

## **Helpdesk Research Report: Conflict and sexual and domestic violence against women**

Date: 01/05/09

**Query:** Conflict has often been associated with rape. Has conflict inevitably been associated with increases in violence against women (including domestic violence)?

**Enquirer:** DFID Iraq

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### **1. Overview**

The literature on sexual violence in armed conflict indicates that rape and violence against women and girls prior to, during and after conflict seem to be extensive in scope and magnitude throughout the world – with reported incidents in conflicts in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East. Sexual violence is defined by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Task Force on Gender and Humanitarian Assistance as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic a person’s sexuality, using coercion, threats of harm or physical force, by any person regardless of relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”. The forms of sexual violence most commonly documented are:

- sexual harassment (such as forced stripping or virginity tests);
- sexual abuse and exploitation (such as eliciting sexual services in return for food or protection);
- rape, gang-rape or attempted rape;
- sexual slavery;
- forced pregnancy, abortion, pregnancy, sterilisation or contraception; and
- trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation  
(see DCAF, 2007 in Key Documents section, pp. 18-19)

Although the occurrence of sexual violence against women in conflicts is increasingly reported and documented globally, there is debate about whether this represents greater international attention to the issue or whether the level of violence is rising in actuality due to the changing nature of warfare – in which civilians are increasingly targeted. Others also stress that data collection underestimates the actual incidents of violence because of stigma, shame and fear of reprisal (e.g. ‘honour killings’, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East) deter reporting.

There is limited comparative analysis and understanding about where sexual violence may be more or less prevalent and why. Much of the literature does emphasise, however, that sexual violence against women in conflict is usually reflective of pre-existing patterns in society: violence and exploitation is considered more likely in environments where such behaviour has already been prevalent and where community structures have played an active role in discrimination against women.

The literature emphasises that attention must be paid to differing contexts of sexual violence in order to formulate appropriate responses to the particular needs of survivors and communities. Nonetheless, there are some common findings that can be considered across varying contexts. This includes the general principle that rape and violence against women is a good proxy indicator of rising tensions and incipient conflict - and should be used as a warning sign of armed conflict in prevention and early warning strategies.

It is acknowledged that sexual violence can be 'random', 'opportunistic' acts committed by combatants and civilians in chaotic conflict environments characterised by a break down of social and moral order, and social, legal and security institutions (e.g. Afghanistan). It has been increasingly acknowledged and emphasised, however, that sexual violence cannot be seen merely as an inevitable 'by-product' of war and insecurity, but rather deserves specific attention as a strategy of war and form of insecurity in itself. Where sexual violence is systematic and used as a 'weapon of war', the motives and tactics can vary. They include:

- Attack on a group/community and destabilising populations: women in armed conflict situations are often held as the bearers of honour and cultural identity. Wartime propaganda can contribute to this imagery (e.g. the Indian state of Gujarat). This has contributed to widespread sexual violence against women in order to dishonour the opponent, to indicate that the whole group/community is under attack, and/or to seek revenge against a group/community. Rape is often a public act, aimed to maximise humiliation, to render the men helpless and shameful for failing to protect 'their' women, and to destroy bonds within communities and families.
- Ethnic cleansing/genocide: in conflicts defined by racial, tribal, religious and other divisions, sexual violence may be used to satisfy the goal of ethnic cleansing and/or genocide. In societies where ethnicity is inherited through the male line, 'enemy' women are raped and forced to bear children. Women who are already pregnant are forced to miscarry through violent attacks. In addition, fear or rape and/or the inability to live in a community in which one has been raped have forced women to flee, advancing the goal of ethnic cleansing and/or genocide.
- Instilling fear: sexual violence is used to dampen resistance by instilling fear in local communities or in opposing armed groups. As noted above, it can also be used to incite flight from a given territory.
- Punishment and torture: women who are active as combatants or dissenters in a conflict are also targeted for violent torture or abuse – as punishment for supporting political adversaries (e.g. Nepal) and/or for not satisfying stereotypical gender roles (e.g. Latin America). Wartime torture and ill-treatment of women in custody has also been prevalent. In some contexts, armed conflict has resulted in the emergence of fundamentalist and other extremist groups that impose conservative totalitarian norms – and the punishment of women who do not follow such norms (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Chechnya, and Tajikistan).
- Affirming aggression: sexual violence can serve to affirm aggression and brutality in armed forces and groups. It may be encouraged or tolerated as a 'morale booster' or a 'reward for bravery'.

Other forms of sexual violence that tend to increase in armed conflict are exploitation, trafficking, and domestic violence:

- Exploitation: conflict creates situations of severe insecurity and economic deprivation; women and girls, particularly those who have been displaced, are often in desperate need of safe passage, food and shelter. Government officials, civilian authorities, peacekeepers and aid workers, have been reported to provide these necessities in exchange for sexual favours.
- Trafficking and sexual slavery: women and girls in armed conflicts throughout the world have been abducted for combat and sexual services, sex trafficking (e.g. Burma), and forced marriages, amounting to forced prostitution (e.g. Afghanistan, Algeria, Kashmir). In other situations, women and girls have fallen victim to trafficking after being lured by promises of safety (e.g. Columbia and Nepal).
- Domestic violence: domestic violence has been reported to increase during and after conflict – largely due to the availability of weapons, the frustration, humiliation and violence male family members have experienced or meted out, the lack of jobs, shelter, and basic services. The example most noted in the literature is that of the Occupied Palestinian Territories, where Palestinian women are said to have experienced increased levels of violence in correlation with increased level of violence outside the home.

