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Child Soldiers: Recruitment and Use of Children in the Sudanese War

Yazeed A Hamoud

PhD Candidate: In Peace, Governance & Development University for Peace, Costa Rica

* Corresponding Author: **Yazeed A Hamoud**

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Abstract

Objective: This article investigates the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the Sudanese war. It examines how armed groups involved in the conflict systematically target vulnerable children. This study further elaborates on how armed groups force children to engage in combat and other auxiliary roles like logistics, intelligence, or support functions, which expose them to violence and exploitation. Additionally, this research evaluates the experiences of these children by describing how armed conflict exposes them to long-term psychological effects, including the disruption of their education and normal social development. It assesses ongoing efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate them into society.

Method: This study used a descriptive-analytical method to collect, evaluate, and synthesize data from secondary literature. Besides, a systematic review of existing empirical research was conducted to ensure a comprehensive examination of the plight of child soldiers in the Sudanese war.

Results: The study found that the recruitment measures of child soldiers in Sudan are complex and often driven by coercion, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and the breakdown of state authority. Child soldiers experience psychological trauma, disrupted education, and social exclusion. The ongoing rehabilitation programs show promising results but face various challenges, such as limited resources, social stigma, and the complications of post- conflict reintegration.

Conclusion: Eliminating the use of child soldiers in Sudan requires the collaboration of various actors to address the root causes of recruitment and ensure sustainable, culturally sensitive reintegration processes. This research's policy recommendations include enhanced international cooperation, community-based support systems, and long-term monitoring of reintegration outcomes.

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Keywords: Child soldiers, Sudanese war, recruitment, rehabilitation, reintegration, descriptive analysis

1. Introduction

1.1.1 Global Context of Child Soldiering

Child soldiering is a widespread phenomenon that has affected many regions engaged in armed conflict. For instance, during ancient and medieval periods, the transition from childhood to adulthood occurred at much younger ages compared to modern standards (Lewis, 2022) ^[22]. This blurred distinction allowed children to be viewed as viable soldiers. Additionally, post-medieval conflicts involved the use of child soldiers. The British Civil Wars (1642-1651) led armies to recruit and use children in combat and supporting roles (Pells, 2022) ^[28]. Armed groups during these periods rationalized their exploitation and undermining of children's developmental rights based on their immediate needs of survival and resistance. In modern conflicts, the use of child soldiers has been documented in various armed conflicts across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. For instance, African countries like Sierra Leone, Uganda, the Central African Republic, Rwanda, South Sudan, and Burundi have witnessed

the use of child soldiers (Dutse, 2021) ^[11]. Armed factions in these countries have engaged in the coercion or forceful recruitment of both boys and girls into combat, logistical support, and intelligence roles. Armed groups exploit children due to the belief that they are easy to control and may carry out orders with less resistance (Regilme & Spoldi, 2021) ^[30]. Global organizations such as the United Nations (UN), UNICEF, and the Human Rights Watch recognize the human rights violations associated with child soldiering. The international community established legal frameworks and conventions, like the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to protect minors from recruitment into armed groups.

1.1.2 The Sudanese Conflict: A Complex Landscape

Sudan's prolonged conflicts and complex challenges make its case of child soldiers a symbol of regional instability. Sudan's history of protracted internal and external conflicts, characterized by continuous skirmishes, civil wars, and regional violence, has destabilized the nation for decades (Çinar & Özer, 2023) ^[7]. The disputes have weakened or eliminated protective structures, like stable governance, secure community networks, and functional legal institutions. The unstable environment has damaged family and community structures that would typically safeguard children's well-being, thus leaving them vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation. Non-state groups supporting government forces, such as the Janjaweed militia in Darfur, have capitalized on Sudan's prolonged instability to normalize violence and desensitize communities while fighting rebel groups like the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) (Ndiaye, 2024) ^[25]. The scenario provides armed groups the opportunity to abduct, indoctrinate, or coerce new generations of children to participate in the conflicts. Armed groups in Sudan use child soldiers to participate in direct combat operations (Hamad, 2023). Frontline roles expose children to deadly confrontations, which include physical harm, emotional stress, and potential death. Additionally, armed groups exploit children's small size and perceived innocence by using them as messengers or couriers to deliver critical information, spies and intelligence gatherers, and logistical support operations such as carrying supplies and assisting in camp setups without attracting undue attention and suspicion. The complex Sudanese case makes it vital to use targeted interventions to destroy the structures that promote the systematic recruitment and use of child soldiers.

