Women’s experiences of warfare and postwar recovery are qualitatively different from those of men. However, to date, the processes whereby women recover from the gendered impacts of war have not been sufficiently explored. In order to address this gap in the literature and to inform policies and services aimed at women recovering from warfare, a qualitative investigation was conducted of the process whereby women in one rural community in northern Mozambique attained wellbeing in the wake of war. Findings indicate that factors at all levels of the socio-ecological system were significant in supporting women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing. © 2009 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

WOMEN’S EXPERIENCES DURING TIMES OF WAR

Distinct gender roles and gender-specific needs result in women’s experiences during and after times of warfare being qualitatively different from those of men. As a result of their marginalization and relative lack of power, women are not only often victims of gender-based violence during and after times of war, but they have specific needs and experiences postwar that are gender influenced (Cockburn, 2001; Colson, 1999; Indira, 1999; Lentin, 1997; Meleis, 2005; Moser, 2001; Sideris, 2003). Given the staggering number of women impacted by war across the globe, this represents a significant social problem. Understanding the individual level as well as socioecological
factors that can hinder or facilitate women's wellbeing postwar then is of critical importance in assisting women, families, and communities to recover postwar.

During times of war, civilians are often routinely targeted for violence. In recent wars as many as 90% of all casualties have been civilians, the majority of whom were women and children (McKay, 1998; Okazawa-Rey, 2002). In developing nations in particular, civilian women's duties place them under duress and differentially expose them to both the threat and reality of violence. For example, women may be less mobile than men are as they take care of children and elderly family members. Women may also be more vulnerable to encountering enemy combatants when they work in agricultural fields or walk long distances to gather water or firewood (Cockburn, 2001).

The social consequences of war also have significant and distinct implications for women. First, levels of social violence are often elevated in the wake of warfare, placing women and girls at greater risk of sexual assault. Second, in developing nations women and girls are often disproportionately responsible for agricultural labor, and are more likely to step on unexploded landmines buried in agricultural fields. Finally, the violence of war often erodes reciprocal relationships upon which women rely for access to resources (Cockburn, 2001; Moser, 2001).

Warfare thus has substantial gendered implications for women and girls. These impacts are rendered even more significant by the fact that women and girls often do not receive adequate services and supports that can facilitate their recovery from war. To address this gap in the literature and to make a contribution to both science and practice, an in-depth qualitative investigation of factors facilitating Mozambican women's postwar attainment of wellbeing was conducted. Mozambique was an ideal site within which to examine civilian women's experiences of postwar adjustment. Not only have Mozambican women survived a particularly brutal war (e.g., Igreja, 2003; Sideris, 2003), but the 14 years that have elapsed between the end of the war and the time when this investigation was conducted also ensured that these women had a period of postwar adjustment upon which to reflect.

THE WAR IN MOZAMBIQUE

The civil war in Mozambique lasted from 1976 to 1992. This was a war of destabilization fought between the Frente de Libertacação de Moçambique (FRELIMO) government and South African-supported Resistência Nacional Moçambicana (RENAMO). The South African goal was to undermine the socialist FRELIMO government, which it perceived as a threat to its then Apartheid government. As a result, RENAMO deliberately targeted civilians by destroying infrastructure and employing tactics designed to instill fear (e.g., nighttime attacks, torture, and public rapes; Cliff, 1991; Magaia, 1989; Peltzer & Chongo, 1996; Sideris, 2003; Summerfield, 1999). In addition, women and girls were often kidnapped to perform both domestic and sexual labor for combatants (deAbreu, 1998; Igreja, 2003).

During the war, approximately 600,000 Mozambicans were killed, 1.7 million fled to neighboring countries, and 4.5 million became internally displaced (Peltzer & Chongo, 1996). It is estimated that virtually every Mozambican family had at least one member killed, mutilated, or who went missing (deAbreu, 1998; Turshen, 2001). In addition, although it is not known exactly how many women were raped during the war, it is estimated that hundreds of thousands were injured (deAbreu, 1998). Finally,
it is believed that at the end of the war approximately 2 million landmines remained unexploded throughout the country (Peltzer & Chongo, 1996).

