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Women, War, and the Law: Gender-Based Violence in Armed Conflict and the UN Response

Syeda Kashmala Susan¹, Hafiz Omer Abdullah² & Nouman Akbar³

¹Advocate High Court, Email: Adv.kashmalasyeda@gmail.com

²Lecturer, Department of Law, University of Sahiwal, Pakistan, Email: Omerabdullah@uosahiwal.edu.pk

³Lecturer, Sarhad Institute of Legal Studies, Sarhad University of Science and IT, Pakistan

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Corresponding Author:

Hafiz Omer Abdullah

Email:

Omerabdullah@uosahiwal.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence GBV in armed conflict remains one of the most pervasive yet under-prosecuted crimes in international law. This article examines the legal, institutional, and political dimensions of conflict-related sexual violence CRSV, situating it within international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law. The purpose of the study is to evaluate how far the international legal framework augmented by the United Nations Women, Peace and Security WPS agenda has advanced the prevention, accountability, and redress of GBV in conflict, and to identify enduring enforcement gaps. Employing a doctrinal methodology, the article reviews treaty provisions, case law from ad hoc tribunals and the International Criminal Court, and the evolution of UN mechanisms such as the SRSG on Sexual Violence in Conflict, MARA, and peacekeeping mandates. Key findings reveal that while normative progress is significant, systemic shortcomings including weak national prosecution, underreporting, political selectivity in sanctions, and inadequate peacekeeper accountability continue to fuel impunity. The study concludes that survivor-cantered justice, credible accountability mechanisms, and gender-responsive peace processes are indispensable to bridging the gap between law and lived realities, and calls for greater institutional commitment and sustainable financing to secure durable protections. GBV in armed conflict ranging from rape and sexual slavery to forced pregnancy, trafficking, and intimate partner violence remains pervasive despite a robust body of international norms. This article synthesizes the doctrinal foundations in IHL, international human rights law IHRL, and international criminal law ICL; maps key jurisprudence; analyses the United Nations' Women, Peace and Security WPS agenda and related accountability pathways; and identifies persistent enforcement and implementation gaps. It argues that meaningful prevention and remedy require survivor-cantered practice, better-resourced institutions, credible accountability including for peacekeepers, and gender-responsive peace processes that integrate intersectional harms.



Introduction

Armed conflict exacerbates existing inequalities and exposes vulnerable populations to unique harms, among which GBV stands out for its prevalence and persistence. Sexual violence, forced marriage, trafficking, and reproductive coercion are not only by-products of war but, increasingly, deliberate strategies of terror, humiliation, and ethnic cleansing. Despite decades of normative development in international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law, survivors continue to face entrenched barriers to justice, reparation, and recognition. The central purpose of this study is to interrogate the gap between the robust international legal framework and the weak enforcement mechanisms that perpetuate impunity (Khan & Usman, 2023). The scope of this research encompasses doctrinal and institutional analysis: it examines treaties, jurisprudence from international tribunals, and the role of the United Nations through its Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, peace operations, and accountability frameworks. The study's significance lies in highlighting how structural shortcomings—political selectivity, fragile national systems, under-reporting, and peacekeeper misconduct—undermine the promise of protection. It hypothesizes that while normative clarity has been achieved, enforcement remains fragmented and inconsistent (Khan, et al., 2023). The guiding research questions are: To what extent has international law effectively addressed gender-based violence in conflict? What institutional reforms are necessary for meaningful accountability and survivor-cantered justice?

