

Violence during armed conflicts: Impact on women

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ABSTRACT

Many countries in the world have been involved in various armed conflicts. Women are the ones who suffer more and are targeted easily in these conflicts. Sexual violence and violation of their rights are the major concerns during and after conflicts which impact women's physical as well as psychological health. It is important to know how women play an important role in protecting and sustaining children and families during and after conflicts, how they themselves are being affected with armed conflict and what legal framework has been formed for women protection during armed conflicts.

Key Words : Conflict, Women, Violence, Abuse, Trafficking, Refugee

INTRODUCTION

Conflicts do exist in almost all countries in the world. The sufferings women have experienced in armed conflict situations have already been given due attention as they are the ones who suffer heavily as compare to their male counterparts in conflicts. Various studies, in this regard, have been carried out and done by international community and organisations like International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Red Crescent Movement, and United Nations Development Fund for Women etc. Conflicts bring hardships to female that have been caught in the torn regions. According to Women's Refugee Commission, during crisis, weakened institutions, poverty and financial hardships leave girls especially vulnerable to multiple forms of sexual and gender based violence, and to resorting to risky livelihoods.¹ Armed conflicts affect in different way to different women. The paper studies an impact of armed conflict on those women on who are civilian and not involved in armed conflicts but are still affected with these conflicts. The paper has also highlighted the legal framework for the protection of women during armed conflicts.

Defining Armed Conflicts :

Before knowing the definition of armed conflict it is important to know what conflict is. Conflict is a clash between groups of people and when these clashes are supported by arms it changes to arms conflict. Therefore, an armed conflict is a skirmish between more than two groups of people or states equipped and supported with weapons/arms. In other words armed conflicts can be

1. Women's Refugee Commission, *I'm Here: Adolescent Girls in Emergencies, Approach and Tools for Improved Response* (October 2014), , New York, p. 20

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defined as “the intentional use of illegitimate force (actual or threatened) with arms or explosives, against a person, group, community or state, which undermines people centred security and/or sustainable development.”²

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) defines the term armed conflict as the protracted confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a state. The armed confrontation must reach a minimum level of intensity and the parties involved in the conflict must show a minimum of organisation and have the capacity to sustain military operations.³

Women and Armed Conflicts :

Every armed conflict imprints cruel toll on the people living in a society regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity or nationality. Women were and still are particularly vulnerable to all forms of such violations.⁴ The majority of women are involved in armed conflict not as fighters/participants but as part of civilian population. Beginning with the history, women were treated as a bounty for the winners of a war who seized defeated enemy’s women and used them for their pleasures like from sex to slavery and trafficking. They used women in war as a way to demonstrate their supremacy over adversaries. The conquering of women served for centuries as a mark of victory; it considers as a proof of soldiers’ masculinity and success, and also compensation for service.⁵

Many emperors and kings used women to demoralize the enemies. World’s history is a proof of those atrocities which impacted women at large. There is no doubt that the world has already seen many women warriors too but they too suffered in one way or another during or post conflicts. They used to fight as a combatant, suffered as widow and slaves, scavengers with brutal treatment as well as worst health conditions.

Since historical times to till now, the impact of armed conflicts has remained same as it was the then. The only thing which has changed is that both national and international organisations have started giving due attention to the women issues in armed conflicts. Estimates say that since 1990, from all deaths related to armed conflicts in the world, 90 per cent are civilians and women and children comprise 80 per cent of this percentage.⁶

There are several examples of armed conflicts which can be discussed to know more about how women were being treated during and post conflicts. Sexual violence was a major problem during World War I and II among women. It was deployed as a strategic weapon and method of torture.⁷ At that time women become victim to sexual violence due to complex situations which are

