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Socioecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Postconflict Violence Against Women and Girls

Maureen Murphy[1], Manuel Contreras-Urbina[1,2], Michelle Spearing[3], and Aisling Swaine[4]

Abstract

This article advances our understanding of the drivers and multidimensional nature of conflict-related violence against women and girls (CRVAWG). It presents an adapted socioecological model, which supports research, analysis, and programming and can be further adapted as the empirical evidence base grows. Although models to help explore violence against women and girls generally have advanced over recent decades, these have not addressed the specific dynamics of conflict-affected settings. This article makes a unique contribution by bringing together research on CRVAWG and presenting a new model for deepening current approaches to understanding and preventing CRVAWG.

Keywords

conflict and postconflict, ecological framework, violence against women and girls, gender inequality

Introduction

As awareness of conflict-related violence against women and girls[1] (CRVAWG) has increased over recent decades, there has been a corresponding interest in how to fully understand, prevent, and respond to it effectively. Research into drivers and

[1]The Global Women's Institute, George Washington University, Washington, DC, USA
[2]World Bank Group, Washington, DC, USA
[3]Conflict, Security and Violence, Oxford Policy Management, Oxford, Oxfordshire, UK
[4]School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

Corresponding Author:
Maureen Murphy, The Global Women's Institute, George Washington University, 2140 G Street NW Washington, DC, 20052, USA.
Email: maureenmurphy@gwu.edu

risk factors for CRVAWG sits across disparate fields including within policy-focused research seeking to advance the women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda, humanitarian research engaging with survivors and situated in social work or public health disciplines, and feminist legal and political science research focusing on accountability and the behaviors of armed groups. Socioecological models have historically been hugely influential in deepening understanding, prevention of, and response to violence against women and girls (VAWG) outside of armed conflict. As multidimensional theoretical and empirically driven models, they set out the interrelated risks and drivers, from an individual through societal levels that contribute to VAWG. Similar models derived from the existing multidisciplinary research on CRVAWG are, however, lacking. To bridge this gap, this article presents a "Socio-ecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Postconflict VAWG" that is the first of its kind for VAWG in conflict-affected settings. It responds to the need for a research framework that can be used to expand understanding of CRVAWG. Specifically, it presents a diagrammatic representation of the ecosystem underpinning VAWG during and after conflict. It also contributes a new basis for further research to expand understanding of CRVAWG as well as to further refine the model itself as more empirical research emerges from humanitarian settings. Finally, it provides a lens through which to deepen policy analysis, planning, and programming approaches to CRVAWG.

Evolution of Socioecological Models in Research on VAWG

The socioecological model is a widely accepted theoretical framework conceptualizing the complexity and multidimensional nature of VAWG as well as establishing the relevance of the wider ecosystem to the etiology of VAWG. It provides a framework to identify, map, and understand the causes of VAWG that are embedded in micro- (individual and familial) to macrolevel (community and societal) social systems. It was adapted by Belsky (1980) to identify the causes of child abuse and neglect and was later applied to intimate partner violence (IPV), most notably by Heise (1998). In Heise's model, IPV is conceptualized as the product of a system of interacting factors at different levels: the macrosystem, the exosystem, the microsystem, and the individual. The model recognizes the role of different variables within each level and advances understanding of the drivers of VAWG in nonconflict settings.

Heise's model has been updated (including models proposed by Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Heise, 2011) and strengthened with empirical evidence on factors associated with both women's experiences and men's perpetration of IPV in low- and middle-income countries. Furthermore, Cislaghi and Heise (2018) adapted this framework to inform social norms change programming. Their framework captures individual, social, material, and institutional domains, with power at the center, in order to conceptualize the different layers that overlap and influence people's actions. Both the Cislaghi and Heise (2018) and Fulu and Miedema (2015) models include a "global" layer to explore the linkages between globalized phenomena and women's experiences of violence at the microlevel. However, none of the existing

socioecological models are sufficient to provide a basis for intervention and research on VAWG specific to the unique dynamics of conflict and postconflict settings.

Adapting a Socioecological Approach for Conflict-Related VAWG

A new adaptation of the socioecological framework that captures the ecosystem specific to conflict-affected spaces is needed for a variety of reasons. First, although patriarchal norms and social systems that disadvantage women and girls are present prior to the outbreak of an armed conflict, these factors may be exacerbated by the conditions engendered by the conflict. These preexisting drivers of VAWG are set out under existing general socioecological models on VAWG and there is no reason to suspect these dynamics would fundamentally shift under conflict conditions (Cislaghi & Heise, 2018; Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Heise, 1998). Furthermore, researchers have demonstrated correlations between countries that have higher rates of VAWG or increased gender inequality with more, or increased severity of, armed conflict, suggesting that unequal power and patriarchy are often associated with conflict itself (Caprioli, 2005; Hudson et al., 2009; Melander, 2005). With the intrusion of international organizations and humanitarian actors in response to many armed conflicts globally, there may also be a confluence of "imported patriarchy" with existing indigenous patriarchal structures and norms that serve to further disadvantage women through both local and globalized mechanisms (Ní Aoláin & Hamilton, 2009, p. 118).

