

**SEXUAL VIOLENCE AND EXPLOITATION:
THE EXPERIENCE OF REFUGEE CHILDREN
IN LIBERIA, GUINEA AND SIERRA LEONE**

REPORT OF ASSESSMENT MISSION CARRIED OUT FROM
22 OCTOBER TO 30 NOVEMBER 2001

UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES
SAVE THE CHILDREN - UK

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**“You people should have
taken care of me.
Instead you abandoned me.”**

(Refugee Child)

Acknowledgements

This is the report of a joint UNHCR/SC-UK assessment that was conducted from 22 October to 30 November 2001 in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The assessment looked at the scope and nature of sexual violence/exploitation of refugee and displaced children in the sub-region. It considered the extent of the phenomenon, its causes and consequences, as well as recommendations for future action.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A. BACKGROUND

- The assessment was initiated to look at the scope and nature of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee children in all its forms – extent (how many, who are the victims, who are the abusers), causes, consequences as well as recommendations for future action.
- The assessment team visited Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea between 22 October and 30 November 2001. The study encompassed refugee and other children of concern to UNHCR, including internally displaced children, returnees and host populations where appropriate. The term “refugee” is used throughout this text to refer to all populations of concern to UNHCR.
- A participatory methodology was adopted which involved focus group discussions and interviews with different sections of the refugee community (women, men, children, camp leadership, foster parents etc.). Meetings with other stakeholders were also held – humanitarian workers, host communities, government counterparts, police and security forces etc. The study team met some 1500 persons in total (approximately 300 in Liberia, 800 in Sierra Leone and 400 in Guinea) mainly in group meetings which primarily consisted of refugees but also included some of the other participants mentioned above.
- By way of general background, children under 18 constitute some 45% of the world’s 21 million refugees and others of concern to UNHCR. In Africa, this figure climbs to 56% with the numbers of refugee children totalling 2,627,707. The specific breakdown in countries covered in this study is as follows: 426,140 or 63% are under 18 in Guinea; 33,766 or 50% are under 18 in Liberia; no figures are available for Sierra Leone. (UNHCR POPULATION DATA UNIT, JULY 2001 – WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OLDER REFUGEES)

B. KEY FINDINGS

1. Sexual exploitation

(a) *What is the extent of sexual exploitation?*

- Sexual exploitation of refugee children in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone is very extensive.
- It mainly takes the form of casual informal encounters between the exploiter and the child.
- Organised prostitution is also found in some camps with pimps targeting adolescent girls.

- Allegations of trafficking for sexual exploitation were also uncovered e.g. Liberian refugee girls in Guinea being trafficked to Western Europe.

(b) *Who are the sex exploiters?*

- Men are the principal sex exploiters. A few reports of female sex exploiters were documented.
- The exploiters are mainly men in the community with power and money including:
 - Agency workers from local and international NGOs as well as UN agencies are among the prime sexual exploiters of refugee children often using the very humanitarian assistance and services intended to benefit refugees as a tool of exploitation. Male national staff were reported to trade humanitarian commodities and services, including medication, oil, bulgur wheat, plastic sheeting, education courses, skills-training, school supplies etc., in exchange for sex with girls under 18. The practice appeared particularly pronounced in locations with significant and established aid programmes. There was compelling evidence of a chronic and entrenched pattern of this type of abuse in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia in particular.

Allegations were documented against a wide range of organisations and individuals as they emerged, unexpectedly but systematically, during the course of the study. These allegations require further investigation as the assessment team was not in a position to verify this information given the broader scope of its work and the shortage of time available for this particular issue. The number of allegations documented, however, is a critical indicator of the scale of this problem as altogether 42 agencies and 67 individuals were implicated in this behaviour. The breakdown of these figures by country is as follows: Liberia -11 agencies and 26 individuals; Sierra Leone -13 agencies and 24 individuals; Guinea - 18 agencies and 17 individuals. Confidential lists detailing these allegations were submitted to UNHCR as the mission was ongoing. This information is derived from discussions and interviews with approximately 80 separate sources comprising of both groups and individuals.

- Security and military forces including international and regional peacekeepers, national forces and police units are another significant category of exploiters. UN peacekeepers in Sierra Leone are alleged to be extensively involved in the sexual exploitation of children with the assessment team recording allegations against UNAMSIL peacekeepers from nine countries. Details of these allegations, which also require verification, have likewise been submitted to UNHCR.

- Teachers both from government establishments and agency-run education programmes.

- Camp leaders and other influential people in the community such as religious leaders.
- Small businessmen and traders
- Men with jobs – depending on local economy this might include diamond miners, palm wine tappers, plantation workers etc.

(c) *Who are the exploited?*

- Girls are the principal targets of sexual exploitation. A few reports of boys being sexually exploited by women were documented, and no reports of boys being sexually exploited by men were received at all. This is not to say that the sexual exploitation of boys by men or women is not more prevalent than appeared. The socio-cultural environment is not conducive to such reporting. In addition, it should also be noted that other forms of exploitation, in particular in the labour market, were found to be a common experience among boys in the region.
- The age of the girls in question is mostly between 13-18 with the youngest reported case being five years of age. The few boys reported to be exploited were in the age range 17-22.
- Especially vulnerable groups included girls from single parent/adult households, separated and unaccompanied children (perhaps living with foster parents or relatives unable to provide adequate care e.g. elderly grandparents, uncles, and aunts), children from child-headed households, orphans, girls who are street traders/or whose mothers are street traders.
- Children are abused in other ways too, for instance some children are used as intermediaries, “pimps” almost, acting as the link between the girl and the exploiter.

(d) *What is the “exchange rate”?*

- The “exchange rate” for sexual services is extremely low. The girls usually get very little money, if any at all, e.g. in Liberia, the girls were reported to receive the equivalent US\$10 cents with which they could buy a couple of pieces of fruit or a handful of peanuts i.e. not a full meal.
- Payment is more often in kind than in cash e.g. few biscuits, bar of soap, plastic sheet, clothes, shoes, books, pencils etc.
- The girls have very little control over the sexual transaction in terms of the money they receive as the exploiter sets the rate.
- The girls have little negotiating power over the use of condoms and are rarely found to use them – indeed the offer of money can easily override any intent to practice safe sex.

(e) *Where does sexual exploitation take place?*

- The locations where propositioning for sexual exploitation takes place were reported to include distribution and registration sites, schools, medical clinics, markets, cars, churches, roads etc.

(f) *What are the underlying causes?*

- Poverty is the principal underlying cause and the lack of the most basic items essential for survival, including food, was frequently cited as the reason for entering exploitative relationships. This is compounded by the lack of alternative livelihood options. Indeed, parents recounted feeling that the exploitation of their daughters is the only way to make ends meet. Both refugee children and communities showed an awareness and dislike for the exploitation they were being subjected to but felt they had no other option.
- The way in which humanitarian operations are managed is clearly a contributing factor for a variety of reasons:
 - There is a lack of adequate control of people working for international and local humanitarian agencies. There is an absence of regulation, monitoring, and retribution for staff who abuse their power and organisational resources to exploit children.
 - This coupled with poor monitoring and control of programme implementation leads to abuses and means that refugees are not even getting what has been allocated to them.
 - International staff are noticeably absent from camps and inaccessible to refugees thus giving male national staff unprecedented power and control over camp life.
 - There is a lack of careful planning of aid programmes e.g. poor camp design and cramped housing which does not allow for adequate privacy and exposes children to sex at too early an age; a lack of female staff; a lack of adequate regulations governing camp life etc.
 - The existing sexual and gender-based violence programmes in the camps do not cater for the special needs of children or pay enough attention to sexual exploitation (rather than violence) as an issue.
 - There is inadequate consultation and involvement of the refugee community especially children and women in decision-making concerning humanitarian activities. This has led to a damaging sense of powerlessness and dependency as well as programmes which do not adequately cater for the real needs of the population.
- National laws in all three countries enable exploiters to go unpunished. The laws are inadequate to provide sufficient protection and do not allow for the prosecution of persons having sex with minors e.g. the age of consent is 14 in Sierra Leone, 16 in Liberia, and it does not exist at all in

Guinea. Even where legal provisions do exist and are adequate, the weakened legal systems and cumbersome procedures make successful prosecutions unlikely.

- The breakdown of community values and the lack of a communal sense of responsibility are also factors. There is widespread acceptance of sex as a trading commodity. Young people were even found to be paying for sex amongst themselves with boys complaining that they are unable to attract girlfriends as they lack the financial means. There is also evidence of peer pressure pushing children into this activity for material rather than essential gain. An associated factor is the issue of harmful traditional practices and a direct link emerged, at times, between sexual exploitation and the practice of traditional customs e.g. early marriages, female genital mutilation.

(f) *What are the consequences?*

- Serious health risks are among the primary consequences including high rates of teen pregnancies, abortions, motherhood, illness/injury and even death as a result of pregnancy-related complications, infant mortality of babies born to teenage mothers, high rates of STDs, and exposure to HIV/AIDS. These health risks are exacerbated by various factors that impede protective behaviour e.g. lack of belief that HIV/AIDS actually exists and is a real threat; cultural practices and beliefs which limit the utilisation of reproductive health services.
- Social/psychological outcomes include forced early marriage, social exclusion, poverty, family breakdown, unemployment, mental and psychological problems.
- The girls usually lose out on developmental opportunities such as training and education possibilities which have to be given up as result of pregnancy. This can result in illiteracy, lack of educational achievement and poor skills development.
- There is consequently severe damage to long-term prospects such as employment. Any marriage prospects that a girl may have had are also lost as girls who are exploited often end up abandoned with several children to raise by themselves by the time they are in their early twenties.

2. *Sexual violence*

(a) *What is the extent of sexual violence?*

- The study revealed lower levels of sexual violence against refugee children as compared to sexual exploitation.
- Most incidents of sexual violence still go largely unreported.

- The types of sexual violence documented included rape, the abduction and abuse of children by military forces, female genital mutilation, and rape as a weapon of war.
- Both the severity of the atrocities in the war and the widespread acceptance of sexually exploitative relationships have undermined the seriousness of crimes of sexual violence when they do occur. The exchange of even the smallest amount can turn a brutal act of violence into a consensual act.

(b) *Who are the perpetrators?*

- The perpetrators of sexual violence are men including international and regional peacekeepers (UNAMSIL, ECOMOG in the past), fellow refugees, armed forces personnel, government soldiers and men from the host community.
- Boys are also reported to be perpetrators of sexual violence against girls of the same age.
- Special categories of men highlighted include those suffering from drug/alcohol addiction or mental illness; ex-combatants; medical personnel.

(c) *Who is affected by sexual violence?*

- Girls are mainly affected by acts of sexual violence. The same comments made above with respect to boys and sexual exploitation apply to sexual violence also. Moreover, incidents of sexual violence affecting boys are frowned upon as acts of homosexuality.
- The majority of those affected were reported to be between the ages of three months and eleven years.
- Those especially vulnerable include children left alone with caretakers who attack them (e.g. neighbours, grandparents), child street traders, children living with foster parents. Attendance at dance halls and social events was identified as a risk factor. In addition, sexual violence occurring within the context of conflict continues to be a phenomenon in the region, including incidents taking place during flight or at transit centres, and girls experiencing sexual violence at the hands of their abductors.

(d) *Where does sexual violence take place?*

- Sexual violence is reported to occur when children go looking for firewood and food. At rivers and streams when children are bathing or doing the laundry. On farms, in abandoned booths, in bushes surrounding the camps, dance halls, video clubs, or emergency/transit booths housing up to a hundred people at any one time.

(e) What are the underlying causes?

- The legacy of conflict in the region with its gross crimes of sexual violence has left the population with an unhealthy “tolerance” of such acts. It has also given perpetrators a sense of impunity to do as they wish. The high levels of sexual exploitation have also served to blur the distinction between consensual and non-consensual acts.
- The prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse is said to be a direct cause of acts of sexual violence.
- Various other factors allow crimes of sexual violence to go unpunished and as such are contributing factors to further acts of violence. These include: low reporting levels due to the social stigma or the need for money in exchange for silence or consent; ineffective prosecution of reported cases because of expensive, cumbersome and corrupt legal processes which favour the perpetrator.

(f) What are the consequences?

- The consequences include severe physical and psychological trauma and injury, social stigma and isolation, forced marriages of the girls to the perpetrators and loss of long-term opportunities and prospects.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS

- These recommendations are addressed to all agencies working with refugee and displaced populations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea as well as governments and donors.
- UNHCR has the primary responsibility to ensure that these recommendations are implemented given the mandate bestowed upon it by the international community for the protection of refugees.
- SC-UK as a child protection agency and a co-sponsor of this study also has a responsibility to ensure that these issues are addressed.
- These recommendations are aimed at ensuring the better protection of refugee children from sexual violence and exploitation and are organised under three main headings: the management of humanitarian operations; the development and implementation of legal standards; and responding to abuses by workers.

1. Management of humanitarian operations

(a) *Provision of assistance and services*

- Review humanitarian assistance currently being provided to refugees (food, shelter, land etc.) to verify whether allocations meet minimum requirements and basic needs.
- Ensure humanitarian assistance reaches a minimum level in locations where refugees have no other means of meeting their basic needs.
- Review the availability of adequate alternative livelihood options (micro-credit, land for farming etc.) to see if more can be done to enable refugee communities to be self-sufficient.
- Ensure that land is set aside for agricultural purposes during negotiations over refugee settlements to enable self-sufficiency and to avoid the types of protection and social problems, which can result from over-dependency.
- Review camp layout and design (toilets, sleeping arrangements) to take adequate account of the need for privacy and physical security and to ensure that the physical plan of the camp does not exacerbate problems of sexual violence/exploitation.
- Review and improve monitoring of humanitarian aid and services being provided to ensure that assistance, which has been allocated, reaches refugees and is not being manipulated to become a tool of exploitation in itself. In particular, review methods, adopt more effective techniques and engage children and adolescents in designing mechanisms to monitor their access to humanitarian services. Also ensure that established techniques for monitoring e.g. spot checks, anonymous informers in refugee community etc. are utilised where appropriate.
- Establish a neutral committee to act as an independent watchdog on the management of humanitarian aid programmes. Its remit should be monitoring the implementation of humanitarian aid and services both for these and other types of abuses. Such a committee should visit camps regularly and hold consultations with various sectors of the refugee community especially children. The committee should be independent of any humanitarian agency and should report to donor governments.
- Review special programmes for vulnerable groups (e.g. supplementary feeding, loans, agricultural activities, housing) to ensure that they are reaching those they are intended to benefit and that those benefiting are not subjected to exploitation in exchange for having been “selected”.
- Verify whether separated and unaccompanied children are able to access assistance and services as individuals rather than having to register as part of a family grouping.

- Reconsider definitions of “vulnerability” to ensure that the most needy are encompassed by such programmes.
- Ensure operational design and implementation is more gender and child-sensitive and be aware that this issue is symptomatic of the low status of girls, children and young people in camp communities.
- All protection agencies should ensure that sexual violence/exploitation is incorporated as a core aspect of their protection work.

(b) *Community mobilisation/consultation*

- Foster initiative among communities and not dependence and powerlessness especially vis-à-vis agency workers. The refugee community should be actively engaged to be concerned for and to protect its own.
- Hold more regular consultations about policies and programmes before decisions are taken. This consultation should take place at a broad level and encompass all sectors of the refugee community and UNHCR international staff.
- Review the way in which camp management structures are set up and managed to ensure that all sectors of the refugee community are adequately represented especially children and women.
- Children should be specifically consulted on the design and implementation of programmes and policies impacting on them.
- Help the refugee community to develop guidelines regarding various aspects of camp life e.g. dances, video clubs.
- Set up a reporting mechanism to ensure that refugees have a way of raising complaints directly with an senior-level international staff member, and require camp leaders to report abuses by agency staff directly to such a person.
- Hold regular individual meetings in camps involving senior-level international staff where individual refugees including children and young people can raise their concerns in a private and confidential manner.

(c) *Programming to combat sexual exploitation*

- Make sexual exploitation of refugee children a major component of existing programmes. Existing sexual and gender-based violence programmes have not identified sexual exploitation as an issue and are not sensitive enough to the special needs of children.

- Review existing sexual and gender-based violence programmes to address the issue of child sexual exploitation. Incorporate specifically designed initiatives to protect children from sexual exploitation and to rehabilitate those who are already victims. This would include inter alia:
 - Taking measures to identify girls in the refugee community who are most vulnerable to sexual exploitation (girls from single parent households, unaccompanied and separated children - perhaps living with relatives unable to provide e.g. elderly grandparents, girls who are street traders/or whose mothers are street traders)
 - Providing aid and services to girls who are identified as at-risk e.g. ensure enough assistance to meet basic needs, education and training for alternative livelihood options/income-generation, health care and advice, psychological/social support, life skills
 - Conducting broader education campaigns in the refugee community (children, men, women, special interest groups etc.) to address knowledge, attitudes and practice concerning sexual exploitation and its consequences. The breakdown in social values and responsibilities of all sectors of the refugee community (parents, leaders, children, etc.) needs to be tackled.
- Identify existing initiatives concerning child sexual exploitation in the local community and see whether the provision of financial support and specialist expertise would facilitate the expansion of such projects to encompass refugee children.
- Implement new projects to tackle the question of child sexual exploitation where there are no possibilities of doing this under sexual violence/exploitation initiatives in the refugee or host communities.
- Document experiences and lessons learned from work by other organisations on child sexual exploitation with a view to replication in refugee settings.
- Recognise that boys too can be targeted for sexual exploitation and abuse despite the fact that girls are the main victims. Special efforts are needed to create an environment where boys feel able to report sexual abuse.
- Strengthen existing sexual and gender-based violence programmes as a whole in terms of co-ordination, accessibility, confidentiality, efficiency, capacity building of staff and refugee participation.
- Ensure that all statistics being collected by various implementing agencies facilitate an analysis of the child and adolescent population within the beneficiary group. This would include programmes for vulnerable groups, registration statistics, medical services, SGBV programmes, income-generating programmes, education etc.

(d) Education programmes

- Build safeguards into education structures to ensure that sexual exploitation does not take place within the school system e.g. close attention to recruitment and monitoring of teachers, more female staff.
- Ensure that the education system does not impose any demands on children or families (e.g. uniforms, special footwear, and school feeding taxes) which can deprive children of education and/or lead them into exploitative relationships.
- Adapt existing education programmes to see how they can address the issue of child sexual exploitation (e.g. peace education and life skills training).
- Provide support to enable teenage mothers to continue their education e.g. child care, promote attitudinal changes of teachers and peer groups towards girl mothers.

(e) Training and awareness-raising activities

- Review all existing training and awareness-raising programmes in terms of their content, methodology and ability to respond to this issue. Existing programmes appear to be too theoretical and/or inadequately tailored to have the desired impact. Any training e.g. child rights, HIV/AIDS needs to be very practical and directly related to the daily lives of refugee children. More creative approaches are also needed and the refugees themselves should be asked about the best way of bringing home messages about child protection and health.
- Expand awareness raising campaigns for the refugee community on a diverse range of subjects (especially HIV/AIDS, child rights, sexual violence/exploitation, and harmful traditional practices).
- Ensure awareness raising campaigns for the refugee communities are age, gender and language sensitive to the needs of refugee children and women.
- Carry out information campaigns to ensure that all groups in the refugee community especially children understand their entitlements and rights (food, services, repatriation etc.). This information should not only be given to community leaders but should be shared with children in a participative and child-friendly environment.