1.1.3 Implications for Developmental Rights

The recruitment and exploitation of children in armed conflicts in Sudan impact their long-term developmental rights. The recruitment and use of child soldiers interrupts their formal learning and academic progress (Arumbinang *et al.*, 2023) ^[4], thus undermining their personal and professional development. Without a steady education, children experience a gap in learning that limits their ability to re-enter academic or vocational training later in life. Forced disengagement from school leads children to lose their social and cognitive skills, like teamwork and problem-solving, thus undermining their ability to integrate into society after conflict. It exposes them to cycles of vulnerability since their limited skills and opportunities increase the risk of poverty and further exploitation. Additionally, exposure to violence and forced participation in

combat can lead child soldiers to develop psychological issues like anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Denov, 2022) ^[9]. Moreover, the physical demands of war can lead child soldiers to develop injuries, chronic health problems, and long-term physical disabilities. The trauma child soldiers experience significantly undermines their social development. They can find it challenging to form healthy relationships and integrate into post-conflict communities. The transformation of children into instruments of war undermines their ability to develop healthy moral lives (Souris, 2022) ^[35]. It leads them to lose their innocence, disrupts family bonds and community ties, forces them to mature prematurely, and impacts their long-term identity, shaped by violence and exclusion, which can persist well into adulthood. The exploitation of child soldiers undermines their developmental rights and exposes them to cycles of vulnerability.

1.1.4 Socio-Political and Economic Dynamics in Sudan

The recruitment and utilization of child soldiers in Sudan is based on its broader socio-political and economic issues. Since Sudan gained independence in 1956, it has experienced protracted civil wars, authoritarian governance, economic crises, and repeated shifts between civilian rule and military intervention through coups (Slom, 2024) ^[34]. Sudan's political instability undermines the government's ability to protect the public and maintain law and order. Local militias and rebel groups have taken advantage of the state's minimal or non-existent control to recruit and utilize child soldiers. For instance, the UN reported 24 cases of child recruitment and utilization in Sudan but only verified one case involving a 14-year-old boy, Abdul Wahid, who was recruited by the Sudan Liberation Army (Khdir, 2022) ^[21]. Moreover, Sudan's ethnic divisions have undermined communal trust and weakened inter-ethnic solidarity that can protect children from exploitation by armed groups. Local militias exploit ethnic divisions and use them to create the narrative of "us versus them." The narrative enables them to polarize communities and justify their recruitment and utilization of child soldiers as a defensive measure or as part of an ethnic crusade. Besides, armed groups exploit families in poverty and debt by coercing and deceiving them into providing their sons or daughters so that they can offer them employment or transport (Alfredson, 2022) ^[1]. Economic challenges can sometimes force children and their families into situations where joining armed groups may appear as the only alternative for material support, financial reward, survival, protection, or a sense of purpose and belonging. Sudan's complex, systemic socio-political and economic issues highlight the urgent need for targeted intervention to protect the rights of child soldiers and foster their rehabilitation and reintegration.

1.2 Research Objectives

1. To analyze the recruitment processes and underlying causes that lead to the involvement of children in armed conflict in Sudan.
2. To document and assess the experiences of child soldiers and their long-term impacts.
3. To evaluate the current rehabilitation and reintegration efforts targeting child soldiers, identifying their strengths, shortcomings, and potential areas for policy intervention.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the socio-political and economic factors contributing to the recruitment of child soldiers in Sudan?
2. How do the experiences of child soldiers during their active service influence their post- conflict lives?
3. What are the challenges and successes in the current rehabilitation and reintegration programs for former child soldiers in Sudan?