Mozambican women suffered multiple consequences as a result of their wartime experiences. These included physical and psychological impacts as well as consequences brought about by the sociocultural meaning attached to their experiences by their larger communities (deAbreu, 1998; Igreja, 2003, 2004a; Nordstrom, 1997; Sideris, 2003; Turshen, 2001). In many cases, an injury to an individual was perceived to also be an injury to the larger community (Honwana, 1998). As a result, some women who were raped, and in particular, women who became pregnant as a result, were ostracized by their families or rejected by their husbands. This was particularly true in the patrilineal South of Mozambique (Igreja, 2004a; Igreja, Dias-Lambranca, & Ritchers, 2008; Sideris, 2003; Turshen, 2001).

Despite these factors, many communities across Mozambique sought to rebuild social structures and relationships that were destroyed by the war (Igreja, 2004a,b; Igreja, Kleijn, & Richters, 2006). Some authors have documented the ways in which war-affected communities drew upon traditional healers to perform ceremonies intended to cleanse victims of wartime violence of their experiences and to remove the individual and social consequences of these experiences. In this way, these individuals could be accepted back into their communities (Green & Honwana, 1999; Honwana, 1998; Igreja et al., 2006; Nordstrom, 1997). Finally, for some women the postwar environment provided opportunities for economic participation and access to freedoms that they did not have before or during the war. For example, to recover from the economic devastation of the war and to supplement their families’ postwar incomes, many women became employed in the informal industry. This provided them with access to greater economic independence and related freedoms (e.g., Sideris, 2003).

However, individuals and communities sought to recover from the war within a context where they had access to few resources or formal supportive structures. Medical care is particularly limited in rural areas of Mozambique, and resources for psychiatric and psychological care are virtually inaccessible to lower income and rural inhabitants. As a result, the majority of Mozambicans recovering from war have had no choice but to rely largely upon local spiritual and traditional healers to facilitate their postwar healing (Igreja, 2004b). In addition, structural adjustment policies imposed upon Mozambique as it made its postwar transition from a socialist to a capitalist economy significantly restricted individuals’ access to various supportive services such as childcare and education (Cliff, 1991; Marshall, 1990; Roesch, 1994; Sheldon, 2002). This placed a particular burden on women, who were forced to perform additional labor to care for their families after the war (Cliff, 1991; Roesch, 1994).

Notably, at the time of independence Mozambique was one of the poorest nations in the world. Although it has made significant strides since then, the majority of the population still lives below the poverty line. Women, in particular, face significant disadvantage. Mozambican women have lower life expectancy than do men (40.44 years as opposed to 41.62 years for men). Literacy rates for women are also low. In 2003, it was estimated that only 32.7% of women were literate (as compared to 63.5% of men). Of those women who attend school, the average number of years of schooling is eight (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009).

Mozambican women have thus sought to recover from the gendered impacts of the recent war that was fought in that nation within a context that was not always supportive of this process. However, despite this, women have actively worked to
restore their own and their communities’ postwar health, seeking to attain wellbeing in the wake of the war.

THE ATTAINMENT OF WELLBEING IN THE WAKE OF WAR

As is the case in Mozambique, communities worldwide strive to attain wellbeing after warfare (Last, 2000). However, to date women’s gendered experiences of wellbeing and distress have not been adequately considered and have often been pathologized (Cosgrove & McHugh, 2000). In addition, women’s voices are not often heard when the effect of the violence of war on civilians is considered (Sideris, 2003). As a result, not enough is known about factors that support civilian women’s recovery from warfare and their attainment of postwar wellbeing.

Wellbeing can be defined as an individual’s ability to withstand and recover from difficulties and strive towards health (Lorion, 2000). However, wellbeing is not just a function of individual characteristics, but consists of individuals’ interaction with their environment (Kelly, 2000; Lorion, 2000). The attainment of wellbeing thus results from a combination of individual characteristics and ecological contexts that support thriving (Davis, 2002; Masten, 2001; Poorman, 2002; Shalev, Tuval-Mashiach, & Hadar, 2004).

