

Opportunity and Sex Offending by International Peacekeepers in the Central African Republic

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Despite their peacekeeping role in the management of internal armed conflicts, some international peacekeepers have sexually exploited local populations in host countries, resulting in dire social consequences and threats to the success of international peace operations. Although researchers have examined sexual violence committed by peacekeepers, few researchers, if any, have used routine activities theory to examine sex offending by peacekeepers. This article explored the extent to which situational opportunities influenced international peacekeepers' engagement in the sexual exploitation of civilians in the Central African Republic, a peacekeeping host country. Data were collected from face-to-face interviews with 15 research participants, including local witnesses, peacekeepers, and U.N. policy makers, and from public records obtained from online sources. Data were coded using an inductive coding strategy and then analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicated that both the local and peacekeeping conditions, including lack of deterrence and accountability mechanisms, heightened the vulnerability of local populations to sex predation and motivated peacekeeper sex offenders to engage in sex offending. Local community leaders and policy makers could use study findings to promote educational programs on the institutional responsibility to protect vulnerable civilians and shape policies to prevent the commission of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers.

Keywords: *sex offending, international peacekeepers, local populations, vulnerability, situational motivation, rational choice theory, Central African Republic*

Introduction

Internal armed conflicts continue to threaten global peace and security and many countries have experienced local armed conflicts with dire humanitarian consequences (Nordas & Rustad, 2013). Managing internal armed conflicts has required international intervention through peacemaking, peacekeeping, peace-building, and peace enforcement operations and programs (Nordas & Rustad, 2013). Since the 1990s, there have been many U.N.-led and U.N.-authorized peace operations, the aim of which has been to support countries as they emerged from internal armed conflicts (Nordas & Rustad, 2013). International peacekeepers have proved themselves in highly volatile environments (Simic, 2012). They have not only helped bring peace but have also kept the peace in lawless and unstable places in many post conflict countries (Nordas & Rustad, 2013).

However, some peacekeepers in international peace operations have sexually exploited local populations in the peacekeeping host countries with dire consequences (Botzios, Keary, & Haden, 2011; Bridges & Horsfall, 2009; Nordas & Rustad, 2013; Simic, 2012; Searle & Westendorf, 2017). The problem of sexual exploitation has not only become rampant but also more worrying than

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previously reported (Associated Press, 2017). Both Searle and Westendorf (2017) and Whalan (2017) described sexual exploitation committed during peace operations as a “disgrace” to states contributing troops and to the United Nations (Whalan, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, it has become an enigma to the establishment of rule of law in unstable places by peacekeepers (Morris, 2010). Exploiting locals would be contrary to the stated goals of restoring peace and security and protecting local populations (Morris, 2010; Searle & Westendorf, 2017).

The United Nations and the troop-contributing countries have expressed their commitment to address sexual exploitation in peacekeeping through U.N. Security Council Resolution 1172 of 2017 (Whalan, 2017). However, on March 24, 2015, *The Guardian* published a leaked report on allegations of sexual exploitation in Central African Republic (CAR) by international peacekeepers, provoking a public discussion on cases of unpunished sexual exploitation in the CAR (Code Blue, 2015; Searle & Westendorf, 2017; Whalan, 2017).

Past researchers have defined key terms that are relevant for this study. The term *International Peacekeeper* or *peacekeeper*, as used in the literature, refers to

military and/or civilian personnel deployed by one or more third-party states, frequently but not necessarily under the auspices of a global or regional organization, into a conflict or post-conflict situation for the purpose of preventing the resumption of military hostilities between two parties and/or for the purpose of creating an environment conducive for negotiations between two parties. (Nordas & Rustad, 2013, footnote 3)

The United Nations defines *sexual exploitation* as “any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another” (Nordas & Rustad, 2013, p. 2) and sexual abuse as “the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions” (Searle & Westendorf, 2017, p. 366). Searle and Westendorf explained some of sexual exploitation or abuse as opportunistic crimes in the sense that the perpetrator might not have planned or used it as a weapon of war but for personal reasons. Fitzsimons (2018) argued that a sexual relationship would be exploitative if it was not based on want but on need. The United Nations Conduct and Discipline Unit (2018b) stated that “all sexual activity with a minor (a person under the age of 18) is considered as sexual abuse” and defined *allegation of sexual exploitation* as “uncorroborated information pointing to the possible occurrence of misconduct” (“Key Terms”).

