

A Psychosocial Perspective on Women's Roles in Global Peacekeeping Bodies

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Abstract: Women play a pivotal yet underrepresented role in global peacekeeping and conflict resolution. Despite comprising nearly half of the peacekeeping force, their participation as key decision-makers remains limited. Research highlights women's unique psychosocial skills, particularly empathy and emotional intelligence, which are crucial in conflict zones where they often face disproportionate trauma. The inclusion of women in peace negotiations, peacekeeping forces, and post-conflict rebuilding is essential to ensuring comprehensive solutions. However, social, political, and cultural barriers continue to hinder their full involvement. Addressing these challenges and enhancing gender-sensitive frameworks is key to achieving lasting global peace and security.

Keywords: women peacekeepers, conflict resolution, global security, gender inclusion, trauma

1. Introduction

Problem Question: What are we missing out on by not giving women substantial, active, and relevant participatory roles in global peacekeeping operations and in dealing with socio political conflicts?

Women possess distinctive thought processes, experiences and abilities stemming from psychosocial differences.- Twemlow, J., Turner, C., & Swaine, A. (2022). Moving in a state of fear: ambiguity, gendered temporality, and the phenomenology of anticipating violence. *Australian Feminist Law Journal*, 48 (1), 87–111. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13200968.2022.2138185>

Despite the relatively equal proportion of women's seats in international peacekeeping organisations-Laura Huber, 2022-The Impact of Women Peacekeepers on Public Support for Peacekeeping in Troop Contributing Countries, International Peace Institute; Desjardins, B. (2023). (Re) Producing military mythology at the Canada Army Run. <https://doi.org/10.22215/etd/2023-15349>; their roles as key players and change agents of peace while solving global conflicts have been underutilised and often unrecognised.

Several published studies report the ever-decreasing ratio of female signatories to conflict-altering agreements and resolutions. Statistics also indicate the highly untapped potential women possess as possible political ministers and leaders in several countries globally.

Table 1: Average rating by the public in India and south Africa of peacemaker's ability to effectively carry out key mission tasks in MONUSCO (with 0 being the worst and 10 the best) depending on whether respondents read the article about a mixed- gender unit or an all- men unit

Mission Task	India		South Africa	
	Mixed gender unit	All- Men unit	Mixed gender unit	All- Men unit
Prevent violence between the government and the rebels	8.4	8.3	6.2*	6.5*
Protect Civilians from Violence	8.6	8.5	6.7	6.8
Protect Human rights	8.6	8.5	6.9	6.8
Train the Congolese military	8.5	8.4	6.3	6.4
Protect refugees	8.5	8.4	6.5	6.5
Work with local men	8.5	8.4	6.5*	6.9*
Work with local women	8.4	8.3	6.4*	6.0*
Prevent Sexual Violence	8.5*	8.2*	6.0	6.2

Bold indicates a statistically difference in rating between respondents who read about the mixed gender unit versus respondents who read about the all- men unit.

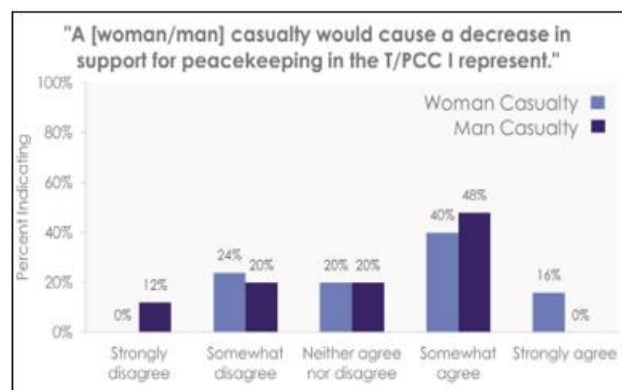
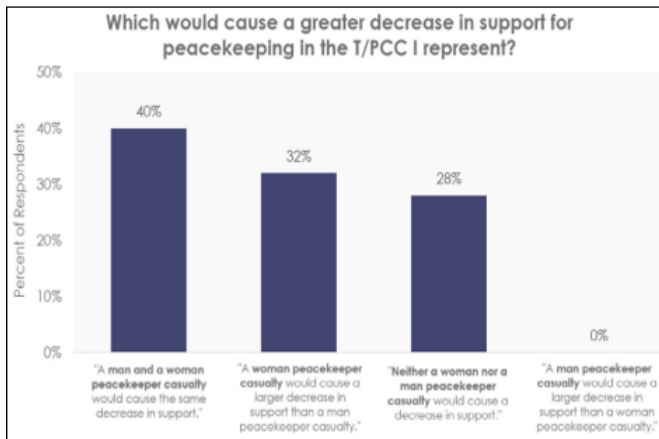


