WOMEN AND EXPLOSIVE WEAPONS

A PROGRAMME OF
WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL LEAGUE FOR
PEACE & FREEDOM

Index

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Introduction

Explosive weapons are used in most armed conflicts. The use of these weapons in populated areas results in civilian deaths and injuries, destroys infrastructure and livelihoods, and wreaks havoc on the lives of women, men, and children alike.

Over recent years, an increased effort has been taken to research the humanitarian effects of explosive weapons and to urge states to curb their use in populated areas. However, the specific impact that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has on women has so far been largely absent from this research. A better understanding of this impact can help improve needs assessment efforts, ensure that all people affected by the crisis are taken into consideration, and allow for a more appropriate and effective response and prevention measures.

The aim of the paper is to explore some of the unique impacts on women from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. It should be noted that it is difficult to disaggregate the impacts of the use of explosive weapons in particular from the impacts of armed conflict more broadly. However, this paper seeks to address the issues related to explosive weapons use because such use does affect civilian populations, including women, differently than other means of conflict such as firearms use. Thus this paper seeks to raise awareness about those unique effects and to make recommendations to prevent these impacts.

This paper also highlights the importance of including women in leadership and decision-making roles to confront the challenges posed by explosive weapons use and in working towards resolution of armed conflicts and the establishment of sustainable peace.

The first section of this paper briefly describes explosive weapons and the legal tools available to assess their use, focusing in particular on legal documents that support greater inclusion of gender analysis and women's participation. The second part of this paper gives an overview on how explosive weapons specifically affect women and why a gendered analysis of the impact of explosive weapons use in populated areas is needed.

The paper also includes five interviews with women from Nigeria, Iraq, and Syria. The three Syrian interviews were conducted by Save the Children and the other two were conducted by WILPF. These interviews are presented as quotes throughout the paper to give concrete examples of life during armed conflict when explosive weapons are used in populated areas.

WILPF is part of the International Network on Explosive Weapons (INEW), a partnership of non-governmental organisations working to reduce and prevent harm from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. For more information on explosive weapons, go to: www.inew.org.

Background on explosive weapons and the legal landscape

What are explosive weapons?

Bombs, cluster munitions, grenades, improvised explosive devices (IED), mines, missiles, mortars, and rockets, though they differ in composition, design, and the way they are used, share certain fundamental characteristics.[1] Explosive weapons use explosive force to affect an area around the point of detonation, usually through the effects of blast and fragmentation.[2] Although they may differ in size, in how they are delivered to a target and in many other details, all of these weapons use explosives as the primary means of causing damage.[3]

When used in populated areas, explosive weapons are very likely to cause great harm to individuals as well as to communities. According to data gathered by NGOs, between 80 and 90% of the people injured or killed are civilians in incidents where explosive weapons are used in populated areas.[4] Survivors of explosive weapon attacks can suffer from many kinds of long-term challenges such as disability, psychological harm, and social and economic exclusion.[5] The fact that explosive weapons use blast and fragmentation to kill and injure people across an area around the point of detonation makes them especially problematic since their effects are difficult to fully anticipate and control.[6] The wider the area of effect, the more difficult this is.

"Populated areas" broadly equates to the legal concept of "concentrations of civilians", as used in Protocol III to the Convention on Conventional Weapons (CCW).[7] This term should be interpreted and understood in a common and broad way in order to encompass all those areas where civilians are at risk of harm, but also to include the indirect harm and danger these weapons cause, such as

Photo Richard Moyes
INEW.org

destruction of vital infrastructure such as housing, schools, hospitals, and water and sanitation systems, resulting in a pattern of wider, long-term suffering.[8]

"When explosive weapons were used in populated areas 91% of casualties were reported to be civilians. In other areas this figure was 32% - a marked decrease."[9]

International attention to this issue is growing due to the severe harm caused to civilians and their wider communities. The UN Security Council has addressed explosive weapons in populated areas during its debates on protection of civilians in armed conflict. The International Committee of the Red Cross,[11] the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict,[12] and the UN Secretary-General have repeatedly drawn attention to the humanitarian suffering being caused and called for restraint in the use of these weapons in populated areas.[13]

INEW is calling on states and other actors to prevent human suffering from the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Towards that goal, they should:

- Acknowledge that use of explosive weapons in populated areas tends to cause severe harm to individuals and communities and furthers suffering by damaging vital infrastructure;
- Strive to avoid such harm and suffering in any situation, review and strengthen national policies and practices on use of explosive weapons and gather and make available relevant data;
- Work for full realisation of the rights of victims and survivors;
- Develop stronger international standards,

including certain prohibitions and restrictions on the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.

In terms of stronger international standards, INEW has urged states and other actors to make a commitment that explosive weapons with wide-area effects will not be used in populated areas.

