the relationship.”* P3 further identifies lack of education as one of the most important factors rendering the victims of sex offenses by international military peacekeepers powerless: *“There is also lack of education in the sense that most of the victims are not educated, their knowledge is thus limited to enable them to foresee the consequences when the perpetrators start talking to them.”* The participation of victims in the investigations render vulnerable and powerless too: P3 stated that: *“Concerning investigations, I can say that investigations are done #53. but Victims do not participate in it, and when the perpetrators leave the country, nothing is heard about them”* P3 further added that *“The victims do not participate in the legal*

action. We have the impression that the legal department does not take the sexual abuses serious.”

The fact that the international military peacekeepers, perpetrators of these sex offenses are judged but, in their countries, according to the P4, is a factor that renders their victims left behind in CAR without recourse to justice powerless because their interest is not considered *“The fact that the perpetrators are to be judged in their countries give the impression that the interest of the victims is not considered”*. To P5, *the problem of powerlessness repose on the victim herself, although at the same time he affirms that, there are some of the victims who the perpetrator of these sex crimes and there are also some who are afraid of the court trials and also possible reprisals from the perpetrator: “The problem to me is more at the level of the victims because they do not want to report. There are some who do not know the perpetrators. Sometimes the victims are afraid of going to court for trials and possible reprisal by the perpetrator thereafter.”* P6 on his part expresses the powerlessness of the victims as an issue of poverty and ignorance: *“Because of poverty and ignorance, the girls and women even took pleasure in going out with them.”*

Theme I: Sensitization

Sensitization as an identified and selected theme for this study was expressed across the lived experiences of five participants. The theme was not depicted in the lived experiences of P2. According to P1, *“The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse, and Where they need to channel their complaints etc.”* For P3, they even sensitize and educate the sex victims

and the population on sexual offenses with international peacekeepers: *“We also sensitized them that such acts were not only punishable by the local laws. We also educated them that such acts linked to the conflict were also punishable by the peacekeeping authorities.”* According to P3, after these sensitization and education of the populations some of the old sex offense cases are now reported: *“This is when the population started reporting such acts, and even those acts that had been committed, and were hidden, now started being reported.”* On sensitization, P3 also recommended that *“At the national level, men should be sensitized, because they are the ones who stigmatize the girls, and the women”*. P4 on the consequences on non-sensitizations stated that *“At this time the community was not yet sensitized about these abuses and at one moment we realized the danger, when the soldiers started going back to their countries.”*

P5. used this interview to make a recommendation for the government of CAR regarding the international military peacekeepers *“To the government of CAR, I will recommend that sensitization against sexual abuse by the international peacekeepers should be reinforced in CAR. When they are gone, they should create focal points to identify the incidents committed by them during their time in CAR. Sensitization should be conducted in all the prefectures so that people can report allegations of sex crimes by whosoever so sexual crime cases are handled properly.”* On sensitization and the government of CAR, P5 stated: *“It requires that the government of CAR does sensitization of the local population using community radios and the local media.”* And for the peacekeeping organizations: *“The peacekeeping organizations are also supposed to sensitize the local population against sexual engagement with members of the local*

population.” Talking on the lived experience on sensitization and the role of the SEA Local Prevention Network of which he is member, P6 stated: *“Its role is to sensitize the people to know that it is their right to report any case of sexual abuse.”*

Theme J: Stigmatization

Five of the six study participants expressed the theme stigmatization in different ways in their lived experiences in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. P4 did not express the theme of stigmatization in narrating the lived experiences in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses. P1 expressed the issue of stigmatization as a behavior linked to abandonment, and divorce of the sex victims at times: *“On the part of the parents, some of them divorce their wives or abandon or stigmatization and sometimes.”*

As opposed to P1, P2 expressed the lived experience related to sex victim stigmatization as one that is implicitly linked to the reporting and court hearings as a resulting consequence: *“..... and the victim tells herself that if she reports the matter it will go to court, #90. the public will listen to the hearing, #91. there will be stigmatization.”* P3 on the other hand, linked also linked the aspect of sex victim stigmatization to the cooperation in her case: *“Unfortunately, these victims do not usually cooperate, because of societal stigmatization.”* P5 in narrating the lived experiences with the victims of sex offenses by international peacekeepers associate the issue of stigmatization numerous other issues that expose the victim to stigmatization in the society: *“On the cases concerning international military peacekeepers, I will recommend that when the report is forwarded to the officials of the international peacekeeping*

forces, financial assistance should be given to the victim to enable the victim to have a house, and to also be able to send the child gotten out of this criminal relationship to school because most of the victims are stigmatized in their communities. P6 on the theme of stigmatization simply expressed the lived experience narration in these words:

“Sometimes raped women were ashamed of being stigmatized.”

Step 5: Individual Textural Descriptions

The individual textural description is a methodological construct that explains the participant’s perception of the phenomenon studied. Although survivors’ access to medical and psychological care in CAR has increased over time, there is still not enough resources available to the sexual violence victims (Reliefweb, 2021). In the context of this study, I have identified the dominant narratives of the participants lived experiences and used excerpts from the lived experiences to describe the narratives. The dominant narratives that characterized the individual participant’s description of the lived experience of providing victim support and assistance included the

- Desire for justice,
- Desire for trial of International Military Peacekeepers(perpetrators) of sexual crimes in CAR
- Desire for legal support of victim
- Desire for compensation of victims
- Desire for increase institutional support.
- Desire for education and sensitization of victims
- Desire for increased professional care.

- Desire to fight against revictimization and stigmatization.

Desire for Justice

The desire for justice for victims of sexual offenses committed by International Military Peacekeepers in CAR was a dominant horizon expressed by all six participants of the study. As stated by Kleinfeld (2018), victims of sexual abuse by UN peacekeepers find little support or justice. Justice meant two things to the participants, punishment of the perpetrator and compensation of the victim. In other words, justice to the participant therefore meant punitive and restorative justice. Participants in this study in sharing their lived experiences in supporting and assistance victims of sex offenses committed by the international military perpetrators expressed the wish to see the perpetrators of sex offenses tried in the CAR tried and sanctioned through the judicial system.

By depositing complaint files at the local police and Gendarmerie means that the victims want the perpetrators to be tried in situ. P1 stated that: *“Sometimes parents deposit complaints at the Gendarmerie or Police.”* P2 stated that: *“Concerning victims of crimes committed by peacekeeping soldiers, I have received victims of sexual abuses committed by French soldiers. When the public prosecutor made these abuses known and gave instructions for these cases to be forwarded to the courts, unfortunately, these instructions were not followed to the end. If it concerns war crimes or crimes committed in CAR against humanity, for example attacks and so on, then the international court of justice can judge them. But if it concerns a few isolated cases of sexual abuse, they should be judged here in CAR.* According to P2, if other perpetrators of sex offenses are tried in CAR, why should the international military peacekeepers not be tried in CAR:

“Concerning perpetrators of sexual violence in the quarter, they should also be judged because, if they are not judged they will continue to commit the crimes with impunity.....When it concerns mature women who go to them for exchange of gifts for sex, it is prostitution which is also punishable by the Central African criminal procedure code..... But it is sexual abuse when the perpetrators entice the children with something to have sex with the and it is sexual abuse, which is punishable by the Central African criminal procedure code.” P2 on the desire to see perpetrators of these sex crimes punished in CAR, enumerated some offenses involved: *“Rape is when force is used.....Fellatio, sodomy are all crimes of rape.... because there is contact of sexual organs even if it is with the mouth.”* P2 also added that although may be evoked as justifications, some of such cases linked to the exchange of gifts before sex are prostitution and are punishable in CAR: *“There is consent, but it is prostitution, and prostitution is against the criminal procedure code and is punishable by law in this country.* P2, also insisted on the judgement of the perpetrators of these sex crimes in CAR because this will deter potential perpetrators and encourage victims to report *“Legal action should be followed, and the perpetrator judged here in CAR. In this case, the victims will be encouraged to report, and if the perpetrators are punished here, it will deter others from indulging into such sexual abuses.”* P3 also expressed this desire to see the peacekeeper perpetrators of sex crimes judged and punished in CAR by stating *“Sometimes, some families of victims take legal action and hire a lawyer.”* For P4, the judgement of sex offenses committed by international military perpetrators in CAR, will ensure the consideration of the victim’s interest *“The victims are asking why the*

perpetrators are not judged in CAR, and how will they the victims be part of the procedure? But we tell them that we have transferred their files to Bangui for further action and decision, because there are no legal structures at the local level. They wonder how they will be aware of what will happen in the countries of origin of these perpetrators. The fact that the perpetrators are to be judged in their countries give the impression that the interest of the victims is not considered. The women feel frustrated and rejected by their community.”

P5 expresses the desire for justice in terms of her lived experience, as a desire expressed by victims using these words: *“Sometimes they want the matter to go to justice, and in that case, we send them to the legal assistance..... Sometimes the victims are afraid of going to court for trials and possible reprisal by the perpetrator thereafter.”*

The desire to have international military perpetrators of sexual offenses against the CAR women and girls to be judged and punished in CAR was also expressed by P6 in these words: *“Let there be justice in such a way that if peacekeepers are sent to other countries for such missions, they should respect ethics and norms of their profession.”*

However, it is important to note here that while the desire for justice in general was expressed in participants’ individual textual description as the pursued of punitive and restorative justice, participant also saw justice as a means through which the victims can be psychologically and morally strengthened in their journey to recovery. Justice to the participants was also a means to achieve accountability for sexual crimes committed by International Military Peacekeepers as well as reparation for the victim through the court process (Mercer & Madsen, 2015). As observed by Mercer et al. (2015) victims of

sexual violence always perceive the pursued of justice as also a psychological strength and a means to hold the perpetrator accountable.

