

Research Article

This article is published by **Jozac Publishers** in the *African Social Science and Humanities Journal (ASSHJ)*. Volume 5, Issue 3, 2024.

ISSN: 2709-1309 (Print)
2709-1317 (Online)

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Article detail

Received: 24 April 2024



Accepted: 14 June 2024

Published: 28 June 2024

Conflict of Interest: The author/s declared no conflict of interest.



Russia-Ukraine war from a gender perspective

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.4314/asshj.v5i3.7>

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Abstract: The paper analyses the effects of the Russia-Ukraine War from a gender lens. It analyses the gendered effects of war from a feminist international relations theory perspective, grounded in poststructuralist philosophy. Using a critical theoretical analysis the paper examines the effects of the war on women, men, and children. From a feminist standpoint position, the paper emphasizes the need to deconstruct gender hierarchies to reconstruct and order social change for equality and sustainable peace. Poststructuralist insights are integrated to expose the power relations in social discourse on war-making and peace-building. Arguing that the patriarchy that exists in many societies fosters inequalities and fuels war The paper also discusses the reality of women not just being victims of war, but also as competent actors in decision-making. The paper concludes by emphasizing the role of men in dismantling patriarchal social norms, systems, and structures, thereby contributing to the necessary transformation for sustainable peace and security. It aims to contribute to the understanding of the complex interrelationship between gender, war, peace, and security. It suggests future research should include masculinity.

Keywords – Feminist international relations, Gender, Peace, and security, Russi-Ukraine, War

1. INTRODUCTION

On 24th February 2022, Russia commenced an armed attack on Ukraine. Russia gave several reasons for this action, among which included accusations of Ukraine committing gross human rights violations in Crimea, which is a part of the border between Ukraine and Russia, and for which Russia accuses Ukraine of having annexed illegally. Another reason for Russia's action was to prevent the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) from getting too close to the Russian border, following Ukraine's move to join NATO. Russia is opposed to Ukraine becoming a member of NATO, a move that Russia perceives will threaten its territorial security and sovereignty (Olimat et al., 2023). In the wake of that February 2022 attack, Ukraine was compelled to also resort to the use of arms to defend its territory, a response which has led to an ongoing full-blown war that has now assumed an international character, with other states, particularly NATO members, assisting Ukraine to fight off Russia. At an Emergency Session of the United Nations General Assembly in March 2022, Russia was condemned for the aggression and violence against the sovereignty of Ukraine, and for threatening international security (Olimat et al., 2023).

The effects of the war, which is still ongoing, have been devastating and have led to many injuries and loss of human life, displacement of people, and loss of livelihoods and property in both Russia and Ukraine. Apart from the value of the uncountable properties that have been destroyed and the millions of dollars that both sides have

channelled into acquiring ammunition and other logistics for warfare, the cost of reconstruction in the aftermath of the war will be very huge. Ultimately, the people who are most affected and made worse off are the vulnerable, including women and children, who rely mostly on public resources for their sustenance, of which the resources are most likely to be diverted from social spending to financing of the war. The effects of the war have also been felt globally, negatively impacting many economies, and resulting in financial hardships, particularly for vulnerable and marginalised people.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Feminism in International Relations

Feminism in international relations (IR) began to gain prominence in the 1980s as part of the critical IR theories, following arguments that the traditional IR theories paid no attention to women, and rather overconcentrated on the state, power, and sovereignty. Highlighting the socio-economic and political relationships that structure relational power, feminist IR arguments have been advanced by advocates such as J. Ann Tickner, Sandra Whitworth, Cynthia Enloe, Jindy Pettman, Marysia Zalewski, and Spike Peterson. Feminists argue that the overconcentration of the state and its supposed issues of 'public' interest are a result of the historic power hegemony which placed the male sex in a dominant position while subordinating the female sex (Kinsella, 2020). Such subordination of the female is also evident in the search for 'knowledge' or 'truth', where discourse is used to perpetuate male dominance or patriarchy. The idea of feminism involves two interlinked concepts or phenomena. On one hand, feminism is an advocacy for women's rights, representation, and emancipation in political, economic, and socio-cultural life. It is therefore an advocacy for the emancipation and promotion of women's issues. On the other hand, feminism is a scholarly approach to understanding women and gender issues and how gender structures international relations (Sjoberg, 2012).