Legal Framework: IHL, IHRL, and Women, Peace and Security

"The use of high-explosive weapons in populated areas is not specifically prohibited by international law, although it has been argued that their use in populated areas should be limited or banned altogether given the likelihood of harm to the civilian population."[14]

International humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) offer a series of protections to persons in armed conflict, civilians as well as combatants. In addition, the UN "Women, Peace and Security" (WPS) framework, starting with Security Council Resolution 1325, provides specific language on protection, prevention, and participation of women living in war and armed conflict situations.

However, a legal analysis published by UNIDIR in 2012 concluded that the legal regulation of explosive weapons within international law is incoherent and fragmentary.[15] The study found that "existing regulatory categories and notions are at times vague, ill-defined and overlapping and do not formally recognize the common functioning of explosive weapons through blast and fragmentation."[16]

When explosive weapons are used in markets, 93% of the casualties were civilians with an average of 25 civilian casualties per attack.[17]

When used in areas of urban residences, 91% of the casualties were civilians and with an average of 9 civilian casualties per attack.[18]

When aimed at place of worship, 94% of the casualties were civilians and with an average of 23 civilian casualties per attack.[19]

International humanitarian law

The provisions of IHL are binding on parties during circumstances of armed conflict and impose legal obligations on all conflict parties, state and non-state actors, to protect civilians from harm and reduce unnecessary suffering. While there is no specific treaty prohibiting or regulating the use of explosive weapons as a category, their use in war is still a subject to IHL.[20]

The main principles of IHL regarding protection of civilians from attacks, which are reflected in Additional Protocol I to the Geneva Conventions and also underpin international customary law, are "distinction," "proportionality," and "precaution".

Distinction. According to Article 48 of Additional Protocol I, at all times during conflict combatants must be distinguished from civilians and only the former can be targeted. Furthermore, civilian objects have to be distinguished from military objects, have to be protected, and are generally unlawful as direct targets.[21]

Proportionality. Art. 51 (5)(b) of Additional Protocol I prohibits attacks violating the principle of proportionality, which means an "attack which may be expected to cause incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians, damage to civilian objects, or a combination thereof, which would be excessive in relation to the concrete and direct military advantage anticipated."[22]

Precaution. IHL requires the one attacking to take precautions in the choice of means and methods of attack. Under IHL (Art. 57 Additional Protocol I), conflict parties are obliged to constantly take care to spare civilians as well as to take feasible precautions to if possible avoid, or minimise civilian casualties and damage to civilian objects. Significantly, this includes the requirement to avoid locating military objects near densely populated areas.[23]

Despite these three principles, IHL is insufficient to adequately regulate explosive weapons use. It provides context against which arguments for regulation can be made, but in itself fails to " articulate the serious risk of humanitarian harm associated with the use of explosive weapons in populated areas in a manner that adequately protects civilians—people who share a legitimate expectation to be protected against the effects of explosive weapons."[24]

IHL and women

In addition to the general protection afforded to civilians under IHL, women are also addressed under the fundamental principle of equality and non-discrimination. The Geneva Conventions state that they should be implemented "without any adverse distinction founded on sex,"[25] and that women "shall in all cases benefit by treatment as favorable as that granted to men".[26] The Geneva Conventions also provide for the "protection" of women, noting that "women shall be treated with all the regard due to their sex"[27] in all circumstances, and stating that women should "be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault".[28] Pregnant women also receive particular protection, wherein "maternity cases and pregnant women, who refrain from any act of hostility, shall enjoy the same general protection as that accorded to the sick and wounded."[29]

Arguably, the Geneva Conventions as well as the rest of the IHL have been elaborated with an androcentric approach. As we can observe in the above-mentioned provisions, where the Geneva Conventions address women specifically they tend to frame them as objects needing "protection," rather than as actors. Furthermore, we can find references to rape and enforced prostitution as attacks on their honour, rather than on their physical integrity or freedom or agency. The perception of women's sexuality as a symbol of honour belongs to patriarchal cultures and is the very reason why rape and enforced prostitution are so common during armed conflict. Judith Gardam and Michelle Jarvis note in their publication Women, Armed Conflict and International Law that nearly half of the 42 specific provisions relating to women in

the Geneva Convention and the Additional Protocols deal with women only as expectant or nursing mothers.[30]

To find gender-aware provisions that can more adequately address attacks on women during armed conflict, it is necessary to also review international human rights law (IHRL) and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

International human rights law

IHRL does not directly govern the use of explosive weapons, as there is no developed approach within IHRL to assess the risk and effects that weapons have on human rights.[31] However, this body of law does include provisions to protect individuals and groups and sets out obligations for states to respect, protect, and fulfil human rights that indirectly affect the legality of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas.[32]

There is also an increased understanding that violations of IHL may also constitute gross violations of human rights.[33] Furthermore, in specific contexts of violence, it is not always clear what legal framework is most applicable. While explosive weapons may tend to be weapons of war fighting rather than policing in the general policy of states, not all instances of explosive weapon use take place in contexts of armed conflict.