Much of the literature also emphasises the persistence of violence and exploitation in the 'post'-conflict, reconstruction phase. The legacy of war - in particular, poverty, social exclusion and the absence of livelihoods and employment; demobilisation of combatants and the integration of former militia and war-time behaviour into civilian societies; the prevalence of small arms and other weapons; a legacy of impunity; and shifts in gender relations during the periods of conflict and post-conflict has resulted in continued sexual violence against women in many regions of the world.

## 2. Key documents

### General

**Rehn, E. and Johnson Sirleaf, E., 2002, 'Chapter 1: Violence Against Women' in Women, War and Peace: The Independent Expert's Assessment on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Women and Women's Role in Peace Building, UNIFEM**

[http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/213\\_chapter01.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/attachments/products/213_chapter01.pdf)

Drawing on examples from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, this chapter discusses the various forms of violence that women face in armed conflict. They include:

- Violence as part of the motives and/or tactics of war: “[women’s] bodies become a battleground over which opposing forces struggle. Women are raped as a way to humiliate the men they are related to, who are often forced to watch the assault. In societies where ethnicity is inherited through the male line, ‘enemy’ women are raped and forced to bear children. Women who are already pregnant are forced to miscarry through violent attacks. Women are kidnapped and used as sexual slaves to service troops, as well as to cook for them and carry their loads from camp to camp. They are purposely infected with HIV/AIDS, a slow, painful murder” (p. 10).
- Violence as a form of punishment: “women and girls are attacked because they are related to political adversaries, [or] because they are political leaders themselves” (p. 11).
- Violence as a form of exploitation: “women and girls experience violence at the hands of many others besides armed groups. Women are physically and economically forced or left with little choice but to become sex workers or to exchange sex for food, shelter, safe passage or other needs; their bodies become part of a barter system, a form of exchange that buys the necessities of life. Government officials, aid workers,

- civilian authorities and their own families have all been complicit in using women in this way” (p. 11).
- Trafficking and sexual slavery: “the breakdown of law and order, police functions and border controls during conflict, combined with globalisation’s free markets and open borders have contributed to creating an environment in which the trafficking of women has flourished [...] Women are trafficked out of one country into another to be used in forced labour schemes that often include forced prostitution. They are pushed into marriage with members of opposing groups either directly, through abduction, or in order to protect their families. They are abducted by armed groups and forced to accompany them on raids and to provide everything from food to sexual services” (p. 12).
  - Domestic violence: “domestic violence is common during peacetime, but until recently the fact that it increases during or after conflict was generally overlooked. Many things contribute to the increase in domestic violence – the availability of weapons, the violence male family members have experienced or meted out, the lack of jobs, shelter, and basic services” (p. 14).

**Ward, J. and Marsh, M., 2006, ‘Sexual Violence Against Women and Girls in War and its Aftermath: Realities, Responses and Required Resources’, United Nations Population Fund Briefing Paper**

<http://www.unfpa.org/emergencies/symposium06/docs/finalbrusselsbriefingpaper.pdf>

Part One of this paper looks at the nature and scope of violence against war-affected women and children. It argues that while some attribute the rising statistics on violence to greater international attention to the issue, the more accurate explanation is an actual rise in numbers of victims due to the changing nature of warfare. Warfare has increasingly targeted civilians in recent times – severely endangering women and girls. It outlines the various motivations for rape and sexual violence in armed conflict, the nature of violence and the environment in which these acts take place (see pp. 3-9):

- Random violence: the violence can be a by-product of the collapse in social and moral order that accompanies war. Incidents are not only limited to combatants; men from the local community may exploit the chaos of conflict to commit sexual violence against women without fear of punishment.
- Systematic violence: carried out by fighting forces for the explicit purpose of destabilizing populations and destroying bonds within communities and families. In these instances, rape is often a public act, aimed to maximize humiliation and shame (e.g. Timor Leste, Northern Uganda and Darfur).
- Instilling fear: sexual violence is used to dampen resistance by instilling fear in local communities or in opposing armed groups. Women’s bodies are used to send messages to the perceived enemy (e.g. Burma, Chechnya, Columbia).
- Ethnic cleansing: particularly in conflicts defined by racial, tribal, religious and other divisions, violence may be used to advance the goal of ethnic cleansing (e.g. Bosnia and Rwanda).
- Supply of sexual slaves to armed combatants: women and girls are abducted for combat and for sexual services (e.g. Columbia and Nepal).
- Flight and displacement risks: conflict-induced displacement renders women and girls vulnerable. During flight, they face high risk of sexual violence committed by bandits, insurgency groups, military and border guards. Usually women are forced to flee without male relatives, which heightens their insecurity. Unaccompanied girls are most at risk of sexual exploitation and many are targeted for trafficking (e.g. Burma). Risks continue in camps, with repeated reports of attacks on women both outside and within the confines of camps.
- Sexual exploitation – exchange for basic necessities: conflict-induced displacement also renders women and girls in need of not only safe passage, but food, shelter and

