



Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for
CHILDREN AND ARMED CONFLICT

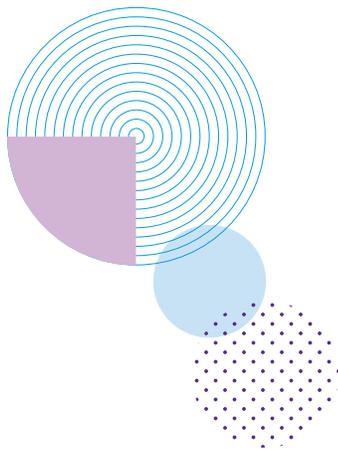


The Gender Dimensions of Grave Violations Against Children In Armed Conflict



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Preface

Children in situations of armed conflict continue to be subjected to grave violations and the risks they face as well as the impact of hostilities remains inherently gendered.

Gender is one of the key factors that shape the experience of children in armed conflict. Boys and girls often face different risks, and hence have different needs and require different types of support before, during and after conflict. It is therefore critical to integrate a solid gender perspective in the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against conflict-affected children and ensure systematic analysis on the gender dimensions of these violations. This would allow a better understanding of the root causes of certain violations as well as possible trends. It would facilitate an in-depth analysis of the reasons why girls or boys might be more exposed to some violations in a given context as opposed to others, which would, as a result, contribute substantively to tailored and long-term programmatic responses and reintegration for survivors of grave violations.



My mandate aims to ensure the voices of conflict-affected boys and girls are equally heard, to shed light on their specific vulnerabilities and needs, and ultimately to empower them to become agents of peace. When addressing the gendered impact of grave violations, oftentimes unconscious bias remains, leaving certain children unheard and unseen. In this regard, gender analysis of grave violations combined with sex-disaggregated data must be prioritised and considered as a pivotal element to fulfil the promise we made to better protect children and prevent violations against them.

This paper is the first step to enhance our collective efforts to further strengthen the MRM capacity in analysing the plight of boys and girls in armed conflict through gender lens. And as we move forward, this would enable us to provide holistic, age-appropriate and gender-responsive prevention and response to better protect children in situations of armed conflict.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Virginia Gamba'.

Virginia Gamba
*Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Children and Armed Conflict*



Introduction

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Armed conflicts have long-term, devastating impacts on children. These effects are compounded further by broader socio-cultural, economic, political, and environmental factors, from health pandemics to the climate crisis. Across conflict settings, children's exposure to grave violations is shaped not only by specific forms of victimisation, but also by gender norms and other intersecting identity-based characteristics, including ethnicity, race, religion, caste, ability, economic status, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression. In situations of armed conflict, understanding how gender and age influence risk, vulnerability and agency is essential for providing gender-responsive and age-sensitive prevention, protection, humanitarian assistance, and recovery.

United Nations (UN) actions to improve the protection for children in armed conflict have evolved considerably since 1997 when the first Special Representative of the Secretary-General for children and armed conflict (SRSG CAAC) was appointed.¹ In 1999 the Council adopted its first resolution on children and armed conflict (CAAC), which officially placed this important topic on its agenda.² In 2005, the Security Council set another precedent by creating the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) as one of its principal instruments for fostering accountability and compliance with international law and child protection standards and norms.³

The MRM has paved the way for advancing the protection of children's rights in armed conflict and engaging parties to conflict in dialogue and action plans to end and prevent violations against children. It generates information to account for violations committed and identifies parties to conflict that commit six grave violations against children: (1) recruitment and use of children by armed forces and groups, (2) killing and maiming, (3) rape and other forms of sexual violence, (4) abductions, (5) attacks against schools and hospitals, and (6) the denial of humanitarian access for children. Under the leadership of the SRSG CAAC, this information is used to engage parties to conflict in dialogue, develop and implement time-bound action plans and other forms of commitment, and programmatic responses involving the UN system to deliver coordinated protection and support for conflict-affected children.

The risks children face in conflict situations have changed as the CAAC mandate evolved over the past 25 years. Strong and recurrent evidence across many contexts demonstrate that boys and girls experience conflict differently. Among other identity factors such as age, ethnicity and race, the gender inequality context and harmful social norms play a determining factor in how children are exposed and subjected to grave violations by parties to conflict. Their vulnerabilities to specific conflict-related violence vary based on socio-cultural gender norms and practices, resulting in distinct impacts for girls and boys, hence requiring distinct protection and prevention responses. However, despite the mounting evidence on the gender dimensions of the impact of armed conflict on children, a systematic gender-sensitive approach in collecting MRM evidence across the board is still lacking, while it is essential to inform the UN Secretary-General's reports on CAAC for consideration by the UN Security Council as well as the appropriate responses by UN Members States, UN entities, and their partners.

It is therefore crucial to expand and systematise the collection of MRM evidence that differentiates the experiences of girls and boys, and to produce gender-sensitive analyses of grave violations against children in armed conflict so that gender-responsive interventions can be put in place for all conflict-affected children, including at the international policy and advocacy level, as well as to enhance accountability by ensuring a coordinated response.

¹ The SRSG CAAC mandate was created by General Assembly Resolution A/RES/51/77 following the publication, in 1996, of the Graça Machel Report on the Impact of Armed Conflict on Children (A/51/306).

² SCR 1261 (1999). Since 1999, the Security Council's normative framework on children and armed conflict has evolved over 13 Resolutions and 13 Presidential Statements.

³ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), S/RES/1612. Available at: [https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F1612\(2005\)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False](https://undocs.org/Home/Mobile?FinalSymbol=S%2FRES%2F1612(2005)&Language=E&DeviceType=Desktop&LangRequested=False)



This paper is produced by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict (OSRSG CAAC) through close consultations with UN Country Task Forces on Monitoring and Reporting on Grave Violations against Children (CTFMRs), as well as CAAC and gender experts. It defines the type of analysis needed to understand the gendered aspect of CAAC violations, lists challenges faced by CTFMRs to conduct such analyses and proposes suggestions on how to overcome them. The paper also includes sets of guiding questions aimed to assist CTFMRs and their partners in integrating a gender perspective in their monitoring and reporting activities with a view to improving the analysis and response to grave violations against girls and boys in situations of armed conflict.

Methodology

The research conducted in the context of this paper included the collection and analysis of primary and secondary data through the following methods:

- **A literature review** of all reports of the Secretary-General on CAAC and other relevant Secretary-General reports, existing guidance on the gendered aspects of CAAC violations including research reports, technical guidance documents, training material. (See Annex)
- **A 14-question survey sent to the CTFMRs in five situations on the agenda of the Security Council**, namely Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Nigeria and Yemen, to consult them on “the gender dimensions of the impact of armed conflict on children,” and understand the challenges they are facing. These situations were selected according to two criteria: (i) the group of CTFMRs represented an array of monitoring and reporting capacities; and (ii) the situations were identified as being representative of the global geographical spread of the CAAC mandate and of the six grave violations of children as well as deprivation of liberty of children for actual or alleged association with parties to conflict. The survey was carried out in English and French.
- **Interviews with CTFMR co-chairs** in each of the five selected countries, for in-depth discussions on the challenges they are facing in both collecting and analysing data to produce gender analyses.
- **Interviews with HQ-level UN and NGO experts** working on CAAC and/or gender issues, in order to gather their insights and advice on how CTFMRs can expand and systematize gender mainstreaming in their monitoring, documentation and reporting work.

The survey and interviews were carried out anonymously, so none of the facts, analyses, challenges or recommendations shared by the CTFMR entities during the research and used in this paper is attributed.



1.

The Importance of Gender Analysis

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What is Gender Analysis?

A gender analysis is a critical examination using specific research tools and methods to identify and investigate how differences in gender roles, norms, activities, needs, opportunities, access to resources, participation in decision-making, and rights/entitlements have a differentiated impact on men, women, boys, girls and LGBTQI+ persons in a particular context.

In the MRM context, gender analysis would describe efforts, at the levels of data collection and analysis that shape prevention and response strategies, that aim to highlight the differences in the ways girls and boys are respectively exposed and subjected to conflict-related violations and the differentiated outcome for each. Adopting a gender perspective would mean no longer referring to “children” as a monolith and instead identifying violations affecting specific groups of children concerned, on the basis of sex/gender as well as other identities.⁴

What Does it Consist of?

- **Designing adequate tools and methodologies:** Developing or adjusting monitoring tools and methodologies may be necessary for gender analysis. For example, if relevant, questionnaires and information management systems should include fields that allow for gender-related data to be collected and then stored and interrogated in a gender-sensitive way. The choice of monitors is also crucial: ideally, there should be a balance of female and male monitors to increase the chances that victims/survivors of both sexes disclose information to them. Monitors should also plan their data collection methods and strategies in a way that will maximise the collection of gender-sensitive data whilst following the principles of “do no harm” and the “best interests of the child”. Some examples include where, when and with whom to conduct interviews, ensuring a diversity of sources, protocols for collecting data on sensitive, gender-related violations, among others.
- **Collecting disaggregated data:** Gender analysis rests on quantitative as well as qualitative data being disaggregated by sex, age, as well as other factors, so that the specific situations of each child, girls and boys, can be visible. The analysis of such data provides a more accurate representation of the distinct ways in which girls and boys are subjected to and affected by violations. Adequate data management systems then enable the cross-referencing of sex-disaggregated data with various other disaggregated data such as age, location, and perpetrator, in order to deepen the gender analysis.
- **Monitoring data:** Gender analysis requires monitoring and documentation teams to be active recipients of data—trying to identify and fill documentation gaps, avoiding making assumptions based on gender stereotypes, and further exploring the root causes and consequences of violations that affect a particular group. It asks questions that lead monitors to explore and understand why and how a violation has affected a particular child, and what their differentiated coping/support mechanisms are. As mentioned above, cross-referencing different database categories with age and sex-disaggregated data can also provide additional clues for gender analysis. For example, the type of location where girls/boys are abducted can reveal their specific vulnerability to this violation, such as while commuting to a market.
- **Gathering contextual information:** A gendered approach to monitoring child rights violations would attempt to situate sex-disaggregated data on incidents within the wider socio-economic, cultural, political and security situation of the context in question. An understanding of dominant gender norms, potential gaps or discriminatory elements in existing national legislation, harmful practices, notions about masculinity, among others and their impact on the lives of girls and boys, as well as the agendas of various parties to conflict are crucial tools for a gender analysis of violations.

⁴ Gender analysis places a great emphasis on ‘intersectional identities’ because the realities and experiences of women, men, girls, boys and LGBTQI+ persons do not solely depend on gender: they intersect with other factors such as an individual’s age, class, religion, education, ethnicity, income, etc. This can help identify if a particular group is targeted and why.

How Can Gender Analysis Support the MRM?

Gender analysis can prevent overlooking some aspects of the nature of violations that are underreported, often on the basis of sex/gender—for example, sexual violence against boys or girls, or their recruitment and use by parties to conflict. Disaggregated data can more effectively equip child protection actors with gender-specific prevention and response strategies, so they can develop interventions that are much better tailored to the differentiated protection needs of girls and boys. Gender analysis can also then assist child protection actors in monitoring the effectiveness of these interventions. The incorporation of the gender approach has been included in the MRM guidance (see box below) and this paper is an opportunity to review how this guidance is practically implemented by CTFMRs and how it can be further improved.



