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## **The Burden of War on Children: A Multi-Regional Assessment of Violence, Trauma, and Human Rights Violations**

**Fraz Ashraf Khan**

Asst. Professor, Department of Law, University of the Punjab, Jhelum Campus

[frazashraf@pujc.edu.pk](mailto:frazashraf@pujc.edu.pk)

### **ABSTRACT**

*Children constitute one of the most vulnerable populations in armed conflict, facing extensive physical, psychological, and social harm. Beyond immediate threats to life, war exposes children to forced displacement, loss of parents, denial of education and healthcare, and severe mental health consequences. Global reports from UNICEF, the United Nations, and other humanitarian agencies reveal the magnitude of this crisis, with more than 250 million children living in conflict zones and enduring violence, exploitation, and deprivation. In 2023 alone, the UN verified 32,990 grave violations against 22,557 children the highest in nearly a decade including killings, maiming, recruitment by armed groups, sexual violence, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals. Regional conflicts in Palestine, Israel, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen illustrate the widespread and devastating impacts, with thousands of children killed or injured, millions displaced, and many deprived of basic services. Long-term consequences include trauma, disrupted development, and compromised future opportunities. The evidence underscores a growing global emergency that necessitates urgent, coordinated international action to protect children, restore essential services, and ensure their fundamental rights amid escalating conflicts worldwide.*

**Keywords:** *Regional Conflicts, Palestine, Human Rights, Children.*

### **Introduction and Background**

Armed conflict continues to pose one of the gravest threats to children across the globe, affecting their safety, development, and fundamental rights. Children are disproportionately vulnerable in war settings, where they endure forms of violence and deprivation that profoundly shape their physical, emotional, and social well-being. Unlike adults, children often lack the capacity to understand, resist, or escape conflict, making them susceptible to forced displacement, exploitation, psychological trauma, and the loss of access to essential services such as education and healthcare. According to UNICEF, more than 250 million children currently live in conflict zones, exposed to persistent insecurity, displacement, and suffering. The United Nations has repeatedly documented the scale of violations committed against children, including killings, maiming, abductions, sexual violence, and the recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups. In 2023 alone, the UN verified 32,990 grave violations involving more than 22,000 children the highest number reported in almost a decade highlighting the increasing intensity and geographical spread of conflicts. These violations occur not only during active combat but also in displacement camps, residential areas, and schools and hospitals, reflecting the erosion of safe spaces that children traditionally depend on.

The destruction of educational institutions and healthcare facilities further contributes to a cycle of deprivation, preventing children from accessing learning opportunities and lifesaving medical care. In conflict zones such as Palestine, Israel, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen, thousands of children have been killed or

injured, and millions more displaced, orphaned, or forced into hazardous survival strategies. Reports from UNICEF and other humanitarian organizations show that children often witness extreme violence, including the deaths of family members, which can result in long-term psychological disorders such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Many are also coerced into armed groups, serving as combatants, messengers, or laborers, with tens of thousands of cases documented in countries like South Sudan, Somalia, Afghanistan, and Yemen. These experiences not only violate children's basic rights but also jeopardize their chances of a healthy transition into adulthood.

The global humanitarian landscape reflects a troubling escalation of conflict-related harm to children, with nearly 470 million children now living in volatile environments where violence is widespread and institutional systems have collapsed or weakened. Regions such as Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan exemplify the catastrophic impact of modern warfare on children, where ongoing insecurity, restricted humanitarian access, and resource shortages compound the challenges faced by minors. The scale and persistence of these violations underscore the urgent need for stronger international interventions, protective mechanisms, and long-term peacebuilding efforts aimed at securing children's safety and future. As such, understanding the extensive consequences of armed conflict on children is essential not only for policy formulation and humanitarian response but also for ensuring that future generations can recover, rebuild, and thrive despite the destructive forces of war.