Secondly, new drivers and risk factors that impact VAWG emerge during periods of conflict and into the postconflict period. Continuums theory has identified how gender norms and inequalities predating armed conflict underpin how women and girls experience violence in conflict and postconflict settings (Cockburn, 2004; Moser et al., 2001). Although continuums theory remains instructive, researchers have pointed to the distinctive forms of VAWG that arise from armed violence, as well as the need to recognize that conflict-related factors may continue to be relevant well into the aftermath of conflict (Boesten, 2017; Gray, 2019; Swaine, 2019).

Our newly proposed model considers both of these aspects of risk—the exacerbation of preexisting and introduction of new—as a framing devise to support the development of CRVAWG prevention programs. We also seek to move beyond the narrow classification of CRVAWG as primarily sexual violence and consider the multitudes of violence experienced by women and girls holistically. As CRVAWG has become a central concern of feminist scholars and practitioners, empirical and theoretical innovations across political science, international relations, health sciences, history, anthropology, and law have attempted to understand causal factors, motivations, and drivers of its multidimensional nature. One of the most common ideas to explain increases in CRVAWG, which has gained significant theoretical and empirical traction, is the strategic rape thesis. This theory is rooted in ways that armed groups may use rape as a tactic of armed conflict and is reflected in decisions of international criminal tribunals,

international law, and policy (Gottschall, 2004). Although recognition of strategic rape and armed group dynamics and a focus on criminal accountability are important, the strategic rape thesis has been critiqued for reducing women's experiences of CRVAWG to a particular form of penetrative rape by armed men and positioning prevention as solely contingent on the discipline and training of militarized actors (Engle, 2017; Meger, 2016).

In response to these critics, a further body of work has advanced the idea of variations in CRVAWG, evidencing other forms of CRVAWG that occur alongside strategic rape or in its absence (Gray, 2019; Kirby, 2012; Swaine, 2015, 2018; Wood, 2006), including violence performed by armed and nonarmed actors motivated by individual or collective motivations, thereby violence in conflict may be multipurpose in cause and intent (Green & Ward, 2009; Swaine, 2018). Relatedly, there is evidence that IPV, community and familial violence, and sexual exploitation may be highly prevalent during conflicts, perhaps more prevalent than strategic rape (CPC Learning Network, 2009; Stark & Ager, 2011). Furthermore, highly conflict-affected populations may often experience more IPV, though, as with sexual violence during conflict, there is variation in these connections between settings (Ellsberg et al., 2020; Kelly et al., 2018). In addition, practices such as child and forced marriage may increase as a result of conflict, driven by the coping strategies of families (Presler-Marshall et al., 2020; Rai et al., 2019). In response to this, we have considered CRVAWG holistically (including forms of violence such as IPV not traditionally considered conflict-related) when developing our model.

Furthermore, we sought to create a socioecological model adapted for conflict that would be applicable to both conflict and postconflict contexts given the unclear demarcation of active conflict versus postconflict dynamics in many contexts (as well as the start–stop nature of conflict–truce–peace agreements—reemergence of armed conflict). In some postconflict settings, armed groups will have left and the risk they posed will have ceased, whereas in others armed actors return to homes and communities posing new risks to women and girls (Cahn et al., 2010; Swaine, 2018). For some women, increases in IPV postconflict result from factors introduced during the conflict, whereas for others it is a continuation of violence that occurred prior to the conflict that returns as men return home postconflict (Horn et al., 2014; McWillilams & Ní Aoláin, 2013; Swaine, 2018). Women and girls associated with armed groups also face specific stigmas, threats, and violence from family and community members upon return (Annan & Brier, 2010). Further, the chronic economic deficits faced by populations recovering from armed conflict heighten vulnerabilities to violence, particularly trafficking and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) by known interpersonal interlocutors, as well as through the introduction of international actors (Rai et al., 2019; Westendorf & Searle, 2017). Although there will be some differences in drivers of CRVAWG between periods of active conflict and its aftermath, omitting the postconflict context from the model would mask the myriad of ways that armed conflict dynamics endure and new factors become relevant postconflict. It would also counter feminist research on continuums and the problem with demarcating conflict versus nonconflict boundaries (Zarkov & Cockburn, 2002).