- other necessities. They risk exploitation by local residents who may provide these necessities in exchange for sexual exploits (e.g. Peshawar, Pakistan and Columbia)
- Persistent violence and exploitation in the reconstruction phase: “evidence suggests that sexual violence does not necessarily end with the cessation of armed conflict. Incidents of rape are reported to have increased sharply in the context of ongoing insecurity in post-war Iraq, for example [...] Events in the Balkans -- where prostitution and trafficking burgeoned in the aftermath of wars in the former Yugoslavia -- illustrate how criminal elements may replace fighting factions in the ongoing sexual victimization of women and girls. The added presence of peacekeeping forces, who have been implicated as users of commercial sex workers in places such as Bosnia-Herzegovina, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Timor Leste and the DRC, may supply a notable portion of local demand [...] In many instances, the risk to women and girls of falling prey to sexual exploiters is exacerbated by reconstruction programs that fail to specifically target their needs, or to address long-standing patriarchal traditions that discriminate against women” (p. 9).

**Amnesty International, 2004, ‘Lives Blown Apart: Crimes Against Women in Times of Conflict’, Amnesty International, London**

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT77/075/2004/en/944d7605-d57f-11dd-bb24-1fb85fe8fa05/act770752004en.pdf>

This report seeks to explore the underlying reasons for sexual violence in armed conflict. Chapter 2 (Gender, violence and conflict) and Chapter 3 (Rape as a weapon of war) are of particular relevance to this query. The report documents that “conflict reinforces and exacerbates existing patterns of discrimination and violence against women. The violence women suffer in conflict is an extreme manifestation of the discrimination and abuse women face in peacetime, and the unequal power relations between men and women in most societies. [...] Conflict and militarization reinforce sexist stereotyping and rigid differentiation of gender roles. Weapons proliferate and violence becomes an everyday means of social interaction. Conflict often creates conditions of severe economic deprivation where the civilian population – and in particular women – becomes almost totally dependent on certain authorities (whether occupation forces, peacekeepers or humanitarian workers) for survival, leaving them acutely vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation” (p. 5 and p. 14). More specifically:

- Wartime propaganda and rhetoric has often strengthened gender stereotypes. In particular, women (women’s bodies, sexuality and reproductive capacity) are considered the repositories of a community’s honour. Thus, imagery of the rape of women is seen to increase fear and distrust of the “enemy”; and attacks on women are considered an attack on the entire community and on men that are supposed to protect them. This occurred for example in the Indian state of Gujarat, where myths of a virile, violent Muslim man and victimized Hindu woman (representing “Mother India”) are said to have contributed to widespread sexual abuse of Muslim women during inter-communal violence in 2002.
- Wartime torture and ill-treatment of women in custody has also been prevalent. Women and girls may be detained because of their suspected opposition to the government (e.g. Peru and Chechnya); their human rights activities; their membership of a particular ethnic, religious or racial group; or because of their relationship to particular men.
- High levels of violence against women can persist in “post-conflict” environments, for example in Central America. Gender-based killings in the community and within families have been linked to the legacy of war that lasted until the mid-1990s. They have been connected in particular with the economic and social problems stemming from the winding down of the war economy; demobilisation of combatants; the prevalence of small arms and other weapons; a legacy of impunity; and shifts in

- gender relations during the periods of conflict and post-conflict. In Afghanistan, as well, the continued absence of protection and justice has kept women extremely vulnerable to violence, forced marriages. The exchange of girls is also widespread as a means of settling disputes.
- Increased domestic violence has also been reported in conflict and post-conflict situations. In the Occupied Palestinian Territories, for example, Palestinian women are said to have experienced increased levels of violence in correlation with increased level of violence outside the home.

**BRIDGE, 2003, 'Gender and Armed Conflict: Overview Report', Institute of Development Studies, Brighton**

<http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/CEP-Conflict-Report.pdf>

This report explores the impact of armed conflict on gender relations, and the distinct ways that both women and men are affected. Chapter 4 (pp 14-20) addresses the gender impacts of conflict, including gender-based violence (GBV). It defines gender-based violence as "violence, sexual or otherwise, which plays on gender norms and gender exclusions to break people down both physically and psychologically" (p. 16).

While gender-based violence exists during peace time, conflict exacerbates such violence: "Firstly, incidences of 'everyday' violence, particularly domestic violence, increase as communities break down during and after conflicts. Secondly, 'everyday' violence escalates in the context of masculine and militarised conflict situations. The establishment of rape camps and the provision of sexual services to occupying armed forces in exchange for resources such as food and protection are two examples of GBV during and after conflict. Conflict breeds distinct types of power relations and imbalances. In the context of conflict, for instance, violence against women is more than the exercise of power over women. By raping women, who represent the purity and culture of the nation, invading armies are also symbolically raping the nation itself" (p. 16).

The report stresses the importance of recognising that gender-based violence during and after conflict reflects pre-existing patterns of violence against women in a society. Domestic violence, for example, is likely to have already existed. Its incidence rises in conflict situations, however, as males in the household are affected by humiliating treatment; and guilt and anger at not having been able to protect the women.

Women, who are active as combatants or dissenters in a conflict, are also targeted for violent torture or abuse – as punishment for not satisfying stereotypical gender roles. The report provides examples from Latin America of such incidents.