Some of the applicable human rights include the right to life and freedom of movement, as well as the right to adequate housing, the right to be free of torture, inhuman and degrading treatment, the right to education, and the right to health. As we will see in section 3, all of these rights are violated by the use of explosive weapons. In particular, the right to life requires states "to respect and to ensure to all individuals within its territory and subject to its jurisdiction the rights recognized in the present Covenant"[34] and "shall protect this inherent right and it shall not be arbitrarily deprived."[35]

UN Photo/Eric Kanalstein

IHRL and women

It is today widely accepted that IHRL obliges states to not only respect, but also actively protect and fulfil all human rights. The obligation to respect human rights is based in the wording of human rights treaties.[36] Human rights law requires states "to refrain from discriminatory actions that directly or indirectly result in the denial of the equal right of men and women to their enjoyment of [human] rights."[37-38]

The Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) states in its article 3 that "States Parties shall take in all fields, in particular in the political, social, economic and cultural fields, all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men."[39]

As further developed in the CEDAW Committee's jurisprudence in AT vs. Hungary, this means that states have both an obligation not to discriminate and also an obligation actively to combat gender inequality, including in times of war. In AT vs. Hungary, the concept of "due diligence" is coined and defined this way: "States may also be responsible for private acts if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violations of rights or to investigate and punish acts of violence, and for providing compensation."[40]

CEDAW Committee General Recommendation 30 reminds us that even in times of armed conflict and in the aftermath of armed conflict, it is the obligation of the state according to CEDAW to meet the needs of women, to not discriminate, and to continue the action to end discrimination.[41] As we will see below, the destruction of infrastructure and the loss of life affect marginalised women uniquely because their needs are often overlooked and they enjoy less access to the labour market, administrative services, health care, education, etc. The General Recommendation reminds us that in the aftermath of conflict, limited resources are often allocated to priorities that do take into account the needs of women, as they are not part of the decision-making processes.[42]

Women, peace and security

At the fourth UN World Conference on Women in 1995, the Beijing Platform for Action included the effects of armed conflict on women as one of the areas of concern where action on national and international levels is required. Strategic goals on women and armed conflict were defined, stating that measures must be taken to include women's participation on conflict resolution, ensure their security in conflict situations, and protect the rights of refugees and internally displaced women under international law.[43] The conference resulted in the Platform for Action, which can be narrowed down to two main concepts:

1. The analysis of issues and the formulation of policy options are informed by consideration of gender differences and inequalities; and
2. Opportunities are sought to narrow gender gaps and support greater equality between woman and men.[44]

Resolution 1325 on "Women, Peace and Security" was adopted in the UN Security Council on 31 October 2000. It recognizes the situation of women in armed conflict as often being precarious and calls upon all states to allow an increased participation of women on all decision-making levels concerning international

peace and security. In particular the preamble notes that "the need to consolidate data on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls"[45] and Article 16 of the resolution invites the Secretary-General "to carry out a study on the impact of armed conflict on women and girls."[46]

In 2009, resolution 1889 emphasised some socioeconomic aspects that will be very important for assessing the impact of explosive weapons on women. This resolution acknowledged that the lack of security undermines women's social, political, and economic participation in the life a community. Insecurity, as we will see, is one of the foremost consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. Furthermore, during post-conflict reconstruction, women's empowerment is essential to their participation in relevant decision-making.[47]

Resolution 1889 also highlights the need to prioritise the education of girls and women after armed conflict, which becomes extremely difficult when schools are damaged or destroyed as a result of explosive weapon use.

UN Photo UNHCR/Roger LeMoyne

In addition, this resolution calls upon states to develop indicators in order to measure progress regarding implementation of resolution 1325. Article 6 requests the Secretary-General "to ensure that relevant United Nations bodies, in cooperation with Member States and civil society, collect data on, analyse and systematically assess particular needs of women and girls in post-conflict situations, including inter-alia, information on their needs for physical security and participation in decision making and post conflict planning, in order to improve system-wide response to those needs."[48]

"Syria, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria were the top five most heavily affected countries by explosive violence in 2012. AOAV recorded 80% of all civilian casualties worldwide in 2012 in these countries alone."[50]

In 2013 the Security Council adopted resolution 2122, building on resolution 1325 and highlighting that the implementation of 1325 has been weak and slow. It states that without a significant improvement of the implementation of 1325, the different perspectives of women will continue to be underrepresented in conflict resolution and peace-building in the future. It furthermore calls on member states to start revising their 1325 action plans and objectives, in order to increase the pace of implementation and develop new goals.[49]

The WPS agenda needs to be better incorporated in the explosive weapons debate in order to guarantee women's security and participation. As we have demonstrated throughout this section, existing international law does not provide sufficient protection for civilians when it comes to the use of explosive weapons in populated areas. The androcentric approach and the depiction of women as passive actors has had a devastating impact on women's security and ability to participate fully and equitably in a wide spectrum of roles and responsibilities.

Photo:
Jason P. Howe,
ConflictPics - INEW.org

The impact of explosive weapons on women

Why examine the impact on women?