By utilizing a socioecological framework, we recognize that in aiming to advance the understanding of CRVAWG, research and programming models should not "isolate visible or incident-based forms of violence directly inflicted on an individual's body during crisis from the wider gendered structures and symbols that relegate unequal status to women and girls" (True & Tanyag, 2019, p. 20). The myriad forms of CRVAWG are enabled by a range of global and local actors, institutions, and systems, the inequalities embedded in interactions between global and local economic, political and social processes, and the condition of inequalities underpinning continuums of violence from nonconflict to conflict to postconflict settings. The normative and globalized nature of gender, racial, economic, and social inequalities forms a foundation from which our model attempts to identify the nature and drivers of multiple forms of VAWG, directly and indirectly, related to armed conflict. We also recognize that armed conflicts and their dynamics differ globally, women and girls may experience armed violence in different ways, and there may be different pathways that increase or decrease experiences of CRVAWG in differing contexts. Our framework lays out these potential pathways as opportunities for intervention and can serve as an overarching framework that could then be adapted in context-specific ways to conflict or postconflict settings as required.

Overview of the Model

The "Socio-ecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Post-Conflict VAWG" is divided into six interrelated layers (global, societal, institutional, community, interpersonal, and individual). At the global level, we provide an introduction to how globalization is influencing and compounding VAWG in conflict-affected settings. For each subsequent level, we break out the factors that preexist conflict, but are exacerbated by these conflict dynamics, and explore newly introduced drivers of violence unique to conflict-affected settings. The layers are interconnected and will interact with each other, reinforcing conditions leading to CRVAWG.

The authors previously published a conceptual framework that illuminates the inter sections between VAWG and conflict-affected settings (Swaine et al., 2019). This research examines how existing peace and state-building processes affect positive outcomes in terms of women's status in conflict settings and reductions in VAWG. The "Socio-ecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Post-Conflict VAWG" presented here builds further on this underpinning research by exploring the underlying evidence base that these peace and state-building processes seek to impact through their interventions. This article gives a discursive overview of the model and a summary of key evidence on the drivers and risk factors for VAWG in conflict and postconflict at each level of the model (Figure 1).

Globalization

Feminist scholars highlight a broader structural context to CRVAWG and argue that what happens in conflict reflects global violence writ large (True & Tanyag, 2019).

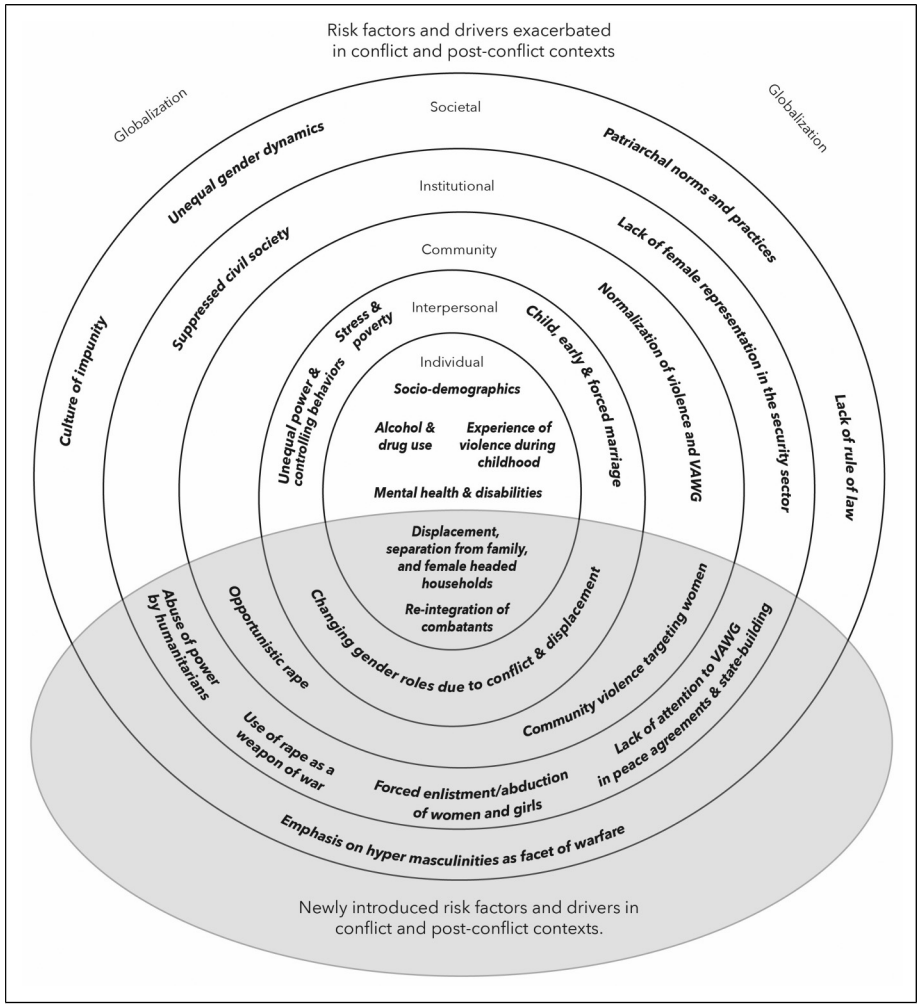

Figure 1. Socioecological framework for drivers of conflict and postconflict violence against women and girls (VAWG).