(f) Other programme initiatives

- Support programmes aimed at making women, especially adolescent girls, self sufficient through skills-training, micro-credit, small businesses etc.

- Establish sporting and environmental activities for children.
- Institute measures to increase security in camps e.g. deployment of police officers especially female police officers, facilities to arrest and detain suspects etc.
- Initiate parallel programming activities to address other forms of exploitation, which affects boys in particular e.g. exploitation in the labour market.

(g) Staff management

- Direct international and senior national staff to spend more of their time in the camps rather than in branch and sub-offices.
- Devise ways of increasing the presence of international and senior national staff in camps e.g. establish a rota of partner agencies working in a particular location to ensure that such staff members are present in the camps at all times.
- Deploy more female staff especially at the level of direct contact with the refugees. Women should operate services concerning girls and sexual health.
- Do not establish staff residence quarters in camps. Where this is essential for operational reasons, staff should be housed at a nearby location outside the camp. Additional safeguards should be put in place to ensure that staff residences do not become a location for sexual violence/exploitation e.g. close monitoring, mixing male/female staff.
- Move field staff between camps on a regular basis to ensure that entrenched patterns of behaviour are not allowed to develop.
- Impose tighter controls on the use of official vehicles especially out of office hours. In particular there should be tighter restrictions on transporting refugees except for work-related reasons.
- Deploy more field staff to address these and other protection concerns properly. Cuts at international level and especially among sectors most directly concerned with such issues – protection and community services – are having a detrimental effect on protection coverage on the ground.

(h) Donor/implementing partner relations

- All actors - donors, UN agencies and NGOs - should be aware of their responsibilities in monitoring and advocating against these practices and

holding their own partners and peers accountable for allegations of staff mis-conduct in particular.

- Donors should hold implementing partners accountable for the behaviour of their staff. A clause should be inserted into agreements with implementing partners to this effect specifying termination of the contract as a consequence of inadequate control of staff.

2. Development and implementation of legal standards

- Lobby governments to implement the Convention on the Rights of the Child (the CRC has been signed and ratified by all three countries).
- Lobby governments to sign and ratify the Optional Protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Support concrete measures to strengthen justice systems, processes, and legal standards.
- Undertake measures to increase the accessibility of the legal system by refugees e.g. provision of mobile courts, transport, legal advice, and interpretation.
- Carry out monitoring and advocacy to ensure that criminal laws are enforced where violated.
- Lobby government to ensure that abuses by national police and security forces are prevented and effectively prosecuted if they occur.
- Ensure that civil laws e.g. employment legislation are used to optimal effect to prevent the sexual exploitation of children.
- In their advocacy work, agencies should use the definition of a “child” as everyone below the age of 18 in accordance with the higher standard established by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Any exceptions to this definition under national law should be judged according to whether this would lead to inadequate protection for those of concern to their organisations. For example, the age of consent under national law is too low in all three countries and exposes those of concern to UNHCR to greater protection risks. UNHCR should advocate raising the national age of consent (to at least a common minimum standard of 16) as this would facilitate the prosecution of adults entering into sexual relationships with minors and thus the better protection of those under UNHCR’s mandate.

3. Responding to abuses by agency workers

(a) *Investigation of allegations of sexual exploitation by workers*

- Conduct an investigation into allegations of sexual exploitation by workers (staff and volunteers) using an independent team which is not associated with the situation.
- Carry out investigations in all locations where allegations have been made being mindful of the fact that there are no doubt other instances and cases that the assessment team was not made aware of given its broad mandate and the shortage of time available to focus on this issue specifically.
- Adopt a common and co-ordinated approach to this issue since it is of sub-regional bearing. Ensure that all three countries are given equal attention. The largest refugee beneficiary populations in Liberia and Guinea appear to have suffered from a particularly chronic and entrenched pattern of abuse by agency workers. The fact that refugee populations are in the process of repatriating to Sierra Leone does not obviate the need for such an investigation in the countries of asylum. Agency workers need to be held accountable both to redress the wrongs suffered by the refugee population and to prevent abuses in future operations.
- Investigate both criminal and disciplinary breaches. Criminal violations might include statutory rape as well as theft, fraud etc. resulting from the appropriation and misuse of organisational property in this way. Disciplinary offences encompass improper conduct in relation to the beneficiary population.
- Bear in mind that criminal prosecutions are unlikely to be successful given the absence of adequate legal standards and poorly functioning legal systems in all three countries. Disciplinary action thus becomes the principal way of controlling and penalising the behaviour of agency workers. In this regard, it is also important to note (while taking care to safeguard employees from spurious allegations) that the burden of proof in civil cases is usually lower than in criminal cases (“balance of probabilities” rather than “beyond reasonable doubt”). This affects the types of methodology used to investigate each type of breach and the evidence needed to secure a conviction.
- Conduct investigations into other types of abuses that compound the problems of child sexual exploitation e.g. corrupt distribution practices and the withholding of assistance from refugees, or sex with non-beneficiary minors below the national age of consent.
- Recognise that the confidentiality and security of witnesses/victims is paramount and take special measures when interviewing and/or otherwise involving children in investigations.

- Take care not to penalise children through investigations and disciplinary action by appearing to deprive them of their “livelihood”. It may be necessary to investigate the situation of the children involved and to discreetly provide essential assistance to those in desperate need in a manner that does not compromise evidentiary findings.
- Carry out instant dismissals of workers where allegations are found substantiated. The organisation should be honest when responding to requests for references to ensure that the problem is not simply displaced elsewhere.
- Review the capacity and obligation of workers to speak up about abuses. Workers wishing to raise complaints with their inspectorates should have the possibility to raise these directly with the unit in question, or better still to an external body, instead of going through the usual supervisory channels. Indeed, making direct communication an obligation rather than an option would ensure that concerns action is taken and help alleviate any fear staff may have of reprisals.

(b) *Preventing future abuses by agency workers*

- Recognise the importance of employment law and disciplinary proceedings in responding to employee abuses. Adequate criminal standards enabling prosecution may not exist e.g. age of consent in Sierra Leone is 14. Even where they do exist there may not be a well-functioning criminal legal system to effectively implement these laws.
- Develop code of conducts/child protection policies. These should be wide-ranging but at the same time specific in the types of behaviour they seek to address i.e. sexual relations with beneficiaries.
- Incorporate the monitoring of child sexual exploitation, as well as other forms of abuse, in all aspects of work. Child protection agencies, such as SC-UK, have a special responsibility to take the lead in this regard.
- Prohibit workers from having sexual relations with beneficiaries under the age of 18 in any code of conduct that is developed. A blanket prohibition punishable by instant dismissal should be put in place irrespective of ongoing debates regarding the appropriateness of relationships between adult beneficiaries and employees.
- Encourage workers to speak up about abuses in this code of conduct. Parallel mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that workers are not penalised for making reports and that their security is adequately protected.
- Review codes of conducts/child protection policies instituted by other organisations to facilitate the development of suitable internal policies.

- Apply the code of conduct to all permanent or casual employees of the organisation, including volunteers. It should also be made applicable to refugee camp leaders who have been put in a position of trust and authority. This code of conduct should be disseminated on a systematic basis to all current and new workers joining the agency.
- Provide more training for workers on their responsibilities towards refugees, as well as special subjects such as child rights, sexual and gender-based violence etc.
- Amend job descriptions for field staff to specify more clearly the time required to be spent in camps and duties regarding refugee consultation. Such matters should not be left solely to the discretion of individual officers or branch/sub-offices.

4. Implementation of these recommendations

- This report, its findings and recommendations should be disseminated widely in all three countries among agency workers, government counterparts and refugee/displaced communities. A particular effort should be made to convey the findings of this report to the children themselves by producing a “child-friendly” version.
- These recommendations should be formulated into a broad plan of action by each agency and responsibilities for ensuring that these provisions are implemented should be assigned to specific persons in each organisation. The most senior levels of each agency should monitor and be held accountable for ensuring that follow-up action is taken.
- This plan should be translated into concrete operational country-level plans of action by each country office with technical support from headquarters. A sexual violence/exploitation specialist should be deployed to assist the country offices to develop and implement concrete plans of action. These plans should focus on remedial and preventive action, including planning for this issue in future population movements and aid programmes e.g. repatriation to Sierra Leone. Refugee and displaced communities, especially women and children, should be consulted and engaged in the development and implementation of these plans.
- UNHCR should convene a meeting of all agencies that are implicated in the allegations of sexual exploitation in order to share the information it is holding on their workers. Participants should be senior level staff from the headquarters of the various organisations concerned to ensure the necessary degree of oversight. Agencies should use the meeting to co-ordinate their investigative approaches into these allegations, and to adopt a blacklisting strategy to ensure that those culpable are not hired by partner agencies. Other subjects which should be covered include the responsibilities of implementing agencies vis-à-vis donors for the conduct

of their employees under partnership agreements as well as the development of codes of conduct and child protection policies.

- Agencies with allegations facing their workers should as a matter of urgency initiate an investigation in all locations where reports have been received as well as other places where abuse may be taking place. Other agencies working in the sub-region should be aware that their staff may be implicated even if allegations have not yet come to the fore - they should take precautionary measures accordingly.
- UNHCR should ensure that a comprehensive investigation is carried out in locations in all three countries where reports against its workers have been cited. The investigation should encompass both disciplinary (improper conduct) and criminal (statutory rape, theft, fraud etc.) breaches using investigative methodologies appropriate to each. It should prioritise the most critical finding of this study i.e. misuse of humanitarian aid by workers to exploit children in all three countries (and particularly in Liberia and Guinea where the most chronic patterns of abuse were found). UNHCR, given its mandate for the international protection of refugees, should ensure that refugee populations are the primary focus of any investigation that is carried out - at the present time, the largest numbers of UNHCR's core beneficiary populations are in Liberia and Guinea.
- UN headquarters should ensure that a full investigation is carried out into the distinct allegations of abuse by UNAMSIL peacekeepers in Sierra Leone.
- UNHCR and SC-UK should convene a meeting in the sub-region of all agencies working with refugee and displaced populations in order to share the findings of the report and to discuss/co-ordinate programmatic follow-up on the broader subject of sexual exploitation, violence and abuse of refugee children in the region.
- Agencies should take steps to apply any lessons learned from these initiatives to other regions given the probable likelihood that these abuses are occurring elsewhere.
- Donor governments and agencies should actively monitor whether these recommendations are implemented and the degree of progress that is made.

INTRODUCTION

A. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The UNHCR/SC-UK study was initiated to look at the scope and nature of sexual violence and exploitation as it affects refugee children in the Mano River States which comprise of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The study covered refugee and other children of concern to UNHCR in the sub-region (including returnees, certain categories of IDPs and host populations where appropriate). The term refugees is used throughout the text to encompass all these groups unless specified otherwise.

Sexual violence/exploitation is one of the major protection issues affecting refugee, especially girls, in West Africa according to information in field reports from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Ivory Coast. The child protection work carried out by SC-UK over the past year has highlighted the following gender issues in particular:

- The low ratio of separated girls to boys within foster families who have been identified and reunified with their families.
- The low number of abducted girls released by members of the fighting forces to participate in the demobilisation process, due to the withholding of girls as sex slaves.
- The vulnerability of separated girls to sexual violence within their foster families.
- The vulnerability of girls to sexual violence during mass population movements and displacement.
- The use of survival sex as a livelihood option/distress strategy by girls during family separation and displacement.
- The lack of access to sexual and reproductive health including HIV/AIDS prevention and care and developmental options.
- The sexual exploitation of girls by agency workers providing humanitarian assistance.

These issues clearly warranted greater attention and programmatic action. The study was therefore set up to increase the amount of concrete knowledge about the scope of the problem alongside a closer examination of the responses of UN agencies, NGOs, communities and the children themselves. The results of such an assessment were intended to help UNHCR and child protection agencies to strengthen their programmes, particularly through the development of a concrete plan of action. The findings would also provide important material for advocacy purposes in order to draw attention to this issue in national and international fora.

The study was carried out by reviewing existing studies on sexual and gender-based violence in the region and by conducting a field mission on the ground. It was implemented over six month period with the assessment mission taking place from 22 October to 30 November 2001. Approximately two weeks were spent in each country with the team consecutively visiting Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The study encompassed selected refugee and returnee communities in all three countries as well as local

communities for the purpose of carrying out comparative work. Locations visited by the study team included; camps in Grand Cape Mount and Montserrado counties namely: Liberia - Sinje I and II, VOA camp as well as meetings with refugees from Samukai town, Zuannah town and Banjor town; Sierra Leone - Freetown, Bo, Kenema, Daru, Blama/Gerihun/ Jembe camps; Guinea - Conakry and the camps near Kissidougou.

The main issues addressed by the study included:

- Scope, nature and causes of sexual violence and exploitation of refugee boys and girls. The study adopted a broad term of reference at the outset but as the assessment progressed the primary focus turned to sexual exploitation and secondly sexual violence. The issue of sexual abuse (paedophilia, domestic abuse, incest etc.) was not explored by this study;
- Resilience and capacity of children and communities to face sexual, violence and exploitation and the factors which enhance or undermine this capacity;
- Impact of sexual violence, exploitation and abuse on children, including in terms of reproductive health and HIV/AIDS;
- Response of communities, local authorities, governments, NGOs, UN agencies;
- Efficacy of existing protection structures such as national laws and regulations, administrative structures, inter-agency child protection networks, UNHCR protection activities;
- Documentation of good practices and lessons learnt.

A participatory approach was adopted and consultative sessions were organised with children, community leaders, government officials, international and local NGOs, UN agencies, security forces and other armed groups. Apart from consultations with refugees, the study team also met with host nationals, NGOs and government representatives.

Despite the effort to involve host nationals, they were outnumbered in most meetings and the views and experiences contained in this report mostly reflect those of refugee/displaced children. The limited contact with host national children did, however, show that these issues are just as pertinent to them as they are to refugees. It should also be noted that programming for sexual violence/exploitation is the same whether it affects refugee or IDP populations.

B. METHODOLOGY

1. Approach

Knowing that it is difficult for children to talk about issues relating to sexual relationships and behaviour, particularly in a culture that considers this to be taboo, the study deliberately used participatory methods to ensure that children would be able to participate without feeling threatened. Participatory methods ensured that refugee, internally displaced and returnee children were

given an opportunity to freely provide the information contained in this report and to influence decisions that will determine future program initiatives.

A special effort was made to ensure that the study was child-centred and information from adults, NGOs and government sources was taken as corroborative. Even though the process was participatory, the study team maintained confidentiality on sensitive information provided by the children to ensure that no child was put at risk of experiencing any form of violence as a result of he or she having taken part in the study. Within the study, the reliability of information provided by the children was tested out by a number of other sources.

Children who participated in the study were not selected on the basis of their experiences of sexual violence or exploitation. Taking into account that it is unethical to solicit information on experiences of sexual violence from survivors, children were not encouraged nor asked to share their personal experiences of sexual violence and exploitation. Even though the study team had the professional expertise to provide counselling to child survivors of sexual violence, the study was not built on collecting individual children's experiences of violence. The following factors were instead used as selection criteria for children – age (5-12 years, 13-18 years); those in and out of school; children with particular vulnerabilities – disabled, girl mothers, unaccompanied minors, separated children, fostered children, child-headed households and single parent /adult households; and finally children who had arrived in the camp as separated children, gone through the child protection programs, and were now adults (19 –25 years).

To further strengthen the participatory aspects, UNHCR and Save the Children country offices were given an opportunity to choose appropriate staff members to join the core assessment team. Even before the arrival of the study team, the country team together with other implementing partners developed the program plan for meetings with government representatives, NGO meetings at head office and field levels, UN representatives, field visits, meetings with refugee children, leaders, women and men, and debriefing meetings. The country teams actively participated in planning, implementing, facilitating, and collecting and analysing data - individually, in pairs and as a team - during the study. Whenever possible the study team held debriefing meetings and shared the findings for the day and planned for the following day's roles and responsibility individually and as a group.

The involvement of country-based staff was seen as a good way to ensure continuity and ensure authenticity of the information collected. There were times, however, when the presence of staff clearly inhibited the refugee community from providing information to the study team.

At the end of the study in each country visit, the study team shared their main findings and conclusions in de-briefing sessions with UNHCR and SC-UK country representatives. Other de-briefing sessions were also held for UN agencies, government representatives, and international and national NGOs implementing partners. The UNHCR country representative was also met

separately to provide more sensitive and confidential information. A regional debriefing meeting was held at SC-UK regional office in Abidjan. The study team, however, was unable to hold debriefing meetings with the refugee children and community due to circumstances beyond the team's control. The debriefing meetings provided an opportunity to give information on the preliminary findings, listen to reactions and to include those in the report.

The study methodology was built around the following issue:

- The participation and voice of refugee, IDP, host and returnee children.
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was taken as the determining international instrument in defining who is a child.
- The study team used three types of analysis: descriptive, critical and prospective.
- The UNHCR/Save the Children "Action for the Rights of Children" (ARC) training and capacity building initiative was used as a general frame of reference for the study.
- With regard to participatory approaches the study team used focus group, group discussion, small groups, spontaneous and planned role-plays, moving theatre, drawings, models and individual interviews.
- The study also derived its information from primary and secondary written records, interviews with different constituencies from the refugee, IDP, returnee and host communities, NGOs representatives, UNHCR staff at branch, sub office and field level, lawyers, police and government representatives.

2. Study team

The study team was composed of a core team, which was joined in each location by country staff from UNHCR and SC-UK where available. The core team responsible for carrying out the study and producing the assessment report included Sydia Nduna (Consultant), Asmita Naik (UNHCR) and Christina Lipohar (SC-UK). The team was accompanied at country level by Mary Flomo-Hall (UNHCR) and Miatta Abdullai (SC-UK) in Liberia. Fode Babe Conde (UNHCR) in Guinea, and Nafisatu Jalloh, Bondu Mani and Hawa Sesay (UNHCR) in Sierra Leone. The team brought together specialists in sexual and gender-based violence, children's issues, law, community services and participatory methodologies.

3. Measuring child participation

To measure children's participation in leadership and decision-making structures a model from a paper called "Primary Health Care: On Measuring Participation" by Susan B. Rifkin was used. This paper provides a conceptual framework to measure how wide participation is on a continuum developed for each of the five factors which influence participation: Needs assessment, leadership, organisational resource mobilisation and management. These factors or indicators within the study were used to focus on the breadth of participation and not its potential social impact. Child participation was assessed by the level of involvement in and the degree of involvement in

decision-making as well as the development of an effective mechanism for expression of children's needs and demands.

To access children's knowledge, attitude and practice, the study team used PHC KAP (Primary Health Care – Knowledge Attitudes and Practices) baseline Survey Assessment Tool developed by the American Refugee committee. The study team used selected questions from the reproductive health and HIV/AIDS section to obtain a broad picture of the children and community's knowledge, attitudes and practices. Through the use of KAP the study team was able to identify where knowledge was lacking or attitudes and practices needed improving. The combination of participatory methods, participation measurement tool and KAP allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of children's needs, experiences and access to services and this information will lead hopefully to better planned programs.

4. Participating groups

The following groups participated in the study carried out in the Mano River States. The groups were further divided according to age, gender, professionalism and service provision. More detailed information can be found in the country reports respectively.