Past researchers (Beauregard & Leclere, 2007; Farmer, McAlinden, & Maruna, 2016) have used different research methods and theoretical models to study sex offenses but not within the peacekeeping contexts. Farmer et al. (2016) used routine activities theory to explore situational motivation and how offenders could desist from sexual offending while Beauregard and Leclere (2007) used rational choice theory to explore sex offending and decision-making processes of sex offenders. These research methods and theoretical models demonstrated that environmental or situational factors could trigger action by sex offenders and that offenders exhibit a rational behavior in deciding to commit or not to commit a sex offense. They both focused on psychological factors in exploring sex offending; however, both researchers argued for the need to explore how environmental or situational factors could relate to the phenomenon of sex offending.

Many factors have explained the commission of sexual exploitation in peacekeeping settings. Researchers (Botzios et al., 2011; Grenfell, 2011) have indicated that a lack of deterrence and accountability mechanisms for holding peacekeeper offenders accountable has created a favorable

environment for sexual exploitation in host countries. Past researchers (e.g., Cannon, 2016) also explained that lack of adequate social welfare, limited opportunities to return home to rest and recuperate, and the hypermasculine nature of international peacekeeping were factors that might drive peacekeeper offenders to commit sex offenses. Contending that the definition of sexual exploitation in the U.N. zero-tolerance policy against sexual exploitation was broad and not helpful, Simic (2012) advocated that researchers should seek the views of local populations regarding the phenomenon of sexual exploitation of peacekeepers.

Further, Nordas and Rustad (2013) used a comparative empirical quantitative research model to study variations in reported sexual exploitation across peacekeeping operations over time. The authors also tested the relationship that might exist between various potential risk factors and sexual exploitation reporting (Nordas & Rustad, 2013). They explained that sexual exploitation committed by international peacekeepers was likely to occur in poor countries with a prevalence of sexual violence, with less fighting, and where the peace operation was sizable and recent. Observing that their study was the first of its kind, Nordas and Rustad noted the difficulties they encountered in data collection and commented on the challenges for future researchers. They advised that there was a need to investigate at the microlevel the local and host factors to understand the attitudes of offenders and victims (Nordas & Rustad, 2013). Travora-Jainchill (as cited in Deen, 2017) argued that “an unstable place with a weak (or no) government may create a sense of lack of accountability, of power over the local population and a few individuals might feel free to engage in unacceptable behavior” (para. 1). In such a situation, the offender might perceive the peacekeeping environment as an opportunity to engage in sexual exploitation against local populations with impunity.

Although researchers have used rational choice (Hug, 2014) and routine activities theories (Cohen & Felson, 1979) to study sex offending, none have considered the commission of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers, according to my review of the literature. Additionally, although researchers have examined sexual violence committed by peacekeepers, few researchers, if any, have used routine activities theory to examine sex offending by peacekeepers. The absence of the perspectives of routine activities and rational choice theories reveals a gap in the literature. To remedy this gap, the present study explored the extent to which situational opportunities influenced international peacekeepers’ engagement in the sexual exploitation of civilians in the CAR, a peacekeeping host country.

Method

Participants Sample

For ethical reasons, time, and resource constraints, I did not recruit protected or vulnerable research populations such as children, victims, and convicted offenders. I used purposeful and snowball sampling strategies to recruit participants. These strategies helped to define the sample size and select research participants. I thus selected and recruited the research participants based on an individual’s personal or professional knowledge of sex offending, willingness to participate without any financial or pecuniary benefits, availability, and accessibility. Other criteria included the accessibility and security conditions of the interview sites, the need for diversity in the nationalities of the research participants, and the need to take into account gender and other ethical considerations. The witnesses I interviewed at the interview sites included a social worker, a national investigation expert, and two local community leaders (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participation of Human Research Subjects Quoted in the Present Study

Category of Research Participants	Age	Gender
Witness 1 (social worker)	25	Female
Witness 2 (national investigation expert)	40	Female
Witness 3 (local community leader)	30	Male
Witness 4 (local community leader)	45	Male

Instrumentation and Data Collection

On February 12, 2018, I received my university's Institutional Review Board approval (no. 02-12-18-0327968) to begin data collection. I started collection the next day. I gathered data on how the participants see the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental conditions of local populations in the CAR from 2013 to 2017 and to what degree the situation created opportunities for motivated peacekeeper sex offenders and increased the vulnerability of local populations against sex predators such as peacekeeper offenders. I gathered empirical data on the impact, if any, of convergences of routine activities that connected peacekeepers to the locals.