The goal of the current investigation was to identify factors at various levels of the socioecological system that have facilitated Mozambican women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing. In addition, understanding factors that have impacted Mozambican women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing in the absence of many of the formal resources conventionally considered important to facilitate recovery from trauma (e.g., psychological counseling; deVries, 1996; Hiegel, 1994) can elucidate factors significant to women in other developing nations’ recovery from warfare. Such an understanding can inform programming and policies aimed at women in other underresourced communities experiencing or recovering from warfare.

METHOD

Preliminary Research Activities

Before beginning data collection, it was important to ensure that the researcher’s understanding of “wellbeing” was appropriate within the Mozambican context. Key informant interviews were, therefore, first conducted with 10 diverse stakeholders (seven women and three men) representing a cross-section of Mozambican society (e.g., NGO employees, professionals, students, and women employed in the informal sector). These informants were able to speak to interpretations of wellbeing as they relate to women residing in various sociocultural contexts (e.g., the difference between rural and urban residents’ interpretations of wellbeing). Overall, there was strong agreement across informants with regard to what it meant to be “well” in the Mozambican context.

Location

The Meconta District in rural Nampula Province was selected as the research site for this investigation because it was a site of active Renamo occupation (Jacobson, 2005), and little research has been conducted in this province. Participants lived in communities that were located at varying distances from roads, and did not have
electricity, running water, or any other modern amenities. Women and girls were responsible for carrying water from wells or pumps and did all cooking over open fires made with wood that they collected. Families farmed their own machambas\(^1\) and sold their produce according to their needs, with the majority of households subsiding on less than one U.S. dollar a day. However, these were relatively stable communities, and many families knew one another during the war.

**Sample**

Women who were 25 or older were purposively selected for participation as they would have been teenagers or older during the war. It was expected that they would be able to remember their experiences during and after the war, and would be able to reflect on the impact that the war has had upon their lives. Only women who remained within their communities during the war were recruited for participation, as it is likely that those women who were refugees or who migrated to other communities to escape the war had experiences that were qualitatively different from those women who remained within their home communities. Finally, both women who were married and unmarried and women who did and did not have children during the war were recruited for participation.

**Procedures**

The first author gained legitimacy within the targeted communities through her association with female key stakeholders from these communities known as community Animators. Animators fulfill important leadership roles in their communities and, for example, organize women's groups, conduct nutritional education, and keep track of infants' development.

Data were collected through semistructured, in-depth, in-person qualitative interviews that were taped and transcribed. Additionally, all participants were interviewed in locations where they felt comfortable and had privacy. All interviews were conducted either in Portuguese (in which the first author is fluent) or in Macua (the primary indigenous language spoken in Nampula province) with the assistance of a Portuguese–Macua translator. Less-educated women often were not fluent in Portuguese, and it was thus necessary to interview them in Macua, their first language.

Overall, 47 interviews were conducted over a period of 6 months, until saturation was achieved (Patton, 2002). The final sample consisted of 47 women aged 25 to 61 (M = 40). All participants were farmers, 45 were married, and 2 were widowed. The husbands of those participants who were widowed died from causes other than the war. All except one of the participants had between one and nine children, with an average of five living children per family.

**Interview guide.** Participants were asked about their recovery after the war, how the war had changed their lives, their attainment of wellbeing after war, and factors that were potentially significant (positively and negatively) to their postwar recovery. These open-ended questions allowed participants to reflect upon various periods of their

\(^1\) Plots of land farmed by individuals and/or family groups.
lives during and after the war. Follow-up probes allowed the first author to explore specific aspects of these experiences with women in more detail.

