

Forum: Human Rights Council (HRC)

Issue # 1: Addressing the psychological impact of armed conflicts in the context of violations of human rights.

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Guiding Questions as you Read

- What happens to people's mental health during and after war?
- What human rights are violated during armed conflicts?
- What are the human rights that are violated during armed conflict and how do they make mental health problems worse?
- What are countries and organizations doing to help people affected by war?
- What can be done to help people recover from trauma after war?

Introduction

Key Terms

Armed Conflict
Psychological Impact
Human rights
Violence
Violations

"There are wounds that never show on the body that are deeper and more hurtful than anything that bleeds"-Laurell K Hamilton. Armed conflicts are defined as organized, violent confrontations involving the use of dangerous weapons between governments or states (Clapp). Beyond the destruction and loss of life, these conflicts leave a long-lasting psychological impact on individuals. Psychological impacts are identified as the effects of specific events, experiences, or environmental factors that leave a lasting mark on an individual's mental and emotional state. These impacts can be both long-term and short-term, depending on how they manifest. Psychological issues can arise in many ways, including emotional, cognitive, and behavioral changes ("Psychological Impact"). Some common psychological impacts include anxiety and fear. Depression, trauma or PTSD, behavioral changes, and an identity crisis. Usually, these effects run longer than any physical violence scars end (Mind), signifying the survivor's inability to move on from trauma fully. Furthermore, armed conflicts create a heavy human rights crisis, including brutalities such as targeted civilian attacks, sexual violence, and forced displacement. While International Humanitarian Law regulates the conduct of war, International Human Rights Law aims to protect human dignity ("Crisis and Conflict |

Human Rights Watch"). Common human rights violations in conflict include targeting civilians, violations of human rights, and forced displacement (Amnesty International). The extent of this issue is far-reaching, as many individuals are affected. This includes children, women, displaced populations, refugees, and the military ("Protection of Civilians | How Does Law Protect in War? - Online Casebook").

Definition of Key Terms

Armed Conflict: The use of armed force between states or organized armed groups within a state ("Armed Conflict – Safer Access").

Humanitarian Aid: Emergency help given to people in other countries to save lives, reduce suffering, and protect human dignity during or after crises or natural disasters. ("Humanitarian Aid Definition | Law Insider").

Psychological Impact: The effects that an event or experience has on a person's mental and emotional state (Emotional and Psychological Trauma).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD): A mental condition in which the individual develops anxiety and depression and recurring distressing memories after a traumatic experience (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Trauma: Severe and enduring emotional shock resulting from a harrowing experience (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Displacement: A situation where individuals are forced to relocate from their homes (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Refugee: A person who has fled their country because of war or for political, religious, or economic reasons (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

War Crimes: “War crimes are violations of international humanitarian law” (International Law: Understanding Justice in Times of War).

Genocide: The deliberate act of destroying, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group through killings or other forms of harm (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Rehabilitation: To help someone return to a healthy and normal life after illness, injury, or prison (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Anxiety: A feeling of nervousness or worry about something happening now or in the future (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Depression: A mental illness where a person feels extremely sad and worried for a long time and often loses interest in daily activities (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Resilience: The ability to recover and thrive again after going through something difficult (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Torture: The act of intentionally causing severe physical or mental suffering to make someone do something or give information (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Definitions).

Violence: Actions that are meant to harm people or that are likely to cause injury or damage (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Violations: An act that breaks or goes against something, especially a law, agreement, principle, or something that deserves respect (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Human rights: Basic freedoms and protections that every person has simply for being human, regardless of nationality, gender, ethnicity, religion, language, or any other status ("What Are Human Rights?").

Conflict Zones: a region experiencing war or political unrest that interrupts essential services such as housing, transportation, communication, sanitation, water, and healthcare, often needing support from outside the affected community (Prasad and Prasad).

Interventions: An intentional action taken to change a situation, to improve it, or to prevent it from getting worse (Cambridge English Dictionary: Meanings & Definitions).

Disease Burden: Refers to how diseases, injuries, and risk factors lead to early death and poorer health within a population ("What Is Disease Burden?").