Desire for the Trial of International Military Peacekeepers (Perpetrators) of Sexual Offenses in CAR

The desire for local trial of the international military peacekeeper sex offense perpetrators was another major trend that characterized the individual textual description of the research participants. Participants described local trial as a trial that will allow the victim to participate and directly confront her perpetrator. In describing this perspective of local trial with victim participation, Mercer & Madsen (2015) asserts “Victims of sexual violence want to be heard and like victims of other crimes they also seek an acknowledgement of the harm caused to them” p.11. Participants perceived local trial not only as a positive factor for victim participation but also as a form that would lead to the transformation of the afflicted person from victim to a survivor. This theme featured prominently in the individual textual descriptions of Participants 1, 2, 4, and 6. In sharing participant’s lived experiences in supporting victims of sexual offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers in relation to their desire in CAR, P1 said: *“The law should be revised to see to it that suspects of these crimes are judged in the presence of the victims, parents, the community etc. and judgment pronounced in the country where the act was committed by the peacekeeper.*

P2 on recounting the lived experience related to the desire for trial of international military perpetrators in CAR stated that: *“What the victim expects, is for the perpetrator to be judged and punished.... even if the soldier is only judged and punished without*

compensation to the victim, the victim will have a calm, and that is already something better.....Rape is when force is used...Fellatio, sodomy are all crimes of rape....and prostitution is against the criminal procedure code and is punishable by law in this country....When it is a civilian foreigner, who commits an act of sexual violence, he is judged in CAR courts, why not the international peacekeepers too..... . and when they are sent back to their home country, who follows to know what is happening there? Consequently, the victim remains here in frustration. Rather, if it were agreed that in case of sexual abuse, the parents of the victim, the quarter head or victim should report, and the victim and perpetrator should appear in court in the CAR for hearing and judgment.”

Further on the lived experience desire of justice to be done in CAR, P3 stated that: *“According to me if the perpetrators are judged in the Central African Republic, it will encourage other victims to report to authorities”* P4 additional stated on the desire for justice in CAR, that *“For majority of the cases, the victims recognize the perpetrators and, wish to follow up these cases in court, and be part of the judicial process. There are some of the perpetrators who give their real names and are recognized. The victims ask that the perpetrators should be judged here... .. The victims are asking why the perpetrators are not judged in CAR, and how will they the victims be part of the procedure?”* According to P6, it should be a hybrid kind of court to judge the international military peacekeepers when they are involved a sexual offense: *“Such cases should be handled by the two judicial systems, that is, the local and international. The sanctions should send a message to the whole world so that such atrocities are not*

committed again. Let there be justice in such a way that if peacekeepers are sent to other countries for such missions, they should respect ethics and norms of their profession”.

However, no crimes victim should be compelled to confront her offender, but she also should not be denied the chance if she so chooses (Koss, 2000). Several nations and tribal communities use communitarian approaches, or forms of restorative justice to better address crimes against women (Koss, 2000). The offender, victim, and community are all included in the framing of the crime (Koss, 2000). The procedure forgoes incarceration in favor of having family, peers, and advocates plan the perpetrator's rehabilitation, the victim's restoration, and the victim and perpetrator's social reintegration (Koss, 2000). According to evaluations, communitarian justice may improve victim satisfaction, increase the social costs of crime, multiply social control, and support resources, and create a new path for targeted prevention (Koss, 2000).

Desire for Legal Support for the sex Victims

Legal support is also one of the most important desires expressed in the participants' lived experiences in providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses in CAR. By attempting to hold sex offenders of accountable in a court of law, the legal system can assist in addressing the survivor's immediate safety concerns, educating them about their rights, and defending both them and the communities where they live in CAR. Despite the importance presented by the desire for justice, there is the risk of re-victimization that make women reluctant to report related cases. Women's reluctance to report sexual assaults is influenced by the secondary victimization they experience in sexual assault court cases. The ability of certain aspects of the legal to

traumatize victims or survivors to the point where survivors perceive the process as a “second rape” is known as revictimization or secondary victimization (Koss, 2000). A good example of this is during cross-examination process of the survivor.

Participants who expressed the desire for legal support for the victims levied their justification in various ways. From the lived experiences in supporting victims of sexual offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers, P1 stated that “*The victims need to know the procedure. Normally they are supposed to be given an idea about the criminal procedure code. Sensitization on everything related to sex offending is a great way of empowering victims of sex offenses. On this, P1 added that “The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse. Where they need to channel their complaints etc.”. Government and Nongovernmental organizations should be involved in giving support, should play this role. Secondly Judgment should be passed so that the victims are satisfied.*”

On the desire for legal support for the victim, P2 stated that: “*I took part by assisting them during the questioning of the victims. Given that the children were still young, they feared responding to the French officials. Sometimes interpretation had to be done by a Central African officer from the local language into the French language. During the questioning of children from 6 to 14 years they were afraid to respond to questions asked by the French whites, but, because of my presence as a lawyer, they answered the questions without fear. You should never accuse the victim of complicity because it will re-victimize her, and she will not cooperate. We need to assist the victim at all levels, that is psychosocial level, medical level, and judicial level where the victim*

should be involved.....So, it requires holistic assistance. Rather, if it were agreed that in case of sexual abuse, the parents of the victim, the quarter head or victim should report, and the victim and perpetrator should appear in court in the CAR for hearing and judgment. I will also propose that there should be prevention instead of only waiting for crimes to be committed, and we start looking for solutions.

According to P3, after all other support assistance have been provided, then the legal support of the victim should continue from there: “.....so that after protection, justice can then takeover.” P3 on legal support also stated that “Sometimes, some families of victims take legal action and hire a lawyer,” On expressing the lived experiences in supporting the victims, especially on the role played by sensitization on the desire to legally support the victims P4 said “*We also sensitized them that such acts were not only punishable by the local laws. We also educated them that such acts linked to the conflict were also punishable by the peacekeeping authorities. This is when the population started reporting such acts, and even those acts that had been committed, and were hidden, now started being reported.*” P6. On narrating his support to victims said, “..... *I make them to know their rights and responsibilities in the midst of such atrocities, and to understand that when we are victims of something like this, we have to defend ourselves, not with weapons, but in an orderly and peaceful manner so that such atrocities should not repeat themselves either to you or to others.*”

Desire for Compensation of Sex Offense Victims

The desire for compensation of the victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers was one of the emergent trends dominantly echoed in

most of the shared lived experiences of the participants of this study. At least four participants expressed this desire in their individual textual description. The compensation of victims can only come out of a civil court proceeding to the benefit of victims in form of payment of general and specific damages to the victims because of the crime committed against her person. Such compensation expressed in monetary terms will help to victims in their recovery process, alleviate the societal stigma and the erroneous revictimization status placed on them and pave the way for their reintegration and acceptance into their communities.

For the victims that have children born out such criminal relationships, compensation awarded them will enable them raise up those children and probably send them to schools. Participants 3, 4, 5 and 6 expressed this desire for compensation in their lived experiences. On the desire for compensation of the victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers, P1 said, *“Sometimes they expect to be compensated.”* while, P2 insisted on the judgement of the perpetrator rather than on the compensation: *“#39. Even if the soldier is only judged and punished without compensation to the victim, #40. the victim will have a calm mind, and that is already something better.”*

P3 stated that *“..... So, they should be judged even when they have gone back to their countries, and compensation paid to the victims in CAR”*. For P4, *“On the cases concerning international military peacekeepers, I will recommendto the officials of the international peacekeeping forces, that financial assistance should be given to the victim to enable the victim to have a house, and to also be able to send the*

child gotten out of this criminal relationship to school because most of the victims are stigmatized in their communities.” P5 has expressed the desire for compensation in other words calling it financial assistance to the victim or a trade that can generate the victim some income: “ ...they should come back to find out how the victim is fairing and give support to the victim by providing her a house or give her financial assistance to let the victim have something doing like a trade that can generate her some income.” P6 is very clear on the issue of payment of compensations to the victim “. Let the perpetrators be judged, and sanctioned, and compensation paid to the victim for the victim to feel that her rights have been respected.”

In support of the desire for compensation for the victims, theoretically, sex offense victims may file legal complaints with troops contributing countries from their perpetrators come. This would seem to be the more sensible choice, especially if the perpetrators have already been brought to justice by the appropriate authorities in these nations. To secure the defendant's testimony, DNA evidence, and a more direct path to enforcing a favorable judgment, the courts in the defendant's home country will have more control over him. However, unless specialized claims procedures are developed especially for that purpose, most victims will not be able to pursue claims against the perpetrators.

The biggest challenge might be getting victims into that legal jurisdiction. The victims would need to locate attorneys, provide them with training, and be ready to travel to the courts to present evidence. Most of the sexual exploitation and abuse victims are extremely marginalized within their own post-conflict communities. The idea that they

would be able to navigate a complex legal process involving multiple legal systems, immunities, and overcome the gaps in evidence derived from faulty investigations, even with the most zealous legal counsel is simply an illusion. A sexual offenses victim in CAR would have little chance of winning a legal case as justice for crimes committed against domestic victims by citizens of CAR are still far from being prosecuted. For most victims, this is simply not a viable option. That is why compensation can only be gotten possibly when judgements for sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers are prosecuted in CAR and not in the perpetrator's own country.

There are a few cases where victims in the host state are pursuing civil claims, but it is difficult to see how such claims will be successful without significant help and support from the peacekeeping operation organizations and the troops contributing countries, especially to help trace the alleged perpetrator, order, and secure the acquisition of DNA and other evidence from the defendant, and enable the enforcement of an eventual positive civil judgment. If the suspected offender has already left the host state's jurisdiction, the court there may find it difficult to extraterritorially serve the defendant, to force an absent defendant to secure a sample of the DNA, and without bilateral or multilateral agreements in place.