I used two complementary methods of data collection: secondary data analysis and interview data collection methods to enrich the understanding of the context and the extent to which situational and environmental opportunities influenced international peacekeeper offenders to engage in sexual exploitation of local populations in the peacekeeping host country. I collected data using face-to-face interviews with 15 research participants, including local witnesses, peacekeepers, representatives of civil society organizations, and United Nations staff, and from public records obtained from online sources.

Data Analysis

I coded the data using an inductive coding strategy and then analyzed using thematic analysis. I used the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental (PESTLE) framework of analysis to understand the degree to which the political, economic, social, technological, legal, and environmental factors increased the vulnerability of targets and the extent to which the conditions influenced the behavior of a motivated sex offender within a given time and spatial reality. I developed a coding matrix to analyze and interpret the data using PESTLE analysis. The data matrix and the data interpretation strategies helped the study in the categorization process of the data and the development of the open coding of the data into topics, trends, and themes.

Results and Discussion

The results of the present study provided understanding of the context and the extent to which situational and environmental opportunities influenced international peacekeeper offenders to engage in sexual exploitation of local populations in the peacekeeping host country. The outcome of the study focuses on allegations of prevalence of sexual exploitation offended by international peacekeepers, susceptibilities of locals to sexual exploitation by international peacekeepers, and motivating factors for international peacekeepers to sexually exploit locals.

Allegations of Prevalence of Sexual Exploitation Offended by International Peacekeepers

In this study, I found that there was a high level of prevalence of cases of sexual exploitation in the CAR between 2013 and 2018. The U.N. Secretary-General's report (U.N. Conduct and Discipline

Unit, 2016) stated that “the world shared a feeling of outrage in learning of allegations of sexual violence by foreign forces serving in the Central African Republic” (p. 2). One of the research participants explained though the United Nations recorded many allegations between 2015 and 2018, most of the allegations took place between 2013 and 2015.

The statistics also show a decline in the recording of cases of sexual exploitation in the CAR between 2017 and 2018 (see Figure 1). The U.N. Secretary-General’s report (U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2018a) stated that the U.N. peacekeeping Mission, *Multidimensionnelle Intégrée des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Centrafrique* registered 19 allegations between January 1 and December 31, 2017, showing a decrease in allegations compared to 2016. The research participants further explained that the ongoing policy, institutional, and programmatic interventions by the United Nations could explain the reduction of cases. Another research participant argued that the opportunity to engage in sex offending was not only becoming more expensive and riskier for any peacekeeper but even more dangerous for those officers who have an oversight role over peacekeepers.

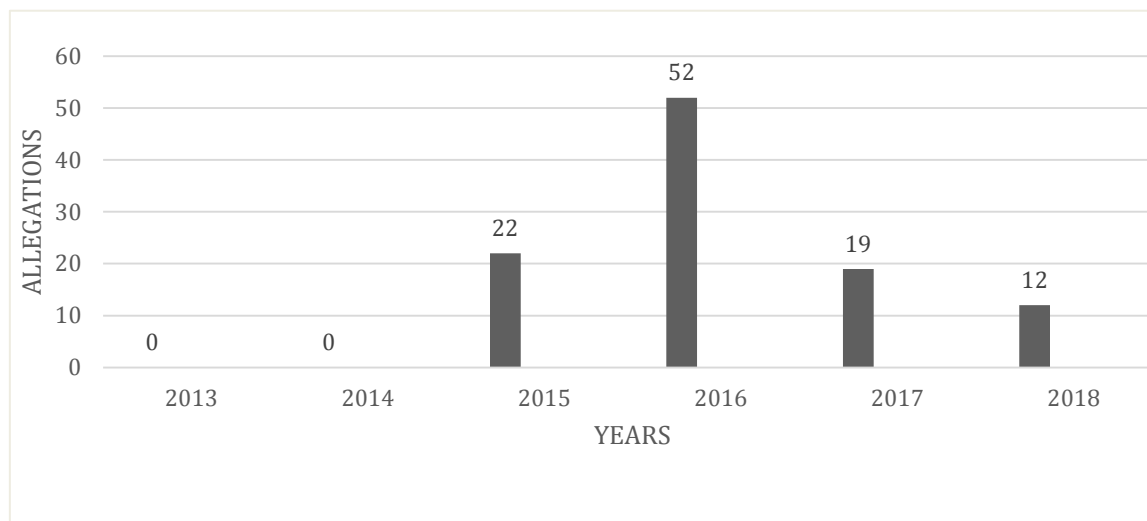


Figure 1. Number of Allegations of Sexual Abuse and Exploitation in the Central African Republic for January 1, 2013, to September 22, 2018 (U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2018b)

