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# LET'S PLAY DART!

## Women in war

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### Abstract

War is usually distinguished as a male-dominant sector, yet its consequences deeply affect women, who are generally excluded from planning and participating in hostilities. This paper explores the profound repercussions of war on women, including economic discrepancies, sexual violence, and long-term disorders like PTSD (Post-traumatic stress disorder). Deriving from case studies across the globe, the research spotlights the persistence of misogyny and delays in justice due to factors like structural collapses and indifference of legal authorities. These findings were drawn from historical records, survivor testimonials, and documentation from international organizations. While this paper gives examples of a few atrocities, the wider context of this issue is unfathomable. The paper proposes strategies to establish effective legal systems in post-war areas, healthcare reforms, rehabilitation spaces, and trauma care for survivors to empower them and build just and fair societies.

**Key words:** women in war, misogyny, gender-based violence, gender inequality, PTSD, post-war stress, ethnic cleansing, comfort women, war-induced poverty, legal justice for women, women's rights in conflict, rape as war tactic.

In cases of conflict, everyone suffers, and innocent beings are harassed, more so, systematic victimisation of women takes place during and as a consequence of war. Whenever we think about war, an image of our strong men safeguarding the country arises in our minds. Did you think that only men suffer from the consequences of war? Unfortunately, the sad aftermath of war is the maltreatment of women in our society and as with everything else, women take the direct hit at the hands of misogyny. Gender-based discrimination has been persistent in the world for centuries be it the huge pay gaps, marginalization in educational endeavours, in political roles of leadership, or dealing with borderline discrimination on simple existence. Oftentimes, women do not go to war; nonetheless, they are severely impacted by it, primarily due to misogyny.

Traditional gender roles in terms of economic dependence on the males of the family have led to less autonomy in the lives of females. A lot of practices have normalised gender violence in most cases where women do not even know their rights against these issues, which is the result of the lack of educational opportunities. Hence the fear of society due to deep-rooted gender-based traditions prevent women from expressing their opinions, knowing that they would not be considered. Traditional culture and religious influences

have also impacted women in negative ways. E.g. the old practice of ‘Sati’ in Hinduism – where, when a husband died the woman was burnt alive with the man as there was no one left to protect her. Such crimes in the name of Religion have been justified previously in our societies.

From the previous point, it is clear that the lack of economic independence is a huge problem, and that gets intensified in cases of war, while detached from their families, women have to start building their networks from ground zero as men in their communities were the one responsible for the same. Even then, it is unsafe for females to step out in crumbled economies and in such cases, women are usually denied their legal rights and end up at the deep end of the poverty spectrum. The situation worsens when a widowed female is involved as they are given a harder time accessing employment and aid.

Various healthcare issues such as maternal mortality rise, causing both emotional and physical disabilities. After the healthcare infrastructures are ruined, pregnant women are left distressed and without medical aid, they often die because of severe haemorrhage, and other infections. The major devastation in the scenes of war is harassment and rape of women with trafficking among other atrocities like rape-related pregnancies. Women have become the targets of sexual violence during and as the deliberate aftermath of war in our society where this abuse alters their lives in the worst ways imaginable.

Some people are of the view that men are the ones who mostly actually go to war and risk their lives to restore peace in a country, so they are the ones who are affected by war the most. War affects everyone but in distinct ways. Men have also suffered violence but men establish the whole idea of prevailing masculinity. Certain men with the general notion of manliness feel that all men should be a part of the same thought sphere, so even if certain males try not to participate in the same idea, they are harassed to send out a stronger statement of dominant manhood (males who have deviated from their paths can be brought back to their male dominant era and contribute to the marginalisation of the voice of women) (Korac, 2018).

Rape is not just a cross-hair in war but also a systematic and strategic affair that is abominable and hard to imagine. If we take the example of ‘Comfort Women’ from the Japanese history of female harassment, we see that it dates back to Japan’s Asia Pacific war (1931- 1945) where females were used as comfort and for uplifting the morale of soldiers in the army. Approximately 50,000 to 200,000 women from various parts of the world were hired in Japan for the sole purpose of pleasing army men and with the rise in recruitment numbers in Japan women were abducted, forcefully raped, and shipped off as a form of trafficking to satisfy the needs of the army (Kuki, 2013).