Desire for Increased Institutional Support

The desire for increase institutional support was manifested variously by majority of the study participants in sharing their lived experiences in the support and assistance provided to victims of sex crimes committed by the international military peacekeepers. Regarding the victims' well-being, institutional responses to sexual abuse perform a

critical role. On survivors' health, institutional reactions from the criminal justice system, healthcare system, and educational institutions can have a big impact (Holland & Barnes, 2019). This work demonstrates that while some survivors who seek institutional support receive trauma-informed and victim-centered care, many others receive harmful and re-traumatizing treatment, such as disbelieving or blaming the victim and taking no action (Holland & Barnes, 2019). But there is still a lot to discover about institutional responses to sexual assault (Holland & Barnes, 2019). Accusations were also levied in DAKOTA against the French peacekeepers serving on a distinct mission known as Sangaris, but no proper institutional response ever came up (Kleinfeld, 2018).

The purpose of this section is to increase our knowledge of how institutions respond to sexual trauma from the study's participants lived experiences in supporting and providing assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in CAR to promote a better, empirically supported institutional responses. On the desire to increase institutional support to these sex victims, the study participants from their lived experiences with these victims expressed the following: P1 stated that *“In our organization, there has been a case here in Bria where my colleague was arrested by the Gendarme .and he later lost his contract, because he was a perpetrator of a sexual offence committed on a girl of about 14 years. When there are cases of sexual abuses within this division, I make reports and send to my hierarchy. Other organizations take positive decisions against their workers who are alleged perpetrators..... The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse. Where they need to channel their complaints etc. Secondly, judgment should be*

passed so that the victims are satisfied. Government and nongovernmental organizations involved in giving support, should play this role. Sometimes when the crimes are committed, they talk about it in the media, but at the tail end nothing is done. No adequate solutions at all. The law should be revised to see to it that suspects of these crimes be judged in the presence of the victims, parents, the community etc. And judgment pronounced in the country where the act was committed by the peacekeeper.”

P2 wishes that the courts as the government institution of CAR should be responsible for the judgement of international military peacekeepers who have committed acts of sex offenses because these acts are punishable criminal code of CAR and secondly because the crimes are committed in the CAR territorial boundaries and the victims are CAR citizens, “..... if it were agreed that in case of sexual abuse, the parents of the victim, the quarter head or victim should report, and the victim and perpetrator should appear in court in the CAR for hearing and judgment.”

P3 on the desire for increase institutional support also considered it from the point of view of point of judging the international military peacekeepers in CAR for victims to be psychologically satisfied, resume their normal lives, and be compensated and that international community should sensitize the peacekeepers “Many of the victims expect justice to be done by judging the perpetrators in the Central African Republic so that the victims can be psychologically satisfied, #98. and resume their normal lives..... When they go back to their countries, they become free. So, they should be judged even when they have gone back to their countries, and compensation paid to the victims in CAR. To the international community, I suggest that the peacekeepers should be sensitized to be

aware of the destruction that their behavior causes on the female children and women in CAR. Consequently, the forces should be made to sign an engagement that they have to respect, failure of which, they will be punished. They should be punished to deter other potential perpetrators.

Institutions at the national CAR level should also be involved in sensitization as stated further by P3 *“At the national level, men should be sensitized, because they are the ones who stigmatize the girls, and the women. In case of violation, they should be punished, and the judicial personnel of the U.N should be competent and honest to ensure justice by punishing the perpetrators. According to me if the perpetrators are judged in the Central African Republic, it will encourage other victims to report to authorities.”*

According to P4, *“In terms of justice, I will say that the state structures to take care of legal support are non-existent... ..Where I presently work, it is now that there is a budget for the province to set up structure that can enable the magistrates to establish a state legal structure to provide legal assistance to victims. The NGO that I work for wants to give subvention to the Ministry of Justice to enable them build case files from our records. P4 additionally said the CAR government should eradicate sexual abuse “Let the government take appropriate measures to eradicate these issues of sexual abuse. We had the opportunity to discuss issues of sexual violence with a female Minister delegate at the Presidency of the Republic, and it is quite relieving to know that the Head of State is already aware of it. If there was even a single government support center for victims of sexual abuse in Bangui, many of these cases will be received and treated. The worst is that of the outskirts of Bangui. We encourage the state to create support centers, and the*

message will spread to the provinces and incidences will reduce by months, and by weeks and this will eventually be eradicated. We feel that the forces that that come to help us in Central African Republic instead ends up harming the population in one way or the other and aggravate the situation. We need the support of partners of the Central African Republic, that is non-governmental organizations, partners of missions present in the Central African Republic etc. to be part of the solution, if not, we shall not only talk of the armed-conflict, but we shall have another conflict situation where are fighting to have their situation redressed.....This is about a situation where officials of the U.N. peacekeeping who know that the United Nations Secretary General is fighting against these sexual crimes, but these officials of contingents create a network to cover such atrocities. Let this end. Let the perpetrators know the reason for which they are sent to CAR. I was working in Bambari, and one of the officials came and asked me not to release information about sexual atrocities committed by a peacekeeper. Let there be an end to this type of attitude.”

According to P5, increase institutional support should come in the way sensitization of the local population against sexual offenses “*From experience, sometimes the victim is not able to identify the perpetrator physically or by his name especially if the act took place in a hidden place in the night. Even if the victim can identify the perpetrator, she is afraid of court action or reprisal by the perpetrator etc. It requires that the government of CAR does sensitization of the local population using community radios and the local media. The peacekeeping organizations are also supposed to sensitize the local population against sexual engagement with members of the local*

population, because their role in CAR is to bring back peace, and not to aggravate the situation by adding to the burden of the people.”

Maybe one way of increasing institutional support could be by making sure all victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers participate in investigations of the cases that concern them. P5 complaint about their non-participation in this way: *“In case of investigations done by the peacekeeping organizations, the victim is not at times involved, and does not know what later happens to the perpetrator thereafter”*. On increase institutional support, P5 still added that: *“If I could make a recommendation, it will be that the psychosocial, and medical assistance be increased because what we give to the victim is not sufficient. On the cases concerning international military peacekeepers, I will recommend that when the report is forwarded to the officials of the international peacekeeping forces, financial assistance should be given to the victim to enable the victim to have a house, and to also be able to send the child gotten out of this criminal relationship to school because most of the victims are stigmatized in their communities. We usually have a victim support project of about six months, and after that it is over. We would also wish that experts in psychology should be recruited to reinforce our victim support services.”*

P5 further stated *“To the government of CAR, I will recommend that sensitization against sexual abuse by the international peacekeepers should be reinforced in CAR. When they are gone, they should create focal points to identify the incidents committed by them during their time in CAR. Sensitization should be conducted in all the prefectures so that people can report allegations of sex crimes by whosoever so sexual crime cases are*

handled properly. To the international community, I have realized that although they carry out investigations on allegations of sex offenses, they abandon the victims to themselves. I will advise that once they identify the victims and carry out investigations even if they do not even involve the victims in those investigations, they should come back to find out how the victim is fairing and give support to the victim by providing her a house or give her financial assistance to let the victim have something doing like a trade that can generate her some income.”

On the increase institutional support, P6 stated some of the things already done at the organizational levels: *“There are seminars here and there, we are not sitting and doing nothing etc. Initially, no measures were taken in that direction of justice.”* On the specific actions of the MINUSCA, which is currently responsible for the peacekeeping operations in CAR, P6 said this: *“It was only with the creation of this SEA prevention network by MINUSCA in 2022 and sensitization that people now know that rape is a crime and is punishable. For one year now that “MINUSCA” took measures to prevent these atrocities, they have reduced. With sensitization and the consequences, people are now conscious. The problem exists, but people are vigilant and take precautions now. Unfortunately, we have not had cases of hearing concerning peacekeeping forces for the victims to take part.”*

All actors supporting and helping the victims of sexual crimes committed by international peacekeepers in CAR would need to bring into a single basket different initiative, including strengthening institutional mechanisms. These could include working with state parties within the protection mechanisms and programs for example, the

judiciary through the reformation of legislation and legal procedures, the strengthening of the civil society through such initiatives that support and strengthen the civil society actors in performing protective tasks such as advocacy, education and sensitization, especially in targeting through campaigns thematic areas like combatting stigmatization, working with religious group, traditional and community leaders well as the media (OHCHR, 2019). Such initiatives are important in enhancing psychosocial support and accompanying witnesses in the judicial proceedings in mitigating re-traumatization and revictimization in the community (OHCHR, 2019). The UN Mission in the CAR has been improving its victim's assistance. According to Klein (2018) "Since the Dekoa allegations, the UN has tried to improve its response to sexual abuse allegations by appointing Victims' Rights Advocates in CAR and elsewhere, setting up a Trust Fund, and introducing a system that enables victims to report cases to members of their local community."

Desire for Education and Sensitization of Sex Victims

Increase institutional support would focus on providing financial and material resources to the organizations that provide support and assistance to the victims as well as peacekeeping organizations that manage peacekeeping operations. The victims need to be sensitized and educated on the various support resources available to them as well as the procedure to be followed to access those support and assistance services as well as the organizations that provide them.

Additionally, the victims and the population of CAR should be sensitized and educated on their human rights when it comes to sexual relationship with members of the

international peacekeeping operations, and most especially what to do in case of sexual abuse and sexual violence. While some of the participants in this study recommended on the desire to reinforced education and sensitization of the local population in CAR, and which some of them are already engaged targeted sensitization and education of potential SEA victims.