Methodologically, this article adopts a doctrinal approach, analysing treaties, case law, and Security Council resolutions, supplemented by comparative evaluation of UN practices and policy documents. The expected outcome is a clearer understanding of both normative advances and systemic failures, alongside a set of actionable recommendations for strengthening prevention and accountability. The article is organized as follows: Section two outlines the conceptual and legal framework; Section three reviews key jurisprudence; Section four examines the UN's WPS architecture; Section five discusses implementation gaps; Section six proposes reforms and future directions; Section seven provides case snapshots; and Section eight concludes with findings and recommendations. Conflict magnifies pre-existing gender inequalities and creates new vectors of harm. Sexual violence is used opportunistically, as a tactic of war, and as a tool of persecution and ethnic cleansing. Yet many survivors' women and girls in particular, but also men, boys, LGBTQI+ persons, and persons with disabilities face legal, social, and economic barriers to justice. Since 2000, the UN's WPS agenda has reframed CRSV as a peace and security concern, not merely a private or "women's" issue. Nevertheless, the persistence of impunity and under-resourced survivor services signals a continuing gap between norms and outcomes. This article evaluates the law's promises and limits and suggests pragmatic reforms (Usman, et al., 2021).

Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, doctrinal methodology, relying primarily on the analysis of international treaties, Security Council resolutions, jurisprudence of international and regional tribunals, and official UN reports to examine the regulation and accountability of gender-based violence in armed conflict. Secondary materials, including academic scholarship, policy analyses, and reports from NGOs and monitoring bodies, were reviewed to provide contextual depth and highlight practical implementation challenges. A comparative approach was employed to assess the interplay between international humanitarian law, international human rights law, and international criminal law, while case law analysis allowed for tracing the evolution of jurisprudence and evidentiary practices. The choice of this methodology is grounded in the recognition that the research problem is predominantly legal and policy-oriented, requiring normative evaluation rather than empirical fieldwork. The synthesis of primary and secondary

sources enables both a critical appraisal of existing frameworks and the identification of gaps and reforms necessary for more effective prevention and accountability (Hussain et al., 2023).

Conceptual and Normative Framework

Definitions and typology

Clarity in definitions is essential for addressing GBV in armed conflict, as the framing of concepts directly influences recognition, accountability, and remedies. GBV refers to harmful acts committed against individuals based on socially constructed gender roles, relations, or expectations. In situations of conflict, such violence is not merely incidental but often weaponized as a deliberate strategy of war, persecution, or social domination. While women and girls remain the most frequent targets, men, boys, and LGBTQI+ individuals are also subjected to these violations, underscoring that GBV in armed conflict is neither monolithic nor limited by gender. Within the broader category of GBV, the United Nations employs the term CRSV to describe a spectrum of violations, including rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and comparable crimes (Khan et al., 2020). Such acts may be opportunistic or systemic, serving purposes that range from terrorizing populations and enforcing displacement to achieving ethnic cleansing and dismantling community cohesion. The recognition of CRSV as a tactic of warfare highlights its instrumental role in contemporary conflicts. The typology of GBV in armed conflict can be understood across several interrelated dimensions. Sexual violence encompasses acts such as rape, sexual torture, enforced prostitution, and sexual mutilation, all of which directly attack bodily autonomy and human dignity. Reproductive violence targets individuals' reproductive capacity and health, manifested in forced pregnancies, sterilizations, and attacks on maternity services (Khan, et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2022).

Forced marriage and intimate partner violence, often overlooked in war discourse, include coerced unions such as the practice of "bush wives" and heightened domestic violence during displacement or post-conflict reintegration. Another category, sexual exploitation and abuse, arises when peacekeepers, humanitarian staff, or armed actors exploit their positions of power to obtain sexual access. Trafficking in persons during war, whether for sexual or labor purposes, further illustrates the cross-border and organized character of GBV (Khan et al., 2020). Finally, structural and intersectional forms of GBV reflect the ways in which race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, and displacement compound vulnerability, producing layered harms that extend beyond the battlefield. This layered typology demonstrates that GBV in conflict is not confined to spectacular atrocities but encompasses a wide range of violations that undermine physical, psychological, and social well-being. Recognizing the breadth of these harms is indispensable to developing comprehensive legal frameworks, survivor-cantered interventions, and effective institutional responses. Gender-based violence encompasses harmful acts directed at an individual based on gender. In conflict, CRSV may include rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced sterilization, trafficking, sexual torture, sexual humiliation, and targeted attacks on sexual and reproductive health care. It also includes domestic and intimate partner violence that spikes during and after conflict, often overlooked in security analyses (Khan, et al., 2020).

