UNIVERSITY OF GÖTEBORG

Department of Social Work

International Master of Science in Social Work

Disqualified: Ex-child soldiers' journey back home with stigma and trauma

A study on the social reintegration challenges of Nepalese ex-child soldiers

Abstract

The aim of the study is to understand the social and psychosocial factors that hinder social integration of the ex-child soldiers returned from the civil war that lasted for 10 years in Nepal. The study highlights the findings that the ex-child soldiers came across difficult psychological and social challenges – mainly in the form of social stigma and personal trauma. The Study brings together theoretical discussion on how social stigma marginalizes ex-child soldiers and creates a social coercion between the ex-child soldiers and family and general society. The study also highlights that apart from the physical rehabilitative support in the form of resources, training and education; there stands a huge need of providing psychosocial support to attain the psychological resilience.

Through the interview with key informants, ex-child soldiers and FGD with caseworkers, the study found out that the participants have sustained social stigmatization mainly through labelling and stereotyping as disqualified, unable to contribute to society, dangerous or deviant and threats to social order and cohesion. The perception of self-labelling and social labelling has created the identity of 'disqualified' and has resulted them to be out of access to many social integration services provided by the help organizations. The post traumatic expression during interview have been observed among the ex-child soldiers in the form of anger and anxiety and feeling of loss and deception when they were termed as disqualified and sent back home with little life opportunities.

The study highlights the insufficiency of the coherent and sustained services to attain rehabilitative, developmental and life changing opportunities even if the contribution made by help organizations, UN and the government is praiseworthy. I particularly highlight the fact that attainment of political goal of peace and stability overshadowed the need to support the ex-child soldiers. Lastly, the study concludes that there is a significant failure, at least among the people interviewed, to adapt to normal society life, mainly due to lack of relevant social support to meet the expectation of the ex-child soldiers; but largely due to the lack of strong political commitment and because of the fake glorification of their participation in the war by the Maoist.

Key words: child soldiers, social integration, Maoists civil war in Nepal, children, armed conflict, social stigma, trauma

Acknowledgement and vote of thanks

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TABLES AND DIAGRAMS

IV. ABBREVIATIONS
CA – Constituent Assembly
CPA – Comprehensive Peace Accord
GON – Government of Nepal
OHCHR – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PLA – People's Liberation Army
UCPN (M) Unified Communist Parties of Nepal (Maoist)
UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
UNICEF: United Nations Children Fund
UNMIN – United Nations Mission in Nepal
UNSRSG – United Nations Special Representative of Secretary General
VDMC – Verified Disqualified Maoist Combatants
YCL – Young Communist League

Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1.   Motivation of the Study

Children and child soldering is a darkest and the saddest chapter of the modern day warfare. It is unfortunate that there is still need of doing research on children and armed conflict in modern day. Even after the end of World War two and during the cold war, world witnessed continuous use of children being used in combat and battle front. United Nations promulgated UN convention on the rights of children we well as optional protocols to prohibit the use of children in armed conflict but many of the countries who have signed these conventions and covenant have not been able to create conducive environment for children to prevent from political violence. This has been particularly true in the case of Nepal.

Due to the rampant poverty, unstable political situation, feudal social structure, Nepal became fertile land for the Maoist to wage against the state mechanisms, government mercenaries and ultimately the unarmed and vulnerable population of Nepal became the worst victim. The Maoist war which began in 1996 and lasted for a decade witnessed many children losing their parents, many families losing their children and more than 13000 people died. Hundreds and thousands got internally displaced and thousands of children became orphans.

Two of the worst victim groups of political violence became obviously women and children as they were easy prayers for Maoist in Nepal to lure them to their political propaganda. Through cultural programs, Maoist attracted children and lured them to follow the battle ground.

When the peace process began in 2006, there were more than 4000 children who were in the ranks and were waiting for discharge to go back to civilian life. Political goal of the UN was to delist the UN from the group using children in combat and the discharge process began with a very little political consensus especially by the Maoist; and poor preparation in terms of communicating the process and choices to children themselves. Much was left upon Maoist leadership to communicate the political decisions and there were political manipulations which prevented many children from accessing rehabilitative and social reintegration support.

The need for the study to understand the social reintegration challenges of these ex-child soldiers stem from difficulties faced by these children on the way home. Less concentration was placed on the psychosocial resilience of these children. The need therefore was to study in depth how these children manage to go back to society and find themselves back in the civilian life at the fragile political situation and extreme family poverty.

1.2.   The main Research problem and the aim of the study

The main research problem which this study wants to address is a challenges faced by these ex-child soldiers upon returning their family and society. Nepali political history over last decades is entangled into a politics of mistrust and this has created a tremendous affect in

the conflict mitigation, peace building and stable democratization. As the politics of mistrust looms in the soil of Nepali politics, so does the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of the future of ex-child soldiers in Nepal. Political use of children and social support of the Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG)[1] has been a matter of serious concern in the peace building process but often been neglected by researchers and politicians alike.

Further to the problems of consensus among the actors of this process viz. UN, GON and CPN-M, It is evident that CPN-Maoist were claiming for cash benefits to the disqualified but government and the international community's including UN were opposing the idea. For example, in a recent interview given to an online media in Nepal, UNMIN Chief Ms Karin Landgren emphasized that cash benefits to the former combatants (including child soldiers) is not the solution for their successful social reintegration[2]. Various bi-lateral agencies led by UNICEF Nepal have pledged to provide assistance package in the form of counselling, vocational training and other rehabilitative services for the discharged including the child soldiers. Therefore, evidently, the economic assistance has been overshadowed by the services to address social obstacles and challenges that the ex-child soldiers may face in the process of reintegration.

As a matter of fact, to presume some practical obstacles, the society which still has not forgotten the bitter experiences of civil war may have hard time accepting and extending cooperation to the child soldiers and their family. The identity associated to them can also be counterproductive when it comes to entering into labour market. It is found out that the psychosocial issues related to the returned child soldiers for example girls entering into marriage and school enrolment are significantly problematic and require higher level of community awareness and supports (Kohrt, 2007). The structural inequalities in Nepali society – for example gender, caste, and class – are extremely challenging when it comes to integration of children especially the girls. The social stigma associated with the past identity, humiliation felt by child soldiers due to being returned instead of something valuable – such as integration to security forces, inability to get enrolled in school due to their age as well the difficulties to enter into employment due to past political affiliation, all these pose a set of complex barriers for the successful reintegration. Presumably, the process of their reintegration to the normal social life is extremely difficult and time consuming and risky. How these children are viewed – as a victim needing help or as an agency for their own changes – also becomes a matter of concern in the entire reintegration and peace process. Therefore, a scientific study of the challenges faced by child soldiers, factors affecting their reintegration including the political ones, coping mechanisms and use of their own agency for individual development are necessary be studied to contribute to the successful reintegration process and for the sustainable peace process.

1.3. Objectives of the study

1. To find out the challenges faced by discharged child soldiers in terms of their social reintegration

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[1] The term is used by various researchers and development agencies and governments alike

[2] Karin Landdgren in interview with republica news

2. To find out and analyse the role of different factors for successful reintegration of child soldiers and sustainable peace building
3. To find out the agencies of change within the child soldiers to make their integration successful
4. To suggest concerned ones the practical socio-political measures for the effective reintegration

1.4.   Research Questions

1. How do the child soldiers view the challenges they may face regarding social reintegration?
2. What factors help and what actors impact for the successful reintegration of ex-child soldiers?
3. What strategies do ex-child soldiers use to facilitate their integration? Are they able to use their own agency in the integration process?
4. What types of pre and post reintegration services are needed/ available for the successful reintegration of the child soldiers?

1.5.   Significance of the research

This is a fulfilment of the 15 credit degree report required by the course of Second Year in Master in Social Work and Human Rights in Gothenburg University, Department of Social Work.

As Nepal is in the process of political transition and the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of child soldiers play a significant role in the peace process, the proposed research will contribute in a greater extent for the same. Reintegration of the child soldiers only from the political point of view and as a problem solving strategy may pose significant threat not only to the entire peace process but also to the social wellbeing and developmental aspect of the children in future. Therefore, a careful and scientific study of the challenges and barriers faced by ex-child soldiers, perspectives of politicians and other agencies regarding the sustainable reintegration of child soldiers in the society in general is important. This research will be a significant contribution in the field of social reintegration of child soldiers and political use of children and will contribute not only to academicians, development workers, social workers and child protection agencies to build knowledge and design support works but also to the entire peace process in Nepal.

1.6.   Definitions of terminology used in the study

Verified Disqualified Minor Combatants (VDMC): VDMC is a term given to the children who were listed by the Human Rights Observer and UN as the minors recruited by the Maoist Army.

CAAFAG: Children Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups (CAAFAG) is the term used by development practitioners and UN simultaneously to address the needs of children who have been in some forms engaged in armed conflict.

Cantonments: After the peace accord in 2006, government and Maoist agreed to confine the Maoist combatants in 7 different camps. These camps have been a residence for Maoist combatants until they return to civilian life. The camp was under the monitoring of UN mission in Nepal (UNMIN).

Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA): Comprehensive peace accord is a land mark peace treaty which officially ended the decade long civil war in Nepal. It was signed on the 21 November 2006. The treaty was signed by the Supreme commander of Maoist comrade Prachanda and the Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala at the presence of other political parties and diplomatic community.

Constituent Assembly Election (CA election): Constituent Assembly Election was held in 2008 as part of the Comprehensive Peace Accord. The Constituent Assembly Election is mandated to elect the legislature which would promulgate the new federal democratic government.

People's Liberation Army (PLA): PLA is an armed wing of the Maoist Party and responsible for fight against state army. It contained around 19000 combatants as they claimed.

Resolution 1612: Building on the previous resolutions on protecting children from armed conflicts, the 5235th Meeting Security Council adopted Resolution 1612 most importantly to require state parties or enlisted armed groups to submit timely and accurate use of children in armed conflicts and make them accountable prepare time-bound actions plans to halt such practices. Before and after the adoption of resolution adopted by UN Security Council, UN General Secretary enlisted Nepal having armed groups recruiting children in armed conflict repeatedly in 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2009 (Watch-list on Children and Armed conflict, 2009, p8). The resolution required to have a Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) to update consistently the progress made in discharging the children from rank.

Chapter 2 – Background

2.1. Evolution of the Maoist War in Nepal

It is very important to provide a synopsis of the civil war context in Nepal. Various writers in the past has more or less summarized the political instability and increasing failure of state in the development and basic needs of the citizens as the conditions for the break out of the Maoist civil war in Nepal. This chronology will summarize the main political events that took place in the early 1990s after the restoration of Democracy in 1990.

The monarchy in Nepal had to accept to be a constitutional monarch due to the popular uprising of the political parties in 1990. Though Nepali Congress and Liberal communists (United Marxists and Leninists) in including some other political parties accepted this new constitution as the political victory, the Maoist United Popular Front of Nepal (UPFN) which was led by Baburam Bhattarai however rejected this constitution citing that it did not give sufficient conditions for true democracy. In the first election of 1991, UPFN secured seats in the parliament. Dissatisfied by the submissive political tendency and status quo of the other political parties, UPFN submitted the 40 points political demands to the Then Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba in 1996. The prime Minister responded without accepting the single demands put forwarded by the UPFN. Right after coming out of the meeting, UPFN declared the armed conflicted and within a short period started to attack on the government establishments.

At the complicated political context at the aftermath of the royal massacre followed by the crowning of new king – Gyanedra Shah and failure to held the election on time resulted a weak government presence in the remote villages of Nepal. Consequently, Maoist party started to capture the district headquarters. More than 13000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands people became internally displaced and many district security offices were destroyed. Amid such chaos, series of peace talks were held in between 2002 to 2006. The king led government tried to held election but it was rejected by the major political parties. Repeated use and through policy of the King towards political parties ultimately resulted in 12 points agreement for a broader political alliance against king and all the major political parties including Maoist joined the movement to thwart king out of the power. Main demand was to reinstate the parliament and to hold Constituent Assembly Election. The movement was successful which resulted in Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 between the ruling political parties, opposition parties and the Maoist. This brought the Maoist into Mainstream politics.

2.2. Peace process and efforts to delist CPN (M) as the party to use child soldiers

It has been more than 3 years after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord (CPA) between the Government of Nepal (GON) and the then rebel group The Communist Party, Maoist (CPN-M) on 21 November 2006 which officially ended the decade- long armed conflicts and open a new avenue for peace process in Nepal. Since then, Nepal Army and the Maoist militants have been confined to their respective barracks and UN-monitored cantonments respectively, peaceful completion of the historic and much proclaimed

Constituent Assembly Election and the drafting of the new constitution of the new democratic republic (to be Federal) is ongoing. Many of the milestones of the peace process have been realized, except the discharge and rehabilitation of disqualified Maoist combatants including child soldiers which, as perceived by many politicians and international communities, is the most important part of the peace process.

After repeated but unsuccessful attempts in the recent pasts to discharge and rehabilitate the disqualified, recently on 16 December 2009, representatives of CPN-M, the GON and UN signed an Action Plan to rehabilitate 4008 disqualified Maoist militants and most of them i.e. 2973 are categorized as children. The fate of these disqualified was indecisive as it lacked, time and again, a strong political will, and the constructive political consensus between the GON and the CPN(M) in terms of assistance package for these disqualified. The works of discharge and rehabilitation was planned from 27 December 2009 and later postponed till 7th January 2010. By the time I wrote this proposal, discharge of disqualified ex-militants started on 7 January 2010 with 201 from *Dudhauli (Sindhuli)* and later on 250 from *Shaktikhor (Chitawan)* which included the minors too.

 Even though the discharge and rehabilitation of these minors have finally been put into the Action Plan and initiated, the future challenges of these minor militants to be successfully reintegrated and prevented from political use of them are not thoroughly studied and analysed. For instance, as Mrs. Radhika Coomaraswamy, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of UN for Children and Armed Conflict, in her speech during the signing of Action Plan cautioned, there is a big challenge of these minors to join the military structures in future and again be used for the political purposes[3]. Therefore, big is the chance of these minors to be manipulated by small factional armed groups operated in various parts of the country as well as to be used by CPN (Maoist) for political purpose, bigger is the risk of these minors to face social exclusion, stigmatization and some forms of psychosocial disorders. Efficient handling and careful reintegration is extremely important not only for the normal post-reintegration development of these children but also for the safe-landing of the entire peace process.

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[3] Excerpts of the statements of Mrs. R. Coomaraswamy in the news of My Republica.com,

Chapter 3 – Theoretical framework

The following two theories have been reviewed for the purpose of the studies and they are presented below.

3.1. Social Stigma Theory

The main question of choosing stigma theory in this research is: How does stigma work to hinder the smooth social reintegration of ex-child soldiers? Theory has been reviewed not in the way of understanding psychosocial dimensions of the subjects being studied but more as a general framework to understand better the social reintegration challenges from the stigma framework.

Stigma is a socially constructed concept which places value on the two varying social identity that involves at least two fundamental components. One is "the recognition of differences based on some distinguishing characteristics, or 'mark'; and the other is a consequent devaluation of the person based on the characteristics (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000). Even though it is widely used in the social psychological research domain, Social Stigma Theory explains the discrimination and prejudices by the society in large to an individual or a group of individuals on the ground of their attached identity or characteristics. A person is stigmatized due to the certain characteristics and that leads to social rejection or exclusion (Hyers and Swim, 2001). At the event of social research using Social Stigma Theory, the views of the person who is victim of stigma and discrimination is studied and the effects of being stigmatized and the ways of how the victim is coping with such stigmatization are analysed (Ibid).

In general, social stigma is caused by number of exhibited behaviours of social exclusion by the society in general towards someone. Social exclusion prohibits people from accessing certain group of people or individual from 'desired relationship' (Abraham, D Christian J. and Hutchinson P. 2007, p.30) or excludes them from normal social life. This means that the feeling of such exclusion involves a socially complex process resulting in the degrading affects in the individual and results in exhibition of behaviours by the stigmatized in the form of "anxiety, anger, disappointment and criminal thought" (ibid).

Stigma is rooted from perception of general society that the deviant behaviours of individual is antisocial which as assumed as threat to social normalcy and values. This leads to coercion within normal social structure and values and the deviant behaviours; and consequently, the deviant individual or group is subjected to 'prejudice', 'stereotyping' and 'discrimination' (Goffman, 1963). He indicated three types of stigmatization viz. physical, individual character and tribal (ibid).

As Goffman (1963) narrated, prejudices and discrimination are seemingly related terms but can be discussed as different outcomes in the process of being stigmatized. Prejudice is exhibited in number of ways and often poses injustices to the stigmatized group. Society has certain prejudice against the stigmatized groups which leads to generalization of perceived characteristics or dysfunctional attributes, or deficiency upon individual. Discrimination is

more of an outcome of the prejudices exhibited by society and curtails certain privileges as normal individual.