Key Terms

Armed Conflict
Displacement
Mental Health
Conflict Zones
Resilience
Interventions
Disease Burden

Current Situation

Armed conflicts remain one of the most serious global crises, not only because of physical destruction but also due to psychological damage caused by exposing civilians to violence, constant fear, displacement, and repeated human rights violations (Mental Health Europe). As a result, many individuals experience long-term trauma, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which can persist even after the conflict ends. According to the World Health Organization,

"One in five people (22%) who have experienced war or conflict in the previous 10 years has depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, or schizophrenia" ("Mental Health in Emergencies"). This statistic highlights how conflict can create widespread mental illness that impacts entire communities, especially when their healthcare systems and psychological support services are limited or unavailable. In many conflict zones, humanitarian aid focuses on immediate physical needs, while psychological care remains underfunded and overlooked despite its importance (Latarche). Meaning individuals cannot access therapy, medication, or basic mental health support. The untreated psychological impacts of war also create social consequences, including family breakdown, substance abuse, loss of educational opportunities, and an increased cycle of violence within communities.

Current Impacts and Key Groups Affected

The psychological effects of conflicts are especially severe for vulnerable communities such as children, refugees, asylum seekers, and survivors of sexual violence ("Refugee and Migrant Mental Health"). Prolonged exposure to violence for children can lead to a risk for cognitive and social development ("Impact of War on Children's Mental

Health - War Childhood Museum"). Many people develop PTSD symptoms after witnessing death, bombings, and the destruction of their homes (Ahmed et al.). Survivors of torture and unlawful detention frequently experience long-term trauma, emotional numbness, and chronic fear. In addition, survivors of sexual assault in conflict zones often face stigma and isolation within their own communities, making psychological recovery even more difficult. Furthermore, psychological recovery is not only limited by access to mental health services, as a lack of emotional and social support can further intensify the effects of trauma. These effects can remain for decades and may even create intergenerational trauma, where children of survivors inherit emotional and behavioral patterns from their parents' experiences (DeAngelis).

Emerging Trends

Recently, psychological needs have begun to be recognized as a crucial humanitarian priority rather than a secondary one. This is reflected in the WHO's statement, which states that "understanding and addressing the consequences on individual and community mental health and psychosocial well-being is an essential component of effective preparedness and response" ("Supporting Mental Health and Psychosocial Well-Being in Emergencies: RCCE-IM Guidance for Preparedness and Response"). Some organizations are working to implement and expand trauma-based interventions, such as group therapy, in-school counseling programs, and community rebuilding initiatives, which help strengthen resilience (Roberts and Fuhr). Another key development is increased focus on documenting human rights abuses and shedding light on survivors' testimonies. While documentation and accountability are essential for justice, they may also risk reopening emotional wounds for victims if done without ethical procedure and proper support systems ("Guiding Principles for Documentation").

Challenges and Limitations

One of the main challenges is the lack of mental health infrastructure in conflict zones. Many affected countries have a limited number of psychologists or psychiatrists available, and armed conflict often destroys hospitals, displaces professionals, and ultimately restricts access to care. Cultural stigma also prevents many survivors from seeking help, especially in cases of sexual violence or psychological disorders (Modir et al.). Moreover, continued instability makes it difficult for steady psychological rehabilitation. Victims and refugees usually require more extended trauma-focused care than is originally offered, as a lot of the programs are short-term. The unstable environment can further hinder their recovery (Opaas et al.). This is further complicated by insufficient international enforcement mechanisms, which reduce accountability for war crimes and human rights violations, allowing the cycle of violence to continue, creating repeated psychological harm for the same populations ("Mechanisms of International Justice to Fight Impunity: International Tribunals, Universal Jurisdiction, and Transitional Justice Processes").

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

The United States

The United States recognizes that there is a severe psychological impact on humans when in armed conflict. The US focuses on prevention, stabilization, and the integration of mental health support in humanitarian crises, often taking into account the violations that drive trauma. They acknowledge that constant exposure to war could lead to PTSD or other long-term issues ("United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability - United States Department of State"). The U.S. government, led by USAID and the State Department, tries to focus on the integration of mental health and

psychosocial support to help recover and support long-term stability.

