

Onoiko A.I.

Master's Student,

*Educational and Scientific Institute of Innovative Educational Technologies,
National Aviation University*

CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

As the characteristics of armed conflicts are changing, impacts of the conflict on children have similarly changed over the decades. Children are no longer the bystanders of conflicts, but they are being targeted deliberately. Civilians have always been killed during armed conflicts, but studies have shown that children are being targeted towards a greater extent. In Afghanistan, for example, in 2013 between January to June 1,319 died and 2,500 were injured, which is a higher number than recorded the year before [3, p. 48].

UNAMA Human Rights Director, Georgette Gagnon, addressed the current situation of Afghanistan by stating that there is an increase of civilian targets in the war. She pointed out an increase of 38 per cent of women and children that have been injured and died in comparison of the year 2012 [1, p. 3].

Since wars are not only fight between the states, but also as mentioned earlier, there is an increase in conflicts within the states. Due to this change in the nature of the conflicts, the perpetrators of the conflicts are not always clearly identified and therefore targets can get partially obscured [5, p. 23]. However, the deliberate targeting of civilians is a method to create chaos, ethnic cleansing and enforce displacement of populations.

Conflict situations are hard for all people having to face and live through them. Due to the vulnerable nature of children, they are especially affected by the direct and indirect causes of armed conflicts. They do not have the essential resources yet to cope of such situations. Armed conflicts can have serious impacts on children during the conflicts, but also after the conflicts have ceased [7, p. 8].

Their material and emotional needs are often not being met; armed conflict undermines the foundation of children's lives in many aspects. Their communities and families can be torn apart due to the conflict situation. The traumatic experiences can have long-lasting effects on the lives of children, and their physical, emotional, intellectual, social as well as spiritual well-being is under a great risk.¹ Rebuilding a society after conflict is not easy by far, especially when children have lived their childhood under violent assaults and warfare. Exposure to armed conflict can have an effect on a child's understanding of violent behavior [5, p. 28].

Cutting the violent cycle needs extensive efforts, both on a national and international level. Children, especially adolescents, who have lived through armed conflict, should not be seen only as victims but rather as active participants in the process of rebuilding a war-torn society. This helps them increase their sense of identity as well as creating a purpose for the future by actively engaging them in developing and executing programmes for younger children.

A resulting impact of armed conflicts can often lie in malnutrition and generally poor health for the children, and an increase in diseases. Children might get lost from their parents, or lose them permanently in conflicts. Schools are being targeted purposely by armed groups and children's education is often put on hold during conflict situations [8, p. 140-141].

There is a great deal of direct or indirect impacts that armed conflicts have on children, and the following part is specifically concerned with the impacts of maiming and killing, child soldiers, sexual exploitation and gender-based violence, and separated families and unaccompanied children.

Armed conflict causes deaths and injuries to civilians, and as mentioned earlier, children are even at a higher risk in contemporary conflicts. Children are killed due to bombings, shooting, landmines and other direct results of fighting. Also many children remain permanently disabled and injured. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), political violence and armed conflicts are the main reason for causing disabilities and injuries to children [4, p. 53].

Explosives, such as landmines and unexploded ordnance, have been used in most conflicts since World War II. The use of landmines is mostly common in armed conflicts within states.

Even more children die due to the poor conditions that a country is facing when conflict breaks out. In armed conflict sometimes the food systems are destroyed as an accidental cost of the fighting, but they can also be damaged on purpose. Food can be used as a weapon of war and starving the population, armed forces or groups can seek out political pressure as well as cause suffering to communities [8, p. 93].

Unavailability of food and its uneven distribution are common during persistent violent conflicts, and are causing malnutrition normally to the poorest populations. Children, especially under the age of five, are at risk of dying from severe malnutrition. Not to mention diseases and unavailability of medical care that is also causing great risks to children. The breakdown of health and social services is common during conflict situation and the displacement of population is also causing diseases to spread during conflicts.