Applicable legal regimes

The regulation of gender-based violence in armed conflict is situated at the intersection of IHL, IHRL, and ICL. Each regime provides distinct yet complementary protections, reflecting the recognition that sexual and gender-based violence is not only a humanitarian issue but also a human rights violation and, in certain contexts, a matter of international criminal responsibility. Under IHL, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols explicitly prohibit acts

such as rape, enforced prostitution, and indecent assault. Article 27 of the Fourth Geneva Convention is particularly significant, guaranteeing respect for women's honour and protection against sexual violence in situations of occupation. Common Article 3, applicable to non-international armed conflicts, further prohibits outrages upon personal dignity, including humiliating and degrading treatment, which jurisprudence has interpreted to cover acts of sexual violence (Khan et al., 2020). Although historically framed in terms of "honour" and "modesty," contemporary interpretations of IHL affirm that these provisions safeguard bodily integrity and dignity more broadly. IHRL reinforces these obligations by imposing duties on states to prevent, investigate, and remedy violations, even during armed conflict. Instruments such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ICCPR and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW underscore states' responsibilities to guarantee equality and freedom from violence. CEDAW, particularly through General Recommendation No. 30, clarifies that obligations extend to conflict, post-conflict, and transitional justice contexts, requiring states to exercise due diligence not only for state actors but also for private or non-state armed groups where they exercise effective control. The jurisprudence of regional human rights courts, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, has reinforced the principle that failure to prevent or prosecute gender-based violence constitutes a violation of state obligations (Khan & Usman, 2023).

International criminal law provides the most direct mechanisms for individual accountability. The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court ICC recognizes rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, and comparable crimes as both war crimes and crimes against humanity. Moreover, acts of sexual violence may constitute elements of genocide when committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group. The ad hoc tribunals for the former Yugoslavia ICTY and Rwanda ICTR developed groundbreaking jurisprudence in this area, establishing that sexual violence can amount to torture, persecution, and even genocide. Subsequent ICC jurisprudence has expanded recognition to forced marriage and sexual violence committed within armed groups, affirming the evolving scope of accountability. Taken together, these legal regimes demonstrate a robust normative framework condemning gender-based violence in conflict. Yet the coexistence of multiple legal systems also highlights challenges of fragmentation, enforcement, and political will. The interplay between IHL, IHRL, and ICL is therefore crucial not only for defining the scope of protections but also for ensuring their effective implementation (Javed, et al., 2021; Riaz et al., 2022).

Due diligence and state/non-state actors

The principle of due diligence is central to assessing responsibility for gender-based violence in armed conflict. It requires states to take all reasonable measures to prevent violations, protect those at risk, investigate allegations, prosecute perpetrators, and provide remedies to survivors. This obligation extends beyond refraining from direct involvement in abuses; it demands proactive steps such as adopting appropriate legislation, training security forces, ensuring access to justice, and creating survivor-cantered support systems. The failure of a state to exercise due diligence may amount to an internationally wrongful act, particularly when systemic neglect fosters a climate of impunity. The complexity of modern conflicts, however, lies in the active role of non-state actors. Armed groups frequently perpetrate CRSV as a strategy of terror, domination, or ethnic cleansing. While international humanitarian law binds all parties to a conflict, including non-state armed groups, questions remain about the enforcement of these norms absent the traditional structures of state authority. Individual members of such groups may be prosecuted before international or domestic courts, as demonstrated in the jurisprudence of the ICTY, ICTR,

and ICC, which has held commanders and fighters alike accountable for acts of sexual violence (Khan, et al., 2023).