PARTICIPATING CATEGORIES	LIBERIA	SIERRA LEONE	GUINEA
UNHCR Protection	✓	✓	x
UNHCR Community Services	✓	✓	✓
Save the Children U.K.	✓	✓	
UNICEF	x	✓	x
Government Representatives			
* Ministry of Justice	✓	✓	x
* Ministry of social Welfare	✓	✓	x
* Police	✓	✓	✓
* Camp level	✓	✓	✓
Lawyers/Associations of Lawyers	✓	✓	✓
NGO Representatives – Head office	✓	✓	✓
NGO Representatives – Field level	✓	✓	✓
Children 5 – 12 Years	✓	✓	✓
Children 13 –18 Years	✓	✓	✓
Former separated children 19 –25 Years	✓	✓	✓
Girl mothers 13 – 21 years	✓	✓	✓
Women	✓	✓	✓
Foster Parents	✓	✓	✓
Community Leaders	✓	✓	✓
Child Protection Committees	✓	✓	✓
Medical Agencies	✓	✓	✓
Sexual and Gender-based Violence Programs	✓	✓	✓
Men's Association for Gender Equity	x	x	✓

5. Questions

The study team used the following basic questions as guideline for all group work and individual interviews:

- Definition of a child under international, national laws and community definitions
- What is sexual exploitation and violence?
- Who is affected?
- Where is it happening?
- Who is perpetrating these acts?
- Why is it happening?
- What are the consequences?
- What has the community done to address the issue?
- What can be done about this issue by others?

C. SOCIO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

1. Historical background

Since the outbreak of the war in different countries in the Mano River States, rebel groups, civilian defence forces, government forces and external regional forces have clashed frequently. In countries like Liberia and Sierra Leone rebel forces have held different parts of the country for long periods of time, while the government controls the rest of the country. The conflicts involve several nations, rebel groups, and militia fighting over a complex mix of economic, state and factional interest. The conflicts mostly begin as civil wars and degenerate into factional fighting, costing millions in lives and property, and destroying the childhood of thousands of children. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced internally or in neighbouring countries. Children have been terrorised by various armed groups and witnessed destruction of life, property and the vital fabric of their families and communities.

As the crisis has escalated, it is clear that the legal and cultural systems that protect children from these kinds of attacks have been further eroded by years of protracted and general insecurity, economic depression, social disruption and political clashes. Some of the armed forces currently operating in the region appear to have embraced torture, rape and sexual slavery of children as tactics of terrorising or pacifying the population. In Sierra Leone, reports indicate that most girl children who were taken as sex slaves, domestic workers and/or as fighters still remain with their captors. The numbers of girls being released still remain relatively low as compared to boys.

Different non-governmental organisations have documented how children continue to be used as sex slaves and child soldiers. Still the true magnitude of the problem may be much higher than these numbers suggest. Many violations occur in remote areas, secluded installations, and towns and villages under rebel control to which these organisations have little access.

Even in accessible areas, under-reporting of sexual exploitation and violence prevails. This is as a result of the stigmatisation of rape victims in some communities, fear of reprisal, collusion of authorities, or a lack of awareness about avenues of justice and available services. These factors limit the accuracy of estimates about the extent of the problem and how it affects children. Thus reliable data on how many children are affected by sexual violence and exploitation within the Mano River states still remains rare.

While most of the documented cases of sexual violence/exploitation focus on female children this does not mean that boys are not affected nor does it fail to recognise that the violence they suffer is no less damaging. However, in most situations of conflict, during flight, and after returning home, sexual violence and exploitation is perpetrated primarily against girls. These acts of sexual violence and exploitation constitute a serious threat to the medical, psychological, mental and social health of children.

2. Government responsibilities

According to international law, governments are mandated to provide all its citizens with protection, ensure their security and provide adequate basic services such as health, shelter, safe water, education and social services. But, with the onset of the conflict, the governments in the Mano River States, have had little or no capacity to fulfil this mandate. The rebel forces that control some areas have also failed to adequately support services to address the population's basic needs. Instead, they have plundered the countries' wealth.

3. Health facilities

Continuous fighting and neglect have left most health facilities badly damaged and insufficiently equipped. The underpaid and demoralised staff of the health sector becomes incapable of managing these facilities efficiently.

4. Legal system

The legal systems are barely functioning. A few powerful people control them and decisions are more often made on the basis of the status and influence of the accused or wronged than on the law itself. This leaves children more disadvantaged than protected by the law.

5. Government security system

The police and military, which should play a key role in ensuring the security and protection of the population, are frequently identified as the perpetrators of torture and sexual violence crimes against children. The general public has lost most of its confidence in them. In most situations, the police and military are poorly paid and use their power to fulfil personal and family financial needs.

6. Social services

The physical and social services infrastructure within the countries in the sub-region has been severely weakened and in many areas no longer functions. Nonetheless, it is clear that the legal and cultural systems that protect children from these kinds of violence, precarious even in peace, have been further eroded by years of protracted and generalised insecurity, economic depression, social disruption and political clashes.

7. Refugee burden

While governments within the sub-region are struggling to recover enough from experiences of conflict to provide for their own citizens, massive movements of refugees and IDPs in their countries have added to the strain. The host government is unable to provide for the refugee population. In such situations humanitarian assistance and workers take on an unprecedented importance. They begin to symbolise life and sustenance for the refugee population, to the point of refugees believe that they are not able to survive without their assistance.

8. Refugee assistance in Africa

The provision of assistance to African refugees, however, has not kept pace with the magnitude of the problem. Even with assistance from the international community in meeting the needs for emergency relief in old situations and new influx and repatriation contexts, refugee situations in Africa last long periods of time and in most situations aid diminishes instead of increasing. Liberia has been host to Sierra Leone refugees since 1991. Guinea has hosted Liberian and Sierra Leone refugees since the late 1980s. The massive refugee population movements within the Mano River States happen in environments with low economic growth rates and high unemployment rates. The economic crisis in the country of asylum has detrimental effects on refugees. The country of asylum fails to absorb refugee labour, skilled or not and instead begins to see refugee populations as opportunities to provide employment for its own citizens. This deprives refugees of getting available employment opportunities even within the camps. While this is good for the host population, it makes humanitarian assistance to be offered with little or not alternatives for refugees to earn a decent livelihood creating high levels of dependence. Further more humanitarian assistance in Africa is given without the political will of the international community getting involved in the root cause of the conflict.

“The tendency that most of us are guilty of is to treat merely the symptoms of refugee movements rather than deal with their root causes. To consider such movements on a piecemeal, short-term basis to overlook the uncomfortable fact that the presence of refugees anywhere indicates that something has gone wrong.” (Refugee and Development in Africa The Case of Eritrea – Gaim Kibreab)

9. Cultural practices

Within the Mano River States practices of early marriage have led to the visible presence of girl mothers. The study team met with girls as young as twelve who were already pregnant.

Throughout the study, adults and children spoke of a cultural practice of adult males putting down payment on a girl child even before she is born. The girl child is reserved for the man himself or his son. The down payment is only made for girl children. Once the parents accept the down payment, the man has ownership over the girl. The girl remains with the parents until such time that the man's family comes to claim her. The man is traditionally expected to support the girl.

The child would under go the rites of passage and then the man would come to claim her. The community said the girl child could be taken from her parents between the ages of 8 to 11 years. When the child is this young, the man is not expected to start having sex with her. He would wait until "she is ready". However, there were no monitoring systems in place to ensure that the man is not involved in a sexual relationship with the child. Even if he did, no one would condemn the act since she is considered to be his wife already.

These types of arrangements were traditionally made between families. Reputation of the family was as important as wealth and status. If the family had a bad reputation no one would agree to such an arrangement. The arrangement was made in an open, sincere and trusting environment, and with the intention of marriage. Secondly, in the past, families, individuals and people entered into such arrangements in order to shift a relationship from a social one to closer family ties. People would be good friends and they would not want to lose the friendship between them. They would agree to their children marrying so that they would become a family. The already existing relationship and friendship became a strong social support network and protection for the girl child.

The girl child married in the traditional way had a strong social support network to ensure her safety and protection. The man's family became her first level of social support, and then her own relatives and parents. The man's family had a reputation to maintain and this acted as a form of social pressure. The man was obliged to listen to his family for fear of social consequences. If for any reason the relationship did not work, the social support network cordially renegotiated the annulment of the marriage. This social support network has been weakened by on-going conflicts. Many refugee children are without their biological parents and extended family members, leaving them more vulnerable to exploitation by traditional practices that were once monitored to reduce the negative consequences.

(a) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

In societies that practice FGM, it forms an important part of the rites of passage ceremony marking the coming of age of the female child. The

practice of FGM violates, among other international human rights laws, the right of the child to the *“enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health”*, as laid down in article 24 (paras. 1 and 3) of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The age at which FGM is carried out varies in different communities. It can be performed on infants as young as a few days old, on children from four to ten years of age, and on adolescents.

The girl’s mother or grandmother decides on the type of operation to be performed by the excisor. Some standard payment is given to the excisor before, during and after the operation, to ensure the best service. *“This payment, partly in kind and partly in cash, is a vital source of livelihood for the excisors”*. The conditions under which these operations take place are often unhygienic and the instruments are crude and un-sterilised. Excision and circumcision is in most rural areas of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone.

Issues of FGM in this study did not focus on their negative effects and impact on children. FGM emerged in the study as a contributing factor to the sexual exploitation of children, at times, leading to early or forced marriage.

10. Social support network

Child survivors of sexual violence and exploitation tend to rely on the informal support network existing within their own families and communities rather than the corrupt or non-existent government services. Relatives, neighbours and friends provide emotional, psychological, social and at times, medical support to victims. Unfortunately the conflict and mass movement of people has weakened or disrupted their capacity to provide this critical support. The tactics of the fighting forces, capturing of children and using them as fighters and as sex slaves, have weakened the smallest unit of the community: the family. The hostile feelings family and friends have toward the captors are directed against the survivor. The conflict is further weakening the social fabric through the loss of close family, friends, neighbours and other extended family members.

In most refugee, IDP, and host communities, conflict deeply affects the social fabric and social cohesion of the society. Within the society, people become more suspicious of each other, thereby weakening the social fabric of that society. Rwanda is a good example of such situation. The genocide experienced by the Rwandan people was of such a magnitude and of such extreme cruelty that it has left the society full of suspicion and severely damaged the social fabric. Among the Sierra Leone refugees and Liberian IDPs, however, it is the concept of sex for reward, be it money or material goods, that has affected the social fabric of the refugee population. The sense of caring for one’s own child, the sense of accountability to parents, and the sense of responsibility as parents have all been eroded by the need to survive.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

A. SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN THE MANO RIVER STATES

There are more young people than ever before, 1.04 billion world wide and nearly 900 million in developing countries. Girls aged 10-14 are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than women aged 20-24. Everyday at least 4,000 people under age 25 are infected with HIV, mainly in parts of Asia and Africa. (UNFPA – A TIME BETWEEN) Children under 18 constitute some 45% of the world's 21 million refugees and others of concern to UNHCR. In Africa, this figure climbs to 56% with the numbers of refugee children totalling 2,627,707. The specific breakdown in countries covered in this study is as follows: 426,140 or 63% are under 18 in Guinea; 33,766 or 50% are under 18 in Liberia; no figures are available for Sierra Leone. (UNHCR POPULATION DATA UNIT, JULY 2001 – WOMEN, CHILDREN AND OLDER REFUGEES)

In the sub-region, children learn about sex from exposure to the sex act and from their friends. Parents and adults, even though they are the best source of information, do not talk to their children about sex as it is considered taboo. Some children felt that with the death and absence of grandparents and auntie's who would normally talk about such things with them, the parents should, *"I think our parents should talk to us about sex, because when they do not I go to my friends and learn the wrong things."* (9 year old boy Sierra Leone) Most refugee children want the support of their parents, they imitate the behaviour of their parents and gain self-esteem through feeling loved and respected by them.

Parents have the perception that their children become sexually active at a later age, like 14 years and above, while some children told the that study they are sexually active as young as five years of age. Many girls have little or no say about what happens next in their lives. Cultural and traditional practices may push them into early marriage and childbearing. Moreover, reaching puberty at a young age propels them even earlier into adulthood.

In the socio-economic environment facing the Mano river states, men are decreasingly able to play the traditional role of the breadwinner. Nevertheless, perceptions that it is the mother's job to look after the children continues to persist even though men are not able to play their part in bringing money home. Men continue to father children and neglect them both in marital and extra-marital relationships, Demonstrating irresponsible behaviour which male children learn. *"Responsible sexual behaviour, sensitivity and equity in gender relations, particularly when instilled during the formative years, enhances and promote respectful and harmonious partnerships between men and women"* (UNFPA Paragraph 7.34)

Unscrupulous adults sexually exploit refugee children. The practices fuelled by poverty speeds the spread of STIs, including HIV/AIDS. Although more and more tragic stories affecting refugee children are surfacing the tendency is to conceal them. Sensitive and safe methods are required to help refugee children disclose their experiences of sexual violence and exploitation.

Refugee children are not adequately represented in leadership structures within the camps. It is only in Liberia that children have representatives in the camp structures and have peers trained to provide counselling, training and support to other children. The positive impact deserves mention as children and adults repeatedly informed the study team of their work with the girls' and boys' clubs. They had already raised issues of concern over video and bola nights and were involved in theatre productions of sexual exploitation. There is a need to continue to involve refugee children in program assessment, planning, implementation and analysis so that the child protection mechanisms can be strengthened. The Convention on the Rights of the Child says that the young have a right to participate fully in decisions affecting their lives.

In the Mano River States, programs addressing sexual and gender-based violence and prostitution have been established. However, within the programs, sexual exploitation has not been named as an issue and there are no or limited available services. The lack of monitoring and support systems has made it possible for sexual exploitation practices to thrive. Conversely, although there are still issues affecting survivors of sexual and gender-based violence, there are mechanisms in place that support those that seek assistance.

Humanitarian workers need to prove to refugee children that their trust will not always be betrayed. Mechanisms that maintain confidentiality on issues of sexual violence and exploitation must be strengthened throughout the region. The little/no availability of information on how boys experience sexual violence and exploitation reemphasizes the point. Clearly a safe space has not been created for boys to seek assistance without severe consequences.

B. DEFINITION OF A CHILD

1. Convention on the Rights of a Child definition

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as *“Every human being below the age of 18 unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier”*. The CRC provided the basis for the study team's definition of who is a child and to address conditions and practices relating to sexual violence and exploitation.

The CRC is the most widely ratified of all UN conventions. Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone have all ratified the CRC. The CRC is a binding agreement and countries that have ratified are all obliged to implement its standards. Article 19 of the CRC protects all children from *“all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”*.

The CRC endorses the realisation by the international community that issues affecting children are global and that they require global solutions. The

standards set in the CRC need to be implemented in a culturally-sensitive way to ensure that individuals, families, societies and communities accept those standards. The CRC as an international instrument has set a high standard concerning the age of a child but allows individual countries to maintain lower standards under their national laws. The clause in the CRC which states that *“unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier”*, allows member countries to maintain national laws that use much lower age standards e.g. 14 as the age of consent in Sierra Leone.

Throughout the study in the Mano River States, NGOs/agencies, the UN bodies and government representatives were knowledgeable about the CRC. They clearly articulated the contradictions that the country laws have with the CRC and the difficulty they have in maintaining recognised international standards.

However, among refugee communities, different levels of knowledge of the CRC emerged. In Liberia, refugee children were knowledgeable and knew exactly what the CRC stated. In Sierra Leone, the further one went from Freetown, the less the community knew of the CRC. The refugees and IDP camps had very mixed and confusing information about the CRC. Statements on the age of a child, for example, ranged from a child being *“some one under five”*, to *“someone always remaining a child”*, to *“someone up to twenty five years of age.”* In Guinea, some of the children and community leaders had some understanding of the CRC. Generally, women had poor knowledge and understanding of the CRC in all the three countries.

In locations where children knew of the CRC parents complained of not being able to punish their children for fear of violating the rights of the child. Clearly the awareness work focused on acceptable disciplinary measures parents can use. One mother said, *“I cannot read, and when I try to discipline my child he shows me the copy of the CRC and tells me I can not do that as it is forbidden.”* (MOTHER IN A REFUGEE CAMP IN LIBERIA) Another grandmother said, *“When I was growing up parents punished us when we did something wrong. They would not give you food or they would tie you to a tree. Now I cannot do the same with my grandchild. My neighbours will go and report me, and my grand child will be taken away. I do not know anymore how to discipline her.”* (WOMAN LEADER IN A REFUGEE CAMP IN GUINEA)

It is evident that the child rights training being carried out by child protection agencies is not serving the intended purpose of genuinely empowering children, their parents and their communities to better protect the rights of children. Girls, for instance, despite attendance at these courses, do not fully comprehend the extent to which their rights are being undermined by their relationships with sex exploiters. These courses need to re-emphasise the overall responsibility of governments in ensuring that the rights of children are protected and in enabling and supporting communities and families to make these rights a reality. Child rights training needs to go beyond the children themselves and should also be targeted at parents and other community members. Parents are not part of current training workshops and thus do not have adequate knowledge and skills to help their children realise their rights.

2. Definition under host country laws

National laws are not always adequate to provide sufficient protection for the child from sexual exploitation. The definition of the age of a child varies from law to law in Liberia and Sierra Leone (as it does in many countries). Of primary concern is the fact that the age of consent is too low in Sierra Leone (14) and does not exist at all in Guinea. Higher standards concerning the age of consent are a critical weapon in prosecuting exploiters who have sex with minors. The absence of such laws means that exploiters go unprosecuted. In Guinea, for example, the fact that there is no age of consent means that there is no statutory rape. A child who has been sexually exploited by an adult but who has not been “raped” cannot prosecute the offender. A child who has actually been raped would have to pursue a prosecution under rape laws and undergo the same medical examinations etc. as an adult to prove beyond reasonable doubt that a rape had been committed. Rape would not be assumed given the inability of a minor to consent to sex.

Even where adequate laws exist on the statute book, their implementation is weak. As the Association for Female Lawyers in Liberia put it, “*There are very good laws that protect children in Liberia. The problem is the implementation, and that is the 101 dollar question*”. One factor impeding implementation is the question of lack of political will to prosecute crimes of sexual violence/exploitation. Existing laws can, for example, be circumvented by prosecutions under parallel offences carrying lesser penalties. In Liberia, the age of sexual consent is 16. Under statutory law, an adult who has sex with a child of 16 years and under commits a first-degree felony. A first-degree felony is punishable by death or by indefinite imprisonment with a minimum of ten years required to be served. However, a case of sexual violence can be tried under the bodily harm offence, which carries a lesser sentence. There has never been a case in Liberia where the death penalty has been given to someone violating the law on the age of consent. There are cases where offenders have been imprisoned but have not served the full term of imprisonment.

Another obstacle to effective prosecutions is the weakened legal systems in all three countries. The Mano River States are recovering from years of war and/or sporadic fighting, their economies have suffered greatly and their legal systems are barely functioning. Access to legal protection is often a long and cumbersome process with an indeterminate and unreliable outcome; the legal system is often understaffed and ill equipped; and in some situations too expensive. The legal system is not child-friendly and does not take adequate account of the special needs of child victims and witnesses. A child taking a case of rape against an adult would be expected to appear in court and testify. In some situations the child gives evidence in camera and is represented by a lawyer in court. Mostly, the child testifies in front of the assailant and other people and the assailant is allowed to cross-examine the child.

The provisions for juvenile offenders are better. The Mano River states do have juvenile justice systems with the decision to try a case in juvenile court

being based on whether a person is below 18 and the seriousness of the offence. The juvenile court is seen as a social court that is not meant to punish the child but rather to rehabilitate him or her. The child is therefore only tried in the presence of the judge, the lawyer, the immediate family members of the child and the survivor. The individual country reports accompanying this report provide more details on the relevant national laws.

