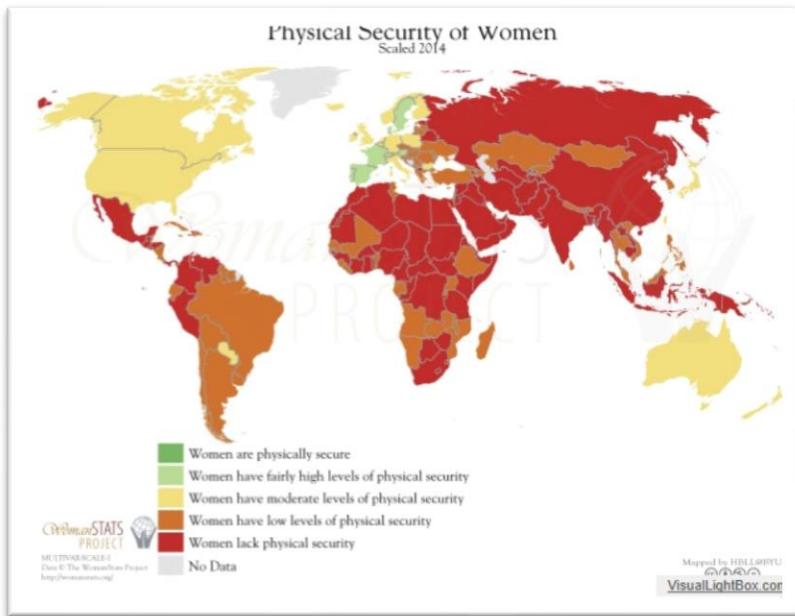


Women and Security



History of the Current Situation

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 in October of 2000.¹ This monumental resolution was the first international document to prevent violence against women during conflict and it sparked the international conversation of women's security. However, women are still often overlooked in policymaking and in societies throughout the world. Also,

gender equality is the United Nation's fifth sustainable development goal, but there are still extensive inequalities between men and women across the globe.² Gender equality and female empowerment should enable all women to feel safe and secure in their environment.

The security of women is their ability to protect themselves and their property from harm. This includes being protected from gender-based violence as well as discrimination. Many nations have taken strides to ensure the security of women. Additionally, multiple nations have even included women in their security forces and have allowed them to take an active role in peace talks and negotiations. Overall, however, there is still much work to be done all throughout the world. For instance, in areas of conflict, women are especially in danger of sexual violence, exploitation, and oppression. Women all around the world have little to no sense of security, preventing a peaceful and prosperous globe.

Recent History

Currently, there are many problems for women due to deeply instilled cultural norms and violence during conflict. Conflicts in nations such as Syria and Sudan have included using rape as a weapon of war. These tactics have been used many times throughout history and continue to occur today. Additionally, the security of women is often not thought of as a top priority or even important in many developing nations making it hard for women to get help when they need it.

¹ "What is UNSCR 1325?" *United States Institute of Peace*. https://www.usip.org/gender_peacebuilding/about_UNSCR_1325.

² "Sustainable Development Goal 5." *United Nations*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg5>.

In Myanmar, rape has been used as a weapon of war during the ‘ethnic cleansing’ of the Rohingya people. Since 2016, hundreds of reports by NGOs of Rohingya women being raped in the



Rakhine State have come out.³ Soldiers from Myanmar have used rape as a weapon in this ‘ethnic cleansing’ that is being backed by the Myanmar government; and, so far, no formal punishment has been given to these soldiers. Women and girls are being targeted during this conflict in order to stimulate fear in the Rohingya people. Also, many women who are victims of sexual violence are being shunned by their communities and families

because the villages feel they have to be ‘cleansed’ of their victims leaving the women with no way to find help after attacks.⁴

Women today also still struggle with political participation. Although women represent 50% percent of the global population, in 2018 only 20% of all legislators across the globe were women. There are many reasons women are less likely to participate in elections including violence, discrimination, and lack of resources. However, this underrepresentation only facilitates these challenges that women face. Without women in the government, many of the problems they face go either unnoticed or are seen as unimportant.⁵

Violence Against Women

Violence During War and Conflict

As previously discussed, violence against women is a common tactic used in war. For example, in Rwanda, it is believed that over 250,000 women were raped during the genocide in 1994, and in Sierra Leone an estimated 60,000 women were raped during the civil war from 1991 to 2002.⁶ There are many reasons why these tactics are used such as showing domination over another group or giving women to soldiers as a “reward.” These atrocities have been happening for thousands of years and the end is not in sight. International law currently sees acts of sexual violence as war crimes, but rape in war continues as if the law was never passed, specifically in developing nations. Rape is not only demoralizing and traumatic for young women but also an extreme health risk. Many STDs are transferred through sexual violence, helping to kill more even after the conflict or violence has ended.