The other concept that Goffman(1963) discusses is stereotyping i.e. is a process of putting tags on individual or a group of people either intentionally and unintentionally but the consequences is often negative to subject being tagged. This is caused by certain ideology, behaviour and the presumed personalities of the deviant person. The society builds certain view point about the person being stereotyped. Increased level of social stereotyping of certain group further deepens the gravity of the problem and sometime leads to the members of the group to be self-stereotyped (Hutchison et al, 2007:30). Hutchison et al (2007:37) stated that social exclusion also causes feeling of group identification among the members of the stereotyped and they exhibit strong 'political commitment… and 'perceived in-group homogeneity' (ibid). We can argue from the above thesis that feeling of in-group homogeneity brings coercion between the stereotyped and general society and often breaks out in social conflict.

The use of the theory of Social Stigma is important to understand the non-cooperation and exclusion experienced by the former child soldiers in the process of returning to normal social life after combat experience. A cross sectional study on how the former child soldiers anticipate and experience the behaviour exhibited by their friends, community members, family members on one hand; and how community people, school teachers, peers and others view about the former child soldiers being returned provides on the other hand; provides bases for understanding the complexities of smooth social reintegration. The perspective of the former child soldiers about the magnitude of being discriminated while searching for jobs due to their association to armed war may provide empirical bases for the understanding of being marginalized, in other word stigmatized, due to their attached identity. Frable (1993) term this stigma as Marginality and Archer (1995) term it as deviance (cited in Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000:4).

Even though, as I stated earlier, Social Stigma Theory in general is a theory widely used in the research domain of Social Psychology and using this framework into understanding the social reintegration process of child soldiers in the domain of social work research is rather complex as it generally, especially social psychology research domain, requires micro-level study and probably clinical treatment to the data collected. However, the objective of the study is not to study in micro level the psychosocial aspects of the subjects being studied (ex- child soldiers), I believe that it still contributes to bring the varieties of information from the key informants to a logical framework to understand the social reintegration challenges. For example, the perfect set of applying this theory would be to understand in deep the psychosocial aspect of the former child soldiers. But due to the complexities in accessing the former child soldiers and also due to the lack of my knowledge in the psychological domain, the attempt has been made rather in understanding the social complexities of the former child soldiers from following three dimensions of the Stigma Theory.

According to Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000:11), "the basic issues in understanding stigma and stigmatization involve recognizing others and those who are being stigmatized. These two groups are generally termed as 'perceivers' and 'targets'. Perceivers are the ones who stigmatize and targets are the ones who are stigmatized. According to Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2002), perceivers hold certain ideas about the ones who are stigmatized. Targets "interpret, cope and respond" the conscious, unconscious and behavioural actions

and perceptions of the perceivers. Consequently misunderstanding of the perception and reception of perception between these two groups creates tussle and impacts the social interaction. This may result diverse emotional and behavioural response between the groups (Heatherton et al 2002:10 – 11).

In a more simple term, same actions of perceivers may have different reactions by the targets. It depends on how it is perception and presented and how it is interpreted. From this theoretical discussion, it can be said that each actions of the perceivers and reactions of the targets have different "needs", "goals" and "motivations" (Heatherton et al (2002: 10 – 11). This provides justification to the interpretation of certain behaviours. As these needs, goals and motivations shape the perception, so does it influence the coping strategy and the roles of the targets. According to (Heatherton et al (2002:10-11), this "ultimately influences the development of a person or of a group identity in a certain social context".

The second dimension that Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) talk about is Personal – Group Based Identity Dimension where the framework involving distinction between personal and social identity is discussed. According to them, "understanding of both personal and group phenomena requires knowledge of personal process, reactions, and identity; and collective process, actions and identity" (Dovidio, Major and Crocker 2000:13). The uniqueness of the interactive intuitions between these two identities is grounded on the response showed by the individual and the group. For example, Brewer (1988 cited in Heatherton et al 2002:12) opines that individual interpretation of actions and behaviour uprooted from the bottom and based on the signals received by the individual such as behaviours oral expressions. This interpretation, as Brewer continues (1988) is also grounded on the logics made by the individual from his experience of being stigmatized.

On the other hand, group based processing of actions and behaviour is always trickle-down where group's ideas and its interpretation makes meaning and is trickled to the individual. The group based identity creation is, according to Neuberg (1990) and Brewer (1988), has more rigid response to the stigma as it is united feeling. That's where; according to different writers (Turner, Hogg, Oakers, Reicher, and Wetherell 1987, and Tajfel and Turner 1979 cited in Heatherton et al, 2002:12 – 13) the individuals as part of the group self-proclaim their identity and consequently self-categorize them.

The third dimension that Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) talk about is the Affective-cognitive-behavioural Dimension where they argue that how stigmatized persons responds to stigma depends on his or her cognitive functions. Even though some writers opine that there is a basic distinction between the affective attitudes and cognitive attitudes, Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000:12) argue that "these attitudes do not necessarily represent distinct process". Affective response is an immediate response caused by the visible stigma or sign such as physical deformity and cognitive response is a consequence after longer social interactions and learning. Even though they stem out of different continuum – for example affective response due to deformed body of disable persons and cognitive response to homosexuality after training and education - , Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) argue that stigmatization behaviour is not a distinctive but rather a blend of these two responses. Even though Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) argues at times that anxiety, anger and hatred are affective expressions and results in negative impact on individual and sympathy is more of a cognitive response, it is often argued that both affective and cognitive may stem from each other interchangeably. To describe this concept in a more easy way, the person who stigmatized may give immediate response in the beginning and learn to give more balanced

response after. At the same time it can be the other way round also – that is cognitive response in the beginning due to the fear of reactions from the stigmatized and affective response after continuous labelling and stereotyping. As Dovidio, Major and Crocker (2000) concludes these responses or reactions, forms of stigma and the attitude of stigmatising agent plays key role to decide how deep or high is the consequence of behaviours; and how the personality is being developed within the stigmatized e.g. rebellious or resilient, tolerant or violent.

From the above theoretical discussions, it can be argued that social stigma stems out from the deviant behaviour of the certain individual or groups of individuals which ignite society to label them as threats to social orders. The society then starts stereotyping the individual behaviours and puts label on them as someone different or not normal. This labelling develops in the sustained prejudices by the society and self-categorization by the stigmatized persons. This creates polar between the deviant and the society and consequently marginalizes the deviant groups. This can be understood as the necessary conditions for social disintegration.

3.2. Trauma Theory

Trauma is caused by the unpredicted, unprepared event(s) which are beyond one's ability to control or respond in a normal way. Trauma occurs when an 'intense emotional blow' assaults a person. It leaves a long mental scar causing various emotional, physical and mental disturbances. "Traumatisation occurs when both internal and external resources are inadequate to cope with external threats" (Van Der Kolk, 1989:393). On the other hand, people are traumatized when person witnessing or experience the fearful incident and cannot be fight back physically or mentally.

Trauma Theory explains why people witnessing the traumatic experience behave in a certain way and what kind of adaptive problems do they face when moving in the post traumatic life. Psychiatrists have termed this behaviour problem as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD is an anxiety disorder caused by the fearful event in which an extreme fear and threats have been experienced or witnessed often life-threatening experience. The response of the ones experiencing and witnessing results in intense fear, helplessness, or horror (APA, 2000: 12).

As the purpose of the research is not to test the behaviour of the ex-child soldiers from the psychiatric research dimension using PTSD, I have avoided theoretical discussion the PTSD and have focused more on the emotions and memories for traumatic events in general social context and focusing more on how an individual experiences cognitive and behavioural impact in post combat life.

3.2.1. Cognitive and Behavioral Sequelae of Combat Trauma

Emotions are often exhibited in the behavioural forms and Memories are often the cognitive process of combat trauma (Jaycox and Tanielia, 2008). The following discussions on the emotions and memories of the people experiencing and witnessing traumatic experience provides bases for the theoretical understanding of the behaviour of people returning from war or combat environment.

Researches on Trauma Theory have found numerous mental and behavioral problematic examples of the people returning from the war or violent experience. One of the researches done by Alford et al (1988) have identified post traumatic disorders associated with difficulties in

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emotional, interpersonal and vocational functioning such as intolerance of mistakes, denial of personal difficulties, anger as a problem-solving strategy, hyper vigilance, and absolute thinking. The research had found out that returnees have problems of adaptation in their behavioral patterns in post-combat environment due to the above problems.

1. Intolerance of mistakes:

Generally the combat returnees have higher level of intolerance towards substandard functions of the society or people which create anger in them resulting in the angry blow or comments towards the people performing sub-standards or committing a mistake. The world is not always perfect. But for the combat returnees, a small mistake in the combat would have caused death or injuries. The expectation of returnees from the civilians the same level of performance is not practical. However, this kind of value system of the combat may be unavoidable but rational, but people from combat who have seen the death of their friends due to small mistakes they have committed continue to be strong even after they return. Researcher in the post-combat behavioral patterns conclude that such intolerance to "mistakes causes depression and distress" leading a the cycle of "self-condemnation and social alienation" (Alford et al, 1988:491)

2. Denial of Personal Difficulties

Returnees of the combat with PTSD have a tendency to deny that they have a personal problem. The American Psychiatric Association (1987) defines it as 'Affective Constriction' meaning people of tendency to restrict their emotional feelings, flashbacks and mental horror when they return to civilian life. War returnees avoid to exhibit "affective overwhelm" by means by restricting their emotional ups and downs by trying to stay emotionally neutral. This behavior pattern has been defined by Lifton (1973) as a "psychic numbing". If such PTSD is not treated, this leads to cognitive disfunctionality of the person resulting in grave mental problems (ibid).

3. Anger as the problem-solving strategy

Most of the returnees diagnosed with PTSD have a problem of controlling their anger (Engendorf et al., 1981). Anger and sense of revenge is an obvious mental response in the combat environment. However, this tends to continue even after leaving the combat environment. Returnees show the behavior of "rigidity and high level of interpersonal conflict" often exhibited in spontaneous angry conflict with people and angry verbal/physical exchange to solve the problem (Alford et al., 1988:493). In the civilian life, this worsens normal life and is "ultimately self-defeating" (Ibid).

4. Hyper vigilance

An over exaggerated cognitive response to the normal world which is displayed in a way that " the world is an inherently dangerous place and danger and threat may emerge at any moment" is described as hyper vigilance (Alford et al., 1988:493). Returnees of the battle experience tend to be extremely alert about the environment around them. They take extreme precaution regarding the incidents and always take each of such incidents as life threatening or insecure. The continuous hyper vigilance results in restlessness, distancing behavior which serves to increase the social isolation and alienation. (Alford et al., 1988:494).

5. Black and white thinking

Soldiers in post-combat environment function in rather an absolute thought pattern and everything is either black or white (Brende, 1983). Such way of absolutism results in problem of trusting very few people (Alford et al., 1988:494). This means that the absolute thinking pattern tends to create the environment where one either trusts someone fully or does not at all. The issue of trust brings erosion in 'interpersonal relationship' among people causing 'disappointment' if the trust is broken (Alford et al., 1988:494). Increased problem with trusting issues thus results in social alienation and isolation as well as hyper vigilance (Ibid).

The world view of people experiencing extreme forms of deception, fight, killings and death results in the severe traumatic experience which often do not fade away without help. The trauma theory explains why certain traumatic incidents have life-long mental affect on people and what kind of behavioral patterns are exhibited in post-traumatic environment and what kind of social implications do such behavioral problems trigger.

Generally for the purpose of this study, traumatic behavioral pattern in post-combat environment are discussed and used to understand the social integration challenges of the ex-minor combatants. The use of Trauma Theory is bit tricky in social science research particularly because more clinical research is expected from the researcher. Nevertheless, my idea is not to examine the level of traumatic experience of the ex-minor combatants but instead the intension is to understand the behavior patterns of the ex-combatants which are counterproductive towards their personal and social adjustment in the post-combat environment.

Chapter 4 – Literature Review

Review of the literature has been recognized both as a process and the product in the social science research (ibid) and so has been used for the purpose of this study. The previous research works and scholarly articles were processed and scanned for the knowledge building process. The literatures which I reviewed built up the foundation for the onset: while locating the research problems and scope of studies as well as during the development of literature review as the separate chapter of this research. Literature review presented in this chapter form an important part of the research by shedding light on the entire analysis of the findings.

4.1 International instruments to prohibit the use of children in War

International Community has been striving to prohibit the use of children in armed conflicts through their various international instruments. For the purpose of this studies, I have reviewed mainly the International Convention on the rights of the child (CRC) 1989, Optional Protocol to the CRC on the involvement of children in armed conflict, EU Guidelines on the children and Armed Conflicts, The Paris Principles – Principles and Guidelines on children associated with armed forces and armed groups, and UN Security Council Resolution number 1612.

The first and the most important international instruments for the protection of children rights is the UNCRC which was adopted by UN on 20 November 1989 as a legally binding instrument and Nepal in fact ratified this convention on 14 September 1990. As a state party to the UNCRC, Nepal must uphold the rights of children and make available the entire legal and infrastructural environment to protect children. Article 38 of the convention states that the state parties must respect the international humanitarian laws at the time of armed conflicts and state army is prohibited to use children under the age of 15 in armed conflict. It can be argued from this article that any armed entity operating in any states or the state army are prohibited to use the children in armed conflict. Even though the conventions speaks vaguely about how state party should prohibit non-state armed from recruiting children, article 39 of the convention states that 'States parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim...armed conflicts'(UNCRC 1989:11). Article 38(4) states that state parties must protect the civilians including children and make available all the mechanisms to ensure that the children who are involved or affected by armed conflict are protected and are provided with sufficient care.

An optional protocol was adopted by UN General Assembly on the year 2000 and Nepal ratified and entered into force on 20 January 2006. The protocol noted that 'parties to conflict take every feasible step to ensure that children under the age of 18 years do not take part in hostilities' (OHCHR, 1996-2012:236). The protocol has also raised the voluntary age of recruitment into state army to 18 years (article, 1,3 and 3) as a measure of 'special protection' which consequently ruled out the provision in article 38 (3) of the CRC (ibid). Article 4 of the protocol prohibits other armed groups to recruit the children under the age of 18 (article 4.1) and requires states parties to 'take all feasible measures to prevent such recruitment and use' (article 4.2) (Ibid, p.238). Article 6 of the protocol states the states parties must ensure 'all appropriate assistance for their physical and psychological recovery and their social reintegration'.

For the purpose of my study, I reviewed the principles and guidelines which are related to the best practices of support for the reintegrated ex-child soldiers. Though not a legally binding document, these principles and guidelines provides a foundation to offer effective and coherent

support mechanisms for the children associated in armed conflicts. The Paris Principle (hereafter written The Principle) highlights that measures should be availed for the returned child soldiers not to discriminate and stigmatize based on their duration of service in the armed groups (p.8). The principle equally calls for the actors to seek the active participation of the children being reintegrated in 'all stages of programme assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation activities' along with the concerned community members (p.10). The principle also highlights the importance of addressing the specific needs and circumstances of girls and to be able to avoid the 'invisibility' of the girls' specific needs and be provided with special attention due to the fact that these girls might have gone through extremely different ordeals than the boys in terms of emotional and physical impact at the time of war. (P.13 -14). The principles also highlight the importance of mechanisms to release them through a community based non-formal process if they wish not to enter into the formal release process (p.27). As part of the release process, The Principle prescribes that the released child soldiers must be separated from adult fighters and must be accommodated at the distance of the adult fighters so that the 'safety and dignity' and their confidentiality are protected. As part of the reintegration mechanism, The Principle highlights the importance of 'inclusive approach to integration' which means that cultural and gender analysis must be done and the best interest of the child must be ensured irrespective of the national standards and inclusive programmes that builds 'on the resilience of children, enhance self-growth and promote their capacity'(p.31).

4.2. Child Soldering: Some accounts of the Afro-Asian customs

To build the understanding on the social reintegration challenges of children on the onset of pre and post peace building context, I have reviewed some literatures which would provide snippets of the general child soldering practices in some countries in Asia and Africa and brought together in a consolidated form the available reintegration practices.

A study of child soldiers in Angola by Human Rights watch in 2003 revealed appalling conditions of children both at the combat environment and also at the social reintegration context. It was estimated that around 9000 children, both girls and boys, were recruited in the Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) and were forced to involve in combat and other works during the fight against the Angolan government that lasted from 1998 to 2002 (Human Rights Watch, 2003). The roles performed by these child soldiers varied based on the age and also the gender. The report showed that smaller children served as 'cooks, domestic and food gatherers' and the ones who were physically developed served in the direct combat and warfare (Human Rights Watch 2003:2). The girls on the other hand served as sex slaves, 'domestic servants and 'wives to the soldiers' (ibid). The Report further reported that 'the women and girls were also forcibly given as 'comfort woman' to visiting guests in the UNITA held areas' (Human Rights Watch 2003). The young girls who were termed as wives and were married to soldiers in the UNITA forces were reported to be in between 500 to 8000 and they were forced to serve as cook clean and dance and engage themselves in sexual relations (ibid). Interestingly, these young women were, as reported by Human Rights Watch, were not recorded in the formal demobilization programming. Furthermore, Human Rights Watch reported that in after the peace process in 2002, these children, both boys and girls were not included in the demobilization programme and received only an identification card and the food aid distributed by the international community.