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas not only has devastating direct impacts on civilians in general, but it also has particular effects on women's lives and livelihoods. The damage and destruction caused by explosive weapons can affect women and men differently.[51] In many societies and cultures, women have different experiences in conflicts compared to men because they are afforded a different status and place in family and public structures. They are often assigned different roles in the home and given differential access to the labour market. They sometimes have different mobility patterns and options and differentiated access to information.

So far, there has been little disaggregated data recorded on the gendered dimensions and effects of explosive weapons. An Action on Armed Violence (AOAV) report from March 2012 examining 30,521 incidents where explosive weapons were used in Iraq between 2003–2010 and found that information on the victims' sex was only available in 40% of the civilian casualties and 14% of the civilians injured.[52]

In the light of this, while there have been a number of studies and papers highlighting the ways in which anti-personnel landmines[53] and cluster munitions[54] affect women, the impacts on women of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas has not yet been explored more broadly. Yet given what we know about armed conflict, and about the use of landmines and cluster bombs, it is reasonable to assume that explosive weapon attacks can uniquely affect women, particularly in societies within which their sphere of action revolves mainly around the home.[55] Furthermore, pre-existing inequality between genders may increase due to the

severe damage to relevant infrastructure and disruption of daily life, which can affect women and men differently due to their different social roles.


UN Photo/John Isaac

The physical violence inherent to armed conflict often also reinforces so-called "invisible violence," i.e. structural and cultural violence.[56] This increase of structural and cultural violence has particularly severe consequences for women, since gender discrimination and gender-based violence are often legitimized by cultural violence, emerging from patriarchal norms and traditions.[57] The "invisible violence" therefore affects the way women are perceived in society and by international organisations and government officials. The methods and nature of armed conflict can transform the perception of women as active members of a community or household into passive victims requiring protection. This tends to result in considering women, often grouped with children and the elderly, as passive and helpless. Rather than truly addressing their needs, this approach undermines women's ability to participate in conflict resolution, reconstruction, and other processes. This is why indirect impacts of explosive weapons use, in such forms as forced displacement, eroded social capital, and destruction of necessary infrastructure, can have different effects on women than on men.

Men are traditionally treated as the key actors in war and reconstruction, because they typically constitute the highest number of combatants and casualties. However, this means that women's roles in armed conflict and post-conflict situations are often overlooked.[58] This androcentric approach to warfare provides an inaccurate picture when estimating the consequences of war, especially today when wars and conflicts are no longer fought at the frontlines by traditional armies. Instead, conflicts are fought everywhere and directly affect civilian populations. Even though research concerning this "new" type of war is extensive, consideration of women's role in fighting and the impacts of conflict on women as both civilians and combatants remain marginal.

Furthermore, if it is understood in a given armed conflict setting that women are likely to be less active as combatants, it follows that they should be more likely than men to be distinguished as civilians. Thus, the relative proportion of females amongst civilian causalities caused by specific weapon types can be considered a direct indicator of either:[59]

a) propensity to use certain weapons in attacks where no effort is made to distinguish civilians from combatants; or
b) relative inability to limit the effects of certain types of weapons to intended targets – which in turn limits the capacity for discrimination in attacks.

Thus the impact of the use of explosive weapons on woman "is illustrative of people being killed and injured despite them being identifiable as civilians. [...] Different patterns of such impact can therefore illustrate either an intention to target such groups, or an inability to target

weapons effectively."[60] Looking at the problem from this perspective allows the use of a gender-based analysis in order to assess the relative "controllability" of different weapon types, without the starting point being one of women being specially victimised.

Within a crisis situation, a gender analysis can help all parties understand the situation more accurately. Assessing the direct impacts of explosive weapons use on women can help improve needs assessment efforts, ensure that all people affected by the crisis are taken into equal consideration, and allow for a more appropriate and effective response and prevention measures.[61] It can illuminate some of the underlying factors in structural violence that both precede and follow conflicts and can shed light on women's engagement in conflict. Examining the impact on women can also help demonstrate the uncontrollability of the effects of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, strengthening arguments for the prevention of such use.

What are the impacts on women?

Very little has been documented on the gendered impact of explosive weapons. However, the AOAV report from March 2012 found that between 2003 and 2011, the proportion of women and children killed and injured by explosive weapons was significantly higher than for firearm incidents and other forms of violence in Iraq. While gunfire killed the greatest number of people overall, only 9% of those killed by guns were female, as compared to 34% of those killed by explosive ordinance.[63] This report concluded that tank fire, artillery, aircraft bombs, missiles, and mortars "all tended to present higher proportions of female and child casualties than the other explosive weapons,"

What is gender?

Gender does not refer to biological sex, but rather to socially constructed ideas that attribute meaning to and differentiate between sexes. Socially constructed understandings of gender affect perceptions of social roles, behaviour, and identity, and have implications for relations between people. Conceptions of gender provide a way of structuring relations of power, whether in families, societies, or even in international relations. For example, in the family these structures are often visible in the traditional role of men as a protector and provider and women as a caretaker as well as the one responsible for the household. However, all these socially constructed roles are not innate or constant; they can alter and change over time.

