

Conflict Economics and Feminism: Does Conflict Promote the Advancement of Women?

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Abstract. Women play an important role in economic and social activities, and there is more controversy in assessing the impact of war and conflict on them. Some argue that conflicts primarily affect men and that women should not be taken into account because men dominate the outcome of conflicts and wars, while most women are far from the battlefield. However, this view ignores the fact that women and girls are the two main victims of conflict and that they should have the same rights as men and that gender should not be used to define or limit a person's behavior. In this study, we will define whether war and conflict have contributed to women's advancement in employment and education. The impact of war and conflict on women covers all aspects of feminism. In this paper, we will analyze the impact of conflict on three main aspects: female health, education, and employment.

1 Introduction

Women have been considered the greatest victims of war and the most vulnerable in the event of serious conflict in their areas. Because they were easy to be battered by terrorism and crimes of violence in front of the war and conflicts. However, there is evidence that war would stimulate the advancement of women to some extent.

It is well known that the status of women in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East area has been low since ancient times. Women are required to wear hijab which consists of black robe and veil when they go outside. They are not allowed to touch and communicate with the male except husbands and relatives (Shirazi, 2010). [15] In such a country, females are not allowed to join the military, and military operations in Saudi Arabia have always been male-only before. However, in 2015, the Middle East erupted into a new Middle East war caused by the Yemeni civil war and led by Saudi Arabia, which lasted until 2020 and remained volatile, and after 2021, for the first time in Saudi history, women were allowed to join the army. According to Abueish (2021), Saudi Arabia allows women to send job applications to military services such as the Saudi Arabian Army, Royal Saudi Air Defense, Royal Saudi Navy, Royal Saudi Strategic Missile Force, and Armed Forces Medical Services, where positions had been only open to males until Feb. 21, 2021. [1] However, those governmental organizations are now open to citizens of all genders in Saudi Arabia, signaling an advancement of women in the Middle East.

Recently, there is an increasing number of people focusing on the economic and social impact of the conflict. Women play an important role in economic and

social activities, which has generated much controversy in assessing the impact of conflict. It has been argued that conflict mainly affects men because men dominate the outcome of conflicts and wars. Women should not be taken into account because most women are far from the battlefield. However, this view ignores the fact that women and girls are two of the main victims of conflict, that they should have the same rights as men, and that gender should not be used to define or limit a person's behavior. In this study, we will define whether war has contributed to women's advancement in employment and education.

Feminism was founded and initiated to promote gender equality. Feminism focuses on women's rights of reproduction and abortion, education, resistance to domestic violence, equal employment, equal pay for equal work, access to maternity leave, candidate eligibility, avoiding sexual harassment, and gender discrimination. In this paper, we mainly analyze the impact of conflict on three areas: women's health, education, and employment.

2 Impact of Conflict on Women's Physical and Mental Health

Undifferentiated attacks, random bombings, and terrorism would account for the deterioration of Women's and children's health. The destruction of infrastructure caused by the combat attacks leads to poor health outcomes for women and children. The U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 reduced the availability of safe sources of drinking water, complete and sound medical facilities, and a steady supply of electricity (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009). [3] Pregnant women, as the largest vulnerable group in the war, are forced to flee local conflict hotspots, leading to increased

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chances of miscarriage, complications during delivery, and malnutrition. Camacho (2008) noted that terrorism-induced prenatal psychological stress increases the incidence of adverse birth outcomes and newborn weight loss. [6] Conflict can exacerbate female suffering due to shortages of basic needs such as food, water and medicine. A significant number of women and children suffer from malnourishment, and maternal mortality rates are very high. Thus, the conflict hurts the long-term health of women and children.

Warfare employment in the military industry posed a serious threat to the physical health of women. First, exposure to chemicals could take a toll on women's health. During World War I, more than ten thousands of men served on the British battlefields, and women had to supplement the workforce in the production of weapons and ammunition, where large quantities of toxic substances in the raw materials were present on the production line, such as TNT powder, asbestos, and other dangerous chemicals (Rennles, 1975; Grayzel, 2002). [14, 9] Furthermore, Grayzel (2002) mentioned that unprotected exposure to dangerous chemicals could lead to the illness of jaundice, producing abnormal yellow-skinned "canary girls" who had a short life. In addition, explosions in munitions factories are responsible for the injuries and deaths of female workers. [9] Hence, warfare is exceedingly hazardous to women's health and personal safety.