Another cruel example of such strategy is the Ethnic cleansing tactic by the Bosnian Serb authorities for the plantation of Serbian seeds in Bosnia (1992-95), majorly Bosnian Muslims were a target and they were shamelessly raped as a part of the horrific scheme. Women who were victims of the same fled their houses which served in favour of the whole idea of eradicating certain communities (Lončar et al., 2006). Around the same time in 1994 in Rwanda, the Tutsi population was severely threatened by the Hutu majority where again, women were made targets and raped in front of their families to terrorize the Tutsi masses (Outreach Programme on the Rwanda Genocide and the United Nations, n.d.). Doing so did

not just mentally or physically torture a woman but was a successful attempt to affect the long-term health of the survivors who were impacted by HIV/AIDS through the genocide.

Equally dire situations to the above conflicts are the ones within a country which can also result in women and young girls being tormented. In Tigray, Ethiopia, two forces fought against each other over governmental issues in 2022 which resulted in a civil war. The actions were over the postponement of elections due to COVID-19, which concerned the whole country, yet again females suffered. Conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) was brutal, 76% of females were raped by multiple people and 96% of the incidences were carried out by perpetrators belonging to the military and unknown to the survivors. An average of four months was recorded for the gap between the reporting of the incident and the care given to the victims (Mishori et al., 2023). These happenings further prove the dissociation of Governments from cases of sexual violence.

As we saw, various instances in history have shattered the lives of thousands of women but nothing has seemed to change. Even currently, in the war going on between Israel and Gaza (2023), women have been raped and murdered in cold blood (Holt, 2003). On top of all this, women who survive have to pick up pieces of their shattered lives and take all responsibility for not only themselves but their children and other family members once they lose their husbands and brothers to war, who were the sole earners of the family. Despite getting justice, women who have been assaulted resume their gender roles and continue to serve their families.

Continued repercussions after the war, lead to various other issues such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders) and depression in females. According to the survey, men have reported more TEs (traumatic events) but lifetime PTSD for women is twice as much as for men with a percentage of - women, 13.4%; and men, 6.3% (Silove et al., 2017). Women are also in danger of experiencing explosive anger symptoms (Rees et al., 2013) which is a result of injustice and violence with no plausible outcomes after a plea for justice. The lack of Government support is making the situation worse. Women who have suffered from violence are denied the right to proper legal protection. In terms of psychological suppression, society makes sure that women are silenced at any mere inconvenience to its ideologies.

After a war is over, the economy of a country crumbles and that impacts its legal system. It takes time for the legal structures to start working efficiently and that results in a huge backlash with cases of violence in a plea for justice. Especially, when these matters are not considered as a priority. In 2001, It was a woman who decided to hear out a victim of rape during a plea at ICTR (International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda) where they were not ready to listen to this victim as it was not of much importance. Judge Pillay made history by recognising the various crimes of Genocide and violence committed and that was the first time perpetrators were rightly faced with consequences for their heinous crimes (Statement of Judge Pillay, president of the tribunal, 2001).

Another layer of injustice can be seen in the sphere of legal matters. Despite that more women today are taking that initial step of making a name for themselves in our patriarchal society, currently, there are just 4 women out of 15 judges in the International Court of Justice whereas overall in the history of the Hague, there have been just 5 female judges as opposed to 106 male judges (UN Photo/ICJ-CIJ/Wiebe Kiestra, 2023). These figures speak

for themselves, we have a lot of work to do to raise the social bar for women in our society. So, women who want their voices to be heard find it difficult to do so in a room where they see none like them being represented in power.

For such situations to not arise patriarchy should be dismantled at its core so that women do not feel afraid of getting harassed as a consequence of various actions of the society. Measures should be taken to implement laws that will safeguard the welfare of women in such adverse circumstances. We should not wait for the rapes and the harassment to happen to take steps and provide justice if any, later, but instead have stricter laws in place to prevent these circumstances from arising. In addition, funds that help with the medical treatment for both psychological and physical problems should be effectively established and made available to the survivors without much hassle and a long tiresome procedure.

In addition to the above reforms, societal support in the form of campaigns should be materialised to prevent any form of ostracisation for women. Men too should become a part of such campaigns to do away with gender-based violence. The government should also invest in extensive trauma caregiving institutions for therapy in cases related to PTSD, anxiety, and depression alongside offering programs for rehabilitation and community building for survivors to re-develop trust in the society. Safe spaces should be developed to allow women to feel a sense of belonging where they can access support from peers and exchange experiences without any stigma.

Gender inequality continues to affect women in various walks of life and their victimisation during the war and post-conflict remains intact. There is an urgent need for re-evaluation of our societal values and tackling patriarchal roots that make women subjective to various psychological and sexual violence. By acknowledging this alarming issue and empowerment of women, as a society, we can move forward towards building a safe environment for females where they are not seen as weak and mere victims, but active contributors working towards an unprejudiced future.

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