
Causes of Armed Conflicts and Their Effects on Women

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ABSTRACT

This paper was meant to establish the causes of armed conflicts and their effects on women. The study was a content analysis of forty cases that dwelt on armed conflicts the world over. The paper analysed the forty papers in various forms from the web/internet. A total of five regions and trouble spots were identified for the study. Out of each of these regions, 8 papers on the causes of armed conflicts were identified and analysed under the headings: ethnic differences, inequitable distribution of resources, limited access to land, religious differences and undemocratic governance. An analysis of another 8 papers per region was undertaken to establish the effects of armed conflicts on women. Results from the analysis show that the majority of armed conflicts wherever they may occur are caused by inequitable distribution of resources, limited access to land by citizens and undemocratic governance. The most prevailing effects of the armed: conflicts were traumatisation and stigmatisation of the raped women, displacement of women and women being thrown into widowhood. The study recommends that serious efforts be made by international communities to curb wars at all costs and avert conflicts which may bring untold suffering to women.

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, one form or another, of conflict does exist in almost every region; (UNIFEM, - 20115). However, Zimbabwe and the majority of the Southern African .states have for the last decades or so enjoyed relative peace although potions of violence have been reported in a number of these countries. Where, for example, in Madagascar, riotous scenes have erupted, these have been quelled thereby averting armed conflicts, thanks to the interventions of both regional and international blocks. Motivated by the relative peace predominant in the region, there is need to conscientise the populace of the basic desire to perpetuate and preserve the status of peaceful existence. This paper therefore, reviews the causes of armed conflicts in a number of war torn regions and it also explores the effects of these armed conflicts on women. Regions that are at war and those that have - witnessed such conflicts were used for illustrative purposes. All this was done with hope that people appreciate the need for peace and shun armed conflicts that bring about untold hardships mostly to women and children who innocently are caught in fhe vicious circle. According to UNIFEM (2005), more than 70 per cent of the war casualties are civilians-most of them women and children.

Background to the Study

A number of wars have been fought nearly the world over and as already alluded to above; the main victims of such armed conflicts have been the female human being, A lot is know about the armed conflicts the world over but the effects of such conflicts have not been disseminated enough to conscientise warring factions on the issue that has left women and girls suffering in one way or another. Regions that have been known to be volatile are mainly in Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Middle East. In Africa, the Great Lakes region has been in the limelight with armed conflicts in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi. Other spots include areas such as the Horn of Africa, where Somalia and Eretria have been in turmoil, to mention a few. In Asia, Pakistan and Afghanistan have been fighting the so called insurgents and the protracted conflicts have created unbearable hardships for the women and other populations. The Americas have not been left out. Armed conflicts have been witnessed in Nicaragua, Cambodia and others. In the Middle East Iraq and others have been caught in the thick of things and a lot of lives have been lost through these armed conflicts. It is behind this background that the present study was meant to analyse the causes of the armed conflicts in these and other regions and also find out how women in these regions were affected by such conflicts.

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Statement of the Problem

After shedding some light on the background to the study, the question that needs to be answered is: What then are the causes of the armed conflicts in the identified regions and what effects did these armed conflicts have on women?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to make a case analysis of studies and papers that have been produced on the issue of armed conflicts, from two angles. Firstly, the paper sought to make an examination and exploration of the causes of armed conflicts. Secondly, it analysed the effects of armed conflict on women and made recommendations that are meant to protect the so-called weaker sex.

Research Questions

The current content analysis was meant to address the following research questions:

- What are the most prevalent causes of armed conflicts in the identified 5 regions?
- What are the effects of these armed conflicts on women?
- How prevalent are the specific types of effects of armed conflicts per region?
- What recommendations can be brought forward to alleviate the plight of women during and in the aftermath of the armed conflicts?

