

## Chapter 3

# The significance of women in international peacekeeping missions

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### Dedication

*I want to dedicate this research paper, first and foremost to the Lord, God Almighty for His unending source of strength, both physical, and mental from the start of this research till the end. Secondly, I want to dedicate this research paper to my family, my father, my mother, my brothers-Davis and Jackson, and my uncle Peter Mburu for the financial, spiritual and moral support that they have continuously showed throughout my studies.*

*Thirdly, I want to dedicate this research paper to my Collegium Civitas lecturers for the knowledge that they have instilled in me. It is for sure that I have gained unmeasurable amount of knowledge and information from my well learned and well informed lecturers. Last but not the least, I want to dedicate this piece of research work to my fellow International Security students from Collegium Civitas, whom we have walked this journey of academic excellence together. I have learnt quite a lot from them through exchanging ideas, knowledge as well as pieces of information.*

**Abstract:** The purpose of this research paper is to demonstrate the important role women play in peace keeping missions, the challenges that they encounter, their numbers as well as the impact that they bring about during the peacekeeping missions across the globe. My research paper will therefore uncover the underlying issues encountered by women during their peacekeeping missions and how relevant their missions are to the society and to the entire world. As the world is pushing for greater equality in gender roles in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a lot needs to be done and especially in the police forces and in peacekeeping missions. When it comes to peacekeeping missions, the military personnel are the ones who are most of the time deployed to war torn countries and a majority of whom are usually male. In UN peacekeeping missions in 2000 for instance, women constituted 25 percent of the total personnel, meaning the other 75 percent was dominated by their male counterparts. According to the UN News, the figures still remain the same in 2021, 5.4% of women in the military and peacekeeping missions, which is an indication of a slow growth rate. Most countries remain reluctant to send women personnel to peacekeeping missions in consideration of the tough situations experienced by their male colleagues. However, women personnel are perceived to be of as less threat during a conflict, and from the historical approach, women are less involved in sexual abuse, rape, kidnap, sex slavery and prostitution which boosts the effectiveness of the peacekeeping missions. In a conflict situation, for example, the affected victims tend to have more confidence in approaching a female military personnel to ask for help or to seek sympathy than from the male personnel. The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000, called for the increased participation of women in peacekeeping missions and also in conflict resolutions. Yet as of 2015, only 32% of the UN member states had fulfilled and implemented this action plan. As of July 2021, this percentage has significantly increased with 51% of the UN member states adopting the 1325 action plan. Nevertheless, some countries are still lagging behind to have the number of women increased in peacekeeping missions.

**Keywords:** Peacekeeping Missions, UN, Military, UNSCR 1325, Gender mainstreaming

## Introduction

As the demand for peacekeeping missions continues to grow across the world, the number of women taking part in them is increasingly growing. The different groups of women deployed for peace operations include: the military personnel, the humanitarian staffs, and the police forces. Although the ratio of men to women taking part in these missions remains

dominated by males, the role that women play has increased. In UN peacekeeping missions, the average number of women deployed across the globe accumulates to 4.5% for the military staff and 14% for the police<sup>64</sup>.

Increasing the number of women in peace operations has been one of the UN ultimate goals together with its member states. A “Global Effort” initiative was launched by the UN police unit in order to advocate and to push for the increase of women in military and in police force to at least 20% by the year 2014<sup>65</sup>. Calls for greater women inclusion however has failed to bear fruit as up to date figures show women’s participation still remains very low with no positive increase. As of 2011 the percentage of women was 4% and 10% in military and in police force respectively. In the recent UN 2020 database, women in military accumulated to 4.8% and in police force they accumulated to 10.9%, which is a slight but a significant increment.

With the UN agenda pushing for greater gender equality in women peacekeeping missions, the member states play an important role in ensuring that more women are recruited in police forces and military and are given adequate training in preparation for the deployment. The willingness of the member states to involve more women to the outside missions and to recognize their positive impact and contribution plays an important role in pushing this agenda further. The United States of America (U.S.) passed a bill in 2017, The Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 (S.1141), in advocacy to support and increase the number of women serving in peace operations. The bill was set to incorporate other nations in the plan of increasing the inclusivity of women in matters pertaining to peace operations. The U.S. is working hand in hand with agencies such as USAID, Homeland Security and the Defence in order to come up with a comprehensive report of what needs to be done in terms of budget allocation,

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<sup>64</sup> Tsujisaka et.al, *Emerging Actors in the Women, Peace And Security Agenda* (South Korea: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019).