In Sierra Leon, around 10 000 children (Essay, 2003) have been reported to be used by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) and also by the government in the war that engulfed the country from 1991 to 2002. Zack-Williams (2006) has given a very coherent analysis of how a traditional families were destroyed into a more atomic families in a fragmented society (which

he defines as Gesellschaft) due to structural adjustment programmes, absence of political and economic transparence, rampant corruption and alienation of young people from their kinship and other social exclusion. The source according to Zack-Williams for RUF to recruit children into their rank was the street children who were the bi-product of this social context. The pulling factors for these children were the feeling of retaliation due to the loss of their families. These feeling of retaliation, exclusion were emotional bargaining chips for the RUF and were perfect solders. The daily chores these young soldiers performed were not really different from the ones in Angola having the similar types of class, age and gender defined roles. The children were socialized to be violent by training them to kill their own relatives and implanting among them the fear of retaliation from the society to prevent them from escape. As many as 80% of the children were in between 7 and 14 years of age and majority of them were women captives who fled the rebel camps in 1997 (Zack-Williams, 2001,p80). It was reported that the children who were demobilized in from the rank in 1993 and were supported by a project called Children Associated with War (CAW), many children had sustained war trauma, malnutrition and skin infections (Zack-Williams, 2006:125).

For about 30 years of wars between the LTTE and Sri Lankan Government, almost 20 - 40% of the total of estimated 7000 – 10000 LTTE soldiers were children (Somasundaram, 2002:1269) and among these child soldiers, 40% were girls (UNICEF 2004, cited inhuman Rights Watch 2004,p6). Later on when Karuna Group broke away from LTTE in 2004, about 1800 child soldiers were released by but there were reports which stated that the Karuna Group recruited them with the fear of LTTE recruiting those (MoD&UD, Online 2006). UNICEF reported that as many as 3516 children were recruited by LTTE even after the ceasefire in 2002 and until 2004 (Human Rights Watch, 2004). Many researchers have found post traumatic stress disorders among these child soldiers (Somasundaram, 2002). Both pulling and the pushing factors were prevalent in Srilanka for children to join LTTE war. The heroism propaganda of LTTE as well as the poverty in Sri-Lanka caused the children to join LTTE. LTTE recruited these children in so called 'baby brigade'. The fiercest ones and the most loyal were the ones who were brought up in LTTE run orphanages and were recruited in an elite 'Leopard Brigades' (Human Rights Watch, 2004:-6). The girl child soldiers, who were reunited in the 'Birds of Freedom', were mobilized as forces to fight against the social oppression and discrimination in Sri-Lanka. Even though many of the girls including boys were fighting the frontline battles, sexual harassment and rape cases were rarely reported (Human Rights Watch 2004:6). May children were reported to be dead in the fights in 1990's. For example, Gunaratna (1998) reported that LTTE poured the young militants from Baby brigade in 1991 in Elephant complex and 550 soldiers died and majority of them were children. These young children were ordered to take capsules or blow themselves up if they were captured by the Sri-Lankan Armies (ibid). In this way, the young LTTE fighters were put in front line and were known for their atrocities. Eventually, these child soldiers became 'Lost Generation of Sri-Lanka' even after the ceasefire and LTTE's defeat by the Sri-Lankan state armies (Jayatunge, 2012).

4.3 Nature of the use of children in War: Nepalese practice

Numbers of literatures have been available in the form of project report, journal articles and research videos to portray the nature and extent of the use of children in armed conflicts. My intention of reviewing these articles was to understand how they were used and how is they taken into consideration while developing response packages to make the reintegration of ex-child soldiers successful. A research article by Anjana Shakya (2010) entitled 'Experience of children in armed conflicts in Nepal' states that many children in the war were 'killed, maimed, abducted, faced extra judicial disappearances and imprisonments'. During the fights, research paper argues that Maoist as well as the state army used the children in the form of fighters,

spies, porters, cook, cultural troops, and scouts. Due to the 'one house, one person' policy of Maoist (Shakya 2010: 559), many children were either voluntarily or forcibly taken to join the Maoist army. Girl children were reported to be used as sex slaves and were also reported to force to marriage within the army of Maoist.

A Report by the Human Rights Watch (2007) stated that even though children were involved in many other roles such as listed above, these children required to support at the frontlines at the time of combat which exposed children to direct use of arms. The same report accounts the voices of many combatants where they have expressed that the young warriors who were never trained in fighting and were given only one grenade were warned by the senior combatants to keep fighting until they through their last grenade and girls soldiers were warned about the treatment they would receive from the state army if they surrender. Which significantly risked their life and due to the tightened security within the groups, children could not escape the battle or Maoist camp due to the fear of punishment they would get if caught by Maoist (Human Rights Watch, 2007: 39-41). Few techniques of frightening the children were use by the Maoist which retained them in their army were: possible retaliation to their family, possible actions they would take to punish the children, fear that state army would rape and torture them (ibid).

4.4 Childhood as the Socio-cultural Construction

A child is as defined by west based on the age any human being under 18 years old. This concept has been legalized through international human rights instruments particularly Convention on the rights of the Child 1989. This has been established as the defining criteria for the states ratifying this convention unless there are reservations due to national standards. A Child as someone under 18 years, vulnerable, dependent and innocent and blanket assumptions that anyone under 18 years shares these characteristics can be considered to define the term "Child Soldiers" taking up weapons.

However, the age defined parameters of childhood is not always valid when checked with the socio cultural practices. Jessica Schafer (in Boyden and Berry, 2004) describes the social construction of the concept of childhood based on the expected economic roles performed by the children. She cites the example from Mozambique where recruited child soldiers in RENAMO were considered as someone having adolescent roles, involved in economic processes and lived away from home (Ibid:88). Therefore, the idea of childhood differs from one socio-cultural context to another. The age parameter is not always the defining factors of childhood. Young men in many societies especially in the developing countries involve into adulthood as young as 12 or 14 years old. The social expectation of children being involved in economic process and adult's roles somehow culturally legitimizes the involvement of children in violence or war. The gender perspective of the concept of childhood is another parameter to define the roles of children in many societies. However, children from rural and most often poor families are expected to involve themselves into wage laborer or household chores or work as a child laborer at the very young age.

In the research conducted by Jessica Schafer in late nineties (Schafer 1999:88, cited in Boyden and Berry 2004) in Mozambique, it is concluded that the concept of childhood is thus based on structural relations of power and hierarchy, patriarchy and kinship, and the content of those social relationship. Therefore, the legitimization of the participation of children in armed conflict can be understood in two dimensions: children are legitimate

perpetrators of violence due to the fact that they are involved in adult's role even if they are under eighteen (ibid); and recruiters make use of the psychological state of the children as someone having responsibilities in the revolution.

4.5 Child Soldiers: Often the forgotten groups in social reintegration process

Researches prove that many countries in the post-conflict environment tend to underestimate the issues of child soldiers or tend to forget them. They are often forgotten in the comprehensive support programme or lumped together under the classification of the "ex-combatants" (Singer, 2005:183). According to Singer (2005) this is due to denial nature of the parties recruiting the child soldiers. Singer (2005) pointed out the example in East Timor where fewer than 18 children were simply sent back to their families and the returned youths were not provided by any authorities or UN.

In the case of Mozambique, despite the fact that there were more than 25% of the total soldiers as child soldiers, neither recruiting party admitted it or the UN managed to cover the child soldiers in the formal demobilization process.

Singer (2005) accounted the fact that the ex-child soldiers are typically the kind of groups that post-war assistance programmes have forgotten to carefully taken into consideration. Firstly, they are no more the ones under 18, and are considered as adults. But the war continues for long because of which they might have started as young as 12 to 13 years old. The ex-child soldiers, who are over 18 at the time of demobilization but had grown up in a war environment during their childhood and adolescence will have more serious problems compared to than the ones who joined the war as adults (Singer 2005:185). Therefore, these groups require specialized social and psychological support to overcome the war trauma and to cope with the loss of education or family contacts or social networks.

4.6. DDR: Disarmament and Demobilization and Reintegration

The previous studies suggest that in all post war settlement process, there is a predominant practice of turning the ex-child Soldiers into the normal civilian life which take place in three mandatory phases: firstly the disarmament and demobilization; secondly physical and psychological rehabilitation; and thirdly family or social reintegration (Singer 2005).

Disarmament and demobilization is a process of separating children from the engagement in military life and control. This is a process where important step of permanently separating children from the use of arms, involve in armed exercise and relieve them from the control of the chain of command. These must be planned to be implemented not in the short term but in a terms of months. And the plans must be directed towards "unified direction and goal" to ensure the restoration of the "freedoms and life opportunities of the lost childhood" of the ex-child soldiers (Singer, 2005:188). The removal of the children under 18 or ex-child soldiers from the sight of the armed forces must be taken immediately after the ceasefire. Researchers have accounted many methods of doing the disarmament activities such as "weapons in exchange for development" which was initiated by UNDP in many post-conflict disarmament programmes including in Sierra Leon (Muggah, 2001, Muggah and Bachelor 2001 cited in Singer 2005). Very important aspect of disarmament process is the dismantlement of the chain of command and structures from where the child soldier's have been placed (Singer 2005). Dismantlement of the chain of command gives a sense of freedom to the ones being disarmed.

The demobilization is defined as the process of moving these ex-child Soldiers to a place or formal camps or housing to prepare them for civilian life. Singer (2005) accounted some key lesions which many International communities experienced in this process of demobilization namely placing the ex-child soldiers far from the conflict zones and not allowing arms in the camps etc. The process of disarmament and demobilization face multiple political challenges. One of these challenges is the manipulation and suspicion of the recruiting party while disarming and demobilizing their soldiers. One Commander in Congo was quoted by refugee's International's report in 2003 stated "You can't demobilize [our] child soldiers because others will enrol them" (Singer 2005). Researchers also suggest that the demobilized ex-child soldiers must be framed in to a the structured environment and routine life which will help them to concentrate at the things they do instead of going back to the memories of war environment (Singer, 2005). Previous researchers have pointed out various key tasks and steps to be taken to successfully demobilize the ex-child soldiers as well as to prepare for the reintegration. These involve incentives programmes, opportunity to provide training which would lead to a gainful employment, security guarantees, protection and confidentiality and family tracing (Singer 2005:188-192)

Rehabilitation:

Process of Rehabilitation involves care of ex-child Soldiers both in the psychological and physical realm. Both the physical and psychic scar of the war environment must be treated before reintegration of these ex-child soldiers. It is advised that the rehabilitation process must involve both professionals who are trained and the community and spiritual leaders.

"Ideally, they will involve the participation of not just international aid workers, as it is too often the norm, but also local community members and spiritual leaders. Giving the appearance of a welcoming and stable local social environment provides a crucial context for the rehabilitation. Additionally, the intent of external intervention must be to support rather than replace local society's coping strategy. This means that there is no standardized approach to rehabilitation" (Singer, 2005: 193)

Psychological rehabilitation:

Typically, ex-child soldiers will have undergone and/or carried out shocking and disturbing events of terrible violence. In that they are young the effect on their psyche is magnified, as the violence takes place during the period when personalities are being developed. The resultant of trauma can manifest itself in reactions like constant weeping, mutism, repeated nightmares, and depression. (Singer, 2005:194)

According to Dan Jacobs (1991), trauma is an external event that is so intense that it overwhelms the person's capacity to cope or master it. In psychological terms, "traumatic stressors" are those events that are "outside the range of human experience and must be of sufficient intensity to invoke the symptoms of distress in most people (2005:194)

Ex-Child Soldiers frequently demonstrate some or all of these symptoms, which most health professionals believe are triggered by a combination of their dislocation from family and society, sense of uncertainty about the future, and memories of extreme violence and loss. Depression, anxiety, higher levels of aggression or introversion, extreme pessimism, limited capacity to accept frustration, and a lack of adequate personal mechanisms to resolve conflict are all common among former child soldiers going through rehabilitation. PTSD also results in secondary effects that trouble the youth's ability to rejoin society. These include learning difficulties, lowered ability to concentrate, changes memory, and greater intellectual inflexibilities (Singer 2005:195).

4.7 Subjective coping competency for Social Reintegration

Various researchers have laid significant emphasis on the subjectivity of the reintegration efforts. Though these researches have laid focus on clinical analysis of the intricacies of human functioning from different perspectives (Strumpfer 2003, Antonovsky 1979, Fursteinberg 2000, Kaniasty & Norris, 1993), these literatures are still valid in analyzing the different perspectives on the coping strategies of ex-child soldiers – adolescents – in the post environment. Various conclusions have been made with the notes that 'human adaptive functioning is more normative than the resilient construct' (Barber 2009:18). These conclusions instigate the idea that clinical model of 'resiliency' for successful reintegration cannot always be applied in a blanket way; rather the adaptive functioning which are caused by exposure of individuals to the specific context play a vital role in the quality of coping competence to post conflict environment. A study done by a UNICEF sponsored project in Uganda made the similar conclusions that the individual adaptive competencies are key factors in understanding the children's engagement to war (Annan, Blattman, & Horton, 2006; Annan, Blattman, Carlson, & Mazurana, 2008; Blattman & Annan, 2007, cited in Baker 2009:18). This conclusion further provides logics that engagement of children in conflict or their reintegration in post conflict environment largely relies on the varied degree of competencies that the individual children posses. However, Baker (2009:19) also cautioned on the conclusion of focusing too much on competency of individuals. He also highlights the fact that this notion is limited as individual competency depreciates in a great degree depending on the length of negative experiences. But at the same time, this notion equally challenges the researchers' "compartmentalization of human functioning" and creates more diverse perspectives on the understanding of individual's responses in extremely challenging environment (ibid).

There are certain evidences provided by the researchers (e.g. Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2006; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995; Strumpfer,2003) that some of youths exposed to political violence have positive change in the post-traumatic context (Baker, 2009:19). He cited an example of a research of Bosnian refugees which concluded that traumatic experience also 'stimulate adaptive responses leading to positive change (Weine cited in Baker 2009:21) and at the same time confirming the trauma has regressive negative effect. This is a transformative perspective in analyzing the post-traumatic event outcomes on the individual level.

The proponent of ambiguity perspectives (Furstenberg 2000: cited in Baker 2009) on the negative and positive outcomes of coping strategy of the human functioning argue that the it is questionable in "draw a sharp line between 'good' bad behaviours" and further notes that these behaviours have contextual 'complex meaning' based on their exposures to the context and environment of society (Furstenberg 2000:p.900 cited in Baker 2009). Arguably, it can be said that individual behaviours are tested either as positive or negative against the social and cultural norms and context as well socio-political history of specific society. This conclusion further denotes the idea that there is subjectivity in interpreting the behaviours of an individual. Experience of negative event and how they respond to such adversity is basically the interpretation attached to the social meanings of such adversity. As an analogy, for example, in the context of participation of adolescent child in political violence or civil war and his experience may have both negative and positive at the post-conflict reintegration. That is to say, interpretation how a child soldier is perceived in post-conflict environment is always attached to how society apprehends the participation of children in war and the political ideology that the majority of people in the specific society belonged to. As Summerfield rightly pointed, "how human beings experience an adverse event and what they say and do about it, is primarily a function of the social meanings and understandings attached to it" (Summerfield, 2003:459 cited in Baker 2009:21)

The balancing perspective of human adaptability to adverse situation provides insights on the both negative and positive dimension of interpersonal relationship of an individual. This perspective, as Baker (2003) narrates, acknowledge the fact that individual experience are made of complex experience of both negative and positive sides and both of these sides must be analyzed and weighted while studying the individuals or groups. This will provide balanced analysis of both the sides of individual experience and consequently can be measured which sides have bigger weight while studying the affect of political violence and while reinforcing the tools to bring the individual to a resiliency or further transform to positive life events.

Primarily, the notion of subjective adaptability can be relevant tools for understanding the adolescents emerging from the war experience and analyzing different factors to reinforce their reintegration. Furthermore, the literatures also suggest that this concept deviates primarily from the objectivity of the pathological framework of analysis; rather it highlights the importance of the cultural contexts, historical and political context as well as individual coping competency as the determining factors for providing foundations for social integration.