3. Community definition

The community definition of a child is deeply influenced by the cultural practices. It was very important for the study team to remain aware of cultural/community factors as they influence all aspects of practices, definition, occurrence, response and prevention of sexual exploitation and violence. Throughout the Mano River States, the definition of a child by the community was based on physical development for both the girls and the boys. Once the girl child starts to develop physically, her breasts begin showing, she reaches puberty and then she enters the secret society and is initiated. If she starts to be sexually active she is considered less and less as a child. For the boy child it largely depends on his physical strength, his capacity to take care of himself and other people and the development of his voice. Regardless of the actual numbers of years the child has, the community will treat the child more and more as an adult.

Despite the existence of statutory laws, the communities treat people as children depending on their level of physical development. Statutory laws in each country acknowledge and respect customary laws. The community perception of a child is strongly influenced by traditional practices and customary laws. Under customary law, parents can give a child as young as 14 years in marriage. During the study, adults spoke of the right of the child to refuse and challenge a parent over such decisions or actions. Children on the other hand spoke of difficulties in being able to challenge or refuse. They noted that the social support of grand parents, uncles and aunts that made refusal possible was not readily available in refugee or IDP settings due to displacement and the death of family members. Children's demonstration of respect for their parents includes not answering back or questioning parents' decisions. Adults represent children and therefore children are not naturally represented on leadership structures. The under representation of children's opinions in such decisions was very clear.

The subordinate positions of women in the community passed on to their daughters adds extra difficulties for a girl to be able to refuse her parents' decision to give her in marriage. Refusing to obey her parents can draw very severe punishment and at times isolation and rejection by her immediate and extended family. *"Many children who end up on the street are escaping abuse and neglect at home."* (REPORT OF THE CONSULTATION ON CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION, WORLD HEALTH ORGANISATION, GENEVA, 29 –31 MARCH 1999) Throughout the study, parental rejection and neglect was given as one of the key factors in refugee girl children living on the streets in urban areas. Sadly, once on the street, children may be sexually violated and exploited.

Within the community, traditional practices like initiation and FGM ceremonies are important marking points of the end of childhood. Children themselves acknowledged that as soon as they emerged from the secret society and are seen as physically developed, men begin to be attracted to them. Their age was not a determining factor of what happened to them. They spoke of their parents' wanting to give them in marriage because they had come back from the Sande (initiation) society. *"Immediately I came from the secret society, my parents gave me in marriage. I was 14 years old, I got pregnant and gave birth. Now I am 18 years and I have already had three children. This is my fourth child. The man left me."* (Girl mother in Sierra Leone) Children as young as eight years with slight breast development spoke of young and older men touching their breasts and buttocks while they called them their wives. *"Every time mama sends me to the market, them big men touch my breasts, and my waist side, calling me their wife. I do not like it."* (Nine-year-old girl in a refugee camp in Liberia)

Boys on the other hand find that sexual prowess is seen with pride as a sign of proof of manhood. Boys said that their parents were happy when they started getting complaints from their neighbours about harassment of girl children as this was perceived as a positive sign of their son developing into manhood. Children spoke of their parents encouraging them to start a family so that they could have grandchildren. *"Our parents say they would like to see their grand children, give them names and look after them before they die."* (Adolescent boys in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea)

C. SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

1. Introduction

Sexual exploitation was defined by the children as *"when them big man go loving with small girl for money. Them big men can go loving to small girls, they call the girl when she is walking along the road, and then the girl go and they go in house and lock the door. And when big man has done his business he will give the small girl money or gift."* (10 YEAR OLD BOY – REFUGEE CAMP GUINEA)

Most of the children who took part in the study knew another child involved in a sexual exploitative relationship. Children knew that sexual exploitation was a violation of the fundamental basic human rights of a child, but felt trapped in their situations and were not able to leave such situations. Parents knew that their daughters were involved in sexually exploitative relationships, but felt they did not have alternatives, as they were not able to provide for them. In some situations parents were instrumental in pushing girl children into such relationships. Sadly, sexually exploitative relationships have become a survival and coping mechanism for the refugee communities, families and individuals. *"If your family does not have a girl, your family is in crisis"* (MOTHER – IDP CAMP IN SIERRA LEONE)

Girl children have found that they have to use their bodies to provide food, clothing and at times educational support for themselves, their parents and their siblings. Unfortunately, humanitarian agencies have created a conducive environment in which sexual exploitation has thrived and the way in which

humanitarian assistance has been given has served to render the refugee community (including children) helpless and powerless.

2. Who is affected by sexual exploitation?

Even though children as young as five years are affected by sexual harassment and are the subject of pornographic photos, the majority of girls affected by sexual exploitation are between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Young girls aged five years and below are used by adult men as a means of gaining access to their older sisters or mothers. The use of young girls as access to their sisters or mothers undermines their capacity to build a sense of security and exposes them to high risks of experiencing sexual violence from that adult. The child builds a relationship with the adult male and will not be afraid to go with him to isolated places, and neither will they react with fear to a stranger who offers them money.

A few reports of boys being sexually exploited by women were documented, with women demanding sex in return for food, educational support and shelter. During the study cases of the sexual exploitation of boys by other men did not come up. Each time the issue was raised the community reacted with the concept that homosexuality does not exist. This does not, however, rule out the fact that it can exist. It simply reconfirms the difficulty that male children have in seeking assistance for sexual exploitation or violence in communities that see sex between two males as a taboo and too big a humiliation to be talked about. The humiliation is seen to also encompass the boy's family.

In addition, it should also be noted that other forms of exploitation, in particular in the labour market were noted to be a common experience among boys in the region. Boys spoke of being asked to provide labour in exchange for services, food and documentation. If a boy is assisted in accessing a ration card, for example, he will be expected to build a house, ferry sand, fetch water and at times wash clothes. *"I have no father and no mother and there are jobs that I am being made to do like washing underpants in exchange for food which I do because I have no parents. I wish I had my parents because I do not have any support and I am exposed to so much abuse."* (Adolescent boy – Sierra Leone)

Children living in a single-parent household were singled out as being the most vulnerable. This included children living with aunts, grandparents and single parents, as well as children living in child-headed households and orphaned children. Children who are sent out to sell in markets were also identified as very vulnerable to sexual exploitation. While the issue of sexual exploitation affected refugee, IDP and host nationals, refugee and IDP children were found to be more vulnerable. Even though children reported incidents of sexual exploitation in foster homes, the study showed that where monitoring mechanisms existed and were functioning the practice was not prevalent. In Liberia, foster homes were singled out, as homes where sexual violence /exploitation might occur.

3. Why are children the particular focus of sex exploiters?

Children are the main targets of sexually exploitative relationships because they are vulnerable. Their situation of poverty has worsened their vulnerability. Throughout the sub-region participants told the study team that children are easy to convince and that they trust more easily. The adults involved in these relationships know they hold more power over the child. The lack of influence on the amount to be paid by the child is a clear indication of the power imbalance in the relationship. It is easy to discredit the side of the story of the child in a culture that does not give voice to children. Children are represented by their parents or adults in their lives, a council of elders or camp leaders are bound to listen to the adult more than the child in situations where there is an issue to be resolved. Most of the time children will not even be asked to give their side of the story. Throughout the sub-region, children were not represented on the refugee camp committee, with an exception of the refugee camps in Liberia.

The other contributing factors leading to the targeting of children in sexually exploitative relationships, were the prevailing beliefs within the communities. These beliefs existed among agency workers, peacekeepers, refugee and non-refugee community leaders, young and old men, educated and uneducated male members of the society, rich and poor. The following quotes from male interviewees sum up the prevailing attitudes to sex with girls.

“ Young girls are sweet”

“They have a high current and they ignite you quickly”

“When you make a salad you do not use an old cucumber, to make a good salad you use a young and fresh cucumber”

“ A young girl for old men is like putting new wine in an old wine skin”

“As an old person, my blood is now cold, and sex with a young person is like getting hot blood in my body, it warms my blood”

“They are clean from HIV/AIDS infection”

“If you have sex with a virgin, a clean girl your blood is made clean from disease”

“Sweet sixteen makes you the first one”

“You prepare them for yourself, first you use your finger and open up the space, and then when you cannot hold it any more, you have sex with her”

“Young girls are soft, fresh and sweet, older women are finished”

“Young girls are agile and they are flexible and they can satisfy you”

“Men prefer young girls now because they believe that they are sexually gratifying and satisfying”

4. Who are the sex exploiters?

The sex exploiters are men in the community with the money, power and influence: agency workers, peacekeepers, regional and national armed forces, teachers, police, businessmen, diamond miners, refugee leaders and logging company staff.

Table showing the different categories of sex exploiters reported in each country

	LIBERIA	SIERRA LEONE	GUINEA
AGENCY WORKERS (NGO and UN)	YES	YES	YES
ARMED FORCES	YES	YES	YES
DIAMOND MINERS	YES	YES	NO
GOVERNMENT MILITARY FORCES	YES	YES	YES
LOGGING COMPANY	YES	NO	NO
NATIONAL AND REFUGEE BUSINESSMEN	YES	YES	YES
POLICE	YES	YES	YES
PEACE KEEPERS	NO	YES	YES
PALM WINE TAPERS	NO	YES	YES
REFUGEE LEADERS	YES	YES	YES
TEACHERS	YES	YES	YES

(a) Agency workers

In all three countries, agency workers from international and local NGOs as well as UN agencies were ranked as among the worst sex exploiters of children, often using the very humanitarian aid and services intended to benefit the refugee population as a tool of exploitation. Most exploiters were reported to be male national staff trading humanitarian commodities and services, including oil, bulgur wheat, tarpaulin or plastic sheeting, medication, transport, ration cards, loans, education courses, skills training and other basic services, in exchange for sex with girls under 18. The practice appeared particularly pronounced in locations with significant and established aid programmes. There was compelling evidence of a chronic and entrenched pattern of this type of abuse in refugee camps in Guinea and Liberia in particular.

Abuse of Position

Agency workers use their positions to deliberately withhold services that are meant to benefit children. *“It’s difficult to escape the trap of those (NGO) people; they use the food as bait to get you to sex with them”* (Adolescent Liberia). The withheld services are used as a weapon to gain sexual favours from children. Withholding of services occurs at all levels: distribution of food and non-food items, medical services, transport, registration for repatriation, registration for ration cards, education scholarships, social services and loans. Excuses are made to withhold services, *“ your name is not on the list”, “the computer swallowed your card”, or “your name did not come from head*

office,” so that sex can be extorted in exchange. These examples were given throughout the three countries.

Agency workers with special responsibilities, such as caring for children with disabilities, providing accelerated learning programmes, or loans for the vulnerable, were found to use the very same resources intended to improve children’s lives as a tool of exploitation. Frequent reports were received by the study team on how agency workers give these services to girls in exchange for sex instead of to the intended beneficiaries of these programmes. In one camp, an agency worker running an accelerated learning education programme was found to have made a disabled girl pregnant. In another situation, an agency worker was using resources meant for the children attending health clubs to demand sexual favours.

Abuse of Power

Junior national staff appear to have taken on unprecedented power and control in most refugee settings given the absence of supervision by more senior staff. International expatriate staff, in particular, seem to spend very little time in the camps. Junior national staff therefore acquire so much power that in the end, they become “the Organisation”. The refugee population fears challenging such a person, or even reporting them, as such an action may threaten their access to the services provided by that organisation. *“If the NGO worker runs away, there will be no food for us”* (Adolescent Liberia). Adults and children echoed such sentiments throughout the study, *“NGO workers have so much power that people treat them as really important people and the community cannot challenge them.”* (Refugee leaders Guinea) This power imbalance turns the refugee population from being a social force for the protection of children into a social pressure against the few members of its own community who try and challenge those perceived to be in power.

Abuse of Humanitarian Assistance

Reports were received that agency workers manipulate humanitarian assistance in order to sexually exploit children, for instance, by using surplus food and non-food items to solicit sex from children. The refugee community realises that one of the ways to access such items is to exchange sex. *“In this community no one can access CSB (Soya nutrient), without having sex first. They say “a kilo for sex”.*” (Refugee women Guinea) Another adolescent girl in Liberia said, *“These NGO workers they are clever they use the ration as bait to get you to have sex with them.”* This has created an environment in which parents blame their daughters for failing to bring food or money into the home and in which people desperate for goods are unable to acquire them through the rightful channels. *“If you do not have a wife or a sister or a daughter to offer the NGO workers, it is hard to have access to aid”* (Returnee male Sierra Leone). Plastic sheeting is another item often used to sexually exploit children. Plastic sheets are in high demand among both the refugees and the host population around the camps. *“If you see a young girl walking away with tarpaulin on her head you know how she got it”* (Refugee Leaders Guinea)

Abuse of Organisational Transport

Agency drivers use transport as a means of sexually exploiting children either by exchanging sex for lifts or by bringing items to the camps which the refugees would not otherwise receive. Female staff members confirmed seeing male drivers have sexual relationships with different girls for short periods of time. *“They change girls so much and none of them marry the girls and if she becomes pregnant she is abandoned, with no support for herself and the child. Most of us used to just look at them and wonder. Our brothers they have a problem.”* (Agency Worker Liberia) Indeed, the assessment team itself witnessed a UN driver leaving a hotel early one morning with two young girls on his arm. The age and refugee status of the girls was undeterminable but the use of vehicles for such purposes does little for the credibility of humanitarian organisations.

Control of Access to Humanitarian Resources

Manipulating access to services is another way of sexually exploiting children. Subtle methods are used, e.g. putting a girl’s ration card on top when she comes late for distribution or for medical services so that she is served first, delivering water to her house when there is a shortage in the camp, or giving her a loan which she would not otherwise have access to. Later on, the agency worker approaches the girl and demands a sexual favour. The consequences of refusing the request are too great and the girl is coerced into agreeing to sex. Those who do refuse reportedly suffer the next time when they try to access services. The girl, her parents and siblings are all penalised at times for her refusal leaving the girl with no option but to agree to sex.

For most parents and girls it is a ‘privilege’ to enter into a sexually exploitative relationship with an agency worker because of the advantages the relationship confers. It increases access to resources, to more money and status - respect from other agency workers even - and special treatment when accessing food and non-food items during distribution, medicine and other humanitarian services. It also increases the family’s access to food that is not distributed but which the refugee population prefers, such as rice. *“In the camp it is seen as a normal thing, in fact to them it is a blessing because they can get a bag of rice.”* (Agency Staff in Refugee Camp Guinea)

Employment Offers

Agency workers ask girls for sex in exchange for employment. Even after they are employed they are obliged to continue sexually servicing the agency worker. They are reminded that the salary they earn is payment for sexual favours. *“No girl will get a job in this camp without having sex with NGO workers. NGO workers who are female already loving with an NGO man. He will continue to go loving with other girls, but girls see it as competition. It is survival of the fittest.”* (Agency Worker Guinea)

Personal Resources

The more powerful the man, the larger the amount of money he will give in exchange for sex. Agency workers have status, good jobs, money, drive nice cars. Girls are seen as a given. *“For a man when he has a powerful position, status, drives a nice car and earns good money, what do you expect? He can want a girl and yes she can get pregnant”* (Child Protection Committee Chairperson) Just having a walkie-talkie is seen as a symbol of power and status. Even though agency workers may pay more than other exploiters, it should be noted that this might still amount to very little in most cases. A Liberian refugee girl, for example, may get the equivalent of US\$ 10 cents in exchange for sex with which she would be able to buy a couple of pieces of fruit or a handful of peanuts i.e. not even a full meal. More often than not payment may be in kind e.g. a few biscuits, a plastic sheet, a bar of soap. In some very sad cases in Guinea, the girls were habitually being left stranded by agency workers who promised them money for sex and then made off without paying anything at all.

A theatre for development play put on in Liberia on the sexual exploitation of children by teachers and agency workers, clearly showed how the status of agency workers is connected to the cars, resources and radios they have at their disposal. Agency workers use their positions/resources to engage in sexual relationships with young people which involve a supply of gifts, services or money, educational supplies (uniforms, books, pencils) or promises of such. The need for girls to dress up and keep up with peer pressure is also manipulated. The position and power of the agency worker facilitates his access to the child, and the child’s family often condones this access.

Implicated Agencies

The assessment team documented allegations of sexual exploitation by workers from a broad range of organisations including international and local NGOs as well as UN agencies. These allegations emerged unexpectedly but systematically during the course of the study. These allegations require further investigation as the assessment team was not in a position to verify this information given the broader scope of its work and the shortage of time available to focus on this particular issue. The number of allegations documented, however, is a critical indicator of the scale of this problem as altogether 42 agencies and 67 individuals were implicated in this behaviour. The breakdown of these figures by country is as follows: Liberia -11 agencies and 26 individuals; Sierra Leone -13 agencies and 24 individuals, Guinea - 18 agencies and 17 individuals. The details of these allegations were submitted to UNHCR in confidential lists as the mission was ongoing. These allegations were made during discussions and interviews with approximately 80 separate sources comprised of both groups and individuals.

Table showing agencies whose workers are alleged to be in sexually exploitative relationships with refugee children. These allegations were not investigated by the assessment team and require further substantiation.

LIBERIA		SIERRA LEONE		GUINEA	
UN	NGO	UN	NGO	UN	NGO
UNHCR	ACF	UNHCR	AFRICARE	UNHCR	ACF
	FEP	WFP	CCSL	WFP	ARC
	IRC		ERM		ASPIR
	LRRRC		IMC		BMZ
	LIURD		IRC		CARE
	LUSH		LVT		SECADOS
	LWS/WF		MERLIN		CSI/ARC
	MERCI		MSF		DPS
	MSF		NRC		ERM
	SC-UK		RC		GTZ
					IFRC/GRC
					IRC
					MSF
					PR
					PU
					RHG

This is not the first time that sexual exploitation by agency workers has been reported in the sub-region, *“one refugee mother was reported to have said to a UNHCR staff member, ‘I gave you my daughter and now you treat her badly and do not give us anything’.*” (UNHCR Kate Burns mission report, 21 May – 11 June 1999, pg.5) However, this study has been able to begin to show the true extent of the problem by documenting specific allegations in different locations. These allegations may indeed only represent the tip of the iceberg given that the assessment team was commissioned to look at the broader aspects of sexual violence/exploitation and only catalogued these instances in the little additional time that was available. **During debriefing sessions in all three countries, UNHCR staff, government representatives and the agency staff, including senior managers acknowledged that they knew such practices had happened.** Regrettably, even in situations where such information had been brought to their attention in the past, no action had been taken to monitor or redress the situation. The children themselves are in no doubt as to what should be done: **“ The NGOs and UN should stop their workers from exploiting children. The UN is the boss of all the NGOs and should stop them exploiting children”** (Adolescent boy, Refugee camp, Liberia).

(b) Peacekeepers

Rule number four of the “Ten Rules of Codes of Personal Conduct for Blue Helmets” states that UN peacekeepers should “*not indulge in immoral acts of sexual, physical or psychological abuse or exploitation of the local population or United Nations staff, especially women and children.*” Rule number five starts with the requirement that the boys in blue helmets should “*Respect and regard the human rights of all*”. “All” should therefore include refugee children, internally displaced children and children of the host country. The study team was informed that every personnel, on arrival in the location, is briefed on the Code of Personal Conduct, “*Every soldier, officer has been read and shown the code of conduct; no one can plead ignorance.*” (UNAMSIL officer) However, the code of conduct and the reality on the ground are two different matters. The assessment team documented many allegations of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers from nine countries: a few examples of reported cases are given here.