Susceptibilities of Locals to Sexual Exploitation by Peacekeepers

In this study, I found that many factors motivated sexual exploitation of local populations by international peacekeepers between 2013 and 2018. There were situational factors that increased the susceptibilities of locals to sexual exploitation by peacekeepers. These factors include the absence of legal and physical protection, the subordinate in the power relationship with peacekeepers, deep-rooted inequality and sexual violence, and the routine activities of local communities that converged with the routine activities of peacekeepers.

The data show that in a situation where the state is absent or weak, and where the protectors become violators, there would be no deterrence to any other motivated offender. A motivated sex offender may take advantage of a situation to engage in criminal conduct where there is lack of

accountability or power over the local population and over criminals. The absence of capable legal institutions to protect vulnerable communities against sex predation increased the susceptibility of local women and girls to sex predation in the peacekeeping host country.

The U.N. Secretary-General's report (U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2016) on sexual exploitation and abuse explained that peacekeeping context or conditions also did not enhance any legal and protective environment and thus heightened the vulnerability of local populations against peacekeeper sex offenders. The CAR Panel (Deschamps, Jallow, & Sooka, 2015) argued that

when peacekeepers exploit the vulnerability of the people they have been sent to protect, it is a fundamental betrayal of trust. When the international community fails to care for the victims or to hold the perpetrators to account; that betrayal is compounded. (p. i)

The CAR Panel (Deschamps et al., 2015) also examined that the UN response to allegations against peacekeepers in CAR "was seriously flawed" (p. i). The CAR Panel argued that "by bringing a child onto the base, past guards, where civilians were not authorized to be, or by calling out to children and instructing them to approach" indicated that the perpetrators did not fear that anyone could apprehend them (p. ii). The panel further observed that in CAR, there was a system where everyone seemed responsible for addressing sexual exploitation but had created "a leadership vacuum in which no one is ultimately responsible or accountable" (p. x).

In this inquiry, I also found that adverse security, political, and socioeconomic conditions, including abject poverty of the local populations, increased the vulnerability of local communities against sex predation. The U.N. Mapping Report (U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017) described the country as "a large and sparsely populated country, ...marked by deep-rooted poverty, ethnic tensions, pervasive political instability, corruption and nepotism that led to a succession of armed conflicts..." (p. 12). The U.N. Secretary-General's report (U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2017) also explained that sexual exploitation by peacekeepers against local populations who "where people are hungry, displaced, desperate, and under extreme duress..." (p. 5). Witness 1 argued that abject poverty pushed many girls or women go after these peacekeepers for sex in exchange for food rations and other basic needs. The data reveal that CAR has been a traumatized and an impoverished society for decades. The evidence indicates that the ongoing conflict has aggravated the poor living and other environmental conditions of local populations everywhere in CAR. These conditions impoverished the local populations and thus increased their vulnerability to sex predation.

In this study, I also found that deep-rooted unequal gender relations and the prevalence of conflicted-related sexual, domestic, and gender-based violence heightened the vulnerability of local populations against sex predations. The U.N. Mapping Report (U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017) examined that "conflict-related sexual violence is a manifestation of the more general discrimination, marginalization and violence suffered by women and girls in the Central African Republic" (p. 207). The report further explained that cultural practices relegated women and girls to an inferior position, thereby increasing their vulnerability to sex predation (p. 207). The U.N. Mapping Report (U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017) states that

In 2015 alone, service providers in the Central African Republic recorded 29,801 cases of women who had survived gender-based violence, including rape, sexual assault and sexual slavery. Of them, 27,977 were women and girls, and 1,824 were men and boys. Forty-four per cent of rape cases involved gang rapes, often committed in front of family members. (p. 205)

In addition, the U.N. Mapping Report (U.N. Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2017) narrated that “thousands of women and girls in the Central African Republic were survivors of conflict-related sexual violence” (p. 206). The report explained that survivors of conflict-related sexual violence experienced trauma and “deprived of the means to cater for their own recovery and livelihood or that of other people under their care” (p. 206). Thus, the dire needs of the victims could have determined or explained the nature of the sexual relationship between them and victims.