An analysis of the gendered and hierarchical power relationships is important in every socio-political interaction. Feminists argue that 'gendered hierarchies' are social constraints. Sjoberg (2012) observes that there cannot be only one or uniform 'gendered' experience; they vary. IR is characterised by a gendered hierarchy; there is an invisible presence of women but the dynamics of that 'presence' continue to change. Ignoring gender issues in IR analysis not only continues to reify patriarchy and gender hierarchy, but it also does not reflect the reality of global politics. There are various strands of feminist IR theories, such as liberal feminists, postcolonial feminists, black feminists, and standpoint feminists, which are all underpinned by different perspectives. However, in general, all these feminist theories seek to address the global prevalence of the subordination of females. Feminism, therefore, involves an analysis of the subordination women are subjected to in many societies, to eliminate it and promote equality and justice for all groups of human beings, such that women in particular, are not disadvantaged solely because they are females (Tickner, 1992; United Nations, 2014).

Feminist international relations (IR) is also a scholarly approach to social research by analysing social phenomena in a gendered way for an appreciation of women and the issues which affect them, to understand the world in general (Tickner, 2005). Feminist IR scholarship involves different approaches. The feminist empiricism approach is premised on the fact that mainstream IR research is tainted by 'androcentrism' (male-centeredness), resulting in a distortion of what is researched and the resulting 'knowledge' (Zalewski, 1993). Feminist empiricists therefore argue for more female IR researchers to remedy this biased knowledge. The feminist standpoint approach, on the other hand, is premised on the fact that 'knowledge' is a social construct that is informed by the prevailing social norms, ideologies, and political structures. Invariably, what is accepted as 'knowledge' then only reflects the interests of the dominant group (Zalewski, 1993). However, marginalized groups, e.g. women, also can present an alternative and objective worldview from their perspectives, which can result in the development of a very different type of knowledge, and perhaps one that results in a complete reversal of what has traditionally been deemed 'knowledge' (Tickner, 2005; Zalewski, 1993). The feminist standpoint approach therefore calls for a 'deconstruction' of 'knowledge' and a

'reconstruction' of 'knowledge' based on the daily lived experiences of women, taking into consideration the various groupings or 'intersectionality' since women are not a homogenous group (Tickner, 1997: 2005).

In undertaking a gendered analysis of any social phenomenon, feminists caution against 'gender essentialism', and the assumption that women are a homogenous group and have similar experiences. The lived experiences of the woman in the Global North differ from the lived experiences of their counterparts in the Global South. Similarly, the lived experience of an urban and educated woman working in the formal sector is different from that of the rural, less educated woman who may be working in the informal sector, or as an unpaid domestic caregiver.

2.2. Gender in the Social Realm

The terms 'sex' and 'gender' are often interchanged, but they are not of the same meaning (Sjoberg, 2012). While 'sex' is the biological distinction between male and female, 'gender' refers to the social attributes or perceptions of maleness (masculinity) and femaleness (femininity) (Conway et al., 1987). Gender is therefore a social construct. Certain social traits such as rationality, independence, weakness, emotion, and interdependence are characterized as 'feminine' or 'masculine'; both males and females can possess any or a hybrid of these traits (Teye et al., 2023). In many social discourses, traits such as dominant/subordinate, public/private, rational/emotional, strong/weak, master/servant, protector/protected, assertiveness/timidity, etc. are given masculine and feminine attributes, with masculinity being generally preferred over femininity (Sjoberg, 2012; Teye et al., 2023). While such discourse generally portrays males as rational, strong, master, protector, or assertive, females are portrayed as subordinate, private, emotional, weak, servant, in need of protection, or timid (Sjoberg, 2012). Consequently, masculine interests are perceived as being of 'public' interest, while feminine interests are perceived as being 'private' and not of much interest to the state (Enloe, 2014).

