

Combating Gender Based Violence in conflict zones

Human Rights Council



Empowering Future Generations: Cultivating Global
Literacy and Enlightenment

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: Combating Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in conflict zones

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Introduction

Gender based violence (GBV) is one of the most serious and dangerous forms of violence. GBV often includes sexual, physical, mental and economic harm. According to UN statistics, one in three women will experience some form of gender based violence. Women in conflict zones especially fall at risk of becoming victims of GBV. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to implement the necessary measures to prevent any sexual crimes in these zones.

Furthermore, ensuring the protection and help for victims of these crimes is also vital to break the endless chain of sexual, physical, mental and economic abuse. These victims of GBV can cause both physical and mental trauma. Lack of aid and therapy, especially for displaced women, can result in lifelong pain and trauma.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender based violence

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

Conflict zones

Areas where violence, conflict and suffering occur. These conflicts are mostly between armed groups and governments. Conflict zones often involve human rights abuses, such as forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings, and sexual violence (GBV). Because of the chaos that ensues as a result of a conflict, human rights are often forgotten. Weaker inhabitants or displaced individuals in these zones are therefore easier targets to GBV.

Femicide

The killing of a woman or girl, in particular by a man and on account of her gender. This term has been used by many feminist movements to bring attention to the hate-fuelled murder of women by their male counterparts.

IPV

Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), or 'domestic violence' is an all-too-common form of violence against women and girls. It refers to any behaviour from a current or previous partner that

causes harm—including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours.

General Overview

Causes

Rape and other acts of sexual violence is usually used against one's enemy for one very precise aim "*to break the enemy's morale*". Women are usually seen as the bearers of the nation's pride and representing the nation.

Consequently, the rape of enemy women symbolized the rape of the whole community. Also, the rape of women during any conflict is not seen as an individual attack on an individual woman but an attack upon the whole nation. Furthermore, the attacker's frustration also plays a significant role. Most of the perpetrators are soldiers who have a deep, build up hatred towards a certain community or group of people, and outs this through acts of sexual violence or humiliation. Militarization, destruction of the family and societal structures, lack of shelter and availability of small arms increase gender-based violence in conflict areas.

Conflicts

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, militarization, destruction of the family and societal structures, lack of shelter and availability of small arms increase gender-based violence in conflict areas. During times of war, the causes of GBV rise, and therefore the amount of GBV cases too.

During the Rwandan genocide in 1994, 100,000 to 250,000 women were raped in Rwanda, according to UN statistics. However, the correlation between GBV and conflicts does not end with the Rwandan genocide.

Many nations with higher rates of conflicts also report higher rates of rape. During Sierra Leone's civil war, more than 60.000 women and girls were raped. However, this data is not always accurate as a large sum of rapes and other acts of sexual violence go unreported because of the consequences that these reports bring. They can vary from being outcasted by the victims' community, or to even being murdered for simply trying to report these crimes.

This femicide is becoming a bigger and bigger problem, especially in conflict zones. Every 10 minutes, a girl or woman is murdered by their male partner or male family member.

Furthermore, 55% of all homicides are carried out by a male relative or romantic partner, further emphasising the horrible fate of many women around the world.

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, among women aged 15-44 years, gender violence accounts for more death and disability than cancer, malaria, traffic injuries, and war put together.

STDs

Men who are carriers of disease, especially HIV/AIDS, are often invigorated to rape local women in conflict zones that are suspected to be in support of their opposition. Due to lack of healthcare in these conflict zones, many women and girls perish because of these STDs. Sexually abused young women in this region have a very high prevalence of asymptomatic bacterial STDs in addition to HIV, with significant risk of long-term reproductive health consequences. Moreover, the lack of healthcare during times of war can also increase the chance of having a miscarriage or dying because of (unwanted) childbirth or pregnancy. WHO's 2013 study on the health burden associated with violence against women found that women who had been physically or sexually abused were 1.5 times more likely to have a sexually transmitted infection and, in some regions, HIV, compared to women who had not experienced partner violence. They are also twice as likely to have an abortion.

Aiding victims

Due to the harsh circumstances that many victims in these conflict zones live in, both physical and mental help will not come on time. Mental disorders such as anxiety, PTSD or rape-trauma syndrome, are often the result of GBV. In order to help these victims, food, shelter, water, medicine and mental aid are of the utmost importance in helping the victim rehabilitate into society.