Violence in the Household

³ “UN panel condemns Myanmar army’s sexual violence against Rohingya.” *Al Jazeera*.

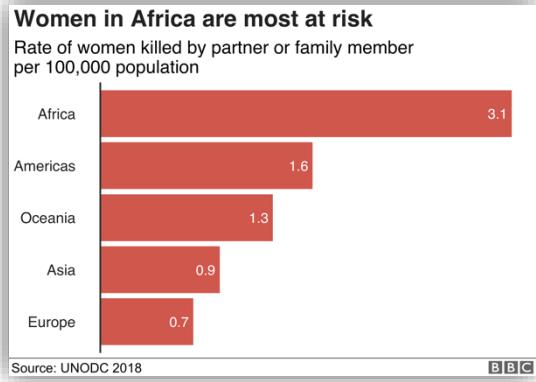
<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/panel-condemns-myanmar-army-sexual-violence-rohingya-190822173056211.html>.

⁴ “Rape: The Burma Army’s Unpunished Weapon of War.” *Burma Link*. <https://www.burmalink.org/rape-burma-armys-unpunished-weapon-war/>.

⁵ “Strengthening Women’s Rights and Political Participation.” *USAID*. <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/addressing-gender-programming/strengthening-womens>.

⁶ “How mass rape in Genocide transformed Rwanda’s response to AIDS.” *Reuters*. <https://reut.rs/2lRE3Yz>.

Women are not only affected by acts of violence during times of war but also in their own home on a daily basis. In 2017, one half of all homicides against women were perpetrated by a family member.⁷ Many cultures see domestic violence, genital mutilation, and child marriage as normal and justifiable. This is a huge problem because it makes women more vulnerable to sexual abuse, violence, and death. Not only do acts of violence against women negatively impact them, but such violence also increases risks for the next generation. For example, children who witness domestic violence are more likely to become victims or perpetrators themselves; and children who get married at age 15 or younger are 50% more likely to be victims of physical and sexual violence from their partners than if they were adults.



Honor killings are also still prevalent today. There are around 5000 honor killings that happen to females every year around the globe. Most of these occur because the women are rape victims and the families kill them so that the women do not bring shame to the family associated with sexual violence to an unmarried woman.⁸

Barriers Women Face

Lack of Economic Opportunity

Many women have no economic opportunity because of discrimination against women and the gender roles women are expected to fill. Around the world, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same jobs as men. This prevents women from becoming independent and requires them to depend on a man for support, furthering their inequality with the opposite sex. Women are also less likely than men to have access to financial institutions because of laws and social stigmas.⁹ This makes women insecure in their finances and makes it very hard for them to be economically stable without being married. If women do not have control of how they make or save money, then they will never be able to be economically independent. Studies have also shown the benefits of involving women into the economy of a nation. When more women work, the gross domestic product (GDP) of nations rise extensively. It is estimated that gender gaps in the workforce costs nations about 15% of their GDP.¹⁰

Political Participation Barriers

⁷ "Global Study on Homicide." *United Nations*. https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/GSH2018/GSH18_Gender-related_killing_of_women_and_girls.pdf.

⁸ "Violence Against Women is an Issue that Concerns us All." *UNICEF*. <https://www.unicefusa.org/stories/violence-against-women-issue-concerns-us-all/35247>.

⁹ "Facts and Figures: Economic Empowerment." *UN Women*. www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment/facts-and-figures.

¹⁰ Ibid.

It is extremely important to include women in the political process to ensure the security of women. However, there are several barriers preventing women from participating in politics. Many women do not have the financial resources to be able to effectively compete in elections. In many areas, it is even difficult for women to vote because of lack of transportation and ability to leave their house. However, political participation of women facilitates policymaking. Recent studies suggest that women are more likely to be responsive to the public's needs and to cooperate across party lines. In order to make women more secure, women need to be involved in policymaking so they are not overlooked during the political process.

Discrimination of the LGBTQ Community

The United Nations estimates that over 76 nations have laws that criminalize and discriminate against LGBTQ people. Many nations such as Honduras, Belarus, Russia, and other Central Asian nations have "anti-propaganda" laws that persecute the LGBT community. Eight countries even have the death penalty for those who engage in homosexual practices including Saudi Arabia, Brunei, and Nigeria. Many United Nations reports also suggest that violence against members of the LGBTQ community includes cruelty that is higher than any other hate crime around the world. Many nations also claim to have equal rights for women and the LGBTQ community but still have high homicide rates for LGBTQ individuals and have stripped away rights from both groups. It is also significant to note that discrimination and persecution of the LGBTQ community also often lead to a lack of political, economic, and social opportunities. Although the LGBTQ community has made many strides since 2011 with 34 countries allowing same-sex marriages and 10 allowing transgender people to obtain accurate legal documents, there is still much work to be done.¹¹



Case Study: South Africa's Alarming Domestic Violence

South Africa has a relatively high rate of domestic violence against women even though the country is one of the most developed in Africa. Recently, there has been an extremely high rate of women being killed by their partners. The Victims of Crime Survey in South

Africa shows a rise in sexual offences from an average of .08% in marriages to .19% in marriages since 2016. This means more than double the number of South African women in marriages have experienced sexual offences since 2016. The survey also reveals that 37.2% of women that were sexually assaulted were attacked by someone they knew intimately. In South Africa, The Domestic

¹¹ "Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. (A/HRC/29/23)." *United Nations Human Rights Council*. [Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity \(A/HRC/29/23\)](#).

