

BORN BETWEEN WAR AND PEACE:  
LIFE COURSES OF PEACEKEEPER-FATHERED CHILDREN IN THE DEMOCRATIC  
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

by  
Kirstin M. Wagner

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Department of History  
School of History and Cultures  
College of Arts and Law  
The University of Birmingham  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores the experiences of children who were fathered and abandoned by United Nations (UN) peacekeepers during the peacekeeping operations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). It sheds light on the circumstances of their conception and identifies the implications of those circumstances for their upbringing. Seeking to understand who peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) are and how their heritage affects them in leading productive lives, the study presents central themes in their biographies: Father absence, identity challenges, socio-economic hardship, and lack of assistance. Therefore, and through these themes, the thesis contributes to the conceptualisation of their life courses.

The United Nations Stabilisation Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) was used as a case study, providing new insights regarding the DRC's long-standing history of conflict-related sexual violence and its impact on survivors for whom such acts can result in pregnancy and childbirth. Fieldwork took place between May and July 2018 in six communities in eastern DRC, where semi-structured interviews, some of them aided by visual methods, were conducted with 35 PKFC and 60 mothers. Grounded in the experiences of these participants, the thesis addresses relational aspects of PKFC's identity that illustrate how their background makes them vulnerable to childhood adversities. In considering how their abandonment clashes with Congolese norms and traditions, the broader socio-political context of peacekeeping missions and its colonial legacy are discussed.

In this thesis, I offer two conceptual ways of thinking about PKFC: the first considers PKFC children born of war who suffer from fatherlessness and the related consequences (e.g., low social status and financial insecurity) – requiring solutions that target their well-being on an individual level; the second understands PKFC's neglect to be symbolic for asymmetrical global dependencies and inequalities – requiring solutions that target the failure of peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions to protect local civilians and provide victims of sexual exploitation and abuse with assistance. In combining these two angles, I situate a psychological analysis of identity and well-being within a broader web of cultural and political factors (patriarchal norms, neo-colonial practices, legal and procedural shortcomings) that cause PKFC's rights to be compromised. With implications for academia, policy and practice, this work sets an agenda for how the international community can better respond to the needs of PKFC and improve their situation on a personal, societal, and political level.

To illustrate how the lives of PKFC are impacted by challenges arising from their unique heritage, the participants' perspectives are introduced in four research papers, each focusing on a different level of experience and disciplinary examination. Building on this, the thesis critically engages with different academic fields that have active and ongoing conversations regarding conflict-affected children, i.e., psychology, human rights, and development studies. In this way, it encourages more comprehensive, interdisciplinary research and calls for a shift in the way academia approaches global challenges.



## Acknowledgements

Firstly, a very special thank you goes to the mothers and children who generously gave of their time to participate in the interviews and share their experiences regarding sensitive issues and challenges. Thank you for your courage and for placing your trust in the research.

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Professor Lee from the Department of Modern History at the University of Birmingham shared her immense knowledge from years of research on children born of war with me. Her interdisciplinary network and research community have started pushing the boundaries of this relatively new field from numerous angles onto an international research platform – work that ultimately enabled me to write this PhD thesis and situate it between different academic disciplines. Thank you for your hard work and for suggesting career-building activities and collaborative disseminations along the way.

Dr Weber from the Department of International Development at the University of Birmingham educated me with her knowledge on gender relations and structural inequalities in post-conflict settings and provided me with advice on social and gender policy, transitional justice and human rights – areas that were directly relevant to studying the situation of civilians in peacekeeping economics and the vulnerability of women and girls who become victims of sexual exploitation and abuse. Thank you for your detailed feedback and for reminding me to take breaks and enjoy life beyond the PhD.

Dr Bartels from the Departments of Emergency Medicine and Public Health at Queen's University contributed her knowledge on the impact of armed conflict and humanitarian crises on women and children in complex environments in sub-Saharan Africa. Her prior work on sexual violence in the DRC added a global health perspective that was beyond valuable in contextualising the research. As a clinical scientist with field-based contacts in the DRC, her knowledge of the area was crucial in making the fieldwork a success. Many thanks for your insights and for allowing me to take advantage of the contacts and funding that were already established.

Similarly, I would like to thank Dr Nicolas Lemay-Hébert from the International Relations Department at the Australian National University and Professor Heide Glaesmer from the Department of Clinical Psychology at the University of Leipzig for their roles as former supervisors/mentors and the additional advice provided. Dr Lemay-Hébert helped steer the early stages of the project, and his knowledge of peacekeeping was fundamental in initiating the research. Professor Glaesmer provided input on two of the papers, and exchanging ideas regarding PKFC's psychology with her has greatly advanced the depth of analysis.

Thirdly, I am grateful to the funders for allowing me to realize the ideas put forward in this thesis. I would like to acknowledge the Global Challenges Studentship provided by the University of Birmingham, without which I would not have been able to commit to the past four years. I further wish to appreciate the funding provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada (Grant number 642571), by the Arts and Humanities Research Council UK (Grant number AH/P006175/1), by the University of Birmingham Research Implementation and Impact Fund, the College of Arts and Law Research Support Fund and the College of Social Sciences Conference Fund.

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Finally, I want to thank my family for having supported (and tolerated) my academic adventures over the years, as well as my partner Tom for being there during stressful times and creating a Sunday whenever I needed one.

## Preface

The idea for this PhD arose in Haiti, where three researchers from different academic fields met and discovered the knowledge gap relating to children fathered and abandoned by UN peacekeepers. They then set up a Global Challenges research proposal and requested funding for a PhD student to design a study that analyses childbirth following sexual misconduct by UN peacekeeping personnel. This is where my story begins.

Working on this topic has been inspiring, eye-opening, painful, and sometimes defeating – and I could not have done it without the support of the people mentioned above. While the conducted research is a work of collaboration, this dissertation is my own original intellectual product.

The fieldwork for this thesis was funded by a research grant from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (Grant number 642571) awarded to Dr Susan Bartels. Other funding bodies contributing to the success of this dissertation include the Global Challenges Research Fund, the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant number AH/P006175/1), the University of Birmingham Research Implementation and Impact Fund, the College of Arts and Law Research Support Fund and the College of Social Sciences Conference Fund.

Ethics approval was granted by the Ethics Committee of the University of Birmingham (ERN\_18-0083; ERN\_17-1715; ERN\_17-1715A) and Queen's University in Kingston/Ontario (6019042), as well as the Congolese National Committee of Health Ethics (CNES 001/DP-SK/119PM/2018). Local research clearance was requested in each city districts regional administrative centres in eastern DRC.

The empirical section of this dissertation is based on peer-reviewed material in the form of four research papers; submitted to journals between 2020-2021. Each of these papers corresponds to a different aspect of PKFC's experiences and reflects an original analysis and new approach to the collected data. The articles are co-authored due to the involvement of others in the design and implementation stage of the research; however, I alone performed the described analysis and wrote the papers. Thus, I alone am responsible for their accuracy.

Chapter Six was published in the following form:

- I) Wagner, K., Glaesmer, H., Bartels, S.A. and Lee, S. "If I was with my father such discrimination wouldn't exist, I could be happy like other people": a qualitative analysis of

stigma among peacekeeper fathered children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Confl Health* 14, 76 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13031-020-00320-x>

Chapters Five, Seven and Eight are currently under review and are expected to be published as detailed:

- II) Wagner, K., Glaesmer, H., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S., and Lee, S. The Presence of the Absent Father: Perceptions of Family among Peacekeeper-Fathered Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *Journal of Child and Family Studies* [estimated publication date: Autumn 2021]
- III) Wagner, K., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S., and Lee, S. 'White Child Gone Bankrupt' – The Intersection of Race and Poverty in Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers. *Journal of Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* [estimated publication date: Autumn 2021]
- IV) Wagner, K., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S., and Lee, S. UNSupported: The Needs and Rights of Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers. *Human Rights Review* [estimated publication date: Winter 2021]

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## **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

ADF: Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces

AFDL: Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo

BAI: Bureau Des Avocats Internationaux

CAR: Central African Republic

CBOW: Children Born of War

CDTs: Conduct and Discipline Teams

COVID-19: Coronavirus Disease 2019

CRSV: Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

DDR: Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration

DNA: Deoxyribonucleic Acid

DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo

ECOMOG: Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group

FARDC: Congolese National Army

FCO: Foreign and Commonwealth Office

FDLR: Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda

FIB: Force Intervention Brigade

GBV: Gender-Based Violence

HIV/AIDS: Human Immune Deficiency Syndrome/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

IDP: Internally Displaced People

IJDH: Institute for Justice and Democracy in Haiti

IPC: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

LRA: Lord's Resistance Army

MARAKUJA: Multidisciplinary Association for Research and Advocacy in the Kivus by United Junior Academics

MINUSTAH: United Nations Stabilisation Mission in Haiti

MONUC: United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo

MONUSCO: United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo

MoU: Memorandum of Understanding

NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation

NVivo: Qualitative Data Analysis Computer Software; QSR International

OIOS: Office of Internal Oversight Services

ONUC: United Nations Mission in the Congo

OVC: Orphan and Vulnerable Children

PKFC: Peacekeeper-Fathered Children  
PKO: Peacekeeping Operation  
PSO: Peace Support Operation  
PTSD: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder  
REV: Rape with Extreme Violence  
SD: Standard Deviation  
SEA: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse  
SG: Secretary-General  
SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence  
SOFA: Status-of-Forces Agreement  
SSA: Sub-Saharan Africa  
SOFEPADI: Solidarité Féminine Pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral  
SVRP: Sexual Violence Related Pregnancies  
STI: Sexually Transmitted Infection  
TCC: Troop Contributing Country  
TPCC: Troop and Police-Contributing Country  
UN: United Nations  
US: United States  
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme  
UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees  
UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund  
UNPK: United Nations Peacekeeping  
UNSC: United Nations Security Council  
UNSG: United Nations Secretary General  
VRA: Victims' Rights Advocate  
ZTP: Zero Tolerance Policy

## Chapter 1: Introduction

My father left my mother while she was pregnant, and my mother gave birth to me when he had already left. I don't talk to him now. When I see other children with their fathers, I feel bad. I feel hurt when I see MONUSCO agents passing by because other children have their fathers, but I don't have mine [...] People call me "daughter of a bitch". When they do, I feel hurt and shocked about it. I do feel like I belong here, but people talk so much. They say that they will chase me because I am a foreigner [...] I would like to tell him[father] to think about me wherever he is. He needs to know that he left me in DR Congo. I am suffering. He should know that I don't have a family. If my mother dies, who will raise me? (Mado, 13, Beni)

In any armed international conflict, sexual relations between foreign soldiers and local women/girls result in children being born, who often grow up without their fathers in fragile communities (Carpenter 2007; Lee 2017). Derived from qualitative research with children in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), the above statement draws attention to a previously unexplored population of such children: those fathered and abandoned by United Nations (UN) peacekeepers. Fathered by a UN peacekeeper from Uruguay, Mado<sup>1</sup> grew up in a single-parent household and describes the context in which her background is stigmatized. In communicating her adversities, she points towards the difficult circumstances of children who are conceived by UN peacekeeping (UNPK) personnel<sup>2</sup>. Mado's concerns about her limited support network and lack of acceptance by her community call for an evaluation regarding the life courses of peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) who continue to live in host state communities after their fathers are relocated or return home<sup>3</sup>.

Many peacekeeping operations (PKOs) have faced allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) perpetrated by UNPK personnel against members of local communities (Higate 2004; Martin 2005). The rise of peacekeeping missions in the 1990s led to a large spectrum of sexual relations unfolding between members of UNPK forces and local civilians, from rape and survival sex to longer-

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<sup>1</sup> To protect the identity of the participant, I have used a pseudonym.

<sup>2</sup> In this thesis, the terms 'peacekeeper' and 'peacekeeping personnel' are used interchangeably and refer to all categories (military, police and civilian personnel) of staff engaged in PKOs.

<sup>3</sup> The standard period of duty for uniformed peacekeepers is six to nine months, making it highly improbable that peacekeepers are still in the host state when their children are born (Villaverde 2015; Blau 2016).

term romantic relationships (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Vandenberg 2017; Westendorf and Searle 2017). Despite sexual relations between peacekeepers and beneficiaries of assistance being prohibited by UN protocols, such relations have repeatedly resulted in claims that children were conceived between members of UNPK forces and local women and girls (UN Secretariat 2003; Simić and O'Brien 2014; Lee and Bartels 2019b). Yet, while the issue of sexual misconduct has attracted significant academic attention, the children born as a result have not. The thesis aims to address this gap in knowledge by focusing on an as yet unexplored consequence of UNPK: abandoned PKFC and their challenges growing up.

The quote above points towards the complex relationships PKFC have with their families and communities. Due to the socio-economic and political insecurity in many conflict-affected regions, PKFC's conception often occurs under unequal power relations that are reflected in Mado's hardship. She relates her experiences of stigma and discrimination both to her mother's status in society (she is called the "daughter of a bitch") and her father's foreign background (she is chased for being a "foreigner"). Set apart from local children by her parentage, she draws comparisons to her peers "who have their fathers" and live in better financial situations. Her comments suggest that she attributes her "suffering" to her father's absence and longs to be re-united with him. It is this tension between her strong sense of connection to her foreign father and her fragmented knowledge about him that raises questions regarding her identity which I address in this dissertation. It is furthermore precisely this tension that is exemplary of the knowledge gap relating to children fathered by peacekeepers that exists within academia, policy and practice. Despite anecdotal evidence about PKFC that has described their existence for almost twenty years, to date, neither the UN, civil society organisations, nor academia have investigated their situation and there is little sense of the impact their abandonment has on their life courses.

On the basis of the DRC case study, this thesis addresses the substantial knowledge gaps surrounding the existence of PKFC. The first chapter introduces the aims and rationale of the dissertation. The introductory section consolidates the limited existing knowledge about PKFC and

illustrates the urgency of systematic research on the subject. Applying critical insights from research on conflict-affected children in other settings, I introduce the conceptual framework that is employed to study the experiences of PKFC from a holistic approach. This will inform how the thesis intends to fill existing gaps in the literature and make notable contributions to scholarship on UNPK and women and children in conflict. Lastly, the research methodology is described, and the content of the following chapters signposted.

### **1.1. Who are Peacekeeper-Fathered Children?**

Over the last three decades, a series of scandals implicating UN peacekeepers in the exploitation and abuse of local populations have raised concerns regarding the work of the UN and the effectiveness of PKOs. Allegations of SEA first emerged during the PKOs in Mozambique and Cambodia and have since been reported in almost all contexts where peacekeepers were deployed (e.g., Phal 1995; Lupi 1998; Higate 2004; Allais 2011; Alexandra 2011). Related to these allegations, journalists brought the issue of paternity affiliated with UNPK to public attention (James et al. 2005; *The Weekend Australian* 2005). The earliest documentation of ‘peacekeeper babies’ emerged during the UN presence in Timor-Leste and West Africa (Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau), where peacekeepers allegedly impregnated local women and girls and then abandoned them without any form of child support (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Murdoch 2006; Kent 2007). The Australian newspapers<sup>4</sup> *The Age* and *The Weekend* were among the first media to report instances in which mothers were left without financial assistance and raised their children in deplorable conditions (Powell 2001; *The Weekend Australian* 2005; Murdoch 2006). SEA and abandonment have since become something of an ‘unintended legacy’ of peacekeeping, a problem that begins with peacekeepers deployment but extends long after fathers

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<sup>4</sup> While scholarly and political interest in the subject has been small, the birth of children conceived under the UN flag seems to have hit a particular nerve among international media. Over the years, the lives of PKFC have regularly found media attention, and various news channels have initiated investigations into their situations.

and PKOs have moved on. Despite reports about SEA-related pregnancies being known since the early 2000s, to this date, there has been no thorough assessment of this topic.

Following reports from West Africa, anecdotal evidence about PKFC arose in relation to a number of other PKOs, including those in Cambodia, the Central African Republic (CAR) and the DRC (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Barker 2006; Murdoch 2006; 2009; Sieff 2016). Most recently, their situation in Haiti has generated extensive media coverage (e.g., Bracken 2014; Brice 2017; McFadden 2016; McVeigh 2017; Ratcliffe 2017; Brice-Saddler 2019; Sean O'Neill 2019). These reports suggest that local populations recognise PKFC as a unique group of children that stands out due to their heritage. For example, *the Associated Press* reported in 2016 that in Haiti, the origin of children fathered by peacekeepers is common currency and that these children are teasingly called “petit MINUSTAHs” (little MINUSTAHs) (McFadden 2016 p.1). This was confirmed by Lee and Bartels (2019), who found in a large-scale cross-sectional study that Haitian PKFC were locally referred to as “bébés casques bleus” (blue helmet babies) or “les enfants abandonnés par la MINUSTAH” (children abandoned by MINUSTAH). Similarly, in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau, children fathered by personnel from the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) were tauntingly called ECOMOG babies (Olonisakin and Aning 1999). This evokes the impression that children fathered by peacekeepers may have a unique social standing in their communities.

In more general terms, journalists and academics have sometimes adopted the expression ‘peace-babies’<sup>5</sup> to describe children fathered by peacekeepers (e.g., Higate and Henry 2004; Rudén and Utas 2009; Simic 2013; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2019; Westendorf 2020). Since this constitutes an euphemistic label that runs the risk of obscuring their challenges and experiences at later stages of life, in this thesis, I use the term ‘peacekeeper-fathered children’ to provide a less biased description (Villaverde 2015; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2020). The acronym PKFC will be used to refer to all individuals who are fathered by a member of a UNPK force and born to a local mother,

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<sup>5</sup> The origin of this term is not clear. The first use of the expression ‘peace babies’ dates back to 1918 when ‘peace babies’ (confectioneries, later called jelly babies) were given out in schools to celebrate the end of World War I (Phillips 2002).



irrespective of their age or the circumstances of their conception. Hence, the term 'children' does not refer to the natural vulnerabilities of childhood specified in international human rights frameworks but instead describes PKFC as children in relation to their peacekeeper fathers (UN General Assembly 1989). The expression PKFC offers a neutral term that as part of a scientific analysis minimises research and presentation bias while also drawing attention to the social, cultural and political context of their conception and the related challenges of their upbringing (Mayall 1994; Lansdown 2005; Denov 2010).

The fact that in several UNPK contexts, local populations have coined terms referring to children fathered by peacekeepers indicates that their existence is not a rarity (Myers, Green, and Edwards 2004; Grady 2016). Due to the lack of reliable data and chronic underreporting of peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA and paternity, no scholar to date has attempted to calculate the scale and breadth of their occurrence. While the number of PKFC born across different 20<sup>th</sup>-century conflict situations is unknown, to get an idea of their prevalence, it is helpful to look at estimates that have been provided for individual conflict settings. Reports suggest that an estimated 25,000 PKFC were born in the aftermath of the PKO in Cambodia, and that 6,600 PKFC were registered during the UN observer mission in Liberia (Bastick, Grimm, and Kunz 2007). Other sources suggest that during the "ECOMOG Baby Boom" in West Africa, the number of children fathered by peacekeepers was between 25,000 (Cooper 1998; Grieg 2001) and 250,000<sup>6</sup> (Muawuya Zakariah Adam Gombe 2010 p.1). Reportedly, in Liberia, the struggles of PKFC were so severe that several NGOs and an orphanage were established to cope with abandoned mothers and children (Gaylor 2001; Rumble and Mehta 2007; Ndulo 2009; Muawuya Zakariah Adam Gombe 2010). In Kosovo, radio advertisements raised awareness regarding the negative consequences of having children with peacekeepers, indicating that the matter was of a significant scale during the Yugoslav wars (Grieg 2001). In Sierra Leone, mothers of PKFC reportedly lined the route to the airport when previous contingents left, begging peacekeepers for money to raise their children (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Concerning the peacekeeping

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<sup>6</sup> According to a blog post from 2010, a government report presented to the Liberian House of Representatives Diaspora Committee states that based on birth registration and naturalisation records more than 250,000 children<sup>6</sup> were fathered by UN personnel (Muawuya Zakariah Adam Gombe 2010).

mission in Timor-Leste, scholars referenced a dozen PKFC and up to one hundred single mothers (so-called 'widows') (Koyama and Myrntinen 2007). Anecdotal evidence from community members in the DRC and the CAR, where the peacekeeping missions are still underway, further confirms that the existence of PKFC is not a marginal one (Bracken 2014; James et al. 2005; Sieff 2016; Larson and Dodds 2017; McVeigh 2017). In line with these mission-specific examples, researchers have suggested that the number of PKFC who were conceived during individual UN missions may be in the range of several hundred to thousands (Simić and O'Brien 2014; Sean O'Neill 2019). This shows that PKFC are a significant population of global importance. These examples further give the indication that while the above detailed UN missions are the first that have received attention regarding the births of PKFC, children fathered and deserted by peacekeepers likely exist in many if not all, countries that have hosted PKOs (Duffy 2019).

Albeit information on PKFC to date relies mostly on journalistic and anecdotal evidence, the described circumstances of mothers and children display patterns that allow some conclusions regarding their life courses. To understand the situation of PKFC, it is crucial to consider the complex dynamics surrounding their conception and, thus, the conditions of the women and girls who bear and raise them. PKFC might be conceived through consensual sexual relations (dating, longer-term relationships or marriage), sexual exploitation (transactional sexual relations or commercial sex-work), or sexual abuse (rape or sex trafficking) (Simić 2012a; Kolbe 2015; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2019). Prior research suggests that in many post-conflict societies, women and girls live in conditions of extreme poverty, insecurity or displacement, and may lack basic resources for survival (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Jennings 2015; Jennings and Bøås 2015; Bell, Flynn, and Machain 2018; Rodriguez and Kinne 2019). Fuelled by structural imbalances and gendered inequality, a correlation between incidents of SEA and host state poverty has been demonstrated, indicating that many sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians constitute rape or involve a transaction where the well-paid male peacekeeper provides the local civilian with money, food, goods, jobs or social services in exchange for sex (Jennings 2014; Karim and Beardsley 2016).

While it is acknowledged that sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians that do not equate to SEA occur, existing evidence suggests that the majority of sexual relations leading to pregnancy and childbirth are the result of power imbalances that originate from the relative affluency of peacekeepers compared to the precarious economic situations of many civilians (Human Rights Watch 2002; Simić 2004; Allred 2006; Lee and Bartels 2019). Thus, when talking about PKFC's context of conception, I am foremost looking at the experiences of children who have been conceived through the exploitation or abuse of civilians, many of whom are from impoverished backgrounds and engaged in sexual relations to escape poverty. Local civilians thus often exercise their agency in an environment in which power differentials (e.g., socio-economic, age) impact their ability to provide meaningful consent (Otto 2007; Henry 2013; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2019). How the consent of local civilians is constrained by power relations and why differentiating between consensual, exploitative, and abusive circumstances in the discussed socio-political context is difficult is further elaborated on in chapter two.

Since SEA and childbirth aggravate pre-existing poverty, the abandonment of peacekeeper fathers often exacerbates distributional injustices between the relatively affluent peacekeeper and local woman or girl, who now has to provide and care for an infant despite her own vulnerabilities and trauma (Puechguirbal 2003; Gilliard 2010). Due to their PKFC's 'illegitimate conception', mothers often experience considerable resentment from their communities, leaving many to raise their children as single parents, without the support of their families and communities (Koyama and Myrntinen 2007). This has been found to force some women/girls to engage in sex work to attend to their PKFC's needs – starting a downward spiral of SEA, stigma, and poverty (Notar 2006; Lee and Bartels 2019b). Thus, although civilians may engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers to alleviate their poverty, childbirth almost always puts mothers in more extreme economic deprivation (Lee and Bartels 2019b).

Growing up under challenging circumstances in environments that are socially and economically constrained, PKFC may face further hardship and experience a range of adversities, yet not much is known about their welfare (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Simić and O'Brien 2014; Villaverde

2015). In resource-deprived communities where many are affected by conflict, their association with UNPK and the white-dominated humanitarian and development sector, may impact how they are perceived socially. Standing between their fathers' position of power/privilege and their mothers' position of vulnerability, they may be admired for their father's agenda of peace and stability, or instead be stigmatised for their violation of it (Allen 1996; Grieg 2001; Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Carpenter 2007). By analysing how PKFC perceive and negotiate their identities, this thesis will assess their role in post-conflict communities and contribute novel empirical data to understanding their life courses.

## **1.2. Research Gap**

Although anecdotal and journalistic reporting points towards the difficult position of PKFC within their families and communities, thus far, no scientific evidence regarding their situation exists. Academics have long ignored the existence of PKFC, making them one of the most widely unexplored consequence of UNPK. The first reference to children fathered by peacekeepers emerged in academic literature in 2002 (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002). Since then, journalistic reports have gradually accumulated evidence about PKFC, yet the field has attracted little systematic research. Despite peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA being the subject of considerable academic debate, the children conceived of SEA have not gained the same, if any, scholarly attention.

Rumble and Mehta argued in 2007 that in academic scholarship, writings on the subject of PKFC are virtually non-existing (Rumble and Mehta 2007). The authors were amongst the first to point towards the urgency of empirical research on the subject and the need for UN authorities to consider that PKFC's childhoods may be defined by "stigma, maternal rejection, statelessness, abandonment and death" (p.20). Despite this, their life courses remain vastly under-studied. The few mentions of PKFC in academic literature have been immersed in storylines about their mothers and the circumstances of their birth, and thus, PKFC have often been considered evidence of SEA rather than individuals with their own experiences and social wounds. The dominant aspects covered by dialogue

on PKFC are the victimisation of the women and girls who give birth to them and the lack of their fathers' accountability. Relatedly, scholars have sometimes addressed paternity in relation to discussions about the rights of victims to reparations, demonstrating jurisdictional issues with the triangle of oversight systems (UN, host state, sending state) that fails to provide mothers and PKFC with assistance (e.g., Simm 2013; Simić and O'Brien 2014; López Salvā 2015; Blau 2016; Smith 2017). While employing a policy-oriented perspective that focuses on procedural gaps in the UN's approach to SEA is essential in shaping more appropriate responses, these contributions have been mostly theoretical and far removed from the actual lives of PKFC.

In 2019/2020, a number of studies about SEA in Haiti were published that broadened the database from policy papers and journalistic case reports to the first empirical research on PKFC (Lee and Bartels 2019b; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2019; 2020; King, Lee, and Bartels 2020; Vahedi et al. 2020). Using a narrative-based approach, Lee and Bartels (2019b) analysed community perspectives regarding the impact of PKOs in Haiti on local civilians and found that SEA and childbirth were a widespread concern amongst those interviewed (Lee and Bartels 2019b). The authors showed that poverty was a key factor contributing to sexual relations that led to childbirth and a key result of the repatriation of implicated fathers. In a subsequent study, Vahedi, Lee, and Bartels (2020) analysed mothers' lived experiences raising PKFC. The authors described PKFC's upbringing in single-parent families and elaborated on their restricted access to resources and education that perpetuated intergenerational cycles of poverty. Based on a relatively small qualitative sample, this analysis provides the first evidence-based foundation of PKFC's circumstances, yet many aspects of their life courses are unexplored, and their voices are still missing from scholarly literature.

While there is growing interest in the experiences of PKFC, two decades after the matter first emerged, the academic understanding of PKFC is still scattered and both the numbers and realities of the children remain under-researched and, to a large extent, subject of speculation. While the life courses of PKFC are closely connected to those of their mothers, I argue that their vulnerabilities, needs, and experiences are distinct. By talking about them rather than to them, we continue to have

little sense of who they are and how they situate themselves within the social fabric of conflict-affected communities. For PKFC to no longer be secondary considerations in the framings of humanitarian and international law, reporting and research about SEA needs to treat them as independent subjects about whom there is a need of a deeper understanding. Rather than assuming the right to speak for them, PKFC must be provided with the opportunity to tell their own stories and help shape responses to their unique situation (Nordstrom 1997). Refocusing discussions away from victim and perpetrator towards PKFC is expected to foster policy changes that advocate for their needs and create a more comprehensive and sustainable solution to SEA. Thus, I argue that PKFC deserve to be a category of their own in institutional discourse on SEA so that they can find representation in policy and practice.

### **1.3. Aims of the Research**

The overall objective of this thesis is to address the critical gap in knowledge surrounding PKFC's life courses. The thesis sets out to contribute to a better understanding of who PKFC are and how their heritage influences their lives. In doing so, it examines the often-voiced assumption within media and academia that PKFC face disproportionate challenges growing up (e.g., Martin 2005; Koyama and Myrntinen 2007). To better understand how PKFC's childhood and adolescence is shaped by the circumstances surrounding their conception, it will: 1) explore their sense of self and identity, 2) describe challenges emerging from their heritage, and 3) identify potential barriers to their safeguarding and protection.

Addressing concerns in the literature, an overall assessment of their well-being is conducted that considers the impact of their heritage on their life courses. Drawing on African philosophy and epistemological assumptions according to which individuals need to be understood in a relational context, the thesis is concerned with relational aspects of PKFC's identity and considers their position within (post)-conflict communities (Udefi 2014; Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017). This is explained further in the next section in which the conceptual framework that was applied to study

PKFC's experiences is introduced. Based on PKFC's level of integration/exclusion, the thesis emphasises the broader socio-economic and security context in which they live, examining the social dynamics, i.e., unequal power relations that drive their conception and impact their upbringing. To understand the weight of their heritage on their identity, I examine norms and customs surrounding gender and race relations in host state communities. I therefore couched my investigation of social identity in a detailed analysis of Congolese traditions and practices concerning family, and kinship that shape identity. To inform and contextualise PKFC's situation, the thesis also considers the situation of their mothers who oftentimes struggle to raise PKFC in resource-deprived circumstances. In providing information regarding the mother-child relationship, the thesis will cover a range of circumstances under which PKFC are conceived, from consensual relationships to sexual violence, and similarly a wide range of circumstances under which they grow up.

Over and above illustrating their experiences within their families and communities, the thesis discusses similarities and differences between PKFC to examine whether they, as a group, face particular challenges. This analysis will result in a list of influential variables that determine their status, such as their context of conception, living situation, racial background, and economic circumstances. Consequently, one of the objectives of the thesis is to look at critical deviance in identity-defining categories of PKFC to see how these affect them in different ways. By researching which characteristics translate into more or less challenging life stories, I aim to unpack perceptions of race and class in Congolese society. Finally, the thesis tackles issues relating to rights violations endured by PKFC, culminating in an assessment of the UN's victims' rights approach.

#### **1.4. Conceptual Framework**

Due to the lack of prior research on PKFC, I have contextualised my analysis of their experiences by existing research on children born of war (CBOW). Situated within literature on women and children in conflict, research on CBOW offers a glimpse into the life courses of conflict-affected children who, like PKFC, have traditionally been treated as an afterthought in discussions about the consequences

of wars (Weitsman 2008; Freedman 2018). The following section provides an overview of CBOW research and discusses challenges in their upbringing that will be explored throughout the thesis.

#### 1.4.1. Children Born of War

Children fathered by members of peacekeeping forces and born to local mothers are considered part of a global group of children called CBOW (Mochmann 2008; Mochmann and Larsen 2008; Mochmann and Lee 2010b). The term CBOW<sup>7</sup> refers to individuals who are born in the context of armed conflict with one parent who is part of a foreign military or occupation force (usually the father) and another who is a local citizen in the country of deployment (usually the mother) (Lee and Glaesmer 2021). The emergence of CBOW as a category of civilians in conflict has led to a small but growing body of work that conceptualises the lives of individuals who are conceived of sexual relations between foreign soldiers and local women in conflict-affected areas.

Although CBOW have existed for as long as international conflict itself, their presence in societies is a widely ignored reality and for a long time, CBOW have completely escaped academic attention (Lee 2017). The extensive silence around CBOW, despite their welfare being both a political and humanitarian concern, corresponds to few other war-affected populations of similar size (Mochmann 2006; Lee 2012). In the mid-1990s, academics and journalists started exploring the life courses of CBOW, slowly but steadily creating awareness of their situation (DeBonis 1995; Bass 1996; McKelvey 1999)<sup>8</sup>. Scholars who comparatively study the lives of CBOW have indicated that, although

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<sup>7</sup> The term CBOW and the related classification into 1) children of enemy soldiers, 2) children of occupational forces, 3) children of child soldiers and 4) children of peacekeeping forces was introduced by Ingvill Mochmann (Mochmann 2006; 2007; 2008) and further developed by Mochmann and Larsen (2008) and Mochmann and Lee (2010). In 2016, the definition was broadened to include children fathered by members of armed groups in internal conflicts, crises and genocide, and children conceived by local warring factions, paramilitary groups, rebels or any other person directly participating in modern warfare (Mochmann 2017).

<sup>8</sup> In the past decade, CBOW have become the subject of considerable academic interest, spanning different disciplines like history, politics, law and development studies, psychology and psychiatry (see the following seminal studies: Carpenter 2005; Ericsson and Simonsen 2005; Mochmann and Larsen 2005; Yarborough 2005; Rains, Rains, and Jarratt 2006; Carpenter 2007; Watson 2007; Mochmann and Larsen 2008; Mochmann, Lee, and Stelzl-Marx 2009; Virgili 2009; Mochmann and DeTombe 2010; Mochmann and Lee 2010; Lee 2011; Glaesmer 2012; Satjukow and Gries 2015; Stelzl-Marx and Satjukow 2015; Lee 2017; Fehrenbach 2018). The most well-known populations of CBOW are children born during the two World Wars, post-war occupations, the



conflict settings differ culturally and geographically, CBOW globally share certain psychosocial and political difficulties that place them at an intersection of a range of adversities (Ericsson and Simonsen 2005; Mochmann and Lee 2010b).

Despite the growing database, the knowledge about CBOW is still patchy and numerous populations of CBOW remain neglected to date. Exemplary of this negligence are PKFC, who, despite being considered a subgroup of CBOW, are entirely unexplored. Since no prior research with them exists, there is no evidence that the social and economic impact of PKFC's heritage resembles that of children fathered by foreign military or occupation forces. In fact, it has sometimes been argued that including PKFC in the definition of CBOW may be unhelpful since their context of conception differs in that a) PKFC are often born of more nuanced and less violent sexual relations than other groups of CBOW and b) PKFC are fathered by individuals from a force employed to serve and protect the local population and thus, there is not the same level of enmity towards them that exists in most occupation contexts (Lee 2017; Lee and Glaesmer 2021). Hence, there is some debate regarding whether the experiences of PKFC are covered by broader conceptualisations pertaining to CBOW. In this thesis, I argue that irrespective of how PKFC fit into the narrower definition of CBOW, information about them can help put the experiences of PKFC into context and inform important areas in research with them. Hence, I have consulted the existing body of work on CBOW to explore PKFC's life courses. To situate my work most effectively within CBOW research, I have developed a conceptual framework that consolidates the fragmented database on CBOW and summarises results which have in the past remained localised within different disciplines. Informed by case studies of CBOW in different contexts and theoretically guided assumptions from different disciplines, the proposed framework highlights challenges for CBOW that individually and collectively create an environment that is detrimental to their welfare. Assuming that many of the fundamental matters around CBOW can serve as a starting

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Vietnam War and the Balkan Wars (Ericsson and Simonsen 2005; Carpenter 2007; Mochmann and Lee 2010). Scholarly work relating to CBOW in African conflicts exists pertaining to the children born of genocidal rape in Rwanda (Nowrojee 1996) and children conceived by abducted child soldiers in the DRC and Uganda (Bennett 2002; Apio 2008; Weitsman 2008; Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International 2010).

point to understanding the life courses of PKFC, I have applied this conceptual framework to PKFC in order to identify potential areas of hardship.

Based on the proposed conceptual framework, I formulated a set of research questions and working hypothesis to assess if PKFC's heritage creates a hostile environment for them growing up. While my research questions are neutral and do not assume PKFC to be disadvantaged, the outlined hypotheses reveal what challenges are expected if their experiences mirror those of other CBOW. I anticipate that this approach will inform a comprehensive understanding of their circumstances.

Overarching Research Questions (RQ): In what ways are the life courses of PKFC impacted by their unique heritage? (What challenges or opportunities does their background pose?)

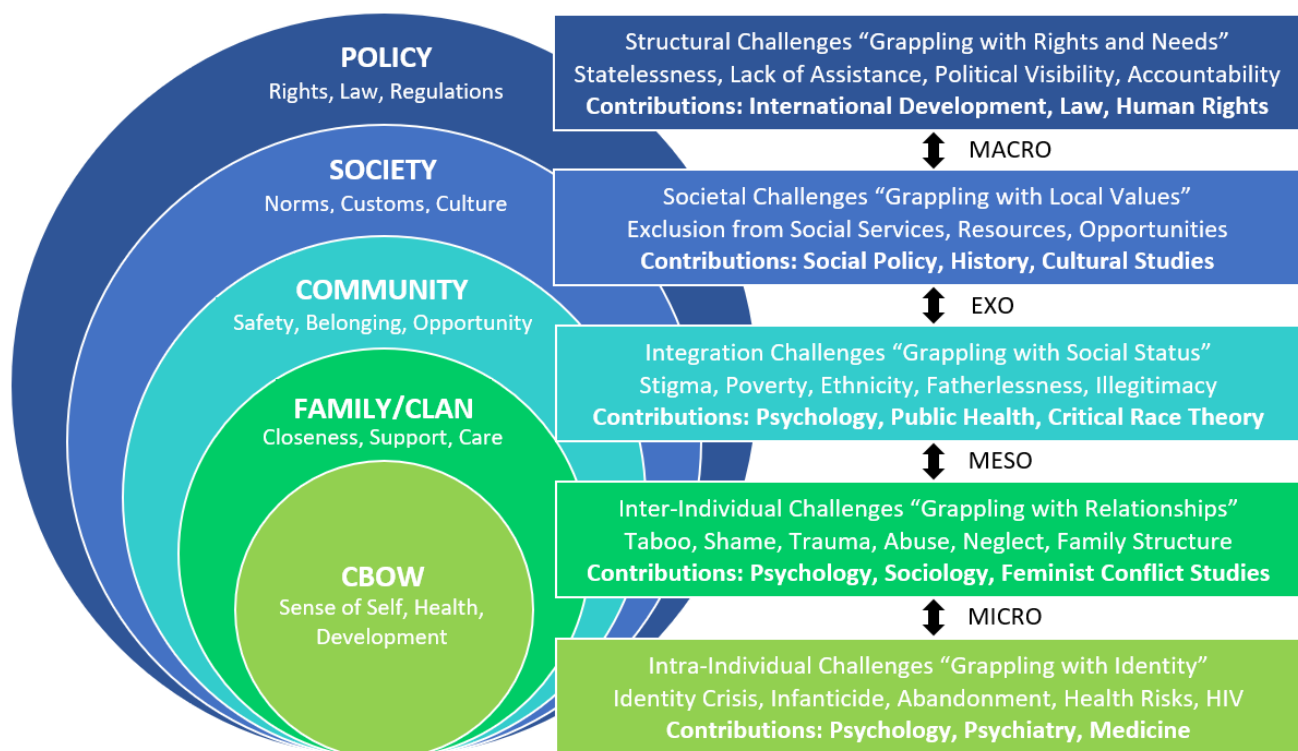
Overarching Hypothesis (H): Originating from their heritage, PKFC experience a number of challenges that resemble those of CBOW.

#### 1.4.2. Socio-Ecological Model for Children Born of War

Prior research with CBOW suggests that many of the challenges they experience are relational and nested in interactions with different social structures (Lee and Glaesmer 2021). I therefore propose a conceptual framework that situates their experiences within relationships and broader societal/political factors. Urie Bronfenbrenner (1974; 1979) developed the ecological systems theory to demonstrate a child's place within their family, community and wider cultural and political context. Being explicitly child-focused, the theory is based on four interrelated systems that show how child well-being is nested within social settings (or ecologies). Each of the observed levels operates within and is influenced by a complex web of circumstances, ranging from narrowest (individual and family) to broadest (cultural and political) (e.g. Paat 2013; Kelly and Coughlan 2019). Building on Bronfenbrenner's theory, I study the experiences of CBOW from a perspective that considers individual, social environmental, as well as political influences on their well-being (McLeroy et al. 1988; Israel et al. 1994; Felitti et al. 1998; Anda et al. 2006; Glanz, Rimer, and Viswanath 2008). Like

Bronfenbrenner, I organized these social structures according to how much influence they have on CBOW.

The child and the family are understood as the immediate setting that is nested in the larger system of clan and community and then linked to the most expansive environment which includes the ideologies and beliefs of society. To illustrate how the challenges of CBOW interact with multiple levels of their environment, I highlight the critical function of family/clan, community, society and policy. By linking how CBOW are marginalised within these structures, I also illustrate how they can move between them if discursive patterns are improved.



**Figure 1:** Socio-ecological model for CBOW: Individual and social environmental factors that present challenges to CBOW (adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, 1979)

#### 1.4.2.1. Micro-Level (Family)

The first unique structure in Bronfenbrenner's theory, the microsystem, considers the interaction of child and family and thus bridges the intra-individual challenges of CBOW, such as uncertainties about

their identity, with the inter-individual challenge of navigating that identity within their immediate social environment (usually the family).

Most CBOW grow up with a conspiracy of silence<sup>9</sup> around their fathers that fuels their need to ascertain their roots throughout their lives (Mitreuter et al. 2019; Provost and Denov 2020). Since their fathers often abandon their responsibility towards them, the paternal identity of CBOW is mostly unknown, and there is little possibility to trace or locate fathers (Denov and Lakor 2018). In patrilineal societies<sup>10</sup> in which paternal heritage determines identity, their lack of paternal family connections becomes a source of psychological strain that deprives them of a sense of safety and status in society (Apio 2016; Kiconco 2021). Children born of sexual violence may further experience an insecure bond with their mothers, for whom their conception is a painful memory (van Ee and Kleber 2012; Denov et al. 2018; Woolner, Denov, and Kahn 2019b). Mothers who see their children as a reminder of their victimisation might develop ambivalent feelings towards their children that can result in abuse, neglect, rejection and abandonment (Glaesmer et al. 2012; Kaiser et al. 2015). Dysfunctional relationships with their mothers were found to impact CBOW's self-worth and confidence, pushing some into social isolation or identity crisis, as they long for a sense of self and acceptance (Meckel, Mochmann, and Miertsch 2016). Their fragmented sense of family may have developmental trajectories and cause physical and psychological harm, putting them at higher risk for developing mental health issues, childhood trauma and somatisation (Glaesmer et al. 2012; 2017; Hucklenbroich, Burgmer, and Heuft 2014). Their resulting social identity might thus be defined by feelings of

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<sup>9</sup> The secrecy (family denial, lack of official discourse or information) around their origin can raise the feeling that their very existence is wrong or 'taboo', a notion that is a root cause for the identity crisis that some CBOW experience (Carpenter 2000; Koegeler-Abdi 2021; Mochmann 2017; Lee 2009; 2012; Satjukow 2011; Stelzl-Marx 2009). The psychological impact of negative discourses concerning their existence can cause internalised stigma, resulting in shame, confusion or anguish that haunts their sense of personal and social identity (Mochmann and Lee 2010b; Denov and Lakor 2017; 2018).

<sup>10</sup> In patrilineal African societies, family, particularly the father's family, determines belonging and is the building block of identity and status (Denov and Lakor 2017). The fact that their paternal origin is unknown may leave CBOW with an impaired sense of place in these societies, making them feel like they do not belong to the family or culture they grow up in (Sanchez Parra 2018; Apio 2016).

'otherness' and isolation (Denov and Lakor 2018; Mitreuter et al. 2019; Mutsonziwa, Anyeko, and Baines 2020; Koegeler-Abdi 2021).

Drawing on these insights, I propose that the interactions of PKFC with their parents, siblings and other members of their household are crucial for fostering a positive identity. In order to ascertain whether PKFC share the challenges of CBOW on the micro-level, my research explores whether their identity is impacted by a lack of attachment figures and meaningful relationships. Since the well-being of mother and child have been found to strongly influence one another, scholars have suggested that research regarding CBOW should include their mothers, an implication that was realised in this thesis (Apio 2016; Stewart 2017).

RQ1: How does PKFC's heritage impact their identity and sense of self? (In what way does their lack of contact with fathers and paternal families affect their safety and status? In what way does their context of conception influence their bond with their mothers and maternal family?)

H1: PKFC struggle with aspects of identity development due to their father's absence and a fragmented sense of family.

#### *1.4.2.2. Meso-Level (Community)*

The mesosystem is a system of interconnected microsystems that provides more information on the surroundings in which children live. Nested in the larger system of clan and community, the meso-system foregrounds links between the child, its immediate family and other aspects of their environment, such as their extended clan and kinship groups.

Documentation of CBOW in other contexts suggests that they often face maltreatment, stigma and discrimination by their communities (Stelzl-Marx 2009; Satjukow 2011; Fritz et al. 2015). Thus, their marginalisation within families may continue outside the home if community members learn about their background (Opiyo 2015). The severe impact of their outsider status is exemplified in Denov and Lakor's (2017) observation that CBOW in Northern Uganda experienced their stigmatised

identities in the post-war period as more debilitating than life in captivity during the war. According to available research, the societal rejection of CBOW often originates from preconceptions about their fathers (based on their role as perpetrators or foreign soldiers) or attitudes towards their mothers (based on them engaging in extra-marital sexual relations or having a child out of wedlock) (Apio 2007; Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008). Thus, the community's knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about their conception are of crucial relevance to their integration. In contexts where their mothers<sup>11</sup> are stigmatised, CBOW might experience a lack of support and economic difficulty (Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008; Bland 2019). Where their fathers are perceived as aggressors, CBOW might be understood as a 'symbolic extension'<sup>12</sup> of their unethical practices (Mukangendo 2007; Liebling, Slegh, and Ruratotoye 2012; Van Ee and Kleber 2013; Mukasa 2017; Sanchez Parra 2018). This can result in them experiencing an inner tension regarding how to position themselves towards their fathers on the one side and their mothers and communities on the other (Weitsman 2008; Lee 2009; Stelzl-Marx 2009; Satjukow 2011; Hamel 2016;).

Based on these insights, I will explore whether PKFC experience marginalised social identities. Since the reputation of peacekeepers is not inherently negative, preconceptions about PKFC's background might less readily lead to societal rejection. Hence, PKFC might escape some of the difficulties that other CBOW face for their connection to an opposing armed group and therefore be met with a more tolerant attitude by families and communities. Moreover, compared to other CBOW in central Africa whose mothers were often abducted, violently raped or forcefully impregnated, the

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<sup>11</sup> Surviving war-time rape or exploitation may result in stigma and discrimination of victims that denies them the full support of their families, clans and communities (Satjukow 2011; Stelzl-Marx 2009; Fritz et al. 2015; Salzman 1998; Stiglmeier 1994). The complexity of lineage affiliations and expectation of sexual exclusivity for women and girls in many settings has been reported to render victims dirtied or unmarriageable after such incidents (Mukamana and Brysiewicz 2008). A child born as a result of sexual assault often exacerbates the stigma for victims since it functions as a continual reminder of the illegitimate conception that could otherwise be denied or repressed (Shanks and Schull, 2000). Moreover, in some contexts, women who decide to raise CBOW might be considered traitors (Apio 2007). Bringing up a child as a single parent might thus mean socio-economic hardship, reduced chances of marriage and traditional family life (Bland 2019).

<sup>12</sup> CBOW are in some contexts referred to as "children of hate", "children of the enemy", "children of bad memories", "war leftovers", "dust of life", "little killers", "children of bad blood", "children of bad spirits", "rebel children" and "bastards" (Wax 2004; Mazurana and McKay 2003; Drolshagen 2005; UNICEF 2016; Daniel-Wrabetz 2007; Grieg 2001; Mochmann, Lee, and Stelzl-Marx 2009; McKelvey 1999).

circumstances of PKFC's conception tend to be less violent; again suggesting that PKFC might face less risk of abuse and neglect than other CBOW since their fathers are less readily condemned as 'evil perpetrators' (Lee 2017).

RQ2: Do PKFC experience marginalised social identities and frequent stigmatisation? (How are the stigmatising experiences towards them produced?)

H2: Experiences of stigma and discrimination present a common challenge in the upbringing of PKFC. These experiences are related to their parents' social role and experience.

#### *1.4.2.3. Exo-Level (Culture)*

The exo-level focuses on children's experiences in their expanded social environment and considers the influence of cultural and religious customs, political and economic circumstances on their development. Challenges that emerge on the exo-level are typically caused by societal influences that cause hardship for children based on how their race, class, gender and other identity-forming characteristics interact with societal norms.

As previously reported by CBOW, social norms and cultural beliefs in society can cause children to be marginalised if their existence opposes dominant cultural ideals about class, race, and kinship (Hamel 2016; Mochmann 2017; Mukasa 2017; Sanchez Parra 2018; Kahn and Denov 2019a; Woolner, Denov, and Kahn 2019a). According to Bergman (2017), stigma in the context of CBOW refers to individuals being labelled as deviant for possessing certain characteristics that clash with accepted cultural values or for lacking a recognised identity. The social norms, attitudes, and ideologies in the respective socio-political context determine the public discourse on CBOW and their degree of social rejection or acceptance. Thus, the social and cultural norms that define a society are also what excludes some individuals from participating in it (Stewart 2017). In many conflict societies, the mere existence of CBOW contradicts the normative framework of the communities they are born into (Mochmann and Larsen 2008; Satjukow 2011). Attributable to their illegitimate status and dual

parentage, they are sometimes considered a symbolic reminder of the conflict itself and, therefore, an easy target for stigma, abuse and neglect (Stelzl-Marx 2009; Apio 2016).

After examining PKFC's experiences of stigma and discrimination, I will explore the complex social dynamics of Congolese culture in which these experiences are embedded. I will determine whether critical deviance in structural categories, such as PKFC's racial background or level of economic deprivation, affects their status in communities. Therefore, I study the differences and similarities between PKFC to understand how their challenges sit within the broader narratives and cultural norms in the communities where they live. In doing so, I argue that subgroups of PKFC may be perceived differently depending on how their unique situations relate to beliefs in Congolese culture.

RQ3: How are the experiences of PKFC shaped by structural differences between them? (Which of their identity-forming characteristics challenge the normative beliefs of Congolese culture? Are PKFC a uniform group who experience their childhood and adolescence similarly?)

H3: The level of hardship within the population of PKFC differs based on which traits they possess and how these traits are perceived locally.

#### *1.4.2.4. Macro-Level (Policy)*

The macro-level encompasses cultural and political ideologies expressed in societal structures that marginalise CBOW. On this more abstract level, challenges often manifest themselves in laws and regulations that cause material and educational inequities for CBOW. Thus, while on the exo-level challenges are based on attitudes and norms in the local environment, on the macro-level broader economic, political and regulatory systems are concerned. Here, global norms and international frameworks interact with local standards and traditional practices, showing how CBOW grapple with political visibility, (inter)national legislation and rights enforcement.



CBOW often experience social, economic and political exclusion (Stewart 2017). In addition to the insecurity that all children in conflict face, CBOW might be exposed to a number of violations of the rights of the child, such as their right to education, family, identity, nationality, physical security, protection from stigma and even survival (Carpenter 2007; Delić, Kuwert, and Glaesmer 2017). Related to the status of their economically insecure mothers, CBOW might be deprived of food and other essential goods such as clothing and adequate shelter (Carpenter 2007b; Stewart 2017). Their ambiguous legal status may prevent them from accessing social services, personal data and national identity documents (Akello 2013; Gill 2019). Local and international actors may contest their citizenship or deny them access to records about their parents, should such records even exist (Carpenter 2000; Carpenter 2007). These rights violations might become increasingly visible as CBOW enter adolescence and struggle with their lack of access to resources and opportunities. With resolution 2467, the UN Security Council recognised all CBOW as war-affected populations in 2019 (UN Security Council 2019a). However, judicial systems are still largely ineffective in securing their rights and fail to impose sanctions against their fathers, with whom it is often impossible to establish contact.

To illustrate how the challenges of PKFC interact with cultural and political ideologies that cause inequities for CBOW globally, I raise broader conceptual questions regarding how their rights are applied within international laws and regulations. I highlight how certain economic or political structures marginalise PKFC and deny them access to resources and equal opportunity (Carpenter 2007; 2010; Mochmann and Lee 2010; Akello 2013; Gill 2019). In doing so, I facilitate “the bigger picture”, guide future responses to SEA and inform how the needs of CBOW can be met more effectively.

RQ4: How effective are current policies for support, and which policy changes might increase quality of life? (What are the socio-economic needs of PKFC? How can PKFC’s challenges be addressed and mitigated through (inter)national laws and regulations?)

H4: PKFC have a right to support that currently is not being realised.

### 1.4.3. An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Most scholarly contributions in the field of CBOW to date only capture a small aspect of their experience. Contributions from psychology lend insight into how being a CBOW causes intra-individual challenges. Contributions from the social sciences depict inter-individual difficulties and the humanities emphasize cultural and political obstacles. While each specialised contribution is important, it is vital to remember that understanding a complex multi-layered phenomenon like CBOW, by nature, requires an interdisciplinary and cross-cultural approach rather than narrow discipline-specific investigations (Mochmann 2017). As a Global Challenges scholar, I advocate for research on CBOW to practice cross-fertilisation of ideas, effective interdisciplinary collaboration, validation and communication (Lee and Glaesmer 2015; *CHIBOW* 2021). With regards to CBOW, this means drawing on expertise across the academic spectrum to study their situation from identity issues to institutional barriers.

The developed socio-ecological model illustrates that the challenges CBOW face filter into all aspects of their lives. Moreover, it emphasises that the experiences of CBOW cannot be studied effectively without understanding the interconnectedness between layers; for instance, their societal and structural problems are more effectively addressed when considering how they manifest in individual and interpersonal challenges. Drawing on the reasoning of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the above model also holds implications for the effective targeting of support since it shows that changes in children's social environment can produce changes to their well-being.

## 1.5. Contributions

The discussed research questions will be explored in the form of four research papers that constitute the core of this thesis. Through these papers, I address the most fundamental questions related to the

life courses of PKFC, reflecting their challenges on the micro, meso, exo and macro-level. By applying the socio-ecological model to PKFC, the thesis makes several notable contributions.

### 1) Theoretical Contributions

Drawing on academic literature, as well as media and NGO reports, I have consolidated the limited existing knowledge about PKFC. This was done via an interdisciplinary perspective that combined information which in the past remained localised and fragmented. The information generated contributes theoretical knowledge to three general areas: [1] Unintended consequences of UNPK, [2] CBOW and [3] Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), specifically addressing sexual violence-related pregnancies and reproductive rights in eastern DRC.

Situated within peacekeeping literature, the thesis contributes new information to discussions about SEA and related pregnancies. Illustrating the experiences of PKFC and their mothers in host state communities advances scholarly knowledge on the socio-economic, cultural, and security-related circumstances in host state communities that allow SEA to flourish and prevent the successful integration of victims. The research demonstrates how the lives of mothers and PKFC are affected by SEA. It will cast light on their limited access to UN subsidies and discusses barriers to justice and accountability. In demonstrating that the UN's current approach to paternity and child support claims is unsuccessful in providing mothers and PKFC with assistance, it makes recommendations for a more victim-(and PKFC) centred approach to SEA.

Situated within literature on CBOW, the thesis highlights the need to address those who are often considered secondary victims (CBOW) of sexual violence/SEA as direct victims because of the way their lives are affected. Research on CBOW is still a relatively new subject but one that is increasingly recognised as important across disciplines, borders, and sectors. My research will show that PKFC, like other CBOW are vulnerable to a range of adversities that remain largely ignored in international legal frameworks. In many countries in which CBOW live, judicial institutions are lacking, unwilling to cooperate or are unable to hold fathers accountable. While there has been some

recognition of these advocacy gaps, this needs to be followed up with empirical research, policy recommendations and assessments of new practices and laws.

Situated within literature on CRSV in the DRC, the thesis advances theoretical considerations regarding how SEA by peacekeepers sits within the violence perpetrated by other armed groups. Moreover, the thesis adds to discussions about how these practices are interlinked with the humanitarian crises in the DRC and normative beliefs of gender and sexuality in Congolese culture (Annan et al. 2009; Baines 2014; Baines and Rosenoff Gauvin 2014). Related to the colonial history of the DRC, I discuss how the identifying characteristics of PKFC, such as their bi-racial background affect their social perception, contributing to knowledge about race relations in post-colonial African societies (Mochmann 2017).

Describing the obstacles faced by PKFC in the DRC opens up a long-overdue academic and non-academic discussion on the subject and allows scholars to apply the knowledge to complex realities in other countries that host foreign armies or peacekeeping troops. Through combining these three theoretical areas, the thesis improves local and international approaches to protecting PKFC and inform civil society, health personnel and political responses to the civilian population in (post)-conflict societies.

## 2) Empirical Contributions

This thesis is a response to the gap in scholarship on PKFC. Following the objective to explore their childhood and adolescence, it provides information about their upbringing in families and communities that have been affected by conflict and the long-term hosting of PKOs. The thesis delivers this knowledge by presenting empirical data collected with 35 PKFC and 60 mothers in eastern DRC. Drawing on their testimonies, the present thesis is the first to explore paternity affiliated with UNPK through interview material from PKFC (adolescent and child participants). Interviewing both mothers and children, it further explores intergenerational elements in their experiences. The empirical contribution of the thesis is therefore unique and is highly relevant in formulating policies that bring

the UN, implicated peacekeepers, and their sending states to comply with their responsibilities towards PKFC.

### 3) Methodological Contributions

The knowledge in this dissertation is drawn from original research conducted with PKFC. With the exception of few empirically based studies, the voices of children born of conflict-related sexual violence or exploitation are absent from academic literature (Banyanga, Björkqvist, and Österman 2017; Hogwood et al. 2018; Provost and Denov 2020). This is partially due to the fact that there is no conventional sampling frame that facilitates access to them. Moreover, fear of stigma and shame may prevent them from coming forward, defining PKFC as a so-called “hidden population” (Lee, 2017). To engage them in the present research in spite of this, I employed an innovative sampling strategy that used the narrative-capture tool SenseMaker® to draw on the wisdom of Congolese communities in locating PKFC (SenseMaker 2021).

PKFC and victims of SEA are considered vulnerable groups, and thus, interviewing them circumvents a range of ethical and methodological difficulties. To break down traditional power hierarchies between researcher and participant and reduce the risk of the research inducing negative psychosocial outcomes, information was collected in a participant-oriented manner with open-ended questions that put PKFC and mothers in control of the information shared (Reinharz and Davidman 1992; Bell 2001; Mertus 2004). In order to include PKFC in the research in an ethical way, I employed child-appropriate interview methods with participatory elements and visual research.

PKFC were treated as research authorities in their own right with unique insights into their situation. Thus, the methodological challenges in interviewing PKFC were an incentive to pay particular attention, care and sensitivity, allowing PKFC to exercise agency within the capabilities of their age. The methodological contribution of this thesis therefore lies in the development of innovative ways to include conflict-affected children in research, as well as in the best practice examples shared (Boyden 1994; Freeman 2007).

## 1.6. Introduction to Methods

In order to fulfil the aforementioned objectives, the research employed a case study design with a predominantly qualitative approach (Gerring 2004; Thomas 2021). Shedding light on a previously unexplored phenomenon, the study was explorative and descriptive in nature, designed to increase the visibility of PKFC and provide a first, yet nuanced account of their situation. Data was gathered through a two-stage research project with stage one being a large-scale narrative study designed to explore peacekeeper-civilian relations, and stage two being an in-depth qualitative study of the experiences of 35 PKFC and 60 mothers.

The research was enabled by a multidisciplinary and cross-institutional collaboration between Queen's University and York University in Canada, the University of Birmingham and Reading in the UK and two DRC-based organisations. Bringing researchers from different academic fields, geographical areas, and civil society organisations together evoked a fruitful interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral approach to the subject. Dr. Susan Bartels (Queen's University) was the principal investigator and recipient of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council Grant that funded the research. Professor Sabine Lee (University of Birmingham), Professor Annie Bunting (York University), Professor Allison Goebel (Queen's University), Professor Stéfanie von Hlatky (Queen's University) and Professor Rosa Freedman (University of Reading) were co-applicants on the research grant. They supported the research with their combined expertise in:

- Public health related issues of humanitarian crises
- Military organisations, peacekeeping and multinational use of force
- Women, children and war
- Gender relations and sexual violence in conflict
- International human rights and feminist international law

I joined the research team in September 2017 to design the second stage of the research and explore the situation of PKFC from a psychological perspective. Attaching my own qualitative work onto the

large-scale narrative data collection enabled me to recruit participants vis-à-vis the community-oriented first stage of the research. Through this method, access to PKFC and their mothers was facilitated and 95 qualitative interviews, some of which involved visual elements, were conducted. The interviews were analysed using qualitative content analysis. Triangulating the results of the qualitative interviews with information from the narrative study and knowledge of local experts helped check for inconsistencies and researcher biases during the interpretation and write-up of the study findings.

### **1.7. Case Study**

In this thesis, I use the UN Stabilisation Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO, predecessor MONUC)<sup>13</sup> as a case study to analyse the challenges of PKFC. I have chosen to focus on the DRC for several reasons: First, peacekeeping in the DRC reflects one of the largest and longest instances of UN intervention and MONUC/MONUSCO personnel are amongst those most often accused of SEA (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). Relatedly, sexual misconduct in the DRC has sometimes been considered to have brought the issue of SEA to public attention (Neethling 2011; Barrera 2015). Since MONUC/MONUSCO is one of the most frequently debated missions, SEA in the DRC is a high-profile case on which much academic (e.g., Notar 2006; Gilliard 2010; Kovatch 2016) and grey literature (e.g., Clayton and Bone 2004; Price 2005; Larson and Dodds 2017; Flummerfelt and Peyton 2020) has been written. This has resulted in an associated wealth of information that can be used to contextualise the experiences of PKFC. Second, the DRC is a landmark for UN policy since UN measures for protection from SEA have often been developed in response to waves of allegations, many of which originated from the DRC. The high level of global interest and policy-focused attention make it an extremely important case to study that has the potential to translate concerns about PKFC into affirmative action. Third, a benefit of focusing on the DRC arises from the time span of the mission (1999-present),

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<sup>13</sup> The acronyms are based on the French names Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO) and Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo (MONUC).

which allows access to victims of SEA from different generations. This enabled the inclusions of PKFC as children and adolescents and highlighted whether changes in UN policy over the last twenty years led to an improvement in their situation. Fourth, host state communities in the DRC experience high levels of poverty and violence that constitute a humanitarian crisis. Fatherlessness and lack of UN support were therefore expected to cause severe consequences for PKFC that urgently needed to be explored (Notar 2006; Human Rights Watch 2020; United Nations Development Programme 2020). I thus conclude that the DRC represents a key case with regard to PKFC well-being and the effectiveness of UN policies to protect them.

## **1.8. Thesis Structure**

The thesis is structured into nine chapters. Chapter two reviews existing literature on peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA, describing its underlying causes, consequences and the UN's response to it. It discusses UN policy concerning paternity and child support claims and demonstrates why these claims are largely unsuccessful. Chapter three provides the relevant background on the DRC to enable an understanding of the present research in its coherent socio-cultural and political context. In this chapter, particular attention is paid to the humanitarian situation in eastern DRC and the situation of children born from sexual violence and SEA. Chapter four contains a detailed description of the research rationale and methods used to study the experiences of PKFC. It will explain the role of local partners in implementing the research, discuss ethics and positionality.

Chapters five to eight present my analysis of PKFC's life courses in publication style format (published or under review with peer-reviewed academic journals). The findings are divided into four empirical chapters that each draw on one of the social structures described in the socio-ecological model. The first research paper analyses PKFC's conceptualisation of family and identity in light of their father's absence, disclosing how their (lack of) relationships with their family and kin networks impact their sense of self. The second research paper examines experiences of stigma and discrimination, evaluating how PKFC's background impacts their prospects of integrating into local



communities. The third research paper unpacks how the social status of PKFC is influenced by local cultural norms and practices, relating their position within communities to societal expectations status-based hierarchies. The fourth research paper casts light on PKFC's limited access to compensation and support, addressing policy gaps in their assistance and inadequacies of the UN's victim's rights approach.

The ninth and final chapter summarises the research (confirming as well as challenging some of the formulated assumptions regarding their life courses) and retraces the central themes explored throughout the thesis. The results are synthesised and discussed in terms of their overall contributions, implications and practical significance. Reflections on ethical considerations when researching vulnerable populations in a demanding geopolitical context such as the DRC will feed into an assessment of the quality of the obtained data and culminate in avenues for future research. In closing, the chapter proposes solutions for more appropriate support mechanisms for PKFC.

## **Chapter 2: Sexual Exploitation and Abuse**

This chapter will provide a brief introduction to UNPK, discuss the definition, origins and consequences of SEA. By disentangling the behaviours that SEA encompasses and the structural and contextual issues that give rise to it, I provide an understanding of the conditions under which PKFC are conceived and the circumstances in which they grow up. This context will inform the adequacy of UN efforts to address SEA and provide justice and accountability to victims<sup>14</sup>. The chapter ends with a critical evaluation of policy responses to resolve paternity claims.

### **2.1. Introduction to UN Peacekeeping**

Founded in the aftermath of the Second World War, one of the UN's primary functions is the maintenance of international peace (Askin 2016). UNPK missions are typically initiated "when a conflict situation within or between countries changes - for better or for worse - and [there is] pressure from international actors for the UN to step in" (Neudorfer 2015 p.9). After the UN Security Council (UNSC) ensures consensus between the parties of the dispute regarding the size and mandate of the mission, peacekeepers are deployed to prevent or contain hostilities (UN Department of Public Information 1996). Since the UN does not have its own military force, it relies on UN member states to staff PKOs and carry out these missions (Ndulo 2009). In consequence, mission personnel are members of police and military forces from different sending states that vary in training, jurisdiction, human rights, and gender equality records. In 2021, the top UN troop and police-contributing countries (TPCCs) were Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Nepal, Rwanda, India, Pakistan, Egypt, Indonesia, China, and Ghana (UN Peacekeeping 2021g).

Compared to the early days of UNPK, when missions were mainly deployed to assist governments in resolving conflicts peacefully and observing ceasefire agreements, operations

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<sup>14</sup> In this dissertation, I will follow the official UN terminology in referring to those who have experienced SEA as 'victims', rather than 'survivors'.

nowadays have become much more complex (Simm 2013). Mandates today may include the neutralisation of armed groups and protection of civilians, with force if necessary (UN Peacekeeping 2021d). The peacekeeping mission in the DRC, whose mandate involves taking military action to disarm rebel groups that pose a threat to the local population, exemplifies that evolution (Kovatch 2016; Berdal 2018). The increased focus on the protection of civilians increases moments of contact with the local population and, thus, the likelihood of sexual relations occurring between peacekeepers and civilians (Valenius 2007).

PKOs have traditionally been judged by their ability to contain conflict but in recent years unintended consequences, above all, sexual misconduct have been considered in evaluating the success of missions (Aoi, De Coning, and Thakur 2007). Over the last three decades, a series of scandals implicating the UN, humanitarian agencies and programmes in the exploitation and abuse of local populations have raised concerns regarding the work of the UN and the effectiveness of PKOs. Allegations of SEA have been reported in relation to peacekeepers, humanitarian and development personnel, military contractors, as well as charities that deliver aid independently of the UN or as implementation partners, for instance, Oxfam in 2018 (Foulkes 2018; *UN News* 2018) or Caritas in 2019 (*The Mail & Guardian* 2019). While peacekeeping missions are credited with a crucial role in protecting human rights in conflict, the risk of peacekeepers exploiting or abusing those most in need of protection calls the legitimacy and morality of deploying missions into question.

## **2.2. The Scope of the Problem**

As of April 2021, 88,021 peacekeepers from 121 countries serve in 12 peacekeeping operations around the world (UN Peacekeeping 2021c). Despite it being the duty of each UNPK personnel to protect and ‘do no harm’, sexual wrongdoings committed against ‘local civilians’<sup>15</sup>, primarily young girls, have been reported in a long list of missions (Carmichael 2006; OIOS 2015). While it is important to note that the

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<sup>15</sup> The term ‘local civilian’ is used to refer to a person in the host state population and is inclusive of internally displaced persons and refugees.

large majority of deployed peacekeepers fulfil their mandate professionally and maintain the standards of conduct and discipline, every UN mission to date has been tainted by SEA in one way or another; a strong indicator that it provides a systematic challenge to UNPK (Williams 2006).

Concerns about sexual interactions, emerging out of existing inequalities between peacekeepers and the civilian population in host countries who are experiencing conflict, natural disaster or humanitarian crises were first reported in relation to the PKOs in Mozambique (Lloyd 1995), Cambodia (Phal 1995), Somalia (Lupi 1998), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (Vandenberg 2002) and have since arisen wherever missions are put in place (Alexandra 2011). The presence of peacekeepers has led to a rapid increase in sex trafficking (Defeis 2008) and brothels near military bases (Koyama and Myrntinen 2007), child prostitution (Machel 1996; Mackay 2001), the exchange of sex for goods or food (Kent 2007), the creation and distribution of pornographic films (Martin 2005; Ross, Scott, and Schwartz 2008), growing harassment and catcalling in the streets (Crossette 1996), and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV (US General Accounting Office 2001). The most serious offences include the abuse of children (Holt and Hughes 2007; Csáky 2008), systematic and networked misconduct (Allen-Ebrahimian 2017; Dodds 2017) and rape with extreme violence or torture (Human Rights Watch 2014; 2016a). Prominent examples of 'SEA scandals' include peacekeepers trafficking and enslaving women in Bosnian brothels (Bell, Flynn, and Martinez Machain 2018), UN and NATO officials driving the demand for child sex-work in Kosovo (Harrington 2004; Traynor 2004), peacekeepers abusing young children in the Central African Republic (CAR) (Code Blue 2015; Code Blue 2016) and UNPK personnel operating sex rings in Haiti (Dodds 2017) and the DRC (Jansen 2006).