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2. Hazen, Jennifer M. (2008), *Armed Violence in Asia and the Pacific: An Overview of the Causes, Costs and Consequences*, UNDP, p. 3.
 3. Kudakwashe, Mubika Augustine & Richard, Bukaliya (April 2015), *Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women*, *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 2(4), p. 78.
 4. Buchowska, Natalia (December 2016), *Violated or Protected: Women’s Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War*, *International Comparative Jurisprudence*, 2(2), p. 72.
 5. Moodrick, Hilly -Even Khen, & Hagay-Frey Alona. (2013). *Silence at the Nuremberg Trials: The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and sexual crimes against women in the Holocaust*, *Women’s Rights Law Reporter*, 35, p. 55.
 6. Olara A. Otunu. (2002). *Special comment on children and security*, *Forum du Desarmement*, no. 3, *United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research*, Geneva, pp. 3&4.
 7. *Focus: Women, Gender and Conflict in ADC*. (October 2009), *Austrian Development Agency*, Vienne, Austria, p. 1

not favourable to them.⁸ Many women tolerated this as they wanted to protect themselves and their families. They considered it as an easy way and means of protection and survival⁹ as women were afraid of and had to tackle with the horrors of armed conflicts and uncertainty, the obliteration of their living, loss of family and death. According to a report of Commission of Government Experts for the Study of the Convention for the Protection of War Victims (1947) explained how women were treated during World War II as it says, “when innumerable women of all ages, and even children, were subjected to outrage of the worst kind: rape committed in occupied territories, brutal treatment of every sort, mutations etc. In areas where troops were stationed, or through which they passed, thousands of women were made to enter brothels against their will or were contaminated with venereal diseases, the incident of which often increased on an alarming scale.”¹⁰ During World War II, the Nazi forces used several women for countless medical experiments (doctoral trails) in their concentration camps¹¹ where they underwent various sterilization procedures. When the Soviet Union forces return to Ukraine after reoccupying it, they accused and charged all women who worked for and used by Nazi administration. They were incriminated with interrogations and were condemned and beaten.¹²

Violence is considered as a strategic weapon to terrify people. In contemporary armed conflicts, it is engrossed with several forms of acts against women; these acts often are committed jointly and coexist with each other. These include- purposeful killing of civilian women, persecution, medical trails and experimentation, tracking, rape, forced sex, forced pregnancy, mutation of sexual organs, forced prostitution or forced exchange of sexual favours for crucial items or return of children, forced marriage, forced pregnancies, intentional infection with HIV, forced abortion, forced sterilization etc.¹³

Following are the issues which women have to face during and post armed conflicts:-

Sexual Violence :

Imagine that for hundreds of years your most formative traumas, your daily suffering and pain, the abuse you live through, the terror you live with, are unspeakable—not the basis of literature. . . . When you try to speak of these things, you are told that it did not

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8. Cassidy L. Chiasson. (August 2015). *Silenced Voices: Sexual Violence During and After World War II*, Honors Thesis, The University of Southern Mississippi, p.1. Retrieved 12 January 2018 from https://aquila.usm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1336&context=honors_theses
 9. Ibid
 10. Crowe, Anna. (December 2016). All the regard due to their sex: Women in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 , Research Working Paper Series , *Human Rights Programme*, p.13 Retrieved 15 January 2018 from http://hrp.law.harvard.edu/uploads/2016/12/Anna-Crowe_HRP-16_001.pdf. Also see Commission of Government Experts for the Study of the Convention for the Protection of War Victims, 14-26 April 1947, *Preliminary Documents*, Geneva, p. 47.
 11. Moodrick, Hilly -Even Khen, & Frey, Alona Hagay-, Silence at the Nuremberg Trials: The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and sexual crimes against women in the Holocaust, p.60.
 12. Dwyer, Philip. (2016). Matthew Lewis and Roger Markwick, War, Violence, Aftermaths: Europe and the Wider World, *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Volume 62, Number 4, John Wiley & Sons Australia. p. 499, Retrieved 15 January 2018 from <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ajph.12299/epdf>
 13. Buchowska, Natalia, Violated or Protected: Women’s Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War, p. 74.