Guidance on gender in the MRM Field Manual⁵

There are several ways in which gender considerations should be reflected in the design and implementation of the MRM. Information on the violation of children's rights should be disaggregated according to sex (girls and boys) during data collection.

Further, certain violations of children's rights may constitute gender-based violence, as the violation is particularly directed against children due to their sex or identity. MRM practitioners should be sensitive to the specific needs and coping mechanisms of girls and boys when dealing with all violations against children, but particularly those that may relate to a child's sexuality or self-image. Interviews of child victims should also be conducted with due consideration to the sex of the interviewer and the victim.

In respect of all violations, girls and boys have different ways of experiencing violations, different coping mechanisms and different needs. MRM staff need to be sensitive to this, as well as to the responses needed by children.

There are many examples of recent and substantive gender analyses produced by CTFMRs, which are included in the Secretary-General's country-specific reports on CAAC, as well as by individual UN entities and NGOs. This paper does not attempt to summarise or surpass them.

⁵ OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF and Department of Peacekeeping Operations, FIELD MANUAL - Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on Grave Violations Against Children in situations of Armed Conflict, 2014, p. 13. Available at: https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MRM_Field_5_June_2014.pdf



2.

A Gender Analysis of the Six Grave Violations

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Gender and age are among the many factors that shape the ways in which children are at risk and what resources are available for their protection, both within the family and the broader community. But gender analysis requires more than sex disaggregated data, as these numbers alone will not increase understanding about the individual, group, or environmental risk factors, or the profile and motivation of the perpetrators. It is important to recognize that children, regardless of their gender, are exposed to any type of violation in the context of conflict as it involves complex factors such as social, political, economic, environmental and security issues. Grave violations rarely occur in isolation and are often interlinked. Therefore, a gender analysis of the grave violations must take these issues into account and entail an understanding of how risks are exacerbated due to gender stereotypes and the complex elements related to each violation. The following sub-sections will explore more in-depth key elements to consider while conducting a gender analysis of the six grave violations: 1) Recruitment and Use; 2) Killing and Maiming; 3) Rape and other forms of Sexual Violence; 4) Attacks against Schools and Hospitals; 5) Abduction; and 6) Denial of Humanitarian Access. It will also include elements to consider in relation to the other issues of concern included in the Secretary-General reports on CAAC, namely the deprivation of liberty for actual or alleged association with parties to conflict as a sub-category of recruitment and use, and the military use of schools and hospitals as a sub-category of attacks on schools and hospitals.



Children are disproportionately affected by conflict, and the impact of conflict on children is inherently gendered.

2.1. Recruitment and Use

Over the past twenty-five years, much has been learned about the challenges of preventing the recruitment and use of children and the obstacles encountered in facilitating their disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration. Children recruited and used by armed groups and forces are still most likely to come from impoverished and marginalized backgrounds or to have been orphaned, displaced, or separated from their families. Some are conscripted, kidnapped, press-ganged, abducted, or coerced by armed groups, while others continue to join for political or economic reasons, or to protect themselves and their families. Others join to avenge atrocities committed against their families and communities or to escape violent family situations or arranged marriages. Understanding both perpetrators' motivations and tactics across contexts in which children are targeted for recruitment and use is important for gender analysis, and especially the potential distinct motivations of perpetrators regarding boys and girls. Particularly in contexts where armed groups designated as terrorists by the UN are operating, their ideology and tactics of recruitment and use have strong gendered implications for boys and girls.

Once recruited, children are still subject to brutal induction processes, and girls experience rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery. Boys and girls continue to be used to serve in combat and supporting roles, including as cooks, messengers, porters, and spies. Although boys continue to be targeted disproportionately, girls also continue to be recruited and used by both State and non-State actors.

In 2001, the Security Council adopted resolution 1379, through which it requested the Secretary-General to list parties to conflict that recruit or use children in his annual report on CAAC. In the following year, the Optional Protocol on the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict entered into force. This instrument sets the minimum age for active participation in armed conflict at 18 years and prohibits armed groups from using, recruiting, or enlisting volunteers below 18 years of age.⁶

⁶ Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict (A/RES/54/263).



The push and pull factors that mediate a child's risk of being recruited and used are determined by local socio-cultural and gender norms as well as the ideology and motivations driving recruitment strategies. Sex, age, ethnicity, religion, geopolitical location, and economic status are primary determinants of a child's risk of recruitment, how they are exploited, and the violations they experience. Since adolescence is understood as a period of heightened risk for most children, it would be helpful to better understand how age corresponds with different elements of gender-related risk and impact in relation to recruitment and use. A more systematic analysis of the gender-differentiated risks and consequences of recruitment and use would be extremely helpful for aligning prevention and response and ensuring that reintegration programs and opportunities are safe and appropriate and do not inadvertently increase risks to girls either of re-recruitment or being stigmatized.

Not all children are forced or coerced into combat or joining a party to conflict. In socio-cultural contexts where adolescent boys are perceived as 'young men' and are expected to provide for and protect their families, boys are more likely to join parties to conflict with their brothers, fathers, and uncles, or based on pressure from the community or family for political, security, or economic reasons. The offer of salaries or stipends has impelled boys to join armed forces or groups to earn income for their families.⁷

Both boys and girls may join armed forces or armed groups for political reasons or to avenge atrocities committed against their families. Without employment or educational opportunities, the prospect of marriage is remote for boys who may join for lack of any other life course options. Girls may feel compelled to follow their partners or join an armed group to escape violent family situations or arranged marriages. Research from Colombia, Sri Lanka, and Liberia suggests a high correlation between domestic exploitation, physical and/or sexual abuse, economic desperation and the adolescent girls' decision to leave their household and join armed groups.⁸ In Syria, some young female members of the al-Khansaa Brigade, all-female morality police of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in Raqqa and Mosul, joined to "assuage the Organization and keep their families in favour [...] and win some freedom of movement and an income in a city where women had been stripped of self-determination".⁹

In his most recent report on children and armed conflict, the Secretary-General indicated that in 2020, 85 per cent of reported incidents of recruitment and use were committed against boys.¹⁰ Boys are primarily recruited for combat and support roles and are more likely than girls to receive weapons and military training. The results of the survey conducted by the OSRSG CAAC in the context of the study on the evolution of the CAAC mandate published in January 2022 indicated that in the Philippines, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Lebanon, Syria, Chad, Burkina Faso, Myanmar, Iraq, Sudan, and Yemen boys were at significantly greater risk of recruitment for combat roles as compared to girls, based on socio-cultural norms regarding gender roles and adulthood. Other findings of the same survey indicated that in some situations on the CAAC agenda boys under 18 years of age are "considered more as an adult man than a child", placing them at higher risk of recruitment, and in other situations, the recruitment of boys provides families with power and a sense of pride.¹¹ Although MRM data reflect a lower level of recruitment and use among girls in the DRC, an analysis conducted among agencies,

⁷ Survey conducted by the OSRSG CAAC with CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations in the framework of the development of the Study on the evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate 1996-2021. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

⁸ UN Women, *Young Women in Peace and Security: At the Intersection of the YPS and WPS Agendas*, 2018, p. 17. Available at: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/4/young-women-in-peace-and-security>

⁹ Ibid. p. 16.

¹⁰ United Nations, *Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict*, A/75/873 - S/2021/437, para.6. https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2021/437&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

¹¹ Survey conducted by the OSRSG CAAC with CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations in the framework of the development of the Study on the evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate 1996-2021. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

communities, and partners found that girls were equally at risk of recruitment and use, but for different purposes, including “as wives, cooks, maids, [and] protecting sacred objects that groups used for their protection”.¹² A study conducted by the Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack on the Impact of Attacks on Education for Women and Girls in the Kasai Central Province, found that after being inducted through ritual baptisms using ‘protective magic’, girls were used as human shields on the front lines believing that they had been instilled power to stop bullets by rustling their skirts or with magical weapons that took the form of brooms or kitchen utensils.¹³

Girls continue to be disadvantaged in accessing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration assistance for a variety of reasons, including the refusal of combatants to release them into transit care facilities, as was the case in 2005 in Liberia, Sierra Leone, the DRC, and Nigeria.¹⁴ Depending on how girls were associated with a party to conflict, they may not always be considered full members who need reintegration support, leaving them invisible and vulnerable after they are released or escape from armed forces or groups.¹⁵ Recognizing these challenges, the Security Council urged Member States in its resolution 2427 (2018) to ensure that the specific needs of girls are considered in the context of release, handover, and security sector reforms. In renewing peace operation mandates in the DRC and South Sudan, the Council has also called for tailored approaches to support girls’ reintegration into civilian life and local peacebuilding initiatives.¹⁶

Children Deprived of Liberty for Actual or Alleged Association with Parties to Conflict

The deprivation of liberty for children for actual or alleged association with parties to conflict is an issue of concern reported within the framework of recruitment and use of children, although *per se* it is not one of the six grave violations against children in armed conflict.

In his most recent report on CAAC, the Secretary-General indicated that in 2020 at least 3,243 children were deprived of liberty for their actual or alleged association with parties to conflict, including those designated as terrorist groups by the UN.¹⁷ The UN Global Study on Children Deprived of Liberty (2019) identified that boys are more likely to be deprived of liberty than girls globally, with 94 per cent of all detained children being boys in the context of armed conflicts and national security. The Global Study also argues that one of the various reasons for this phenomenon is that oftentimes girls commit less violent offences and it may also be explained by traditional gender stereotypes that girls are portrayed as in need of protection.¹⁸ This is in line with the recent trends of recruitment and use of children in which boys make up a significant proportion of victims.¹⁹

In situations of armed conflict, particularly in conflicts involving armed groups designated as terrorists by the UN, oftentimes children are detained by State actors and are given significantly fewer opportunities for reintegration, as required under international law.²⁰ In Somalia, for example, between August 2016

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, “ALL THAT I HAVE LOST: Impact of Attacks on Education for Women and Girls in Kasai Central Province Democratic Republic of Congo”, 2019, p. 7. Available at: https://protectingeducation.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/documents_drc_kasai_attacks_on_women_and_girls.pdf

¹⁴ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, February 2005, A/57/965-S/2005/72, para.145. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2005/72>

¹⁵ Global Coalition for Reintegration of Child Soldiers, Gaps and Needs for the Successful Reintegration of Children Associated with Armed Groups or Armed Forces, 2020. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Gaps-and-needs-for-Successful-Reintegration-of-CAFAAG.pdf>

¹⁶ See Security Council resolution 2502 (2019) in renewing MONUSCO’s mandate and Security Council resolution 2406 (2018) in extending the mandate of the UN Mission in Sudan and South Sudan.