The adverse effects of war and conflict on women's mental health should also be taken into account. War-induced domestic violence and sexual harassment can have long-term effects on female veterans. Murdoch et al. (2006) found that the population of female veterans is commonly plagued by experiences of combat and military sexual trauma. They are at higher risk of developing drug-related illnesses, post-traumatic stress disorder, accidental death, and psychiatric disorders compared to the general female population. [11] Women's mental health can be damaged by war, and their emotional well-being requires much attention. Women soldiers are often described as brave and strong, but the reality is that behind almost every brave woman soldier lies unseen and unappealed pain. Likewise, almost every woman who has lost a loved one during the war needs emotional comfort. Grayzel (2002) argues that the war left women without fathers, brothers, and partners and that they suffered immeasurable emotional trauma. The Islamic Republic brainwashes women that honorable and great women are willing to sacrifice the men they love on the battlefield, including fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons. However, by the time these women, who carry family and maternal roles, become widows or orphans, they would feel devastated by grief. [9] Thus, women as the families of martyrs leave indelible scars inside, they are the real casualties of war.

Women's physical characteristics may be objectified by some form of payment during the war. Military brothels, transactional sex, and sexual violence take a disproportionate toll on the female body, making them more vulnerable to prostitution, poverty, disease, and killings resulting from armed conflict. Murdoch et al. (2006) found that the sequelae of sexual assault and sexual harassment are common in female veteran populations.

[11] Females in regional conflicts are at high risk of contracting sexually transmitted diseases, such as STDs and HIV, from soldiers in the military (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). [13] Once conflict occurs, these females would be abandoned and would experience rape and sexual harassment, a common phenomenon in the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009). [3] The utilization of violent forms of femicide also has been serious. As a result, the United Nations has taken action against those who violate the law by raping and enslaving women, using domestic violence against women, and organizing early marriages (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). [13] However, Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) also mention that this action has not been very successful, women are still not given freedom of expression, and some feminists and advocates have been killed by ISIS while fighting for women's rights. [13]

3 Impact of Conflict on Women's Education

The pursuit of the right to higher education is a sign of women's progress. Women could truly realize and construct self-development only if they achieve independence and full control of self-determination. All this presupposes that women need to strengthen their rights and capabilities through education. Arney (2020) studied the impact of combat on women's educational achievement. She found that female soldiers had a greater desire for the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) than males. The MGIB is a government benefit for veterans, which includes unemployment insurance, financial assistance for housing and business loans, and subsidies for higher education and vocational training. [4] Arney (2020) found that females were more likely than males to use the Veterans' Bill of Rights after the troops they served with incurred severe casualties. [4] Many women have a strong desire to enrich themselves with higher education after experiencing intense combat and frequent life-and-death trials in war.

Giving women many opportunities for higher education is seen as an effective way to improve their social status. According to Brock et al. (2015), labor shortages during World War II led to women being allowed to receive vocational training and enter traditionally male fields for specialized classified jobs. [5] They found that there was an increasing number of women pursuing degrees in medicine, law, engineering, banking, insurance and business administration and becoming the supplement of social mobility.

It is important to realize that conflict and war have impacted women's and children's education in many ways; on the one hand, the social reconfiguration brought about by war has given some women the opportunity to attend school. The decades of wars in Afghanistan, for example, have greatly expanded educational opportunities for female genders. According to Faizi and Mashal (2020), the Taliban prohibit girls in Afghanistan from attending school, so they carry out suicide attacks on young women in educational centers. [7] However, nearly 20 years of U.S. political intervention and military presence in

Afghanistan have allowed a growing number of girls to receive formal education and transform female students into labor force in society (Faizi and Mashal, 2020). [7] On the other hand, the war and the ensuing disruptions have also devastated women and children, who were the most affected by war-induced displacement. The collapse of accommodation and schools diverted their attention from education and they had to begin a life of vagrancy (Rehn and Sirleaf, 2002). [13] In addition, conflict and war push women and children into poverty traps, and most of them are thus unable to receive schooling, resulting in their lack of skills and causing unemployment, poverty, and marriage at an early age. Hence, women should be trained for employment and fully understand how to use their skills to meet their daily needs and become independent individuals.