*happen, you imagined it, you wanted it, you enjoyed it. Books say this. No books say what happened to you. Law says this. No law imagines what happened to you, the way it happened.*¹⁴

Crimes against women remain unavoidable in armed conflicts and the magnitude of violence suffered by women before, during and after conflict is overwhelming. Violence against women in conflict is one of history's great silences.¹⁵ Since past times, sexual violence against women has been the most experimented thing to preserve the morale of troops/soldiers. In 1204 the Crusaders raped women in Constantinople; in 1937 Japanese soldiers raped women in Nanking; during WWII German soldiers raped many Jewish and Russian women, and Russian soldiers raped German women.¹⁶ During this time, some took advantage of the situations and took that in an opportunistic way to sexually abuse women, but violence was used to a large extent as a part of official policies in order to humiliate and even eliminate communities.¹⁷ Rape deemed as an inevitable and obligatory consequences of armed conflicts.

There was a case of *comfort women* during World War II in which Japanese Imperial army forced 2, 00, 000 women from ten countries to work as sex slaves.¹⁸ They were forced to stay in camps which were known as *comfort stations*; these stations were used as brothels where those women were repeatedly raped and suffered other forms of violence and sexual violence, due to which many of them died during the war whereas those women who survived suffered permanently both mental and physical injuries.¹⁹ In 2015, with a pressure of NGOs, Japanese government apologised for this crime after many years and firmly decided to pay US dollars 8.3 million to fund victims.²⁰

There was a case of a Polish lady named Irene gut Opdyke during World War II who was employed to manage households for a German officer. She hid a Jewish friend in her house. After knowing this, the German officer assured Irene to keep her secret if she sleeps with him and become his mistress.²¹ In order to protect and save her friend's and her own life, she did whatever he said. She tolerated immense sexual violence to survive. Like this many other women were raped and also compelled to give up their body for food, protection, safety, and survival.²²

According to United Nations Women's Refugee Commission 2015, 'All 51 countries involved

14. Moodrick, Hilly -Even Khen, & Frey, Alona Hagay, Silence at the Nuremberg Trials: The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and sexual crimes against women in the Holocaust, p.55.
15. Rehn, Elisabeth and Sirleaf, Ellen Johnson. (2002). Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts' Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace-building, *United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)*, New York, p. 9.
16. Moodrick-Even Khen, Hilly, & Hagay-Frey, Alona, Silence at the Nuremberg Trials: The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg and sexual crimes against women in the Holocaust, p.55.
17. Dwyer, Philip, Lewis, Matthew and Markwick, Roger, War, Violence, Aftermaths: Europe and the Wider World, p. 499.
18. Lives Blown Apart: Crimes against Women in Times of Conflict: Stop Violence against Women, *Amnesty International*, 2004, Retrieved 12 January 2018 from <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/88000/act770752004en.pdf>
19. Buchowska, Natalia, Violated or Protected: Women's Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War, p. 73.
20. BBC News, Japan and South Korea agree WW2 'comfort women' deal, 28 December 2015, Retrieved 2 January 2018 from <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-35188135> accessed.
21. Opdyke, Irene. (2004). *In My Hands*. New York: Random House
22. Chiasson, Cassidy L., Silenced Voices: Sexual Violence During and After World War II, pp.3-4.

in conflicts since 1986 have number of cases of sexual violence against women.²³ Many nongovernmental organisations and governmental organisations had initiated joint efforts which resulted in the production of reliable studies of contemporary wartime cruelty against women. Those studies envisage that violence, particularly sexual one, is omnipresent in all armed conflicts all over the world and it is overwhelming.²⁴

