



The Child Casualties of War – A Scoping Review of Reporting and Monitoring Grave Violations of Children’s Rights in Armed Conflict

Research Article

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Abstract

In accordance with the United Nations there are six primary grave children’s rights violations during conflict; (1) killing or maiming of children, (2) recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups, (3) attacks on schools or hospitals, (4) rape or other sexual violence against children, (5) abduction of children, (6) denial of humanitarian access to children.¹ This study employed a comprehensive scoping review methodology that examined the existing body of research and grey literature related to methods implemented to monitor and report grave violations of children’s rights in armed conflict. Out of 6154 identified articles, 18 met the final inclusion criteria. The results of this study suggest that significant disparities exist in reporting and monitoring grave violations of children’s rights in conflict within both grey and academic literature. This demonstrates a weak foundation of evidence for the basic assumptions underpinning humanitarian and international policy.

Introduction

During armed conflict, children are at an increased risk of being subject to grave human rights violations.²⁻⁷ Early efforts to establish an international mechanism to report and monitor grave violations against children in conflict have faced a multitude of barriers including challenges to the validity and accuracy of reports due to limited capacity, subjectivity in reporting, and political intimidation.^{8,9} While evidence-based policies are widely recognized as the foundation of the current geopolitical climate, there is minimal description in published work of reporting instruments and monitoring mechanisms specifically for violations against children in armed conflict.^{10,11} The following study aims to highlight current gaps in the literature and the need to develop innovative approaches for rigorous reporting and monitoring of children’s rights in order to understand trends of violations and to protect vulnerable populations of children in conflicts.

Methods

A scoping review of the existing body of research and grey literature related to data collection methods implemented to monitor and report grave violations of children’s rights in armed conflict was conducted using the Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) methodology.¹² A combination of keywords with appropriate synonyms and subject headings were selected. Terms were searched as both keywords in the title and/or abstract and subject headings as appropriate. A child was defined as “a human being below the age of 18 years unless, under the law applicable to the child,

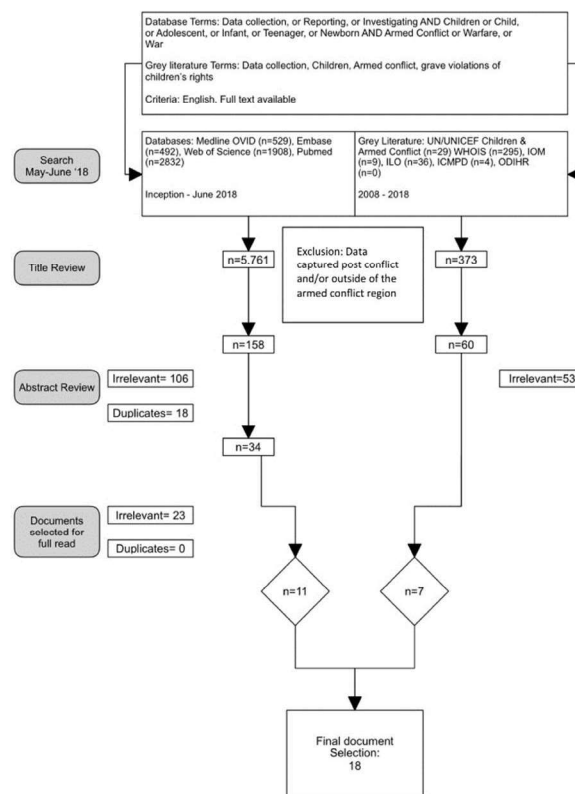


Figure 1. Search Strategy

majority is attained earlier”.¹³ An English language limit was applied. The literature search was conducted between May 2018 and June 2018 using four online academic databases: Medline OVID, Embase, Web of Science, and PubMed. Simultaneously, between May 2018 and June



2018, five online grey literature databases were searched: UN/ United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organization (WHO), International Organization of Migration (IOM), International Labour Organization (ILO), International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD), Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

The academic literature underwent three levels of screening: (1) title, (2) abstract review and (3) full-text review. The grey literature screening included two levels of screening: (1) title and abstract, if applicable and (2) full-text review. A review of reference lists of key articles was conducted, and additional studies of relevance were included.