While the media has often highlighted sexual abuse and sadistic forms of rape, a more pervasive problem is transactional sex and sexually exploitative relationships that involve around power differentials and structural imbalances between peacekeepers and local civilians and thus, subtler forms of coercion (Beber et al. 2017; Westendorf and Searle 2017; Lee and Bartels 2019a). A survey conducted in Monrovia showed the extent to which transactional sex took place during the UN

missions in Liberia between 1997 and 2018 (Beber et al. 2017). Beber et al. obtained information on the sexual history of a random sample of 475 women and found that every second woman had engaged in transactional sex, with over 75 percent naming UN peacekeepers as male participants in those transactions. The authors concluded that the likelihood of a woman engaging in transactional sex before the age of 25 increased by 50 percent if they were living in an area where peacekeepers were stationed. That incidents of SEA and other forms of sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians are a widely accepted norm across missions has also been confirmed by peacekeepers themselves (Heineken and Wilén 2019) and is prominent in divorce (Negrusa and Negrusa 2014) and HIV statistics (Sarin 2003; Okumura and Wakai 2005; Mabuza 2010) of UN personnel who have returned to their home countries. Finally, the scale of the problem is reflected in the steadily growing policy and academic literature, countless media reports, and the number of mixed-race children in countries that host PKOs.

### **2.3. Definition**

The Secretary-General (SG) bulletin on “special measures for protection from SEA”, implemented in 2003, is the legislative framework that governs the behaviour of UN peacekeepers with regard to sexual relations when on mission (UN Secretariat 2003). By issuing this bulletin, the UN Secretariat established a zero-tolerance policy (ZTP) on SEA, defining all actual or attempted sexual relations between UNPK personnel and beneficiaries of assistance<sup>16</sup>, that take place in the context of unequal or coercive circumstances, as exploitative or abusive (UN Secretariat 2003). Accordingly, sexual exploitation constitutes “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power or trust for sexual purposes, including but not limited to profiting monetarily, socially or politically” (p.1). Sexual abuse constitutes “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual

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<sup>16</sup> While undefined by the UN, the term ‘beneficiaries of assistance’ is assumed to describe that part of the host state population that has been affected by conflict (Simm 2013). This may exclude the local elite or those who occupy powerful positions.

nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions” (p.1). In practice, sexual exploitation involves transactional sex (sometimes connected via criminal networks), commercial sex work, and longer-term relationships which occur under unequal conditions between adults. Harrington (2007) suggests that transactional sex comprises sex for necessities, for example when civilians engage in sexual relations to obtain food and money for their own or their family’s survival, and sex for status and protection, when sex is not traded for a basic survival need but is perceived to provide vulnerable civilians with physical protection or status items. For instance, a young woman or girl might be provided with a place to live, clothes, a cell phone or an education. Sexual abuse involves rape (perpetrated by individuals or groups), sexual assault, sex with minors and “extortionist sex for food or money” (Martin 2005 p.6). Given the complex contexts within which sexual relations occur, exploitative and abusive conditions are not always easily distinguished and may be blurred, for instance, when peacekeepers refuse to pay the negotiated price for the transaction or retrospectively pay their rape victim to disguise an incident of abuse as transactional (UN General Assembly 2005; Save the Children 2014).

The ZTP is based on the assumption that sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians almost always involve unequal power dynamics and, thus, are exploitative and coercive by nature (MacKinnon 2007). A force commander of the UN mission in Rwanda put it this way: “There is no equality between partners in conflict, or even post-conflict societies, when one partner is a well-paid armed military soldier and the other is a person in poverty and instability, desperate to feed themselves and their family” (Dallaire 2009 p.184). This assessment, which assumes inherently unequal power relations between peacekeepers and local civilians, while acknowledging the material realities of those living in the host state (lack of resources, security, and opportunity), is a contested idea for several reasons (UN Secretariat 2003; Otto 2007).

First, the ZTP was designed from the top-down without including the views of local populations (Simić 2015). Although it is widely acknowledged that sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians are impacted by the relative status and affluence of peacekeepers,

the UN has been criticised for trying to prevent all sexual relations, including practices between adults that may in fact, be consensual (Simm 2013). Feminists have pointed out that by outlawing dating and more long-term relationships, the UN does not provide an effective legal framework for sexual crimes but negates civilians who live in environments with prevailing socio-economic disparities the ability to make their own decisions and thus, robs them of agency (Meger 2016; Westendorf and Searle 2017; Bell, Flynn, and Martinez Machain 2018). In consequence, some have argued that the UN's definition of SEA goes too far in bureaucratising the problem and undermines the autonomy of local populations (Otto 2007; Simić 2009; Meger 2016). In fact, the imposed ban on sexual relations based on the assumption of an inherent power imbalance had women in Bosnia ask whether they were "second class citizens" who are considered "less worthy" (Simić 2012a; 2015 p.4). Second, it has been suggested that the ZTP may be counter-productive for enforcing the rights of civilians who engage in transactional sex since it drives sex work underground, reduces reporting and limits the accuracy of statistics<sup>17</sup> (Dahrendorf 2006; Simić and O'Brien 2014). Moreover, prohibiting transactional sex deprives the most vulnerable of a coping strategy for survival since access to resources, even in return for sex, is sometimes considered a "privilege" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees and Save the Children UK 2002 p.9). Third, including statutory rape in the definition of SEA may diminish acts that constitute war crimes or crimes against humanity as SEA and prevent them from being treated with the seriousness they deserve under international law (Defeis 2008; Brown 2019).

Feminist scholarship has been divided regarding the ZTP for decades and while some critique it for perpetuating conservative and imperial stereotypes and being overly inclusive, others like the UN's Victims' Rights Advocate would like to see it go further in prohibiting all relations in the field – since currently those that do not create an imbalance of power are not prohibited (Otto 2007; *SciencesPo* 2020). The question what constitutes an imbalance of power, or lack thereof, leaves room for interpretation, creating varying degrees of enforcement of zero-tolerance between mission

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<sup>17</sup> Simić and O'Brien (2014) argue that the unclear distinction between consensual sexual relations and SEA makes identifying the scope of sexual misconduct impossible which may worsen the situation for victims on the ground.

operation sites. While some commanders issue a ban on all sexual relations, others believe this to be unrealistic and assess SEA on a case-to-case basis (Simm 2013; Simić 2015). A recent study by Heinecken and Wilén (2019) found that peacekeepers in the post-deployment phase struggle with relational turbulences due to infidelity in the field, indicating that sexual relations in missions are still routine.

Scholars have acknowledged the difficulty of establishing consent under the conditions present in host countries. In an attempt to conceptualise sexual consent in the face of poverty, Vahedi et al. (2019) demonstrated that peacekeepers represent both a source of pleasure and danger for female civilians. Accordingly, local women and girls may initiate sexual relations with UNPK personnel in anticipation of socio-economic gain while also fearing intimate partner violence, pregnancies, and sexually transmitted infections. The authors conceptualised the ability of local civilians to consciously weigh these risks and benefits as sexual consent. While this conceptualisation raises important considerations regarding the different motivations for sex with peacekeepers, it is questionable if in a context where there is a lack of education about sexuality, reproduction, and safe sex measures, as is often the case in areas of deployment, these decisions can be made fully informed. Kolbe (2015) has shown that female civilians in Haiti who had agreed to transactional sex did not have accurate knowledge regarding the prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmittable diseases, voicing beliefs according to which “the use of contraceptives<sup>18</sup> can cause disease” or that voodoo priests could “protect you from HIV and pregnancy” (p.26). Prior research from Haiti, as well as anecdotal information from other countries, has shown that some women are actively trying to become pregnant in an effort to raise their social and economic standing (Kolbe 2015; O’Brien 2017; Lee and Bartels 2019b). Lee (2017) argues that contrary to their expectations, motherhood adversely affects civilians for three reasons. First, if peacekeepers abandon them during pregnancy, their source of income may temporarily be unavailable. Second, household expenses increase due to maternity costs

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<sup>18</sup> Kolbe elaborates that according to the interviewees, contingents were known to “always” or “never” use condoms, suggesting this was the reason why there are many PKFC with the same racial background in host countries (Kolbe 2015 p.16).



and childcare. Third, mothers and children may be rejected by their support systems which may cut them off from financial resources. Thus, sexual relations with UN peacekeepers that might be perceived as a privilege almost always become a liability when peacekeepers do not take on paternal responsibility (Simm 2013; Lee 2017). Vahedi et al. (2020) suggest that in these situations, the initial given sexual consent of local civilians to engage in sexual relations is retrospectively withdrawn.

In order to establish consent and agency, one needs to distinguish between a conflict and post-conflict situation and, thus, the level of vulnerability/insecurity of local civilians (Otto, 2007). To appreciate the extent of power differentials between peacekeepers and civilians, the peacekeeper's gender, nationality, wealth, rank, age, and control over desirable resources should be considered, as well as their possession of armed weapons (Martin 2005; Kolbe 2015). Similarly, the relative insecurity of the local civilian, their level of poverty, age, gender and need for resources such as food, water, shelter, medicine, and security are factors that play into their ability to consent to sexual relations. Kolbe (2015) differentiates between transactional sex for items that represent a "need" (food, shelter, emergency medical care) and items that represent a "want" (jewellery, clothing, perfume, flowers, household, or electronic appliances) (p.12). The abuse of power is thus clearly evident when peacekeepers demand sex in exchange for humanitarian assistance but less obvious when they engage in longer-term relationships in which they provide civilians with gifts and social and material opportunities or contacts, as is common, in most relationships in non-conflict situations.

The question of whether civilians can provide consent and how this relates to the usefulness of zero-tolerance is even less straightforward when the situation of mothers, and by implication, PKFC, is considered. As shown above, mothers might, in hindsight, withdraw their consent to sexual relations, supporting the UN's position that they are unable to make an informed decision and act in their own best interest. However, after childbirth, civilians are now more than ever in need of a coping strategy for survival and depriving them of the option to engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers aggravate the poverty of mother and child. Yet, survival sex with the underlying desire to care for PKFC has been found to lead to a situation of dependency and renewed pregnancy, fuelling a cycle of

poverty and human rights violations. The question of which sexual relations are classified as SEA too gains additional nuances when the situation of PKFC is considered since whether or not they are born as a result of consensual sexual relations or sexual misconduct impacts the options available to them in terms of assistance (Lee 2017; Simić and O'Brien 2014). In recent years, the UN has made increased efforts to include the perspectives of victims in constructing answers to SEA and in order to create a sustainable solution to SEA (Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate 2020). However, as this section showed, developing a policy that comprehensively addresses their situation is complicated<sup>19</sup>.

## **2.4. Underlying Causes**

Existing literature on SEA has often aimed to analyse the conditions within peacekeeping spaces that enable sexual misconduct to thrive and persist (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Karim and Beardsley 2016). Since a range of behaviours is classified as SEA (from sadistic sexual torture to more consensual long-term relationships), the reasons that cause it are diverse and operate differently across mission-specific contexts (Westendorf and Searle 2017). Nonetheless, academic scholarship has come to some understanding regarding the motivating and permissive factors of SEA (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Jennings and Bøås 2015; Rodriguez and Kinne 2019). Besides the size of the mission, the vulnerability of the local population and the culture of PKOs - both regarding gender and race relations in the host state, as well as within contingents/sending states - seem to impact the prevalence and nature of SEA (Bell, Flynn, and Machain 2018; Westendorf 2020). In the following section, I will discuss the origin of SEA from the perspective of those who are considered socioeconomically vulnerable and those who are in a position of power.

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<sup>19</sup> The heated debate regarding the right approach to consent in armed conflict goes beyond the context of UNPK and is discussed in much detail elsewhere (Halley 2008; Otto 2009; Simić 2012a).

#### 2.4.1. Vulnerability

PKOs are generally deployed in places where conflict has disintegrated community structures, and the local population lives in volatile conditions, impacted by humanitarian crises, violence and displacement (Shotton 2006; Bennett 2011; Cockayne and Lupel 2011). Existing research shows that the lack of resources and security in many conflict settings makes civilians susceptible to SEA and allows sex trade and sex trafficking to flourish when missions are deployed (Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009; Jennings 2010; Nordås and Rustad 2013). The arrival of relatively affluent, predominantly male peacekeepers creates a demand for transactional sex that boosts the sex industry (Simić 2010; OIOS 2015). This has been attributed to the fact that civilians who live in adverse socio-economic conditions and have few educational and/or employment opportunities, engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers to improve their dire financial situations, gain safety and security<sup>20</sup> (Beber et al. 2017; Westendorf and Searle 2017; Lee and Bartels 2019). In other instances, civilians are raped when trying to get humanitarian assistance and resources like food or medicine from peacekeepers or carry out daily chores under UN protection (Bader and Muscati 2014). This kind of “opportunistic rape” has been described as occurring more frequently in unregulated contexts where CRSV has long been a norm, such as the DRC or the PKOs in West Africa (Meger 2010; Westendorf and Searle 2017 p.386). Based on fieldwork in Southern Sudan, Côte d’Ivoire, and Haiti, researchers from Save the Children found that the most vulnerable children (orphans, displaced or ostracised children, as well as those who were reliant on humanitarian assistance) were the most prone to being sexually exploited and abused (Csáky 2008). Thus, I foremost understand SEA to be the consequence of socio-economic power relations and conflict-related vulnerability.

This category of extreme vulnerability includes mothers of children born of SEA or other forms of CRSV. When SEA results in childbirth, victims are often left without any provision for the maintenance of their children. The pregnancy may cause them to drop out of school/lose work or

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<sup>20</sup> This is illustrated in the slogan “Feel safe tonight: sleep with a peacekeeper” which was printed on T-shirts in Timor-Leste (Koller 1999 p.1).

diminish their security otherwise, causing an even greater imbalance of power between peacekeeper and woman/girl, and thus risk for SEA (Martin 2005; Villaverde 2015; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2020). This is particularly concerning for those raising their children in communities that frown upon pregnancy out of wedlock and children conceived with foreigners since those perceptions may deprive mothers of community social support, creating circumstances in which they rely on transactional sex with peacekeepers to provide for their children (Holt 2004). The thesis will show this situation of dependency is not uncommon in communities where material deprivation and stigma place mothers in a position in which they have limited tools to ensure their PKFC's well-being.

In many countries where peacekeepers are stationed, patriarchal structures have manifested themselves in inequitable gender norms that make women/girls more susceptible to SEA and men/boys more likely to become perpetrators. Examples of this are host societies in which the interests of women are secondary to those of men when it comes to education, inheritance, and marriage or where their work is remunerated or valued less, placing women in a subordinated economic position. In addition, norms around sexual and reproductive health care typically restrict women's sexual freedom, for instance, through lack of access to contraceptives and safe abortions, making even consensual sexual relations more dangerous and pregnancies more likely to occur (Wheeler 2020). The same social attitudes that enable SEA are known to complicate the situation of single mothers once a PKFC exposes their involvement in extra-marital sexual relations. Therefore, many of the economic and gender-based implications of deploying peacekeepers in areas with prevailing social inequalities can be observed in the circumstances surrounding the birth of PKFC.

#### 2.4.2. Power

Theories which argue that SEA is a product of peacekeeping being dominated by patriarchal structures and gender inequitable norms have received considerable attention in explaining the variation of SEA in different missions. Investigating the gendered effects of deploying peacekeepers, some scholars suggest that the level of gender inequality, stereotyping, and misogyny in TCCs constitute factors that

increase the likelihood of peacekeepers abusing their power (Karim and Beardsley 2016). Moreover, the level of development in the host state and the degree of CRSV perpetrated by armed groups, coupled with a culture of impunity due to a gradual normalisation of sexual violence, has been said to determine the prevalence of SEA in different missions (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Neudorfer 2015).

Both military and police have previously been identified as perpetrators of SEA; however, military personnel have more often been associated with misconduct and have faced more allegations of planned and sadistic forms of rape (Karim and Beardsley 2016; UN Peacekeeping 2021a). Scholars have argued that masculine norms that are prevalent within a military context produce sexually violent behaviours that translate into misconduct (Enloe 2000; Whitworth 2004). Referred to as ‘militarized masculinity’, the culture that underlies military training is considered to teach “particular ways of seeing the world in terms of us/them, friend/enemy, human/non-human” and link power and control to gender relations which subordinate women (Fetherston 1998 p.170; Higate 2007). Militarised masculinity thus describes a group culture with attitudes dominated by a form of hypermasculinity that originates from warrior culture and functions in opposition to gender equality goals (Simić 2010; Mattsson 2016). The “military rules” within PKOs have been said to protect personnel from accusations and encourage soldiers to act as bystanders or facilitators of SEA, culminating in a “wall of silence” (Schmitt 1992 p.1; Hipkins 2003). Moreover, constructions of militarised masculinity may determine that peacekeepers do not consider sex with civilians problematic<sup>21</sup>.

In light of this, it is noted that until recently, peacekeeping missions were essentially all-male. While there has been a significant increase in female peacekeepers over the past ten to 15 years, as of April 2021, still only 5,617 of the 78,988 deployed uniformed peacekeepers are women (UN

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<sup>21</sup> Reflecting an ethos of hyper-masculine attitudes, over the years, peacekeepers have voiced opinions according to which having sex with civilians is a) their right, b) a necessity, c) a leisure activity, d) an outlet for stress and aggression, e) a way to increase competitiveness and productivity among the team, f) a way to boost the ego and improve confidence, g) a reaction to predatory local women, h) a part of male identity, i) a defence of heterosexuality, j) an altruistic intervention, k) a form of respecting the local culture or k) way to make vulnerable civilians feel more secure (Razack 2000; Mackay 2001; Cockburn and Hubic 2002; Higate 2004; Higate and Henry 2004; Jennings 2014).

Peacekeeping 2021f). Gender training and increased ratios of female peacekeepers have been found to challenge aggressively masculine spaces and attitudes; however, it is doubtful that gender training can eradicate, dismantle and deconstruct deeply rooted gendered stereotypes (Simić 2015; Carson 2016). Yet, it has also been argued that overemphasising the role of masculinity or patriarchy may mask the individual responsibility of men (Kirby 2013). Related to power dimensions, although relatively unexplored compared to hyper-masculine norms, race relations between the expatriate peacekeeper and local civilian in “the shadows of colonial violence” may fuel SEA (Razack 2000 p.129; Henry 2013; 2004; Westendorf and Searle 2017). SEA as the product of colonialism will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter which describes the DRC case study.

## **2.5. Consequences**

Regardless of the background of the incident, SEA often has severe and far-reaching consequences. In the following, I have classified the impact of SEA into consequences for victims, communities, perpetrators, and missions.

### **2.5.1. Consequence for Victims**

Potential consequences of SEA for victims<sup>22</sup> include medical risks, psychological conditions, social repercussions, and economic insecurity. Medical risks of SEA include infection with sexually transmittable diseases and injuries like tears and fistulas, incontinence, infertility and chronic pain (UN General Assembly 2005; Allais 2011). Due to the widespread poverty and restricted health care services in many conflict and post-conflict settings, these issues may remain untreated, leading to further complications and long-term health impairments (Nieuwenhuizen 2013). In cases of unwanted pregnancies, emergency contraception or abortions may not be accessible due to legal restrictions or

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<sup>22</sup> Although there is significant documentation of male victims, the present thesis considers female victims due to its focus on pregnancy and childbirth.

costs (Tayler-Smith et al. 2012). Illegal abortions as well as unsupervised labour and delivery present considerable risks to both mother and child (Allais 2011).

Psychological conditions comprise feelings of worthlessness, fear and stress, which can manifest themselves in depression or other psychological disorders (Nieuwenhuizen 2013). Like other forms of sexual violence, SEA may be associated with a higher likelihood of anxiety disorder, mood disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, and suicide attempts (UN General Assembly 2005; Rees et al. 2011). Prior research has shown that certain patterns of CRSV, such as having multiple assailants, lead to a higher likelihood of experiencing psychological trauma, suggesting that different forms of SEA may lead to varying levels of risk for psychological suffering (Bartels et al. 2010). Women or girls who had sexual relations with peacekeepers hoping to enter a long-term commitment might feel disappointment and struggle with low self-esteem, guilt and shame (Whitworth 2004). Those who were forced into sexual relations (by perpetrators, family members or others profiting from it) may feel betrayed, develop trust issues and insecure attachment styles. Existing work shows that women who became pregnant as a result of CRSV have a greater risk to develop psychological difficulties (Bartels et al. 2010). Mothers' psychological discomfort may also be related to their children's deprivation of resources (Wheeler 2020).

Pertaining to social repercussions, SEA has been shown to cause ostracism and stigma for victims that may lead to their rejection by husbands, families and communities (Murdoch 2009; Blau 2016). In settings with patriarchal structures, having extra-marital sexual relations (and untraditionally conceived children) can be perceived as a violation of social and cultural norms (Lee 2017). In some host states, the community perception that HIV/AIDS is prevalent amongst sex-workers and peacekeepers adds to victims' isolation and shuts them off from their social, economic, and emotional support systems (US General Accounting Office 2001; UN General Assembly 2005; Sen, Datta, and Mutumayi 2011). The resulting loss of status makes it difficult for victims to participate in society, form new relationships, get married or find work (Whitworth 2004).

Related to their altered social standing, victims may struggle with augmented economic insecurity, a lack of income, resources, shelter, and protection (Lee and Bartels 2019a; Vahedi et al. 2020). The risk of adverse economic implications increases significantly when children are born as a result of SEA (Patel and Tripodi 2007; O'Brien 2017). Without subsidies from the UN or peacekeeper fathers, single mothers may be left with little to no financial stability (Bracken 2014 p.1; Lee and Bartels 2019b). This is especially concerning for minors who cannot shoulder the responsibilities of motherhood (Lee and Bartels 2019b). The UN acknowledged in 2005 that families of children conceived through SEA might be trapped in a vicious circle of “desperate financial situation[s]” that can push them “into further exploitative relationships with peacekeeping personnel and others in order for them and their children to survive” (UN General Assembly 2005 p. 9, 25). In practice, affected women or girls might be confronted with the financial burden of providing for an infant while facing the sociocultural prejudice of pregnancy outside marriage and suspicion due to the ambiguous status of their mixed-race children (Higate and Henry 2004; Rudén and Utas 2009).

The UN VRA argues that besides the original victim, the families of SEA victims, especially their children, are also harmed by the incidents and need to be included in a victim-centred approach to SEA (*SciencesPo* 2020; Wheeler 2020). Similar to their mothers, PKFC might face stigma by family and community for their illegitimate conception and foreign appearance, depriving them of kinship and economic, social and emotional support (Allais 2011; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2020). Since PKFC are often conceived through sex-work, transactional sex and sexually exploitative relationships, they were shown to grow up under adverse economic conditions (Higate and Henry 2004; Lee and Bartels 2019). The absence of peacekeeper fathers exacerbates this condition and differentiates PKFC from other children in conflict settings whose fathers contribute to their socio-economic well-being (Lee and Bartels 2019b; Vahedi, Bartels, and Lee 2020;).

In some countries where peacekeepers have fathered children, the legal protection of single mothers has been described as weak, and paternal power structures may determine that if the father of a child is absent, paternal uncles or other family members exercise rights over the children (UN



Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2001; *BBC News* 2002). Relatedly, the legitimacy of women-led households and the dual role of mothers as carers and income-generators is still contested in many host states, causing some PKFC to be abandoned, become homeless or grow up in orphanages (Rehn and Sirleaf 2002; Muawuya Zakariah Adam Gombe 2010). Due to their mother's hardships and father's absence, PKFC might face disproportionate psychosocial challenges trying to make sense of who they are and how they fit into (post)-conflict societies (Glaesmer 2012; Lee 2017). In the context of present-day Sierra Leone, the identification of children as fathered by peacekeepers has been compared to a "social death", raising the question of what their integration may look like (Lawal 2019 p.1).

### 2.5.2. Consequences for Communities

SEA often has broader societal implications that are damaging beyond the level of the individual and fracture the social cohesion of communities. When engaging in sexual relations with civilians, peacekeepers do not only violate the non-fraternisation policy of the UN but often disrespect the local norms of communities regarding sexuality, family and marriage thereby causing societal conflict that may have long-term and inter-generational impact (OIOS 2002; Westerndorf 2016). In the early 2000s, scholars have reported friction between peacekeepers and local men who resented foreigners for having sexual relations with "their women" (Higate and Henry 2004 p.492). The lack of support by peacekeepers for children fathered in host states has been said to have fuelled these disputes further (Kent 2007). Exacerbated by the growing population of PKFC, open hostility and antagonism towards the intentions of UN personnel grew in host countries, negatively affecting the peacebuilding process (Rudén and Utas 2009).

As shown above, the shame and social stigma of SEA-related pregnancies deny some women/girls the ability to return to their families, homes and villages, prevent them from pursuing their education/careers, and having a traditional family of their own. This may end up dismantling communities and causing irreparable damage that severely harms the development of host countries (Afeni 2012; Wiker 2016). Coupled with the fact that many women, regardless of whether or not they

consented to sexual relations, are already in precarious life situations and fight existential problems, children born of SEA are considered to substantially weaken the economic security of the families they are born into (Higate and Henry 2004; Lee and Bartels 2019a).

The transactional sex economy that PKOs foster create outlasts most missions and might shape gendered economic and power relations in the future, impacting public health developments while potentially setting back societal gender and human rights goals (Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009; O'Brien 2017). One consequence of the increase in sex work can be the spread of HIV/AIDS which victims might pass on to their future partners and children (Harrington 2007). Feminist voices have highlighted the risk that SEA may normalise sexual violence in host societies and institutionalise impunity within the security sector and forces that peacekeepers train and mentor (Westendorf 2020). Hence, SEA compounds the insecurity of already vulnerable families and communities and undermines the long-term development of host states.

### 2.5.3. Consequence for Perpetrators

The ZTP condemns violations of peacekeepers' code of conduct as serious offences with grounds for administrative and disciplinary measures like suspension, repatriation and dismissal (UN Secretariat 2003). Holding peacekeepers accountable for acts of SEA, however, is difficult due to the lack of functioning police and judicial systems in many host states and the various forms of immunity that apply to peacekeeping personnel. Peacekeepers are governed by agreements between host states, the UN and TCCs (including the Status-of-Forces Agreement, hereafter SOFA, and the Memorandum of Understanding, hereafter MoU), which create jurisdictional limitations that have been shown to complicate accountability processes and allow offenders to hide behind a screen of impunity (UN Treaty Series 1946; UN General Assembly 1990; 2011).

Pertaining to military personnel, the model MoU between the UN and TCCs outlines the obligations of member states regarding their contingents' conduct and discipline, such as the requirements for pre-deployment training (UN General Assembly 1990; 2011). The MoU further

specifies that TCCs have exclusive jurisdiction over their contingents. This means that the UN lacks the authority to sanction and discipline most personnel in missions (Simm 2013). If an allegation of SEA emerges, the UN can carry out preliminary investigations and make recommendations to TCCs regarding disciplinary proceedings. These recommendations, however, are not binding and although TCCs are required to pass the allegation on to the appropriate local authority and take action, the follow up to cases of misconduct has been patchy (UN General Assembly 2007a; UN Peacekeeping 2021a). Moreover, the response rate of TCCs regarding the progress and outcome of investigations is low, especially on issues pertaining to paternity (OIOS 2015; UN Peacekeeping 2021a). Therefore, uniformed personnel are typically repatriated but not necessarily prosecuted if a credible allegation of sexual misconduct is reported. This prevents criminal accountability and evokes the impression that “you can rape or abuse women and girls and you can get away with it” (Ferstman 2013; Lewis Mudge in Sieff 2016 p.1). Based on the UN misconduct tracking system, as of July 2021, 196 allegations of SEA against uniformed personnel have been substantiated (of a total of 771 received). Out of those, only 57 offenders, have been jailed, while most have been repatriated (UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

UN officials, staff, and experts on missions have functional immunity for crimes committed in the host state (UN Treaty Series 1946). This means that they cannot be prosecuted for actions undertaken while in official UN capacity, for instance, while on duty. The SG can waive immunity for UN staff accused of committing serious crimes (Miller 2006; 2007). While this would allow the host state to prosecute perpetrators, SEA often takes place in countries with failed judicial systems that may not be able or willing to prosecute them and thus, using this leverage is often ineffective. This impunity has at least in some instances led peacekeepers to pursue, harass and assault civilians in peacekeeping contexts free of consequences (Whitworth 2004). Based on the UN misconduct tracking system, to date, 60 allegations of SEA against civilian personnel (of a total of 302 received) have been substantiated. Out of those, most offenders have been barred from working for the UN, but it is not clear whether any disciplinary measures have followed (UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

A similarly critical gap of accountability has emerged in cases of paternity. In instances in which local civilians fall pregnant, most often, the fathers will have left the mission area at the time of birth<sup>23</sup> (Blau 2016). The SOFA and MoU determine that member states are required to pursue paternity claims under the national legal system of the purported father; however, conducting investigations and DNA tests in national courts while mother and child might live in an IDP camp on another continent is difficult, especially since member states are often uncooperative (Sieff 2016; Conduct in UN Peacekeeping 2021). Bound by the aforementioned agreements, the UN's role in advancing paternity claims is limited to coordinating and facilitating them, causing many paternity claims to go unresolved (UN General Assembly 2015). Based on these realities, the UN's VRA concludes that exploiting and abusing civilians is still "not costly enough" for perpetrators (*SciencesPo* 2020).

#### 2.5.4. Consequences for Missions

Sexual misconduct by peacekeepers affects the outcomes of individual PKOs and the work of the UN as a whole on multiple levels (Nordås and Rustad 2013; OIOS 2015). When peacekeepers violate the rights of civilians, they undermine their mandate, compromise their mission's ability to perpetuate peace and advise the host state on adherence to international norms such as gender equality (UN General Assembly 2005; Afeno 2012; Stern 2015; Proulx 2016; Jennings 2019). The repeated occurrence of SEA and the UN's ongoing failure to prevent and punish offences impacts the success of missions which is dependent on the trust between host countries and the UN (UN Secretariat 2007 p.6; Askin 2016). Peacekeepers, who are expected to act more ethical than local warring factions, lose their legitimacy as facilitators of peace when they engage in SEA (Simm 2013; Neudorfer 2014). The betrayal of the host state's trust is compounded when the UN fails to care for the victims of SEA and their children, making it more difficult for PKOs to succeed (Deschamps, Jallow, and Sooka 2015; OIOS

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<sup>23</sup> A typical employment for military and police personnel in contingents lasts between six-nine months. If the father is a UN official, volunteer or contractor he might be employed for longer; however in the large majority of cases peacekeepers are redeployed elsewhere or repatriated before their children are born (Villaverde 2015; Blau 2016).

2015). The long-term entrenchment of transactional sex economies and violence against women in host states that emerges as a consequence of widescale SEA undermines the objectives a UN mission stands for and weakens the fabric on which missions are built (Alchin, Gouws, and Heinecken 2018).

By engaging in any form of sexual relations, peacekeepers further lose their neutrality and may be perceived as favouring a certain group. Grady (2010) has shown that SEA threatens the impartiality of peacekeepers since engaging in sexual relations with any party during conflict might be perceived as creating a political advantage for them, thus breaching the principle of unbiased interference. For instance, the publicly known sexual relations between Belgian peacekeepers and Tutsi women in pre-genocide Rwanda led to the social perception that the UN was pro-Tutsi (Grady 2010).

Westendorf (2020) argues that the effects of SEA on peacekeeping outcomes remain poorly understood, with SEA often being treated “as a relatively minor issue, rather than one at the heart of peacekeeping effectiveness” (p.1). Yet, the normalisation of SEA may institutionalise itself within peacekeeping forces and may be exported to subsequent deployments (Westendorf 2020). Costs related to prevention, prosecution and remedial action may divert UN resources away from other vital issues of advancing peace and security and decrease funding for missions (Westendorf 2020). They might further diminish the confidence of individual peacekeepers in the work of PKOs, reduce their commitment and increase staff attrition (Westendorf 2020).

## **2.6. UN Response**

The UN response to SEA, which has often been described as reactive in nature, coalesces around the pillars of prevention, prosecution and remedial action (Awori, Lutz, and Thapa 2013). In the following, I will provide an overview of the most significant policy developments across these areas before providing more detailed information on each of them.

Initially, sexual misconduct was sometimes described as typical male behaviour rather than a systematic problem, brushed off with a ‘boys will be boys’ attitude - a statement that was voiced in

response to sexual misconduct by peacekeepers in Cambodia and illustrates the laissez-faire attitude the UN had towards SEA in the 1990s (Martin 2005). With the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the organisation adopted a more rigorous outlook and implemented a number of policies and preventive mechanisms to stop SEA from occurring. This includes the UN's broader Women, Peace and Security agenda and strategy of gender mainstreaming that reaffirmed the important role of women in peacekeeping and mandated that mission commanders take the impact of SEA on local women and girls seriously (UN Security Council 2000; Whitworth 2004; Steinkogler 2011; Kirby and Shepherd 2016). Following the West African 'aid for sex' scandal, the UN cracked down strongly on SEA by imposing a ban on (almost) all sexual relations in the field (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2002; Naik 2003; UN Secretariat 2003; Simm 2013). Beyond providing agreed-upon definitions of exploitation and abuse, the ZTP obliged UN staff to report offences and thus, marked a signal break from missions by-and-large ignoring allegations earlier on (UN Secretariat 2003)<sup>24</sup>.

Yet, SEA continued to proliferate, leading to new wave of policy development. Following a series of sexual abuse allegations in the DRC, SG Kofi Annan commissioned the so-called 'Zeid-report' in 2004 "to determine the nature and extent" of SEA and inform a strategy to eliminate future cases of misconduct (Hoge 2005; UN General Assembly 2005 p.9; Ndulo 2009). The report, prepared by former peacekeeper and UN representative of Jordan, Prince Zeid Raad Al-Hussein, is credited with providing the first comprehensive account of SEA and setting out numerous proposals for reform (UN General Assembly 2005). Besides detailing that SEA in the DRC was both widespread and ongoing, Zeid Raad Al-Hussein also groundbreakingly acknowledged the existence of PKFC (UN General Assembly 2005). The Zeid-report was followed by a period of remarkable policy output: the adoption of a new model MoU between TCCs and the UN that promulgated provisions on SEA, resolution 62/63 on criminal accountability of perpetrators and resolution 62/214 on assistance for victims (UN General Assembly 2005; 2007d; 2008a).

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<sup>24</sup> Since 2003, the SG releases an annual report that records allegations of SEA and discusses the effectiveness of measures for protection from SEA.

In 2010, a global review of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee highlighted that the UN response to SEA remained ineffective and that the designed policies did not translate into mission-specific contexts (Inter-Agency Standing Committee 2010). Shortly after, Conduct and Discipline Services were strengthened to better enforce UN standards, resolve discipline issues, and process allegations. Since 2010, the Conduct and Discipline Unit has been tasked with managing the UN misconduct tracking system, an online database that tracks allegations of vetted misconduct filed against UN peacekeepers (Askin 2016; Karim and Beardsley 2016). Although criticised for being subject to significant fluctuations due to changes in policies, reporting, and taxonomies, the misconduct tracking system contributes to greater transparency and thus is considered an important development (UN General Assembly 2005b; Simić 2015; Grady 2016). Since 2015, the published information includes the nationality of uniformed personnel, the type of allegation (e.g., soliciting transactional sex, transactional sex, exploitative relationships, non-consensual physical contact, rape and sexual assault), whether a paternity claim<sup>25</sup> was filed, whether paternity was established, the status and duration of the investigation and actions/disciplinary measures undertaken to hold perpetrators to account (UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

In 2015, an independent review panel brought the extensive violent abuse of women and children in the CAR to light (Deschamps, Jallow, and Sooka 2015; Schechner and Hinshaw 2015;). The report not only revealed “a pattern of sexual violence” perpetrated by some contingents but also that the UN response to the matter had been “seriously flawed” (Deschamps, Jallow, and Sooka 2015 p.1,2). To target accountability and clarify the obligations of member states, several panel recommendations were implemented and resolution 2272 was adopted (UN Security Council 2016; UN General Assembly 2016a; 2016b; Whalan 2017). Urging TCCs to carry out criminal sanctions under national laws, the resolution calls upon sending states to investigate allegations expeditiously and hold

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<sup>25</sup> Based on the Conduct and Discipline website a paternity claim refers to an allegation of SEA “where the actions resulted in pregnancy and the birth of a child. A potential paternity claim refers to situations where the complainant or victim is pregnant, but the child has not yet been born. Paternity established refers to matters where paternity of the child has been proven either through DNA testing or through admission by the father” (UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

their nationals accountable, while granting the SG the authority to repatriate police or military units when there is credible evidence of widespread or systematic misconduct. AIDS-Free World's Code Blue Campaign, which seeks to end impunity for SEA, has criticised the SG for not exercising this leverage in cases where there has been extensive documentation of offences (AIDS-Free World 2020) <sup>26</sup>.

In 2017, SG António Guterres called SEA a top priority for the organisation and appointed a high-level task force to develop a "game-changing strategy" to combat SEA (UNSG 2017 p.1). Informed by the work of the task force, he outlined a new approach to SEA in his 2017 annual report, characterised by four objectives: Putting victims first, ending impunity, building a multi-stakeholder network to support prevention and response efforts, and improving strategic communications and transparency (UN General Assembly 2017). Acknowledging that "no magic wand exists" to end SEA, the new approach is considered a significant improvement to the UN's previous response (UN General Assembly 2017 p.6; Nesi 2018). While the UN has made notable efforts to address allegations of sexual misconduct and restore confidence in the organisation, addressing but especially preventing sexual misconduct remains one of the biggest challenges of peacekeeping activities today.

### 2.6.1. Prevention

To ensure greater sensitivity towards sexual relations in the field, gender awareness training is being implemented at various stages of deployment, in order to prevent SEA. The UN supports member states in the delivery of pre-deployment training via e-learning materials that provide military groups with UN guidance on how to carry out their duty professionally (Carson 2016). In-country training is

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<sup>26</sup> Although repeatedly involved in allegations of SEA and currently under investigation for rape as a crime against humanity in their home country, Burundian military are deployed in the CAR. In an interview with Code Blue, a Burundian activist says: "The gross human rights violations, including torture and sexual violence, which are committed by our security forces, are very well documented. How, then, are these same forces deployed in peacekeeping missions around the world?" (AIDS-Free World 2020 p.13). After the number of Burundian troops employed in CAR were increased in 2019, the president of the Burundian Coalition for the International Criminal Court voiced that employing Burundian peacekeepers is not only a violation of UN policy but that the UN was indirectly funding the crimes committed in Burundi. Code Blue argues that based on Resolution 2272, the UN has to take the appropriate steps to stop Burundian peacekeepers abusing the local population in CAR.



designed to help peacekeepers cope with the stressors and psychological challenges of adapting to the host country's environment and contains training on the situation of local populations (UN General Assembly 2017). In the last two years, the UN has sought to improve training initiatives by developing a mobile phone app that illustrates ways to prevent SEA, as well as videos on how to report it that are now shown on aircrafts that transport uniformed personnel to host states (UN General Assembly 2021). During deployment, gender advisors are available to help peacekeepers uphold ethics and the UN standards of conduct.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that these efforts are not enough to change the perceptions of social power and gender relations of peacekeepers with misogynistic attitudes (Lyytikäinen 2007; Smith 2014; Sieff 2016). The Conduct and Discipline Unit oversees and works with Conduct and Discipline Teams (CDTs) of individual UN missions to improve prevention efforts like curfews, off-limit areas, and non-fraternisation policies (Askin 2016). Over the years, a number of reforms have aimed to create a "culture of prevention", including mission-specific programmes for more effective oversight, risk assessments and pocket-sized cards or posters that remind field personnel of the UN rules and prohibitions relating to sexual relations with civilians (Hahn 2016; UN General Assembly 2016b; 2017; Connors 2019 p.6). Since 2018, the names of UN personnel implicated in an allegation are included in a UN system-wide database which prevents the rehiring of staff involved in previous allegations. This might have some weight towards enhancing peacekeepers' behaviour in the field (UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination 2021).

The second stream of prevention aims to provide local populations with information regarding what conduct is expected of peacekeepers and what their rights are if misconduct occurs, for example through radio messages (Jennings 2008; Hárs 2021). In 2020, the community outreach and communication fund was established to raise awareness regarding reporting mechanisms (UN General Assembly 2021).

Despite continuous efforts to improve protection from SEA and training programmes for personnel, the preventative measures in place have fallen short of eliminating the problem. Madeline

Rees from the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom voiced that without accountability measures, "UN resolutions promising to protect women remain little more than a wishlist" (Ratcliffe 2017 p.1). Amending the model MoU to include a mandatory DNA databank that contains samples from all peacekeepers has been discussed as both a measure of prevention that encourages peacekeepers to act according to UN policy, as well as one that enhances accountability since allegations of rape and paternity can be much more easily confirmed or refuted (UN General Assembly 2005; Blau 2016). However, this strategy has not yet been implemented.

### 2.6.2. Prosecution

As the UN fails to ensure ethical behaviour by its peacekeepers, it also struggles to prosecute wrongdoings and hold peacekeepers accountable for their actions, leading some to argue that "impunity is the norm, and accountability the rare exception" (Askin 2016 p.1).

SEA and childbirth are known to be affected by chronic underreporting, partially because the UN still fails to create an environment in which victims feel confident and comfortable to report it (Csáky 2008; Jennings 2008; Leonard 2017). In conflict settings with widespread CRSV, there may be a vacuum of liability and effective legal responses, as well as a lack of protection networks for victims that discourages them from coming forward (Csáky 2008). In some countries reporting may expose criminalised activities such as transactional sex, same-sex relations or adultery (*SciencesPo* 2020). Since only a fraction of perpetrators is prosecuted, the relatively high risk of reporting might outweigh the comparably low chance for financial compensation (Ndulo 2009; Kovatch 2016). Some victims may rely on peacekeepers for accessing aid or other resources and fear that reporting SEA might cause them to lose their assistance or source of income (UN General Assembly 2009; Lee and Bartels 2019b).

Although all peacekeeping missions are bound to the same guidelines, it is expected that UNPK bases differ in how rigorously they approach SEA. While some UN officials will take the ZTP exceptionally serious, others will turn a blind eye to protect their contingents (superiors, colleagues, friends) from losing their reputations and jobs. This risk is exacerbated if allegations are not reported

to official contact points of CDTs but field staff directly (Awori, Lutz, and Thapa 2013). Due to the high number of incidents that remain unreported, as well as allegations at least occasionally being falsely discarded, relatively few cases are assumed to make it to the Investigations Division of CDTs (AIDS-Free World 2020).

If the UN finds an allegation to be credible, pay for the respective peacekeeper is suspended<sup>27</sup>, UN staff are dismissed, and uniformed personnel repatriated. When allegations pertaining to uniformed personnel are made, the UN then turns the investigation over to the respective sending state (Harrington 2007). Although TCCs are under contractual obligation to appoint a National Investigation Officer to assess evidence and decide whether an allegation should be prosecuted by home state authorities, this does not always occur. For instance, Burundi has repeatedly ignored the requests of the UN to appoint a National Investigation Officer, breaching its contract by giving no response to allegations (AIDS-Free World 2020). The UN will continue to request updates from TCCs at regular time intervals and has imposed a six-month deadline for investigations to be concluded (UN General Assembly 2015; Mudgway 2016). In 2019, a leaked UN report revealed a litany of problems with investigations, detailing how DNA samples “were left to rot” while investigators were discrediting witnesses, resulting in cases being closed due to unsubstantiated or insufficient evidence (Kleinfeld 2019 p.1).

If an allegation is substantiated/paternity established, exercising disciplinary measures is still challenging. TCCs often have no interest or limited capacity to prosecute their nationals (Ferstman 2013; Petrova 2015). In some sending states, the domestic legal systems are unable to punish their citizens for crimes committed in the host state (Human Rights Watch 2016b; Vandenberg 2017). Disparities in national criminal laws may mean that some types of offences are not prosecutable in TCCs, for reasons such as the evidence collected not being permissible in local courts, states having a lower age of consent, a varying approach to prostitution, or not accepting paternity claims (Hampson

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<sup>27</sup> As soon as TCCs are notified regarding an allegation, pay for the implicated peacekeeper is suspended. If the allegation is not substantiated, pay for the implicated peacekeeper is returned via the member state.

2005; Mandrup and Cold-Ravnkilde 2017; Wheeler 2020). Yet the UN can neither prosecute offenders themselves nor intervene with the jurisdiction of TCCs since its authority is limited to repatriating peacekeepers and barring them from future missions (Blau 2016). In 2008, the UN repatriated 100 Indian soldiers from the DRC for sexual misconduct. Although the UN made a recommendation for the peacekeepers to be penalised, Indian authorities decided that all of the accused were innocent, leaving the UN no possibility to investigate further or retrace the matter (Caplan 2012).

For civilian staff, the primary jurisdiction to investigate and prosecute offenders falls with the country where the crime occurred. However, host states often have limited capacity to deal with SEA, and their legal systems may be corrupt or dysfunctional. If they do not carry out their responsibility, extraterritorial jurisdiction can be exercised by the sending state. The lack of prosecution, in this case, is exemplified in the recent case of a British UN official who is accused of child rape in the DRC. In July 2017, the mother of the victim reported the allegation to Congolese authorities. Since the DRC did not press charges, the allegations were investigated internally and a series of offences established (Code Blue Campaign 2021 p.1). While the implicated peacekeeper's employment was terminated, he was never prosecuted because the United Kingdom decided not to investigate the matter. The fact that even a country with a well-functioning legal system that claims to be a global leader in the fight against SEA opts out of prosecuting offenders shows that the system is still alarmingly ineffective (Code Blue Campaign 2021 p.1). Based on the UN's misconduct tracking system, substantiated allegations may result in repatriation but rarely punishment, allowing perpetrators to walk away with near-complete impunity (Freedman 2018; Perlmutter 2021; UN Peacekeeping 2021).

### 2.6.3. Victim Support

Based on the UN's set of principles to combat impunity, victims of SEA have the right to justice and reparations, including compensation and rehabilitation; however, if perpetrators hide behind their immunity, these are not provided to victims (OHCHR 2005; UN Economic and Social Council Commission on Human Rights 2005).

The UN first outlined support mechanisms for victims of SEA in 2008 by introducing the “Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support to Victims” [hereafter Comprehensive strategy], a document detailing how the UN will provide support to those who have been sexually exploited or abused by anyone working under a UN contract (UN General Assembly 2008). While not intended as a means of compensation, the strategy outlines that “victims of SEA by UN staff and related officials should receive appropriate assistance and support in a timely manner” (p.2). Accordingly, victims can request “medical care, legal services, support to deal with the psychological and social effects of the experience, and immediate material care such as food, clothing, emergency and safe shelter” (p.3). Victims whose complaints are verified are entitled to additional reparative support. The strategy further sets out a focal point network in order to monitor the implementation of support. In 2009, a UN-wide “Victim Assistance Guide” was issued that clarified details about reporting mechanisms, complaint services as well as the role of the UN in facilitating access to victim support (ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on Protection from SEA 2009).

By adopting the Comprehensive strategy, the UN distanced itself from the premise of non-responsibility for the actions committed by peacekeepers (Lee 2017). However, instead of offering compensation through the UN, it refers accountability to assailants and their home countries, emphasising the individual liability of perpetrators (UN General Assembly 2008). In providing intermediary assistance, it further relies on existing in-country entities for victims of sexual violence, stating that “[t]he nature and scope of the assistance to be provided is determined on a case-by-case basis and depends on the services which are locally available to other GBV [gender-based violence] survivors” (ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on Protection from SEA 2009 p.6).

Shortcomings in providing remedial actions were discussed in a 2009 report that was issued by the SG to inform the effectiveness of the Comprehensive strategy (UN General Assembly 2009). The report pointed out that there were issues with underreporting, a lack of safe and accessible complaint pathways, and no designated funding to implement services and expand the existing programmes of NGOs and other service providers. The VRA has argued that local entities assisting

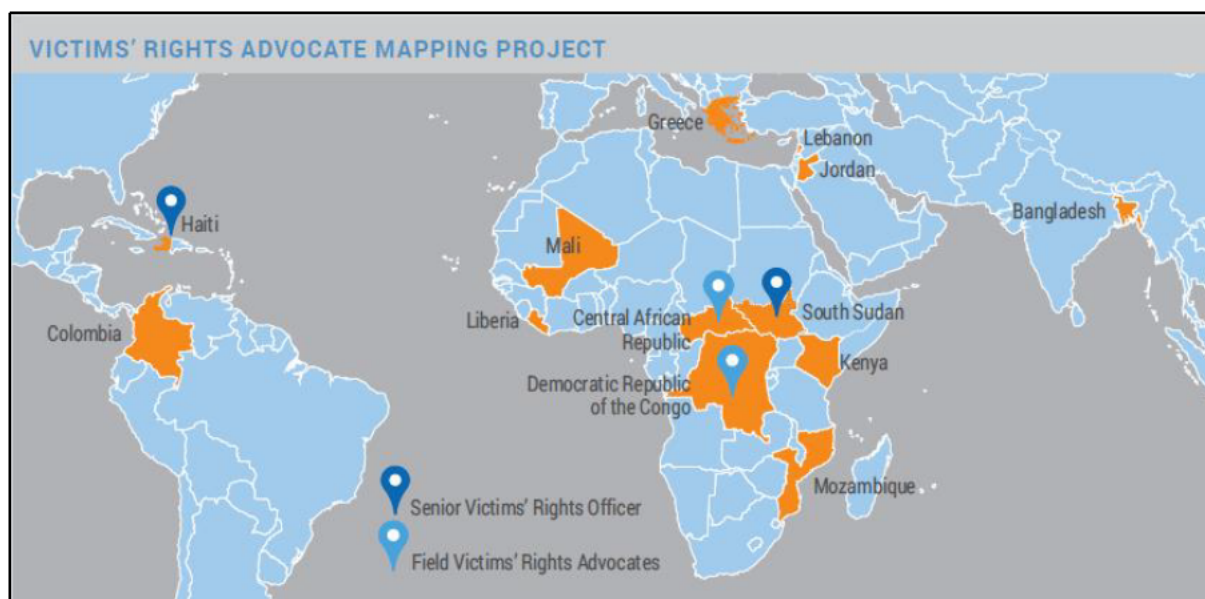
victims of sexual violence more broadly were further not equipped to cater to the unique needs of SEA victims, such as those relating to paternity and legal claims (*SciencesPo* 2020).

In 2015, the independent review panel investigating SEA in the CAR reported that the welfare of victims was still “an afterthought, if considered at all” and that this lack of justice “failed to satisfy the UN’s core mandate to address human rights violations” (Deschamps, Jallow, and Sooka 2015 p.1). Prompted by this, SG Ban Ki-moon established the Trust Fund in Support of Victims in 2016 (UN General Assembly 2016a). Designed to address service gaps and support civil society actors in offering specialised services to victims, such as rehabilitative and transformative opportunities, the Trust Fund has proven itself to be essential in translating the Comprehensive strategy into practical support on the ground, for instance, through funding income-generating projects that alleviate the poverty of victims and strengthen their capacity to sustain themselves (Office of the VRA 2020; *UN Peacekeeping* 2020). Although some projects lately have been suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trust Fund has a clearly positive impact on victims’ lives (*The Trust Fund for Victims* 2020).

When António Guterres took the office of the SG in 2016, he pledged to “elevate the voice of victims; put their rights and dignity at the forefront of [UN] efforts; and address the stigma and discrimination they face” (UNSG 2017 p.1). To illustrate the new momentum regarding victim assistance, he appointed the first UN VRA, creating a new role within the UN system to improve UN protocols and “develop system-wide mechanisms and policies to promote reliable gender- and child-sensitive processes for victims and witnesses to file complaints” (UNSG 2017 p.1). In addition to establishing a global VRA, he designated field VRAs and Senior Victims’ Rights Officers to accompany victims in the four PKOs with the highest numbers of allegations: The DRC, the CAR, Haiti and South Sudan (UN General Assembly 2017; Connors 2020). While the VRA works across the UN system to identify ways to promote and protect victims’ rights, field VRAs are the “main contact for victims on the ground” (Connors 2020 p.503).

As the first VRA, Jane Connors, who aims to increase the visibility of victims in the UN’s response to SEA, admits that the UN has fallen short on considering the victim-side of SEA in the past,

focusing its energy on dealing with the perpetrators and the question of accountability instead (MINUJUSTH 2018; Connors 2020). Since 2017, Connors has worked on uniting the UN and civil society actors in 13 countries with varying UN presences in their efforts to provide victims with assistance (Connors 2020). In 2020, she concluded a pilot mapping of services available to victims and found that although “medical, psychosocial, shelter, protection and legal services were generally provided through existing gender-based violence pathways”, these services “varied in terms of availability, accessibility, quality, capacity and resourcing, and [that] there were gaps, particularly in remote contexts, for those affected by conflict or health emergencies, including COVID-19” (UN General Assembly 2021 p.10). The mapping served to identify victims’ needs and best practices regarding the provision of support across missions (Office of the Victims’ Rights Advocate 2020). According to Connors, victims in the visited countries were concerned with a) complex, inaccessible and unclear complaint pathways, b) distressing investigation procedures marked by repeated interviews, c) patchy or no information on the progress of their cases, d) difficulties accessing documents such as laboratory results, e) little support with legal or other redresses especially regarding paternity and child support claims, f) lack of protection, g) limited or no assistance on health, education and livelihoods, and h) concerns for their children (Connors 2020; *SciencesPo* 2020).



**Figure 2: Mapping undertaken by the UN VRA on services available to victims; Source: Office of the Victims' Rights Advocate, Mapping of Victims' Assistance**

With the input of the VRA, the UN endorsed an updated protocol on victim assistance in 2019 that claims to provide “consistent direction” on a victim-centred approach to SEA and prioritise the needs of victims over the prosecution of perpetrators (UN Protocol 2019 p.1; Connors 2020 p.506). The new protocol states that aid will be made available in accordance with the individual needs of victims, “irrespective of whether the victim initiates or cooperates with an investigation or any other accountability procedure” (UN Protocol 2019 p.2). This means that victims are now guaranteed support as soon as an allegation is raised. Moreover, victim assistance will be provided in a “holistic, integrated manner with the support of a designated case manager” who informs victims about their right to decide on the assistance they want (UN Protocol 2019 p.4).

In the last year, a victims’ assistance tracking system has been rolled out, and partnerships with NGOs and other implementation partners have been strengthened to address gaps in services and investigations (UN General Assembly 2021). One major improvement is community-based reporting mechanisms that allow victims to report SEA in a more secure and contextually appropriate forum and thus, make it easier for women to come forward (Connors 2020). The UN’s recent efforts to remove bureaucratic obstacles and mainstream a victims’ rights approach shows a general



willingness to recognize the structural changes needed within the organisation to prioritise victims' interests, however, there are still numerous barriers to enforcing victims' rights, especially those of mothers and PKFC (Freedman 2018; UN General Assembly 2021 p.3). To overcome these limitations, understanding their adversities is crucial.

## **2.7. Paternity Recognition and Child Support**

If peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA is described as an unintended consequence of UN peacekeeping, then children born as a result of SEA are a by-product of such consequences. In line with that, academic and policy reporting has often considered PKFC an extension of their mother's victimisation. Yet, as shown above, the existence of PKFC has distinct public health, psychosocial, economic, and politico-legal implications that are similar, if not more complex, than those concerning their mothers. They therefore deserve specific treatment and attention.

In 2006, a review of gender-related activities of peacekeeping prepared for the Department of PKOs revealed that "UN babies" had been born during the UN mission in East Timor (Ospina 2006 p.44). Referencing 20 cases of children fathered by peacekeepers, the report points out that despite the evidence, no official records regarding these children existed and that the UN did "not have a clear picture of the[ir] situation" (Barker 2006; Ospina 2006). Although mission officials claimed that a mechanism of assistance had been developed, Ospina states that these mechanisms were "not operational" (p.44). Reportedly, the lack of UN follow-up regarding SEA-related pregnancies was heavily criticised by local experts. According to a national NGO staff member, the introduction of zero tolerance and the subsequent repatriation<sup>28</sup> of peacekeeper fathers were "abstract" measures with no positive impact on the structural inequalities' victims were facing (Smith 2017).

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<sup>28</sup> It has been argued that the repatriation of peacekeepers who are implicated in paternity claims is counterproductive since it removes fathers from the context in which an effective investigation and prosecution can take place (Lee and Bartels 2019a).

That the welfare of PKFC has been disregarded in discussions surrounding SEA has been criticised in light of the fact that the Zeid report had already laid out solutions to questions of paternity and child support payments in 2005 (UN General Assembly 2005)<sup>29</sup>. Despite this, children fathered by peacekeepers were not openly acknowledged until the 2008 Comprehensive strategy, which included “children who are found by a competent national authority to have been born as a result of acts of sexual exploitation and abuse” in its outlined provisions of support for victims (UN General Assembly 2008 p.3). Accordingly, children who are conceived in an act of SEA are entitled to support that covers their “medical needs, legal, psychological and social consequences directly arising from sexual exploitation and abuse, in the best interest of the child” (p.3,4). In addition, the strategy states that “the United Nations should work with Member States to facilitate, *within their competence*, the pursuit of claims related to paternity and child support” (p.4). But what is within UN competence?

As stated in the revised MoU, paternity claims can only be undertaken in national judicial courts of TCCs since “compensation is a matter of personal accountability” (UN General Assembly 2011; UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2017). The UN itself has no obligation or authority to compensate mothers and children, and its role is restricted to that of a facilitator who assists victims in the pursuit of claims. While the UN can arrange intermediate assistance, such as food and shelter, and support mothers and children through trust fund initiatives, when it comes to criminal

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<sup>29</sup> The Zeid report states that “victims who have credible evidence of paternity ought to be encouraged to seek a court order for support if there is a functioning legal system. For cases where there is no functioning legal system and where the mother of a peacekeeper baby is able to credibly identify a staff member as the father of her child, the General Assembly could adopt a resolution requesting the Secretary-General to promulgate rules enabling him to offer to obtain a DNA test of the child. The staff member would have to either acknowledge the claim or to submit to a DNA test to prove that the allegation was ill-founded. If paternity were established, the United Nations could, with a small change in its rules, deduct from the salary of that staff member, or from his final emoluments if he had been dismissed for violation of the standards set out in the 2003 bulletin, a specified amount, say the equivalent of one year's salary of a local employee in the mission area. This would at least provide some child support to the mother. If the identity of the father is unknown, some assistance could be given from the trust fund for victims. Similar rules could be introduced by the Secretary-General for other categories of personnel. If such claims are made against members of national contingents, the United Nations should assist the mothers to make a claim that could be forwarded to the troop-contributing country for consideration. The model memorandum of understanding could have provisions whereby the troop-contributing country would agree to process such claims in accordance with its laws” (UN General Assembly 2005 p.26).

accountability and child maintenance, the responsibility rests with individual peacekeepers. The UN is tasked to assist victims with legal services and ensure that legal claims are “accompanied by the necessary conclusive evidence, such as a DNA sample of the child when prescribed by the Government’s national law” (UN General Assembly 2007a p.6; Deen-Racsmány 2011).

Lee (2017) argues that the Comprehensive strategy is a significant step towards securing assistance for CBOW, though “intentions and reality diverge” since enforcing paternity claims is, again, entirely dependent on the collaboration of TCCs (p.327). Under the domestic law of most host countries, fathers are required to pay child support for children they abandon. However, in the peacekeeping context, the father often lives in a different jurisdiction beyond the reach of host state courts. As shown above, enforcing sanctions through the national legal system of peacekeepers’ home states is often impossible, and thus, accessing assistance through legal institutions is too (Vandenberg 2017). Mothers might only know the first name or nationality of the peacekeeper, making it difficult to track them down and confirm the allegation. Thus, while ground-breaking in its acknowledgement of PKFC and their right to assistance, the Comprehensive strategy is largely ineffective in providing it. Moreover, the strategy has been criticised for only extending the outlined provisions to PKFC born of SEA, rather than all children born of sexual relations between peacekeepers and local civilians (Simić and O’Brien 2014; Smith 2017). As illustrated throughout this chapter, it is very likely that all children with absent peacekeeper fathers, including those born of consensual sexual relations, require support<sup>30</sup>.

Since the socio-economic impact of single parenthood remains devastating for mothers regardless of their consent concerning their child’s conception, it seems intuitive that the UN shares a responsibility to ensure that mothers can provide for their children and that PKFC can trace their father’s identity should they wish to do so. However, there is currently no basis on which the UN has any liability towards PKFC born of consensual sexual relations. Lee argues that without UN assistance,

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<sup>30</sup> A study conducted by the UN Population Fund in 2005 found that the population in Timor-Leste considered consensual sexual relations that resulted in women being abandoned with a child as damaging as sexual violence (UN Populations Fund 2005).

mothers in host states have no realistic prospect of finding legal representation that would allow them to pursue a child support claim through private international law or conventions such as the “Hague Convention on the International Recovery of Child Support and Other Forms of Family Maintenance” or “Convention on Jurisdiction of Parental Responsibility”, especially considering that not all host states have joined these conventions (Lee, 2017). According to Simić and O'Brien, the “best option” for mothers of PKFC born of consensual sexual relations would be to file action under domestic law, hoping to receive a parental order to present to the foreign court, or travel to the TCC directly and file the claim there (Simić and O'Brien 2014 p.356). Considering the material realities of mothers and the complicated nature of such claims, the chances of either succeeding are slim.

There are some provisions regarding paternal obligations of peacekeepers that were specified in an earlier draft of the Comprehensive strategy that were not included in the final draft<sup>31</sup> and thus there are still too many uncertainties to make this an effective policy (UN General Assembly 2006; Simić and O'Brien 2014). The practicalities of child support payments, including questions such as how often, how much, for how long and to whom it is paid out, have further not been answered. Although the UN presumably recognised the limitations of not specifying these details, at the time, the organisation might have feared to risk the contribution of troops from its member states by guaranteeing more rigorous child maintenance provisions (UN General Assembly 2009; Simić and O'Brien 2014). The 2009 assistance guide for victims states that “the ultimate goal is to enable the guardian/caretaker [of PKFC] to address their children's relevant medical, psychosocial, legal and material needs without further assistance”, ensuring that they are “socially and economically stable” (ECHA/ECPS UN and NGO Task Force on Protection from SEA 2009 p.8). While the sustainability aspect of this approach is much appreciated, the assistance guide does not consider that PKFC may have needs of their own.

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<sup>31</sup> The draft strategy comprised 14 pages and includes details regarding how fathers are identified, how cases are pursued in the alleged perpetrator's home country as well as how child support payments will be deducted from staff member's salary.

Several reforms have sought to remove barriers to paternity and child support. In 2014, guidance on paternity testing and the use of standardised DNA collection kits/protocol was made available to TCCs (Cara 2015; UN General Assembly 2015; Conduct in UN Field Missions 2021). The UN has further worked towards establishing national paternity focal points, a practice that aims to link mothers of PKFC with the appropriate officials in member states and thus, facilitate communication regarding the legal requirements of national courts in peacekeepers' home countries (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2021). Where the national legislation of member states permits it, the UN will facilitate paternity testing; however, testing has not been made mandatory, and it is still up to TCCs how much of an effort they want to make in providing DNA. In his 2005 report, Zeid Raad Al'Hussein made the general recommendation that each UN personnel who is the subject of an allegation should either unconditionally accept the claim or prove the allegation insubstantial by providing a DNA sample (UN General Assembly 2005). Conversely to this victim-friendly approach, at present, the UN offers assistance in obtaining DNA but the cooperation from TCCs is voluntary, and although increasing, the response rate to requested genetic material is low<sup>32</sup> (Simić and O'Brien 2014).

Academic researchers have highlighted the benefits of mandatory DNA testing for all peacekeeping personnel prior to deployment with the purpose of providing evidence in cases of alleged rape or paternity claims immediately when they emerge (Blau 2016). In fact, a DNA databank has been branded the "most foolproof method" to work around the arising challenges of cooperating with TCCs (Cara 2015 p.1). While this has raised some concerns regarding peacekeepers' right to privacy, participating in peacekeeping is voluntary, and HIV tests are already being conducted (Villaverde 2015). However, it has been argued that member states' discomfort with such a policy and the fear of receiving less personnel for future missions has so far prevented the realisation of this strategy. Although the introduction of a DNA collection protocol and testing kits brought some improvements in pursuing paternity claims, cooperation with member states is still one of the main

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<sup>32</sup> The last time the UN published the response rate of communication from TCCs regarding paternity matters, it was as low as 20 percent (UN General Assembly 2015).

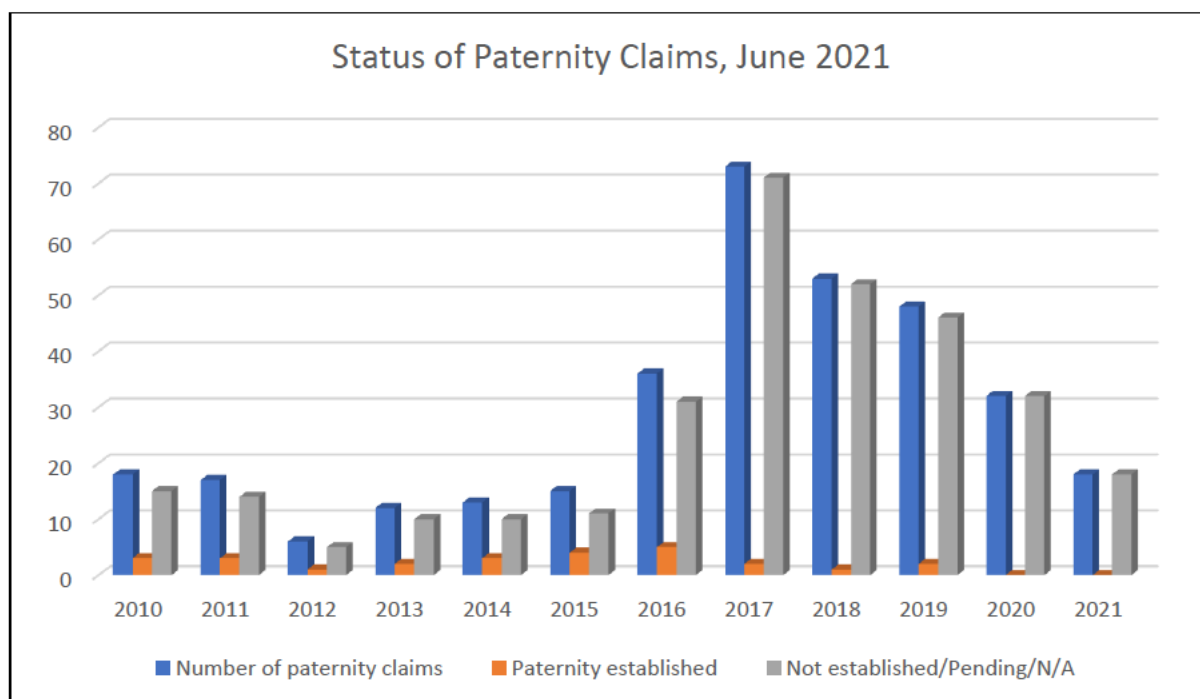
pitfalls in proving paternity. Moreover, the issue of compensation remains since it is not clear which legal proceedings follow a DNA match and whether it delivers financial support. The proposed solution by Zeid to deduct child support from peacekeeper's salary or final emoluments to provide mothers with one year of their earnings in the field has not been implemented<sup>33</sup>.

To date, no information concerning successful child support claims has been made public, raising the question of whether any mothers are regularly receiving support. The 2015 SG report on SEA noted that there are "numerous obstacles to having paternity recognised [...] including with regard to accessing national judicial systems to obtain court judgements and getting international legal recognition from the country of nationality of the mother and child and that of the father" since "some of the alleged fathers refuse to be tested and, even in instances of positive tests, judicial proceedings still need to be conducted in order to obtain legal recognition of the identity of the father and a settlement for support" (UN General Assembly 2015 p.8, 18).

The slow progress and large number of pending cases clearly shows the ineffectiveness of the the UN system concerning paternity cases. As of June 2021, the UN misconduct tracking system has logged 341 allegations of SEA that implicate peacekeepers in fathering children (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). As demonstrated in Figure 3, only a minimal number of the allegations (N=26) has been substantiated, while the large majority (N=242) of claims are pending. I, therefore, conclude that despite the widespread awareness regarding the occurrence of PKFC and significant intensification of UN efforts to improve their situation, the legal framework to establish paternity, hold fathers accountable and provide mothers with child maintenance is ineffective and not improving at a significant rate.

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<sup>33</sup> It is noted that the proposal does not account for how financial compensation is established once the peacekeeper is no longer with the United Nations (Ndulo 2009). Moreover, it is unclear what the legal basis for solving the paternity support claim is or how the proposal would apply to consensual relationships (Simić and O'Brien 2014).