Peacekeepers are alleged to sexually exploit children in exchange for money and food. Children as young as five are asked to pose naked in exchange for biscuits, cake powder and other food items. “*When ma asked me to go to the stream to wash plates, a peacekeeper asked me to take my clothes off so that he can take a picture. When I asked him to give me money he told me, no money for children only biscuit.*” Children and adults spoke of teenage girls being asked to strip naked, bath and pose in certain positions while the peacekeepers take pictures, watch and laugh. Some are alleged to have sex with the girl: not using condoms if it is against their religion.

The peacekeepers are among the highest paying customers for sex with children. They pay anything from US \$5 to \$300 (equivalent of 10,000 – 600,000 in Sierra Leonean currency) The peacekeepers are alleged to pool money to obtain a girl and then all have sex with the same child. Certain battalions used a well-known phrase “jig jig 5 block” to procure sex from girls in their early teens.

In one reported case, peacekeepers are said to have contributed to the death of more than ten teenage girls. In this particular incident, the local chief had banned the girls from going to the battalion as the local community was concerned about the rising scale of exploitation and abuse. The girls nevertheless tried to go via a back route in a canoe. The canoe capsized, allegedly killing all the girls. In another case, they are alleged to have caused the death of a girl who died following sex with more than five peacekeepers. Peacekeepers are also said to sponsor girls through initiation/circumcision ceremonies, with the expectation that the girl will sexually service them afterwards.

The hope of a better life, for no matter how short a period and whatever the cost, makes girls and their parents submit to these practices. Some peacekeepers go as far as meeting the parents of the girl and pretending they have good intentions. However, when the time comes to leave, “*Some of them leave without even saying good bye, and some will leave the parents*

some money to take care of the girl. Others will give the girl some of their personal belongings.” Asked how much and what personal belongings, the girls laugh and say, *“If he really liked you he would leave you his cooking things, bedding and a picture. If he loved you he might leave you his underwear to remember him by (more laughter).”* (Adolescent and women IDPs in Sierra Leone.) The parents are said to receive no more than a maximum of US\$ 20.

In one community, peacekeepers were reported to have rented a room in town and used it for sex with teenage children. When this practice reached unacceptable levels, the community again tried to do something. All the girls who were caught were paraded and mocked by the community as punishment. Such measures did not act as a deterrent given the money to be made. The girls sent middle “men” instead - young boys - brothers, relatives or friends - to find peacekeeper clients for them.

Teenage girls complained to the study team of the difficulty of making a living through hard work. Girls who are trying to earn a living through selling items at the market are made fun of by other girls. *“Why are you suffering here wasting your time. Look at me and all the nice things I can now buy. If you want to live good go to UNAMSIL.”* (Adolescent girl IDP camp Sierra Leone) Girls come from far and wide to make money in this way, from as far afield as Guinea, with Liberian and Sierra Leonean refugee girls prematurely making their way to Sierra Leone irrespective of the security situation there.

In Freetown, nationals spoke about the behaviour of the ‘boys in blue helmets’ with a feeling of helplessness and sadness. *“All you need to do is go to Paddys around four o’clock and in the evening you will see for yourself, or just drive along the beach. All the restaurants there, you just see these big men with little girls. You go to Lumley Beach and Laka Beach and no one needs to tell you anything.”* (Police Officer, government representatives and agency staff Freetown) A visit to any of these locations will reveal the ready visibility of this behaviour.

The few UNAMSIL persons met by the study team, spoke of their “difficulty” in refusing such advances, *“For the people here, it is a privilege to go out with a UNAMSIL person. Mothers bring their daughters and want to give them to you, workers who clean and cook for us parade their sisters, and at times even the law enforcement officers like the police will start talking to you about their sister and showing you her picture. What are we supposed to do?”* (UNAMSIL Officer Sierra Leone) Again the position of power, wealth and status enjoyed by UNAMSIL personnel gives them the ability to do as they wish without retribution.

Nationals on the other hand feel powerless compared to the peacekeepers who are known to have diplomatic immunity. Sierra Leone nationals expressed concern at issues outside the scope of the study such as fears about the increase in HIV/AIDS since many of the countries that the peacekeepers come from have high infection rates. It was even alleged that some countries are deliberately sending infected soldiers so that they could access good UN terminal packages for their families. *“Any soldier who dies on*

duty in the UNAMSIL is said to be paid US \$ 50000.00." (UN staff Sierra Leone) The study team had no way to verify this.

Table showing past and present UNAMSIL battalions whose peacekeepers are alleged to be involved in sexually exploitative relationships with refugee/displaced children. Locations where these incidents are said to take place are also shown. These allegations were not investigated by the assessment team and require further substantiation.

COUNTRY	LOCATION
Bangladesh	Kenema, Daru
Britain	Freetown
Ghana	Bo, Kenema, Daru
Guinea	Bo
India	Daru
Kenya	Freetown
Nigeria (ECOMOG FORCE BEFORE 2000)	All over
Pakistan	Bo, Kenema, Daru
Zambia	Freetown, Bo, Kenema

(c) Teachers

Teachers ask for sexual favours from female students in exchange for good grades. These teachers are either working for government establishments or for agency-run education and skills-training programmes. Children said that if one refuses the teacher's advances the girl would have a miserable time in school. The teachers tell the girl student *"If you want to have good grades, come and see me later at my house and I can see what I can do."* They then proposition the girls with sex in exchange for grades. Boys spoke of teachers targeting them and punishing or failing them because they are dating a student the teacher wants. *"When this situation happens you have no choice but to stop going out with the girl."* (Adolescent Liberia)

Agency staff, including senior managers, UNHCR staff, government representatives and community leaders and the children are all well aware that teachers use grades to sexually exploit children. During the time the study team was in Liberia, the children put on a theatre for development play on sexual exploitation by teachers. However, no action was reported to have been taken against the teachers. The children spoke of the negative effect this has on affected girls, *"They pass even when they do not know anything that is being taught in class, and they will be illiterate in future."* (Adolescent Guinea)

(d) Refugee leaders

The refugee leaders have gained status within the community because of their close association with UNHCR and the NGOs. UNHCR and its implementing partners feel that the community is highly involved in the identification and selection of community leaders, and that they belong to the community. The refugee community feels they owe their allegiance to UNHCR and its implementing partners. The refugee leaders acquire power to influence the ability of other refugees to access resources from the humanitarian community. This power base was even acknowledged by agency workers who had to work with the refugee leaders in identifying refugee labour and in the distribution of food and non-food items. They also have the power to make a child's life miserable if the girl refuses to give sexual favours. Girls and parents in fear of severe repercussions simply have no choice but to accept these sexually exploitative relationships. Community members responsible for preparing groups of children for cultural performances and activities are using these outings as opportunities to sexually exploit children.

(e) Diamond miners

The young men who go to the diamond areas come back with money and they use the money in exchange for sex with young girls. The diamond miners are able to give considerable sums of money, but not as much as the agency workers. They buy girls nice things from the market and, at times, give gifts to the girl's parents. All this is done in exchange for sex.

(f) Logging company employees

The practice of sexual exploitation by employees of logging companies was found in internally displaced camps situated nearby. The owner of the company and his sons are alleged to take IDP children from the camps, have sex with them, pay them \$50 Liberian dollars (equivalent of US\$ 1) and take them back. The employees, mostly foreigners, are involved in sexually exploitative relationships in exchange for money.

(g) Businessmen

Both national and refugee businessmen exchange money and items that they sell for sex. The girls want to dress nicely, have their hair done and access other necessities. The businessmen can facilitate this process as they have money and, at times, the desired commodities. The businessmen were said to promise shoes, clothes or money and then later refuse their promise on very flimsy grounds. Sometimes the amount they are promised is reduced from 5000 to 100 in local currency (i.e. equivalent of US\$ 2.5 to US\$ 0.05 cents) by the time the girls are paid, or they may be given the money in instalments based on how quickly the goods sell. Girls as young as nine years complained of genital and breast fondling by businessmen each time they are sent to the market by their parents. It is only in this category of exploiters that sexual exploitation of boys was reported. Boys were sexually exploited in exchange for financial support and food. Most of the boys affected are school going

children. *"I have a female friend who works for an NGO and she gives me money in exchange for sex"* (Adolescent boy Guinea) *"My friend he has to have sex with this business woman because he needs her to pay for her education. Everyone in school is laughing at him, but he said, I do not love the woman, but what can I do? I need the money."* (Adolescent boy Sierra Leone) Like the girls, the boys said the financial and material support is withdrawn if the boy starts refusing to sexually service the woman involved. The boys also do not have any control over the amounts of money they are given each time they have sex with woman. The women are said to give the boy food or pay anything between 50 and 5000 in the local currency.

(h) Military personnel

The military men who provide security within the camps or man roadblocks near the camps use their power to demand sexual favours from refugee girls. The girls are too scared to refuse for fear of severe consequences and most of the times agree to little or no payment.

(i) Foster parents

Within the study, children in foster homes did not emerge at particular risk compared to other children. The monitoring system in place made it possible for most of the abuse to be identified and dealt with. Some foster parents, just like some biological parents, did push their foster children into sexually exploitative relatives, however, there is no indication that this happens more than within the biological families. Once again the foster parents did identify the difficulty of raising a foster child when the child protection agency did not give them skills to know and understand the child's rights. The other key issue raised was when any assistance - food, education materials, clothes, and other items - are given only to the foster child. Foster parents spoke of the difficulty it creates in the family since the biological children will not receive the same. The parents either have to provide or share out whatever has been given. Sharing most of the time was not being possible because of the amounts given.

In some situations throughout the sub-region, it was difficult to get past what the child protection agency had taught the foster parents and to talk about the real situation. Most foster parents felt telling the truth would be taken as a sign of failure or betrayal. The study team got common answers like *"These are our children, and we love them just like our own, because they are Sierra Leone children, and you never know it is not just your biological child who can take care of you, or become the president."* (FOSTER PARENTS IN LIBERIA AND SIERRA LEONE) The uniformity in response from the different groups made it difficult to gauge whether the child protection teaching had affected the response the study team got. Some of the agency workers had the suspicion that children in foster homes are more vulnerable to sexual exploitation than biological children. In other cases, foster parents spoke of the benefits of having a foster child due to the extra assistance it would bring to the family.

5. Where does sexual exploitation take place?

The propositioning takes place at distribution sites, registration centres, medical clinics and any service providing site, at offices, in homes, entertainment centres. The incidents were cited as happening during dance events, video shows, market days.

6. Why does sexual exploitation occur?

(a) *Survival/Coping mechanism*

Parents have no means of earning a livelihood so they cannot provide for their families. Men spoke of feeling helpless and losing power, control and respect within the family and the community. Men spoke of wives and children not respecting them because they cannot give them anything. The loss of capacity to provide was recognised as so significant by the refugee community that parents felt unable to provide parental guidance and to control their children. The failure of parental control has contributed to the weakening of the social fabric of the community, right down to the social cohesion of the family unit. Mothers, whose power base and control is usually, only exercised in relations to children, are finding that the children no longer respect and listen to them. The children feel they do not need to listen and respect their parents, as they are not able to provide for them. However, in the middle of all this, parents and children still need their basic needs met. The need to buy food, clothes, and pay for school necessities is as real as in other situations where an income is earned. The involvement of children and women in sexually exploitative relationships has become a mechanism for survival for most refugee families. Within the study it became very clear that sexual exploitation couldn't be addressed without providing alternative means and opportunities for earning an income.

Young people depend on such relationships to meet educational expenses and to provide for themselves and their dependants. Although school fees are usually waived in refugee situations, associated costs such as school supplies and taxes for school feeding must be borne by the family making it prohibitive for many families to enrol any or all of their children. Conditions placed on students such as mandatory uniform, matching socks and special footwear further exacerbate the financial burden to the family and compel children to engage in sexually exploitative activities in order to support their own education. In meetings with girl mothers, girls most of the time refused to name the agency workers for example, because they argued they would lose the support they were getting. *"If I tell you the name of the NGO worker I have to sex with, he will get fired, and then how will I feed my child and myself?"* (Girl mother – Guinea). Another girl said, *"Yesterday I was walking with a friend of mine and this kind NGO worker stopped his car and gave me 100 Liberian dollars (US\$ 20). I was able to help my child and myself. If I tell you his name and he losses his job, what will I do?"* (Girl mother Liberia)

(b) Peer pressure

For adolescent children the purchase of particular items takes on a lot of importance. It is a means for getting accepted by other children, and it has become a mechanism for getting respect from the parents. In the camps a lot of peer pressure existed and the need to fit in could not be over emphasised. Peer pressure to dress nicely, attend dance evenings and video shows and provide for their families were all aspects that were very real to adolescents.

(c) Food rations/supply

In every meeting, insufficient ration was raised as a primary factor contributing to sexual exploitation. Food given to the refugee community for thirty days was said to finish within ten days and refugees did not have land to grow their own food to supplement. The refugees also felt that they should be given enough food to last 30 days instead of ten. However when the food finishes and the family needs more, the immediate option is to get money quickly and buy food. The girls become a means to access money quickly and easily. *“ I am a mother of seven children and when the food finishes my youngest child keeps crying and pulling on my skirt, what do you think you can do if your daughter brings you some?”* (REFUGEE WOMAN – LIBERIA)

Despite the constant complaint about the inadequacy of the food rations, little effort has been made to acknowledge this as an issue and to try to work out solutions that involve the refugees themselves. This issue is met with explanations on how the ration is calculated based on the required kilocalories. During the study most staff, NGO and UN, admitted that they, themselves do not prepare food based on kilocalories, but on quantity. The other explanation given is that *“Refugees, refugees complain too much. Even if you give them as much as they need, they will still complain.”* (AGENCY WORKERS) Asked if this was true the refugees said, *“Yes we might complain if they gave us enough but it will not be about the amount of food, but maybe the type of food. Like why give us corn meal when it is not our staple food?”* (REFUGEE MALE – GUINEA) Clearly the lack of knowledge that the kilocalorie food supply calculation is not working has affected the coping mechanism of the refugee population. Instead of adopting durable solutions, refugees have resorted to immediate and quick solutions - the easiest being sending their daughters into sexually exploitative relationships that bring in quick money and food.

(d) Parental pressure

Parents encourage girl children to be involved in sexually exploitative relationships for money. *“Some mothers will tell their daughters to get involved in such relations. They tell you that your friends are bringing money home why can't you do the same?”* (Adolescent girls – Mano River States) Parents accept money from the children without asking where the child got the money. The men blamed the women. Men, however, when asked further why they do not ask where the money is coming from say, *“Some of these things you just play a blind eye to it. What can you do when you can not provide for your family?”*

(Male leaders – Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) Mothers are sending girls into exploitative relationships either to shift the burden of caring for the family on to the daughters or to bring income into the family.

(e) Absence of livelihood options

The absence of livelihood options has left parents feeling helpless. Parents feel their position has been compromised because they are unable to provide for their families even to minimum standards.

Most host governments have policies that hinder refugees from being hired as salaried employees. The humanitarian community, therefore, cannot employ refugees, so they are hired and receive only an incentive. The other reason that was consistently given to the study team was that, *“If refugees are given jobs, they will not want to go back home.”* (UNHCR STAFF) Asked about this, the refugees said, *“Home is home. Who would want to stay as a refugee in someone’s country, just because of a job, and anyway such low paying jobs that become available within the camps.”* (REFUGEE IN GUINEA)

Refugees told the study team that, the only way to access money in the refugee community is to sell the ration food and to let their daughters enter sexually exploitative relationships. *“The sale of ration food is heavily frowned on”*, said the refugees, so much so that it does not give them any form of negotiating power. The buyers, who at times can be agency workers themselves, easily threaten them with reporting or repercussions. In the end, when the ration food is sold, it does not earn much money. For example, bulgur wheat sells for much less than rice. The money earned from the sale of part of the ration food is not enough for refugees to supplement their ration with other basic food varieties. The refugee community said, *“It is the nature of assistance and the environment within which it is given that forces us to sell part of the ration food. Sometimes it is the only way to make some money that will help you buy an item that will assist you assure yourself that you are still a human being”* (Refugee Man – Guinea). Such items were simple things like buy meat, condiments, peanuts, fish and rice and, at times, alcohol.

The remaining alternative is for girls and women to get involved in sexually exploitative relationships. When a girl child takes home some money no questions are asked as to how she has earned that money. When asked children said they tell their parents different stories like *“I picked the money up on my way from school, a kind uncle/man gave it to me, my friend gave me, my auntie gave it to me.”* In most situations the children said there was no need to explain how they earned the money because parents were only too glad that the money was there. In other situations the parents would have sent the child. *“You know we need 1500 today and we do not have it. Go and find it and do not come back until you have the money”, or “You are now big enough and you should start contributing to the food in this house”.* (Adolescent boys and girls – Guinea) The study team was told such things are said to girl children as young as thirteen years of age. In such situations the children said the parents would only be too glad to receive the money and would not ask.

The pattern of humanitarian assistance has led to overwhelming dependency by the refugee population. The size of the plastic sheet determines the size of the house. The food ration is for thirty days but it is calculated on kilocalories and not quantity. It finishes within ten days, but there is not enough land to grow food. The non-food items given are not replaced as often but there are not enough income-generating jobs for the refugees to earn money to buy their own. Education is free but all the other related expenses are left for the parents to provide, like books, pencil, uniforms and shoes. The parents have no income and the girl has to fend for herself. It's like their bodies are the only currency they have left. At the same time, surrounding the refugee population and controlling so much of their lives, is a moneyed elite – UN and NGO workers, peacekeepers, etc. – whose resources are 10x, 100x, 1000x more than what the refugees have. They can afford to exploit this extreme disparity and pay for sex when they want and with whom they want.

7. What other factors contribute to the prevalence of sexual exploitation?

(a) Design of refugee shelter

In every meeting, participants cited that early exposure to viewing sexual acts between parents contributed to early sexual activity. Children as young as three years have seen adults, mostly their parents, have sex. In the theatre for development play in Liberia on sexual exploitation by teachers and NGO workers, the opening scene are where the teenage son and his sibling are watching bewildered while their parents are having sex. When the boy goes to school and approaches a girl, he says *“I want to be loving with you. There is this thing that I see my parents do, and I want to try it with you.”* In the meetings with children between 5-12 years of age, children spoke of having “sex” with each other. When asked how she knew what to do, a four-year-old girl said, *“I see ma lied down there on the floor and a man gets on top of her.”*
(Five year old refugee girl – Liberia)

Parents and children expressed great difficulty in trying to have any form of privacy as most refugee shelters consist of one room only. Parents spoke of sending their children out to the dance night or the video clubs so that they could have some privacy. Children spoke of pretending to be asleep while their parent had sex. Single-headed households had similar struggles as at times, the child would have to be asked to leave the sleeping place so that the adults could have sex. *“My son is 15 years now and people in the community approached me and advised me to stop sharing the same bed with him. They told me that he will rape me one of these days. It is also hard in that when my boyfriend comes I have to ask him (my son) to sleep on the floor until after he has left. I did not stop until I head of a woman who was raped by her son and she got pregnant. Now I ask him to sleep on the floor, but every night I really feel bad.”* (Refugee Mother – Liberia)

The early exposure to sex was cited by children and parents as a key-contributing factor in children becoming sexually active at an early age. The reasons ranged from the child just wanting to try things out, to the child

accepting the act as something normal and good since the parents are involved in it so much. In terms of sexual exploitation it was seen as a contributing factor in that the child will not feel the adult is doing something wrong to him/her. Eight-year-old boys tried to have “sex” with three to five year old girls, and reports of fingering were cited in this age group. Boys of ten years and above were trying to have sex with eight-year-old girls. Most of the group participants in the under 18 age group said they were sexually active.