Chapter 5 – Methodology

5.1 Qualitative research

This is a qualitative research. Qualitative research method was chosen as this method has the profound benefits while researching social lives and people. As the research topic suggests, the primary objective of this study is to find out the challenges faced by the minor combatants who are verified and discharged and reintegrated to the society. This instigate to the fact that the views of different stakeholders including the ex-combatants themselves could not be found by the use of quantitative numbers and figures. Epistemologically, the qualitative research relies on the individually perceived interpretation of the social reality and 'the social reality… is constantly shifting production of perception' (Walliman, 2006:37). Similarly, for the purpose of this research, views and statements of the subjects studied are relative of their context and perception and the meaning are the production of how they have perceived the situation. The views are in the form of statements, opinions, verbal manifestations which need careful analysis to bring out the meaning of their message. Kvale (1996) stated that qualitative method is crucial in comprehending the experiences and highlights the lived meaning.

Two definitive boundaries justify the selection of qualitative method for this research. Firstly, there is a methodological advantage of using qualitative method as it houses a great numbers of data collection techniques. I have used two methods – Key informants interview and Case study – which are placed as the popular method while doing research in the field of children and social work. Secondly, the context and issues – children in armed conflict – which this research revolves around are of critical type and needs carefully selected method so as study the subjects that are politically sensitive, socially subdued and scarcely accessible. Any other quantitative approach would be practically difficult to use as the size of the population being studied – ex-combatants and stakeholders – are stretched geographically after they were sent back home and are large number in size.

Originally I had planned to use two methods viz. Key informants' interview among political parties and stakeholders and Focused Group Discussion with the VDMC. As the later data collection method was practically impossible while being in the field – the children were not available for focused group discussions because they were geographically far and politically 'captured' within the stronghold of the UCPN (M). Therefore, a backup data collection method – the case study was adopted to study the selected individual units of the population. Therefore, I ran a Key informants interview among stakeholders/actors and the case studies of minor ex-combatants.

5.1.1 Key Informants interview

Key informants interview, by definition, is a way of collecting information from the key sources and people who are either expert or have ideas about the given topic. In social science research, particularly in Social work, the key informant interview is conducted to do the 'need assessment' of the community. Key informants were chosen in the three basic competencies – knowledge of the subject matter, relevant experience, and reliable information (Banyard and Miller, 1998). A Semi-structured interview guideline was prepared covering all the thematic areas of the research. Semi Structured interview with the Key informants allows research to be able to find the all possible views from the respondents by altering the sequence of the questions

or themes. Banyard and Miller (1998) opined that intensive interview gives opportunity to the interviewer to collect information which might be difficult if left to 'forced choice' answers. Therefore, a semi-structured interview guideline was prepared to be able to cover comprehensive subjects within the themes and give the interviewee and interviewer a more comfortable environment for free opinion The questions were asked based on the themes and tentative questions prepared but during the course of interview, some questions were altered or explained to the interviewee for clarification. Similarly, in the interview guide, the questions were sorted out in a way that the completion of the one section would smoothly transit to another theme.

5.1.2 Focused Group Discussion

Focused group discussion (FGD) is a widely used research method in qualitative research. Focused group discussion is group interview technique through which a researcher obtains information through an interaction among individuals in a certain topic. It is an interview technique designed to be applied in a small group of informants where they discuss around a certain topic guided by the questions or topics led proposed the researcher (Schutt, 2003). Some researchers have particularly highlighted the convenience part of this method as this helps researchers to gather information from informants gathered in a place quickly and conveniently. However, others underlined the fact that focused group discussion helps researchers understand the "conscious, semi-conscious, and unconscious psychological and socio-cultural characteristics and process" of the universe being studied (Berg, 2007:144). The focused group discussion facilitates the informants to give their arguments and counterarguments in an interactive and spontaneous way which consequently helps researchers to understand both the oral and silent dimensions of the topic being discussed. Berg (2007:148) writes that FGD is advantageous for researchers to obtain large amount of information in a relatively short period of time, get insights about the topic which were not known to researchers or not properly understood, to have a spontaneous discussion which may lead to a more interactive conclusions and may not require complicated sampling.

In a general setting, focused group discussion is conducted in which the researcher acts as a moderator or facilitator and the participants give their arguments and counter arguments on the topics being facilitated by the researchers. Berg (2007:157) points out the importance of moderator to avoid asking the leading questions. In the beginning researcher opens up the discussion by highlighting the objectives of the research project. The discussion follows once the moderator opens up the main questions and the participants start giving their arguments and counter arguments. Generally, the moderator facilitates the discussions ignited by a short question and the group participants continue with a short series of discussions (Krueger, 1997).

Researcher planned to interview the case workers directly working with the ex-child soldiers but also anticipated the problem of accessibility in the remote hills of Nepal. However, social workers' perspective was very important for the richness of researchers. They were key persons to the information of the primary subject of research – child soldiers. Accordingly, six case workers were invited for the focused group discussions.

Even though first method – key informants interview – presumably may seem to generate information from the similar process as Focused Group Discussion, as the participants in Focused Group Discussion are also the key informants. However, it can be said that information collected through the Focused Group Discussion may generate unique set of information as it allows participants in a same setting to express their attitudes and

experiences and can be immediately be counter-argued by the other participants. This gives researcher the convenience to test the validity of the information on the spot. As Berg (2007:149) says "traditional interviewing styles permit a more detailed pursuit of content information than is possible in a focused session."

For the purpose of the study, the participants of Focused Group Discussion were appointed from the case workers who represented gender, caste, and district to make a balanced group for spontaneous interactions. The participants were selected among 20 case workers who were participating in the psychosocial counselling training organized by UNICEF Nepal. The members of the group were not given information of the other members being participated. This caution was taken to avoid pre-planned answers from the group members which would otherwise lead the discussion to pre-determined statements. This spontaneity of the participants gave me the privilege to emphasize the consistency and intensity of the participants' comments as well as to silently probe the statements while presenting and analysing data.

5.2 Participants in the study and Sample

The participants in the study were selected on two layers basis using purposive sampling under non probability sampling. In the first layer, key informants both from policy level and field level were identified for the purpose of the study. The second layer included the ex-minor combatants themselves who were selected based on the reference made by the key informants. Purposive sampling has been selected because the samples selected for the study are not possible by using randomized sampling method in the qualitative studies. It is argued that non-probability sampling in qualitative study is used when the randomized sampling is not possible and the research questions that do not concern with the study of the larger population (Grinnell and Unrau, 2005:164). The purposive Sampling, as Grinnell and Unrau (Grinell and Unrau, 2005:166) defined as the methods of selecting the study population because of the 'unique position of the sample elements' and 'individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about the issues under investigation. Adhering to this definition, the key informants for the first layer of the samples were chosen as they represented key agencies in the policy and field levels and had unique positions and opinions based on the level of their involvement in the issues of reintegration challenges of the ex-minor combatants. For the second layer, the objective of the study was not to study the whole population of ex-minor combatants but to study the individual cases with the special purpose of understanding their perspective on the post-reintegration social challenges.

Accordingly, for the purpose of the first layer, All together 13 respondents were selected from various agencies viz. Government of Nepal, UCPN (M), UNMIN, UNICEF, and OHCHR using the purposive sampling. The informants were chosen based on the portfolio and the competencies of providing information for the purpose of study. However, OHCHR representative refused to take part in the study citing that the information to be shared will be politically sensitive. Two informants viz. UNICEF and UCPN (M) were contacted through phone because I could not meet them due to nationwide political strikes during the field study time. From the field level, Six Community Case workers (CSWs) of an NGO supported by UNICEF Nepal representing six districts of Nepal, two district in-charges of the UCPN (M) from Ilam and Taplejung, One Journalist, One Human Right Activist and one representative from the District level Peace committee of the Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction Nepal were nominated for the interview. Among the local key informants, one in-charge of the UCPN (M) rejected to be interviewed.

5.2.1 Respondents profile

For the purpose of this study, I collected data using two methods and the respondents represent three distinct 3 groups of informants which are presented in the table below.

Table 1: Strategic grouping of respondents and their profile.

Respondent's grouping	Respondents Profile		Methods used
Ex-Child Soldiers (Right Holders/Beneficiaries)	Male	4	Semi-structured interview
	Female	3	Semi-structured interview
Duty Bearers	UN	1 Senior Political Advisor	Semi-structured interview
	Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction	1 Rakam Chemjong	Semi-structured interview
	Maoist	1 (Ilam)	Semi-structured interview
	Local Government	1 Peace Coordinator *Taplejung*	Semi-structured interview
Stakeholders	Social Worker	5 social workers	Focus Group Discussion
	Local Journalist	1 Ilam	Semi-structured interview
	Human Rights Activist	1 *Taplejung*	Semi-structured interview

A multi-layers respondent were strategically chosen to have an in-depth understanding on the social reintegration process of the disqualified ex-minor combatants. One of such layers was the ex-child combatants from whom a direct experience of their journey from the cantonment to the society has been studied. 7 Respondents ex-child combatants have been interviewed and two of them were interviewed in May 2010 right after the discharge and reintegration efforts in *Taplejung* district of eastern Nepal. Both were interviewed in together in a group as they did not want to speak separately. A social worker was also present at the time of interview as they did not want to speak to me without the presence of the social worker. The other five respondents were interviewed around July 2011 after a year in Dhangadi district of southern Nepal where these ex-combatants were living in an organized shelter run by the Maoist party. The average length of active combats of all the respondents is 3 years but some have been in the war as long as 5 years. Due to their requests, all the real names have not been mentioned in the presentation of data but names have been changed by me.

The second layers are the people who have direct contact with the ex-child combatants or have concerned and stakes towards the transitional rehabilitation, delivery of reintegration and rehabilitation packages and successful social adjustment; as well as the other stakeholders who have direct observatory roles in the reintegration process. I am expected to quench significantly important and factual information from these respondents as they have direct and unrestricted contacts to the lives of ex-child combatants and their environment and family. In this layer, a focused-group discussion with 5 social workers working in different district of eastern Nepal was been conducted in May 2010 in Ilam bazaar of Ilam District. All the social workers have been participating in the psychosocial counselling training provided by UNICEF. All the social workers were working with different Community based NGOs in different districts. A journalist and a Human Rights Activist were also interviewed in May 2010 in Taplejung.

Efforts to collect data at the policy level has been largely influenced because of the time of data collection –the discharge had just started and Maoist party was out of the government and was creating a lot of hurdles to the coalition government; and also particularly because the profile of the third layers of respondents were highly political or highly neutral. Reaching out to the respondents ended up in few cancellations of interview appointments. However, attempts to understand how policy has been laid out to translate the reintegration process and to bring the social integration of ex-child combatants to a logical conclusion was realized. Minister Peace and Reconstruction, a senior political Advisor of UNMIN and a district level Secretary of CPN Maoist, as well as a District Coordinator of District Peace Committee of the government have been interviewed for this respondents' profile. A representative from OHCHR Nepal was approached but due to repeatedly 'no comments', 'confidential', 'neutral' 'no mandate to speak' kind of responses from the respondent, the data of this interview has not been included in data presentation and analysis. UNICEF and UNDP representatives were not available for the interview.

I was very aware about the complexities of collecting factual data from the respondents due to sensitivity and fragility of the political situation in Nepal at the time of study. Efforts were made, thus, to reach out to as much as possible the diverse groups of respondents within the strategic layers of profiles to gather data which would on their own provide check and balance to each other's opinion or statements. Many times, it was very difficult to get the facts out from the respondents, more journalistic approach to asking questions have been done however, this has been very limited and these cross questions were always aligned with the main theme of the study.

5.3 Procedures

The following process was adopted to conduct the research.

5.3.1. Literature review

An extensive review of already published articles, books and thesis in the areas of children in armed conflict, political use of children and child soldiers was done. Basically the electronic resources and published books and articles by previous researchers were reviewed to avoid the duplication of the research areas. Literatures in the review process helped both in knowledge building of the researcher in the areas of the use of children in armed conflict, psychosocial problems faced by reintegrated children in post reintegration phase and documented modalities of the rehabilitation packages rendered ex-minor combatants in war countries. The press releases and news articles along with the newspaper study opened up a new avenue of ideas in the areas of child soldiering and the socio-political factors attached to these. The review of the previously published articles has contributed immensely in the identification and theorization of research issues in question and to provide a scientific backbone of the entire study.

5.3.2. Research Design and interview guides

After the Literature review, I designed the research methods most suitably efficient to collect the data. Considering the socio-political context, aim of the research and research questions, as discussed in the section of Methodology, a qualitative research design using

the most commonly used data collection techniques viz. Key informants interview using semi-structured interview guide; and Case study on ex-minor combatants using key themes of inference were developed. Accordingly. The samples were strategically identified and the guide semi-structured interview with key informants and thematic inference guidelines were revised and finalized considering the various ethical parameters. Then the guides were translated in to Nepali to conduct the interview with the Nepali speaking participants.

5.3.3. Data collection

After the research design has been completed with the selection of research methods and interview guides for key informants interview and focus group discussion, I travelled to Nepal in 2010 and interviewed the participants of the research viz. Ex-child soldiers and other key informants. As the first attempt of the interview was limited due to the control of Maoist district in charges on the ex-child soldiers not participate in the interview, a second attempt was made in the year 2011 in June/July and more ex-child soldiers were contact and interviewed.

5.3.4. Analysis of the findings and report writing

After the data were collected, the interview materials were divided into three sets – the ex-child soldiers, the stakeholders and the duty bearers. After the interviews were sorted into different categories, the transcription was followed by the presentation of data. The interview materials were separated into different thematic topic and the different colours were given to clearly separate the interview materials. Analysis was done by using both theoretical and empirical data to make the meaning wherever possible.

5.4. Ethical considerations

Reamer asks a very turning question regarding how likely the research will 'generate information that will enhance social work's ethical duty to assist people in need'' (Reamer, 2006 cited in Grinnell and Unrau 2005:36). So at the level of composing research design, particular attention was paid in stating research questions and the answers of which would be a significant contribution in designing future programmes and services that would do the justice to the ex-minor combatants.

Corresponding to the code of ethics of the social work research, related to 'social justice' and 'diversity', particular attention was paid while selecting the respondents of the research so as to avoid this research being termed as politically biased and narrow in respondents. (Grinnell and Unrau, 2005:36)

Though samples for the case studies were found with 'luck' rather than the 'selectiveness', criteria for selection was 'gender' and 'groups characterizing their post-reintegration social livelihood'.

Third but the very important aspect of the ethical consideration in social science and social work research is about obtaining informed consent. The informed consent is a way through which I communicated the objective of the research, main research questions, rights of the respondents to reject the interview, leave the interview in the middle if they wish and

privacy and confidentiality foe the interviewer. The informed consent with a letter explaining the above and contact details of the research and the research supervisor was read out during the interview and the translated copy of the informed consent letter in Nepali was handed over to them prior to the interview session. However, the key informants representing the policy level were of the opinion that mention their name in the research was not a problem and the names have been mentioned accordingly.

Informed consent is ''a concept… which means that research participants must be informed about the purposes, methods and risks associated with the research study, and they must voluntarily consent to participate in it'' (Grinnell and Unrau, 2005:36).

5.5. Validity, Reliability and Generalizability

The questions of validity are often distinguished to those that are internal to the sample under study and those that are external (applying to broader- unstudied – population) (Grinnell and Unrau, 2005:36). This means that the research come across a measuring rod to check whether the research report is valid reflection of the expression of the respondents; and whether the findings can be claimed valid to apply it to the similar areas in other research content.
On the other hand, "Reliability is the extent to which a data collection procedure and analysis yield the same answer for multiple participants in the research process'' (Kirk and Miller 1986 cited by Franklin and Ballan in Grinnell and Unrau 2005:438). To explain simply, the data must be trustworthy and something to rely on. A research is reliable if the theory used in research reliably explains the subject being studied.

To respond to the issues of validity as highlighted above, direct meaning and implied meaning of the statements of the respondents are analysed by highlighting the important message that ex-child soldiers want to convey in this research. On the other hand, the issue of external validity which is termed as generalizability refers to the ''transferability' of the findings of this research to the larger population or to the 'match' between one sample and its settings and events. (Grinnell and Unrau 2005:442)

Problem with the generalization as argued by Cronbach (1975) is that the findings ''decay'' and become more history than 'science' in social science research. Following his criticism, I argue that this research claims to be generalizable to the extent to which the findings in this research in the given socio-political setting (transitional) may generate the same findings in the next study. However, particular caution to be noticed is that the findings are based on analysis of the events from the statements by policy level informants may be 'politically correct' and be biased and therefore must be generalized with caution while explaining the similar cases in the another geographical and socio-political context.

5.6. Limitations of the study

This study is a fulfilment of the Masters degree in Social work and human rights and is limited in terms of credit points and number of pages. This consequently limited the presentation of data into a limited space available.

It is also worth noticing that some interview conducted among the duty bearers carries often the politically correct statements and they must be read and applied with the limitation resulted by the politically correct statements.