**Figure 3. Status of paternity claims, informed by data from the UN misconduct tracking system**

It seems that while in theory, the UN has set out a system to support PKFC, very few (if any) have secured provisions (OIOS 2015; Bureau des Avocats Internationaux 2019a). One might argue that while resolutions and disciplinary measures implemented have become more and more comprehensive, these efforts are not bearing the desired fruit since allegations continue to be levelled while the damage left behind remains unrepaired.

However, the 2021 SG report provides a number of updates on the Trust Fund that indicate that the field VRAs are making significant progress in providing mothers and PKFC with intermediate assistance and livelihood support (UN General Assembly 2021). Accordingly, in the DRC, the first projects designed to provide children born of SEA with educational support are currently being launched. Similarly, in Haiti, an Emergency Response Fund project for life-saving assistance for children born of SEA is being secured, as well as a project launched that supports children born of SEA with school fees, uniforms and other equipment (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2021). Hence, while the UN does not have a handle on paternity claims, it is making progress in providing mothers and PKFC with support that is not predicated on legal accountability.

## **2.8. Conclusion**

The continued occurrence of SEA, which is evident in the birth of PKFC, tarnishes the image of missions and questions the UN's credibility and values, undermining the core goals and principles of peacekeeping. Although conflicts over paternity surfaced in the late 1990s, the UN has only made notable efforts to address it in the last decade. In this chapter, I have shown that accountability for SEA remains a significant challenge and that the resolution of paternity and child support claims is largely unsuccessful. This has significant impact for the lives of mothers and PKFC who often live in extremely precarious financial situations and for whom reparations are almost exclusively unavailable.



## **Chapter 3: The Context of Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo**

This chapter provides background information on the factors that have enabled the DRC to become an epitome of a war-torn country with a thriving peacekeeping sex economy. Before detailing what is known regarding SEA and PKFC in the DRC, it will give an overview of the history of the conflict and UN intervention in the DRC and discuss current political and humanitarian challenges, especially in the east where sexual crimes and other human rights violations are paramount. This will contextualise the situation of women who conceive children with UN peacekeepers and concretise the parameters of PKFC's upbringing.

### **3.1. Conflict and UN Intervention**

The conflict in the DRC is extremely complex and has fuelled a serious humanitarian crisis. Years of colonialism, oppression by national and international regimes, power struggles and corruption have left indelible scars on the DRC, substantially affecting the peace-building process to the present day (Coghlan et al. 2006; Vinck et al. 2008).

#### **3.1.1. Colonialism (1885-1960)**

In the 1870s, the Congo Basin was explored for its economic potential (Forbath 1978). Given the general ambivalence of European countries towards colonial expansion into Africa in the late 1800s, the constitutional monarch of Belgium – whose colonial ambitions had previously been blocked by Belgian authorities – took on the colonisation of the Congo Basin in a private capacity (Ewans 2017). Under the guise of a humanitarian enterprise, the Congo Free State became the property of King Leopold II in 1885 (Louis and Gifford 1971; Katzenellenbogen 1996). King Leopold's administration relentlessly extracted resources (ivory, rubber, minerals) from the Congo Free State and committed large-scale atrocities against the civilian population (inhuman labour conditions, arbitrary executions,

repression, mass killings, and rape<sup>34</sup>) that led to high rates of death and a significant population reduction (Hochschild 1999; Van Reybrouck 2010). Sparked by denunciations of foreign missionaries that raised international concern regarding the human rights violations committed in the Congo Free State, diplomatic pressure on Belgium to free the country from King Leopold's rule grew, and the Belgian government eventually annexed the Congo Free State as a Belgian colony in 1908 (Gann 2015). To justify the continuation of colonial projects like forced labour on European plantations and mining enterprises, the Belgian colonial administrations maintained the idea of a white and Christian civilisation's superiority and perpetuated a race- and privilege-based social hierarchy with whites as the highest status group (Slade 1962). To avoid the rise of a Congolese social, political and intellectual elite, the concept of class became tightly bound with the colonial ideology of racial segregation (Vanthemsche 2006; Jaffee and Casey 2020). According to media reports, mixed-race children (called "métis", "mulattos" or "children of sin") who were born in the Belgian Congo between 1908 and 1960 were often forcefully removed from their homes, placed under state supervision and raised in convents and other religious institutions (Le Bourdon and Keating 2020; *The Brussels Times* 2020).

An outburst of African nationalist movements demanding the end of colonial rule provoked major riots in the 1950s that ultimately resulted in the DRC's independence. Pressured by the growing influence of nationalist regimes, Belgian authorities arranged for Congolese elections in 1960 and a coalition government between Patrice Lumumba (Mouvement National Congolais) and Joseph Kasavubu (Alliance des Ba-Kongo) was formed (Freund 2016). Before the DRC reached independence in 1960, Belgian authorities arranged "to bring everything that was Belgian back to Europe, including children born to a black African mother and a white Belgian father" (Chini 2019). Hundreds of Congolese children were relocated to Belgian orphanages, where they lived cut off from their families and ancestry (Van Hooste 2020). In some Congolese provinces, missionaries abandoned biracial

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<sup>34</sup> It has been argued that during this time, rape by militias and foreign workers, as well as transactional sex arrangements between colonisers and colonised became institutionalised in the DRC (Stanley 1885; Doyle 1909).

children, and some children were violently raped and discriminated against in the years after independence (Chini 2019; *France 24* 2020).

### 3.1.2. Independence and Dictatorship (1960-1996)

From 1960 to 1965, the Republic of the Congo<sup>35</sup> entered a new period of political upheaval - referred to as the Congo crisis - that was characterised by state fragility, ethnic divisions and regional fragmentation (Gibbs 2000). When the Republic of the Congo rather suddenly gained independence in 1960, few Congolese nationals had meaningful political experience, and many issues regarding the country's federal and regional interests, as well as Belgium's role in Congolese affairs post-independence, remained unresolved (Vanthemsche 2006; Zeilig 2008). Despite no longer holding executive power, Belgian officials initially maintained their role within government institutions, partially due to inadequate Congolese replacements (Gondola 2002). In July 1960, a military mutiny erupted and clashes between Congolese and Belgian forces, as well as civilian unrest caused Europeans to flee the country (Renton, Seddon, and Zeilig 2007). Interpreting attacks against whites as a collapse in state order, Belgium sent paratroopers to restore control and protect its nationals (Gondola 2002). This led to more racial segregation, rendered many government ministries unable to function, and caused a divide between the coalition leaders Patrice Lumumba and Joseph Kasavubu, who differed in their perception of Belgium's intervention (Gibbs 2000). The conflict made room for the secession of the mineral-rich southern provinces Katanga and South Kasai, whose ethnic differences sparked the desire to separate the wealth generated in the mines from the rest of the country, depriving the Republic of the Congo of large proportions of its revenues (Young 1965; Young 1966; Turner 2007; Nugent 2012). Belgian troops and mining companies supported the secessionist governments, and thus, the threat of national disintegration was interpreted as an act of Belgian aggression (Gibbs 2000).

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<sup>35</sup> The name Republic of the Congo was chosen at the time of independence, changed to Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1964, then to Zaire in 1971 and ultimately reverted back to Democratic Republic of the Congo in 1997.

Fearing that the tensions would tear the newly independent state apart, Lumumba and Kasavubu made an urgent appeal to the UN to remove unauthorised Belgian troops (Doss 2014). Agreeing to provide technical assistance for protection from external influences until the Congolese security forces could reassert Congolese sovereignty on their own, the UNSC authorised the UN Mission in the Congo (ONUC) in July 1960 (UN Security Council 1960a). Deployed for the “maintenance of order and protection of life”, yet not to enforce a specific political solution regarding internal politics, i.e. the fate of the secessionist states, the UNSC sent 3,500 UN military to replace Belgian’s soldiers (UN Security Council 1960b p.2; UNSG 1960). Given ONUC’s significant scale and scope (the mission later comprised nearly 20,000 personnel), ONUC has been deemed “the most important instance of peacekeeping during the Cold war” and a central inspiration for modern-day PKOs (Gibbs 2000 p.1).

The Congo crisis was a proxy conflict for the cold war, with both the US and Soviet Union being interested in the DRC’s natural resources (Zeilig 2008). Since the UN and US refused to dispose troops to fight regional opposition, Lumumba called on the Soviet Union to provide military assistance for the Congolese army to suppress the secessionists (Gibbs 2000). Despite Soviet logistical support, a launched offensive against South Kasai failed, and the demoralised Congolese troops went on a rampage that tarnished Lumumba’s international reputation (Gibbs 2000). Complicated by cold war politics, the Congolese government disintegrated over Lumumba’s decision to accept Soviet aid and the perceived threat of communism to the region (Ntalaja 2002). Taking advantage of the crisis in leadership, Joseph-Désiré Mobutu Sese Seko, the Congolese army’s chief of staff, carried out a coup d’état, suspended parliament and established a military government (Haskin 2005).

ONUC’s mandate lacked operational clarity regarding the authority of its troops to intervene with the increasingly unstable security situation, and the mission was unable (or unwilling<sup>36</sup>) to stop the coup from fomenting, playing an indirect role in Lumumba’s arrest and subsequent execution

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<sup>36</sup> Western forces, including the UN, were accused of being complicit in Mobutu’s coup by providing financial resources to advance his political career (Gibbs 2000).

(Doss 2014). At the prospect of an all-out civil war, the mission's mandate was broadened and, for the first time in UN history, peacekeepers were authorised to use assertive action and force to prevent military action, marking the transition from lightly armed and 'neutral' peacekeeping missions to interventionist and 'muscular' ones (UN Security Council 1961; Gibbs 2000). With the help of ONUC troops, Mobutu's government succeeded at defeating the secessionist movements in 1963 (Urquhart 1984). Although many armed units were still active and unrest in the eastern regions of the DRC intensified, ONUC was concluded in 1964. Backed by the United States due to its anti-communist stance, the autocratic and repressive regime of Mobutu (1965-1997) brought some stability to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (from 1971 Zaire), but its corrupt totalitarian rule was guilty of many human rights violations and the informal economy allowed the gradual decay of state institutions (Kennes 2005). By the 1990s, the Zairian state was weak and encountered considerable internal resistance from opposition groups in the east, including the rebel leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila (Gribbin 2005).

### 3.1.3. Continental and Civil Wars (1996-2006)

From 1996, Zaire was the centre of a complex war over national and territorial power, resources, ethnic influences and intertwined external conflicts with spillover from Rwanda, Uganda, Angola and Burundi (Notar 2006; Tull 2009). The First Congo War (1996-1997) was fuelled by the 1994 Rwandan genocide of ethnic minority Tutsis that caused millions of Rwandan refugees (including Hutu militia and armed forces) to flee over the border into eastern DRC, causing an influx of armed combatants and a reification of ethnic divisions (Nieuwenhuizen 2013; Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021). Together with the Zairian army, Hutu forces fought Tutsis living in Congolese territory and sparked a new era of instability that led to years of protracted violence involving both foreign and national militaries, as well as local militia groups (Prunier 2008). With the campaign of opposition leader Laurent-Désiré Kabila to liberate Zaire from Mobutu's regime, massive violence and international armed conflict began. The Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL) under rebel Kabila

recruited thousands of child soldiers from eastern communities and led them into a “war of liberation” (International Crisis Group 1999 p.1). After gaining support from Rwandan and Ugandan forces, the AFDL defeated dictator Mobutu in 1997, marking the end of the first Congo war (Van Reybrouck 2010). Self-declared president Laurent-Désiré Kabila attempted to reorganise the country (renaming it the Democratic Republic of the Congo), but the economy remained weak and ethnic conflict in the east reigned (International Crisis Group 1999). Kabila turned on his Ugandan and Rwandan allies, fearing that they would encourage the Congolese army to a coup (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021). This strengthened Ugandan and Rwandan rebel movements and ultimately resulted in a Ugandan/Rwandan joint invasion that initiated the second Congo War (1998-2003) (Tull 2009; Curtis 2005). Together with Congolese rebel groups, Ugandan and Rwandan troops conquered most of eastern DRC and tried to overthrow Kabila’s government in 1998 (Tull 2009). Due to the large involvement of neighbouring countries (Angola, Zimbabwe, and Namibia fought alongside the Congolese government; Chad, Libya and Sudan alongside the rebels), the ensuing conflict on Congolese soil has often been described as Africa’s World War (Coghlan et al. 2006; Prunier 2008).

The UN urged foreign armies to withdraw and arranged for a ceasefire and national negotiations to facilitate peace in the region. In July 1999, six warring parties (DRC, Rwanda, Uganda, Angola, Namibia and Zimbabwe) signed the Lusaka ceasefire agreement (Prunier 2008). Shortly after, UNSC resolution 1279 authorised a small military liaison team of observers and officers - the UN Organisation Mission in the DRC (MONUC) - to monitor the ceasefire and promote the government’s disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) process (UN Security Council 1999; Notar 2006; Gilliard 2010). Despite the UN’s monitoring, conflict continued to arise in the eastern regions, and Laurent-Désiré Kabila was assassinated in 2001. His son Joseph Kabila seized power, realised the withdrawal of Ugandan and Rwandan forces and paved the way to the Inter-Congolese Dialogue in Pretoria, which led to a peace deal that outlined a power-sharing transitional government between Joseph Kabila and the four most influential Congolese rebel leaders (Tull 2009; Nagel, Fin, and Maenza

2021). In 2003, the transitional government officially took power, and the Luanda Agreement between the DRC and Uganda put an official end to the war (Ahere 2012).

The aftermath of the second Congo War was marked by frequent uprisings and flaring human rights violations. The influx of militia groups<sup>37</sup> from neighbouring countries during the wars caused persistent violence in the eastern provinces, making the region vulnerable to inter-communal tensions and arms proliferation with periodic escalations (UN Security Council 2008; Médecins Sans Frontières 2004). Between 2002 and 2004, there was a massacre of civilians in Kisangani (Tshopo), militia violence in Beni (Nord Kivu) and Bunia (Ituri), and Bukavu (South Kivu) was temporarily captured by Tutsi rebels (Doss 2014). As the dimensions of the conflict shifted, MONUC's mandate became more proactive, and the mission's strengths increased greatly (from 500 military personnel in 1999 to 10,000 peacekeepers in 2005) (Reynaert 2011; Doss 2014). From 2002 to 2006, MONUC's focus was to install a new government and facilitate the transitional arrangements that culminated in adopting a new Congolese constitution and Joseph Kabila's democratic election as president in 2006 (Berdal 2018).

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<sup>37</sup> During the second Congo war, twenty armed groups were known to operate in eastern DRC.



**Figure 4:** Deployment of peacekeepers in DRC in 2005, Source: Department of PKOs, November 2005

### 3.1.4. Recent Developments (2006-2021)

The installation of parliamentary institutions and the country's first generally peaceful elections were celebrated by the international community as a significant political achievement (Tull 2009). Yet, shortly after the elections, violence resurfaced in the east due to various armed groups attempting to reinforce their political influence. From 2007 to 2008, the National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP) – a Rwandan supported armed group of ethnic Tutsis led by Laurent Nkunda – gained influence in North Kivu and caused a refugee and humanitarian crisis (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021). In conjunction with Rwandan military troops, the Congolese national army (FARDC) conducted a series of military operations to remove Nkunda (Shepherd 2011). As repayment for their support, Rwandan forces were welcome again in eastern DRC and fought against the Hutu militia group Democratic



Forces for the Liberation of Rwanda (FDLR) and other rebels (Rodríguez 2011). Several diplomatic events tried to promote stability in the Great Lakes region, yet the competing interests and varying agendas in the region – especially concerning the control of mineral reserves – could not sustainably be resolved (Doss 2014).

Following an upsurge of violence that severely threatened North Kivu's capital Goma, MONUC's mandate was expanded, incrementally turning MONUC into a multidimensional PKO with a broad mandate of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and peace enforcement (Tull 2009; Reynaert 2011). With resolution 1856, MONUC became the first UN mission primarily tasked with protecting civilians (Tull 2009). Other tasks included countering threats by rebel movements, patrolling the eastern borders with the local police, reforming the state security forces, and providing humanitarian assistance to refugees, internally displaced people, conflict-affected children and victims of sexual violence (UN Security Council 2004; 2007). Despite fierce condemnation of MONUC's performance by local civilians who criticised the mission for a) its inability to protect civilians, b) its cooperation with the Congolese army who was responsible for many human rights violations, and c) MONUC's use of resources in resource-deprived communities, the mission is believed to have contributed to the eventual withdrawal of foreign armies (Doss 2014).

In 2010, UNSC resolution 1925 concluded MONUC's mandate in the DRC and established the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) in MONUC's place (UN Security Council 2010; Behr 2011; Nieuwenhuizen 2013). While official discourse states the adjustment from MONUC to MONUSCO was made to reflect the DRC's evolved political context, scholars have argued that the mission was in large part transformed to divert attention away from MONUC's "profound loss of credibility", arising from widespread allegations of SEA, perceived failures to protect civilians and alienation from the Congolese government (Kovatch 2016, p.158). The new mission was endowed with many of the earlier dimensions of the mandate and tasked to a) secure and protect civilians, b) respond to violence, c) conduct joint patrols with the Congolese army, d) train Congolese military and police forces, e) monitor compliance with

international human rights law, and f) combat crime, terrorism and sexual violence (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021).

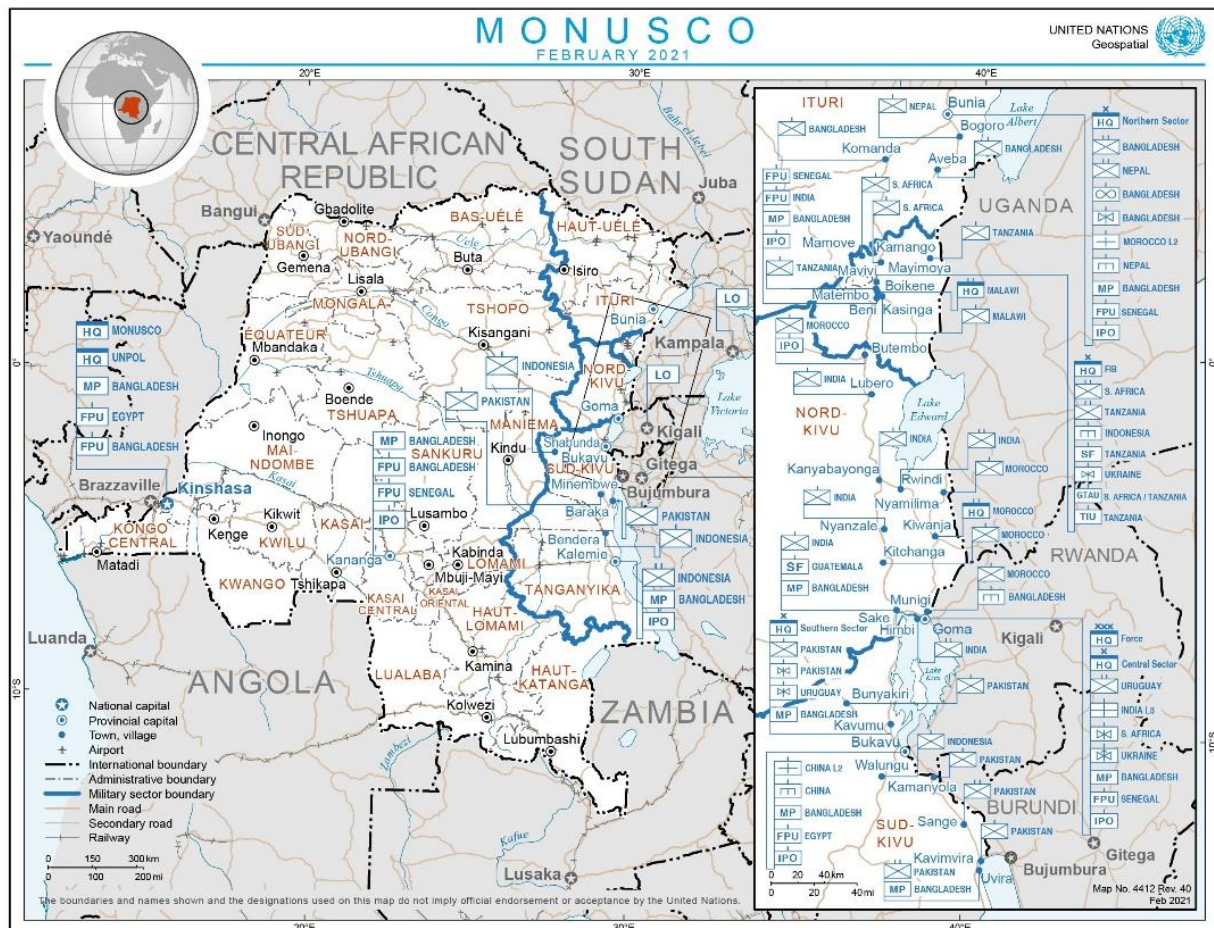
In the context of the deteriorating security in the east, a major crisis emerged in North Kivu in 2012. The rebel force March 23 (M23) initiated a rebellion against the Congolese state and captured Goma under the eyes of the UN, exposing MONUSCO's struggle to keep the peace in eastern DRC (Stearns, Shepherd, and Manby 2012; Doss 2014). In response, the UNSC called for a peace, security and cooperation framework that was signed by 11 countries in 2013 and took the unprecedented step of authorising a Force Intervention Brigade (FIB) to disarm rebels in the Great Lakes region (UN Security Council 2013). The responsibility of the FIB<sup>38</sup> was to support the implementation of the agreement and stabilise the troubled region by neutralising armed groups and disrupting illegal activities, thus, remitting the use of force by peacekeepers to protect civilians (Lilly 2016). Through a series of joint operations with the Congolese army, the FIB defeated the M23 in 2013 (McKnight 2014). Despite its increasingly heavy presence, the FIB has been criticised for not defeating other armed groups such as the Ugandan Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), the Rwandan FDLR and smaller *Mai-Mai* militias, some of whom financed their activities by looting villages (Lilly 2016; Human Rights Watch 2020). Additional criticism has emerged due to the impression that the FIB was taking up too many resources in impoverished areas while cooperating with the Congolese army, which is guilty of many human rights violations (Spijkers 2015).

Over the years, the UN's inability to carry out offensive operations against rebels forces and stop killings and sexual violence from occurring has repeatedly led to riots in which civilian protestors demanded the departure of UN troops (Human Rights Watch 2014; Moloo 2016; Al Jazeera 2021b). In 2019, MONUSCO's offices in Beni were burned down due to outrage about the FIB's inaction when rebels killed civilians in proximity to their base (*The Economist* 2020). In 2021, hundreds of young people in Beni, Goma and Butembo requested for the UN to "act up or pack up" in light of recent

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<sup>38</sup> It has been reported that the FIB has a shorter chain of command and thus, can respond more quickly to security threats (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021).

failures to eradicate atrocities by armed groups (Al Jazeera 2021b). Scholars have found that MONUSCO's troops were, in fact, often unable to fulfil their mandate due to contingents lacking resources, training and leadership (Novosselof 2019).



**Figure 5:** Deployment of peacekeepers in DRC in 2021, Source: UN Geospatial, February 2021

Insecurities in eastern DRC today are mostly the consequence of small identity-based armed groups who define themselves in opposition to ethnic majorities and experience grievances over land and resource allocation or political underrepresentation (Nantulya 2017). In the wake of the relative stability in western DRC, some UN troops have recently been moved to the east to consolidate mission strength in the Ituri and Kivu provinces (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021). As part of a multi-year drawdown strategy, MONUSCO is currently closing field offices in the Tanganyika and Kasai regions (Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021). The majority of UN troops in 2021 are located in the Kivus, Ituri and

Tanganyika region, where decades of violence have caused largescale humanitarian suffering, as the next section will show.

### **3.2. Humanitarian Situation in Eastern DRC**

The civilian population in the DRC has been heavily affected by conflict. The Second Congo War, in particular, destabilised the country, caused widescale displacement, economic devastation and a breakdown in infrastructure (Coghlan et al. 2006; Vinck et al. 2008; Mukaba et al. 2015). Due to patterns of political instability and intercommunal ethnic conflict, an estimated six million civilians were killed and over five million uprooted by the insecurities (UNHCR 2020a; 2020b). The eastern regions continue to be ravaged by recurrent waves of conflict, security vacuums and foreign interferences. In several areas, rebel groups have established themselves as ruling entities who isolated villages and terrorised civilians (levied taxes on them, controlled their territory and mineral reserves, conscripted men and boys and systematically violated women and girls) (Csete, Kippenberg, and Haslam 2002; Amnesty International 2004; Médecins Sans Frontières 2004). To this day, the security of the Great Lakes region remains highly volatile due to fighting between more than 130 armed groups (Human Rights Watch 2020). In the Kivus, Ituri and Tanganyika provinces, many live in fear of militias or have regrouped to the cities for security, leaving their homes and fields to the rebels (Al Jazeera 2021a; International Rescue Committee 2021).

Since 2017, the ADF and other armed groups who exert influence in unpoliced regions have been responsible for thousands of killings and the displacement of entire regions, putting millions in need of humanitarian assistance<sup>39</sup> (Al Jazeera 2021b). Political turmoil and external exploitation left

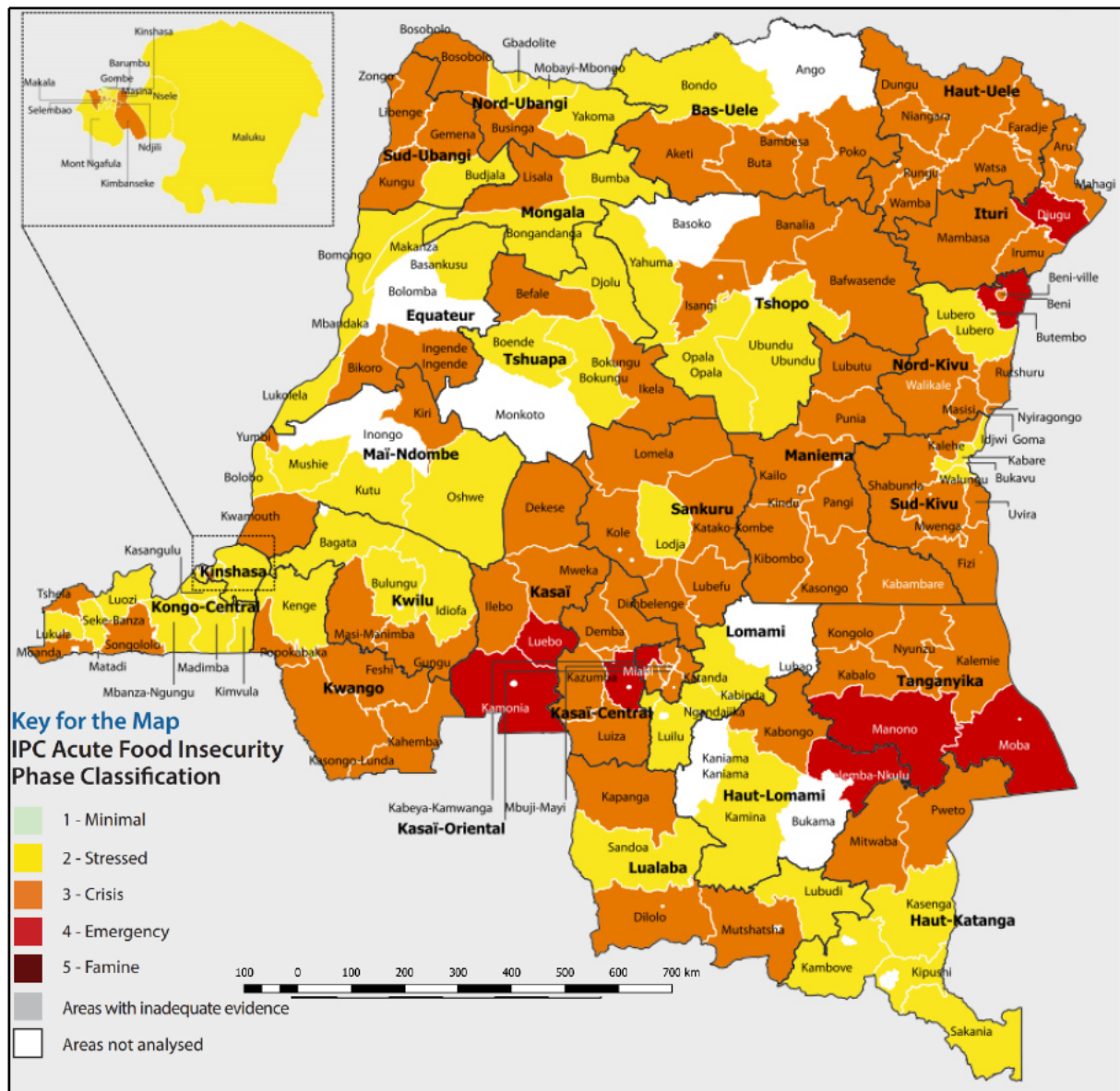
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<sup>39</sup> From 2017 to 2018, conflict-related humanitarian needs have duplicated with an alarming 13 million people demanding basic supplies for survival (UNICEF 2017; UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2018). Many have suffered the consequences of outbreaks such as cholera, measles, Ebola and Covid 19 (UNICEF 2020; Al Jazeera 2021a). The lack of shelter, clean water, medical care, and sanitation facilities in displacement camps accelerated transmissions, putting those most vulnerable at acute risk of infection (UNHCR 2020a). In 2020, tensions in and around Beni rose where a government-led military operation against the ADF caused largescale population movement that forced some to seek asylum in neighbouring countries (UNHCR 2020b; Al Jazeera 2021a; International Rescue Committee 2021). According to statistics of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than one million Congolese were displaced in 2020 (UNHCR 2020). In 2021, the ADF attacked

the DRC falling behind in a global comparison of human development, and thus, the DRC has become a base for many international relief and development programmes (Marchais, Bazuzi, and Lameke 2020). Positioned 175 of the 189 countries included in the Human Development Index (HDI), the DRC's development is below the regional average and reveals high levels of distribution inequality, especially in the category of life expectancy (Malik 2013; UN Development Programme 2020). Between 1990 and 2020, the Gross National Income per capita decreased by almost 40 percent, which is reflected in high rates of unemployment, low levels of education and a weak health and judicial system (European Commission 2018; Michaux and Boy 2020; Prashad 2020; United Nations Development Programme 2020). As of July 2021, a record high of 27.3 million (one-third of the DRC's population) face acute hunger, and 6.7 million are at an emergency level of food insecurity (Al Jazeera 2021a; UN World Food Programme 2021). On a day to day basis, many families eat less than two meals a day, struggle to cover their health-related needs and send their children to school (Aldersey, Turnbull, and Turnbull 2016).

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refugee sites in the Ituri province, burnt down villages, schools and relief sites (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2021c; Peyre-Costa 2021). The eruption of the Mount Nyiragongo volcano in May forced an estimated 450,000 near Goma to flee their homes, some of which were destroyed by lava or levelled by the subsequent earthquakes in the region (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2021b). Since then, electricity and water shortages, as well as road blockages, have affected the distribution of food and relief items (UN High Commissioner for Refugees 2021a).



**Figure 6: Food Insecurity Situation in DRC, Source: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Technical Working Group DRC, Results from July 2021**

While western DRC has stabilised, conflict continues to simmer in the east where the economic devastation is unprecedented for modern times, and some parts still experience high levels of human rights violations, as the next section will show.

### 3.3. Conflict-Related Sexual Violence

Concurrent with the critical humanitarian situation, sexual violence has become a defining feature of the conflict in DRC (Mukwege and Nangini 2009; Johnson et al. 2010; Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp 2011). It has been estimated that 40 percent of women (24 percent of men) in the eastern parts of the country have experienced sexual violence and that ten percent of women's first sexual encounters take place against their will (DRC Ministry of Planning 2007; Johnson et al. 2010; Kelly et al. 2011). Descriptions that dub the DRC 'rape capital of the world' and 'worst place in the world to be a woman' speak to how endemic sexual violence is (Bailey 2016; Lewis 2021). Over the years, the attention of the popular press to sexual and gender-based violence has escalated to the degree where the complex political conflict in the DRC has sometimes been reduced to or sensationalised by morbid details of violent acts of rape (Meger 2010a; Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp 2011; Baaz and Stern 2013). While it is clear that sexual violence committed in the DRC includes the most brutal and horrific forms of rape (gang rape, sexual slavery, kidnapping, genital mutilation, the intentional transmission of sexual diseases, forced incest, impregnation or marriage, instrumentation, trafficking and public humiliation), postmodernist feminist discourse has identified problems with the way Congolese women are portrayed as passive victims of universal suffering while western interveners are depicted as their saviours (Brown 1995; Csete, Kippenberg, and Haslam 2002; International 2004; Mukwege and Nangini 2009; Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp 2011; Marcus 2013; UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2018). To direct attention to the social, political, military, and economic context in which violence against women and men occurs, I have employed the term *conflict-related* sexual violence throughout the thesis.

I further use the term 'rape with extreme violence' (REV) to describe the so-called "new pathology" and class of rape crimes that was observed in eastern DRC (Mukwege and Nangini 2009, p.1). Out of 492 sexual violence survivors surveyed in South-Kivu in 2003, 80 percent reported gang rape, 12 percent the insertion of objects (e.g., knives or guns) into their genitalia and 38 rape in front of family or community members (Ohambe 2004). Since these forms of rape may permanently



damage survivors' reproductive ability or identity, they are referred to as REV (Mukwege and Nangini 2009). CRSV, including REV, is commonly perpetrated by warring parties and occupying armies who organise collective acts of sexual violence to strategically destabilise family and community structures, gain political advantage or control over regions by curtailing movements and economic activity (Brownmiller 2005; Peterman, Palermo, and Bredenkamp 2011b; Bartels et al. 2013). Systematic forms of CRSV that are deliberately used to help armed groups achieve their objectives (e.g., ethnic cleansing) are addressed in feminist literature as a weapon of war (Baaz and Stern 2013; van Wieringen 2020). In the DRC, rape raids by armed groups that weaponise sexual violence may be triggered by pillages of local villages and thus often coincide with the looting of material items and valuables like cash, food, clothing or livestock, the killing and abduction of civilians or destruction of houses and villages (Bartels et al. 2010).

Trends over time show that CRSV in the DRC has “metastasised into a wider social phenomenon” of opportunistic rape by civilian perpetrators and ‘interveners’ like UN peacekeepers who exploit conflict-related insecurity to sexually assault civilians (Human Rights Watch 2002; Médecins Sans Frontières 2004; Gettleman 2007 p.2). Corresponding statistics illustrate that the numbers of sexual crimes and killings committed by non-combatants have risen significantly throughout the years of conflict (e.g., Kalisya et al. 2011; Loko Roka et al. 2014). Based on a study from researchers at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative that analysed sexual violence trends in South Kivu, civilian rape increased 17-fold between 2004 and 2008 (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International 2010; Bartels et al. 2011). Moreover, intimate partner sexual violence rates in the DRC are three times higher than in surrounding countries, suggesting that the social mechanisms that prevent rape in other societies have been partially disabled<sup>40</sup> (Ministry of Planning 2007; Johnston et al. 2017). A major incubator of this is that due to diminished government authority, corruption and the lack of a functioning judicial system, perpetrators of sexual violence are rarely brought to justice

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<sup>40</sup> However, due to the focus on sexual violence in the DRC, it might also be reported more than in other countries, as a result of the increased attention for it (Swaine 2018).



(Amnesty International 2011; Kovatch 2016). The state's failure to ensure accountability might evoke sexually aggressive behaviour amongst civilians who internalise the norm of impunity. In consequence, advocates of women's rights within and beyond the DRC have voiced concern that the high incidents of atrocities during the lengthy wars have led to a gradual 'normalisation' of sexual violence (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International 2010; Liebling, Sleg, and Ruratotoye 2012; Nieuwenhuizen 2013; Kovatch 2016).

Although sexual violence concerns victims and perpetrators of all genders, studies have consistently pointed towards the increased vulnerability of women and girls to sexual and gender-based offences, especially during conflict when gender inequality is exacerbated (Steinkogler 2011). In the DRC, women have historically been restricted in their ability to be educated, own or inherit land and participate at all levels of society, limiting their independence (Meger 2010; Prashad 2020). The DRC's gender development index (defining the ratio of the female to male HDI) is amongst the highest in the world with a three-year difference in schooling for boys and girls<sup>41</sup>, low labour force participation rates for women and a substantial gender divide in command over household resources (UN Development Programme 2020). In Congolese society, sociocultural and religious norms make open discussion of sexual and reproductive health matters difficult, especially amongst unmarried women for whom bride value is dependent on virginity (Bosmans et al. 2006; Vodiena et al. 2012; Say et al. 2014; Johnston et al. 2017). Young people in South Kivu were found to have inaccurate knowledge regarding fertility and HIV-related issues and described the use of contraceptives as promiscuous (encouraging infidelity), sinful or immoral (Wax 2005; Bifuko et al. 2015; Johnston et al. 2017). Amongst sexually active young adults, the uptake of modern contraceptives was as low as 23 percent for men and eight percent for women (Bifuko et al. 2015). The roman catholic church and its stance on modern contraceptive methods have influenced public opinion regarding family planning (DRC Ministere de la Sante Publique Secretariat General 2010; Mukaba et al. 2015). Moreover, the

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<sup>41</sup> According to UNICEF (2021), 53 percent of girls aged 5 and 17 are out of school. Reasons for this include lack of household resources, as well as concerns about girl's safety due their increased vulnerability to sexual violence, child labour, child marriage and early pregnancy (UNESCO 2011).

health care situation in many areas is dire, and few places treat rape victims or provide trauma-informed care (Grimes et al. 2006; Nieuwenhuizen 2013; World Health Organisation 2014).

Sexual violence, especially REV, is associated with adverse health outcomes for the individual. Rape survivors may sustain physical injuries (e.g., infertility, chronic pain, sexually transmitted infections, unwanted pregnancies, genital trauma), emotional trauma (e.g., symptoms of anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, PTSD, insomnia, low self-esteem, withdrawal) and face severe social repercussions (e.g., stigma and discrimination, abandonment or social isolation) (Bartels et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2010; Kalisya et al. 2011; Kelly et al. 2012; Bass et al. 2013; Verelst, De Schryver, Broekaert, et al. 2014; Verelst, De Schryver, De Haene, et al. 2014; Dossa et al. 2015). A population-based survey on attitudes about justice in eastern DRC in which one-third of respondents said they would not accept sexual assault survivors back into their communities revealed that survivors are regularly cast out by communities if knowledge about their abuse becomes public (Vinck et al. 2008). Related to this, community isolation and social withdrawal resulting from sexual violence were found to impact the mental health of survivors as severely as the attack itself (Kelly et al. 2012). The risk for psychological disorders is mediated by societal rejection and significantly increases in women/girls who fall pregnant as a result of the attack (Fleshman 2005; Notar 2006; Johnson et al. 2010; Bartels et al. 2011; Watts, Hossain, and Zimmerman 2013).

### 3.3.1. Sexual Violence-Related Pregnancies

Scholars have approximated that 17 percent (up to one in five) of sexual violence survivors in eastern DRC experience sexual violence-related pregnancies (SVRP), yet these pregnancies remain mostly undisclosed and there is limited data on the situation of Congolese women who raise children born from rape (Johnson et al. 2010; Rouhani et al. 2015; Scott et al. 2017). Using respondent-driven sampling, Johnston et al. (2017) estimated the population size of females with SVRP in South Kivu, arriving at a total of 17,400 SVRP between 1996 and 2012<sup>42</sup>. The risk of SVRPs from REV is particularly high since attacks are often carried out by multiple assailants or occur in captivity (Johnson et al. 2010;

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<sup>42</sup> This estimate excludes stillbirths and women who are not raising their children born from sexual violence.

Bartels et al. 2013). In a retrospective cohort study of sexual violence survivors who presented for post-assault care to Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, Bartels et al. (2011) found that women who experienced sexual slavery were 37 times more likely to fall pregnant than women who experienced other types of abuse.

Studies have shown that SVRPs not only increase the risk for medical complications and psychological symptoms in survivors but also intensify the social stigma and economic hardship experienced by them (Kelly, Leaning, and Cragin 2009; Bartels et al. 2010; Kelly et al. 2012; Liebling, Slegh, and Ruratotoye 2012; Scott et al. 2015). It is unclear how many women and girls terminate SVRP in the DRC or what the methods or outcomes of the terminations are. However, research from others contexts suggests that almost half of all sexual violence survivors in conflict settings attempt to abort their pregnancies, despite termination often being highly restricted or illegal (Holmes et al. 1996; Tayler-Smith et al. 2012; Dossa et al. 2014). Based on the DRC Penal Code, abortions are criminalised and subject to imprisonment (with a five to 15-year sentence), except in cases of medical emergencies (DRC Ministry of Health 1970; UN Population Division 2002; Kalonda 2012). The Maputo Protocol, ratified in 2008, which outlines women's autonomy regarding their reproductive health decisions, has recently been applied to Congolese law and as a result since 2018/2019 abortions are permitted to preserve the health of pregnant women, as well as in instances of rape, incest or foetal impairment (Center for Reproductive Rights 2021). Based on a secondary analysis of Congolese health surveys, Chae et al. (2017) estimate that in Kinshasa alone, 146,713 abortions are carried out annually (amounting to an abortion rate of 56 per 1,000 pregnancies) the majority of which are induced illegally. The authors estimate that 62 percent of pregnancies among Congolese women aged 15 to 49 are unintended, out of which 43 percent are aborted.

Limited medical resources and the high costs (monetary and social) of accessing post-abortion care present barriers to help-seeking behaviour in women who self-induce abortions (Casey et al. 2019). If terminations are performed in insanitary conditions, by unqualified individuals or with hazardous methods, they can lead to life-threatening health complications (Say et al. 2014; Casey et

al. 2019). Based on an analysis of data from the World Health Organisation (WHO), ten percent of maternal deaths in SSA are the consequence of unsafe abortions, and thus, abortion complications contribute substantially to maternal mortality (Say et al. 2014; Chae et al. 2017). The DRC has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, and risks are particularly high among child and teenage mothers (Save the Children 2013; DHS Program 2014; Johnston et al. 2017). Congolese women have been found to abort the foetus through intoxication (by drinking herbal infusions and enemas, soapy water, corrosive products or digesting high quantities of medications) or mechanical methods such as kicking the uterus or introducing a foreign body into the vagina (Burtscher et al. 2020). Since these methods are dangerous and often ineffective, some mothers abandon the child at birth (Clifford 2008). If complications with clandestine abortions arise, abortion stigma has been found to prevent victims from seeking life-saving medical support (Kelly, Leaning, and Cragin 2009; Shellenberg et al. 2011). The article “better dead than being mocked” evidenced in 2020 that many women in the DRC continue to avoid abortion stigma at *all* costs (Burtscher et al. 2020).

Since survivors who carry SVRP to term are considered a hard-to-access population group, studies regarding their circumstances are rare. Bifuko (2015) disclosed community perceptions amongst 1,305 young people in South Kivu, according to which mothers of illegitimately conceived children are heavily stigmatised. Rating their agreement to predefined statements on a Likert scale, more than 80 percent of the participants agreed that a woman loses respect if she has a child outside marriage and that it is her own fault if she is subsequently shunned by the community (Bifuko et al. 2015). Moreover, 50 percent of female respondents and one-third of male respondents agreed that a child born of extramarital sexual relations should not be granted the same household privileges as marital children (Bifuko et al. 2015). Relatedly, Congolese males indicated that mothers of children born from sexual violence were considered “sympathisers” or “wives” of the rapists and, thus, SVRP reduced survivors’ chances of reintegration (Kelly et al. 2017 p.6).

The first study to systematically assess psychosocial difficulties in Congolese women who raise children from SVRP found strong evidence for poor mental health outcomes in mothers; amongst 750

women who had given birth to a child conceived through rape, 49 percent met the symptom criteria for major depressive disorder, 58 percent for PTSD, 43 percent for anxiety and 34 percent for suicidality (Scott et al. 2015). Similarly high were the numbers of mothers reporting stigma, which evidences that having a child born of sexual violence (CBSV) is a risk factor for psychological difficulties and societal rejection. Stigma and mental health were interrelated, with those who felt stigmatised significantly more likely to report mental disorders. Based on the same interviews, Rouhani et al. (2015) analysed the parenting attitudes of mothers with CBSV. Accordingly, the majority of participants reported a primarily positive maternal-child relationship and positive feelings towards their children. Yet, some mothers described alternating emotions of love and hate, thoughts of abandonment, and shame relating to their children. Moreover, 66 percent described seeing their assailant or remembering the attack when looking at their child. Spousal, family, and community acceptance were linked to higher parenting scores, while abandonment, stigma and mental health problems were related to lower parenting scores. Despite mothers' negative social experiences, the relatively positive bond between mother and child might reflect the importance of motherhood in Congolese society.

It has been illustrated that communities struggle similarly, if not more, with the acknowledgement of the CBSV than with the reintegration of their mothers (Kohli et al. 2013; Scott et al. 2017). Preliminary findings from the above-mentioned studies suggest that CBSV face considerable levels of childhood adversity (Rouhani et al. 2015; Scott et al. 2015). In Rouhani et al.'s study on parenting children conceived from sexual violence, mothers reported lower acceptance levels for their children than for themselves. Acceptance of the child by the survivor's spouse was reported by 45 percent of mothers, acceptance from the survivor's family by 68 percent, and acceptance from the community by 53 percent. The parenting index for mothers of highly stigmatised children was lower, creating concern that these children may be of higher risk of abuse and neglect. In focus group discussions with Congolese men, relatives of sexual violence survivors described that CBSV were without a place in Congolese society due to their lack of a male caregiver and traditional head of

household (Kelly et al. 2017). They further explained that the children were “reminders of the attack” who might grow up to be a “replica of the rapist” and embody highly aggressive qualities (p.6).

Household survey data from 2018 shows that 60 percent of children in the DRC (up to 95 percent in rural provinces) are not registered at birth and thus not recognised before the law (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018). Children whose fathers’ identities are unknown<sup>43</sup> are extremely unlikely to have a legal identity. This restricts their social security, economic rights and civic participation in society (The Fund for Global Human Rights 2017). The lack of birth registration in Congolese children has been linked to problems with access to education, healthcare, and increase in child protection risks like “child labour, child marriage<sup>44</sup>, trafficking and exploitation, and conscription into the armed forces” (The Fund for Global Human Rights 2017). Hence, CBSV are at increased risk of human rights violations and may be restricted in their ability to access social services, education, and medical care.

This section has shown that the protracted conflict in the DRC has resulted in a widespread humanitarian crisis and an environment of impunity in which CRSV has become a norm. The next section will illustrate that this environment has increasingly produced sexual misconduct by foreign peacekeeping, humanitarian, and development personnel.

### **3.4. Peacekeeper-Perpetrated SEA**

Peacekeepers in the DRC have been implicated in numerous scandals, including economic crimes such as the smuggling of gold and trafficking of weapons, sexual crimes, torture and other human rights violations (e.g., *BBC News* 2007; 2008; Gilliard 2010; Meger 2010). In the early 2000s, MONUC became notorious for allegations of SEA, many of which involved underage girls (Holt 2004; Ndulo 2009). The mass allegations associated with the mission, ranging from the operation of sex rings to paedophile

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<sup>43</sup> According to Congolese law, both parents’ names need to appear on the birth certificate (The Fund for Global Human Rights 2017). CBSV are thus very unlikely to have a legal identity, especially if the father is a foreign soldier.

<sup>44</sup> Although illegal, nearly 40 percent of girls marry before the age of 18 (UNICEF 2016).

networks, implicated peacekeepers from almost all contingents and groups of personnel (Morris 2010; Simm 2013). Similar to other countries where the arrival of peacekeepers coincided with a rise in child prostitution, in the DRC, underage sex work rose to unprecedented levels (Rasmussen 2005). Although illegal, an extensive sex economy emerged with children (“kidigo usharatis”[little prostitutes]) as young as six selling sex for survival (Wax 2004 p.1; Csáky 2008; Mattsson 2016).

Between 2004 and 2005, a series of SEA scandals emanated in the city of Bunia, where 4,500 peacekeepers were stationed to protect civilians and provide humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected communities (e.g., Clayton and Bone 2004; Holt 2004; Lacey 2004; Price 2005). According to media reports by several major newspapers, women and children in IDP camps near Bunia openly exchanged sexual services for shelter, small amounts of money or food (Holt and Hughes 2004). UN investigations by the OIOS confirmed in 2005 that “sexual contact with peacekeepers occurred with regularity”, highlighting the disconcerting fact that sex in exchange for food and other goods was particularly common amongst very young girls (OIOS 2005 p.1). It has further been reported that international organised crime and human traffickers supplied sex workers to areas where peacekeepers were stationed, and thus sex work was largely institutionalised by UN forces (Murphy 2006).

With the transformation from MONUC to MONUSCO, SEA became more regulated and reportedly driven underground. It has been documented that around 2010, patterns of SEA by peacekeepers shifted from rape to transactional sex and sexually exploitative relationships (UN General Assembly 2010). Peacekeepers were less visible in bars and restaurants but started frequenting prostitution hotspots<sup>45</sup>, inviting sex workers into UN vehicles, testing ‘girlfriends’ for HIV

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<sup>45</sup> The beach resort hotel Uvira in Goma became known as a ‘hotspot’ for transactional sex, where Russian peacekeepers checked in as “temporary guests” to meet Congolese women and girls (Fontan 2012 p.1). According to a sex worker at hotel Uvira, the regular price for transactional sex was 20 to 30 USD; however, teenage girls were often exploited for less than three USD (Fontan 2012). Reportedly, problems surfaced when women were underpaid, ambushed by multiple men or when paternity issues arose (Rasmussen 2005; Notar 2006; UN General Assembly 2010). The doorman of Hotel Uvira explained that girls were either regulars, came in bulks by minibuses or were accompanied by Congolese intermediaries who facilitated meetings while peacekeepers rented hotel rooms per night or on a monthly basis (Fontan 2012). ‘Girlfriends’ or those in more

and providing them with army uniforms to meet up at the camps. Reportedly, sex workers entered the base early in the morning or late at night through holes in the fence, which increased their risk of being violated and gang-raped (Sen, Datta, and Mutumayi 2011).

A 2020 report on corruption by UN agencies and NGOs during the Ebola and Covid19 crises shows that SEA by peacekeepers continues to be a problem (Zaidi and Mnette 2018; Henze, Grünewald, and Parmar 2020; Peyton 2020). Reportedly, during the 2018 to 2020 government-led operation to control the Ebola outbreak, some of the 15,000 aid workers (from the WHO, World Vision, UNICEF, Oxfam, MSF and the UN agency International Organisation for Migration) stationed in and around Beni have been implicated in allegations that resemble the patterns of SEA by peacekeepers: aid workers giving out jobs and humanitarian assistance in return for sex, women and girls being recruited via local boys or intermediaries, victims and witnesses being bribed and a general lack of accountability (Dodds and Kleinfeld 2020; Cheng and Maliro 2021). Accordingly, ‘sex-for-jobs schemes’ that used sexual blackmail for hiring were an open secret during the Ebola operation. Women reported being offered fake work contracts as cooks, cleaners or community outreach workers or being invited for job interviews at local hotels where they were told that they “had to offer something” to secure the contract (Flummerfelt and Peyton 2020; Peyton and Flummerfelt 2020 p.1). Once employed, women said they were ambushed, raped, or drugged by their superiors, forced to have sex in UN cars or at peacekeeper camps, leaving some pregnant and HIV positive. A leaked email revealed that in at least one case of paternity claim, management at the WHO bribed a mother by buying her a plot of land, allegedly to protect the reputation of the organisation (Peyton and Flummerfelt 2020). Similar allegations regarding SEA in the aid sector surfaced in 2021 relating to Covid-19, including one concerning a victim who died from complications of an illegally induced abortion (Flummerfelt and Kasongo 2021). In another instance, a young mother of a child fathered by

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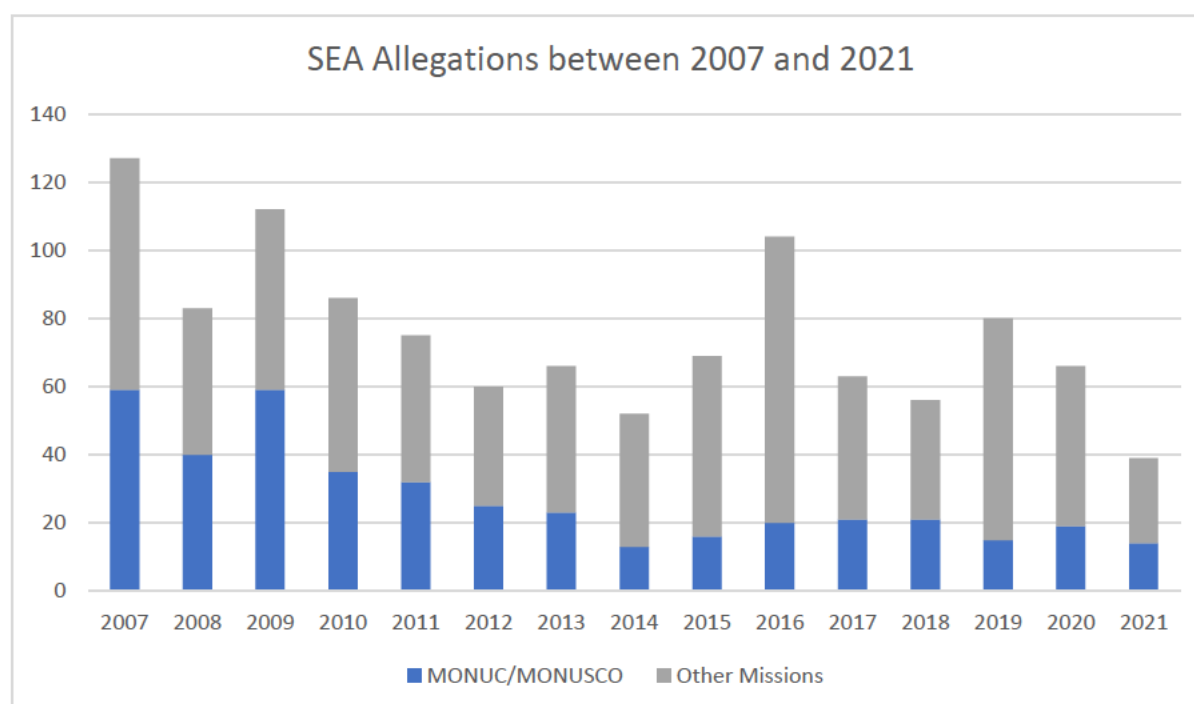
long-term relationships with peacekeepers were often provided with mobile phones to arrange meetings more discreetly (Fontan 2012).



a humanitarian worker admitted being homeless, jobless and resourceless since her family rejected her due to the pregnancy (Flummerfelt and Kasongo 2021).

### 3.4.1. More than a Few Bad Apples

Due to the gravity and frequency of sexual offences, the DRC has been described as the “epicentre” of peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA (Larson and Dodds 2017 p.1). According to the UN misconduct tracking system, the DRC holds the highest number of peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA globally (UN Peacekeeping 2021). Although allegations have declined in recent years, of the worldwide total, still more about one-third are annually reported in the DRC, raising the question of why SEA during MONUC/MONUSCO is so much more widespread than in other settings where missions operate.



**Figure 7.** Total number of SEA allegations reported per year based on information from the UN Misconduct Tracking System, July 2021

Previous analysis comparing risk and protective factors across mission contexts suggests that this has to do with mission-level factors such as mission size and staffing and host-country factors such as resource deprivation, gendered disparity, and high rates of CRSV (Nordås and Rustad 2013).

**Mission-level factors.** Concerning mission and budget size, MONUC/MONUSCO is the largest PKO in the history of the UN<sup>46</sup>. The UN spends more than one billion USD on UNPK in DRC each year and currently deploys more than 17,500 peacekeepers there (UN Peacekeeping 2021b). Among the top TPCCs for MONUSCO are countries with undemocratic processes and poor human rights records, including (in descending order based on size of contribution) Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Indonesia, South Africa, Morocco, Nepal, Tanzania, Uruguay and Malawi (UN Peacekeeping 2021b). Alleged perpetrators in the DRC are (in descending order based on number of allegations) South African, Tanzanian, Moroccan, Beninese, Senegalese, Malawian, Uruguayan, Guinean, Nepalese and Romanian (UN Peacekeeping 2021a)<sup>47</sup>. Between 2015 and 2021, the FIB in eastern DRC - which is predominantly composed of African troops from Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa - has been responsible for more than half of all allegations received (UN Security Council 2017; 2019b; Nagel, Fin, and Maenza 2021; UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

The information provided by the UN conduct and discipline website reveals that 42 percent of SEA pertaining to MONUSCO personnel are classified as sexual abuse and 58 percent as sexual exploitation<sup>48</sup> (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). However, during the MONUC era, one-half to two-thirds of victims were minors, and thus, the number of rape cases during MONUC is believed to be much higher<sup>49</sup> (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). While reported sexual abuse allegations and incidents referring to child victims have decreased significantly in recent years, the number of claims involving sexual

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<sup>46</sup> The UNSC started scaling back mission personnel in 2019/2020 (UN Peacekeeping 2021b). At the peak of the mission, more than 20,000 peacekeepers were deployed.

<sup>47</sup> Since 2015, the nationalities of uniformed personnel implicated in an allegation are publicly available. However, this does not extend to civilian peacekeepers which is highly problematic considering that almost one third of allegations in the DRC implicate civilian peacekeepers (between 2007 and 2021 alleged perpetrators were 65 percent military, 6 percent police, 29 percent civilian) (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). The number of civilian offenders is extremely high considering that civilian peacekeepers only make up a small percentage of mission personnel deployed (six percent in 2021) (UN Peacekeeping 2021b). This finding contradicts some of the academic scholarship that considers militarised masculinity to be a main factor in explaining SEA and challenges the UN to release more information concerning civilian peacekeepers.

<sup>48</sup> The type of allegation (sexual exploitation or abuse) and type of personnel (military, police or civilian) have only been documented since 2010, thus, this statistic refers to allegations reported during the MONUSCO era only (UN peacekeeping 2021).

<sup>49</sup> Whether or not an allegation was made concerning a child victim has been recorded since 2008. From 2008 to 2010 (and likely before), the majority of victims were child victims and thus, would have been classified as sexually abused even if payment was negotiated and agreed upon (UN Peacekeeping 2021a).

exploitation and sex-work remains high (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). In 2014, a team of experts (high-ranking military officers, UN officials and scholars) assessed risk factors for SEA in different missions, citing “laxity in discipline” for MONUSCO personnel and patchy patrols by military police (UN General Assembly 2014 p.10).

**Host-country factors.** Scholars have argued that several external circumstances in the DRC contribute to the large-scale occurrence of sexual misconduct by peacekeepers (e.g., Nordås and Rustad 2013). Three elements appeared meaningful in my own research. First, the incredibly challenging dynamics in the DRC (high levels of poverty, displacement and security threats) cause particularly strong power imbalances between peacekeeping personnel and local civilians (Gilliard 2012). Death and other war atrocities have led to many young people to live by themselves (in children-led households, on the street, in IDP camps) with little to no family support or economic leverage, leaving them vulnerable to recruitment by armed groups, abduction and SEA (UN General Assembly 2005; International Rescue Committee 2007; Westendorf and Searle 2017). Many can no longer tend to their fields due to rebels taking possession of the land, leading to a lack of income and food shortages (UNICEF 2018; Prashad 2020). The arrival of thousands of predominantly male and uniformed peacekeepers worsened pre-existing inequitable gender norms and class division in the DRC (Edu-Afful and Aning 2015; Tikka 2018). In the emerging peacekeeping economy, job opportunities for traditionally ‘female sectors’ such as waitressing, domestic labour, and sales increased, leading to increased proximity between peacekeepers and local civilians and, thus, instances of SEA (Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009). Due to the threat of violence from armed groups, women increasingly conducted daily chores (e.g. fetching water and firesticks) under UN protection (International Rescue Committee 2019; Freedman 2011). These situations intensified engagement between peacekeepers and local women, creating a heightened risk of SEA (Jennings 2014; Mullin 2019). That SEA is linked to poverty and displacement is reflected in the fact that often the most destitute (orphans, internally displaced persons, refugees and single mothers) are exploited or abused (OIOS 2007; Kovatch 2016). In fact, investigations by the

UN detailed that incidents of rape in the MONUC era primarily concerned “poor village children” between 12 and 16 who were illiterate, deeply affected by war and had “no visible means of financial support, other than the money, food and clothing they received from peacekeepers” (OIOS 2005 p.8; OIOS 2007 p.6). The UN provides 1,428 USD per peacekeeper per month (Congressional Research Service 2020), which is high compared to the average monthly per capita income in the DRC of 45.4 USD (World Bank 2019). The vast income disparity between civilians and UNPK personnel has fuelled sex work, sexually exploitative relationships, and sexual servitude (Wax 2005; Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009; Nieuwenhuizen 2013;). A civilian peacekeeper in eastern DRC suggested in 2007 that in a local secondary school, two-thirds of girls in a class paid their fees with money made from transactional sex with peacekeepers (Higate 2007). Moreover, girls in the DRC have sometimes described survival sex as “obligation sex” since family members depend on the income this generates (Wax 2005 p.1).

Second, the rejection of survivors of CRSV by their families increases the vulnerability of women/girls to SEA (Shotton 2006). This has been described by *the Washington Post* whose story “one-dollar girl” illustrates the extremely difficult path of reintegration for sexual violence survivors in the DRC (Wax 2005). The article features a ten-year-old girl who became a sex worker after being raped by militias. Accordingly, the young girl sought counselling after the incident, where she learned that although what happened was not her fault, she was no longer a virgin and therefore “worthless” in the eyes of Congolese society (p.1). Rejected by her family, she started selling sex to peacekeepers for one USD. This shows that the social exclusion of sexual violence survivors contributes to the survival sex economy in the DRC that reinforces a cycle of violence.

Third, the widespread nature of CRSV in the DRC has created an environment of impunity that allows peacekeepers to commit SEA in a vacuum of responsibility (UN General Assembly 2005). Related to this, SEA by peacekeepers has sometimes been described as driven by “the shadows of colonial violence” and a nostalgia for the colonial social order that rationalises violence against civilians with an ‘us vs them’ mentality (Razack 2000; Whitworth 2004 p.376; Henry 2013; Westendorf

and Searle 2017). Little academic literature has considered the role colonial views of race and gender have on perpetuating a culture within UNPK in which SEA is normalised. However, the relevance of colonialism in ‘othering’ civilians has been described in 2008 by a senior UN official from France who explained his abuse of 24 under-age girls in the DRC with the patriarchal and colonial culture in peacekeeping spaces: “Over there, the colonial spirit persists. The white man gets what he wants” (*The Irish Times* 2008). Despite the diversity of peacekeepers, a mentality of white supremacy<sup>50</sup> according to which local civilians are racialised, sexualised, degraded and dehumanised may be applied to justify violence by peacekeepers (Autesserre 2014). Hence, the colonial history of the DRC may contribute to the extremely high rates of SEA in the DRC and may hold some power in explaining the behaviour of peacekeepers who hyper-sexualise local civilians and engage in sexual practices (e.g., child rape<sup>51</sup>) that they are highly unlikely to perform in their home countries (Higate and Henry 2004).

### 3.4.2. Zero Compliance with Zero Tolerance

Instances of SEA by UN peacekeepers were reported since the launch of MONUC in 1999, yet mission management only increased its efforts to respond to the allegations when media attention to sexual misconduct in the DRC increased in 2004 (Holt and Hughes 2004; Rasmussen 2005). Reportedly, between 1999 and 2004 staff members were ridiculed for reporting SEA, and witnesses, both within and outside the UN, threatened and intimidated (Rasmussen 2005). In response to the growing media attention, the UN acknowledged in 2004 that there was clear evidence that “shameful acts of gross misconduct” were being committed by peacekeepers and other UN personnel (*BBC News* 2004 p.1; Fleshman 2005). Once it became increasingly apparent that SEA in the DRC was both widespread and systematic, the UN requested several high-level investigations into the mission.

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<sup>50</sup> Although the majority of peacekeepers who are deployed in the DRC come from former colonised countries, they might reproduce this mentality.

<sup>51</sup> The high rates of child rape are perceived to be linked to opportunism, colonial stereotypes and fear of infection with HIV/Aids since sex with children is less likely to result in a sexually transmittable infections (Ross, Scott, and Schwartz 2008).

Following a preliminary assessment of the situation in Bunia, the Department of Peacekeeping ordered a special emergency response project to the Ituri region and requested for the UN's internal investigative arm, the OIOS, to undertake a full investigation into the incidents raised by the media. The resulting assessment brought mixed results. Although serious problems with conduct and discipline were identified and victims' testimonies were described as "detailed and convincing", evidence of SEA was difficult to detect and the failure of contingents to cooperate meant that most allegations were judged as unsubstantial (OIOS 2005). According to the situation report by MONUC's personnel conduct officer, assessments were "hampered by limited time, resources and logistical means" and there was strong resistance to address the issue (Rasmussen 2005). Rasmussen states that although most peacekeepers were non-instigators of SEA, "many of the mission's personnel were complicit in the problem – directly or indirectly" (p.1). Reportedly, senior officials failed to investigate serious allegations and colleagues and contingents looked the other way, making SEA a systematic UN problem (Rasmussen 2005). In a confidential UN report obtained by *The London Times* in 2004, a special adviser to the SG said that the situation in the DRC "appears to be one of zero-compliance with zero tolerance" (Clayton and Bone 2004 p.1). The allegations in the DRC further led to the influential Zeid report<sup>52</sup> (UN General Assembly 2005). After visiting the DRC in 2004 and meeting with victims, government officials, NGOs, women's rights organisations, mission management and different contingents of peacekeepers, Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein concluded that the reality of SEA in the DRC was "deeply disturbing" and that there appeared to be an official ZTP, "coexisting with an unofficial policy to the contrary" (UN General Assembly 2005 p.8,22; Shotton 2006).

Collectively, these investigations described clear patterns of SEA and led to a number of policy recommendations, spanning preventative action, the detection of future misconduct, and mission-based responses to SEA, including the establishment of a new office within MONUC to investigate allegations more effectively (OIOS 2005; Dahrendorf 2006). The UN expanded disciplinary procedures,

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<sup>52</sup> SG Kofi Annan's appointed Jordanian diplomat Zeid Ra'ad Al-Hussein to investigate the pervasiveness of SEA in the DRC and start a dialogue with member states regarding how to resolve the issue (UN General Assembly 2005).

updated amenities and recreational facilities on base, established a focal-point network and a hotline for confidential reporting and imposed a number of restrictions for mission personnel (Fleshman 2005; UN Security Council 2005). In order to facilitate monitoring and the identification of perpetrators, MONUC introduced a ban on all unofficial contact of peacekeeping personnel with local civilians, a dusk-to-dawn curfew, off-limit areas for some local businesses and required military personnel to wear uniforms at all times (Behr 2011; Simm 2013). Moreover, the UN decided to withhold mission subsistence allowance from peacekeepers until after deployment in order to restrict their financial liquidity in the field (OIOS 2005).

These policy changes were initially perceived as a turning point and thus, from 2005 onwards, MONUC officially changed course from actively suppressing allegations to enforcing and encouraging standards of conduct. However, in reality, the ‘boys will be boys’ attitude prevailed and the OIOS reported in 2007 that girls in Bunia remained at high risk and were increasingly following peacekeepers to different locations (OIOS 2007 p.10). Between 2005 and 2007, the OIOS investigated 217 instances of transactional sex with girls aged 14<sup>53</sup> to 18 but found that it was “virtually impossible to substantiate specific instances” (p.2). As reasons for this, the report outlined that victims were apprehensive of being confronted with their perpetrators, were pressured or intimidated not to testify, feared losing their source of income or ceased cooperating due to a lack of financial incentives. Many of the perpetrators were no longer in Bunia and the OIOS considered the substantiation of an allegation without an in-person identification impossible. Most importantly, however, contingents and commanders were reluctant to cooperate and claimed that the “sexual teasing” of local civilians was “the real problem” (OIOS 2007 p.7). Bribes and threats by mission personnel often prevented the enforcement of restrictions while some regulations were bypassed, for instance by parking UN cars further away from brothels (Rasmussen 2005; Higate 2007). Hence, rather than preventing incidents,

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<sup>53</sup> Before 2006, the local age of consent for sexual relations was set to 14 for girls which is considered to still have negative implications for the protection of girls against SEA today (Puechguirbal 2003; OIOS 2007; US Department of State 2012).

these measures might have led to SEA occurring in more private settings and being increasingly driven underground (Dahrendorf 2006).

