

STIGMA AND CHILDREN BORN OF WAR

Concept Note and Workshop Overview

CONCEPT NOTE

A major gendered consequence of sexual violence in conflict for women is childbirth resulting from diverse forms of conflict-rape and sexual exploitation. The traumatic way in which some children come into being may present enduring challenges for children, their mothers and communities. Due to perceived association with an “enemy” or “foreign” father, some children may experience stigma from birth. As they grow up in “post-conflict” environments, stigma experienced by children and often their mothers, may intersect with other vulnerabilities, obstructing their human rights and life chances.

Over the last decade or so, researchers in the field of “children born of war” have criticised the lack of systematic international policy focus and design for this category of victim-survivor (Mochmann 2008; Carpenter 2010). Concerns about intergenerational stigma were a key motivation for the emergence of this field, whose boundaries are contested. While empirical data is incomplete, evidence of stigma-related risks for at least some children includes: infanticide, contested citizenship, statelessness, poverty, sexual exploitation and intersectional discrimination. Factors which may influence family and societal acceptance or rejection of children remain unclear.

Children born of war continue to emerge in sporadic and incidental ways across international fora and media reporting. For example, girls and women are returning to communities with children conceived through rape in captivity by the Lord’s Resistance Army, Boko Haram and ISIS. The former LRA Commander, Dominic Ongwen, is being prosecuted before the ICC in an historic forced pregnancy trial, and now adult victim-survivors seek reparations in Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo.

Clearly, the lives and complex needs of these children are not reducible to a single policy agenda, legal or conceptual framework. However, the piecemeal way in which they are emerging across policy agendas and academic discourse may itself be problematic and potentially stigmatizing. Their situation, “categorization” and the potential impact of intergenerational stigma warrants more holistic consideration.

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

On 25 September 2017, the LSE Centre for Women, Peace and Security held an interdisciplinary workshop to facilitate dialogue, knowledge exchange and critical reflection amongst academics, policymakers and civil society on the issue of children born of war¹ and stigma. The workshop convened a diverse range of

¹ There is no universal understanding of the term “children born of war” in scholarship, policy or legal fora. Who may fall within this “group” and the criteria which should be used to identify such children is an open question which holds particular significance when policies/laws are designed to address the rights/risks/needs of children born in specific circumstances. In this report, the term “children born of war” refers primarily to children born in circumstances of sexual violence and exploitation by armed actors (to either civilians or women who are also members of armed groups) during situations of conflict and use of the term always encompasses children born in such circumstances. However, in some presentations, “children born of war” was used to also refer to children born as a result of consensual or more ambiguous relationships between local, civilian women and foreign armed groups, peacekeepers and occupying forces

participants, including academics and researchers across disciplines, UN representatives, government officials, NGOs, and activists.

The event was motivated by concerns that the rights, needs and specific vulnerabilities of some children born as a result of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) are not being adequately understood or addressed in conflict and “post-conflict” settings, at national and international levels.

Existing research indicates that stigmatisation of children born of war and their mothers in diverse “post-conflict” societies is one key risk which can produce and contribute towards a range of gendered, intergenerational physical, psychological, cultural and socio-economic harms. On 18 September at the United Nations, the UK launched the [Principles for Global Action](#) to prevent and address stigma associated with CRSV (“the Principles for Global Action”), which recognise children born of rape as victim/survivors who face particular risks. The emergence of this agenda, in addition to growing academic research on children born of war offered a critical opportunity to bridge the academic-policy “divide” by exploring stigma and broader challenges such children may face from multiple perspectives. The workshop also considered critical questions of whether and how human rights and protection risks children and their mothers may face are being addressed.

KEY GOALS OF WORKSHOP

Through discussions on a range of conceptual and empirical issues relating to children born of war, the workshop sought to:

- Explore the experiences of children and their mothers across different conflict contexts;
- Address ethical challenges of conducting research on/with children born of war;
- Promote and advance evidence-based policymaking,
- Identify protection gaps for children born of war and their mothers;
- Highlight practical, positive interventions in reducing stigma and other risks;
- Capture emerging policy recommendations and future research questions.

(whether perceived as “enemy” or “allied”). This report recognises the difficulty of trying to find the most respectful and sensitive language to describe children who were born as a result of sexual violence and abuse. This is a situation in which language fails us and different, legitimate views may exist concerning the best or “least worst” language to use. Every child is an individual entitled to full dignity and human rights, whose identity should never be defined or position understood solely in relation to the circumstances of their conception.

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