The data collection was done in an extremely complicated political environment right at the beginning of reintegration process of disqualified verified minors from the cantonments. The situation was fragile and mobility of the researchers, Human Rights activists were under public and political vigilance especially from the Maoist party. This limited me in fully utilize opportunity to interview ex-child soldiers as well as other informants.

5.7. Research topic and the researcher

The research problem is not simply a concurrent social work research topic which needed to be studied from academic domain at the post conflict context in Nepal. I would like to highlight that primarily my research interest rooted and upshot from my professional experience of working with street children from the year 2002. The significant group of street children which received services from the organization – Child Watabaran Center Nepal – which I founded in the year 2002 in Kathmandu Nepal were none other than the ones who ended up on the street due to the displacement of conflict and consequently due to the loss of their family. More than 150 000 people were believed to be internally displaced after the then government started "Operation Romeo" in the year 1995 and imposition of state of emergency in November 2001 (Shrestha and Niroula, 2005). As a manager of voluntarily-run child home, I came across over a dozens of children who had been affected by conflict. After my international Master from the department of social work in Gothenburg University in 2007, I returned back to work with Child Watabran Center and started expanding my radar of intervention from the direct service sector to policy level discussion. That exposed me to the much sensitive but hardly researched topic in Nepal about the participation of children in armed conflict in Nepal. Particular interest grew from the question – it became difficult to integrate the children living at child homes who had faced armed conflict, could someone imagine the traumatic austerity an ex-child soldier undergo when it comes to their returns to society? Particular research interest grew within me due to this awareness and the research idea was further concretized so as to study ex-child soldiers' social reintegration challenges from practice and academic level of social work research domain. By adding this paragraph about research topic and the researcher, I would like to bring reader closer to my practice background and my deep interest and awareness in research domain to further increase the validity and reliability of the research project and its finding which I deeply wanted to explore and aspire to continue study in future.

Chapter 6 – Results

In this chapter, interview materials which were collected from the three strategic interview groups have been presented under different thematic research questions which this research project wanted to answer. Attempts have been made to make meaning of the interview materials by sometime using the exact Nepali word in parenthesis to give the actual words expressed by the informants. As far as possible, literature has been used to explain certain empirical data; otherwise they are presented under thematic discussion and are analysed using theory in chapter 7.

In the following passages, I will present the data under different themes of the interview questions and the data will be supported by ideas, perspectives and literatures under each theme to bring about thematic perspective throughout the presentation of the data.

6.1. Duration of active combat and nature of combat environment

All of the 7 child soldiers interviewed were recruited in civil war at their early teenage. All of the ex-combatants were at the age of 19 to 23 years old when I interviewed them and all said that they were 16 years old when they joined civil war as their commanders had given strict instructions to tell that they were 16 and above. The oldest interviewee was 23 years old youth from Dhangadhi and he told that he spent 3 years in the active combat. The youngest interviewed was 18 years old (aka comrade *nipurna*) a girl who was living in an organized camp in *Taplejung* district. She had spent 3 years in the civil war and had joined the troop when she was 13 years old. According to the opinions of all the respondents, the children were at 7 – 9 grades of their school when they joined the civil war. That means children within the age group of 13 to 16 were the ones who joined the civil war in some kind of forms. Out of the 7 ex-child soldiers interviewed, three had spent 3 years, one had spent 6 years, two had spent 1 year and half year and one had spent 1 year in the civil war.

The nature of work performed by these ex-child soldiers performed during the war varied but the most common work were messenger and cultural troops. A social worker[4] in a Focus Group Discussion conducted in Taplejung said:

> *"Most of the children in the period of 10 years of war were used in relationship making, CIDs [secrete informants/messenger] and in cultural group to conduct cultural program. Besides this, they were also used in training in armed group and used in security guards [sentry]. But mostly they were used in cultural group and as CIDs."*

Even though, the children who were involved in cultural troops had generally lesser risks of being exposed to gun battle, the social workers confirmed that they came across and met the children who were taken in the cultural groups but were also actively carrying arms. Another social worker[5] said:

> *"Even those who have been in the cultural groups also have not only been in the group but also carried weapon and directly got involved in the war. It was compulsory for them to know how to make bombs and weapons."*

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[4] Case worker A, Ilam 9 May 2010.
[5] Case worker C, Ilam, 9 May 2010

The main attraction or motivation technique Maoist used was to inspire children to dance or sing in the village level revolutionary cultural programs. However, once they followed the cultural troops and affiliated to the party, they used to be, as another social worker[6] said: *"divided into different fields such as army, information distribution… it was compulsory for the children to be in the combat field at least once."* So the rotation of duties was a means to train all the newly recruits in the different jobs within the army.

Describing his responsibilities, *comrade Prapti*[7] (female, age 22) told that she did *"security rounding, inviting people in the programmes…"* and after she entered into the barrack, she went in training and combat duty. *Kamred Suman(male, 22)*[8] who joined PLA when he was 16 told: *"I worked in improving the relations (sambandha sudhar) with public and taking care of leaders (netaharuko surakshya). I worked as a sentry guard."*

6.2. Exposure to extreme conditions and violence

All the ex-child soldiers who were interviewed were exposed to extreme conditions of battle environment, had seen the murder themselves and had sustained extreme hunger and sleepless night travels. Sharing her experience from the battlefield, *comrade Prapti* (female, age 22)[9], told:

> *"Sometimes, no food were available, only to live with noodles and biscuits. No water. We never ate full stomach. We used to share food with big troop… We lived with hunger for even two or more days sometimes. Sometimes, we were not allowed to sleep. Difficulties like sleeping in the forest, to live in the strictest rules etc. There were most difficult moments like fighting even in the heavy rain in the night."*

Comrade Suman[10] *(age 22, Male)* who joined the Maoist party at the age of 16 and spent in the active combat for 6 years narrated his combat experience by saying *"at the war, we used to be in the back side, advanced group used to be in front. At the back, to rescue injured and sick and to clear the dead body was our duty.* He still remembered the battle and the death of his friends. He said *"…enemy fired at us from the other side of the hill when we were sitting in Khimdi village. That was the saddest moment. 9 of our friends became martyrs".*

6.3. Discharged with feeling of loss: Denial as the coping mechanism

The discharge process began in December 2009 and the verified minors were the first ones to leave cantonment after the government and UN drew up a discharge and reintegration Plan of Action of around 4000 verified minors. Combat life was horrible but feeling of loss was skyrocketing among these who were first termed as "disqualified". Even though these ex-child soldiers fought the war as fearlessly, bloodily and ruthlessly as their other fellow combatants, terming them as the "disqualified" created a extreme form of loss and anxiety. After talking to the social workers, journalist, and human rights activists as well as with the ex-child soldiers, they all confirmed that there was a gap between the Plans of Action and how commanders in the

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[6] Case worker E, Ilam, FGD excerpts from 01/04/2010
[7] Comrade Prapti, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[8] Comrade suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011
[9] Comrade Prapti, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[10] Comrade suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011

specific cantonments conveyed the message to the disqualified. They were again given oral garlands of bravery and contribution they made to the party, and they were not "disqualified" accordingly to party so that the Maoist party could win the sentiments and make as easy discharge as possible. Discharged ex-child soldiers felt humiliated and felt "extremely bad". One of the interviewee, *Comrade Pratpti[11]* shared her anguish of being discharged saying:

"We felt extremely bad. Everybody understands disqualified in a negative way. We have come to a condition of mental damage. Felt extremely sad."

But some interviewees among ex-child soldiers said that the pain sustained and increased even more later compared to when they were first discharged. For example, *Comrade Suman[12]* told:

> *"Felt pain in the soul. There was definitely a pain when you are ousted after contributing in such a big scale in the past. The pain that is now was definitely greater than that was when we were discharged because there were a lot of consolations from the commanders."*

All the ex-child soldiers who were interviewed told that they were not happy with the decision to disqualify and discharge them. As a mechanism to cope with this feeling and to save their faces from the family members and villagers, they told that they were out on a short vacation. When they returned back in the village, they normally stayed for maximum of 1 month and returned back to party district camps or lived with their friends. A social worker[13] employed in an organization to support the ex-child soldiers narrated about a story of a girl in a FGD in Ilam:

> *"I went to visit this girl and found out that her family was also the supporter of Maoist. But they were not informed that their daughter was disqualified and sent back. When we investigated the case, we found out that the girl actually did not tell her parents that she was disqualified because she was afraid of how the society will take her and she didn't go home but instead went to another village."*

The social workers also observed extreme level of humiliation among the ex-child soldiers who were sent back home. Due to the loss of their education, loss of ranks in the cantonment, and being terminated as disqualified, some of them lied to the parents. A case worker during the FGD in Illam shared: *"the main internal conflict is feeling of humiliation (hinatabodh). This is the main problem because of which they haven't even told in their families that they were disqualified. They have been saying that they were on vacation."*

However, a discharged ex-child soldier interviewed in Taplejung did not feel that she was disqualified. She expressed her rage by telling, *"We will not be disqualified just because of UNMIN. If we leave party, we will be disqualified but not now. We are still in the party. We are still fighting."*

6.4.   Social reintegration services rendered and recipients opinion

Even though the discharged ex-child soldiers were provided with various kinds of rehabilitation packages in terms of travel allowance to go back home, toll free number to call if they needed support, short term skill trainings and support for education, support for counselling etc. But all

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[11] Comrade Prapti, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[12] Comrade suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011
[13] Case worker D, Ilam, FGD excerpts from 01/04/2010

of the ex-child soldiers interviewed expressed that the support package did not match their expectations and did not help them. Many of them had financial expectations from the government and Maoist and UN agencies. They were given 4000 Nepali rupees each (around 50 USD) to travel to their families. A Social Worker[14] shared her opinion during FGD in Ilam:

> *"Package should be made according to their interest. Since the package came first, they did not fit into the package. Their interest should decide which training they want. And the contextualization of it."*

Comrade Prapti[15] expressed dissatisfaction over the rehabilitation package rejected, she said: *"There was only one package. Some friends who wanted, went and took the training. Only few have finished degree and SLC. They work from that base. We the losted 8 or 9 graders could do nothing even if we had taken training. There was no package for our base, so we never took [training].*

For the ex-child soldiers, the training package was not sufficient and they termed it "formalities" to complete the process (Comrade Suresh)[16]. He told: *"There was a provision of a training for one or two months but there was no provision of employment based training. We wanted a job guaranteed after the training which never happened."*

For the ones who accepted the training package was also not easy even after the training. Comrade Geeta accepted a study package from UN to study grade 11 and 12 but she had to stay far from her home to be able to study. She however studied the grades 11 and 12 but said that she could not do anything with UN package. She was preparing for midwives course (ANM) at the time of interview. She told:

> *"4000 rupees was given... that was not useful. Party used to keep 1000...cut as levy. 12 grades graduates are so many out there in the village. University degree holders men and women are also many. I was not able to live on my own. I could not stay back at home. Since I could not stay at home, I walked out here."*

One of the biggest problems due to which many ex-child soldiers rejected the package was due to the politicizing and bargaining of the Maoist party for increased financial packages. Accordingly, these children were trained from the commanders to reject the package and that it was not easy for public and help organizations to have a direct contact with the ex-child soldiers as they were still in the stronghold of Maoist even after the discharge process. The training package and whole support package was difficult to offer and monitor. A Senior Political Advisor[17] of UNMIN during the key informant's interview told,

> *"...this thing is difficult for UNMIN as they are still in the hold of Maoist. We did not have the direct access. The whole thing was built upon trust. The process had to take only six months according to the agreement but it took really long time. So, all these people were staying there hoping for something to happen. Whole thing is difficult as Maoist is still treating them as their armies."*

Politicization occurred en route after drawing up rehabilitation packages and during conveying and offering the same to the ex-child soldiers. Even though the policy level agreement was that *"they have to be reintegrated back in the society and they should not be taken back into the*

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[14] Case worker A, Ilam, FGD excerpts from 01/04/2010
[15] Comrade Prapti, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[16] Comrade Suresh, age 23, male ex-child soldiers, Dhangadi, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[17] A senior political Advisor(not to be identified as name), UNMIN, interviewed 18 April 2010

army" (Rakam Chemjong, Minister of Peace and Reconstruction, 2010), evaluation process went wrong along the way due to grip of the Maoist upon the ex-child soldiers. Even though there was clearly laid 6 steps plans such as informing, educating, training etc, Minister Chemjong[18] further admitted by saying:

> *"Maoist Protested in political way. We had thought of giving them full information about the disqualifications and physical treatment, psychosocial counselling choices. But this was taken as a political issue and [was] protested."*

A district level in-charge of CPN (M) in Ilam admitted the fact by saying that "they are still in the framework of the party" and blamed government for not being able to recognize the contribution that their soldiers made to the country. He said *"They [government] misused the money. They could have given 100 000 rupees for their life skills or life planning which was actually possible, looking at the budget they had, so they have always missed the money."*

6.5. Social integration: role of family, social network and challenges

Apart from the rehabilitation package for reintegration being overly politicized, the interviewed ex-child soldiers expressed higher level of broken relationship with the society and family that made their journey from cantonment to family difficult and for many impossible. And consequently, all the ex-child soldiers interviewed and who had once visited their family for a short period either moved to another village or came back to the district headquarters and stayed in a camp-like shelter organized the Maoist party. The questions focused mainly on their perception and experience of relationship with some key social networks mainly family, school, friends and other help organizations. The expectations the ex-child Soldiers had from these social networks and experience they had in terms of using these networks for their easy adaptation to the family or in society were largely affected by their own readiness to be adapted but also because of the non-cooperation exhibited from the social networks.

Some ex-child soldiers interviewed expressed that they did not want to take "bourgeoisie education (*Burjuwa sikshya*)" and did not feel education opportunity was lost, they however admitted that they had a feeling of broken links with friends. Comrade Nipurna (age 17, female) from *Taplejung* said: *"we could not study, we could not take burjuwa shikshya (bourgeoisie education). We lost friends. "*

Even though family was the important player in terms of providing conditions for easy adaptations to social life, it largely dependent on whether the receiving family believed or not on Maoist's political ideology. If the family of the ex-child soldiers believed on it, it was easier for them to adapt to the family and society but for others, it was 'be-on-your-on' kind of situation. A Social worker[19] from *Pachthar* district told in a FGD:

> *"I can give you an example of one youth who was very good in studies left school and went to join Maoist army to earn money like 8000 rupees per month. Now when he is back his family and his school both did not accept him and told him to do what ever he wants to. So he is left with no other option than telling the party that he will now go wherever the party takes him."*

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[18] Mr. Rakam Chemjong, GON, Minister of peace and reconstruction, interviewed 21 April 2010
[19] Case worker C, Ilam, FGD excerpts from 01/04/2010

But for Comrade Minu, she was welcomed by the parents and schools alike without any allegations. Both family and school teachers consoled her and motivated her to study. But due to the poverty, she could not continue staying in the family. Her problem was not the family or school, but the family poverty which could not allow her to stay in the family. She[20] narrated her story as saying:

> *"There was no problem from the school. There were nearest sirs and madams [teachers]. I went [to the Maoist] because of the lack of money after my father died. I could not buy uniform and books, and that's why I went. Sirs and Madams [teachers] consoled us saying not to fear and even your fathers can give exams. Teachers are educated class, they give extremely positive suggestions and motivate."*

However, experience of *Comrade Suman[21]* (age 22, male) was different than that of *Comrade Minu.* The family had expectations in terms of money from him when he returned back as the family heard that other qualified retiree combatants had returned with money. He said: *"Family also changes their view by saying that the own friends came with money but you came empty hands. On the other hand, I also feel that I could not do anything. They call us disqualified."* He even experienced that the friends circle had been lost and he did not feel comfortable to 'mingle' with the 'new faces'. He Said:

> *"We don't have much relationship. All those friends from past are on their duty. It is difficult to mingle and build relationship with the new ones. It may be easier with one who understands, but with the ones who does not understand... it is difficult."*

For Comrade Sochak[22] his own feeling of being 'embarrassed' for not being able to bring back anything after returning from war and cantonment is hindering him from going back to family. His other colleagues had '*retired with money and doing well with by opening shops* (Comrade Sochak), he feels that '*family thinks negatively*' about him returning '*without money*'. He expressed his sense of embarrassment in this way:

> *"When I stay without anything, family thinks negatively. The same feeling in the society, and also in the family. Since I am embarrassed, I have not gone home. They phone and day – leave it, come back home, But I feel embarrassed. I am staying here hoping that the party would make it easier to go back home."*

Both the government and nongovernmental organizations had availed different kind of services in terms of counseling, follow up and even channeling them to the training. But these have been found to be largely hampered or inaccessible or inadequate for these ex-child soldiers. Besides, the help organizations were limited in their support as they could not freely access to the lives of these ex-child Soldiers. One of the biggest barriers for not being able to provide unrestricted support from the help organizations and other members of the society was that the Maoist party still had control over the ex-child soldiers. For example Moist District In charge of Ilam said: *"they come from a principle…they are part of us and we need them to change the society. They will be with us."* This type of control and rigorous indoctrination of political views even after the discharge restricted many help organizations to offer help in an open manner. For example,

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[20] Comrade Minu, Age 22, interviewed on 23 June 2011 in Dhangadhi
[21] Comrade Suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, interviewed on 23June 2011 in Dhangadi
[22] Comrade Sochak, interviewed Male, ex-child soldier, 23 June 2011 in Dhangadi

the two ex-child soldiers interviewed in Taplejung had requested their anonymity from party establishment while being interviewed.