Figure 6-7: UN diplomats' perception of the effect of woman/ man peacemaker casualties on public support for peacemaking in their country

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Laura Huber, 2022-*The Impact of Women Peacekeepers on Public Support for Peacekeeping in Troop Contributing Countries*, International Peace Institute



Source: *Women, War & Peace*

Nine of 13 current women leaders are their country's first

Current women heads of government

✓ Country's first female leader

Head of state or government	Country	Years in office
PM Sheikh Hasina	Bangladesh	19
PM Katrín Jakobsdóttir	Iceland	5
✓ PM Ana Brnabić	Serbia	5
✓ PM Mia Mottley	Barbados	4
PM Mette Frederiksen	Denmark	3
PM Sanna Marin	Finland	3
✓ PM Kaja Kallas	Estonia	2
✓ Pres. Samia Suluhu Hassan	Tanzania	2
✓ Pres. Xiomara Castro	Honduras	1
✓ PM Fiamē Naomi Mata'afa	Samoa	1
✓ Pres. Dina Boluarte	Peru	<1
✓ PM Giorgia Meloni	Italy	<1
✓ Borjana Krišto*	Bosnia-Herzegovina	<1

* Krišto is chairwoman of the Council of Ministers.

Note: Years in office includes nonconsecutive terms held by the same woman. Figures are through March 1, 2023. Data is limited to heads of government for the 193 United Nations member states.

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of data from the Council on Foreign Relations and independent sources.

Therefore, integrating women into all aspects of peace operations occurring in NATO, the UN, G20 and other international bodies is essential to sustain peace and justice.

1) Women's Perception Globally: Focus on Vulnerabilities

Who are the most vulnerable in any kind of conflict? Who are the victims when war or natural disasters ravage a land? Who are those who are deeply uprooted and deeply shaken by the naked barbaric dance of terror that is passed off as global and geopolitical conflict? It would come as no surprise to anyone to know that the population most at risk at any great upheaval are women and children. Research has shown that the trauma endured by women and children residing in war zones and subject to the theatre of terror is far greater than the trauma that is perceived by men who are part of a similar conflict.

Luszczynska, A., Benight, C. C., & Cieslak, R. (2009). *Self-efficacy and health-related outcomes of collective trauma: A systematic review*. *European Psychologist*, 14 (1), 51-62.

An explanation of this research finding can be found even through the evolutionary theory of psychology.

(Dietz et al., 1999; Felitti et al., 1998; Herman, Susser, Struening, & Link, 1997; Hillis, Anda, Felitti, Nordenberg, & Marchbanks, 2000; Lalor & McElvaney, 2010)

We are living in an age of women empowerment but the evolutionary theories state that a woman is essentially a nurturer who thrives in an environment of peace, harmony and stability. These are the first pillars of society that are smashed down in any environment of conflict and trauma.

The diminished sense of agency in transitional justice contexts is even more commonplace and pronounced for women, because they frequently speak about the sufferings of others rather than their own experiences. Sidonie Smith describes that in the South African case, "women became witnesses to mourning for lost loved ones" rather than "witnesses to their own experiences of harm and degradation.