In this research, I found that, to an extent, technological factors, including the increased use of cheap and easy to use social media, facilitated connections between local communities and peacekeepers, and helped keep social relationships. One research participant explained that with technology, it was easy and cheap to connect and remain in touch with peacekeepers. They would exchange telephone and connect with WhatsApp and other social media contacts. Even at a distance, there were connections between sex predators and their targets through social media channels.

The increasing vulnerability of local populations created opportunities for any motivated peacekeeper to engage in sex offending of the local people. Figure 2 provides a PESTLE analysis of the data on the extent to which situational factors influenced the peacekeeper sex offender to engage in sex offending of the local people in the host country. Thus the absence of legal and physical protection, the subordinate in the power relationship with peacekeepers, adverse security, political and socioeconomic conditions, technological factors, and the routine activities of the communities that converged with that of peacekeepers made locals susceptible to the sexual exploitation by military peacekeepers.

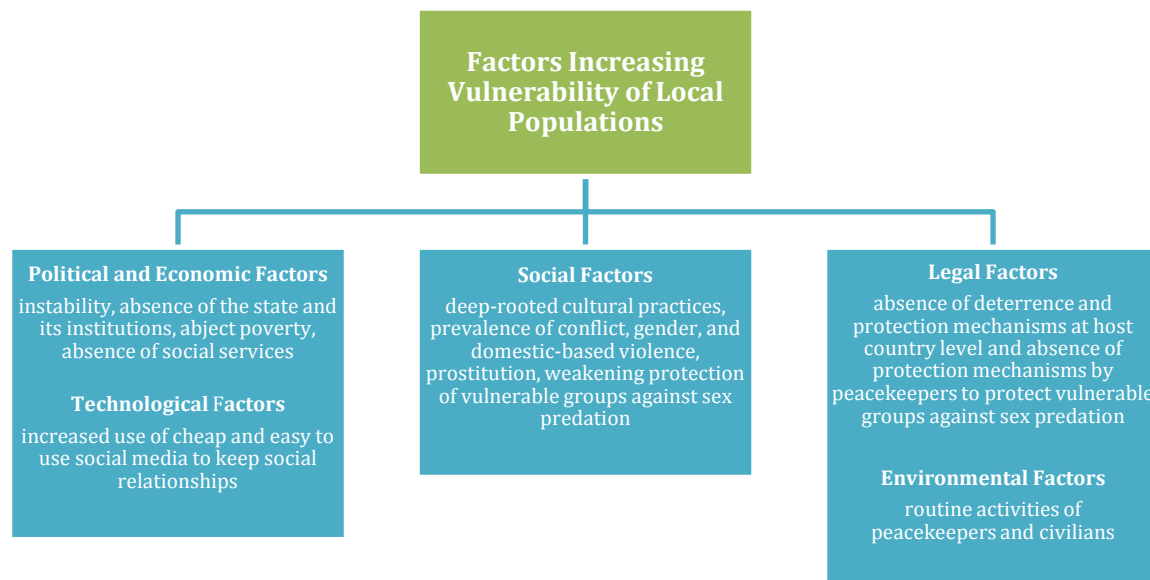


Figure 2. Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, and Environmental Analysis (a Situational and Causal Analysis)

Motivating Factors for International Peacekeepers to Sexually Exploit Locals

In this study, I also found that many situational or motivating factors such as indiscipline and lack of welfare, dominance in the power relationship with the civilians, and the routine activities of peacekeepers that converged with the routine activities of communities motivated peacekeepers to sexually exploit locals. The U.N. Secretary-General's report (U.N. Conduct and Discipline Unit, 2016) stated that peacekeeping context increased motivated peacekeeper sex offenders to engage in sexual exploitation by local people in the host country. The report explained that sexual exploitation in CAR could partly be due to the difficult conditions in which peacekeepers lived, including

the excessive length of the deployment for certain contingents; the living conditions of contingents, including lack of welfare and communication facilities to stay in contact with home, and camps in proximity to and not properly separated from the local population; and a lack of discipline among some of the contingents. (p. 7)

The data indicate that the presence of many international peacekeepers with no social welfare, no comprehensive leave policy, not adequately sensitized on the prohibition of sexual exploitation, and fraternizing with local populations could be sources of motivation for many of those peacekeepers to engage in sexual relations with local people.