This sensitization and education appeared as a major emerging issue in the lived experiences of P1, P3, P4, P5, and P6. P1 recommends this *“The public should be sensitized on the criminal procedure code and stages to follow in case of any abuse..... Where they need to channel their complaints etc.”* P3 is already involved in the sensitization and education of the local population: *“We also sensitized them that such acts were not only punishable by the local laws. We also educated them that such acts linked to the conflict were also punishable by the peacekeeping authorities.* The desire expressed in the lived experience by P3 is because the education and sensitization of the local population has already started to yield some fruits: *“This is when the population started reporting such acts, and even those acts that had been committed, and were hidden, now started being reported.”* P3 further recommended that: *“At the national level, men should be sensitized, because they are the ones who stigmatize the girls, and the women.”* On the dangers of non-sensitization on abuses, P4 stated that: *“At this time the community was not yet sensitized about these abuses, and at one moment we realized the danger, when the soldiers started going back to their countries.*

P5 on the lived experiences from supporting victims of sexual offenses, made the following recommendation to the government of CAR on sensitization, made the

following recommendations: *“To the government of CAR, I will recommend that sensitization against sexual abuse by the international peacekeepers should be reinforced in CAR. ... they should create focal points to identify the incidents committed by them during their time in CAR. Sensitization should be conducted in all the prefectures so that people can report allegations of sex crimes by whosoever, so sexual crime cases are handled properly.”*

P5 additionally recommended to the CAR government and the peacekeeping organizations that. *“It requires that the government of CAR does sensitization of the local population using community radios and the local media. The peacekeeping organizations are also supposed to sensitize the local population against sexual engagement with members of the local population, P6 on the role played by the MINUSCA/UN Local SEA Prevention Networks stated that “Its role is to sensitize the people to know that it is their right to report any case of sexual abuse.”*

Desire for Professional Care

Sexual violence has become a global health problem. The desire for increased professional care for victims of sexual offenses committed by the international military peacekeeper sex offense perpetrators was another emerging trend that characterized the individual textual description of this research participants. P2 stated that *“..... the victim needs a psychosocial agent to counsel, and comfort her so that she can cooperate with legal action to smoothly take place.”* On the desire for professional care, P3, said *“..... but if the psychosocial services play their role well, the family of the victim will be willing*

to continue with the judicial procedure.” P3 additionally stated that *“Sometimes, some families of victims take legal action and hire a lawyer.”*

P4 on the need for professionals to handle cases of men who are victims stated that *“It is therefore a very serious problem to men who are victims, because they suffer from this abuse, but they have nobody to whom to confide.”* On the desire for professional care, P5 expressed that *“We would also wish that experts in psychology should be recruited to reinforce our victim support services.”* According to P6, there is personnel, but they do not do the job *“We have all the necessary personnel, for example, the police, the gendarmerie, bailiffs, the prosecutor, the president of the court, the penitentiary personnel ..., which ought to have made justice to take its course, but it is not the case.”*

Desire to Fight Revictimization and Stigmatization

Another emergent trend from the expression of the lived experiences of the study participants was the desire to fight revictimization and stigmatization of the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in CAR. Survivors of sexual offenses are often stigmatized and marginalized (Schmitt, Robjant, Elbert, & Koebach, 2021). Myths about rape can lead to stigma, reduce disclosure, discourage seeking help from support professionals and organizations, and deepen the victim’s trauma (Schmitt, Robjant, Elbert, & Koebach, 2021). Areas of conflict and organized violence continue to be apparent hotspots of sexual victimization (Schmitt, Robjant, Elbert, & Koebach, 2021).

Participants expressed the desire to fight against stigmatization and re-victimization because it has the consequences of leading to divorce and abandonment of the victims of sex offenses committed by international military perpetrators. Victims are accused of being accomplices for what happened to them. On this P1 said *“On the part of the parents, some of them divorce their wives or abandon or stigmatization and sometimes, the girls and women even accused of being accomplices or being the cause of sexual abuse or rape.* As a result of this, victims want to keep what happened to them secret and would not want to report it. On this P2 said: *“You know very well that this issue deals with the moral and intimacy of the victim, and the victim tells herself that if she reports the matter it will go to court, the public will listen to the hearing, there will be stigmatization.”*

P2 also warn that victims should never be accused of what happened to them because this will revictimize her. *“You should never accuse the victim of complicity because it will re-victimize her, and she will not more cooperate. We need to assist the victim at all levels that is, psychosocial level, medical level, and judicial level where the victim should be involved.”* The fear of stigmatization in the society also causes the victims not to cooperate as confirmed by P3 *“Unfortunately, these victims do not usually cooperate, because of societal stigmatization.”* The women are ashamed if stigmatized in society as P6 said: *“Sometimes raped women were ashamed of being stigmatized.”*

Stigmatization and re-victimizations are like adding insult the existing injury of the victim because they both reinforce the trauma of sexual offending of the victim and that is why some of the participants expressed the lack of justice as frustrating to the

victims. Through justice and compensation, the victims may be able to clear this stigma levied on them by the society by rebuilding their lives and paving the way for recovery.

Step 6: Individual Structural Descriptions

The individual structural description of participants' lived experiences is a model that was constructed by creating abstractions of participants' horizons to capture the economic, socio-cultural, emotional, and psychological meaning of participants' lived experiences. Here, I created an individual structural description of the six research participants as follows:

Fight Against Revictimization and Stigmatization

Revictimization and stigmatization as individual structural units of the participants' lived experiences were important horizons that featured in their textual description. Revictimization and stigmatization have important consequences for victims' healing, reintegration, and acceptance into their local society. This is important because with revictimization and stigmatization, the victim is rejected by the immediate family, and relatives, and stigmatized by the community. The research participants perceived revictimization and stigmatization as important barriers to victims psychological, social, and emotional healing and recovery. For the study participants, revictimization and stigmatization are the negative factors that affected the victim pursued of justice, education, mental and physical health as well as contribute to their psychological trauma.

According to Kennedy & Prock, (2016) since these sex offenses are gendered sexual and intimate offenses that are against the social norms of what is proper and acceptable, survivors may encounter stigma. The stigma can take the form of victim-

blaming messages from the larger society as well as specific stigmatizing reactions from others in response to disclosure (Kennedy & Prock, 2016). Stigma and stigmatization have a significant impact on survivors' thoughts, feelings, and behaviors as they struggle to heal, as well as their risk of being re-victimized as well as how they seek and receive help (Kennedy & Prock, 2016).

Increased Legal Support for Victims

Legal support as the individual structural unit of the participants' lived experience was a significant horizon expounded by the participants. Participants described the lack of legal institutional support as a major limitation to the pursued of justice by victims of sexual offenses in general and specially those whose perpetrators were international military peacekeepers. They described the lack of legal institutional support as prevalent in the urban centers as well as in rural areas of CAR. Participants also perceived the lack of institutional support as a demonstration of the lack of political will on the side of the government of CAR as well as the demonstration of the nonchalance that characterizes the perception of victims' interests. Since the Dakoa allegations of SEA. The UN has tried to enhance its handling of sexual abuse allegations by appointing the Victims' Rights Advocates in CAR and elsewhere, establishing a Trust Fund, and introducing a system that enables victims to report allegations to the local community members (Kleinfeld, 2018). However, IRIN's reporting indicates that there is still much to be done to support and fairly treat victims (Kleinfeld, 2018).

Fight for Compensation of Victims

Victim compensation is a horizon that featured in the lived experience of all the participants in this study as they provided support and assistance to victims of sex crimes. However, limited attention has been paid to the potential of seeking compensation as redress to the harm of sexual violence. All participants viewed compensation to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers as being individually awarded by the courts through the judgements and sanctioning of the perpetrators. However, for a variety of reasons, sexual crime victims struggle to find justice for their claims. Compensation for offenses that are committed to specifically identified individuals such as these victims can never be treated globally under the Trust Fund as conceived and implemented under the UN system. The different types of compensation for damages in sexual offense lawsuits would either be pecuniary, non-pecuniary, and punitive and should be dealt with on the bases of individual victims and not collectively.

While the purpose of awarding non-pecuniary damages by the courts is to compensate the victim, the purpose of awarding punitive damages is to punish the perpetrator and to serve as a deterrent, both to the perpetrator and to potential perpetrators. Participants perceived compensation to victims in their individual structural description as an expectation and a right to the victim that should be awarded by the courts through judgement, the payment of which should act as a deterrent to the perpetrators and potential perpetrators. This individual structural description stems from the consideration given to sexual offenses by the participants. The participants perceived sexual crimes as a most heinous crime against mankind in terms of its high costs,

transactional cost, social cost, and psychological cost (Hassan, 2021). They perceived sexual offenses like rape as not just a crime against the victim as a person alone, but as a crime against the entire society (Hassan, 2021). Sexual offenses destroy the whole psychology of the victim and put her into a serious emotional crisis (Hassan, 2021). Other than the perception of the participants, sexual offenses are the most hated of all crimes because they are against the basic human rights and they equally violate the most cherished fundamental human rights, which is right to life (Hassan, 2021).

Sweetser (2008), focusing specifically on the instances of sexual offenses, makes the case for a compensation mechanism in situations where the UN peacekeepers have violated the rights of those they are supposed to be protecting. The UN must act to compensate victims to protect its organizational immunity and its discretion in waiving the immunity of peacekeepers because there are currently no clear mechanisms for accountability (Sweetser, 2008). Considering the current absence of clear mechanisms for accountability, the United Nations must take action to compensate victims to preserve its organizational immunity and its discretion in waiving the immunity of peacekeepers (Sweetser, 2008).

Increased Education and Sensitization of Victims

In CAR, sexual violence has erupted into a public health crisis that disproportionately affects women and children (Reliefweb, 2021). This study participants variously expressed increased education and sensitization as individual structural units of their lived experiences in supporting and assisting victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. Five of the six participants in this study expressed

their support for education and sensitization in the empowerment of victims, potential victims in the CAR population. Participants perceived that education and sensitization of this vulnerable group can enhance and strengthen their capabilities to fight against the sexual offending by the international military peacekeepers.

The participants in expressing their lived experiences supporting and assisting these victims believed that their ignorance on the justice procedure because of lack of education and sensitization was an important factor rendering them vulnerable to sexual offending by the military peacekeepers in CAR, although other factors were also identified such as poverty. The education and sensitization, participants believed, should focus on the sexual abuse reporting mechanism and the justice procedure in combination with the fight for their rights as victims. Some participants had the believe that it is only education and sensitization that could take away the victims' fear of court hearings.