During the civil war armed conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo rape has been a weapon of war which brought several thousand victims to sufferings.²⁵ As per records of 2008, there has been an increase in the sexual violence cases in Haiti since 2004.²⁶ According to a survey conducted in Sierra Leone, 94 per cent of displaced households experienced sexual assaults, including rape, torture and sexual slavery; Nearly 2, 50,000 women were raped during 1994 genocide in Rwanda, sexual violence occurred in the Algeria, Myanmar, Southern Sudan and Uganda due to ongoing rivalries, innumerable women were raped in 1971 Bangladesh conflict and there was an increased numbers of women trafficked out of war zones to become forced labourers and forced sex workers.²⁷

Terrorist groups also pose threats to the safety of women during armed conflicts. Iraq and Syria are the worst affected countries where terrorists are using women. Here, several women were sexually abused by Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), also known as Daesh and many women have been turned into sex slaves by and for these terrorists. Most are the cases of Yazidi women who experienced violence (physical and psychological). *Yazidi women are sold for money, bartered for weapons or given as a gift. Those women and girls who convert to Islam are sold as brides to Daesh fighters for \$25 - \$150. Those who do not – are raped. It needs to be underlined, that Daesh made rape and slavery part of its brutal theology, treating rape as a means of converting to Islam.*²⁸

Sexual violence results in grave consequences for the victims; they will be thrown out of the community public life, suffer a loss of or repression in marital life, given treatment on the belief that the victims have dishonoured their families.²⁹ Society and families reject women after an incidence of sexual violence. The society marks the sufferers of sexual violence as ‘damaged goods’³⁰ which impacts the psychological conditions of women. They felt contended with the humiliation, embarrassment, shame and an agony prompted by sexual violence. Due to this they also gets flashbacks of incidents, feel difficult to mingle with people and establish relationships, persistent

23. <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/armed-conflict/> Retrieved 16 January 2018

24. Buchowska ,Natalia, *Violated or Protected: Women’s Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War*, p. 74.

25. Ibid.

26. [http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingat10/E.%20Women%20and%20armed%20conflict%20\(Sep%2009\).pdf](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/beijingat10/E.%20Women%20and%20armed%20conflict%20(Sep%2009).pdf) Retrieved 10 January 2018.

27. Rehn, Elisabeth and Johnson Sirleaf, Ellen, *Women, War and Peace: The Independent Experts’ Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women’s Role in Peace-building*, p. 9.

28. Buchowska, Natalia, *Violated or Protected: Women’s Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War*, p. 75.

29. Than Claire de (2003). *Edwin Shorts: International criminal law and human rights*, Thomson, Sweet & Maxwell. p. 347.

30. O Bennett, Bexley, and Warnock, K. (1995). 1995: Introduction’, in O. Bennett, J. Bexley and K. Wamock (eds), *Arms to Fight, Arms to Protect: Women Speak Out About Conflict*. London: Panos Publications. Also see Kudakwashe, Mubika Augustine, Richard, Bukaliya, *Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women*, p. 80.

fears haunt them and there could be dullness in enjoyment in life.

Another serious concern is that the service provided like health care facilities, legal and economic support and security etc to the survivors/victims of sexual violence encompasses with many gaps. Moreover, women struggle with a fear of stigma which stops them from accepting or seeking any assistance.

Socioeconomic Impact :

Women experience negative economic consequences of an armed conflict. The rape surviving women generally lose their economic position in their families especially when they deprive of inherited properties and forced to live in isolation.³¹ After 1994 Rwanda genocide, thousands of widows and daughters could not legally put a claim on the homes, property or bank accounts which their deceased husbands or fathers had earlier.³² These kinds of situations, further, push and force them to live in poverty. Post conflict situation proves difficult for women as they put their efforts and exert on rebuilding their domestic resources to survive back again. In other cases, by and large women become the head of a family when she loses her husband during armed conflict i.e. when her husband dies or is misplaced.³³ Generally men are considered as the one who support their families with earnings. So when women split from their husbands (either due to death or some other circumstances), their houses incur with poverty and lack of money. They lose their source of income. Women who are less educated or illiterate and those who have not got training for any work find it difficult to get a job in order to help themselves and their families economically.³⁴ The women who have knowledge of work or trained and who can join occupations are also at loss as all the resources would be diverted to the armed conflicting areas for forces involved.³⁵ Therefore, women bear socioeconomic impact of armed conflicts on their lives during and post conflicts.