2) Overview of War & Impact on Women

War is a very complex process. The ravages of war are felt on several different levels. There is the physical loss of life and limb, there is the destruction of structures, there is the economic devastation; the greatest cost that war extracts is the psychological trauma and suffering of those who are victims of such violence. If the Hindu scriptures are to be believed, the soul is a mirror of joy, bliss and ecstasy. For it to exist amidst the dance of barbarism is a feat that it is not capable of performing for any period of time. Without divorcing from itself the fundamental essence that is said to have created it.

We measure the destruction of war through the number of bodies recovered from the battlefield while not fully acknowledging the psychological and emotional devastation that manifests in the psychology of even the victor. However, most often we find that the psychological impact of war manifests as post traumatic stress disorder.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition that can develop after someone experiences or witnesses a shocking, scary or dangerous event.

According to a May 2024 meta-analysis, *Jingchu Hu, Biao Feng, Yonghui Zhu 2022, Gender Differences in PTSD: Susceptibility and Resilience*; the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in people living in war affected areas, is 48.42%, with a 95% confidence interval (CI) of 37.08-59.77%. The analysis also found that women have a higher prevalence of PTSD than men, at 48.3% than men at 37%.

Further, studies using questionnaires like the Empathy Quotient (*Baron-Cohen and Wheelwright, 2004*) and the Empathy Scale (*Mehrabian and Epstein, 1972*) have found that women score higher than men in self-reports of empathy.

A study of the University of Cambridge found that women showed higher cognitive empathy than men in 36 countries, and similar levels in 21 others.

Greenberg, D. M., Warrier, V., Abu-Akel, A., Allison, C., Gajos, K. Z., Reinecke, K., Rentfrow, P. J., Radecki, M. A., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2022). Sex and age differences in 'theory of mind' across 57 countries using the English version of the 'Reading the Mind in the Eyes' Test. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

Cognitive empathy is the ability to understand what someone else is thinking or feeling, and use that information to predict how they might act or feel which again is something women are more strongly capable of emoting.

This further establishes that women, being the gender that is found to empirically be the gender who gets affected psychologically and emotionally the most, tend to relate to the huge impact of it and can be better equipped to deal with the vicissitudes of it for the population at large.

3) Statistics on Women's representation in Global Peacekeeping Bodies

In 1993, women made up 1% of deployed uniformed personnel. In 2020, out of approximately 95, 000 peacekeepers, women constitute 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police units and 34% of justice and corrections government-provided personnel in UN peacekeeping missions.

The number of women in UN peacekeeping operations has increased since the launch of the Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy in 2018, but the progress has been slow, especially in military contingents. *Source: SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database 2018*

Some say that biases against women in the appointment process, a lack of external networks, and a UN bias towards well-known candidates make it difficult for disqualified women to get senior leadership positions.

As of September 2023, there were 6, 200 women serving as uniformed peacekeepers, which is less than 10% of the more

than 70, 000 uniformed peacekeepers. This includes 16% of formed police units and nearly 7% of military contingents. In 2021, 36% of government-provided justice and corrections personnel in peacekeeping missions were women. The UN also asks contributing states to nominate at least 20% of their police officers and 30% of their justice and corrections personnel to be women.

Source: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/african-women-frontline-of-peacekeeping>



Source: <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/women-peacekeeping>

4) Role of Women in Post War Scenarios

Women peacekeepers serve as powerful mentors and role models for women and girls in post-conflict settings in the host community:

Civilian roles

Women have performed many civilian roles, including operational analysis, human rights promotion, political and reconciliation processes, explosive removal, mine awareness, airfield management, vehicle repair, and public information.

Military roles

Women in the military have unique tactical skills, such as screening female civilians and searching houses in areas where it's not culturally appropriate for men to enter private spaces. Local populations may also feel more comfortable sharing information with military troops that include women.

Peace and political processes

Women peacekeepers have actively participated in peace and political processes, and promoted the integration of gender into response planning. In 2022, women participated as negotiators or delegates in four out of five active United Nations-led peace processes.

Source: The Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping

5) Exploring Causes behind Underrepresentation of women: Current context

It is strange that while it is accepted that women and children are the greatest at risk population in conflict zones and it is also accepted that women temperamentally are the greatest nurturers and have the ability to deal with highest levels of sympathy much greater than most than the male counterparts, they are grossly misrepresented in peacekeeping missions.