Additionally, the study participants all agreed that this education and sensitization of the victims and the local population should be undertaken by non-governmental organizations, the government of CAR and the organizations responsible for the peacekeeping operations and troops TCCs. Another aspect of education and sensitization of the victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers as perceived by the study participants should also include learning a trade that would help the victims regain their lives through income generating activities that would alleviate them from acute poverty.

Increased Professional Care

Increased professional care was another horizon expressed in the participants' individual structural description in relationship to their lived experiences in supporting victims of sexual crimes committed by international military peacekeepers. It is important to mention that the invisible consequences of sexual offending by the international military peacekeepers include post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression (Holland & Barnes, 2019). Victims of sexual offenses have thoughts of committing suicide. When some participants in this study expressed the need for an increased professional care for victims of sex offenses in CAR, it is because they have lived related experiences with them when providing support and assistance to these victims practically. The participants are professionals and interact with the victims daily and know what exactly is required in comprehensive support and assistance to the victims when compared to the actual resources available.

The victims' access to psychological support is crucial in preventing and reducing mental trauma and psychological suffering caused by sexual violence (Holland & Barnes, 2019). Increased professional care is required for survivors presenting related symptoms for which they should be admitted for treatment by psychologists and psychiatrists the soonest possible (Reliefweb, 2021). Increased professional care as expressed by the participants should be comprehensive in nature, meaning it should be increased medical, increased psychosocial, and increased judicial assistance to victims. The increased professional care in the perception of the participants is envisaged to accompany victims in their healing and recovery process so they can be strong enough to resume their normal

lives (Reliefweb, 2021). The stage setting of the reception Centre of victims is very important. The Centre should not be too clinical because the victims are not sick but traumatized (Peeters, et al., 2019).

The victims need to feel safe, and a facility that provides more than just care could help (Peeters, et al., 2019). The idea of a multipurpose hall would be a good one to organize get-togethers and parties for victims to help them heal and learn to reintegrate into society (Peeters, et al., 2019). The recovery process of the sexual assault victims is aided by the all-encompassing care provided in sexual assault care facilities (Peeters, et al., 2019). All victims should be able to enter through their doors and in addition to offering the victims immediate care, victims reintegration into society ought to be enhanced with a drastically cut personal costs (Peeters, et al., 2019). The expression for increased professional care by the participants is fortunately yielding some fruits as the Doctors Without Borders (MSF) have established a center to host local and international organizations specializing in providing legal, protection, education, and socioeconomic support and assistance to victims of sexual violence (Reliefweb, 2021). Known as the Tongolo Center in Bangui, CAR, victims can now have access to all the needed services in one spot. The UN and affiliated NGOs also claim they offer extensive support to sexual exploitation and abuse victims, including financial aid as well as medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance (Kleinfeld, 2018).

Step 7: Composite Textural Descriptions

This stage of data analysis is focused on the structural descriptions and imaginative variations, through which, the researcher attempts to have a mental picture of

how the participants' lived experience occurred. The essential is to subsequently construct a personnel structure of the experience.

Table 3

Summary of Individual Textual Descriptions

| Textural Descriptions | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 |
|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Desire for justice | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Desire for trial of international military peacekeepers | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Desire for legal support for the victim | x | x | x | x | | x |
| Desire for compensation of the victim | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Desire for support of the victims | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Desire for increased institutional support | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Desire for education and sensitization of victims | x | x | x | | | x |
| Desire for increased professional care | x | x | x | | | x |
| Desire to fight revictimization & stigmatization | x | x | x | | | x |

I created the above table 3 in which I outlined all the themes from participants as expressed in their interviews of lived experiences providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses committed in CAR by the international military peacekeepers. The table made it possible for me to outline the reoccurring major themes across all the six study participants. From the table, I was able to note the common themes of the individual composite description as expressed during their individual interviews by participants as their lived experiences providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses.

As drawn from the table above, all participants expressed their desires for justice, compensations for the victim, increased support for the victim, and increased institutional

support for the victim. Five participants apart from P5 expressed their desires to have the international military peacekeepers tried in CAR, while four participants, excepting P4 and P5 in presenting their lived experiences expressed the desires for the education and sensitization of the victims and local population by various stakeholders, increased professional care for the victims and the increase fight against revictimization and stigmatization of the victim.

Step 8: Composite Structural Descriptions

At this stage, I examined the emotional, social, and cultural connections across the lived experiences of all participants and described the common elements of these lived experiences. This is where I described common elements of their experiences. I essentially conceptualized on what elements factored the most into and informed most of the lived experiences of the participants. Table 4 below, shows the relationship of categories of individual structural units of experience with the psychosocial and cultural context of the lived experience.

Table 4

Composite Structural Description

| Individual Composite Structural Descriptions | P1 | P2 | P3 | P4 | P5 | P6 |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Fight against revictimization and stigmatization | x | x | x | | x | x |
| Increased legal support for victims | x | x | x | x | x | x |
| Fight for compensation for victims | x | | x | x | x | x |
| Increased education and sensitization of victims | x | | x | x | x | x |
| Increased professional care | x | x | | x | x | x |

The above table presents the composite structural descriptions of the study participants. All the six participants in the narration of their lived experiences expressed the need for legal support for the victims. All other aspects of their lived experiences relating to revictimization and stigmatization, compensation for the victim, education and sensitization of the victims and increased professional care were expressed in the interview narrations of five of the six participants.

For the fight against revictimization and stigmatization, all participants expressed their support except P4 who did not verbally mention anything related to it in narrating her lived experiences. Concerning the fight for compensation and increased education and sensitization for the victims, all other participants expressed positive perceptions for them in the narration of their lived experiences except for P2 who did not mention it. For increased professional care, all participants narrated their lived experiences with the victims in favor of it except P3.

Step 9: Composite Structural-Textural Description

This unit of the lived experiences of the participants described the meaning and essence of the entire experiences of the participants. Here, my analysis sought to answer the two research questions for the study:

- RQ1: What are the lived experiences of the experts providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by the international military peacekeepers in the Central African Republic?

- RQ2: What essence do these experts make out of these lived experiences supporting and assisting victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers?

This is the last of all the Modified Van Kaam steps in data analysis, otherwise known as the synthesis. At this stage, I integrated both the textural and the structural descriptions by synthesizing them into an all-inclusive understanding of the lived experiences of the sexual offending of members of the local population by the international military peacekeepers in CAR. This section attempted to summarize the lived experiences of the participants of the phenomenon studied. A textural-structural description which emerged from this synthesis thus represented the meaning and essence of the lived experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

RQ1: Findings on the Lived Experiences of Participants

From the lived experiences of the study participants, I attempted to answer RQ1 which is “*What are the lived experiences of professionals providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by the international military peacekeepers in the Central African Republic?*” The data presented that resulted from the interview of the study participants revealed that the participants supporting and assisting victims of sex offending by the international military peacekeepers experienced the powerlessness of the victims. This powerlessness of the victim resulted from several factors that included poverty, fear of reprisals, revictimization, ignorance of the justice procedure, impunity, stigmatization, abandonment and rejection by their families and communities. These factors singularly or collectively rendered the victims powerless, especially when it

came to seeking of justice. Many of the sex victims because of poverty as narrated by the participants, are forced to negotiate an out of court settlement with their perpetrators or they simply refuse to participate in the judicial procedure because of the fear of reprisals by their perpetrators who are usually armed and in army uniform and are deemed to be financially powerful.

The second finding is related to the desire by the participants for the judgement of the international military peacekeepers, alleged perpetrators of the sex offenses in the Central African Republic either by the judicial instances of CAR or by an international judicial instance or a mix of both. Participants perceived that the judgement of the alleged perpetrators in CAR would act as a deterrence to potential international military peacekeeper perpetrators. Such judgement in CAR would give the sex victims the opportunity to participate in court hearings and to confront their perpetrators face-to-face and present their own side of what happened to them. It would also be an opportunity for the victim and their communities in CAR to see justice being served to the victim and the allege perpetrator being held accountable. All the study participants in sharing their lived experiences with me had the perception that the victims of sexual offending by the international peacekeepers, once they depart from CAR, nothing is heard about the case again while the victim remains abandoned to herself in CAR.

The third finding pertains to the increased need for institutional support for the sex victims of sex offending by the international peacekeepers. This increased support should take the form of sensitization and education, creation of centers for sex victims care, that will include psychosocial, medical, and judicial. The participants perceived that

such centers be made available throughout CAR and funded to provide psychosocial, medical, and judicial services by experts to all sex victims, including those whose perpetrators are international military peacekeepers.

The fourth finding is the desire by the study participants to see the victims compensated by either the perpetrator or the organization that brought the peacekeeper perpetrators to CAR. Such compensation can only be possible if the victims or their legal representatives participate in the court judgements that directly concern them for their interest to be taken into consideration during court hearings. Participants see the judgement that happens elsewhere without the victim participation or representation as not being free, fair, transparent, and equitable especially as the victims have never been informed of the court judgement decisions on cases that concern them once the perpetrator leaves CAR. To the participants, the victims, or their representatives (lawyers) should participate in the court hearings irrespective of where the trials take place, but preferably that the judgements be caused to take place in CAR, place of the crime.

RQ2: Findings on the Essence of the Lived Experiences

Relating to the RQ2, *“What essence do the experts providing support and assistance to victims make of these lived experiences?”*, the study participants, said their lived experiences in supporting and assisting victims of sexual offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers, gave them the opportunity to understand that the abandonment and rejection of the victims of sex offenses by their families, their communities, the government of CAR and the peacekeeping organizations led to their

disempowerment which further weakens and increase their vulnerability to revictimization and stigmatization by their families and communities. In the face of this, the participants feel oblige to negotiate the acceptance of victims after their treatment by their families.

The participants from these lived experiences with the victims of sex offenses, found it important and necessary to empower the victims of sex offenses through education and sensitization on their rights, justice procedure and the learning of a trade for them to rebuild their lives even if they do not receive any compensation from the sex violence perpetuated on them. Education and sensitization on the rights of the victims is a crucial tool to help them overcome the stigma that accompanies such crimes in the communities where they live.