Disarming the ex-child soldiers from their combat mind is the biggest challenge in reintegrating them back. A local journalist[23] from *Taplejung* opined said that the ex-child soldiers still *"...are not feeling guilty that they were in war, they feel proud about it."* He further said: *Until and unless these disqualified have returned to the homes do not feel that was not good and we should not repeat it, the peace process will be difficult for sure."* For him a big responsibility lies in the Maoist party to make easier for the ex-child soldiers. He said:

> *"The party should be more active to change these youths. They will listen to party more, so party should be more involved in it. The party should ask them to study and learn."*

Family poverty, feeling of embarrassment, lost relationship with the friends, political indoctrination and party control over the ex-child soldiers, expectations of the ex-child soldiers from party and government for financial support, restricted support from help organizations as 'they themselves are afraid of Maoist (local journalist, Taplejung)' all, either in whole or in part, are creating barriers for the ex-child soldiers to reintegrate in the society and family.

However, more than social barriers, the key issue is 'violence' which has a key impact in the lives of people which is hindering the social integration of these ex-child soldiers. The key social and psychosocial impact of war among the ex-child soldiers as perpetrators and the older generations of the community as the victims are still looming in the memories of the society which is not easy to eliminate quick. A Senior Political Advisor[24] working with UNMIN opined that:

> *"Issue about violence is not only they are being affected, but they are affecting the whole community. Children coming and killing elderly people have disturbed the whole hierarchy thing. The children have to deal with the anger of the community now when they are back in the community. They did the thing without knowing that they had done."*

6.6.   Trauma and flashback: Psychosocial limitations for integration and adaptation

Published research on studies of ex-child soldiers have put a lot of focus on the psychological impact of the combat environment and their negative impact in social adaptations – mainly war trauma perspective. Giving psychological dimension of this research is limited but efforts have been made to understand the state of mind of ex-child soldiers by asking different questions related to psychosocial dimensions – such as fear, flash backs, disturbing dreams and other psychosocial challenges such as social perception. Opinions of ex-child soldiers themselves, the social workers working for them and other key informants have been used in the result of this study.

All of the ex-child soldiers interviewed had some kind of fear that is disturbing them in many forms. Impact of fear was immeasurable –as the study did not have planned to do so, but existence of fear was obviously prevalent. Finding the expression of fear by asking straight

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23 Ananda Gutuma, radio journalist, Taplejung, interviewed 10 april 2010
[24] A senior political Advisor(not to be identified as name), UNMIN, interviewed 18 April 2010

question did not always produce examples and they the ex-child soldiers did not want to show that they were 'fearful' or 'coward' but expression could be noticed in answers of other questions e.g. what kind of memories keeps coming in your mind, which were answered in both positive – happy moments, and negative –sad moments and directly implying fearful situation that they were passing through. *Comrade Prapti[25]* revealed by saying:

> *"I often remember about the duty to watch the enemies. Watch around with the fear of enemies attacking me. I fear that enemies might come from behind and kill me by choking me."*

The fear which she still holds is not actual fear but is the by-products of her exposure to extreme combat environment. 'Enemies might come from behind and kill me by choking' can be understood merely as the state of mind from her exposure to *"duty in the darkest nights…. not allowed to put the light on… (*Comrade Prapti*)"* in the middle of the forest. She fought with '*no fear*' and had no other option to be able to survive in the night combat.

Constant flashbacks of the war time memories have been disturbing all the ex-child soldiers interviewed. These flash backs are often when they are alone and when they try to sleep. Comrade Suresh[26] explained his flash back as very '*haunting*' and '*painful*' which keeps coming when he is alone. He said:

> *"The moment in Darchula, where there was a friend talking to me a moment ago, suddenly was killed. It was in the year 2062 BS. The moment when friends got martyrdom in Mugu and Darchula always keeps haunting me (pirolchha). When I remember this moment, I feel extremely painful (pidadayi). "*

Some of the ex-child Soldiers interviewed told that they miss the moments when they used to eat together, physical training, cultural performances which were dearer to make them feel good about. But all of them had exposed themselves to death, kidnapping, suicide, and explosion. One ex-child soldier shared that he often hears the noise of bombs and guns when he is alone. He[27] said

> *"Firing of weapons and so on. The sounds of two way firing…dyang dung[makes sound]…that keeps coming. All these sounds I often hear. When I am alone in the silent days, I hear these noise a lot."*

Degree of impact of such fears and flashbacks are prevalent among the ex-child soldiers interviewed. Impacts are not surmountable and have impact in their daily lives. Some ex-child soldiers perceived them as something that is normal and does not affect them personally. But for some it is definitely haunting and painful. The responses were often mixed. One ex-child Soldier interviewed told:

> *"There is nothing I remember about. There are no moments which are worth remembering or worth forgetting."*
> - *Comrade Suresh (Male)*

The Ex-child Soldiers were asked about the types of dreams they often dream about and they have reported some kind of nightmares in the form of *'everybody fighting in the war', 'friends*

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[25] Comrade Prapti, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[26] Comrade Suresh, age 23, male ex-child soldiers, Dhangadi, interviewed on 21 June 2011
27 Comrade Suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, interviewed on 23June 2011 in Dhangadi

getting ready for war at 3 o'clock in the morning', *'women trying to suicide'*, *'guns shots'* etc. These dreams, flashbacks and fear found to have added fuel to worry much more about their family life, financial crisis, relationship and marriage. They constantly worry about life not being as before they joined the Maoist as they have excessive physical training in battle. Comrade Prapti shared her worry, *"…the same PT [physical training] is destroying our physical. We have not been able to do our home chores. We have a fear that life won't be like before."* The 'physical' worry can instigate multiple situations about life such as bodily injuries, but it may also mean battered reproductive health for women. However, this has been presented in gender and combat after effects in the following paragraphs.

6.7.   Social Stigma, coping strategy and identity perception (identity crisis)

The ex-child Soldiers also expressed their perception about how would people perceive about their identity. The common feeling of stigmatization perception of ex-child soldiers were 'character based' and also 'affiliation based'. The perception about ex-child soldiers themselves about them being different is highly positive than about their feeling about how community perceives about them. For example, 3 female ex-child soldiers perceived that other people are backbiting about their character which would ultimately lead them to problem with marriages. All the four male ex-child soldiers interviewed worried about other people backbiting about their character of being killer and hostile. Comrade Geeta[28] said:

> *"The first problem is backbiting (kura katne)….Our society allege us as if we sleep at the same bed. They talk behind and even some asked me this. When we try to convince that it is not true, they don't believe. We are the ones discharged with already a black sport on our forehead, so society do not believe us…They take us as murder (hatyara)"*

Perceived social stigma felt by ex-child soldiers are always connected to 'perceived allegation' which they fear that society would backbite against them. For example, one ex-child soldier, Comrade Sochak[29] told: *"they think I am the fighter. They think I am a member of Maoist party…they put allegation to us saying that we have killed people, slept together with other women etc."* Coping with those allegations have been sustained by talk or argument by the ex-child Soldiers. Their usual responses were that they would tell the people that *"they fought for the country… that is not correct to put allegation for the people who fought for change."* (Comrade Sochak).

In terms of identity, ex-child soldiers interviewed expressed that they prefer to identify themselves as member of the Maoist party except one who is overly disgruntled with the party and opted out to be identified as individual. Both Group identity and the personal identity have stem out either from their expectations of support from the party and government to provide them financial support or as a security as it would add pride and strength to their daily life. One of the ex-child Soldiers interviewed told, *"Now I want to identify as a member of the party organization, because my public identity is attached to party…I live in party organization… I feel secure to identify as part of the organization."*

Interestingly, group identity can strengthen to fight social labelling and often herald in finding individual security in group identity. The reason of opting for group identity were not same

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28 Comrade Geeta, female, 22 year, interviewed on 21 June 2011 in Dhangadi
29 Comrade Sochak, interviewed Male, ex-child soldier, 23 June 2011 in Dhangadi

from one ex-child soldiers to another. Some identify as member of the group because they *"worked since past in this organization and will continue doing so",* and *others prefer group identity because they 'feel secure to identify as part of the organization'(comrade Sochak, Male).* For some, it is because they have *'offered the most important days to the party, the moments of putting energy and efforts have been given to party' (comrade Suresh, 23, male).* From this group identity perception, it is can be a last resort and only hope to cling to feel mentally secure and not feel lost because they still glorify the contribution they made to the party and the country. But this identity when checked with society perception can become a major barriers for smooth integration. For example, a journalist[30] said:

> *"These children underwent training in the past. Though they have said to be disqualified, they are skilled of war. They are bit alone one minded. And Society can also treat them a bit different, so there can be conflict in the society."*

However, acceptance degree and integration success does not necessarily depend on the perception of either their individual or group identity in the context studied. In fact, degree of coercion depends mainly on the attached identity in the past which acts as big barrier in adapting to social life easily. The perception of both the help organizations and society in general is an 'ex-combatants' identity. This identity perception is somehow creating obstruction in their integration apart from the glorified identity given by the Maoist. A senior political Advisor of UNMIN explained that, *"One of the important facts is [that] they are used as victims. They should not be only looked as they were used as combatants but the social impact should also be looked into".* The by-product of the coercive identity perception between the ex-child soldiers themselves – group identity (voluntary), attached identity (imposed); and the given identity by the society in general – ex combatants, somehow creates a communal hegemony and ex-child soldiers defiant to this, which will lead to , as the Senior Political Advisor of UNMIN said, *"increased level of fraction between society and disqualified".*

The juxtaposed identities labelled by the Maoist party, help organizations, peers, schools and government and UN and the perceived by ex-child soldiers themselves was found to have derailed their already battered identity to a more complex 'identity crisis'. In the perception of the ex-child soldiers, their glorified identity of being a party cadre as *'...it has become a matter of pride to say that one has fought 10 years for the democracy in the country...*(district in-charge of Maoist Party in Ilam district) has been contrasted by the labelling as 'disqualified' by the government and UN. The identity crisis has created a cross roads for the ex-child soldiers in terms of getting help for choosing social life. The ex-child soldiers come across more identity crisis situation when they confront the family and society and peer groups. Their feeling about how society perceives their identity contrasts sharply the 'glorified identity' of the Maoist propaganda. Some of these ex-child soldiers want to carry 'organizational identity' and some want to leave and choose 'individual identity'. When they choose the individual identity, they also can not totally avoid their attached 'fighter' or killers identity. This identity crisis rather gives an ambiguous behaviour pattern among ex-child soldiers and due to this, they end up in the cross road of choosing or not choosing the services offered by help organizations, affiliating or not affiliating within the Maoist party, going home or staying back in camp like shelters. This identity crisis has contributed significantly in dilemma of choosing the facilities as well as creating conditions for help organizations in rendering services.

6.8.   Gender and social adjustment and after effects

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[30] Ananda Gutuma, radio journalist, interviewed 10 April 2010 in Taplejung

Nepalese society is restrictive towards women in terms of freedom in certain life events. That is largely exhibited in terms of relationships, marriage, travel, and professions. In a largely patriarchal society, fathers, brothers and husbands make decisions about their daughters, sisters and wives. One of the biggest motivational factors for the Maoist to attract female combatants in the ranks was to fight against this conventional patriarchal society and women's experience of violence and sexual atrocities, polyandry, domestic violence, dowry, and other discrimination compared to their male counterparts. A women wing of the party of the schools and in the community had taken responsibility to use this as propaganda to lure young girls to fight against this injustice. Sexual violence and sexual atrocities were the reasons why many women joined Maoist to fight against even though it was not the 'necessary evil for social change (Lohani-Chase, 2008:145), this might have provoked women witnessing such event to take revenge and consequently join the Maoist War. During the civil war and even after the peace treaty, women and gender issues have been largely overshadowed by the class ideology of the Maoist ideology. As Mina (2008) argues, Maoist indeed succeeded politicizing and justifying the civil war through the sustained social and class inequalities which definitely highlights the 'women question', but their sacrifices and the bodily sacrifices during war have been largely 'unacknowledged' despite the fact that their suppression have been 'secretly wished for' to bring about social uprising and to fuel civil war.

The detailed account of how the women combatants experienced war as compared to their male combatants can be separate domain of research, but attempts have been made in this research to understand how women ex-child soldiers experience their journey from combat experience to social life especially in the context of onset of social patriarchy before they joined the civil war and deformed identity in the civil.

Perception of ex-child soldiers on what society think of them being involved in war have been differently expressed by male and female ex-child soldiers interviewed. Male ex-child soldiers have expressed their perceived worry of society not accepting them due to the atrocities they have committed in the war and largely due to the humiliation of felt about not being able to support the family financially. However, female ex-child soldiers have expressed their perceived worry that society may alleged them about pre-marriage sexual relationships. Comrade Minu[31] told:

> *"People think that Maoist of the past is not good. They keep snatching, keep threatening, women and men sleep in the same bed. But the truth is known by the one who holds it. We are still in the old bourgeoisie culture."*

Female ex-child soldiers have double the challenges compared to their male fellows because they return back to the family, not only with the identity tag of disqualified but also as a woman combatants. This poses jeopardy in finding friends, mixing with society and adapting to new family life. Comrade Geeta[32] further expressed her experience when she went to her village and met friends:

> *"I found completely different behavior than before. We were discharged out in helpless (bichalit) by calling us disqualified. Even if the family (gharpariwar) does not say, they show that behavior [helplessly discharged). Even the educated people in the society show this behavior. We are perceived based on some bad views of society (naramro distrikon)."*

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[31] Comrade Minu, Age 22, interviewed on 23 June 2011 in Dhangadhi
[32] Comrade Geeta. Age 21, interviwed on 21 June 2011 in Dhangadi

Backbiting, character assassination, insult, and verbal allegation are often the reactions shown by the friends, family and community. Even though, some ex-child soldiers did not directly feel the social allegations, Geeta[33] told that these were the reasons why she opted out to leave the village and live in a camp like shelters organized by Maoist Party. She told:

> *"The girl who left the home (gharbata bahiriyeko manchhe)... unwise think such a filthy about us as we went to Maoist. They talk filthy (nanathari kuraharu). Even own friends tell nonsense about us. They talk behind you (pithyun pachhadi naramrakura). I realized that even friends think filthy about you."*

The pain of returning to the same patriarchal society which they left with the vision of changing it has not been so far changed as they aspired. One of the biggest issues is the marriage and finding life partner. As society alleged the women about their sexual relationship before marriage, finding the right partner is challenging for them and for their family. Even bigger challenge is to maintain the married life. Comrade Geeta[34] expressed her challenge:

> *"Even if in future, I will be married, I see problem about what to do or how to do. I see problems related to all aspects of livelihood (jiwan yapan)."*

6.9.   Change agents and self-competencies

Personal competencies, ability to reflect upon hardships gone through during the war and ability and the environment to use these competencies in new challenges in post-war period and the role that these competencies and soft skills play in their efforts to adapt to new civilian life has also been the focus of this study. Amid a fragile political environment, extremely poverty at their family as well as lack of access to basic life opportunities are external barriers to which these ex-child soldiers have very little control. Precarious life experience before and during the war and their self-reflection has been somehow found to be a malevolent but necessary settings for obtaining a lot of personal qualities among the ex-child soldiers interviewed. And these ex-child soldiers have access to the personal qualities which they possess but it takes external support to search these qualities and translate as change agents. Radhika Khadka[35], a social worker from Taplejung, shared her observation about the capacity of the ex-child soldiers that she interviewed.

> *"They have become confident on political issues. They are aware about politics. They have left their bad habits and physical appearance is also changed. They have become creative."*

Gyanendra Magrati,[36] a social worker from Terhathum observed:

> *"They know about human rights. They have realized the importance of education. They have leadership quality in the environment that they grew....the feeling that we have to do something."*

The personal qualities were reflected during the interview with the ex-child soldiers and also with the other key informants. These personal qualities were expressed in the form of soft skills

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[33] Comrade Geeta. Age 21, interviwed on 21 June 2011 in Dhangadi
[34] Comrade Geeta. Age 21, interviewed on 21 June 2011 in Dhangadi
[35] Case worker E, FGD excerpts from the date: 01/04/2010 in Ilam
[36] Case Worker FGD excerpts from the date: 01/04/2010 in Ilam

such as ability to explain society, socio-political complexities, ability to theorize the class inequalities, say, from Marxist perspective, even though biased but higher level of self-confidence and discipline as well as ability to convince general public.