This social construction of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' has contributed to the historical subordination of women's interests in many societies, manifesting in diverse economic, political, physical, and social forms; and which have also been carried into the international realm or global politics (Enloe, 2014). The concept of gender varies across states, gender is generally seen in a socio-political hierarchy. But feminists posit that 'masculinities' and 'femininities' are differences that do not have hierarchical power implications to define or determine social and political interactions (Sjoberg & Tickner, 2013). Sjoberg (2012) also observes that these perceptions of gender are used to create socio-cultural hierarchies based on masculinity and feminism where a high value is associated with masculinity. Masculinity is therefore given an ideal hegemony in any socio-political context such that people with 'masculine' characteristics get privileged or dominate, while people with 'feminine' characteristics are subordinated. The gendered social hierarchy is as much a social construction as a 'structural feature' of socio-political relations or conduct (Sjoberg 2012). The gender hierarchy is also seen in the structure of global politics and is a constant feature that impacts political processes and decisions.

2.3. Feminism from a Poststructuralist Perspective

Poststructuralism recognises that social structures influence human behaviour, but the relationship between human behaviour and social structures is fluid; social structures can change human behaviour and human beings also have the agency to change social structures. Poststructuralism also exposes the 'textual interplay' of power relations (Teye et al., 2023). Poststructuralists contend that discourses are influenced by power relations which can shift in social interactions. Discourse influences the way people think and act; and can remain unchallenged, prescribing 'normal' or 'natural' behaviour. Calling into question the influence of certain accepted 'facts' and 'beliefs' on people's behaviour, poststructuralism rejects such 'facts', arguing that what is accepted as 'truth' or 'knowledge' is influenced by those who wield power, 'the elites' (McMorrow, 2017). The 'elites' manifest in different forms or roles, such as in government, policymaking, businesses, allocation of financial resources, the media, and persons deemed as 'experts' within a society. The 'elites' also get the opportunity to further reinforce their dominant viewpoints and interests.

Additionally, discourse demonstrates how gender manifests in international politics and reveals the underlying power dynamics in international relations.

Consequently, poststructuralists call for a 'deconstruction' of what is deemed 'truth' or 'knowledge', by locating the elements of 'instability' and 'reconstruction' of those elements (Devetak, 2013). Perceiving modern society as a system of power, poststructuralists reject any form of the totalitarian regime or traditional conceptualisations of power as a preserve of a few 'elites' and posit that, 'power must be analysed as something which circulates' or functions in a form of a chain; resistance cannot be separated from power (Teye et al., 2023). Hence, wherever power relations exist, there also exists resistance.

Gender inequalities are fostered by systems and structures (Dowuona-Hammond & Hammond, 2022). The structures in many sectors of national economies contribute to discrimination against women and manifest in 'gender-blind policies and practices' at all levels. Very important national decisions are often taken without women's involvement or agency (Darkwa, 2015) which results in various incidences of women's interests being ignored, or incidences of policy decisions that do not take into account the interests of women (Enloe, 2014). Consequently, given the underrepresentation of women in public decision-making, the outcome of the decision-making process reflects men's interests, and the neglect of women's interests (Darkwa, 2015). There ought, then, to be a fundamental shift in the conceptualisation, organisation, and governance of social structures; as well as a rethinking of the social norms, values, and practices which reinforce these biases or injustices.

Analysing a social phenomenon from a feminist standpoint perspective underpinned by poststructuralism, therefore, investigates the power relationships between men and women, and the structural dynamics which contribute to perpetuating discrimination against women, to change such power relationships. A feminist standpoint perspective also helps to highlight the intersectionality between women and men and the reasons for women's vulnerability to various deprivations, to foster gender equality and social justice (Zalewski, 1993). Feminist writers are therefore constantly shedding light on the consequences of war on women, how masculinity features in war, and the interplay of power relations. Through their activism, Feminist IR theorists have helped to purposely highlight how differentiated many societies are, and the hierarchical inequalities between males and females. The feminist standpoint has also revealed women's resistance to 'war, violence and militarisation' (Cockburn, 2013). It is for these reasons, that this paper adopts the feminist standpoint theory in a poststructuralist sense to analyse the impact of the Russian/Ukraine war within a gender context.