Asked as to why bigger houses were not built, the refugees and NGOs said there is a standard size of refugee shelter that is determined by UNHCR. Refugees spoke of agency workers tearing down houses if the refugees built a bigger one than they were allowed. Financial and material resources were the other reason given by UNHCR and NGO workers. However, it would not require more material or finance to divide the same shelters into two rooms so that there is at least some privacy. The other contributing factor is the connection between the size of the shelter and the size of the plastic sheet. If you build a bigger house they will not give you more plastic sheeting. Even though UNHCR insisted that no refugee’s house had been torn down, the implementing partners and the refugee community insisted that such incidents had taken place as they were told to follow UNHCR standards.

The lack of privacy does not only relate to sex relationships but also to other activities that take place in a home. Parents are compelled to dress in front of their teenage boys and girls.

(b) *Deliberate withholding of information*

Refugee children and adults have little or inadequate information related to some of their most fundamental basic human rights. Assumptions are made on the existing communication channels with little or no monitoring systems to ensure that they work. Refugee children were among some of most poorly informed people on issues like access to services and documentation. Simple information about how much food they should receive, how to access ration cards or education scholarships, were presented to refugees as processes that needed special channels to be accessed. *“I got married because I was told that I would not be registered if I show up alone.”* (15 year old refugee girl Guinea). A returnee girl was standing crying next to a man, when asked she said, *“I was told I would not be registered for repatriation on my own. So I attached myself to this man, since we are registered together the process here is for me to go with him. He comes from another district and I come from another”* (Adolescent girl Sierra Leone) The community services officer said, *“This girl she would have ended up so far away from her home if she had not been identified.”* Children told the study team that most of the time they are not given information that allows them to make the right decisions. Refugees told the study team that humanitarian agency workers even refuse to acknowledge to them that the food rations are not enough. *“What are we supposed to do when they tell us they are giving us enough food to last 45 days, and yet we know it does not. The only thing is to insist they give us enough food”*. (Male and female refugees –Moro river states)

Humanitarian agency workers deliberately withhold information in situations where they know of other agency worker sexually exploiting a refugee child. It is almost like a code of silence, which exists among them and ensures protection for the person concerned. Asked why even staff in sexual and gender-based violence programs do not bring such issues to the attention of senior staff, the study team was told, *“Male staff who work in SGBV programs are considered as weird, reporting another staff would mean more isolation and social stigma for them. They want to feel accepted by the other staff.”* (NGO Senior Staff). How do staff report other staff when they themselves are involved?

Even in situations where most members of staff know about an incident of sexual exploitation, agency workers refused to tell the study team. For example, in Liberia, there was an agency worker who had been in Zuanna town and was transferred to VOA camp. When he moved, he took a refugee girl with him. Agency and government representatives knew exactly who he was, but no one would tell the study team his name. In Guinea, an agency worker was alleged to have made a 14-year-old girl pregnant and was trying to get her an abortion. Again no one would tell the study team his name.

It was only when referring to situations involving other NGO workers, that the question of confidentiality came up. In some situations when the study team put agency workers to the test they said, *“UNHCR protection told us it was okay to have a relationship with a refugee girl as long as you had good intentions. Don’t you know that there are a lot of good marriages that have existed between NGO and UNHCR staff and refugee girls.”* *“There is a UNHCR expatriate staff who came here with his refugee wife, and they were very happy together, and when his contract finished he took her with him.”* (NGO Workers –Liberia) Asked what was meant by good intentions, the staff said, *“if you intend to marry the girl”*. Asked how many had intentions to marry the girls or how many men had already married the refugee girls, they said, *“none, we are still thinking about it”*. Asked what age UNHCR protection had given to them, they could not agree among themselves. The important thing observed was that none of them cited an age that was 18 years and below.

(c) Impunity

The study team did not hear of a case of sexual exploitation by agency workers, which has been reported and prosecuted. There had not been a case in which a staff member of an agency has been fired because of their sexually exploitative behaviour. Staff who had sexually exploitative relationships and had been fired were normally dismissed for theft or other malpractice.

The other thing that gives impunity to the agency workers is that in order for a refugee to make a report, they would have to go through the same persons who themselves are perpetrators of sexual exploitation. Most staff appear to connive to hide the actions of the other staff. In situations where it has reached senior staff, the response has been to send in other national staff to investigate the issue. With the limited presence of senior staff on the ground

to ensure that the victim is not mistreated and threatened, refugees opt to keep silent and not to report such incidents. *“If you report one NGO worker you will not only be in trouble with that person, but with the other staff also.”* (Adolescent Liberia and Guinea) Refugees complained that when they have tried to send written complaints through other staff but that the information has simply been held back. Children complained that they are harassed or labelled rebels if they were boys or denied services if they were girls when they tried to complain. Refugees spoke of trying to go see senior staff, and being stopped by security guards outside the offices. They also said that it is easy for their complaints to be discredited as they hear humanitarian workers tell their seniors, *“Refugees are traumatised and they have a lot of issues that they need to deal with. That is why they are always complaining”*.

In most of the camps, there are refugee and IDP leaders so why are they not reporting or dealing with issues of sexual exploitation? The children said, *“because they themselves are involved and because how can they report the very people that put them in power. They want to maintain their power and one way of doing it is by siding with the NGO workers.”*

The peacekeepers go with impunity, because even though in the code of conduct it says. *“Honour and respect the laws of the host country”* the experience in the region has been that when any peacekeeper commits an offence, they do not stand trial in the country where they have committed the offence. Instead they are sent back to their home country. No information is provided to the affected family, as to whether the person was tried in their home country. Even for the host country police to try them, they have to go through the United Nations Secretary General’s representative in the country. Even the police say, *“they have diplomatic immunity and we cannot do anything without following right procedure. The right procedure however takes things out of our control.”* In a particular incident where a peacekeeper was accused of committing rape, his whereabouts were reportedly not known, but the police informed the study team that the person had been sent back to his home country. *“The whereabouts of Is not known”* the police record said.

Both the agency workers and peacekeepers have economic resources that make it possible for them to pay the family of the affected girl and to settle matters out of court. This has happened even in situations of sexual violence. In one case a peacekeeper was alleged to have raped a 13-year-old girl. The peacekeeper paid \$300 US to the family of the girl. The girl, her parents and family has moved out of the area and no one knows where she has gone. The case was closed. Similarly the other categories of perpetrators enjoy immunity as they can use their financial and status capacities to influence formal and non-formal legal decisions to their advantage.

(d) Subordinate positions of women

Women’s dependence on men, a syndrome that repeats itself in daughters, makes it difficult for women and daughters to influence decisions that determine how the little income that comes into the family is spent. Even men in the camps who earn an income may spend it on other young girls instead of

their families. Women and daughters find that they have no control over their husbands or over how many sexual partners they have or marry. The limited or lack of livelihood has shifted the roles and responsibilities of power relationships in the community, including the family unit, but the responsibility has clearly not changed the power relationships. Sexually exploitative relationships reinforce the subordinate positions of girls and women as they once again discover they need men and their bodies to be respected and to survive.

(e) *Small-scale businesses*

The need to hold on to the only activity that brings in an income is so important that the person concerned would do anything just to keep it going. The limited number of available customers increases the importance of maintaining one's clientele. Children of women who are involved in small business experience a special vulnerability as the mother tries to please her clients. Sexually exploitative relationships can develop through this type of transaction. Adult males who have no wives depend on buying cooked food. Each time he buys from the woman he will ask her to send her daughter to bring the food to him at his house. Each time he gives the girl 5 Liberian dollars. Eventually the man starts buying the girl small gifts and food, and then eventually exploits her sexually. The child has difficulty in reporting such incidents as the man will remind her of all the money and gifts he has given her. He will also remind her that he could stop buying food from her mother and they would lose income. Even in situations where the child has reported to the mother, her fear of losing a "good customer" makes her keep silent.

The pattern of male adults systematically winning a girl's confidence, by starting with giving her small amounts of money and gifts, reduces the child's own sense of security because when the adult starts exploiting her sexually she has built a relationship of trust with him. Children said such adult men use such phrases as "*If you want some more money come and see me at my house*" When the child gets to the house the man would say, "*if you want more come inside the house.*" The child will not be afraid as it will not be the first time that she has been given money. In some incidents this pattern has led to children experiencing sexual violence when the child refuses sexual advances.

Children who are sent to sell things around the camps and the townships face particular vulnerability to experiences of sexual exploitation. Adult men know which routes the children take, and they wait for them in and near abandoned buildings and even in their homes. "*A girl child selling things will be called in the house, and the man will tell her that if you have sex with me I will buy all the things you are selling, and you will have more money*". Children informed the study team that there is no assurance that the man will really give the girl the money after having sex with her. Girl children on the other hand feel tempted to agree, thinking she can make some money that she can spend or that it will please her mother if she takes a little more. Some of the children go to men seeking payment for sex because they have lost the money while selling things, or because the goods have become damaged in one way or the

other. Children face severe punishment if they go back home without the money and opt for selling sex to recoup the money instead. The study team was told that parents would *"beat the girl so severely that she would not be able to walk for days. Or parents would beat the girl and then chase her from home, telling her not to come back without the money. Or parents would deny her food until she has found the money"* The child's experiences of punishment are so severe that he/she would prefer to earn the money one way or another. The easiest way is to exchange sex for money as men willing to pay for sex are readily available. In most meetings when the study team asked the children what they would do if they were in trouble with their parents they said *"I would do loving with them big men and get money or my boyfriend would help me."*

Girl children who sell food and non-food items are also said to be vulnerable to such abuses by peacekeepers. At the training school in Henskins, the peacekeepers are said to call girls over, promise them money for being allowed to touch and fondle their breasts. The girl's shirt would be opened, while she stands there with her merchandise, and her breasts are touched. At times, the girl would also be kissed. Similar reports were made in Daru and Kenema. Again there was no assurance that the peacekeepers actually bought the products she was selling.

(f) Harmful traditional practices

Female genital mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation is a traditional practice that has prevailed for years. Children talked of fear of rejection by the community if a girl fails to go through the secret society. However, in camps where parents are unable to earn an income, most families are unable to finance their daughter's initiation process. The entrance of a girl child to the secret society is also not as controlled a process as it has been in the past. The female circumcisers (Zoes) and women go dancing around the camp and any girl child who joins them with or without parental consent, once taken into the initiation society (Sande bush), will not be released until she has been circumcised. Parental responsibility is to finance the child and to feed her while at the secret society. The activity has become an income-generating activity for the circumcisers.

The Zoes were one of the best-dressed groups of women encountered by the study team. They were full of power and refused to give any information. Parents find that they have to pay an exceedingly high price to the Zoes to have their daughter initiated. Parents are reported to have to pay 300 Liberian dollars (equivalent of US\$ 6), 80 cups of rice, a new piece of cloth, a big basin, a bucket, a mat and three chickens for the child to go through the secret society process. Additionally, during the time the child is in the "Sande bush", parents are expected to supply rice, vegetables, meat, oil and firewood on a regular basis. Failure to pay, results in the parents being fined, on top of the initial cost of the initiation. The girl is not allowed to leave the Sande bush

until the parents have paid. Most parents are too scared to be seen to be at differences with the Zoes or going against the secret society.

Parents who are already economically compromised are often compelled to find men to sponsor the initiation of their children. Children spoke of being asked to find a man who can sponsor them. *“Your parents will asks you to find a man who can pay and show him to them before you go to the Sande bush”* Once a man, regardless of his age, has paid for the girl she will be expected to give sexual favours in return. At times the girl will be forced into marrying the man. In situations where the girl tries to refuse, the man will demand a refund. When parents are not able to pay, they will use pressure to force the girl to be sexually involved with the man.

Men in powerful positions like agency workers, peacekeepers, ECOMOG, community leaders, teachers, chiefs and businessmen were identified as groups of men who sponsor girl children to undergo female genital mutilation and accept sexual favours as a reward.

The graduation from the Sande society is also accompanied with celebrations, and the girls must dress in very nice clothes. The social pressure on parents to feed their child with the best food and to dress their child in the very best of clothes is tremendous. Foster parents spoke of the struggle they have to go through. *“If you cannot provide for your foster child people will think you do not love her because she is not your own child. They will come to you and say, I will buy for her if you do not want just because she is not your child. This will bring problems between you and her”* (Foster parent – Liberia and Sierra Leone) Again this is another stage in the process where parents will encourage a man to finance their daughter’s graduation in exchange for sexual favours.

There is tremendous peer pressure to join the society, and children will sometimes convince other children to enter the compound with them, without the knowledge of the parents. This is a distortion of what actually happens in the Sierra Leone society, where it is the parent who usually takes the daughter to the bush. Older women who themselves had undergone the circumcision complained that the whole practice has become so distorted. *“This is a practice that was only done in the rural areas, parents used to prepare and send their daughter there. During the initiation, we were never told how to sexually satisfy men, but how to be good wives, but now that is all they talk about. So when children come out of the secret society they feel now they are big and they know how to satisfy men.”* (Refuge Women – Guinea) The other significant change with practices of FGM, is that since in the refugee camps its performed on children as well as adults, girl mothers and pregnant girls, it can no longer be seen as marking the rites of passage into adulthood, or as ensuring virginity.

Early/Forced marriage

Early/forced marriage is related to the issue of sexual exploitation as parents get a pay off for the girl especially in situations where the relationship is linked to economic gain for the parent of the girl, and as a way of relieving them of

their financial burden. Parents and other adult relatives were said to force young girls into marriage. *“I was 14 years old and my grandfather forced me to marry an old man. I was so sad, I became pregnant and had a child. Again I became pregnant and I had another child. I waited for him and prayed until he died, now I am free and I have never looked at another man again.”*

(Adolescent girl, Liberia) During conflict, while fleeing and upon arrival in the host country, parents give their daughters to men to try and protect them from being abducted, and on the basis that the girl will be safer if seen as someone’s wife. In the past, parents would give their daughter to the paramount chief to gain status. Now it is to the agency workers because of poverty. Although most participants stated that forced marriage was common, there were some women who insisted it did not exist in the refugee camps.

(g) Video clubs

Video clubs were introduced into the camps with the good intention of entertaining the refugee populations. They are open to every one of all ages. However, the video clubs were identified as contributing factors, because pornographic videos are shown there *“Hard core play boy video.”* The study team was told, *“During those videos, you can see the penis penetrating the vagina”* (6 year old boy and adolescent boy - Guinea.) *“In those videos, you see people having sex on the floor, on tables, in water and even in the kitchen, they do all sorts of things.”* (Adolescent Guinea) The videos start at 20.00 hours until 06.30 hours in the morning. Children go back home between 06.00 and 06.30 hours in the morning. The entrance fee is 100 Liberian dollars. There is no age restriction. The video places were also cited as possible places where sexual exploitation and violence occur. Children were also said to be involved in sexually exploitative relationships to make money to pay the entrance fee.

(h) Bola/dance night

The bola is a dance night, again introduced with good intentions. The peer pressure to attend bola night and the opportunity for adult males to access young girls without their parents, make the Bola Night another contributing factor for sexual exploitation. There is no age limit nor is there any time limit. When children leave the dance hall or bola nights, the parents do not know what the children actually do. The dances start at 20.00 hours in the evening and go on up to 06.30 in the morning. The dance nights happen during the weekends or sometimes every night in some camps. Both parents and children know and accept that dance nights create opportune situations for sexual exploitation of girl children. *“Men promise to take you to the bola night, pay for you and buy you nice things if you have sex with them.”* (Adolescent girl – Liberia)

(i) Children’s limited access to information

Separated and unaccompanied children usually do not have relevant information given to them on registration, repatriation and service access. A separated or unaccompanied child is not allowed to register on his/her arrival in the camp. They are asked to register with adults. For fear of being labelled

as rebels, children attach themselves to adults believing it is the only way to be safe. For girl children this leads to the adult male asking for sexual favours in return. For boys, they either stay with the adults or separate upon arrival in the camp. Remaining with no ration card and no means to access basic services once again exposes them to situations of sexual exploitation.

8. What are the consequences?

(a) Teenage pregnancy

Most girls find that their families and carers reject them when they become pregnant. The only option becomes terminating the pregnancy. However abortion is illegal in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea and is a felony offence punishable with life imprisonment. The medical services that are supported by UNHCR and located in the refugee camps, will not carry out an abortion on a girl as the staff are afraid of the law. Children therefore resort to different traditional and other informal methods. Children and women spoke of the different methods that are used, a combination of traditional herbs and easily accessed pharmaceutical products.

The most common elements used in traditional abortions were: cassava leaves mixed with baking soda and lime swallowed or inserted into the vagina; 10 tablets of chloroquine swallowed with coca cola; 10 ampicillin, tetracycline tablets swallowed with coca cola; and traditional herbs given by older women in the community. The children said once the abortion has been induced, no matter how sick the girl gets, she stays at home and continues to rely on the traditional doctors. This statement was supported by the lack of data of teenage girls going to medical installations in the camps with abortion-related problems. In Bo, the study team was informed that there are a minimum of five abortions carried out every day in private clinics and pharmacies.

The different methods used were known not only to the girls and women but also to the boys. Boys confessed to having had a girlfriend successfully induce an abortion. *“If the girl gets pregnant and she does not want the baby she will spoil the belly, by drinking blue dissolved in water and made into a thick mixture and drink.”*

Table showing abortion methods used in different locations

METHOD	LIBERIA	SIERRA LEONE	GUINEA
Private medical practitioners	Yes (in Monrovia)	Yes (Bo, Kenema and Freetown)	Yes (Kissidougou and Conakry)
<i>Ampicillin</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Blue dye</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Cassava Leaves</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Chloroquine</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Lime Fruit as a mixer</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Native soap</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Paw Paw Leaves and roots</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Tetracycline</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes

Children said that even if they went to the medical clinic they would not tell the staff they had induced the abortion. Children from IDP camps spoke of the medical staff chasing away girls who go to the clinics to try and seek medical attention. *“They will refuse to treat you no matter how sick you are, and they will chase you out of the clinic threatening to report you to the police for having committed an offence. They will tell you that you killed a person.”* Children said they would only go to the clinic if their lives were in danger and even if they went they would not tell the medical staff about what they had done for fear of being threatened and called names. Because of the high incidence of abortion among teenage girls, the boys and girls clubs informed us that they have taken it upon themselves to encourage other teenage girls to use contraception to avoid pregnancy.

The study had a lot of difficulty in obtaining any data relating to the number of teenage girls who have been pregnant, are pregnant, married or have had a child. In one camp, the study team asked the boys and girls club to assist in registering all the girls 18 years and below who have had a child, who are pregnant and who are married. Within two days, the study team was given 65 names. This information was not readily available from medical or other implementing agencies in the camp.

(b) Girl mothers

“If we had alternative ways of making money, I would never look at another man again for a long, long time.” (Girl Mother Guinea) The presence of girl mothers as a result of teenage pregnancy was very apparent in most camps. The study team could visibly see that this was one group of children that had few or no programs targeted towards them.

In most meetings the girl mothers displayed visible signs of broken spirits. They were the only group that at times were not even able to give the study

team recommendations. They were resigned to their situations so much that they saw no way through. Most of them had become mothers between the ages of 13 and 16. Even though these girls were now 19, they already had three to four children and had first become pregnant when they were 13 or 14 years of age. Information from the community gave very alarming figures of the rates of girl pregnancy e.g. six deliveries every week by girls 18 years and below; 50% pregnancy rates of all the teenage girls in the camp; 75% pregnancy of all the girls in school. (The study team was not able to confirm these figures, as there are no available records from any NGO).