METHODOLOGY

This present study was a study of cases on the effects of armed conflicts the world over. The researchers undertook a survey of internet / web papers that dwelt on the causes and effects of armed conflict and improvised spreadsheets. The first spreadsheet was on the causes of the armed conflicts to ascertain the prevalence of a specific cause in a given region. This required information on the region and type of cause. The second spreadsheet required data on the region, nature of the conflict that is armed or unarmed and nature of effect on women. The number of occurrences of each of the stated variables was tabulated onto a spread sheet and percentages calculated. This enabled the researchers to draw conclusions on the nature of causes of armed conflicts in the different regions. It also made it possible for researchers to deduce the extent to which women had been affected. For the convenience of the study, regions were grouped into 5 geographically related areas in terms geopolitical and economic boundaries.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept Definition

Hereunder, we define the term "armed conflict". However, it should be admitted that there seems to be no universal definition in existence for the term "armed conflict".

What is an armed conflict?

On one hand, The Use of Force Committee, USA (2008) cited by O'Connell (2009), defines armed conflict as the presence of organised groups that are engaged in intense fighting. On the other hand, Stewart (2003) defines "armed conflict" as organised collective violent confrontation between at least two groups, either state or non-state actors.

ICRC (2008) defines the term as protracted armed 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 (party to the Geneva Conventions). 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.

Hazen (2008) defines the term "armed conflict" 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.

From the above citations, one deduces that conflict involves the use of arms and has to do with two or more warring factions. Armed conflict, therefore, can be viewed as a state of organised, armed and

often prolonged conflict carried on between states, nations, or other parties typified by extreme aggression, social disruption, and high mortality thereby hampering development.

Types of Conflict

Every conflict is multi-dimensional and there is extensive academic attention to the categorisation of the type, the character and the values of conflict. In this study we look at the following types of armed conflict:

Intra-state conflict is the most common type of conflict and occurs between the armed forces of the government and an opposing civil organised group, within the state borders. This conflict is often driven by ethnic, religious or ideological incompatibility. Differences exist between "classical" intra-state conflict, that is, conflict without foreign intervention and intra-state conflict with a foreign involvement in which at least one party engaged in the conflict is supported by military troops of a foreign government.

Inter-state conflict occurs between two governments deploying their respective two armed forces. The conflict occurs anywhere and often begins with a formal declaration of war.

Non-state conflict involves the use of armed forces between two organised groups, neither of which is the government or the state sponsored.

Extra-state conflict occurs between a state member of the international system and a political entity (not a system member) outside of its territorial boundaries. Extra-state is: state vs. independent non-state actor.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH STUDIES

Causes of Armed Conflict

According to Amani (2003) and Id21 Research Highlights (2005), the causes of armed conflict are often linked with attempts to control economic resources such as oil, metals, diamonds, drugs or contested territorial boundaries. In countries such as Colombia and the Sudan, for example, oilfield exploration has caused and intensified the impoverishment of women and men. Entire communities have been targeted and killed, displaced and/or marginalised in the name of oil development. The control of resources, like the exercise of power, is gendered. Those who do not have power or resources - groups that are disproportionately, though by no means exclusively, made up of women - do not usually start wars.

LIMITED ACCESS TO LAND

Research suggests that access to natural resources is both a cause of these conflicts and a factor in sustaining them. Research from the Africa Centre for Technology Studies, Kenya, examines the relationship between armed conflict and access to agricultural land. Studies in Rwanda, Burundi and eastern Democratic Republic of Congo show that changes in land use and land access are significant factors in armed conflicts. Limited access to land and unfair land distribution create patterns of economic domination, leading to social exclusion for poor, landless people. Those living in poverty seldom have access to the equipment necessary to initiate armed conflict. Occasionally, sometimes with the help of foreign powers, hunger and poverty lead people to take desperate measures and take up arms to achieve some degree of dignity for which they are willing to sacrifice themselves. These conditions can create the deprivation and social tension that leads to violence (Id21 Research Highlights, 2005; Amani, 2003; Huggins et al (2005).