1.4 Problem Statement

The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Sudan is an urgent yet under-addressed humanitarian crisis. Despite the widespread acknowledgment of the issue by international organizations and human rights advocates, children continue to be recruited, exploited, and ignored in the aftermath of armed conflicts. Despite various national and global interventions, the lack of policy coordination, limited resources, and unavailability of sustainable, culturally sensitive programs have inhibited the effective rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers. Furthermore, there is still limited knowledge on how children are lured, coerced, or forced into armed groups and how these processes vary depending on region, gender, ethnicity, and socio- economic status. While previous research studies acknowledge trauma, the specific psychological and social impacts of different responsibilities of child soldiers, like combatants or support roles, have not been adequately studied, including their gender-specific consequences. The success and failure of current rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives have not been systematically evaluated. What works in one region may not be applicable elsewhere, and scalable best practices remain under-identified. This study aims to fill these knowledge gaps by providing an integrated, data-driven analysis of the socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects that drive child recruitment in Sudan, multidimensional trauma experienced by child soldiers—psychological, physical, educational, and social, and the scope, limitations, and outcomes of existing post-conflict interventions, including NGO efforts, legal frameworks, and community-based initiatives. Through this analysis, this study aims to inform the development of more effective, sustainable, and contextual-based strategies for the prevention of child soldiering and the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of affected children into Sudanese society.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Child Soldiering as A Strategic War Tactic

Armed groups often engage in the recruitment and use of child soldiers as a calculated military strategy rather than a mere consequence of chaotic conflict. Since children are usually inconsistent and developmentally more impressionable than adults, armed groups find them easier to indoctrinate, control, exploit, and manipulate into accepting their extreme ideologies and violent behavior (Vicente, 2022) [38]. Children's lack of life experience and critical reasoning limits their ability to resist or question orders, even when they involve committing atrocities. Manipulation enables armed groups to gain control and minimize dissent, making children useful tools for militant operations in volatile environments (Faulkner & Welsh, 2022) [13]. Armed factions view children as disposable assets due to their perceived lower societal value in the context of war. They send children to the frontlines and use them to serve as couriers and decoys

(Birhane, 2021) [6]. From a cost-benefit standpoint, training and equipping child soldiers is often cheaper than recruiting adults because they require fewer resources, do not demand command positions and logistical support, and are often unpaid. Children's perceived expendability allows armed groups to absorb significant losses without undermining their operational capabilities (Eni *et al.*, 2023) [12]. Additionally, armed groups may use female child soldiers as combatants or can abduct and coerce them into roles such as sex workers, "wives" of commanders, domestic workers, or leverage to control male fighters. Gender-based violence and exploitation expose girls to sexual trauma, unwanted pregnancies, and exclusion from community acceptance (Fisseha *et al.*, 2023) [14]. Sudan's weak governance and prolonged instability have made the recruitment and use of child soldiers feasible and advantageous for armed groups.

2.2 Drivers of Recruitment in the Sudanese Context

Besides militaristic strategy, the recruitment and utilization of child soldiers in Sudan is facilitated by structural vulnerabilities grounded in the nation's social, economic, and political factors. They include factors like economic disparities, marginalization of specific regions and communities, and limited access to basic services (Cinar & Ozer, 2023). These factors are often interrelated, exposing children to vulnerability, especially those in volatile regions like Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. Chronic poverty may lead children to join armed groups to access food, clothing, and a sense of belonging and recognition (Ismael & Olonisakin, 2021) [20]. Armed groups manipulate their desperation by providing them with the illusion of stability, purpose, or economic relief, even when reality involves brutality and exploitation. In addition, rebel groups often recruit children whose parents and family members were killed during wars by promising them revenge toward those responsible (Hynd, 2021) [19]. They also take advantage of orphaned or unaccompanied minors with no family members or caregivers to protect them. Non-state armed groups often provide children a sense of belonging by integrating familial and military units within their organizational structure (Suarez & Baines, 2022) [27]. Furthermore, tribal and ethnic conflicts undermine social cohesion and can lead local community members to recruit youth to protect them, thus leading to a cycle of armed childhood participation in wars. Sudan's instability has led about 400,000 children in conflict areas to drop out of school, making them targets of rebel groups such as the Sudan People's Liberation Army (Gunawan *et al.*, 2024) [16]. The intersection of poverty, family breakdown, and government instability creates an environment that facilitates the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Sudan.

