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‘Even Peacekeepers Expect Something in Return’: A Qualitative Analysis of Sexual Interactions Between UN Peacekeepers and Female Haitians

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Abstract

The UN maintains a zero-tolerance policy on sexual interactions between peacekeepers and beneficiaries of assistance. Our research describes the lived experience of engaging sexually with UN peacekeepers during *Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haiti* (MINUSTAH) from the perspectives of Haitian women/girls. Eighteen semi-structured interviews were conducted with Haitian women raising children fathered by MINUSTAH peacekeepers. Transcripts were analyzed according to empirical phenomenology.

Adverse socio-economic conditions were key contextual factors. Three themes related to the nature of the sexual interactions emerged: sexual violence, transactional sex, and long-term transactional relationships imbedded in perceptions of love. Most sexual interactions were transactional and nuanced since the peacekeeper assumed the role of romantic and material provider. Sexual consent was conceptualized as the ability to weigh the benefits and consequences of engaging sexually with peacekeepers. Sexual violence was identified among minors and in instances of sexual abuse.

This study provides empirical evidence to support a nuanced understanding of sexual relationships between women/girls and peacekeepers. In addition to holding peacekeepers accountable, a harm reduction approach that aims to raise awareness for peacekeeping codes of conduct and provide comprehensive reproductive and sexual education should be considered.

Keywords: Haiti, Peacekeeping; Transactional Sex; Sexual Abuse and Exploitation; United Nations

Introduction

The UN has increasingly relied on peacekeeping operations (PKO) to address international threats to peace and security. The influx of predominantly well-paid male peacekeepers, relative to host countries with high levels of poverty, creates informal labour markets that increase the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) for women and girls. Since 2003, the UN has maintained a zero-tolerance policy on sexual interactions between peacekeepers and beneficiaries of assistance, conceptualizing such sexual interactions as inherently abusive and exploitative (United Nations Secretariat, 2003). However, during the UN's longest peace operation in Haiti, *Mission des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation en Haiti* (MINUSTAH), enough children were conceived by peacekeepers that a new term was coined, labelling such children 'peace babies'.

Background

Haitian Context

Alongside the Dominican Republic, The Republic of Haiti occupies the western third of Hispaniola. The Spanish initially colonized Hispaniola, however, they ceded to the French in 1697 resulting in France's annexation of the western portion of the island (Lundahl, 2011). Through West African slave labour, the French created prosperous industries of cotton, coffee, indigo and cacao (Lundahl, 2011; Dupuy, 2014).

The slave uprising of 1791 would abolish this system of production founded on slavery. During the Haitian revolution, former slaves revolted against French colonial rule and gained independence from France in 1804 (Lundahl, 2011), with colonial presence coming to an end in 1826 (Rivera, 2018). Accordingly, Haiti became the first country to become independent from colonial rule in Latin America and the Caribbean. Following independence, the racial stratification paralleled the class system; racial ideologies that favoured the monopolization of

power by the whites and mulattoes became inextricably imbedded within the social order (Dupuy, 2014). Following independence, Haiti experienced civil and political unrest due to natural disasters, coups, political leader assassinations, gang/organized crime uprisings, and rapid political turnovers (Baranyi, 2011). Civil and political unrest in Haiti is perpetrated through organized crime, rather than interstate conflict (Rivera, 2018).

Economically, Haiti has experienced widespread disparities. The gross domestic product is \$761.00 USD per capita (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). The official Haitian currency is the Gourde, which continues to depreciate in comparison to the US dollar, thereby increasing the cost of imported goods (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). Consequently, household purchasing power is low, with approximately 60% of the population living below the poverty line of \$2.41 USD/day and just under 25% of the population living below the extreme poverty line of \$1.23 USD/day (The World Bank, 2019).

Women and girls living in Haiti face disproportionate hardships. For instance, among female Haitians between the ages of 15 and 49, the literacy level is 78% and the level of unemployment is 44% (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). In contrast, among Haitian males the literacy level is 83% and the level of unemployment is 26% (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). When employed, Haitian women work predominantly in the sales and services sector (i.e. street vendors), and perform unskilled labour (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). In addition, 13% of Haitian women have no level of formal education (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018).

Literature Review

Peacekeeping Operations: MINUSTAH

Peacekeeping is defined as the non-traditional use of soldiers coordinated by international organizations rather than state governments (Diehl, 2008). Through Resolution 1542 the UN sanctioned MINUSTAH, the longest PKO in Haiti, operational between 2004 and 2017 (Diehl, 2008). The initial purpose of MINUSTAH was to complement the actions of the state by protecting civilians from the threat of armed gangs. However, considering the 2010 earthquake, continued distrust of foreign intervention, and the absence of state governance, MINUSTAH could not fill the vacuum of power that arose following the neutralization of organized crime (Rivera, 2018). Efforts to legitimize the Haitian government became perquisites for long-term stable governance. Consequently, the scope of MINUSTAH expanded to also include: support of democratic elections and the interim government, protection and stabilization of human rights, and humanitarian assistance (Baranyi, 2011).