Unresolved struggles over resources, combined with the _ severe impact of displacement, impoverishment and increased militarisation in zones of conflict, serve to prolong existing armed conflicts. Moreover, conflict tends to cause and/or perpetuate inequalities between ethnic groups and discrimination against marginalised groups of women and men, thereby paving the way for the outbreak of future conflicts (Hug gins et al, 2005; Amani, 2003).

Armed conflict as the world moves into the 21st century is growing in its complexity. At the international level, inequality in the distribution of power and resources has become more pronounced. Coupled with structural inequalities between and within nation-states, this disparity has led to more regional conflict, as well as an escalation of international armed conflicts. Furthermore,

the nature of warfare itself has dramatically changed due to the development of increasingly sophisticated weapons technology. Nations have placed greater emphasis on increasing and/or reinforcing military strength. This worsens existing constraints on women's rights, which in turn exacerbates inequalities in gender relations (Amani, 2003). At the same time as increased militarisation has further limited the rights of women within countries, gender equality has been co-opted at the international level to justify military intervention into sovereign nations. The liberation of women from the oppressive Taliban regime, for example, constituted one of the justifications for the American invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. But in the five years prior to the invasion, there was a consistent lack of regard for the plight of women, despite attempts by both local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to draw attention to the violation of Afghan women's human rights. Amani (2003) argues that in reality, military interventions are never the answer to resolving gender inequalities. Armed conflict and its aftermath either cause gender inequality or exacerbate existing gender inequalities, which are further compounded by divisions on the basis of race, class, caste, sexuality, religion or age.

RELIGION AND RACE

Religion and race seem to be inescapably at the top of the list when we look at the spate of Terrorism / armed conflict over the last century. Furthermore, from observation, this cause is concentrated almost entirely on the religions all vying for domination, credibility, and increasing control over their followers (Amani, 2003). Race could apply more in Africa and Asia than elsewhere but despite human rights, anti-discrimination and other recent world-wide laws, there seems to remain a huge gap in people's tolerance of other races. Almost all of the world's major attempts at genocide have been centred around this issue.

EFFECTS OF ARMED CONFLICT ON WOMEN

The investigations conducted elsewhere show that 43 out of every 100 women affected by the internal armed conflict have been victims of different forms of violence based on their gender (UNDFW, 2005). In today's world, with some form of conflict in almost every region, more than 70 per cent of the casualties are civilians-most of them women and children (UNIFEM 2005). During conflict and reconstruction, the impact of horrific gender-based violence at societal, community and individual levels is a critical issue (UNICEF, 2005).

A lot has been said about the effects of the armed conflicts the world over. However, hereunder we review a few of the articles that we accessed on the web to give a brief insight into these effects. The effects are discussed under the headings; Displacement, widowed, Sexual abuse, other abuses and Socio-economic effects.

SEXUAL ABUSE

According to Agustiana and Pakpahan (2004), civilian women and girls face different risks and dangers in armed conflict compared to those faced by civilian men and boys. There is a growing literature and attention to sexual violence and rape as a strategy of warfare. After incidences of sexual violence, women are often rejected by family or community. Despite pity for the trauma the women have suffered, society marks the victims as 'damaged goods' (Bennett et al. 1995) The forms of violence used - rape, mass rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced sterilization and the forced termination of pregnancies. The raping of women is a means for the aggressor to symbolically and physically humiliate the defeated men. In some contexts, the actors of the conflict use sexual violence as a punishment and a general warning to the female population within the community under control (Amnesty International, 2004). Rape or the threat of rape is also used to drive communities off lands or to heighten terror during attacks. In recent years rape has also been used to willfully transmit HIV (Smith, 2001). Such cases of abuse have been well documented in Rwanda, Uganda and Sierra Leone.