Participants from their lived experiences in supporting these sex victims also perceived that the lack of justice as it is the common practice because victims are exposed to sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers, their human rights are violated. This lack of justice dehumanizes the sex victims because they lost their dignity in the process.

Another essence of the lived experiences of the participants, is that of poverty and the impact it has on the victims of sex offending by the international peacekeepers. Some of the victims because of poverty are forced into negotiations with their perpetrators to receive financial gains. At times it is this poverty that pushes them into transactional sexual exploitation with the peacekeepers exchanging money or food for sex with

members of the CAR local population. Thus, poverty increases their vulnerability to the sexual offending by the international military peacekeepers.

Corruption and impunity are also aspects of the essence of this lived experiences of the participants as allege perpetrators can corrupt their way through the justice procedure and get out free without any sanctions. This discourages the victims from reporting sexual abuses because it does not make sense to report the perpetrator who will not be arrested, nor prosecuted, and sanctioned.

Participants also found essence in the revision of the laws to make sure that the allege perpetrators, international military peacekeepers are judged in the presence of their victims, family members and the local communities and in the location where the crime was committed. This will have a positive impact on the victims, their families, and their local communities because they will be sure that justice has been served. While this could help in the victim's recovery process and the rebuilding of her life, it could also help to deter potential perpetrators.

Summary and Transition

Chapter four opened with an introduction and then used the Modified Van Kaam data analysis approach through bracketing and imaginative variation to look at the data in a unique way through the nine outlined steps treating each participant's interview as its own dataset. The approach that started with horizontalisation, which is the process of preliminary coding and grouping by listing all quotations to the lived experiences of the participants. Secondly, was the reduction and elimination whereby, I examined every quote through the two lens questions of whether the quote is important to the participant's

lived experience and whether the quote can be reduced to its concealed meaning. The reduction and elimination ensured the separation of the invariant constituents of the experience from unnecessary and additional information. I also brought out the various themes that characterized the interviews of the participants, and checked these themes against the dataset to make sure that my themes were representative of the experiences narrated by the participants. I then created the individual textural descriptions for each participant by using the verbatim excerpts and quotes from the participants' interviews. I further created the individual structural descriptions by examining the emotional, social, and cultural linkages between what the interviewee said.

I later created the composite textual description by using a table that outlined all the themes from each participant. This enabled me to identify the common themes used by the participants. Step 8 and 9, respectively consisted of creating the composite structural description and a composite structural-textural description which essentially presented the findings of the research.

Chapter five focuses on the interpretation of the findings, formulation of recommendations, and the presentation of the limitations of the study, and the implications. The chapter will be subdivided into five parts. Part one will introduce the final chapter. Part two will discuss the results. Part three will address the limitations, and part four will provide recommendations. Part five will explain the implications for future studies and then the conclusion.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experiences of the expert service providers providing support and assistance services to victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers in the CAR. The study also sought to understand the essence that these expert service providers make of those lived experiences. The study was carried out within the theoretical perspective of the classical theory of deterrence and the retributive criminal justice theory. The findings from the study permitted me to answer the research questions. The key findings from the study noted that:

1. There is the desire for increase justice in terms of victim participation in the justice process as well as for the international military peacekeeper perpetrators of sexual offenses to be judged and sanctioned preferably in the location where the offense was committed.
2. The desire to empower the sex victims from the vulnerability of powerlessness through education and sensitization, provision of legal support, payment of compensation, and the protection from re-victimization and stigmatization.
3. The desire for increase stakeholders and institutional support for sex offense victims and the expert service providers who provide support and assistance to them as well as the involvement of the host country of operations, CAR in the protection of sex victims and in the justice process in which its citizens are litigants.

4. The desire to first consider the interest of the sex victims rather than the attempt to protect only the image of the peacekeeping organizations whose peacekeepers are sexually abusing members of the local population in CAR.

This chapter presents the interpretations and discussion of the study findings, the limitations of the findings of the study, recommendations, and related implications of the findings, and then the conclusion.

Discussion of the Findings

One of the findings of this study relates to the participants' increase desire for justice on behalf of the victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers. According to the experts assisting victims of sex offenses, justice cannot be perceived as accomplished without it going through the principles of procedural justice. These principles of justice and fairness are central to procedural, retributive, and restorative justice and were perceived as absent from the judicial treatment of the sex victims in CAR. These principles are supposed to ensure procedures that safeguard unbiased, consistent, and reliable decisions. The four major principles of procedural justice include voice, neutrality, respect and trust, and adherence to them is related to improved justice compliance and positive outcomes.

Participants saw these four principles as completely non-existing when it came to the handling of allegations concerning victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers because the victims do not participate in the justice procedure, which supposedly take place in the perpetrators' own countries according to the memorandum of understanding signed between most of these peacekeeping

organizations and the TCCs. Since the victims do not participate and are not represented either, their voices are not heard, and participants in this study perceived that as the non-consideration of the victims' interest by the peacekeeping organizations in CAR. They also considered the justice process to be incomplete until the victim's voice is heard and the perpetrator held accountable for the crime committed and the victim compensated.

The participants expressed their concerns over the handling of the sex allegations in the perpetrators' own home country, as nobody in CAR has ever been informed by the various peacekeeping operations of the final justice decisions arrived at in these criminal cases committed by the international military peacekeepers against the local population in CAR. For these reasons, all the study participants believed that for justice to be served for those sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers the court hearings must take place in CAR. Participants based their argument on the fact that these sexual offenses have been committed in CAR, against CAR citizens and are also punishable under the CAR criminal law. The study participants held the opinion that the effective holding of the perpetrators accountable and the compensation of the victims were crucial ingredients for the victims' recovery process and the rebuilding of their lives.

The lack of proper accountability mechanism was perceived by the study participants as encouraging impunity and as a dynamic factor which independently contribute to or is supportive of the sex offending by the international military peacekeepers. Victims of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers need to be given an opportunity to tell their own side of the story and to

also feel that they have been listened and their interest considered before making the decision in these judicial instances where the perpetrators are tried.

The fact that the perpetrators are tried in their own home countries and by their own compatriots from the participants' perception, poses the problematic issue of their neutrality. Participants argued that people need to see the justice procedure as neutral, fair, and the principled decision-makers, who apply the laws consistently, transparently and people who do not base their decisions on personal opinions or bias. Victims of sex offenses are people who further need to feel respected and treated courteously, and with consideration by the justice system, the peacekeeping organizations, and the society, for them to believe their human rights are respected and considered equal to those of other people and that the crimes committed against them are considered serious. According to the study participants, victims of sex offenses need to see all the stakeholders involved in peacekeeping operations as people with trustworthy motives and intentions, who are sincere, authentic, ready to listen and care and who are there to do the right thing, especially for CAR women sexually offended by the international peacekeepers.

Another finding from this study relates to the desire to empower the sex victims because of their powerlessness in terms of their poverty situation, the fear of reprisals from their perpetrators who are powerful people in terms of the resources they have, and the positions they occupy as well as the fact that they do not face justice in CAR where they commit the sexual offenses. The impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators and the ignorance of the victims as well as the stigmatization and possibility of revictimization further add to the vulnerability of the victims and further complicate the situation for sex

victims. Consequently, participants desired the involvement of all peacekeeping stakeholders, including the host country, CAR government in the empowerment of the victim as a solution to this vulnerability, which as a necessity should pass through education and sensitization, the justice process. The desire of the participants to put the interest of the sex victims at the center of every consideration rather than the efforts in attempting to protect but the image of the peacekeeping organization is an important finding of this study.

Interpretation of the Study Findings

Interpretative phenomenology and hermeneutic are frequently used interchangeably, although they focus on the interpretative process of the study findings (Frechette et al., 2020). In fact, hermeneutics draws on interpretative phenomenology to reveal the interpretations of meaning such as from human experience and other sources of meaning (Frechette et al. 2020). This study enabled expert service providers providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers to describe their lived experiences in a way that shed light on the plight of sex victims while making sense of those lived experiences. Though some findings from my study aligned with previous research surrounding the sexual violence and abuse committed by international peacekeepers, other findings were perceived as new to the existing literature.

This study is grounded in criminal justice theories: the classical theory of deterrence and the retributive theory of criminal justice. The findings from the study aligned with the two theoretical frameworks. According to the classical theory of

deterrence, crime is caused by the individual's free will as all human beings rational and make their decisions freely with an understanding of the consequences. This theory aligns with the actions of the international military peacekeepers who, like any other criminal, by their own decisions decided freely to engage in the sexual offending of members of the local population in the CAR, because they weighed the potential of benefiting from the crime as being more than the consequences (Steele, 2015). According to the classical theory of deterrence, they must have weighed the potential gains and losses before engaging in committing sex crimes against the women and girls of CAR (Abramovaite et al., 2022).

The findings of my study also align with the retributive theory of criminal justice, according to which deterrence is the cornerstone of the criminal justice system and essential for upholding law and order in the society. This reason alone makes this theory well suited for the reprimanding the sexual crimes committed in the various peacekeeping operations in the CAR. Aligning with the findings of my study, the retributive criminal justice theory finds the duty to punish individuals who have been found guilty of committing an offense. Punishment involves intentionally imposing a cost or burden as a response to the wrong committed by the offender, especially like in case of international military peacekeepers in CAR who by their own free will have decided to sexually abuse the same vulnerable people they have been sent to protect as confirmed in the past studies (Willigenburg & Borght, 2021).