Criminal Immunity

According to *Status-of-Forces Agreement* (SOFA), military members of national contingents are granted immunity from host state criminal jurisdiction for criminal acts undertaken during their official capacity (Simm, 2013). Disciplinary authority over national military contingents, including SEA and paternity, is the responsibility of troop contributing countries (TCC), as outlined by the *Memorandum of Understanding* between TCC and the UN (Simm, 2013).

Sexual Violence in Peacekeeping Operations

Sexual violence perpetrated during PKO is conceptualized as a form of gender-based violence perpetrated by male peacekeepers against local women and girls (Higate, 2007; Kent,

2005). The UN recognizes and defines two forms of gender-based sexual violence within peacekeeping contexts: sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. In the Secretary-General's 'zero-tolerance policy' on SEA the UN defines *sexual exploitation* as 'the actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust for sexual purposes' and defines *sexual abuse* as 'the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions' (United Nations Secretariat, 2003, p. 1). In addition to SEA, the UN also recognizes transactional sex as 'the exchange of money, employment, goods, or services for sexual activity between beneficiaries of assistance and peacekeeping personnel' (2003, p. 1).

The zero-tolerance policy also states that sexual relationships between UN staff and beneficiaries of assistance are based upon 'inherently unequal power dynamics' and are 'strongly discouraged' (United Nations Secretariat, 2003). This 'strong discouragement' is subject to an exception: 'The Head of Department, Office, or Mission may use his or her discretion ... where beneficiaries of assistance are over the age of 18 and the circumstances of the case justify exception' (2003, p. 3). Therefore, forces under the command of the UN are prohibited from committing SEA, including transactional sex, and are strongly discouraged (although not entirely prohibited) from engaging in sexual relations with beneficiaries of assistance who are above the age of 18.

Civilian-peacekeeper sexual interactions first gained scholarly and media attention when UN peacekeeping personnel were involved in magnifying the existing sex work industry during the *UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia* (UNTAC), operational between 1992 and 1993 (Alexandra, 2011). During this time, the UN had no policy or framework to address sexual interactions between local civilians and UN peacekeepers (Simm, 2013). In response to SEA by members of UNTAC, Yasushi Akashi, the head of UNTAC, infamously replied, 'boys will be boys', thereby perpetuating a culture that dismissed sexual interactions as inherent

components of male-dominated PKOs (Martin, 2005). Following UNTAC, allegations of sex with peacekeepers were reported during PKOs in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone (Allais, 2011).

Nature of Sexual Interactions with Peacekeepers

Some scholars have questioned the UN's framing of sexual interactions between peacekeepers and beneficiaries of assistance as being inherently exploitative and abusive. For instance, Otto (2007) has argued that the zero-tolerance policy's broad definition of SEA also includes consensual sexual relationships between adult civilians and peacekeepers. Similarly, Simić (2009) has argued that conflating all civilian-peacekeeper sexual interactions with sexual violence, such as, forced sex work, sexual assault, and human trafficking, is problematic because women/girls are treated as passive objects without agency. Simić also raises the point that current research does not adequately interrogate or consider that consensual relationships are referenced in the zero-tolerance policy as being strongly discouraged, but not prohibited (Simić, 2009; Simić & O'Brien, 2014; Simić & Simić, 2012). Furthermore, the zero-tolerance policy does not address the adverse socio-economic conditions, rooted in gender inequality, that underlie sexual relations between peacekeepers and local women/girls (Kanetake, 2010; Meger, 2016; Morris, 2010).

Peacekeeping Economies

Scholars have also examined peacekeeping economies to address gendered socio-economic disparities (Higate & Henry, 2004; K. M. Jennings & Bøås, 2015; K. Jennings & Nikolić-Ristanović, 2009). In Haiti, socio-economic vulnerability and ubiquitous gender inequality result in a range of gendered survival strategies that disproportionately affect women and girls, such as trading sex for money, food, or security (i.e. transactional sex) (Fawzi et al., 2005). The influx of foreign, well-paid, and predominantly male peacekeepers magnifies the

gendered economies of sex work, domestic labour, and waitressing within host countries. By increasing the demand of ‘women’s work’, which is largely precarious and informal, intimate interactions between local women and girls and peacekeepers are magnified, thereby increasing occurrence of sexual interactions (K. M. Jennings, 2014).