¹⁷ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/879-S/2021/437. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>

¹⁸ Manfred Nowak, Report of the Independent Expert of the Secretary-General leading the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty, July 2019, A/74/136, para.35. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/74/136>

¹⁹ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/879-S/2021/437. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>

²⁰ Ibid.



and September 2019, 893 boys out of 910 children were verified as having been detained for alleged association with Al-Shabaab or pro-ISIL elements. Most of these detention cases were carried out by the National Army (492), followed by the Somali police (303).²¹

When in detention, both boys and girls are often subjected to disproportionate types of violence and exploitation, including during interrogations. While girls are at high risk of different forms of sexual violence, including rape and strip-searches during interrogations, boys are also subjected to such violence.²² Gender-specific interrogation techniques, including the use of sexual violence, often leave the male survivors with trauma and feelings of emasculation, powerlessness and failure.²³ Children are frequently detained with adults which may expose boys and girls to secondary victimisation and denial of access to child-appropriate services.²⁴

Removing children from their families and communities at a crucial stage in their emotional and cognitive development creates serious developmental deficits. Without access to educational or vocational opportunities, their life options are limited, and the risk of re-recruitment increases. When children are released from detention, both boys and girls continue to suffer long-term physical and mental distress, have difficulty finding work, and face rejection and reprisals regardless of whether they were directly or indirectly involved in the conflict or not.

To conclude, a more systematic analysis of the gender-differentiated risks and consequences of recruitment and use would support aligning prevention and response and ensuring that reintegration programmes and opportunities are safe and gender-sensitive.

2.2. Killing and Maiming

The targeted killing and maiming of children in armed conflict violate every moral and cardinal principle of law and war, which afford children complete immunity and special protection against any form of indecent assault. Yet at least 104,100 children have been verified casualties of war since 2005 when the MRM was established through Security Council resolution 1612.²⁵

In 2020, killing and maiming was one of the most prevalent violations committed against children with 8,422 children affected.²⁶ Parties to conflict continue to deploy landmines, cluster munitions, explosive remnants of war (ERWs), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and the use of chemical substances as weapons, including in dense urban areas, which causes widespread destruction leaving children maimed, mutilated and scarred by serious, permanent and disabling injuries. In the absence of measures to mitigate harm, children, regardless of their gender, are very likely to become casualties in a crossfire between parties during ground engagement.²⁷

²¹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Somalia, March 2020, S/2020/174. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2020/174>

²² United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, January 2012, A/66/657-S/2012/33. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2012/33>

²³ All Survivors Project, Destroyed from Within: Sexual violence against men and boys in Syria and Turkey, 2018. Available at: <https://allurvivorsproject.org/destroyed-from-within-sexual-violence-against-men-and-boys-in-syria-and-turkey/destroyed-from-within-sexual-violence-against-men-and-boys-in-syria-and-turkey/>

²⁴ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Handbook on Children Recruited and Exploited by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups: The Role of the Justice System, 2017.

²⁵ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022, p. 48. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

²⁶ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/873-S/2021/437. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>.

²⁷ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Small Arms and Light Weapons, December 2019, S/2019/1011. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2019/1011>

In 2020, an estimated 70 per cent of child casualties of conflict reported through the MRM were among boys.²⁸ The different risk exposure to killing and maiming between boys and girls can be partly explained by socio-cultural norms and expectations regarding gender roles. The outcome of the survey conducted in the context of the study on the evolution of the CAAC mandate published in January 2022 indicated that in many situations in the Middle East, families are more likely to impose restrictions on girls' movements and activities outside of the house based on safety concerns, whereas boys have greater risk exposure when they are at school or working, and especially when they are recruited and used in combat.²⁹ According to the survey, this disparity is attributed to the "gender restricted environment that does not allow girls to participate in public life equally as boys" and to the gender division of labour among children, in which boys' risk exposure is associated with their responsibilities for livestock herding.³⁰ In Iraq, for instance, between August 2019 and June 2021, approximately four times as many boys (193) were killed and maimed as compared to girls (48).³¹ Approximately 67 per cent of these children were affected by ERWs and IEDs while herding livestock or playing, predominantly in areas that had previously been under Da'esh control.³²



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Gender-motivated killings are often driven by the intersectionality between discrimination based on race and ethnicity and sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. In conflict settings, gender-based killing is also associated with human trafficking, organized crime and gang-related activities, unintended pregnancy, and forced abortion. Girls have become direct targets of deliberate killing by armed groups, including those designated as terrorist groups by the UN that oppose girls' education or gender equality. Adolescent girls and boys are targeted for joining resistance movements, and for their actual or alleged association with an armed group. More systematic gender analysis of killing and maiming would identify situations in which gender is a motivation for killing or maiming, for example, in the context of ethnic cleansing or genocide, where targeting is based on gender, race, and ethnicity as well as sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression. Similarly to recruitment and use, in situations where armed groups designated as terrorists are operating, gender-responsive monitoring of killing and maiming would also include an analysis of girls and women who are targeted for their activism as human rights and gender equality defenders. This contextual analysis can also help strengthen prevention and response programs.

The UN Arms Trade Treaty (ATT), adopted in 2013, prohibits States from exporting arms to States when there is an overriding risk that those arms could be used to commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law or international human rights law.³³ Prior to exporting conventional weapons, the ATT obliges States parties to assess the likelihood of the weapons being used to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence against women and children. A more systematic gender

²⁸ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/873-S/2021/437, para.6. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>

²⁹ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq, January 2022, S/2022/46, para.29. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2022/46>

³² Ibid, para. 31.

³³ United Nations, The Arms Trade Treaty, 2013. Available at: <https://www.thearmstradetreaty.org/hyper-images/file/TheArmsTradeTreaty1/TheArmsTradeTreaty.pdf>



analysis of the use of conventional arms in carrying acts of killing and maiming could accelerate efforts to curb the illicit proliferation of small arms and their contribution to gender-based violence against children.

Finally, the use of indiscriminate weapons has resulted in staggering levels of disability, particularly in Syria, Afghanistan, and Yemen. Establishing collaborations with organizations with the required expertise on disability could complement MRM reporting.

2.3. Rape and other Forms of Sexual Violence against Children

Sexual violence is a pervasive tactic of war and terrorism, perpetrated against women, men, girls, and boys. It is used to displace communities, as a form of political persecution, to terrorize and dehumanize, for ethnic cleansing, and to control female sexual and reproductive health and autonomy. The Security Council, in its first resolution on CAAC 1261 (1999), highlighted the need for “special measures to protect children from rape and other forms of sexual abuse and gender-based violence in the situations of armed conflict and to take into account the special needs of the girl child throughout armed conflicts and their aftermath”.³⁴ In resolution 1820 (2008), the Security Council outlined that conflict-related sexual violence against civilians can amount to crimes against humanity, war crimes and genocide and recognized that these crimes constitute a threat for international peace and security. In resolution 1882 (2009), the Council expressed its concern about “the high incidence of rape and other forms of sexual violence committed against children, in the context of and associated with armed conflict including the use or commissioning of rape and other forms of sexual violence in some situations as a tactic of war”³⁵, which led the violation of rape and other forms of sexual violence to become a trigger for listing parties to armed conflict in the annexes of the annual report of the Secretary-General on CAAC. Since 2005, the UN has verified the incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence of at least 14,200 children.³⁶ Nevertheless, rape and other forms of sexual violence against boys and girls remain chronically underreported due to protection concerns, fear of reprisals or rejection, stigma, weak rule of law and lack of appropriate response and services, among other factors.³⁷

The Security Council’s insights about the links between structural gender inequality and conflict-related sexual violence provide a critical context for understanding and responding to rape and sexual violence against children. In resolution 2467 (2019), the Council recognised that “sexual violence in conflict occurs on a continuum of interrelated and recurring forms of violence against women and girls...[while] conflict also exacerbates the frequency and brutality of other forms of gender-based violence”.³⁸ Further, it recognized that “the disproportionate impact of sexual violence in armed conflict and post-conflict situations on women and girls is exacerbated by discrimination against women and girls and by the underrepresentation of women in decision-making and leadership roles, the impact of discriminatory laws, the gender-biased enforcement and application of existing laws, harmful social norms and practices, structural inequalities, and discriminatory views on women or gender roles in society”.³⁹

According to the most recent report of the Secretary-General on CAAC, girls remain disproportionately affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence with 98 per cent of this violation perpetrated against

³⁴ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1261 (1999), S/RES/1261, para.10. Available at: [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1261%20\(1999\)](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1261%20(1999))

³⁵ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1882 (2009), S/RES/1882, p. 12. Available at: [https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1882%20\(2009\)](https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1882%20(2009))

³⁶ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022, p. 49. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

³⁷ United Nations, Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, July 2021, A/76/231, para.6. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/76/231>

³⁸ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), S/RES/2467, p. 13. Available at: [https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2467\(2019\)&Lang=E](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2467(2019)&Lang=E)

³⁹ Ibid, p. 12.

girls in 2020.⁴⁰ They are at heightened risk of sexual violence while walking to and from school or carrying out the daily livelihood activities that are socially prescribed based on gender, such as collecting firewood or water, as documented in Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and northern Nigeria.⁴¹ Armed groups, in particular groups designated as terrorists by the UN, frequently commit rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual slavery, targeting girls. For instance, in Somalia, girls are used as reward for fighters and an incentive for new recruits by Al-Shabaab. Rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence can form part of a wider pattern of ethnically and religiously motivated violence to terrorize and displace communities, expel ethnic minorities, and seize contested land and other resources. Most girls join armed groups by force or coercion and are most often held captive and subjected to repeated violations by multiple perpetrators. Girls that are forcibly married and have children are often rejected by their families and communities and struggle to resume their education or socioeconomic activities. In Northern Uganda, years after the conflict ended, girls returning home with children born as a result of conflict-related rape were more likely to suffer further victimization and rejection.⁴²

Additionally, girls are also targeted based on their actual or perceived political, ethnic, religious or gender identity or because of the perceived affiliations of their parents. The report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic also identified the use of sexual violence against women and/or girls residing in the home during arrests of the targeted male, as well as during detention and at checkpoints.⁴³ Harmful practices like forced and early marriage also tend to be underreported, including when families initiate these arrangements or if these are formalized following a forced pregnancy, through payments or economic compensations or when perpetrators are permitted to countermand a criminal case by marrying their victims.⁴⁴

After undergoing such heinous violence, oftentimes survivors face countless detrimental health consequences, such as physical injuries, psychological trauma, and adverse sexual and reproductive health outcomes. In times of conflict, for example, access to sexual and reproductive health services for survivors, including post-rape kits, is severely hampered due to insecurity and access constraints for service providers. This, in turn, may increase the risk of sexually transmitted diseases including HIV. In Mali, it was reported that about 50 per cent of health centres are not equipped with post-rape kits and 38 incidents of rape that resulted in HIV infection was reported in 2020.⁴⁵

Survivors are also exposed to other life-threatening risks and harms such as social and economic marginalisation, statelessness, discrimination, stigma, and legal barriers to access to justice and protection, which adversely affect the realisation of their rights and empowerment. These obstacles may be further exacerbated for the girls who become pregnant as a result of rape and for children born of such violence in conflict situations. Survivors and children born of conflict-related sexual violence are often perceived as affiliated with the parties to the conflict which may lead to further stigma, abuse, infanticide, abandonment or other grave violations.⁴⁶ This is the case in Afghanistan and Iraq, where hundreds of “wives” and children of terrorist fighters are being held in prisons without due process and identity documents.⁴⁷ In Iraq, returnees perceived as affiliated with ISIL faced discrimination and, in some cases,

⁴⁰ United Nations, Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/873 - S/2021/437. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>

⁴¹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, March 2015, S/2015/203. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2015/203>

⁴² International Review of the Red Cross, Child Marriage in Armed Conflict, 2019. Available at: <https://international-review.icrc.org/articles/child-marriage-armed-conflict>

⁴³ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, March 2021, S/2021/312, para. 56. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/312>

⁴⁴ Ibid, para. 32.

