

Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict

Threat, Mobilization and Gender Norms

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Kreft, A-K. (2017) The Gender Mainstreaming Gap: Security Council Resolution 1325 and UN Peacekeeping Mandates. *International Peacekeeping* 24(1), 132-158.

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Abstract

Sexual violence is a highly gendered violence. It disproportionately – albeit not exclusively – affects women and girls, and it asserts gendered hierarchies between perpetrators and victims. The widespread rape of women has been reported e.g. in World Wars I and II and in many wars in medieval Europe, but only since the 1990s has sexual violence in conflict moved onto national and international policy agendas. Sexual violence is now globally recognized as a weapon of war and increasingly condemned and confronted by domestic actors. What are the implications of the politicization of conflict-related sexual violence, as a highly gendered violence, for women's agency in conflict settings?

This is the overarching question this dissertation addresses, using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Paper 1 shows that women mobilize in response to the collective threat that conflict-related sexual violence constitutes to them as women. Qualitative interviews with representatives of women's organizations and victims' associations in Colombia reveal, in paper 2, that patriarchal structures and societally entrenched gender inequality are at the heart of mobilized women's understanding of this violence. An examination of United Nations peace operation mandates in paper 3 reveals that gender content, including a commitment to women's participation, is higher when sexual violence is widespread in the respective conflict. Paper 4 shows that countries experiencing a conflict with prevalent sexual violence adopt legislative gender quotas sooner and at higher levels than other countries.

Jointly, the results indicate that conflict-related sexual violence makes gender salient in both domestic and international arenas, as a result of which women's agency may be amplified. While women's civil society mobilization in response to conflict-related sexual violence broadens out to incorporate a more comprehensive and holistic perspective of gender inequalities in society, the international response signifies a narrowing in of the global Women, Peace and Security framework on the singular issue of conflict-related sexual violence. The results are encouraging in that they reveal the previously overlooked nexus between women's victimization in sexual violence and women's political agency, but they also expose the long road yet ahead for gender equality norms.

Key Words: Sexual violence, Armed conflict, Intra-state war, Victimization, Agency, Women's mobilization, Gender norms, Women, Peace and Security framework, Colombia