

Women's widespread inequality and rape as a weapon of war

March 7 2014, by Niki Widdowson

Women are more likely to experience mass rape and sexual torture in armed conflicts around the world, as a deliberate strategy to humiliate, intimidate and dominate them and their 'enemy' community.

ARC Future Fellow Dr Sara Davies, from QUT's School of Law said this deliberate targeting of [women](#) in conflict could be attributed to the status of women in the community before and after conflict.

"The key to changing the conditions that render sexual and gender-based [violence](#) so prevalent in many conflicts is for the international community to prioritize the political status and participation of women," Dr Davies said.

"Donor nations must prioritize and reward the efforts of nations that seek to ensure women's involvement in conflict prevention as well as conflict resolution.

"If we focus on women as 'victims of war', we risk ignoring all the social and political conditions before the conflict that help explain why, in most conflicts, women are particularly vulnerable to sexual and gender-based violence."

Dr Davies said women are politically, economically and socially excluded in many parts of the world.

"It ranges from being unable to determine their own reproductive health

choices to having no economic independence," she said.

"Women must become part of the political process, they must have health rights and economic independence if we are to have any hope of women achieving equal participation and equality.

"It has taken nearly two years for a gender advisor to be appointed to the staff of the UN-Arab League Joint Special Representative for Syria, in a situation where there are accounts of widespread sexual and gender-based [violence against women](#), men and children, well before the situation was declared a civil war.

"This delay in such a vital appointment indicates women's political participation is rarely seen as an important priority, yet women make up at least half of the Syrian refugee population. The fact they are not included in the political process does not mean they are not crucial for ending the conflict and stabilizing the country."

Dr Davies said efforts such as the United Kingdom's Prevention of Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI), promoted by Foreign Secretary William Hague, had been vital for securing politicians' interest in funding research and policies to address the prevalence of sexual violence in armed conflict.

"However, we must understand prevention starts much earlier than ensuring combatants do not rape during conflict and the best way to do this is for all donor countries to make sure women have equal participation in all projects," Dr Davies said.

Dr Davies and Professor Jacqui True of Monash University are exploring conducting an ARC Discovery project on the relationship between violence against women and extreme cases of sexual and gender-based violence in the Asia-Pacific Region.

"The project will look at three different conflicts in the Asia Pacific - Myanmar, Philippines and Sri Lanka - each with different phases and intensity of conflict in order to identify the factors associated with heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence across countries," Dr Davies said.

"We will look particularly look at the relationship between endemic violence and gender-based discrimination against women and extreme cases of sexual and gender-based violence.

"No country can have economic progress without women's participation and empowerment.

"In post-conflict situations donors countries must provide assistance that recognizes efforts to ensure equal participation of women in political, security and legal reforms; there will be no peace or prosperity when half the population is not involved in the process."

Dr Davies' work on prevention of [sexual violence](#) in [conflict](#) situations is linked to her wider research on the contribution of global governance initiatives to reduce human insecurity.

She is an ARC Future Fellow with a project on Global Health Diplomacy, which investigates when international cooperation generates and sustains international political interest and donor investment.

The global health programs Dr Davies is examining include: reducing child and maternal mortality, improved early detection of infectious disease outbreaks, tobacco control and consumption, and immunization.

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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