2.4. Causes and effects of War

Generally, the major causes of war arise from socio-economic, religious, political, or ideological reasons, as well as the exclusion of persons from resources and other sources of livelihood. However, an often overlooked cause of war arises from the 'patriarchal gender relations predisposing societies to belligerence' (Cockburn, 2013). Social inequalities and exclusions account for the causes of wars. In many societies, people are assigned social roles based on their gender. Men and women are assigned differing roles which manifest either in heroism or victimisation and sometimes to the extent of different deaths. Sex and gender have been said to be key to theorising war. There is also evidence linking the treatment of females in a given society and the disposition of that society toward war. States that commit a high percentage of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to military expenditure do so at the expense of limiting expenditure on the provision of social infrastructure and services such as education, healthcare, and housing. Ultimately this hurts a society's poor and marginalised, many of whom are women and children (Cockburn, 2013; Wu, Hanka & Takács-György, 2024).

An analysis of war regimes aimed at securing sustainable peace must entail a gender-awareness. Cockburn (2013) suggests that 'men predominate ... violence' with few men opposing the war as 'men'. Consequently, demilitarisation and peace must recognise and acknowledge the reasons for men predominating armed conflicts (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2023). Concluding that 'masculinities' shape violence, Cockburn (2013) further suggests that any 'strategy for demilitarisation and peace ought to involve a strategy to transform 'masculinities'; which is

why some gay men in Turkey and Serbia refuse to allow their 'masculinity' to be exploited for war, and accordingly refuse to be conscripted into the military. Cockburn therefore recommends a mutual determination of values, analysis, strategies, and methodologies by both men and women, to resist war.

Patriarchy also plays a role in turning ordinary people into fighting soldiers. The patriarchal systems of many societies imbue in boys the traits of 'competition, combativeness, physical strength ... ambition', qualities which make males more inclined to fight (Cockburn, 2013). In many societies, males are socialised to perceive themselves as 'protectors', while females are socialised as needing protection, i.e., females are to be protected by males. Likewise, males are conditioned to perceive themselves as the dominant sex, wielding coercive power and being hierarchically superior in sex. Hence masculinity is to be preferred to femininity. This conditioning is reflected in armed conflict situations where boys are more likely to be conscripted as child soldiers for combat than girls. This has also contributed to why females have generally struggled to get recruited into the armed forces alongside males, on grounds of equality. The socio-economic cost of war and the heavy toll it exacts on society are usually not borne by the political elite but rather by the working class, women, children, minorities, and other marginalised persons.

Assessing the Russian-Ukraine war from a feminist standpoint context shows patriarchy at work. Ukraine is geographically and culturally situated between two competing hegemonic powers – Russia and Western Europe. Russia sees Ukraine (a member of the former Soviet Union) as its 'eternal province' which must adopt the Russian alternative version of 'modernity', and reject everything Western European, given the cultural and historical importance of Ukraine to Russia. On the other hand, Western Europe sees Ukraine as a periphery of Western Europe, to advance Western cultural and socio-economic systems, and to move Ukraine from a post-communist regime to 'liberal modernity' (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2023). Consequently, Russia opposes all moves by Ukraine to align with Western Europe, and Western Europe has consistently opposed Russia for its continuing hold on Ukraine. It is against this background that 'Ukraine is posited by Russia as feminised and torn between a masculine Russia defending traditional values, and a sexually degenerate Europe, referred to as "Gayropa"' (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2023). But while Russia has been widely criticized for its handling of Ukraine, the critics have failed to question the increasing manipulation of Ukraine by Western Europe. From a feminist standpoint position and a poststructuralist perspective, this paper suggests that patriarchy is the root cause of the war. One of the solutions to the problem is for both Russia and Western Europe to acknowledge Ukraine's agency to decide for itself and act on its own.

