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What Do They Dream About?: The Long-lasting Effects of War and Trauma on Child Soldiers

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http://pangedoes1001.files.wordpress.com/2010/06/childsoldier2.jpg



http://www.childsoldiers.org/resource/treatment-center-database/

What Do They Dream About?

What long-lasting effects does trauma experienced in war have on a child soldier?

By: Danny Chavez, Esther O'Connor, and Alexander Markos

Child Soldiers

“A child associated with an armed force or armed group refers to any person below 18 years of age who is, or who has been, recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls, used as fighters, cooks, porters, spies or for sexual purposes.”

(Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2007)

Grave Violations Against Children in Armed Conflict

Recruitment or use of children as soldiers, Attacks against schools or hospitals, Denial of humanitarian access for children, Abduction of children, Rape and other grave sexual abuse of children, Killing and Maiming



http://childre nandarmedc onflict.un.org /images/hom e- slides/CAAC WorldMap_e n.jpg

Do You Know?

There is evidence for the use of child soldiers in over 40 countries since 2008, including the United States and several European countries.⁴

-There are an estimated 300,000 children currently used as soldiers worldwide.

-Child soldiers have been used in armed conflicts all over the globe, including the American Civil War, World War II, and the Vietnam War.⁵

-From 1987 to 2007, 83 out of 107 armed conflicts involved the use of child soldiers. Out of these 83, 26 occurred in Africa, 26 in Asia, 11 in Europe, 11 in the Middle East, and 9 in North/South America.⁵

-The youngest child soldiers today are 7 years old.⁷

-The most common reason for the widespread use of child soldiers is the development of lighter weapons, which make child soldiers more effective than they have been in the past. Child soldiers are also less costly and are more easily manipulated than adult soldiers.

-During their time in these conflicts, child soldiers are exposed to all kinds of violent acts such as beatings, murder, and rape.

Impact of Trauma

Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): This disorder is usually caused by death, injuries, or sexual violence. The specific symptoms that most child soldiers have are distressing and frightening dreams, flashbacks, reenactment in child play, and memory blanks. Most of them have feelings of detachment, guilt, and a constant negative state of mind. The most difficult part to fix, though, is the aggression, depersonalization and derealization.

“Chronic danger or exposure to extreme stress requires costly developmental adjustment in children.”⁶

The trauma experienced by child soldiers results in various psychological complications and disorders:

- Severe depression
- Suicidality
- Intense angry behavior
- Anxiety disorders
- Social withdrawal
- Loss of trust
- Rapid, violent mood swings
- Guilt and shame

-In different studies, over 50% of former child soldiers experienced extreme cases of depression.
-There has been proven dramatic correlation between suicidal thoughts and PTSD in child soldiers.

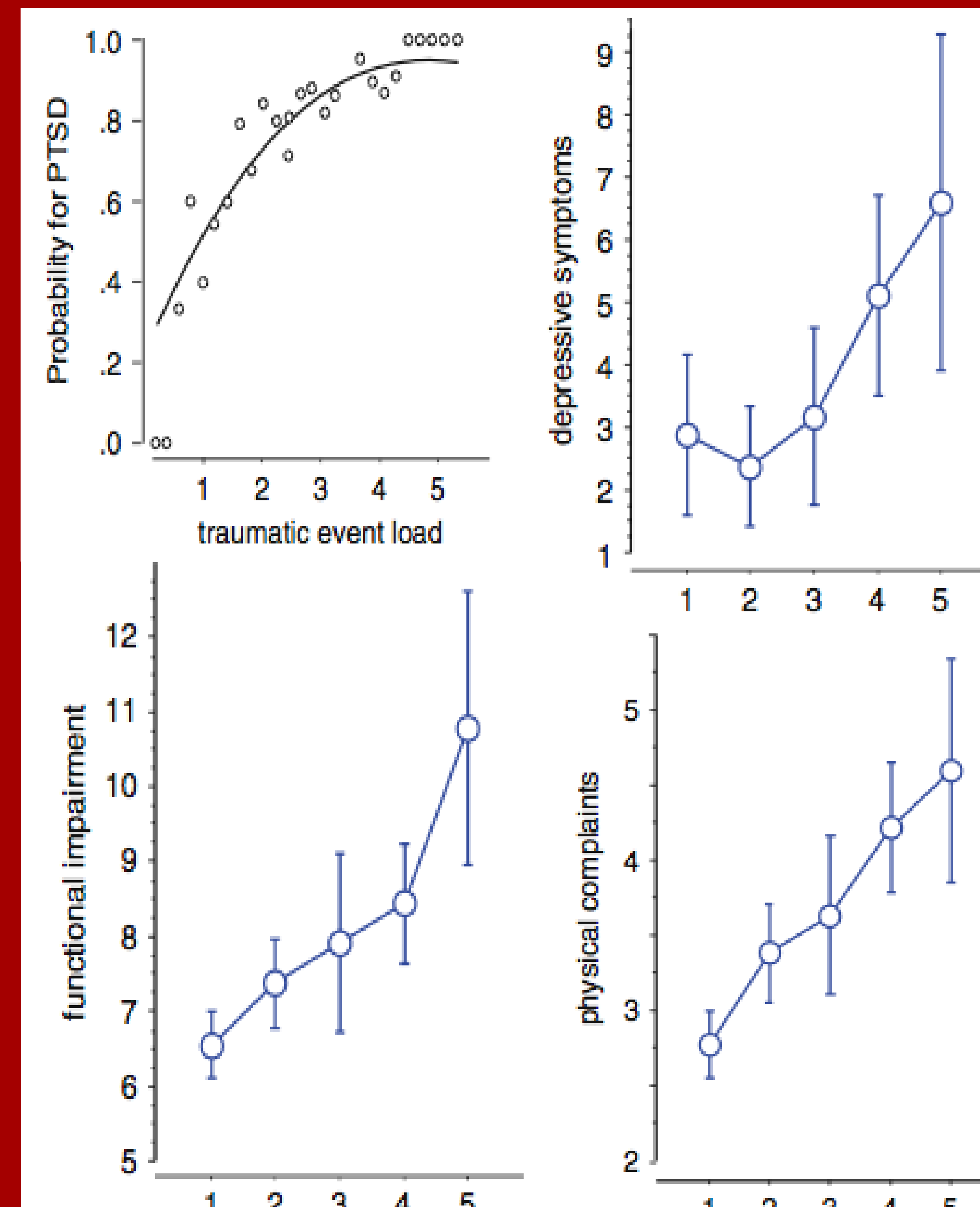
“Trauma survivors, including child soldiers, frequently report high rates of physical illness.”⁶