Transactional Sex

The discourse surrounding transactional sex arose from scholars analyzing sexual exchanges during the HIV pandemic in sub-Saharan Africa (Stoebenau, Heise, Wamoyi, & Bobrova, 2016). A recent qualitative literature review of transactional sex in sub-Saharan Africa defines transactional sex as sexual relationships that are non-commercial and non-martial and motivated by the implicit assumption that sex will be exchanged for material support or benefits (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Transactional sex is distinguished from sex work. Sex work is a commodity exchange involving sexual activity between the buyer and seller, as opposed to transactional sex, which involves an exchange between partners in a relationship (Stoebenau et al., 2016). Kolbe’s (2015) qualitative study of 231 interviews with Haitians who engaged in transactional sex with MINUSTAH peacekeepers identified a variety of sexual relationships—one-time occurrences, ongoing transactional relationships, and dating.

Peace babies

Sex with peacekeepers may result in the conception of so-called ‘peace babies’: children fathered by peacekeepers and born to local women and girls. The first publicly-reported and acknowledged peace babies were conceived during the *United Nations Mission in East Timor*, operational in 1999 (Simić & O’Brien, 2014). In addition, during the *United Nations Mission in Liberia* over 6,000 children were registered as being children of peacekeepers (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Simić & O’Brien, 2014)

Present Study

Children fathered by UN peacekeepers are a palpable representation of the contested sexual interactions between UN peacekeepers and local females. Peacekeepers represent both a source of pleasure and danger for women and girls in counties that host PKO. Pleasure may be derived from having a foreign peacekeeper boyfriend who provides material support. However, peacekeepers are also a source of danger for the women/girls who are victims of peacekeeper-perpetrated sexual violence, lack access to sexual and reproductive health information, are unaware of their rights, and may subsequently become pregnant. Using MINUSTAH as a case study, this research explores the lived experiences of Haitian women and girls who engaged sexually with UN peacekeepers and conceived children. The present analysis focuses on the trajectory Haitian women and girls up to the point in time where contact with the MINUSTAH peacekeeper was lost. Lived experiences beyond this point will be explored in forthcoming publications.

Materials and Methods

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted from October to December 2017 with women raising peace babies in Haiti. This qualitative work followed a larger mixed-methods SenseMaker® study conducted from June to August 2017, which examined broader community perceptions about the experiences of women and girls living in communities that hosted MINUSTAH bases (Lee & Bartels, 2019). SenseMaker is a mixed-methods data collection software that utilizes a narrative-based research methodology (Bartels et al., 2018; Girl Hub, 2014). The second and third authors were in Haiti prior to and during the implementation of the original SenseMaker study.

The current study is community-based in that the authors collaborated with *The Commission of Women Victims for Women* (KOFIV): a grassroots community-based organization located in Port-au-Prince that is dedicated to providing services and support to survivors of sexual violence in Haiti, (KOFIV, 2008). The authors worked with the community partner to develop the semi-structured interview guide, conduct research training, develop a recruitment strategy, and implement the research. Moreover, KOFIV was instrumental in sharing knowledge of the recruitment sites, Haitian culture, and the field of sexual violence response in Haiti. The interviews were conducted by five research assistants who were Haitian women working for KOFIV and had previous experience working with survivors of sexual violence in Haiti as: crisis and support line volunteers, counsellors, and community outreach staff. This group of female Haitian research assistants underwent a four-day training led by the second author, which included: recruiting and approaching research participants, informed consent, confidentiality, semi-structured interviewing, audio recording interviews, as well as providing psychological support to participants and referral for services if needed.

Any female participant from the SenseMaker study who shared a first-person experience about having a child fathered by a MINUSTAH peacekeeper and who agreed to a follow-up in-depth interview, was contacted by the KOFIV research assistants and invited to participate in the current qualitative study. From this purposeful sample, a snowball sample was used to recruit other women in the community who were raising peace babies. Interviews were conducted with 18 females aged 16 and older in each of the following communities: Port-au-Prince (including UN bases at Cité Soleil, Tabarre and Log Base), Hinche, Leogane, Port-Salut, Port-du-Paix, Cap Haitien, Fort Liberté, and Saint Marc.

Each participant was interviewed at one point in time in late 2017. Although some methods of phenomenology encourage multiple interviews with each participant (Lauterbach,

2018), the present study was not initially conceptualized in this manner. Its original purpose was to obtain rich qualitative data from individual participants in order to build on the larger SenseMaker research project (Lee & Bartels, 2019). The present qualitative research in conjunction with the original SenseMaker study address the lack of empirical data on peace babies and their mothers.