<sup>65</sup> DCAF, *The UN wants to deploy more women in peacekeeping, so why are there so few?* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, 2018) <https://www.dcaf.ch/un-wants-deploy-more-women-peacekeeping-so-why-are-there-so-few>.

resources needed for this plan to work effectively. This can serve as an example to the other countries willing to emulate this bill.

## Why women peacekeepers are important

The role of women in peace operations has been restricted and minimized based on the religious beliefs, cultural beliefs, ethnicity and even countries rules and regulations. Unlike women, men have been given the priority, entrusted, and put in charge of most peace operations. We will therefore evaluate and point out the outstanding roles that women have been playing in peace operations within confined and limiting opportunities.

The UN Security Council resolution 1325 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year occurred during the world's deadliest calamity- COVID-19 pandemic. Jean Pierre La-croix, the Peace Operations chief, during a meeting termed this pandemic as "one of the pandemic's thorns"<sup>66</sup>. The pandemic was seen to be disrupting the peace operations, plans and schedule which were put in place during the first outbreak of this pandemic, however this turned out to be an opportunity for the women peacekeepers to utilize their skills. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women peacekeepers have been on the frontline in emergency response, creating awareness through educating the masses on the importance of putting on masks, washing hands, sanitizing, observing social distancing and even avoiding one on one contact with strangers. They have also been seen educating people in vulnerable areas to prevent the spread of false information about COVID-19. During the pandemic, the rate of gender-based violence has tremendously increased for women and girls. With governments imposing lockdowns and curfews in their territories, there has been a spike in numbers among those sexually and physically harassed; France for instance, recorded an increase of 32% in gender based violence within a span of one week lockdown<sup>67</sup>. In response, women

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<sup>66</sup> News, UN, Women integral to battling coronavirus and pushing for lasting peace and security. (Geneva: UN News, 2020).

<sup>67</sup> European Institute for Gender, Gender-based violence <https://eige.europa.eu/covid-19-and-gender-equality/gender-based-violence> 2020.

peacekeepers have mobilized human rights activists to act and condemn these pernicious acts. Women in peacekeeping operations have also engaged themselves in making COVID-19 protective gear, masks, gloves and distributing them to the vulnerable countries. Women in peacekeeping are acting as logistics managers; this is a vital role as it ensures that the COVID-19 kits, materials are accounted for in terms of collection, storage and safely and evenly distributed among the vulnerable groups without any mishandling or looting. Women in peace keeping are also acting as nurses in this pandemic; they are at the frontline in emergency responses, providing medical treatment to the patients in critical conditions and conducting COVID-19 tests to people to curb the spread of the virus.



**Figure 1.** A peacekeeper demonstrating how to clean hands during the COVID-19 pandemic

*Source:* UN Peacekeeping, Africa Renewal: Special focus on Africa and COVID-19, 22 April 2020

Additionally, women peacekeepers are increasingly involved in countering and ending the violent extremism and terrorism<sup>68</sup>. The FBI (Federal Bureau of Investigation) defines violent extremism as “encouraging, condoning, justifying or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological, religious, social or economic goals.”<sup>69</sup>. One of the contributing factors for the increased violent extremism today is the defined gender

<sup>68</sup> FBI: FBI strategic Plan to Curb Violent Extremism, (Washington DC: FBI, 2015).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

roles in society. By “defined gender roles” I mean specific tasks for men and women; a man can only perform a specific role and doing a different role would be regarded as a taboo or unethical and same case applies to a woman. Women have always had a big influence in a society, and when it comes to violent extremism and terrorism, a number of them have been involved in planning attacks, acting as spies, persuading their children, husbands or family members to join the terrorist groups among them: the Al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, ISIS, and Al Shabaab. Women peacekeepers have acted as mediators during international peace negotiations. A record of eighty-two peace treaties were signed by women negotiators in forty-two militia conflicts from 1982 to 2011<sup>70</sup>. These peace treaties act as a linkage between the top-notch women delegates and the local women peace activists campaigning for the counter-terrorism and end of violent extremism. When it comes to illegal arms disarmament, illegal trading of arms, which is the main cause of terrorism and violent extremism, women peacekeepers have taken a lead in the planning, implementation and execution of laws. 54 out of the 117 countries which have a legal framework in control of small arms and light weapons have incorporated gender mainstreaming in their framework<sup>71</sup>.