Widowed :

Armed conflicts generate psychological and emotional trauma associated with attack, separation from loved ones, loss of property and income, destruction of home.³⁶ When a woman loses her husband in armed conflicts (either directly involved in conflict or killed in action), her status changes and she becomes the only support for her children and families.³⁷ It requires courage and moral support. In case if she emerges stronger, she can hold upon and preserve the families whereas in

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31. Turshen, M. (2001). *The Political Economy of Rape: An Analysis of Systematic Rape and Sexual Abuse of Women During Armed Conflict in Africa*, W Moser, F. C. Clarke (Eds.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors: Gender, Armed Conflict and Political Violence*. London: Zed Book
 32. *Lives Blown Apart: Crimes against Women in Times of Conflict: Stop Violence against Women*
 33. Gardam, J., & Jarvis, M. (2001). *Women, armed conflict and international law*, Kluwer Law International, London, Boston: The Hague. Also see Buchowska, Natalia, *Violated or Protected: Women's Rights in Armed Conflicts after the Second World War*, p. 73.
 34. Mubika Augustine Kudakwashe, Bukaliya Richard, *Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women*, p. 81.
 35. Ibid.
 36. *Armed Conflict*, Chapter XV, p. 205, retrieved 17 January 2018 from <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/rwss/docs/2001/15%20Armed%20Conflict.pdf>
 37. Ivanciu, Cosmin. (2016). *The Protection of Women During Armed Conflicts*, *Scientific Research and Education In the Air Force-AFASES 2016*, p. 576. Retrieved 10 January 2018 from <http://www.afahc.ro/ro/afases/2016/SOCIO/IVANCIU.pdf>

weaker cases she needs support and stability during and post armed conflicts. Sometimes, women feel isolated and psychologically weak in situations when she's left alone. They do not go outside in order to protect themselves from violence and manage to stay indoors.³⁸

Displacement of Women in Refugee Camps :

There are millions of refugees living across the borders in the world. Many countries are facing the problem of displaced people due to armed conflict ridden vicinity and environs. Women are the worst victims and an easy target; among these are the displaced women. They are deprived of home, goods and basic necessities. During their stay in the refugee camps, they are on greater risks as their chances of facing sexual abuse become more susceptible; especially when the refugee camps have shortage of required protection facilities for example proper lighting around toilets and well behaved medical staff (as sometimes medical staff could also exploit women for sexual favours). Their poor conditions, lack of protection and weakness due to deficient rations also contribute to the assaults. Many times, they are being asked to grant sexual favours in order to obtain resources for survival in the camps.³⁹

Death rates among women in refugee camps are elevating with each passing day in armed conflicts due to deficiency of energy and medicines. A woman who is carrying child in her womb needs and is liable to get nutritious food for strength and medical care. Similar is the case with the lactating women which demand special consideration.⁴⁰ Traditionally and in many families male take their meals first and in refugee camps too they do the same which, many a time, leave several women and children starving due to shortage of foodstuff. The main reason for men taking their food first could have been a belief that well nourished men can have good strength and can protect their families better.⁴¹ Women in refugee camps cannot avoid hardships like fair distribution of food, prevention of harassment by men in the camps, lack of sanitation and other special needs of women. There is unequal distribution of food and other resources due to gender discrimination which causes malnutrition and other health problems to women.⁴² In general, the sharing of food, water, firewood resources lie in the hands of men. Men can force women to perform sexual acts for them on the pretext of exchange of these resources; here men misuse their power.