⁴⁵ Ibid, para. 39.

⁴⁶ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General, Women and girls who become pregnant as a result of sexual violence in conflict and children born of sexual violence in conflict, January 2022, S/2022/77. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2022/77>

⁴⁷ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, March 2021, S/2021/312, para.13. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/312>



were subjected to violence by local populations and comprehensive legislation and social support for children born of sexual violence remain insufficient.⁴⁸

While conflict-related sexual violence disproportionately affects girls, boys are frequently subjected to sexual violence in armed conflicts and post-conflict situations,⁴⁹ including as a form of ill-treatment in detention settings.⁵⁰ They also experience secondary trauma from becoming forced witnesses of sexual violence against family members. Adolescent boys and young men in Myanmar reported being forced to witness sexual violence against female family and community members.⁵¹ Boys are also recruited into sexual slavery. For instance, the Bacha Bazi practice is a form of sexual slavery used in Afghanistan by police, senior commanders or men in positions of power, involving the rape and sexual abuse of young boys or conscripts for protracted periods. Adolescent boys are groomed, kidnapped, or bought from poor families, and often made to dress as females and dance for entertainment, or engage in sexual acts. They are symbols of power and social status among warlords and former Mujahidin commanders. Although the practice was outlawed by the Taliban and in Afghanistan's revised penal code of February 2018 and Child Protection Law, it is still alleged to continue.⁵²

An analysis of the patterns of sexual violence throughout different stages of conflict would help understand how gender can be instrumentalized and how gender implications produce different and sometimes disproportionate impacts against girls and boys, so as to guide the design of prevention and response programs. More specifically, a cluster analysis of reporting on sexual violence when it occurs together with other violations could be correlated with victim/survivor profile characteristics, potentially offering greater insights into how rape and other forms of sexual violence are instrumentalized and about which children are at most risk.

2.4. Attacks against Schools and Hospitals

Through resolution 1998 (2011), the Security Council requested the Secretary-General to include attacks and threats of attacks on schools, hospitals, and related protected personnel as an additional trigger for listing in the annexes of his annual reports on CAAC. Targeted attacks on these protected facilities can mean a permanent end to a child's education and limited hope for benefitting from essential health care.

Since 2005, more than 13,900 attacks on schools and hospitals have been verified, three-quarters of which were in relation to education.⁵³ In 2020, the highest number of verified attacks on schools took place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Afghanistan, the Syrian Arab Republic, and Burkina Faso, where the MRM verified reports that schools and hospitals were bombed, looted and/or used for military purposes and then temporarily or permanently closed.⁵⁴ Protected persons in relation to schools and/or hospitals were also abducted, threatened, detained, injured or killed.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ Ibid, para. 33.

⁴⁹ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2467 (2019), S/RES/2467. Available at: [https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2467\(2019\)&Lang=E](https://daccess-ods.un.org/access.nsf/Get?OpenAgent&DS=S/RES/2467(2019)&Lang=E)

⁵⁰ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, S/2015/203, para.6. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2015/203>

⁵¹ Women's Refugee Commission, Sexual Violence against Men and Boys in Conflict and displacement: Findings from a Qualitative Study in Bangladesh, Italy and Kenya, 2020. Available at: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Sexual-Violence-against-Men-Boys-Synthesis-Report.pdf>

⁵² United Nations, Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Iraq, S/2022/46, para.31. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2022/46>

⁵³ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022, p. 50. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

⁵⁴ United Nations, Annual report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, May 2021, A/75/873 - S/2021/437. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/437>

⁵⁵ United Nations, Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, July 2021, A/76/231, para.7. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/76/231>

Sex disaggregation of information on individuals who are affected and under threat or targeted by attacks on schools and hospitals and correlation of reporting on attacks with information on access to services would enable advanced gender analysis on these attacks.

Attacks against Schools

In resolution 2601 (2021), the Security Council emphasised that “many children in armed conflict, in particular girls, lack access to education owing to attacks and threats of attacks against schools, damaged or destroyed school buildings, mines and explosive remnants of war, insecurity, the prevalence of violence, including sexual and gender-based violence against children, in and around schools and loss or lack of civil documentation.”⁵⁶

Targeted attacks on school infrastructure, including playgrounds, libraries, sanitation systems, classrooms, render them unusable, forcing schools to close temporarily or permanently. Due to humanitarian supply and access constraints, the looting and the destruction of educational and health facility equipment and records are often irreplaceable. Where schooling is not co-educational, boys’ schools may be more vulnerable to attack for recruitment, while girls and female teachers may be more vulnerable to attacks based on ideology. In its resolution 2601 (2021), the Security Council highlighted that girls and women may be the intended victims of attacks targeting their access to and continuation of education.⁵⁷ In the first six months of 2021, after regaining control of Afghanistan, Taliban forces closed 920 schools.⁵⁸ They entered schools for girls and set classes and equipment on fire, and damaged the school facilities, resulting in school closure.⁵⁹

Girls are often at risk of threats of attacks, rape and other forms of sexual violence, and abduction at school and on the way to and from school. In 2017, 82 schoolgirls among the 276 who had been abducted by Boko Haram in 2014 from a school in Chibok, Nigeria were released. As of 2021, over 100 of them have since been freed or managed to escape and the rest remain missing.⁶⁰ Girls who are abducted may be subjected to sexual violence, including sexual slavery as well as forced marriage. In 2018, the UN documented 110 schoolgirls were kidnapped from a school in northeast Nigeria and subjected by members of Boko Haram to forced marriage, rape and physical and emotional violence.⁶¹

Children are also exposed to abduction and recruitment during attacks on schools. Parties to conflict may also attack and subsequently use educational institutions for military purposes. In this regard, high recorded numbers of schoolboys are subject to recruitment and used as noted in Security Council



PHOTO CREDIT: UNICEF/UN0518466/Bidel

⁵⁶ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), S/RES/2601, p. 12. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/313/76/PDF/N2131376.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵⁷ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), S/RES/2601, p. 11. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/313/76/PDF/N2131376.pdf?OpenElement>

⁵⁸ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, The Impact of Explosive Weapons on Education: A Case Study of Afghanistan, 2021. Available at: <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/the-impact-of-explosive-weapons-on-education-a-case-study-of-afghanistan/>

⁵⁹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict in Afghanistan, S/2021/662, para.48. Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2021/662>

⁶⁰ BBC, Nigeria kidnappings: Chibok schoolgirl returns home seven years on, 8 August 2021. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58138504>

⁶¹ United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related Sexual Violence, March 2019, S/2019/280, para.119. <https://undocs.org/en/S/2019/280>



resolution 2601 (2021).⁶² Both boys and girls may be abducted and recruited and used not only in military operations, including in direct combat or as spies, suicide bombers or human shields, but also in supporting roles such as cooking and cleaning.⁶³ Though there is a need for in-depth sex-disaggregated data and analysis, it is worth noting that in some contexts such as Yemen and Afghanistan, education for boys is given priority over girls' education. This may lead to higher enrolment and attendance rates among boys hence increasing the possibility of a higher number of boys affected by this violation.⁶⁴

The consequences of such attacks have long-term implications for boys and girls regardless of their gender, although the destruction and closure of schools can exacerbate pre-existing gender inequalities of educational access at all levels. For instance, children who have been affected by rape and other forms of sexual violence including forced marriage and who were forcibly recruited and used by armed forces may further face stigma, discrimination and exclusion, which may impede the continuation of their education. When adolescent girls drop out of school, they usually take on domestic labour and family care responsibilities for other children or sick household members, while boys are likely to drop out of school to find work and support their families or join parties to conflict for security or protection.

Attacks against Hospitals

Attacks on hospitals continued to have a devastating impact on girls and boys and remained particularly high in 2020.⁶⁵ In situations of armed conflict, hospitals are often threatened or forced to close, medical supplies are stolen, and medical personnel may be detained or killed. Armed forces and groups may also position themselves in a hospital to filter patients in search of wounded members or rival parties. Consequently, these acts could cause destruction and closure of fully functioning medical facilities, hindering children's access to life-saving services and care which may lead to increased mortality in boys and girls.

In the context of the MRM, information on the victims of attacks against hospitals is not systematically disaggregated by sex, thus there is insufficient analysis on the gendered impact of this violation at the time this paper was produced. However, boys and girls may be affected differently by the consequences of such attacks. In particular, the destruction and closure of health facilities that provide sexual and reproductive health services may hinder girls of childbearing age from accessing necessary care, including obstetric and gynaecological care services, leaving them more vulnerable to childbirth complications and maternal deaths. Moreover, the limited availability of services and their predominant focus on girls and women often prevent boys that survive sexual violence and abuse from accessing health services. Overall, the gendered impact of the attacks on hospitals needs to be assessed further through in-depth analysis.

Military Use of Schools and Hospitals

Schools and hospitals can be used for military purposes, such as for weapons depots or operational centres. The use of protected facilities for military purposes not only jeopardises the civilian nature of the infrastructure, but also exposes students and educational personnel, as well as patients and medical personnel, to the risk of retaliatory attacks and other violations.⁶⁶ The study conducted by the OSRSG

⁶² United Nations, Security Council resolution 2601 (2021), S/RES/2601, para.11. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/313/76/PDF/N2131376.pdf?OpenElement>

⁶³ United Nations, Impact of Armed Conflict on Children: Report of the Expert of the Secretary-General, Ms. Graça Machel, submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/157, 1996, A/51/306. Available at: https://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/51/306&Lang=E&Area=UNDOC

⁶⁴ Save the Children, Gender, Age and Conflict: Addressing the different needs of children, 2020. Available at: <https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SC-Gender-Age-and-Conflict-report-final.pdf>

⁶⁵ Ibid, para. 7.

⁶⁶ Global Coalition to Protect Education from Attack, Education Under Attack 2020, 2020. Available at: <https://protectingeducation.org/publication/education-under-attack-2020/>

CAAC on the impact of COVID-19 on the implementation of the MRM documented an alarming increase of military use of empty schools, in violation of international humanitarian law which prohibits using them as military bases, shelters, for staging, weapons storage, training, or as a checkpoint or detention facilities.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the gender dimensions of the military use of schools and hospitals needs to be further examined.