2.3 Psychological and Social Consequences

Child soldiering exposes children to long-term psychological and social effects. Child soldiers experience extreme levels of violence, coercion, and deprivation, thus leading them to develop trauma that affects their mental health, identity development, and social reintegration (Sehal *et al.*, 2023). Former child soldiers often experience mental health problems, such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Psychological conditions expose children to dissociation and emotional detachment (Spinazzola *et al.*, 2021) [36], particularly those forced to commit atrocities or witness extreme brutality. Male child soldiers who return to civilian

life are likely to encounter social stigma and alienation (Denov, 2022) ^[9]. Communities may perceive them as cursed, morally compromised, dangerous, or symbols of shame and misfortune due to their involvement in violent acts. Girls who return as former child soldiers and survivors of sexual exploitation and rape experience psychosocial difficulties and more negative impacts than their male counterparts (Okraqui & Yohani, 2021) ^[26]. Their families or communities may reject them, blame them for their abuse, and consider them unmarried or dishonored. Participation in armed conflict disrupts children's normal psychological and emotional development (Hazer & Gredeback, 2023) ^[18]. It slows their cognitive and emotional growth since they engage in adult roles in life-or-death situations. Exposure to violence may prevent children from developing their self-identity (Denov & Piolanti, 2021) ^[8], leaving them disoriented when re-entering civilian life. The psychological and social effects of conflict on child soldiers make it necessary to offer them comprehensive, long-term mental health treatment to foster their healing and post-conflict reconciliation and stability.

2.4 Legal and International Frameworks

International law and policy have evolved to address the recruitment and use of child soldiers. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989) is an international treaty that protects children's rights (Rizky *et al.* 2022) ^[31]. It prohibits their involvement in armed conflict. CRC's Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (2000) established 18 as the minimum age for military involvement (Regilme & Spoldi, 2021) ^[30]. Sudan ratified the CRC in 1990 and the Optional Protocol in 2005, formally committing to ending the recruitment and use of child soldiers. However, there is still a significant gap between ratification and actual practice since both state and non-state actors are engaged in child recruitment. Besides, the Rome Statute (1998) of the International Criminal Court (ICC) classifies the conscription, enlistment, or use of children under 15 years old in hostilities as a war crime under Article 8 (Rasakandan & Tehrani, 2022) ^[29]. It provides legal mechanisms to hold individuals criminally accountable for violations related to child soldiering. Despite its significance, Sudan did not ratify the Rome Statute and resisted ICC jurisdiction for many years, especially under former President Omar al-Bashir, whom it indicted for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Archibong, 2021) ^[3]. Sudan limits the ICC's ability to indict individuals involved in the recruitment and use of child soldiers without international support from member states or transitional justice measures. The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces or Armed Groups (2007) further outline best practices guidelines for preventing recruitment, reintegrating former child soldiers, and promoting community acceptance (Baillie Abidi, 2023) ^[5]. However, weak legal institutions, lack of enforcement mechanisms, and impunity by military leaders and local warlords have blurred the lines between voluntary and forced recruitment in survival contexts.

2.5 Efficacy of Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs

International mandates, humanitarian initiatives, and post-conflict development agendas shape efforts to rehabilitate and reintegrate former child soldiers in Sudan. However, the Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers

emphasized that the process faces financial constraints, time limitations, and humanitarian access (Macfarlane, 2023) ^[23]. Most rehabilitation and reintegration programs operate in post-conflict environments with inadequate funding and damaged infrastructure. Humanitarian actors often face challenges such as security risks, logistical or accessibility issues, and perception of local population control (Malhouni & Mabrouki, 2024) ^[24]. In addition, they encounter problems like limited access to rural areas and inadequate education or mental health care facilities. Internationally designed programs may further fail to provide essential services and resources and establish comprehensive, sustainable programs that address former child soldiers' unique challenges (Dönmez, 2023) ^[10]. Their programs may ignore local cultural norms and needs, like the role of family and clan systems in healing and the stigma that returnees face, particularly girls who have experienced sexual violence. Culturally inappropriate interventions risk alienating beneficiaries or failing to address former child soldiers' trauma and social exclusion (Alipanga & Luberenga, 2024) ^[2]. Since most interventions are project-based, they often lack the long-term support needed for full reintegration due to their focus on the children's immediate needs, such as demobilization or temporary housing, rather than their long-term growth and personal restoration. The projects leave children vulnerable once funding or agency presence ends, exposing them to further social alienation (Parker *et al.*, 2021). The absence or limited rehabilitation and reintegration programs to support former child soldiers and the family and community into which they return leave them vulnerable to further exploitation by armed groups.