The reason for this can be seen under different layers. One is a social lens. The unfortunate truth is that even in 2024, there is an incredible bias in many parts of the developing world against women who seek to go out and make a name for themselves. Forget about making a name for themselves, this

bias extends in a life threatening manner against those merely seeking to empower themselves through education. The story of Malala Yousafzai and the battle that she fought against the oppression of the Taliban while more than a few years old, continues to be an everyday reality for far too many women in societies that have refused to grow with times and understand much less accept the changing dynamics that influence gender interactions in the modern world.

A society that does not permit a girl to get education is hardly likely to permit that girl to go out and create an independent identity in the world. A misconception about a woman's inability to survive in a war zone while it is absolutely true that when it comes to physical strength, men overpower women in quite a dramatic fashion.

A 10% increase in the number of girls going to school translates to an average 3% increase in a country's GDP. Even so, some countries still neglect girls' education. What works in convincing governments of the need to prioritise girls' education and women's advancement?

It is a misconception about the requirements for functioning effectively in a conflict zone that prevents women from either coming forward to perform the duties or be given the opportunity to show their worth in such an environment. Not all members of the peacekeeping force head out with rocket launchers strapped to their back and their fingers glued to the trigger of their AK-47. There are several different functions served even within such conflict-ridden zones. We have already touched upon how women and children are the primary victims of such violence. Who better than other women trained in fields to be called upon for service where women have served excellence through time, in these troubled zones.

So the frontline does not only require Rambo, it also requires Florence Nightingale as well as G. I. Jane. An interesting point to note is that a lot of these conflict zones occur in those parts of the world which are still not liberated socially. There are theatres of war where women struggle to find a voice even in the best of times and have almost no way to express themselves when their worlds are crashing around them. During such times and in such an environment, the only hope she has is to find another woman who understands her problem and is willing to be a medium to address it in any way they can.

To expect a man to relate to the traumas of these women and children and for them to be able to understand the extent of the loss experienced is truly asking for more than what is logically possible. There is an urgent need for women to participate in such conflict settings and as part of peacekeeping forces that are designed to help the vulnerable population in these war zones. There is also not enough awareness of the importance of psychological and social assistance that is required in these settings. There is enough research that indicates that social and psychological trauma that is experienced over time is no less debilitating and threatening than is the risk of life that is immediately experienced by participants of conflict.

The diminished sense of agency in transitional justice contexts is even more commonplace and pronounced for

women, because they frequently speak about the sufferings of others rather than their own experiences. Sidonie Smith describes that in the South African case, "women became witnesses to mourning for lost loved ones" rather than "witnesses to their own experiences of harm and degradation.

This outcome can be influenced by a sense of shame about discussing one's own violations, especially when they likely confer social stigma, but it also reflects the gendered nature of memory specialisation. Women typically narrate communal suffering and the quotidian impact of war. It is unsurprising, therefore, that they become the bearers of collective memories of sexual and other violations as well and are routinely called on to narrate degrading and brutal episodes of violence as part of transitional justice proceedings. Yet placing this burden on women is problematic, given that they are not the only victims or witnesses; offering testimony is demanding, invasive, and even dangerous.

In conflict zones, women are active participants in the conflicts that affect their countries. They may become combatants. They may become the sole providers for their families, more active in the informal or formal sectors of the economy, or more active in peacemaking groups as a result of conflict. They also suffer disproportionately from sexual violence and displacement. Yet during war and in its aftermath, women very often are excluded from activities aimed at resolving the violent conflicts that so deeply affect them. Those conflicts cannot be brought to a lasting end without making women's lives more secure, and it is women who are best positioned to determine how their security is achieved.

6) Global Actions taken to Remedy Women's underrepresentation

Recognizing that sustainable security is not possible without the involvement of women, the United Nations in October 2000 passed Security Council Resolution 1325. The resolution calls for increased representation of women at peace negotiations and at all levels of decision making

regarding security; inclusion of women in postconflict reconstruction efforts and in disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration efforts; increased protection from sexual violence; and an end to impunity for crimes affecting women.