Using a gender perspective or doing research and analysis through a gender lens means examining how these constructed gender roles might affect policy decisions or budgets. It also means being sensitive to the fact that women and men may be differently affected, may play different roles, and may have different experiences in a particular situation due to their sex or expectations about gender.

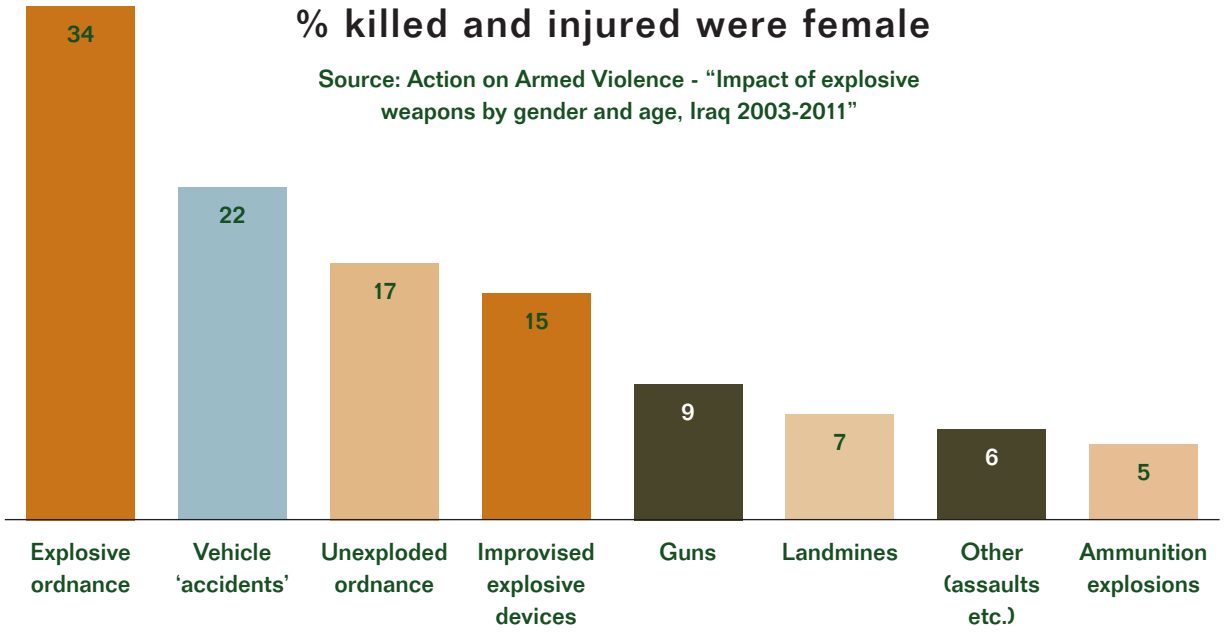
Even though this paper focuses specifically on the experiences of women concerning explosive weapons, it is important to underline that questions of gender do not specifically concern women's issues. A gender perspective takes a comprehensive approach to all genders and gender identities, including analysing and challenging conceptions of masculinities and femininities. Furthermore, a gender perspective helps us examines different experience of "women and men in order to break down stereotypes about how men and women 'should' operate, and the complex ways in which conflicts impacts upon them." [62]

It is also essential to recognize that "women" is not a homogeneous social category. This is also true when it comes to experiences of war and armed conflict. Recognising the diversity of experiences, interests, and agencies is necessary to ensure that any approach to addressing the challenges of the use explosive weapons in populated areas are applied in the most effective, integrated way possible to ensure the security and wellbeing of all.

as these weapons "may be used against targets at greater distance and/or may produce wider area effects due to greater explosive yield."[64]

This was re-confirmed by the Oxford Research Group study Stolen Futures: The Hidden toll of child casualties in Syria, which found that girls in Syria are killed by explosive weapons (74%) in greater numbers than by small arms (17%).[65] Based on this evidence, we may conclude that if more incidents of violence in conflict settings involve explosive weapons, the proportion of civilian casualties that are female is likely to rise.

The following sections look at the specific consequences that women experience when explosive weapons are used in populated areas. This is done in order to recognise the diversity of experiences of different people in order to ensure that any actions made to address the challenges of the use explosive weapons in populated areas are applied in the most effective, equitable way possible to guarantee the security, protection, and well-being of all. Due to structural and cultural violence in many societies, women do not always receive the same protection as men. As both combatants and causalities, women's roles, situation, and needs are often overlooked. This paper therefore tries to emphasize how women are affected by these weapons in order to advocate for the importance of ensuring women affected by the use of explosive weapons receive the same attention, recognition, and treatment as men.



Note: Orange shading indicates explosive weapons, dark grey shading guns and direct assault and blue vehicle accidents. The light orange shading indicates that these incidents may have been accidents rather than direct 'attacks'.