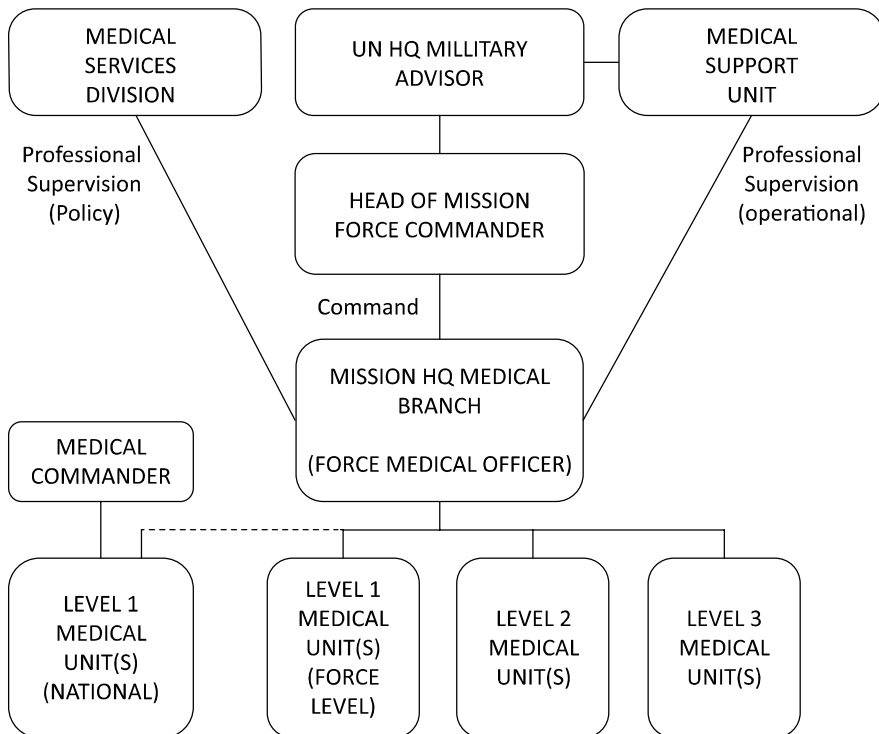
Women in peacekeeping act as pilots and paramedics; they are involved in MEDEVAC (Medical Evacuation) and CASEVAC (Casualty Evacuation). Medevac and Casevac are terms used in the conflict zone, which in layman’s terms refers to emergency response or evacuation of disaster victims to safer grounds and the provision of health care services to prevent deaths or further injuries. In any conflict situation, the injured or affected civilians are entitled to high level medical services in a timely manner without any discrimination of colour, gender, race or religion as stated under the Geneva Convention and same applies to evacuation procedures. In every emergency response and evacuation, the goal is always to reduce the number of the casualty’s deaths and to save as many lives as possible. In a conflict zone where the medical resources are limited, the victims are

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<sup>70</sup> Women, UN, Facts and Figures: Peace and Security, (UN Women, 2019) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>.

<sup>71</sup> Women, UN, Facts and Figures: Peace and Security, 2019.

first administered first aid and where complications arise, they are airlifted to the nearest health facility in military camps or in a country's medical facility. In a peacekeeping mission, there is always a well laid out plan which is followed for the response and evacuation measures such as the UN plan as the Figure 2 demonstrates below. Figure 2 illustrates the command flow during a peace operation from the senior post down to the medical units.



**Figure 2.** An illustration of the UN medical support organization during a peacekeeping operation

Source: UN, *medical support manual for United Nations peacekeeping operations* (New York, USA: 1999)

In refugee camps, women peacekeepers serve as paramedics, administering vaccines and drugs to the victims of wars, with the majority of the victims being women and children. They also distribute vitamins and immune boosters to the starving and malnourished children. During the post

war period, most of the civilians suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the women peacekeepers serving as psychiatrists always provide guiding and counselling to the victims. Physical and mental wellbeing of civilians is really important after a conflict and for the healing process of a community.

The number of women peacekeepers serving in aviation field as pilots has also grown and this has increased the accountability measures during the peace operations in terms of response and evacuation measures during a crisis. They help in evacuating disaster victims who are stuck in remote areas where road transport is impassable, poorly maintained, or not developed.