There are several examples where the people serving in refugee camps misused their powers and took advantage of women's poor conditions. *In Sierra Leone, women were used as sexual slaves for the camp managers and forced to grow food, cook and provide other services to them.*⁴³ This shows that displaced women are no longer safe in refugee camps. Even elderly women and those who have mental and physical disability are also vulnerable to violence.⁴⁴

38. Augustine, Mubika Kudakwashe, Richard, Bukaliya, Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women, p. 81.

39. McKay, Susan. (1998). The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls and Women, *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*. 4(4). p. 389.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid. Also see Ashford, M. W. & Huet-Vaughn, Y. (1997). The impact of war on women. In B. Levy, & V. Sidel (Eds.). War and public health, New York: Oxford University Press. pp. 1866-1896.

42. <http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/WPS%202010%20Sidebar2.pdf> Retrieved 3 January 2018.

43. Kudakwashe, Mubika Augustine, Richard, Bukaliya, Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women, pp. 81-82.

44. Violence against women in situations of armed conflict and displacement, *World Health Organisation*, 1997, p. 1, <http://www.who.int/gender/violence/v7.pdf> accessed on 18 January 2018.

Problems of displaced women in refugee camps can be unravelled and their mental and physical conditions can be improved when refugee camps look up for precautions and get better safety measures for the security of women living in there.⁴⁵

There is lack of hygiene in the refugee camps due to which they can easily catch diseases related to their physique. There is shortage of doctors and other medical staff in these camps. Whereas, medical infrastructures like hospitals get destroyed during armed conflicts which cause shortage of medical facilities, treatment and other health amenities to women.

Trafficking in Women :

Trafficking in women is one of the serious concerns along with other issues related to women. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates has given a data of millions of women who were trafficked across international borders during and after armed conflicts. *In the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia, women and children were abducted to work for the many militias that patrol the diamond fields, as well as to service the commanders. The conditions in Afghanistan resulted in women and young girls being trafficked into India, Pakistan and, to a lesser degree, other countries in Central Asia.*⁴⁶ International intervention itself can result in an increase in trafficking operations and may intensify during post-conflict periods.⁴⁷ There is a lack of legally responsible and fair dealing justice system which exempts the individuals responsible of gender based violence from punishment and provides them freedom.

Other Forms of Abuse :

Girl Soldiers :

Recruiting child soldiers in armed conflicts is not a new phenomenon, whereas recruitment of girls or women as child soldiers in the same gives a different perspective. Sometimes there is a possibility that they may become volunteers because of poverty or lack of facilities in their families and sometimes they are apprehended forcefully to join. They could be less in numbers but their responsibilities are gender specific. They are given works like to cook in the camps, to wash dirty garments or to care the injured ones. In present day conflicts, due to poor economic conditions and since they require food and safe haven for themselves and their families, women are compelled to give sexual favours and services during armed conflicts. They are often forced in to prostitution also. After the peace treaty 1992 in Mozambique, many girls within an age group of 12 to 18 years were employed in to prostitution by soldiers of United Nations Operation.⁴⁸

Abduction :

Abducting women and girls is not a new trend. The tendency of the same is increasing every passing day. During the armed conflicts also many women and girls are being kidnapped by the aggressors. There are mainly two reasons for holding these women against their wishes: - they could be employed as a part of fighting forces against an opponent and for sexual abuse and violence and some for sale.⁴⁹ For example Boko Haram terrorist group abducted 276 schoolgirls in

45. McKay, Susan, *The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls and Women*, p. 389.

46. Kudakwashe, Mubika Augustine, Richard, Bukaliya, *Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women*, pp. 81-82.