Translation. Given the multilingual nature of the investigation, it was necessary to ensure that all documents and interviews were accurately translated. First, a local university student verified the first author’s translation of documents from English into Portuguese. Second, community Animators were recruited to act as Portuguese–Macua translators in the field. Given the significant logistical problems inherent in reaching the targeted, rural communities, it was not possible to bring outside individuals along to act as translators during interviews. In addition, discussions with service providers revealed that women in the targeted communities would be uncomfortable and likely unwilling to be interviewed if an outside translator was used. Hence, five community Animators at the targeted farmers’ associations were recruited to act as translators in the field, as they were some of the only women in these communities who were fluent in both Portuguese and Macua. Finally, to ensure the accuracy of all Portuguese–Macua translations, two fully bilingual research assistants were recruited to review all interview tapes.

Data analysis. The Portuguese versions of all interviews were transcribed for analysis. All data were analyzed using Atlas.ti (Muhr, 1991), and using inductive thematic content analysis (Patton, 2002). As each transcript was analyzed, and new themes were identified, these were compared to previously identified themes in order for overarching analytic categories to be generated. These categories were then used to construct a coding framework that was used to deductively analyze all data. Convergent and disconfirming evidence for the final framework was sought from each transcript (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), ensuring that the coding framework reflected an emergent understanding of the data and participants’ perspectives.

Multiple sources of data triangulation were incorporated into the process of data analysis. First, the bulk of data analysis occurred while the first author was still in Mozambique, allowing for participant input to be obtained with regard to emergent findings. This member check took the form of three informal discussion groups conducted after the completion of initial data analysis. The first author’s interpretations of the data were validated through these conversations. Second, an impartial third party reviewed all data analysis procedures and related interpretations.

Additional methods to improve the trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry outlined by Guba and Lincoln (1989) were also followed. The first author spent a number of months within the research site, thereby engaging in prolonged engagement. She also engaged in persistent observation in order to identify characteristics of the communities in question most relevant to the investigation (e.g., women’s roles within their communities). In addition, the first author engaged in peer debriefings, regularly discussing her findings and emergent conclusions with impartial others. Second, transferability was increased through the provision of thick description of the phenomenon under investigation. Finally, dependability and confirmability of the data were ensured through the maintenance of an audit trail of all data collection and analysis procedures, related decisions that were made, and justifications of these decisions.
RESULTS

**Wellbeing in Mozambique**

Key informants participating in the first phase of the research agreed that because individual definitions of what it means to be well vary and are often contextually determined (e.g., rural and urban residents may have different interpretations of what it means to be well), universal wellbeing is determined by an individual’s access to rights and resources that facilitate their capacity to achieve their own goals and aspirations. This additionally serves to remove gendered restrictions to women’s attainment of wellbeing (e.g., access to education and equal consideration in the workplace can assist women in furthering their goals). Notably, participants also observed that not all women have equal access to necessary rights and resources, and that, in particular, women who lived in rural areas were frequently severely impoverished and/or did not have access to the structures necessary to ensure that their rights were adequately enforced. One key informant summed this up by saying

"Women have achieved emancipation, but they are still in the process of obtaining wellbeing...those women who study...those who haven’t studied still live in rural areas and they still experience deprivation, they still have not achieved wellbeing...she is free, Mozambique is free, but fundamentally, she does not have wellbeing...she does not have resources."²

For women in Mozambique, the attainment of wellbeing is thus not a state, but a process. This process is facilitated by individuals’ access to rights and resources that allow them to achieve their goals and aspirations, but this access is not universal.

When asked about their attainment of postwar wellbeing, women who participated in the second phase of data collection provided similar descriptions. Notably, women associated their postwar attainment of wellbeing with the ability to engage freely in daily tasks and to make key decisions about their lives. The absence of sociopolitical restrictions on their capacity to live peaceful and meaningful lives was essential to women’s postwar sense of wellbeing. When asked to describe what it meant to her to be well, one participant provided the following response:

"...I sit at home, I take my hoe, I go to my machamba,³ I come back from my machamba, I get my water bucket, I go to the river, I farm without seeing any enemies, that is how I have wellbeing..."