During peace operations, women peacekeepers have also provided patrols and served as security personnel. In Africa, countries like Mali, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic are among the most bombarded by the militia attacks like Al-Mulathameen, in Mali, M23 Rebels in DRC, whose aim has been to kill the locals, cause tension, spread fear, and kidnap the civilians for media and international recognition. Women peacekeepers have been deployed to patrol and provide security to the locals, for the assurance of their safety and harmony. The provision of door-to-door patrol by women peacekeepers create a one-on-one interaction with the local civilians and this interaction can unleash vital information affecting the locals and the possible solutions or measures which can be put in place. Civilians are likely to find solace in women peacekeepers than in men as women portray a collective, calm and sympathetic look and considering that some of the women peacekeepers are mothers, they can vividly relate with the affected victims and especially women and girls quite comprehensively. In Mali, UN has been very vigilante in peace restoration efforts, deployment of peacekeepers, military troops and also engaging other international bodies and agencies. In 2018, for instance, 25 Swedish military women were stationed in Timbuktu to provide security and patrol to the displaced persons during the militia clashes<sup>72</sup>. As the

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<sup>72</sup> News, UN, Women integral to battling coronavirus and pushing for lasting peace and security (Geneva: UN News, 2020).



peace operations continue to thrive in Mali, the number of women peacekeepers has also increased; in 2018, the number of women in MINUSMA (United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali) increased to about 363 peacekeepers<sup>73</sup>. This number included women peacekeepers from African countries, Asia, Europe and even America.

Women peacekeepers promote women empowerment and more so act as role models to other women and girls. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women empowerment has taken much of the media headlines and debates and it has called for gender parity. However, some career paths and jobs such as security guards, security patrol, military deployment and operations are still considered to be male suited. In Sudan for instance, women are forbidden to put on trousers, own a gun or even be soldiers<sup>74</sup>; cultural differences and religious beliefs are some of the attributes to this gender impartiality. Women peacekeepers deployed in conflict regions serve to break that gender perception and to uplift other women in empowerment. In a conflict, women and girls experience sexual abuse, physical assault and mental torture, and after a conflict, the healing process is always crucial for normalcy to be achieved. Some women opt to form local groups and organizations for empowerment, with the help of local governments. Women peacekeepers deployed in these regions partner with these groups to help the conflict victims recover and heal, empower them in business ventures, and also provide them with business ideas in which they can earn some income instead of depending on government aid and grants. Women peacekeepers also serve as tutors and teachers to school children who have been displaced and who do not have the opportunity to access education or who are faced with a shortage of teachers; in return, young children look up to and emulate the positive skills portrayed by these women and learn that there are no specific jobs for a particular gender. This interaction with the local community helps to establish, to develop and to build a concrete and

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<sup>73</sup> United Nations Peacekeeping, United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali, ([minusma.unmissions.org](https://minusma.unmissions.org)) <https://minusma.unmissions.org/en/under-blue-helmet-mali-voices-guinean-women-peacekeepers>.

<sup>74</sup> Heineken, Lindy, *Challenges Facing Women in Peacekeeping*, (Oxford Research Group, 2016).

mutual relationship between the locals and the peace agencies. Building trust amongst the locals is the core value in every peace operation

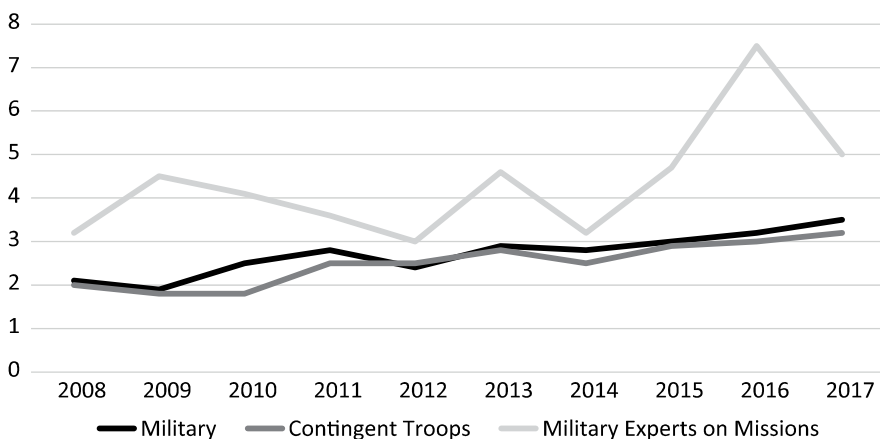
Furthermore, women peacekeepers serve as engineers in peace operations, including: software engineers, geospatial specialists, electric engineering, mechanical engineers and civil engineers. Engineering is essential in peacekeeping operations, from the capturing of the large amount of data, data storage and dissemination to launching of physical projects e.g. construction of roads, bridges, dams, building structures and even building of war machines. After a conflict, the physical structures are usually damaged, and a rapid response is always needed for the reconstruction and restoration of these structures for normalcy to be attained. China is one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council and it has largely contributed to peace operations by sending its skilled troops, including women engineers to UN peace missions. In all of its missions, China has deployed a total of about 800 women peacekeepers, which comprises of skilled platoons<sup>75</sup>.

