

War and Children - A Disturbing Association

— Dristi Gupta, Intern- AIF

“War is organized murder, and nothing else”

--Harry Patch, the last surviving soldier of World War I

Conflict and war have a deep and wide-ranging effect on all, especially children, affecting several aspects of their development, safety, and well-being. Children can suffer long-term impacts from the aftermath of armed conflicts and violence associated with war, which might impact their current situation and future opportunities.

Children rely on the consideration, understanding, and care of people who love them. In times of war, their ties are often broken by the death of a parent or the emotional absence of sad or preoccupied parents. In certain cases they also lose the guardianship of their parents which makes them refugees. This results in their being placed in refugee camps, where kids must endure years of abject poverty and lose all chance at an education, cognitive ability, and other social and cultural features. Lives do not stay the same post wars.

The use of explosive weapons, landmines, and other explosives in combat zones puts children at a risk of direct physical damage to their bodies, including injuries, even fatalities. Many times, children lose limbs, leaving them permanently crippled, and that becomes a deterrent to their future endeavors. Also food related issues like malnutrition and other deficiency diseases might simultaneously occur.

A crucial component of children's overall health is the psychological effect of war, which frequently includes a variety of mental, emotional, and behavioral reactions to the experiences they had both during and after the war. The mental health of children can be negatively impacted by conflict for a long time. Trauma symptoms in children might include nightmares, flashbacks, and enduring emotions of terror. These symptoms can lead to the development of post-traumatic



stress disorder (PTSD) and other diseases associated with stress. Children raised in post-war contexts may have increased anxiety, sadness, and persistent emotional discomfort, which may affect their capacity to control their emotions and participate in everyday activities.

Children's capacity to build trustworthy relationships and their sense of security can be negatively impacted by the disruption of attachment ties caused by the disintegration of family and community structures during times of conflict. Along with emotional problems associated with loss, sadness, and helplessness, children may display behavioral issues including anger, withdrawal, or regressive tendencies. They may also face stigmatization issues.

Another important aspect experienced by children is of homelessness as a result of family relocation and the loss of secure homes, safety, and security. Children who experience homelessness as a result of conflict encounter a wide range of difficulties that have an influence on their development and well-being. They lose community and social support.

Taking the Israel-Palestine conflict as an example. According to a research study done in collaboration with Imperial College London, 54–97% of Palestinian children had seen firing, fighting, or explosions, and 56–95% had been subjected to tear gas. Furthermore, 37% have witnessed family members arrested, underscoring the widespread exposure to

violence and instability associated with conflicts. Also, the total blockade of Gaza has resulted in children having no access to food or water, leading to undernourishment, dehydration, and heightened risks of diarrhoeal diseases.

It requires comprehensive and multifaceted strategies to address children's protection in war zones, incorporating legal, humanitarian, and developmental solutions. The following are important fixes and initiatives to safeguard children in conflict-affected areas:

Adherence to International Law: Ensuring respect for international humanitarian law and human rights law, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict, to protect children from the impact of armed conflict.

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR): Supporting DDR programs to facilitate the release and reintegration of children associated with armed forces or armed groups, providing psycho-social support, education, and vocational training.

Education and Access to Learning: Prioritizing the protection and continuation of education in conflict-affected areas, safeguarding schools from attacks, supporting alternative learning opportunities, and providing psycho-social support for students and teachers.

Access to Healthcare and Nutrition: Ensuring access to essential healthcare services, including mental health support and nutrition programs, to address the physical and psychological impacts of conflict on children.

Community Engagement and Empowerment: Empowering local communities and civil society organizations to play an active role in protecting and supporting children, fostering community-based child protection mechanisms and resilience.

By putting these ideas into practice, parties involved can try to lessen the effects of armed conflict, protect children's rights and well-being as specified by international legal frameworks, and provide safer conditions for

kids in conflict-affected regions.

Some organizations are actively involved in providing programs for child welfare in conflict zones, they are:

UNICEF: UNICEF is committed to providing evidence-based interventions and response services to safeguard children in conflict areas in more than 140 countries. They offer children affected by war immediate aid, healthcare, clean water, sanitation, hygiene kits, and more. In addition, UNICEF seeks to prevent child conscription into the military, establish Child-Friendly Spaces, and reconnect separated children with their families. Additionally, they help children impacted by landmines and explosive weapons and combat hunger.

WAR CHILD AND WAR CHILD CANADA: These groups work to address the three major pillars of opportunity, justice, and education in order to create lasting peace. Their locally-driven strategy, which focuses on allowing local communities to lead the process of conflict healing, provides annual help to over 600,000 individuals. In areas that are afflicted by war, they provide livelihood programming, educational initiatives, and legal help to victims of violence.

UNITED NATIONS (UN) SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT:

The office of the UN Special Representative collaborates with international partners and governments to stop and address child abuse. In addition to campaigning for social change that fosters safer environments for children, their activities are focused on tackling harmful behaviors and societal norms, involving young people, bolstering laws and regulations, and supporting parents and caregivers. Defining international coalitions and defining technical guidelines are other priorities for the Special Representative's office in order to fully combat violence against children.

These groups, in conjunction with government organizations, are vital to the implementation of child welfare programs in conflict areas because they offer vital support and safety to children and families impacted by violence and war.