Another participant simply said, “We are free.”

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² Quotes have been translated either from Portuguese to English or from Macua to Portuguese to English. When a translator was present during an interview, quotes are in the third person as this is how the translator presented the information to the first author. In order to maintain the authenticity of the data and to minimize the loss of meaning that occurs with translation, quotes that were translated from Macua into Portuguese were left in the third person. Quotes from interviews conducted in Portuguese are presented in the first person.

³ Plot of farmland.
The postwar context was thus significant both to participants’ capacity to recover from the impacts of the war as well as their attainment of wellbeing in its wake. If women’s recovery from the impacts of warfare is to be encouraged, it is essential to understand those characteristics of their postwar environment that may facilitate their postwar attainment of wellbeing.

Postwar Attainment of Wellbeing

All of the women who participated in this investigation had had some direct experience of violence, ranging from having their property stolen to seeing family members murdered. In addition to the loss of life and generalized violence, many women and their families also lost all of their belongings, including their stores of seeds intended for the next season’s planting. Additionally, although none of the women interviewed for this investigation were willing to admit that they were raped (likely for fear of stigma and/or because such disclosure is considered to be taboo, as described by Igreja et al., 2006, 2008), participants did describe the fact that many women who were kidnapped were forced to “marry” soldiers or were otherwise sexually assaulted. Women who were kidnapped were also often forced to perform domestic labor and to act as farmers and porters for soldiers. This combined with the fact that they were provided with inadequate nutrition and were treated harshly, ensured that girls and women who were kidnapped often suffered severe physical and psychological consequences as a result of their experiences.

Overall, participants described the war as disruptive in multiple ways. In addition to the violence, fear, and hardship it wrought, the war rendered it difficult, if not impossible, for women to engage in activities that gave meaning to their daily lives. For example, one participant described life during the war in the following manner:

During the time of the war, all the people slept in the bush, there was no time to farm, there was no time to bathe, there was no time to fetch water, there was no time to play or to sit and braid hair, there was no time. All the time we just fled into the bush, all the time we just fled…

The war was thus a period of significant suffering for those women who participated in this investigation. This resulted not only from their individual experiences of warfare, but also from the disruptive impact it had upon their families and larger communities. It is within this context that women’s postwar recovery will be examined.

Facilitators of Women’s Postwar Attainment of Wellbeing

Despite facing significant adversity, the majority of the women who participated in this investigation indicated that they had attained wellbeing since the war. Only two indicated that they were not well, and of these two women, one had recently been widowed and one was suffering from a grave illness. Given that women largely felt that they had recovered from the war, regardless of the significant and negative impact it had had upon their lives, it was important to understand those factors that facilitated their postwar attainment of wellbeing. Notably, factors that supported women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing existed at all levels of the socioecological system.
Facilitators of Mozambican women’s wellbeing at the micro level. At this level of analysis, women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing was supported by the ways in which their families responded to them and assisted them during and after the war. Family members assisted one another with material needs as well as with their recovery from the experience of violence.

First, the material support that family members provided to one another assisted women to recover from economic losses. As the following participant explained, “…during that time those who had some food offered it to others, they said ‘come help me in my machamba, and then I will give you some to eat.’” Another participant described the assistance that she received from her family after combatants burned down her house, “…when they burnt my house down I received help from my family, they took beans and corn and gave it to me; I built my house and until now I am living without problems in my life.”

In addition, many women who were kidnapped during the war remained with soldiers for extended periods, even years. They often lost everything as a result and depended upon their family members to assist them to get back on their feet. For example, the following participant described the assistance family members provided to one another: “When those who were kidnapped returned home, they [the family members] took some food and gave it to them…they came back from there and had nothing…their family gave them what they purchased.”

What is particularly notable about this support is that family members assisted women and girls who returned from being kidnapped, even when they may have been raped. This stands in contrast to literature documenting cases where women were ostracized from their communities after being raped. When asked about this difference, one participant stated, “…it was not the same here like there, when these people came back they were received by their families.” In fact, participants indicated that they were happy to have their female family members return to them after being kidnapped. This was further illustrated by the fact that women who had been kidnapped were still living within their communities and were married with families.