### **Research Methodology**

This study employs a qualitative, descriptive, and document-based research approach grounded entirely in secondary data to examine the multifaceted impact of armed conflict on children. Due to the ethical constraints and logistical challenges of conducting fieldwork in active war zones, the research relies on verified information from authoritative international organizations, including UNICEF, the United Nations, UNHCR, Save the Children, and other humanitarian agencies, supplemented by peer-reviewed academic literature. Relevant numerical statistics, narrative accounts, and regional assessments published between 2019 and 2023 were systematically identified, extracted, and cross-checked to ensure accuracy and credibility. The data were then organized into thematic categories such as child fatalities and injuries, displacement, orphanhood, recruitment of child soldiers, psychological trauma, and the destruction of education and healthcare systems. A thematic content analysis technique was used to interpret both quantitative and qualitative data, enabling the identification of trends, recurring patterns, and cross-regional comparisons. Inclusion criteria focused on verified, methodologically transparent sources specifically addressing children in armed conflict, while unverified media accounts or non-child-focused datasets were excluded. Ethical considerations were upheld by relying exclusively on publicly available reports from organizations that follow strict ethical protocols, avoiding the disclosure of any identifiable personal information, and presenting sensitive material with neutrality and respect. While the methodology ensures rigor through triangulation of multiple trustworthy sources, limitations include potential underreporting, incomplete data due to restricted humanitarian access, and the rapidly evolving nature of global conflicts, which may affect the timeliness of certain figures.

### **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this research carry substantial implications for international policy, humanitarian programming, and long-term development planning. Firstly, the documented rise in grave violations against children underscores the need for stronger enforcement of international humanitarian and human rights laws, particularly those outlined in the

Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN's agenda on Children and Armed Conflict. Secondly, the widespread destruction of schools and health facilities implies that states and aid agencies must invest in resilient education systems, mobile healthcare units, and trauma-informed support services tailored to children in conflict zones. The high prevalence of displacement, orphanhood, and child soldier recruitment further suggests the need for comprehensive reintegration programs, psychosocial support, and community-based protection networks. Additionally, the study implies that global actors must address the structural causes of prolonged conflicts such as political instability, poverty, and governance failures to protect future generations. The large number of unverified casualties and restricted humanitarian access in places like Gaza and Sudan also indicate the urgent need for improved data collection mechanisms and negotiated access for relief agencies. Overall, the implications extend to international diplomacy, humanitarian funding priorities, and national child protection policies, calling for coordinated, multi-sectoral responses that place children at the center of conflict-related policymaking.

### **Statistics on Children Impacted by Armed Conflict:**

In 2023, the United Nations confirmed 32,990 grave violations involving 22,557 children, representing the highest recorded incidence of such violations in almost ten years (UN, 2023). Violations transpired in combat zones, displacement camps, urban areas, residences, and educational institutions. In the verified cases, 5,301 children were killed, and 6,348 were maimed or injured, indicating a 35% increase compared to previous years. The extensive deployment of explosive weapons and intentional assaults on civilians have had a notably detrimental effect on children. The recruitment and utilization of children by armed groups increased markedly in 2023, with 8,655 verified instances, 15% of which involved female children. Additionally, there were 4,356 reported cases of child abduction, alongside a 25% rise in incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence, impacting 1,470 children, primarily girls. Violations encompassed assaults on educational institutions and medical facilities, significantly hindering children's access to education and healthcare (UNICEF, 2023). The report indicated significant levels of denial of humanitarian access, documenting 5,205 verified violations, representing an increase of more than 32%.

Grave violations were most prevalent in conflict zones, including Israel, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Myanmar, Somalia, Nigeria, and Sudan. In 2023, a total of 4,312 Palestinian children and 70 Israeli children were reported killed or maimed, accounting for 37% of all verified cases. Additionally, more than 23,000 reported cases of children killed or maimed are unverified, attributed to ongoing insecurity and movement restrictions, especially in Gaza. UNICEF confirmed the killing and maiming of 1,244 children in Sudan, which hosts the largest child displacement crisis globally (UNICEF, 2023). The escalating conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has worsened the nation's already critical humanitarian conditions. Approximately 470 million children reside in conflict zones, with the situations in Gaza, Ukraine, and Sudan highlighting the critical necessity to safeguard children from the intensifying global conflicts (UNICEF, 2023). The United Nations has persistently sought to engage with stakeholders in these conflicts, with the objective of preventing the exploitation of children in armed conflict and promoting sustainable peace (UN, 2023).