Attribution of responsibility is particularly important in hybrid contexts where non-state actors exercise effective control over territory. In such cases, international law may treat their conduct as attributable to a state, triggering state responsibility for acts committed under their authority or with their substantial support. Conversely, even when state involvement cannot be proven, the doctrine of due diligence still obliges states to take measures to prevent, investigate, and punish violations by non-state groups operating within or from their territory. This includes regulating private actors, strengthening border controls to prevent trafficking, and cooperating with international mechanisms of accountability. Ultimately, the interplay of state and non-state obligations underscores the indivisibility of responsibility for GBV in armed conflict. While armed groups bear individual and, at times, collective liability, states remain the primary duty-bearers under international law. Ensuring effective protection therefore requires not only prosecuting non-state perpetrators but also holding states accountable for their failures of prevention and response. States and de facto authorities must exercise due diligence to prevent, protect, and prosecute. Non-state armed groups can incur individual criminal liability; their conduct may trigger state responsibility where attributable. Transitional and hybrid mechanisms complement domestic prosecution where capacity or will is lacking (KHAN, et al., 2021).

Jurisprudence and Evidentiary Evolution

The development of international jurisprudence has been pivotal in reframing GBV in armed conflict from an incidental harm to a serious crime under international law. Early precedents from the ad hoc tribunals established the foundations for recognition. In the landmark Akayesu case ICTR, 1998, the Tribunal held that rape and sexual violence could constitute acts of genocide when committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a protected group. This case expanded the legal definition of rape, moving beyond a narrow focus on physical penetration to encompass coercion, intimidation, and the broader context of violence. Similarly, the ICTY in Furundžija 1998 and Kunarac et al. 2001 clarified that sexual violence can amount to torture and slavery, establishing the elements of rape under customary international law and setting a precedent for command responsibility in cases of sexual enslavement. The ICC has built upon this jurisprudence, though not without controversy. In Bemba 2016, the Trial Chamber convicted a senior commander under the doctrine of command responsibility for failing to prevent and punish sexual violence by troops under his control. However, the Appeals Chamber's subsequent acquittal exposed the evidentiary challenges of linking high-level commanders to crimes committed on the ground, especially in dispersed and fluid conflict settings. By contrast, in Ntaganda 2019, the ICC confirmed that rape and sexual slavery committed by members of the same armed group against child soldiers constituted war crimes, reinforcing that victims and perpetrators may belong to the same armed entity. The Ogwen judgment 2021 further advanced the law by recognizing forced marriage as an "other inhumane act," and by addressing reproductive crimes such as forced pregnancy within the coercive environment of armed conflict. These rulings highlight both the evolution of legal categories and the court's willingness to reflect survivor experiences more holistically (Khan, et al., 2021).

Alongside doctrinal advances, evidentiary practices in prosecuting CRSV have undergone significant transformation. Traditional reliance on survivor testimony, often burdened by stigma and traumatization, has been supplemented by pattern evidence, medical documentation, and witness corroboration. The tribunals pioneered trauma-informed interviewing and protective measures such as anonymity, in-camera testimony, and relocation programs to safeguard

witnesses. More recently, the ICC and investigative bodies like the UN's Independent International Fact-Finding Missions have employed digital and open-source evidence, including satellite imagery, intercepted communications, and crowd-sourced data, to corroborate accounts of sexual violence. While these innovations enhance credibility, they also raise concerns about chain of custody, data protection, and the risk of re-identification of survivors in hostile environments. Despite these advances, significant challenges remain. Under-reporting due to stigma, fear of reprisals, and cultural taboos limits the evidentiary record. Weak national forensic capacity, inadequate preservation of crime scenes, and the politicization of prosecutions further complicate justice efforts. Nevertheless, the trajectory of jurisprudence and evidentiary practice reflects a growing recognition that CRSV is neither inevitable nor invisible, but a prosecutable crime requiring rigorous legal and procedural innovation (Usman, et al., 2021).