47. Ibid.

48. McKay, Susan, *The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls and Women*, p. 387.

49. Women and Armed Conflict, <https://www.wikigender.org/wiki/women-and-armed-conflict/> Retrieved 11 January 2018.

Chibok, Borno state in Northern Nigeria in April 2014 and later raped them and used them for pleasures. They were forced to marry, sexually abused and give birth to children. Some of them were used as suicide bomber to carry out missions. The UN Security Council condemned the abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law by Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin region and recognised that women and girls were particularly targeted by Boko Haram. It also expressed its sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims.⁵⁰ On 15 January 2018, Boko Haram released a video in which some of these girls appeared with children and stating that they do not wish to return to their homes.⁵¹

Women in Confinement - ill treatment :

During armed conflicts, women in detention have been in small numbers as compare to men in the world due to which they are less visible when imprisoned. Women may be imprisoned during armed conflicts as prisoners of war, as civilian or as security/combatant detainee. In most of the cases, women preferred to be a prisoner in order to get away from unfriendly and hostile surroundings.⁵² International Humanitarian Law provides protection to the women who are kept as prisoners or detainees during armed conflict situations.

*“The relevant provisions are laid down in the four Geneva Conventions for the protection of war victims of 12 August 1949 and their two 1977 Additional Protocols and concern the treatment of persons deprived of their freedom, including the specific conditions of detention and treatment of women. In other situations of violence not covered by the 1949 Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols, other international standards supplement domestic legislation on the treatment of detainees.”*⁵³

If, sometime during armed conflicts, the security forces find women as a menace to them, they may hold them in confinements. But due to cultural reasons women are being released by the authorities as they believe that *“it is not culturally acceptable for women to be away from their families. In one Middle Eastern country where several female combatants were detained, the authorities were trying to contact their families so that they could be taken back to their homes. The authorities stated: “We cannot keep them, they are women.” However, in other contexts, women may have cumulative life sentences for “political-terrorism”-style crimes – and subsequent needs related to long-term imprisonment.”*⁵⁴

Women need more privacy and protection as prisoners of war. They also look upon meeting cultural and religious requirements. Therefore, it becomes necessary to provide them with a separate accommodation from male counterparts. Lack of necessary space and privacy for their own existence

50. Statement by the President of the Security Council in 7492nd meeting of Security Council, United Nations Security Council Document S/PRST/2015/14 on 28 July 2015. Retrieved 21 January 2018 from www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/PRST/2015/14

51. Chibok Girls kidnapped by Boko Haram Paraded in new video, *The Telegraph*, Retrieved 21 January 2018 from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/01/15/chibok-girls-kidnapped-byboko-haram-paraded-new-video>. Also see Abducted Chibok Girls say ‘we won’t return’: Boko Haram Video, Retrieved 21 January 2018 from <https://youtu.be/vj-kvp1GZDQ>

52. Lindsey, Charlotte, (2001). Women Facing War, ICRC study on the impact of armed conflict on women, *International Committee of the Red Cross Women and War*, Geneva, p. 162.

53. Lindsey, Charlotte. (June 2001). Women and war: the detention of women in wartime, *International Review of the Red Cross*, 83(842). p. 506.

54. Ibid, p. 162

leave several gaps in the safety and safeguarding of women captives, both health and sanitation wise and psychologically too. Even the Geneva Convention discusses about the welfare of women prisoners. *Under the Third Geneva Convention prisoners of war and other persons entitled to prisoner-of-war treatment, if interned, must be detained in premises located on land, affording every guarantee of hygiene and healthfulness. If interned in unhealthy areas or where the climate is injurious to them, prisoners of war and civilian internees must be removed as soon as possible to a more favourable climate.*⁵⁵

For the security of the women, female personnel's are required to guard them in the confinement/detention centres as the absence of female guards brings difficulties for women prisoners. They are being given ill-treatment in the form of torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment⁵⁶ and face sexual harassment and violence, humiliation during body searches by male guards etc. Women totally rely on others for their protection in prisons. In other words, ill treatment include violence (both psychological and physical), sexual violence, threats to life, abusive language, unnecessary and abusive body searched which include strip searches, prohibition of family visits, solitary confinements etc. Sometimes male guards behave in shameful manners with women in detention in order to humiliate them.⁵⁷