2.5. Gender and Militarisation

Many states are becoming militarized in one way or the other. In some militarised states such as Turkey, uniformed personnel are very highly regarded; a situation which fosters militarisation. Even in states such purport to be pre-eminently civilian, militarisation manifests in many ways. Enloe (2000) observes that such 'militarization is a step-by-step process' that leads to gradual control by the military and makes people overly dependent on the military for their well-being. Militarisation is hyped and now shapes production and consumption in many societies. Even in states which purport to be liberal and democratic, such as the United States of America and some Western European states, the national culture is deeply embedded with 'masculine honour' and high regard for military service (Cockburn, 2013; Farid, 2021). Feminist analysis of war has concluded that the patriarchal systems in many societies, coupled with capitalism and nationalism, and influenced by 'combative' masculinity, lead to a predisposition to war and armed conflicts, which many state systems favour or encourage (Cockburn, 2010); Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). A state of militarisation contributes to the misogynistic and bizarre attacks on women.

Drawing inferences therefrom, Cockburn and Enloe (2012) make three analytical findings; first, states make women complicit by 'luring' women to lend support to militarised policies and operations. Secondly, wars and war-waging rely on several forms of masculinity, including 'the militarised masculinity of the weapons engineer, of the civilian national security 'expert', of the chauvinistic politician, of fathers urging sons to enlist, and of weapons-wielding combatants themselves' which are perceived as measures of a 'real man'. Thirdly, any analysis of war must

deal with the various ways men and women are militarised together, meaning that, the patriarchy must be addressed (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012).

Without feminists resisting the lures of militarisation and highlighting the larger patriarchal social system and its workings on militarisation, wars will continue to wag on. Patriarchy is a complex and slippery phenomenon. A feminist understanding of war is therefore needed to operationalise peace and security. Resistance by men to militarism is springing up in South Korea and Turkey, but the caution is for such men not to convert this awareness into another 'intellectual lead' (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). For the Russian-Ukraine war (and all other armed conflicts) to end then, men must reject patriarchy and its tendency for militarism, by themselves and with others.

2.6. Gendered Analysis of War

War is a gendered terrain with women and men playing different roles which manifest in different ways. Gender plays out in the events leading to war, during war, and the post-war period. In many instances, soldiers are predominantly males. A female soldier is perceived differently from a male soldier; women often struggle to be accepted into male ranks. The victims of sexual violence during war situations are mostly women and children, and so are a substantial portion of refugees (Cockburn, 2013). While women are often victimised in war situations, males are more likely to be recruited into combat. During armed conflicts, males are more likely to be deployed to the battlefields and the frontlines, but female soldiers are often assigned to service roles.

Notwithstanding these generalisations, there are instances where the generalisations do not hold (Sjoberg et al., 2011). There can be women and child soldiers, men can be sexually abused during war, and women can instigate war (Cockburn, 2013). Furthermore, a female who is subjected to sexual violence during the war is so assaulted as a woman, and of a subordinated class; but a man who is sexually assaulted is so violated as a man, with the aim of 'feminising' him and destroying his self-respect. A woman rape victim can become pregnant as a result or even miscarry a pregnancy, but a male rape victim will not suffer these consequences. Despite the violence women face during conflicts, evidence shows that in many societies, women are unable to 'admit' or speak out about the sexual abuse and horrors they are subjected to during the war, for fear of stigmatisation, further victimisation, or social rejection by their spouses, close associates, and community. Few women victims of sexual violations during armed conflicts speak out about their experiences, with many preferring to bottle up their pain with the psychological effects, thereby affecting the quality of their mental health, general well-being, and dignity.

Civilian casualties of war are often described as 'women and children', as if 'woman and children' are one homogenous group (Cockburn & Enloe, 2012). Children are also often victims of armed conflicts and end up as refugees or are drawn into the conflict by being recruited as child soldiers. These are reasons why the analysis of the impact of war ought to take cognisance of gender. Such gendered effects of war can be complex. Even though the nature of war may not have changed much over the years, there is now a greater appreciation of what war, peace, and security entail for all genders. War results in dire socio-economic consequences for children, men, and women. A discussion of the impact of war on each of these persons follows. Copy and paste from your manuscript.

3. PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this paper is to use the Russia-Ukraine war as a case study to undertake a gendered assessment of how war impacts men, women, and children. Using a feminist international relations theory underpinned by a poststructuralist philosophy, the paper discusses the gendered effects of war, peace, and security.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Secondary data sources were used and obtained largely from these databases or online search engines for academic materials concerning the study goal/purpose. These sources include Web of Science, ResearchGate, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. A few materials were obtained from open-access sources including Google among others. The following keywords were used in the search for online materials: "Russia-Ukraine War" "Gender",

“Feminism/Feminists”, “Sexual Violence”, and “Militarism”. In all our searches we obtained 42 materials (books, book chapters, and journal articles). Out of the 42 materials gathered and after reading only relevant materials that were in line with the purpose of the study were selected and used. This resulted in the use of 25 materials which have been cited and referenced. The main materials used were largely journal articles, books, book chapters, and a few online weblinks. Table 1 shows the main themes that emerged from the data gathered and their respective sources of information. Table 1 Major themes and the sources of information obtained from the literature.

Table 1: Major themes and the sources

Major themes	Sources
Gender	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cockburn, C. (2013) • Cohn, Kinsella and Gibbings (2010) • Conway, Bourque and Scott (1987) • Darkwa (2015) • Rehn and Sirleaf (2002). • Sjoberg, L. (2012) • Sjoberg Cooke and Neal (2011) • Teye, Darkwa. and Thorsten (2023) • Tickner (1992) • United Nations. (2014)
Feminism/Feminists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinsella (2020). • Enloe (2014). • Devetak (2013) • McMorrow (2017) • Sjoberg and Tickner (2013). • Tickner (1997) • Tickner (2005)
Russia-Ukraine War	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wu, Hanka and Takács-György (2024) • Kratochvíl and O'Sullivan (2023). • Olimat, Antwi-Boateng and Janardhan (2023) • Olsen. (2023) • UNICEF. (2023)
Sexual Violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mhajne (2024) • Bastick, Grimm and Kunz (2007) • Dowuona-Hammond and Hammond (2022).
Militarism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cockburn and Enloe (2012) • Cockburn (2010)

5. FINDINGS

5.1. Effects of War on Children

Children are a vulnerable group in need of protection, and war has devastating effects on them. Apart from the psychological trauma war imposes on children, children also suffer from physical, developmental, and environmental harm, as well as become displaced or separated from their parents, friends, and loved ones during the war. Children are also exposed to and suffer from sexual abuse and exploitation, torture, kidnapping, starvation, and diseases during war times. Additionally, they are at increased risk of being orphaned, refugees, camped in foster homes, trafficked, drawn into the armed conflict as child soldiers or combatants, or even murdered. Wartime experiences leave children with long-term psychological and physical scars, some of which make their rehabilitation or reintegration into their communities impossible (UNICEF, 2023). War makes children lose their ‘childhood’ or ‘innocence’.

The Russian-Ukraine war is reported to have resulted in more than six thousand Ukrainian children being forcibly separated from their families and being held in Russia or Russian territories. Some of these children have allegedly

been given out to Russians for adoption, while others have been forcibly sent to camps and are being re-educated or indoctrinated by Russia (Olsen, 2023; Agyeman-Boaten, Fumey & Norman, 2022; Amatu, Morah & Nwafor, 2022).

The socio-economic crises that war causes also lead to a deterioration of children's well-being. Social infrastructure, including health facilities and schools, are destroyed or damaged during war. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that the Russian-Ukraine war has resulted in a year of horror for millions of children in Ukraine who have been forced to sleep 'cold and scared' and reiterates that 'no child ever have to bear that kind of suffering'. More than one billion dollars is needed to address the immediate and long-term needs of the children caught in the war (UNICEF, 2023). The children need an end to the war but until then, their physical, mental, and psychological development must be prioritised by all states and individuals. There is a need for humanitarian access, cessation of hostilities and refrain from the use of explosive devices in civilian areas.