Source: Women Count for Peace

Despite these advances, women in zones of conflict and in reconstruction efforts, and those working on their behalf, emphasize that they often have little or no voice in negotiating peace or planning reconstruction, lack economic opportunities, and continue to be the primary targets of ongoing sexual violence. It is therefore critical to pool the knowledge of those working on issues of gender equality and inclusion to determine what measures and practices have proved effective or ought to be tried in countries emerging from war.

To that end, three hundred military, diplomatic, academic, non government organisations (NGO), the United Nations, and business sector experts at a 2010 conference in Copenhagen on The Role of Women in Global Security shared experiences in conflict zones, offered recommendations for ways to increase women's participation in global security, and cited barriers to putting those recommendations in practice.

Women are typically excluded from formal peace processes. They tend to be absent at the peace table, underrepresented in parliaments that are developing policy in countries emerging from conflict, and underrepresented in peacekeeping forces. Melanne Verwee, who heads the State Department's Office for Global Women's Issues, noted that thirty-one of the world's views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions. Its goals are to help prevent and resolve violent conflicts, promote post conflict peacebuilding, and increase conflict management tools, capacity, and intellectual capital worldwide. The Institute does this by empowering others with knowledge, skills, and resources, as well as by its direct involvement in conflict zones around the globe.

Source: Women's Peacebuilding Strategies Amidst Conflict

The United Nations reckons that fewer than 3 percent of signatories to peace agreements have been women and that women's participation in peace negotiations averages less than 8 percent for the eleven peace processes for which such information is available. Such agreements typically do not address sexual violence.

The failure to adequately recognize the full profile of experiences and violations during conflict, including its gender dimensions, limits the prospects of reparations for harms and their associated potential to transform gender regimes. As a result of the narrow focus on certain classes of violations, especially physical ones, viewed as most severe and often disproportionately suffered by men, most formal reparations programs are woefully insensitive to the many other ways in which women and girls are affected by violence and surrounding circumstances.

At a minimum, these programs rarely account for pervasive problems such as forced labor, coerced marriage, displacement, chronic health problems stemming from sexual violence and malnutrition, and a sharp rise in female-headed households and the resulting feminization of poverty, which can be exacerbated by male-biased land tenure systems and inheritance patterns. Another profoundly significant thing the programs often ignore is the myriad opportunities that are foregone or never available because of the loss of family members, economic assets, institutional upheaval, and infrastructural damage.

Even in the difficult circumstances of refugee camps, women have demonstrated an ability to organise, lead, and communicate the needs of other women in the camps.

Source: Council on Women's Relations

One consequence of the view of women's roles in war as primarily passive victims is that little thought is given to the role women ought to play in the reintegration of combatants into the societies from which they came. In addition, women's views are typically not incorporated when postconflict governments set up mechanisms for reconciliation between armed groups and civilians. But women and girls have played many roles in conflict in different parts of the world, as fighters, supporters of rebel groups, spouses, or slave labour. Women's participation is therefore critical in these processes and by excluding them, critical opportunities for rebuilding communities are lost.

7) Global Community Examples of Women's roles in Conflict Scenarios

In some of the clans in Somalia, women have more power than in others, especially if they are related to an elder, have wealth or come from a respected family. These women can often influence and pressure the men and especially the elders in the clan to take part in peace building. Unfortunately, women do not get to participate in the formal negotiations for peace that they have lobbied for. There are many examples of what women in Somalia engage in peace building, for example they work with; Human Rights, Disarmament, Peace and Security and political advocacy (Jama, 2010).

Historically, women in Sudan have had a big impact on conflict resolution and have also had a significant role in peace building, especially concerning healing, reconciliation and building bridges between divisions created by the conflict (Freitas, 2016). Women were in the 1990's involved in peace building at the grassroots level where they were part of the "People to People" initiative which was an initiative to heal the internal conflicts that were present in the country at the time. In 1994, over seven hundred women attended a women's conference for civic groups. It was also one of the first times that the military institution had to recognize the women as a part of the civil society and thus attempted to co-ordinate their operations with the civilian group created (Itto, 2006 & Faria, 2011).