Though some research participants cautioned about describing all sexual relationship between local people and peacekeepers as exploitative, data show that there is a differential power relation between local civilians and peacekeepers which could increase the vulnerability of communities to sexual exploitation. In this research, I found that that peacekeepers, with their higher purchasing power with power to control physical lives of local populations, had dominance over communities and vulnerable individuals. One of the research participants explained:

Interviewer: How would you explain power relations between peacekeeper and locals?

Witness 2: It has been a relation of rich and poor, of unequal parties. The arrival of the peacekeepers with money infrastructure or material amenities changed the lives of many poor civilians, unskilled workers, including the internally displaced persons who were not in the camps. Poor people maintained a dependency relationship with the peacekeepers.

The research participant narrated that the peacekeepers brought in some dynamics in the economy, especially in the sex industry. The research participant argued that the peacekeepers came and lived in CAR with no families, no spouses, and they lived exclusively in bunkered homes employing local cleaners, housemaids, houseboys, local security guards, and cooks. The research participant also explained that the peacekeepers would frequent only highly exclusive restaurants, swimming pools, and other recreation facilities where sex workers frequent. The research participant further narrated that most of the victims would only report relationships that ended badly, or where the peacekeeper had unceremoniously left CAR without a future commitment to the relationship or where there was a failed promise on the part of the peacekeeper.

The data also indicate that there were convergences of routine activities connecting peacekeepers to the locals. The evidence shows that international peacekeepers interacted and lived with local populations and engaged in outreach to build trust and sought intelligence from among local communities in CAR. By doing so, they increased possibilities for fraternization with local populations. The data also indicate that peacekeepers would routinely facilitate access of local people to food, water, shelter, medical, and psychosocial facilities; these routine activities brought the

peacekeepers close to the local communities. To some extent, the interaction and close relationship between local communities and motivated sex offenders transform into fraternization and sexual exploitation between a civilian in a vulnerable position, and a motivated peacekeeper sex offender. The convergences of routine activities of peacekeepers and the local population created opportunities to connect peacekeepers to the civilians. Thus, the situational factors of peacekeepers and the local population interactively motivated sex offenders among the peacekeepers to engage in fraternization and into an exploitative sexual relationship (see Figure 3).

However, one of the research participants cautioned about making general accusations of sexual exploitation against peacekeepers for all relationships that existed between them and local communities and cautioned about describing all the sexual relationship as exploitative or abusive:

Interviewer: How would you define the sexual relationship that would exist between some peacekeepers and some local people in CAR?

Witness 3: We have to be careful in the analysis because the close relations between the everyday activities of the peacekeepers and the local communities made it easy to accuse international peacekeepers of anything, including of sexual exploitation. The international peacekeepers cannot alienate the local people because the armed groups live within the communities, so winning the hearts and minds of the local people is strategically and tactically important for the peacekeepers. The peacekeepers are foreigners and may not understand the terrain in which they operate, so they rely on the local populations for intelligence and guidance. Also, local communities rush to the peacekeepers whenever these communities are at risk. I am not sure if every relationship between peacekeepers and local people was to sexually exploit locals.

Another research participant argued that there should be a consideration for the cultural dynamics and affinity of some peacekeepers and local communities:

Interviewer: Any other consideration about what could explain the fraternizing relationship between the local people and peacekeepers?

Witness 4: We should understand the cultural links between the neighboring countries and CAR. Some contingents speak the same local languages as the local populations and sharing similar cultures. For example, the parents of some of the peacekeepers from the neighboring countries were originally from this country and maintained family ties with Central Africans. Some peacekeepers even claimed to have relatives within the CAR. These contingents were coming from the neighboring countries whose populations share the same cultural way of life and were divided only by artificial colonial borders.