In addition to **altering the structure** of the brain, excess trauma can also lead to the co-occurrence of several pathogenic processes, including “a permanent alteration of bodily processes, due to a state of persistent readiness for an alarm response.”⁶

Trauma can cause a reduction in the number of white blood cells, which **lowers the effectiveness of the child’s immune system** (i.e. increased susceptibility to infectious diseases, autoimmune disorders, heart problems, and cancer).

	Total (n = 169)	Boys (n = 141)	Girls (n = 28)
Recruited by force	109 (64.5)	83 (58.9)	26 (92.9)
Witnessed shooting	157 (92.9)	133 (94.3)	24 (85.7)
Witnessed someone wounded or killed	152 (89.9)	127 (90.1)	25 (89.3)
Seriously beaten	142 (84.0)	117 (83.0)	25 (89.3)
Had to fight	124 (73.4)	115 (81.6)	9 (32.1)
Personal properties looted during attack	123 (72.8)	98 (69.5)	25 (89.3)
Family member/friend killed during attack	120 (71.0)	99 (70.2)	21 (75.0)
Were threatened to be killed or seriously hurt	119 (70.4)	93 (66.0)	26 (92.9)
Witnessed a child being wounded or killed	116 (68.6)	94 (66.7)	22 (78.6)
Family member/friend injured during attack	108 (63.9)	87 (61.7)	21 (75.0)
Believed they might have died from illness	107 (63.3)	89 (63.1)	18 (64.3)
Believed they might have starved to death	106 (62.7)	95 (67.4)	11 (39.3)
Had to loot properties	94 (55.6)	84 (59.6)	10 (35.7)
Killed someone personally	92 (54.4)	86 (61.0)	6 (21.4)
Had to punish other children	91 (53.8)	79 (56.0)	12 (42.9)
Were injured during attack	74 (43.8)	61 (43.3)	13 (46.4)
Were forced to engage in sexual contact	47 (27.8)	31 (22.0)	16 (57.1)

(2)



(6)

After Disarmament and Demobilization comes... Reintegration

“Parties shall take all appropriate measures to promote physical and psychological recovery and social reintegration of a child victim of any form of neglect, exploitation, or abuse; torture or any other form of cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment; or armed conflicts. Such recovery and reintegration shall take place in an environment which fosters the health, self-respect and dignity of the child.”
(United Nations Convention, Article 39)

What is reintegration and how does it help?

After a child is disarmed and demobilized from his/her military position of servitude and re-enters society, there are a multitude of different problems that are encountered. There are difficulties, including but not limited to: acquired negative values, disconnect with social norms, major emotional scars, physical deformation, lack of family or supporting community, gender-restrictions, deficit in literacy and/or skillsets, etc. Reintegration and its different methods focus on healing these scars and filling these deficits to improve the lives and well-being of those involved.

Liberia⁽⁸⁾

-A case study done in 2006, “examines the various methods employed in providing support...”¹ to the thousands of child soldiers resulting from the Liberian conflict that ended in 2003.

- Found that reintegration works best with
 - ❖ educational support
 - ❖ skill acquisition
 - ❖ and family reunification
- The main challenges to overcome:
 - ❖ funding
 - ❖ inadequate educational infrastructure
 - ❖ weak family economy
 - ❖ inadequate follow-up agencies

-The success of reintegration relies primarily on the reunification of children with family or community.

Uganda⁽²⁾

-Conflict and war caused by the Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) and government forces has been plaguing and creating child-soldiers in Uganda since late 1980s.

- Reintegration should include:
 - ❖ all children affected regardless of soldier status
 - ❖ programs dedicated to distress and sexual activities
 - ❖ school-based interventions that reduce symptoms and violence, and promote healthy communities.

Children as a part of a reintegration program of the Child Soldiers Initiative.

http://www.childsoldiers.org /resource/treatment-center-database/



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