Interviews were conducted in Haitian Kreyol in private settings including NGO offices and the participants' homes. The interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed and translated from Kreyol to English by a professional translator. The semi-structured interviews were an average of 23 minutes in length. The interview questions were developed by the second and third authors in consultation with Haitians from KOFAVIV. The survey was originally written in English, translated to Haitian Kreyol, and independently back translated to English to check for accuracy.

The nature of the research was explained to potential participants using a standard script and participants gave verbal informed consent to participate after having the opportunity to ask questions. Mobile phone credit (approximately \$1 USD) was provided to each participant as a token of appreciation for participating and light refreshments of cold drinks and biscuits were available during the interview. If travel to the interview site was required, those costs were also reimbursed (typically about \$1 USD on local mini-buses). The study protocol was approved by the Queen's University Health Sciences and Affiliated Teaching Hospitals Research Ethics Board (protocol number #6021205).

Data Analysis

We used phenomenology to understand the lived experiences of women who conceive and give birth to children fathered by UN peacekeepers. Phenomenology is a qualitative research tradition rooted in philosophy; it seeks to create an explanation of a phenomenon based upon the perceptions of persons who have experienced the phenomenon (Aspers, 2009). This

tradition is employed when little is known about the phenomenon of interest and to explore sensitive content and experiences (Donalek, 2004). The qualitative analysis was conducted using empirical phenomenology to capture the universal essence of the phenomenon by reducing individual participants' experiences (Moustakas, 1994). The universal essence is comprised of textual descriptions (outlining what the participants experience) and structural descriptions (analysing how the context and setting influence the participants' experience of the phenomenon) (Moustakas, 1994).

Data were analysed according to Mustaka's (1994) empirical phenomenological approach. The 18 semi-structured interview transcripts were coded by the first author who iteratively analysed each transcript for meaning units and organized them using NVIVO 12.2.0. Following the initial coding, the transcripts were read again for further refinement into more precise units of meaning (codes), each representing a distinct aspect of the lived experience. The codebook includes a combination of: a-priori theory-driven codes that pertain to the existing transactional sex framework (Stoebenau, Heise, Wamoyi, & Bobrova, 2016), data-driven codes emerging from the raw data, and structural codes according to the phenomenological tradition. To enhance rigour during the coding stages, the coding researcher consulted with the second author to discuss the various codebook drafts and the emerging themes. The team then critically assessed whether the codes developed were contextually accurate and represented distinct meanings. The transcripts were read a final time to develop an initial overall structure of the lived experience. Furthermore, members of KOFAVIV were consulted during the data analysis and manuscript writing stages to: identify any misunderstandings in the authors' coding, incorporate Haitian culture and values into the analysis, and identify any gaps in the researchers' knowledge base.

Participation in research group meetings established a reflexive research analysis practice that focused on the first authors' critical self-reflection. The authors are outsiders with

respect to Haiti and the communities in which the participants reside. As such, reflexivity – the researchers’ self-critical analysis of attitudes related to the research topic (England, 1994)– was paramount to establishing the credibility of the analysis and findings (Tracy, 2010). Reflexivity also contributed to the researchers’ ability to bracket previous experiences, ideas, and prejudices related to the phenomenon (Esbensen, Swane, Hallberg, & Thome, 2008). In May of 2018, the first and second author travelled to Haiti for one week to conduct field work which consisted of: contextualizing the qualitative findings by visiting the identified sites of sexual interactions (MINUSTAH bases and public beaches), facilitating focus group discussions with staff members of KOFAVIV to generate discussion related to the present findings, and further engaging in reflexive journaling.

Results

Study Sample

Seventeen of the 18 participants were biological mothers of the peace babies, and one participant was the biological maternal grandmother of the peace baby. Port au Prince, Tabarre, and Saint Marc were the most represented locations. At the point of interview in 2017, all the participants were above the age of 18, between 20 to 42 years old. At the point of the sexual interaction with the peacekeeper, the youngest reported age was 14 and the oldest reported age was 29. The following locations were reported as sites where sexual interactions with peacekeepers took place: MINUSTAH base/home of peacekeeper, home of the women/girl, beach, hair salon, and bar. A subsection of the women (33%) could identify the peacekeeper father by nationality or name. On average, the women had 1.9 children including the peace baby, with the maximum number of children being 4 among the oldest women in the sample. At the point of interview, the peace babies ranged in age from 8 months to 12 years. Although incomplete, these demographics help to contextualize the major themes presented below.