2.6 The Role of International Agencies and NGOs

International agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a significant role in addressing the recruitment and use of child soldiers in Sudan. UNICEF, War Child, and Save the Children lead the child demobilization and reintegration initiatives (Dönmez, 2023) ^[10], especially in conflict-prone regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile. They offer demobilization and interim care centers, psychosocial counseling and trauma support, family tracing and reunification services, and non-formal education and vocational training. Besides, NGOs operating in post-conflict and conflict-affected regions offer psychosocial and mental health services to former child soldiers (Vus *et al.*, 2023) ^[39]. They offer group counseling sessions, life skills training, and recreational and cultural activities. These services help children process trauma, develop coping mechanisms, and rebuild social connections with their communities and peers (Sekibo & Iroye, 2024). However, former child soldiers often lose access once these NGO projects end, or they change their focus because most of their services are donor-funded and short-term. The dependency on external aid from international donors limits the long-term impact of rehabilitation and reintegration programs (Ghulam *et al.*, 2025) ^[15]. Besides, some communities may view international donors with suspicion, especially when their programs do not align with local culture, religious values, and traditional conflict-resolution practices. Creating programs without directly involving former child soldiers may lead to mismatched priorities since they may fail to address their needs or aspirations (Macfarlane, 2023) ^[23]. Collaborating with local authorities, partnering with civil society and religious leaders, and empowering former child soldiers can

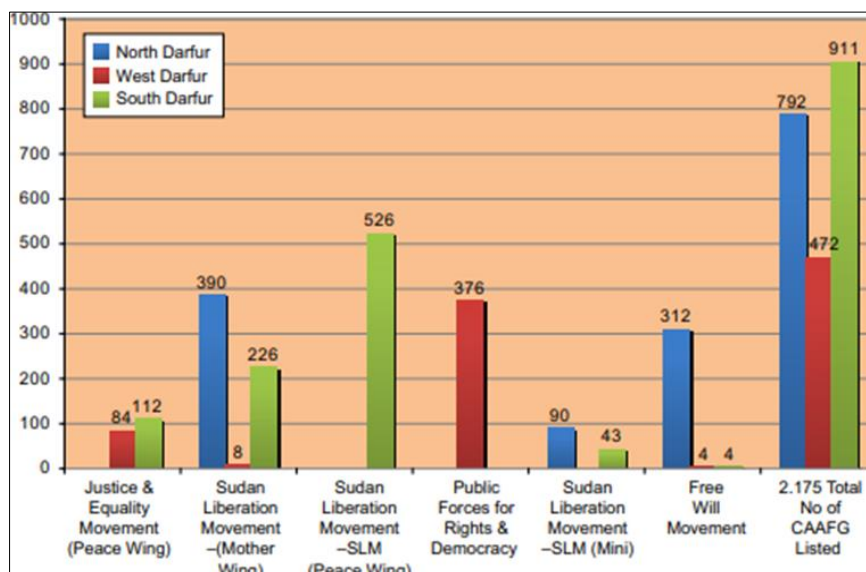
help NGOs end cycles of violence and facilitate the children’s long-term recovery, rehabilitation, and reintegration.