4 Impact of Conflict on Women's Employment and Labor Markets

As a large number of men served in the army during World War II and the government in the United States mobilized the entire society to support the war effort to achieve victory, approximately six million women came to the front stage of history and were thrust into the industrial workforce (Brock et al., 2015). [5] The conflict objectively created an opportunity for women to improve their social status, and the demand for labor broadened women's occupational orientation, enhanced their social prestige, and changed the traditional positioning of the image of women in society at large.

In the long run, conflict facilitates the transformation of women's economic behavior. The war objectively helps women's movement into society in search of work with regular pay. At the same time, the war claimed the lives of thousands of soldiers in the military, a large percentage of whom were men, which left many families without support (Al-Ali and Pratt, 2009; Shirazi, 2010; Grayzel, 2002). [3, 15, 9] Thus, the death and injury of men increased the incentive for women to seek paid work to afford the expenditure of household and take care of children (Shirazi, 2010; Grayzel, 2002). [15, 9] Although female employment was initially considered expedient, as the war progressed, women working outside the home became a fixed mode. Because women found that they could get higher pay and larger individual space in the job of factories than being housewives (Grayzel, 2002). [9]

Women's employment levels and women's wages would be boosted by the war. The mobilization of the war increases the female labor supply (Acemoglu et al., 2004; Orr, 2017). [2, 12] According to Armev (2020), the number of women in the labor market increased from 1940 to 1950, because women were increasingly mobilized to work during World War II. [4] In the United States during World War II, women became the main productivity due to the shortage of male labor caused by military service (Brock, et al., 2015). [5] At the same time, female wage rates increased during World War II (Lawless, 2004). [10]

The growth of the female labor force suggests that revisions to the position of women inevitably affected the shaping of roles in the traditional spheres of the sexes.

Once women broke out of their traditional roles and gained new skills, knowledge, and status, they were reluctant to return to their old status before. Brock et al. (2015) mentioned that the roles of women are changed significantly because of the acquisition of new job opportunities that only belonged to men in the past, especially the positions of doctor and lawyer. [5] Hence, the war shaped new economic roles and images for women, and women's economic status improved compared to normal times.

However, it does not mean that women's employment was unhindered after the important turning point of World War II. Gender discrimination restricted women's access to work and equal treatment with men in the postwar period. Brock et al. (2015) believed the reason for the imparity was that the preference of employers was still for male clerks. [5] Although the British government encouraged women to enter the workforce during the war, female workers faced struggles with male worker crowding and employer discrimination after World War II, resulting in the hard to reach out "equal pay for equal work" (Grayzel, 2002; Gazeley, 2008). [9, 8] In addition, female veterans were treated unfairly after the war. Murdoch et al. (2006) point out that the female nurse's corps was discharged at the end of the war without any benefits for veterans, they were deprived of their ranks and denied the commensurate salary and relevant pensions. Gender discrimination rooted in local culture creates inequality in the labor market. [11] Although the demobilization of male soldiers after the war added difficulties to women's employment, women maintained their new economic roles in larger numbers. The market demand for labor increasingly promotes female labor force participation. According to Armev (2020), female labor market participation has shown a clear upward trend from the past to the present due to conflict-induced changes in market preferences, occupational skills, gender roles, and other factors, especially rising demand in the labor market. [4]

5 Conclusion

The improvement of women's status has always been a concern of society. Despite the disastrous impact of wars and conflicts on economic and social development in conflict areas, women's awareness has been effectively promoted. This paper analyzes the impact of conflict on women from three aspects: health, education and employment. We found that armed attacks threaten women's lives and that violence and toxic chemicals during wars could be harmful to women's physical and mental health. On the other hand, the war indirectly reversed the lack of educational resources and job opportunities for women. The labor shortage in the market caused by the war promoted the integration and economic independence of domestic women through employment and increased women's willingness to pursue higher education. Benefiting from the post-war economic boom, they consolidated their early gains and began to move into a new era of employment and study.

There are multiple associations between women and

conflicts, which are complex and close. Conflicts are not harmful to women but also bring opportunities for women to receive higher education and equal employment. We found that conflict has broken down old social rules and shackles that bond women to enjoy equal rights while new social rules came into being. Women's rights, such as equal opportunities in education and employment, returned to the population of women at a much faster pace than before the conflict because of the arrival of the conflict and the construction of a new social order. Of course, when peace returned, traditional gender relations also returned to a certain extent, and women who had played non-traditional roles in the conflict period were ostracized. However, the flood of female consciousness awakening and social progress was unstoppable, and women's status was eventually promoted.

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