Russia

Russia consistently emphasizes the importance of state stability in the context of armed conflicts and its impact on human populations. They tend to focus more on national security and strategic outcomes than on the psychological consequences when humanitarian crises break out. Even though their stance is clear. They do recognize that mental health is something that affects people's state, especially that of their military personnel and veterans. The government has taken measures to treat and implement support systems for soldiers and families, especially with PTSD. The government has provided more than 2,700 medical-psychological counseling sessions in 2023, prioritizing military personnel (Russian). Overall, Russia's position tends to lean more toward security. They acknowledge the consequences of mental health, but do not always focus on it.

China

China believes that the psychological impact of armed conflicts is divided into two branches. It internally focuses on the strengthening of the mental resiliency of its own troops but externally employs a strategy of "psychological warfare" to shape perception and weaken adversaries. In recent years, China has been increasingly integrating technologies such as AI into its cognitive warfare capabilities. China is always emphasizing sovereignty and non-interference when it comes to armed conflicts (Samuli Seppänen and Smith). Some of the noticeable impacts that China has provided were with its Chinese peacekeepers, who provided psychological counseling to their troops going to missions in the DRC and Liberia. This included mental health education and knowledge of their state (Gowan).

France

France deeply acknowledges that trauma, PTSD, and anxiety are long-term issues that could arise from violence, displacement, and death among individuals. France has been known to fund psychological care access in conflict zones through partners such as Action Contre la Faim and Médecins Sans Frontières. This includes treatment in Chad and some mental health clinics in Liberia (Médecins Sans Frontières). France also has strong beliefs that health, dignity, and security are claimed through foreign policy, UN participation, and action for peacekeeping. They have provided national centers like CN2R and more than 5 regional psychotraumatology units, whose goal is to provide free care for all trauma victims (El-Hage et al.).

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom is aware that armed conflicts pose long-term, serious psychological impacts on civilians, refugees, and their military personnel. Knowing that exposure to violence and instability can lead to trauma ("Mental Health Problems | Useful Contacts | Trauma - Mind"). The UK is constantly addressing such implications that it supports veterans through national healthcare programs and funds international humanitarian initiatives that include support in conflict-affected regions. Furthermore, the UK is known for emphasizing the importance of human rights, specifically in health, dignity, and security. They are always trying to strengthen their principles and their foreign policy. They are also involved in peacekeeping, where their efforts are focused on mental health to increase the recovery of individuals ("Mental Health & Psychosocial Support"). Overall, the UK constantly promotes a general approach where they combine humanitarian aid and protection of human rights while helping individuals with psychological help.

United Nations Involvement

WHO Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP)

Launched by the World Health Organization in 2008, the Mental Health Gap Action Programme (mhGAP) is a global initiative designed to expand access to mental health in crisis-affected communities (Brohan et al.). It's one of the WHO's main strategies for closing the treatment gap relating to psychological help. It was created to support countries in treating mental, neurological, and substance use disorders through evidence-based guidance, practical tools, and trained non-specialist health workers ("Mental Health Gap Action Programme (MhGAP) Guideline for Mental, Neurological and Substance Use Disorders"). MhGAP trains general health workers to recognize and treat conditions like depression, psychosis, suicide risk, substance use disorders, and child mental health issues. This is critical because the WHO reports that mental and substance abuse disorders account for a major share of the global disease burden, yet millions are still left with inadequate care ("Over a Billion People Living with Mental Health Conditions – Services Require Urgent Scale-Up"). This program is especially effective in conflict zones because wars and displacement often destroy healthcare systems and leave very few medical professionals available. WHO's approach helps basic mental healthcare continue even in areas where resources are limited. mhGAP provides adaptable guidelines and intervention tools that countries can fit into their own health systems, helping strengthen national capacity and reduce the mental health treatment gap ("Mental Health Gap Action Programme (MhGAP) Guideline for Mental, Neurological and Substance Use Disorders"). Additionally, a systematic review reported that mhGAP improves provider capacity and leads to better patient outcomes in multiple countries (Keynejad et al.).