In the following years, the department of peacekeeping established MONUC's mission-specific conduct and discipline team and deployed a resident OIOS officer to better implement the UN's Comprehensive strategy on combating SEA (UN General Assembly 2007c). In 2009, MONUC became the first UN PKO to put in place a unit that was tasked with gender mainstreaming and the improvement of the mission's response to sexual violence in the country (UN Women Evaluation Office 2012; Kasperek 2019). When MONUC was transformed into MONUSCO, the conduct and discipline team opened three sub-offices in Goma, Bukavu and Bunia to attend to allegations in the eastern part of the country where most troops were deployed (UN General Assembly 2010). This laid bare the limitation of existing support initiatives and service structures for victims of SEA in large parts of the country and sparked the SG recommendation to strengthen protection clusters and networks for victims of SEA with local initiatives (UN General Assembly 2009). Since 2018, the field victims' rights advocate in the DRC has been working to improve collaborations with organisations such as UNFPA and UNICEF, as well as local, non-UN organisations who have established referral pathways for service providers, vocational training and other projects for victims (UN General Assembly 2019). Throughout the years, communication campaigns, community outreach activities and other awareness-raising efforts were launched via radio or local media, exhibitions, symposiums, workshops or community theatre (UN General Assembly 2008b; 2013; 2014; 2019).

Despite these positive developments, the UN has received much criticism for its inaction regarding SEA in the DRC, and for arguably being more proactive in examining the rape of women and girls by rebels than by its own troops (The Pan-African Alliance 2017). Since 2010, 73 military personnel have been repatriated on disciplinary grounds and 14 civilian personnel were dismissed or had their contracts terminated (UN Peacekeeping 2021a). While repatriation and dismissal do occur, disciplinary measures are rare and disproportionate to the number of allegations received. The lack



of prosecution of perpetrators is especially problematic for victims with SEA-related pregnancies as is demonstrated below.

### **3.5. PKFC in the DRC**

Allegations of SEA by peacekeepers resulting in the birth of children first emerged in 2004 when media reports indicated that peacekeepers in Bunia had abandoned children. The article “Push to make dads of peacekeeper babies pay” was one of the first to pick up on the issue, reporting about 141 women and girls in the Ituri region who had conceived children with Moroccan and Uruguayan peacekeepers (*The Weekend Australian* 2005). Reporters from the *Washington Post* who visited the region in 2005 confirmed that a “growing number of babies allegedly fathered by United Nations soldiers and civilians” existed and highlighted the case of a US-American peacekeeper who had fathered children in several countries, including the DRC (Lynch 2005). This means that the first paternity cases in the DRC reach back more than twenty years. The 2005 report of MONUC’s personnel conduct officer states that the birth of children associated with the mission was raised on a number of occasions between 2003 and 2004 but that paternity-related matters were not taken seriously until the media drew international attention to them (Rasmussen 2005). The report further details security incidents, beatings, and assaults by peacekeepers on pregnant women, as well as arguments between victims and MONUC personnel who abandoned children. The public nature of these incidents would suggest that mission officials were aware of peacekeepers fathering children and the related problems for civilians. Yet, the UN was initially reluctant to address childbirth associated with the mission (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2005).

Interestingly, the OIOS investigations into allegations of SEA in Bunia did not mention paternity claims, yet the Zeid report (which addressed many of the same allegations) provided detailed accounts of issues relating to paternity and child maintenance. The report not only acknowledged the presence of abandoned “peacekeeper babies” but voiced concern regarding their situation, describing extreme deprivation of economic resources (UN General Assembly 2005 p.5). It seems unlikely that

the OIOS would not have come across paternity matters unless claims of women with SEA-related pregnancies were not subject to official documentation (remained unreported, were dismissed, or resolved on the quiet)<sup>54</sup>. When the OIOS returned to Bunia in 2006, it received reports from a local NGO concerning ten girls who had allegedly conceived children with peacekeepers (OIOS 2007). The OIOS was able to substantiate the case of a 17-year-old girl who identified three peacekeepers as sexual partners in previous months, one of whom could be identified in a physical line up. However, due to having had multiple sexual partners, the girl (who was still pregnant at the time) could not implicate the individual in a paternity claim.

In 2008, *ABC News* profiled allegations according to which peacekeepers in the DRC were sexually exploiting or abusing “hundreds of underage girls”, only to then “leave their children and their crimes behind” (Ross, Scott, and Schwartz 2008 p.1). The article drew attention to the lack of support mothers and PKFC received by highlighting the situation of a young disabled girl who was raped and impregnated by a peacekeeper while begging for food. According to her mother, she had repeatedly been turned away at the UN camp, where she attempted to request assistance. The article concluded that fatherless children with no valid support system were “creating a whole different level of problem in the Congo” (Ross, Scott, and Schwartz 2008 p.1; *The Irish Times* 2008). Relatedly, Fontan (2012) described the circumstances of several 14 and 15-year-old girls in impoverished communities who fell pregnant after having had sexual relations with peacekeepers. The author stated that despite “already having been through hell during the Congo war”, the girls, themselves children, were now responsible to provide for an infant. Larson and Dodds (2017) from *the Associated Press* interviewed several mothers of PKFC in the Ituri region. Arguing that PKFC were “effectively sentenced to a lifetime of poverty”, the authors introduced the circumstances of a 14-year-old mother who became pregnant after being raped by a peacekeeper at age eleven and again at 13. Abandoned by her family, she

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<sup>54</sup> The 2014 annual SG report on special measures for protection from SEA, raises the issue of bribes by UN peacekeepers (UN General Assembly 2014). Reportedly, local civilians were raising unfounded accusations in the hope to extort money from peacekeepers or UN officials, pointing towards the regularity with which bribes must have occurred.

stopped going to school and became a sex worker, increasing her risk of another pregnancy. Reportedly, the UN sent investigators to eastern DRC in 2010 to inquire about her situation, yet no assistance followed.

*Outlook* interviewed victims of SEA by Indian peacekeepers next to the UN Nyiragongo base in Goma in 2011 (Sen, Datta, and Mutumayi 2011). A sex worker described wearing an army uniform for access to the camp where she agreed to meet a peacekeeper for transactional sex but was cornered and gang-raped by ten men. She argued that after having had sexual relations with peacekeepers, “she might as well have a child with them” since children fathered by peacekeepers could reduce her suffering. She explained that having a PKFC enabled mothers to request food rations at the UN, and thus, “such a kid [was] the mother’s Western Union.” (Sen, Datta and Mutumayi, 2011). This raises the possibility that some civilians in the DRC might engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers hoping to conceive a child. However, Congolese women who were raising children fathered by peacekeepers did not share this perception and, on the contrary, reported fewer financial resources and high levels of stigma. One woman explained that having a child out of wedlock was tabooed in Congolese society, especially if a foreign soldier fathered the child, and thus, she was confronted with overt rejection and discrimination (Sen, Datta, and Mutumayi 2011). Another mother who had given birth to a child with “distinct Indian features” shared that having had sexual relations with peacekeepers “brought her bad luck”, for it eliminated her chances of education or marriage (Sen, Datta, and Mutumayi 2011 p.1). While some women with SEA-related pregnancies received short-term financial support by their ‘peacekeeper boyfriends’, others were pressured into aborting or bribed to keep the pregnancy a secret. One mother discussed her families’ attempts to report the soldier who impregnated her before realising that her family “couldn’t possibly win against the UN” (p.1). Reportedly, women and girls who engaged willingly in sexual relations with peacekeepers often only discovered the far-reaching consequences of SEA once they were abandoned by peacekeepers and rejected by their families and friends. The report by *Outlook* also featured women who had lost their PKFC due to medical complications and self-induced abortions, confirming the above-outlined

concerns about the risks of clandestine terminations. On the subject of adverse health outcomes, scholars have raised concern regarding the spread of HIV/AIDS amongst victims with SEA-related pregnancies who run a high risk of transmitting the virus to their children (Nieuwenhuizen 2013).

While news channels such as *Outlook*, *the BBC*, and *the Associated Press* have increasingly made headlines with investigations of paternity claims, systematic studies and peer-reviewed reports are absent. Yet, based on these and other sources, the number of PKFC in the DRC is thought to be quite high. Between 2010 and 2021, 118 paternity claims have been associated with UN missions in the DRC, of which only ten have been substantiated (UN Peacekeeping 2021). According to the UN misconduct tracking system, there has been a peak in allegations involving paternity between 2016 and 2018, which might be related to SG António Guterres' initiatives to encourage women to come forward (UN Peacekeeping 2021).

### **3.6. Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that SEA by UN peacekeepers in the DRC does not take place in a vacuum but often occurs in a situation where there is a lack of managerial and command oversight, strong inequalities in terms of gender, ethnicity and socio-economic conditions, a history of colonial violence and foreign exploitation and no effective judicial system in place to process the terror of sexual violence (Meger 2010). The extent of SEA in the DRC illustrates that the problem of sexual misconduct by peacekeepers is not one 'of a few bad apples' but an issue that is both systematic and ongoing. Due to community perceptions, according to which having a child outside marriage impedes women's chance for social stability, women with SEA-related pregnancies often become single parents and struggle with psychological and economic difficulties their whole lives. Patriarchal norms leave a mark on the identity of victims that may compromise the futures of PKFC. The influence of gender, ethnic and class relations on the life courses of PKFC in the DRC will be further explored in chapter five to eight.

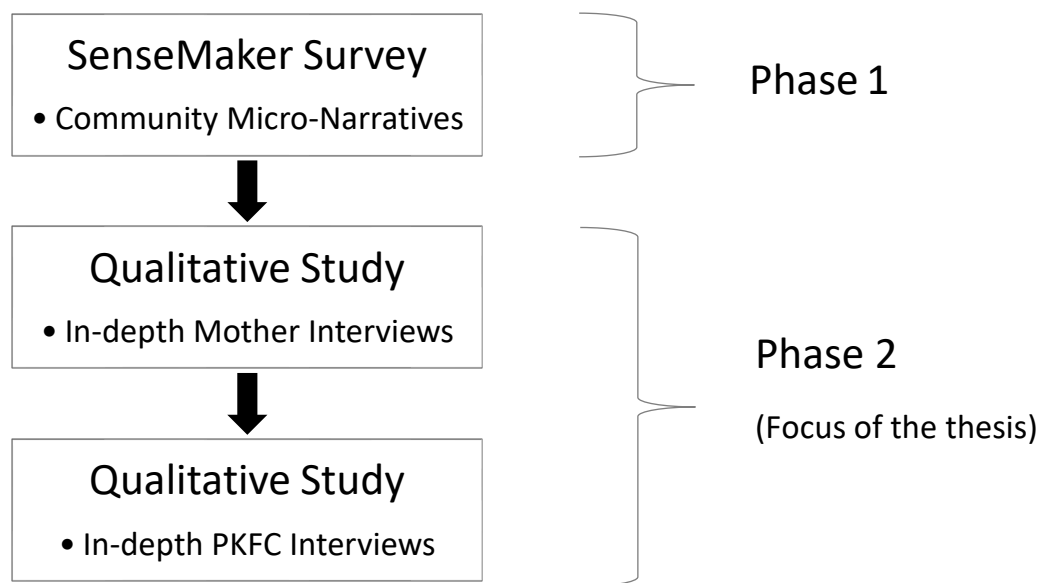
## **Chapter 4: Methodology**

Building on the contextual information provided on PKFC in the DRC, this chapter explains how my research contributes to an improved understanding of their life courses. In the following, I lay out the research rationale, strategy and methods used to include PKFC in the present research. After summarising the study design and general methodology, I will explain the fieldwork logistics. In describing the ethical underpinnings of the project, I will address my positionality and epistemological assumptions in conducting the research. The chapter finishes with an outline of the performed data analysis and an initial exploration of participant characteristics that set the scene for a more detailed assessment of their experiences presented my four research papers.

### **4.1. Study Design**

Researching with victims of SEA and their children presents a range of methodological and ethical challenges. The following section describes how I engaged mothers and PKFC in the research despite these challenges, using a combination of methods and strategies.

The research was designed in two phases. The first phase employed the narrative-based mixed-methods tool SenseMaker® to collect stories about interactions between UNPK personnel and local women and girls in areas of UNPK deployment (Cognitive Edge 2021). In the second phase, qualitative follow-up interviews were conducted with all women and girls who participated in the first part of the research and had shared a story about sexual relations with UN peacekeepers resulting in pregnancy and childbirth. This enabled the interviewing of mothers of PKFC who functioned as gatekeepers to the interviewing of children.



**Figure 8.** Study Design and Research Phases

More precisely, the first phase of the research was designed to document a broad range of interactions between UN peacekeepers and female civilians in eastern DRC. This data collection employed the narrative capture tool, SenseMaker®, to gather information about the experiences of local women and girls who live in communities that host peacekeepers (Cognitive Edge 2021). Funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada, the SenseMaker study was a cross-national and intersectoral collaboration between Queen’s University in Kingston, York University in Toronto, the University of Birmingham, the University of Reading, and two DRC-based organisations, addressing the impact of PKOs on local communities. In collecting a large scale of narratives about peacekeeper-civilian relations, the SenseMaker project also gained access to civilians who experienced SEA-related pregnancies and childbirth.

The second phase of the research which constitutes this PhD research, followed-on to the experiences of participants who shared stories about maternity with a qualitative, explorative study designed to learn more about the circumstances of mothers and their PKFC. Due to the lack of previous information on the topic and the sensitive nature of the research, this data collection employed a qualitative methodology with an open, participant-oriented interview style (Polit, Beck, and Hungler 2001; Streubert and Carpenter 2007; Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey 2011). Semi-structured interviews

were conducted with two groups of participants; mothers of PKFC who were identified via the SenseMaker study, and PKFC who were recruited via their mothers.

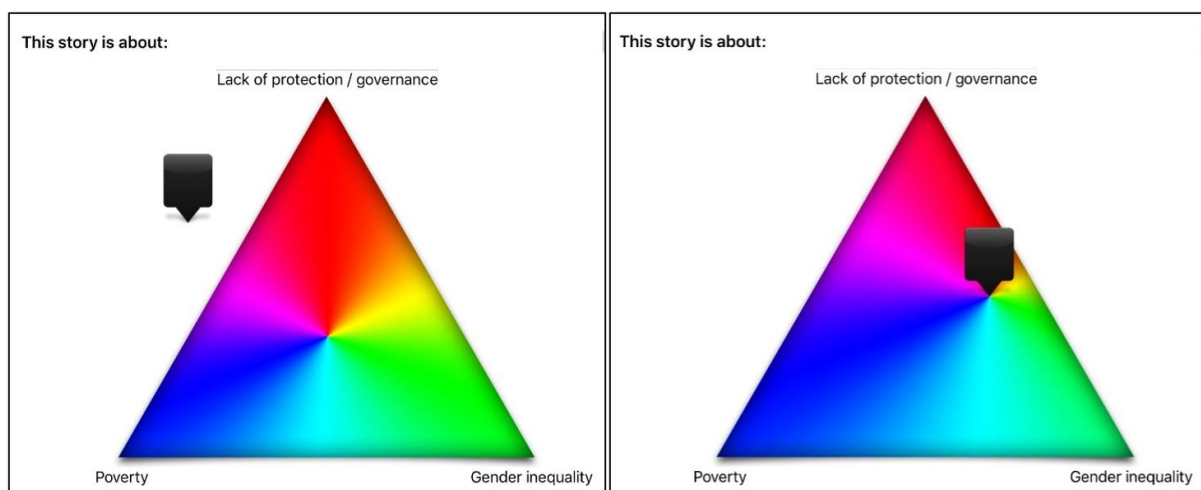
Thus, the empirical research of the thesis is based on a two-stage research project, with stage one being a collaborative narrative study designed to explore peacekeeper-civilian relations in Congolese communities, and stage two being my own qualitative study that examined the situation of PKFC and their families through semi-structured interviews. Since stage two constitutes the main subject of the present thesis, I will only provide an overview of the larger SenseMaker study but then go into detail about the qualitative interviews on which my analysis is based.

#### 4.1.1. SenseMaker Data Collection

The mixed-methods stage of the research employed the narrative-capture tool SenseMaker (Cognitive Edge, 2021). Initially developed to analyse organisational culture, SenseMaker has recently gained popularity as a research medium for social impact studies (Bartels et al. 2018; Lee and Bartels 2019b). Drawing on the notion that storytelling is a natural way to communicate complex ideas in everyday conversations, SenseMaker assumes that people ‘make sense’ of their experiences through storytelling (Brown 2006; Koenig Kellas and Trees 2006; Fivush et al. 2011; Thomson 2011). Based on this assumption, SenseMaker explores the social patterns of cognitions that lead individuals to share stories in social interactions (Van der Merwe et al. 2019). Used as a research tool, SenseMaker prompts participants to share a narrative on a topic of interest that is then audio-recorded and interpreted via the SenseMaker software. This facilitates the rapid collection and analysis of hundreds of stories, each of them contributing to a collective memory that is described as the ‘wisdom of crowds’ (Van der Merwe et al. 2019; Cognitive Edge 2021).

This study used SenseMaker to administer a cross-sectional survey documenting interactions between peacekeepers and local women and girls in Congolese communities. Community members were approached in public areas and naturalistic spaces (markets, parks, shops or bus stops) and asked to share a story in response to their choice of three open-ended story prompts, each eliciting a micro-

narrative about a form of interaction between female civilians and UN peacekeepers. The research prompts (which can be found in Appendix A) encouraged positive, negative, and neutral experiences and documented stories based on participants' own experiences, the experience of a family member, neighbour, friend, or an experience they had heard or read about. As such, the SenseMaker survey did not target cases of SEA but instead prompted for stories about interactions more generally, allowing the theme of SEA to emerge naturally amongst a variety of topics (Van der Merwe et al. 2019; Cognitive Edge 2021). No prior personal contact with UN personnel was required, and all community members over the age of 13<sup>55</sup> could participate in the study. If the prospective participant was willing to share a story, their narrative was voice recorded on a tablet that the participant subsequently used to self-interpret the gathered narrative via the SenseMaker app. After recording their story, participants were asked a series of questions to convey the meaning of their story. For instance, they were asked to plot different aspects of their narrative spatially on pre-defined scales, including the dyads and triads shown below. In this way, participants assigned their own narratives data points that could be translated into quantitative values and statistical outputs.



**Figure 9.** Example triads

<sup>55</sup> Age 13 was chosen as a cut-off point for participation since it is known from prior research that girls as young as 13 are affected by SEA (Lee and Bartels, 2019). Moreover, research suggests that girls may start to be perceived as sexually emancipated from puberty (Zungwe, Butedi, and Mavungu 2015; Kangaude and Skelton 2018).



Position the indicator on the scales where it best describes the experience you shared. If a question is not applicable to your experience, check the Not Applicable (N/A) box.

**The interaction and relations you shared in the story were...** ☒

Entirely initiated by the foreign UN or MONUSCO personnel Entirely initiated by the woman or girl

**In the story shared, the peacekeeping mission...** ☐ N/A

Provided the girl / woman with too much protection and safety Put the woman / girl at risk and in danger

**Figure 10: Example dyads**

Having participants interpret their own narratives on these scales offers accurate information on the topic of the study since it reduces the role of the researcher and, thus, the likelihood of researcher bias interfering with the interpretation of results (Cognitive Edge 2021). This is especially important in a cross-cultural context where researchers are less familiar with the social values and norms within which the research is embedded and, thus, more likely to draw faulty conclusions (Bakhache et al. 2017; Bartels et al. 2019). Having the participant self-interpret their experience also allows for the inclusion of context, underlying information and emotions, adding more layers of meaning to the story. Once each narrative is backed up with data evaluation points, these can be pooled to compare the information from different stories through statistical analysis, generating plots where clusters reveal widely held perspectives on particular issues. Once enough stories have been collected to enable statistical power, the ‘knowledge of crowds’ allows the application of complexity theory<sup>56</sup> to the data through which patterns and themes can be identified (Burnes 2005; Lee and Bartels 2019a). In the produced statistical outputs, each story is still linked to the accompanying qualitative answer,

<sup>56</sup> Complexity methods are based on the idea that different actions like storytelling and sensemaking give feedback to one another, creating complex social dynamics. The SenseMaker software explores these complexities with pattern management to assess and monitor experiences, preference or attitudes (Van der Merwe et al. 2019).

making SenseMaker a unique mixed-method tool that provides statistically valid and qualitatively rich results. As part of the assessment, standard multiple-choice questions were asked to get demographic data about the participants and provide context for the story. For instance, participants in this study were asked who their story was about, how often similar events took place in their communities and how the story made them feel. After conducting each interview, the answers to these questions were used to identify those participants who were personally affected by SEA and for whom sexual relations with peacekeepers had led to pregnancy and childbirth. Participants who met these inclusion criteria were invited to share the details of their experience in a qualitative follow-up interview. These interviews form the second stage of the research.

Over a nine-week period, the SenseMaker data collection documented 2,816 stories. Of these, 1,182 (42%) either mentioned a PKFC or were about a PKFC, as detailed in the table below. These numbers provide a first indication of how prevalent peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA resulting in the birth of children might be in eastern DRC.

**Table 1.** SenseMaker interview numbers (total number of stories vs those referring to PKFC)

Site <sup>57</sup>	Stories	Mentioned a PKFC	About a PKFC
Kisangani	563	167	112
Goma	511	51	133
Bunia	538	137	119
Bukavu	492	87	123
Beni	252	89	41
Kalemi	460	60	63
<b>Total</b>	<b>2816</b>	<b>591</b>	<b>591</b>

#### 4.1.2. Qualitative Interviews

The second stage of the research methodology involved gathering more in-depth data regarding SEA resulting in pregnancy and childbirth. Traditional qualitative interviews were conducted with a subsample of the participants from the SenseMaker study. The survey data introduced above was used to identify first-person accounts of sexual relations with UNPK personnel resulting in a live-born

<sup>57</sup> The study locations are introduced in section 4.3.

infant, enabling the selection of eligible respondents for qualitative interviews with mothers of PKFC. Beyond that, the snowball-recruitment method<sup>58</sup> was deployed to increase participants and reach a higher sample size (Goodman 1961). Hence, mothers (and a small number of other guardians) were included via an information-oriented non-probability approach either through the SenseMaker study or via the recommendation of someone previously interviewed. This resulted in 60 interviews conducted with mothers of PKFC, and four interviews conducted with grandmothers (Goodman 1961; Van Meter 1990). The latter are not subject of this thesis and were therefore excluded from the analysis. During their interviews, mothers were asked questions that determined their PKFC's eligibility to partake in the study. In order to be eligible, PKFC had to be a) six years of age or older<sup>59</sup>, b) be aware of their peacekeeper fathers<sup>60</sup> and c) not be at risk of psychological distress arising from the interview. If the mother interview identified one or more PKFC as potential participants, the possibility of interviewing them was discussed. If mothers agreed to have their child take part, parental consent was audio recorded and mothers asked to introduce the study to their child. PKFC were only interviewed if they were referred to the study by a previously interviewed guardian. This resulted in 35 interviews with PKFC.

Hence the two stages of the research complemented each other in methodological and content-related aspects. Whereas the first stage of the research gathered information on forms of interactions, including SEA and childbirth, to get an understanding of the impact MONUC/MONUSCO has had on women and girls in Congolese communities, the second stage was explicitly directed at victims of SEA and the children born as a result. In conceptualising the qualitative interviews, I took

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<sup>58</sup> In the closing of each interview, mothers were asked to forward information about the study to other women/girls who are raising PKFC.

<sup>59</sup> Children younger than six were non-eligible due to ethical concerns and them not being considered capable communicators in the context of this study (Bruzzese and Fisher 2003).

<sup>60</sup> Whether PKFC were aware of their background was established by asking their mothers/guardians' the following questions during their interviews: "Does your child know that his/her father was working for the UN? (If applicable) "Does your child know that his/her father is not Congolese? (If applicable) "Does your child know that your new partner is not his/her biological father?".

advantage of the SenseMaker study as a sampling technique and innovative way to access PKFC families.

#### **4.2. Partner Organisations**

Both stages of the research were implemented by fieldworkers from two local partners: [1] the Multidisciplinary Association for Research and Advocacy in the Kivus by United Junior Academics (MARAKUJA) and [2] la Solidarité Féminine Pour La Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI). The first partner MARAKUJA had extensive experience in facilitating research projects in conflict-affected and weakly-institutionalised environments in eastern DRC. As an organisation with a large network of researchers in the Great Lakes region, the role of MARAKUJA was to coordinate data collection and research logistics. The second partner SOFEPADI was instrumental in informing a research design that was sensitive to the local culture. Further, as a women's rights organisation, they had the necessary contacts to set up a comprehensive referral system for participants in need of psychological, social or legal services and provided resources and support to study participants.

	<p><b>MARAKUJA</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A multidisciplinary non-profit association for research</li> <li>• Conducts projects across conflict-affected provinces and war zones</li> <li>• Network of 100+ researchers</li> <li>• Based in Goma</li> </ul>
	<p><b>SOFEPADI</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A female-led non-governmental organisation</li> <li>• Promotes women's rights (safety, security, education, health, equality and justice)</li> <li>• Network of 50+ activists and social workers</li> <li>• Eastern base in Beni</li> </ul>

Figure 11. Partner Organisations (Source: marakujakivuresearch.com; sofepadirdc.org)

Pilot-testing of the SenseMaker survey was conducted in January 2018. This revealed that the visibility of white researchers was a barrier to local participation<sup>61</sup>. Consequently, my background as a white researcher was an overriding argument for me not to conduct (or observe) the interviews myself. Instead, the data was collected by research assistants from the named organisations in an effort to enable better communication and a higher level of trust between participants and interviewers. This also helped to indicate that the research was independent of the UN.

<sup>61</sup> It is possible that the visibility of white researchers raised suspicion among participants regarding the research team's connection to the UN and the risks involved in speaking about their situations. Conducting the research as a white European might have thus not only acted as a barrier to participation but could have elicited a different set of responses and falsified the results.

While the overall responsibility for the project laid with the principal investigator, Susan Bartels, the implementation of the interviews was devolved by MARAKUJA, who was contracted to employ fieldworkers, oversee logistics and administrative issues (e.g., processing salaries and travel costs). The managing director of MARAKUJA also advised on security-related aspects, such as how far outside the city centres recruitment sites could be extended safely. SOFEPADI collaborated by providing cultural and contextual guidance in designing, implementing, and interpreting the surveys. Experienced in working with victims of sexual violence, SOFEPADI was included for their cultural and thematic expertise and to provide participant aftercare. They were consulted to revise the survey instruments regarding cultural clarity, consistency, and accuracy and attend to participants' needs for psychological care and social services emerging from the interviews. To benefit from the familiarity of MARAKUJA with the research setting and knowledge of SOFEPADI concerning issues related to sexual violence, ten employees from MARAKUJA and two employees from SOFEPADI operationalised the interviews. Before the study launch, these 'research assistants'<sup>62</sup> underwent comprehensive training on research ethics and conduct.

The five-day training week, organised in conjunction with staff from MARAKUJA, was conducted in Goma, where the headquarter of MARAKUJA is located. It was largely completed in French, with some sections being delivered in English and translated on the spot by local interpreters. The research training aimed to impart a general sense of the significance of the research, introduced

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<sup>62</sup> I refer to the individuals who implemented the interviews as research assistants. I am aware that this connotes inequalities in a Global South context, however, this nomenclature was considered preferable to the use of other terms such as 'interviewers' or 'researchers' since it clarified that the individuals who conducted the surveys had research training and experience while also highlighting the different roles expatriate and local researchers had in conceptualising the research. MARAKUJA was an implementation partner and neither the MARAKUJA coordinator, nor fieldworkers were involved in the research design and data analysis. Therefore, the term 'researcher' (which implies equal partnership) would have been misleading. With the second study partner, SOFEPADI, this was more complicated. The coordinator of SOFEPADI, Zawadi Mambo Albertine, was consulted at all stages of the research and was considered a 'research partner' whose cultural and thematic expertise guided the design, implementation and evaluation of the study. However, Zawadi passed away in 2019 and could not be included in research outputs. The two SOFEPADI fieldworkers who conducted the qualitative interviews were not involved in the planning stage of the research, however, they were consulted after study implementation to provide input concerning data interpretation and analysis (in place of Zawadi), and thus their role between 'researchers' and 'research assistants' was more fluid. Since their responsibilities were still mostly restricted to study implementation and they could not contribute to the drafting of publications due to language barriers and lack of academic experience, I have made the decision to address them as research assistants.

the study objectives, design and timeline of the data collection. It involved a briefing on research ethics, during which the study protocol for informed consent, data management and confidentiality was explained. Research assistants were made aware of the risks of interviewing vulnerable populations and discussed the appropriate reactions to adverse events, as well as reflected on researcher biases, health, and safety protocols. The essential functions, care and maintenance of iPads, as well as usage of the SenseMaker app were illustrated, and the SenseMaker prompts, questions and survey activities reviewed and then simulated in pairs and role-playing scenarios. MARAKUJA shared the procedures and logistics of the fieldwork, i.e., travel and transport to study locations, team communication, researcher identification and the frequency and mode of payment, were discussed.

I delivered the research training on the qualitative interviews, explained the eligibility criteria, survey questions, and discussed in length the challenges arising from interviewing mothers and PKFC. Rather than having all twelve research assistants engage with the qualitative interviews in detail, I relied on the two female research assistants from SOFEPADI to conduct them since they had previous training in surveying vulnerable populations and were familiar with the protocols of talking to individuals in a considerate and compassionate way. They were told that during data collection, they should assist their MARAKUJA team members with the SenseMaker study but that their primary responsibility was the qualitative study. Similarly, the MARAKUJA research assistants learnt how to set up the qualitative interviews but were told to refer suitable participants for a follow-up interview to the SOFEPADI research assistants. Like this, the responsibilities were clearly defined, and the authority regarding the different stages of the research was meaningfully divided.

On the last day of the training week, research assistants put the acquired skills into practice by interviewing participants outside the training group. After this practice run, they received a certificate about the training completed, which ascertained their legitimacy during the study period and could be used as a qualification for future employment.

### **4.3. Study Locations and Procedure**

The interviews were conducted between May and July 2018 over a nine-week period. Data collection was concentrated in six cities in eastern DRC and was facilitated from Goma, the capital of the North Kivu province, and an important trading post in the Great Lakes region (Vlassenroot and Büscher 2013). Since communities in the Goma area experience armed conflict and displacement constituting a humanitarian crisis, the region continues to be closely monitored and controlled by the influence of several military forces (Büscher 2016; Pech, Büscher, and Lakes 2018). Goma being the logistical base and home of the local study partner MARAKUJA, the other interview locations were chosen strategically according to UN base size, nationality of base staffing, dates of operation, regional influence and geographic variation. This information was obtained from published peacekeeping data and community partner knowledge. In view of these selection criteria, Bukavu (South Kivu) and Kalemie (Tanganyika) were included to the south and Beni (North Kivu), Bunia (Ituri), and Kisangani (Tshopo) included to the north of Goma. Since Beni is the site of one of the offices of the second local study partner, SOFEPADI, it functioned as a point of contact for participants in need of psychosocial support. In the chosen locations, research was extended to towns and villages up to 30km perimeter of each UN base.



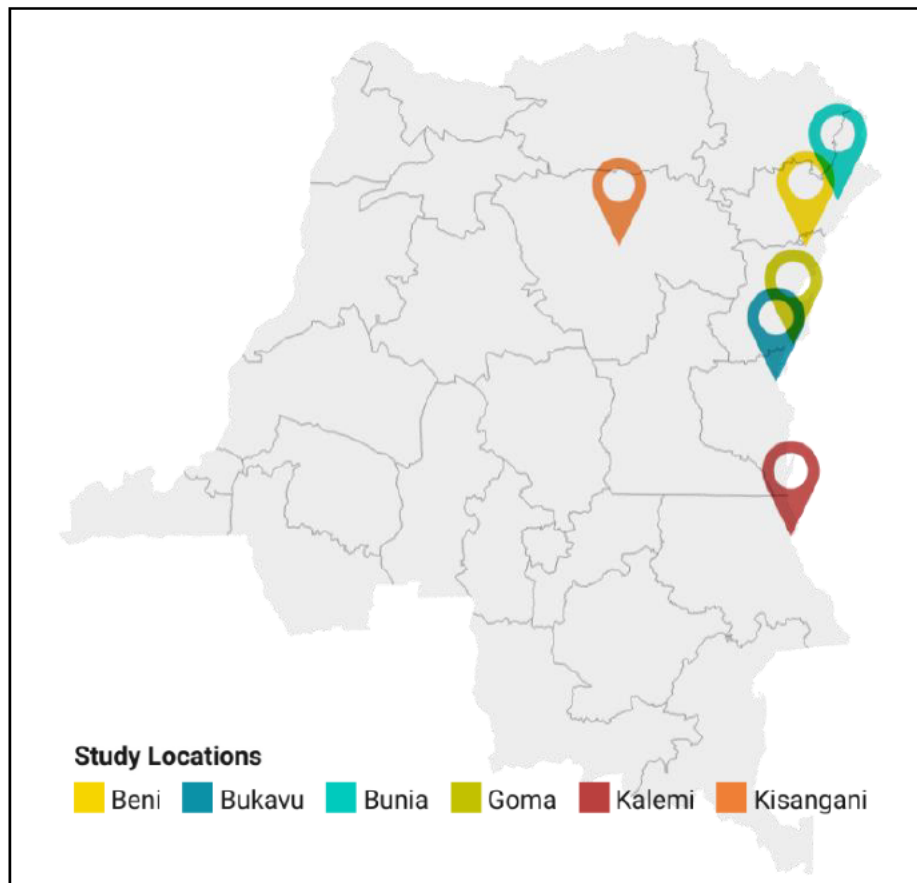


Figure 12. Study locations (Source: datawrapper.de)

For practical reasons, research assistants were divided into two field crews (“Team Lingala” and “Team Swahili”), who each conducted data collection in three cities. The Lingala team visited the predominantly Lingala-speaking regions Beni, Bunia, and Kisangani. The Swahili team visited the predominantly Swahili-speaking regions Goma, Bukavu, and Kalemie. Both teams consisted of six individuals (exclusive of two back-ups) with at least one researcher local to each of the cities visited, guaranteeing a thorough understanding of the area. The gender make-up of the teams was the same (two males, four females), and research assistants were encouraged to primarily interview participants of their own gender. Both teams appointed a team lead who took on additional responsibilities, managed the team internally and provided feedback to the manager of MARAKUJA. Each team consisted of five employees from MARAKUJA and one from SOFEPADI to benefit from a combination of expertise in field research and social work. The fieldwork proceeded city-by-city, with

researchers collecting data for two weeks (ten days) per city and then having one week for travel and rest between sites.

The logistical frame anticipated that once recruited, respondents would undergo the following steps before taking part in an interview: introduction to the research background, including an explanation of the information sought during the interview, the manner of recording it and the purpose for which it would be used, as well as the process of informed consent, provided on an individual verbal basis. After the participant's role in the research process and their rights were communicated, the interviewer turned on the recording device, obtained consent and conducted the interview. Even though maternal/guardian consent was provided for the participation of PKFC, verbal assent was obtained from children and adolescents before their interviews. Thus, the researchers ensured that PKFC themselves felt comfortable taking part in the research. The survey content was introduced in a manner that was tailored to the age and mental capacity of children and adolescents, providing PKFC with the information necessary to make an informed decision about their participation (Broome et al. 2003; Munford and Sanders 2004; Bogolub and Thomas 2005).

Depending on personal preferences, interviews mostly took place outside in a quiet area or participants' homes, as long as venues provided enough privacy. If participants seemed distressed or disengaged, they were offered a break and asked whether they would feel more comfortable skipping a question or ending the interview, leading to variations in interview length. In closing each interview, research assistants gave out referral cards for support services by SOFEPADI and other organisations. Participants did not receive financial compensation to ensure intrinsic motivation and the reliability of the collected information provided. Mobile phone credit was provided if required for scheduling interviews, and transportation costs were covered if participants had to travel to the interview site on another day. Participants received refreshments during the interview as a culturally appropriate sign of hospitality and appreciation of their time.

#### **4.4. Instruments**

Depending on the group of participants interviewed, I used a mix of traditional qualitative research methods and participatory visual research to explore their experiences.

##### **4.4.1. Qualitative Interviews**

Conducting research with vulnerable populations such as children or victims of SEA requires instruments that are sensitive and attentive to their needs (Flaskerud and Winslow 1998; Fargas-Malet et al. 2010). Therefore, the research employed semi-structured interviews that followed an open, participant-centred style and allowed flexibility regarding the inclusion and order of different items. Interview guides were tailored to the participants' responses and priorities in communicating experiences (Aitken 2001). This approach allowed the research team to be empathetic and responsive to participant well-being (Christensen and James 2008; Bergen and Labonté 2020).

Since there are no established instruments for researching PKFC, all interview guides were self-constructed based on the available literature and the exchange with experts from the field. In conceptualising each interview guide, I drew from existing scholarly work in three areas: (1) SEA during UNPK (e.g., Notar 2006; Jennings and Nikolić-Ristanović 2009; Nordås and Rustad 2013; Simić and O'Brien 2014; Kovatch 2016; Westendorf and Searle 2017; Whalan 2017; Lee and Bartels 2019a), (2) CRSV in the DRC (e.g., Wakabi 2008; Johnson et al. 2010; Meger 2010; Maedl 2011; Kelly et al. 2011; Peterman et al. 2011; Eriksson Baaz and Stern 2013) and (3) CBOW (e.g., Rimmer 2006; Daniel-Wrabetz 2007; Carpenter 2007; Mochmann and Lee 2010; Theidon 2015; Denov and Lakor 2017; Glaesmer et al. 2017; Lee 2017). The surveys were designed in English, translated into French to discuss them with the director of SOFEPADI and then translated into Kiswahili and Lingala before implementation. Back translation of the surveys into English by independent translators guaranteed that the meaning of questions was maintained across languages. Translation discrepancies were resolved based on input from the local partner.

Each thematic category included a topic question and prompts. The research assistants were instructed to discuss the topic questions and pose probing questions wherever they appeared meaningful and appropriate. If it was assumed that posing the probes would not add new information or make the participant uncomfortable, no follow-up questions were asked. All questions were phrased in a way that minimised desirability bias and prompted positive, negative, or neutral experiences (using terms like “different” or “special” rather than “stigmatised” and “discriminated against”); thus, it was not suggested by the interviewer that PKFC were disadvantaged due to their background. Instead of endorsing a research agenda that was pre-defined in this way, the questions elicited responses that encouraged the participant to describe their situation. PKFC were repeatedly told that there were no right or wrong answers, reducing the risk of children responding to social cues regarding which responses may be desired from them (Backett-Milburn and McKie 1999; Punch 2002; Clark 2005).

Mothers were interviewed about their family’s demographics/socio-economic status, the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy, the impact of maternity on their well-being and the reaction from others after childbirth. Moreover, they were prompted for information available about the fathers of PKFC, previous attempts to seek assistance, and an evaluation of the mother-child relationship. Hence, mothers were questioned about those aspects of their lives that directly impacted their PKFC. The interviews with PKFC sought to understand how they experienced their identity and which forces shaped their everyday lives. Dependent on their age, children were questioned about their living situation, knowledge about and emotional reaction towards their fathers, their relationship with their mother or guardian, and social status in the community.

PKFC were divided into two age groups to tailor the interviews to their respective development stages and levels of cognitive and psychosocial maturity (Montemayor and Eisen 1977; Shaffer 1996; Harter 2003). To engage each group in the research in the best possible way, interviews with children aged six to 12 and 13 to 19 were carried out using different approaches. In order to explore the views of the youngest participants (6-12) under ethically tenable terms, I used visual

prompts such as the evaluation of photographs and their own drawings to engage them in the research in a child-centred way. These visual elements were combined with some short other questions about friends and family that resembled a natural conversation while still supplementing information about PKFC's living circumstances and integration into families and communities. Adolescents (13+) who were expected to have a more consolidated view on their identity as PKFC received more detailed and lengthy questions about how their heritage impacted them. A significant difference between the interviews with children and adolescents was further that child interviews did not mention PKFC's background while interviews with adolescents directly addressed their heritage in the questions, e.g.:

PKFC 6-12: "Some people might think that you are different or more special than other children in your community. Do you know why they might say that?"

PKFC 13+: "Some people might think that you are different or special *because of who your father is*. Is this something you have noticed?"

This served to mitigate potential risks for children to find out undisclosed information about their heritage but also allowed me to judge whether identity-related aspects of being a PKFC were actually tangible for children. A more detailed description of the survey items can be obtained from each publication, as well as appendix A. In order to prevent mother's influence on PKFC interviews, children were interviewed separately from their mothers whenever possible. However, some mothers of children in the age group six to 12 requested to be present during the interview as silent observers.

#### 4.4.2. Visual Research

The voices of children have historically been marginalised in academic research for a number of reasons, including practical and ethical concerns about their ability to consent and communicate their ideas effectively (Clark 1999; Cremin and Slatter 2004; Mayall 2008). Conflict-affected children, in particular, are often excluded from research due to their increased vulnerability (Euwema, De Graaff,

and De Jager 2008; Akesson et al. 2014; Green and Denov 2019; Hynd 2020). However, not including children in research negates the possibility of them weighing in on issues that concern them. In line with normative frameworks that cover the right of children to provide testimony on child-related matters, this thesis builds on the idea that children should be involved in research to the highest degree possible (UN General Assembly 1989; Komulainen 2007; Thomson 2009; Lansdown 2011; Alasuutari 2014). Understood as research authorities in their own right, PKFC were considered to have experiences that are distinct from those of their mothers and should be explored in a child-appropriate format (Fattore, Mason, and Watson 2007; Crivello, Camfield, and Woodhead 2009; Freeman and Mathison 2009; Holloway 2014). This perspective translated to them being treated as study participants who are capable communicators but required different research methods to express their views (Punch 2003; Christensen and James 2008; Holland et al. 2010).

Visual methods have a rich history in participatory research with children and successfully depict their lived realities in a nuanced yet playful manner (Mitchell 2008). Since they deviate from the more rigid structure of traditional interviews and function independent of linguistic ability, they offer a way of including individuals of different age groups and levels of literacy (Literat 2013). Drawings and photo-elicitation, in particular, have often been used to access the ideas of very young participants who it would be difficult to engage in research with more traditional methods (Harper 2002; Leitch and Mitchell 2007). Visual sociologists have used these techniques to research issues of social injustice in the African context, including children's experiences of homelessness in Uganda (Young and Barrett 2001) or girls' experiences with SGBV in Rwanda (Mitchell and Umurungi 2007). Orientating my interviews on the works of these visual researchers, I applied two visual methods to access the views of PKFC in the age group 6-12 and make their interview a more playful and natural experience.

In the first part of the survey, PKFC were asked to draw a picture of their family and share some information about each person in the drawing and their relationship to them. This task was designed to break the traditional power relations between child and researcher and make them feel

comfortable with the research setting (Collier Jr 1987; Hazel 1996). Having reached particular popularity in work with very young participants, family drawing exercises are a recognised technique to gain insight into children's understanding of family and familial identity (e.g., Kaplan and Main 1986; Fury, Carlson, and Sroufe 1997; Ladd, and Goldberg 2003; Gullone, Ollendick, and King 2006; Madigan, Roe et al. 2006; Arteche and Murray 2011; Carmela et al. 2019). By inquiring about children's rationale regarding the drawing process, early childhood experiences can be understood without relying on the interpretations of adults (Clark 2005; Dockett and Perry 2005). Combined with an element of self-interpretation, the family drawing paradigm allowed me to learn about PKFC's backgrounds on their own terms (Harper 2002).

In the second part of the survey, photo-elicitation was integrated as a visual element to probe PKFC to discuss their relationship with their fathers in more detail (Harper 2002; Rasmussen 2004; Epstein et al. 2006; Pyle 2013). Participants were presented with four photographs, each showing MONUSCO personnel in playful interaction with Congolese children<sup>63</sup>. The photos (derived from the UN website and attached in Appendix A) were anticipated to invoke comments about peacekeeper fathers without explicitly mentioning PKFC's heritage. The individuals in the photographs varied in gender, age, and nationality, ensuring that PKFC could relate to the photos. After studying the pictures, PKFC were asked for an emotional reaction and an explanation of why they liked/disliked the pictures or felt a certain way about them. All children participated in the visual tasks, and many invested considerable time and effort into the exercises. A selection of the drawings is presented in chapter five.

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<sup>63</sup> The first photograph was of a UN peacekeeper from Bolivia lifting a Congolese boy in the air. The second picture showed a Congolese boy high fiving a uniformed peacekeeper. In the third photograph, a girl is shown in friendly interaction with a Uruguayan peacekeeper, and in the fourth, a group of girls plays a game with two UN peacekeepers.

#### **4.5. Funding**

Funding for this research was provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Canada Insight Grant (Grant number 642571) awarded to Dr Susan Bartels at Queen's University (submitted October 2016; awarded April 2017). My PhD is funded by a University of Birmingham-distributed Global Challenges PhD studentship. To cover the expense of interview transcription and translation, I received funding from the University of Birmingham Impact Fund. Funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (Grant number AH/P006175/1) enabled me to publish one of my articles open access.

#### **4.6. Ethics and Data Management**

Any research design involving vulnerable populations such as conflict-affected women and children requires careful ethical considerations regarding the potential benefits and harms of the research (Schweitzer and Steel 2008; Betancourt et al. 2014). Ethics approval was requested separately for each subgroup of participants to fully reflect the unique ethical implications of interviewing them. The protocols were approved by the institutional review boards of Queen's University (6019042) and the University of Birmingham (ERN\_18-0083; ERN\_17-1715; ERN\_17-1715A), as well as the Congolese National Committee of Health Ethics (CNES 001/DP-SK/119PM/2018). Local research clearance was obtained by field teams in each city or district's regional administrative centres before the launch of data collection.

The rights of the participants were protected under the core ethical principles of respect, justice and beneficence (Belmont 1978; Greaney et al. 2012; Miracle 2016). The potential harms of the research were considered and minimised to the highest degree possible. Potential risks included (1) psychological distress or (re-) traumatisation from discussing sensitive information, (2) loss of anonymity if data confidentiality was to be broken, (3) personal physical or emotional threat as a result of having participated in the study, or (4) disclosure of previously unknown information.



The risk of psychological distress or re-traumatisation was mitigated by the emotional support provided through the SOFEPADI research assistants. Experienced in psychological care, they followed a protocol developed to respond to acute stress reactions and provided information on counselling opportunities and psychological support services. All participants received a referral card that included a dedicated mobile phone number carried by a SOFEPADI employee at the Beni headquarter to access support over the phone<sup>64</sup> or be referred to a suitable organisation in their network. Thus, the research was committed to ensuring the mental and social well-being of its participants. For participants who suffered health challenges before the study, the information provided had the potential to improve their well-being in the long term. Participants were aware that their right to contact these support services was not dependent on them taking part in the study.

The risk of loss of anonymity was mitigated by only collecting de-identified data. This was guaranteed through a system of coding, which was implemented both as the information was provided, and in any subsequent notes. Participants were asked not to use actual names, and coincidentally collected information that could potentially identify participants was not reported. All data was saved electronically on iPads and voice recorders which were password protected. Audio files were archived under participant identification numbers and stored on the audio recorders until they could be uploaded to a secure server in a compressed form. Some areas in which the research took place suffered regular shortages of electricity and internet access. As such, the safe upload of information was not always immediately feasible. However, the original data was deleted from personal devices as soon as possible. This way, output data only had to be stored locally for a short period of time. After uploading the data, only the expatriate research team had access to the recordings.

The risk of victimisation and stigma was mitigated by interviewing participants in private and keeping the nature and title of the interview open and general (study of peacekeeper-civilian

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<sup>64</sup> Participants were assumed to have access to a mobile phone should they wish to withdraw from the study or have questions about the research. To acknowledge that some participants would not have credit to make such calls, top-up vouchers for mobile credit (0.5 USD) were given out to participants upon request.

interactions). A maximum level of discretion was guaranteed to ensure that the study would not negatively impact participants' social status or position within communities. Informed verbal consent to take part and have the anonymised results published was obtained after foreseeable risks were explained. Previous work on culturally sensitive issues in central Africa suggests that using a written consent form significantly reduces the willingness of participants to engage in research (Tindana, Kass, and Akweongo 2006; Scott et al. 2017; Sumbasi et al. 2021). Due to the political dimension of the subject, all interviews contained not only private but also politically sensitive or, in the case of abortion, legally relevant information. Thus, in the context of the present study, recording consent verbally minimised potential risks to participants that might have arisen from written documentation of their participation (Burkhardt et al. 2016; Swanson, Hennink, and Rochat 2019). Verbal consent further illustrated an inclusive choice regarding illiterate participants and children. Participants were reminded that their information would only be presented in a way that maintains their anonymity externally. Output data was not shared with other institutions or researchers due to ethical constraints, given the sensitive nature of the research and the risk of participant identification from the combined set of information. Hence, the data is covered by a confidentiality agreement and will only be re-used by the original research team and responsibly shared among investigators. All research assistants were recommended by local partners with extensive experience in undertaking research in the DRC, thus minimising the risk of malicious or accidental breaches of confidentiality.

The risk of disclosing previously unknown information to PKFC was managed by defining strict eligibility criteria. Moreover, in the interview with children, no question directly referred to PKFC's heritage or exposed the context of their conception. In order to manage the risks involved in interviewing children further, I employed visual research techniques alongside the semi-structured interviews. Since this enabled children to be in control of their narrative and the information shared, I believe that it was ethical to include them.

The research was conducted in eastern DRC, where many areas continue to face insecurities (UN Peacekeeping 2021b). Since there is an advisory from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office

(FCO) against travel to these regions, precautionary measures had to be taken to allow the research to take place. Due to the perceived risk level in and around Goma, the Birmingham Institutional Health and Safety regulations required an extensive security assessment, including risk mitigation strategies for the outbreak of violence or infectious diseases, as well as an emergency and evacuation plan. The collaboration with international researchers who had previously conducted studies in eastern DRC allowed me to enter the field with an experienced research team; an advantage that did not only open up a network of valuable contacts but served as an important argument in negotiations with the ethics board with regards to my personal safety. Considering that deterioration in security might disrupt research activities, the research team maintained a flexible research plan in terms of location and timing of deployment. Relying on local media and the experience of MARAKUJA, the security situation was evaluated daily and plans put in place to mitigate risks, postpone or close data collection prematurely if necessary.

#### **4.7. Positionality and Power**

For any researcher, self-reflexivity is essential in acknowledging the limits of their objectivity and how their own lens of looking at the world affects their research (Chodorow 1989; Fine 1989; Maher and Tetreault 2001). Examining one's own beliefs and judgments is particularly important for international qualitative research that includes interactions with individuals from different cultures and backgrounds and thus, takes place in a context where power relations play an inherent role (Yao and Vital 2018; Millora, Maimunah, and Still 2020). With regards to the present thesis, the value of self-reflection was further increased by the nature of the research and the socio-economic and cultural power imbalances that define SEA and make an assessment of researcher positionality imperative. Scholars have argued that the practice of peacekeeping itself embodies elements of neo-colonialism and a "white masculinist ethos" that reinforces colonial divisions (Whitworth 2004; Henry, Higate, and Sanghera 2009 p.470; Henry 2012; Enloe 2016). In light of that, identifying my biases, prejudices, and

preconceptions towards the participants and research in colonial spaces was crucial (Robson 2002; Cohen and Crabtree 2008).

My positionality during this research is clearly defined as that of an ‘outsider’ (Pratt 2007; Unluer 2012). Born and raised in Germany, I am an educated white woman who conducted this research from a position of racial and class privilege. I did not share any cultural, ethnic, or national heritage with the participants, nor did I have a history of father absence, poverty, conflict, or early motherhood. As a PhD student, my views are impacted by my academic background and training (Lincoln and Denzin 2003). This includes my previous degrees in psychology, my employment within health care and psychiatric institutions, and the fact that as a German citizen, I was able to pursue higher education free of charge; a privilege that clearly differentiates me from the participants, many of whom were resource-deprived and could not afford schooling. Thus, the perspective from which I interpret the social world of the participants is that of an outsider with significant privilege, and I am conscious of this.

As a person with euro-centric assumptions regarding race and gender, my relationship to colonised spaces, such as the DRC, is problematic. When western researchers study issues of social justice in the Global South, there is a risk of misrepresentations, as well as colonial concepts emerging that frame local populations as in need of being ‘saved’, ‘rescued’, or ‘given a voice’ (Sultana 2007; Tuck and Guishard 2013; Smith 2020). Early on during the PhD, I presented my research at an African studies conference, and a young black scholar asked me why – as a white person – I was conducting this research. Later that year, at a Social History Conference, I was confronted with the colonial power structures behind funding bodies that support EU-based scholars in conducting international research in the Global South<sup>65</sup>. These and other instances have challenged me to (re)assess my positionality and taught me the risk of reproducing neocolonial stereotypes through my work (Tuhiwai Smith 1999).

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<sup>65</sup> I understand that the ‘Global South’ is a contested term that is often descriptively inaccurate (Kloß 2017; Sajed 2020). However, in the context of the present thesis, I consider it preferable to other terms such ‘low- and middle-income countries’ since it encompasses non-economic factors like the colonial history and racial oppression of host countries of UNPK.

Thus, I recognise the structural and epistemological implications of my work and the colonial legacy of it. I am also conscious of the ongoing privilege of western knowledge over that of indigenous knowledge and the racial and civilisational hierarchies that fail to diversify academia and externally determine the interests of less economically developed countries. Since my research runs the risk of reproducing these social divisions, I have attempted to use African academic research as much as possible and mediate power relations by taking the following actions:

First, I employed a qualitative research design that prioritised the knowledge of those at the heart of the research: PKFC and their mothers (Tuck and Guishard 2013). Despite my quantitative background in which the researcher typically determines standardised measures, I understood the research as a collaborative product of the researcher, the participant, their relationship and surrounding (Deutsch 2004). Scholars such as Okot p'Bitek (1986; 2011) and Chilisa and Tsheko (2014) suggest that decolonised research methods must be open to local ways of knowing, which envision a more narrative-orientated and flexible approach to research. Thus, rather than imposing quantitative research scales that risk leaving the participant feeling unsure of the purpose of the study and unable to tell their stories in their entirety, I employed a qualitative approach with participatory elements that was sensitive to the participants' experiences. Hence, I tried as much as possible to give the participants influence over the research and to foreground their perspectives, mitigating historical colonising practices with an open, participant-oriented design (Hall 1992; Minkler and Wallerstein 2011). This was especially important in work with PKFC since traditionally, the power dynamics introduced by adult researchers interviewing child participants result in children being 'studied down' (Hertz and Imber 1993; Rosaldo 1989). I aimed to reduce inter-generational boundaries by introducing elements of visual research, self-interpretation and asking a small number of open-ended questions that facilitated the generation of knowledge from the perspective of PKFC, avoiding a top-down analysis (Boyden 2003). In addition to obtaining parental consent for the participation of PKFC, assent was taken from PKFC themselves to acknowledge their power and authority in the research process (Broome et al. 2003; Munford and Sanders 2004; Bogolub and Thomas 2005).

Second, the study was designed and implemented in collaboration with two DRC-based organisations whose staff conducted the interviews. This partnership enhanced a historically informed, culturally-sensitive approach to the topic and bridged the gap of social and cultural differences between the expatriate research team and the participants. Due to their background, they might have been perceived as ‘insider outsiders’: insiders regarding their cultural, linguistic, national and religious heritage but outsiders in terms of their ethnicity, education and class (Collins 1986; Mullings 1999; Ganga and Scott 2006; Setlhabi 2014). Thus, while historical and political processes located the fieldworkers in a similar positionality to the participants and they were familiar with local values, they were still different regarding many of their personal experiences, as is further reflected upon in section 9.4. (Tedlock 2000; Coghlan 2003). The research assistants’ gender and age resembled mothers’, making it easier for participants to talk about sensitive topics such as SEA (Oakley 1981; Finch 1984; Nast 1994; Jacobs 2000). Sharing cultural commonalities and being aware of taboos around constructions of gender and sexuality, thus, was hoped to positively impact upon the relationship between interviewers and mothers (Valentine 2002; Vanderbeck 2005).

While this enabled a relatively high degree of sensitivity towards Congolese culture, I acknowledge that at all stages of the research (planning, implementation, analysis), the expatriate research team consisted of white female researchers with inherent bias in their perspectives regarding the issues at hand. At the data analysis stage, this is particularly relevant since researchers cannot free themselves from their own epistemological assumptions and analytical interests in the data, and thus maintaining a reflexive approach to the analysis was essential (England 1994; Tracy 2010).

#### **4.8. Data Analysis**

The duration of each interview was determined by the participant’s openness and willingness with which information was provided. In some cities, women seemed more reluctant to participate in the study than in other sites which was reflected in interview lengths. This could be due to a more sensitive or critical representation of the subject, interview fatigue or the notion of the research being less

relevant in these areas. Due to the non-invasive questioning (broad and open interview style) and participants' varying cognitive/emotional ability to address sensitive issues, the duration of interviews varied between participants. Most interviews with mothers lasted between 20 and 30 minutes, while surveys with PKFC took ten to 20 minutes to verbally administer (see section 9.3. and 9.4. for a reflection on interview length). Despite significant variability in interview duration, including some very short ones, none were excluded from the analysis since all contained valuable information about participant's lives.

After the fieldwork was completed, the material was transcribed and translated into English by local translators. In the first phase of data analysis, I used software-based analysis to organise the large volume of data and familiarise myself with the data. All qualitative interviews were uploaded to NVivo 12.2.0 to explore the data through performing basic queries (Bazeley and Jackson 2013; Edwards-Jones 2014). With the help of word frequency queries, text searches, coding and grouping queries, I developed a general sense of the significance of different themes in the data. I then conducted a qualitative thematic content analysis, generating initial codes and collating data relevant to each code (Braun and Clarke 2006). Applying the developed socio-ecological model to the data, I divided my analysis into four areas of focus to provide a more detailed and nuanced account of PKFC's a) family and identity, b) community acceptance/rejection, c) cultural norms and societal expectations, d) political needs and rights. Within each of these areas, I then conducted a thorough thematic analysis at a latent/interpretative level, defining patterns in semantic content and their underlying conceptualisations (Mayring 2004; Armat et al. 2018). While the overall areas of interest were pre-defined by my research questions, the coding itself was data-driven and based on an inductive explorative approach that did not try to match themes with existing research (Walters 2001; Maxwell 2012).

Each of the four areas is explored in a separate publication. In preparing each manuscript, the data was read and re-read for emerging themes, coded and divided into precise units of meaning, representing the distinct features of the concept of interest. The codebook of themes, categories,





**Table 2.** Sample description

	PKFC	Mothers
Sample Size	35 (36.8%; N=95)	60 (63.2%; N=95)
Children aged 6-12	22 (23.2%; N=95)	
Adolescents 13-19	13 (13.7%; N=95)	
Age in 2018	12 (SD=2.8; n=18)	26.2 (SD=7.2; n=46)
Children aged 6-12	8.4 (SD=3.6; n=7)	
Children aged 13-19	14 (SD=1.8; n=11)	
Age at Conception		19.7 (SD=5.9; n=34)

N represents the overall sample size; n represents the number of participants in each group who provided their age<sup>66</sup>.

#### 4.9.1. Mothers

Of the sample of 60 mothers, 53 detailed the circumstances of their PKFC's conception. Out of those, the minority (11%) reported instances of rape or sexual violence, occurring both in private and in public, by single perpetrators or groups, and varying levels of violent means. Most participants (62%) appeared to have had sexual encounters with peacekeepers out of necessity in exchange for money or food, albeit sometimes linked to romantic notions. Transactional sex was initiated by MONUSCO personnel (often through local boys who brought women back to the camp) or by the participant, for instance, while selling goods close to MONUSCO camps. Transactional sex often led to more frequent sexual relations and mainly took place on UN territory, in hotels or private homes. Women/girls described crawling under the fence of UN camps in the evening or visiting UN personnel in the morning on their way to school. Most reported leaving the camp with milk, rice, cookies, chicken or small amounts of money. For this study, I considered 13 cases (26%) as longer-term relationships since participants lived temporarily in the same accommodation as the peacekeeping personnel. Longer-term relationships or dating often started with interactions in the street, at parties or restaurants and sometimes involved peacekeepers paying for participants' education. Although the large majority of mothers indicated that the sex was consensual, almost 50 percent of mothers were under the age of 18 when they conceived, and thus their sexual relations constituted statutory rape (sexual abuse as

<sup>66</sup> Demographic data was not explicitly requested and thus, not all participants volunteered their age during the interviews.

per UN definition) (UN General Assembly 2003). Hence, the sample consists of many child mothers, the youngest of whom was ten when she conceived.

Despite several mothers indicating that their relationships with peacekeepers were initiated with the expectation of marriage and becoming a family, they all experienced abandonment and a lack of financial support once peacekeeper fathers were repatriated or relocated. Many lacked essential goods during pregnancy and childbirth and were struggling to raise their children due to extreme poverty, deprived of food, housing, health care and other essential goods. Most mothers had a basic level of education, yet many reported that childbirth prevented them from continuing their education or finding work so that their household income was significantly lower than the average in the area. Across locations, mothers reported little to no paternal financial contribution to childcare responsibilities, forcing some to pursue sex-work as a source of income. Relatedly, several mothers had more than one PKFC from different fathers, and very few mothers were married.

#### 4.9.2. PKFC

The oldest PKFC in the sample was born in 1999 when MONUC peacekeepers arrived in the DRC. Thus, at the time of data collection, the age of PKFC ranged from six (minimum age required for participation) to 19. Like mothers, the majority of PKFC attended primary school, but many dropped out of secondary school due to a lack of funds to cover tuition. Both children and adolescents suggested that their fathers' absence caused them socio-economic suffering and deprived them of education, food, adequate housing and status items like clothes and toys. Most PKFC had little to no information about their fathers; many did not know their names or whereabouts and had never been in contact with them. They were often raised by grandparents, uncles, aunts or other relatives who supported their mothers in childcare. Three-fourths of mothers recalled the nationality of peacekeeper fathers precisely, the majority of whom were from Tanzania and South Africa. Consequently, most PKFC were of mixed ethnicity and voiced that they were considered foreigners.



two articles focus on broader contextualisation, social norms and policy-related questions. While the content of all papers is interrelated, each article presents a unique literature review, analysis and interpretation of the data with different conceptual and disciplinary perspectives.

## Chapter 5. Making a Sense of Self (Publication 1)

Wagner, K., Glaesmer, H., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S., and Lee, S. The Presence of the Absent Father: Perceptions of Family among Peacekeeper-Fathered Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. *J Child Fam Stud* [Submitted: 31<sup>st</sup> of August 2020; Current Status: Revise and Resubmit]

### Journal of Child and Family Studies

#### Presence of the Absent Father: Perceptions of Family among Peacekeeper-Fathered Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo --Manuscript Draft--

<b>Manuscript Number:</b>	JCFS-D-20-00849R1	
<b>Full Title:</b>	Presence of the Absent Father: Perceptions of Family among Peacekeeper-Fathered Children in the Democratic Republic of Congo	
<b>Article Type:</b>	Original research	
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<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner University of Birmingham Birmingham, West Midlands UNITED KINGDOM	
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	University of Birmingham	
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>		
<b>First Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner	
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Kirstin Wagner Heide Glaesmer Susan A Bartels Sanne Weber Sabine Lee	
<b>Order of Authors Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Funding Information:</b>	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (642571)	Dr. Susan A Bartels
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>The United Nations Stabilization Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo has faced heavy allegations of peacekeeper-perpetrated sexual exploitation and abuse. Reports indicate that sexual encounters between members of peacekeeping forces and female civilians have resulted in the birth of children; however, no conclusive information on these children exists to date. This is the first study to explore the perspectives of children who are fathered and abandoned by peacekeepers. We analysed semi-structured interviews with 35 children and adolescents regarding their perceptions of family in light of their fathers' absence. The results indicate that their lack of knowledge about their fathers impacts significantly on their self-conception and social identity. Not being able to uncover paternal roots and family ties exacerbated poverty and denied peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) successful socialisation and cultural integration. Although increasingly reliant on their maternal family, PKFC received limited care from their remaining kin networks, causing some to compare their upbringing to that of orphans. Due to their exhausted support mechanisms, they engaged in wishful thinking about relationships to their unknown fathers and inflated the value of searching for them. Derived from their hope to overcome hardship, PKFC saw the pursuit of ideal-typical family relations as the route to happiness and financial security. Based on these and other family-related challenges, we discuss policy shortcomings and recommendations for positive change.</p>	

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**Keywords:** United Nations peacekeeping, Democratic Republic of Congo, Children born of war, Family perceptions, Absent father

### **Highlights:**

- Explores the perspectives of peacekeeper-fathered children through data collected with child participants.

- Analyses family relations via children's family drawings and adolescents' qualitative interviews.
- Illustrates children's mental scripts of fatherhood and family life in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
- Demonstrates wishful thinking as a form of coping with father absence and related challenges in patrilineal societies.
- Adds to the limited knowledge about Children Born of War and Orphaned and Vulnerable Children in Sub-Saharan Africa.

## **Introduction**

Sexual misconduct during United Nations (UN) peacekeeping (UNPK) has been reported since the 1990s when peace support operations increased rapidly in numbers and strength. With rising awareness of sexual contact between members of UNPK forces and local host populations, mechanisms and policies were put in place to prevent what became recognised as a systematic problem of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). In 2003, the UN adopted a "zero-tolerance" stance and announced "special measures for protection from SEA" (UN General Assembly 2003). Since then, the organization has strongly discouraged all forms of sexual interactions between UNPK personnel and beneficiaries of assistance, based on an assumed imbalance of power, which renders even longer-term relationships exploitative. Notwithstanding these regulations, two decades later, sexual misconduct is still widespread.

Crucially, women and men are no longer the only focus of discussions surrounding peacekeeper-perpetrated SEA. Since 2007, children conceived as a result of sexual relations between UNPK personnel and local women and girls have been acknowledged as an unintended consequence of peacekeeping (UN General Assembly 2007). Known by the euphemism 'peace-babies', peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) have sporadically made international media headlines, yet there is little empirical data about them (Bastick et al. 2007; Simić and O'Brien 2014). The first study addressing PKFC showed that in Haiti mothers were often left alone with child caring responsibilities and raised their children in settings of extreme socio-economic deprivation (Lee and Bartels 2019;

Vahedi et al. 2019). This suggests that peacekeepers who negate their paternal obligations increase the economic and social vulnerability of mothers and subsequently, leave their children to grow up in unfavourable circumstances.

Children born from sexual encounters between foreign soldiers (members of foreign military or peacekeeping forces) and local civilian mothers are referred to in scholarship as Children Born of War (CBOW) (Lee and Mochmann 2015). Despite indications that PKFC are a sizeable group within CBOW, their perspectives are missing entirely from the scholarly and political discourse (Lee 2017). By making their voices heard, the present study addresses three substantial gaps in research on the life courses of CBOW. First, academic studies focusing on family relations and familial identity of CBOW have not been conducted widely. The role of fathers, in particular, remains largely unexplored. Oliveira and Baines (2020) and Mitreuter et al. (2019) provide a starting point in discussing CBOW's paternal identities but much remains unknown regarding their unique biographical narratives and family situation. The present study is concerned with how PKFC conceptualise their families in light of their fathers' absence and undisclosed paternal roots. Analysing the views of 35 PKFC regarding fatherhood and family relationships thus provides a key contribution to the field of CBOW research. Second, existing testimonies of CBOW are based mainly on their perspectives as adults which might not reliably portray their concerns as children and adolescents. By interviewing PKFC between 6 and 19, we present their perceptions at earlier stages of life and evaluate how their unique background affects their formation of a sense of self. Third, comparing the experiences of CBOW in recent conflict settings has shown that there are similarities and differences across geopolitical locations, yet few case studies from Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) exist (Lee 2017). We address this issue by exploring PKFC's physical and emotional relationship with their families in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Hence, the findings extend the limited knowledge about CBOW in SSA.

The UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO, formerly MONUC) is one of the most significant UN interventions based on its size and years of operation. It is also widely implicated in scandals and allegations of SEA (Kovatch 2016). The duration



of the mission, the large size of armed troops and the scope of accusations would suggest that there are a significant number of PKFC in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Furthermore, the DRC remains one of the economically poorest and most conflict-ridden countries in the world (UN Development Programme 2019), with structural imbalances, informal labour markets and transactional sexual relations increasing the number of children conceived with UNPK personnel. High levels of poverty and inequitable gender norms are likely to make the consequences of absent peacekeeper fathers more burdensome. Thus, we believe exploring the family relations of PKFC in DRC is a crucial foundation for further research and broader conceptualisations regarding the life courses of PKFC.

The structure of the article is driven by critical themes regarding family that were raised during the interviews: the limited care available to PKFC and the consequences thereof for their access to economic resources, identity development and belonging. Before describing the methodology and empirical findings, we briefly discuss the academic debates in which this research is situated.

### Children Born of War

Research in different geopolitical or historical contexts has identified CBOW as marginalised groups who face similar challenges growing up (Lee 2017). Psychological studies show a higher prevalence of childhood adversities, maltreatment and psychiatric disorders like depression and anxiety (Glaesmer et al. 2012, 2017; Kaiser et al. 2015). Stigmatisation and ostracization, in particular, represent formative experiences in the childhood and adolescence of many CBOW that affect their emotional development (Aßmann et al. 2015; Stelzl-Marx 2015). The common perception of CBOW as 'illegitimate' or 'foreign' complicates identity development and has a negative impact on their position within families and communities (Author).