Major themes

Four major themes related to the lived experience of engaging sexually with a MINUSTAH peacekeeper and conceiving a child emerged:

Contextual Factors/ Social Forces

The social, economic, and physical context in which the women and girls were embedded influenced the nature and frequency of their interactions with MINUSTAH peacekeepers. Specific contextual factors/social forces that were identified include: structure of the family unit, economic hardship and poverty, proximity to MINUSTAH bases, and natural disasters. The contextual factors/social forces may be conceptualized as risk factors for conceiving children with MINUSTAH peacekeepers. Furthermore, the contextual factors/social forces may be leveraged by a sexually coercive peacekeeper to commit SEA or may underlie transactional or long-term sexual relationships with peacekeepers.

Many women described the structure of their *family units* prior to the sexual interactions with the MINUSTAH peacekeepers. Some women who were teenagers when interacting sexually with peacekeepers mentioned one or more of their parents were deceased or unable to care for them:

I was in school and at certain point my mom couldn't afford [my education], then my dad passed away ... I started to go to school, then I met the white [man] I thought he could help me ... with paying for school since my family didn't have the means, so I accepted to talk to him and after a few days went by, we became friends. But the reason that happened was because my family didn't have the means. If my parents were capable I wouldn't be in the situation I am in today (Port Salut 2).

The experience of *economic hardship and poverty* was further echoed. In line with the theory of peacekeeping economies, interactions with peacekeepers through gendered, informal, precarious, and illicit employment was conceptualized as a means to alleviate socio-economic hardship:

I used to buy and sell used clothes, and then I noticed sales were down, so I stopped doing that. I have a brother who was responsible for a resort hotel, and a MINUSTAH [peacekeeper] named [x] who stayed at the hotel, was looking for someone to work for him, cook, do laundry for him. So my little brother came to look for me at my house so I can go work for him ... He told me that I didn't look like someone who should work for people. He told me to explain my problems to him, and he would help me take care of my problems. (Saint Marc 3)

Living in *proximity to MINUSTAH bases* also facilitated intimate interactions with peacekeepers: 'I was living very close to the MINUSTAH's base. We got acquainted with them. We made a few jokes with them' (Port-de-Paix).

Moreover, through the provision of humanitarian aid, *natural disasters* were linked to an increased level of intimate contact with peacekeepers, leading to sexual encounters:

I met with a member of UN forces while I was going to ask for food after the earthquake. He had said he loved me and he gave me a card for me to meet with him again ... after the earthquake he had helped me get food, helped me get alimentation kit and many other things...Many people donated things, donated food to us. This is how we met (Tabarre 2).

Nature of the Sexual Encounter

The women described a variety of sexual encounters and relationships that resulted in conception. Some women described instances of sexual violence perpetrated by MINUSTAH peacekeepers, such as sexual abuse:

One day, as I was getting food there, one of them called me, and I went to see him. There, he dragged me inside and forced himself on me. I ended up getting pregnant after that. I never told my mother about it (Fort Liberte 2).

Transactional sexual relationships with peacekeepers were also frequently noted. One participant described a sexual encounter where money was exchanged for sexual activity:

He used to give me money. He would give me about \$200 USD. I used to be happy and shared the money with my mother, my father. But right now, once I became pregnant, Aristide returned, I have never heard from the MINUSTAH anymore (Tabarre 3).

Transactional sex with MINUSTAH peacekeepers was exploitative in situations where humanitarian aid was exchanged for sexual activity. One participant described an implicit norm that sexual activity with MINUSTAH peacekeepers would be exchanged for goods such as food:

He always used to come to my house. He would bring me things, like when they have things inside [his base] like milk, and things he would bring me some ... Some men won't give you things if you don't sleep with them (Port Salut 2).

Although humanitarian aid was occasionally used to leverage the exchange of sexual activity, peacekeepers who engaged in transactional sex were perceived as “helping”. One participant illustrated how peacekeepers who exploit the economic situation of women and girls could be perceived positively at the time of the transaction:

After the earthquake he used to give me food, he used to give me money, he used to provide for me, he used to give me a lot of things. What he provided allowed me to help all of us in the family. Simply he was helping me. I considered the fact that he was helping me only because I wasn't much mature (Tabarre 2).

Outside of transactional sex, women also identified engaging in long-term monogamous sexual relationships with MINUSTAH peacekeepers:

I only had relations with him ... I got pregnant after we were already together for 4 years because he did many missions ... I know he is the father, because I spent 4 years [with him] and I wasn't with anyone else (Port Salut 3).

Perceptions and feelings of love were also shared by the participants when reflecting on both transactional and long-term relationships with MINUSTAH peacekeepers:

When I met the MINUSTAH, he told me that he loved me a lot. I thought that we were going to have a beautiful life together. But I became pregnant then, I have not seen the MINUSTAH up until this day as I am speaking to you ... He was someone that gave me affection. We used to sleep together ... we used to have a great relationship and slept together (Tabarre 3).