The UN's Women, Peace and Security WPS Architecture

Security Council resolutions

The United Nations Security Council has played a decisive role in elevating gender-based violence in armed conflict from a peripheral humanitarian issue to a central concern of international peace and security. The adoption of Resolution 1325 (2000) marked a paradigm shift by affirming that women's participation in peace processes and protection from sexual violence are essential to sustainable peace. It introduced the four pillars of the WPS agenda participation, protection, prevention, and relief and recovery laying the groundwork for subsequent normative advances. Building on this framework, Resolution 1820 (2008) was the first to explicitly recognize sexual violence as a tactic of war and a threat to international peace and security, thereby mandating its consideration under the Council's Chapter VII enforcement powers. This was reinforced by Resolution 1888 (2009), which established the post of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict and mandated the deployment of Women Protection Advisers in peace operations. Resolution 1889 (2009) complemented these measures by emphasizing women's roles in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. The Council deepened accountability mechanisms through Resolution 1960 (2010), which created a monitoring, analysis, and reporting arrangement MARA on conflict-related sexual violence and introduced the possibility of targeted sanctions against perpetrators. Resolutions 2106 (2013) and 2122 (2013) expanded the survivor-centered approach, calling for improved access to justice, comprehensive services for survivors, and enhanced women's participation at all stages of conflict resolution. Resolution 2242 (2015) further linked the WPS agenda to emerging global security threats, including counterterrorism and violent extremism, while emphasizing the need for gender expertise in peacekeeping and mediation (Riaz, et al., 2022; Khan et al., 2022).

Institutional mechanisms

The UN and related international bodies have developed a range of institutional mechanisms to address gender-based violence in armed conflict, reflecting the growing recognition that legal norms alone are insufficient without robust enforcement and monitoring structures. One of the most significant innovations is the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict SRSV-SVC, created pursuant to Security Council Resolution 1888 (2009). This office spearheads advocacy, coordinates responses across the UN system, and engages directly with governments and armed groups through formal commitments to curb sexual violence. Its annual reports to the Security Council have become a key tool in naming and shaming perpetrators, thereby exerting both diplomatic pressure and shaping accountability agendas. Complementing this is the MARA on conflict-related sexual violence, established under Resolution 1960 (2010). MARA collects and verifies information through UN field presences,

enabling systematic documentation of violations and providing the evidentiary foundation for sanctions listings and policy interventions. At the operational level, the deployment of **WPAs** in peacekeeping missions has been instrumental in mainstreaming gender expertise, advising mission leadership, and engaging local communities to enhance protection strategies (Khan, et al., 2019).

Beyond the Security Council, other UN entities play critical roles. UN Women provides policy guidance, capacity-building, and advocacy, particularly around women's participation in peace processes. The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees UNHCR addresses GBV among displaced populations through protection programming, while the World Health Organization WHO ensures medical and psychosocial support for survivors. The Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict, established in 2009, further strengthens national judicial and security institutions by providing technical assistance on investigation, prosecution, and reparations. At the international justice level, the ICC incorporates specialized units, such as the Gender and Children Unit and the Victims and Witnesses Section, which are designed to handle sensitive testimonies, ensure witness protection, and develop gender-sensitive prosecutorial strategies. Meanwhile, regional organizations, including the African Union and the Council of Europe, have developed their own frameworks and monitoring mechanisms, illustrating the diffusion of global norms into regional governance structures. Despite these advances, institutional mechanisms face persistent challenges. Underfunding limited political leverage, and lack of coordination often undermine their effectiveness. Moreover, peacekeeping missions continue to grapple with allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by their own personnel, raising questions about credibility and accountability. For these mechanisms to achieve their intended goals, greater coherence, survivor-cantered approaches, and stronger enforcement capacity remain imperative (Khan, 2018; Khan et al., 2021).