Family members additionally ensured that women and girls had access to care, as was available, to assist them in recovering from the physical and psychological consequences of their wartime experiences. Family members took their wives and daughters to medical professionals, if these were available. In addition, women and girls were taken to see curandeiros (traditional healers) to receive treatment for the physical and psychological consequences of their wartime experiences. One woman who had been kidnapped during the war relayed the following regarding her experiences upon returning to her family: “When I arrived here…when they brought me back from there, my family arranged for me to be treated by a curandeiro. I wasn’t a compete person, I was like a ‘bandito’ from the bush.” This participant indicated that after treatment she was a person again and managed to recover from her experiences during kidnapping.

Facilitators of women’s wellbeing at the meso level. At this level of the socioecological system, women’s wellbeing was facilitated by the resources available to them within their communities. First, as noted above, women who experienced violence during the war were often treated by curandeiros who cleansed them of their experiences, providing

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4 Participants often referred to soldiers as ‘banditos’, or bandits.
them with an opportunity to be reintegrated into their communities. In addition to receiving treatment for their physical health concerns, women were often ritually washed by curandeiros. This ritual bathing broke the link between what happened to them and their current and future lives. The ceremony also cleansed women of their experiences during the war and allowed them to once more become part of their communities. This served as a form of renewal for women, symbolically breaking the connection between them and their experiences and allowing them to be accepted back by their communities.

Participants described the results of these treatments in the following ways: “...there weren’t problems when these people came back here [those who were kidnapped], at home they arranged for them to see a curandeiro, they were treated, and they lived like they lived before the war.”

Other participants said the following about returnees’ recovery after being treated by a curandeiro, also emphasizing the secrecy that surrounds these experiences: “…these people who were captured felt better [after they were treated].” And “…[after being treated] other people were free, they just can’t speak about what happened in the bush....”

Participants additionally had access to various other resources, including membership in farmers’ associations, programs provided by nongovernmental organizations (e.g., women’s savings groups), and government-sponsored adult education programs. Participants credited their memberships in farmers’ associations and women’s savings groups with providing them with material resources that facilitated daily living (e.g., seeds to plant and additional financial resources). Participants also particularly appreciated the fact that savings groups would allow them to have money to pay for their children’s health care and to purchase additional material resources for their families. These savings groups thus had the potential to facilitate wellbeing.

In addition, participants identified the ability to obtain an education as a facilitating factor in their attainment of postwar wellbeing. Obtaining an education allowed women to strive for larger life goals and could also facilitate their ability to earn an income and to assist their families in better meeting their needs. One participant described how an education would allow her to have more options given the development that was occurring in northern Mozambique: “I go to school so I can learn to write. These [aid] organizations are always arriving, I want employment, so I can also be in the group that they will hire from…”

Facilitators of Mozambican women’s wellbeing at the macro level. At this level of analysis, recent postwar changes to the larger social system have allowed women to access rights and resources to which they did not previously have access. This included facilitating women’s access to meso-level resources. These postwar changes to the government and the social system in Mozambique have awarded women greater access to legal rights as well as increased access to liberties and resources that were previously denied to them for gendered reasons.

Participants were aware of the rights that they now had access to and were able to take advantage of some of these new opportunities. The following participant discussed some of the changes to the social system that she had observed since the war: “Because of democracy we are recovering, and men are feeling this difference. They are discovering that they cannot treat their wives badly. We can also not treat our husbands badly, we are equal.”

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Another woman said the following about her perception of her changing rights: 
“...I always think ‘from where we came, today is about moving forward, we are moving forward. My rights are changing’…”

Participants were also aware of the fact that these societal changes provided them with access to new resources, such as the opportunity to obtain an education and access to opportunities for greater political participation.

