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## VIOLATION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CONFLICT AREAS: A STUDY FROM A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE

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### Abstract

The wars and conflicts taking place in various countries of the world have increased the violation of women's rights, which have appeared in many forms. Given the international reports that indicate grave violations of the rights of women, we find that the most prominent of these violations is the use of women in conflict and participation in violence, the arrest of women by parties to the conflict and exposure to exploitation, the exposure of women to direct injuries that lead to death or disability, and the separation of women About the family, staying in refugee camps, and being subjected to violence and human trafficking. This study aims to discuss the grave violations faced by Middle Eastern women due to wars and conflicts from the perspective of social work. In light of this discussion, professional aspects related to direct social work practice with women victims of wars and conflicts proposed. As well as propose for social policies aimed at protecting Middle Eastern women.

**Keywords:** Wars and Civil Conflicts, Human Rights, Women's Crisis, Middle East.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

War is the most severe condition that violates human rights. Violations of human rights lead to conflict and war, as well as can be a result of war and conflict, and are intertwined with other factors. Compulsion and systematic discrimination that apply to people, discrimination in access to education and health services, limitation of expression or religious freedom based on race, ethnicity, religion, language, gender or other characteristics, or denial of political participation and concerns about access to resources and control of land, lead to conflict and war. Violent conflict can also arise where violent human rights violations, illegal arrests, extrajudicial

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killings, loss, torture, killing prevalence, or genocide attempts. At the same time, wars and conflicts cause severe human rights violations (Lekha Sriram et al, 2014). All parts of the society affected by these violence incidents. However, it can easily be seen that vulnerable groups in society are more influenced by war and conflict. The violation of the rights brought by the war can be seen mostly in the Middle East region.

When examined the profile of women in the light of the political conditions and social and cultural structure of the Middle East region it can be seen that the education status of the woman, her role in the family, the value and her economic situation are in a lower status than the males. In addition, she was more affected by war and conflict events and subjected to various violations of rights. In many countries of the Middle East, laws, traditions and cultural values that have devastated women and violate their rights, along with wars and conflicts that have continued in the region in recent years, have increased the issue of women's rights violations.

Gulf countries in the region that has seen some progress in women's rights compared to other countries. It also, lack of research and data on the situation of women is hampering the advocacy efforts of non-governmental organizations and activists. All work to be done in line with women's rights must be guaranteed by the state authorities, otherwise, permanent patriarchal attitudes, prejudice and traditional tendencies of male judges throughout the region must be perceived as a threat to undermine new legal protections for women's rights (Kelly, 2009). Two issues related to gender in the Middle East complicate the matter: the province based on patriarchy, beliefs, and values; other is legal doctrines. Patriarchy elements learned through socialization experience, certain patriarchal values related to women and gender roles prevail with a large part of the Middle East; The legal dimension, the core of the party and the discriminatory rules against women is related to the criminal law as a nature. These two factors-the patriarchal practices and the legal limitations unite in the social order places women in a rather disadvantaged status (Kazemi, 2004, 453-474). War and conflict have brought women to a more disadvantaged situation and have caused the women's crisis in the region.

## **2. PROBLEMS FACED BY MIDDLE EASTERN WOMEN IN THE WAR ENVIRONMENT**

Wars and conflicts come with several dangers that impose themselves on women related to the loss of housing, which makes them vulnerable to all forms of violence. With the absence of a health system, women are vulnerable to the risks of infectious diseases, reproductive health problems, exposure to sexual and physical violence, forced displacement and asylum in neighboring countries, widowhood, and, ultimately, mental health problems (Lauren and Theresa, 2019). As a result of war and siege events, the health, education and economic situation of women are very affected and they are deprived of various rights. Living in an environment full of violence, oppression, discrimination and all kinds of abuse against women has had a negative impact on women in physical, mental, health and social aspects. Although the United Nations Security Council, in its resolution no. 1325, referred to violence against women during armed conflict as a war crime, violence against women is increasing in the region of the Middle East. Since there is no serious sanction against the violators of this law, it is possible that it can be considered as an inadequate mechanism for protecting women in an environment of violence. In the absence or inadequate of protection mechanisms required to protect women in an environment of war and conflict, women are experiencing different problems in this environment than in other environments of violence. These problems can be summarized as follows:

### **2.1. Poverty and Exposure to Violence**

Economic crises in the Middle East region have a great impact on the employment of women especially young women. Therefore, the low participation rates in the female workforce will lead to a huge loss of investment in the education of women as well as to unofficial employment (World Bank, 2010). Because of the damage caused by war, conflict and encirclement



to the economy of the society poverty has reached its peak. Women are struggling to meet basic needs such as shelter and nutrition, and sometimes exposed to sexual assault and abuse while trying to meet the needs of those who are in need of it and their needs.

## **2.2. Death and disability**

Forcing women to participate in wars and conflicts led to the violation of women's right to life and cause permanent and temporary disability. Death and disability rates due to the use of women as live bombs, activists, human shields and soldiers in the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East have increased. Even if women do not participate in any action, they are more likely to be injured or lost in attacks against civilians. When the state institutions become dysfunctional and the rehabilitation programs abolished, the disability situation becomes more serious. The lack of access to rehabilitation programs and the lack of a suitable infrastructure for the disabled have caused women affected by war events to be dependent on the home.

## **2.3. Arresting and Entering Prison**

Most women who are forced to participate in war and conflict often arrested and imprisoned in inhumane and very bad conditions. At the time of the arrest, there are many problems such as humiliation, appearing before military courts, mistreatment and exposure to torture. These women experienced a lot of problems after they leave prison such as; psychosocial problems, health problems, and problems occurring from torture and sexual abuse in prison.

The most prominent example in this regard is the Palestinian women arrested in the prisons established by the Israeli occupation. Although women are treated not differently than men, they are imprisoned in extremely harsh and inhuman conditions. Palestinian women are constantly subjected to ill treatment and degradation; Isolation and naked body searches, as well as inadequate medical treatment and deprivation of external visits have been reported. Some of these women have very young children. Palestinian women and girls are being imprisoned in Israeli occupation in prisons on very crowded and inhuman conditions with Israeli women convicted of murder, robbery, drug use, prostitution or other crimes (FIDH, 2003). This situation may lead to social isolation and exclusion for women that have faced such conditions after they leave prison.

## **2.4. Rape**

From the moment war and conflict begin, women are being at risk of rape and harassed in various situations and places, such as war zone, in prisons, and during migration. The rape, which causes very serious damage to women's psychology, sexual and physical health, is often carried out by the military and conflict parties. This phenomenon, which is seen clearly in war and conflict throughout the world general, has been reported by various international organizations and associations. However, it seems that there is no serious attempt to prevent this problem.

Sexual assault on women and rape is one of the most dangerous forms and paths of violence that accompany wars and conflicts. It uses rape and sexual abuse against women as a method of fighting (Alsaba & Kapilashrami, 2016, 5-17). Regardless of the country or region, the environment and conditions of war and conflict are similar. Examples can be given from the wars that have occurred since it is difficult to exemplify the number of incidents caused by the ongoing war in the Middle East region. Sexual violence and systematic rape against women in the Bosnian war have been seen as an "ethnic cleansing" tool and weapon of war. In the Bosnian war, systematic rape and sexual violence against women used as a weapon of war "ethnic cleansing" tool. Systematically abused have been estimated between 20,000- 60,000 women and girls by rape in the camps established for this purpose, in addition to, subjected to sexual violence (Gogen, 2011, 119-126). Throughout the fifteen-year civil war of Peru, women have been the target of violence, which is strictly and constantly committed by both sides of armed clashes. Most of the time, the same woman died because of violence by both sides (Abu-Hamad et al, 1995). The surviving



women struggle solely with health, psychological and social problems because of sexual violence and encroachment. It can be said that the continuation of war and conflict for a long time and not to provide health and psychological services for women victims of sexual violence has seriously affect their lives and their kids.