Women and girls have been held against their will and repeatedly raped until they conceive, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Rwanda. Sexual slavery is another form of gender-based violence experienced by women and girls during armed conflict. Examples of women and adolescent girls being forced into sexual slavery include East Timorese women abducted during the occupation of the island region, and Rwandan "ceiling women" who were kept in the space between the rafters and roof while their captors were away and then brought down for sexual and domestic slave labour upon the

captors' return (Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004). An investigation of refugee camps in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone revealed the sexual exploitation of women, girls and boys by humanitarian workers and peacekeepers in exchange for basic provisions (Benjamin, 2001; UNIFEM, (2002).

OTHER FORMS OF ABUSE

The fact, that generally, women do not go off to fight and largely remain unarmed and unprotected at a time when traditional forms of moral, community and institutional safeguard have disintegrated, and weapons have proliferated, leads to women being particularly vulnerable during wartime" (Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004). Food scarcity and inequalities in food distribution are exacerbated during periods of armed conflict, rendering women and girls more susceptible to malnutrition (UN, 2002).

Collection of firewood or water often puts young girls and women at risk of dangers, which include kidnapping, sexual abuse and exposure to landmines. Social attitudes also affect the vulnerability of women and girls. For example, families have often wrongly assumed that an elderly woman or a woman with children will be safe from harm and have left them to safeguard property while the rest of the family flees.

Armed conflict exacerbates existing inequalities between women and men and puts women and girls at heightened risk of physical and emotional abuse from male family members. The increased availability of and access to weapons increases the risk of severe injury or death during assault.

Women-run SOS hotlines for abused women and children reported high levels of abuse during and following the wars in the former Yugoslavia, as weapons that men used during the war were turned on women and children when they returned home. Given the gender-based division of labour, women and men have different risks of exposure to landmines. For example, women are at risk since they are responsible for gathering fuel or fetching water while men may be in greater danger on public roads. Abuse and torture of female members of a man's family in front of him is used to convey the message that he has failed in his role as protector. These forms of humiliation and violence take on powerful political and symbolic meanings.

SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS

Women who have lost their limbs may be unable to farm and are often abandoned by their husbands Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004).

As members of the civilian population, women experience distinctive economic problems in armed conflict. In many cases women are separated from the men who traditionally may be their source of income. Lack of education and training, their role in caring for others, and general community attitudes make it extremely difficult for women to support themselves financially. In many cultures, moreover, it is women who have the most to gain from economic development, and are thus particularly disadvantaged when these resources are diverted during armed conflict.

WIDOWED

With men making up the majority of landmine casualties, women may be required to provide 'sole support for their families Agustiana and Pakpahan, 2004). Even if women are not directly wounded during armed conflicts, the devastation suffered by their families and the threat of violence can contribute to women's isolation. Widowhood, flight to cities and remaining inside the home to avoid violence, all serve to break down social institutions and isolate women. Furthermore, the widowed women have no rights in claim land ownership after the death of the husband (Id21 Research Highlights, 2005).

TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN AND GIRLS

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimates that, in 2001, between 700,000 and 2 million women and - children were trafficked across international borders. There is increasing evidence that a significant amount of this activity is associated with armed conflict. In Sierra Leone, women were used as sexual slaves for the camp managers and forced to grow food, cook and provide other services. 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.³³ International intervention itself can result in an increase in trafficking operations and may intensify during post-conflict periods.

THE HEALTH OF WOMEN

Women and girls also face health threats that stem from biological differences. For example, the physical vulnerability of women and adolescent girls is higher than that of men and adolescent boys due to their sexual and reproductive roles. Particular risks women face include SIIs, including HIV I AIDS and "vesico-vaginal fistula, trauma, mutilation, complications from botched abortions, uterine problems, scarring of the vagina and problems having a normal sexual life or giving birth in the future" (Smith, 2002; UN, 2002). In a study on women's health in Afghanistan during the Taliban regime, interviewees attributed their depression to Taliban policies that restricted their movement, access to employment and education opportunities, and caused isolation, financial hardship and fear.