UNICEF Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) Programs

Introduced as part of UNICEF's broader humanitarian response efforts, the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) programs have become an important tool for helping children affected by armed conflict and displacement ("UNICEF Guidelines on Community-Based MHPSS in Humanitarian Setting"). These services include psychological first aid, child-friendly safe spaces, and ongoing counseling in schools, shelters, and refugee communities (Snider and Hijazi). UNICEF emphasizes that children exposed to violence, war, and family separation are more vulnerable to long-term mental health effects ("Protecting Children's Mental Health in Emergency Settings"). By providing early and continued care, UNICEF aims to help children rebuild stability and cope with crises. As part of UNICEF's larger child protection and humanitarian response efforts, these programs address both urgent and long-term healing ("Help Protect Children Living amid Armed Conflict"). This work is essential because psychological conflict can last for years, disrupting education, relationships, and early development ("Surviving Is Just the Beginning: The Impact of Conflict on Children's Mental Health"). Furthermore, in 2022, UNICEF strengthened this effort by publishing a multisectoral MHPSS framework for the East Asia and Pacific region, outlining community-based strategies and key actions countries can utilize to support children and adolescents ("Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS)"). Their approach shows that mental health care is not only about treatment but also about protecting children's safety, dignity, and future.

Timeline of Events, Relevant Resolutions, Treaties, and Events

Date	Description of Event
2005	The World Health Assembly (WHA) represented a shift in global health policy by acknowledging that psychological wounds are as debilitating as physical ones. They recognized that many focused deeply on the physical aspects. This resolution urged the community to treat mental health as a core priority for humans (<i>FIFTY-EIGHTH WORLD HEALTH ASSEMBLY GENEVA, 16-25 MAY 2005 RESOLUTIONS and DECISIONS ANNEX GENEVA 2005</i>).
2010	Researchers highlighted a critical connection between the general stress of war, such as witnessing murder and combat, and mental stress, PTSD, and major depression. Furthermore, a study published by Social Science and Medicine explains how different wars impact individuals differently (Priebe et al.).
2019	The World Health Organization estimated that 1 in 5 people living in areas affected by armed conflict live with a mental health disorder. It said that the prevalence was three times higher than they expected (World).
2024	Conflicts in Ukraine, Gaza, and Sudan intensified, which led humanitarian actors to report that one in five adults in these zones continued to meet the criteria for depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Williamson and Murphy).

2026 Researchers have been constantly emphasizing that preventing arm conflicts as a whole would be the most effective way of reducing psychological harm. But in the short term, collaborative efforts among human-rights-based bodies and others are needed to design effective mental health interventions in conflict regions (Bosi).

Evaluation of Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue

Several UN bodies, international organizations, and governments have decided to take the initiative to reduce the psychological impact of armed conflicts and the violations that fuel them. Not only that, but they have taken into account that part of solving the crisis is to support people through it (Nations). The protection of civilians in the UN Peacekeeping missions has increased and aimed to reduce exposure to violence and sexual and gender-based abuse to individuals, meaning that all people involved work together to prevent physical attacks and prevent psychological trauma (Mental Health Europe). Furthermore, the World Health Organization (WHO) has developed psychological interventions such as self-help groups and group-based programs specifically targeted to refugees and displaced populations to prevent an outburst in mental health disorders (Barbui et al.). Even though there is a lot of focus on refugees, military and UN peacekeepers also get provided training and stress management practices to reduce any mental harm when entering an area of conflict. Many military personnel operate and are designed to go to a behavioral health team in their unit, which offers counseling to determine if they need any help (Disorder et al.). As for the peacekeepers, those who are exposed to many incidents and trauma also experience mental health disorders. The UN has organized many clinics for its peacekeepers for

comprehensive mental and psychological support so they don't fall into a hole where depression, anxiety, and PTSD take over their lives. Overall, the UN and other organizations have attempted to combat the issue at hand by providing strengthening sessions, group sessions, and psychological support for not only refugees but also military personnel, UN peacekeepers, and all individuals affected by conflict.