Due to the change of the pattern and nature of conflicts, not only have children come under a heightened risk of becoming targets of conflicts, but also they have become themselves the perpetrators of violence. A child soldier is often regarded as a person, under the age of 18 years who is either directly or indirectly participating in an armed group or forces during armed conflict [2, p. 51].

Direct participation consists of wielding armaments, assault rifles, machetes or grenades on the front lines of conflict. Indirect participation, on the other hand, consists of combat support as spies and messengers, mine cleaners, porters, cooks and sexual slaves.

Girls consist of a significant proportion of children who are involved in armed conflicts. It has been estimated that 40 per cent of the children in armed forces are actually girls.³ Girls are often forced into sexual violence, but they are also engaged in active battles. As children grow up and become stronger, they can raise from a servant's role to a more active participant in conflict as in combat.

The use of a word child soldier is therefore widely discussed, the word itself might be misleading as it often refers to the image of a young boy carrying a weapon and who is participating in killing. Alternatively, such children are referred as ‘children associated with fighting forces’⁵ or ‘children associated with armed forces and armed groups’.⁶ In this study, the word child soldier is used, as it is widely referred by the United Nations and its specialised agencies [1, p. 8-9].

Especially children exposed to sexual violence should be in a special attention and helped with special knowledge. Under international humanitarian law sexual violence, including rape, is a war crime. The perpetrators of such act are therefore violating the international humanitarian law. A larger scale of systematic violations is regarded as committing a crime against humanity according to international law.

Sexual violence can have long-lasting physical, emotional and social effects on children. The most direct effect is the exposure of sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, which can rapidly damage a child’s health, risk future reproduction and ultimately lead to death. Children exposed to sexual violence also carry a personal humiliation with them and are in danger of being rejected by their families [8, p. 85-86].

1. The EU has set policy framework and guiding principles for the protection of children in armed conflict [7, p. 31]. Its policy on the protective measures on the rights of the child in armed conflict is summarised in the EU Guidelines on Children and Armed Conflict.

2. The EU emphasises the importance of adequate training in protection of children in countries that are engaging with EU crisis management operations in respective to their mandates [2, p. 10]. According to the literature review and the conducted interviews, it can be concluded that the EU does not have a dedicated operation on the protection of children, but the protection, welfare and rights of the child in armed conflicts are generally crosscutting objectives. The Implementation Strategies of the EU guidelines reinforces training in child protection of all military and civilian crisis management personnel involved in CSDP operations.

3. However, there is no systematic and coherent planning of the training and it is the responsibility of each member state to decide how the training is conducted on children’s rights and protection [3, p. 18]. The updated checklist for integrating child protection in CSDP operations outlined that CAAC is often included in the overall human rights perspective of the training.

References:

1. Decision of Constitutional Council of French Republic 71–44 DC of 16 July 1971. [Електронний ресурс]. – Режим доступу: <http://www.conseilconstitutionnel.fr/conseil-constitutionnel/english/case-law/decision/decision-no71-44-dc-of-16-july-1971.135366.html>
2. Global Gender Gap Report 2014. – Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2014. – P. 358 // http://www3.weforum.org/docs/GGGR14/GGGR_CompleteReport_2014.pdf
3. Dictionary of Law. 3-rd Ed. – Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. – 1034 p.
4. Mori M. Aborto e morale / M. Mori. – Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1996. – 126 p.
5. Raes J. A propos de l'avortement / J., A. Raes. – Roma: La Revue Nouvelle, 1971. – 90 p.
6. Right to Life [Electronic resource]. – Mode of access: <http://www.righttolife.com.au/euthanasia>. Aspx.

7. Waller L. Report of the embryos produced by in vitro fertilization [Electronic resource] / L. Waller // Committee to consider the social, ethical and legal issues arising from in vitro fertilization. – Melbourne, 1984. – Mode of access: <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/papers/govpub/VPARL1982-85No168.pdf>.

8. Zatti M. La prospettiva del biologo. Statute biologico del l'embrione / M. Zatti // Procreazione artificiale ed interventi nella genetica umana. – Padova, 1987. – 205 p.