**International Committee of the Red Cross, 2001, 'Women Facing War', ICRC, Geneva**

[http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0798/\\$File/ICRC\\_002\\_0798\\_WOMEN\\_FACING\\_WAR.PDF](http://www.icrc.org/Web/Eng/siteeng0.nsf/htmlall/p0798/$File/ICRC_002_0798_WOMEN_FACING_WAR.PDF)

This comprehensive ICRC study, which explores the problems faced by women in wartime and the coping mechanisms they employ, has a section focused on sexual violence (pp. 51-65). It states that while both men and women are subject to sexual violence, it is women and girls who suffer disproportionately from rape, forced prostitution and sexual slavery. In addition, forced impregnation, forced maternity and forced termination of pregnancy are violations specific to women and girls. Further, the study highlights that women in armed conflict situations are often held as the bearers of honour and cultural identity. This makes them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence – designed to dishonour the opponent in armed conflict and to indicate that the whole community is under attack.

Violence perpetrated by peacekeepers is also a grave cause for concern. The study notes reports that have contained allegations of rape and sexual harassment by peacekeepers, including documentation of a large rise in prostitution of women and girls with the arrival of peacekeeping troops. Trafficking is another form of violence and exploitation that is exacerbated by conflict situations: "Women made vulnerable by war are frequently abducted from or coerced to leave refugee camps or tricked by traffickers when in search of employment. This often occurs in countries where poverty and the collapse of governmental protective mechanisms force young women to seek 'help' – which leads them to sexual slave traders" (p. 56).

The study stresses that rape and other forms of sexual violence cannot be regarded as a "by-product" of war – either as a reward for soldiers or civilians or because of the breakdown in societal institutions and law and order. It asserts, "The fact that rape has – wrongly – been viewed by some as an inevitable part of war may have contributed to its becoming a regular and particularly cruel means of attacking women" (p. 52).

**DCAF, 2007, 'Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict: Global Overview and Implications for the Security Sector', Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces**  
<http://se2.dcaf.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=DCAF&fileid=F493CA07-B64B-9ED2-9D5C-92E57A64DB9D&lng=en>

This report documents the extensive scope and magnitude of sexual violence in armed conflict, providing profiles of 50 countries in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and the Middle East that have experienced conflict over the past twenty years. Demonstrating sexual violence as a global phenomenon, it argues for much greater attention to the issue as a key form of insecurity in itself as opposed to a side-effect of insecurity. It outlines both similarities and differences in the forms, settings and motives of sexual violence in conflict; in the profiles of the perpetrators and victims; and in the consequences between and within conflict-affected countries and regions. It finds that while some general conclusions can be made, "attention to the specificity of different contexts of sexual violence is essential in order to formulate responses that meet the particular needs of survivors and their communities, and to make progress in prevention" (p. 13).

#### Sexual violence in armed conflict: Settings

The report states: "conflict-related sexual violence occurs in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites, and camps for refugees and displaced persons. It occurs at the height of conflict, during population displacement, and continues after conflict. Acts of sexual violence are committed during attacks on civilian centres, or during looting raids. Women and girls are often targeted with sexual violence whilst performing daily chores, such as collecting food, water and wood. Women and children have been abducted by armed groups and kept in sexual slavery, or forced into combat roles. Women and men in detention have been raped, subjected to sexual mutilation, humiliation and torture.

For displaced women and children, places of "refuge" may be extremely unsafe. Sexual violence occurs within and around camps for refugees and displaced persons. Family violence, too, is prevalent in displacement and refugee settings, exacerbated by trauma, fractured community bonds, loss of livelihood and stress.

The presence of international humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel may trigger an increase in prostitution to meet a perceived or actual demand for sexual services, which in turn may lead to women and children being trafficked for sexual exploitation purposes. Some humanitarian and peacekeeping personnel have themselves committed acts of sexual violence and abuse. In the past this has included exchanging money, food, assistance items or benefits for sexual services, and having sex with young children" (pp. 13-14).

Sexual and gender-based violence often continues even after a conflict is over. The report finds that a number of countries emerging from armed conflict report a very high and/or increasing incidence of criminal and domestic violence. It asserts that impunity for acts of sexual violence perpetrated during the conflict may result in legacy of tolerance of such abuse. In addition, poverty, social exclusion and the absence of livelihoods and employment, as well as weak rule of law in post-conflict settings, can also result in sexual exploitation of women and girls and increased trafficking.