Feelings of reciprocated love may obscure the transactional nature of sexual encounters with peacekeepers, given that material and economic provision is an extension of gendered dating norms. For example, when one participant was asked why she decided to engage sexually with a MINUSTAH peacekeeper, she answered, ‘We were together and often saw each other. He was helping me as well. That is why I ended up falling for him later’ (Port de Paix).

The feelings of love expressed by some women were altered when they lost contact with the peacekeeper and subsequently became solely responsible for the peace babies. In all cases, contact with the peacekeeper was lost because his tour of duty ended. The women recognized that perceptions of love fall short of providing financial security for their children:

I had his contact information, I used to try to call him. When I called him, he would tell me “I love you darling” or tell me to say hello to the child for him, but he never sent anything for the child. Now I just never try to call him anymore ... When I tried to call him, he was telling me “I love you” that wasn’t what I was interested in (Port Salut 4).

Operationalization of Consent

Absence of Consent.

Perceptions of consent varied among the women. Absent consent was identified by the participants in instances of sexual abuse, and by the coding researcher when statutory sexual assault was committed. In addition, age was also mentioned in relation to the conception and birth of the peace baby. Participants who were teenagers during the sexual interaction mentioned lacking sexual and reproductive health knowledge:

I ended up sleeping with one of them while I was in eighth grade. Then, I got pregnant by him. I was too young to give birth to her. The reason why I had her so young was because I did not understand how things were. I did not have someone to advise me not to be involved in that situation (Port de Paix).

Presence of Consent.

Some women who mentioned they expressed sexual consent revealed that their consent was premised on certain expectations, promises, and unwritten rules between themselves and the MINUSTAH peacekeepers. The *expectations* that served to scaffold sexual consent were described by the participants as relating to the conviction that they would not become pregnant or that the peacekeeper would support them during child rearing if they did conceive a child:

I never thought that he would get me pregnant, and leave without looking for me ... He used to tell me when I was pregnant that he was ready to take care of the child. That he would not let me raise the child on my own, and that he will take him/her. But all were lies that he was telling me to make me feel good at the time. None of it was real (Tabarre 1).

Similarly, in relation to sexual consent, other women discussed *promises* expressed by the MINUSTAH peacekeeper. The promises expressed by the peacekeepers included: financial support, immigration to the peacekeeper's country of origin, and marriage. The potentiality of socio-economic mobility by virtue of engaging sexually with peacekeepers is inextricably connected to the promises made by the peacekeepers. For instance, one participant described a life she imagined for herself vis-à-vis the sexual relationship with the MINUSTAH peacekeeper:

Promises he made to me before he left, he said that once he got back home, he would work to send for me to come live with him where he is. He said he would send money for me to gather the necessary things for me and for the child. He said he would get me a house, he would marry me (Port Salut 2).

In addition to discussing the expectations and promises that framed sexual consent, women also illustrated the *unwritten rules* implicit within transactional sex with peacekeepers. Specifically, in the case of transactional sex, consent was not expressed in relation to specific sexual activity, in a case-by-case manner. Instead, accepting the commodity exchange involved in transactional

sex was perceived as providing implicit consent to sexual activity in broad terms. In essence, when women accept the peacekeeper's 'help' through transactional sex, their sexual consent was presumed:

He was helping me out, and he asked me to do it with him, I didn't want to do that with him, but he also insisted. And then because of the things he did to help me out, I agreed (Saint Marc 3).

When retrospectively reflecting on sexual encounters with MINUSTAH peacekeepers from their current position as mothers, a minority of women labeled their sexual encounters as exploitation. This occurred despite previous descriptions of consensual decisions to have sex with peacekeepers, thereby illustrating that perceptions of consent may shift to exploitation if the underlying premises are not realized: 'At the beginning, I had advantages, but on his end he was exploiting me. I mean I wasn't someone he wanted to be with, that means he only wanted to give a child to take care of' (Tabarre 4).

Resilience

Despite losing contact with the peacekeeper father, women described coping strategies that strengthened their resilience. While peace babies symbolized a palpable representation of previous sexual interactions with peacekeepers, many women described finding solace and strength in their children. The identity of motherhood and the peace baby as a source of strength motivated the women to continue providing for their children. Thus, peace babies were perceived as a *coping mechanism*: 'If I didn't have him, there would be good side and bad side. When you don't have children in life, a dog has it better than you do' (Saint Marc).