Since CBOW rarely grow up with their fathers, interpersonal relationships within their remaining family fundamentally impact on their psychosocial well-being (Stelzl-Marx 2015). Nonetheless, their perceptions of family are relatively unexplored, and few studies have attempted to

answer how the uncertainty about their biological origin affects their sense of self and purpose. Studies which explored vital questions around fatherhood showed that paternal absence and non-disclosure of paternal ancestry are critical aspects for CBOW's self-perception that might lead to identity crises (Denov and Piolanti 2020; Mitreuter et al. 2019; Stelzl-Marx 2009). This uncertainty eventually pushes many CBOW to embark on a search for their fathers, often with limited success.

In contrast to children born in the aftermath of other conflicts in central Africa whose mothers were often abducted, violently raped or forcefully impregnated (e.g., those conceived during the Rwandan genocide or the Lord's Resistance Army conflict in Northern Uganda), the circumstances of PKFC's conception are frequently less violent and in parts consensual (Lee 2017). Nonetheless, peacekeeper fathers who conceive children in asymmetrical relations with local women typically negate their responsibilities, causing PKFC to be raised by single mothers or in alternative family arrangements (Lee and Bartels, 2019; Vahedi et al. 2019). The absence of peacekeeper fathers increases PKFC's chance of living in poverty and limits their familial support networks. Given their father's lack of involvement and unknown identities, PKFC share cultural commonalities with paternal orphans, whose living conditions have been more widely researched.

#### Paternal Orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa

Since no participant in this study lived with their biological father, the research is situated amongst academic debates about children growing up in absent father homes. Although the norms of family and kinship are changing throughout Africa, family structure in patriarchal settings is traditionally comprised of parents, children and generations of other close relatives like grandparents and unmarried siblings (Odimegwu et al. 2020). Officially an orphan is defined as a child who lost one or both parents due to death (UNICEF 2006). However, in the context of SSA, the term is also used to describe 'social orphans', children with family members who are unable to care for them or who have abandoned them due to circumstances such as poverty (Johnson et al. 2012). Multi-generational family networks play a pivotal role in the care of children who are separated from one or both parents

(Odimegwu et al. 2020). This is particularly important in the context of poverty where the public infrastructure for other forms of assistance is lacking (Aldersey et al. 2016), and orphanages are often ill-equipped, with evidence documenting insufficient beds, food and clothes (De Buhr 2006).

While some research focusing on paternal orphans has found indicators of poorer child well-being (Amato 2005; McLanahan et al. 2013), most studies suggest that healthy family dimensions like affection and communication are more important than family structure. Yet, researchers have noted that problems with mental health and development might occur if the missing parentage leads to low household income or a general lack of support (Golombok 2015; Weinraub et al. 2002). In line with that, Richter and Morrell (2006) argue that depending on the particular context and reasons for parental absence, psychological and social consequences for children will differ. In patrilineal societies like DRC, children are born into their paternal families, and it is mostly the father's responsibility to provide for children (Tonheim 2012). The absence of fathers puts children at a higher risk of financial insecurity and deprivation of other essential goods (e.g., Eddy et al. 2013; Hermenau et al. 2015; Operario et al. 2008). Thus, the implications of growing up in absent-father homes are culturally embedded. While male parentage appears less relevant in studies conducted in western cultures, findings from patrilineal societies where the father's lineage determines children's social status present different outcomes.

South Africa is experiencing one of the world's highest figures of fatherlessness and thus has become the centre of research on Orphaned and Vulnerable Children (OVC) in SSA (Hall and Sambu 2018). Hall and Sambu estimate that less than one-third of South African children live with both their biological parents. Previous research in South Africa has shown that family structure (nuclear, single-parent, extended family) is linked to educational outcomes (Operario et al. 2008). Moreover, the presence of fathers was found to be associated with the coverage of children's basic needs and their healthy psychological and cognitive development (Eddy et al. 2013). The limited availability of resources (e.g., access to health care, schooling, inheritance) might further reduce their chances of

pursuing social stability and cause psychological strain on their well-being in the long term (Hermenau et al. 2015).

Country-level estimates for DRC state that 12% of children do not live with any parent, and 26% only live with their mothers (UNICEF 2018). The likelihood of becoming a paternal orphan increases with age and is higher in urban areas and impoverished neighbourhoods (UNICEF 2018). In DRC, substantial resources flow within family and community networks to help raise children who are abandoned or separated from a parent (De Herdt 2007; Shapiro and Oleko Tambashe 2001). Linked to clan structures, kin networks go to considerable length to assist single mothers in caring for children (Foster 2007). Nonetheless, first-hand perspectives of paternal orphans are lacking, and little knowledge exists on the socio-cultural scripts that shape children's perceptions of family in this context. Reportedly, OVC who live in extended families might fall into a 'subservient role' and not be granted the same rights or privileges as biological children in the household, especially if resources are already sparse, preventing all children from being educated (Tonheim 2012; Verhey et al. 2004). This evidences the important link between family structure and economic well-being and illustrates the implications of fathers' absence in the present study.

## **Methods**

In light of the above considerations, this research combined traditional semi-structured interviews with a family drawing exercise to examine the role of family for PKFC in urban centres of eastern DRC. We designed the data collection strategy as part of a larger mixed-methods study that explored peacekeeper-civilian relations in DRC from May to August 2018. Permission to speak with the children was provided by guardians who were recruited through a snowball technique and had previously shared their perspectives in an interview. Children aged six years or older were eligible for participation if their guardian stated that they were aware of their paternal heritage. The present article will focus exclusively on data collected with PKFC.

Interview locations included Bukavu, Kalemie, Beni, Bunia, Kisangani, and Goma, where UN bases were established. The sites were chosen according to base size, years of operation, and nationality of the troop contributing country. Two community-based partners implemented the study: Multidisciplinary Association for Research and Advocacy in the Kivus by United Junior Academics (MARAKUJA) and Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI). MARAKUJA is a non-profit organisation that connects Congolese researchers to realise large-scale data collection projects. They facilitated the broader mixed-methods research. SOFEPADI is a non-governmental organisation that advocates for gender equality and women's rights. Two female SOFEPADI research assistants who had previous experience working with vulnerable populations carried out the qualitative interviews analysed here. All research assistants completed a five-day training on research ethics, data management, and collecting data with children prior to the study. We used a mix of qualitative methods tailored to two participant subgroups: children aged 6-12 and adolescents aged 13-19. A total of 35 individual interviews were conducted; 22 with children and 13 with adolescents. Since younger children were expected to be less responsive to a traditional interview format, they received fewer questions and instead were engaged through the family drawing paradigm (Fury et al. 1997; Kaplan and Main 1986). Adolescents received more detailed and lengthy questionnaires about their perceptions of family and identity.

### Family Drawing Paradigm

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant conceptual shift when thinking about children as contributors of unique perspectives, rather than reproducers of knowledge on their way to adulthood (Einarsdottir et al. 2009). Since research with children raises specific challenges (e.g., ability to consent and quality of the collected information), scholars have debated which data collection tools align best with their emotional and cognitive abilities. Methods involving drawings are considered a nuanced, yet playful tool to gain insight into children's psychology and they have therefore reached particular popularity in work with very young participants (Mitchell 2008). Since drawings function

mostly independent of linguistic ability and development, they are versatile and prominent in contexts where the formal education level of participants is unknown and verbal interview skills are still limited. The family drawing paradigm (FDP) has been recognised as a standardised technique that facilitates understanding of children's place within a family unit and familial relationships (e.g., Gullone et al. 2006; Madigan et al. 2003; Roe et al. 2006). Designed to gain insight into children's representational models of family in early childhood (Fury et al. 1997; Kaplan and Main 1986), researchers have adopted the FDP in clinical settings to explore aspects of family separation (Carmela et al. 2019) and dysfunctionality (Arteche and Murray 2011). In the present study, we administered family drawings to explore the household composition of PKFC and their engagement with family members despite the potential absence of those individuals. In order to facilitate these conversations, participants in the age group 6-12 were asked to "draw your family" using the provided A4 sheet of paper and a choice of coloured pencils. No further instructions were given. Since the drawings were generated within a specific cultural context, they were followed up by a subsequent discussion that encouraged participants to describe their finished drawings and voice their rationale. As part of the assessment, research assistants addressed each individual in the drawings and asked: "can you tell me something about this person?". The combination of both drawings and the children's subsequent comments allowed us to evaluate how accurately the visual material reflected the children's living situation.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Interview guides with topic questions and prompts were self-constructed to serve the unique situation of PKFC but drew from existing literature about family and identity in the context of CBOW (Lee and Mochmann 2015; Lee 2017; Mitreuter et al. 2019). Participants in the age group 6-12 were asked for insight into their family demographics, sense of belonging, and relationships with family members. Adolescents were further prompted to discuss their knowledge about their fathers, emotions towards them and the implications of their fathers' absence. A section of the adolescent interview was directed at how the participants' representation of mother and father, or lack thereof, shaped their identity

construction. Questions were broad, open-ended and tailored towards children's responses and their willingness to share lived experiences (Aitken, 2001). Non-directive probes facilitated structure while letting PKFC drive the discussion. This was done to ensure that participants were at ease during the interview and did not feel pressured to stay on topic and complete a research activity at the expense of their comfort. If requested by children in the age group 6-12, mothers stayed in the room as silent observers. Interview guides were initially drafted in English, translated into Kiswahili, Lingala, and French and then independently back-translated to ensure accuracy, with discrepancies discussed among the research team. Interviews were delivered in Kiswahili, Lingala, or French as preferred by the participant. SOFEPADI team members evaluated the questions for cultural sensitivity, relevance, and appropriateness. All interviews were audio-recorded using Zoom H4n Pro devices. They were later transcribed verbatim and translated to English.

#### Ethical Approval

Children's interviews were first discussed with guardians, and their informed consent was obtained. Having participated in the research themselves, guardians understood the goals of the research. PKFC were told that sharing their ideas was meaningful and important so that others could understand how they feel. After discussing the project in an age-appropriate manner, they then gave verbal consent themselves. Written consent was waived due to anticipated differing levels of literacy and the child-centred approach minimising ethical risks. Both guardians and children were given the opportunity to ask questions and could withdraw their consent to the study at any time. No identifying information was collected, and the research took place in private locations, often in the homes of PKFC. The study protocol was approved by XXXX and by XXXX. Participants did not receive financial compensation but were provided with refreshments during the interview.

#### Data Analysis

The qualitative thematic analysis was data-driven. The translated and typed transcripts were assessed based on common narratives which were prioritised according to the consistency of issues raised amongst participants. We triangulated the data from interviews with codes developed from analysis of the FDP. Adapting elements of the rating scale by Tognazzo (1999), the assessment focused on content interpretation more than the graphic or formal level of the pictures. We approached the coding process thematically to explore cohesion within the family unit. Similar to the coding of transcripts, we identified intergroup trends regarding family type and features that emerged in several drawings. In analysing children's drawings, the knowledge of the child stands above that of the researcher, therefore, their attribution of meaning drove data processing and informed the creation of themes (Stanczak 2007). Previous studies focusing on diverse family settings have highlighted the composition and grouping of family members as indicators of adjustment to family life (Dunn et al. 2002). Originating from the unique quality of our data, we decided to ascertain family composition, the inclusion and exclusion of family members and the positioning of the child within the family.

In the remainder of this article, we highlight the conceptualizations produced by PKFC regarding their families. The first section depicts relationships with family members, or lack thereof, as experienced in daily life. As part of this section, the consequences of absent fathers and the role of mothers and maternal family members in raising PKFC are discussed. The second section captures the representational models of family shared in the FDP. Representative quotes and drawings are used to illustrate key themes during the conversations, although it should be acknowledged that these were chosen by the authors, who are non-Congolese researchers, and thus there may be some cultural bias in the analysis.

## **Results**

As per inclusion criteria, all PKFC were aware of their paternal heritage. Yet, few mentioned details about their context of conception or discussed their parents' relationship. Most participants had not lived or previously spent time with their fathers; and many did not know their fathers' names. The



majority of PKFC had been told that their father left around the time of pregnancy or birth. None of the participants were in contact with their fathers when the interviews took place in 2018, except for a PKFC whose Congolese father worked for UNPK in the Central African Republic. Two PKFC (twins) received occasional support from their father, in the form of clothing. All others reported no financial contributions from their fathers to the household where they lived at the time of the interview. PKFC seldom specified their father's ethnicity but referred to them as white or black men, Europeans or foreigners. A subsection identified the fathers' nationality, amongst them Beninese, Nepalese, Moroccan, and Tanzanian.

The majority of PKFC lived in poverty. They were deprived of food, housing, education, school supplies, clothing or personal hygiene products. While the levels of these unmet needs differed, all PKFC struggled with access to at least one basic resource. Living situations of PKFC varied widely. Reportedly, no child was raised by both their biological parents and few lived with a stepfather. Instead, it was relatively common for PKFC to be brought up by other relatives and half the participants indicated that they were living in a household of maternal grandparents or aunts and uncles. One-third of PKFC no longer lived with their mothers due to maternal death, child abandonment, mothers living abroad or having relocated to other cities. Three PKFC spoke about mothers returning to their compound only infrequently. PKFC occasionally lost touch with siblings, and no PKFC specified receiving support from older siblings.

#### Father and Paternal Family

Participants reported several challenges associated with fatherlessness. First and foremost, the vast majority discussed the financial implication of their limited paternal care. Participants of all ages expressed frustration about the lack of material support from fathers, indicating that even the youngest children saw their insufficient access to resources as unjust and directly linked to their father's absence. For example, "I remember my mother, but I know nothing about my father. This is the reason why I am always hungry. If he was living with me, I wouldn't be hungry." (Bukavu, 10). PKFC

imagined that if present, their fathers would have provided for them and contributed to their general well-being.

Younger children mentioned that showing others what one receives from one's father, e.g., clothes or toys, was a matter of pride and social acceptance; not being able to do that marked them as outsiders: "My friends sometimes decry me by saying that I use their dolls while never bringing any of my own. This makes me feel sad and upset and triggers thinking of my departed father. They sometimes insult me saying that I am crazy, stupid, imbecile and poor. They insult me this way because of poverty." (Bukavu, 12). This suggests that economic constraints, in conjunction with fatherlessness, had social repercussions.

Economic deprivation also denied many adolescents the chance of completing or accessing formal education. Since DRC is a patrilineal society, participants widely perceived it as a paternal obligation to ensure that children pursued their studies. Living with limited educational opportunities, they felt that their fathers had failed them in not assuming that responsibility, leaving them with fewer prospects than their peers, as illustrated by this youth, "I feel sad and disappointed because my father has never schooled me. I wish he would take me to school and help me buy shoes and clothes." (Bukavu, 12).

The father's absence was expressed as missing social support and emotional guidance in navigating daily challenges, especially when coupled with difficult living conditions. Several PKFC showed signs of depression or anxiety that they associated with the stressors of their daily lives and lack of paternal care: "My mother always goes here and there. My neighbours hate me and say that I have to look for my father. I am worried a lot; I am not stable enough to live such a life. Therefore, I often wonder where my father is by saying 'father, where are you? Come take me'." (Kisangani, 15). Many PKFC did not fully comprehend the reasons for their father's absence and not only felt deprived of a relationship with their fathers but also of any knowledge about them. PKFC in our study rarely had narratives or information regarding their paternal origin: "Since I was born, I have never had the chance to learn anything about him apart from hearing that I have one. I really know nothing about

him. I have never heard his voice, not even once.” (Bukavu, 13). The lack of memories, or representation of fathers in participants’ homes, might make their absence more absolute and aggravating.

Nevertheless, PKFC seemed reluctant to question the matter; maybe to avoid disconcerting confrontations or to comply with social standards of respect towards their mothers. Left in the dark about this vital part of their biography, some PKFC created stories justifying or explaining their father’s reasons for leaving to partially fill this void: “My mother told me that my father came for service purposes. Then he made my mother pregnant and left for America. Maybe his mission was over, and he was supposed to leave, I don’t know.” (Kisangani, 13). These experiences echo those reported by children in similar contexts in SSA (Manyatshe 2013; Nduna and Sikweyiya 2015).

Several adolescents struggled with uncertainty around their lineages and ethnicity. Not knowing their father’s nationality made it difficult for some to form racial reference groups: “My mother gave me a Congolese name. People say that I am Congolese because of my skin colour. Sometimes they also challenge me, saying that I am not Congolese. That offends me.” (Kisangani, 13). Family has a critical role in helping children cope with stressors that impact their sense of self, however, PKFC in our study were often left to their own devices with the task of resolving their identity.

Generational contracts implicit in patriarchal family structures determine the social value of paternal kinship groups and that men are carriers of cultural identity. With mothers struggling or refusing to disclose their paternal identities, PKFC not only lacked the support of their father as an individual but also that of their paternal families and clans. Relatedly, PKFC reported that the difficulties experienced concerning their absent fathers were compounded by a sense of illegitimacy, due to the unknown family ties and tribe. Due to these missing connections, PKFC might experience challenges related to inheritance or marriage in the long term and thus might be compromised in establishing their own families. For many Congolese, marriage is a way of ensuring lineage making, access to resources and social acceptance through association with a clan. Hence, fathers and paternal

families serve as a link between family and society (Makofane 2015). With absent fathers, participants relied increasingly on their single mothers and maternal family networks. We will therefore now look at the role of mothers and the consequences of non-nuclear families.

### Mother and Maternal Family

The support and love of mothers are especially vital to children's well-being in single-parent households. In the present study, PKFC reported conflictual feelings towards their mothers and tension-filled mother-child relationships. Some talked about lengthy periods of separation from their mothers, or only saw them intermittently. In these scenarios, mothers typically lived elsewhere or travelled to other provinces for employment or new relationships. This is consistent with prior research in SSA, highlighting the migration of single mothers to urban areas for work, while grandmothers raised the children (De Herdt 2007; Odimegwu et al. 2020). In instances where mothers had relocated yet maintained a relationship with the PKFC, they usually contributed to the household income of fostering families. In other cases, PKFC believed mothers had migrated to start a new chapter in their lives without them, as was the case for the following participant, "I don't talk to my mother any longer. She is in Kinshasa; here I live with my grandparents. I really don't know much about my siblings because I don't stay with them. I only stayed with one for a short period of time. I have never seen my father, and I only saw my mother for a little while." (Kisangani, 15).

Many PKFC lived in extended families. The relationship to members of the larger family or kin group was generally described as nurturing and supportive. In some instances, coresident attachment figures like maternal grandparents, uncles or aunts filled the parental gap in children's lives. In line with what has previously been described as 'social fathering' of OVC (Denov and Piolanti 2020; Nduna and Sikweyiya 2015; Richter and Morrell 2006), some PKFC found alternative father figures in other adult males. One youth explained,

My mother delivered me, she left and abandoned me when I was two months old. She dropped me off at my grandparents. When my uncle saw that I was suffering there, he picked me up and took me to his house four years later. He started supporting me very much, including feeding me, buying me

clothes and shoes, schooling me and everything. At this moment, I am still living at my uncle's where they take good care of me. They consider me as if my uncle was my father and my aunt my mother. (Bukavu, 14)

Traditionally, fatherless children in DRC are raised as part of a larger household and mothers are supported by close relatives. After conceiving children with UNPK personnel, mothers sometimes faced stigma and rejection by their families (Author). Low-income family networks were not always able to carry the expenses of childcare. In extreme cases, this led to PKFC being cut-off from maternal family networks, with mothers needing to provide economically; in addition to fulfilling the role of the sole caretaker. Many mothers were young when they gave birth and had not completed their education to a degree that enabled gainful employment. Thus, the loss of maternal family connections made it very difficult for them to raise PKFC, as this child concluded, "My mother has a miserable life; she does not feed us quite well." (Goma, 10). Two PKFC reported that their mothers were sex-workers and considered their clients fluctuating new partners. Such circumstances are likely to constitute an unstable environment for children that might impact their sense of security (Mpotseng 2019). Participants occasionally felt ill-treated by their mothers, blaming them for not assuming parenting roles or having cut their emotional and financial connection to them. These PKFC indicated that their mother's abandonment was the source of their unmet needs:

I don't know what to say about my mother. I don't think she considers me her child any longer since she remains quiet when people [extended family] are asking her for money. These days during which my uncle is sick and can't obtain money, my so-called mother responded by saying 'stop disturbing me' and switched off her phone[...] She abandoned me and my two younger brothers. (Bukavu, 14)

### Orphan Identity

PKFC discussed the presence and involvement of family members as essential for their identity construction and community acceptance. This indicates that their sense of self is salient in relation to others and that as is common in DRC, identity is culturally determined and rooted in communalism. As illustrated above, the fathers' absence held significant financial consequences, and was perceived as a barrier to psychosocial well-being. Many children were cut off from paternal and, in some

instances, maternal family ties and expressed an intimate need for care, security and love. They chose to identify with OVC due to the limited support available to them. Participants expressed that their lack of care resulted in a sense of isolation and otherness. The absence of family due to parents being unknown, dead or living elsewhere was perceived as a void in social identity: "I am like an orphan. MONUSCO should remember us who were left here in Kisangani. We are considered orphans." (Kisangani, 13). The term orphan or "Yatima" in Kiswahili was used independently of whether PKFC were living in isolation or with their mothers; the fact that they were excluded from parts of traditional family life seemed to weigh heavily on their identity, as expressed here, "I would like to tell him to think about me wherever he is. He needs to know that he left me in DR Congo. I am suffering. He should know that I don't have a family. If my mother dies, who will raise me?" (Kisangani, 13). The adoption of an orphan identity might further reflect PKFC's uncertainties regarding the future. In areas with exceptionally low life expectancy due to poverty, armed conflict and lack of health care, family networks are a crucial form of security for children with precarious caregiver circumstances. The story of a ten-year-old boy, who claimed he watched his mother die before running away from war, indicated the despair in losing one parent without being able to rely on the other: "My mother told me that my father is white, but she didn't show him to me. I was asking her about him, but she didn't tell me anything until she died. I don't know where my father is." (Bunia, 10).

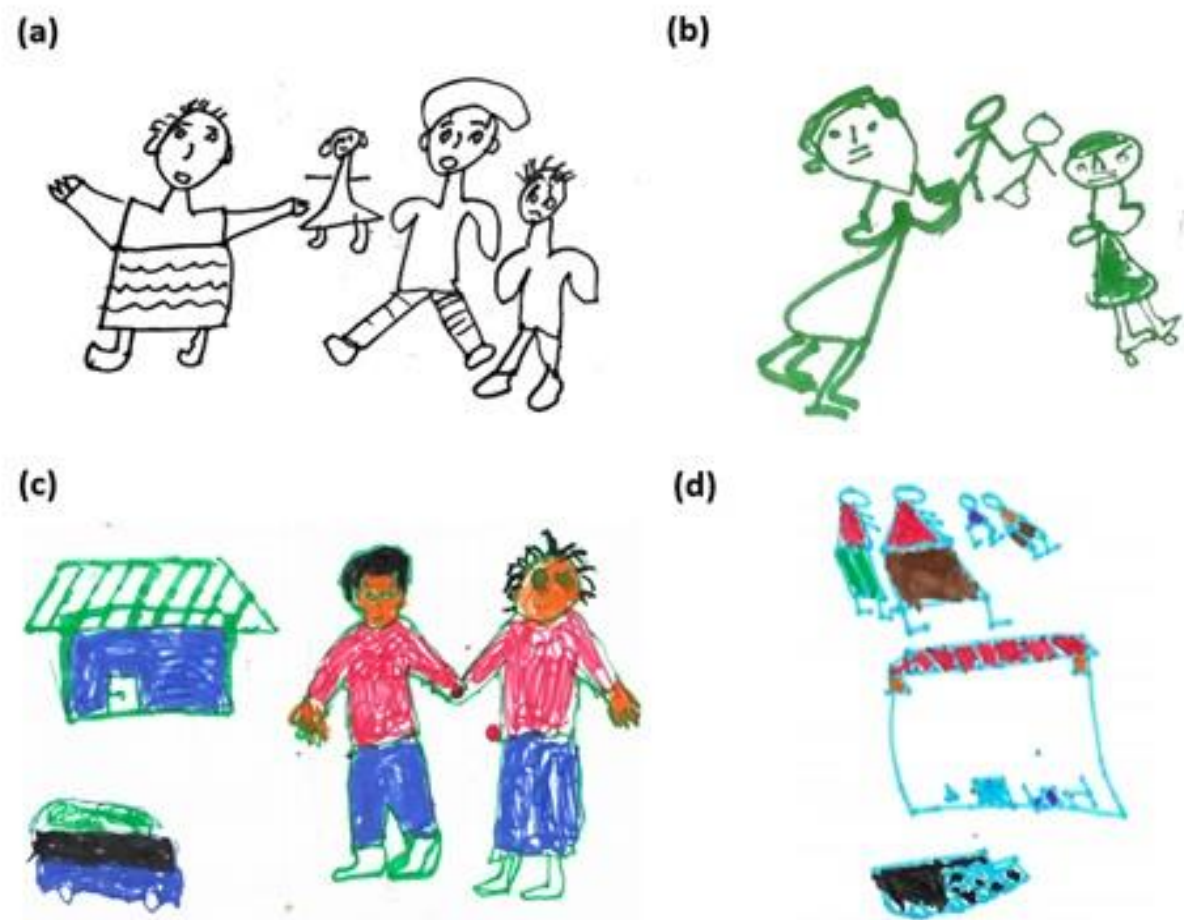
Without extended family networks intervening to care for paternal orphans, PKFC in DRC experienced barriers of belonging to their communities and needed to negotiate their legitimacy as individuals. One PKFC mentioned that the family she was born into, and the family she grew up in, used different names to address her, indicating that she needed to navigate different identities depending on each context: "My mother named me Lucia, the family I grew up in calls me Marie-Laure and at school people use Maombi." (Bukavu, 14).

Most salient was the sense of a missing purpose or direction in life. Not knowing their roots and their family's history left a void regarding self-worth and social conscience among PKFC. In addition, the deprivation of relationships and material possessions led PKFC to consider themselves

orphans: “Let me tell you that I never go to school. I have no food support and even when I do get food, I start thinking about my mother who is living abroad and my father who I have never seen. I feel meaningless in a household where I can’t be around my parents. When I think of the deep poverty I’m in, I feel much despair.” (Bukavu, 13).

### Wishful Thinking

By evaluating children’s drawings along with the analysis of the interviews, we found that the vast majority of produced images included absent family members. As illustrated in Figure 1, PKFC drew families with mothers and fathers, despite them having no memory of nuclear family life. Thus, physically absent fathers remained paramount in PKFC’s lives and held an important role in their perceptions of family.



**Figure 1.** Examples of family drawings that include absent peacekeeper fathers

Although previous FDP studies showed the type of family portrayed to be associated with current household composition (Roe et al. 2006), the constellation of individuals in family drawings has also been considered to be a measure of child adjustment and coping regarding family transitions (Burns and Kaufman 1972; Dunn et al. 2002; Payne 1996). In the study of Carmela et al. (2019), children of separated parents were found to include absent fathers in 88% of the observed cases. Similarly, Dunn et al. (2002) found that children in a step- or single-parent family were more likely than children in nuclear families to alter their depicted family composition. Accordingly, added characters might be an expression of aspirations about family forms that are not met in reality. Based on our analysis, the vast majority of PKFC created ideal-typical family drawings with a clear underlying structure that did not match their family's actual situation. This might reflect poor coping regarding their father's absence and discontent regarding their household structure and family relations. One child explained his drawing as follows, "When you told me to draw my family, I drew my father and my mother. My mother lives here but my father does not. He went to his country." (Kisangani, 8).

The in-depth interviews confirmed that the drawings were not life-like representations of family. Instead, they reflected children's biological relatedness as much as their hopes for the future. Several PKFC were explicit about the drawing being an expression of their desire to be reunited with their fathers, clearly evidencing an idealised representation of family: "The drawing means that I want to have the father and mother in our house." (Bunia, 7). Many PKFC understood the drawing task as an opportunity to engage in wishful thinking and imagine a functional family or a better life. The verbal explanations that PKFC offered regarding their drawings combined with a thematic analysis by the first author led to three subcategories of wishful thinking, that will be described in the following sections.

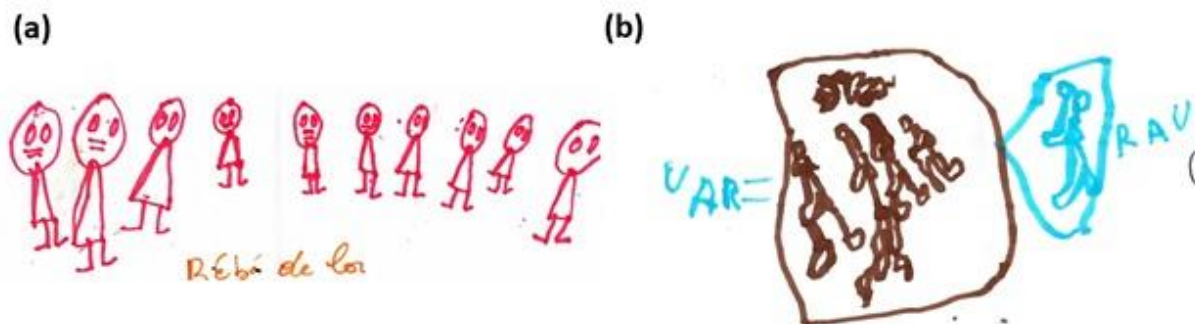
### *Desire for Affection*

The most critical element in PKFC's decision to include absent family members in their drawings was an emotional connection to these individuals, which was evidently quite strong in some cases. In other words, physical distance did not determine the paternal emotional bond for PKFC; thinking about their



fathers and having positive feelings towards them sufficed to include them in their family portrait as illustrated by this participant, “I have drawn my mother, father, younger brother and two younger sisters. It’s because I love them. I am happy to see them. In the picture, we all live together.” (Bukavu, 12).

PKFC primarily described their feelings towards their fathers as loving and affectionate. Some drawings reflect that sentiment and portray a close, albeit fictional, relationship with their fathers. Physical proximity and contact with family members, like holding hands (Fig 1c), has previously been assessed as an indicator of emotional closeness (Arteche and Murray 2011; Fury et al. 1997). Conversely, no signs of interaction or open expression might reflect detachment and affective distance (Wagner et al. 2015). Despite PKFC reporting affection, few of their drawings actually showed physical contact or signs of interaction that convey a sense of family. One child separated the father from the rest of the family by drawing lines (Fig 2b) which has previously been interpreted as unresolved issues or an obstacle in the relationship between the illustrator and an alienated individual (Fury et al. 1997; Tognazzo 1999).



**Figure 2.** Examples of family drawings that illustrate affective distance

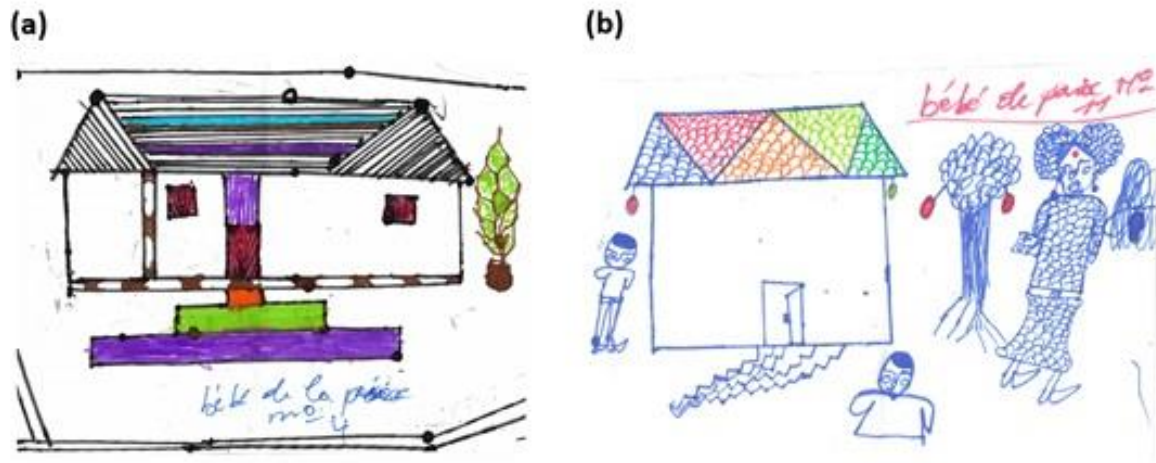
It became apparent in the interviews that love has a material component for participants who grow up with limited socio-economic means. Being deprived of essential resources for survival like food, the provision and sharing of goods was a way for PKFC to define love. One child explained, “I know that my grandparents love me because they give me food and buy me other things.” (Bunia, 7). Thus,

stretching the ideal of emotional closeness and affection might also be related to wishful thinking regarding material possessions.

### *Desire for Safety*

Analysis of the FDP also revealed that one out of every two PKFC chose to portray their family next to a house, often including a path, trees or a car (Fig 3). PKFC mentioned that the house was something they desired for themselves and others in their family. Thus, it was at least partially imagined, as in this narrative “I have drawn the father, mother, children, house and car. I would like for my mother to raise us and for my father to come. The children in the drawing are me and my younger brother. The house is to live in and the car to drive it.” (Bunia, 7). The house was predominantly mentioned in relation to necessity and especially dominant in drawings of children deprived of housing security. Therefore, it might represent a space where children feel less exposed to their challenges and adverse living conditions. In that sense, the home is symbolic of safety beyond a physical structure and protects PKFC from both poverty and emotional struggles, as in the following example, “I have drawn a house because my mother is suffering. I would like her to be in it.” (Bunia, 12).

As shown in Figure 3, one PKFC drew a house only, clearly pointing towards this element as the centre of their understanding of family. Scholars have argued that omitting oneself from the family drawing might illustrate an impaired sense of involvement in the family (Fury et al. 1997; Wagner et al. 2015). PKFC’s desire to share a physical space with their family seemed to play an essential role in overcoming their struggles and reuniting with absent family members. Thus, the house might stand for a decent living standard that guarantees family well-being.



**Figure 3.** Examples of family drawings centred around homes

### *Desire for Happiness*

Lastly, PKFC described the completion of the nuclear family as a route towards a better life and the end of suffering. Facilitated by their drawings, they explained that their current challenges were a consequence of their difficult familial situation. Conversely, PKFC were under the impression that having a nuclear family would eliminate at least some of their problems: “I wish I would see him. I wish I would live a good and happy life.” (Bukavu, 12). As outlined above, the deprivation of resources and opportunities was perceived to be rooted in paternal absence. This sentiment was most pronounced when PKFC described unknown fathers as the origin of hardship and imagined the fathers’ hypothetical return as the start of a better life, as illustrated here, “If I was with my father, such discrimination wouldn’t exist. I could be happy like other people.” (Kalemie, 19). These thoughts were often grounded in comparison to social peers, siblings, and others living in what they perceived to be a functional family. PKFC demonstrated a degree of jealousy towards other children with parents who were more available and supportive. Moreover, they assumed that peers in nuclear families were facing less socio-economic hardship. One adolescent speculated, “Other children who are living with their parents must be living well I think.” (Bukavu, 13).

Many PKFC used the drawings to change their family’s narrative and reject the painful reality of absent peacekeeper fathers. Thus, the described representation of family was not only inclusive of

absent fathers but centred around them. Participants of all ages discussed the possibility of searching for their fathers to make this imagined family a reality.

### Search for the Father

The majority of participants expressed an intense desire to locate and get in touch with their fathers, despite the low chance of success. During conversations with research assistants, PKFC asked for advice and information regarding their family reconciliation (e.g., “I am looking for ways to start talking to each other”; “I would like to ask you to find my father for me”). Searching for one’s father was driven by the motivation to resolve father-related challenges. Firstly, being reunited with their fathers was anticipated to enable PKFC to assimilate and integrate more easily into their local communities. Many PKFC mentioned that they faced stigma regarding their parents’ absence or needed answers to explain their situation to their peers:

Other children often ask me to tell them where my father is. I tell them I don’t know and then I really feel so sad. I think my father must be in Europe. It hurts. Other children’s parents are married, and their fathers are still living with their families. My comrades mock me saying that I have no father. They hurt my heart when they say that I have no shoes or clothes. When I reply that there is no one to support me, they ask me why I can’t follow my dad. (Bukavu, 9)

Secondly, learning about their paternal heritage and origin was important for constructing an identity or sense of self. This was based on curiosity about similarities and differences with their parents, as well as the desire to confirm that their fathers are good men and that they themselves are therefore worthy of love. It can be expected that issues around identity formation and self-acceptance are of greater concern to older youth who are more strongly influenced by their surroundings. PKFC saw the disclosure of their father’s identity as a way to make sense of their own experiences and biographies and to resolve issues around their orphan status: “I have never seen his face and he didn’t even leave me a picture. I would like to meet my father. I want to see him, to know him and his name.” (Kalemie, 19). Thus, fathers represented a conduit to ascertain their roots, explore their identity and achieve self-acceptance.

Thirdly, PKFC were interested in searching for their fathers as a response to monetary hardship and lack of material care. Research in absent-father homes in South Africa has shown that in contexts of poverty, the motivation to establish paternal identity is dominated mainly by the need for support (Nduna and Jewkes 2011). Our study is consistent with this finding as almost all PKFC anticipated that financial contributions would result from reconciling with their fathers: “I would tell him to come rescue me from poverty.” (Bukavu, 13). PKFC in the age group 12-19 perceived education to be key in taking control of their lives. They almost exclusively noted that their father’s absence denied them access to schooling and, therefore, the chance of a better future. Existing literature states that only 33% of adolescents in DRC attend school; OVC significantly less so (UNICEF 2018). Moreover, the economic well-being of families and the relationship of children to the head of household drives the investment in children’s educational attainment (Shapiro and Oleko Tambashe 2001). In line with that, adolescents in our study reported an overwhelming desire to attend school. The high rates of dropouts amongst them were not only caused by their inability to cover fees, but also by them taking up work to support their remaining family. One youth articulated his wishes in the following narrative,

I would tell him to support my studies; that’s my first claim. I am jobless. I wish I went on studying because I stopped in the 5<sup>th</sup> form secondary school. I know how to write and to read but that isn’t good enough. I would like him to know that I am no longer a kid, I have become a grown person and I can’t go to school or get my diploma because he doesn’t support me (Kalemie, 19)

PKFC frequently described their fathers as saviours that would eventually come to end their “suffering”. The attributes and abilities ascribed to fathers idealized them, showing parallels with children’s spiritual beliefs or hope placed in God. Despite the unlikely chances of finding absent peacekeeper fathers, the ongoing search for them was often discussed in practical terms and PKFC revealed they had thought in detail about meeting them. Their priorities for the first interaction were to demand an explanation for their abandonment (“I want to ask him why he left me this way”), get financial support (“I would tell him to send money so that I can pay my school fees, buy food, clothes and shoes”) or be taken to fathers’ countries of origin (“I want my father to come take me. I want to be taken where he is”).

## Discussion

This is the first study to explore the life courses of PKFC through their direct consultation. The significant amount of time children spent on their drawings and the accompanying explanations indicate that they were comfortable with the study setting. The level of reflection in the drawings confirmed that children as young as six-years-old are capable communicators of their mental models. No child chose not to draw. Almost all children used the FDP to build a narrative about their father. Many children asked questions during the interview, indicating that the activity succeeded in redressing more traditional power dynamics between researchers and participants. We found that the ability to express emotions orally was limited for younger children. Therefore, engaging them through the FDP was an effective way to include them in the research. Triangulating this data with the traditional interview format proved essential in directing us towards a coherent analysis of participants' family situations.

Contrasting these two sources of information revealed a significant gap between participants' perceptions of family and their personal situations, i.e., participants almost exclusively produced drawings that showed them as part of a more extensive family network than they actually experienced. Fictional elements in visual research with CBOW have previously been observed in the context of conflict-affected northern Uganda. Drawings produced by paternal orphans, born into captivity of rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army, highlighted that when asked to illustrate a time of happiness in their lives, children drew detailed, yet fictional, experiences (Stewart 2015). Like Stewart, we found a tendency for CBOW to engage in wishful thinking and express an ideal-typical version of reality in their drawings.

Family drawings are an expression of internal working models and beliefs (Leon et al. 2007) that have been described as "fantasies that combine children's subjective life experiences and their meetings with the objective outside world" (Piperno et al. 2007, p. 390). The divergence between children's mental models and their lived experiences is related to their emotional development and social adjustment (Arteche and Murray 2011). Children are used to drawing on schemes and scripts

that they develop from infancy to make sense of their environment based on prior experience (Gordon 2002). In early years, these are usually derived from family and domestic life, which include the roles and social identity of different family members. Research has shown that children react with cognitive discomfort when their mental models of parental roles and family are challenged (Palkovich 2015). Cognitive dissonance theory can make several contributions to resolving this tension. Festinger's theory (1957) postulates that holding two contradictory cognitions (ideas, attitudes, beliefs, opinions) causes psychological discomfort that individuals try to reduce by changing an obverse cognition or, reconciling dissonant ideas, by adding new ones. Children, like everyone else, have an interest in initiating change to reduce dissonance, particularly if self-justification is important to them. PKFC might hold the following cognitions: 1. My father is good; 2. Good parents support their children; 3. My father does not support me. In order to resolve this contradiction, PKFC could make several alterations. Changing the original cognition about their fathers to 'my father is bad' might cause PKFC to self-attribute and therefore, be costly to their self-esteem (Wicklund and Brehm 2004). PKFC almost exclusively looked up to their fathers and were under the impression that they would be supportive if they were around. The assumption that their fathers are good people might further be encouraged by the image of UN peacekeepers as providing help and assistance. Thus, this cognition is resistant to change. Another way to reconcile dissonance is to alter the second cognition to: 'good parents support their children as best they can.' This inner attitude allows PKFC to escape the dissonant relation by explaining the lack of support as circumstantial; implying that something is hindering their fathers' provision of support. Believing that their fathers cannot get in touch with them allows PKFC to hold on to a positive representation of their fathers and thus, to maintain a positive self-image. As such, no dissonance is evoked and PKFC can think of their fathers as loving and themselves as love-worthy. Resistance to changing this cognition is relatively low since there is little experience-related test to the assumption in reality.

Many children voiced a rationale according to which peacekeepers were not aware of their existence or had only temporarily turned their backs on them. Consequently, they wanted to search

for their fathers to remind them of their paternal obligations. This determination in searching for absent fathers replicates the experiences of CBOW in other geopolitical and historical contexts (Denov and Piolanti 2020; Ho et al. 2019; Mitreuter et al. 2019; Stelzl-Marx 2009). Thus, the knowledge generated in this study might be relevant in explaining the urge to find absent fathers for CBOW in other conflict or post-conflict settings. Currently, most CBOW exist on the margins of their communities and their socio-economic situations severely limit their opportunities (Lee 2017). The degree to which such challenges are attributable to fatherlessness is determined by social norms and the perceptions of fatherhood in the surrounding culture. While the outsider status of CBOW is influenced by a number of factors (e.g., mixed ethnicity, being born out of wedlock), fatherlessness is particularly relevant in settings with patrilineal family structures like DRC, where PKFC perceived themselves to be severely disadvantaged and deprived of their peers' privileges.

Although restricted access to economic and material resources reflects the situation of many children in DRC, PKFC clearly articulated that their circumstances amplified poverty. Not being able to draw on family ties led to financial concerns and hindered PKFC's educational attainment. Although increasingly reliant on their remaining families, maternal networks often provided PKFC with limited care and attention due to their illegitimate conception and the related stigma. The insufficient support on both sides caused PKFC to portray themselves as orphans whose lack of societal integration denied them sustainable livelihoods. Whilst participants were not aware of the legal complexities behind their circumstances, PKFC of all ages discussed the injustice of being left fatherless and resourceless without any point of contact. Moreover, they had a clear sense of fathers, mothers, communities, and authorities abandoning their responsibility towards them.

We found that the knowledge of their unfavourable childhoods amplified the value ascribed to reuniting with fathers as a means of improving life circumstances. Altering the narrative about their family's situation might have emotional and materialistic value in healing their pain since believing in the feasibility of finding their fathers enables PKFC to hold out hope for a better future. In order to maintain that hope over time, PKFC wanted to assume an active role in overcoming their challenges



by searching for their fathers. Future research should investigate coping mechanisms and adaptive responses to fatherlessness in order to encourage more fruitful ways to channel PKFC's desire for change into constructive actions.

### **Limitations**

While the children who participated in the current study endured significant rights violations and exacerbated hardship, no claims regarding the overall population of PKFC can be made since the study sample was not representative of PKFC in DRC or elsewhere. Due to its focus on family, the study does not account for PKFC who might live on the streets or in orphanages. Cultural specifications shape the image of family and will likely differ in other settings of UNPK. The interpretations of our results are therefore specific to patrilineal African societies in which fathers assume the discussed social role. It is likely that PKFC in other geopolitical contexts, experience fatherlessness differently. Although the FDP has been validated cross-culturally and in racially diverse contexts (e.g., Goldner and Scharf 2012; Shiakou 2012), few studies from SSA exist, and children in this context might respond differently to drawing exercises. Some children were willing to share their thoughts through pen and paper, yet hardly participated in answering questions unrelated to the drawing, leading to incomplete data. Additionally, interviews with younger children were relatively short in comparison to those of adolescents. Younger participants were occasionally supervised by their mothers which might have distorted their responses. Almost all children asked the research assistants for support to find their fathers. This has considerable ethical implications as it seemed that not all participants understood that the research was independent of the UN, or that research assistants had no way of contacting their fathers. Besides, PKFC emphasised their unstable conditions throughout the interview, indicating that they might have hoped to secure additional benefits from the research.

We acknowledge epistemological limitations related to our viewpoints as non-Congolese, adult researchers with inherent biases in interpreting the experiences of Congolese children. The FDP succeeded in capturing the ideas of very young children, yet drawings can only offer a partial and

socially situated representation of their perspectives. Although a diverse team of local experts, researchers and translators was engaged in the research process and consulted regarding data interpretation, nuances might not always have been appreciated fully. As researchers foreign to DRC, the authors might have modelled PKFC's narratives against the epistemic structures of social life in the Global North (Go 2020). Thus, the present research provides a first account of PKFC's family relations and perceptions of fatherhood that should be explored further in order to claim precise connections between family structure and well-being.

### **Practical Implications**

This study contributes to our understanding of PKFC in DRC and globally. Semi-structured interviews with 35 children and adolescents provided novel insights into the life courses of this population. In addition, children's drawings illustrated their conceptualizations of family and facilitated conversations about family structure. Our research successfully explored how PKFC experience growing up in families with absent peacekeeper fathers and thus adds crucial insights to debates around CBOW and OVC in SSA.

Based on the views of PKFC shared in this study, we make several recommendations for positive change. First, participants reported that fatherlessness limited their ability to access economic resources and construct coherent identity narratives. Moreover, absent fathers and missing family links were perceived as negatively affecting their sense of security and denying PKFC cultural integration. While changes in social policy and local attitudes towards PKFC are needed in the long term, peer assistance is a low-cost approach that could provide emotional support for PKFC in the short-term. Most participants reported knowing others with similar procreation backgrounds, yet few were connecting with them regularly. Forming support networks with other PKFC and tackling issues of identity as a group might bring relief from some of the familial and social burdens that exclude these children from participating in society. Moreover, these networks could be used to introduce PKFC to transparent information regarding their possibilities of support.

Second, the article shed light on PKFC's relationships with their mothers and kin networks. The results evidenced that single mothers struggled to assume the role of provider and carer, and occasionally separated from their children. Thus, fatherlessness and poverty negatively impacted family interaction and quality of life. As traditional for SSA, PKFC often relied on the support of maternal families. However, the prejudice against families with PKFC and dire financial situations occasionally exhausted these support mechanisms. The population in DRC is facing enormous challenges, including poverty, food insecurity, gendered inequality, and social unrest. Children who are denied stability in many spheres of life need family connections to cope with these stressors. However, due to sparse financial means, many mothers did not have the time to form loving relationships with their children. A dysfunctional mother-child relationship might be detrimental to PKFC becoming healthy and happy individuals. To prevent this, mothers must have access to financial resources or a level of education that allows them to pursue gainful employment and childcaring activities. The empowerment of their mothers with access to education, grants, and livelihood skills, will ultimately also help to support PKFC.

Lastly, we found that knowledge of one's father was essential for the development of identity, social contacts and resources. Although information about fathers was often limited or concealed, PKFC believed their fathers to be an essential part of their family. Illustrated through their drawings, PKFC exposed their desire for the social and economic security of an ideal-typical family network. Lack of opportunities for self-actualization and financial independence led PKFC to engage in wishful thinking and inflate the value of reuniting with their fathers. Despite PKFC having no starting point in searching for their fathers, they believed finding them to be the start of a better life. The UN could play a role in facilitating father communication, or at the very least informing PKFC regarding their rights and the limitations of national and international policies.

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## Chapter 6. Living with Stigma (Publication 2)

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Corresponding Author:	Kirstin Wagner University of Birmingham Birmingham, West Midlands UNITED KINGDOM	
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:		
Corresponding Author's Institution:	University of Birmingham	
Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:		
First Author:	Kirstin Wagner	
First Author Secondary Information:		
Order of Authors:	Kirstin Wagner	
	Heide Glaesmer	
	Susan A Bartels	
	Sabine Lee	

RESEARCH

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# “If I was with my father such discrimination wouldn’t exist, I could be happy like other people”: a qualitative analysis of stigma among peacekeeper fathered children in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Kirstin Wagner<sup>1\*</sup> , Heide Glaesmer<sup>2</sup>, Susan A. Bartels<sup>3</sup> and Sabine Lee<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

**Background:** The United Nations (UN) Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO) comprises the largest and longest serving peacekeeping operation to date. Since the launch of the mission in 1999, sexual relations between UN peacekeepers and the local population regularly occur; some resulting in children being conceived. Reports have indicated that women and girls bearing children from such relations face difficult socio economic realities. The present study is the first to explore the situation of peacekeeper fathered children (PKFC) through a qualitative analysis that includes interview material from mothers and child participants.

**Methods:** The article uses theories from stigma research to illustrate how children conceived through sexual relations with UN peacekeepers integrate into social networks. We conducted a case study of mothers and their PKFC at different sites of UN peacekeeping (UNPK) in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Based on 95 in depth interviews held in 2018, a thematic qualitative analysis examined experiences of stigma and discrimination. In order to understand the challenges of mothers and children from a transgenerational perspective, we evaluated perceptions of rejection rooted in the mother child relationship.

**Results:** Of the mothers and children surveyed, a large majority struggled with stigmatizing behaviour by family and/or community members. PKFC perceived their discrimination to be based upon their mixed ethnicity, fatherlessness, illegitimacy at birth, as well as a lack of resources and opportunity. Mothers most often attributed their stigma to economic deprivation, extra marital sexual relations, single parenting and being associated with UNPK. Parallels in the experiences of mothers and children suggest a bi directional transmission of status loss and stigma between generations.

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\* Correspondence:

<sup>1</sup>Department of History, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK  
Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



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**Conclusions:** This is the first empirical study to compare the situation of PKFC and their mothers in any country of UNPK deployment. The findings highlight multiple burdens that affect their daily lives and illustrate an interplay between drivers of stigmatization for mothers and children. The overarching needs identified are financial, and these call for action regarding policies and programmes that provide resources to those concerned. The results further demonstrate the need for psychosocial support that considers transgenerational dynamics and both mothers and children as core addressees of assistance.

**Keywords:** Stigma, Children Born of War, United Nations, Peacekeeping, Sexual Misconduct, Democratic Republic of Congo, Transgenerational

## Background

The armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been described as the deadliest conflict since World War II [1]. Despite perceptible improvements in the past two decades, the country continues to suffer from recurring cycles of violence and a distressing amount of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) [2, 3]. In response to the ongoing instability, the United Nations (UN) Security Council (UNSC) established the UN Organization Mission in the DRC (MONUC) in 1999 [4]. Renamed to the UN Stabilization Organization Mission in 2010 (MONUSCO), peacekeepers were authorized to use force in order to protect civilians against the multiple foreign and domestic armed groups [5]. In 2013, the UNSC introduced an “intervention brigade” with the aim to target the security vacuum and aggravating humanitarian crises in the east [6]. As of December 2019, 17,000 personnel are deployed in DRC [7]. Despite peacekeepers being mandated to protect civilians, their daily presence for over 20 years has come with challenges for the local population. Sparked by their prolonged proximity to one another, sexual relations (e.g. rape, business arrangements, romantic relationships) between UN peacekeeping (UNPK) personnel and local women and girls emerged [8].

Allegations of sexual misconduct during UNPK have unfolded from a long list of peacekeeping operations (PKO), still, only a small fraction of impeached peacekeepers are prosecuted or convicted [8, 9]. Irrespective of the UN strongly discouraging all sexual contact between peacekeepers and residents in host countries [10], sexual encounters regularly occur; some with far-reaching consequences. Reports indicate that women in different geopolitical settings have children fathered by members of UNPK forces [11, 12], yet to date, little is known about their experiences. According to estimates from the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, approximately 25,000 children were left behind by peacekeepers in Cambodia and another 6,600 in Liberia [13]. The first systematic study addressing children left behind by peacekeepers confirmed in 2019 that during the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH), a sizeable group of “pitit MINUSTAHs” (little

MINUSTAHs) or “bébés casques bleus” (blue helmet babies) were born [14]. Anecdotal reports from the DRC suggest that children abandoned by UNPK staff are not uncommon (e.g., [15–18]), however, no comprehensive statistics exist.

Euphemistically referred to as “peace-babies”, children fathered by UN peacekeepers (hereafter PKFC) are considered a subgroup of children born of war (CBOW) [19]. The term CBOW refers to individuals with one parent who is part of a foreign army or peacekeeping force and another who belongs to the local population in the country of deployment [20, 21]. Neglected for a long time, the experiences of CBOW have recently become a focus of academic study. A conceptual framework defining the psychosocial consequences of growing up as a CBOW was developed in 2012 [22]. Glaesmer et al. emphasize three aspects affecting the mental health of CBOW: experiences of stigmatization and discrimination [23, 24], child maltreatment [25], and identity formation [26]. While all three categories pose substantial challenges to CBOW [27, 28], this article focuses on stigmatization because it was the major concern of those interviewed in the present study.

Stigma, according to Goffman’s seminal work [29, 30], is a “deeply discrediting attribute” which reduces an individual “from a whole usual person to a tainted, discounted one”. The focus of psychological discourses has shifted to a less individualistic view, emphasizing that stigma is socially constructed within a certain context [31, 32]. The widely used sociological definition, by Link and Phelan [33], combines different stigma concepts (labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination) and highlights power dynamics that allow it to flourish. Subsequent frameworks emphasized structural determinants such as economic, political or historical factors that enable stigma to translate into social injustice [34, 35]. Cross-cultural research suggests that stigma experiences are universal, but that the process of being discredited affects individuals differently [36]. Negative emotional implications, e.g. self-doubt, shame, guilt, fear, anxiety, and avoidance depend on available coping mechanisms [31, 37]. As such, internalization of negative

stereotypes towards oneself, referred to as “self-stigma”, can lead to particularly severe ramifications when individuals start to agree with the contents of society’s negative perceptions [38, 39]. Self-stigma may interfere with identity construction when stigmatizing attitudes manifest themselves in a person’s self-concept and sense of self [30]. Similarly, social stigma exerts significant influence over relational aspects of identity that may cause identity gaps through conflicting social roles [30]. Structural discrimination and social withdrawal often deprive individuals of equal opportunity [40]. Recent contributions to stigma research have highlighted different forms of stigma, such as “stigma by association” or “family stigma”, illustrating that stigmatizing behaviour can be detrimental beyond the scope of the individual it was initially ascribed to [37, 41].

Women or girls who were sexually abused by armed forces and groups face severe prejudice in DRC [42]. In a population-based survey, one-third of Congolese men and women said they would not accept sexual assault survivors back into their communities [43]. Bearing a child from SGBV has been found to impose severe social, health and psychological consequences, leaving victims to feel devalued, hopeless, angry, anxious, or overwhelmed [44]. Due to the fear of stigmatization and inadequate justice and service responses, sexual violence related pregnancies (SVRP) might be aborted, abandoned, and remain largely unreported [44, 45].

It has been illustrated that children deepen the shame experienced by survivors and that communities struggle even more with the acknowledgment of the children conceived from sexual violence than with the reintegration of sexual violence victims themselves [45, 46]. However, the relationship of mothers and children born as a result of SGBV, as well as the impact of stigma on this relationship are not well understood. In 2015, Rouhani et al. assessed parenting attitudes towards children raised from SVRP among a large sample of mothers in the South Kivu province of eastern DRC [47]. The results showed that the majority of the interviewed women had positive feelings towards their offspring, yet two-thirds reported often picturing the assault when looking at their child. The prevalence of perceived stigma attached to the family was nearly 40%. Acceptance by family and community was related to a better maternal-child relationship, while experiences of stigma, maternal anxiety and depression led to lower parenting indexes. Mothers perceived acceptance from the spouse to be the lowest, followed by the community and the family. The study did not account for children’s perceptions of stigma, yet the importance of addressing stigmatizing behavior towards children in DRC is paramount.

Stigma behaviour towards CBOW has been observed in many cultural contexts, including countries with

German occupation forces in World War 2 and the Rwandan genocide in 1994 [48]. Conceived during conflict, CBOW are often ascribed multiple stigmas due to overlapping burdens [48, 49], e.g. being born out of wedlock and having an inter-ethnic background. Thus, their experiences with stigma might be particularly threatening to their social identity [24, 26]. Yet, few studies have investigated this group and their participation in society. To our knowledge, no detailed research specific to the life courses of children fathered by UNPK personnel exists. The authors aim to close that knowledge gap through the first transgenerational analysis that addresses the psychosocial situation of PKFC and their mothers. In doing so, we aim to expose the needs of a vulnerable and hard to access population and inform policies for their assistance.

## Methods

### Study design and sample selection

This study is developed out of a wider mixed-methods research project examining relations between UNPK personnel and the local female population in eastern DRC. Within the larger study, community members around six UN bases were asked to share and interpret a story about a girl or woman interacting with peacekeepers. All women who shared first-person narratives about conceiving and giving birth to a PKFC were invited to participate in a follow-up qualitative interview. Snowball sampling was used to increase sample size, with participating mothers of PKFC inviting other women who were raising PKFC, as well as their children to also take part in the study. The current analysis is based exclusively on these follow-up qualitative interviews. All participants were approached face-to-face. Interview locations were chosen according to UN base size, years of operation and nationality of the troop contributing country: Bukavu and Kalemie to the south, and Beni, Bunia, Kisangani, and Goma to the north, representing the major cities with a UN presence in eastern DRC. All interviews were conducted over a 9-week period between June and August 2018.

The larger mixed-methods study was implemented by “the Multidisciplinary Association for Research and Advocacy in the Kivus by United Junior Academics” (MARAKUJA) and by “Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral” (SOFEPADI). MARAKUJA is a non-profit network of Congolese researchers that design, implement, and evaluate large-scale research projects. SOFEPADI is a Congolese non-governmental organization that promotes the rights of women and girls and advocates for their equal access to social justice. MARAKUJA oversaw the logistics of the project. Two female SOFEPADI research assistants supported the mixed-methods data collection in addition to



conducting all follow up in-depth interviews. As social workers, both SOFEPADI research assistants had experience working with vulnerable populations, including victims of SGBV. All research assistants were fluent in local languages and completed a five-day training on research ethics, standardized interviewing and data management immediately prior to data collection. Given their cultural, linguistic and content expertise, the project relied on SOFEPADI's guidance to ensure that the research was designed and implemented in a culturally sensitive manner. SOFEPADI also created a support system for participants in need of psychological counselling and provided referral cards for additional support services at the end of each interview session.

### Survey design and delivery

Semi-structured interview guides were developed with topic questions and a series of prompts, allowing flexibility regarding sensitive issues. The questions were open-ended, and were designed based on the revised literature and core components of stigma proposed by Goffman, and Link and Phelan [29, 33]. Although self-constructed to fit the specific subpopulations, items in the questionnaires drew from existing instruments such as the "inventory of stigmatizing experiences" [50] and its adaptation for CBOW by Kaiser, Kuwert and Glaesmer [51]. The questions were organized into thematic categories and tailored to the participant subgroup to understand the lived realities of both mothers and PKFC. Mothers were asked to provide insight into the family's demographics, the circumstances surrounding the pregnancy, and the reaction of others to the birth of the PKFC. The survey also asked about exposure to stigma from family and community, and about facets of the mother-child relationship. Depending on their age, PKFC were asked for information about relationships within their immediate social circles and perceived social status. While younger children (aged 6–12) were approached with broad questions that did not mention their heritage, interviews with adolescents (aged 13–19) asked more explicit questions in reference to their heritage. For instance, with young children social status was addressed with questions such as "Some people may think that you are different or more special than other children here, do you know why they would say that?"

Interview guides were written in English, translated to Kiswahili and Lingala, and independently back translated to English by professional translators. The interview questions were refined and tested for comprehensibility and cultural sensitivity by the SOFEPADI research assistants. Any discrepancies were resolved by consensus and a cross-check confirmed that there were no substantive differences in the content being delivered across geographical regions or languages. All interviews were

conducted in Kiswahili, or Lingala and were audio-recorded using Zoom H4n Pro devices. Every effort was made to create a safe space for participants that ensured data confidentiality and protection.

### Data analysis

Qualitative thematic content analysis was used given the explorative nature of the research. The strategy for analysis was inductive, triangulated with the main themes arising from the literature. The data was open-coded based on emerging themes and overarching narratives, creating categories, sub-categories, and relationships between them [52]. Perceived stigmatization was classified according to its most commonly listed causes and the magnitude of the detailed experiences, based on frequency and impact on participants lives. The codebook was generated by the first author using NVivo V12.2.0 [53] and discussed with the wider research team. The quotes were chosen by contextual relevance.

### Ethics considerations and informed consent

After reviewing the participant information and consent forms in Kiswahili or Lingala, participants gave verbal informed consent. PKFC were provided with this information in an age appropriate manner under the prerequisite of parental consent. Verbal consent was recorded, and data confidentiality guaranteed. Written consent was waived due to possible illiteracy and the minimal risks involved. The degree of sensitivity inherent in the broad and open questioning of young respondents enabled their inclusion in an ethical manner. No personally identifying information was gathered, and all interviews took place in private locations to mitigate potential harm resulting from being singled out for an interview. Participants were not paid to participate but they were provided with light refreshments at the time of the interview. If an interview had to be arranged for a later time, mobile phone credit was offered to facilitate scheduling. Participants had an opportunity to ask questions and were explicitly told about their right to refuse the interview or withdraw from the project. The research was approved by the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Board ERN 18-0083 (or protocol 18-0083) and by the Queen's University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (protocol 6, 019,042).

## Results

### Study population

A total of 95 individual interviews (35 PKFC and 60 mothers) were conducted. Children in the age group 6–12 ( $n = 22$ ) were on average 8.4 years old with a Standard Deviation (SD) of 3.6 years at the time of

the interview. Adolescents in the age group 13–19 ( $n = 13$ ) were on average 14 ( $SD = 1.8$ ) years old when the study took place. Among mothers who provided details on the nature of the sexual interaction ( $n = 53$ ), 37 mothers (69.8%) acknowledged that it was consensual, oftentimes involving romantic ideas and expectations. Ten women (18.9%) described the relationship as being predominantly transactional in nature, centred around the exchange of food, money, clothing or other items in return for sex. However, transactional and romantic relationships were not clearly distinct or mutually exclusive, and most consensual relationships included presents and material expressions of affection due to the adverse socio-economic conditions in DRC (see [54] for categorization of sexual interactions in the context of UNPK). Six mothers (11.3%) reported becoming pregnant after being raped by one or more peacekeepers. At the time of the interview, mothers were on average 26.2 ( $SD = 7.2$ ) years old; compared to an average of 19.7 ( $SD = 5.9$ ) years at conception. The youngest girl reportedly impregnated was 10 years old and the oldest woman impregnated was 36 years old, with 46% of the mothers being under the age of 18 when they conceived. In the current data set, 75% of mothers ( $n = 45$ ) recalled the nationality of the father precisely, although most used the terms “black” and “white” for descriptive purposes. The most commonly reported countries of origin for peacekeeper fathers were: Tanzania (37.7%), South Africa (15.6%), Morocco (6.7%), Uruguay (6.7%), Benin (6.7%), Malawi (6.7%), Sudan (4.4%), Senegal (4.4%), Guatemala (2.2%), DRC (2.2%), Bangladesh (2.2%) and Nepal (2.2%).

### Stigma experiences

The analysis uncovered the often-challenging relationships of mothers and PKFC with their families and communities. Stigmatization was assessed based on individuals facing labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and/or discrimination [33]. The magnitude of stigma was evaluated through consideration of frequency and impact of the shared experiences. Perceived stigma by PKFC was compared to the observations of their mothers who were asked to evaluate their own and their children's social interactions.

Of the PKFC surveyed, a majority articulated stigma. Children aged 6–12 years were not asked explicit questions about acceptance and were therefore less likely than adolescents to comment on their integration. For both age groups, stigma was manifested in a range of experiences; from teasing and bullying to overt discrimination, abuse and neglect. As demonstrated below, participants detailed severe cases of

physical and verbal abuse, which in some instances made it difficult for PKFC to form meaningful relationships.

*“They strike him a lot at home. They insult him, they make fun of him, scorn him and don’t take care of him much, sometimes they even beat him. His nickname is ‘Aramu’ [Motherfuck]. He feels rejected and very sad when they behave like that.”* (Mother, Goma).

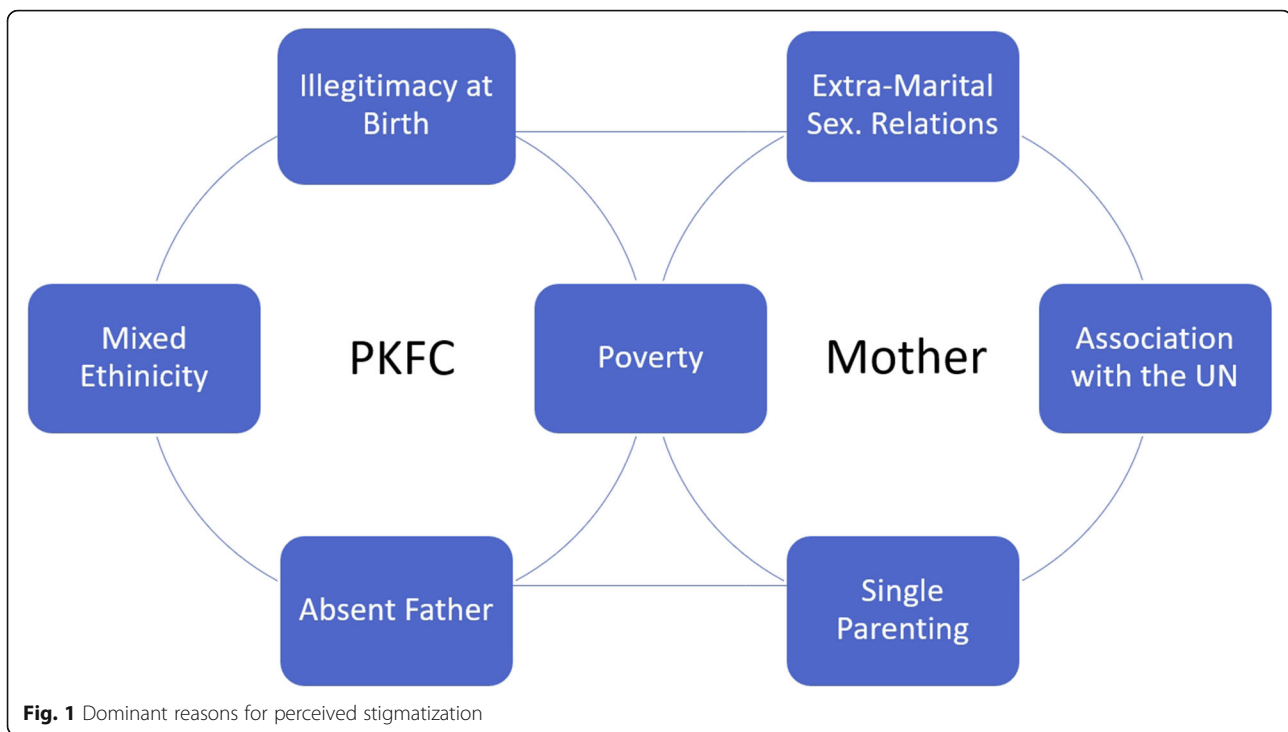
Stigmatizing attitudes and behaviour were also a reality for the mothers. The deterioration in social status after giving birth to a PKFC was the most dominant and recurring theme in interviews with mothers. Many participants reported an altered reputation and frequent issues with connectedness and closeness to friends, neighbours, and other members of the community. More than two thirds of mothers reported facing far-reaching consequences of stigmatization, with several being cut off entirely from family ties and resources. The most severe forms of stigmatization included becoming the subject of gossip and harassment in the community to a point where mothers felt the need to relocate.

*“It affected me a lot. Not only did he leave me and the child, but the information was spread in my community. I am no longer respected there. A child outside marriage makes one suffer, especially when it gets ill and the parents have chased one away from home. I get embarrassed to ask for help. I feel bad and like my life is sinking, I am regretful.”* (Mother, Goma).