### **2.5. Health Problems**

Exposing or directly witnessing violence in a war and conflict environment results in many problems associated with women's mental, social, and physical health. The living in an environment of war and conflict makes a woman susceptible to many health problems that may be the result of serious injuries, disability and rape and the like. In general, injury, disability, illness due to lack of food and beverage, PTSD are problems that can be seen in women living in a war and conflict environment. In addition, it is possible to talk about the lack of health care because of the conflict or the inability to deliver essential health services for women who sojourn in the war environment. Malnutrition and related illnesses, irregular pregnancy and related abortions and child deaths are health problems that women experience due to war and siege.

War and conflict affected women's health in most rape victims from the very negative because women are often raped more than once. Thus rape can have more physical and physiological injuries on the woman's health and can often lead to death. Depending on the unwanted pregnancies as a result of rape, women can experience abortion through many non-medical methods, this may be leading to risk of death, infection, scarring or sterilization. Physical injuries resulting from rape may include gynecological and internal bleeding. Sexually transmitted diseases such as pregnancy and HIV / AIDS have long-term physical effects (Clifford, 2008, 1-13). Therefore, health-care services provided to women who have been raped and exposed to sexual violence must contain a range of preventive and curative health services to protect women from fatal diseases such as HIV / AIDS, and other health services. In addition, psychosocial support services, follow-up services, and training health workers are an integral part and must be taken into consideration when planning health care for women victims of wars and conflicts (Gogen, 2011, 119-126). In general, the lack of protection of women in times of war and conflict and the inability to deliver the necessary medicines or impede it delivery and the resulting deaths of women is one of the clearest examples of the violation of women's rights.

### **2.6. Migration and Related Problems**

One of the most significant changes in migration over the last half century is increase women's migration compared to the past. As well as women have migrated from their country for family reasons and for work, they are also forced to immigration and asylum a result of ongoing wars and conflicts in their country (UNFPA 2014). Women are most affected by the immigration process among the risky groups. Particular attention should be paid to the special needs of women in groups that are forced to migrate due to the crisis in their country. Migrated women with different cultural backgrounds are considered as priority risk groups for maintaining and improving the mental health of these groups (Tuzcu and Ilgaz, 2015). Women can face various risks when they leave the country alone or with their families due to war and conflict and when they seek safe places in other countries or in their own countries. In this process, women suffer psychological trauma from the very negative side of their mental health as a result of separation from family, sexual or physical attack, witnessing violence or torture and exposure to violence.

In the process of forced migration, women can be caught with diseases that pose a great risk to her health like HIV as a result of sexual violence, risks and the exploits they are facing. There are many factors that prevent women from benefiting from reproductive health, access to health services and care during this process. Some of these factors are; availability of services, demand for care services and financing factors (McGinn, 2009, 129-144). In addition, the fact that women are aware of these services in countries where they have migrated can be regarded as the



quality of the services and visibility of existing services and the protection of the rights of refugee women.

### **3. WOMEN VICTIMS OF WAR AND SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION**

The social work profession deals with the problems faced by women in the context of war and conflict as a whole and implements a holistic social work intervention. To improve the physical, mental and familial status of women, considering the very stressful and very risky environment conditions that women experience, social workers by working with national and international organizations and associations are playing a major role in meeting necessary health services, nutrition, education, psychosocial support programs. Therefore, providing necessary services by intervening at micro, mezzo and macro levels to protect women during and after risky situations are among the roles of social workers.