8) Recommendations for Change in Women's participation on a Global scale

A key area for the new policy is removing legal constraints, including restrictions on women's ownership of land. Land is one of the most important assets for households in developing countries, but women in these developing countries are less likely than men to own and control it. Worldwide, women own 1 to 2 percent of registered land.⁹ In Uganda, where women are the primary cultivators, women own 7 percent of the land they till. Because they access land through male relatives, women's economic security is weak, and any decisions regarding investment or selling land typically require the signature of a husband or other male relative. Conflict magnifies the difficulties that such legal restrictions place on women, where men may be absent and more women become widows and thus heads of households but cannot inherit the land on which they work.

Another important constraint in postconflict settings is the difficulty women face in starting businesses. When the Taliban came to power in Afghanistan in 1996 and barred women from public life and work, Afghan women turned to informal enterprises for their livelihoods, and the importance of the informal economy for women continues to the present. The World Bank reports that more than half of Afghan women in female-headed households are sewing, embroidering, or washing laundry for others.

Limited access to finance and capital is another constraint facing female entrepreneurs, and this constraint becomes more acute during war. Microcredit has proved a key mechanism for helping women in small, informal enterprises, both in building businesses and dignity in difficult circumstances. Unlike traditional finance mechanisms, microfinance takes into account women's inability to use land or other resources as collateral.

Laura Shepherd (2016) discusses women as agents of change rather than victims of violence. She argues that previously many scholars argue that men are the perpetrators while women are the victims of violence in conflicts. However, Shepard means that the masculinized story of war does not describe the complexity of men's and women's role in war. Further, she means that by only letting women be represented as victims of violence undermines their agency and thus the development of peacebuilding activities, in which women can participate and all their experiences of conflict is addressed is undermined.

Another scholar who have used the concept of women as agents in conflict is Rita Manchanda (2005). She wants to change the way women are perpetuated in conflicts, where women are solely seen as victims, which she means is not the truth. Women in conflicts often take part as decision makers, negotiators, peace activists and participate in the military struggle. The struggle she means is to start identifying women as agents instead of victims and strengthen their roles as agents for social transformation.

Judith Butler (1988) considers the difference between sex and gender and the psychological explanation to women's social existence. The psychological reasoning to women's

subordination to men can be explained through the so-called gender schema. Gender schema is the way people address the incoming information and select how we react and act on certain information. Through this selective intake of information the individual can impose the current structures of the society. All this is learned from childhood, where society teaches girls and boys the gender roles that are associated with their sex. For example, boys are taught to be strong and powerful while girls are taught to be nurturing and caring.

This results in that there is an internalised motivation to why women and men behave in different ways and how they regulate their behaviour to adapt to their gender schemas and the gender roles that are existent in the structure of a society (Bem, 1981). By understanding the psychological explanation to how gender is taught, Judith Butler (1988) argues that gender is something we do rather than who we are, meaning that by accepting and acting in a gender appropriate way, we become women and men. Butler argues that with the help of feminist theory we can begin to understand the structural ways that culture and politics are constructed and reproduced.

According to a recent study of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR, 2017), women are rarely included in peace negotiations. In the peace negotiations from 1990-2017 women represented 2% of the mediators, 5% of the witnesses and signatories and 8% of the negotiators. Of the 1.187 peace agreements during the same time, 19% mentioned and made references to women, 5% made references to gender based violence. Experts on the area of creating lasting peace stress the need to include women in the peace negotiations since women's needs are different to those of the men and they are often more vulnerable which is overlooked or forgotten in the negotiation process. This in turn leads to the peace agreements being less effective and less likely to be sustainable since the humanitarian responses are limited (CFR, 2017: IPI, 2013: Kumalo, 2015: UN Women, 2012).