The girls were made pregnant by fellow students, fellow refugees, and agency workers, however they all had one thing in common. Regardless of who the father was, they took no responsibility for the child and the mother. *“They want you when you are young and single but once you get pregnant and with a child they reject you.”* (Girl mother Sierra Leone) *Another said, “An NGO worker made me pregnant but now he left me and is loving to another young girl.”* (Girl mother – Guinea) NGO workers were alleged to use code names in some places to avoid responsibility for the child. The children said that if a person uses a code name and they make you pregnant, they would then deny responsibility and start using their real name. *“Look at me, I am not Tupac. My name is Ibrahim”* (Adolescent girl- Sierra Leone). Children also said that some of the men would pierce the condom they were wearing during sex, and when the girl gets pregnant they would refuse responsibility saying they wore a condom during sexual intercourse. Meanwhile the girl would not know that the condom had been pierced.

(c) Reduced educational opportunities

There were high illiteracy levels among girl mothers. Some of them did not even know their age. In groups of 25, there would be one or two who would still be going to school or skills training. Girl mothers who tried to start or continue with school spoke of the difficulties they had to find help. Most of them had to go to school with the child and they said these created difficult and embarrassing situations. *“When I go to school with the child I feel bad because I am not free and if the child messes up I have to leave class and clean him up. The other students will be complaining that the class smells and I feel really bad.”* (Girl mother Guinea) *“When I am in class I will not concentrate. I worry about what I, my little sister and my child will eat when I get home.”* (Girl mother – Sierra Leone) Throughout the study period, there was no mention of any programs that addressed such issues or that support girl mothers with childcare while they are in school. Clearly again, the family support network that would normally take on this role has been weakened further, exposing the girls to more abuse.

Once again the means to make money in order to feed and support the child and themselves emerged as another contributing factor for girl mothers dropping out of school. Here are a few quotations demonstrating the difficulties most of these children have to endure.

"I have to sleep with so many men to make 1500, so that I can feed myself and my child. They pay me 300 each time, but if I am lucky and I get an NGO worker he can pay me 1500 at one time and sometimes I get 2000" (Girl mother Guinea)

"I leave my child with my little sister, who is ten years old, and I dress good and I go where the NGO workers drink or live and one of them will ask me for sex, sometimes they give me things like food, oil, soap and I will sell them and get money." "I sleep with different men but mostly NGO workers because I have to eat and feed my child" (Girl Mother - Liberia)

"I walk about in the evening and a man will stop and ask for sex and promise to pay. One of the NGO worker, he was refusing to pay me my money and then I asked him during the day and he beat me saying that he was annoyed with me because he cannot do such a thing" (Girl Mother – Guinea)

"The wife of the business man saw me with her husband who promised to pay me and she came and beat me, I could not fight her because she was big, the man refused to pay me because I shamed him" (Girl mother – Sierra Leone)

Girl mothers spoke of the difficulties they face in being accepted in society. *"The adult women treat us as children and make us feel we do not belong to their group. The young and single girls of our age who have no children make us feel we dirty because we did something bad and they feel if they are with us the men will not like them, so they do not like us anymore. We are lonely most of the time."* (Girl Mother – Guinea) Their parents at times throw them out of their homes, and the community treats them as bad girls. One girl said, *"When I was in Guinea, my mother was the only bread earner in the home. I fell in love with this boy and I became pregnant and my mother threw me out and the community treated me very badly. I reached a point when I wished I had not had sex to make money and had not got pregnant."* (Girl mother – Sierra Leone)

There are indications that illiteracy among women is very high in the Mano River States e.g. Sierra Leone reportedly has 90% illiteracy among women and 85% among men. The education system in refugee camps is supposed to reduce such numbers and prepare refugees for when they return home. With the high prevalence of sexual exploitation by teachers exchanging grades for sex, the education system is contributing to producing illiterate girls who will be the future illiterate mothers and women. Rights to education are rights that belong to refugee children. Refugee children whether they are in school or out of school deserve a chance to learn and when that chance has been made available and is again taken away it is unforgivable.

(d) STDs and HIV/AIDS

The study team did not have the mandate and the capacity to assess the numbers of refugee children who have become HIV positive as a result of sexual exploitation and violence. However, it would be irresponsible not to acknowledge that all the indicators point to high-risk behaviour patterns, which

expose children to STD and HIV/AIDS infection. The combination of immature bodies, poverty, lack of negotiating powers and practices of unsafe sex, disbelief about HIV/AIDS are factors that gravely increase risk.

9. The pattern of sexual relationships

“Negotiation for safer sex and contraceptive use is difficult for many young women – married or not – due to their low status in society. Lack of power also leaves them vulnerable to sexual abuse, including incest and rape. Low economic status of young women needing money for school books or other essentials, makes them easy prey for “sugar daddies and prostitution” (Health, Sexuality and Reproductive rights of Young People) The study found a more equal power balance in peer relationships between boys and girls and thus a better possibility of negotiating safe sex through the use of condoms. However, between female adolescents and male adults there is limited or no room at all for negotiating safe sex. The amount of money the adult pays undermines the negotiating power of the girl. The strong link between sex and money has made it difficult for boys to find girlfriends, as their financial status is very poor. In some camps children said that some young boys are resorting to rape, as they are not able to pay the amounts demanded by the girls.

10. The situation of the 19-25 year old age group

Girls in the 19 to 25 age groups, spoke of men who once wanted them when they were younger, completely ignoring them now and telling them that they are old. Even girls who were still under 18 years, and were with a child, experienced similar treatment, even the fathers of their babies would ignore them and threaten them with spite. *“They no longer look at us, they say that we are now old and finished.”* (19 year old girl – Sierra Leone) Girls in these age groups have to work to earn money. If they engage in sexually exploitative relationships, they are paid so little that it does not help. Girls in this age group engage in casual labour such as domestic work, clearing rice fields, harvesting rice and pounding rice. The low levels of demand for girls in these age groups meant a low prevalence of sexual exploitation.

Once again the pattern emerged among the 19 to 25 old that most of those who had single parent/adult relationships in their lives experienced early or forced marriages. On the other hand those who had no adult relationships in their lives, or left foster homes to live on their own, were found to be unmarried, without children and involved in skills training activities. The other issue unique to this age group is that they are in a no man’s land. They are neither children 18 years and below, nor do they fully qualify for adult status. They cannot register on their own to access plots and other services unless they start a family. They fear suspicion from the host country and the home country, they are vulnerable to forced recruitment, and yet there are no specific programs directed towards them.

Within the study they emerged as another group vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. They are also within the age group of most child headed households. In some countries, in the region, they were identified as one of

the groups in the community who become sexual abusers of other children. Asked about how the programs they went through when they were children protected them against sexual exploitation and violence. Most of them felt arriving as a separated child exposed them to abuse. They felt that even though some of the experiences with foster parents were not the best, they would still recommend that separated children be placed in foster homes. However before placing a child in the foster home, the child protection agency should investigate the family and find out their past history. They felt some of the foster parents who are given a lot of children actually use the children to access resources and labour rather than caring for them. In Liberia, there was a woman who had seventeen children in her care, and in Guinea we were given an example of someone who was taking care of 21 foster children excluding their own.

They also pointed out the lack of follow up by the protection agency. *“Some times the only contact you have with them is when they come to do interviews for registration, then they promise you that they will look for your parents, but after that you get no information”* (Adolescent boy – Guinea) Information on whether your parents were found or not. No information on what will happen. The low or no information flow levels were identified as key contributing factors to most separated children getting abused. They complained that even staff who used to help them when they were seen, as children no longer want to. *“Now they do not even want to see us. When you go to the office or meet them within the camp and ask for help, they tell you that now you are big enough you should take care of yourself.”* Some of the protection agencies still claim that they still work with them despite the fact that they are above 18.

D. SEXUAL VIOLENCE

1. Introduction

The children defined sexual violence as *“when one person wants to do woman business and the other one does not want, and he sex her by force.”* Most of the children who took part in the study knew of or had heard of a child who had been sexually violated. Some of the children spoke of their friends who had experienced sexual violence. *“My friend she went to church for lessons, the pastor called her to come in front, he started to do man business with her, and when she cried, he took a cloth and put it in her mouth. When she went home she told her parents, but her father said nothing should be done to the pastor. He is still at church and my friend feels very bad.”* (9 year old girl – Sierra Leone) Throughout the sub region sexual violence was seen as penis penetration of vagina. The response to sexual violence involving boys was always met with disbelief and arguments that such things do not happen in their communities. *“Within our community it is a taboo to have sex with a boy or another man.”* Most of the time the participants failed to differentiate sexual violence against boys from the practice of homosexuality, which is highly frowned upon and strongly condemned by men, women and children. The lack of available reports or data on sexual violence towards boys cannot be taken as a sign of the non-existence of such acts, but rather as a silencing

factor hindering boy children from coming forward and seeking assistance. *“The stigma towards boys who get raped is so strong in the community, that the boy will just keep quite, and if he told his family, the fear of shame for the whole family will make them encourage the child to keep silent.”* (Adolescent boy – Guinea)

2. What factors influence the prevalence of sexual violence?

(a) Regional conflict

Sexual violence was used as a weapon of war during the conflict in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The sub-region has one of the worst records of such atrocities during any war. The deliberate capturing of girl children to be used as sex slaves, domestic workers and load carriers was common practice. The perpetrators who committed these atrocities went and still continue to go with impunity. The affected children were without the protection of their governments, their communities and their families. At times the forces that were supposed to protect them perpetrated the atrocity or abandoned them. *“You people you should have taken care of me. Instead you abandoned me. I was raped and I lay there bleeding with no one to help me”* These words were spoken by a 14 year-old girl who was abducted by the RUF at eight, was raped repeatedly from the age of ten and is now pregnant. She knows her assailant, but still the law cannot take its course, he still walks free. Most of the regional and country fighting forces embraced sexual violence as a weapon of war. ECOMOG is said not only to sexually violate girls but boys too.

During the war, sexual violence atrocities were committed with such high levels of impunity that the community believes the perpetrators got so used to this that they continue doing the same today. The community perception of sexual violence is that: *“it was not so bad before the war. It got very bad during the war and while fleeing. It is not so bad now in the camps or community”* and *“Rape was occurring before the war but not as rampant as it is since the war.”* This perception has been strengthened as most fighting forces in the region embraced sexual violence as a weapon of war. Because of the cruelty and extreme numbers of children that were affected during the war, sexual violence is seen as relatively minor and therefore goes unreported. The community has a strong sense of sympathy for survivors of sexual violence during the war and most survivors feel comfortable to talk about such experiences. Clearly the survivor is seen as the victim of a crime that was committed with impunity. However, survivors of sexual violence during peacetime are blamed for the incident as they are seen being able to avoid such incidents. The perpetrators of sexual violence in non-war related incidents are often regarded as the victims, rather than the survivor herself. Although perpetrators of sexual violence are currently primarily from within the community, there continue to be reports of sexual violence by the RUF in Sierra Leone as well as from within the ranks of military and police groups working within the country. Acts of sexual violence by international personnel are also reported. There are still children living with their captors as sex slaves in some areas in Sierra Leone.

The community also felt that incidents of sexual violence still occur in the community because perpetrators got used to committing such offences with impunity during the war. *“Men raped children as young as 3 years during the war, so right now they have continued doing the same.”* (Refugee leader – Guinea) There is also a strong sentiment that some of the girls, who were abducted and used as sex slaves, got used to having sex every day and deliberately go out looking for men – the rape is thus seen as a consequence of their own behaviour.

The showing of pornographic movies at video centres are said to excite and make young men who cannot afford to pay for sex into committing acts of sexual violence. After watching explicit pornographic material some men want to experiment with what they have seen. Since sexual relationships are so closely connected with financial rewards, most girls will refuse free sex, the men are said to have no option but to force the girl.

(b) Prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse

Some of the perpetrators and survivors are drug addicts, with sexual violence being committed while under the influence of drugs or while trying to access drugs. Children are said to use hashish, marijuana, cocaine, brown brown and gunpowder. In most camps children know where one can obtain drugs which are sold during dance and video shows. Some of the perpetrators and survivors will be under the influence of alcohol. Palm wine, which is a local brew, is readily available in most refugee camps. Girls who drink alcohol will behave in ways that put them at risk, and men will commit rape while under the influence or at times use it as an excuse to commit rape.

(c) High prevalence of sexual exploitation

The high prevalence of sexual exploitation has influenced the communities' perception of sexual violence. The seriousness of the offence is greatly reduced when any form of monetary or material exchange takes place between the survivor and assailant before or after the incident. Most assailants know that if they give the girl any form of money or material goods and later sexually violate her, the community will accept that it was not an act of sexual violence. *“A man approaches a girl and she refuses, he will start giving her money saying he is just helping her, she will become friendly to him, and then one day he will rape her, if she complains people will say why did you get his money”*. (NGO WORKER – Liberia) Assailants are said to use this to their advantage. As soon as an assailant is accused of committing an offence of sexual violence, they will offer to pay the girl or the family. Survivors on the other hand are finding that less and less people believe them. The one solution they are embracing is to keep silent about such acts. *“If any young girl gets raped they will just keep silent, they will only report if she gets sick or injured but most teenage girls do not report.”* (Adolescent girl – Guinea) For girls that have already become pregnant the situation is even made more complex. *“when you already have a baby people say that you are used to doing bad things.”* (Girl Mother – Sierra Leone) The need for most families to make some money

leads them to settling out of court rather than having the case dealt with in a legal and just manner.

(d) Social stigma

The shame and stigma attached to experiences of sexual violence force most children and their families to keep quiet about such experiences. Most children within the sub-region find that the adults in their lives encourage them to keep silent about their experiences of sexual violence even in situations where sexual and gender-based violence programs exist. It is a community perception that a good mother is one that keeps her children's experiences secret. Social status for girls depends on her capacity to get married and have a family. A known experience of sexual violence not only reduces her chances of marriage but also her parents' chances of obtaining a good dowry for her. Parents will try and deal with the issue internally, within the family as best as they can. *"The way you sell a commodity depends on the way you market it. If you have a daughter and she gets raped and you tell everyone, you will have problems to get her married. A good mother keeps secrets for her daughter"*.

(Refugee women – Guinea) The strong need for protecting the girl and family from social stigma has enabled perpetrators to commit sexual violence offences with impunity.

(e) Low reporting levels

Low levels of reporting throughout the region were influenced by many factors. The following are the most common:

- Fear of social stigma and its repercussions for the girl, as mentioned above.
- The need for economic gain verses the need for justice
- The lack of confidentiality. In locations where there are sexual and gender-based violence programs, refugees and IDPs raised issues of concern in relation to confidentiality. Refugees felt that even with the existence of reporting and referral mechanisms more needs to be done to strengthen the code of confidentiality. The lack of confidentiality simply continues to strengthen the fear of social stigma.
- The limited or lack of presence of UNHCR protection staff on the ground. The refugees felt they had little or no access to UNHCR protection. In some refugee situations, they could only access protection staff by going to the UNHCR branch office on certain days and at specific times, even though they did not have money for public transport. In other refugee situations protection staff were so unknown that refugees only referred to field officers and saw no role for protection staff in ensuring their safety when dealing with the national security forces or court procedures. Even some of the implementing partners said *"Protection (it) is very difficult to get them on board."* (NGO worker – Guinea) Other concerns and issues raised in relation to protection were that *"There is a very narrow definition of the roles and responsibilities of protection and security on the ground within the organisation. Therefore protection is not really involved in this issue that is why staff numbers have been reduced because sexual violence and exploitation is not seen recognised as a major issue for protection."*

However, it is a protection issue we all know." (UNHCR worker) The limited or total absence of protection staff from UNHCR or its implementing partners on the ground is seen as a major stumbling block that deters refugees from reporting incidents of sexual violence.

(f) Legal procedures

The long legal procedures and processes in all three countries were found to be expensive and difficult with few positive aspects for the survivor and her family. The refugee experience of the legal system is that it barely functions. It is controlled by a few powerful people who make most of the decisions more often on the basis of status and influence of the accused person rather than on the law itself. It leaves children more exposed than protected by the law. The refugee population has lost most of its confidence and tends to rely on the informal community-based traditional legal systems. The community response entails financial compensation by the perpetrator and/or forced marriage of the girl to the perpetrator.

Most refugee experiences with the host country security forces have also been so negative that they try to avoid contact with them as much as possible. Involving the host country legal system means involving the security forces. The legal system in most situations erodes away even the little confidentiality that the sexual and gender-based violence survivor will be struggling to maintain. The survivor and her family will be expected to attend court and give evidence. The continued trips to and from court proceedings make it impossible to maintain confidentiality. The court procedures are more humiliating than supportive, and the survivor may not even be able to converse in the host country language.

The limited capacities of the judicial system tend to make the court procedures long and expensive for the survivor and her family. One of the children interviewed had been to court and had her case deferred (either because of the absence of the criminal judge or for other reasons) on twenty occasions. If there is no agency to support the family and witnesses with the costs of travel and meals when making the trip to and from court, the case will be dropped. The right of the perpetrator to bail is an issue that the refugee community finds difficult to deal with. A perpetrator will be arrested and within a few days he will return to the camp. Upon return, he, his family and friends will begin to harass the survivor and her family. *"According to the law, a perpetrator is entitled to bail pending hearing and the refugees do not understand the procedure"* (NGO Liberia). Policies of relocation do exist but survivors find that policies on paper are very different to realities on the ground. The situation is made more difficult as there is little or no information flow between the refugees, the refugee leaders, implementing partners and UNHCR, on the legal procedure and its stages. The refugees simply feel it is more dangerous for the child to try and seek legal redress. It exposes them to more risk from the assailant, his family and friends and from other community members. *"If a girl has been raped and she reports it becomes known by everyone and she becomes more vulnerable to experiencing more rape. Because men know that if a girl has been raped and she is raped again she is*

most unlikely to report. She will be afraid that she will be blamed and the her mother will be blamed for not training her daughter properly. People will say, why is it only happening to you and not the other girls?" (NGO worker Guinea) In cases that involved an agency worker, the community had the tendency to protect the perpetrator, fearing prosecution will result in loss of employment and reputation which would lead to severe repercussions to the wider community e.g. loss of services provided by that agency.

Sexual violence throughout the sub-region is committed as a crime and not based on ethnic or tribal lines. At times the crime of rape is committed as a means to get access to the girl. Community punishment to the perpetrator is usually marriage to the child, the perpetrator therefore will rape the child in order to have access to her through this traditional settling of the case.

(g) Focus on physical evidence

The definition of sexual violence and the legal proof required is heavily dependent on physical evidence. Rape is defined in the three countries as *"As penis penetration of the vagina"*. One of the key documents required in cases of rape is the medical report. The medical report is mostly based on forensic evidence and this is very difficult to obtain, as most survivors do not report on time. Because the doctors' reports are so focused on physical evidence, when they find none, they will say that no rape has occurred. The focus on physical evidence brings issues of virginity into the limelight, a young girl is expected to be a virgin and if she is not, even if she has been raped, her case will not be taken seriously. *"The court system can be so brutal for the child survivor. The perpetrator is allowed to cross-examine the child. The statement is taken from the child and the perpetrator within the same room. The translator's loyalty affects what he says and how he treats the survivor, at times he simply interrogates the child and is so unfriendly"* (NGO worker – Sierra Leone) The doctors' limited training inhibits their capacity to write medical reports, which continues to undermine the case.