Figure 1 illustrates the most frequently listed reasons for perceived stigmatization. Each of the contributors to stigma will be explored in greater detail below. Overlapping content due to parallels in the experiences of mothers and children will be combined under joint headlines and discussed in light of trans-generational influences. As such, the feeling of illegitimacy among children is illustrated against the backdrop of their mother's extra-marital sexual relations. This is summarized under the heading context of conception. Stigma based on fatherlessness and single parenting will be debated in light of local norms regarding family structure. Lastly, othering of PKFC related to mixed ethnicity will be discussed in conjunction with their mothers' connection to UNPK under the headline of ethnic belonging.

### Poverty

A large proportion of the population in eastern DRC are impoverished and gendered socio-economic disparities



are widespread [55]. Having a child out of wedlock adds significantly to these pre-existing financial insecurities, especially for women who tend to work in lower paid, informal sectors. Besides having to cover the expenses of pregnancy and maternity, mothers reported that raising a PKFC was a barrier to marriage as well as economic and educational activities which could have provided some degree of financial stability.

*“Some say I am not intelligent; I should have aborted: ‘your schoolmates are completing their studies while you must stay home and raise a child by yourself’. These thoughts bring me much suffering and raise doubts. I wanted to become a teacher.”* (Mother, Kalemie).

Every fifth participant in our study pointed towards a shortage in resources as the main reason for their social stigmatization. The example below reflects the situation of a 16-year-old mother who was exploited through her family and forced into child prostitution as a result of poverty. Although impregnated by UN personnel at the age of ten, this young mother names her lack of income as the dominant reason for social exclusion.

*“My family cannot support me because they have no means, they are destitute. I think if people treat me different, it’s because I’m jobless and I have no activity that generates income like a small business... Currently we are starving.”* (Mother, Goma).

After giving birth to a PKFC, women were almost without exception left in a situation of financial hardship. Mothers in our study received negligible assistance from the individual peacekeepers. Yet, there appeared to be a hierarchy amongst them, with women who had longer-term support from the UN peacekeeper at the top and other women being looked down upon for not securing similar benefits.

*“Many mock me and laugh at me. Some do this because unlike me they were lucky enough to get money, plots of land or houses from their MONUSCO boyfriends. They say I am miserable and cursed for not having been offered such things by my South-African husband.”* (Mother, Bukavu).

Poverty also played into the stigma experiences of PKFC. Children and adolescents in the current sample described lack of shelter, food, and other basic resources, as well as the inability to afford health care and schooling. Younger children exemplified sparse economic means by not possessing certain toys and thus, feeling left out during playtime.

*“My friends sometimes decry me by saying that I use their dolls while never bringing any of my own. This makes me feel sad and upset and triggers thinking of my departed father. They sometimes insult me by saying that I am crazy, stupid, imbecile and poor.”*



*They insult me this way because of poverty.” (PKFC, 12, Bukavu).*

The longing for financial security was usually discussed in the context of the unaccountable father and the aggravated economic conditions caused by his absence. Observing PKFC's deprivation of a decent living standard created additional pressure on mothers.

*“My children are different from other children in that they are dressed poorly; you see it when they meet for birthday parties. When others are dressing up, they complain because their peers' fathers bought them brand new clothes and shoes. It's heart-breaking to experience such situations. They are being told that they are street children who have no father.” (Mother, Goma).*

Some women found themselves in a downward spiral of further social rejection when extreme poverty led them to (re) engage in sex-work to meet their child's basic needs.

*“I didn't care what was right or wrong. I was willing to do whatever in return for food ... My worries were to find clothes for the child. I was living far from my family, I stopped going to school and willingly became a prostitute. Men came to sleep with me and gave me money which helped me a lot.” (Mother, Goma).*

### Family structure

Verbal attacks and harassment related to family structure were described by both mothers and children. Participants fathered and abandoned by peacekeepers experienced stigma as a result of their absent biological fathers and paternal families. Not knowing the identity and/or whereabouts of parents and growing up without the social support of extended families were among the most commonly cited reasons by PKFC for being stigmatized.

*“Some people say I am different because my father left when I was a baby. Some people are amazed to see I am still alive.” (PKFC, 14, Bukavu).*

Comments about fatherlessness were frequently linked to the absence of a male role model and head of household. Teasing or bullying by classmates also projected prejudice against peacekeepers on to the children and portrayed them as conceited, privileged or violent.

*“I really feel sad when I realize that my child isn't treated fairly. If his father was here, he wouldn't*

*undergo this kind of discrimination. Others sometimes call him bad names, like 'son of a hooligan', 'son of a dumb father'. It makes me indignant!” (Mother, Bunia).*

A large majority of PKFC reiterated being told to “go to their fathers” or “follow their dads” in order to find relief from familial and socio-economic hardship. These comments support the representation of PKFC as an “out-group” in their community, deprive them of a sense of belonging, and propagate the idea of an incomplete identity.

*“My comrades mock me by saying that I have no father. They hurt my heart when they say that I have no shoes or clothes. When I reply that there is no one to support me, they ask me why I can't follow my dad.” (PKFC, 9, Goma).*

The perception of fatherlessness as the reason for hardship was reported by PKFC of all age groups, including the following young adult born in 1999 when UN peacekeepers first arrived in DRC. The emotional and physical abuse driven by his siblings distanced the 20-year old from his own home and denied him safety and shelter.

*“It's my stepbrother and sister who treat me differently. It has happened at times that my brother came home late drunk and found me on the bed sleeping and started disturbing me, chasing me away from the house. In these situations, I would sometimes spend the night outside. Other times my mother intervened so that I can go back to the bedroom. If he is really drunk, he beats me up. Recently he cut my mat into two parts. If I was with my father such discrimination wouldn't exist, I could be happy like other people.” (PKFC, 20, Kalemie).*

Ostracization of the mothers partially resulted from being a single parent. Tainted as a violation of family code and social norms, this theme paralleled the theme of “fatherlessness” in its expression of familial hardship. The socio-economic burden of raising a child without a male partner, and raising a PKFC in particular, often rendered women unmarriageable and hence lowered their social status in the eyes of the community. Several mothers spoke about their lowered prospects of new relationships; few mentioned long-term partners.

*“Because of this child, my life is dark, no men will ever intend to marry me. I am 36 years old. My life is bound to difficulties.” (Mother, Kalemie).*

In Congolese culture, husbands do not necessarily provide for children from earlier relationships. Hence, instead of improving the socioeconomic situation for PKFC, new partners sometimes caused more severe rejection and increased the family's dysfunction.

*"What troubles me the most is that my husband doesn't want to pay the school fees for my daughter. Moreover, he insults her a lot. I must wonder about the future of my child."* (Mother, Bukavu).

### Ethnic belonging

A number of PKFC listed "mixed ethnicity" as the predominant cause for stigma. Children reported being humiliated or ridiculed on the grounds of not being Congolese, being "white" or "foreign", or otherwise singled out for their ethnic heritage. They also recalled negative stereotyping attached to not being able to trace their family clan or ethnic group.

*"The child is rejected by their family; they are not accepted amongst them. They tell the kid that he is a foreigner. Children bully him to leave and go to South Africa, his father's country. They rebuke him for not being Congolese. When he is playing with others, they tell him all kinds of insults. Most often to go back to his country. They regard him as a foreigner, just as his father."* (Mother, Bukavu).

Related to their inability to trace their origin, PKFC were affected in their identity creation and suffered from isolation. The country of the father's origin or the children's skin colour was frequently used as a derogatory name for PKFC; participants were referred to as "Nepali", "Tanzanian" etc. or "White" instead of addressed by their first names. Thus, stigma heightened their racial awareness and left them questioning their cultural identity.

*"Sometimes, he feels anxious. Especially when other children make fun of him and call him Tanzanian. He cries when they shout, 'get out of here, Tanzanian'."* (Mother, Beni).

Cases of social marginalization and maltreatment appeared more severe for mixed-race children who clearly stood out as biracial. The data revealed that experiences of stigma occurred more often and more persistently for PKFC fathered by "white" internationals.

*"The neighbours don't love her. They constantly make fun of her saying that she is the 'daughter of a white'. My friends were even bringing different kinds of poison in order to kill her. Because of this she only*

*stays here in the compound, she is ashamed."* (Mother, Bukavu).

In line with this, children seemed to struggle less with stigma if their non-Congolese paternal lineage was not as clearly visible and if they were still considered "black". In anticipation of negative reactions, some women decided to refrain from disclosing the ethnic heritage of their children in order to avert stigmatization and adverse life experiences.

*"The kid doesn't know anything about his father, I am the only one who knows his secret. I always lie; tell him that his father lives here in the area, although he is from South Africa and I don't know where he is. And still, the child is often discriminated by others."* (Mother, Kalemie).

When non-disclosure as a strategy of protection failed, PKFC and mothers were confronted with their "otherness". For mothers, being linked to UNPK was anticipated to be a factor for losing the status of a "respectable" woman. Mothers described the damage to their reputation to be particularly severe based on a perceived "association with the UN".

*"My family blames me and say they won't take care of one of their children, I shouldn't have gone to work for someone like that and I shouldn't have gotten pregnant. It makes me very sad."* (Mother, Goma).

We found a consensus that relations with UNPK personnel impaired prospects for future relationships, more so than extra-marital intimate relations with local men. The data does not capture the sentiment of the general population towards peacekeepers; therefore, it is not clear whether this reflects negative attitudes towards the work of the UN specifically or relationships with non-Congolese men more generally. Yet cultural expectations and family code seemed to oppose relationships with UNPK staff.

*"They call me a Beninese's wife. My reputation is ruined ... When people learn that you were once friends with a guy from MONUSCO they start despising you and talking ill of you. It is not easy to find another boy or man-friend if you have been deceived by one of them."* (Mother, Kalemie).

### Context of conception

An equally large group of PKFC comprehended the stigma directed at them to be linked to their mother's place in society rather than their father's background or

ethnicity. These participants felt singled out because of their mothers' lifestyle or behaviour. Some of the most recurrent insults directed towards PKFC were "daughter/son of a bitch", "bastard" or "illegitimate", portraying the children as the products of rape, sex-work, or a parental relationship that otherwise conflicted with social norms. This has been summarized under the theme of "illegitimacy at birth".

*"The child is discriminated everywhere he goes. He is insulted as a 'son of a bitch'. They say he isn't worth it to be alive."* (Mother, Kisangani).

Since the illegitimacy of children was understood to be rooted in the "context of conception", this theme naturally emerged in mother's interviews. Due to cultural and religious values as well as restrictive abortion laws, some women felt torn between having a child out of wedlock versus undergoing an abortion. Despite not being explicitly asked about the decision-making process, a small number of women discussed how they would be stigmatized if they kept the pregnancy, while others, reported that they would be stigmatized if they aborted the pregnancy.

*"So many people told me to abort so I wouldn't be called the mother of a MONUSCO child. They said I would never find another one to love me if I kept the pregnancy."* (Mother, Kalemie).

*"I thought about aborting the baby but when I asked other people for advice, they made it very clear that it is shameful to commit such a crime. I insisted at first, contending that I might give birth to a 'mulatto', but they convinced me that this wouldn't be a problem; at least not if MONUSCO was still in the area."* (Mother, Bukavu).

Due to the local understanding of fidelity and marriage, women who are known to have had "extra-marital sexual relations" struggle to maintain their societal status. Exposed by pregnancy and childbirth, mothers faced prejudice for being perceived as promiscuous and disrespecting traditional gender roles; often regardless of whether the sex was consensual. One quarter of mothers reported that their pregnancies occurred due to transactional sex, sex-work, rape or gang rape. Yet, women often bear the blame for these incidents. One participant who reported a gang rape by MONUSCO personnel was heavily stigmatized after being impregnated at the age of 13.

*"People started wondering where this little girl got her pregnancy from. They laughed so much at me. They said look at her who has been raped, she has a*

*white child. Many people laughed at me. I felt so insulted, all of this hurt me so much."* (Mother, Beni).

Despite rape being outside of the victim's control and women almost exclusively engaging in transactional relationships out of necessity, stigma was particularly severe for this group. They were presumed to be HIV positive and were socially tainted for not being able to identify their children's fathers.

*"What do people say? They often just stare at us and then gossip about our personality. They contend that we are the sex chattel of South Africa. They mock and target us, wherever we go. They accuse us of aids etc. I have no power really. I simply sigh and take the blame. I have cried and cried over this. God is my last resort."* (Mother, Bukavu).

#### Intergenerational aspects of stigma

Reasons set out for perceived stigma and discrimination were often two or threefold and most individuals carried a combination of labels. Inherent in many of these narratives were experiences of stigma that resided in the mother-child relationship and their social status as a unit, which will be the subject of this section.

*"All my adventures were secret until the pregnancy revealed them and since they discovered what I have done, they don't love me anymore. My child is often scorned because he is a MONUSCO bastard and a foreigner. He is discriminated and insulted, and I am being blamed for it."* (Mother, Bukavu).

This snapshot of a young mother's life signifies that the stigma experiences of mother and child interact. Moreover, it gives a brief insight into negotiations of guilt and responsibility. While children occasionally understood their stigma to reside in the nature of their conception and their mother's social circumstances, mothers reported that the existence and social exclusion of their children were aggravating to their own social standing.

*"Some people also tell me that I am scolded because of my child ... but she is my birth daughter, my flesh and blood. Nobody can reject their birth child, even if they were ugly."* (Mother, Goma).

The succeeding generation's victimization led to additional stigma in mothers, that was based on being a neglectful parent. Not being able to provide for children and not having secure and stable livelihoods was socially perceived as personal failure. Many mothers reported

feeling responsible for their children's difficult socio-economic circumstances, like they were passing their own hardship down to their children. In that sense, the fractured social identity of PKFC increased mother's problems with integration and acceptance.

*"A child without a father is called 'Shanga' in North Kivu. He is not accepted. He is stigmatized because I'm stupid, that's what they say. It makes me sad. He laughs with others, even with me sometimes but he also gets told: 'You, a child without a father, or you, a child without an aunt in Congo'. He feels internal sadness. When I see my child, I feel unhappy. I'd like to build a house for his welfare."* (Mother, Goma).

In a number of cases, these dynamics had a bearing on the mother-child relationship and adversely affected the bond between PKFC and their mothers. Dysfunctional relationship patterns not only reinforced community stigma, as outlined above, but also increased the likelihood for mothers and children to internalize aspects of stigmatization. For instance, a proportion of participants experienced mood alternations and showed symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation. This was particularly true when painful recollections about the circumstances of conception or, difficulties linked to giving birth, evoked conflicting emotions in mothers such as: love, hate, shame, hope or desire to abandon the PKFC. As a result of opposing feelings, disturbances in the attachment of mothers and PKFC were observed.

*"People in the community gossip much about my life. Some say that I broke my marriage promise because of a foreigner who is the reason I am now a desperately poor woman. It hurts me so much, but I have no other choice as to stand it. I sometimes wonder whether I should kill myself or my child, but I guess I just need to hold on and bear the consequences of my decisions. If his father returns, we can get our dignity back."* (Mother, Bunia).

While some PKFC reported having a good relationship with their mothers, others experienced similarly ambivalent or negative emotions towards them. A handful of PKFC gave accounts of child maltreatment or reported that their mothers were physically or psychologically unable to care adequately for them, with the latter sometimes raising questions for the PKFC about their right to exist. One respondent detailed that being deprived of motherly care left her feeling worthless and not deserving of love.

*"Oh, she never cares about her child - me. She only roves, roams and wanders in the city all day long, and when she comes back home very late at night or*

*in the evening, she meets me and starts shouting at me. She never talks to me in a friendly way. She says I have no value at all for I'm not like her other children. When she says that, I feel like it's better to take a knife, stab myself and die once and for all. I feel very upset for I have no support from my relatives, apart from my grandparents. Other children who are living with their parents must be living well, I think."* (PKFC, 13, Bukavu).

Children might absorb their mothers' experiences of discrimination and feel like a burden that has caused them misery.

*"People sometimes challenge me by saying that I am not Congolese. That offends me. They also say that my mother became pregnant because of her prostitution. She keeps feeling sorry for that. It disturbs and hurts me so much .... Sometimes, I ask my mother why she decided to give birth to me."* (PKFC, 13, Kisangani).

## Discussion

This qualitative study, including 90 in-depth interviews, explores the spectrum of stigma experiences as reported by PKFC and their mothers in eastern DRC. Little empirical data currently exists on the situation of children born to UNPK beneficiaries in host countries. The current study narrows this knowledge gap through perspectives on family and community integration. Data collection showed that the identity of PKFC was well known and that even the youngest participants were aware of stereotypes that originated from the circumstances of their conception. Our results suggest that mothers and children received negligible assistance from peacekeeper fathers, leaving them almost exclusively in a situation of financial hardship. Despite a range of experiences, both mothers and children were found to be situated between acceptance and rejection. The data revealed four key areas causing stigma. In addition to these, we identified similarities between drivers of stigmatization that suggest intergenerational aspects and stigma transmission between mothers and children.

The first and most consistent cause of stigma, "poverty", was identified to have a large influence on the acceptance of mothers and PKFC in their community. Confirming prior literature [11, 14, 54], the adverse pre-existing socio-economic conditions in DRC were often found to be a reason for mothers to engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers. The demographic profile of mothers in our study indicated that pregnancy often occurred in young women and those from poor backgrounds. Contrary to the initial hopes voiced by mothers, having a PKFC rarely led to an elevated social



status but was intertwined with more severe lack of resources and opportunity. Reportedly, the social status of families was related to the availability of financial means; for instance, mothers and children mentioned that the inability to cover school fees had an impact on their reputation in communities and raised questions about child support. Giving birth to a PKFC often complicated family relations and prevented young mothers from continuing their own education, significantly limiting their prospects for employment. Mothers detailed being looked down upon for not securing alimony payments or other benefits from former partners. Stigmatization of individuals with conflict-related trauma has previously been described to be exacerbated by contextual factors such as economic deprivation [56]. In the present study, stigmatization did not occur universally but was mediated by different factors that increased participants' vulnerability, such as socio-economic hardship. Accordingly, the social challenges of families with PKFC were reinforced by low financial security, a condition that worsened when family support was withdrawn. Consequently, having a PKFC did not only lead to immediate alterations in the social status of mothers but set off a chain reaction that reinforced stigma and status loss in the long-term.

Secondly, family structure and prejudice centred around the "absent father" or life partner were reported to be factors contributing to the stigma experiences of participants. Growing up without a father in a patrilineal society with clear gender roles, PKFC faced challenges integrating into their communities and developing a cultural identity that was accepted by their peers. They described the longing for a "normal" family life, the lack of a male role model and support from both parents to be the source of stigma. Like PKFC, mothers sensed that being a "single parent" and raising a PKFC by themselves prevented them from entering new partnerships and building families that complied with social norms. Confirming theoretical assumptions [57, 58], this indicates that a less conventional family unit provoked negative attention and demoted the social status of mothers and children. Replicating what is known from CBOW in other settings [49, 59, 60], we found that stepfathers did not accept children from previous relationships, which turned reconstituted families into an additional factor for rejection. In instances where preconceptions about the circumstances of conception drove kin networks away, PKFC did not grow up in traditional compounds. For communal societies in which extended family is at the centre of social activities, being deprived of this integral part of life is severely problematic [61]. Moreover, it can be expected that less traditional living arrangements worsened socio-

economic challenges, like household income, reinforcing poverty and the stigma attached to it.

Thirdly, both groups mentioned stigma attached to issues surrounding ethnic and cultural belonging. This was tangible for PKFC when being taunted for their "mixed-ethnicity" or stigmatized on the grounds of not being Congolese, being "white" or foreign. The uncertainty regarding the origin of children's inter-ethnic appearance was perceived to amplify their outsider status. Physical features that evidently identified PKFC with their father's ethnicity made them an easier target for stigmatization and conveyed more potential for societal rejection. In line with this, mothers mentioned "association with the UN" to be the root of a loss of status as well as familial and communal problems. Having a child visibly connected to a foreign army has been shown to cause stigmatization and considerable hardship in other settings [62, 63]. Our study shows that being associated with non-Congolese paternal lineage distinguishes families in eastern DRC from the general population. Stereotypes towards relationships with internationals or those working for international organizations seemed to have enabled individual or structural discrimination against women in their communities. The complexities of social processes nourishing these prejudices and whether they are UN-specific remains to be explored.

Lastly, each group signified stigma based on the circumstances surrounding conception. PKFC noted social repercussions for being born "illegitimately", while mothers pointed towards the local understanding of marriage and fidelity to explain their altered social status after "extra-marital sexual relations". The data illuminates a range of experiences regarding the nature of conception, from consensual, romantic relationships to rape with extreme violence. Previous research in contexts where the value of women is traditionally defined by reproductive exclusivity has shown that sexual violence can lead to social ramifications as severe as the attack itself [64, 65]. In line with earlier work [59], the present study suggests that rape and sex-work particularly diminished acceptance for mothers and children. However, more quantitative studies with higher sample sizes are needed to confirm such observations. Approximately half of the mothers interviewed were minors at the time of conception, including a girl impregnated at the age of ten and several girls impregnated at the ages of 13 and 14. We found that independent of consent and age at impregnation, mothers reported a community perception that they were responsible for the events leading to conception. While PKFC were often confronted with being the product of inappropriate sexual relations, mothers reflected on stigma attached to raising a child born out of wedlock. Hence, both were

repeatedly reminded of the contextual factors leading to conception and the “illegitimacy” of their actions / existence.

The social judgment associated with the themes explored in this study affected the reality of both groups collectively. Based on parallels in the experiences of mothers and children, we argue that each source entails elements of transgenerational stigma. Stigma ascribed to mothers was passed down to children via two channels or modes of transmission: directly, when communities punished PKFC for their mother’s experiences, or indirectly, moderated by the mother-child relationship. Evidence suggests that interpersonal trauma like sexual abuse has noticeable negative impact on post-partum bonding [66]. Thus, the risk of a weak maternal bond is elevated for PKFC conceived through rape since mother-child attachment may be influenced by their mother’s traumatic experiences. Social marginalization, especially when internalized, was detrimental to mothers’ abilities to provide care and stability for their children. Earlier work has shown that insecure attachment and a compromised relationship between caregiver and community, significantly affects the development and maintenance of child mental health [67–69]. In the present study, being neglected by a parent reinforced negative social interactions and internalizing symptoms for children. Conversely, PKFC’s experiences with social hardship and community stigma have also been shown to influence mothers. Earlier research in eastern DRC examined the mental health of women raising children from SVRP and found that stigmatized children significantly increased the likelihood for most mental health disorders in mothers [70]. Similarly, prejudices directed at PKFC transferred to mothers when the unfair treatment of their children provoked low mood in caregivers. Hence, the social standing of PKFC and their mothers are interrelated and experiences with social marginalization have proven to be a salient factor driving the mother-child relationship. Longitudinal research targeting the social status of mothers and children over time will be essential to detangle how their situations affect one another.

### Limitations

The sample in the present study is not representative. Thus, the results cannot fully be generalized to PKFC in the DRC or other countries hosting PKO. Participating in an interview with an international research team might have raised expectations regarding long-term outcomes of the research. As such, it is conceivable that participants may have overreported issues around poverty to secure personal benefits or described their situation as less severe to avoid further societal repercussions. For participants with children conceived

during the MONUC era, pregnancy and childbirth were more than 10 years in the past and the events might not be reliably recalled [71]. However, the focus of the present analysis is on stigma which persisted to the time of data collection. Due to the sensitive nature of the research and different age groups being accommodated with unique survey instruments, questions were sometimes asked inconsistently which resulted in occasional missing data. Lastly, the analysis was conducted by a group of non-Congolese academics with inherent bias regarding cultural norms. Although local experts, researchers and translators were consulted along the way, nuances of the narratives might not always have been appreciated fully.

### Contributions

The limitations above notwithstanding, the present study makes several notable contributions. Being the first to provide transgenerational empirical data on CBOW, the results are expected to be highly relevant to conflict-affected youth in a variety of contexts. Research in different settings suggests that stigmatization and discrimination represent formative experiences in the childhood and adolescence of many CBOW, regardless of their paternal background [25, 72]. Previous insights into the stigma of German Occupation Children born in the aftermath of World War 2 identified the “father’s origin”, “physical attributes” and “illegitimacy at birth” as anticipated causes for stigma [23]. In the present study children also listed fatherlessness, poverty and transgenerational elements as precursors for stigmatizing behaviour. It seems likely that for children in the current sample, the familial and social burdens faced by CBOW in other settings are exacerbated by the adverse socioeconomic conditions in DRC. The extreme level of poverty, combined with issues of race and neglect caused intersectional stigma and impacted children’s self-concept, social and cultural identity. Moreover, the experiences of stigma not only caused difficulties in constructing coherent and positive identity narratives but also resulted out of PKFC’s difficulties to manage their multiple identities aspects. This echoes the experiences of CBOW in other settings [23, 24, 26].

Moreover, we show the importance of prioritizing intergenerational aspects of stigma for CBOW. Few studies to date have discussed links between maternal and child mental health in conflict-affected settings [67–69]. Yet, the present study makes a connection between the two and suggests that their social standing is intertwined. It is thus, all the more important to consider difficulties that emerge for CBOW within the context of their family and community.

The current study advances existing literature on sexual misconduct during PKO by adding empirical data on

the individual experiences of affected women and children. It is unique in that it provides the largest sample to date of qualitative interviews with women who have conceived children with UNPK personnel and illuminates children's struggles through their own thoughts and emotions. In conjunction with the recently published studies on MINUSTAH [14, 54], it addresses the gap in literature on CBOW in the UNPK context. By including rich qualitative data, we take the narrative-based approach of Lee and Bartels further, and contribute significant information to their evaluation of community perceptions. While not being exhaustive in its exploration, the study demonstrates the personal experiences of two generations by directly voicing the concerns of a highly vulnerable population. To our knowledge, this is the first study to include children's perspectives in a systematic analysis of sexual misconduct during UNPK. PKFC are considered a hard to access population group and interviewing them carries a variety of ethical challenges [72, 73]. Yet, not including them in research that concerns them negates the possibility of them being active partners and authorities in their own right. Thus, we believed the benefits of their participation to outweigh the risks of their inclusion. Our study successfully included them in the research process and documented their social identities by empowering them as social agents. As such, our research shifts the focus of discussions regarding SGBV in humanitarian settings to a new population and contributes to a newly established data base.

## Conclusion

This is the first study to capture transgenerational aspects of stigma by examining the life stories of mothers and CBOW in any geopolitical setting. Previous research indicates that the psychosocial consequences of being a CBOW include a higher risk of growing up in a hostile social environment [22]. We have investigated the assumption that the societal attitude towards PKFC, as a subgroup of CBOW, is conspicuous in stigmatizing behaviour. The context of family and community helped to conceptualize the stigma experiences of PKFC and added an additional layer of understanding to the analysis. The majority of participants reported struggling with social alienation. The core insights regarding the roots of perceived stigma were found to be based upon the following factors:

- a) Economic factor: Poverty
- b) Familial factor: Family structure
- c) Geopolitical factor: Ethnic belonging
- d) Sociocultural factor: Context of conception
- e) Intergenerational factor: Mother-child relationship

These factors highlight the web of contextual determinators that represent the background for applied prejudices. While some themes arose consistently and indicate the existence of main influencers, the diversity of personal accounts hints at an interplay of these factors. More work disclosing drivers of rejection and acceptance is needed, yet our research shows that PKFC are a socially disadvantaged group in (post)-conflict settings.

As a result of the data presented, several changes in policy and programming are recommended. First and most important, poverty as the main reason for stigmatization needs to be addressed. Second, psychosocial services tailored to support families with PKFC are necessary so that healthy relationships can be formed, and self-stigma reduced. In addition, preventive measures that lower the likelihood for sexual misconduct and stigma should continue to be implemented. This includes training for UNPK personnel to facilitate an understanding of the vulnerability of local populations in host countries, as well as community-based approaches around reproductive and sexual education for women and girls that increase awareness regarding the potential implications of sexual relations with members of UNPK forces and reduce the stigma attached to it.

Currently, the multi layered legal landscape largely prevents mothers from holding individual peacekeepers accountable and securing child support [9, 74, 75]. Our findings challenge the international community to rethink current policies to effectively benefit the needs of those addressed in this study. The authors suggest that in order to facilitate integration of PKFC effectively, policy and programming recommendations should consider mothers and children as core addressees of assistance and develop services that support them individually and collectively. The present article aims to inform such services; however, the complexities of assistance and reparations will be discussed in forthcoming publications.

## Abbreviations

CBOW: Children Born of War; DRC: Democratic Republic of Congo; MARA KUJA: Multidisciplinary Association for Research and Advocacy in the Kivu by United Junior Academics; MINUSTAH: Mission des Nations Unies pour la stabilisation en Haïti (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti); MONUC: Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies en République Démocratique du Congo (United Nations Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo); MONUSCO: Mission de l'Organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en République Démocratique du Congo (United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo); PKFC: Child fathered by a member of a UN peacekeeping force and born to a local mother in the country of deployment; PKO: Peacekeeping Operation; SD: Standard Deviation; SGBV: Sexual and Gender Based Violence; SOFEPADI: Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral; SVRP: Sexual Violence Related Pregnancies; UN: United Nations; UNPK: United Nations Peacekeeping; UNSC: United Nations Security Council

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#### Authors' contributions

KW, SB and SL conceptualized the study. KW analysed and interpreted the data and wrote the article. SB was lead investigator of the overall project and oversaw the data collection. SOFEPADI provided local expertise and carried out the interviews. HG, SL and SB reviewed the write up, edited drafts and provided guidance. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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#### Availability of data and materials

The datasets used during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

The study protocol was ethically approved by the institutional review boards of the University of Birmingham (ERN 18 0083) and Queen's University (6019042). Ethics approval was also obtained from the Congolese National Committee of Health Ethics (CNES). Local research clearance was requested in each city districts regional administrative centres. Verbal informed consent to participate was obtained and recorded before interviews were conducted. In addition, the consent of a parent or legal guardian was obtained for all PKFC.

#### Consent for publication

Consent for publication was obtained from participants or their legal guardian.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

#### Author details

<sup>1</sup>Department of History, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.

<sup>2</sup>Department of Medical Psychology and Medical Sociology, University of Leipzig, Leipzig, Germany. <sup>3</sup>Departments of Emergency Medicine and Public Health Sciences, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada.

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## Chapter 7. Negotiating Social Norms (Publication 3)

Wagner, K., Bartels, S.A., Weber, S., and Lee, S. 'White Child Gone Bankrupt' – The Intersection of Race and Poverty in Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers. *Cult Med Psychiatry* [Submitted: 1<sup>st</sup> of February 2021; Current Status: Revise and Resubmit]

### Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry 'White Child Gone Bankrupt' – The Intersection of Race and Poverty in Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Full Title:</b>	'White Child Gone Bankrupt' – The Intersection of Race and Poverty in Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers	
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<b>Funding Information:</b>	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (642571)	Dr. Susan A Bartels
<b>Abstract:</b>	Children fathered and abandoned by United Nations peacekeepers are an unintended consequence of peacekeeping operations. Research suggests that the social identity of peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) is complex and contradictory. While economically disadvantaged, PKFC's biracial background is assumed to confer elements of racial privilege. Using the Democratic Republic of Congo as a case study, the present research addresses this hypothesis and evaluates the impact of race on PKFC's social standing. Drawing on in-depth interviews with a heterogeneous sample of 35 PKFC and 60 mothers, we analyse how race and poverty interact and cause PKFC's conflicting social role. The data demonstrates that being of mixed race leads to the expectation of having a higher living standard. Since most PKFC live in extreme economic deprivation, their anticipated racial privilege contrasts with reality. We found that the stigmatizing effects of poverty were amplified by biracial identification, leading to additional disadvantage, epitomised in the term "Muzungu aliye homba" [white child gone bankrupt]. The findings add to research on children born of war and show the role of culture in shaping children's social identities. Based on participants' accounts, we make policy recommendations that address the nexus of race and poverty.	
<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner University of Birmingham Birmingham, West Midlands UNITED KINGDOM	
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	University of Birmingham	
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>		
<b>First Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner, MSc	
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Kirstin Wagner, MSc	
	Susan A Bartels, Dr	
	Sanne Weber, Dr	
	Sabine Lee, Prof	

## **‘White Child Gone Bankrupt’ – The Intersection of Race and Poverty in Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers**

**Abstract:** Children fathered and abandoned by United Nations peacekeepers are an unintended consequence of peacekeeping operations. Research suggests that the social identity of peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) is complex and contradictory. While economically disadvantaged, PKFC’s biracial background is assumed to confer elements of racial privilege. Using the Democratic Republic of Congo as a case study, the present research addresses this hypothesis and evaluates the impact of race on PKFC’s social standing. Drawing on in-depth interviews with a heterogeneous sample of 35 PKFC and 60 mothers, we analyse how race and poverty interact and cause PKFC’s conflicting social role. The data demonstrates that being of mixed race leads to the expectation of having a higher living standard. Since most PKFC live in extreme economic deprivation, their anticipated racial privilege contrasts with reality. We found that the stigmatizing effects of poverty were amplified by biracial identification, leading to additional disadvantage, epitomised in the term “Muzungu aliye homba” [white child gone bankrupt]. The findings add to research on children born of war and show the role of culture in shaping children’s social identities. Based on participants’ accounts, we make policy recommendations that address the nexus of race and poverty.

**Keywords:** Social Identity, Peacekeeping, Children, Poverty, Race

### **Introduction**

“My friends say that all of us are children but not in the same way. They say that we are different. I don’t want them to talk like that. I don’t feel happy then.” (PKFC)

Sexual and gender-based violence perpetrated by military, police and civilian personnel associated with peacekeeping operations is defined by the United Nations (UN) as sexual exploitation and abuse (UN General Assembly 2003). In spite of the UN’s persistent efforts to eliminate sexual relations

between UN peacekeeping personnel and local populations, the continuation of such relations is evidenced by the growing number of mixed-race children in host state communities (Author 2019a; Harrington 2007). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in particular, has emerged as the setting for mounting reports of male peacekeepers implicated in rape, transactional sex, and sexually exploitative relationships leading to pregnancy and childbirth (Author 2020a; Notar 2006; UN General Assembly 2007). Although it is acknowledged that peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) are an unintended legacy of peacekeeping missions, relatively little has been done to establish an evidence base relating to the life courses of these children.

Since the early 2000s, claims that members of UN peacekeeping forces are fathering children in the fragile settings where they operate have been a matter of concern for public and scholarly debate (Lynch 2005; Ndulo 2009). According to media reports, mothers of PKFC are “extremely impoverished and face discrimination, stigma and the heartache of being abandoned to look after their children alone” (McVeigh 2017). Early empirical evidence confirms that the absence of peacekeeper fathers often leaves mothers to raise their children in extreme socio-economic deprivation (Author 2019a, Author 2019b). Recent research into the situation of PKFC identified multiple areas of disadvantage, most importantly their lack of support from peacekeeper fathers, the UN, or family and kin networks (Author 2020b; Author 2021). However, focusing solely on their economic needs can obscure the complex reality of their existence.

Despite being disadvantaged, scholars have noted that the mixed-race background of PKFC might confer elements of racial privilege, leading to a more diverse and contradictory social standing. Higate and Henry (2004, 492) indicated that the multi-faceted impact of PKFC on communities could include an elevation in social status where being of mixed race is interpreted as desirable or “racially superior”. Fathered by UN personnel from troop-contributing countries around the world, PKFC often hold features that clearly identify them as being of different ethnicity, making them stand out as biracial (Author 2017; Ndulo 2009). In Haiti, women were sometimes perceived to be seeking out relationships with peacekeepers “with the goal to have beautiful, mixed-race children” (Author 2019a,

197). Thus, the cultural and societal perceptions of race in host state communities hold implications for how PKFC are situated in society. Koyama and Myrntinen (2007) found that in Timor-Leste, PKFC were treated differently based on their fathers' sending state - an indication that their life experiences as biracial children are qualitatively distinct not just from non-PKFC but also from one another.

To date, no academic, news or policy report has addressed the racial background of PKFC specifically or examined their presumed racial privilege. The present research is the first to evaluate the importance of their racial heritage and reflect on PKFC as a racially heterogeneous group. By considering the interaction of mixed race and poverty, the article is concerned with how PKFC's differences determine their social relations and lead to an increased or reduced risk for stigmatisation. According to the literature, PKFC might be perceived as having a dominant racial identity that is interpreted as constituting a privileged social status. Due to their economic deprivation, they might belong to a lower social class and receive an inferior education than their peers, providing them with fewer opportunities. We will discuss whether the interaction of these factors constitutes a conflicting social role and evaluate how racial differences contribute to a more or less privileged social identity. In doing so, we break away from simplistic explanations of PKFC as a uniform group but consider the roots of their outsider status. Using the UN Stabilization Organization Mission in eastern DRC as a case study, we will discuss how being of mixed race is viewed in an otherwise monoracial post-colonial setting and address the social, cultural and political parameters of racial identity in this context.

The article employs insights from women's studies, ethnic studies, psychology, and history to analyze the social position of PKFC from a multidisciplinary perspective. In order to conceptualize how PKFC's social status is construed and interpreted, we will first discuss how societies are organized using an intersectional approach to social identity.

## **Theoretical Background**

Linking the self to society, intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989, 1991) addresses the interactivity of social identity structures like race with gender and other factors that have historically fostered

inequality. The concept of intersectionality emphasizes the multi-layered nature of social identity and promotes the awareness of asymmetrical relations between identity-forming experiences (Gopaldas 2013). Accordingly, personal identity reflects a combination of group memberships and social processes that create unique social positions for individuals. Identifying with multiple marginalized groups simultaneously can lead to unique forms of disadvantage, low self-esteem and multiple minority stress (Crenshaw 1989; Cyrus 2017). Although most research employing an intersectional lens focuses on underprivileged groups, intersectionality also helps understanding social advantages or conflicting social roles (Cole 2009). By investigating social identities as mutually constructed rather than additive (e.g., being a black woman vs being black and a woman), an intersectional analysis can be used to deconstruct binaries and analyze the variability within groups (McCall 2005).

Researchers applying the framework in social psychology emphasise how a sense of belonging to a privileged or oppressed group is formed, and explore how interrelating identities are combined (Settles and Buchanan 2014). According to social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 1979), group memberships develop through a process of social comparison during which one categorises oneself as part of an in-group while others are referred to as the out-group (Stets and Burke 2000). The process of cross-categorization describes negotiations according to which individuals can be different along one set of criteria but similar along another (Deschamps and Doise 1978). An intersectional approach to social identity takes multiple social identities into account and examines how they are organised in a person's self-concept (Freeman 2003). For biracial children, self-conception is considerably more challenging as they need to integrate their dual racial and/or cultural identification into all the other challenges of growing up (Lichter and Qian 2018).

### **Present Study**

This research aims to deconstruct the complexity of PKFC's social identities by evaluating the implication of their biracial provenance. By looking at the status differences of a racially heterogeneous sample of PKFC, we will assess whether mixed-race PKFC are indeed afforded unique

opportunities. In the process of evaluating their social status, cultural and societal perceptions of race will be discussed against the backdrop of intersectionality and social identity theory. Although racial categories and the related colour terms 'white', 'brown' and 'black' are controversial, they are critical key concepts emerging from the narratives of those participating in the present study and thus, will be applied as a locally significant source of classification. In order to acknowledge the interconnections between race and poverty, we will apply elements of an intersectional analysis. Since intersectionality is a signal contribution of feminist studies with an inherent focus on gender, we are not following a traditional intersectional approach, as we believe that intersections with gender will become more clearly reflected in older PKFC and should be the subject of future study.

In eastern DRC, where the study was conducted, racial inequality is a remnant of the colonial era. The DRC is a racially homogenous, predominantly black setting with beliefs about whiteness, white supremacy and black inferiority introduced by colonialism and reinforced by the global North's role in recent conflicts (Jourdan 2013). Although 'blackness' operates as the normative foundation of race, social hierarchies with racialized dimensions, illustrated, for instance, in the white-dominated humanitarian and development industry, take a toll on the prospect of racial equality (Marchais, Bazuzi and Lameke 2020). To justify a white civilization's superiority, the Belgian colonial administrations created a race- and privilege-based social hierarchy with whites as the highest status group. The racist ideology of colonial order is exemplified in the abduction of mixed-race children (called "métis", "mulattos" or "children of sin") who were born to African mothers between 1908 and 1960 and forcefully repatriated to Europe (Van Hooste 2020). Little is known about race relations in eastern DRC today, and no information exists on how mixed-race is perceived and interpreted. Belonging to the relatively small fair-skinned population within eastern DRC, the stories of PKFC offer a productive tool to research perceptions of race in this context.

## **Methods**

The research was conducted over three months, with 95 participants (60 mothers and 35 PKFC) as part of a larger study investigating peacekeeper-civilian interactions in eastern DRC in 2018. The objective of the here-analysed interviews was to determine through an exploratory-descriptive inquiry how mothers and PKFC experience the absence of peacekeeper fathers, their resulting life circumstances and social identities. Cole (2009) noted that in order to gain an understanding of social identity that is sensitive to group differences and similarities, an interpretative qualitative approach often leads to more meaningful results than a statistical analysis. Qualitative interviews were therefore used to emphasise inter-and intragroup variation in PKFC's social identities.

We employed a conversational, semi-structured interview style with topic questions to guide the discussions and prompts that followed up on participants' narratives (Sands 2004). All questions were open-ended and only explored issues further when participants seemed willing and comfortable to discuss them. PKFC aged six to 20 years were invited to participate if their mothers confirmed that they knew about the circumstances of their conception. The number of mothers in the study exceeds that of PKFC since some children were excluded due to their age or unawareness of their family situation. While PKFC were asked to detail how they understood their social identity, mothers added information regarding their PKFC's social identification, cultural norms and perceptions of race in the surrounding context.

The study was conducted in cooperation with Congolese community partners from Marakuja Kivu Research and Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI). Both organisations were involved in the formation of interview guides and helped to implement the study. Two female social workers from SOFEPADI conducted the interviews that are analysed here. Both had experience in working with vulnerable populations and completed a five-day training prior to the start of the study. SOFEPADI also set up a referral system for counselling and other service needs emerging from the interviews.

The fieldwork was located in urban centres in eastern DRC, namely Beni (North Kivu), Bukavu (South Kivu), Bunia (Ituri), Goma (North Kivu), Kalemie (Tanganyika) and Kisangani (Tshopo).



Interviews were conducted in Lingala, Kiswahili, and occasionally French, audio-recorded with participants' permissions and subsequently transcribed and translated into English by professional Congolese translators. The interviews were conducted privately, and no identifying information was collected. All interviewees gave age-appropriately informed verbal consent to participate and have the anonymised results published. After mothers had participated in the study themselves and understood the nature of the research, the participation of their PKFC was discussed and parental consent recorded. The study protocol was approved by XXXX and by XXXX (see Author 2020a for more information on study design and implementation).

In the first step of data analysis, interviews were classified into three categories, those illustrating low social status, average social status, and high social status. Low social status was attributed when participants referenced negative stereotyping, stigma and social exclusion. High social status was attributed when participants referenced being considered special, admired and treated preferentially. We have chosen to focus on social status as a meaningful construct and dimension of social identity that illustrates individual and social perceptions (Cheon, et al., 2020; Oldmeadow and Fiske 2010). Originating from this classification, content analysis was used to identify frequently and infrequently endorsed factors contributing to social status. The resulting codes are a reflection of the social standing of PKFC, evaluated by themselves and their mothers. Deductive codes included topics from the survey, such as participants' living circumstances and interpersonal relationships with family and community. Inductive codes included cultural constructions and social discourse regarding the local norms that shaped participants' social interactions. After compiling a comprehensive list of codes, their presence and absence in each group of interviews was assessed and compared.

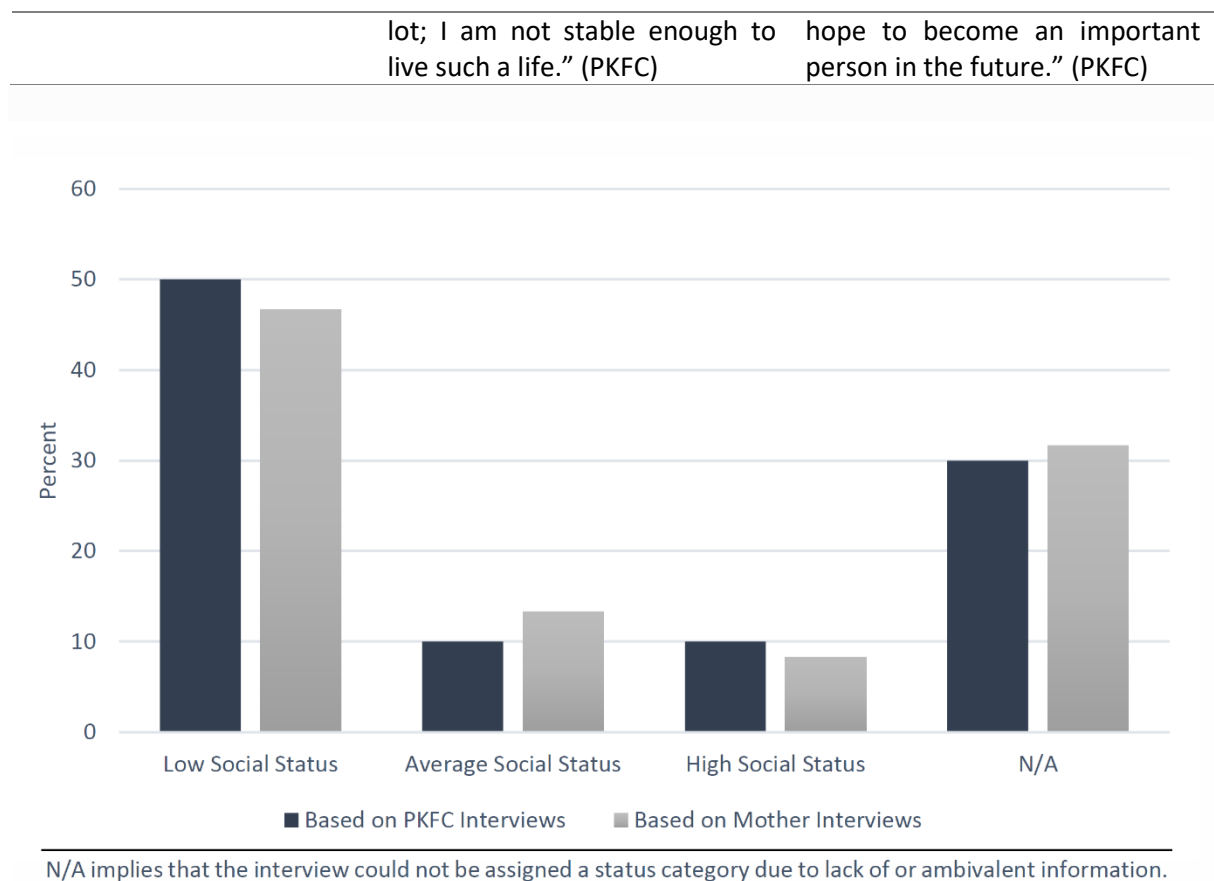
We perceived race and economic means to be observable aspects and indicators of status differences. In the following sections, we will show that whether PKFC have average, higher or lower social status than their peers is impacted by racial group variations and financial disparities.

## Findings and Interpretations

Where peacekeeper fathers absolve themselves of their paternal responsibility, their children's social identity tends to be characterised by increased economic and social volatility, translating into low social status (Author 2020a; Author 2020b). Drawing on both mothers' and PKFC's interviews, we found that most PKFC experience severe 'othering' and ostracization – a central mechanism of social exclusion that has widely been discussed in literature on DRC wartime sexual violence (e.g. Koos and Summer 2019). However, in spite of the overwhelming impression that PKFC faced high levels of stigma, a minority of PKFC recounted having no experience with harmful stereotyping and societal shame. Based on our analysis, three of the 35 PKFC did not perceive themselves to have deviating social status and described acceptance by family and community; an additional three implied having higher social status than their peers. The latter described that they were being treated preferentially and regarded highly by family members, friends and teachers. In line with this, mothers occasionally detailed that their child elevated their family's social standing. Thus, the findings highlight a spectrum of social identities with social status, occasionally increasing rather than decreasing.

**Table 1** Low vs High Social Status

	<b>Low Social Status</b>	<b>High Social Status</b>
<b>Social Status of PKFC (Evaluated by Mothers)</b>	"The neighbours don't love her. My friends were even bringing different kinds of poisons in order to kill her. They constantly make fun of her saying that she is the daughter of a white. Because of this, she only stays here in the compound; she is ashamed." (Mother)	"My child is a star. He is loved everywhere. Some people don't even accept me as his mother. My relatives want to live with him and pay his school fees, but he prefers to stay with me because he loves me so much. I think my child will be somebody of great importance." (Mother)
<b>Social Mobility of Mothers (Evaluated by Mothers)</b>	"My family rejected me. They no longer speak to me. 'No one sent you to make a baby of that skin colour', that's basically what I always hear from them." (Mother)	"My friends and family members were happy with me because of this baby. In short, I was like a star... At that time even most MONUC agents were happy with me." (Mother)
<b>Social Status of PKFC (Evaluated by PKFC)</b>	"My neighbours hate me and say that I have to look for my father. They backbite me whenever I attempt to talk. My community laughs at me[...] I am worried a	"My mother loves me so much. She doesn't like me to leave and go somewhere else. Among her children, I am the only one who has a high level of education[...] I



**Figure 1** Observed Distribution of Social Status in PKFC

Arising out of these experiences, we will discuss the influence racial identification and poverty have on status differences. The first section addresses race as an indicator of social status and examines race-related cultural and societal perceptions. The second section addresses poverty as an indicator of social status and demonstrates the stigmatizing effects of low economic means. The final section connects the two and illustrates how the nexus of race and poverty shapes mothers’ social mobility and children’s social identity.

### First Axis: Race

Mothers who recalled the nationality of peacekeeper fathers named Tanzania, Uruguay, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sudan, DRC, Benin, Malawi, Senegal, and Guatemala as countries of origin. Thus, the intra-categorical complexity of race for PKFC posits a range of children who are dark-skinned (due to Congolese or other African descent) and fair-skinned (due to North

African, Asian or Latin American descent). Since their individual appearance resembles their unique racial heritage, organizing PKFC as a racial category is difficult. We found that in the local context, race was thought about in binary lines but included ‘skin tone bias’ and the reality of ‘colourism’ - PKFC being treated differently based on whether they had a lighter or darker skin (Hunter 2005). Although one mother used the term “mulatto” to refer to her child, most participants applied the racial/pan-ethnic terms “black” and “white” and then added ethnic/national terms to those lines, stating that, for instance, “the white is [was] from Nepal”. Thus, rather than being considered of mixed race or identified due to their dual racial background, PKFC were initially labelled black or white: “There are so many children here who were forgotten. Black and white children.” (Mother)

In line with how mixed race typically defaults individuals in predominantly white countries to the non-white category and individuals in predominantly black countries to the non-black category (Rost-Banik 2020), PKFC whose physical appearance differed from the local norm usually identified as white. Thus, the term ‘white’ was most consistently used to describe mixed-race children fathered by UN peacekeepers from countries outside central Africa. However, it was sometimes also applied to individuals fathered by UN staff from surrounding countries or more urban areas in DRC. Echoing that there is “no monolithic version of whiteness” (Clements and Mason 2020, 485), we will refer to ‘whiteness’ as a socially constructed racialized identity that, even within the same cultural context, holds different connotations, some of which do not refer to biological race.

**Table 2** Identity Labels and Categories for PKFC

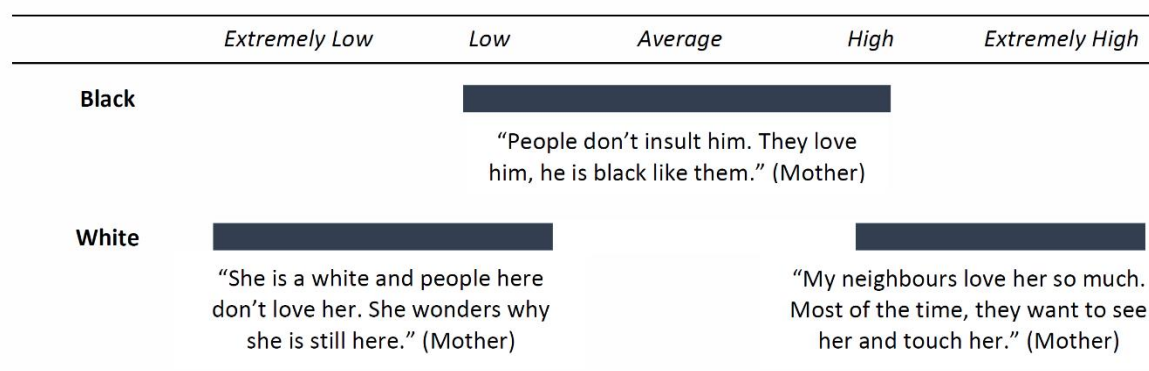
<b>Racial Identity / Identification</b>	<p>“My friends are black, but I am white.” (PKFC)</p> <p>“He is black like them.” (Mother)</p>
<b>Ethnic Identity / Identification</b>	<p>“I am white. The white is from Morocco”. (PKFC)</p> <p>“I take my child as Tanzanian. Her name was given to her by her father[...] When I think about the future of my child, I picture her in Tanzania.” (Mother)</p>
<b>Clan Identity</b>	<p>“Some people know about the child’s backgrounds; others don’t want to think about it because we can’t be certain of his tribe[...] We are worried what will become of our children since they will want to know their tribe and we have nothing to tell them.” (Mother)</p>
<b>Nationality</b>	<p>“He always says that he is Beninese. In school, they interview children for their nationality. The child says that he is Beninese. My father is Beninese; therefore, I am Beninese. He is old enough to reply to these questions.” (Mother)</p>

<b>Citizenship</b>	"I take him as Congolese, but I haven't registered him with the state." (Mother)
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Based on our analysis, PKFC's racial background accentuates their social status. Participants' extensive referencing to race and racial stigma suggests sensitivity to racial identity and group differences for PKFC of all ages. Physical features that evidently identify PKFC with their fathers' lineage made them an easier target for racial stigmatisation and conveyed more potential for societal rejection. PKFC reported being singled out or verbally attacked on the grounds of being white or visibly linked to their foreign fathers. Mothers who had witnessed their children being socially excluded due to their white identification also reported that being "see[n] with a white baby" affected their own social status.

They call him Muzungu or white boy. They stigmatise him because I, the mother, am black, but the child looks different from my other black children as far as complexion and hair are concerned. They simply say that he is a white, not a black child[...] When people see my child, they often wonder how a black woman can deliver a white child. They say that the child is white so he should go to his father. (Mother)

Overall, black PKFC were less often confronted with stereotyping and prejudice; likely because their group membership as PKFC was less salient, and they assimilated more easily into the local culture. This suggests that ethnically mixed children experience less social status deviation if they do not stand out as biracial. While for black PKFC no significant within-group variation was observed (black PKFC predominantly shared average to low social status), the social standing of white PKFC varied significantly, from extremely low to extremely high. While the large majority of white PKFC experienced negative stereotyping, some were "loved and admired because of her [their] skin colour".



**Figure 2** Observed Variance in *Social Status* Based on **Race**

PKFC discussed their racial identity mostly in terms of their appearance and related group differences. Some PKFC referred to other mixed-race children as “kids like me” (see Meltzoff 2013 for “like-me” social categorization). Since children’s racial identity becomes increasingly salient with heightened awareness of group boundaries, biracial identity scholarship emphasises that racial diversity helps biracial youth navigate identity challenges (Rumbaut 1994). However, our participants did not live in racially diverse communities, and had little exposure to other racial groups, as the following example shows: “She doesn’t know her father. She only saw the chief of her father once when he came to visit the children who are left by MONUSCO agents for support issues. When she realised that he was white, she decided that he was her father.” (Mother)

According to social identity theory, the lack of racial reference groups (‘others like me’) might pose stress on PKFC’s sense of self. While it is assumed that many mixed-race children have a conflicting racial identity, children conceived by peacekeeping personnel are also confronted with the uncertainty of their lineages that deny them making sense of their ancestry. In patrilineal African societies, social status (e.g., rights, obligations, privileges) is linked to belonging to a clan that is confirmed in children’s names and determined through their paternal family (Author 2017). Mothers indicated that the absence of clan privilege and inability to trace their fathers’ tribe left PKFC feeling uncertain of their role within communities (see Table 2). Family has a critical role in helping children cope with identity stressors (Crawford and Alaggia 2008), yet PKFC often receive limited care and attention from family and therefore might be left alone with the task of resolving their identity (Author 2021). When self-esteem is at substantial risk, biracial individuals might distance themselves from one racial group or try to reduce dissonance and the climate of conflict otherwise (Rockquemoore, Brunnsma, and Delgado 2009). We found that some PKFC developed a sense of belonging to their fathers’ high-status minority group and, despite their absence, sought contact points with their fathers’ culture.

My boy is now nine years old. I told him that he has the name of his father and that he is Nigerian, he is very happy with that. He is crazy about his father. He said one day he will go to Nigeria. He feels alright, but he asks me a lot of questions when he sees UN cars. He asks me if his father was working with people driving in such cars. (Mother)

Interestingly, families and communities placed a number of role expectations upon white PKFC that seem to originate from the historical legacy of colonialism and a social organisation that privileges whiteness. The data holds strong evidence that there is a distinct cultural understanding of whiteness that predicts fair-skinned PKFC to be “different from local kids in every way possible”.

She behaves like white people. Whenever I buy something for her siblings, she wants to have it. I often meet with other women who are in the same situation. Whenever we meet, we cry together because we think about how hard it is to raise that kind of children. White children and black children are very different; the white one wants to sleep well, eat well and live in a given comfort. That lifestyle is difficult to provide. (Mother)

According to our data, mothers viewed white children as distinct from black children in behavioural characteristics. Reportedly, white children required more care and attention than black children, were “aggressive”, “egoistic”, or wanted to “show off”. Mothers mentioned that due to their white consciousness, PKFC were “too demanding” and had “luxurious” preferences regarding food, clothing, or skin care. With respect to food choices, many mentioned PKFC asking for “western” food like fries, doughnuts, or sweets instead of rice, bread, and vegetables. This led mothers to conclude that it was “seriously hard to raise a child of this [white] skin colour”.

**Table 3** Stereotypes for White PKFC

<b>Food</b>	“He doesn’t eat the same food as others. He doesn’t like fufu or cassava-bread, rice sometimes. He prefers things like pancakes, drinking juice. He gets angry when we can’t find the food of his choice. He doesn’t insult us, but he shows that he is furious to death. When he gets the food he likes, he cools down. His temper is like sitting on a volcano.” (Mother)
<b>Clothes</b>	“The child doesn’t really want to wear common or more modest outfits; he enjoys fashionable clothes.” (Mother)
<b>Skincare</b>	“It’s not easy to pay for medication and also the ‘Bazungu’- special white race body lotion that he needs. I was lately in Bukavu to find one, but I was unable to afford it. I went to a supermarket called ‘la beauté’ and to an Indian shop in Bukavu, but in both places, it was too expensive. It costs 27 dollars.” (Mother)
<b>Lifestyle</b>	“Sometimes I don’t understand him. He wants to live a luxurious life; he wants to be smart and have sophisticated things.” (Mother)
<b>Mood</b>	“Each child has got her father, both are foreigners[...] They are very shy and don’t play games. Others say children who are two years old can laugh, but this one instead, she cries. She is aggressive and violent smacking towards others.” (Mother)
<b>Behaviour</b>	“She behaves differently to other children. This child is so agitated. She is aggressive, and she likes to fight. Her peers push her to fight. She is rude and aggressive.” (Mother)

The adopted characteristics of whiteness appear to be perpetuated by cultural stereotypes, media portrayals and the socio-historical understanding of whiteness. This shows that in the local context, whiteness is highly racialised. PKFC's families and communities create two social categories for PKFC and express the attributes and societal worth of their assigned group membership. PKFC's 'degree of blackness' thus significantly impacts how central race is to their existence and on whether racial discrimination presents a daily concern.

### **Second Axis: Poverty**

The DRC has one of the highest rates of extreme poverty globally with exceedingly high levels of food insecurity, low life expectancy, and poor access to health care and education (Azzarri and Signorelli 2020; UN Development Programme 2019). Recruiting participants from impoverished neighbourhoods meant that PKFC were likely to live in economically strained households. Fatherlessness and the resulting living circumstances further diminished their economic security. Consequently, the intra-categorical complexity of poverty for PKFC posits a range of children from socio-economic circumstances that are similar or lower to those of most families in eastern DRC, with occasional outliers of higher socio-economic means. Poverty status was assessed based on food insecurity, inadequate housing, poor health conditions, occupational status, and educational attainment. While most PKFC recounted income indicators and access to resources that placed them below the average (operationally defined as extensive referring to unmet basic needs), a handful of PKFC were living above this threshold. We will refer to those participants as 'relatively wealthy'.

About me? Let me tell you that I never go to school. I have no good clothes. When I think of the deep poverty I'm in, I feel much despair. I'm dressed poorly. I have no body lotion, not even the local palm oil or soap to wash my face. I have no food. My life is nonsense. Hard life conditions. It's too harsh, too bad actually. Nothing changes for the good ever. My family goes through much pain to find the amount of food we need daily[...] On many occasions, we go to bed without having eaten anything. I have no shoes, not flip-flops either. You can see that what I am wearing is completely torn apart. (PKFC)



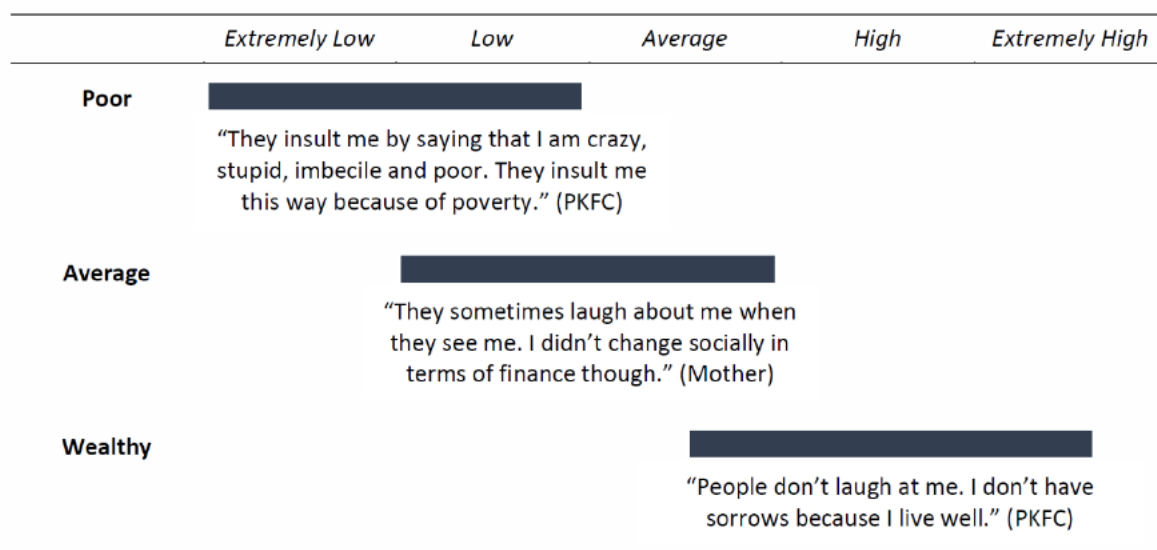
As shown previously (Author 2020a), the social challenges of PKFC are often caused and compounded by poverty. Mothers mentioned that their lack of financial means to cover their children's basic needs lowered their social status which in turn made them lose the support of family and friends who did not want to carry the burden of association with them. In this way, the mutual reinforcement of marginalisation and economic hardship caused a spiral of more extreme stigmatisation and poverty. Several mothers pointed out that their "story is [was] just one example" of how raising a PKFC caused "miserable life conditions".

"We are carrying a heavy burden raising abandoned children without any means. The other mothers – there are so many - are also sitting on a mountain of problems. They exercise no activity; they do nothing and are in very critical situations. We have all become like street children." (Mother)

Mothers' social mobility varied with the level of support received from former partners. Many perceived that the public knowledge of their former partner's neglect, evidenced in their apparent struggles and economic disadvantages, contributed to their negative status and reflected poorly on their social networks and communities. Occasionally, mothers spoke about initial improvements in social status due to the PKFC or explained that they had been met with jealousy and envy during the pregnancy but that this changed once the child was born and the fathers absolved themselves of their responsibilities. One mother who initially received noteworthy support from the PKFC's father detailed that her family began struggling with social stigma since that support ceased.

"People laugh at me because of my situation these days. Formerly, when the man was still alive, the kids were going to good schools, but now that the situation has changed, the topic became subject of their gossip. They say my children are no longer looking good." (Mother)

Although most PKFC in this sample faced high levels of poverty and stigma, those who were relatively wealthy appeared to be regarded well. Participants who felt broadly accepted, insinuated that their situation was exceptional because of their high living standard, implying that most others did not benefit from such circumstances. Thus, there seems to be a clear (and largely linear) relationship between participants' level of poverty/support received and their social status.



**Figure 3** Observed Variance in *Social Status* Based on **Poverty**

### The Intersection of Race and Poverty

Among research about the relationship between racial identity and poverty, a particular knowledge gap relates to this intersection in the post-colonial settings of the global South. Based on the experiences of PKFC, we will discuss how financial disparities interact with racial group memberships and contribute to a privileged or devalued social identity.

Table 4 introduces three patterns of interaction that were observed: (a) an average level of poverty translates into low social status for white PKFC and average social status for black PKFC, (b) the interaction effect of poverty and race is larger for PKFC who are considered white than PKFC who are considered black, (c) for white PKFC variance in poverty might lead to one of two extremes. What does this mean? The effects of poverty on social status are amplified by white racial identification. This showed particularly in the sample outliers - participants whose social status was extremely high or low.

**Table 4** Observed Interaction of Race and Poverty

<i>Poverty X Race</i>	White	Black
<i>Poor</i>	Extremely low social status	Low social status
<i>Average</i>	Low social status	Average social status
<i>Wealthy</i>	Extremely high social status	High social status

Poverty status appears to be able to explain the considerable within-group variation in the social status of PKFC who are perceived as white. We argue that this is due to a social comparison between the role assigned to white children (introduced in Table 3) and their ability to adhere to their attributed group membership (Hechter and Opp 2001). In other words, the social status of PKFC depends on their ability to enact the local cultural norms of their communities (Chandler and Wiborg 2020). As discussed in the section on race, host state communities in DRC expect white children to abide by a certain ‘norm of whiteness’ that is informed by a stereotypical representation of the white elite. White children were considered to live “in a given comfort” and were predicted to “become important people” who would attain positions of power, become “ministers, doctors and so on”. As discussed in the section on poverty, the financial reality of most PKFC was characterized by extreme hardship and deprivation, lack of support and family connections. Thus, securing a “bright future” along the lines of economic and educational achievement stands in stark contrast with the lived reality of most PKFC (Author 2020b). For the large majority of participants, the expectations that the Congolese society sets for white children were highly incompatible with their social and financial realities. Scarce financial means made day to day expenses difficult and did not allow for a luxurious lifestyle.

**Table 5** Aspired vs Actual Living Standard

	<b>Aspired Living Standard</b>	<b>Actual Living Standard</b>
<b>By PKFC</b>	“I hope to become an important person in the future.” (PKFC)	“In order for me to be like him, I must go to school, but it is very difficult for me to go to school.” (PKFC)
<b>By Mothers</b>	“I pray that God keeps my child safe as he can assist me in the future. A white child can be helpful in that way.” (Mother)	“My child is deprived of everything: lotion, soap, clothes, and food. Nobody can really believe that this is the child of a MONUSCO agent, it doesn’t have a decent living standard.” (Mother)

Not being able to meet the expected social norms aggravated stigma related to poverty and reversed racial privilege through sanctions (Hechter and Opp 2001). A derogatory term for PKFC in DRC is “Muzungu aliye homba” [white child gone bankrupt] which conveys traces of gloating about failed white privilege. The common term in central Africa, “Muzungu” [white/European] is used as an

indicator of race but is also linked to economic means and a higher living standard. Thus, the cultural perception of “Muzungus” is that of power and wealth, an implication of whiteness shaped by historical racial inequality (Jourdan 2013). Similar to racial slurs like “white trash” or “cracker” (Wray 2006), the adaptation “Muzungu aliye homba” indicates that PKFC defy the white-racial frame of reference by being poor and powerless despite their association with racial privilege. Hence, the term illustrates their non-adherence with the ideology and practices of the white elite. Poor PKFC being reprimanded for the discrepancy between their expected and actual living standard is in line with the ‘status incongruity hypothesis’ that predicts backlash towards people who behave incongruous to behaviour stereotypes associated with their social group membership (Rudman, et al., 2012). By contradicting the established racial logic, poor PKFC form a racial ‘other’ and are denied the structural benefits of whiteness (Cushing-Leubner 2020). To describe the implication of this intersection, we introduce the term ‘white-poverty stigma’.