Women who remain in conflict zones may find themselves with few options apart from working for warlords and criminal militias or entering into exploitative informal economies. Indentured servitude and other forms of forced labour may evolve along gender and generational lines. Apart from being used as sexual slaves for militia commanders and soldiers in Angola and the "Democratic Republic of the Congo, women and adolescent girls are forced to do domestic work for soldiers, to work as daily labourers and to carry supplies and messages between work gangs or among fighting forces (UNICEF, 2005). Often these activities are used to further humiliate women under the control of armed forces. As part of the assault on civilian livelihoods, wells are poisoned, lands are mined and market places destroyed, making the daily tasks of fetching water, tilling the land and buying and selling in markets increasingly dangerous. Functioning nurseries and schools are rare and qualified teachers are few, especially for the internally displaced and refugees.

Women also face specific and devastating forms of violence related to gender, including rape as a weapon of war and sexual slavery, practices that in turn greatly increase their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS: As women struggle to keep families together and care for the wounded on the margins of fragile war economies, they are the first to be affected by infrastructure breakdown, and may be forced into survival strategies that involve exploitation (UNIFEM, 2005; Id21 Research Highlights, 2005).

WOMEN AS HEADS OF HOUSEHOLDS

Conflict has led to many women being widowed or separated, and therefore becoming the single head of household. The American Association of University Women (2007) in "The effects of war on women" argues that women are gravely affected by conflicts. They are displaced, become heads of households; lose their resources since they often cannot own land or anything. They try to hold it together, but often are punished after the conflict is settled because of what they had to do to do this. Women are exposed to violence and abuse. They are preyed upon. They lose protection and freedom of movement; they are forced into marriages, forced to become combatants in army and militia. They are forced to have abortions, forced to be pregnant; they are detained and raped. The rape is not for pleasure but for control. When violence against women increases it is a sign of impending military conflict... It escalates during the war but continues after the conflict has died down.

WAR AND JUSTICE FOR WOMEN

War exacerbates women's suffering. In their roles as mothers, nurturers and caregivers, women invariably account for a large proportion of civilian casualties. 'Women in Afghanistan, for example, have constituted the majority of civilians injured or killed as a result of the mistargeted bombing of houses, hospitals and other civilian structures (Malakunas 2001). The destruction of resources and the poisoning of farms have endangered all civilians' lives (Edwards 2001). Furthermore, even though women assume non-stereotypical roles as combatants, policy-makers and/or heads of households, attempts to have their voices heard in official processes are often dismissed. Few resources are made available to address and prevent gender-specific violations such as rape and forced marriage

SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE

A total of 50 studies and articles articulating the issue of the effects of conflict on women and girls were identified from the web. These were subjected to content analysis to find out if they had the valid content which would be used to draw conclusions about the issue at hand. Using the 4 variables

stated above, some 10 articles were discarded because they failed to meet the criteria. The total sample of the articles for the case study was therefore 40 articles. The 40 T articles were made up of 8 articles each per region.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Finding answers to the present study meant answering five research questions. Research question 1 was stated as follows: What are the most prevalent causes of armed conflicts in the identified 5 regions?

Table1. *Distribution of causes of armed conflict by region*

Region	Ethnic Differences	Inequitable Distribution of Resources	Limited Access to Land	Undemocratic Governance	Religious Differences
1	8	7	5	8	3
2	7	8	4	7	6
3	3	8	8	5	8
4	2	8	5	8	3
5	8	7	7	6	8
Total	28	38	29	34	28

According to Table 1, Region 1 had 8 conflicts resulting from ethnic differences while 7 were a result of inequitable distribution of resources. Limited access to land contributed to 5 armed conflicts whereas undemocratic governance contributed to 8 and 3 were a result of religious differences.

In Region 2, the highest number of conflicts was a result inequitable distribution of resources, followed by undemocratic governance and ethnic differences which accounted for 7 each. The least number of conflicts were as a result of limited access to land which accounted for only 4 conflicts.