The importance placed on physical evidence has contributed to girls who sustain lower levels of physical injury feeling that their case will not be believed. The parents and children themselves seek formal redress when they have sustained severe physical injury. The available data showed that most of the cases reported were of children 11 years and below as this is the age group that sustain much more severe physical injury. The community members are much more outraged when the child involved is younger and has suffered severe physical injury. Any child who suffers rape without physical injury will have a very difficult time to convince anyone she has been raped. In most situations the case will be dealt with under bodily harm or physical injury, which draws a much lower penalty. *"A young girl of 10 had been raped but did not sustain serious physical injury, the question everyone asked was, how could she be raped and not have vaginal tears, the medical report said the same, the man was never charged and he still walks free"*. (NGO Liberia) Justice in most sexual violence cases involving children is compromised

as adults feel they have a right to make decisions for the child, however, most of these decisions are based on emotion and not on fact.

3. Who is affected by sexual violence?

- Girls between the ages of four and 12 are commonly being sexually harassed, either verbally or through touching of buttocks, breasts, or genitals *“each time ma sends me to the market them big men like touching my waist line and my boobs.”* Children said boys of their age group also did the same, but that adult male mostly did it.
- Children experience attempted rape mostly when they go to use the toilets or take a bath. The toilets and bathrooms are all located in the same place, and divided along gender lines. Children say adult males lay watch for when the child is going to the toilet. They then follow the child and try to rape them *“Me and my friend went to the toilet and when I got in this man came and tried to sex me. I screamed and he got scared I run away with my friend.”* (10 year old girl Liberia)
- Children as young as three months are affected, most suffer rape by penis penetration of vagina or by finger penetration. There were rare cases of oral rape, mainly by male parents with infants.
- High incidents of rape among children by their grandparents were reported. Most of the children will be left in the care of their grandparents by their parents. It is within the period of the parent’s absence that male grandparents sexually violate the child.
- Girls living in female-headed households (no husband) are more vulnerable from sexual violence by neighbours, care givers and male friends of the mother.
- The levels of sexual violence experienced by girls still with their abductors and in IDP situations is much higher than those in refugee camps, especially where awareness campaign have been conducted as part of the sexual and gender-based violence program.
- Children who attend dance/bola nights and who go to video shows unaccompanied by adult siblings.
- Children sent to sell or to deliver what has bought from the mothers stand. The children who are sent to sell food and non-food items are vulnerable to sexual violence as the adult person waits for them in isolated or abandoned buildings on their way to and from selling things. Some of the children are sent to sell food items near drinking places and are expected to stay late at night until the items are finished. Some children are sent to sell food items at parking areas for long distance truck drivers.

4. Who are the perpetrators?

- Adult men including security personnel
- Adolescent boys and young men are committing sexual violence (rape) and sexual harassment against their peers
- Drug addicts
- Drunkards
- People known to the children

- Unmarried men who cannot afford to pay for sex
- Mentally ill people
- Ex-combatants (RUF, CDF, ex-SLA)
- Neighbours
- Relatives
- ECOMOG
- Medical staff – children talked about having their breasts and vaginas touched by doctors even if they came in with a complaint not related to those body parts
- UNAMSIL soldiers

5. Where does sexual violence take place?

- Sexual violence is committed in areas around the camps such as streams where children are sent to wash their clothes and kitchen utensils, where children take baths, the bush when children are sent to look for food and firewood.
- In the surrounding villages or host community as children go looking for work in the palm wine plantations and rice fields.
- Dark and isolated places be it buildings or bush areas within the camp, or between two parts of the same camp.
- In transit centres or emergency booths where hundreds of people are sleeping under one roof. The emergency booths are supposed to house families for a short time but in some situations families live there for more than six months. Children, especially girls find themselves sleeping next to adult men who are not their relations.
- In toilets and latrines and where male and female latrines are in close proximity. An adult male going the same direction as a teenage girl will not raise any suspicion, as both male and female latrines are located next to each other in close proximity.
- At night during the bola/dance nights, and video shows. Children who attend dance and video clubs late into the night will at times try to walk home alone. The dance and video places even though there are a lot of people around are ideal for perpetrators picking out girls who seem alone and without money to pay to get in.
- During conflict situations and large scale population movements (both during flight and repatriation), at checkpoints along the route or close to IDP areas, or at military/ security locations within refugee camps.
- In the perpetrators and or survivors own home.

E. HIV/AIDS

1. Children's knowledge, attitude and practice on HIV/AIDS

In refugee camps, generally, both children and adults have a high level of knowledge about HIV/AIDS - what it is, how it is transmitted, and how one can protect oneself. The knowledge levels are less in some IDP camps, especially the newly established ones and the lowest levels are among host populations in rural areas which have just been opened up. In refugee camps where the knowledge levels were high, there was evidence of awareness work by NGOs. Children and adult groups made very well informed presentations to the study team. In communities where knowledge was weakest, children and adults still said one could identify an HIV positive person with certain signs. Such as their skin getting dark, that one can contract HIV/AIDS by stepping on the urine of an infected person, or if a fly sat on the urine and then sat on your arm, if one has visible veins on their arms, or by shaking hands with an infected person. Children, especially girls, said one could tell an HIV positive male as the tip of their penis shines bright and releases a clear liquid.

Adult women and female children had a weaker knowledge base in comparison to the male population. Clearly the awareness work has been more targeted more towards males than females. Older women complained that they were not comfortable to attend the awareness campaigns as live demonstrations are made on how to use a condom. *"During the awareness campaign, they use the penis to demonstrate how to use a condom, it is very embarrassing for us to watch that as within the group our children and their friends will be there"*. (Refugee woman – Liberia) The medical and social services agencies doing the awareness campaign told the study team that everyone was welcome and that awareness campaign meetings were not done along the lines of gender and age. Teenage boys attributed the girls' lack of knowledge as a major contributing factor to the girls' lack of negotiating power in using condoms as a means of protection.

Throughout the sub-region, among children and adults alike, female-male problems begin to surface in their attitudes and practice. Most refugees who were involved in the study did not actually believe that HIV/AIDS exists. They said, *"we have heard that it exists from the radio and magazines and that it is there in South Africa, but we have never seen a live person with HIV/Aids. For us to believe show us a person, bring a person with AIDS and we will believe."* (Adolescent boy Guinea) Some people thought HIV/AIDS was being advertised as a means to discourage them from having sex. In Sierra Leone, the study team was informed of a doctor who was going around schools and lecturing to children on how he knows that HIV/AIDS does not exist. The few people who said they had seen a person infected with HIV/AIDS, told the study team, *"we only found out when the person had died and even then they told us the person died from malaria."* (Adolescent Sierra Leone)

Adults and children both felt that "prevention" of the spread of HIV/AIDS could best be achieved by killing they infected person so that the disease did not spread. In Guinea, the study team was told that, *"in one of the camps, a girl*

who was HIV positive was given a lethal injection so she could die.” Asked whether the girl had no family, the response was, “ her family too wanted her to die because they were tired, they were taking her to the hospital and she was not getting well. So they asked the doctor if he could give her poison in the injection and he agreed.” (Adolescent boy Guinea)

The use of condoms as a means of protecting oneself is shrouded in mythology. Even though there is this high level of knowledge, adolescents very quickly agree to remove the condom if their partner objects to its use. Among peers, both girls and boys could refuse the use of the condom. *“Why do you bring that thing near me, do you think I am dirty” (Adolescent boy – Liberia)*, upon such statement the partner will immediately take off the condom and proceed with sexual intercourse. When asked why, the children said, *“At that moment you are so hard, so ready that you must just have, do it.” (Adolescent boy Liberia)* Clearly, the awareness raising does not include negotiating skills or the timing of the negotiation. The awareness raising has not extensively covered information about the truths and myths of condom use. Girls seemed more likely to refuse the use of condoms than boys, and this was linked to their limited access to awareness information on HIV/AIDS and condom use. Boys are also accused of tearing the tip of the condom in order to enjoy maximum satisfaction, condoms are seen as barriers to sexual gratification. According to adolescents, sexual satisfaction can only be achieved through the act of sexual intercourse, preferably by “direct current” or by “flesh to flesh”. Once again a girl’s capacity to negotiate safe sex, through the use of condoms is compromised in relations involving adult men who offer her higher amounts of money.

2. Condom myths

“It will get stuck in your belly”

“For someone to enjoy sexual intercourse, the semen must travel to the girl’s uterus, and there find a liquid, and when the two mix they will create a sweet liquid and that is what makes sex sweet, the condom blocks this from happening”

“The condom gets stuck in your vagina and you can die”

“Skin to skin, neck to neck, flesh to flesh”

“Direct current”

“Wicked men piece the tip of the condom so that you can get belly or sick, and then when you tell them they refuse saying they wore a condom”

“It is too small for some and too big for others”

“It disturbs with sexual satisfaction”

“Most girls think you are insulting them if you go with a condom, they think you are saying they are dirty”

“Religion does not allow the use of condoms, it disturbs with having children”

“If a woman asks a man to wear a condom, he will think she has another boyfriend”

“If a girl goes to get condoms and wants to use them it is seen as a sign of prostitution”

3. Access

Access to condoms varied from place to place, with some places having very good access and other places having no access. In some IDP and host community areas access was restricted, or they needed to buy condoms whereas in refugee camps the supplies were much higher and free. In situations where access was good and supplies available, children used clean condoms to learn how to put one on and to play with as balloons. In situations where access was limited or restricted, children used dirty condoms to learn how to wear them and to play with as balloons. *“ We pick up one from behind the house or at the video club or the dance hall, and then one of us will teach the other how to wear one. All of us will try it on.”* (8 Year old boy Liberia) The cost of condoms ranged from 50 Francs for two to 300 Leon’s for one. The cost in some locations increased with the arrival of foreign troops, expatriate staff and refugee populations.

4. Prevalence

There are limited/no voluntary HIV testing facilities located within refugee and IDP camps. In most situations the already over burdened host national medical facilities with limited testing capacities are the ones relied on to provide services for refugee populations. In the location where blood transfusions are carried out at the medical centre within the camp, blood is tested for HIV/AIDS, however, due to the lack of pre and post-test counselling services, and treatment facilities, individuals who test positive are not informed of their status. Due to this situation, the study team did not find available any data indicating the prevalence rates of HIV/AIDS among refugees and IDPs within the sub-region. Despite high pregnancy rates among teenagers, the visible presence of girl mothers, the girls are not tested for HIV/AIDS and neither are they offered anti-viral drugs as an option during pregnancy in order to reduce mother-child transfusion.

F. REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES

Children's access to reproductive health services was also reviewed by the study. Throughout the sub-region condom use has mostly been promoted as a method of protection against HIV/AIDS, and at limited times, STD's, but it is not seen as a method of contraception.

Within the refugee population of Muslim men, contraception is strictly forbidden. Men argue that it is against their religion for their children and wives to use contraceptives. For women married to such men, accessing and using contraceptives, means having to resort to methods that are counterproductive, such as going to the clinic on a daily basis to obtain their contraceptive pill, or hiding their contraceptive pills outside the home or with a friend. Those that hide outside the home at times end up taking the pill wrongly and getting pregnant as a result. Children resort to asking their friends or brothers to get the contraceptives for them and keep them at their house. At times the girl is unable to go to her friend's house and misses her daily dose.

Most refugee children and adults believe that the injection is a method only suitable for adult women who have had children. Young girls therefore do not choose it as an option despite the difficulty they have with the pill. The medical staff insisted that the refugee community have been given the information that females of all ages can use the injection. Within the different communities, however, refugees still strongly believed that taking the injection before one has a child would lead to barrenness. Although medical staff state the contrary, adolescents believe that the contraceptive injection is available only to adults, and that the pill is their only option of contraception. Emergency contraception is offered only in cases of sexual violence survivors who report to the medical centre within 72 hours.

ACRONYMS

ARC	American Refugee Committee
ARC/CSI	American Refugee Committee/Community Safety Initiative
ACF	Action Contra la Faim
AFRICARE	Full name not known
ASPIR	Association of Sport to Improve Refugees (name may be incorrect)
BMZ	Bundesministerium für Wirtschaftliche Zusammen-arbeit (German government)
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CCSL	Council of Churches, Sierra Leone
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
DPS	Direction Préfectorale de la Sante (Guinean government local health division)
ERM	Enfants Refugiés du Monde
FEP	Family Empowerment Programme
FGM	Female Genital Mutilation
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammen-arbeit (German government)
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IFRC/GRC	International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies/Guinean Red Cross
IMC	International Medical Corporation
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LIURD	Liberian Islamic Union for Reconstruction and Development
LRRRC	Liberia Refugee Repatriation and Resettlement Commission
LUSH	Liberian United to Serve Humanity
LWSWF	Lutheran World Service/World Federation
LVT	Full name not known – acronym may be incorrect
MERLIN	Medical Emergency Relief International
MERCI	Medical Emergency and Relief Co-operative International
MSF	Medecin Sans Frontière
NGOs	Non-governmental organisations
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
PR	Projet Recensement (Guinean government project)
PU	Premiere Urgence
RHG	Reproductive Health Group
SGBV	Sexual and Gender-based Violence
SC-UK	Save the Children - U.K.
SECADOS	Services Catholique des Oeuvres Sociales
STDs	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food programme

GLOSSARY

◆ ADOLESCENT

Persons between the ages of 10 and 19 years. (World Health Organisation)

◆ AGENCY WORKERS

The term agency workers is used throughout the text to mean staff or volunteers from local, national and international non-governmental organisations as well as United Nations agencies unless specified otherwise.

◆ CHILD

The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as “*every human being below the age of 18 years unless under the law applicable to the child majority is attained earlier*”. The study team used the CRC definition in the Mano River States as a guideline to determine who is a child.

◆ DISPLACED PERSON

- see internally displaced person

◆ EARLY/FORCED MARRIAGE

Is the practice of giving away girls for marriage at the ages of 11,12,or 13, after which they must start producing children. Marrying off a girl child robs her of her childhood, time that she needs to develop physically, emotionally and psychologically. In most situations early marriage is practised with the husband to be many years senior to the girl. “*It is with this strange man that she has to develop an intimate emotional and physical relationship. She is obliged to have intercourse, although physically she might not be fully developed.*” (Harmful traditional practices affecting the health of women and children. Fact sheet No. 23)

◆ EMOTIONAL ABUSE

Emotional abuse includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, including the availability of a primary attachment figure, so that the child can develop a stable and full range of emotional and social competencies commensurate with her or his personal potential and in the context of the society in which the child dwells. (World Health Organisation)

◆ FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Female genital mutilation (FGM), or female circumcision as it is sometimes referred to, involves surgical removal of parts or all of the most sensitive female genital organs. “Circumcision or Sunna (traditional) circumcision: Involves the removal of the prepuce and the tip of the clitoris. Excision or clitoridectomy: Involves the removal of the clitoris, and often also the labia minora, it is the most common operation and is practised through out Africa.” (Regional Plan of Action to Accelerate the Elimination Female Genital Mutilation in Africa)

◆ GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

Gender-based violence is physical, mental or social violence (including sexual violence) that includes acts (attempted or threatened) carried out with or without force and without the consent of the survivor. The violence is directed against a person because of her or his gender (because she is female or because he is male) or gender role in a society or culture. (Pain Too Deep for Tears)

◆ GUINEAN FRANC

The exchange rate for the Guinean Franc as of January 2002 was 1915.00000 per US\$1. The currency symbol is GNF.

◆ INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSON

The term internally displaced person is used in this text to refer to people who have been forced to flee their homes but who have not reached a neighbouring country and therefore, unlike refugees, are not protected by international law or eligible to receive many types of aid. UNHCR is involved in assisting certain categories of internally displaced populations upon the

request of the UN Secretary-General and providing certain criteria are met. These populations are referred to as “internally displaced populations of concern to UNHCR” in this text. (UNHCR “Refugees by Numbers 2000”)

◆ **LEONES**

The national currency of Sierra Leone is Leones. The currency symbol is SLL and the exchange rate as of January 2002 is 2000.00000 per US\$ 1.

◆ **LIBERIAN DOLLAR**

The exchange rate for the Liberian dollar as of January 2002 was 45.00 per US\$1. The currency symbol is LRD

◆ **ORPHAN**

Orphans are children, both of whose parents are known to be dead. In some countries, however, a child who has lost one parent is called an orphan. (Draft Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children)

◆ **REFUGEE**

The term refugee is used in this text to refer to refugee populations falling under UNHCR’s mandate. The UNHCR statute and the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees define refugees as persons who are outside their country and cannot return owing to a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group. Regional instruments such as the 1969 Organisation of Africa Unity Refugee Convention and the 1984 Cartagena Declaration expanded the mandate to include persons who have fled because of war or civil conflict. UNHCR also provides assistance to other “persons of concern” including asylum seekers, returnees (refugees who have returned home), local civilian communities directly affected by movements of refugees, and certain categories of internally displaced persons. (UNHCR “Refugees by Numbers 2000”)

◆ **RETURNEE**

The majority of refugees prefer to and do return home as soon as circumstances permit, generally when a conflict has ended, a degree of stability restored and basic infrastructure is being rebuilt. UNHCR encourages voluntary repatriation as the best solution for displaced persons. The agency often provides transportation and a start-up package which could include cash grants and practical assistance etc. field staff monitor the well-being of “returnees” in delicate situations. The duration of such activities varies, but rarely lasts longer than two years when longer-term development assistance from other organisations is more appropriate. (UNHCR “Refugees by Numbers 2000”)

◆ **NEGLIGENT TREATMENT – CHILD**

Neglect is the failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakers and causes or has a high probability of causing harm to the child’s health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. This includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible. (Legal Rights Awareness Among Women in Africa)

◆ **SEPARATED CHILDREN**

Separated children are those separated from both parents, or from their previous legal or primary customary primary care-giver, but not necessarily from other relatives. These may therefore include children accompanied by other adult family members. (Draft Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children)

◆ **SEXUAL EXPLOITATION**

Sexual exploitation is the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violates the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual exploitation is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust or

power, including economic power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person. The inducement or coercion of a child to engage in any unlawful sexual activity:

- The exploitative use of children in prostitution or other unlawful sexual practices
- The exploitative use of children in pornographic performances and materials.
- The use of children in work or other activities for the benefit of others. This includes child labour and child prostitution(World Health Organisation)

◆ **SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE**

The term sexual and gender-based violence is used increasingly within the humanitarian community to mean program initiatives that prevent and respond to sexual and gender-based Violence. However, most forms of sexual violence can also be classified under gender – based violence as long as the primary cause of the act was the person's gender. In situations of conflict, there are many sexual and gender-based violence atrocities committed and about which little or no documentation exists.

◆ **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

Sexual violence is any act, attempted or threatened, that is sexual in nature and is done with force or without force and without the consent of the victim. This includes acts of forcing another individual (through violence, threats, deception, *cultural expectations* or economic circumstances) to engage in sexual behaviour against his or her will. Sexual violence also includes penetration by objects such as sticks, guns, bottles, stones, feet, fingers, etc. (The Private is Public A Study of Violence against Women in southern Africa)

◆ **STATUTORY RAPE**

Is sexual intercourse with someone under a specific age, which is deemed to be unlawful. The person is presumed by law to be unable to give informed consent by reason of his or her age.

◆ **UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN**

Unaccompanied children (also called unaccompanied minors) are children who have been separated from both parents and other relatives and are not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so. (Draft Inter-agency guiding principles on unaccompanied and separated children)