2.5. Abduction

In 2014, Boko Haram was largely unknown outside of Nigeria before it abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, the country's predominantly Muslim northern region.⁶⁸ The 2015 annual report of the Secretary-General on CAAC drew attention to this tragedy and the growing use of mass abductions as a tactic to terrorize ethnic groups or religious communities, and as a precursor to other violations, including recruitment and use, or sexual violence.⁶⁹

Subsequently, the Security Council adopted resolution 2225 (2015), which added abduction an additional violation to trigger inclusion in the annexes of the Secretary-General's annual report. In doing so, the Council recognized the association between mass abduction and heightened risks for girls to be subjected to recruitment and use, sexual slavery, and trafficking, even in post-conflict situations and despite the cessation of hostilities.

Globally, the MRM has verified 25,700 cases of abduction between 2005-2020⁷⁰, one of the fastest-growing violations against children in armed conflict. In 2020, child abductions increased by 90 per cent, accounting for the largest number of verified violations. Over 95 per cent of the 1,683 verified child abductions were perpetrated by non-State actors, mainly in Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria.⁷¹

The abduction of children in situations of armed conflict is mostly perpetrated by non-State armed groups and occurs in a variety of settings, including from children's homes, schools, and public spaces, often preceding or following other abuses and violations.⁷² Abduction is both a grave violation and a means, or strategy, for committing other grave violations, and often takes place for the purpose of recruitment and use, and in contexts of forced displacement. Some armed groups, especially those designated as terrorists by the UN, have institutionalized the abduction of girls and boys as a recruitment strategy and as an instrument to increase their finances.⁷³

More than 70 per cent of CTFMRs consulted in the context of the development of the Study on the evolution of the CAAC mandate reported that boys and girls are equally at risk of abduction, associating the abduction of boys with recruitment and use, and the abduction of girls with sexual violence, including sexual slavery. The CTFMRs also indicated that gender differentiation was more pronounced in relation to the circumstances under which they are abducted, the causal drivers,

⁶⁷ OSRSG CAAC, Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, 2021. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Impact-of-the-COVID-19-pandemic-on-violations-against-children-in-situations-of-armed-conflict-1.pdf>

⁶⁸ Available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2021/03/23/boko-haram-nigeria-kidnappings-school-children/#>

⁶⁹ A/69/926- S/2015/409 pp 6.

⁷⁰ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, p. 49. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

⁷¹ United Nations, Annual Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, June 2020, A/74/845-S/2020/525, para. 11. Report of the SG Available at: <https://undocs.org/S/2020/525>

⁷² United Nations, Security Council resolution 2225 (2015), S/RES/2225. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N15/183/99/PDF/N1518399.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷³ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2331 (2016), S/RES/2331. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/451/58/PDF/N1645158.pdf?OpenElement>. Also see, United Nations, Security Council resolution 2388 (2017), S/RES/2388. Available at: https://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2388%282017%29



the subsequent violations experienced, and the medium- and longer-term impacts on them.⁷⁴ The deadly nexus linking grave violations of abduction, sexual violence, and recruitment and use has become a defining feature of the operations of groups listed as terrorists by the UN such as ISIL, Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab, Al Qaida, and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.⁷⁵ One of the CTFMRs consulted indicated that during ISIL's occupation, abduction was predominantly documented as an accompanying factor of girls being subjected to recruitment and use and sexual violence.⁷⁶

ISIL's genocidal campaign against the Yazidi religious minority instrumentalized the enslavement of Yazidi women and girls. ISIL used the shariah practice of the 'spoils or 'wages of war' to forcibly enslave and traffic Yazidi women and girls from Mosul to Raqqa, in the Syrian Arab Republic, for distribution among ISIL fighters. Formal regulations were issued regarding the purchase, sale, 'gifting' of girls as a form of in-kind payment, and 'disposal', as they were not considered eligible for marriage because of their religion. Some were even bequeathed as part of the estates of deceased ISIL fighters. In Syria, ISIL abducted Yazidi girls as young as nine years of age for sale at markets or held them in captivity for sexual purposes at "rest houses" or prisons as rewards to fighters or commanders.⁷⁷

As conflicts increasingly take on regional dimensions, so do the risks facing children. In resolution 1612 (2005), the Security Council drew attention to interlinkages among the cross-border abduction of children and the recruitment and use of children as soldiers as well as other violations and abuses committed against children in situations of armed conflict in violation of international applicable law.⁷⁸ In addition, girls are at risk of specific vulnerability concerning trafficking in persons as it is a critical component of the financial flows to armed groups designated as terrorists by the UN.⁷⁹

2.6. Denial of Humanitarian Access for Children

Denying humanitarian access to children and attacks against humanitarian workers is prohibited by international law, which requires that children must be among the first to receive protection and relief.⁸⁰ In defining the "denial of humanitarian access", the MRM Field Manual and its Annex on International Legal Foundations and Standards make explicit the need to consider three dimensions of access: (1) factors constraining humanitarian agencies' ability to access children, and (2) factors constraining children's access to the special attention and the care they require and (3) the humanitarian consequences of access constraints for subpopulations that are especially vulnerable and cut off from essential life-saving aid.⁸¹

⁷⁴ OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022. p. 52. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

⁷⁵ United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Handbook on Gender Dimensions of Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism, 2019, p. 130. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/terrorism/Publications/GENDER/17-08887_HB_Gender_Criminal_Justice_E_ebook.pdf

⁷⁶ Survey conducted by the OSRSG CAAC with CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations in the framework of the development of the Study on the evolution of the children and armed conflict mandate 1996-2021. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>

⁷⁷ The Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups, 2020, p. 8. Available at: <https://alliancecpha.org/en/GAAFAG>

⁷⁸ United Nations, Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), S/RES/1612, para.16. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N05/439/59/PDF/N0543959.pdf?OpenElement>

⁷⁹ United Nations, Security Council resolution 2331 (2016), S/RES/2331. Available at: <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N16/451/58/PDF/N1645158.pdf?OpenElement>

⁸⁰ Art. 23, 142 Geneva IV; art. 54, 70, 77 AP I, art. 14, 18 AP II, and Principle 8 of the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

⁸¹ OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF and Department of Peacekeeping Operations, FIELD MANUAL - Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on Grave Violations Against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict, 2014, p. 71. Available at: https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MRM_Field_5_June_2014.pdf

Among the six grave violations against children, the denial of humanitarian access is the only one that does not trigger the listing of parties to conflict in the annexes of the Secretary-General annual reports on CAAC. While in-depth analysis on the gender dimension of this violation is missing, mainly due to limited sex-disaggregated data, it is important to acknowledge that the impact of the denial of humanitarian access for children may differ based on their gender and that it increases the vulnerability of boys and girls in different ways.

Moreover, in conflict and post-conflict settings, children often find themselves becoming the new head of households due to separation or loss of parents and taking responsibility for acquiring resources such as food, water or fuel. However, in contexts where women and girls have limited mobility due to security issues or cultural and social influence, it may be challenging for women and girls to access humanitarian aid, especially in relation to sexual and reproductive health.

According to the survey conducted in the framework of the 25th anniversary study on the evolution of the CAAC mandate⁸², respondents mostly indicated that the denial of humanitarian access impacts boys and girls equally. Nevertheless, some respondents noted that girls are mostly affected by movement restrictions, which would imply, for example, additional challenges in accessing areas of distribution of humanitarian aid. Other respondents noted that teenage boys could be perceived as associated with an opposing party and therefore denied access by local actors facilitating the distribution of humanitarian assistance. The respondents also emphasized the need for a better understanding of the gender-differentiated impacts of the denial of humanitarian assistance on girls as compared to boys.

Restrictions on visas or travel permits for humanitarian personnel limits the number and type of organizations that are allowed to operate, the type of services or relief they deliver, and the areas they are permitted to access. This, in turn, may limit the availability of age and gender-specific assistance and services provision.

Actual and potential attacks against humanitarian personnel may increase the vulnerability of children affected by conflict. National personnel and local contractors of UN agencies and non-governmental organizations continue to be the most vulnerable. Although data on attacks against humanitarian personnel is not disaggregated by sex, fewer female personnel are likely engaged in high-risk relief efforts. The reduced presence of female protection officers, clinicians, and teachers often reduces girls' access to life-saving assistance.

A gender analysis of the special needs of girls and boys that are denied humanitarian access could inform strategies to overcome the obstacles confronting humanitarian actors. This could be complemented by an assessment of "acts of omission" or failures on the part of states to prevent, protect, and respond appropriately to violations where the state knew or should have known about these violations.

⁸² OSRSG CAAC, Study on the evolution of the Children and Armed Conflict mandate 1996-2021, 2022. Available at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Study-on-the-evolution-of-the-Children-and-Armed-Conflict-mandate-1996-2021.pdf>



3.

Existing Challenges in Conducting Gender Analysis in the Context of the MRM and Preliminary Guidance for CTFMRs

This section outlines the challenges in conducting gender analysis in the context of the MRM that have been identified by the five CTFMRs consulted in the framework of this study, namely Afghanistan, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria and Yemen, through a survey and bilateral interviews. It also proposes a list of guiding questions for CTFMRs to identify, assess, and possibly address each identified challenge in general terms.

It is important to highlight that the capacities of CTFMRs to conduct gender analysis and integrate a gender perspective in the MRM varies greatly from situation to situation, mainly depending on their monitoring capacities. The challenges mentioned in this chapter are not meant to be exhaustive nor fully representative of the challenges that other CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations are facing.

3.1. Sex Disaggregation

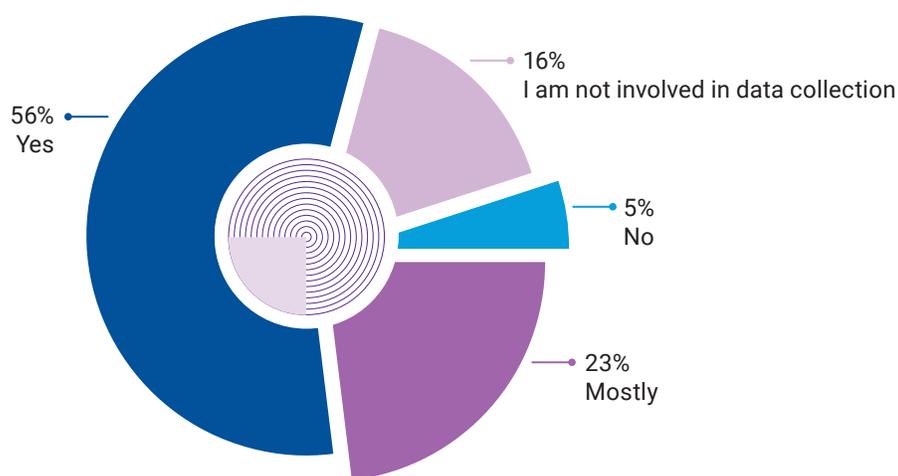
The Annual Report of the Secretary-General on CAAC provides sex-disaggregated data on each grave violation. Eight out of 13 Security Council resolutions on CAAC have highlighted girls' specific vulnerabilities and needs. Most recently, the emphasis on vulnerabilities and specific needs of boys have also been explicitly referred to in the last two resolutions on CAAC: resolution 2427 (2018) and resolution 2601 (2021).