Violence Act creates an obligation to all law enforcement to protect victims as much as possible. Also, the Criminal Law Amendment Act broadly characterizes sexual offences to include rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and sexual harassment. This definition makes it less likely for people to get away with sexual offences because it clearly states any form of offence will be persecuted.

Despite there being institutions and laws in place, there was still an increase in sexual offences because last year, the Confirmation Court in South Africa ruled that the Criminal Procedure Act should be amended to abolish a 20-year prescription period for sexual offences and other forms of gender-based violence. This means that criminals committing sexual offences will have the chance to get less time in jail for committing sexual assault. People committing sexual offences are now getting an average of eight-year sentences. Because the punishment is less for sexual assault, more people are committing it. Also, there are not many organizations in South Africa that help victims of sexual assault because there is still a stigma of victims in the nation. Women feel scared to come forward and speak out against sexual violence out of fear of being shunned by their communities.¹²

Case Study: The Spread of The Islamic State's Violence Against Women into Afghanistan

The Islamic State (IS) has gained a reputation for many war crimes such as rape, torture, and beheadings. Iraq and Syria there have seen increased cases of forced marriages and rape involving IS members and these reports have been spreading to many regions of Afghanistan. Most notably, there have been dozens of reports in Nangarhar, an Eastern province, and Zabul in the South. The reports are also predicted to be underestimating the number of assaults from IS members because the stigmas in Afghanistan make it almost impossible for women to report sexual abuse. This makes it very hard to know the true scale of the spread of the Islamic State's sexual violence in Afghanistan. The IS groups in Afghanistan are also known to have sex trafficking and smuggling routes through to Turkmenistan and into Iran.¹³ There are even reports of IS members raping girls as young as ten years old in the IS controlled Khorasan Province which operates in Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹⁴



Many nations such as the United Kingdom have attempted to eliminate stigmas against sexual violence in nations such as Afghanistan. In November 2019, there will be an educational campaign on turning the stigma of sexual violence on the perpetrator; however, many educational programs have

¹² "Violence Against Women-Part 1: case Studies and Legal mechanisms." *Helenn Suzman Foundation*.

<https://hsf.org.za/publications/hsf-briefs/violence-against-women-part-i-case-studies-and-legal-mechanisms>.

¹³ "Horrors that Can't be told': Afghan Women report ISIS Rapes." *The Straits Times*. <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/south-asia/horrors-that-cant-be-told-afghan-women-reportisis-rapes>.

¹⁴ "Former ISIS fighter describes watching militants rape girls as young as 10 and commit 'crimes against humanity'." *The Independent*. <https://bit.ly/2kkRcsQ>.

occurred and failed due to the deep-rooted cultural norms surrounding the attitudes towards rape victims.

Organizations Working Towards Women's Security

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women is an intergovernmental body, founded in 1946, that is tasked with the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. The most recent session of this commission focused on providing social protection systems for women who went through sexual assault. Also, the session focused on getting girls access to public services as well as sustainable infrastructure. The main goal of this commission is women empowerment. However, the problem with this goal is that many women cannot feel empowered because there are deep-rooted social stigmas against them in society, preventing women from self-empowerment. This limits the organization because many nations will not cooperate because of the stigmas that are in place.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a new report titled "[Discrimination and violence against individuals based on their sexual orientation and gender identity](#)" ([A/HRC/29/23](#)). This report made women's rights a more prevalent issue in the United Nations but failed to mobilize all member nations to recognize the true scale of the issue.

Women's Rights Worldwide is a non-governmental organization (NGO) whose main goals are to end sex trafficking, get women their human rights, and provide humanitarian aid to women in developing countries. This NGO has funded and volunteered in many projects and has been widely successful. However, because many of the issues they are fighting are still prevalent in the world today, there is still much work to be done.

Questions to Ponder

- In what ways has international law helped the security of women?
- In what ways have international laws and resolutions been ineffective?
- What part has your specific country played in advancing the security of women?
- How do stigmas effect women in society in different ways?
- How does religion and culture play into the rights women have in certain nations?
- How have women been empowered in your nation?