### **Fatalities and Injuries**

In recent years, armed conflict has resulted in the deaths and injuries of thousands of children worldwide. In the Syrian civil war, UNICEF (2020) indicates that over 1,200 children were murdered in 2019, with many more wounded or mutilated. In Afghanistan, at least 1,000

children perished and over 3,000 sustained injuries during the violence in 2020 (UNICEF, 2021). Since 2015, the persistent violence in Yemen has resulted in the deaths of more than 10,000 children (Save the Children, 2020). The circumstances in Sudan and South Sudan are similarly grave, with over 5,000 children being murdered or injured from 2013 to 2018 (UNICEF, 2021).

### **Displaced Children**

Compulsory relocation resulting from armed conflict is a significant concern for children. In Syria, more than 6.5 million individuals have been internally displaced, with over 50% being children (UNHCR, 2020). The circumstances in Afghanistan have been catastrophic, resulting in almost 2.5 million children being displaced due to persistent conflict (UNICEF, 2020). The conflict in Ukraine has resulted in the displacement of over 5 million individuals in Europe, with over half being children, who have sought refuge in neighboring nations like Poland and Romania (UNICEF, 2022). In Palestine, it is projected that more than 1 million children have been displaced since the onset of hostilities in 2000 (UNRWA, 2021).

### **Loss of a Parent:**

The death of one or both parents during war intensifies the anguish endured by children. In several war zones, children become orphans as a result of violence, airstrikes, and explosions. In Syria, it is predicted that more than 35,000 children have lost at least one parent (UNICEF, 2020). The UN (2021) says that in Afghanistan, thousands of children have been orphaned as a result of the protracted conflict, with many living in refugee camps or without sufficient shelter. In the Sudan war, several children are deprived of parental care, rendering them more susceptible to exploitation and trafficking (UNICEF, 2020).

### **Child Soldiers**

The use of minors as combatants in armed warfare is a further egregious outcome of war. In nations such as South Sudan, Somalia, and Syria, minors are often conscripted into armed factions and compelled to engage in combat. The UN (2020) reports that over 300,000 children are now engaged in violent conflicts worldwide, with about 50,000 youngsters recruited as soldiers in the continuing war in Yemen (UNICEF, 2021). In Afghanistan, around 10,000 children are reported to have been conscripted by both governmental and rebel factions (UNICEF, 2021).

### **Injured Youth and Prolonged Psychological Distress**

The quantity of youngsters who endure assault but sustain serious injuries is alarming. In Yemen, about 4,500 children sustained injuries in 2019 (UNICEF, 2020). In Gaza, during escalatory phases, as many as 1,500 youngsters have had injuries within a few days (UNRWA, 2021). These injuries are often incapacitating, resulting in prolonged physical and psychological distress. Children who endure assaults often bear the enduring scars of conflict, confronting obstacles such as physical impairments and mental health disorders, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression (UNICEF, 2020).

### **Effects on Education and Health**

Conflict significantly impedes children's access to school and healthcare. In nations such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen, educational institutions have been destroyed or converted for military purposes, resulting in a generation of youngsters bereft of education. In Syria, almost 6,000 schools have been damaged or destroyed, resulting in millions of children without access to education (UNICEF, 2020). In Yemen, about 2 million children have been deprived of education as a result of the war (Save the Children, 2020). The effect on healthcare is substantial, since children in war zones often lack access to vital medical services owing to the devastation of hospitals and clinics (WHO, 2020).

## **Regional Insights on Children's Distress**

### **1. Europe (Ukraine):**

The conflict in Ukraine has severely affected children, with more than 3.5 million compelled to leave the nation by 2022 (UNICEF, 2022). The bombardment of civilian regions has led to thousands of child fatalities, and the psychological impact on displaced children is substantial.

### **2. Syria & Iraq**

The lengthy violence in Syria has resulted in extensive child fatalities, relocation, and educational disruption. More than 2 million children have been displaced, with many more urgently need humanitarian aid (UNICEF, 2021). In Iraq, children have seen violence, relocation, and disruption of their daily routines as a result of persistent clashes with ISIS (UNICEF, 2020). In Palestine, children have suffered considerable damage as a result of the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian war, with over 400 Palestinian children murdered in 2021 alone (UNICEF, 2021).

