

Recruiting Child Soldiers: The Supply and Demand for Child Soldiers

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Problem:

- Why recruit children to fight?
 - No contest between a young adult and an adolescent
 - Widespread norm against the use of children in war

To attempt to solve this puzzle:

- We integrate economics, child psychology, anthropology, and conflict studies – but the language used here is economics
- Are child soldiers substitutable or complimentary labor?

What is a child?

- UNICEF (legal): Any person below 18 years old, who participates in an armed group in any capacity
- ‘Psychological’: person undergoing relatively fast (and fairly predictable) changes in preferences and task-solving abilities due to age
- Favela gangs: Any person too young to handle guns and contracts (12 –14)

An emerging explanation for child soldiers focuses on supply factors

- Lighter, cheaper deadly weapons -- AK47 (Singer)
 - Problems with this explanation
 - Doesn't explain the variation in child soldier rates across different conflicts
 - Most reports are that if children are employed directly in violence, they often are using traditional weapons (e.g. machete)

Supply factors

- Demographics
- Poverty
- Child labor
 - family-based (not associated with soldiering)
 - independent – out of household (associated)
- War / insecurity
 - Out-migration of women and young children
 - disintegration of the family structure
 - Refugee and IDP camps

Contextual Factors Alone Cannot Explain Variance Across Groups in the Use of Child Soldiers

- Need to also look at why groups would want to recruit children -- Demand
- Organizational factors interact with contextual factors

Demand factors

- Conflict characteristics: Size, enemy efficiency, phase of the conflict
- Child-adult substitution possibilities
- Existing stock of child and adult soldiers
- Traditional task distribution child/adult
- Principal's motivation, norm restraints
- Relative costs

Organizational factors

- Hierarchical vs. Personal leadership
- Nature of Organization's Endowments
 - Material Resources (diamonds, drugs)
 - Social Endowments
 - ideology
 - kinship / solidary norms

Nature of the Conflict

- degree of fighting with government's army
- type of combat (light vs. heavy weaponry)
- effectiveness of government's army
- Phase of the conflict – early, late

Recruitment

- forced vs. voluntary
 - Problem of allegiance of forced recruits
 - Most children recruited “voluntarily”
 - Attractiveness of joining depends on contextual factors – poverty, breakdown of family structure, etc. (participation constraint)
 - LRA’s reliance on abduction not common

Allegiance

- Problems of Desertion / Defection
- Rewards vs. Punishment
 - Reward structure depends on nature of endowments (material vs. social)
 - Non-pecuniary rewards (functional benefits and solidary norms)
 - Socialization
 - Children in general more responsive to punishment
- Punishment (extra-legal penal code)
 - No external independent judicial system
 - Penalties harsh

Military groups tend to recruit children when:

- They rarely engage the opposition's army in direct combat (and thereby the differences between an adult and a child are less pronounced).
- They are losing militarily and lack enough adult manpower.
- They are ruled on a personal rather than a hierarchical basis, thereby substituting the role of a “family”.
- They lack the pecuniary and non-pecuniary resources to meet the reservation level for recruitment of adults or if children become easier to recruit because their outside options are substantially less than adults (e.g. land-holding in Rwanda and Sierra Leone) or because they are more vulnerable.

Military groups tend to recruit children when (continued):

- They have a large number of defections – they fail to meet the incentive compatibility constraint for recruiting adults – and they find that relative cost of monitoring children declines (Blattman & Annan, 2008)
- Material Resource-endowed groups may find that material motives may “crowd out” social/ideological motives. Children are cheaper than adults and will demand less of the “loot”.

Understanding the Recruitment of Child Soldiers

- Need more systematic information from children themselves (micro-level data)
- Need to look at both the contextual factors and the nature of the violent organizations that recruit children (**supply** and **demand**)
- Need to bring together the work of child labor economists, child psychologists, criminologists (experts on gangs), anthropologists, sociologists (organization theorists and refugee experts), and conflict theorists.