By all accounts, major progress has been achieved over the last few years on breaking down violation incidents by sex. The overwhelming majority of CTFMRs and their members are now aware of the importance of sex disaggregation and systematically attempt it. This is the result of a systemic effort: the sex of child victims is included in the MRM templates (e.g., the incident form) and it is always documented when feasible.

Figure 1 shows that about 80 per cent of respondents reported that they are either fully or mostly capable of disaggregating data by sex, with only 5 per cent reporting that they could not and 16 per cent indicating they are not involved in data collection. Interviews with CTFMR members revealed that data disaggregation by sex is most easily and frequently done for the following four violations: killing and maiming, recruitment and use, sexual violence and abductions.⁸³

Figure 1: CTFMR Survey Question #4

Are you able to collect sex-disaggregated data for six grave violations?



⁸³ According to an analysis of MRM data conducted by Save the Children in 2020: "Some violations are more consistently disaggregated by sex than others: abduction (99%), sexual violence (96%) and recruitment and use (94%) had the highest levels of disaggregation in the UN's 2019 report. In comparison, disaggregation for incidents of killing or maiming was less consistent, with 83% verified incidents divided according to sex, and none of the verified incidents of attacks on hospitals were disaggregated by sex—or age—in 2019 or 2018 reports." In *Gender, Age and Conflict: Addressing the Different Needs of Children* (April 2020): <https://www.savethechildren.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SC-Gender-Age-and-Conflict-report-final.pdf>



It was identified that sex disaggregation is challenging for collective violations, such as attacks against schools and hospitals, as individual victims may not necessarily be known, although information on students is sometimes collected for incidents of attacks against schools. Data disaggregation for denial of humanitarian access remains elusive, as the number and victims of this violation are generally estimated based on available population statistics.

However, sex disaggregation can remain a challenge for individual violations in some contexts. Reasons invoked for these documentation gaps include the following factors: families refusing to disclose detailed information to monitors out of grief, fears for their child's safety, or the sensitive/taboo nature of the violation; the presence of armed groups obstructing access to sources, or intimidating sources; the volume of cases to investigate and follow up. In these situations, once the basic information about an incident is confirmed, monitors may not pursue further documentation efforts, including victim/survivor profiling. For example, with killing and maiming, the challenge is with high-casualty aerial attacks or incidents involving Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), which not only cause dozens of casualties, effectively becoming a collective violation, but also create challenges in terms of identification of victims. Although medical sources can confirm the number of victims, their sex is not always ascertained, and monitors may not have the capacity to pursue this information with witnesses and families, especially if the number of victims has been high.

Sex disaggregation is rarely a problem for incidents of rape and other forms of sexual violence. Nevertheless, this violation continues to be seriously underreported for both girls and boys.

Guiding Questions to Strengthen Sex-Disaggregated Data Collection

- For which violations is data disaggregation not fully possible? Can reasons be identified?
- If the reason is linked to the source, can data on the profiles of the victims/survivors be obtained from other sources? (e.g., hospitals, police, community members)
- If it is linked to trust / the sensitive nature of the violation, would another CTFMR member have better access to sources through their programmes?
- Can an estimate of the number of girls/boys affected be provided instead? Either from the source or available demographic data?
- Can other types of data be gathered to help determine the sex of victims or at least suggest estimates? (e.g., number of girls/boys enrolled in a school that has been bombed)

3.2. Underreporting or Biased Reporting

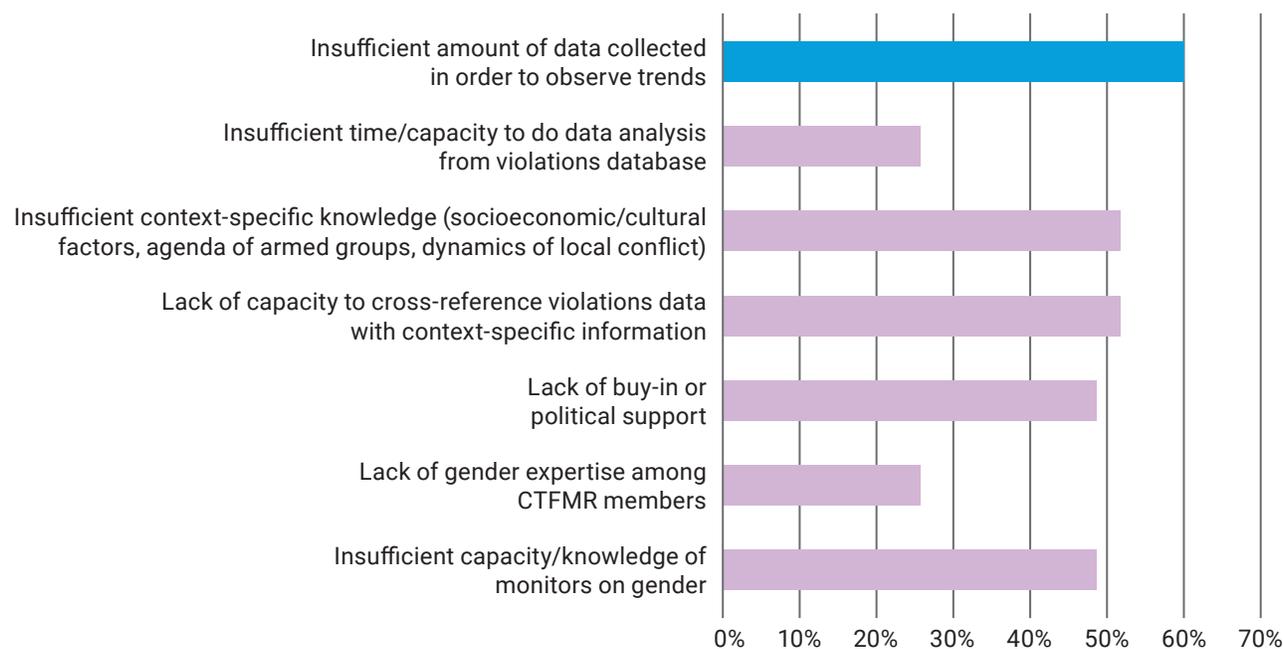
There are many reasons why violations are not reported by victims/survivors and their families and communities, and these are very often directly linked to sex/gender. Underreporting can lead to biased reports and gender-blind responses, and it could also enable the perpetration of further violations. The outcomes of the CTFMR survey demonstrated that the most challenging issue for a gender analysis of grave violations is the insufficient amount of data collected to observe trends, reported by 60 per cent of the respondents (see figure 2).



PHOTO CREDIT: UNICEF/UNI328045/Haro

Figure 2: CTFMR Survey Question #9

In your context, what are the main challenges for a gender analysis of grave violations?



It is important to highlight that in some CAAC country situations, interviewees have stressed that some practices are not considered by communities to be violations of children’s rights, especially if the violations are perpetrated by communities themselves rather than an external party. For example, in some contexts, “forced marriage” is not considered a violation by men or women when families and local government representatives or traditional leaders facilitate the recruitment of boys or girls in exchange for security or resources, or to “resolve” a claimed rape involving girls, including very young girls. Often the family members may have arranged the marriage themselves. Similarly, in many contexts, boys are expected to earn a living and/or take up arms to support and defend their family and community. Families will not see this as a violation but as a duty, and they may conceal information on the whereabouts of their child to any monitor investigating their disappearance.

Victims/survivors and their families may also actively conceal an incident if they feel it can stigmatise and dishonour them. For example, boys subjected to sexual violence may feel that their masculinity will be undermined if they disclose the incident.⁸⁴ Girls and their families may also refrain from reporting sexual violence if it takes away a girl’s chance to marry and continue being respected and protected by their community. In the most extreme cases, violations linked to sex/gender are so sensitive that concealment can even lead to murder—of a witness or victim. For example, the family of a girl who was raped or even abducted by a party to conflict is likely to cover up the incident by marrying their daughter to the perpetrator or, too often, by carrying out an “honour killing”.

On the other hand, in similar contexts, boys who do report being sexually abused may instead face disbelief and mistrust, rather than stigma and rejection. In many socially conservative contexts, entrenched homophobia may render many violations—including potentially those affecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and questioning (LGBTIQ+) children—invisible and unreported because it is not recognised or accepted by the concerned society.

⁸⁴ All Survivors Project, *Destroyed from Within: Sexual violence against men and boys in Syria and Turkey*, 2018. Available at: <https://allsurvivorsproject.org/destroyed-from-within-sexual-violence-against-men-and-boys-in-syria-and-turkey/destroyed-from-within-sexual-violence-against-men-and-boys-in-syria-and-turkey/>



In some cases, the gender dimension of a violation is missed because groups of victims/survivors are not visible to monitors. For example, the proportion of girls among children associated with armed groups has been, and continues to be, vastly under-estimated because girls remain much less visible than boys and often are released from the groups in an informal manner, which precludes their registration into reintegration centres, all of which militate against having firm figures for impacted girls.⁸⁵ Similarly, whereas the vast majority of children deprived of liberty in context settings are boys, violations that they are typically subjected to in these all-male environments are mostly out of the reach of child protection monitors.⁸⁶

Finally, some interviewees mentioned the potential gender bias of monitors leading them to report sexual violence against boys as torture and other forms of cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment. Other interviewees stressed a potential gender bias in the reporting in patriarchal cultures as the interviews are predominantly conducted with male sources.⁸⁷ In that region, men have more public lives than women, and they have more opportunities than women to represent and speak on behalf of the community. If most sources are male, the information conveyed to the CTFMR, in general, is likely to be gender-biased and misrepresent (or not represent) the situation and perspective of girls—particularly so in a society where girls are less culturally visible, their rights, needs and experiences less understood, and their voices considered as less important.

Guiding Questions to Identify and Address Underreporting or Biased Reporting

- Is it possible to diversify sources of data to tackle underreporting or biased reporting? Can there be equal representation of sexes among sources used for one incident?
- If relevant/necessary, could monitoring templates be translated into minority languages?
- Could sources be misreporting violations (failing to identify multiple violations, or failing to see marriage as rape, torture as sexual violence)? Are monitors aware of any signals or euphemisms survivors of sexual violence might convey instead of labelling the abuse they were subjected to?
- If sources, or victims/survivors themselves, are difficult to identify or reach, is it possible to establish links with and use community-based services (medical, psychosocial, educational, economic or legal) as entry points for reporting? Are there other ways information could be collected from girls who do not participate in public life and are not represented by heads of households?
- Would employing more female child protection staff help? Opinions are divided, and the sex of the monitor in no way guarantees the disclosure of information from victims of the same sex. However, CTFMRs should bear in mind that a victim-centred approach should allow the victim to choose the sex of their interviewer, particularly for cases of rape and other forms of sexual violence.
- For more long-term approaches, can CTFMR entities and partners plan/coordinate sensitisation activities to shift social norms related to gender? Can key actors be engaged, and dialogue take place on some of the sensitive gender issues affecting specific contexts? Perhaps through identifying and working with certain groups which are open to change?