…the difference I noticed is that today women are studying and have jobs, yes, because back then women didn’t work, only the men worked, but today women work as well, like men; if someone says ‘that woman over there, she is a [government] minister,’ she really is a minister, while before it wasn’t like that…

These changes to the social system have thus broken down some of the gendered barriers that women experienced to their attainment of wellbeing and have provided a context within which they have achieved postwar wellbeing. One participant summed this up well by saying:

…we are recovering, now, today, we are moving forward, we really are moving forward; women are already studying, because before the war, and during the war, it was before we moved forward, but today women are studying and are going to work.

Factors That Have Inhibited Mozambican Women’s Postwar Attainment of Wellbeing

Women identified two factors that negatively impacted their postwar attainment of wellbeing. First, at the time of this investigation, the Meconta region was suffering from delayed annual rainfall made worse by a short rainy season the previous year. Although the rainy season did eventually start, families were forced to deplete their food stores and they were not able to plant and harvest as expected. Many participants spoke of experiencing significant hunger.

However, despite this, participants still considered themselves to have attained overall wellbeing. Although women felt the impact of the period of hunger, they described it as a transient time that did not change their overall attainment of wellbeing. As the following participant describes, “…the difference is that during the war they killed people like animals, while today, if it wasn’t for this hunger, we could sit and play without any worries….” Another participant echoed this sentiment by saying, “…this time is a good, the only bad is this hunger, if it wasn’t for this hunger I could sit there and say ‘now I am free’….”

Participants additionally identified postwar crime levels as an impediment to their capacity to live well after the war. This is significant as women are often particularly vulnerable to criminal activity. Their gender roles may expose them to threats as they spend time in machambas, or when they are walking to and from water collection sites. Participants indicated that crime levels interfered with their daily activities. They described this obstacle in the following way, “…the war is over, yes, but it is not over because of the thieves, the war of the knives has ended, of the weapons, but the war still exists in the ‘Corridor.’”

5 The thoroughfare between two major cities along which the targeted communities were located.
Thus, although women felt themselves recovered from the war, their lives were not without hardship and continuing challenges.

**DISCUSSION**

Previous studies have documented the negative impacts that unsupportive postwar contexts can have upon women. For example, others have noted cases in which women who had been raped during war were rejected by their families and communities, resulting in their loss of social and economic resources necessary for their postwar recovery (Igreja, 2003; Peltzer & Chongo, 1996; Turshen, 2001). In addition, it has been argued that the absence of resources that are conventionally thought to support postwar healing, such as counseling and culturally appropriate treatments for trauma, can be detrimental to individuals’ recovery after war (Igreja, 2004b; Peltzer & Chongo, 1996). Finally, researchers have argued that postwar contexts that do not support women’s attainment of economic wellbeing exacerbate the economic difficulties generated by war (Cliff, 1991; Roesch, 1994; Marshall, 1990; Sheldon, 2002).

The current study, in contrast, focused on women’s attainment of wellbeing after war. The women who participated in this study spoke about the various ways in which the postwar context (at the micro, meso and macro levels) supported their recovery from the impacts of the war. At the micro level, women’s access to family and social support networks were particularly significant to their postwar recovery (e.g., Davis, 2002; deVries, 1996; Hiegel, 1994; King, King, Keane, Fairbank, & Adams, 1998; Shaley et al., 2004). These networks not only allowed women to mitigate some of the negative economic impacts of war, but also contributed to their psychosocial recovery.

Notably, as was mentioned earlier, this finding stands in contrast to those of authors such as Sideris (2003), Igreja, Kleijn, and Richters (2006), and Turshen (2000) who found that in the patrilineal south of Mozambique, women who were raped were frequently ostracized from their communities. This finding thus needs to be placed within a sociocultural context. The acceptance of women who may have been raped back into their families and communities likely resulted from the fact that the Macua are matrilineal. In matrilineal communities, where bloodlines are traced through women, female sexuality is not as closely guarded as in patrilineal communities. Women in matrilineal communities consequently have greater reproductive freedom and more significant access to social power (e.g., Addai, 1999; Takyi, 2001; Takyi & Broughton, 2006; Takyi & Dodoo, 2005). As a result, although it is possible that victims were stigmatized, they did not face the same consequences as women have in patrilineal communities such as those in the south of Mozambique (e.g., Igreja et al., 2006; Sideris, 2003; Turshen, 2000).