#### Sexual violence in armed conflict: Motives

The report states "sexual violence also occurs during times of peace, but takes particular forms and is motivated for different reasons during armed conflict. In some conflicts it has been used strategically to advance military objectives, such as the clearing of a civilian population from an area, and has occurred with varying degrees of official knowledge and support. In other contexts it has seemingly occurred "as a result" of a lack of organisational structure and discipline, or linked to a general breakdown of law and order. However, this cannot fully explain why individuals commit acts of sexual violence. Whilst not offering any comprehensive answer to the very complex question of "why" sexual violence is committed, a number of motives can be identified for its use in armed conflict, although they are not necessarily exhaustive:

- Sexual violence is used to torture and humiliate people, and may be aimed at gaining control over the victims, or ensuring their compliance, as during detention or forced recruitment.
- Sexual violence is used to punish or humiliate an enemy group, where a person or persons are targeted in the knowledge that such abuse will have a broad impact. When committed against women and girls, sexual violence is often intended to humiliate their families and communities, wherein women and girls are "bearers of honour", and men are shamed for failing to protect "their" women. It is used as a means of destroying family and community structures, most overtly when armed groups commit public rapes in front of the community, force family members to witness each other's rape, or even force people to commit acts of sexual violence against their own family members.
- Sexual violence is committed to instil terror in a population, and to incite flight from a given territory. In some places, it has been part of an act or attempted act of genocide, committed with the intention of contributing to the destruction of a particular ethnic or social group.
- Sexual violence can serve to affirm aggression and brutality in armed forces and groups. It may be encouraged or tolerated as a "morale booster" or a "reward for bravery".

Indeed, the documentation compiled in this report suggests that sexual violence in conflict is primarily an expression of domination. The level of physical violence inflicted by the perpetrator of a rape may result in the death or permanent disability of the victim. On the other hand, sexual violence may involve no overt physical force, as when a humanitarian worker pays a woman for her sexual services. However, sexual violence is manifestly related to the perpetrators' understanding of their own and others' masculinity, and the masculinity or femininity of their victims". (pp. 14-15)

#### Latin America (pp. 71-86)

The report notes that there is little documentation on sexual violence in Latin American conflicts; however it is unclear whether this is because of comparatively low incidence or because of low reporting. Nonetheless, the report finds that in many of the conflicts in Latin America, "one can observe the intersection between gender and ethnicity. In Colombia, Guatemala and Peru, for instance, indigenous women, often from rural areas, seemed to be at greater risk of sexual violence and were sometimes specifically targeted. This should be



understood against the backdrop of the widespread discrimination suffered by indigenous populations in general in many Latin American countries.

Many Latin American countries emerging from conflict report a high, and in some cases a growing incidence of criminal violence, including sexual and other forms of violence against women (see, for example, the profiles on El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti and Nicaragua). As in other regions, it is difficult to identify whether levels of post-conflict sexual violence are higher than during or before the conflict, or whether there is increased reporting of such crimes in post-conflict situations. One might wonder whether impunity for acts of sexual violence committed during the conflict perpetuated a tolerance of such abuse against women and girls, as a long-lasting legacy of conflict” (p. 71).

#### Asia (pp. 87-112)

The report states that “sexual violence has taken many different forms in conflicts across this vast region, ranging from East Asia and the Pacific to Central Asia and South Asia, and it is difficult to identify any common patterns across Asia. However, some particularities do emerge as regards the use of female combatants, and the grave problem of human trafficking. Large numbers of women have joined guerrilla groups in the conflicts in Nepal and Sri Lanka, as combatants and in other roles [...] Whether or not the participation of women in guerrilla groups is emancipatory may be contested, especially in cases where it may expose women to exploitation and violence. However, among the reasons why women join guerrilla groups like the LTTE is to seek protection against sexual violence. Meanwhile, in India, women have gained prominence as fighters in state security forces. [...]

The problem of trafficking of women, girls and boys for sexual exploitation is global, but particularly serious in a number of Asian countries, including Afghanistan, Burma/Myanmar, Cambodia, Nepal, Philippines, Sri Lanka and Tajikistan [...] Trafficking of women for sexual exploitation increased during the armed conflict in Nepal, with many women sent to brothels in India. An influx of international peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel may trigger a growth in prostitution to meet the perceived or actual demand for sex, as was the case in Cambodia” (p. 87).

#### Middle East (pp. 129-142)

The report profiles Iraq, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Kuwait, Lebanon and Yemen. Apart from Iraq since 2003, information on the region is scarce. Nonetheless, sexual violence during detention, used as a form of torture, has been reported Iraq and Israel and the Palestinian Territories. Survivors of social violence in the region face extreme stigma, social exclusion and the risk of ‘honour killings’. As such, many victims do not report the crimes. Honour killings have been reported in Iraq, Lebanon, the Palestinian Territories and Yemen, and in other Mediterranean and Gulf Countries; it is difficult though to directly attribute them to the armed conflict. Domestic violence against women, however, has been reported by Palestinian women’s activists to be linked to armed conflict and occupation in the Palestinian Territories. A security vacuum, poor economic conditions and frustrated angry male relatives, who are unable to provide for their families have they argue culminated in increasing violence against women within the family.

#### **Ertürk, Y., 2008, ‘SIDA Conference on Gender Based Violence’, Statement by UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences, Stockholm**

[http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Human\\_Rights/StatementGBV.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Human_Rights/StatementGBV.pdf)

This statement by the UN Special Rapporteur emphasises that the intensification of pressure and control over women and the militarisation of societies at large are common to all conflict

situations. It provides examples from around the world to demonstrate the prevalence of violence against women, in order to make the following key points:

- Rise of rigid patriarchal control and extremist groups: “Displacement and dispossession caused by conflict and war alters everyday life, manipulates identities and destroys community sanctions, making women and girls subject to rigid patriarchal control and vulnerable to domestic violence, incest, among others”. This also gives rise to the emergence of fundamentalist and other extremist groups that impose conservative totalitarian norms – and the punishment of women who do not follow such norms. (e.g. Afghanistan, Occupied Palestinian Territories, Chechnya, Tajikistan)
- Interconnectedness of violence without and outside the home: “Where masculinity becomes severely damaged under detention, at check points, in refugee camps or in one’s own home during raids, VAW becomes a compensatory response. The legitimized and unrestrained use of violence in combat and the normalization of violence at home reinforce each other” (e.g. Occupied Palestinian Territories). The statement highlights that domestic violence is the most commonly encountered gender-based violence in all conflict situations. Emergency programming, however, is currently not designed to address it.
- Post-conflict perpetuation of inequality and violence: Violence is not limited to war-time acts but is increasingly becoming a “normal feature of civilian life as former militia are integrated into society as civilians and as the norms of war are internalised into everyday male behaviour” (e.g. DRC). In addition, if peace agreements do not address violence against women and/or if the traditional patriarchal gender order remains unchallenged, women are likely to remain vulnerable to violence (e.g. Guatemala and Afghanistan). In El Salvador, by contrast, women’s non-traditional experience in the conflict (with some participating in opposition forces) as well as their frustration over discriminatory treatment in reintegration programmes created a new sense of feminist consciousness that created a climate to challenge discriminatory practices. This has resulted in considerable gender equality achievements at the legislative level.

The Rapporteur recommends that violence against women “must be treated as a continuum – without singling out certain acts as more important - and as part and parcel of the overall status of women, which requires simultaneously providing immediate specialized assistance for victims, such as rehabilitation and health and social services, addressing the root causes of gender inequality and supporting women’s political, social and economic empowerment”.

**Amnesty International, 2005, ‘Making Rights a Reality: Violence Against Women in Armed Conflict’, Amnesty International, London**

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ACT77/050/2005/en/df6e5231-d4d3-11dd-8a23-d58a49c0d652/act770502005en.pdf>

This report provides anecdotal evidence of violence against women in war, spanning Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. It outlines the various forms of abuse that women and girls in armed conflict most frequently experience (see p. 4). It also outlines various stages of violence against women – before, during and after conflict: “Before full-blown hostilities develop, mounting pressures may increase the incidence of acts of violence against women. In fact, some have suggested that increasing levels of violence against women may be used as a warning sign of armed conflict in prevention and earlywarning strategies. Furthermore, the risk of such acts does not end with the close of official military operations: violence against women often continues and is sometimes exacerbated in post-conflict phases” (p. 6).

**Chhabra, S., 2006, 'Gender Perspective in Peace Initiatives: Opportunities and Challenges', Women's Link Journal**

[http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/womenslinkjournal\\_gender\\_peaceinitiatives.pdf](http://www.eldis.org/fulltext/womenslinkjournal_gender_peaceinitiatives.pdf)

This paper examines the issue of women in armed conflict – their experience both as victims and active participants. It states that attacks against women are becoming an increasingly common war strategy, including raping women in front of their husbands – often to break down families and cause social instability: “The contempt (an expression of a forceful projection directed at female victims, who remind their men of their failure by their mere presence) and the social exclusion confronting these female victims of sexualized violence by “their own people” frequently forces them to flee” (p. 4). The paper documents cases of violence against women in Nepal, Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. In Nepal, it states that since the war began in 1996, women suspected of supporting armed opposition groups have been killed, tortured or raped by security forces. In Afghanistan, the complete breakdown in law and order and lack of institutions to protect women has created a climate in which armed groups and government soldiers have committed violence and rape against women with impunity. In India and Pakistan, the long-standing conflict over Kashmir has resulted in militarism and the reinforcement of “macho culture” and gender stereotypes that has also rendered women vulnerable to violence.

**Heineman, E., 2008, 'The History of Sexual Violence in Conflict Zones: Conference Report', Radical History Review, issue 101, pp. 5-21**

<http://rhr.dukejournals.org/cgi/reprint/2008/101/5.pdf>

This paper provides a historical overview of sexual violence in armed conflict, beginning with World War II. It stresses that “sexual violence is anything but an incidental problem in war” (p. 5). It should not be viewed as an inevitable by-product of armed conflict, but rather warrants specific attention. It also notes that there is limited information on sexual violence in the wars that preceded the Rwandan genocide and ethnic cleansing in the former-Yugoslavia; and limited understanding about why sexual violence is more or less prevalent in different conflicts.

Another area that is not well understood, the paper asserts, is the use of “insider sexual violence to mark or punish women whose behaviour is interpreted as traitorous in civil conflicts. As conservative Muslims in Uzbekistan resisted the secularizing efforts of the Soviet Communist Party in the late 1920s, they murdered some 2,500 women in connection with de veiling. [T]hey constituted ‘a form of terrorism designed to force women to conform to a social order that the religious leaders proclaimed to be divinely willed’” (p. 11).

The paper also stresses the importance of understanding the particular ways sexual violence occurs in specific wars beyond broader cultural attitudes and practices. For example, “Bangladeshi women’s traumas stemmed not simply from generic rape, but also from the fact that the rapists were often their own neighbours, not enemy soldiers. In Bosnia, rape by neighbours led women to flee, as they felt they could no longer live amid their rapists. In this way, among others, mass rape served ethnic cleansing. In Bangladesh, where women remained in their communities, continuing to live amid their rapists required excising the memory of the rape itself” (p. 17). The paper highlights as well that the fear of rape takes a tremendous psychological toll. It can constrain women’s movement and prevent them from seeking social, educational and professional opportunities.