Defence personnel, staff associations, parliamentarians, CSOs, academics and other subject matter experts all have potential roles to play in law and policy-making for defence. When developing strategies to advance gender equality and integrate a gender perspective, defence institutions should consult CSOs working on gender equality as well as their own staff associations. They should take into account existing laws, government policies, NAPs and other national initiatives related to gender equality, and look for synergies with gender equality initiatives in other parts of the public sector.

To integrate a gender perspective, the following non-exhaustive list provides examples of the kinds of activities staff working in finance and procurement can undertake.

Support local businesses that are owned by women or promote gender equality.

Only contract companies with a transparent and good track record on human rights, including as regards sexual discrimination and SEA, and include provisions that are aligned with appropriate international labour standards and

allow contracts to be terminated if company personnel commit abuses.

Key recommendations to transform the scenario include:

- Recommendation 1: Adopt clear definitions of gender. Approach gender broadly, not simply as a synonym for women.
- Recommendation 2: Standardise gender policies and practices.
- Recommendation 3: Internalise norms of gender sensitivity across the community of researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.
- Support women to join political parties involved in the negotiations so as to promote their agenda from within the structures. If this meets with resistance, help them to consider alternative measures, such as hosting a dialogue.

-Watson, C. (2012) 'Gendered Social Institutions, Young Women and Girls. Overview of Key Analytical Perspectives and Policy Thrusts for Further Reflection'. Critical Assessment Paper Produced for ODI for DFID-Supported Flagship Programme 4: Transforming the Lives of Girls and Young Women.

While there are many positive results of women's work for peace in informal peace processes, they are seldom included

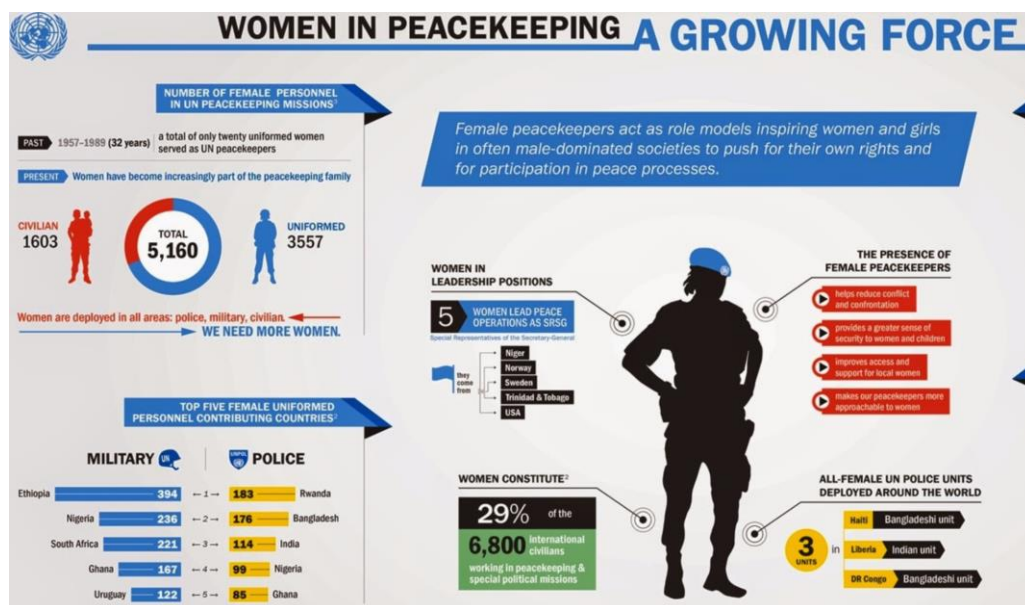
in formal peace processes. Women are usually not represented among decision-makers and military leaders, the usual participants in such processes. Women are under-represented in formal peace negotiations, whether as local participants representing warring factions, or as representatives of international authorities overseeing or mediating deliberations and institutions invited to the negotiating table.

In addition, central issues of concern to women, including their participation in post-conflict political, social, civil, economic and judicial structures, do not always reach the negotiating table, in part because of the exclusion of women from the formal peace negotiations.