Peacekeeper conduct and accountability

While United Nations peace operations are mandated to protect civilians from violence, including sexual violence, peacekeepers themselves have at times been implicated in acts of sexual exploitation and abuse SEA. These violations range from transactional sex in conditions of coercive dependence to rape and trafficking, often targeting women, children, and displaced populations in contexts where the power imbalance is extreme. Such misconduct not only compounds the vulnerabilities of war-affected communities but also erodes the legitimacy and credibility of UN missions, undermining the very mandate of protection they are tasked to uphold. The accountability framework for peacekeeper conduct is shaped by the UN's "zero tolerance policy" on SEA, first articulated in the early 2000s and reinforced by Security Council resolutions and Secretary-General bulletins. Mechanisms such as Conduct and Discipline Units CDUs within missions, the centralized Conduct and Discipline Team at UN Headquarters, and community-based complaint reception mechanisms were developed to prevent and respond to allegations. The creation of a trust fund for victims and public disclosure of nationalities of implicated contingents represent further steps toward transparency and reparations. Nonetheless, implementation remains uneven and frequently constrained by structural challenges. A central barrier to accountability lies in the jurisdictional arrangements governing peacekeeping operations. While the UN has administrative authority to investigate and repatriate personnel, criminal jurisdiction rests with troop-contributing countries TCCs. (Kanevskaja, 2020; KHAN et al., 2021).

Implementation Gaps and Structural Challenges

Despite the existence of a comprehensive legal and institutional framework, the implementation of norms addressing GBV in armed conflict remains uneven and fraught with structural deficiencies. One of the most persistent challenges is the disconnect between international commitments and

domestic enforcement. Many states that have endorsed Security Council resolutions or ratified international treaties fail to incorporate these obligations into national legislation, leaving survivors without effective legal remedies. Even where laws exist, weak institutions, corruption, and fragile judicial systems prevent meaningful enforcement. Another critical gap lies in the CRSV. Survivors often face stigma, fear of retaliation, lack of access to services, and cultural taboos that discourage disclosure. This silence not only undermines data collection but also hampers accountability efforts, as reliable evidence is difficult to obtain in the absence of survivor testimony. While innovations in documentation and digital evidence are emerging, they remain underutilized and underfunded in conflict zones. Resource and capacity constraints also limit effective responses. Peacekeeping missions and national institutions often lack trained investigators, forensic tools, trauma-informed personnel, and survivor-centered services. Financial shortfalls in UN programs further restrict the deployment of Women Protection Advisers, victim assistance initiatives, and monitoring arrangements, creating inconsistencies across missions and regions (Usman, et al., 2023; Usma et al., 2021).

Institutionally, fragmentation and lack of coordination between international and local actors weaken responses. The multiplicity of mechanisms from UN agencies to regional bodies and NGOs often leads to duplication of efforts, competition for funding, and inconsistent protection frameworks. Moreover, geopolitical divisions within the Security Council create selective enforcement, where some contexts receive sustained attention while others are sidelined due to political alliances or strategic interests. This inconsistency erodes the credibility of international law and fosters perceptions of impunity. Finally, structural challenges are compounded by the power asymmetries in conflict and post-conflict settings. Survivors, particularly women and girls from marginalized groups, face multiple barriers to accessing justice, ranging from discriminatory social norms to the exclusion of women from peace negotiations and transitional justice processes. Without addressing these structural inequalities, legal norms risk remaining aspirational rather than transformative. Taken together, these gaps illustrate that the greatest obstacle to combating GBV in armed conflict is not the absence of norms, but the failure to operationalize them in ways that are survivor-centered, context-sensitive, and politically insulated from selective enforcement. Bridging this divide requires a reorientation from symbolic commitments to concrete, resourced, and enforceable measures at both international and domestic levels (Lin & Song, 2024; Usman et al., 2021).

Toward Effective Prevention and Accountability: Policy and Legal Reforms

Bridging the gap between normative frameworks and lived realities of survivors requires a shift from rhetorical commitments to concrete, enforceable measures. Effective prevention and accountability in cases of GBV during armed conflict demand reforms at both the policy and legal levels, aimed at strengthening institutions, empowering survivors, and ensuring that perpetrators face justice. At the international level, reforms should focus on consolidating legal standards and closing definitional gaps. The Rome Statute's recognition of sexual violence crimes provides a strong foundation, yet inconsistencies remain regarding crimes such as forced marriage and reproductive violence. Codifying these as autonomous crimes within international criminal law would enhance clarity and strengthen prosecutorial strategies. Moreover, harmonizing the interplay between international humanitarian law, human rights law, and criminal law would reduce fragmentation and promote consistent application across tribunals and domestic systems. Accountability also hinges on enhanced state responsibility through the due diligence standard. States should be obligated to not only prosecute perpetrators within their jurisdiction but also regulate the conduct of non-state armed groups operating under their control or influence. National Action Plans under the Women, Peace and Security agenda must be backed by legislative reforms,

specialized investigative units, survivor-friendly courts, and reparations programs that are accessible and adequately resourced. Donor support should prioritize capacity-building in fragile states to ensure that commitments translate into practice (Hussain, et al., 2023).