Possible Solutions

When addressing psychological impact in conflict zones, governments and international organizations must strengthen mental health services as well as infrastructure for affected populations. This can be achieved through expanding access to trauma counseling, child protection programs, and rehabilitation services designed for refugees, displaced individuals, and survivors of violence. These services should be available in refugee camps, shelters, and temporary communities where many victims lack access to healthcare. Alongside this, agencies should provide group therapy, crisis hotlines, and safe spaces for children in these situations. However, it is also imperative to ensure psychological rehabilitation is sustained and stable rather than short-term, since recovery from conflict-related trauma can be a long process that requires continuous support, follow-up care, and emotional rebuilding over months or even years. Providing constant support can reduce long-term issues such as depression, PTSD, substance abuse, and suicide risk, which are common in post-conflict communities.

In addition, enforcing international humanitarian law and human rights protection can help reduce the abuse and exploitation that worsen psychological trauma. Holding armed groups and governments accountable for war crimes can discourage repeated abuse and protect vulnerable populations. To strengthen early intervention,

governments and humanitarian agencies should prioritize training health workers, teachers, and aid staff to recognize early warning signs of psychological distress, including anxiety, panic attacks, and PTSD symptoms, to ensure rapid intervention and timely access to professional care. Schools and community centers also play an influential role by offering emotional support programs and structured routines that help restore a sense of normalcy. By integrating mental health into humanitarian response and post-conflict recovery, the international community can help restore stability, trust, and dignity to affected populations.

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16

SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.

Psychological disturbances in armed conflicts are related to multiple Sustainable Development Goals, specifically SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. This goal aims to promote "peaceful and inclusive societies" (United Nations, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions"). Due to the increased trauma it fuels, violence and mental health are escalating, which is recognized by building stronger institutions. It is important to restore the social cohesion of communities. Psychosocial support helps rebuild trust between groups and aims towards the rebuilding of peace. By providing psychological care through public health and social services, societies can demonstrate their protection and accountability for their citizens, helping restore national inclusion and bring justice for those affected (United Nations, "Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions").

Useful Links for Research (Appendix)

The appendix is a list of useful links that can guide research. In the appendix, there are short descriptions of links that help understand their relevance to the issue. Additionally, each description of what the article is about includes a possible use for it in the delegate's research. Common uses of the resources are related to giving perspective on each country's viewpoints, possible contribution to the debate, current events related to the issue, statistics that can be used in the debate, amongst other uses.

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)30934-1/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)30934-1/fulltext)

Source A: This article provides data on how common mental disorders are in conflict-affected settings and highlights the serious psychological hardship caused by war. It is a useful source for statistics and evidence to support the need for mental health interventions in conflict zones.

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4063269?ln=en&v=pdf>

Source B: This UNHCR document outlines progress in strengthening MHPSS within refugee programming. It is useful for showing how the UN continues to improve support systems over time, rather than treating mental health as a second-priority issue.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/world/growing-conflict-impact-children-s-mental-health-and-well-being>

Source C: This source focuses on the effects of conflict on children's mental health and well-being. It is useful for showing the long-term emotional damage caused by war and why early intervention matters.

<https://www.refworld.org/policy/opguidance/unhcr/2013/99764>

Source D: This UNHCR guidance report describes how mental health and psychosocial support should be included in refugee assistance. It helps to depict how displaced people receive care and the main challenges faced in refugee settings.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5775132/>

Source E: This article explains how armed conflict affects children's mental health, showing that PTSD, depression, and developmental difficulties are common after exposure to war trauma. It also discusses protective factors such as social support and stable family environments. It provides vital information on the issue as a whole.

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-023-02438-8>

Source F:

This study explores how war and trauma affect child development, especially among refugee children. It shows that conflict can influence emotional processing, attention, and long-term psychological growth and highlights the importance of mental health support for displaced children.

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