### **3. South Asia (Pakistan, Afghanistan):**

Both Pakistan and Afghanistan have seen persistent instability, with children in both nations suffering the most from the bloodshed. Between 2015 and 2018, more than 2,000 children were murdered or wounded in terrorist strikes in Pakistan (UNICEF, 2021). The persistent fighting in Afghanistan between the Taliban and the Afghan government has resulted in significant casualties, with children experiencing death, injury, relocation, and exploitation (UNICEF, 2020).

### **4. Sudan**

In Sudan and South Sudan, children are especially susceptible to the repercussions of armed war. In South Sudan, almost 1.5 million children have been uprooted, with many facing the threats of famine and sickness (UNICEF, 2020). In Somalia, children have been ensnared in the turmoil of enduring civil conflict and terrorist assaults, with many individuals conscripted as child soldiers or exposed to severe violence (UNICEF, 2021).

### **5. Palestine**

According to the UN's 2025 "Children and Armed Conflict" report, there were 8,554 verified grave violations affecting 2,959 children (2,944 Palestinian, 15 Israeli) in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the latest reporting period, including killings, maimings, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals. In Gaza alone, the UN verified that 1,259 Palestinian children were killed and 941 were maimed as a result of hostilities, while noting that verification is ongoing for thousands more alleged child casualties. Meanwhile, a UN-coordinated 2023 situation report by UNICEF documented that between 7 October and 31 December 2023, more than 5,350 children were killed in Gaza, a figure that underlines the catastrophic impact on minors in a very short time span. Moreover, UNICEF reported that all children under five in Gaza some 335,000 infants and toddlers were at high risk of severe malnutrition and preventable death by end of 2023, reflecting the collapse of health, nutrition, and basic services.

The UN has further warned that the figures do not reflect the full scale of suffering, given ongoing access restrictions, damaged infrastructure, destroyed homes, attacks on schools and hospitals, and widespread displacement indicating the actual toll on children is likely higher than officially verified.

## **Conclusion & Recommendations**

To protect children from the terrible effects of armed conflict, the international community, national governments, and humanitarian organizations must all work together to make protective measures stronger and put in place comprehensive, child-centered interventions.



Governments and fighting groups must follow international humanitarian law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child to the letter. This means that attacks on civilians, schools, and healthcare facilities must stop right away. Humanitarian groups should make it easier for people to get safe places to stay, food, medical care, and emotional support. They should put the needs of displaced, orphaned, or traumatized children first. To stop long-term developmental setbacks and cycles of violence, programs that help child soldiers reintegrate, support orphans, and provide education and job training need to be expanded. International organizations, such as the UN and regional groups, should improve ways to monitor and report violations against children and punish those who do them. They should also make it easier for humanitarian workers to get into active conflict zones safely. Long-term strategies should also include programs that build peace, resolve conflicts, and make communities stronger so they can protect children and fix health and education systems. Finally, policymakers need to make sure that all of their actions include mental health and trauma-informed approaches. This is because the psychological effects of war often last long after the physical threats have gone away. All of these suggestions are meant to reduce immediate suffering, protect children's rights, and make sure that future generations can grow up in safety and stability, even though there are still many conflicts around the world.

In conclusion, the plight of children affected by armed conflict represents one of the most pressing humanitarian crises of the modern era. The extensive data reported by UNICEF, the United Nations, and global humanitarian organizations reveal a sharp increase in violence, displacement, exploitation, and deprivation among children living in conflict zones. These children endure not only the immediate horrors of war such as killings, injuries, and the loss of family members but also long-term developmental, psychological, and educational setbacks that undermine their future potential. The widespread destruction of essential infrastructures, the recruitment of minors into armed groups, and the persistent denial of humanitarian access further compound their suffering and hinder recovery. This study demonstrates that the impacts of war on children are profound, far-reaching, and escalating, demanding urgent international action. To ensure that children trapped in conflict are protected, supported, and given the chance to rebuild their lives, global actors must strengthen protection systems, invest in child-centered humanitarian responses, and work toward sustainable peace. Ultimately, safeguarding children in armed conflict is not only a moral imperative but also essential for securing a stable and peaceful future for societies around the world.

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