3. Research Method

This study utilizes a descriptive-analytical research design to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the complex humanitarian and socio-political phenomena involving the recruitment and use of child soldiers in the Sudanese war, including their experiences, rehabilitation, and reintegration into society. It employs a systematic review of secondary sources involving peer-reviewed articles from disciplines like conflict studies, psychology, sociology, and international law, which provide theoretical frameworks and empirical findings related to child soldiering. The collection process prioritizes reliable, up-to-date, and region-specific data to ensure relevance and accuracy. Qualitative thematic synthesis is used to analyze data, which involves coding key themes, categorizing challenges and solutions, and cross-comparative review. Texts are examined for recurring patterns related to factors that promote the recruitment and use of child soldiers, psychological trauma, gendered experiences, and reintegration outcomes. Challenges faced by former child soldiers are grouped by type, such as social, legal, and psychological, and linked to specific intervention strategies identified in the literature review. Besides, this study compares interventions and their outcomes across different regions and periods to identify factors contributing to program success or failure. The data analysis process allows the research to move beyond isolated case findings and ensure an in-depth examination of the phenomenon across the Sudanese conflict environment. Interpretation involves a comparative and contextual evaluation of the synthesized data. It identifies regional disparities in how child soldiering occurs and how effectively rehabilitation programs respond. It also examines how sociocultural, economic, and institutional factors influence recruitment and reintegration outcomes. Finally, interpretation involves assessing the gaps between international frameworks and local realities, focusing on enforcement, cultural compatibility, and sustainability. This study’s descriptive focus ensures that findings are contextually grounded, offering practical insights for policy reform and operational planning.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of this research study illustrate the complexity involving the recruitment, use, experience, rehabilitation, and reintegration of former child soldiers in Sudan. Based on an interdisciplinary review of qualitative data, the study found several key findings that describe the causes, consequences, and ongoing responses to this issue. The recruitment and use of child soldiers in Sudan is not a random byproduct of war but a calculated and systemic phenomenon primarily driven by socio-economic deprivation, lack of government oversight in remote and conflict-ridden regions like Darfur, Blue Nile, and South Kordofan, and the strategic exploitation of vulnerable populations by armed groups. Most armed groups that recruit and use child soldiers target children in the Darfur region (Figure 1). War, famine, and displacement have led to the collapse of family units and community protection structures, making it easy for rebel groups and local militias to abduct, manipulate, or coerce children into joining their ranks. Former child soldiers often experience immediate and long-term psychological trauma, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression, due to their direct experience with violence or being forced to commit atrocities. Spending time with armed groups disrupts children’s education, basic life skills, and healthy social relationships, undermining their cognitive and emotional growth. Former child soldiers face stigmatization, marginalization, and distrust among their families and communities, thus complicating their re-entry into society and integration into civilian life to escape poverty and instability. Girls who survive sexual exploitation and rape and then return to society when pregnant or with children encounter additional trauma, isolation, and secondary victimization. The challenges facing former child soldiers in Sudan expose them to long-term marginalization, mental and social development issues, and chronic poverty. Overall, child soldiering in Sudan is a significant issue driven by socio-political instability, poverty, and the tactical strategies of armed groups; thus, there is an urgent need to address the problem and ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers.

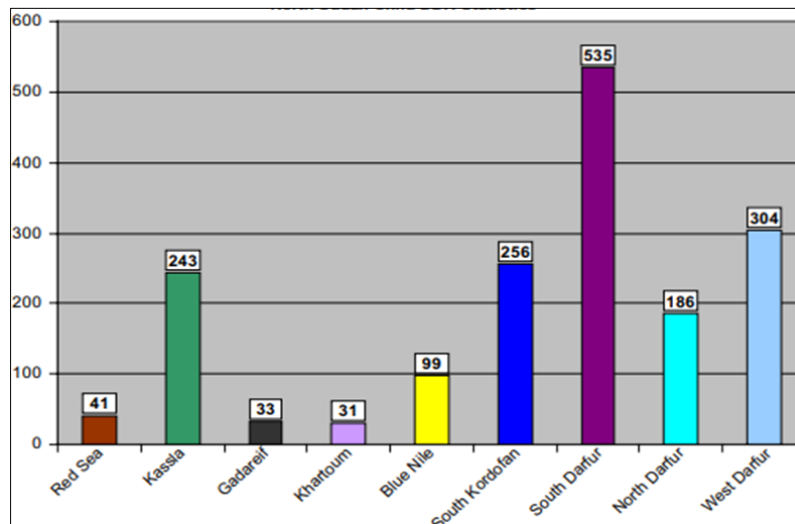


Source: Hamad (2023)