**DCAF, 2005, 'Women in an Insecure World: Violence Against Women: Facts, Figures and Analysis', Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces**  
[http://www.dcaf.ch/women/pb\\_women\\_ex\\_sum.pdf](http://www.dcaf.ch/women/pb_women_ex_sum.pdf)

This book compiles a detailed list of facts and figures on violence against women in daily life, during war and conflict, and in post-conflict situations. It stresses that violence against women must be acknowledged as a key issue in its own right. It notes that widespread sexual violence is a common characteristic of armed conflict: "Rape, sexual assault, forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy and other forms of sexual violence are used as a method of warfare." (p. 14). The book discusses as well the particular risks that refugee and internally displaced women experience; the sexual exploitation of women by peacekeepers and humanitarian workers; and the growing awareness of increase of family violence in post-conflict communities.

**Hynes, H. P., 2004, 'On the Battlefield of Women's Bodies: An Overview of the Harm of War to Women', Women's Studies International Forum, vol. 27, no. 5-6, pp. 431-445**  
[http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6VBD-4DWHJFT-1&\\_user=122868&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&\\_view=c&\\_acct=C000010083&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=122868&md5=7db2091fa60e7832b13c8b77d4a58d72](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VBD-4DWHJFT-1&_user=122868&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&_view=c&_acct=C000010083&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=122868&md5=7db2091fa60e7832b13c8b77d4a58d72)

This paper provides an overview of key literature on rape and sexual violence in armed conflict, dating back to the use of "comfort women" by the Japanese Imperial Army during the 1930s and World War II. The literature covers various countries and regions and finds common incidences of violence against women around the world.

## **Girls**

**Mazurana, D. and Carlson, K., 2006, 'The Girl Child and Armed Conflict: Recognising and Addressing Grave Violations of Girls' Human Rights', United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women**  
[http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Human\\_Rights/girl\\_child.pdf](http://www.peacewomen.org/resources/Human_Rights/girl_child.pdf)

This report documents violations against girls in conflict situations, discusses relevant international standards and initiatives and offers recommendations for addressing such harms. It finds that sexual exploitation of girls is exacerbated in environments in which gender-based violence and exploitation of girls and women had already been prevalent and where community structures play an active role in violations of the rights of women and girls. Conflict exacerbates this violence by breaking down social structures, community networks and legal institutions designed to protect girls; and by creating desperate situations where there are few opportunities for displaced or refugee populations to meet basic needs. In such cases, girls may feel forced to turn to commercial and exploitative sex to generate income for themselves and their families. The report provides examples of such incidences from Columbia, Liberia and Northern Uganda involving the exchange of sexual exploits with soldiers and militia for food, basic necessities and protection. UN peacekeeping and humanitarian personnel, in the DRC and the Balkans for example, have also been reported to have participated in the sexual exploitation and abuse of girls.

The abduction of girls during situations of armed conflicts is also a grave concern. Girls are abducted for use in fighting forces; for forced physical and sexual labour – including forced marriages. The report notes incidents of trafficking for sexual purposes in which girls are lured by promises of safety (e.g. Columbia and Ecuador) or purchased to be wives or prostitutes (e.g. Afghanistan, trafficked through Pakistan for destinations in the Gulf, Iran and elsewhere). These girls, the report states, are most likely to be from tribal groups and ethnic minorities, stateless persons and refugees. Force marriages of girls and young women by

armed opposition groups have been documented in armed conflicts in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the DRC, Burundi, Algeria, Kashmir and elsewhere. In Algeria and Kashmir, the report notes that abductions have taken place with impunity. Forced marriages have also been committed by state armed forces, for example in East Timor.

The report also stresses that taboos surrounding incest and underage sex, as well as conflict-induced displacement, makes it especially difficult to monitor incidents of sexual violence against girls. HIV/AIDS infection has also become an increasing risk for girls with the prevalence of sexual violence and exploitation in war-affected communities.

See also:

**Save the Children, 2005, 'Forgotten Casualties of War: Girls in Armed Conflict', Save the Children, London**

[http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/EVIU-6BSFEG/\\$file/SCF\\_apr\\_2005.pdf?openelement](http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/lib.nsf/db900sid/EVIU-6BSFEG/$file/SCF_apr_2005.pdf?openelement)

### **Case studies**

#### *Iraq*

**Susskind, Y., 2007, 'Examination of Gender-Based Violence in Iraq since the US-led Invasion, MADRE, New York**

<http://www.madre.org/index.php?s=9&b=24&p=86>

This report documents the use of gender-based violence by Iraqi Islamists that have come to power since the US overthrow of Iraq's secular Ba'ath regime. It asserts that "violence against women is not incidental to Iraq's mounting civilian death toll and civil war – it is a key to understanding the wider crisis". It finds that "under US occupation, Iraqi women have endured a wave of gender-based violence, including widespread abductions, public beatings, death threats, sexual assaults, "honour killings," domestic abuse, torture in detention, beheadings, shootings, and public hangings. Much of this violence is systematic—directed by the Islamist militias that mushroomed across Iraq after the US toppled the mostly secular Ba'ath regime.