“The others tease him saying he’s a white South-African walking around like a poor local child. They call him a ‘South-African son - a boy with an unknown father’. Sometimes when others tease or mock him, he gets very angry and he falls out with them.” (Mother)

Drawing on the work of others (e.g. Cooley, et al., 2019), we suggest that the mechanism behind white-poverty stigma is the social evaluation that white individuals have failed to take advantage of their racial privilege. In addition to the external sanctions of status incongruity, PKFC might wrestle with a threatened self-concept and experience a sense of inferiority towards their absent fathers’ high-status minority group (see Steele and Aronson 1995 “stereotype threat”). The data holds an indication of harmful consequences for self-regard and psychological well-being when PKFC were not able to manage the demands of their group membership. For instance, being neglected the social, political and economic privileges of their fathers might have caused PKFC to act out and explain the behavioural problems mothers observed in their children (see Table 3).

Interestingly, the few PKFC in the sample who were categorized as white and relatively wealthy seemed to derive social benefit from their intersecting group memberships. It appears that

PKFC who receive support from fathers or are from an otherwise more privileged background are rewarded for enacting their presumed privilege (Chandler and Wiborg 2020). Instead of battling with the social sanctions attached to violating stereotype norms, they were found to receive financial contributions that elevated their social status further (see Table 1).

“Many people like him and give him 5 dollars or 10, especially when we walk around the airport. People are happy to call him a white boy.” (Mother)

While financial resource flow within Congolese family and community networks is not unusual (De Herdt 2007), we perceived this to be related to a preconception according to which white PKFC were to become gatekeepers to economic relief. As the following excerpt shows, families hoped that white children could help them move towards a better future.

“The child indeed is white, so he might be my salvation one day.” (Mother)

The societal expectation for PKFC to play a role in the local economy (whether adhered to or not) resembles elements of ‘white saviour discourse’ (Cole 2012; L’Anson and Pfeifer 2013); a narrative that might be encouraged by PKFC’s link to UN peacekeeping and the white dominated aid industry that is in control of desirable resources.

Based on those social expectations, our data suggests that lack of access to resources and essential life domains like education affects the social status of PKFC more than it would affect other children. This is especially the case for white PKFC who sit in tension with their assumed white privilege (represented by their white elite fathers) and their black, natal realities (represented by their poor local mothers). While the social status of black PKFC is primarily driven by their level of poverty, that of white PKFC is compounded by the status expectations for white children.

## **Limitations**

The present study offers a first account of the essence of PKFC’s relationships with society, rather than exact representations of race or patterns of child poverty. Our results inform the experiences of a relatively small number of PKFC and are not representative of PKFC globally. In order to address PKFC’s

situation ethically, the research focused on the context in which children lived and engaged them with their own living environment. Words like 'poverty' or 'poor' were not used by the interviewers and no quantitative information on family income was collected. Similarly, PKFC were not asked to systematically reflect on their racial identity but instead were left to bring up race-related issues themselves. Consequently, not every interview could be attributed a respective social category and the related interpretations should not be seen as absolute. To capture race and poverty as truly intersectional, explicit questions about what it means to be 'poor' and 'white' need to be asked. Whether assessing these concepts more directly in research with children is possible is a question of ethical considerations. We acknowledge biases inherent in our position as non-Congolese adult researchers.

### **Strengths**

The strength of the current research lies in the multidisciplinary collaboration of scholars and civil society organizations and its interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach. Due to the non-invasive interview style and support of local experts, children as young as six were included in the research. To our knowledge, this is the first study to focus on the racial background of PKFC and reflect on them as a racially heterogeneous population. Drawing on 95 qualitative interviews, we contribute novel information to the currently emerging database regarding the life courses of these children. Employing the perspectives of both PKFC and mothers triangulated findings about social identity and identification and enabled a nuanced interpretation of their experiences. Historically informed and contextualized, our analysis bridges the individual accounts of PKFC with broader discussions about race in host state Congolese communities. The study advances scholarship in the arts and social sciences regarding the perspectives of children born of war and informs psychological discourse regarding racial awareness and identity in biracial children in central Africa. While our results are specific to PKFC and the post-colonial setting of DRC, it is likely that white-poverty stigma can be observed in impoverished situations in other populations. Their interdisciplinary and intersectoral

approach makes our results not only of direct interest to the UN but also to academics, NGOs, and human rights organizations working to safeguard vulnerable children in conflict.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This is the first study to empirically explore the racial identity and differences of PKFC. Discussing social identity as the qualitative outcome of different group memberships suggested that the psychological experience of race is interrelated with economic dimensions. Our results show that whether PKFC are indeed afforded unique opportunities depends on the relationship between their expected and actual living standard. In showing how PKFC challenge the prevailing racial order, we make the contextual terms and historic moment explicit in which PKFC live and thus provide new context for targeted interventions. Based on the testimonies shared, we make two recommendations to advance meaningful policy solutions:

First, while in theory the UN has set out a support system for PKFC, very few (if any) PKFC are regularly receiving child support or other UN subsidies (Blau 2016; Office of Internal Oversight Services 2015). The current study shows that PKFC's financial hardship is connected to other areas and highlights that programs designed to alleviate poverty might transform more than one strand of disadvantage. Thus, the knowledge of white-poverty stigma reinforces the importance of addressing poverty. Reparation payments may help reverse social sanctions and work towards reconciling PKFC's relationships, for instance, through repaying family debt (Adams 2011).

Second, participants' lack of racial reference groups and contact with 'others like them' complicates the resolution of their racial identity. Most children reported knowing others with similar procreation backgrounds, yet few were connecting with them regularly. Forming support networks with other PKFC and tackling identity issues as a group might bring relief from some of the burdens addressed in this study. Since peer support activities are a low-cost approach that has empowered children born of war in other contexts (Stewart 2015), building relationships with peers might have protective effects against negative group-related experiences and mistreatment.

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## Chapter 8. Matching Needs and Rights (Publication 4)

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### Human Rights Review

#### UNSupported: The Needs and Rights of Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers --Manuscript Draft--

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<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner University of Birmingham Birmingham, West Midlands UNITED KINGDOM	
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	University of Birmingham	
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>		
<b>First Author:</b>	Kirstin Wagner	
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Kirstin Wagner	
	Susan A Bartels	
	Sanne Weber	
	Sabine Lee	
<b>Order of Authors Secondary Information:</b>		
<b>Funding Information:</b>	Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences (642571)	Dr Susan A Bartels
<b>Abstract:</b>	Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by United Nations (UN) peacekeepers causes severe physical and psychological consequences. Where SEA leads to pregnancy and childbirth, peacekeepers typically absolve themselves of their paternal responsibilities and paternity suits are largely unsuccessful. The lack of support for peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC) tarnishes the image of the UN who fails to implement a victim-centred approach to SEA. Analysing shortcomings in the provision of support, this article presents an evaluation of the UN's justice system from the perspective of PKFC families. In-depth interviews with thirty-five PKFC and sixty mothers demonstrate local barriers to child support and paternity claims in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. We discuss PKFC's need for support and their mothers' attempts to navigate an opaque international legal system. The findings cast light on their limited access to UN subsidies, mounting a critique of UN accountability processes and frameworks for victim support.	

## **UNsupported: The Needs and Rights of Children Fathered by UN Peacekeepers**

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**Keywords:** Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, United Nations Peacekeeping, Paternity, Democratic Republic of Congo, Victim Support, Peacekeeper-Fathered Children

### **Introduction**

"MONUSCO needs to assist us. They can't reject us, especially since we are the products of what our fathers did when they were working for them." (PKFC, Kisangani)

As of February 2021, twelve peacekeeping operations (PKOs) are deployed to promote peace in conflict settings around the world. While most missions play a critical role in containing conflict, they also produce a range of unintended consequences (Aoi, De Coning and Thakur 2007). Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), in particular, has surfaced as an endemic problem during PKOs that undermines the United Nations' (UN) efforts to protect civilians (Westendorf and Searle 2017). The

breakdown of community structure and lack of basic necessities in countries of UN peacekeeping (UNPK) deployment has been found to drive civilians to seek out relationships with peacekeepers or to trade sex in exchange for food, shelter, money, or other goods (Nordås and Rustad 2013). Where sexual relations lead to pregnancy, peacekeepers are often redeployed elsewhere or repatriated from host state communities before their children are born (Blau 2016). The Special Advisor of the UN Secretary General (SG), prince Zeid Raad Al-Hussein, acknowledged in 2005 that “many victims, especially those who have ‘peacekeeper babies’ and have been abandoned by the fathers, are in desperate financial situation[s]” (UN General Assembly 2005, 25). Since many civilians in host state communities are already fighting existential problems, children left behind by peacekeepers have been shown to substantially weaken the economic security of their families (Lee and Bartels 2019; Wagner et al. 2020).

Notwithstanding the challenges faced by mothers and children, limited progress has been made with economic and social reparations (Ferstman 2019). Peacekeeper-fathered children (PKFC), in particular, have little agency in matters of assistance since they are often too young to demand compensation themselves (DeLaet 2007; Blau 2016). Moreover, their ‘victim status’<sup>1</sup> is entangled with that of their mothers, presenting a new form of victimhood that poses challenges to traditional models of justice (Baines and Oliveira 2020). In light of this, we will discuss the situation of PKFC in host state communities and explore their rights under UN accountability processes and frameworks for support. An evaluation of the UN’s justice system’s operation by victims is crucial for understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the mechanisms in place to support them (Tamarit, Villacampa and Filella 2010). To our knowledge, this is the first study to centre the voices of mothers who conceived children with peacekeepers and the children born of these relations. Our work makes several key contributions to the ongoing academic and policy debates on sexual misconduct at the hands of UN peacekeepers,

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<sup>1</sup> For the purpose of this study, we follow the official UN terminology in referring to those who have experienced SEA as ‘victims’, rather than ‘survivors’. Although not victims of SEA in the traditional sense, PKFC are integrated in the UN protocol for support of victims, and thus, we consider them victims in discussing strategies for assistance. Wherever a distinction between victims and PKFC is relevant, this will be specified.

by (1) presenting the concerns of mothers and PKFC, (2) outlining local barriers to child support and paternity claims and, (3) portraying victims' demands regarding the reorientation of existing policies.

We start by outlining the UN's response to SEA and childbirth and providing contextual information on the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), where the field research for this study was conducted. We then demonstrate the gaps in UN protocols for assistance based on the experiences of thirty-five PKFC and sixty mothers, and finally discuss policy considerations to improve their access to support services.

### **Responding to the Needs of Victims**

Securing compensation and assistance for victims of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) are basic principles of reconciling conflict-torn societies (UN General Assembly 1985). While the UN increasingly works towards mitigating the harmful effects of SEA for victims, historically, policy and programming regarding SEA-related issues have often overlooked the severely deficient mechanisms for victim assistance.

From the 1990s when SEA was first addressed as a serious concern both in the academic and political discourse, the emphasis was on the perpetrators, and the key concerns were to understand better the nature of SEA, the reasons for the systematic perpetration of sexual offences by peacekeepers and the cultural factors contributing to SEA (Nordås and Rustad 2013; Freedman 2018). As a result, significant attention was devoted to the prevention of future misconduct and comparatively little to helping existing victims overcome the physical, psychological and social effects of SEA (Ferstman 2019). In 2003, the UN announced "zero tolerance" towards sexual misconduct and adopted "special measures for protection" (UN Secretariat 2003). Since then, most sexual relations between UNPK personnel and beneficiaries of assistance are classified as exploitative or abusive, due to an assumed imbalance of power. Framed by the 2003 bulletin, sexual abuse refers to sexual relations with minors under eighteen or sexual acts inflicted in a forced or coercive manner, while sexual exploitation refers to sexual relations that involve "a level of agency and negotiation" but occur

in a coercive environment (UN Secretariat 2003; Otto 2007, 260). Sexual exploitation includes “transactional sex” and “sexually exploitative relationships” which thrive on vulnerability and are therefore also prohibited (UN General Assembly 2017; Conduct in UN Field Missions 2020b). In spite of increasingly comprehensive policies aimed at preventing sexual misconduct, SEA allegations have continued to proliferate in the peacekeeping context.

While the international community has prioritized issues around prevention, reforms to improve accountability have centralized punitive justice and again, undermined the rights of victims to effective remedies (Blau 2016; Mudgway 2016). Nonetheless, still only a fraction of implicated peacekeepers are prosecuted or convicted which discourages victims from pursuing compensation through judicial procedures (Kovatch 2016). Political and structural barriers create jurisdictional limitations that complicate accountability processes through agreements that grant each category of UN personnel their own set of immunities and disciplinary measures (Blau 2016). UN officials, civilian staff and experts on mission benefit from functional immunity regarding prosecution for criminal acts committed while acting in an official UN capacity (UN Treaty Series 1946). In relation to military contingents, the Status-of-Forces Agreement (SOFA) and the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) determine that only troop- and police-contributing countries (TPCCs) can prosecute sexual misconduct (UN General Assembly 1990, 2011). This implies that most peacekeepers are not subject to the host countries’ jurisdiction, but that the responsibility to investigate SEA lies with peacekeepers’ countries of origin (Simm 2013). Where PKFC were born as a result of SEA, member states are required to pursue paternity claims under the national legal system of the purported father (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2020a). The deputy spokesperson for the UN SG elaborated that the responsibility for child support rests with individual peacekeepers since “compensation is a matter of personal accountability” (UN Meetings Coverage and Press Releases 2017). This proves challenging, however. TPCCs are often reluctant to follow up on claims regarding their own nationals or lack resources to do so, frequently making it impossible for victims to access assistance through legal institutions (Vandenberg 2017). Sometimes acts constituting SEA according to the UN definition do not constitute a criminal offence



under the national legislation of TPCCs and cannot be penalized in local courts (Mandrup and Cold-Ravnkilde 2017). Bound by the SOFA and MoU, the UN's role in advancing paternity and child support claims is restricted to coordinating with member states and facilitating DNA testing where national legislation permits it (UN General Assembly 2015). In 2015, the UN documented a response rate from TPCCs regarding paternity matters of only 20 percent<sup>2</sup> (UN General Assembly 2015). Notwithstanding the organization's efforts to translate its policies into constructive action, in practice UN policies for child support have largely failed to assist PKFC. Despite good intentions to end impunity, there is still a critical legal accountability gap and numerous barriers for victims of SEA to realize their rights.

Questioning the appropriateness of trials as a path to justice, more recent scholarship has promoted restorative justice and social repair (DeLaet 2007; Freedman 2018). Aligning with better-informed ideals of justice, attention shifted towards creating a greater understanding of the needs of SEA victims, including mothers and those born as a result of SEA. The UN publicly acknowledged PKFC in 2008 with the adoption of a "Comprehensive Strategy on Assistance and Support for Victims" and considered PKFC among those directly affected by SEA (UN General Assembly 2008). According to the strategy, complainants (individuals who reported SEA) were entitled to basic assistance, e.g., emergency medical care, and victims (individuals whose complaints were verified) were entitled to additional reparative support<sup>3</sup>. Children born as a result of SEA were to receive "assistance and support addressing the medical, psychological and social consequences directly arising from sexual exploitation and abuse, in the best interests of the child" (UN General Assembly 2008, 4). Moreover, all those affected could request "immediate material care, such as food, clothing, emergency and safe shelter". The implementation of the outlined response, however, depended on the availability of local services that often had not been allocated adequate UN funding (Mudgway 2016). Although aid was guaranteed to all "children who are found by a competent national authority to have been born as a

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<sup>2</sup> Although the resolution of paternity and child support claims has increased significantly in recent years, important information on investigations and accountability measures taken by member states remains pending, see UN General Assembly (2020).

<sup>3</sup> The distinction between "complainant" and "victim" was dropped in the 2019 Victim Assistance Protocol.

result of acts of SEA” (UN General Assembly 2008, 3), the number of individuals who have received concrete assistance is extremely small (Office of Internal Oversight Services 2015; Bureau des Avocats Internationaux 2019a).

Since 2004, the effectiveness of structural and operational policies on protection from SEA have been discussed annually in a SG report. Prompted by shortcomings regarding victim assistance that were highlighted in the 2015 report, SG Ban Ki-moon established the Trust Fund in Support of Victims (hereafter “Trust Fund”) in 2016 to address service gaps in the provision of support (UN General Assembly 2016). Designed to support relevant in-country entities in providing specialized services to victims, the Trust Fund does not provide financial compensation to individual victims but funding to organizations who offer, for instance, rehabilitative and transformative opportunities to beneficiaries (UN Peacekeeping 2020). In 2017, SG António Guterres outlined a “new approach” to victim support, anchored in the creation of a new position within the UN – the Victims’ Rights Advocate (VRA). The first VRA, Jane Connors, seeks to reinforce a victim-centred, rights-based approach to SEA, embodying the new momentum and seriousness with which the organization aims to remove barriers to assistance for victims (Connors 2020). Additional Field VRAs have been designated as the “main contact for victims on the ground” (Connors 2020, 503). An updated protocol on victim assistance endorsed in December 2019 represents the organization’s evolution in the provision of support since 2008 and aspires to be “age, disability-and gender sensitive, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate” (UN Protocol 2019). Consequently, victims have the right to choose between a range of options for assistance, amongst them education and professional support. Despite its stated victim-centred approach, building effective capacity and avenues for assistance remains challenging. Haitian attorneys who published a series of letters to the VRA after filing paternity suits for ten PKFC in 2015 have suggested that protocols may not be implemented as proposed (Bureau des Avocats Internationaux 2019a, b, 2020). The legal team argued that years after initiating legal action, no child support claim has resulted in sustained assistance and the UN allegedly remained “non-responsive, non-cooperative and opaque in its approach, failing to provide essential

evidentiary documentation and adequate and transparent assistance to clients.” (Bureau des Avocats Internationaux 2019b, 1). The UN thus continues to be perceived as failing to uphold its obligation to facilitate paternity claims, ensure child support and comply with their own standards of transparency.

The 2019 protocol on assistance states that the views of children are a “significant factor in the settlement” of victim-related issues, yet very little is known about their interests or perspectives (UN Protocol 2019, 6). Through the prism of the ongoing PKO in the DRC, the present study seeks to explore their needs and rights.

### **PKFC in the DRC**

Systematic evidence on PKFC conceived during the UN Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO, formerly MONUC) is limited, although a broad spectrum of journalistic and anecdotal testimonies account for their existence. In 2005, reports emerged about 141 females who had conceived children with Moroccan and Uruguayan peacekeepers (The Weekend Australian 2005). Shortly afterwards, news outlets highlighted “mounting concern that large numbers of peacekeeper babies” were being abandoned (Lynch 2005). In 2016, allegations surfaced against eleven Tanzanian peacekeepers facing paternity claims and Aljazeera broadcasted a story about hundreds of PKFC in the Ituri province (Bryan 2016; Essa 2017). Meanwhile, the UN’s Misconduct Tracking System recorded 266 victims of SEA in DRC between 2010 and 2020, of which 101 implicated peacekeeping personnel in child support or paternity claims (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2020b). These numbers are considered underestimates because of the barriers victims face in filing complaints (Grady 2016). The UN’s Deputy-Chief of Conduct and Discipline Services addressed this complexity: “You cannot expect a woman living in the middle of Congo, for example, to be able to file a claim for recognition of paternity, and then child support, in a court on another continent” (Bracken 2014). To date only eight of the 101 filed paternity claims have been confirmed; all others are pending or were rejected (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2020b).

## Methods

The study is derived from a wider mixed-methods research project addressing peacekeeper-civilian interactions in eastern DRC with data collected between May and August 2018<sup>4</sup>. From this dataset, we present interviews with sixty mothers and thirty-five PKFC using a convenience sample. Since victim support for PKFC has not extensively been researched in the past, interviews followed an exploratory-descriptive approach, employing semi-structured questionnaires. All interview guides were self-constructed with topic questions and prompts addressing victims' needs for assistance and previous support received from peacekeeper fathers, state representatives, UN authorities, and/or non-governmental organizations. Interview guides for two age groups of PKFC were employed to adapt the style and detail of questions to their respective cognitive and emotional development. Accordingly, interviews with younger children (aged six to twelve) were designed with a few, open-ended questions that encouraged them to talk about their situations under playful conditions including drawing their family units. Interviews with adolescents (aged thirteen to nineteen) contained more explicit questions regarding their family's circumstances.

Interviews were conducted in Lingala, Kiswahili, and occasionally French, recorded, and transcribed by Congolese research staff. All participants gave informed verbal consent to participate and to have the anonymous results published. Participation was informed in an age-appropriate manner, targeted to children, adolescents, and adults. PKFC younger than six were excluded due to ethical concerns and them not being capable communicators in the context of this study. Parental consent for the participation of minors was obtained from mothers during their interviews. Written consent was waived due to the low level of risk associated with non-invasive questioning, anticipated levels of literacy and local cultural norms. Interviews were conducted privately; no identifying information was taken, and no compensation was offered. The local partner Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI) created a support system for participants in need of

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<sup>4</sup> For more information on the study design and larger research project see XXX.

social services or legal advice and gave out referral cards with contact numbers in closing each interview session. The study protocol was approved by XXX and XXX.

Qualitative thematic coding was applied by identifying data themes through open coding. Emerging concepts were summarized under the categories “needs” and “assistance”. Categories for codes describing the needs of mothers and PKFC were chosen based on frequency and consistency across narratives to reflect the situation of most participants. Categories for codes describing attempts at seeking assistance and subsequent service provision were further based on novelty and theoretical saturation to portray the scope of individual experiences<sup>5</sup>. Representative quotes were chosen to illustrate themes.

## **Results**

Participants implicated UN personnel from twelve countries in fathering and abandoning children, the majority of whom were Tanzanian and South African. Mothers who recalled the position of fathers at MONUSCO said they were soldiers, lieutenants, sergeants, pilots, drivers, mechanics, cooks, doctors, or photographers. Of the mothers who indicated their age at conception, 50 percent were under the age of eighteen and the youngest girl impregnated was ten. This adds to the troubling picture of very young girls being sexually abused by peacekeepers and confronted prematurely with the responsibilities of motherhood (Lee and Bartels 2019). At the time of the interviews in 2018, the mean age of mothers was 26.2 (SD=7.2) and the average age of interviewed youth was 12 (SD=3.6), with a range of six to nineteen. Accordingly, the majority of PKFC in the study were born after implementation of the zero tolerance and other related policies. However, four PKFC were born before 2003 when the UN did not yet have a clear stance regarding sexual relations with beneficiaries of assistance.

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<sup>5</sup> PKFC were not asked about their families attempts of pursuing assistance, thus, their interviews could not be coded regarding those issues.

All mothers described being left with little to no assistance after peacekeeper fathers were transferred or repatriated. Most mothers engaged with peacekeepers out of necessity in exchange for money, food and other basic goods. Their need for “survival sex” indicates that PKFC were raised by mothers from very poor backgrounds who lacked family support. Half of the mothers (N=30) stated clearly whether they had reported paternity to UN officials. Out of those, 13 percent had not contacted MONUSCO authorities and 63 percent indicated that their complaint was ignored or rejected, while 23 percent described an initial investigation or legal case, but no participant had been awarded compensation.

We present the data in two sections. The first section illustrates the needs of victims, specifies which forms of assistance they requested, and which types of assistance were available at the time of interview. The second section describes obstacles to assistance including barriers to reporting, compensation and specialized services financed by the Trust Fund.

## Needs Assessment and Analysis

### A) Individual Needs

The group of ninety-five participants interviewed is distinct from the general population in eastern DRC in terms of their economic and social circumstances. Qualitative thematic analysis revealed that participants lived in circumstances of extreme poverty. Despite varying degrees of financial exigency, all seemed to lack basic resources. This has been summarized under the theme “suffering”, a term used by many participants to describe their living situation. We have identified key sectors of resource scarcity that appeared to have significant impact on participants’ livelihoods.

(i) Food insecurity. Most mothers and PKFC described food insecurity that regularly prevented them from eating two or three meals a day. They suffered from insufficient funds to buy basic ingredients like vegetables, rice, tea, and oil. Mothers demonstrated their need for urgent remedies to feed their families, particularly the PKFC, who in some instances were denied access to available household resources (Wagner et al. 2020).

“My family goes through much pain to find the amount of food we need daily. Sometimes, when we get about 1000 Congolese Franks [0.5 USD], we thank God for it, but we never get full or satiated with the little food we have. On many occasions, we go to bed without having eaten anything.” (PKFC, Bukavu)

(ii) Lack of health care. The interviews suggest that some PKFC might face chronic malnutrition and other health deficiencies due to undernourishment. Moreover, mothers described not being able to afford an examination or treatment when their children developed more serious illnesses. This puts PKFC at risk for long-term health and development issues.

“My status doesn’t really reflect that of a respectable person, my child is deprived of everything: lotion, soap, clothes, and food. Nobody can really believe that this is the child of a MONUSCO agent, it doesn’t have a decent living standard. Even his health has degraded due to bad living conditions. When he is sick, I am in trouble because I don’t have the means to pay for healthcare.” (Mother, Bukavu)

(iii) Poor sanitation. Participants’ restricted access to health care was aggravated by their inability to purchase cleaning and hygiene products like soap. PKFC complained about the need for personal care products and expressed a fear that they would “look dirty”.

“I have no body lotion, not even the local palm oil or soap to wash my face.” (PKFC, Bukavu)

(iv) Precarious housing. Inappropriate housing, lack of money to pay rent or afford a plot of land to build shelter on was another serious concern. Participants described structural problems with houses, inadequate maintenance and lack of lamp oil and clean sheets. A small fraction of participants indicated homelessness.

“That guy from MONUSCO is living peacefully with his wife and children while my house is leaking, and the sheets are overused. Basically, he destroyed my life when getting me pregnant. He deceived me and now my life is crammed with suffering, impending hardships.” (Mother, Kalemi)

(v) Inadequate clothing. Interviewees also had grievances regarding their appearance and inability to buy the desired clothes and footwear. In line with existing research, the data suggests that clothes

were not only perceived as a necessity but contributed to defining social status (Boyette, Lew-Levy and Gettler 2018). PKFC's inability to afford clothing drew attention to their father's absence.

"When I think of the deep poverty I'm in, I feel much despair. I am dressed poorly. I have no good clothes. I have no shoes, no flip-flops either. You can see that what I am wearing is completely torn apart." (PKFC, Bukavu)

(vi) Compromised education. PKFC overwhelmingly indicated their struggle to afford tuition fees, school supplies, uniforms, and other costs related to their education. Many were schooled infrequently and skipped certain months or grades, significantly impacting their future prospects and life courses. Uncovered expenses and the obligation to work to supplement the household income often prompted PKFC to drop out of school.

"We are always short on money which is why I have not been able to attend sixth form primary school. At that time, I fell sick in the middle of the school year and because of the lack of money, left school forever. I no longer go there. I have no idea about MONUSCO agents really, but I do not like them because they don't pay our school-fees, they do nothing for us." (PKFC, Bukavu)

(vii) Unviable employment. Similar circumstances applied to mothers whose professional opportunities were often severely compromised. Childrearing costs that exacerbated poverty compelled some mothers to exchange sex for goods that ensured their child's survival. This "downward spiral" or chain of SEA has previously been reported for victims in DRC (Notar 2006) and Haiti (Lee and Bartels 2019).

"My concerns are about the living conditions of the child as I am jobless and penniless. Currently, I'm struggling to get food for the child's survival. I am living a strange life when I meet fellows in the bush who go to fetch fire sticks so that we can have the child's soap or body milk. I think much about the child's father for I think that if he was living with me, I would be free from hardships." (Mother, Goma)

The critical needs expressed in the interviews illustrate the extreme poverty in eastern DRC, as well the impact of absent fathers in patriarchal settings and of low socio-economic means. Most mothers made a clear distinction between their financial situation pre- and post-childbirth; thus, single



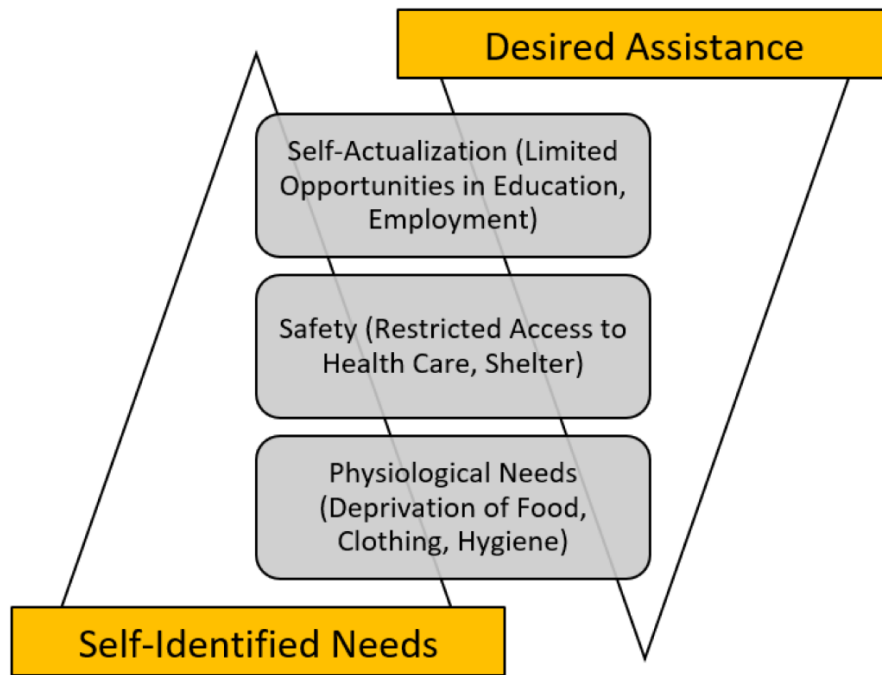
parenting aggravated their already dire socio-economic conditions. In order to ascertain family quality of life in the Congolese context, the number of meals a family eats per day, their ability to send children to school, and their access to health care are appropriate measurements to classify living standards (Aldersey et al. 2017). Based on this, families with PKFC must be considered highly vulnerable in a country-wide comparison. The disproportionate “suffering” of PKFC families prompts the moral and political urgency of assistance.

#### B) Desired Assistance

Study participants expected the UN to provide assistance when the UN peacekeeper fathers did not. They discussed what aid they needed and how support could be most effectively targeted. Despite struggling with basic daily expenses, few participants asked for immediate alleviation of their most pressing needs. Instead, they requested forward-looking assistance in the form of education, employment, land or housing (see Figure 1). Mothers assumed that the lack of paternal family connections and inheritance would restrict PKFC’s access to resources in the long-term, and thus desired structural support to increase their children’s prospects.

“I wonder what to give to the child when he is grown up. A handsome child should have a plot of land, a house, a farm, so I need a job that enables me to give goods to him. All assistance is welcome. My main expectation, however, is work, as it will help to better our living conditions in the long-term.”

(Mother, Goma)



**Fig. 1** Relationship between Individual Needs and Desired Forms of Assistance

(i) Employment. Many mothers were the sole caretakers and providers for their children, but without earning subsistence wages. They often worked long hours in informal jobs, unable to spend time with their children or cover their existential needs. Several mothers operated “small businesses” selling goods like vegetables to enhance income, hoping to later invest in products with a larger profit; thus, they were looking to expand their commercial activity. Others hoped vocational training could improve their chances of employment. Participants saw capacity-building for income generation as a way to ensure their child’s survival and guard them against recurrent SEA, and a way out of poverty that would improve their family’s quality of life.

“I sometimes buy potatoes, cook them and sell them at the market or on sidewalks. People buy things like this from me and in return I get the soap to wash my child’s clothes. If they gave me money, I could trade and expand my selling business. Through this work, I might be able to avoid selling my body - to have sex for money in order to buy soap, clothes, food and so on.” (Mother, Kalemi)

(ii) Education. Most PKFC asked for funding towards their education to better their chances of employment and pathways to a productive and independent future. They directed their claims equally

to absent fathers and MONUSCO authorities as they considered both to have an obligation in supporting and assisting them.

“He was supporting us a little bit but these days we are not receiving any support from him that is why I am not going to school this year. I sell water around the city in order to be able to survive.” (PKFC, Kisangani)

(iii) Housing/Land. Being provided with appropriate housing or a plot of land to grow food or build a compound on was another commonly requested form of assistance that was perceived to ensure PKFC’s safety and inheritance.

“If someone could give me my own house, I would be the happiest person in the world. Feeding my son, dressing him etc. are difficult but the biggest problem for which I wish MONUSCO could find a solution is housing, having my own compound. My son will want to know where our house is for sure.” (Mother, Bukavu)

Infrequently, participants were granted help from other institutions, community groups, faith-based or non-governmental organizations. They reported that civil society actors like “Médicins sans frontières”, “The Red Cross” and “Heal Africa” assisted them with free health care and legal complaints, whereas MONUSCO did not.

## Barriers to Assistance

In spite of the needs outlined above, accessing official support through the UN was unrealistic for many mothers for several reasons, including barriers to reporting the SEA in the first place.

### A) Barriers to Reporting

Mothers identified multiple barriers to reporting paternity to the UN, amongst them (i) lack of credible evidence, (ii) unclear complaint pathways, (iii) misinformation, (iv) change in policies, (v) lack of confidence in authorities, (vi) fear of negative consequences and (vii) the expectation of resilience.

(i) Lack of credible evidence. Mothers indicated that they did not have peacekeeper identifying information to support their allegations and confirm their victim status. Identifying perpetrators was

considered to be dependent on knowledge of the country flags and numbers written on military uniforms. This perceived requirement prevented mothers who had sexual relations with civilian peacekeepers, or military personnel who did not regularly wear their uniforms, from seeking paternity support. Similarly, victims of sexual abuse and sex-work were less likely to report incidents of SEA since they often did not have details about the implicated peacekeeper.

“He always came to our house with a civilian uniform. Other soldiers who had babies with girls were leaving the camps in their military uniforms, that’s why they can be found more easily. I, however, was not able to remember the number on his uniform. Some women who did are now working there.”

(Mother, Beni)

(ii) Unclear complaint pathways. Participants did not have a comprehensive understanding of UN protocols for assistance; few knew their official right to paternity and child support or how to access it. Unfamiliar with the procedures of filing complaints against perpetrators in their countries of origin, mothers assumed that the geographical distance to fathers spoiled their chance of assistance. Without clear guidance, the prospect of talking to uniformed personnel, particularly from the same organization as their abusers, was intimidating.

“I haven’t gone to MONUSCO. We don’t know where and how to accuse him, and we can’t know where those MONUSCO guys are today. It is hard to go see someone you don’t know and have never met.”

(Mother, Bukavu)

(iii) Misinformation. It was a widespread misconception that the main form of support that could be awarded through UN authorities was employment with the organization. Encouraged through UN personnel, one mother was waiting for her son to be old enough to claim his allegedly rightful place at MONUSCO.

“The MONUSCO troop major even said there is nothing to worry about, since my child is a boy, he can easily be employed with MONUSCO later, as soon as he reaches ten years of age. I was expecting him to get a job at the end of this month but so far nothing has happened and there is no one who can guide me on how to get child support.” (Mother, Bukavu)

Several factors were thought to influence who was getting assistance. Some participants were under the impression that only mothers who conceived children during the MONUC era were being supported. Others believed that whether assistance was granted depended on the ethnicity of peacekeeper fathers. This could be a sign that at earlier stages UN regulations were not universally adhered to or interpreted differently across base camps or contingents.

“Only the ones who had babies with them a very long time ago are supported.” (Mother, Beni)

“I know that there are women in similar situations who work at MONUSCO. I know they are mainly the ones who had babies with Tanzanians.” (Mother, Beni)

Based on these and other rumours in the community, it is likely that victims draw false conclusions regarding who qualifies for assistance, and do not report SEA and childbirth if they consider their children’s ethnicity, age or gender unlikely to render them eligible for support.

(iv) Change in policies. Mothers with older PKFC occasionally reported that they had received food rations in the past as unofficial forms of assistance from the UN. The more stringent laws and regulations that came with renewed mandates, combined with the regular rotations of contingents, prevented mothers from continuing to access these services. Once stricter regulations required them to re-establish their eligibility for support through legal action, they often refrained from filing complaints due to an incomplete understanding of the legal pathways and a perception that UN officials were already aware of their situation.

“I went to MONUSCO when the child was four years old. I asked them to help me be in touch with the father as I was burdened with the child’s responsibilities and charges all by myself. They asked me to come back after one month to get some food. They gave me rice, beans, cooking oil; the next month they did likewise. In the third year, they chased me away and asked me to open a case somewhere [...] I understood that there was no support and decided to stay at home.” (Mother, Goma)

(v) Lack of confidence in authorities. A further barrier to reporting SEA was participants’ distrust in Congolese and other authorities. Because of previous experiences with military or police and local

corruption, participants believed that speaking out was naive, if not dangerous, thus demonstrating a general lack of confidence in the UN's reporting mechanisms.

"I didn't report the relationship because Congolese authorities are useless. MONUSCO authorities don't know anything, there is no point in going there. They are not thinking about us, yet we have their children." (Mother, Kisangani)

(vi) Fear of negative consequences. Related to that, some mothers were afraid that attracting attention to their situation could have negative consequences such as UN officials taking PKFC away or fathers being repatriated before paternity had been recognized.

"They came looking for me while I was away. They only met my mother; she hid the child from them. She was afraid that they would take her. MONUSCO knows that there are so many children that were left by these agents. They constantly make false promises." (Mother, Beni)

Others were worried how asking for assistance would affect their reputation. Participants seemed to fear showing weakness, as well as the potential jealousy and retaliation from their communities if they were to be granted assistance.

"Human beings are scornful of others when they request assistance; that is why we avoid talking about it, we prefer not to open our heart to other people. Whatever happens, is supposed to happen." (Mother, Goma)

(vii) Non-reporting as resilience. Occasionally, silence was perceived to demonstrate resilience. The Congolese ethos of "la débrouille" describes a sense of resourcefulness that has previously been found to illustrate coping with unlawful conduct (Trefon 2004). Derived from the French term "se débrouiller" [to find a way], it is often applied to mean that "using one's own means" to overcome adverse conditions is the locally anticipated response to hardship (Braun 2016, 21).

"I don't know his address and I won't search for it. I think I am intelligent enough to help myself. If I get vegetables, I cook and eat. People say that he, who trusts in others, dies helplessly. I believe in myself and pursue progress and a better life." (Mother, Kalemie)

Evidently, under-reporting of paternity is a complex, yet prevalent issue (Grady 2016). The failure of the UN to ensure effective reporting and investigative processes violates victims' rights a second time and increases the suffering of PKFC families (Freedman 2018). The power gap between mothers and peacekeepers, which is recognized by the UN, silences those most in need of support and is reinforced by the UN's lack of transparency.

#### B) Barriers to Compensation and Support

Many of the social, political and psychological obstacles that prevented mothers from reporting were closely linked to practical difficulties in realizing assistance, manifested in complications with legal recognition or services from the Trust Fund. Mothers who advocated for their right to compensation often faced barriers with respect to (i) inadequate processing and communication of their claims, (ii) corruption, (iii) the gap in legal authority between the UN and TPCCs, and the (iv) limited availability and communication of specialized services.

(i) Inadequate processing and communication of claims. Of those who contacted UN authorities, a large majority said they received limited help from the organization. Participants detailed that some UN officials violated their right to information about legal processes by urging mothers to seek comfort in their spirituality, rather than court actions. Other officials were empathetic towards women's needs for support but left them "without answers to their questions" about the navigation of a complex, multi-layered legal system. The lack of action reinforced the widely shared notion that UN officials had no interest in holding peacekeepers accountable for fathering children.

"I tried to speak to MONUSCO officials and requested that they look for the father in his country, but my effort was unsuccessful. I went to the place where women who are left with children go to expose their problem to a woman working for the UN. When I went there, I saw no reaction. In fact, they didn't do anything. It is hard to understand (cries)." (Mother, Bunia)

Mothers who gave accounts of an initial investigation, often described poor follow-up and mismanagement of their cases. Repeat interviews, lengthy delays or non-compliance with promised

next steps made for a distressing process. Due to the lack of tangible progress, some mothers eventually gave up hope that they could benefit from legal processes.

“We were told to register our children with MONUSCO but so far there hasn’t been any feedback. They disappointed us, only moved our case around. MONUSCO says they advocate transparency and discipline because they are supposed to, but in practice they don’t have it.” (Mother, Bunia)

Participants recounted meetings where MONUSCO officials had gathered them in public places, in order to take photos and video footage of children with mixed ethnicity or collect blood and saliva samples. They deplored that, years afterwards, these actions had not led to sustained assistance and that DNA results had not been released.

“MONUSCO is supposed to help. They come here from everywhere and take photos. They ensure us that their chief is requesting to have a record of all the children who were left by MONUSCO agents. I even went to their headquarter for further support, they took several photos but then nothing. I cried out for help showing them the difficulties we are encountering when raising our children.” (Mother, Bunia)

(ii) Corruption. The interviews strongly suggest that in some instances illegal processes and corruption led to victims not being treated according to UN guidance. The following example shows that incidents of SEA and childbirth were at least occasionally swept under the carpet.

“The officials at MONUSCO did not answer, they did not do anything as if they were silently backing up the actions of this man. Luckily, the superior of my husband<sup>6</sup> was relocated, and they brought in a new chief to the mission. When my parents presented the case to him, he pressed my husband to pay charges. We found out that the former gentleman was corrupt.” (Mother, Bukavu)

In a similar way, doctors were accused of being partial towards peacekeepers and of having falsified paternity tests to their advantage.

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<sup>6</sup> Some mothers perceived the fathers of their children as partners rather than perpetrators. While not legally married, they symbolically speaking referred to them as “husbands”.



“We had a blood test done after the child’s birth in Goma, the result being positive. The woman [procurer] asked the Malawian to plot with the doctor and say that the blood of the child and the man were different. She asked him to refuse the pregnancy for his job protection [...] My parents consulted the human rights office, or parliament of children’s rights but didn’t succeed. There was no reaction from either party and no one came to investigate. We gave up since nobody helped us.” (Mother, Goma)

(iii) Gap in legal authority. When adequate reporting and processing of cases took place, the repatriation of implicated peacekeepers was perceived to delay the prompt handling of cases and interfere with participants’ chances of being supported. It appeared logically inconsistent that allegations were substantial enough to repatriate peacekeepers but could then not be verified or translated into assistance.

“One day I went to report the case to the Bangladeshi Police. I explained to them how their soldier had abused me and got me pregnant without providing any care... when I came back to present my arguments, they revealed that he was sent back to South Africa because I had reported him. I learned that he was reshuffled to South Africa without listening to what I had to say. I then decided that it was better to drop the matter since it was already entangled with discrimination and scorn.” (Mother, Bukavu)

Echoing the experiences of other victims of SGBV, the emotional impact participants experienced from passing through the UN’s complex criminal justice system resembles anger, resentment, sadness, fear and shame (Williams 1999; Tamarit, Villacampa and Filella 2010). Victims’ lack of confidence in receiving compensation through legal action contributed to their desire for rehabilitative and transformative social services.

(iv) Limited availability and communication of specialized services for victims

Recognizing these difficulties, the UN made grants available to fund a range of support services from an alternative source (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2020c; Office of the VRA 2020). Financed by the Trust Fund, local organizations in DRC have implemented some of the first UN projects to provide

livelihood support for SEA victims by engaging them in education and vocational training (Conduct in UN Field Missions 2018; UN General Assembly 2018). Two participants discussed labour organizations and women's rights initiatives who organized services that resemble Trust Fund initiatives, although they did not identify them as such.

"Nobody took care of the child apart from me and an association for women. They reported what had happened to MONUSCO and came back with 'muzadi', some money for assistance for me to stop prostitution. The organization supported me in building a house, completing a bakery and a sewing workshop, getting a mushroom farm [...] that's why I stopped bothering MONUSCO for help." (Mother, Goma)

Contrary to the participants' perception that other victims of SEA had occasionally received such assistance, most study participants had not been offered rehabilitative or transformative opportunities themselves. Non-transparent information regarding the existence of services at the time of data collection left mothers to wonder why other victims were treated preferentially, causing jealousy and envy between them. Hence, the limited availability and communication of specialized services could lead to further psychological harm and damage victim support networks.

### **Policy Considerations**

This is the first study to involve child participants in research that investigates paternity related to UNPK and thus, foregrounds the protagonists' voices and increases their visibility in discussions about victim support. By analysing the experiences of mothers who conceived children with peacekeepers and the children born of these relations, we contribute crucial information to the very limited knowledge base relating to this population.

Although comprehensive resolutions increasingly lay out the regulations for victim support, for affected individuals access to justice often remains elusive. Recent UN initiatives and measures to address the perceived failures outlined above will take time to be fully implemented in host and member states. Hence, we expect the effectiveness of changes in system-wide policies and

programming to be better reflected in the missions' future practice. Nonetheless, our research shows the inadequacy of policies in 2018 and the urgency for programs to be adjusted. In addition to the actions introduced by the SG in 2017 and their application by the VRA, we have identified several factors that impact the effectiveness of policies regarding victim support, in line with the four workstreams at the core of the new strategy: (1) Putting victims first, (2) Ending impunity, (3) Consulting a multi-stakeholder network to victim support UN guidelines, (4) Improving strategic communications and transparency (UN General Assembly 2017).

### Putting Victims First

The data presented in this article contributes to elevating the voice of victims and raising awareness about their situations. The results summarized participants' most-pressing needs and their demands for assistance, thus highlighting valuable information for the realization of a victims' rights approach. Our data shows the restrictions and potentially long-term impacts of the lack of economic resources for PKFC who are born into families that often cannot ensure a minimum subsistence. Participants in each group indicated that poverty and economic deprivation were the key factors underlying their struggles. The scope of individual needs ranged from survival resources to tools for self-actualization. To enable a basic living standard, participants lacked adequate food, health care, hygiene supplies, clothing, and safe shelter. In the hope to secure stable livelihoods and rise out of poverty, participants asked for assistance with housing, education and employment. Thus, they desired forward-looking assistance with lasting impact rather than immediate material support to relief their most pressing needs.

Structural support could have immense impact in contexts like eastern DRC where severely restricted access to resources prevents the sustainable reintegration of victims into host communities. Our results endorse the UN's efforts of supporting mothers through career building and income generating activities (e.g., job placement, professional and vocational training). PKFC - at a minimum - need to be supported through scholarships that cover their education fees, school materials and

uniforms. We expect livelihood opportunities to counteract the often reported downward spiral and poverty trap, which mothers experience when childrearing exacerbates hardships and forces them to engage in sex-work as a means of survival. Rehabilitative and transformative services could furthermore help additional societal goals by dismantling gendered stereotypes and structures that have fostered SEA in the past (Manjoo 2013).

The UN faces multiple barriers to providing compensation and accountability within the existing framework and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future. Recognizing this reality might mean employing justice mechanisms with higher consideration of victims (Blau 2016; Lambourne 2009). Restorative, rather than retributive, forms of justice emphasize victim-centred interventions, which are in line with the UN's most recent approach (De Greiff 2008; Freedman 2018). The push towards victims' reparations echoes developments in international human rights law that shift the focus from the prosecution of the implicated peacekeeper towards emphasis on repairing the harm caused to the victim (Mudgway 2016; Strang 2010). The testimonies shared above homogenously support a holistic approach to accountability, that focuses on assistance and mitigates the harmful consequences of SEA more directly. PKFC are not victims of SEA in the traditional sense, but they are children born of war, who suffer from fatherlessness and the related economic and social consequences. As such they require justice mechanisms that tackle their unique situation by providing them with the resources necessary to thrive as individuals (Baines and Oliveira 2020).

Increasing disbursements from the Trust Fund could ensure that the concerns of mothers and PKFC are accounted for. However, to grant specialized services to all victims of SEA, and those born as a result of it, financing of the Trust Fund needs to become a priority and exceed voluntary contributions of member states and payments withheld from peacekeepers against whom allegations have been substantiated (UN General Assembly 2017). Based on that, we advocate to further strengthen the focus on the Trust Fund and expand its current reach and infrastructure.

Ending Impunity

Ending impunity is directly linked to the effectiveness of mechanisms that mitigate harm and manage the consequences of SEA for affected victims (Hooper 2006). Evidently, convictions of perpetrators are sporadic under the UN's current legal infrastructure (Freedman 2018). Our data established that SEA and rearing of PKFC often remain unreported and that multiple barriers stand in the way of victims obtaining legal redress. The weak enforcement of policies through TPCCs creates a vacuum of jurisdiction and punitive measures that shields perpetrators from assuming responsibility for their actions and, ultimately, enables the continued perpetration of SEA by peacekeeping personnel against host community members (Akonor 2018).

It is the mandate of the VRA to ensure that victims can pursue paternity claims through "appropriate and timely judicial processes" (UN General Assembly 2017). Since the UN adopted a number of proposals from the SG's report to improve special measures for protection from SEA in 2015, the UN commits to completing initial investigations of allegations within a six-month time period (Mudgway 2016). However, extenuating circumstances and lengthy delays in conveying information to court systems often extend legal actions. The resulting timelines are inconsiderate of the urgency of victims needs and reinforce the harm inflicted.

Our results clearly show the need to amend investigation protocols. Paternity and child support claims are reliant on evidence, yet "bribing witnesses not to testify, to testify falsely or to obtain evidence is widely practiced" in DRC (Mandrup and Cold-Ravnkilde 2017, 4). According to a South African legal officer, before the National Investigation Team arrives to assess an allegation, "evidence often gets lost, and the names of witnesses can be difficult to identify" (Mandrup and Cold-Ravnkilde 2017, 4). The data presented contains serious allegations of falsified results and corruption interfering with paternity tests. This is extremely damaging to the social and emotional status of victims.

The immediate repatriation of implicated fathers has previously been reported to amplify mothers' difficulties in seeking child support, since it removes the alleged offender from local jurisdiction and effective prosecution in host countries (Smith 2017; Lee and Bartels 2019). Collective

repatriation of national contingents further obstructs the possibility to thoroughly investigate potential witnesses (Whalan 2017). Thus, repatriation needs to be revisited and calibrated towards the needs of victims. While it is vital that abusers leave the mission, delaying their repatriation until all necessary evidence has been collected might simplify some of the logistical difficulties of cross-border investigations (Whalan 2017). In the meantime, disciplinary measures should be imposed to prevent further misconduct.

The UN can only take limited action against personnel themselves. They can however exert political pressure on TPCCs to comply with the steps necessary to hold their defence leadership accountable (Freedman 2018). The 2017 annual report of the SG recommended that member states should withhold payment to TPCCs who do not promptly carry out investigations and transfer these resources to the Trust Fund (UN General Assembly 2017; Van Leeuwen 2019). While the General Assembly is yet to leverage this mechanism, we recommend that TPCCs who cannot uphold the UN's standards of conduct be required to financially supplement the victim assistance programs in order to maintain their engagement in UNPK missions and that future participation be conditional on improved accountability and support mechanisms.

### Improving Communication and Transparency

Communication with victims is key in rebuilding trust and designing effective remedies (De Greiff 2008). In line with existing research, our data indicates that information gaps are the main reason for victims' discontent with the UN's justice system's operations (Tamarit, Villacampa, and Filella 2010). The high rates of drawn-out cases and non-reporting in this study demonstrate that the operationalization of assistance was not easily accessible to victims. Moreover, it indicates that victims were at least occasionally denied their "right to information" or "right to access of justice", as specified under procedural laws (McGonigle Leyh 2011, 127). Internal protocols define the credibility of evidence and speed at which cases move forward, however, this guidance is often not available to victims, making it impossible for them to determine the fairness with which claims are assessed.

Currently victims of sexual abuse or exploitative sex-work are less likely to report paternity, since they often cannot identify the peacekeeper perpetrators or do not have the information that they believe necessary to verify their allegation. In the interest of non-discrimination, it is of critical importance that victims are made aware of their rights irrespective of their circumstances. Transparent information regarding what is required of victims to qualify for assistance could remove some of the discussed barriers and improve solidarity between victims.

Based on the data presented, the UN needs to be cognizant of the perceived reality that reasonably founded allegations have not always led to an investigation in the past. To rebuild victims' trust after past failures we suggest that local Conduct and Discipline Units proactively seek out mothers who might have been discouraged from taking legal action through prior mishandling of their cases.

#### Consulting Multi-Stakeholder Networks

Facilitating access to social services for victims requires the existence of these services, as well as budgetary and human resources for their maintenance (Whalan 2017). The UN emphasized its obligation to build "networks of support" through civil society organizations and local authorities that promote targeted response efforts (UN General Assembly 2017). Few of the women in this study were benefiting from local support services and providers. Those who did, acknowledged their positive impact and relevance to their situation. Thus, our study credits the UN's existing cooperation with local organizations in providing support projects which, with nationwide coverage, could significantly better the lives of victims and promote systematic monitoring of SEA through communities. In the interest of regaining and retaining victims' trust, the UN should, however, clearly communicate which partners work as facilitators of support.

Initiatives to promote community outreach and complaint reception mechanism are especially important in contexts like eastern DRC where SGBV is generally widespread and there is exhaustive demand for trauma-sensitive assistance (Maedl 2011). Thus, fighting conflict-related

sexual violence requires an integrated and coherent approach that is carried out in collaboration with local support services and implementing partners (Whalan 2017). This reinforces the transformative goals of structural support (Manjoo 2013).

The work of the VRA includes the mapping of support available to victims in countries with PKOs (UN General Assembly 2018; Connors 2020). We urge this mapping to consider countries with retired peacekeeping forces or areas where troops have been withdrawn to learn about the burden that local entities shoulder once UNPK leaves host state communities. It is vital that resident coordinators for victim support remain engaged after MONUSCO has been terminated and that plans for the continuation of outreach activities are introduced while the mission is still active.

## **Conclusion**

The article has engaged with recent debates regarding the consequences of sexual misconduct committed by UNPK personnel and contributed knowledge regarding the situation of mothers who conceived children with peacekeepers and the children born of these relations. This is the first study to explore the perspectives of PKFC through data collected with child participants and thus, contributes important information to what constitutes assistance “in the best interest of the child” (UN General Assembly 2008, 4). Our findings suggest that PKFC are a neglected and disadvantaged group who receive limited assistance from peacekeeper fathers despite the fact that they are often lacking the bare minimum for survival. The narratives shared highlight the impact of PKFC’s restricted access to economic resources on their health, safety, and self-actualization and bear witness to the ineffectiveness of UN victim support processes. While notable progress towards prioritizing a victim-centred approach has occurred in recent years, the operationalization of reforms on the ground remains woefully inadequate. Persistent effort and institutional changes are needed for transformative action to occur across the UN system and to shift the complex organizational dynamics that have enabled SEA in the past towards better protecting and serving local populations.



Based on our findings, we make the following recommendations to improve current practice: Placing victims at the forefront of matters related to SEA means providing them with immediate remedies and structural support. The Trust Fund is at the core of long-term support, therefore, increasing disbursement to the Trust fund is vital. The low success rate of paternity and child support claims undermines the UN's attempts to end impunity and take swift and decisive action. Protocols for investigations need to be amended so that unlawful conduct, lengthy delays and the repatriation of implicated peacekeepers do not interfere with collecting evidence and DNA testing. Greater transparency and information sharing about the operationalization of assistance might remove some barriers to reporting and help regain victims' trust. To promote sustainable response efforts, local support services and implementing partners should work with the UN on an integrated approach to SGBV that benefits victims of SEA once MONUSCO is no longer active.

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## **Chapter 9: Conclusion**

In this thesis, I have analysed the challenges of PKFC who grow up without their fathers in conflict-affected communities. Where UN PKOs are deployed, peacekeeper-civilian relations (consensual or exploitative/abusive in nature) develop, some of which result in pregnancies and children being born. The UNPK missions in the DRC have been associated with high numbers of allegations of SEA, and thus, the DRC is an important case to study when exploring the legacy of children fathered by UNPK personnel. Although the UN has acknowledged PKFC since 2005, policymakers, NGOs and academics have all but ignored them, and no reliable data on their situation exists. By analysing issues concerning PKFC's identity and well-being, the present research has contributed to establishing an evidence base dedicated to their situation.

### **9.1. Integrative Findings**

Drawing on the perspectives of 35 PKFC and 60 mothers, I have examined the assumption in previous academic work that PKFC are vulnerable to childhood challenges and exclusion from post-conflict societies (Martin 2005; Koyama and Myrntinen 2007). Following ideas from feminist post-colonial theory that are concerned with power relations, as well as from indigenous African philosophies that focus on human interactions, I assessed the relational aspects of identity and status (Lewis and Mills 2003; Udefi 2014; Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017). In order to understand how PKFC's surrounding affects their acceptance/exclusion, I have applied a socio-ecological model that shows interdependencies with families, communities, broader societal and international legal structures (Udefi 2014; Chilisa, Major, and Khudu-Petersen 2017). Considering the different layers (or ecologies) of their environment, I have conceptualised PKFC's place within families, communities, policy and programming. In documenting how their challenges relate to the social world around them, I have demonstrated the complexity of their situation and evidenced how the intersection of different identity-forming characteristics makes their childhood and adolescence difficult.

Through my research, I have identified several aspects of PKFC's heritage that present barriers to a 'normal childhood'. On the micro-level, I have considered PKFC's self-concept and sense of family and familial identity. According to my analysis, PKFC experience numerous challenges due to their fathers' absence and lack of patrilineal family connections. Intra-individually, the lack of knowledge about their provenance makes forming a coherent concept of family and identity difficult, which holds negative implications for self-esteem and well-being. Inter-individually, the inability to uncover paternal roots and family ties reduces PKFC's chances of acceptance and lineage making. This was found to complicate bonds with their mothers and occasionally led to abandonment, rejection, or neglect by maternal kin networks, causing some PKFC to compare themselves to orphans. Mothers' new partners occasionally represented a source of stigma, and stepfathers and siblings contributed to PKFC feeling alienated from the family unit. Due to their exhausted support mechanisms, PKFC engaged in wishful thinking regarding their relationships with their unknown fathers. A family drawing exercise disclosed that many held on to representations of family that were inclusive of absent peacekeeper fathers and centred around their desire to find them. Derived from comparisons with peers whose fathers contributed to their financial well-being, PKFC saw the pursuit of ideal-typical family relations (mother, father, child) as the route to happiness and financial security. Nonetheless, the possibilities of contact were minimal, and no PKFC was in touch with their father at the time of data collection. Hence, fatherlessness and impaired relationships with mothers and other family members present a barrier to their well-being.

On the meso-level, the social status of PKFC families was considered. Theories from stigma research informed my analysis of PKFC's struggles with integration into social networks and showed that most children and adolescents experienced frequent stereotyping and ostracising. PKFC named fatherlessness, poverty, racial prejudice, as well as transgenerational elements as contributing factors in their stigmatisation. Their social challenges were found to be exacerbated by economic deprivation, a condition that worsened when family support was withdrawn, and thus, loss of social status and financial insecurity mutually reinforced one another. This caused some PKFC to perceive themselves



as burdens on their mothers and households to whom the stigma extended (Neuberg et al. 1994; van der Sanden et al. 2014). Parallels in the stigma experiences of mothers and children suggested a bi-directional transmission of stigma between generations that negatively affected the mother-child relationship and caused feelings of guilt and shame among PKFC. While my assessment of social identity on the meso-level highlighted main drivers of stigmatisation that impacted the social stability of most PKFC, my analysis also hinted at an interplay of factors and significant within-group variation in the degree to which stigma was experienced.

This was further explored on the exo-level, where the diversity of personal accounts of stigma was related to external influences and societal expectations. In my analysis of status differences, I found that although most children and adolescents were severely marginalised, heavy stigmatisation did not affect all of them. In fact, some PKFC seemed to be granted opportunities and respect due to their heritage. Originating from this observation, I examined the cultural mechanisms behind social status to explain what caused the perception of these outliers. Based on an intersectional approach, I evaluated sources of acceptance and rejection to understand patterns and commonalities between PKFC. This showed that participants' racial provenance created social role expectations according to which PKFC with lighter skin colour were expected to have a higher living standard and abide by certain 'norms of whiteness'. My findings highlighted that enacting racial privilege (being 'white' and relatively wealthy) led to an elevated social status while failing to enact racial privilege (being 'white' and poor) led to stronger social stigmatisation. Hence, physical features that identified PKFC as bi-racial amplified status differences that originated from variation in participants' levels of poverty. If PKFC's anticipated living standard contrasted with reality, they became a target for societal rejection (Rudman et al. 2012). Hence, on the exo-level, my findings demonstrate the role of cultural norms and context in shaping PKFC's social identities.

On the macro-level, broader political structures and conceptual questions regarding how PKFC's rights are applied in international legal frameworks were considered. In order to inform a more victim- (and PKFC-) oriented approach to SEA, I conducted a needs analysis and discussed barriers to

paternity and child support. My results showed that the large majority of PKFC were resource-deprived and received no assistance from the UN, NGOs, or peacekeeper fathers. Moreover, many were caught up in a downward spiral of poverty and stigma that was driven by their mothers' need for sex-work to alleviate poverty. Of the PKFC and mothers interviewed, the large majority described limited access to food, shelter, healthcare, or other essential goods, a theme that was often referred to as suffering. Many PKFC experienced a violation of their right to education, equal opportunity, self-actualisation, and non-discrimination, and were exposed to child protection risks. My analysis on the macro-level therefore identified that UN support processes for victims did not adequately provide PKFC with assistance or safeguarding. Based on this, I suggested ways to remove obstacles to support and orientate existing policies on PKFC's needs.

The applied socio-ecological model has provided a holistic account of PKFC's challenges and promoted a better understanding of how their struggles filter into different aspects of their lives. Individually, each finding contributed essential information to a complex web of circumstances that makes PKFC vulnerable to adversity. Collectively, these findings present the first in-depth analysis of their complex identity and (lack of) place within society. The interconnectedness of PKFC's burdens has shown that different aspects of their marginalisation reinforce one another, highlighting the dynamic nature of social categorisations and intersectional disadvantage.

## **9.2. Strengths**

The strength of the present thesis lies in its interdisciplinary and intersectoral approach that has enabled narrowing the critical knowledge gap relating to PKFC. Despite the challenges inherent in interviewing vulnerable populations, I have contributed empirical data that addresses the gap in systematic research on their lived experiences. By putting PKFC at the centre of my analysis, the research has shifted the focus of discussions surrounding SEA from direct victims and perpetrators to the children whose needs have thus far been neglected by policymakers and academics.

### 9.2.1. Contributions

The thesis makes several original contributions. By exploring the circumstances of children who were fathered and abandoned by peacekeepers in eastern DRC, it provided notable *theoretical contributions* to debates on unintended consequences of UN peacekeeping (e.g., gaps in the UN's victims' rights approach), SVRP in the DRC (e.g., transgenerational themes of trauma) and CBOW research (e.g., intersectional disadvantage/privilege). The established database of 95 qualitative interviews constitutes a unique *empirical contribution* that consists of the to-date largest sample of mothers and, for the first time, involved PKFC in academic research. The applied interdisciplinary lens enabled an innovative approach to recruiting (SenseMaker) and interviewing participants (child-centred with elements of visual research) that accounts for a considerable *methodological contribution*.

Drawing on expertise across the academic spectrum, as well as media and NGO reports, I have consolidated the limited existing knowledge about PKFC and advanced academic scholarship in several areas. Situated at the intersection of discourse on CRSV and CBOW, the research confirmed that SEA has far-reaching and intergenerational consequences. By evidencing the struggles of mothers of PKFC with social integration, I have confirmed the previously observed relationship between SVRP and psychosocial difficulties (Burkhardt et al. 2016; Onyango et al. 2016; Scott et al. 2017). By demonstrating PKFC's challenges growing up (e.g., identity crisis, childhood adversity, stigmatisation, economic hardship, and rights violations), I have further confirmed the association between CBOW and childhood adversities (Carpenter 2007b; Lee 2017). Taking these results further, I have established that psychosocial problems in mothers and PKFC are interrelated since low social status cascades between generations and impacts the mother-child relationship. Since links between maternal and child mental health in conflict-affected settings are largely unexplored, this finding makes a significant contribution to the literature on CRSV in the DRC, as well as CBOW research.

In eastern DRC, where sexual violence has affected more than one-third of the population, the socio-cultural rejection of CBSV is a barrier to post-conflict reconciliation and an impediment to

sustainable peace (Johnson et al. 2010). A key aim of the present thesis was to examine the sociohistorical and cultural parameters that deny victims of CRSV or SEA integration into Congolese communities. Due to the lack of previous studies on PKFC, I have developed a socio-ecological model that summarised existing resources on CBOW to discuss this phenomenon and explain the societal influences that exclude PKFC from participating in society. I have shown that their adversities are in large parts relational, and they dynamically interact with societal expectations, cultural norms, and institutional and legal barriers. By drawing comparisons to other populations of CBOW, I have evidenced that PKFC share a broad range of identity-forming characteristics and experiences with them. I thus believe that the developed socio-ecological model is a useful theoretical instrument to explain the complex adversities of PKFC, which could inform research on CBOW more widely.

The thesis has added information to the security-related and socio-economic circumstances that allow SEA to flourish in peacekeeping spaces. I have found evidence that the willingness of local civilians to engage in sexual relations with peacekeepers was driven by power relations and the vast income disparity between civilians and peacekeepers that led to the perception that they were more suitable partners or clients than local men. In addition, becoming the mother of a bi-racial child with lighter skin was occasionally perceived as desirable due to anticipated improvements in material and social status. Yet, contrary to the expectation that having a child with a UN peacekeeper leads to upward social mobility, this outcome only became a reality when mothers received support from peacekeeper fathers; a scenario that constituted the absolute exception. This observation has added new information to the mechanisms that explain the rise in peacekeeper-civilian relations and feeds into discourse on the interaction of race and class in Congolese society.

Assessing the racial identity of PKFC whose physique differs from their peers, has highlighted challenges with identity formation. To my knowledge, this is the first study to focus on the racial identity of CBOW, who often are the only bi-racial children in their communities. Social identity theory postulates that social comparisons inform racial identity, and thus, a lack of racial reference groups may put a strain on a child's self-concept (Lewis 2001; Rogers and Meltzoff 2016; Cvencek et al. 2018).

The present thesis illustrates how central race is to the social identity of PKFC and thus, advances psychological theory on racial awareness in children who live in predominantly black settings. My analysis of race-based status differences in PKFC adds to an emerging body of literature that indicates the complexity of racial hierarchies in post-colonial settings where white racial identification may be linked to oppression. My findings are unique in demonstrating that the perception of whiteness causes disadvantage if the anticipated privilege ascribed to white identity diverges from reality. While this result is specific to PKFC, it is likely that 'white-poverty stigma' can be observed in other populations. Hence, the present study has enabled a conversation around race and class in post-colonial societies and made explicit the contextual terms and historic moment in which PKFC live. In this way, my research has not only illuminated the intersecting dimensions of PKFC's identity but discovered the interconnectedness of political and social processes that define the relationship between whiteness and poverty.

The thesis explored an underrepresented and un-researched group of conflict-affected children through a unique methodological proceeding, contributing the largest sample of qualitative interviews with mothers and first empirical research with PKFC to date. Access to PKFC was facilitated via their mothers who were recruited through a community-based cross-sectional survey using the innovative mixed-methods research tool SenseMaker. The fact that mothers participated in the research themselves and thus had a high degree of knowledge about the study enabled meaningful parental consent for PKFC to take part. Due to the broad and open qualitative interview style that incorporated elements of visual research, children as young as six could be included in the research. This shows that child-centred methods can be a basis to identify the views of very young participants, in spite of their linguistic and cognitive restrictions. Triangulating the information provided by PKFC with their mothers' perspectives has provided a nuanced picture of PKFC's life courses.

### 9.2.2. Impact

By illustrating the adversities of mothers and PKFC, I have evidenced the systematic failure of the UNSC to protect civilians and the inability of UN regulations to provide justice and accountability to victims. The far-reaching and transgenerational consequences of SEA for women who conceive children with peacekeepers show the moral and political urgency of making policies more victim-oriented and providing mothers and children with tangible forms of support. A key aim of this thesis was to better understand the challenges of PKFC and their mothers' obstacles of accessing support. Mapping the availability of services for PKFC, or lack thereof, is an important step in informing effective interventions for them, and thus the present research can help to tailor support programmes to their specific situation. By identifying the gaps in programmes that focus on PKFC, the thesis has delivered critical results for a thorough re-evaluation of the UN's victims' rights approach.

Being the first to document the perspectives of PKFC, the unique empirical contribution of this thesis has the potential to influence policymakers, practitioners in development policy and civil society actors in their efforts to advance opportunities for redress. The findings are not only of direct interest to the UN, its member states and donors, but may impact the capacity of NGOs and human rights organisations who work towards the safeguarding of children in conflict. To broaden the impact of my and make my research more readily accessible for different stakeholders, I have written four research papers that disseminate my findings. Hence, to facilitate the transfer of the knowledge generated in this thesis, I chose to present my results in an alternative-thesis format and divided them into four areas of focus that appeal to different audiences. The UN VRA has voiced interest in the research conducted with PKFC, and thus, there may be an opportunity to share my findings with the UN directly. This is especially important since the 2021 SG report on SEA states that UN leaders will soon hold a technical-level meeting to discuss solutions to paternity and child support (UN General Assembly 2021).

In 2020, the results of the larger research project have been presented back to Congolese community partners to receive input concerning the interpretation of results. Although these efforts

were interrupted by Covid19, this has advanced the drafting of additional publications that will be shared with Congolese community leaders and humanitarian organisations. Research outputs at a later stage will include a policy brief for key stakeholders, a website that disseminates joint results from research on SEA in the DRC and Haiti, presentations of the findings at international conferences, as well as media engagement. These outputs are anticipated to widen the network of those interested in the subject and contribute to developing new training materials for peacekeepers that heighten awareness regarding the consequences of SEA.