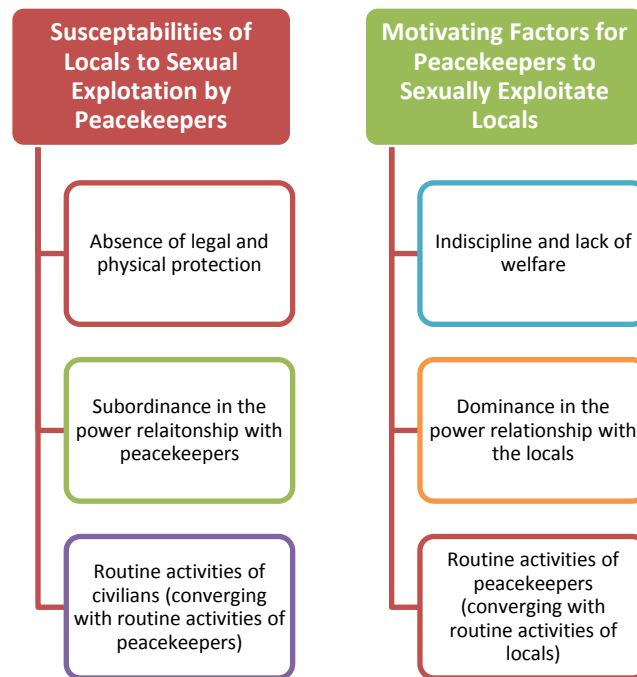


Figure 3. Findings Regarding What Motivates Sexual Exploitation

Discussion

The research confirmed existing literature on sex offending in peacekeeping by peacekeepers against local populations in the host country. Searle and Westendorf (2017) argued that some of sexual exploitation or abuse could be described as opportunistic crimes because the perpetrator might not have planned and might not have perpetrated as a weapon of war but for selfish ends. In this study, I find that the presence of many situational factors in the peacekeeping setting heightened the vulnerability of local communities to sex predation. In such a situation, the peacekeeper offender might perceive the peacekeeping environment as an opportunity to engage in sexual exploitation against local populations with impunity.

Past researchers have argued that lack of deterrence and lack of accountability mechanisms for holding peacekeeper offenders accountable created a favorable environment for the sexual exploitation of local populations by international peacekeepers. Deen (2017) explained that in unstable places where government was absent or weak, individuals might pursue self-interest, including sex offending. Similarly, the data in this study also indicate that, in the absence of deterrence and protection mechanisms, the peacekeeper sex offender may perceive the vulnerability conditions of local people as an opportunity to engage in sexual exploitation against locals. I found that the weakness and the absence of deterrence and protection mechanisms in the host country heightened the vulnerability of local communities to peacekeeper sex offenders. I also found that the presence of weak targets and the absence of protectors in the same geographical space and time heightened opportunities for any person who was pursuing self-desires.

Further, Afeno (2012) found that armed conflicts increased the physical, political, economic, and social insecurity of local people and the vulnerability of communities to sex predation. In this

inquiry, I also found that adverse security, political, and socioeconomic conditions, including abject poverty and the cultural practices of the communities increased the vulnerability of locals to sex predation. As Fitzsimons (2018) opined, a sexual relationship premised on the needs of one party is exploitative in nature. Thus, the dire needs of the victims could have determined or explained the nature of the sexual relationship between them and victims.

Nordas and Rustad (2013) concluded that sexual exploitation committed by international peacekeepers was likely to occur in developing countries with a prevalence of sexual violence. In this study, I similarly concluded that deep-rooted unequal gender relations and the prevalence of conflict-related sexual, domestic, and gender-based violence heightened the vulnerability of local populations to sex predations.

Afeno (2012) argued that in a highly masculine peacekeeping context, peacekeepers may be encouraged by peers to patronize commercial sex workers. Additionally, Cannon (2016) explained that lack of adequate social welfare, limited chances of returning home within a reasonable period to rest and recuperate, and the hypermasculine nature international peacekeeping could drive peacekeeper offenders to sex offending. In this research, I also found that peacekeepers fraternized with locals and sex workers, creating an opportunity for sex predation. In this study, I concluded that sexual exploitation of local populations in a peacekeeping host country is, to a great extent, an environmental and opportunity-based crime.

The present study also brought new insight and theoretical perspectives to the existing body of knowledge on the commission of sexual exploitation by international peacekeepers in host countries. Beauregard and Leclere (2007) and Farmer et al. (2016) approached the study on sex offending from the pathological and personal perspectives. However, this research brought new ideas by approaching the study from the perspectives of rational choice and routine activities theories.

From the theoretical perspectives, routine activities theory of crime states that for a crime to be committed, there must be a motivated offender, an available target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). These theoretical constructs were present in this case study. First, the evidence in this study indicates the presence of many vulnerable boys, girls, and women amidst motivated peacekeepers. Second, the presence of many international peacekeepers with no social welfare, no comprehensive leave policy, not adequately sensitized on the prohibition of sexual exploitation and fraternization with local populations could be a source of motivation for many of those peacekeepers. Also, the increased vulnerability of many boys, girls, and women created the opportunity for many peacekeepers to engage in sexual exploitation. Third, the data show the impact of the convergence of the routine activities of local populations and international peacekeepers within the same geographical space and time. The evidence also demonstrates how the routine activities of local people converging with activities of peacekeepers in the same spatial reality increased the susceptibilities of locals to sexual exploitation by peacekeepers. Fourth, the evidence describes the absence of capable guardians within the same geographic area and time as an opportunity for motivated sex offenders. The whole state infrastructure for the protection of its populations was inexistent. The international peacekeepers took charge of state and human security. However, some of the peacekeepers were, unfortunately, the alleged perpetrators of sexual violence and abuse against those they were meant to protect. Thus, a motivated peacekeepers sex offender in CAR is likely to engage in sexual offending while in the proximity of vulnerable targets, and in the absence of protectors.