Comrade Nipurna[37] told enlightened the issue and told: *"No one has all the qualities. But I am somebody who can not give up. I hate losing."* The realization of her own ability can be interpreted from different forms such as someone being stubborn, but the same habit of 'not give up' and 'hate losing' can the foundation for her strong perseverance and ability to stick to what she aims to be. The challenge remains however, to transform this perseverance to something positive.

However, the mass assumption of taking these ex-child soldiers only as victim restricts possibilities to unleash their change agents and self-competencies which would be useful agents for social integration.

Immense commitment towards party, sense responsibilities towards family and self as well as ability to look among peers the positive thing which they can learn and apply in their own life were expressed during the interview of the ex-child Soldiers. Comrade Suresh[38] expressed his responsibilities towards his parents in the following way:

> *"Among four brothers, I am the oldest. From generations back, it has been a tradition that oldest son has to manage home in our culture. There are big responsibilities in the family and there are a lot of challenges. "*

Comrade Suman[39] expressed that he 'learned the idea about how to build relation' which he hopes to use this skills in future to finding jobs and asking people to help him. He is aware that his dependence towards party is not going to continue long and will have to find out solutions himself. He said:

> *"In my opinion, this will not continue long because, it has crossed the limit of dependency. We are planning to do something on our own creativity. Perhaps, we will not stay like this for long."*

The self-awareness about their conditions and realization that their rights as a child were violated during the war can be a turning point for shifting their depoliticizing and mental disarmament and consequently may create a part of foundation for civilian lifestyle. Another ex-child soldier interviewed worked as a member of a child club in the community before she joined the civil war. She had learned about child rights, raised awareness against domestic violence and caste discrimination when she worked as the club members. After she returned back from the war, she had the opportunity to join the club.

Despite comrade Geeta's[40] difficult journey as an student union member before war, ex-child soldiers during war, and now separated from her husband and living in a camp-like shelter, she has torn apart many of the backbiting, financial crisis and marital hardships and has managed so far been able to finish high school and preparing for the community assistant midwife (ANM) course. Despite her hardships she expressed her optimism by saying: *"I don't see dark [future].I feel, I can do something. I see bright side of my future."*

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[37] Comrade Nipurna, female ex-child soldier, age …, interviwed on
[38] Comrade Suresh, age 23, male ex-child soldiers, Dhangadi, interviewed on 21 June 2011
[39] Comrade suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011
[40] Comrade Geeta, age 21, female ex-child Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23 June 2011

6.10. Money, money, money: deception, demands and despair - Vicious circle

All the child soldiers interviewed expressed their biggest challenge being the financial crisis. All of them had hoped that government and the Maoist party would one day relinquish to their demands of financial package and due to which they were staying in the camp-like shelter organized by the Maoist party.

The story of deception with money starts from the date of joining the civil war. Even though Comrade Minu [41]shared that the real reason of joining the civil war was of higher value than money – we have to fight for the country and we have to reform it. However, she admitted the fact that she was promised 7000 rupees per month. However, that did not happen in reality. The story of deception continued when they were discharged. Party promised that they would negotiate out a financial package if they would boycott the other rehabilitation packages such as vocational trainings and counselling services. Ex-child soldiers were told that their sacrifice to the party and the country would be appreciated. Maoist District in-charge in Ilam repeated that they should be compensated with 100 000 Nepali rupees each. This false hope is deeply rooted in the demands of the ex-child soldiers and it is nurtured day by day due to the extremely need of money they are going through. During the interview with the Ex-child soldiers in Dhangadhi, they told that there is a piling credit in the shops. Comrade Geeta[42] told:

> *"The main problem is to eat and live. How to go back home, there are bills to pay to here to the landlords (sahujees). That's why they don't let us leave. Credit has reached around 250 000 rupees for food only. Vegetable credit has reached 150 000 rupees. We have not paid house rent. Therefore, they will not relieve us easily. Brush, toothpaste, and soap have been brought when friends went home."*

It is not only the crisis at the shelter where they are living, there is also a mounting crisis back home which pushes them hard to stay where they are and does not let them come out of this vicious circle. Comrade Suresh told:[43]

> *"The biggest problem is about how to solve the family problems and how to return back openly. Next problem is what to bring with me when I return. We have nothing that we have gained after so many years."*

Comrade Suman[44] further added:

> *"There are a lot of social neglect when we go home with an empty hand and with the tag of 'disqualified" while other colleagues who have fought the same war have gone with financial relief package. That's why there is no condition to stay in the family as they have different view point when they see others. It is painful to stay back in the village."*

The aspirations of the ex-child soldiers in terms of financial relief package were not only unmet by the government and UN agencies but the reason behind not providing financial support to them were never properly explained to them. Even though, financial compensations has not

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[41] Comrade Minu, age 22, female ex-child soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23 June 2011
[42] Comrade Geeta, age 21, female ex-child Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23 June 2011
[43] Comrade Suresh, age 23, male ex-child soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 21 June 2011
[44] Comrade Suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011

been prescribed by policy and practices in many of the post war rehabilitations, leaving the important task of communicating properly this policy stand to the commanders in the Maoist camp by the government and UN agencies gave Maoist an opportunity to politicize this as a bargaining cheap and consequently gave a false hope.

The demands are often exhibited in policy dialogue where they pressurize their district leaders to take their requests to the party headquarter, sometime through plea for support to buy their daily foods and pay their credits and sometime with the threat to revolt. Such requests have been met meagrely and often returned with no support. A revolt idea of comrade Suman[45], - *"...to put pressure. Even if they do not listen to us, then we have talked about going to their houses and sleep there"* – can not only be his desperate plea for rescue but also speaks about the continuous return of demands with deception and demands leaving them in a vicious circle of poverty.

6.11. Denial and withdrawal tendency

The key informants confirmed the gaps between the policy and practice in terms of rehabilitations packages which made the successful integration almost unattained. The first and the key gap has been perpetrated by the gross denial tendency rampant from policy level to community level. The Maoist party district In-charge[46] denied the fact that the ex-child soldiers have psychosocial problems even if they were exposed to violence and killing. He further gave a contrasting statement. He said[47]: *"they did not literally carry gun but participated in the war."* While interviewed ex-child soldiers were admitting the fact that they were used as messenger and sentry, he denied by saying: *"...they were not compelled...to share information or letter at that period of time was to risk your life and no one can be compelled to risk their life. So it is just the charge against our party."* It posses more complication to uncover the problem and try to find the solutions among the psychosocial challenges if the Maoist Party denies the degree of problems among these ex-child soldiers.

Even among the ex-child soldiers interviewed, they deny the fact that they are disqualified. A symbolically implied meaning can be degrading and it can be the reason why they deny and do not want to accept the fact that they were disqualified. However, to make the rehabilitations package reach to the ex-child soldiers and that they actually utilize those package, the ex-child soldiers need support in understanding why they need support and how they are disqualified. However, this was not properly communicated and instead misleadingly glorified them as war heroes creating a complete brain wash among with the idea that taking this package is surrendering. Even though, Not every single ex-child soldier boycott the rehabilitation package, but at least the child soldiers interviewed viewed them useless.

Even though withdrawal tendency is practiced widespread in clinical field, analogy of withdrawal tendency can be made in context of ex-child soldiers, government and service providers. Due to the politicization, ex-child soldiers withdrew outright right in the first place from taking the rehabilitation packages. Those who joined short term training discontinued citing that it would not help them. One ex-child soldier[48] complained: *"Trainings were not timely and relative and was nothing to make effect in our lives. We rejected with the view that his package has not really acknowledged the real contribution we made"*. Another ex-child

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[45] Ibid

[46] Umesh Adhikari, District Incharge of Maoist party, Ilam, interviewed on 13 April 2010

[47] ibid

[48] Comrade suman, age 22, Male Exchild Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23June 2011

soldier said that the training package was not useful as they would have to compete with the highly educated, she said: *"the UN package was not useful for me. 12 grades graduate are so many out there in the village. University degree holder men and women are also many…"*

It was observed that the ex-child soldiers interviewed were at the difficult cross roads as support package were not taken and that there was no hope of Maoist party and the government delivering them any financial package.

Chapter 7 – Analysis and Conclusion

In this chapter, I will try to provide the answer to my theory questions by analysing the findings of the studies by trying to apply the theoretical framework and main concepts used in the study. During the entire study process, I have endeavoured to answer the theory question of this study i.e. how do chosen theories – social stigma theory and Trauma Theory – explain the social reintegration challenges in the Nepalese context.

The following discussions herald from an analytic discourse of the primary interview materials as well as established theoretical bases and pre-established research findings. Attempts have been made to make the meaning of the results through the vantage point of two chosen theories. Both Social Stigma Theory and Trauma Theory are well-known theories in the social psychology research domain and it does definitely not do the justice to the social psychology domain. Obviously, this research is rooted in social work research domain. Therefore, the concepts of social stigma and trauma are used in understanding the psychosocial dimension of the ex-child soldiers and their social reintegration challenges and not necessarily to do the clinical testing of trauma and stigma concepts.
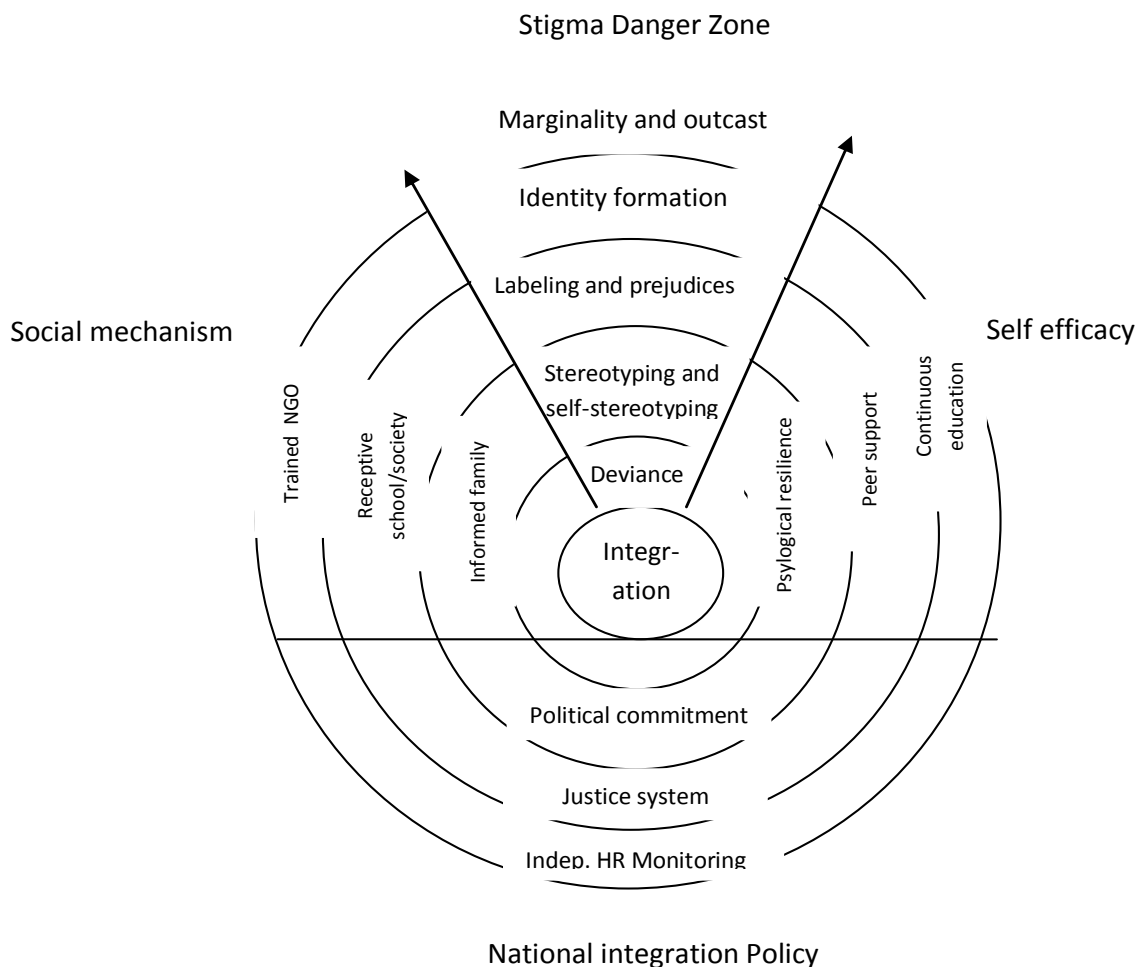
7.1. Stigma: vicious circle and actors impacting reintegration

As explained in the theoretical discourse in chapter 3, Stigma is defined (Goffman, 1963) as some kind of 'mark' or 'sign' that prohibits individual or the group from utilizing his/her full potentials to be accepted in the society. Such prohibition can either be perceived by larger society, or exhibited or acknowledged by the ones being stigmatized. This 'mark' or 'sign' both refer to the perceived meaning of those individuals by larger society either as a symbolic meaning or as a physical mark. Taking off the discourse from this definition, society put a tag – at least through the perception of Ex-child soldiers – of being 'disqualified'. This tagging transcends to the level where the ex-child soldiers not only not only perceive their identity of belonging to Maoist ideology, but also the ones who were verified useless or someone without the capacity to contribute to anything (disqualified). The sustained stigmatization from being labelled as Maoist combatant and later as someone being disqualified affected a lot the mental thought process of the ex-child soldiers. Primarily these ex-child soldiers have been perceived as individuals belonging to a deviant group. This labelling creates a kind of rebellious mind and among the ex-child soldiers. As Rubington and Weinberg (2002:193) states, labelling creates an assumptions among people from the 'vantage point of the persons who have been socially defined by others as deviant". Even though it is kind of a 'distorted view of the social reality', however, it is creates a necessary grounds for perception-generated social interaction among the perceived and the perceivers (ibid). Here the society to which the ex-child soldiers return define concurrent situations and events from the convenience of their interest and values. And on the other hand, the ex-child soldiers assume that they may be the ones which society defines – Maoist fighters from criminal war history. This perception of both perceived and the perceivers give the new identity to these ex-child soldiers as 'disqualified'. The reactions and the reproduction of this labelling is the creation of harsher condition for social reception of ex-child soldiers.

As a conclusion of the research findings and based on the interview materials collected, I have developed a new conceptual diagram which would explain the stigma vicious circle which are hindering the social integration of ex-child soldiers and three distinct groups which are important factors to impact integration of ex-child soldiers in the society. I have named it a Potter's integration wheel against stigma. The diagram represents the analogy of

wheel of pottery making where a potter places the clay at the center of the wheel (at the place of integration in the diagram) and creates a distinct pot or statue. Analogy of the wheel simply explains that the stigma circles must be identified (as separated by arrows in the wheel) and the other three mechanisms have to work in a circular balance to be able to create integration possibilities. Stigma circle cannot be separated in the cycle but must be identified in parallel to be able to provide help to ex-child soldiers facing stigma. Otherwise, they will be outcast and fall into marginality and are far away from the centre of the integration cycle as shown in the diagram.

Diagram 1: Potter's Integration wheel against Stigma

Stigma Danger Zone

Marginality and outcast

Identity formation

Social mechanism

Labeling and prejudices

Self efficacy

Stereotyping and self-stereotyping

Trained NGO

Receptive school/society

Informed family

Deviance

Psylogical resilience

Peer support

Continuous education

Integr-ation

Political commitment

Justice system

Indep. HR Monitoring

National integration Policy

From the result it can be analysed that ex-child soldiers' stigma experience started right from the time when they were identified as deviant by the society. For example, deviant behaviour started when they could not tolerate the traditional patriarchal system of the society. Or Young boys from low caste group joined army because they wanted to revolt against the Hindu caste system and untouchability. For Example, comrade Prapti said "*I wanted fight against torture given by men to women. So I joined Womens group in my school and later on joined PLA*" [49]. Girls in Nepalese families are perceived to be demure

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[49] Comrade Geeta, age 21, female ex-child Soldiers, Dhangadi, interviwed on 23 June 2011

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and expected to take care of fathers, brothers and husbands. Rebelling against this traditional system means a deviant behaviour.