Like religious fundamentalists in the US and elsewhere, Iraq's Islamists see the subordination of women as a top priority—both a microcosm and a precondition of the social order they wish to establish. As in Iran, Algeria, and Afghanistan, a campaign of violence against women was the first salvo in the Islamists' war to establish a theocracy in Iraq".

Women have also become a battle ground for Iraq's warring sectarian militias. The report notes that women are seen as the carriers of group identity and militias have been taking revenge on each other by raping women. Despite the fact that most assaults on women have been occurring in public, violence against Iraq women is still perceived as largely a "private" or family matter, outside the area of politics.

**Dakkad, H., 2007, 'Tackling Sexual Violence, Abuse and Exploitation', Forced Migration Review, special issue, pp. 39-40**

<http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/Iraq/17.pdf>

This brief article documents the pervasive violence against women that has been occurring in Iraq since 2003, fuelled by the absence of rule of law, the imposition of theocracy and vulnerabilities stemming from insecurity, economic hardship, displacement and social disintegration. It finds that women are being beaten and harassed for being "improperly dressed". It is also suspected that the large number of Iraqi women that have gone missing

have been traded for sex work, with sex traffickers targeting vulnerable households. Forced marriages are also on the rise, amounting to forced prostitution. In addition, domestic violence has intensified with the proliferation of weaponry.

**Human Rights Watch, 2003, 'Climate of Fear: Sexual Violence and Abduction of Women and Girls in Baghdad', Human Rights Watch**

<http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2003/hrw-irq-16jul.pdf>

This report discusses the insecurity and violence experienced by women in Iraq in 2003. Iraqis have perceived a sharp increase in cases of sexual violence and abduction since the start of the war. Numerous reports of sexual violence and abduction of women and girls in Baghdad have been documented by medical practitioners, victims, witnesses, and law enforcement authorities. There are also a large number of incidents that are likely unreported due to the fear that reporting sexual violence will trigger "honour killings" and social stigmatisation. These reports have contributed to a climate of fear in which women and girls do not feel safe outside their home.

*Palestinian Territories*

**Amnesty International, 2005, 'Israel: Conflict, Occupation and Patriarchy: Women Carry the Burden', Amnesty International, London**

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/MDE15/016/2005/en/623916bd-f791-11dd-8fd7-f57af21896e1/mde150162005en.pdf>

This report discusses the impact of the Israeli occupation and conflict on women in the Palestinian Territories. Section 6 (pp. 20-22) discusses the increased pressures and violence against women. Key points include:

- A reported correlation between increased level of violence which Palestinians were subjected to by the Israeli army and an increase in violence against women within Palestinian society and in the home;
- Feelings of humiliation, frustration and anger stemming from restrictions and confinement, poverty and unemployment – and in particular, the inability of males to support their family - has also rendered women vulnerable to violence within Palestinian society and in the home;
- Restrictions on movement and curfews, unemployment and insecurity that confine people to their homes for prolonged periods, in crowded conditions, have also contributed to an increase in violence against women, including sexual abuse, within the family.

**3. Further Resources**

**Report on the International Symposium on Sexual Violence in Conflict and Beyond, Brussels 21-23 June 2006**

This report is the outcome of an international symposium, sponsored by the Government of Belgium and the European Commission (EC), and convened by UNFPA to raise awareness among key international actors about the enormous impact of war-related sexual violence on survivors, families, communities and nations.

**Forced Migration Review, 2007, 'Sexual Violence: Weapon of War, Impediment to Peace', Forced Migration Review, issue 27**  
<http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR27/full.pdf>

This special issue of the Forced Migration Review explores the challenges and opportunities for combating sexual violence in conflict, post-conflict and development recovery contexts. Produced in collaboration with UNFPA, this special issue builds on the momentum created by the international symposium on 'Sexual violence in conflict and beyond' held in Brussels in June 2006, convened by UNFPA, the European Commission and the Government of Belgium. Articles focus on key issues and challenges, highlight examples of good practice, and present practice-oriented recommendations for uptake by policy makers and funders.

#### 4. Additional information

##### Author

This query response was prepared by **Huma Haider**: [huma@gsdrc.org](mailto:huma@gsdrc.org)

##### Contributors

Andrew McDevitt (GSDRC)  
Angela O'Neill (Concern International)  
Anthony Zwi (University of New South Wales)  
Brigitte Holzner (Austrian Development Agency)  
Carla Koppell (Hunt Alternatives Fund)  
Dyan Mazurana (Tufts University)  
Emiko Noma (Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice)  
Henia Dakkak (United Nations Population Fund)  
Joanna Wheeler (IDS)  
Lisa Heineman (University of Iowa)  
Median Haeri (ICRC)  
Naomi Hossain (IDS)

##### Websites visited

Amnesty International, BRIDGE, DCAF, Eldis, Forced Migration Review, Google, GSDRC, Human Rights Watch, Ingenta journals, International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Institute for Inclusive Security (Hunt Alternatives), International Crisis Group (ICG), Kvinna Till Kvinna, MADRE, Peace and Conflict Monitor, PeaceWomen Project, Save the Children, SIDA, Siyanda, UNFPA, UNIFEM, Womenwarpeace.org

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