Health effects

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas results in both physical and psychological harm, in the form of blast and fragmentation injuries, crush injuries, burns, trauma, and post-traumatic stress disorders.[66] In addition to these injuries affecting both women and men, blast waves caused by explosive weapons can also have specific implications on pregnant women as the placenta can be damaged, which can lead to miscarriage.[67]

"If someone gets sick, no one can take him to a hospital. We had small makeshift clinics in our area but not everything was available, only first aid."

Um Ali, Syrian border, Lebanon

(Source: Save the Children)

Research done on women survivors of landmines shows that women tend to face a higher risk of being stigmatised and marginalised by their spouse and family because of their injuries or disfigurement.[68] The UN Mine Action Service (UNMAS) reported that although more men than women are victims of landmines, women tend to have more limited access to emergency care and longer-term rehabilitation assistance.[69] These findings regarding landmines are likely to reflect similar challenges for women injured by explosive weapons more generally.

The use of explosive weapons in populated area also has devastating effects on health care systems due to destroyed infrastructure, destruction of hospitals, and a general fear of moving around in an armed conflict setting. In 2011 the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) published the report Health Care in Danger which reported that the use of explosive weapons had a much greater impact both on people and on health-care facilities by comparison with the use of other weapons, as they injure and kill people and hospital staff, destroy hospitals, and hinder ambulances, medical staff, and people travelling to or from the hospital.[70]

The World Health Organization reports that complications in pregnancy and childbirth kills approximately 287,000 women every year, making maternal deaths the second biggest killer of women of reproductive age.[71] With explosive weapons the leading cause of violent damage to healthcare infrastructure in conflict settings, and healthcare infrastructure an important resource for safe childbirth, use of explosive weapons in populated areas can exacerbate this threat to women's health.

"I gave birth at home because I was too terrified to leave. Many pregnant women are losing their children during this war, they are bleeding out because they cannot reach help."

"Maha, Syrian border, Lebanon

(Source: Save the Children)

Decreased access to reproductive health can be a death sentence for women in countries where even during peace-time the risk of dying from pregnancy is staggeringly high. Iraq, one of the top five countries most heavily affected by explosive weapons according to Action on Armed Violence, has a maternal mortality rate of 84 female deaths per 100,000 live births, one of the highest in the region. According to the

United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), 80% of these deaths could be prevented by better access to health care during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Over 40% of Iraqi women highlighted the difficulty in accessing health services as being the main factor for lack of appropriate health care.[72]

The US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq between 2003 and 2011 resulted in 628 health care professionals reported killed and 18,000 of 34,000 doctors fleeing the country.[73] This has had devastating long-term effects on the available health care system reaching far beyond the aftermath of the conflict.

The conflict in Syria and the extended use of explosive weapons in populated areas has also affected the access to medical care for Syrian women. As more than half of public health facilities have been destroyed,[74] there is a constant shortage of medicine and health workers struggle to service those in need.[75] Although no reliable maternal mortality rates are currently available, the percentage of emergency caesarean sections have gone from 29% in 2009 to 45% in 2013,[76] indicating there have been consequences on maternal health care

Although the destruction of health care structures has been identified as having a particular devastating effect on women, "there is still a striking lack of attention paid to how armed conflict may affect reproductive health and maternal mortality" and the long term effects this has on women after war.[77]

Material damages

In the same manner that explosive weapons destroy health care structures it also damages private property, public spaces, and

UN Photo/Sophia Paris

infrastructure, which hinders necessary mobility and can lead to further harm and death.

In 2012 an increasing use of explosive weapons was registered in Iraq, with a particular noted increase in the use of improvised explosive devises (IEDs).[78] IEDs are often used in marketplaces,[79] which represent the second highest location for civilian casualties from explosive weapons.[80] Explosive weapon attacks aimed at residential areas and markets disproportionately affect women, as they often have primary responsibility for buying food and household goods at markets.

"(W)ho do you usually find at markets during daytime? Women. Who do you find at playgrounds? Mothers and their children."

Leyla, Iraq

(Source: WILPF)

At the same time, the destruction of infrastructure also makes it even more difficult for humanitarian organisations or UN relief to reach marginalised women. The tendency for

women to lack access to politics, decision-making roles, and media further undermines women's perspectives from being taken into account when victiwm assistance policies, post-conflict reconstruction efforts, and other programmes are being developed and implemented.[82]

"Now, when a door bangs, I get scared. I don't go to crowded places. I suspect everyone in front or behind me of being dangerous. I stopped going out all together for a while. I was just so afraid, afraid of everything. If somone was carrying a bag in front of me, I would run back home. I felt staying at home was the solution."

Nancy[81], Nigeria

(Source: WILPF)

Single-headed households

Where men are killed or injured, women often have to take on new roles as the sole income provider for their families. This can trigger increased domestic violence if men may not be able to play their traditional role as a provider and therefore feel humiliated by that, as well as by not being able to protect their family from harm.[83] The pressure on women who are the primary income providers is generally higher than for men due to systematic discrimination against women in the labour market and patriarchal customs within communities and societies. This is particularly true in a context where the labour market is already struggling due to war and violence.