Social work interventions for women affected by the war and the conflict can be addressed in two ways. These are:

#### **3.1. Environment of War and Conflict**

In very risky and violent conditions of war, the physical and mental health of women is very deeply affecting. In conditions of war and conflict, women may remain very helpless for the provision of basic needs. Therefore, social worker who are working in various institutions and organizations are obliged to meet these basic needs and to develop support programs to address the physical, psychological and social problems experienced. In line with this task, social worker is expected to take the advocacy role and act cooperation with national and international organizations in order to provide to safe places for women. Then social worker provides the basic needs of women and applies psychosocial support programs. These programs are applied in the form of working with individuals and groups according to the situation of women, traumatic process and negative experiences they have experienced.

#### **3.2. Refugee Camps**

The refugee camp was not the ideal place for violations of the rights of women displaced by war and conflict to end. The results of a study on Syrian teenage girls and young women indicated an increasing sense of vulnerability to violence since their displacement. As girls reported that they are forced to either work or marry, due to financial pressures and limited educational opportunities, this increases the possibility of exposure to violence related to work or marriage to these vulnerable groups. Consequently, changing social paths after displacement and living in the refugee camp made women more vulnerable to the risks of violence and sexual harassment (Wringe et al, 2019, 1-8). Problems faced by women in war and conflict environment in addition to those faced during either process asylum within the country or to resort to the neighboring country affects the mental and physical health of women significantly. While some of the women in the asylum country are staying in refugee camps with very crowded and unfavorable conditions, others are struggling to survive in big cities outside refugee camps. Work towards these women and social work intervention can take place within the context of case management. It is expected that working within the framework of support programs to protect refugee women's physical and psychological health and meet their basic needs. However, refugee women outside the camp may not be able to benefit from these programs. It is therefore necessary for social workers to prepare special intervention plans and support programs for women outside the camps.

### **4. CONCLUSION**

The problems encountered by women in the war and immigration process cause psychological and physical illnesses. Therefore, various interventions and support programs need to be developed to protect the rights of women living in risky situations such as war and to



improve their physical and psychosocial well-being. In order to realize this effectively, the implementation of international women's protection mechanisms and the establishment of safe living spaces for women are of great importance. Here advocating is a basis for the work in subject of facilitating the entry of refugee women from violence environment to other countries and protecting and maintaining their rights as refugees. International cooperation is requiring for the protection of women from all kinds of abuse and violence they have experienced in this process. This cooperation may only be effective in the context of holistic social work intervention. Therefore, the international work to be done in this regard needs to be well structured and implemented accordingly.

International cooperation that needs to be developed to protect women from all kinds of violence and abuse resulting from war, conflict and migration, and to save them from problems they face; it is necessary to include women left in war environments, women who have settled in refugee camps and orphans. The cooperation in the field of protection of women victims of wars and conflicts must be conducted by a team of various humanitarian disciplines, led by social worker. This international cooperation for the protection of women in war and conflict which done by the specialists should be on the individual, community, society and political and institutional levels. These include:

Negotiating for the creation of protection camps in safe places under the protection of the United Nations for women who remain in war environments,

Should be negotiated with parties to the conflict in order to avoid these places from their attacks,

Supporting the role of Civil Society Organizations in war and conflict situations by cooperating with it,

Protecting women from all kinds of risks they encounter in the war environment and providing them with basic services such as nutrition, housing and health services,

The most powerful mechanism that can prevent women's rights violations in situations such as war and conflict is women's movements. Therefore, the establishment of an international platform for the recovery of women in conflict and conflict situations,

The urgent international intervention of the parties to the conflict in order to protect the women arrested in prisons from cases such as torture, rape, arrest in inhumane conditions,

Provision of psychosocial support programs, health services, financial assistance for women living in a war and conflict environment,

Building support programs and systems based on family and community and providing internationally qualified support,

Establishment of international support programs based on help the helpers for social workers who carry out work for women in the conflict zone,

Preparing psycho-social support programs for women to recovery from the psychological trauma they experience in war zones and in the asylum process and encourage their participation in this programs

Necessary informative and facilitating activities are required for women living outside refugee camps to benefit from health, education and other services.

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