



Project Abstract

Children as Legacies of War: Humanitarian Actors as Agents of Change

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Overall Mission Objective

The objective of our project was to explore the humanitarian response to children born of wartime rape and sexual exploitation. We sought both to analyze the social response to such children in conflict settings characterized by mass rape or sexual exploitation by troops and peacekeepers. We also wanted to consider what role human rights advocates in post-conflict situations can play in mitigating negative socio-cultural reactions to children born of mass rape or exploitation. Because of the preliminary nature of the work, the project centered on amalgamating existing data and developing case studies on the issue, and gauging the state of humanitarian knowledge and practice with respect to addressing it, as a prelude to carrying out longitudinal evaluations of the effectiveness of humanitarian initiatives in this area.

Progress and (Preliminary) Outcomes

1) NSF funds were used to convene an interdisciplinary workshop at University of Pittsburgh, bringing together practitioners and academics from a variety of disciplines and seven countries to present papers and discuss the ways in which conflict-affected societies react to children born as a result of wartime rape. The workshop combined theoretical insights about post-conflict justice, humanitarian action, and human rights law with four detailed case studies on Bosnia, Sierra Leone, Uganda and East Timor, each written by practitioners with experience in the field. The most rigorous of these papers were revised and edited for inclusion in a volume of essays on this topic, which is now under review at Kumarian Press.

Evidence from the case studies written by workshop participants and published in the edited volume demonstrate that the societal response to children born of wartime rape and sexual exploitation varies greatly by context, but that regardless of the cultural context they are likely to be a particularly vulnerable population in post-conflict societies due to a variety of factors. These include the health effects associated with trauma during pregnancy and childbirth; affective bonding difficulties between mother and child; the potential for stigma from the mother's community of children viewed as belonging to the outside; and the economic marginalization of rape survivors and their children generally. Factors mitigating these outcomes seem to include the presence of alternative care arrangements for mothers who wish to give up their babies, the availability of psycho-social, medical care and economic opportunities for those who wish to keep their children, the attitudes of the mother's extended family. Hypotheses have also been generated during the research process about the relative severity of the societal impact (and therefore the impact on these children's rights) based on the nature of the sexual violence; the extent to which lineage is visible in the child's features; the religious composition of the victim and perpetrator societies; where the circumstance of conception fall on a scale between sexual



exploitation and sexual violence. Ultimately, more comprehensive research is required to explore these hypotheses and determine whether the patterns observed in the case studies are generalizable, as they are based primarily on the anecdotal record and on information cobbled together from studies primarily designed to address sexual violence against women, rather than children born as a result.

2) Concurrent with the development of the edited volume, which aimed to shed light on and build theory regarding the treatment of these children in post-conflict societies, NSF funds were used to convene a series of four focus groups with humanitarian practitioners to assess the nature of the humanitarian response to this issue. Focus groups were held in New York, Geneva and Pittsburgh, and drew on human rights and humanitarian organizations with some expertise in child protection and/or gender-based violence in armed conflict. The focus groups constituted a means to raise awareness of this issue among humanitarian policy-makers, to gather data on the state of and gaps in existing knowledge and practice, and to engage practitioners in evaluating the methods and objectives of the research project itself. A series of verbatim transcripts is archived at the University of Pittsburgh and currently being analyzed using Atlas.ti 5.0 qualitative data analysis software. This analysis will culminate in a report on the humanitarian response to this issue and will inform the development of a more comprehensive study on this topic.

Generally, the focus groups suggested that little attention has been paid to this specific group in the humanitarian sector. Humanitarian practitioners generally concur on this point, but they disagree over whether this is a good thing: some argue that humanitarian needs are best served by channeling aid to this population in the context of broader groups, rather than addressing their specific needs. Others argue that stigma cannot be overcome and specific health needs addressed without naming the population and the types of discrimination they face. However, references to a few specific programming initiatives were identified during this project that could form the basis of a comparative study on the relative effectiveness of different strategies for promoting these children's rights in the context of post-conflict social transformations.

A third finding, however, is that although there is some recognition of the vulnerability of these children due to societal attitudes about their origins, approaches to conceptualizing their human rights are contested. Participants in the working group and focus groups agreed on the nature of the problem but significant disagreement existed on how to apply the discourse of human rights or of humanitarian action to address their concerns. Several of the theoretical essays in the edited volume suggested that conventional understandings of 'human rights culture' or 'post-conflict justice' do not adequately capture the needs of this population. There was also dissent within the working group on what it would mean to conduct ethical research on this population. We found that the issue needs to be approached with care, and one testable hypothesis about the relative neglect of this issue in the humanitarian sector is precisely that such concerns as these make this population a difficult one to deal with directly.



Broader Impacts

Several graduate students received training and employment in connection with this project. Synergy was created within the humanitarian sector during focus groups over the course of this project, and efforts were made to connect these practitioners, through the NSF project, to the broader human security research being conducted within the Ford Institute of Human Security at University of Pittsburgh. The PI has also presented scholarly work in connection with the project at the International Studies Association, and the Association of Genocide Scholars. Additional speaking engagements on this issue were carried out at the UNICEF Innocenti Research Institute in Florence, Italy and at UNICEF's Global Policy Section on New York. In addition to these forms of outreach, the project website includes a select bibliography on this issue as well as a series of short thematic country case-studies.

Project Website

<http://www.pitt.edu/~charli/warbabies>