5.2. Effects of War on Women

The impact of war on women can be analysed through the lens of women as victims of war, as competent actors of war, as competent actors in peace-keeping measures, and as competent actors in decision-making. War impacts women in diverse and interconnected ways. War exposes women to extreme violence and sexual abuse with the accompanying long-term medical, physical, and psychological trauma. War also exposes women to increased risk of displacement, breakdown of family life, and increased risk of being trafficked.

Furthermore, war exposes women and their dependants, an already disadvantaged group, to economic or financial stress due to loss of property, livelihoods, and reduced public expenditure on social services, for which women form a substantial portion of beneficiaries. The agony is even more severe for women who are household heads. Another effect of war on women concerns their reproductive health, maternal care, and challenges with their overall well-being, arising from the unavailability, inaccessibility, or destruction of adequate healthcare services, or unsafe environments (United Nations, 2014). The burden on women who are also expected to be caregivers, also increases, particularly when women themselves need care. Women are expected to be caregivers for the injured, aged, and other family members. This places additional stress on women, particularly those without supportive partners or other social support systems.

Furthermore, women soldiers are more harassed sexually by their male counterparts than the reverse. Cockburn (2013) observes that the sense of entitlement of a male to any woman's body is heightened or affirmed when that male is 'initiated' into a squad. Consequently, the most obvious gendered and sexualised feature of war is the mass rape of females. Incidences of sexual assault and harassment of females dramatically increase during war than in peacetimes, due to a breakdown of law and order during wartime. In 2007, rape increased significantly in fifty-one armed conflicts across the world (Bastick et al., 2007).

In a report assessing the gendered impact of armed conflicts, the United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM) observed that among other atrocities, women in armed conflict societies were subjected to horrendous torture such as having their 'wombs punctured with guns' and being 'raped and tortured in front of their husbands and children'. Some pregnant women were beaten till they miscarried or had the foetuses crudely ripped from their wombs. Women were also subjected to multiple incidences of gang rapes, sexual slavery, and murder. These atrocities left women so traumatized that 'survival seemed for some a worse fate than death' (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Feminists contend that in times of war, rape is perpetrated against women because the male soldier has gun 'power', and sometimes such atrocities are condoned by the military command as a way of strategically destroying society and people's dignity.

But women are not only victims of war, sometimes they are active participants. There are women soldiers or combatants, as well as women decision-makers who sanction war. Women are therefore crucial to peace-building efforts, conflict resolution or prevention, as well as rehabilitation or rebuilding of society. The presence of women at decision-making tables also contributes to sustainable peace and security, which require 'restorative gender justice' and ultimately a comprehensive and overwhelming change in gender relations (Cockburn, 2013).

5.3. Peace-building and Security

After the cessation of hostilities or the end of war, security and peace must prevail. Apart from economic and ideological reasons, inequalities contribute to war. Hence for peace and security to prevail, inequalities must be addressed. Feminists have pointed out that the traditional concept of 'security' which is largely state-based, is inadequate without acknowledging women's vulnerabilities before, during, and after war (Cockburn, 2013). Feminists therefore define 'security' to entail a 'multilevel and multidimensional' removal of all forms of violence against women (Tickner, 1992). War displaces people, including women and children, wreaks havoc on women, including extreme sexual violations, and deprives them of the basic necessities and dignities of life. But even in times of peace, women continue to be exposed to these threats. Security for women therefore entails their equal access to and participation or involvement in security talks, as well as all efforts aimed at peace-building (United Nations, 2014). Taking a gendered perspective of militarisation and war then requires a look at the main sources of threat to women's security, which include the overwhelming dominance of men and the exclusion of women in decision-making.

5.4. The United Nations Women, Peace, and Security Agenda

The United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 (Women, Peace and Security) was passed in October 2000 and is aimed at promoting women, peace, and security issues. It advocates for the prosecution of crimes against women, offers more protection for women in armed conflict situations, and the involvement of women in UN peace-keeping operations, field missions, and decision-making (Cohn et al., 2010).