The findings from my study also aligned with the previous research studies conducted on the sexual offending in host peacekeeping countries committed by

international peacekeepers against members of the local population. Findings from this study revealed the powerlessness of the sex victims in the face of the sex offenses committed against them as well as the possible impunity enjoyed by the international military peacekeepers committing these atrocities in the same way that past studies revealed (Smith, 2017). Smith (2017) in his study findings, demonstrates this sense of powerlessness in the victims of SEA, and the impunity of those who perpetrate it. In the face of this powerlessness of the sex victims and the impunity enjoyed by the perpetrators, the March 2016 United Nations Security Council resolution 2272 devoted to the prevention of peacekeepers' engagement in SEA instead focused on the embarrassment of SEA on the UN rather than focusing its efforts on holding the perpetrators accountable and increasing the protection of members of the local population in host countries of operations (Smith, 2017).

My study findings also aligned with the existing literature on the accusative blame on the victims of sexual assault as being accomplices of what has happened to them (Gravelin et al., 2019). In the context of sexual assault, blaming the victim refers to the tendency to hold victims responsible for their own assaults (Gravelin et al., 2019). My study further blamed the powerlessness of the victim of sex offenses committed by the international military peacekeepers as not only resulting from re-victimization through the blame for her complacency as to what happened to her, but also as resulting from the stigmatization from her community, her ignorance on the justice procedure, her poverty-stricken situation, possible impunity of the perpetrator, and the abandonment by her own family and community.

Limitations of the Study

My study suffered from several limitations worth sharing here. My participants were expert service providers, who have been working with victims of sex offenses for long and almost all of them gave very lengthy narratives during my data collection interviews. All study participants were French speaking, and I had to conduct my data collection interviews all in French before translating them into English. After translation, I shared the translated transcripts with an experienced professional French-English translator to reviewed and ascertained that the transcripts were correctly translated before I could start transcribing and analyzing them. This was a lengthy and time-consuming process that was furthered worsened as I did everything manually following the advice from my peer adviser. With the peer advice, I used the Modified Van Kaam design to conduct my data analysis. The entire process gave me double work. With the voluminous interview data collected, it was also messy to handle. A good amount of my time was spent in the process of avoiding to mix-up the data.

Another limitation is related to the study methodology, which was the qualitative phenomenological methodology. This research design relies on the researcher as the data collection instrument as it is only the researcher who knows exactly the type of data he or she wants to collect on the topic and from who. As an experienced professional in the domain, I tried to remain neutral without influencing the process during the data collection stage same as in the transcription and analysis of the study data. Using the Modified Van Kaam data analysis methodology was very helpful in avoiding personal bias as I had to read the scripts over and over to make sure that I captured exactly the

experiences as narrated in the participants' own voices. In this way, I avoided my personal bias from influencing the findings of the study.

The third limitation to this study was the snowball sampling methodology of selecting participants. I needed to interview at least an initial participant before I was proposed the next possible participant or participants. This made me to waste a lot of time in the process of contacting the participants, introducing myself to them and asking if they would want to participate in the study before fixing the date and time. At times, the participant would not immediately be available, and this further wasted my time. At times, I was obliged to reschedule the interviews because of last minute professional responsibilities or emergencies necessitating the attention of the participant at the time we would have been having the interview and we had no other choice than to reschedule the interview. This made me to waste useful time that I could have used in doing other things.

Another limitation to this study is related to the location of participants who essentially came from two towns in CAR. This poses the issue of generalizing the findings to cover the entire territory of the CAR, because the realities in other locations from which I did not have participants may be different from the ones where I had my participants. Although through snowball sampling, participants recommended some participants that were in very remote locations that are very difficult to reach because of the nature of the roads and the prevailing insecurity that constituted a serious hinderance to movement.

The difficulty of handling my education in combination with my professional and family issues was another challenge that I faced all along this journey. This led to numerous sleepless nights and accumulated stress.

Recommendations

One of the reasons why I conducted this study was to raise awareness on the significance of the expert support and assistance services given to the victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers and how through their lived experiences, they could contribute to finding a solution to this problematic issue that nobody seems to consider from their point of view. Understanding the issue of sexual offending of members of the local population from the point of exploring the lived experiences of these experts, opened the door to many other related problems necessitating further research.

By the way, given the short time, I had to conclude my research on this topic, I was not able to look at it from other angles. I would therefore recommend that additional and deeper research be carried out on the same topic using the quantitative and mixed research methodologies. This will be an important complementary knowledge to the present research. I did not explore the lived experiences or role played by the family members of sex offense victims in supporting and assisting victims. Some study participants made mentioned of this family role as being very important when they narrated their lived experiences in providing support and assistance to sex victims. They argued that the family members live with the sex victims in the same households, and better understand their plight and grief, and therefore have some lived experience that

they can share in related research studies. Another area requiring further research would be the role and implication of NGOs and the host governments in the handling of SEA allegations that are committed in their territories against their own citizens, and which are punishable under their national criminal laws. This aspect also surfaced during my research.

Another new issue that out of the lived experiences of the expert service providers' narratives relates to the children born out of this criminal sexual relationship who do not know their fathers by no fault of theirs, nor that of their mothers, especially those born out of rape. These children at times are stigmatized, victimized, and given names because they do not have the local color of the people in the communities where they live with their mothers. I recommend that further study be carried out elucidate the plight of these children. It is important to know what will become of them with their mothers struggling single handedly to raise them up without any income.

Another area of recommendations for further research and which participants in this study expressed the desire to know, was what happens to the alleged perpetrators of these sex offenses when they are repatriated to their home country. Are they judged and sanctioned accordingly or what happens to them? Research into these recommended areas will shade a lot of light into the many questions raised by the participants in this study and other inquisitive and curious people about these sex crimes committed in peacekeeping operations.

The persistence of international military peacekeepers in sexually offending members of the local populations in CAR and other host countries of peacekeeping

operations, and the inability of the TCCs and peacekeeping operations to either stop or properly hold the alleged perpetrators accountable constitutes negligence, lack of respect and consideration for the victims and the local communities. I recommend that the TCCs be directly charged by the peacekeeping organizations through a signed agreement to pay specific and general damages to the victims of sex offenses committed by their soldiers either in CAR or elsewhere each time an allegation is substantiated. Such payments should be made directly to the individual victims and not paid into a trust fund like that created by the UN. The payment of such damages would help in the recovery process and in re-building the life and integration of the victim into her community. For victims who have children, the payment of such damages would help in the upbringing of the children. This could also act as a deterrent to potential perpetrators.

This study given the magnitude of its findings, could be a very important document that can be used by various stakeholders in advocating for the rights, better treatment and protection of the rights of victims of sex offenses in peacekeeping operations at different levels.

The last but very important recommendation is the crucial importance of creating an international peacekeeping tribunal to try all serious offenses including offenses of sexual nature, committed by international peacekeepers of all categories. Such an international tribunals if created, could hear cases of offenses, especially sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers in locations or communities where those offenses have been committed. It should be a mobile court for all peacekeeping operations. Prosecutors and judges to handle such cases may be drawn from different

countries and would hold court hearings across all peacekeeping missions. This can have an enormous deterrent effect on potential peacekeeper perpetrators. It would also permit the victims to tell their own side of the story with real evidence, and pursue civil claims against their perpetrators and possibly, the peace keeping operations.

Implications of the Findings

Results from this study have added substance to the existing knowledge on the SEA committed by international peacekeepers against members of the local people in CAR and other host countries of operations. It has brought in a new perspective on SEA through the understanding of the lived experiences of expert service providers providing support and assistance to victims of sexual offenses. Inferences drawn from the lived experiences of participants in this study have demonstrated what impact the findings from this study can have on the criminal justice system, on the theories of criminal justice, human rights, international law and on the support for the victims of sexual offenses. I will therefore present the implications that the findings from this study have on human rights, the criminal justice system, legal theories, the international communities and peacekeeping organizations, victim support, and social change.

Results from my study have a direct impact on the protection of human rights. Sexual violence perpetrated by international military peacekeepers in all its forms is essentially a human rights issue. The human rights law is universal, and applicable always, in armed and non-armed conflict situations. Sexual violence is prohibited by international human rights law, and thus the engagement of international military peacekeepers in the sexual exploitation and abuse of members of the local population in

CAR constitutes a direct violation of human rights of the victims. The irrevocable prohibition of torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment is found in all human rights treaties and provides a strong ground for the prohibition of all forms of sexual violence, and those perpetrated by international military peacekeepers in CAR should not be an exception. Rape as a form of sexual offending causes severe pains and intentionally inflict sufferings and trauma on the victim and calls for reparation through the justice system. The experiences narrated by the study participants from their lived experiences in providing support and assistance to the sex offense victims recalls the trauma they go through after these heinous crimes and their desire in holding the perpetrators accountable as a pathway to the victim's recovery from trauma and the beginning of a new life.

The findings of this research have important implications for future criminal justice policy and practice related to sex offenses committed in peacekeeping operations by peacekeepers. To date, previous studies have largely neglected the opinion of these expert service providers providing support and assistance to sex victims. The purpose of the criminal justice system intervention is both for punishment and prevention. Participants in this study expressed their desire to have international military peacekeepers guilty of committing sex offenses tried in CAR, and in the locations where the offenses are committed. According to the participants, this desire will act as a deterrent to potential international peacekeeper sex offenders as well as give hope to the victims and their communities that there is consideration for the interest and consideration for the victims.

The results of this study at the organizational level may help policy makers to formulate peacekeeping policies that can effectively hold the sex offenders accountable at the peacekeeping operational level, deter potential perpetrators, and compensate and protect victims and potential victims from future offending. Participants in this study expressed their desire to have perpetrators tried in CAR either in mixed jurisdictions or by international peacekeeping courts created for that purpose because they also want the voice of the victims to be heard and for the victims to confront their perpetrators face-to-face and be able to ask them direct questions.

My study equally has an implication on the criminal justice theories as applicable to it. According to the classical theory of deterrence, if the punishment of a crime is severe, certain, and swift, a rational person would weigh the potential gains and losses before engaging in committing a crime. International military peacekeepers are rational beings. If they chose to sexually offend citizens of CAR, it is because they have weighed the gains from this behavior to outweigh the consequences. These international military peacekeepers have their individual free will as rational beings and they make their decision to commit these crimes freely with an understanding of the consequences.