Another woman demonstrated resilience by describing her continued commitment to providing for her child:

Whatever the circumstances may be, I have a child ... I refuse to have someone else take care of him/her ... I should keep working on it and take care of my child. ... Once I said, if I ever see the child's father again, before I even talk to him, I should take him to show him where I go to work, how far away it is, just so I can provide for the child ... because of the child, I pull through everything (Port Salut 3).

In addition, *spirituality, faith, and religion* also contributed to resilience. In cases where women did not have a reliable source of income or social support, God was identified as a coping mechanism:

"Sometimes God makes me find one person who may send me some money, once in a while, not always... I am living through faith, I am waiting for God. I don't think I will stay like that [forever] God has to say something at the end" (Port Salt 2).

Another participant describes enduring hardships through God: 'I will continue enduring everything with him as God willing because I know one day he will grow up to be an adult. A child today, an adult tomorrow' (Port Salut).

Discussion

The present study sought to describe the phenomenon of engaging sexually with MINUSTAH peacekeepers, according to the lived experiences of Haitian women raising peace babies. Our findings contribute novel insights to the current discourse on sexual relations during PKO. Firstly, the contextual factors and social forces that shape the lives of Haitian women and girls may be used by sexually coercive peacekeepers to facilitate SEA. For instance, living in

proximity to MINUSTAH bases and experiencing the effects of natural disasters are contextual factors that increase intimate and friendly interactions with peacekeepers. In addition to the contextual factors, findings also indicate that economic hardship and poverty are social forces that may influence the bounded decisions of women and girls to interact sexually with peacekeepers through transactional relationships or employment. For example in Haiti, unemployment and lack of formal education disproportionately affects women compared to men (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). Thus, the adverse employment and educational opportunities experienced by some Haitian women and girls may increase their vulnerability with respect to exploitative transactional sex. Consistent with previous literature, we draw attention to the adverse socio-economic conditions that support the economies of transactional sex and influence bounded sexual consent and agency (Otto, 2007; Simić & O'Brien, 2014). This study advances existing literature by highlighting these adverse socio-economic conditions using the lived experiences of Haitian women and girls who are mothers of children fathered by peacekeepers.

In doing so, this study provides a nuanced typology of sexual interactions during PKO and identifies factors that increase the risk of conceiving children with peacekeepers. We found that peacekeepers fathered children through: sexual violence perpetrated through sexual abuse or exploitative transactional sex, non-exploitative transactional sex, and long-term relationships. Some participants shared feelings of reciprocal love between themselves and the peacekeepers, regardless of the type of sexual encounter. When present, perceptions of love may have obscured the transactional and exploitative features of their relationships with MINUSTAH peacekeepers. Perceptions of love were concomitant with women and girls imagining a “beautiful life” with the peacekeeper partner, characterized by the expectation of upward socio-economic mobility. However, once contact with the peacekeeper was lost and he was no longer offering financial and material support, the discrepancy between the perception

and reality of love became apparent. This discrepancy was amplified by socio-economic disappointment. Consequently, perceptions of love were re-evaluated by the women and girls.

This study differs from the work of Otto (2007), Simić (2009), and Simić and O'Brien (2014) by taking into consideration the impact of losing contact with the peacekeeper father. Losing contact altered how Haitian women perceived the peacekeeper, from loving partner or provider to perpetrator of unintended financial and emotional hardships. We also recognize that perceptions of sexual consent and exploitation can change over time, and that some women may have labeled themselves as being exploited due to the peacekeeper's abandonment.

Moreover, we present the first empirical conceptualization of sexual consent between Haitian women and girls and UN peacekeepers. Consent was perceived as being present when women had the capacity to weigh the advantages and negative consequences of engaging sexually with peacekeepers. The ability of women to weigh the benefits and consequences of engaging sexually with MINUSTAH peacekeepers was influenced by the *expectations* of not becoming pregnant or receiving support by the peacekeeper father during child rearing; *promises* made by the peacekeeper related to financial support, immigration, and marriage; and the unwritten *norm* of consenting broadly to sexual activity when accepting transactional 'help' from peacekeepers. However, the perception of consent was not limited to cross-section of time. The passage of time influenced the operationalization of sexual consent since in all cases the peacekeeper left Haiti and did not uphold the original premises of the sexual consent.

This conceptualization of sexual consent is not entirely separate from how consent operates in contexts removed from PKO. Consent is based on the capacity to understand the positive and negative implications a decision has on one's life, based on the information present at a given point in time. However, the consent of Haitian women who engage sexually with peacekeepers is bounded. That is, the operationalization of sexual consent between women in host countries and UN peacekeepers occurs within a context of unique unequal power dynamics

that differentiate it from other forms of transactional sex. It is important to note that this operationalization of consent does not apply to sexual acts between UN peacekeepers and minors and sexual activity under the influence of drugs/alcohol.