Within the UN system, reforms are needed to address peacekeeper accountability. Closing the impunity gap requires binding agreements with troop-contributing countries to prosecute offenders, the establishment of independent investigative mechanisms, and greater transparency in reporting outcomes. Survivor-centered reforms such as expanding victim assistance funds, ensuring access to medical and psychosocial support, and adopting community-based reporting systems are equally critical to rebuilding trust in peace operations. Preventive measures must also be mainstreamed into peacebuilding and transitional justice processes. This includes ensuring women's meaningful participation in negotiations, embedding gender perspectives in ceasefire and disarmament agreements, and prioritizing economic and social empowerment programs for survivors. Transitional justice mechanisms—such as truth commissions and reparations schemes—should explicitly address sexual and gender-based violence to ensure recognition, accountability, and societal transformation. Ultimately, prevention and accountability require more than institutional reform; they demand sustained political will and adequate resources. International actors, particularly the Security Council, must apply consistent pressure across all conflicts rather than selectively. Survivors' voices must guide policy frameworks, ensuring that justice is not only punitive but also restorative and transformative. By reorienting from symbolic commitments to survivor-centered implementation, the international community can begin to close the persistent gap between law and practice in addressing GBV in armed conflict (Khan, et al., 2020; Usman et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This study has highlighted how gender-based violence in armed conflict constitutes not merely a by-product of war but a deliberate strategy that undermines human dignity, social stability, and the prospects for lasting peace. Despite a robust normative framework under international humanitarian, human rights, and criminal law, as well as the development of institutional mechanisms and Security Council resolutions, implementation continues to falter due to systemic underreporting, weak state capacity, fragmented institutional responses, and entrenched political resistance. The persistence of impunity whether for state actors, non-state armed groups, or peacekeepers underscores the urgent need to move beyond rhetorical commitments toward survivor-centered accountability and prevention. The significance of this research lies in its call for both legal and policy reforms that prioritize harmonization of international regimes, strengthen due diligence obligations, close accountability gaps, and embed gender perspectives into peacebuilding and transitional justice. It also emphasizes that effective prevention must be rooted in survivor empowerment, protection of rights, and genuine political will at both national and international levels. Looking ahead, future research should explore how emerging technologies such as digital evidence collection, artificial intelligence, and blockchain can be harnessed to document and prosecute conflict-related sexual violence while safeguarding survivor privacy. Comparative studies of regional human rights bodies could also shed light on innovative accountability models. Moreover, greater attention to the intersectionality of GBV addressing how ethnicity, displacement, disability, and age compound vulnerabilities will be essential in shaping more inclusive and context-sensitive responses. By deepening the discourse on prevention, accountability, and survivor-centered justice, the international community can begin to close the gap between norms and realities, ensuring that the law not only condemns but also effectively confronts gender-based violence in armed conflict. The legal architecture condemning CRSV is no longer thin; its central deficit is credible, consistent implementation. Closing the gap requires: (1)

domestic incorporation of international definitions and survivor-cantered procedure; (2) resourced investigations, including digital forensics and protection; (3) integration of enforceable CRSV measures into peace and security arrangements; (4) principled, politics-resistant sanctions and conditionality; (5) transparent peacekeeper accountability with victim-first remedies; and (6) sustainable financing for services and reparations. Future research should examine long-run socioeconomic outcomes for survivors and children born of wartime rape, the efficacy of sanctions designations on CRSV incidence, and best practices for integrating GBV prevention into climate-security and cyber-conflict contexts.

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