⁸⁵ The reasons for this have been extensively and repeatedly documented and analysed—most recently in Alliance for Child Protection in Humanitarian Action, *Technical Note on Girls Associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups* (December 2020): https://alliancecpha.org/system/tdf/library/attachments/tn_gaafag_eng.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=41543. The report also specifies: “The body of evidence related to GAAG [girls associated with armed forces and armed groups] is very limited. The lack of data on girls’ association with armed actors has contributed to a misrepresentation of the problem. The recruitment and use of girls is highly contextual with respect to both numbers and girl’s roles and functions. Although studies estimate that girls represent 6 to 50% of children associated, only a fraction of girls are formally identified and released. Worldwide, 74% of the conflicts have led to the recruitment of children by parties to the conflict, out of which 63% have used girls. Data also suggests that the likelihood of recruitment of girls increases with the length of the conflict. However, based on 2019 verified data from the Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on the six grave violations of children’s rights in situations of armed conflict, only 8% of 4,594 CAAG identified in 11 countries were girls.”

⁸⁶ Manfred Nowak, Report of the Independent Expert of the Secretary-General leading the United Nations global study on children deprived of liberty, July 2019, A/74/136, para.36. Available at: <https://undocs.org/A/74/136>.

⁸⁷ OSRSG CAAC, UNICEF and Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *GUIDELINES on Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism on Grave Violations against Children in Situations of Armed Conflict*, 2014, p. 9. Available at: https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/MRM_Guidelines_-_5_June_20141.pdf

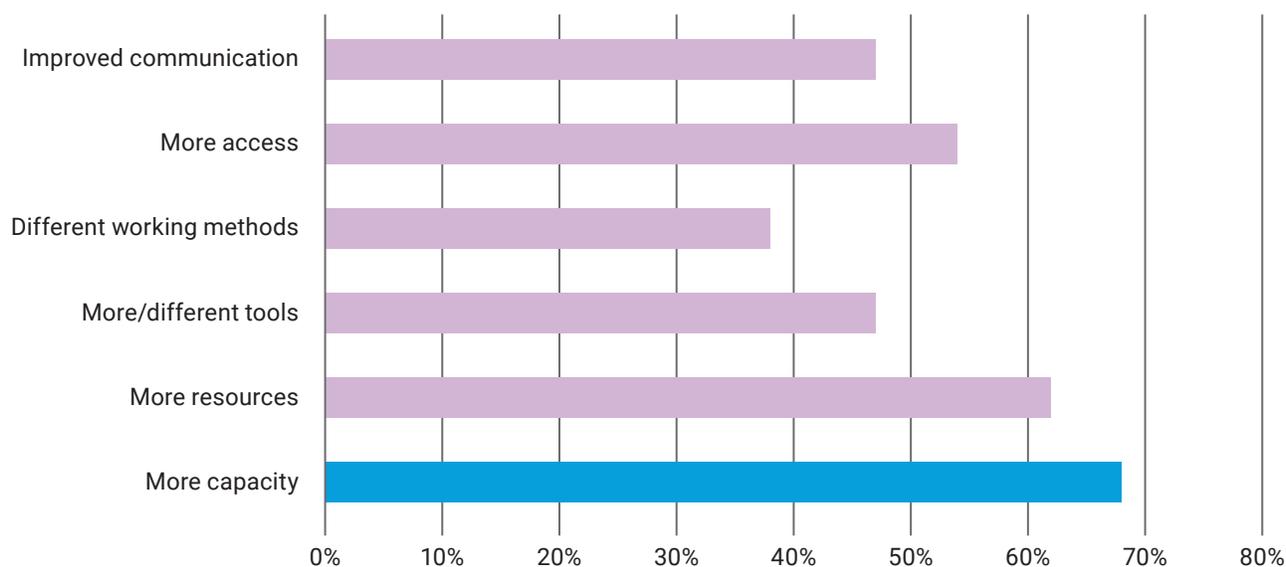
- Can there be collaborations with local and national media to not only publicly raise gender issues and thereby normalise discussions about gender, but also to investigate specific violations that are particularly difficult to document?
- If reaching “hidden” victims is too challenging, can information be accessed through sources close to them? For example, by asking children recently separated from armed groups how many girls and boys were associated with that group?

3.3. Monitoring Capacity

The gender-responsiveness of the MRM depends on the expertise and capacity of existing UN information-gathering resources at the country level. Where a monitoring system is present in situations that are not on the Council’s agenda, or where there is a limited UN presence, there will likely be fewer available resources and gender expertise. The survey showed that almost 70 per cent of the respondents require more capacity in order for them to conduct a gender analysis of grave violations. (See figure 3)

Figure 3: CTFMR Survey Question #10

What do you think would equip you to conduct a gender analysis of grave violations?



With some exceptions, CTFMRs as instruments for monitoring, verification, advocacy, facilitation of dialogue with parties to conflict and providing technical assistance to joint action plan implementation, are not set up to conduct in-depth research on violations and may not have the type of monitoring expertise required for thorough gender analysis. The capacity is sometimes barely sufficient to allow them to verify and report on violations they receive. Yet, the type of monitoring that is susceptible to improving our understanding of the gender dimensions of the impact of conflict on children needs to be more comprehensive and therefore proactive, particularly when social norms related to gender significantly obstruct monitoring.

Efficient gender analysis relies on constant questioning and follow-up of data received. In other words, promoting a differentiated understanding of the experiences of girls and boys requires CTFMRs to not only extend their monitoring reach (as described above in 2.2), but also (i) Develop and verify hypotheses through active case finding; (ii) Seek more individualised information from victims/survivors, and their families and communities; (iii) Be appraised of the socio-cultural, economic, political and security contexts, and (iv) Be aware of the continuum of violations.



- **Develop and verify hypotheses through active case finding:** For example, CTFMRs could interrogate data on sexual violence against girls associated with armed groups as follows: Why is there no data on sexual violence against boys? Is it not happening, or is information not reaching us? What is the armed group's perception of boys' roles? How do they use boys and is it based on expectations around masculinity? How does it impact them in the long term? How are girls impacted and what responses are in place for each group? (Etc.) If possible, monitors should then seek to gather this evidence to complete a gender analysis. (Noting that once the analysis is done, it may remain valid for a long time.)
- **Conduct interviews with victims and/or their families:** Many interviewees stated that the type of qualitative data needed for a gender analysis of CAAC violations should ideally be collected through individual interviews. The most direct way to appreciate the differentiated experiences of girls and boys is to ask them.⁸⁸ Individual interviews are already conducted with children separated from armed forces/groups, and they provide a wealth of evidence to guide gender-sensitive prevention and response activities. Interviews could be particularly useful to appreciate the distinct impacts of denial of humanitarian access on girls and boys, for example. In addition, as one CTFMR interviewee put it, in complex conflict contexts, issues affecting boys and girls vary significantly from one locality to another. The more specific the information is, the better.
- **Gathering contextual information:** To understand the gendered nature of child rights violations, data collected on violations alone is not sufficient. It needs to be studied in the context of other relevant material, including information on the social, cultural, economic, political and security realities that define the lives of girls and boys, sometimes in very different ways, in a given situation bearing in mind that the MRM is based on international child rights standards, not the standards of the country being monitored, but that understanding the local socio-cultural context is key to being able to gather data efficiently and sensitively, and that understanding is not justifying. An understanding of the local gender norms and power dynamics is crucial, as well as of the motivations and actions of some parties to conflict. Knowledge of protection gaps affecting girls and boys respectively may also be useful. Other statistical or mapping data sets could also throw some light on the gender dimensions of violations, as well as data from other monitoring bodies.⁸⁹
- **Be aware of the continuum of violations:** Girls and boys are often trapped in the so-called gender-based violence continuum. For example, a girl recruited by an armed group can be subjected to sexual violence and become pregnant, becoming trapped in an armed group longer than her male counterpart, and missing out entirely on her education. Upon release/escape, due to gender norms, she is likely to face stigma and social rejection, leading to aggravated impacts on her mental and physical health, and exposing her to further harm, e.g., exploitative forms of labour. Gender analysis needs to look beyond the current incident to consider compounding violations in the long term. A violation can be the continuation of a series of incidents, and/or can trigger additional violations. Labelling and adding up incidents and victims is an important aspect of the MRM, but CTFMRs should be mindful of the broader gender dynamics of violations.

Some CTFMR staff stressed that MRM monitoring templates are specifically designed to be easy to use and allow the collection of data at scale. So, in order for CTFMRs to be able to capture information on the reasons behind a violation, whether these reasons were in any way related to gender, and on the long-term impact of the incident on the child, they would need to deploy additional resources, which are already lacking to fulfill their current mandate. One CTFMR interviewee said that the incident forms were reviewed and simplified last year, as they were too burdensome for some of their monitors.

⁸⁸ Always respecting international guidelines and good practices on interviewing children. See UNICEF's guidelines for interviewing children: <https://www.unicef.org/media/reporting-guidelines>.

⁸⁹ For example, UNICEF's Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys statistics or OCHA's visualisations of conflict-related data. But also international, country-specific reporting mechanisms such as the monitoring, analysis and reporting arrangements on conflict-related sexual violence (MARA), state and alternative reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, Universal Period Review reports to the UN Human Rights Council, the US State Department's Trafficking in Persons reports, etc. Thematic reports produced by NGOs on MRM situations also provide a wealth of analysis which can assist CTFMRs in assessing the gender dimensions of violations.

More fundamentally, and even with specially designed tools, the real challenge is that many CTFMRs do not have the resources (time and staff) to do this analytical work. Or to do it systematically. For example, 51 per cent of survey respondents cited ‘insufficient context-specific knowledge’ as a challenge, but the same number of respondents also cited “lack of capacity to cross-reference violations data with context-specific information” as another challenge: both gathering and analysing information appear to be serious obstacles. Indeed, there is often a maximum of one or two MRM posts in each CTFMR (some are often part-time), and the responsibility for compiling and cross-referencing all this information would fall solely on them.

Guiding Questions to Enhance Monitoring Capacity

- Since monitoring cannot be exhaustive anyway, could CTFMR members (and partners) consider conducting targeted interviews, including where relevant with small groups of children affected by an incident in one location, to throw some light on its gender aspects? For example:
 - Interview a group of students after an attack on school (and ask, among other questions, if girls have come back to school since the incident).
 - Interview a group of children who were injured during an attack. (Could being maimed have compounded existing vulnerabilities for girls?).
 - Interview community members in a village that has been denied humanitarian access. (Could lack of access to water due to a siege disproportionately affect girls?)
 - Interview service providers to get a better sense of the profile of victims and survivors they are providing assistance to.
- Could any information be (formally or informally) gathered from armed groups during the engagement process following the signature of Action Plans? For example, discussions held during sensitizations on child protection could provide some insights into their views and attitudes on gender roles and that of the wider community in which they operate.
- If there is no capacity for proactive research, can existing data on violations be better exploited? For example, by cross-referencing database categories; looking at data subsets; and/or compiling incidents of multiple violations?
 - By cross-referencing sex and location in their database for the killing and maiming of boys, one CTFMR monitoring team was able to see that, whereas boys were killed in markets, mosques or bus stations, a significant proportion of girls were killed at home—thus exposing the gender dimension and consequences of this violation.⁹⁰
 - Zooming in on data subsets can also be very informative. For example, could the specific age brackets of children used by Boko Haram to carry and detonate explosives indicate that the group is relying increasingly on young girls—revealing a strategy betting on prevailing social perceptions of young girls as inoffensive (when women wearing a burqa could arouse more suspicion). When cross-referenced, data subsets often enable a more gendered reading of documented incidents.
 - It is also important to interrogate information management systems to identify cross-cutting violations and the gender-based continuum of violations.