Major Parties Involved

UN women

UN women is a group responsible for organising the 16 days of activism. The 16 days of Activism is an opportunity to revitalize commitments and call accountability and action from decision makers. UN women also is responsible for the UNITE campaign. UNITE calls on governments, civil society, women's organizations, young people, the private sector, media, and the UN system to join forces to address the global pandemic of violence against women and girls.

WHO

WHO and UN Women, along with other partners, co-lead the Action Coalition on Gender-based Violence, an innovative partnership of governments, civil society, youth leaders, private sector and philanthropies to develop a bold agenda of catalytic actions and leverage funding to eradicate violence against women.

UNICEF

In coordination with governments, civil society and United Nations partners, UNICEF provides survivors with clinical health services, dignity kits, psychosocial support and the safe spaces they need to access care and protection. Safe spaces allow women and girls to participate in activities for empowerment and learn critical information on how to receive aid and where to report sexual

exploitation and abuse. In 2023, UNICEF reached nearly 23 million women and girls in 77 countries with care services related to gender-based violence. UNICEF also works to address the underlying social drivers and environmental conditions that lead to a higher incidence of GBV in emergencies.

Timeline of Events

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| 1985: | The World Health Organization (WHO) launched a program to study and understand violence against women worldwide. |
| 1993: | The United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women was adopted. This was a major step in creating international norms for addressing GBV |
| 1995: | The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing resulted in the Beijing Platform for Action, a key document supporting the promotion of women's rights globally. This includes tackling GBV |
| 2000: | The UN Security Council passed a resolution recognizing the protection of women in conflict, with particular attention to sexual violence (BGV). |
| 2006: | The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence was adopted, also known as the Istanbul Convention, as the first legal instrument to provide binding measures for preventing and combating violence against women. |
| 2009-2017: | The Istanbul Convention was signed by many European countries. This requires parties to develop laws, policies and support services to end violence against women and domestic violence. |

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Istanbul Convention

The Istanbul Convention is the first legally-binding instrument which claims to create a comprehensive legal framework and approach to combat violence against women. It is also focused on preventing domestic violence, protecting victims and prosecuting accused offenders. The Istanbul Convention was signed by many countries in Europe.

However, due to false claims made by conservative groups stating that the Istanbul Convention was 'made to erase the difference between men and women' the Convention received a lot of criticism.



16 days of activism campaign

This campaign, which starts on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and ends on Human Rights Day, is a worldwide initiative led by UN Women. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the impacts of GBV and advocate for the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. It has been an important global tool in advocating for policy changes, increasing community awareness, and supporting the rights of women and marginalized groups.

Possible solutions

Support for victims

Though preventing GBV proves itself a difficult task, aiding victims is also of the utmost importance. This aid can consist of, but is not limited to: Creating safe shelter spaces, making mental health support more available and creating a better medical support system. Gender-based violence (GBV) survivors require comprehensive, easily accessible, and powerful

support programs. For these programs to be effective, the party responsible for aiding these victims must remain neutral and culturally sensitive. To achieve effective, integrated, and coordinated action, there must be collaboration, skill, knowledge, training, coordination, and high level support and commitment within all organizations of the UN. A minimum set of good quality services must be provided for health care, psycho-social support, security/police/protection, and legal justice.

Legal aid

As mentioned before, ensuring victims can easily report these cases, and perpetrators can be prosecuted by an independent and sovereign judge is of the utmost importance. The actual enforcement of the law is quite challenging, especially in war torn conflict zones. Successfully finding and persecuting the perpetrators is a difficult task, and is often not the first priority of law enforcement in these conflict zones. A fine example of these sovereign and helpful legal aid centers are the ARC International's two GBV Legal Aid Clinics (based in Guinea). These clinics work with refugee survivors of GBV from Liberia and Sierra Leone. The Clinics provide three primary services: education on the legal rights of women and children and confidential advice to women and children regarding their legal rights and options.

Changing social norms

One of the most important underlying factors of GBV is the nearly normalised aggressive and hostile behaviour of men towards women and girls. In many cultures women are supposed to take on submissive roles. This complex however, changes the way these women and girls are viewed. Instead of being seen as equals, they are rather seen as objects. Therefore, changing the ways women and girls are seen around the world is a key factor in preventing GBV from happening. Teaching both men and women how to respond to and prevent GBV is for example a way to change the social stigma and normalisation of GBV.

Useful documents

State and Peacebuilding Fund Annual Report 2021

[World Bank Document](#)

WHO, Global Database on the Prevalence of Violence Against Women

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