"In Iraq, we say, 'the victim isn't the only victim,' as those around, families, suffer as well."

Leyla, Iraq

(Source: WILPF)

Due to long-lasting conflicts with significant use of explosive weapons, 10% of Iraqi households have lost their husbands/fathers, traditionally the main breadwinners. According to the UNAMI, households with a female main income provider are one of the most vulnerable groups in Iraq, with a higher degree of poverty, food insecurity, and lack of access to clean drinking water due to a lower level of income and social marginalisation. They are also disadvantaged in education, employment, and shelter and due to their poor living situation are at a higher risk of health problems.[84] There has also been an increase of single-headed households in Syria due to the conflict as many men have been killed or are in battle,[85] and this is likely to result in a similar pattern of economic and social marginalisation of households with a female main income provider in the future.

Because of the lack of job opportunities for women and the fact that it can be both unsafe and more difficult for women to move around in conflict situations, women face risks of economic impoverishment. Being left to paying expensive medical bills for injured family members[86] (where medical services are even still available) or with caring for people directly where (those services do not exist) further aggravates the challenge for women to provide for their families.

"While explosions like this is going to affect the livelihoods of everyone, and the women will bear the brunt of the burden."

Nancy[87], Nigeria

(Source: WILPF)

Due to discriminatory traditions and constructed gender roles, struggling to provide for their families can lead to women becoming more vulnerable to physical attacks and sexual exploitation, including being forced to provide sexual acts in return for basic needs and protection.[88] This risk is even higher when their social infrastructure is eroded, due to loss of family or community members or loss of housing and shelter.

Displacement

The use of explosive weapons in populated areas forces major population displacement because of fear of death or injuries, or the loss of housing and other necessary infrastructure. Displacement in turn contributes to an increase risk for civilians as it frequently increases the risk of death, diseases, malnutrition, and increased poverty.[89]

"The homes on my street, they were shelled. Three homes destroyed by shells. And two shelters, each with families in, with children."

Wala, Syria

(Source: Save the Children)

Displaced women have a higher risk of exposure and exploitation, in particularly of being subject to gender-based violence. Research shows that during conflict and militarisation of societies there is often an increase in sexism and violence towards women and therefore also an increase in the risk of sexual violence, which then usually goes unpunished.[90]

Women that are displaced or separated from their families and communities are therefore at a greater risk of harassment, domestic violence, rape, trafficking, forced prostitution, and other crimes that are disproportionately targeted towards women due to constructed gender discrimination that makes women dependent on others for help and safe passage.

In Syria, women have been reported to be exposed to increased domestic violence, sexual exploitation, and abductions in the overloaded camps and host communities.[91] Syrian women in refugee camps in and outside of Syria are also forced into street prostitution in order to support their families and Syrian girls are brought to Lebanon for the purpose of prostitution.[92] The social stigma attached to sexual violence and other gender-based violence in Syria is high and will have long-term consequences even after the conflict has ended. This also makes it more difficult for women to seek help since the women risk being rejected by their families and communities.[93]

"The area that we lived in was being bombed and they had snipers on all the high buildings, so anybody who moved would be shot. [...] There were no schools, no hospitals, no electricity, no water, nothing at all. Everything was broken, ruined"

Um Ali, Syrian border, Lebanon

(Source: Save the Children)

Conclusions and recommendations

It is clear that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas leads to severe harm to civilians. Reports indicated that 80–90% of casualties due to explosive weapons used in populated areas are civilians.[94]

In addition to direct physical harm, the use of explosive weapons also has a long-lasting effect due to the weapons' destructive nature, which means that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas continues to contribute to death and challenges after the immediate fighting is over. **Therefore, the humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapon in populated areas need to be acknowledged and addressed by stronger international policies in order to strengthen protection of civilians.**

Although limited data is available to analyse the actual impact explosive weapons use has on women, this report has made evident that explosive weapons have specific gendered aspects of harm that might not be apparent at first sight. Casualty recording and all other discussions on explosive weapons in populated areas should therefore always take in to account the unique impacts explosive weapons have on women. **More research is required with a specific focus on the demographic characteristics of the civilian harm caused by these weapons.**

In spite of being affected by these weapons, women are rarely allowed to contribute to decisions regarding security issues or peace negotiations. Such exclusion leads to a failure to adequately address women's experiences, needs, and concerns, as well as victim assistance and accountability mechanisms in regards to the use of explosive weapons. **Increased participation of women on all decision-making levels concerning international peace and security is therefore needed.**

The above challenges are largely due to a lack of understanding and implementation of already available rules and laws dealing with women and gender. The specific impact that explosive weapons have on women and girls must, in accordance with UNSCR 1325 (2000), 1881 (2009), and 2122 (2013), be included in all data collection and research, in order to understand and prevent suffering. The WPS agenda also ensures the inclusion of women and their experience in all decision-making forums related to explosive weapons use and their humanitarian impact. **Therefore, rules and laws already in force should be respected and better implemented, and be guided by the Women Peace and Security agenda.**

Without this, there will continue to be insufficient information and understanding, which will in turn affect areas such as needs assessment, victim assistance, prevention strategies, risk reduction education, and information gathering activities. Working with insufficient information from the outset will lead to inadequate measures that may even worsen the situation for women.