For example, once these girls join the Maoist army, they talk about freedom and communism, women rights and punish the ones who do not follow them. This distorted roll is perceived by society something as threat to society and society starts to label them. The labelling is in the form of social blames and character assassination. We can take one example of a ex-child soldiers who perceived that society thinks that *"...Maoist of the past is not good. They keep snatching, keep threatening, women and men sleep in the same bed. But the truth is known by the one who holds it. We are still in the old bourgeoisie culture."*[50] Such type of character assassinations qualifies ex-child soldiers specially girls for social alienation, let say for example for marriage. On the way back home when they find the society unchanged, they find themselves in difficult situation and start to self-categorize themselves. That was the very reason these girls had left the family and society again and living in the organized living with their comrades. The sustained stereotyping and labeling leads then to the new identity – the Maoist combatant, the dangerous, disqualified etc. Ultimately a child is far away from the central question of integration. This I have called the vicious circle of stigma or Stigma Danzer zone.

Based on the interview with the duty bearers and the stakeholders, there are mainly three core actors group which are important factors in impacting the social integration of ex child soldiers. The foundation that creates a conducive environment for integration of ex-child soldiers is a National integration policy which includes independent Human Rights monitoring bodies, transitional justice system and strong political commitment from the political parties. The other important factors which have been found decisive in integration is how the family and social support system functions. At the absent stable economic situation in family, without regulated school system and semi-skilled social service providers, the social integration was found to be a rather difficult and uncontrolled process.

The third and the most important actors group is the Individual themselves. In most of the interviews conducted, relatively higher degree of satisfaction was expressed by the ex-combatants because they were active in the child clubs, had access to counseling and peer support among each other and commitment to continue education. Even though there were economical and social factors affecting, the self-efficacy perspective is somehow found to be a sustaining mechanism to survive harsh family poverty and social chaos. The one utilized in positive context the skills obtained from war to fight for the rights seemed to have succeeded better in their everyday life.In summary it can be said that coping strategy of the individuals to fight against the stigma perception of the perceivers affects largely the social integration back into their society and family.

7.2. Cognitive and Emotional expression and consequences from traumatic events

Efforts have been made to analyze the interview materials by processing them through the key emotional interpersonal and vocational disorders resulted from the cognitive and behavioral sequelae of combat trauma of the ex-child soldiers. As Alford et al (1998) found

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[50] Comrade Minu, Age 22, interviewed on 23 June 2011 in Dhangadhi

out that post combat trauma and the disorders and difficulties associated with it have larger implications on how the individual functions emotionally, develops interpersonal relationship and succeeds in vocational skills. He states that such disorders and difficulties can be observed in different forms such as intolerance of mistakes, denial of personal difficulties, and anger as a problem-solving strategy, hyper vigilance, and absolute thinking. The following table helps to understand how the child soldiers feel or express about their trauma experience and how these may probably affect their social integration.

Table 2: Traumatic events, responses and social consequences

Traumatic events domain	Behaviour/oral expression (as shared by the ex-child soldiers)	Interpreted consequences
Intolerance of mistakes:	*It was just dangerous for my friend to leave the lights on when they sleep. What if enemies notice us?*	Tendency of intolerance creates distance with the other friends and consequently disintegrates them from friends
Denial of personal difficulties	*There are quite few people who have negative thoughts. There are many having positive thoughts, so I don't think we will have so much of problems.* *We have not done a big crime. To our best, we have done good. Have not done that big crime. It is just sometimes that I feel guilty (glani hunchha). No big crime really.*	Lack of accepting difficulties creates service provides find right solution for personal support.
Anger as the problem solving strategy	*There are no support for us, no one has helped. Party has just given promises but has given nothing.* *Party president had given the promise. Deputy commanders and division commanders and the party leaders who have become ministers once have promised. If our nothing happens, we may fight against them.*	Prohibits links to look for better opportunities, search find helping hands. Anger may lead to revenge.
Hyper vigilance	*"I often remember about the duty to watch the enemies. Watch around with the fear of enemies attacking me. I fear that enemies might come from behind and kill me by choking me."*	Isolates the ex-child soldiers, cuts off links among people. Escalates worries.
Black and white thinking	*There is nothing to expect from home. Society does not do for another's life (arkako jiwanko lagi). Party also...well, won't help each individual.* *As all friends are same, there is nothing learn from each other. The positive thing is that there is feeling of doing something good. There is nothing exceptional with them.*	Pre-judgement on the wrong and right prohibits individuals from seeking opportunities. Prohibits individual to see the positive things.

Researcher found out the existence of enormous level of denial tendencies among child soldiers. They denied that they had personal or social difficulties even though they expressed unconsciously that they have problem of concentration, social links and even physical difficulties. They denied that they had committed crimes while somewhere in the interview they expressed that they were involved in atrocities. The think that killing is "*no a big crime really*" which tempts them to justify their actions in combat environment. They largely perceive that what they did was just.

Hyper vigilance was obvious behaviour while talking to the researcher. First of all, they seemed extremely vigilant that there was no one who would listen to the conversation we had during the interview. At the same time, expression of fear that "*enemies might come from behind and kill me by choking me*" obviously makes them hyper vigilant so that they are all the time prepared to respond

to the perceived dangers. That makes them highly active in mind and results in tiredness. As Alford et al., (1988:494) says the continuous hyper vigilance results in restlessness, distancing behavior which serves to increase the social isolation and alienation. The ex-child soldiers interviewed preferred to stay in a camp like environment as a safe resort naturally distanced them from their friends and families in the village and creates more of a social isolation.

Anger is not only obvious consequences of deception and social alienation, but also the sustained traumatic experience of ex-child soldiers from their battled field. Fighting in the battlefield for years, staying in cantonment for years and return back to society being disqualified all add up to form a extreme angers towards the Maoist Party, UNMIN and the government. The ex-child soldiers are always grunted about lack of support from their leaders and the government. They expression of "*If our nothing happens, we may fight against them*" is not only a expression of anger but also the sense of revenge – either caused by battle loss or their friends being killed - they carry deep in their minds. As Alford et al., (1988:493) states, the persons returning from the combat environment exhibit higher degree of rigid and interpersonal conflict and natural angry behavior such as verbal fight – "*we may fight against them*" to solve the problem.

7.3. Conclusions

Child soldiers are always the forgotten group in the peace process if we look into the history of post war reconstruction and peace process. In a broader peace process, cost of rehabilitating child soldiers and reintegrating them back in the normal family life is always underestimated. Consequently, these children fall into secondary priority as they are not the direct threat groups for peace process. Same has been observed in the peace process in Nepal.

Peace process still has not come to conclusion until the end of writing this thesis. Around 4000 ex-child soldiers have found their way to their homes themselves with very little and project based support from international community and local service provider and UN.

The physical scars they carry from the wounds they receive when they fought with their young minds are never properly cured. When social services are not government regulated and NGOs are supported by international community, these children fall in between this two complicated support system. However, a significant achievement has been made at the individual level of many ex-child soldiers through the cooperation between UNICEF and the government of Nepal. Vocational training has been offered, hunting line for support had been created, local NGOs have been trained to provide psychosocial support these children and local peace committee in the district has been created through which support has been channelized.

From the research findings, it can be concluded that:
1) The term disqualified minors created a labelling for ex-child soldiers
2) Financial resources to support for the rehabilitation has been rejected which significantly hindered the economic reintegration
3) All the challenges and problems were not calculated when the ex-child soldiers were discharged. It was done in a haste without much consensus from Maoist which hampered the entire support process
4) Ex-child soldiers have heightened sense of being deceived by the fellow senior comrades
5) Ex-child soldiers have a rampant denial attitude which limited support agencies to provide services for rehabilitation.

6) Maoist party did the political manipulation and did a fake glorification of their jobs in war.
7) There is a lot of worry among ex-child soldiers, partly because of the fear and anxiety but mainly because of the financial problems

7.3.1. Missing Piece in the Puzzle: Political commitment

One of the most puzzling facts is the fragile political situation and mistrust among political parties. Times and again agreements for delisting children from rank were not obeyed by the Maoist party, political chain of commands in the district level denied the fact that ex-child soldiers actually have a psychosocial problems and need help. They glorify the atrocities committed by the ex-child soldiers, try to normalize the crimes witnessed by the ex-child soldiers and make fake commitments to win the heart. Constant change of the government created hurdles for easy transfer of support to youths.

7.4. Recommendations

I would like to make the following recommendations.

Recommendations for further research:

- A longitudinal research is recommended to have a better results on the social reintegration situation
- A research from social psychological perspective is necessary to examine the extent of trauma and coping strategy
- University must establish the children and armed conflict research unit to further deepen the knowledge building process through research. It is because there are still many children who are being used and killed in war in different countries and Sweden is receiving a lot of unaccompanied refugee children who fled conflict and violence. There is a need of more University trained social workers to work with war and conflict affected children in future.

For prevention of the use of children in conflict and war:

- Create proper monitoring system to work as the watch dog against children's recruitment in war in future if violence breaks
- Security personnel must be trained to protect children from being abducted.
- Child protection committee can be established in each village to provide vigilance to child protection

At the level of service delivery:

- More central, controlled and integrated mechanism must be set up
- The government and NGOs must have educated social workers to provide support.
- Political commitment must be obtained and checked and counterchecked.
- Transparent logical financial support is key to access to opportunities in ex-child soldiers life.
- Truth and reconciliation bill must be set up
- Family must be empowered and strengthen to receive ex-child soldiers before they are sent home

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II. LIST OF APPENDIXES

a) Appendix A – Letter of informed consent

Informed Consent

The following is a presentation of how we will use the data collected in the interview.

The research project is a part of our education in the International Masters program in Social Work at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. In order to insure that our project meets the ethical requirements for good research we promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees have the right to decide whether he or she will participate in the project, even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview will be recorded as this makes it easier for us to document what is said during the interview and also helps us in the continuing work with the project. In our analyze some data may be changed so that no interviewee will be recognized. After finishing the project the data will be destroyed. The data we collect will only be used in this project.

You have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact us or our supervisor in case you have any questions (e-mail addresses below).

Student name & e-mail
Tirtha Raj Rasaili
mr_tirtha@hotmail.com

Supervisor name & e-mail
Ingrid Höjer
ingrid.hojer@socwork.gu.se

Note: The informed consent has been translated into Nepali for the Nepali speaking interviewees.

Appendix B (1/2) – Interview guides

Interview Guide for Key Informants Interviews (including participants for the Focused Group Discussions)

(Note: The Interview guide has been translated into Nepali language for the Nepali speaking interviewees)

Section A)
Formalities
1. **Introduction:** Introduction of the Researcher and the research project
2. **Courtesy:** Thank the Interviewee for the time
3. **Highlight the objectives of research and timeline for interview**
4. **Obtain informed consent:**

Note: The following questions are devided into different themes based on the research questions. Questions will be asked based on the relevance to the certain informants. And the order may also be changed based on the relevance of the topic. The researcher will try to find the respondents view of the following issues.

Section (B)
Background Questions

1. How do you define the term 'child soldiers' ?
2. How do you describe the use of children in civil war in Nepal?
3. What are the **Nature** and **Magnitude** of the use of children in armed conflict in Nepal?
4. How do you assess the problems to be faced by children in post-reintegration phase?
5. Where does the situation of ex-child soldiers who were being discharged stand at present?

Section (C)
Challenges/Barriers
1. What are the challenges in your opinion in placing the reintegrated children in society as a normal individual?
2. How do you characterize the psychological problems faced by children from War trauma?
3. What social issues do you see among children while they try to adapt to social life?
4. What kind of capacities do the children have to cope with their post-reintegration psychosocial environment?
5. How do you describe the ex-child soldiers own potentiality to overcome the trauma of civil war?
6. How do you see the stigmatized behaviours to be rendered by the society to ex-child soldiers in Nepal?
7. How can ex-child soldiers may overcome such stigmatization?

Section (D)
Knowledge, Attitudes and Behavior
Knowledge:
1. How do you view about the availability of the knowledge among actors involved in rehabilitating and reintegrating ex-child soldiers?

2. How do you view the awareness among society in general to make the reintegration of children constructive and receptive?

Attitudes
1. How do you describe the mentality and behaviors of child soldiers after they returned?
2. How do you describe the attitudes of the ex-child soldiers towards government, party, and the UN and society in general?
3. What is your opinion about characteristics of child soldiers in Nepal?

Behavior:
1. How do you assess the behavior of the various actors in society (school, community, family and administration) towards the ex-child soldiers?
2. What kind of behavior have you observed/being reported to you, which are being shown by the ex-child soldiers towards society?
3. What is your observation regarding the behavior shown by political parties towards the ex-child soldiers?

Section (E)
Kind of Supports/Supports rendered
1. What kinds of support are needed for their successful reintegration in the society?
   a. Social
   b. Economic
   c. Political and structural
   d. Psychological
   e. Recreational

2. What kind of role should the community play for children to make the environment receptive and constructive?
3. What kind of roles should the school play to make a receptive and constructive environment for the ex-child soldiers?
4. What kind of roles should family play to make a receptive and constructive environment for the ex-child soldiers?
5. What kinds of supports are being rendered to the ex-child soldiers? Do you think that the supports they are receiving are enough? If so how? If not what kind of supports are needed? (probe with the question number 1 of Section E)
6. How do the different duty bearers are responding to empower the own potentiality of children to cope with the challenges? (connect with the question 6 of Section C)

Section (F)
Concluding questions
1. How do you relate the peace process and reintegration of ex- child soldiers in Nepal?
2. How do you see the future of use of children in political war?
3. Are there any questions which you think are important to be discussed?
4. Do you want any of your comments not be to used during the research?

Thank you

B) Appendix B (2/2) – Interview guides

Interview Guides for the interview with ex-child soldiers
(To ask ex-children the following questions and to add and withdraw questions based on the environment of the interview situation)

(Note: The Interview guide has been translated into Nepali language to be able to ask questions to respondents in Nepali)

Obtain informed consent before starting the interview

Introductory Questions

Focus introductory questions on the Nepalese way of greetings and receive information such as when they joined the party, how long they stayed, note the gender, ask pseudonym (alias name in the party). Explain the purpose of the study and thank them for their readiness to speak.

<u>Subjective Introductory Questions</u>

How did you participate in the people's war, what kind of work did you do?

What inspired you to participate in the people's war and what forced you?
Can you please tell in short how your experience was during the war?
Can you tell us the saddest moment while being in the war?
How did you feel when you were told that you were disqualified?
Now when you returned back from Cantonment in the society, how are you feeling?
How are you living nowadays?
Do you have some other problems? If yes, what kind of problems?
In your opinion, was it right or wrong to be ousted from the cantonment?

<u>Main Questions</u>
<u>About the rendered services and facilities for the ones in social and family reintegration</u>

What kind of services were provided to you before going out of the cantonment
What kind of support are you receiving after being returned to the family and society from such as NGO, government, other agencies?
What is your opinion about the available support and services
How do you manage everyday cost
For you to be able to live in society, what kind of support you think you may need?
What about the positive or negative part of the support you received?
What kinds of support are you getting from the party, what kind of support do you need?

<u>About the challenges</u>

What kind of problems do you think you may face in future?
What kind of behavior did your friends and relatives showed towards you when you returned back? Did you observe some difference?
About you being returned back home, what did your family, friends, teachers told you? Did they give any negative comment? Or any positive comment?

What do you think that a society perceives about you being involved in the people's war.
What kind of barriers are you facing to go back and live a normal life in society?
(Ask questions categorically about the following actors in society)
With the family

School
Friends
Other psychological and social barriers

About Psychological and social Challenges
Do you often get flashback from war time?
What kind thoughts come in mind, what are the thoughts, feelings that reoccurs? Can you please tell me a moment that keeps coming in your mind?
Do you feel uncomfortable or fear about some incident or person?
If you try to forget those moments of fear if any, how do you try to forget
Were your old buddies still in the village? What are they doing?
How do you feel, when you talk to your friend?
How do you feel when you talk to them?

Final Question about social and psychosocial challenges
Among the barriers you faced or felt, what is the biggest challenge for you to return back in the family and village?

About Social Stigma and the strategy to cope
Main Question
As your identity is a former soldier, do you think society will stigmatize you, think of bad about you? What kind of perception do you think the society will have?
How do you respond to it, if they point at you with some allegation
(Ask questions categorically about the following level of allegations)

Reaction to Individual allegation
Group Allegation
How do you want to identify yourself? As a member of Maoist party or individual?

Added Questions:
What do you want to do in future, what work?
What kind of opportunities are there in your desired job/sector of work
What do you think are the challenges that you may face in your future career/job?
What kind of support you may need to make your future plan successful, do you think you will get those support?

About ability and positive aspect of self
What kind of responsibilities do you have in your family?
How do you fulfill that?
What kind of skills do you have which are helpful to make you successful
If you have personal limitations, what kind of strengths do you have to solve them?
Do you have some knowledge about child rights, human rights? If so can you give some examples?
What kind of preparation have you done for study, work or training?
Is there anything that you may learn from them and can be useful for you?

At the end, ask them to add anything about their feelings and comment about what they said, ask them if they have any questions. And finally thank them.