During armed conflicts, the convicted women are often stripped, undressed and exposed to sexual abuse. They are being humiliated. Women face many difficulties due to which women refrain from reporting or raising voices. Sexual violence causes enforced pregnancy, enforced abortions etc which assault women's psychic.⁵⁸

Other forms of ill treatment are damage to reproductive organs, cutting of breasts, electric shocks. This kind of inhumane treatment can force women to live a stressful life which may lead to their death. Therefore, such kind of treatment should be forbidden. Women must be kept safe in prisons during armed conflicts.⁵⁹

Hygienic and proper food in confinements is another major issue for women, which is not being provided properly to the women in confinement during armed conflicts. Nutritious diet is a must requirement for all. If they are deficient in nutrition, their health will be affected and there are more chances that they could easily catch diseases.

Health of Women :

Armed conflicts generate negative effects on the health of girls and women. Due to lack of food, starvation and malnutrition, women become physical and psychologically weak which resulted in failing to carry out their responsibilities properly, providing protection and nourishing their children.

Another perspective can be that women are more prone to sexually transmitted diseases like HIV from sexual violence/abuse; this occurred in Northern Uganda during 1980s.⁶⁰

Suicide cases are soaring high as sexual violence in armed conflicts brings physical and distressing experiences to women. They become incapable of finding a sense of control over their bodies and lives.

Women often go for unsafe abortions due to unwanted and forceful pregnancies. They also

55. Ibid, p. 166

56. Ibid, p. 171

57. Ibid, p. 169

58. Ibid, p. 172

59. Ibid, p. 171

60. McKay, Susan, *The Effects of Armed Conflict on Girls and Women*, p. 385.

avoid health check up and proper treatment too as they feel dreadful and outrageous in their own society. It anguishes them if they are forced to bear children of their aggression. Young girls who are giving birth to unwanted children are more prone to birth complications such as muscle injury and chronic pelvic inflammatory diseases (PID) that can lead to lifelong problems such as incontinence and sterility.⁶¹

Public Health Infrastructure :

Long duration armed conflicts damage public health infrastructures like hospitals and other medical centres. Health infrastructures are needed for the operation of a society and the requirement of these during and post conflicts is a necessity especially for women. These structures provide an access to life saving facilities and medical care. Women who give birth to children in the absence of trained doctors and birth attendants in unhygienic conditions are under life risks. Women feel shy if there is a male doctor or attendant, therefore, a medical field requires an increase in the number of women health staff during and after an armed conflict.

Apart from this, those women who work out of their houses are more vulnerable to aggression and danger during conflicts. For instance African women do 80 per cent of work in food production which exposed them to landmine injuries during and post armed conflicts. Many of them lost their limbs and ability to work due to lack of medical services and for many their spouses deserted them.⁶²

Conclusion :

Armed conflicts bring different forms of issues which impact women's physical and psychological conditions. These include sexual harassment/abuse by both enemy and friendly forces in order to generate a greater psychological impact on each other's forces. In these situations, those who were meant to provide protection to women become tormenter themselves and add on and increase women's sufferings during and post conflicts. Terrorists also abduct many women during armed conflicts and sexually abuse them or sale them as slaves or to buy weapons. Armed conflict situation damages existing health services and infrastructures which make women suffer worse and force them to cope with injuries due to violence and other health related issues with less medical facilities; which can hamper their health. Women were and are never been secured during and post armed conflicts. Their soften attitude, helplessness, weak body structures, constraints and other compulsions make them vulnerable to more sufferings during and post armed conflicts.

International legal framework has provided women with the special protection and security. According to the International Humanitarian Law, during the situations of armed conflicts, women are entitled to same protection like men, disregarding whether they are civilians or combatants. Regardless of several discussions and re-appeals on national and international level, millions of women are subjected to various serious violence issues during armed conflicts which leave lifelong impact upon them. Therefore, all potential measures are required to discard of women's sufferings during and post armed conflicts. More global commitments require to be transformed into practice.

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61. Ibid, p. 385

62. Ibid, p. 388

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