

Evaluating Trauma-Informed Psychosocial Group Interventions for Former Child Soldiers' Mental Health in Gulu, Uganda

Julius Okello¹, Grace Akello², Sarah Adoch^{2,3}
Robert Opiyo^{3,4}

Busitema University | Department of Interdisciplinary Studies, Busitema University | Kyambogo University,
Kampala | Makerere University, Kampala

Correspondence: jokello@hotmail.com

Received: 11 December 2013 | Accepted: 11 March 2014 | Published: 08 May 2014 | DOI:
[10.5281/zenodo.18944200](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18944200)

ABSTRACT

{ "background": "The enduring psychological impact of armed conflict on former child soldiers in Northern Uganda represents a critical public health challenge. While psychosocial interventions are widely implemented, there is a paucity of survey-based research evaluating structured, trauma-informed group models within post-conflict community settings.", "purpose and objectives": "This study aimed to evaluate the perceived effects of a specific trauma-informed psychosocial support group programme on the mental health outcomes of former child soldiers in Gulu District. It sought to measure self-reported changes in symptoms of post-traumatic stress, depression, and social functioning.", "methodology": "A cross-sectional survey was administered to a purposive sample of programme participants. The survey utilised a structured questionnaire incorporating adapted, validated scales for psychological distress and open-ended items for qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively and inferentially, while thematic analysis was applied to qualitative responses.", "findings": "Participants reported significant reductions in key mental health symptoms, with 73% indicating a marked decrease in intrusive traumatic memories. Qualitative analysis identified the normalisation of experiences through shared narrative and the development of peer support as central therapeutic mechanisms. However, a minority reported heightened distress during initial sessions.", "conclusion": "The findings suggest that trauma-informed group interventions can be an effective component of mental health support for this population within a community-based framework. The model's emphasis on safety, peer connection, and cultural relevance appears to facilitate recovery.", "recommendations": "Programme implementers should integrate phased screening for readiness and provide additional individual support for those initially destabilised by group work. Policymakers should allocate sustained funding for longitudinal outcome monitoring and facilitator training to ensure intervention fidelity.", "key words": "trauma-informed care, psychosocial support, former child soldiers, mental health, Uganda, group intervention, post-conflict", "contribution statement": "This study provides novel empirical evidence from participant perspectives on the specific mechanisms and outcomes of a structured trauma-informed group model for former child soldiers in a real-world community setting, filling a significant gap in

Keywords: *post-conflict mental health, psychosocial interventions, former child soldiers, Northern Uganda, trauma-informed care, African Great Lakes region, war-affected youth*

Article Highlights

- Survey reveals 73% of participants experienced reduced intrusive traumatic memories.

Programme Implications

Findings support integrating phased readiness screening and individual support alongside group work to mitigate initial

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Normalisation of experience through shared narrative identified as key therapeutic mechanism.• Minority reported initial distress, highlighting need for phased screening and individual support.• Study provides novel empirical evidence on trauma-informed group models in real-world settings.	<p>distress for a minority of participants.</p> <p><i>This study evaluates participant-reported outcomes of a specific community-based intervention.</i></p>
--	--

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

This is an abstract-only publication. The complete research paper with full methodology, results, discussion, and references is available upon request.

REQUEST FULL PAPER

 **Email:** info@parj.africa

Request your copy of the full paper today!

SUBMIT YOUR RESEARCH

**Are you a researcher in Africa? We
welcome your submissions!**

Join our community of African scholars and share
your groundbreaking work.

 **Submit at:** app.parj.africa



Scan to visit app.parj.africa

Open Access Scholarship from PARJ

Empowering African Research | Advancing Global
Knowledge