Mainstreaming gender in disarmament and arms policies has faced challenges because it has not been sufficiently integrated as a general

approach to address all topics of security, armed conflict, and armed violence. Together with the gender-neutral language in international law and politics, this has contributed to the lack of inclusion of women's experiences and perspectives and thereof lack of security for women.

As men are seen as the key normative actor in security policies, the absence of a gender analysis therefore presupposes men's experience as the only relevant experience. **The gendered impacts of explosive weapons need to be addressed as an overarching approach in policymaking in order to have appropriate tools that prevent and correlate to the abovementioned areas.**

Recommendations:

States, international organisations, and civil society should work to:

- Recognise that the use of explosive weapons in populated areas causes severe humanitarian problems, requiring the development of stronger and more explicit international standards, restrictions, and prohibitions.
- Strive to avoid such harm and suffering in any situation by reviewing and strengthening national policies and practices on use of explosive weapons.
- Undertake increased research on the general humanitarian consequence of explosive weapons use in populated areas, including research on the gendered effect of these weapons.
- Develop stronger international standards for the collection of data on violence incidents, including gender-disaggregated data.
- Develop increased understanding of and policies regarding the rights of victims and survivors and include a gender perspective in victims and survivor assistance programmes.
- Acknowledge and address in the human rights bodies that the use of explosive weapons in contexts of crime or law-enforcement should be assumed to be a human rights violation, in particular as it affects the right to life and freedom of movement, as well as socioeconomic rights.
- Promote, in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1325 and the women, peace and security agenda, women's participation in all decision-making bodies and processes, in particular on disarmament and security issues.
- Strengthen the implementation of national policies and practices in line with UNSCR 2122 (2013).
- Provide better training on gender mainstreaming in disarmament and security forums and improve the dissemination of knowledge of these rules and practices in order to strengthen the existing policies and laws.
- Work to achieve incorporation of women's perspectives and participation in relation to security issues in the post-2015 sustainable development goals agenda and any follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action.

Appendix 1

Overview of key explosive weapon types[95]

Class	Summary
Air-dropped bombs	Explosive weapons dropped from aircraft. Common subtypes include: × General purpose / high explosive (GP / HE) bombs × Penetration bombs × Carrier bombs (for delivery of other payloads, including submunitions, see below)
Demolition charges	Blocks of explosive for engineering or sabotage use.
Grenades	Relatively small 'land-service' explosive weapons for use against personnel or vehicles, which can be either thrown or fired from weapons. Common subtypes include: • Hand grenades - blast and/or fragmentation • Anti-armour grenades • Rifle grenades • Spin stabilized grenades
Improvised explosive devices (IEDs)	Explosive weapons (of any class, e.g. grenade, bomb, rocket) that is not mass-produced. However, IEDs may use mass produced explosives or explosive ordnance as a component. Common subtypes include: Person-borne bombs (so-called 'suicide bombs') Vehicle-borne bombs Roadside bombs
Landmines	Generally victim activated explosive weapons. Common subtypes include: • Anti-personnel mines • Anti-vehicle mines
Missiles	Missiles have a propulsion system and a guidance system. Common subtypes include: • Air-to-air missiles • Air-to-surface missiles • Anti-tank guided missiles • Surface-to-air missiles (static and mobile) • Surface-to-air missiles (portable/shoulder launched) • Surface-to-surface missiles

Class	Summary
Mortar bombs	Mortar bombs are indirect fire weapons, which are normally (but not always) muzzle-loaded. Common subtypes include: • High explosive • Carrier (for delivery of other payloads, including submunitions, see below)
Projectiles	Explosive projectiles are fired through a barrel by the ignition of a propellant charge. Common subtypes include: • Armour-piercing high explosive (APHE) • High explosive anti-tank (HEAT) • High explosive fragmentation (HE frag) • High explosive 'squash head' (HESH) • Carrier (for delivery of other payloads, including submunitions, see below) • Some projectiles are not explosive weapons.
Rockets	Rockets are unguided munitions with an integral propulsion system. Common subtypes include: • Air-launched rockets • Artillery rockets • Rocket propelled grenades (RPG)
Submunitions	Submunitions are smaller explosive weapons delivered by carrier bombs, projectiles or mortar bombs (often 'cluster munitions'). Subtypes include: • Anti-armour • High explosive fragmentation • DPICM (dual purpose improved conventional munitions)
Underwater	There are a variety of explosive weapons intended for detonation under water, including: • Depth charges • Limpet mines • Naval mines • Torpedoes

Comment: There are numerous exceptions to these generalisations. Many of these categories can also have non-explosive payloads.

Endnotes:

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