Implications for Social Change

Programs that aim to include communities in the transformation and creation of more sustainable societies need a solid foundation in social research, otherwise programs intended to bring about such change are likely to rely on implicit or supposed problem identification and implied community needs and desires in the absence of adequate research.

The findings of this study will contribute to social change at three main levels. At the individual level, it will permit the understanding of the narrations of the lived experiences of individual participants in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers. At the level of the organization, the findings of the study will inform the practical involvement in both the host country of operations and peacekeeping organizations focused the formulation of policies that can effectively prevent and protect members of the local population from sexual offending as well as address the handling procedure of SEA allegations committed by the international peacekeepers. The study findings may also lead to the formulation of the victim education and sensitization empowerment activities that focus schools and the local communities. With information from this study, such programs could inculcate notions on the prevention and protection members of the local population from sexual offending by peacekeepers in CAR as well the fight against revictimization and stigmatization of the survivals.

At the community level, my study will help both the peacebuilding operation and local communities to understand the greater question of sexual offenses and sexual violence in CAR. The narration of the lived experiences of the participants has brought to the limelight the vulnerability of members of the local population who have been further weakened by the sexual offending of the peacekeepers. The findings from the study can be used to formulate policies that can protect the local population in their communities.

The findings of this study will also have implications at the societal level as it will sensitize and raise awareness and understanding of the magnitude and impact of the

sexual offending and violence in CAR. The study has brought to the limelight the vulnerability and powerlessness of members of the local population, especially women and girls who are the most sexually victimized by the international military peacekeepers.

Conclusions

This study was aimed at understanding the plight of victims of sexual offenses committed by international military peacekeepers from the perspective of the lived experiences of the expert service providers whose work is to provide support and assistance to these victims of sex offenses, including those committed by international military peacekeepers. Victims of sex offenses committed by peacekeepers are a specific group of vulnerable persons with special and specific needs which can only be provided by a selected group of experts. These experts are individuals capable of supporting the sex offense victims by providing them with psychosocial, medical, and judicial assistance. The conversation between me, as the researcher and these expert participants revealed their lived experiences with sex offense victims, from the perspective of the procedures they used, the expectations of the victims, their successes, challenges, and recommendations to the various stakeholders involved in peacekeeping operations.

The participants equally shared the essence that they make of these lived experiences. Information gotten from the lived experiences shared by the study participants was then used to answer the two research questions. This gave rise to four major findings, some of which aligned and confirmed the existing literature related to the sex offenses committed by international peacekeepers in general and military peacekeepers to be specific. Relating to the study findings, they largely revolved around

the vulnerability and powerlessness of the sex victims and the desire to empower them. The study participants essentially affirmed their desire for the victims' empowerment that could happen through the desire to increase justice for them, their education and sensitization on the procedure and their rights.

The study findings were interpreted in relation to the human rights, criminal justice system, the theoretical framework, and most especially social change. Concerning the importance of this study, the findings could be used by peacekeeping organizations to reformulate policy that may effectively prevent SEA by international peacekeepers, including military contingent members. The study could also help the CAR, as the host country to come up with policies that could best protect the local population from sexual offending through policies that could empower and protect members of the local population from sex offending by peacekeepers. Additionally, the findings from this study constitute additional knowledge and information to the existing literature in the field of criminal justice and crime prevention.

Despite the findings presented by the study, as well as my practical experience working in peacekeeping operations, I can still state that, the discussion on the sexual offending of members of the local population in peacekeeping host countries remains far from being over. Despite the efforts put in by some peacekeeping organizations like the UN, if the TCCs as well as individual peacekeepers still do not understand the harm done to the vulnerable local people that they are mandated to protect, sexual offending will forever remain a major challenge in peacekeeping operations. Every single individual peacekeeper must be part of the solution and must be seen engaged in putting in every

effort to protect rather than to harm. The host country, CAR, despite its vulnerability, lack of resources and difficulties in restoring the state authority everywhere, must show signs of its willingness and determination to prevent its local population from being preyed upon by those mandated to protect. It is my understanding that this study will serve as a starting point for many related future studies as well as a source of policy creation for peacekeeping operation stakeholders.

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Appendix A: Participant Interview Questionnaire

Michael Njong

(Ph.D. Researcher)

Criminal Justice - Law and Public Policy

Walden University, USA

Lived Experience Data Collection Interview Questions for Study Participants

You were chosen to participate in this research study because you have a lived experience in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by the international military peacekeepers in the Central African Republic against members of the local population. I am about to interview you on your experience of the phenomenon. Although the interview does not pose any foreseen risk to you, I must however warn you that some of the questions I am about to ask you may recall some traumatic moment of your lived experience of this phenomenon. You are free to stop the interview if the recall of such experience becomes emotionally unbearable. You are also free to withdraw participation in the research study if you think that the questions are emotionally traumatizing. You are also reminded that your participation in the study is voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time without any consequences, if you so wish. The findings of this study may not be of direct help to you but will be beneficial to the academic community adding to the existing knowledge on the subject matter and to the international community in providing adequate support and assistance to victims and holding the perpetrators of sex offences accountable in general through an objective, transparent and victims' participation in the investigation and prosecution process of cases that concern them.

1. Explain your area of expertise and tell me about your lived experiences in providing support and assistance to victims of sexual abuses in the Central African Republic with focus on victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers.
2. Describe the expectations of this group of sex offense victims in CAR from your experience with them?
3. What are the challenges experienced in supporting and assisting victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers?
4. What is your perception on the accountability process of the international military peacekeepers, perpetrators of sex offenses against members of the local population in CAR?
5. Tell me about the support you receive from peacekeeping stakeholders in supporting and assisting victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers.
6. What do you desire for the victims of sex offenses committed by international military peacekeepers?
7. What role does the CAR government play protecting these sex victims?
8. How do these sex offence victims perceive the accountability process by their perpetrators?
9. What meaning do you make of your lived experiences in supporting and assisting victims of sex offences committed by military peacekeepers?

10. Is there any other experience or aspects related to your work with these victims that you want to share?

We have come to the end of this interview. I want to thank you for your participation in sharing your lived experience in providing support and assistance to victims of sex offences committed by international military peacekeepers in the Central African Republic. I want to assure you that the information shared through this interview remains CONFIDENTIAL and will only be used STRICTLY for the purpose of this academic research study and no other purpose.

Again, thank you very much for your availability and participation.

Appendix B: Participant Interview Questionnaire Translation into French

Michael Njong

(Chercheur en doctorat)

Justice pénale - Droit et politique publique

Université Walden, États-Unis

Questions de l'entretien de collecte de données sur l'expérience vécue pour les participants à l'étude.

Vous avez été choisi(e) pour participer à cette étude parce que vous avez une expérience vécue de soutien et d'assistance aux victimes d'abus sexuels commis par les soldats de la paix internationaux en République centrafricaine contre des membres de la population locale. Je m'apprête à vous interviewer sur votre expérience du phénomène. Bien que l'entretien ne présente aucun risque prévu pour vous, je dois cependant vous avertir que certaines des questions que je vais vous poser peuvent rappeler un moment traumatisant de votre expérience vécue de ce phénomène. Vous êtes libre d'arrêter l'entretien si le rappel d'une telle expérience devient émotionnellement insupportable. Vous êtes également libre de retirer votre participation à l'étude de recherche si vous pensez que les questions sont émotionnellement traumatisantes. Nous vous rappelons également que votre participation à l'étude est volontaire et que vous pouvez vous retirer à tout moment sans aucune conséquence, si vous le souhaitez. Les résultats de cette étude ne vous seront peut-être pas d'une aide directe, mais ils pourraient aider à identifier les stratégies ou la politiques de mis à jour, qui pourraient davantage améliorer le soutien et l'assistance mise à la disposition des victimes d'abus sexuels.

1. Expliquez votre domaine d'expertise et parlez-moi de vos expériences vécues en matière de soutien et d'assistance aux victimes d'abus sexuels en République centrafricaine, en mettant l'accent sur les victimes d'infractions sexuelles commises par des militaires de maintien de la paix internationaux.
2. Décrivez les attentes de ce groupe de victimes d'infractions sexuelles en RCA à partir de votre expérience avec eux ?
3. Quels sont les défis rencontrés dans le soutien et l'assistance aux victimes d'infractions sexuelles commises par les militaires de la paix internationaux ?
4. Quelle est votre perception du processus de responsabilisation des militaires internationaux, auteurs d'infractions sexuelles contre des membres de la population locale en RCA ?
5. Parlez-moi du soutien que vous recevez des acteurs du maintien de la paix dans le soutien et l'assistance aux victimes d'infractions sexuelles commises par des militaires de la paix internationaux.
6. Que désirez-vous pour les victimes d'infractions sexuelles commises par des militaires de la paix internationaux ?
7. Quel rôle le gouvernement centrafricain joue-t-il dans la protection de ces victimes sexuelles ?
8. Comment ces victimes d'infractions sexuelles perçoivent-elles le processus de responsabilisation de leurs agresseurs ?
9. Quel sens donnez-vous à vos expériences vécues de soutien et d'assistance aux victimes d'infractions sexuelles commises par des militaires de maintien de la paix ?

10. Y a-t-il d'autres expériences ou aspects liés à votre travail avec ces victimes que vous souhaitez partager ?

Nous sommes arrivés à la fin de cet entretien. Je tiens à vous remercier de votre participation au partage de votre expérience vécue en matière de soutien et d'assistance aux victimes d'abus sexuels commis par des soldats de la paix militaires internationaux en République centrafricaine. Je tiens à vous assurer que les informations partagées au cours de cet entretien restent CONFIDENTIELLES et ne seront utilisées STRICTEMENT que dans le cadre de cette recherche universitaire et à aucune autre fin.

Une fois de plus, je vous remercie beaucoup de votre disponibilité et participation.

Appendix C: Data Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Step 1: Horizontalization

Step 2: Reduction and Elimination