Fig 1: Distribution of targeted children in Darfur by armed groups and state

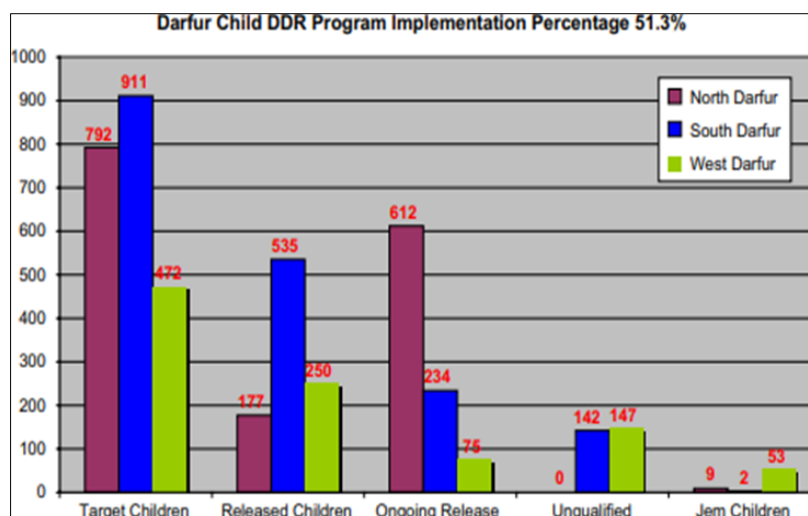
National and international initiatives have been launched to ensure the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers into society. The Sudan Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Commission leads the reintegration of former child soldiers at the highest policy level and across various states, as shown in Figure 2. Successful reintegration programs combine psychosocial support with educational access, vocational training, and family reunification. Community-based approaches that engage traditional elders, religious leaders, civil society, and local networks assist former child soldiers in Sudan transition back to civilian life. Besides, they ensure their family and community acceptance. However, challenges like limited funding, cultural resistance, and insufficient community participation may undermine the programs' long-term success. Most programs are underfunded, leading to inadequate services and limited reach. Short-term funding cycles often force programs to end before achieving full rehabilitation and reintegration, increasing the risk of relapse for former child soldiers. International interventions that do not reflect local cultural norms, needs, religious values, and traditional conflict-resolution practices may face resistance or fail to achieve their purpose. Creating programs without

directly involving former child soldiers and community stakeholders may lead to mismatched priorities since they often fail to address the participants' needs and aspirations. Nevertheless, comparative assessments show that programs emphasizing community participation and long-term support may lead to better reintegration outcomes. The commission has managed to reintegrate about 51% of former child soldiers into society (Figure 3). Based on the findings, this study provides several policy recommendations to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration of former child soldiers. Developing coordinated intervention strategies that align with Sudanese cultural norms and power structures can ensure long-term success. Supporting local communities to offer continuous psychosocial care, trauma-informed counseling, mentoring, educational access, peer support, and follow-up can mitigate recruitment challenges and enhance reintegration success. Besides, the international community, donors, and agencies should provide long-term funding and support to Sudan to strengthen its legal institutions to prevent recruitment, prosecute offenders, and uphold affected children's rights. A comprehensive, multi-stakeholder approach will ensure the survival and development of former child soldiers returning to civilian life.



Source: Hamad (2023)

Fig 2: The number of reintegrated former child soldiers across various states in Sudan



Source: Hamad (2023)

Fig 3: The implementation process involving former child soldiers in Darfur

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the critical plight of child soldiers in Sudan, revealing how socio-economic marginalization, political instability, and the systematic failure of protective institutions in the country facilitate their recruitment and involvement in skirmishes, civil wars, guerrilla insurgencies, and regional conflicts. The recruitment and use of children in armed conflict is not just a byproduct of war but a deliberate strategy by armed groups who exploit these vulnerabilities to target the most disadvantaged children whose families and communities have been destroyed by violence, displacement, and poverty. Children forced into armed conflict often experience immediate and long-term psychological and social challenges. Exposure to violence, forced involvement in committing atrocities, and separation from family and education disrupt their early development and leave them with emotional scars. In addition, stigma, mistrust, and cultural barriers further complicate their rehabilitation and reintegration into society, particularly for girls returning as survivors of sexual violence and rape that led them to get pregnant or give birth. Although many NGOs and international agencies have implemented various rehabilitation and reintegration programs targeting former child soldiers in Sudan, challenges such as underfunding, short-term mandates, and lack of cultural alignment undermine their effectiveness. Successful efforts often prioritize community-based, long-term engagement that provides the children with long-term educational access, vocational training, psychosocial support, and family reunification. Addressing the issue of child soldiers in Sudan requires a coordinated and multidimensional response that disrupts the recruitment and use of child soldiers and guarantees comprehensive, culturally sensitive support for their rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Future policies and programs should implement sustainable development and legal reform to tackle root causes such as poverty, lack of education, and absence of child protection services. The international community, NGOs, and governments should involve families, religious leaders, former child soldiers, and traditional elders to help them design and deliver culturally sensitive rehabilitation and reintegration strategies to ensure the children's sustainable recovery and development.

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