Finally, women peacekeepers act as photographers and drone operators during the peace operations. Photography in peace missions is like a medium of communication, and capturing every moment and archiving it in an image or in a video form, plays a crucial role in a peace mission. The images and videos captured during a crisis help to determine the type of response measures that will be provided and most importantly during the reconstruction and restoration phase. During a crisis, the photos and videos taken play a crucial role in mobilizing for support in form of funds, aid and physical material from the public, other nations and also from the international humanitarian bodies like the UN, Red Cross, European Union, among others. The archives are used during the mitigation and preparedness planning; for example, how can a similar conflict be avoided in the future, in case of a similar occurrence what will and will not be done, which methods can be used and so forth. After a reconstruction phase in a conflict, the archives can be used as evidence of an accomplished mission, and also to show how resources donated by the donors were

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<sup>75</sup> Zürcher, Christoph, 30 Years of Chinese Peacekeeping, (Ottawa: CIPS report, 2019).

utilized. During the UN peacekeeping mission in Cyprus, United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP), Katarina Zahorska served as the first woman photographer in the military in this mission<sup>76</sup>. When narrating her experience, Katarina stated that working as a woman photographer in a peace mission and documenting the daily activities of the troop gave the whole operation a sense of authenticity and they were able to meet their target.



**Figure 3.** The statistical trend of women in military personnel of UN peace operations, 2008–2017

Note: The vertical side represent the number of women in percentage (%). From *SIPRI Multilateral Peace Operations Database*, June 2018

The chart above is a representation of the percentage of UN military women who are categorized into three groups: military, contingent troops and military experts on missions (MEMs) who were deployed in UN peace operations from 2008 to 2017. Within this period, the total number of women personnel in military accumulated to 3.9%, in a total of 23 peace missions<sup>77</sup>. According to the chart above, the graph lines are rising and falling inconsistently throughout the years and the percentage of numbers is still

<sup>76</sup> United Nations, United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus, (New York: United Nations, 2020).

<sup>77</sup> Tidblad-Lundholm et.al, Trends in Women's Participation in UN, EU and OSCE Peace Operations, (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018).

low, thus representing the low figures of women taking part in peacekeeping missions. Technically, the UN has no control on the number of women deployed in peace operations as this solemnly relies on the member states taking part in a certain peace operation and the decision on whether or not to deploy women or how many should be deployed depends on them. In convoluted and dynamic UN peace operations like the Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) the participation of women was relatively lower as compared to other smaller peace operations, with both missions having a record of 2.4% and 2.8% respectively<sup>78</sup>. And in instances where more women were deployed, a decrease of men deployed was recorded and this was a matter of covering up a loophole rather than of promoting gender parity.

## **Hurdles experienced by women peacekeepers**

The biggest challenge women peacekeepers face is sexual harassment, sexual assault and sexual violence by their seniors and male colleagues. This is the major challenge that women in peacekeeping missions face as this is a male dominated sector; they are sexually assaulted and harassed by those above them, those who are in the position of assuring their safety and wellness and when this happens, the victims have nowhere to report the matter to. The inclusion of women in leadership positions in peace missions is still wanting as the figures are low; in UN peace operations for instance, the women heads in 2018 constituted about 35% while that of the deputy heads constituted about 48%<sup>79</sup>. Women peacekeepers also experience sexual assault from the civilians in the host countries that they are deployed for the operations. In 2014, 26% of women in U.S military, which is equivalent to 1 in every 60 women, reported sexual assault from their seniors or team leaders and out of this number, 54% of whom did not

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<sup>78</sup> Tidblad-Lundholm et.al, Trends in Women's Participation in UN, EU and OSCE Peace Operations, (Stockholm: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Women, UN, Facts and Figures: Peace and Security, 2019.

report the incidents with fear of losing their jobs afterwards<sup>80</sup>. Those who took action and reported the situation found that often little or no action against the sex offenders was taken while in some circumstances the perpetrators were just given a mere warning and the victims were requested to drop the charges. During the peace mission in Liberia, United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), 17% of women peacekeepers highlighted sexual harassment as the biggest obstacle that hindered them from effectively accomplishing their duties<sup>81</sup>. This demonstrates to what extent sexual harassment can affect peace keeping operations.