Women not only call for issues specific to themselves but raise issues that affect society as a whole, such as land reform, access to loans and capacity-building.

There is indeed very clear quantitative evidence that peace processes are more likely to occur, more likely to succeed, and more likely to stick when you bring women and civil society groups into the process.

Source: *The Shared Rewards of Women's Peace and Security*



Source: *United Nations Peacekeeping*

DID YOU KNOW?

The International Peace Institute found that **women's participation increases the probability of a peace agreement lasting at least two years by 20% and a peace agreement lasting fifteen years by 35%**. Nearly 100 studies reach similar conclusions.

Yet, the Council on Foreign Relations found that women constituted, on average, less than 15 percent of negotiators between 1992 and 2019.

Source: *The International Peace Institute*

9) Case study of women's activism around the globe

Rwanda offers a very interesting case study. It has had the highest percentage of female legislators in the world – in fact, a majority – for some time. Rwandan women had a really important role to play in rebuilding the country after the genocide. Their election system is also interesting and unique in the way it pushed for women's participation

The Gender Equality Dividends

20% improvement in annual adult earnings generated by each additional year a girl spends in school¹

US\$ 1.5 trillion
cost to the global economy of violence against women²

35% increase in the chance of a peace accord lasting 15 years when women are involved in the process³

2%
reduction in global food insecurity that could be achieved by closing the gender gap in farm productivity and the wage gap in agrifood-system employment⁴

35%
potential GDP increase from closing the gap between men and women's employment participation rates in countries with high gender inequality⁵

Source: *United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (2022). Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2022.*

in politics. There is a general ballot, on which women and men can stand, and also a separate women-only ballot. This has enabled essentially a feeder programme where new female politicians can come into the system through the women-only ballot and as they gain strength and experience they can then stand in the general ballot and create more opportunities for women. This has shaped voters' behaviour. Because they had to vote for women on one ballot, it soon became something that everybody was used to doing. It has helped to strengthen women's role in governance.

10) Role of Technology and Women's civic engagement

Further, Digital platforms and technologies have become cornerstones for positive civic engagement and innovative approaches to peacebuilding, particularly for women, young women and marginalised groups who have struggled to access traditional public platforms and decision-making spaces. Platforms can be useful tools for women to analyse and share their views on peace and security priorities with mediators, negotiators and decision-makers. Emerging technologies can help analyse conflict trends and counter disinformation through peaceful and inclusive narratives.

However, the digital world carries distinct gendered risks. Women, girls and persons with diverse sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) face significant online harassment and threats. This often leads to self-censorship and exclusion from digital spaces and hinders their equal participation and leadership in peacebuilding and other societal spheres.

-Kaur, P., Fernandez, M. D., Vardhan, R. (2024). *Gendered Cybersecurity to Gender-Exclusive Cybersecurity: Sustainable Development Goal 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions*. In: Shackelford, T. K. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Domestic Violence*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-85493-5_2183-1

It is, therefore, essential to ensure that there are clear, rights-based legislative frameworks and platforms that provide opportunities for gender-sensitive, safe and constructive digital engagement. For women to lead digitally, the following measures need to be achieved:

- Designing strategic approaches for conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive digital security through evidence-based and consultative methods;
- Enhancing digital literacy, awareness and sound cybersecurity practices for women in all their diversity;
- Supporting multisectoral advocacy and leveraging governments' and private-sector actors' support for conflict-sensitive and gender-responsive digital security; and
- Engaging in whole-of-society legal and policy reforms that strive to harmonise cybersecurity, national security and international security framework

2. Conclusion

Thus, we can safely conclude that women, though having to play a difficult role on social fronts through the years, are beginning to step up to the challenges they face through conflict and in a post conflict environment. With access to technology, they are beginning to gain new areas and spaces to represent themselves and include other methods to engage with communities at large. We are about to witness an era of more active participation and opportunities to facilitate peace at large and evolve from being a victim to a meaningful participant of the change processes.

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