The "layers" of violence are seen as essential in understanding CRVAWG, including connections between the predominance of militarism as an accepted norm in resolving conflict in societies globally, and between structural and symbolic global violence (True & Tanyag, 2019). Militarized ideologies, political economy drivers of everyday violence, and hierarchies of gender and race provide a basis for political armed violence as an accepted response to the resolution of disputes (Cockburn, 2012; Enloe, 2000; Lutz, 2002). The political economy analysis highlights how violence in conflict, particularly sexualized CRVAWG, is motivated in part by establishing

extralegal economic activity and capital accumulation through the structural inequalities of the global economic order (Meger, 2016; True, 2012). Global economic and labor inequalities reflected at national, community, and familial levels affect women's poverty and insecurity and create conditions of vulnerability to exploitative, as well as other forms of, violence (True, 2018).

The arms trade associated with conflict, enduring imperialist racialized ideas, stereotypes about the perpetration of violence, global economic and criminality models that facilitate trafficking, the migration of humans in violent and exploitative ways, and feminized austerity measures all enable and are outcomes of violence (Runyan & Peterson, 2014; Suchland, 2015; True & Tanyag, 2019). Feminist theories and research on continuums, militarism, the normalization of violence, and structural inequalities have evidenced the relationship between public or political violence and private violence (Cockburn, 2004; True & Tanyag, 2019). Armed violence establishes conditions that make men's control of women permissible and has led to tacit acceptance of organized as well as interpersonal forms of VAWG within and outside of armed conflict globally.

Interventionist peacebuilding does not undo these enablers of CRVAWG from micro- to macrolevels, often situating global patriarchies at the center of postconflict transitions (Swaine, 2018; True & Tanyag, 2019). The insidious nature of militarism and inequalities inherent to globalization means that reform of state institutions postconflict draws from these political economies, entrenching gendered and racial hierarchies, and inculcating economic, social, legal, and political processes that rely on those inequalities and that ultimately enable CRVAWG (Swaine et al., 2019; True, 2018). Many of these factors are outside the influence of specific programming interventions, and therefore we consider the global level only as a framing mechanism for our model. However, they are important to acknowledge in understanding VAWG in conflict and postconflict settings and provide an overarching grounding for the rest of our analysis of risk factors and drivers of CRVAWG through the socioecological framework.

Societal Level

Risk Factors and Drivers Exacerbated by Conflict

Unequal gender dynamics and patriarchal norms and practices. Feminist researchers posit that the root causes of VAWG, in both conflict and nonconflict settings, are unequal gender dynamics and patriarchal norms and practices that discriminate against women and girls. Research in nonconflict affected settings has demonstrated this connection between gender inequality and rates of IPV (Heise & Kotsadam, 2015), and some researchers have suggested these inequalities may contribute to increases in the utilization of conflict-related sexual violence as a facet of warfare (Coulter, 2009; Ellsberg et al., 2021; Olujic, 1998). However, the exact connection between gender inequality and conflict-related sexual violence is unclear, and cross-national analysis did not find gender inequality to be associated with higher rates of wartime rape (Cohen, 2013). Nevertheless, it is generally agreed that patriarchy is a

necessary, though not sufficient, condition contributing to the use of sexual violence during conflict (Cohen et al., 2013).

A culture of impunity and lack of rule of law. Impunity and a lack of a functional rule of law can suppress reporting of violence and increase the prevalence of VAWG. Patriarchy and unequal gender norms may also contribute to the de-prioritization of VAWG within the state and legal systems. In conflict-affected settings, weak states may experience more sexual violence by rebel groups during civil wars (Cohen, 2013). These weak or failing states are often unable to fulfill their roles as purveyors of justice, enabling multiple forms of CRVAWG (Ellsberg et al., 2021; Goetze, 2008). Informal institutions, customary justice processes, or traditional and religious leadership structures may step in where formal state structures fail. However, rather than providing a mechanism for punishment and restitution, often these institutions compound blame on women and girls for the harm they experience and increase revictimization through social punishment (Iyakaremye & Mukagatare, 2016; Myrttinen et al., 2014).