At the meso level, women had access to culturally appropriate resources designed to minimize the impact of their wartime experiences (e.g., treatment by curandeiros), which facilitated their capacity to recover from war. The importance of traditional healers such as curandeiros to individuals’ capacity to attain wellbeing has been well documented in the literature on warfare (e.g., deVries, 1996; Hiegel, 1994; Igreja et al., 2006; Krippner, Johnson, & Friedman, in press). In fact, it is argued that such treatment has the effect of bringing about a complete psychological recovery for war-affected individuals and is more appropriate to contexts such as Mozambique where individualistic Western models of health and trauma do not apply (Green & Honwana, 1999; Honwana, 1998).
Changes postwar at the macro level also served to increase participants’ access to resources necessary for their postwar empowerment. Notably, women had increased postwar access to resources that improved their capacity to make choices about their lives, including increased economic, educational, and political power. This not only contributed to the postwar redress of power considered by many to be necessary for true postwar recovery and the prevention of future wars (Comas-Díaz, Lykes, Brinton, & Alarcon, 1998; Martín-Baró, 1994; Hernández, 2002; Green & Honwana, 1999), but it also increased women’s capacity for self-determination and wellbeing (Nelson, Lord, & Ochocka, 2001; Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Pierson, 2001; Zimmerman, 2001). This is particularly significant given the established connection between empowerment and wellbeing (Cowen, 1991; Rappaport, 1995).

Findings from this investigation thus suggest that empowerment theory provides a useful framework within which to examine women’s attainment of postwar wellbeing. This is especially true if a definition of empowerment that focuses on individuals’ capacity to exercise control over their lives and related choices as a route to wellbeing is employed (Nelson et al., 2001; Prilleltensky et al., 2001).

However, notably, participants were still vulnerable to economic setbacks, as they did not have sufficient buffers (e.g., long-term savings) in place to protect themselves against natural disasters and other phenomena that impacted their levels of agricultural production and related access to income. During the time that this investigation was being conducted, women’s savings groups were being started in the targeted communities. It is possible that over time such savings groups will serve to buffer women against events such as drought or crop blight; however, at the time of this investigation it was not possible to assess the impact of these groups. However, participants understood the potential importance of such groups and noted these as a positive aspect of their membership in farmers’ associations.

**Limitations**

Study findings should be considered within the context of the investigation’s methodological limitations. Given the significant methodological challenges inherent in conducting cross-cultural research in multiple languages, it is possible that important aspects of women’s postwar recovery process were overlooked or incorrectly interpreted (e.g., meaning may have been lost in translation and participants may not have fully trusted the first author). Multiple strategies were put in place to minimize such methodological concerns (e.g., persistent observation, member checks, and key informant interviews); however, these challenges are complex and it is possible that the measures taken were not sufficient. In addition, the investigation focused upon factors that facilitated women’s recovery from warfare. Although this is an important source of inquiry, more negative aspects of women’s postwar experiences may not have been adequately explored or portrayed.

**CONCLUSION**

This study illustrates the importance of considering the socioecological context within which women recover from warfare, including the availability of indigenous support structures and resources that support their empowerment. The availability of such resources and supports not only has implications for women’s postwar recovery, but should also inform service provision to women in war zones. It is thus essential to tailor
postwar interventions to the particular postwar context within which women reside and to evaluate the availability of indigenous support structures and resources that may facilitate women’s recovery. Additionally, the importance of considering factors such as the kinship structures of communities impacted by warfare has also been illustrated. These structures may have significant implications for the ways in which communities respond to war survivors as well as for the supports that are both needed by and available to women following war. The significance of these implications should be further explored in future inquiries.

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