### **9.3. Limitations**

In spite of its many strengths, there are a few limitations inherent in this thesis. As a result of this investigation, no estimate for the prevalence of children fathered and abandoned by UN peacekeepers can be made. However, nearly all participants related their experiences to those of other PKFC families living in their proximity, suggesting that they are numerous. Despite drawing from a comparatively large qualitative sample, participants were selected purposively, and the research is not representative of PKFC in the DRC or elsewhere. Since the presented analyses are culturally sensitive, the findings are further limited in their generalisability. However, host countries of PKOs are often structurally similar with regard to socio-economic challenges, political fragility and gender norms and thus the results make valuable contributions to other settings. Future studies should compare the experiences of PKFC cross-culturally to determine the extent to which the discussed results are applicable to other geographical areas. Similarly, quantitative studies with standardised instruments should be conducted across different regions to establish an international repository of knowledge on PKFC.

The present thesis discussed the 'life courses' of PKFC, yet the research did not systematically differentiate between the experiences of children and adolescents and did not follow PKFC over time. Instead, a cross-sectional analysis of their situations was undertaken and trends and patterns for PKFC of different age groups observed. More controlled study settings and longitudinal research identifying

similarities and differences in the experiences of PKFC over time, including later stages of life, are necessary to provide a more comprehensive picture of their development.

My findings summarise the information provided by mothers and PKFC in 2018 but do not account for changes in their situation since then. For instance, the push of Tshisekedi's government towards free primary school education might have eased concerns around schooling for PKFC (Herrmann 2020). Similarly, the initiatives of the office of the VRA to provide PKFC families with livelihood support, education, and vocational training have increased significantly since 2018. It is thus possible that more mothers and children are receiving professional support and career-building opportunities now than at the time of data collection. Follow-up studies should regularly map the needs of SEA victims and the availability of services for them to determine the progress the UN is making in providing them with assistance.

The discussed interviews were relatively short and might have lacked some of the detail and richness traditionally afforded in qualitative research. This could be explained by the fact that participants were recruited in natural spaces (e.g., markets, bus stops) and had limited time to spend on the interviews, sometimes because toddlers or children required their attention. Since the qualitative interviews followed on from the SenseMaker survey, participants may have experienced a degree of interview fatigue or withheld details that they had already shared in the previous survey. Moreover, the question-answer format of the qualitative interviews may have been perceived to align less well with African epistemology and local forms of disseminating knowledge than the narrative approach of the SenseMaker survey, potentially limiting engagement in the follow-up interviews (Muwanga-Zake 2010; Oliveira 2016). Gender socialisation and local cultural norms in the DRC might have caused women to be hesitant and less used to talking publicly or sharing personal experiences surrounding culturally sensitive topics like sexual violence and abortion, leading to shorter answers and occasional missing data.

Related to the cultural authenticity of the research, I acknowledge certain biases inherent in my positionality as a non-Congolese, western researcher with Eurocentric views and beliefs about



identity, self-actualisation, race, and gender relations that may not have appreciated fully the participants perspectives about African value systems in interpreting the data. While I have taken steps to mitigate my biases, the thesis can only be understood in light of this limitation, as I reflect upon further in the next section.

#### **9.4. Ethical and Methodological Reflections**

This section elucidates ethical dilemmas arising from researching a sensitive topic like SEA within a Global South context as a Western researcher. I believe that being non-Congolese and European is not just part of the limitations but has a strong impact on the research as a whole, and therefore I have attempted to address my positionality as an epistemological issue throughout the thesis.

Pilot-testing of the surveys in the DRC has shown that the visibility of white researchers during the administration of the interviews was an obstacle to local participation; most likely since their presence was perceived as a link to the UN. Conducting or observing the interviews myself was therefore not possible as it might have distorted participants' responses or raised anticipations regarding the research outcomes. In addition, the security situation in eastern DRC did not allow me to travel to most of the study locations since my ethical clearance was bound to UK government advice concerning the level of risk involved in different regions. Not conducting the interviews myself had impacts, both positive and negative, concerning the quality of the obtained data. Although I listened to the audio files immediately after their upload was completed (to check length, sound quality and delivery style), linguistic barriers prevented me from assessing their content prior to translation, limiting my control over the collected information. To mitigate this limitation, extensive research training of the research assistants was delivered before the launch of the study. While this nonetheless might have impacted the rigour of the research, the cultural expertise of the research assistants provided a level of sensitivity that could not have been guaranteed by foreign researchers. This is reflected in the significant variation in length of the interviews, which indicates that research assistants responded to the unique needs of participants and prioritised their well-being and comfort

over other aspects of interview conduct, such as standardisation. This reduces concerns around the invasive nature of the interviews and the challenges of interviewing vulnerable groups. In fact, I would argue that interviewing mothers and PKFC was only ethical in light of the research assistants' prior experience working with victims of sexual violence in the DRC, and the psychological support offered through them<sup>67</sup>.

Due to the close collaboration with local partners, a relatively high degree of sensitivity towards local cultural norms was achieved. Yet, attention to power relations between the research team and study participants required much critical observation since even within the same cultural context, there were tangible power relations between research assistants and participants. Representing both insiders to Congolese culture and outsiders to the issues unique to participants, research assistants reported that finding common ground with the participants was challenging because of class differences and participants alarming levels of poverty. Despite the study not yielding financial rewards, participants sought out participation via snowballing and openly encouraged the research. Mothers voiced that it was beneficial to talk about their experiences since issues concerning sexuality, violence and abortions were taboo subjects in Congolese society, and the UN had proven itself unwilling to listen to their problems: *"I want to encourage the researching you are doing. It is not easy to get someone to listen to the problems we are facing."* (Mother, Beni, 36). Similarly, PKFC expressed their gratitude for the received attention, indicating that talking about their situation might have helped them alleviate distress: *"I want you to know that you did well to come and ask about my feelings"* (Boy, Goma, 12). Hence, despite a number of ethical risks (e.g., re-traumatisation) and trade-offs (e.g., lack of compensation despite levels of poverty), mothers and PKFC wanted to take part in the research; evidence that they should be considered active partners in conversations surrounding SEA.

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<sup>67</sup> The SOFEPADI research assistant were trained social workers and experienced in speaking with victims of sexual violence. They offered referrals to professional services and were equipped to provide emergency immediate assistance if necessary.

Conducting research in conflict-affected communities where the security situation remains unstable had further ethical implications regarding research epistemology and conduct. Due to the difficult research terrain, the study could not have been managed effectively without local partners. Field teams experienced several challenging situations, including a flare-up of insecurity in Beni, where a shooting between the state organisation FARDC and the rebel group ADF forced six researchers to hunker down for the night, causing great concern amongst all those involved and raising questions about the feasibility of evacuation. This situation vividly illustrated the value of being able to discuss next steps with a strong local entity that understands the research context and can navigate challenging scenarios. Careful planning and flexibility tailored to fit local consultancy helped mitigate and manage the risk of insecurities; however, a certain degree of exposure to safety hazards for fieldworkers remained. While the level of related risks for Congolese and non-Congolese researchers likely differs, tasking fieldworkers with research that requires individuals to travel to risk-affected areas is problematic<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, the relationship between the study's Global North-based design/budget and Global South-based implementation could be perceived to reflect elements of neo-colonialism that are to be seen critically<sup>69</sup>. However, not conducting research under the discussed contextual and relational conditions would also have had ethical implications that originate from the severe challenges of PKFC and their neglect to this day. I therefore believe that the research was conducted in the best possible way with a high level of critical reflexivity and consideration for both the participants and research assistants (Middleton and Cons 2014).

## **9.5. Policy Recommendations**

PKFC fall through numerous legal gaps and face cultural and political obstacles that reveal gross failure at communal, national and international levels to protect them. The perspectives gained in this thesis contribute to informing interventions for each of these gaps while drawing attention to how the

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<sup>68</sup> See Sukarieh and Tannock (2019) for further reflection on subcontracted research in humanitarian settings.

<sup>69</sup> See Marchais, Bazuzi, and Lameke (2020) for a Congolese perspective on western research in eastern DRC.

different dimensions of their hardship interact. Building on the practical implications outlined in my articles, I emphasise the following recommendations:

**Economic Support.** In the context of eastern DRC, where most civilians live in poverty, putting the needs and dignity of victims first clearly implies the provision of adequate and timely economic assistance. Across all interviews, income-generating support was identified as the most important tool for victims to rebuild their lives. Mothers requested vocational training that would teach them skills to provide for their families, attend to their children's needs and overcome their marginalisation. More precisely, they wanted to be engaged in livelihood projects (e.g., agricultural programmes, work with textiles or sales) that facilitate self-sufficiency and help them become productive members of society. Reinforcing recent UN activities financed by the Trust Fund, participants requested that all support programmes aiming at professional opportunities should include the starting capital necessary to put learned skills into practice, for instance through investing in sewing machines or plots of land (The Trust Fund for Victims 2020; UN General Assembly 2020). Such programmes were anticipated to work towards reconciling victims' relationships and reversing some of the stigma mothers and children were facing due to economic deprivation and family debt (Adams 2011).

It is often assumed that if support is provided to mothers of CBOW and their livelihoods improve, their children will also benefit (Lee 2017). Therefore, advocacy efforts typically consider CBOW vis-à-vis their mothers as indirect beneficiaries of support frameworks for women. While in many cases interventions and programs directed at mothers will have a positive effect on PKFC, my work has shown that this is not necessarily the case as some children are denied access to available household resources or no longer live with their mothers. I further argue that as PKFC grow up, assistance provided via their mothers becomes less relevant while assistance designed directly for them becomes more critical. In line with this, PKFC named support with school fees as their highest priority. While since 2020 all children in the DRC should have access to free primary school education, it is unclear whether the necessary infrastructure already exists to enable this. Yet, moving forward,

educational support for PKFC will primarily need to target secondary school education and vocational training courses. Attending to the educational needs of PKFC is particularly important since their lack of access to land and inheritance (which are traditionally passed on via male relatives) already impairs their chances of socio-economic stability. Unlike other CBOW, PKFC did not voice concern about sponsorship exposing their identities; likely because their heritage is well known in communities anyway (Denov and Lakor 2017). If high levels of stigma arose from providing PKFC with scholarships, boarding schools could be considered; however, this would increase family separation, as well as the risk of enforcing class division along racial lines.

Scholars have argued that with the transition from conflict to post-conflict societies, organisational structures of support for civilians often end while much of the hardship associated with the conflict remains (Denov and Lakor 2017). Relatedly, participants in this study were concerned that their chances of assistance would vanish once MONUSCO was to leave their area. Hence, mothers requested that the UN should *“take a heart to care for their children before the mission was over”* (Mother, 29, Bukavu). Ensuring that the support structures for victims of SEA stay in place after MONUSCO is terminated, and informing communities about this, is essential now that the UNSC has started withdrawing troops.

**Psychosocial Support.** Since economic deprivation is related to stigma and anxiety about how to get by, easing financial concerns might have a synergetic effect on psychosocial suffering. My analysis has shown that psychological difficulties for PKFC are linked to their mothers’ trauma and might be mediated by the mother-child relationship. Assisting mothers in addressing their mental health needs is therefore vital in preventing negative psychosocial consequences of SEA from transmitting to the next generation (Rouhani et al. 2015). Given the extremely high rates of stigma and alarming psychological symptoms (including suicidal ideation) found in PKFC, mental health services for children and adolescents are furthermore essential.

Despite their apparent need for psychological support, specialised trauma-sensitive care may not be realistic in resource-deprived communities where a large percentage of the population has been affected by conflict. It has thus been argued that in (post)-conflict settings where the health care infrastructure to treat sexual violence survivors with individual counselling is not available, service providers should prioritise relational aspects of mental health and offer group-based integrated care (Anderson and Van Ee 2019; Van Ee and Blokland 2019). In the context of the DRC, research with sexual violence survivors has further indicated that group therapy sessions may lead to better mental health outcomes than individual therapy, speaking to the importance of interpersonal relationships in Congolese society (Bass et al. 2013). Group sessions may thus represent a cost-effective approach to nurturing psychosocial well-being in mothers. I suggest that group therapy sessions should be offered on a regular basis in different locations in eastern DRC to enable mothers to discuss their challenges. Similarly, peer-to-peer initiatives for PKFC should be launched to create a safe space for them where they can share their insecurities and develop a sense of belonging and community that facilitates self-acceptance and fosters a positive identity in them. Peer-based support could further help PKFC organise themselves collectively and strengthen their voice as a group. This has been rated highly by CBOW in other African settings, where researchers found a strong desire for collective recognition (Denov et al. 2020; Provost and Denov 2020). UN funding for these sessions should have an integrated travel budget to reimburse mothers and PKFC for any costs arising from attending network sessions.

Based on my research, I further recommend adding family mediation to the UN-provided ‘immediate support’ (provided within 24 to 72 hours of reporting an allegation), especially in instances of maternity (UN Protocol 2019). In the DRC, families and spouses have a huge part to play in supporting sexual violence survivors to consider their options regarding the termination of SVRP. Moreover, the acceptance of survivors by their families is essential in mitigating psychological symptoms, economic hardship and community stigma (see Kelly et al. 2012” ‘If your husband doesn’t humiliate you, other people won’t”). In an effort to prevent spousal abandonment and the rejection of victims by their families and communities, time-sensitive support should (on an optional basis)

include family members so that they can address their concerns regarding maternity and childbirth and be educated about ways to cope with the perceived 'betrayal'<sup>70</sup> and stigma by association.

**Community Sensitisation.** Since the stigma attached to sexual violence is deeply entrenched in Congolese culture, I recommend increasing the focus on community-based work that promotes social reconciliation. Local radio or media adverts<sup>71</sup> raising awareness regarding sexual violence could increase the visibility of CBOW and work towards improved reporting, deterrence, and prevention of SEA (Neudorfer 2014). Given the importance of religion in Congolese society, church groups or religious NGOs could play a role in promoting pathways of acceptance by including survivor-positive messages in services and outreach programmes (Rouhani et al. 2015). Improved knowledge about the situation of women with SEA-related pregnancies might help civilians make more informed decisions regarding sexual relations with peacekeepers. To improve the well-being of PKFC, educational workshops on the topic of CRSV and SEA could be implemented in schools by teachers, community leaders, NGO workers or UN personnel. Reportedly, in Rwanda the school curriculum includes discourse on children born of genocidal rape that has shown positive effects in mitigating stigma and discrimination (McEvoy-Levy 2007). Including similar lessons in the DRC could be a cost-effective approach to fostering acceptance of PKFC and sensitising future generations towards issues of equality and social justice. In conjunction with NGOs, theatre- and youth groups, MONUSCO's CDU has previously organised a series of events to raise awareness regarding the potential consequences of sexual relations with UNPK personnel (Kuate and Biongo 2017; UN General Assembly 2021). I suggest expanding these campaigns to addressing paternity and involving mothers and PKFC in their organisation.

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<sup>70</sup> Victims of SEA may be perceived to be in breach of local norms (marriage/fidelity) even though the SEA was forced or coerced (Wagner et al. 2020).

<sup>71</sup> Media campaigns raising awareness of the hardship of sexual violence survivors and CBSV were found to be rated highly in their effectiveness of discouraging stigma in Sierra Leone (Baldi and MacKenzie 2007).

Relatedly, peacekeepers appear to have little knowledge of the impact SEA-related pregnancies have on local civilians. Despite country-specific training on gender, they often degrade or dehumanise female civilians, creating a permissive environment for SEA (Whalan 2016). Training for UN personnel should emphasise the circumstances within which civilians exercise consent and raise concern for the potential consequences of unplanned pregnancies in fragile economies (Lee and Bartels 2019b).

**Legal Support.** PKFC exist in a protection and accountability gap that constitutes a human rights failure (Whalan 2016; Dowds 2018; Neenan 2018). My research has shown that in spite of recent developments designed to strengthen the focus on victims, the measures in place to provide justice and reparations to them are wholly inadequate. While the support and reintegration work provided through the Trust Fund reflects progress in the delivery of resources, these services have not yet been comprehensively implemented, exclude PKFC born of consensual sexual relations and do not address the children's right to know and be cared for by their parents.

The re-orientation of UN policies and regulations towards PKFC should be resolved from the bottom-up, in consultation with the mothers and children on whose behalf they were implemented. To date, very little information regarding how paternity is established and child support enforced has been made public. To be accountable for peacekeepers fathering and abandoning children, UN statistics need to become more coherent and transparent. This could be achieved through impartial investigators who oversee progress and decision-making in paternity cases and provide data on the outcomes of claims (King, Lee, and Bartels 2020). Greater information sharing regarding how many children are receiving support and what that support looks like is necessary so that victims feel actively encouraged to pursue claims and understand the procedures (and barriers) in place. In my research, all women who reported paternity to the UN bemoaned the lack of information about the progress of their claims. An easy way to go about this would be to schedule follow-up appointments when an allegation is raised.



Academic researchers have highlighted the benefits of mandatory DNA testing for peacekeeping personnel prior to deployment to confirm or refute paternity claims immediately when they arise; however, after 15 years of debating a DNA databank as the ‘gold standard’, this method has still not been implemented<sup>72</sup> (e.g., Blau 2016; Deen 2017). While a DNA databank is imperative in addressing future claims and urgently needs to be explored, it cannot provide accountability retrospectively for PKFC whose fathers no longer work for the UN. I suggest that for pending cases in which the DNA of the child has already been provided, analysing this genetic material concerning its ethnic components could be considered a victim-friendly alternative. This would not solve paternity and child support claims (which are considered to be the individual responsibility of peacekeepers) but would provide additional evidence of foreign heritage<sup>73</sup> and thus may help build a case of eligibility to assistance from the Trust Fund (*National Post* 2015 p.1).

Due to the very small likelihood of PKFC to have a legal identity and the related challenges with social security, access to education and civic participation, I recommend that the UN should establish a birth registration system that documents the legal age and (where possible) dual nationality of children. While this does not reduce the UN’s other responsibilities towards PKFC, it might help scale back child protection risks, help PKFC make sense of their identity and open up the possibility of travel to their fathers’ home countries as they get older (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2018; The Fund for Global Human Rights 2017; Wheeler 2020).

## **9.6. Areas for Future Research**

The presented information has made various contributions; nonetheless, research on PKFC is in very early stages, and considerable gaps in knowledge remain. In the following, I want to draw attention to two areas that are unexplored in the current resource base.

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<sup>72</sup> Peacekeepers’ privacy rights and the anticipated discomfort of member states with such a policy have been noted as reasons for this (Villaverde 2015; Blau 2016).

<sup>73</sup> The goal here would not be to prove a specific nationality but to substantiate non-Congolese heritage.

As with other CBOW, a significant number of PKFC are born from non-violent sexual relations like dating, longer-term relationships or marriage (Simić and O'Brien 2014; Lee 2017). However, no information exists as to whether the nature of the parental relationship is an indicator of the challenges PKFC face. This is problematic when considering PKFC's right to support. To date, the fate of children conceived in consensual relationships (sexual relations that do not involve a form of transaction or payment) has entirely been ignored by the UN whose policies focus exclusively on victims of SEA and their children. By including children born of SEA in protocols for victims, the UN denies the broader category of PKFC their right to acknowledgement and assistance. To avoid this, I propose designing a framework for PKFC that is separate from SEA and adopts a more neutral terminology like 'peacekeeper-fathered children'. To inform this framework, I encourage future studies to cast light on how the needs of children conceived in consensual, exploitative, or abusive circumstances may differ.

Relatedly, the perspectives of peacekeepers regarding SEA-related pregnancies and their role as fathers have not yet received any attention. The lack of policy guidance for children born of consensual sexual relations has painted a picture according to which peacekeeper fathers are perpetrators. I argue that this narrative (which originates from problems with the ZTP) is not the most conducive in encouraging peacekeepers to disclose paternity. It is possible that without the blanket ban of all sexual relations or the fear of immediate repatriation, the 'tradition of silence' within the UN would be weakened. In my research, I have found evidence that some peacekeepers initially showed interest in being involved in their children's lives. In one instance, a peacekeeper tried to take his PKFC to India, an attempt that was prevented by a local court order. This shows that irrespective of where peacekeepers sit on the partner-perpetrator continuum, some may be willing to secure their children's well-being but may be incapacitated by UN regulations that make admitting fatherhood not only costly (may result in repatriation and other disciplinary consequences) but ineffective (chances of custody are low). I therefore suggest that future research should explore in more detail the role of peacekeeper fathers and their paternal rights as foreign nationals who conceive children in host

states. Information about how to report fatherhood and what to expect from it should also be included in peacekeeper training.

## 9.7. Closing Remarks

The UN is determined to work towards better measures for protection of the local population in host countries, yet tackling sexual misconduct remains one of the biggest challenges for UNPK today. Since 2017, the UN SG and VRA have put genuine effort into prioritising victims' needs, however, thus far, these efforts have failed to provide the majority of mothers and PKFC with assistance. This thesis has directed attention to the serious impact this failure has on the lives of PKFC, whose rights and well-being are currently being compromised. Given their fathers' absence and the related challenges with social stability in strongly patriarchal societies, specific measures are needed to transform their life courses. The final chapter has laid the foundation for policy action that addresses their marginalisation and provided starting points for future research. These steps can help promote the inclusion of PKFC and help achieve more sustainable solutions for them.

Born between war and peace, PKFC are central to transitional justice agendas and are connected to conflict in a unique way. Since their needs are in large parts attributable to the consequences of western intervention, ensuring their well-being is a UN responsibility that is vital to Global South perspectives on UNPK: *"MONUSCO has to take responsibility for these children because they are suffering. They should live up to their words. They don't do anything, yet they are still here."* (Mother, 39, Beni).

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## Appendix A: Interview Guides

### MONUSCO Qualitative Survey Mothers

My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a part of a group of researchers from Solidarité Féminine Pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), the Marakuja Kivu Research Group, the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom and Queen's University in Canada. We are trying to better understand the relationship between UN peacekeepers and local community members here in DRC and in particular the perspectives of women raising children fathered by peacekeepers. This interview builds on a survey we conducted recently. Your participation is voluntary, and you have the option not to answer a question or to end the interview at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be associated with you now or in the future. The discussion will last for approximately 60 minutes. Do you agree to be interviewed?

1. To begin the interview, I would like to ask you about your background. Please tell me about yourself and your family. (Probes: *How old are you? Are you currently married or have a partner? How many children do you have? How long have you lived in this area? How do you spend most of your days?*)
2. You indicated that you have had intimate relations with someone who works for the UN. Can you please tell me about the circumstances of this interaction (Probes: *What led to the interaction? How old were you at the time? Did you choose to have sexual relations with the involved UN personnel? Were you promised food/money/goods or something else in exchange for having sexual relations? Did you use a condom or any other form of contraception? How many sexual interactions did you have with this man? In your opinion, who was responsible for the incident or who initiated the intimate relations?*)
3. I understand that you have a child who was fathered by a UN personnel. Can you please tell me about the circumstances surrounding the birth of this child (Probes: *When did you realise that you were pregnant? How much uncertainty was there about the identity of the father or the time of conception? What was your initial reaction towards the pregnancy? Did you consider terminating the pregnancy? YES> Why did you decide to continue the pregnancy? What were your concerns for the future and for the child's future?*)
4. Thank you. I now understand your situation after learning about this pregnancy. Can you please tell me how other people reacted to this pregnancy and later to the child? (Probes: *What was the reaction of your friends and family to the fact that you were impregnated by a UN personnel? What is their attitude towards you and your child now? To what degree do they support you?*)

*How has your involvement with UN personnel changed the way people in your community perceive or treat you, if at all? How has it affected your social status or your value in their eyes? To what degree does your community stigmatise you because you have a child outside marriage? To what degree does your community stigmatise you because you have a child fathered by a foreigner? How do you feel about the way people in your community treat you and your child?*

*Questions added in case women are in a new relationship:*

*How often is your past involvement with UN personnel a topic of discussion or dispute in your new relationship? How does your partner feel about you having a child fathered by a UN personnel? How is the relationship between your partner and your child? To what degree does he accept your child? To what degree does he treat your child as his own?*

5. What can you tell me about the child's father? (*Probes: What do you know about him? Do you know his nationality or age? Do you know his position within the UN or how long he was employed in the DRC? What is your current relationship with him? Is he aware of the child's existence?*)

*YES> When did you tell him about the pregnancy or about his son/daughter? What was the father's reaction to the pregnancy/child? How did you want him to deal with the pregnancy/his paternity? To what degree does he help support you in raising your child, financially or otherwise?*

*Did you report him to local authorities or other UN personnel?*

*YES> What was the response of the person you reported the incident/relationship to? Were you offered any assistance or support by this person? In your opinion, what would an appropriate response to your report have looked like?*

6. Can you please tell me what the child knows about his / her biological father? (*Probes: Does the child know that his/her father was not Congolese? Does the child know that his/her father worked for the UN?*)

*NO> What is the child's understanding about his/her father?*

*YES> How did the child find out about his/her father? Do you think this was a defining moment in his/her life? Did you consider hiding the fathers' identity from your child in order to protect him/her? Does the child know about the nature of your relationship with his/her father?*

*How have you handled discussions with your child about his / her father? Do you think it would be in the best interest of your child to know more about his/her biological father? To what degree would you like your child to be in touch with his/her father? Does your child self-identify as being Congolese, as the father's nationality, both, etc.?*

7. We just talked about how family and community reacted to you after you gave birth to a child fathered by a UN peacekeeper. Now I would like to hear about the family and community's reaction to your child. (*Probes: To what degree is your child accepted? Does your child face stigma because of who he/she is? Do you believe that your community treats your child differently because of who he/she is? Does he/she stand out as a result of having different colored skin? Is he/she perceived as having a higher or lower social status than his/her peers? If so, does this result in different treatment? Are you aware of people calling him/her derogatory names? Do you believe that your child is more or less accepted by your community than you are?*)
8. It would be great if you could help me understand some of your child's characteristics and describe your relationship with your son/daughter. (*Probes: What is your child's gender? Is your child in school? How old is the child currently?*)

How would you describe your child? How do you think your child self-identifies? Who are the most important and influential people in your child's life? Overall how do you think your child is feeling? To what degree does your child seem sad, anxious, or angry? Does your child act out, misbehave or become violent? To what degree do your child's emotions reflect your own attitude towards life? To what degree do you struggle to provide for your child?

*How would you describe your relationship with your son/daughter? How difficult or easy is it to look after your child? To what degree do you feel connected to your child? How often are you overwhelmed with the stress, responsibility and financial implications of having a child? Do you often think about the child's father or the events that have led to pregnancy when interacting with your son/daughter? What meaning do you give to your child?*

9. Have you sought assistance to help with financial and other child-rearing responsibilities? (*Probes: From the child's father? From your family? From the church or community? From the UN? From other NGOs? From local authorities?*)

YES> *What has been the response and what sort of assistance have you received?*

Are you aware that the UN has a policy through which women raising children fathered by UN peacekeeping personnel can seek assistance? (*Probes: Has anyone ever mentioned this policy/assistance to you?*)

No> *In what way would it be easiest for you to receive such information? Radio? At church? From local NGOs?*

YES> *Do you know of any women raising children fathered by UN peacekeepers who have tried to get assistance through this policy? YES> Can you comment on their experiences?*

10. What services and assistance would be most helpful? (*Probes: To you? For your child? For other women and children who are in a similar situation?*)

11. What are your greatest concerns? (*Probes: For you? For your child? For women and girls living in areas that host peacekeeping missions?*)

What are your hopes for the future (*Probes: For you? For your child? For women living in areas that host peacekeeping missions?*)

12. Is there anything else that you would like to bring up before we close the interview or is there anything you would like to know about the work we are doing?

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and we believe the information you provided will be very valuable in helping women and girls in similar situations. If you would like to request support services because of the experiences we talked about today, you may follow up with SOFEPADI using the number provided on the card. If you know of any other women who have children fathered by a UN peacekeeper and who might be willing to share their story, we would be very thankful if you could introduce us.

*If child is between 6 and 12:* Lastly, we are interested in asking your son/daughter some questions intended to understand his/her perception of family and friends. We will show him/her a photo of UN personnel and ask his/her opinion about the picture. We will not question your child about his/her father being a peacekeeper, nor will the interview reveal this information to him/her if

he/she does not know. We believe that in order to better meet the needs of children in similar circumstances, it is very important to understand their experiences in growing up. The conversation with your son/daughter will last for approximately 15 minutes and can take place now or in the next few days. You are invited to be present at the time of the interview. Do you agree to have your child interviewed if he/she also agrees to participate? When would this be most convenient for you and him/her?

*If child is between 13 and 19:* Lastly, we are interested in asking your son/daughter some questions intended to understand his/her perception of family and the influence that having a peacekeeper father has had on his/her life. We believe that in order to better meet the needs of children in similar circumstances, it is very important to understand their experiences in growing up. The conversation will last for approximately 30 minutes and can take place now or in the next few days. Do you agree to have your child interviewed if he/she also agrees to participate? When would this be most convenient for you and him/her?

## MONUSCO

### Qualitative Survey PKFC 6 – 12

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a part of a group of researchers who want to learn about the life of people here, their families and friends, and I am hoping that you will help me with that. Your mother gave permission for you to talk to us, but you can decide for yourself if you want to talk to me. No one will know whether you decide not to talk to me, and we can stop the conversation at any time. Because I am not going to take your name, where you live or anything else that would let others know we talked, you don’t need to worry about others knowing what you say. I will audio record your responses to make sure that I collect the information correctly. Our conversation will last for about 15 minutes. If it is ok with you, I am now going to ask you some questions about your family and friends. Do you agree to talk to me?”

1. To begin, I would like to ask you to draw a picture of your family. Please take as much time as you need and use the paper and colored pencils in front of you. *Probes: (pointing at one person) “Who is this person? Can you tell me something about this person? (pointing at two individuals) “Can you explain to me how they know each other? Do they live together? Why do they not live together?”*
2. This is a great picture, thank you! *Then point towards each individual and ask: Who is this person? Can you tell me something about this person? (ask for the age of the child and the age of his/her siblings while talking about them)*
3. *In case there is no man in the picture: Can you explain to me why there is no dad in your picture? How does this make you feel?*
4. *In case there is a man in the picture: Point at him and the child’s mother and ask how they know each other? (Probes: Do they live together? NO>Can you explain to me why they do not live together?)*
5. *In case there are siblings: How do you get along with your brother(s)/sister(s)? (Probes: How do they treat you? How much do you fight? What do you fight about?)*

6. I am now very interested to learn about your friends and other people in your community. *(Probes: Can you tell me who your best friend is and what you like about him/her? Do you have many friends, or do you prefer to play alone or keep to yourself? Are there children in your community or at school that pick on you or bully you? YES>How do they pick on you or bully you? Why do you think they do that?)*
7. Some people might think that you are different or more special than other children in your community. Do you know why they might say that? *(Probes: How do you think you are different or more special? How does this make you feel?)*
8. I will now show you pictures and would like to know what you think of them. Remember that you do not have to answer if you don't want to and there is no right or wrong answer. *(Show pictures of boys - Probes: Do you like the pictures? Why do you like/dislike the pictures? Show pictures of girls - Probes: Do you like the pictures? Why do you like/dislike the pictures?)*



You did a great job. This was my last question. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about yourself or is there anything you would like to ask about me?

## MONUSCO Qualitative Survey PKFC 13+

“My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I am a part of a group of researchers from la Solidarité Féminine pour la Paix et le Développement, MARAKUJA Kivu Research, the University of Birmingham in the UK and Queen’s University in Canada. We are trying to better understand the relationship between UN peacekeepers and community members in this area. This conversation builds on the discussion we had recently with your mother. Your mother gave

permission for you to talk to us, but you can decide for yourself if you wish to participate. During the interview, you are free to skip any questions that make you uncomfortable, and you can end the discussion at any time you choose. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be associated with you now or in the future. That means that I am not going to take your name or any other information that would identify you. I will audio record your responses to make sure that I collect the information correctly. Our discussion will last for approximately 30 minutes. Do you agree to be interviewed?"

1. To begin the interview, I would like to ask you about your background. Please tell me about yourself and your family. (Probes: *How old are you? Are you currently married or have a partner? Do you have children? What is your living situation? Have long have you lived in this area? How do you spend most of your days?*)
2. I am interested in learning more about your perceptions of your family, especially your father. (Probes: *What do you know about your father? Are you currently in contact with your father or has there previously been contact?*)

*YES>Who established contact? How often have you been in touch? How much contact would you like to have with him?*

*NO>Would you like to be in contact with your father? What would you like to know about him or what would you like your father to know about you?*

*How do you feel when you think about your father? What do you think of the UN and the work they are doing here? How do you feel about the fact that your dad worked for the UN? What is your understanding of why your father left? How do you feel about him leaving? When you are older, would you like to be similar to your father?)*

3. Could you describe your relationship with your mother? (Probes: *How close do you feel to your mother? How much do you think she cares about you? How often does she seem angry or overly stressed at you? How frequently do feel like you are causing her trouble or pain? To what degree is your relationship with your mother different from some of your friends' relationships with their mothers? Does it sometimes bother you to be seen or associated with your mother? When you are older, would you like to be similar to your mother?*)

*In case there are siblings: To what extent do you think your relationship with your mother is different from your siblings' relationship with your mother? Do you sometimes feel like your mother prefers them over you or you over them?*

4. Some people may think that you and your mother are different or special because of who your father is. Is this something that you have noticed? (Probes: *How often do you think people in your community treat you differently because of who your parents are? In what ways do they treat you different? How does this make you feel? How much do you feel you belong or fit in to your community?*)

*How often are you picked on or mocked for being of mixed-race? To what extent are people jealous of you because of how you look or who your dad is? Do you think that you are more / less popular than other people in your community? Do people show you more / less respect than they do others because of how you look and who your father is? Do others ever call you names related to your family background? YES>Can you tell me about those names?)*

5. If you could send a message to your biological father, what would you want to say to him?
6. Do you know other people your age who have similar relationships with their biological fathers? (Probes: YES>*Do you know other young people fathered by UN peacekeepers? Do you talk to them about their experiences?*)
7. Is there anything else that you would like to share or anything you would like to ask about the work we are doing here?

Thank you for your participation. You did a great job and the information you provided is very valuable. If what we spoke about today upsets you or if you would like to request support services because of the experiences we talked about today, you may follow up with SOFEPADI using the number provided on the card. If you have any questions about the interview, SOFEPADI can help you contact us.

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French, Kiswahili, and Lingala versions available upon request

## **SENSEMAKER Survey**

### **INTRODUCTION**

You are invited to participate in a community survey conducted by Solidarité Féminine Pour la Paix et le Développement Intégral (SOFEPADI), the Marakuja Kivu Research Group and Queen's University to better understand the relationship between UN peacekeepers and local women and girls. The purpose of the survey is to understand how the lives of women and girls have been affected by the presence of UN peacekeepers and to identify if particular challenges arise as a result of their presence.

### **INFORMED CONSENT**

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to share a story related to a prompting question. You then give the story a title and answer some questions about it. There are no right or wrong answers. At the end we ask for information about your age, sex, marital status, and education level. We will *not* collect any information that will identify you or that can be traced back to you. Everything is completely anonymous.

Please don't share any people's names in your story. If by accident we obtain any information that could identify you or be linked to you, we will keep it confidential.

Your participation is voluntary. Whether you participate or decline to participate will not in any way affect the aid or services that you receive now or in the future. Although there is no direct financial or other compensation offered at this time, we believe that the results of this project will be useful for better understanding the needs of local community members and will help us to better meet those needs.

If you have any questions or would like more information about this research, you can contact Mr. Aimable Lameke, local project coordinator, by phone at [REDACTED] or by email at [REDACTED]. You may also contact the principal investigator, Dr. Susan Bartels, by email at [REDACTED].



If you have any concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Albert Clark, Chair of the Queen's University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board at [REDACTED] or via email at [REDACTED]

Your signature (checking the box) indicates that you understand the above information and agree to take part in this survey. Please understand that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty, and that, by signing, you are not waiving any legal claims or rights. Your participation should take approximately 20 minutes, you can decline to answer any specific questions that make you uncomfortable and we can end the interview at any time at your request. Before proceeding, you can ask any questions about what it means to give informed consent.

I understand and agree to participate ☐

#### NARRATIVE PROMPTS:

Read the following three phrases and decide which one interests you most. Please tell a story about your chosen phrase.

1. Think of a woman or girl who lives near this UN base. Share a specific story that illustrates the best or worst thing for her because of living near the base.
2. Think of a woman or girl who has interacted with UN personnel in your community. Share a specific example of a positive or negative experience that she has had as a result of her interaction with a UN personnel.
3. Think of a woman or girl in this community. Tell a story about how the presence of UN workers has helped or harmed her.

Story

Please give your story a title:

---

#### TRIADS:

To answer the question, use your finger to drag the indicator in each triangle to a position that best describes the experience shared in the story. The closer the indicator to any one corner, the stronger that quality is in the context of the experience. If a triangle topic does not relate to your experience or you prefer to not answer the question, check the Not Applicable box by pressing on it with your finger.

Before we get started, let's do a quick warm up exercise. Imagine you just told someone



about your experience with the last meal you ate. Thinking about that experience, click and drag the indicator in the triangle below placing it in a way that best describes your experience. So for example, if your last meal had a lot of meat, then you would drag the indicator to the meat extreme. Now you try...

For your last major meal, what did you eat: fufu, meat, vegetables?

Do you have any questions about how the triads work?

**Triad 1:** This story is about: 1. Poverty, 2. Lack of protection / governance, 3. Gender inequality

**Triad 2:** In this story, the foreign UN or MONUSCO personnel was: 1. In a position of authority, 2. Able to offer protection, 3. Able to offer financial support

**Triad 3:** Was the nature of the interaction in the story: 1. Voluntary.... 2. Business/transactional.... 3. Sexual

**Triad 4:** In the story, it would have helped the woman or girl most to have had support from: 1. The UN or MONUSCO, 2. NGOs or civil society organisations, 3. Local Chiefs and communities

**Triad 5:** In this story, who was responsible for the events: 1. UN or MONUSCO, 2. Individual girl / woman, 3. Community or family

**Triad 6:** The events in the story were in the best interest of...  
1. Family..... 2. Girl / woman.... 3. UN personnel

**DYADS:**

Position the indicator on the scales where it best describes the experience you shared. If a question is not applicable to your experience, check the Not Applicable (N/A) box.

**Dyad 1:** The interaction and relations you shared in the story were...  
Entirely initiated by the foreign UN or MONUSCO personnel ..... entirely initiated by the woman or girl

**Dyad 2:** In the story shared, the peacekeeping mission...  
Provided the girl / woman with too much protection and safety ..... put the woman / girl at risk and in danger

**Dyad 3:** In relation to the woman or girl in your story, those in power ....  
Did absolutely nothing to support her .... provided her with too much support

**Dyad 4:** As a result of the interaction with the UN, the social status for the woman or girl in your story was ...  
Improved too much ..... diminished too much

## STONES:

Think about the woman/girl in the story you shared and select the choices that relate to her experience. Drag the corresponding indicators into the rectangle placing them where they best represent your perspective. Leave any choice in the list that doesn't apply to your experience.

1. Based on the story shared (add arrows to illustrate the continuum)....:

Y – axis = Harmful to helpful

X – axis = Involuntary to voluntary

Stones: transactions with UN personnel, personal relationship with UN personnel, financial security, change in social status, sexual relations, having a baby/child

2. Based on the story shared (add arrows to illustrate the continuum)....:

Y-axis = Negative to positive

X-axis = Unnecessary to necessary

Stones: UN presence, protection of rights, presence of local police and authorities, gender equality, access to UN grievance process, intervention of community leaders

## MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS:

Please answer the following questions as each relates to your shared story.

1. Who is the story about?

About me

About someone in my family

Someone else I know

Something I heard or read about

Prefer not to say

2. How often do events in the story occur in your community (choose ONLY 1):

Rarely

Occasionally

Regularly

All the time

Not sure

3. What is the emotional tone of this story (choose ONLY 1):

Strongly negative

Negative

Neutral

Positive

Strongly positive

Prefer not to say

4. How does your story make you feel (choose up to 3):

Afraid

Angry

Disappointed

Embarrassed  
Encouraged  
Frustrated  
Good  
Happy  
Hopeful  
Indifferent  
Relieved  
Sad  
Satisfied  
Worried  
Not sure

5. For the woman or girl in the shared story, the outcome was.....

Entirely fair  
Somewhat fair  
Neutral  
Somewhat unfair  
Completely unfair  
Not sure

6. What was the nationality of the UN personnel in the story (choose up to 3)?

Bangladesh  
Democratic Republic of Congo  
Egypt  
Ghana  
India  
Nepal  
Morocco  
Pakistan  
South Africa  
Senegal  
Sierra Leone  
Tanzania  
Uruguay,  
Other [write in box]  
Don't know

7. What was the role of the UN or MONUSCO personnel?

Armed soldier  
Unarmed soldier  
Civilian who works with the UN (doesn't wear a uniform)  
UN Police  
Worked for an NGO rather than the UN  
Other  
Don't know

Please answer the following questions as they relate to you.

8. What is your age (choose ONLY 1):

Under 13  
13 - 17  
18 - 24  
25 – 34  
35 – 44  
45 – 54  
55 – 64  
Aged 65 or older  
Prefer not to say

9. What is your sex (choose ONLY 1):

Female  
Male  
Other \_\_\_\_\_  
Prefer not to say

10. What is your marital status?

Married  
Living with partner  
Separated  
Divorced  
Widowed  
Single never married  
Prefer not to say

11. I'll read you a list of 5 items that some people have at home. Please tell me *which* of these you or your household owns. Your household consists of people who sleep under the same roof and eat the same meals. Chose as many as your family has:

- 1) radio
- 2) mobile phone
- 3) refrigerator or freezer
- 4) vehicle such as a truck, a car or a motorcycle
- 5) generator, inverter or a sun panel that provides electricity to your home.
- 6) None of the above

12. What is the highest level of schooling that you have completed (choose ONLY 1)?

None  
Some primary school  
Completed primary school  
Some secondary school  
Completed secondary school  
Some technical training  
Completed technical training  
Some university

Completed university,  
Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
Prefer not to day

Thank you for participating. Please hand the iPad back to the research assistant.

**Research Assistant Questions:**

1. In what area was this interview conducted?  
Beni / Buni  
Bukavu  
Goma  
Kinshasa  
Kisangani  
Lumbubashi
2. Which category (group) does this participant belong to (choose ONLY 1)?  
Woman or girl raising a peacekeeper baby  
Woman who had sexual relations with member of UN but no peacekeeper baby  
Woman or girl who experienced sexual violence or sexual exploitation by the UN but no peacekeeper baby  
Female community member no sexual relations with member of UN  
Male community member not directly affected  
Community leaders (religious leaders, teachers, and healthcare providers)  
Other \_\_\_\_\_
3. Was this story:  
About a peace baby  
Mentioned a peace baby  
Neither
4. Was this story:  
About sexual relations with member of UN  
Mentioned sexual relations with member of UN  
Neither
5. Was this story:  
About sexual abuse and exploitation by MONUSCO  
Mentioned sexual abuse and exploitation by MONUSCO  
Neither
6. Was this story:  
About other wrongdoing by MONUSCO  
Mentioned other wrongdoing by MONUSCO  
Neither
7. Would you flag this story for translation and further analysis because it is une histoire de valeur (a story of value) with rempli détails?

Yes  
No  
Not sure

8. What story number was this for the participant?

1<sup>st</sup>  
2<sup>nd</sup>  
3<sup>rd</sup>  
4<sup>th</sup>

9.. Interviewer comments

END / SAVE  
SAVE/TELL ANOTHER STORY

## Appendix B: Evidence of Ethical Approval

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### QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES & AFFILIATED TEACHING HOSPITALS RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD (HSREB)

#### HSREB Initial Ethics Clearance

September 19, 2016

Dr. Susan Bartels  
Department of Emergency Medicine  
Kingston General Hospital

**ROMEO/TRAQ: #6019042**

**Department Code: EMED-242-16**

**Study Title: Relationship Between MONUSCO Peacekeepers and Local Congolese Communities**

**Co-Investigators: Dr. A. Bunting, Dr. S. Lee, Dr. A. Goebel, Dr. S. von Hlatky**

**Review Type: Delegated**

**Date Ethics Clearance Issued: September 19, 2016**

**Ethics Clearance Expiry Date: September 19, 2017**

Dear Dr. Bartels,

The Queen's University Health Sciences & Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (HSREB) has reviewed the application and granted ethics clearance for the documents listed below. Ethics clearance is granted until the expiration date noted above.

- Protocol – September 13, 2016
- SenseMaker Survey
- Qualitative Survey
- Information/Consent Form – September 13, 2016

#### Documents Acknowledged:

- Cover Letter – September 14, 2016

**Amendments:** No deviations from, or changes to the protocol should be initiated without prior written clearance of an appropriate amendment from the HSREB, except when necessary to eliminate immediate hazard(s) to study participants or when the change(s) involves only administrative or logistical aspects of the trial.

**Renewals:** Prior to the expiration of your ethics clearance you will be reminded to submit your renewal report through ROMEO. Any lapses in ethical clearance will be documented on the renewal form.

**Completion/Termination:** The HSREB must be notified of the completion or termination of this study

through the completion of a renewal report in ROME0.

**Reporting of Serious Adverse Events:** Any unexpected serious adverse event occurring locally must be reported within 2 working days or earlier if required by the study sponsor. All other serious adverse events must be reported within 15 days after becoming aware of the information.

**Reporting of Complaints:** Any complaints made by participants or persons acting on behalf of participants must be reported to the Research Ethics Board within 7 days of becoming aware of the complaint. Note: All documents supplied to participants must have the contact information for the Research Ethics Board.

Investigators please note that if your trial is registered by the sponsor, you must take responsibility to ensure that the registration information is accurate and complete.

Yours sincerely,



Chair, Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

*The HSREB operates in compliance with, and is constituted in accordance with, the requirements of the TriCouncil Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2); the International Conference on Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice Consolidated Guideline (ICH GCP); Part C, Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations; Part 4 of the Natural Health Products Regulations; Part 3 of the Medical Devices Regulations, Canadian General Standards Board, and the provisions of the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA 2004) and its applicable regulations. The HSREB is qualified through the CTO REB Qualification Program and is registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). Federalwide Assurance Number: FWA#:00004184, IRB#:00001173*

*HSREB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion or decision.*





**QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY HEALTH SCIENCES & AFFILIATED TEACHING HOSPITALS  
RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD (HSREB)**

**HSREB Renewal of Ethics Clearance**

September 20, 2017

Dr. Susan Bartels  
Department of Emergency Medicine  
Kingston Health Sciences Centre – KGH Site

**ROMEO/TRAQ #: 6019042**

**Department Code: EMED-242-16**

**Study Title: EMED-242-16 Relationship Between MONUSCO Peacekeepers and Local Congolese Communities**

**Review Type: Delegated**

**Date Ethics Clearance Effective: September 19, 2017**

**Ethics Clearance Expiry Date: September 19, 2018**

Dear Dr. Bartels,

The Queen's University Health Sciences & Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (HSREB) has reviewed the application. This study, including all currently approved documentation has been granted ethical clearance until the expiry date noted above.

Prior to the expiration of your ethics clearance, you will be reminded to submit your renewal report through ROMEO. Any lapses in ethical clearance will be documented below.

Yours sincerely,

Chair, Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

*The HSREB operates in compliance with, and is constituted in accordance with, the requirements of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2); the International Conference on Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice Consolidated Guideline (ICH GCP); Part C, Division 5 of the Food and Drug Regulations; Part 4 of the Natural Health Products Regulations; Part 3 of the Medical Devices Regulations, Canadian General Standards Board, and the provisions of the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA 2004) and its applicable regulations. The HSREB is qualified through the CTO REB Qualification Program and is registered with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP). Federalwide Assurance Number: FWA#:00004184, IRB#:00001173*

*HSREB members involved in the research project do not participate in the review, discussion, or decision.*



REPUBLIQUE DEMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO  
MINISTRE DE LA SANTE PUBLIQUE  
COMITE NATIONAL D'ETHIQUE DE LA SANTE  
- CNES -



Créé par l'Arrêté Ministériel n°1250/CAB/MIN/S/ZKM/043/MC/2006 du 18 Décembre 2006  
N° d'enregistrement au U.S. Department of health and Human Services (HHS): IORG0008558/ IRB,  
Federalwide assurance (FWA): 00026293

DIRECTION PROVINCIALE DU SUD-KIVU

COMMISSION D'ETHIQUE DE RECHERCHE BIOMEDICALE ET  
COMPORTEMENTALE(CERBC)

Bukavu, le

14 JUN 2018

Au Docteur SUSAN A. Barthel ;  
MPH, Department of Emergency Medicine  
Kingston Health Sciences Center – KGH Site  
Université Queens de Canada.

**Concerne :** Approbation Ethique de votre Projet de Recherche portant sur « La relation  
entre la MONUSCO et la Population en République Démocratique du  
Congo»

Docteur,

Le Comité Provincial d'Ethique de la Santé du  
Ministère de la Santé de la République Démocratique du Congo a bien reçu votre demande  
d'approbation éthique du protocole du projet introduit par le Directeur de MARAKUJA  
asbl dont l'intitulé est repris en marge et vous en remercie.

Après avoir évalué minutieusement tous les aspects  
éthiques et scientifiques de votre projet selon les lignes directrices nationales d'éthique de la  
recherche impliquant des êtres humains du Ministère de la Santé de notre pays et  
conformément à la décision du CNES n° 001/CNES/SR/03/2015 du 13 mars 2015 exigeant  
aux investigateurs œuvrant dans le secteur de la santé de soumettre leurs études à  
l'évaluation éthique, le Comité Provincial d'Ethique de la Santé a donné son approbation  
éthique à cette étude sous le numéro : CNES 001/DP-SK/119PM/2018.

Il autorise son déroulement en République  
Démocratique du Congo pour la période allant du 15 Juin 2018 au 31 octobre 2018.

Veuillez agréer, Docteur l'expression de nos  
sentiments les meilleurs.

Visa du Directeur Provincial du CNES

Dr. KYEMBWA SAFARI Israël

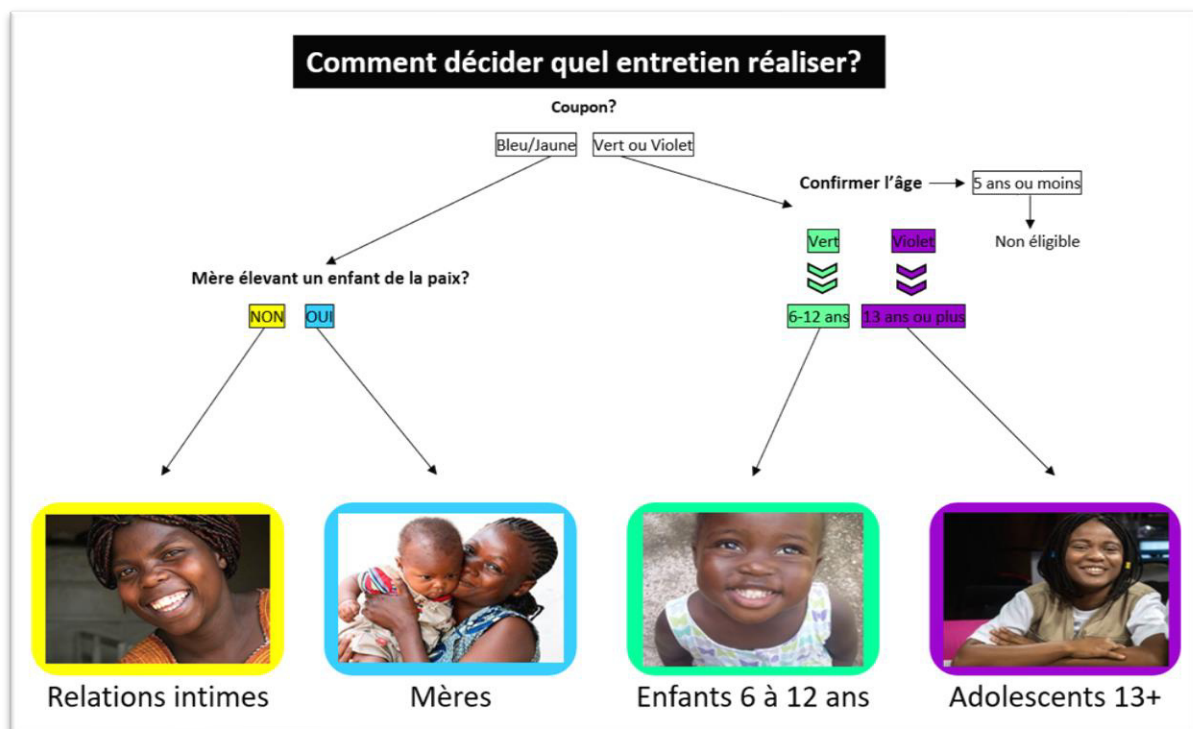


Président de la CERBC

Professeur KITOKA MOKE

Bureau : Av. Boulevard No 2, Bâtiment de l'Agence aux frontières - Labotte  
Tél : +243 821 649 733, +243 977 409 815  
E-mail : [dnecnes.sudkivu@gmail.com](mailto:dnecnes.sudkivu@gmail.com)

## Appendix C: Material for Research Assistant Training (French)





Avant de réaliser un entretien avec un participant, il faut décider quelle feuille d'entretien doit être utilisée. Même si tous les entretiens de suivi ont des structures et procédures similaires, il y a quatre versions d'enquête avec différentes questions. Selon les expériences de la personne qui va être interrogée, le chercheur doit décider quel entretien est le plus adapté.

1. Enquête pour les femmes/filles qui ont eu des **relations intimes** avec le personnel de l'ONU mais qui n'élèvent pas un enfant né de ces relations.
2. Enquête pour les **mères** qui ont eu des relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU et élèvent actuellement (ou ont élevé auparavant) un enfant né de ces relations.
3. Enquête pour les **enfants** (âgés de 6 à 12 ans) qui sont nés de relations intimes entre les Casques Bleus de l'ONU et des femmes congolaises.
4. Enquête pour les **adolescents** (âgés de 13 ans et plus) qui sont nés de relations intimes entre les Casques Bleus de l'ONU et des femmes congolaises.



Relations intimes



Mères

### 1<sup>ère</sup> Génération

Participant (de 13 ans et plus) qui ont eu des relations intimes avec les Casques Bleus de l'ONU



Enfants 6-12 ans



Adolescents 13+

### 2<sup>ème</sup> Génération

Participants ou participantes (de 6 ans et plus) qui ont un père Casque Bleu et une mère congolaise

**Relations intimes:** Ce groupe rassemble des participantes (de 13 ans ou plus) qui ont été identifiées par l'étude SenseMaker comme ayant eu auparavant des relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU. Les femmes/filles de ce groupe seront encouragées à la fin de l'entretien à inviter d'autres femmes/filles ayant des relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU à participer.

SEULES les participantes à l'étude SenseMaker peuvent être admises à participer à ces entretiens. Les femmes/filles qui affirment avoir eu des relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU mais qui n'ont pas encore participé à l'étude SenseMaker seront premièrement demandées de le faire avant de mener les entrevues en profondeur.

**Mères:** Ce groupe rassemble les participantes (de 13 ans ou plus) qui ont été identifiées par l'étude SenseMaker comme ayant un enfant né de relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU. Les femmes/filles de ce groupe seront encouragées à la fin de l'entretien à inviter d'autres femmes/filles ayant des enfants de Casques Bleus à participer.

Les femmes/filles qui affirment avoir un enfant né de relations intimes avec le personnel de l'ONU mais qui n'ont pas encore participé à l'étude SenseMaker seront premièrement demandées de le faire avant de mener les entrevues en profondeur.

## Comment interroger les participantes du groupe “relations intimes” et “mères”?

### Avant l’entretien:

- Regarde le bon et vérifie si la participante est éligible pour le groupe « relations intimes » ou « mères ».
- Si pour quelques raisons il n’est pas certain que l’individu soit éligible pour le groupe « relations intimes » ou « mères », le chercheur doit aborder la participante de la manière suivante :

*« Merci de votre intérêt pour me parler. Avant de vous expliquer le contenu de l’entretien, je voudrais vous demander quelques questions qui vont m’aider à identifier quel entretien est le mieux adapté pour vous. »*

1. *« Quel âge avez-vous ? »*  
➤ Si la participante a 12 ans ou moins, elle ne sera pas interrogée.
2. *« Est-ce que vous avez eu des relations intimes avec quelqu’un qui travaille pour l’ONU ? »*  
➤ Si la participante répond NON, elle ne sera pas interrogée.
3. *« Est-ce qu’en ce moment vous élevez un enfant qui est né de ces relations ou est-ce qu’avant vous vous êtes occupée d’un enfant qui est né de relations intimes avec le personnel de l’ONU ? »*  
➤ Si la participante répond OUI, le chercheur peut continuer avec l’entretien « mères ». Si la participante dit NON, elle devra répondre à la question suivante :
4. *« Est-ce que vous avez parlé à l’un de mes collègues ces derniers jours ? »*  
➤ Si la participante dit OUI, le chercheur peut continuer avec l’entretien « relations intimes ». Si la participante dit NON, elle ne sera pas interrogée.



*« Merci d’avoir partagé ces informations avec moi. Maintenant, je vais vous expliquer la procédure et le contenu de l’entretien. »*



*« Malheureusement vous ne remplissez pas les conditions pour participer à cette étude. Je m’excuse pour le dérangement et je voudrais vous remercier pour votre intérêt pour notre recherche »*

- Il est crucial que la section d’introduction de l’entretien soit communiquée en totalité pour être sûr que les participantes ont compris leur rôle dans le processus de recherche et puissent donner leur consentement éclairé (voir l’exemple ci-dessous). SEULS les individus, qui ont donné verbalement leur accord à être interrogé, peuvent participer.

Mon nom est \_\_\_\_\_. Je travaille pour [SOFEPADI] ou [Marakuja Kivu Research] et fais partie d’un réseau plus vaste incluant [Marakuja Kivu Research] ou [SOFEPADI], Queen’s University / Canada et University of Birmingham / UK. Nous essayons de mieux comprendre la relation entre les soldats de paix de l’ONU et les membres de la communauté locale....

**Consentement**

Acceptez-vous d’être interviewé ?

- Les entretiens feront l’objet d’un enregistrement audio. Avant d’allumer l’enregistreur, les consignes suivantes devront être communiquées :

*« Merci d’accepter de passer cette entrevue. Alors je vais maintenant allumer l’enregistreur, puis enregistrer votre numéro d’identification, et aussi vous demander encore de confirmer que vous voulez être participante »*

Allume l’enregistreur et rassure-toi que ça enregistre bien, enregistre le numéro d’identification du participant qui est mentionné sur le coupon et ensuite demande le consentement. *« Acceptez-vous d’être interviewé ? »*

### Pendant l'entretien :

Les enquêtes par entretien contiennent plusieurs domaines de question qui sont indiqués par des numéros. Le chercheur est prié de parler au moins de la **question principale** de chaque domaine avec la participante. Les questions écrites entre parenthèses et en *italique* sont des sondages que le chercheur est encouragé à poser afin de guider la conversation et de poursuivre son enquête sur les réponses de la participante (voir l'exemple ci-dessous). Cependant, le chercheur est flexible quant à poser ces questions et devra décider selon le contexte de chaque entretien si les sondages sont significatifs. Si une participante a déjà donné une réponse approfondie à la question principale et si on peut supposer que poser les sondages n'apportera pas de nouvelles informations, il n'est pas obligé de les poser.

4. Quelle a été la réaction de votre famille et de votre communauté au fait que vous avez eu des relations sexuelles avec un membre de la MONUSCO ? (Sondages : *Est-ce qu'ils le savent ? Est-ce que vous faites face à la stigmatisation en conséquence ? Si oui, pouvez-vous donner un exemple ? Dans quelle mesure êtes-vous soutenu par votre famille ? Par votre communauté ?*)

Dans le cas où les participantes paraissent excessivement bouleversées ou mal à l'aise, on leur proposera de faire une pause et on peut leur demander si elles préféreraient passer la question ou arrêter l'entretien.

### Après l'entretien :

Il est écrit sur chaque feuille d'entretien comment finir l'entretien et remercier la participante d'avoir accordé son temps. Selon si la femme/fille fait partie du groupe « relations intimes » ou « mères », elle est invitée à recruter de nouvelles participantes pour l'étude.

Il sera demandé aux participantes du groupe « relations intimes » et « mères » de transmettre à d'autres femmes/filles qui avait eu des relations intimes avec un agent de MONUSCO, l'intérêt de participer à un entretien. Pour réaliser ces entretiens, il faudra donner les coordonnées.

Il sera également demandé aux participantes du groupe « mères » de transmettre l'intérêt de participer à un entretien à leur fils ou à leur fille qui a été conçu(e) par un Casque Bleu de l'ONU. En se reposant sur les instructions sur la feuille d'entretien, il sera demandé aux mères de donner leur autorisation parentale pour que leur enfant soit interrogé et il sera discuté quand et comment un entretien avec l'enfant peut avoir lieu.

Il est important de s'assurer que l'enfant qui va potentiellement être interrogé soit au courant de l'identité de son père. Si vous avez un doute si cela est le cas, les questions suivantes devront être posées :

*« Est-ce que votre enfant sait que son père n'est pas congolais ? Est-ce que votre enfant sait que son père travaillait pour l'ONU ? (Le cas échéant) Est-ce que votre enfant sait que votre nouveau partenaire n'est pas son père biologique ? »*

Si la participante répond NON à l'une de ces questions, son enfant ne sera pas interrogé. Il est prévu que les enfants plus petits soient interrogés immédiatement.

Pour tous les enfants/adolescents qui ont été identifiés comme étant éligibles pour la participation, les mères qui ont donné leur autorisation parentale recevront un coupon qui permettra aux enfants de passer les entrevues si ils le veulent bien. Selon l'âge de son enfant, ce coupon sera soit de couleur verte (de 6 à 12 ans) ou violette (13 ans et plus).



*« Cette une invitation à participer à notre étude pour votre enfant dont le père est un Casque Bleu de l'ONU. Je serais reconnaissant(e) si vous pourriez lui donner ce coupon et parler de l'étude à votre fils/fille. Il est essentiel, dans le cas où votre enfant souhaite participer, qu'il/elle me redonne le coupon quand il/elle demandera un entretien. »*

Avant de donner le coupon, le chercheur a donc besoin d'écrire le numéro d'identification de la mère sur le coupon de l'enfant.





### Pendant l'entretien :

Les enquêtes par entretien contiennent plusieurs domaines de question qui sont indiqués par des numéros. Le chercheur est prié de parler au moins de la **question principale** de chaque domaine avec la participante. Les questions écrites entre parenthèses et en *italique* sont des sondages que le chercheur est encouragé à poser afin de guider la conversation et de poursuivre son enquête sur les réponses de la participante (voir l'exemple ci-dessous). Cependant, le chercheur est flexible quant à poser ces questions et devra décider selon le contexte de chaque entretien si les sondages sont significatifs. Si une participante a déjà donné une réponse approfondie à la question principale et si on peut supposer que poser les sondages n'apportera pas de nouvelles informations, il n'est pas obligé de les poser.

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### Après l'entretien :

Il est écrit sur chaque feuille d'entretien comment finir l'entretien et remercier la participante d'avoir accordé son temps. Selon si la femme/fille fait partie du groupe « relations intimes » ou « mères », elle est invitée à recruter de nouvelles participantes pour l'étude.

Il sera demandé aux participantes du groupe « relations intimes » et « mères » de transmettre à d'autres femmes/filles qui avait eu des relations intimes avec un agent de MONUSCO, l'intérêt de participer à un entretien. Pour réaliser ces entretiens, il faudra donner les coordonnées.

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Avant de donner le coupon, le chercheur a donc besoin d'écrire le numéro d'identification de la mère sur le coupon de l'enfant.



## Comment interroger les participants du groupe « enfants de 6 à 12 ans » et « adolescent de 13 ans et plus » ?



**Enfant de 6 à 12 ans:** Ce groupe comprend des participants et des participantes âgés de six à douze ans qui ont donné un coupon vert pour participer. Le coupon indique qu'une mère, qui a récemment participé à un entretien, a demandé à son enfant de participer et a donné son consentement éclairé à la participation de son enfant. Ainsi, le coupon identifie l'enfant comme ayant le droit de participer.

SEULS les enfants âgés de six à douze ans avec un coupon seront interrogés. Les enfants âgés de moins de six ans ou sans coupon ne seront pas interrogés, même s'ils affirment avoir un père Casque Bleu de l'ONU.

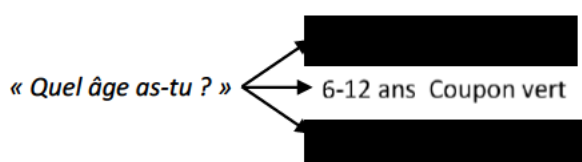
**Adolescents de 13 ans et plus:** Ce groupe comprend des participants et des participantes de 13 ans ou plus qui ont donné un coupon violet pour participer. Le coupon indique qu'une mère, qui a récemment participé à un entretien, a demandé à son enfant de participer et a donné son consentement éclairé dans ce but. Ainsi, le coupon identifie l'adolescent(e) comme ayant le droit de participer.

SEULS les adolescents avec un coupon seront interrogés. Les adolescents sans coupon ne seront pas interrogés, même s'ils affirment que leur père est Casque Bleu. Les participants de ce groupe sont attendus d'avoir entre 13 et 20 ans.

### Avant l'entretien :

Pour les individus du groupe « enfants » et « adolescents », le processus de classification sera simple puisqu'ils apporteront le coupon que leurs mères auront reçu précédemment. Les coupons identifient le groupe d'âge de l'individu et signifie que l'autorisation parentale a été obtenue. Cependant, le chercheur devra confirmer l'âge de l'enfant avant de commencer l'entretien pour s'assurer qu'aucun participant âgé de moins de six ans ne soit inclus et qu'il n'y ait aucune confusion pour d'autres raisons.

« Merci d'avoir voulu parler avec moi. Avant de t'expliquer ce que nous allons faire dans la prochaine demi-heure, je voudrais te poser une question » :



Même si l'autorisation parentale a été obtenue, c'est le rôle du chercheur de s'assurer que l'individu lui-même se sente à l'aise de participer à l'étude. C'est pourquoi, la section introductive de l'étude doit être communiquée en totalité, et le dictaphone doit être allumé avant d'obtenir le consentement verbal. SEULS les individus qui ont donné leur consentement verbal à être interrogés peuvent participer.

Similaire à l'interview avec les mères, le numéro d'identification doit être enregistré avant de commencer l'interview.



### Pendant l'entretien:

Les entretiens pour les « enfants » et les « adolescents » sont similaires à ceux pour les participantes au groupe « relations intimes » et « mères » et contiendra de nouveau des **questions principales** et des **sondages**.

- Dans la première partie de l'enquête « enfants », il sera demandé aux participants de dessiner leur famille et de dire au chercheur qui fait partie de cette famille. Le chercheur doit encourager l'enfant à partager des informations à propos de chaque personne sur le dessin et doit poser des questions sur les relations entre la mère et le père selon les instructions dans l'enquête.
  - Svp! Prenez une photo du dessin et demander l'enfant si vous pouvez la garder (faites la collecte des dessins et donner les a Susan à la fin de l'étude). Les photos doivent être téléchargées au « Dropbox » quand vous avez eu cette chance.
- Dans la dernière partie de l'enquête « enfants », il sera demandé aux participants de regarder des photographies d'enfants qui parlent avec des Casques Bleus de l'ONU et de partager leur opinion à propos de la scène sur l'image. Chaque chercheur qui conduit des entretiens de suivi recevra une copie plastifiée des photographies. C'est la responsabilité du chercheur d'avoir ces photographies à disposition quand cela est nécessaire.

Dans le cas où les enfants ou les adolescents paraissent excessivement bouleversés, on leur proposera de faire une pause et on peut leur demander s'ils préféreraient passer la question ou arrêter l'entretien.

### Après l'entretien :

Il est écrit dans chaque enquête comment terminer l'entretien et remercier les participants de nous avoir accordé leur temps. Il NE sera PAS demandé aux participants du groupe « enfants » et « adolescents » de transmettre l'intérêt de participer à l'entretien à d'autres.

N'oubliez pas d'éteindre le dictaphone à la fin de chaque l'entretien, d'enregistrer le dossier correctement et de donner une carte de référence à toutes les participantes !

### **Réponses aux questions qui pourraient surgir :**

1. Qu'est-ce que vous essayez de faire/ quel est le but de votre recherche ?

Nous essayons de mieux comprendre la relation entre les Casques Bleus de l'ONU et les membres de communautés locales. C'est pourquoi, nous recueillons des histoires et des opinions à propos du travail de l'ONU et nous écoutons les expériences que les gens d'ici ont eu avec le personnel de l'ONU. Ensuite, nous allons partager nos résultats et notre compréhension de l'attitude des congolais envers l'ONU avec d'autres afin d'encourager une conversation sur les aspects positifs et négatifs du maintien de la paix pour qu'ainsi les missions puissent être potentiellement améliorées.

*(Si les participants souhaitent en savoir plus, ils peuvent appeler le numéro figurant sur la carte de référence ou envoyer un email à [REDACTED])*