Newly Introduced Risk Factors and Drivers in Conflict and Postconflict Contexts

Emphasis on hyper masculinities as facets of warfare. Hyper masculine archetypes are commonly utilized as aspects of military or armed group organization and motivation and have been linked to the perpetration of sexual violence during and after conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Banwell, 2014; Meger, 2010; Wright, 2014). For example, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ingelaere and Wilén (2017) found drivers of rape by ex-combatants related to the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Ex-combatants attributed the overwhelming power of biological urges with a masculine "need," justifying aggression. Men who do not meet the ideals of masculinity may use sexual violence to prove their manhood, gain status with other men, or because they believe it is their right to have sex (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Banwell, 2014; Meger, 2010).

Institutional Level

Risk Factors and Drivers Exacerbated by Conflict

Lack of female representation in the security sector and a suppressed civil society. In both conflict-affected and peaceful societies, patriarchal norms and rigid gender roles suppress female representation in security forces and armies. In conflict and postconflict settings, lack of promotion of women and attention to CRVAWG as part of security sector reform and transitional justice mechanisms may exacerbate tolerance of this violence, compound stigma, and risk further victimization of women and girls (Bastick, 2008; Myrttinen et al., 2014).

Newly Introduced Risk Factors and Drivers in Conflict and Postconflict Contexts

Abuse of power by humanitarians and peacekeepers. Although it occurs in societies around the world, SEA of women and girls by aid workers from the UN and non government organizations (NGOs), as well as UN Peacekeepers, is particularly acute in

conflict-affected contexts where those in power may demand sex in exchange for food, services, or other favors (Potts et al., 2020; United Nations, 2002; Zicherman, 2006). The entrance of "MWMs" (men with money) under large-scale peacekeeping operations presents additional risk factors, including private-sector workers, private security company operatives, as well as NGO/UN staff. A culture of impunity around these issues has long affected rates of SEA and potentially normalized the practice in these contexts. Although no prevalence data exists on SEA during and after armed conflict, the limited available evidence suggests it is widespread (Hutchinson et al., 2016; McAlpine et al., 2016).

Use of rape as a weapon of war. The use of sexual violence in conflict by state and nonstate actors has multiple drivers and is well documented (Barstow, 2000; Card, 1996; Enloe, 2000; Niarchos, 1995; Seifert, 1996; Swiss & Giller, 1993; Turshen, 2001). Rape may be an explicit tactic utilized by armed groups to attack, express dominance over, dehumanize, or reduce the reproductive capacity of a rival group. Soldiers may commit acts of violence based on direct orders, to facilitate group cohesion, demonstrate loyalty, or to conform to the ethos of the armed group (Cohen, 2017; Wood, 2018). Sexual violence may also be used to "feminize" the enemy by attacking women who are under the men's protection (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Seifert, 1996).

Forced enlistment and use of women and girls in roles associated with armed groups. Although women and girls can have varying roles during conflict, both in support of and opposition to the conflict, often they may be forced to enlist as soldiers, abducted by fighting forces, or otherwise play supporting roles (porters, servants, etc.) for armed groups (Coulter, 2009). During this time, women and girls may experience CRVAWG, including being taken as wives or otherwise used as sexual slaves by armed groups (Coulter, 2009; McKay & Mazurana, 2004).

Lack of attention to VAWG in peace agreements and state-building mechanisms. Although globally calls for the inclusion of women in peace processes have led to a growing response including the adoption of global policy instruments and increased service provision to survivors, gender and CRVAWG are still not systematically addressed in peace agreements and state-building mechanisms (Castillejo, 2012; Swaine et al., 2019). These dynamics continue as societies transition into a postconflict period, where a lack of attention to CRVAWG in peace agreements, transitional justice measures, etc. may compound cultures of discrimination and impunity and enable continued CRVAWG after the formal cessation of hostilities (Sigsworth, 2008). Furthermore, transitional justice efforts may not fully be implemented and do not necessarily result in wider-scale reductions in VAWG.

Community Level

Risk Factors and Drivers Exacerbated by Conflict

Normalization of violence and VAWG. In the context of armed conflict, witnessing, experiencing, or perpetrating violence may make it easier to disengage and

depersonalize those who are harmed by violence or CRVAWG (Muñoz-Rojas & Frésard, 2004). Exposure to violence increases when a society experiences armed conflict, which can legitimate male sexual violence and enable the mass rape of women. The normal constraints of society are suspended, which allows for behavior that goes against traditional social norms, such as rape, to become commonplace (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Horwood, 2007). Armed conflict directly affects participants as combatants, targets of attack, etc. and has effects beyond the battlefield. After the cessation of hostilities, CRVAWG may continue due to the normalization of violence in postconflict settings (and associated impunity, lack of rule of law, and increase in weapons) that may continue to affect rates of IPV and nonpartner assault (Cockburn, 2004; Dolan, 2010; Ellsberg et al., 2021; Guruge et al., 2017; Niner, 2011).