Ethnic differences contributed to 3 conflicts while inequitable distribution of resources accounted for 8 the same as limited access to land in Region 3. Undemocratic governance accounted for 5 and religious differences accounted for 8 armed conflicts.

In Region 4, ethnic differences accounted for only 2 conflicts whereas inequitable distribution of resources accounted for 8 the same as undemocratic governance. Limited access to land accounted for 5 and religious differences were causative of 3 armed conflicts.

Eight conflicts were a result of ethnic differences in Region 5 while inequitable distribution of resources accounted for 7 armed conflicts. Limited access to land resulted in 7 armed conflicts and undemocratic governance accounted for 6. Eight were a result of religious differences.

Research question 2 was stated as follows: What are the effects of these armed conflicts on women?

Table2. *Distribution of effects off Armed Conflicts on Women by region, Nature of conflict and type of conflict*

Region	Nature of Conflict		Nature of Effect on Women				
	Armed	Unarmed	Displacement	Widowed	Sexual Abuse	Other Abuses	Socio Economic
1	5	3	8	8	8	8	8
2	2	6	8	7	6	7	6
3	3	5	4	3	8	8	8
4	8	8	8	8	8	8	5
5	1	7	3	2	8	8	4
TOTAL	19	29	31	28	38	39	31

Table 2 shows that 5 armed and 3 unarmed conflicts caused displacement in all the 8 studies reports while another 8 reported that women had been widowed. Sexual abuse and other abuses were reported in 8 each, the same as socio economic effects.

In Region 2 there were 2 armed and 6 unarmed. Displacement as an effect accounted for 8, those widowed accounted for 7 whereas sexual abuse and other abuses had 6 and 7 respectively. Socio economic effects were witnessed in 6 documented reports in Region 2.

Three armed conflicts and 5 unarmed ones accounted for 4 displacements, 3 widowed circumstances, 8 sexual abuses and 8 other abuses. Five source documents reported socio economic effects being perpetrated against women in conflict areas.

In Region 4,8 armed and 8 unarmed conflicts caused displacements in 8 circumstances, 8 reports reported widowhood, another 8 sexual abuse and other abuses. Five of the reports in Region 4 reported socio economic effects on women.

One armed and 7 unarmed conflicts in Region 5 caused displacement reported in 3 reports and caused widowhood in 2 reports and 8 each for sexual abuse and other abuses. Four reports reported socio economic effects on women as result of conflicts.

Research question 3 was stated as: How prevalent are the specific types of effects of armed conflicts per region?

From Table 1, it can be seen that the highest number of armed conflicts that is 38, resulted from T inequitable distribution of resources, followed by undemocratic governance which contributed to 34 armed conflicts. Ethnic differences and religious differences accounted for 28 apiece while limited access to land contributed to 29 armed conflicts. Table 2 also enables us to make an analysis of the effects of conflicts on women. It can be seen that displacement, widowhood, sexual abuse, other abuses, socio economic effects are rife in Region 1, 3, 4 and 5.

Research question 4 was stated as: What recommendations can be brought forward to alleviate the plight of women during and in the aftermath of the armed conflicts? After an analysis of the results form the studied documents, the following recommendations have been brought forward by the researchers. It is recommended that:

- There should be democratic governance in states so as not to infringe on people's rights. Politics of long incumbency should be avoided so as to give citizens the basic right to express their wishes in democratic elections.
- There should be civic education that helps the citizens to understand their obligations and responsibilities in society.
- Conflicts should be solved amicably and were needs be third party interventions should be sought by warring parties. Bodies such as regional and international ones should act well in advance before escalation of hostilities.
- Youth empowerment in socioeconomic development is encouraged to curtail idleness which results in youths being abused through being recruited for evil undertakings to perpetuate the status quo.
- A culture of tolerance should be developed during which process the citizens are conscientised of the need to amicably tolerate divergent views from different people of different origin.

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