Gender discrimination is also a major challenge that women in forces and in peacekeeping face. In U.S military, 1 in every 8 women face discrimination<sup>82</sup>. In the Serbian military, the protocol of women advancing from one rank to the other is a bit slower and less transparent than for the men<sup>83</sup> and this makes things a bit harder and more complicated for women to fully explore and participate in peace missions. While in missions, women are restricted to remain in the camps for their safety and security purposes whereas their male counterparts are free to move in and out of the camps without any keen supervision. However, some women in uniform claimed that they feared for their safety while in the camps than when conducting patrols outside the camps<sup>84</sup>, this can be attributed by the high rate of sexual misconduct within the camps. Also women lack military gear and protective armaments designed for the feminine use and this hinders them from full participation thus being left behind in the camps.

Women peacekeepers who have been caught in the mix of sex harassment, sex assault or they have been involved in a compromising situation have faced the risk of work attrition. This is unlike their male counterparts

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<sup>80</sup> Andrew R et.al, *Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment in the U.S. Military*, (California: Rand Corporation, 2015).

<sup>81</sup> Newby, Vanessa, *Challenges for female peacekeepers can come from within UN militaries*, 2019

<sup>82</sup> Andrew R et.al, *op.cit.*

<sup>83</sup> Milošević, Marko, *Challenges of Women's Participation in Serbian Peacekeeping Missions* (Belgrade: Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, 2012).

<sup>84</sup> Taylor et.al, *Uniformed Women in Peace Operations: Challenging Assumptions and Transforming Approaches* (New York: International Peace Institute, 2020).

who in most circumstances are issued with a warning or a second chance just for them to remain in a particular position; the rate of women getting retribution is higher than that of men.

The deployment of women peacekeepers for community engagement, care givers, nurses and other less involving tasks has contributed to inadequate training prior to the deployment. Their male counterparts on the other side go through an intense and vigorous training from how to operate heavy war machineries to military technology and this makes them more prepared to handle the tasks with ease. Women peacekeepers deployed in extreme war-torn zones encounter challenges with helping the civilians who have experienced extreme torture, trauma, sexual abuse and who need a comprehensive therapy or counselling and for most peacekeepers this is usually out of their scope. The stereotype and the notion that women understand and can handle their fellow women experiences has contributed to inadequate training and unpreparedness for the deployment; handling disaster victims and survivors requires some level of specialty.

## Conclusion

Both women and men play a significant role in peace missions and are equally important. The participation of women in peacekeeping missions should not only be about the fulfilment of the quota requirements but also about giving them the full participation in all sectors. By adhering to this, it will ensure that women have fully explored their potential and they have fulfilled the mandate of the mission. A record was broken in 2007 when an all-female Formed Police Unit (FPU) from India was deployed by United Nations Missions in Liberia (UNMIL) for peacekeeping operations<sup>85</sup>. The unit was well prepared and had received adequate training needed to undertake the tasks and this helped them run their operations for a period of 10 years. The unit received global recognition and attention for the good work that they undertook during the entire operation. Likewise, other UN

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<sup>85</sup> UN News, in first for UN peacekeeping, all-female police unit arrives in Liberia (news.un.org. January 2007).

states should emulate this example to empower women and to motivate other women in the military to participate in peace missions.

Despite the call from the UN to increase the number of women in military, police units and those being deployed in peace missions, the number is still relatively low and women are still under represented. Some countries are still bound by their culture and religious laws which hinders or rather prevents women from taking part in missions or even joining this workforce.

Sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexual assault are very common for women in the police force and military and the experiences are worse during the deployment. This is the major challenge that women in peacekeeping missions encounter and it inhibits them fully taking part in their assigned duties. This issue has led to many women stepping back from undertaking vital roles in missions for fear of being intimidated. UN should join hands together with other human rights activists and keenly focus on this issue and come up with a defined manifesto outlining this issue, the solutions and how to curb it.

Reforms should also be conducted regularly in the police and military departments in order to ensure women get an equal share as men and that the division of tasks will be equally distributed. Also in terms of offering job promotion, women should get job promotions just as men, based on their merits rather than because of their gender. Women have faced discrimination in job promotion despite having commendable work and this has affected their morale.