Newly Introduced Risk Factors and Drivers in Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts

Intra- and intercommunal violence including opportunistic rape of women and girls. Armed conflict introduces new risk factors for VAWG with women and girls directly targeted during intra- or intercommunal violence as a mechanism to bring shame, "feminize," or otherwise attack rival groups. Their targeting may be part of a cycle of revenge killings/rape where the cycle of violence continues as retribution for previous violent acts (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Ellsberg et al., 2021). In addition, women and girls may be subject to opportunistic sexual violence during a crime, raid, or intercommunal attack (or as a result of the breakdown of rule of law and associated increased impunity), even if they are not explicitly the target (Ellsberg et al., 2021).

Interpersonal Level

Risk Factors and Drivers Exacerbated by Conflict

Household stress and poverty. Household stress may increase during times of conflict for a variety of reasons, including tensions resulting from living in poor quality or congested housing, food insecurity, and other displacement-related factors that can, in turn, affect rates of IPV and/or sexual exploitation (Cardoso et al., 2016; Ellsberg et al., 2021). In addition, environmental factors, such as deforestation, and fights over limited resources, such as water, may also contribute to stress and communal conflict in these settings, potentially increasing CRVAWG (Castañeda Camey et al., 2020).

Conflict can also increase poverty through the destruction or confiscation of resources, hyperinflation, and collapse of the labor market, which can directly or indirectly impact CRVAWG. The looting of livestock or assets may contribute to cycles of violence, including incidents of revenge attacks and rapes (Ellsberg et al., 2021; Mootz et al., 2017). In cultures where a bride price is necessary for marriage, men who are unable to pay may see sexual violence as the only way to have sex in lieu of them being able to be married (El-Bushra & Sahl, 2005; Ellsberg et al., 2021). Furthermore, the economic stress of household poverty can in turn increase the risk of IPV as well as SEA (Cardoso et al., 2016; Ellsberg et al., 2021; Iyakaremye & Mukagatare, 2016; Mootz et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018).

Unequal power and increased controlling behaviors. Armed conflict can further exacerbate gender inequalities and lead to increases in controlling behaviors by men against women and girls, which are often closely associated with experiences of IPV (Ellsberg et al., 2021; Stern & Nystrand, 2006). High rates of sexual violence may create narratives that adolescent girls need to be "protected," which can manifest as controlling behaviors and patriarchal practices such as not being allowed to attend a school or being forced into marriage (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2019).

Child, early, and forced marriages. Although early and forced marriages are themselves forms of VAWG, they can also be associated with increased rates of IPV (Wachter et al., 2018; Wirtz et al., 2018). Conflict can impact rates of early and forced marriage for a number of reasons. For one, displaced families may not be able to support their children due to prohibitions on employment for refugee families, lack of assets, etc., which can drive them to marry their daughters before maturity (Spencer, 2015). In some contexts, marriage has positive economic consequences for the family, for example, marriage can mean fewer family members vying for limited resources (Presler-Marshall et al., 2020). In addition, families may marry their daughters to protect them from sexual violence or to protect family honor (Hutchinson et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2019; Presler-Marshall et al., 2020; Spencer, 2015).

Newly Introduced Risk Factors and Drivers in Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts

Changing gender roles due to conflict and displacement. During conflict men may be unable to fulfill what they see as their traditional masculine roles, such as providing economically for their family or ensuring protection from violence. Men's belief that they do not meet ideals of masculinity has been linked to the perpetration of sexual violence during conflict (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Wright, 2014) and can impact men in other ways, including men who are not directly associated with armed groups. Furthermore, women and girls who challenge patriarchal social norms within society or take on more "masculine" roles in the home face particular risks of violence (Weber et al., 2019). For many women, conflict up-ends traditional gender norms and allows space for them to take on new roles, such as earning money outside the home. However, these changes in gender roles may contribute to increases in IPV as men try to reestablish traditional positions of power within the household both during conflict (for the men who remain in the community) and post conflict (for men reintegrating into the community after participating in the conflict) (Cardoso et al., 2016; Guruge et al., 2017; Wachter et al., 2018).