Sexual consent involving beneficiaries of assistance and UN peacekeepers is different from other forms of transactional sex involving adults on the basis of the peacekeepers' immunity from host-country prosecution, transient terms of duty, provision of humanitarian aid, and duty of protection. In addition to being better positioned to access contraception and in a position of greater financial stability, the peacekeeper is aware that his term of duty will eventually end. The peacekeeper is also protected by legal agreements that secure his immunity from host-country prosecution in the case of sexual violence and paternity, may have received training on the UN's zero tolerance policy to some capacity, and is reasonably aware that a civilian's right to humanitarian assistance is independent of transactional sex. Thus, peacekeepers who misconstrue their term of duty, offer humanitarian assistance as payment, and create a false hope of marriage or immigration in an effort to leverage sexual relationships with beneficiaries of assistance are willfully blind to their responsibilities and roles as UN peacekeepers. Moreover, the current state of immunity from prosecution serves to exacerbate the unequal power dynamics present. Thus, while adult Haitian women may have the capacity to consent to sexual activity with peacekeepers, their agency is bounded by adverse socio-economic conditions and misinformation, in the form expectations and promises that some peacekeepers have a role in perpetuating.

Women who became pregnant as teenagers noted they were not fully aware of the potential consequences of the sexual interaction, including the possibility of becoming pregnant and being a single mother. The need for culturally and contextually-appropriate sexual and reproductive health education is also echoed within the Haitian population more generally; 38% of Haitian women aged 15-49 years report unmet family planning needs, and only 18% of

teenage girls aged 15-19 know how to correctly identify their fertile window (Institut Haïtien de l'Enfance, 2018). While we acknowledge that the prevention of SEA must focus on the perpetrating peacekeepers, there is also potential for interventions to address the social, economic, and contextual factors that increase the vulnerability of some women and girls to conceiving peace babies. Further research examining the potential impact of a comprehensive sexual and reproductive health program framed within the context of civilian-peacekeeper sexual interactions and Haitian culture/values is warranted for young girls who live in proximity to peacekeeping bases. Engaging such teenage girls in dialogue focused on peacekeeping codes of conduct and humanitarian assistance may also address misconceptions surrounding the exchange of sexual activity for humanitarian assistance. We propose a school-based program whose operating costs are financed through the PKO and facilitated by local Haitian women who are expert peers. Such an intervention may also be income generating for Haitian women who have lived experience engaging sexually with peacekeepers and/or are raising peace babies.

A comprehensive sexual and reproductive health program contextualized for PKO represents a shift from the UN's reductionist zero-tolerance policy to a harm-reduction strategy that acknowledges the contextual factors and social forces influencing the bounded agency of women and girls who engage sexually with peacekeepers. So long as women and girls face adverse socio-economic conditions and live in proximity to peacekeeping bases, transactional sex with peacekeepers is likely to continue. This harm-reduction approach recognizes the socio-economic context of sexual interactions with peacekeepers and proactively aims to protect women and girls from sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies, while not condoning SEA perpetrated by peacekeepers.

Limitations

The present study has several limitations. Firstly, saturation may not have been reached in our sample of 18 interviews. The present study includes only eight MINUSTAH-hosting communities and recruitment of other participants from additional sites may have revealed novel themes not captured in the current analysis. Additionally, we suspect that women who receive informal child support payments from MINUSTAH peacekeepers may have been less likely to participate. Given the interviews were on average 23 minutes in length, the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the participants may not have been fully explored. The research assistants varied with respect to their use of the interview guide and the demographic questions were not asked consistently. Due to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon of interest some participants may not have been comfortable discussing intimate details of their sexual encounters. Lastly, conducting cross-cultural research between three different languages (English, Haitian Kreyol, and French) presented unique challenges. The colloquialisms and idiosyncrasies of language may have been lost in the translation phase from English to Haitian Kreyol and vice versa during the data collection and transcription, which negatively affects data quality.

Strengths

The present study has several strengths. Firstly, to our knowledge this study presents the first empirical data about sexual interactions between UN peacekeepers and local women and girls that resulted in the conception and birth of peace babies. By employing the phenomenological tradition, this study contributes a nuanced, bottom-up understanding of civilian-peacekeeper sexual interactions resulting in the conception of children, according to the perspective of women and girls in Haiti. Moreover, the authors triangulated findings by collecting data from a heterogeneous sample of women across Haiti that were of various ages and had peace babies of diverse ages (data source triangulation).

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Declaration of Interest Statement

No conflict of interest to disclose.

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