⁹⁰ This analysis was also reflected in Save the Children’s report *Stop the War on Children—Gender Matters* (February 2020): <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/node/16784/pdf/ch1413553.pdf>: “The specific vulnerability of boys, particularly adolescents, reflects the ways in which cultural gender norms influence when and where girls and boys spend the majority of their time. Boys are often expected, and permitted, to be outside in the community more than girls, who may spend more time at home. This affects boys’ exposure to crossfire, unexploded ordnance and explosive remnants of war. Boys, particularly adolescents, are more likely to be targeted by armed actors because they are perceived as a threat.”



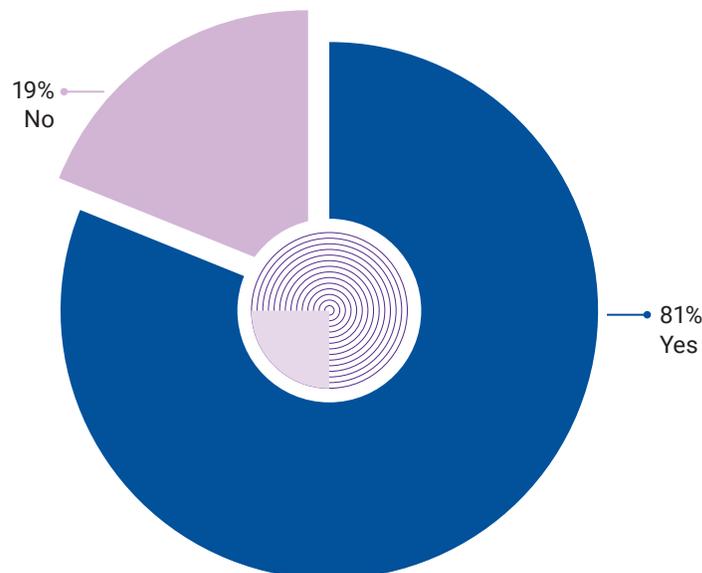
- Can contextual information be gathered from CTFMR member entities with specialist knowledge, or from national staff? Could this be done in regular information exchanges beyond the CTFMR technical-level meetings?
- Would CTFMRs consider questioning the data they receive even if they do not have the capacity to conduct proactive monitoring and full gender analysis, simply to expose the gaps and report information with all the necessary caveats?

Gender Expertise

The vast majority of CTFMR survey respondents (80 per cent) indicated that they have received some form of training or sensitization on gender. (See figure 4) However, during the interviews, CTFMR interviewees emphasized three specific gender capacity gaps:

Figure 4: CTFMR Survey Question #3

Have you received any training/sensitisation on gender?



- **Insufficient gender capacity/knowledge of monitors:** 49 per cent of respondents cited this challenge (see figure 2) and stressed how essential it was for monitors to be sensitised because any assumption, ignorance or bias on their part will compromise the data and misrepresent the gender dynamics of violations. For example, some interviewees expressed concerns about the fact that stereotypes may persist that only boys are used in hostilities, or that sexual violence only affects girls.
- **Lack of gender expertise among CTFMR members:** It was identified as a challenge by 24 per cent of survey respondents (see figure 2). Although interviewees admitted that they could rely on the expertise of colleagues and other gender specialists in their organisation, they deplored the total absence of gender experts working on the CTFMR, who could regularly advise the technical level on how to conduct a gender analysis of the data.
- **Ignorance of techniques inherent to gender-sensitive monitoring:** Even though only a few interviewees highlighted this specific challenge, as they were already aware that it was a necessary step towards understanding the gender dimensions of grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict, it does not mean they have sufficient capacity. This paper has found that the overwhelming majority of MRM actors would benefit from training on gender analysis specifically, and related monitoring and documentation methods.

Guiding Questions to Assess Internal Gender Expertise within CTFMRs

- Do monitors have sufficient understanding on gender and are they able to identify the main gender dynamics in their specific context? Is there a satisfactory gender balance among all monitors?
- Could they be prejudiced in a way that could interfere with data collection/neglect violations or certain groups of victims? Do they require specific/further training?
- How many gender experts are there in the UN Country Team, and could one or two experts be brought in as permanent members of the CTFMR? Could this be brought to the attention of the CTFMR co-chairs for their consideration?
- If gender experts are not available, would CTFMR members consider regularly consulting with colleagues in gender units and with gender affairs officers, in order to get their advice on how to question and read violations data through a gender lens?
- Would it be relevant for co-chairs to explore options for training on gender-sensitive monitoring and documentation techniques? If so, would they consult their leadership and HQ colleagues to identify funding opportunities and appropriate training courses?

3.4. Systemic Support

Most UN sources interviewed for this paper explained that insufficient capacity (time, expertise, resources) at the CTFMR level stemmed more broadly from the fact that UN Country Teams (and the humanitarian sector in general) had not yet practically integrated a gender perspective in their planning and operations, and that gender was not yet prioritised. Lack of buy-in or political support was indeed the third most cited challenge in the survey (for nearly 50 per cent of respondents—see figure 2).

On the other hand, when more established CTFMRs have been able to produce snippets of gender analyses on a particular violation, they have stressed that the MRM is not the best channel for it, as its reporting templates are too restrictive. In these CTFMRs, some member agencies sometimes choose to publish their own data analysis, when they have the capacity to do so. Some have asked for support to be able to produce these reports as their data/databases are underexploited.

In order to improve the gender focus in the monitoring and reporting practices of individual entities composing CTFMRs, systemic changes needed to be initiated at the UN leadership level, in-country and in HQ, so that the capacity of the MRM is reviewed and CTFMRs are automatically given the means to integrate gender lenses in their work.

Guiding Questions to Assess Existing Systemic Support within CTFMRs

- Are CTFMR co-chairs seized of the issue and supporting gender integration?
- Is there at least one gender expert on each CTFMR? Have all members been trained on gender mainstreaming?
- Do CTFMR co-chairs make sure that MRM reporting provides insights into the gender dimensions of grave violations and how to respond?
- Do CTFMRs members and co-chairs regularly report to their HQ on the challenges they face in carrying out their mandate, and in particular conducting gender analyses?



4.

Conclusions

PHOTO CREDIT: UNICEF/UN0377400/Lemoyne

The use of gender lens in the monitoring and reporting of grave violations against children affected by armed conflict is essential to ensure systematic analysis on the gender dimensions of grave violations and to design tailored prevention and response strategies.

As a first step to analyse the gender dimensions of the six grave violations, this paper has demonstrated that children experience different violations over the course of their childhood, often repeatedly, and by different actors and has argued that understanding how grave violations are interlinked is critical for prevention and response that is holistic, age-appropriate, and gender-responsive.

The findings of the research conducted to produce this paper led to the conclusion that appointing a technical expert on gender as a permanent member of the CTFMRs to provide systematic guidance is crucial. In addition, cluster analyses of violations that are more likely to occur together or precede or follow one another, with associating related clusters of incidents with individual characteristics that are recorded in the victim/survivor profiles, could offer greater insight into gender-differentiated trends and patterns of risk and impact. It will also provide a better understanding of how best to align prevention and response.

While sex and age disaggregated data collection is mostly systematically done by CTFMRs and their equivalents in non-MRM situations, a more consistent analysis of causal drivers, and gender and age differentiated risk factors can help expose how gender is being instrumentalized in conflicts across different settings.

Overall, in order to implement a systematic gender analysis of the grave violations against children in the situations on the CAAC agenda, changes in the monitoring and documenting practices of individual agencies making up CTFMRs, systemic changes need to be initiated at the UN leadership level, in-country and in HQ, so that the capacity of the MRM is reviewed and CTFMRs are automatically given the means to integrate gender in their work. In peacekeeping operations and special political missions contexts, for example, gender and child protection capacities would need to be aligned with the child protection mandates authorized by the Security Council and reflected in concepts of operation, deployment priorities, budgets and outcomes. In a follow-up study, it would be useful to assess how operations have adapted to evolving child protection mandates and their responsiveness to information generated by the MRM.

Integrating a gender perspective in the implementation of the MRM, its architecture, monitoring tools, action plans, international legal foundations and standards, guiding principles and partnership, would contribute to better scrutinising how unseen gender norms and gender biases can affect the protection of children in situations of armed conflict. It would also provide an opportunity for the MRM to be more context-specific and inclusive of diverse population groups. This, in turn, would further strengthen the CAAC mandate, and broaden its partnerships to leave no one behind.



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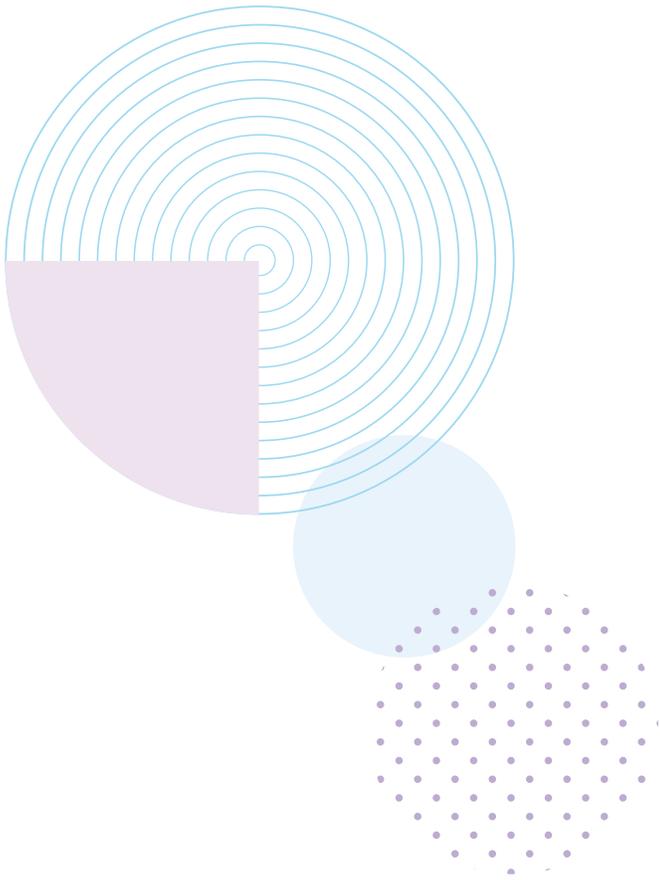
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