Individual Level

Risk Factors and Drivers Exacerbated by Conflict

Socio demographic characteristics. The connections between socio demographic factors and rates of VAWG are well documented in non conflict settings (Fulu & Miedema, 2015; Heise, 1998, 2011). In conflict settings, many risk factors remain the same but may

manifest differently. For example, characteristics such as age, religious identity, ethnicity/race, LGBTI identity, education level, and employment status can sometimes lead to deliberate targeting by armed actors or reduced social protections. For example, when examining age, high rates of conflict-affected adolescent girls report that they have experienced sexual violence, and exposure to armed conflict may increase the risk that girls experience either IPV or sexual violence (Murphy et al., 2019; Tanner & O'Connor, 2017). Similarly, race and ethnicity are interlinked with VAWG in conflict settings when there is an ethnic component to the wider conflict. Although women and girls may be targeted for sexual violence due to their race or ethnicity, these risks can also be seen within the household. For example, research in Somalia found that membership in a minority clan raised the odds that a woman experiences IPV (Wirtz et al., 2018), suggesting that tensions within ethnicities or communities may be replicated within the home.

Alcohol and drug use. Exposure to conflict can increase substance abuse by male perpetrators, and sexual violence during war has been linked to the use of alcohol and drugs among soldiers (Baaz & Stern, 2009; Kassimeris, 2006). In conflict and post conflict contexts, alcohol and drug use are often linked to displacement and the breakdown of traditional economic structures that leave men idle. In addition, local brewing of alcohol is one of the few viable economic activities for displaced populations. Increased use of these substances by men has been seen to affect rates of IPV perpetration in both conflict and post conflict settings (Guruge et al., 2017; Mootz et al., 2018; Rubenstein et al., 2017; Wachter et al., 2018; Wirtz et al., 2018).

Experience of violence during childhood. Exposure to violence in childhood often increases in conflict-affected areas. Children associated with armed groups experience violence during armed conflict, and children who are growing up in conflict-affected settings may be more exposed to armed violence or IPV at home due to increased rates of violence overall. This exposure to violence during childhood is associated with an increased likelihood of perpetrating (for men) or experiencing (for women) both IPV and non partner violence (Gibbs et al., 2018a; Nandi et al., 2017; Rubenstein et al., 2017; Wirtz et al., 2018).

Mental health and disabilities. Although poor mental health and physical disabilities can be consequences of VAWG, they are also risk factors for further experiences of violence (Dunkle et al., 2018; Gibbs et al., 2018b). Trauma and exposure to armed conflict are also clearly associated with mental health disorders including post traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety among others (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). Experiences of conflict may also lead to physical disabilities such as loss of limbs, eyesight, or hearing. These mental and physical challenges may increase the risk that women and girls experience violence or that men perpetrate VAWG in conflict and post conflict settings (Goessmann et al., 2019; Nandi et al., 2017).

Newly Introduced Risk Factors and Drivers in Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts

Displacement, separation from family support structures, and female-headed households. Displacement and migration can be drivers of VAWG in conflict-affected populations. Displacement may increase stress and poverty, and populations from

different cultural backgrounds living in close proximity have been reported as a factor contributing to increases in CRVAWG (Cardoso et al., 2016; Ellsberg et al., 2021; Oliveira et al., 2018; Rubenstein et al., 2017). Displacement can also lead to the breakdown of social support structures, including increases in female-headed households, which can increase the risk of women and girls experiencing both IPV and non partner sexual violence (Cardoso et al., 2016; Wachter et al., 2018). Sexual violence also occurs when women and girls leave the relative safety of displacement camps or population centers in order to collect firewood, farm, or conduct other business (Ager et al., 2018; Ellsberg et al., 2021).

Experiences as and reintegration of combatants/abductees. Risks of CRVAWG do not end for women and girls as the conflict ends. Research has examined the experiences of returning female soldiers and found that they experience challenges with reintegration and family and community violence—particularly in contexts with weak states. For example, Annan and Brier (2010) demonstrate that former abductees into the Lord's Resistance Army in Northern Uganda faced stigma from the community as well as IPV upon their return. Women and girls who experienced sexual violence during conflict may be considered "impure" and be unable to marry or take up traditional feminine roles in their communities (Stark, 2006), increasing pre existing unequal power dynamics and contributing to further marginalization.

For men, the emphasis on hyper-masculinities during conflict may continue to impact CRVAWG even after a conflict ends and combatants are reintegrated into the household. In contexts such as Northern Ireland, El Salvador, the former Yugoslavia, and Timor-Leste the return of men who were imprisoned or who fought during the conflict meant the return of IPV to their homes (Charlesworth & Wood, 2001; Fitzsimmons, 2005; Swaine, 2018; United Nations Secretary-General, 2002). The "domestication of violence" following a war is a critical concern (Theidon, 2007, p. 470); however, it should be understood in respect of the continued lack of data on whether IPV is a new, continuing or renewed event in the home following the return of men. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, IPV post conflict was cited by some women as a continuation of what they experienced prior to the war and thereby unrelated to the war specifically (Horn et al., 2014). However, recent research has demonstrated that even 5 years after the end of the Liberian war, women in conflict-affected districts were experiencing more IPV than those in non conflict-affected areas, suggesting that conflict has long-term impacts on experiences of IPV (Kelly et al., 2018).