The Resolution acknowledges how war impacts women and recognises women's agency in eliminating war. Consequently, it seeks the protection of women and an appreciation of the needs of women in armed conflict situations, as well as the elimination of all forms of violence against women in such times. The Resolution also calls for women to be included in peace negotiations and talks. Women are also to be involved in implementing whatever conflict resolution mechanism is agreed upon. The Resolution also calls for a gender perspective in all peace processes, being mindful of the gendered needs of both males and females during and after war, including disarmament, resettlement, reintegration, or re-skilling of former combatants. In focusing on women as victims of war, it also emphasizes women as effective actors in peace-building and security and thereby calls for the inclusion of women in decision-making and action regarding war and peacetime, including peace-keeping.

6. RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The findings imply that women in reality are not just victims of the Russia-Ukraine war, but game changers of the war as well as competent actors in decision-making in the war situation.

7. CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCIENTIFIC COMMUNITY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The study (paper) adds to feminism-feminist international relations in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war from the gendered effects of the war on women and children. It highlights some of the dire consequences of the war on women and children. It highlights some of the children's vulnerabilities including acts of sexual abuse and exploitation, torture, kidnapping, starvation, diseases, increased risk of being orphaned, refugees, camped in foster homes, trafficked, drawn into the armed conflict as child soldiers or combatants, or even the risk of being murdered.

8. CONCLUSION

War impacts men, women, and children in specific and different ways. Feminist IR theorists posit that the causes of war arise from the patriarchal systems in most societies, which system has led to gender inequalities between males and females. In many societies, the masculinist traits assigned to males, and feminine traits assigned to women, also perpetrate the subordination of women, entrench inequalities, and fuel war and armed conflicts. Women and

children are often portrayed as victims of war, but the reality is that women are also competent actors who have the agency to contribute to war, peace, and security. Therefore, in addressing the problems of war, there must be a conscious effort to change or transform the underlying gender relations, otherwise, violence will continue to disrupt the peace which will ultimately lead to war.

Feminist international relations theorists therefore advocate for a different world system which upholds the principle of equality of the male and female sexes with equal opportunities for all genders. A feminist analysis of war offers an alternative perspective for understanding peace within a system of mutual respect and partnership of men and women. Paying attention to gender and involving women in decision-making can cause a fundamental change to the dynamics of war and help achieve sustainable peace and security.

A gendered analysis of the impact of war underscores the inequalities women face. By adopting a feminist standpoint international relations theory from a post-structuralist perspective, the paper has discussed the gendered experiences of men, women, and children during war. Feminist standpoint advocates for a 'deconstruction' of what is accepted as 'knowledge' or 'truth', which invariably projects the views or perspective of the dominant group; and offers a voice to the marginalised or subordinated who also have agency to present truth or knowledge from their perspective. Poststructuralism contributes by acknowledging the human agency to change the social structures and systems that order or influence behaviour and hence presents a good philosophical perspective for a gendered analysis of war and its impact on diverse groups. The paper also discussed the role of men in changing the underlying patriarchal structures and systems that fuel militarism as a way of contributing to the elimination of social inequalities and sustainable peace.

The paper has emphasized the need to recognise that women are not just victims of war, but also competent actors in conflict resolution and peace-building mechanisms. Consequently, the paper has also discussed the United Nations Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security as an important aspect of sustainable peace. War continues to adversely impact the global society hence the need for a holistic understanding of the gender dynamics that contribute to war and peace-building.

By discussing the intersectionality of gender, power, conflict, peace, and security, the paper contributes to international relations scholarship and will help policymakers explore comprehensive and inclusive strategies for attaining lasting peace and security. Ultimately, sustainable peace requires collective effort and commitment to dismantling the gendered hierarchies and inequalities that are the root causes of conflicts and wars globally.

9. FUNDING

This research paper received no internal or external funding.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Special thanks to the Legon Centre for International Affairs and Diplomacy for the administrative support.

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