Rational choice theory of crime argues that, like law-abiding people, criminal offenders make intelligent decisions about when and where to offend, and they weigh the benefits and the cost of committing an offense (Hug, 2014). The availability and proximity of vulnerable targets, the possibility to engage in a sexual offense with no pain and at no cost, and the absence of any fear of the consequences of committing the crime are relevant factors in the determination of the offender. The data also show that the sexual offending took place in places where the offender did not fear any consequences, having no fear of being caught or being investigated or being punished by anyone. As well, the evidence indicates that the sexual offending took place in areas where there were no institutions or mechanisms to protect those vulnerable populations. Thus, the presence of weak targets and the absence of protectors in the same geographical space and time heightened opportunities for any person who was pursuing self-desires.

Therefore, from the perspectives of routine activities and rational choice theories, the situational and environmental factors could influence the peacekeeper sex offender's assessment of a high-risk environment and a low-risk environment before, during, and after the commission of the crime of sexual exploitation of target in the host country. The research, thus, provided new insights into the current body of knowledge on the commission of sexual exploitation by international peacekeepers.

The study adds value to the body of the research literature on crime prevention by bringing a new perspective to understanding the opportunity and the vulnerability factors that influence peacekeeper sex offenders to engage in sexual exploitation of local populations of host countries. Understanding sexual exploitation of local communities in a peacekeeping host country as an environmental and an opportunity-based crime could advance criminology theory especially its usefulness and relevance to international interventions in peace processes, public administration, and public policy studies.

The findings contribute to positive social changes at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. They informed individuals of what would likely to influence sex offending in a peacekeeping context. The study could be an essential tool for the development of programs to raise the awareness of sexual offending in a peacekeeping environment. The research should be useful for policymakers and peacemaking management to reduce or prevent sex predation.

At the organizational level, the results of this study inform the development of practice by both the host state and peacekeeping operations aimed at addressing sex offending by peacekeepers. The research findings also support the development of educational and capacity development programs within peace operations, especially at the design and the start-up phases, as part of the response to sexual exploitation by peacekeepers in unstable places.

At the societal level, the study helps the peacekeeping community and local communities to grasp the wider issue of sexual and gender-based violence in the CAR. The inquiry brought to the fore the nature of the vulnerability of the local population, especially women and girls. Moreover, the research informs the contextual and situational factors that could contribute to sex offending by peacekeepers in host countries.

Thus, local community leaders, civil society organizations, peacekeepers, and policy makers could use the findings in this article to promote educational programs on the institutional responsibility to protect vulnerable civilians as well as shape policies to prevent the commission of sexual exploitation by peacekeepers. These actions may also help susceptible civilians, especially women and girls, to be aware of the risks linked to their vulnerability and empower them to seek legal redress.

Given the preliminary and explorative nature of the present study, there is a need for additional inquiry with quantitative and mixed research method approaches to complement the qualitative research method approach to deepen the understanding on the context and the extent to which situational and environmental opportunities influenced international peacekeeper offenders to engage in sexual exploitation of local populations in a peacekeeping host country. Due to a limited data collection scope, I could not comprehensively assess the extent to which the situational and environmental conditions influenced the behavior of both the victim and the perpetrator. A subsequent study will require more time to access restricted secondary data and to reach out to vulnerable groups, including victims and peacekeeper offenders.

I did not explore the extent to which cultural affinity could influence peacekeeper sex offenders. The evidence shows that troop-contributing countries with the highest number of allegations were against peacekeepers from neighboring countries with similar cultures and traditions. Future studies could consider the extent to which cultural affinity with peacekeepers from the neighboring countries explains sexual exploitation in peacekeeping operation context.

Finally, there is a need to examine that extent to which sexual exploitation by peacekeepers is part of a bigger problem of sexual and gender-based violence in local communities. A better understanding of sexual exploitation will thus require understanding the issues of sexual and gender-based violence in local communities.

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