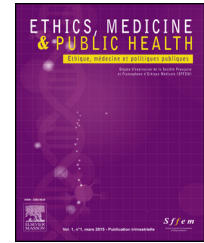




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# Children born of wartime rape: The intergenerational realities of sexual violence and abuse



*Enfants nés du viol en temps de guerre : les réalités intergénérationnelles de la violence sexuelle et de la maltraitance*

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**Summary** Brutal forms of sexual violence continue to pervade contemporary wars. In many such contexts, females have been systematically sexually assaulted on a large scale, resulting in the birth of thousands of children. Born of war, these children are deeply affected by their biological origins and subsequent treatment by their families, communities and society. Research has begun to reveal that these children may face stigma, abandonment, violence, barriers to legal citizenship and land rights, and are prevented from accessing formal health, education and employment systems. Yet post-conflict policies and public health programs have yet to systematically address this population of children. This paper explores the intergenerational complexities of wartime sexual violence and abuse. Alongside a discussion of the multiple implications of wartime rape for mothers and their children, the article highlights the ways in which research, policy, practice, and public health programming can begin to address their complex needs.

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**MOTS CLÉS**

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**Résumé** Des formes brutales de violence sexuelle continuent d'envahir les guerres contemporaines. Dans de nombreux contextes, les femmes ont été agressées sexuellement systématiquement sur une grande échelle, entraînant la naissance de milliers d'enfants. Nés de la guerre, ces enfants sont profondément affectés par leurs origines biologiques puis par l'attitude de leurs familles, de leurs communautés et de la société. La recherche a commencé à révéler que ces enfants doivent faire face à la stigmatisation, l'abandon, la violence, aux obstacles à la citoyenneté et aux droits du sol, qui les empêchent d'accéder aux systèmes de santé, à l'éducation et à l'emploi. Pourtant, les politiques d'après conflit et les programmes de santé publique doivent encore se pencher sur cette population d'enfants. Cet article explore les complexités intergénérationnelles de la violence sexuelle en temps de guerre et d'abus. Parallèlement à la question des multiples implications du viol en temps de guerre pour les mères et leurs enfants, l'article met en évidence les façons dont la recherche, la politique, les pratiques et les programmes de santé publique peuvent commencer à répondre à la complexité des besoins.

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## Introduction

Today's armed conflicts pose a serious global public health concern to children. Seventy five per cent of the world's child population – 1.5 billion children – live in the 42 conflict-affected countries, where they are victims, witnesses and participants in war [1]. War often ruptures the fabric of life that supports healthy child development, severs familial and extended social networks, and forces children and youth<sup>1</sup> to live in societies where basic social structures and systems have been degraded or completely collapsed. Recent conflicts have left millions of children and youth killed, injured or disabled, orphaned or separated from their families, and victimized by multiple forms of sexual violence [2]. According to UNICEF (2014), children in conflict-affected countries are the most vulnerable to sexual violence, with more than 150 million young girls and 73 million boys experiencing these atrocities every year. This paper explores the intergenerational complexities of wartime sexual violence<sup>2</sup> and abuse, and in particular, the phenomenon of children born of wartime rape. The paper begins by outlining the problem of wartime rape, as well as the existing research on children born of wartime rape. This is followed by a discussion of some of the intergenerational realities and psychosocial, economic, cultural, and legal implications for children born of wartime rape. Given the limited research, policy and practice information on the topic, the paper then addresses key approaches to research with children born of wartime rape, including a focus on the rights and capacities of these children, as well as potential public health

and policy responses, and the need to include participatory practices in policy-making. The paper ultimately highlights the importance of including the voices and perspectives of children born of rape in the development of policy, practice and services designed to meet their needs.

## Understanding wartime sexual violence

Sexual violence during armed conflict is one of the most recurring wartime human rights abuses. Historically, sexual violence has been routinely committed against females<sup>3</sup> during armed conflict and was prevalent in the wars of the ancient Greeks, Romans and Hebrews as well as in the Trojan War [5,6]. Mass sexual violence has been documented during World War I, World War II, the Vietnam war and, over the last few decades, in the conflicts in Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, El Salvador, Guatemala, Liberia, Kuwait, Northern Uganda, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Timor Leste, and the former Yugoslavia, to name but a few. Women and girls have been ongoing targets for sexual violence during conflict because of their ethnicity but mainly because of their gender, and their bodies are used as literal sites of combat [7,8]. These crimes of sexual violence have been characterized by extreme brutality and are frequently preceded or followed by other egregious human rights abuses against the victim, her family and her community [9]. War-related sexual violence may occur in homes, fields, places of detention, military sites, and camps for refugees and displaced persons [10]. Although the majority of victims of sexual violence are women and girls, men and boys are also targeted in armed conflict [4].

<sup>1</sup> The UN defines a "child" as a person under 18 years, and a "youth" as a person between 15 and 24 years.

<sup>2</sup> Sexual violence refers as any act of a sexual nature, which is committed on a person under circumstances, which are coercive. Sexual violence is not limited to physical invasion of the body [3].

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that during armed conflict, males are also victims of sexual violence [4]. This article, however, is focusing solely on wartime sexual violence against females.

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