Conclusions

Although all VAWG is rooted in gender inequality, unequal power, and patriarchy, researchers have recognized there are unique conflict dynamics that require separate exploration in order to understand the multidimensional nature of risks and drivers of violence in conflict-affected settings. The model laid out here presents a unified conceptualization of CRVAWG in conflict contexts. It is a tool that can be used by researchers and practitioners as a means through which to examine and deepen

understanding of factors that contribute to and drive VAWG in conflict-affected contexts and in the case of practitioners develop tailored responses.

Heise's original ecological framework for VAWG has been adapted and further advanced in multiple ways through both scholarly research and programmatic application. We envision a similar vibrancy and utility for our proposed model. For example, Heise's adaptation of the ecological framework for IPV contributed to the formation of some of the most well-known VAWG prevention models globally (e.g., SASA!, WHO's Respect Framework). In the same vein, we hope that the "Socioecological Framework for Drivers of Conflict and Postconflict VAWG" will be adapted both to frame new research as well as to use for the development of policy and programming initiatives. The model can be used as a basis for research in specific conflict sites, where new factors and drivers might be identified. In programming, context-specific gender analysis can inform the application of the model and its adaptation in response to context-specific realities. For example, programmers may consider changing gender roles initially in the context of conflict (e.g., women taking on more masculine roles in response to the absence of men) and then consider how the reintegration of men back into the household during the post conflict period may cause a reaction against these new roles, potentially increasing violence. Globalization and global drivers of violence also prompt the need for interventions on CRVAWG to consider joined up ground-to-global level advocacy work on these issues.

Many of the drivers in the framework have been empirically documented in previous studies of VAWG in conflict-affected settings. However, these studies have utilized different perspectives and methodologies and are primarily based on qualitative data—though a small evidence base of quantitative studies is emerging. In some cases, drivers were included in the model based on theoretical connections and we still lack empirical evidence that confirms these associations. Given this, the proposed framework should not be considered definitive and further adaptations and contextualization can be done as the evidence base grows. Further research is needed to empirically test the connections laid out in this article and, as such, we expect this framework will change and adapt as further evidence is generated. However, as it is presented here, we feel that it is an essential first step in bringing together disparate evidence bases and providing a common framework for various government, civil society, and humanitarian agencies seeking to reduce CRVAWG.

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ORCID iDs

Manuel Contreras-Urbina https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8747-0053
Aisling Swaine https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5782-5084

Note

1. "Conflict-related violence against women and girls" refers to a range of physical, sexual, economic, psychological, emotional, and coercive harms and abuse affecting women and girls that may be directly or indirectly related to the politics or context of a conflict and enacted by armed or non armed/civilian actors on a collective or individual basis. See UN Action (2011, Swaine) and (2019).

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Author Biographies

Maureen Murphy is a research scientist at the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University. Her research focuses on violence against women and girls in conflict and humanitarian settings with a particular interest in operational research and capacity building of humanitarian actors to conduct their own ethical and rigorous research. Maureen holds a Master's in Public Health from Columbia University where she focused on gender-based violence and reproductive health topics in complex emergencies. She is currently a Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) candidate in Global Health at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at George Washington University.

Manuel Contreras-Urbina works at the World Bank as a Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Specialist for Latin America and the Caribbean. He has 25 years of experience in gender research and programs. Before joining the Bank, he served as the Director of Research of the Global Women's Institute at George Washington University, as the Program Officer at UN Women in Mexico and Central America, and as the coordinator of the Gender, Violence, and Rights portfolio at the International Center for Research on Women. Manuel earned a PhD in Population and Gender from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

Michelle Spearing is an independent consultant on peacebuilding and the intersections of conflict, violence, and gender. She has over 20 years of experience working in and on fragile and conflict-affected states, spanning operational programming, research, and policy engagement. Michelle has engaged over many years on the women, peace, and security agenda, including acting as an advisor to DFID and the FCDO, DFAT, GiZ, and UNDP. She holds an MA in Peace Studies and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Social Research Skills with Conflict Specialism.

Aisling Swaine is a professor of Gender Studies, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin. Aisling's research and teaching focus on conflict-related violence against women, transitional justice, and global gender policy, with a focus on gender-based violence and on the women, peace, and security agenda. Aisling previously worked with international NGOs and UN agencies in humanitarian and peacebuilding settings, specializing in implementing policy and programming responses to gender-based violence.