Results

The search yielded over 5,761 articles (Medline OVID: 529; Embase 492; Web of science 1908; Pubmed 2832; UNICEF children in armed conflict: 29; IOM: 9; ICMPD: 4, ODIHR: 0), which resulted in 158 articles that met initial inclusion criteria following title review screening. Following abstract screening, 34 articles were reviewed for full-text, yielding 11 studies in the final review (10 studies, 1 systematic review). Similarly, within the grey literature, 373 documents and online tools were included in the initial title review, yielding 60 to be evaluated. Of these, 7 documents and online instruments were included in the review. Study and report characteristics were extracted from each study, and given the high level of variation among included evidence, results were summarized in Table 1 and Table 2 using a narrative synthesis approach consistent with the framework of Arskey and O'Malley (2005).¹² The results from the search depicts the distribution of grey and academic tools and articles as they relate to each of the six grave violations against children's rights in armed conflict (Figure 2). Results indicate that grave violations against children's rights in conflict are

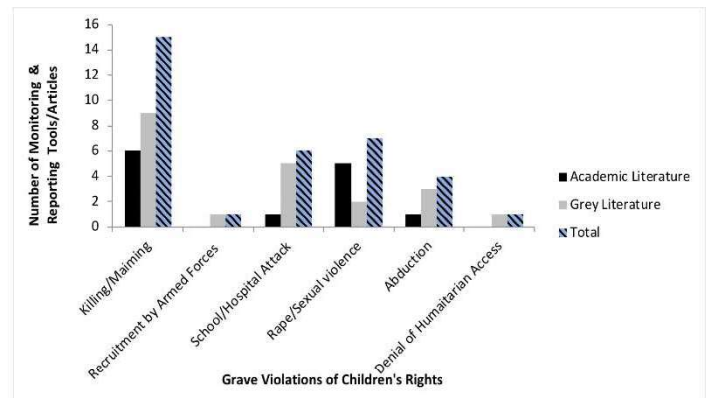


Figure 2. Distribution of grey and academic literature.

being monitored by several international regulatory agencies including: military healthcare forces, academic institutions, media groups, humanitarian aid societies, and nongovernmental organizations. Six of the grey literature articles described monitoring mechanisms, four of which were monitoring systems available online and open sourced for public use.

Discussion

Gaps in the Literature. There is a lack (n=18) of academic research and grey literature investigating the reporting and monitoring mechanisms used to capture grave violations against children's rights in conflict. Specifically, the results of this study indicate that there is little written regarding the recruitment of children by armed forces, the denial of humanitarian access to children, and the abduction of children in conflict. The silence surrounding the monitoring and reporting of grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict is deeply unsettling. It is arguable that the lack of literature reporting aggregate trends in violations of children's rights in armed conflict are limiting actors in the development of policy, legal and humanitarian responses.

Summary of Grey Literature on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations of Children's Rights				
Instrument	Organization	Method	Purpose	Grave violation captured
Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) ¹⁵	United Nations	Secondary data, observations & affected population interviews	Systematic gathering of information on grave violations against children in situations of armed conflict	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (2) recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups, (3) attacks on schools or hospitals, (4) rape or other sexual violence against children, (5) abduction of children, (6) denial of humanitarian access
Surveillance System for Attacks on Health Care ¹⁶	World Health Organization (WHO)	Secondary Data Analysis	Online Dashboard Tool	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (3) attacks on hospitals
Aid Worker Security Database ¹⁷	Humanitarian Outcomes	Secondary Database	Online Database	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (3) attacks on hospitals
Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project ¹⁸	Armed Conflict Location & Event Data (ACLED)	Secondary Database	Online analysis and crisis mapping project	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Physicians for Human Rights ¹⁹	Physicians for Human Rights	Mixed Methods	Advocacy	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (3) attacks on schools or hospitals, (4) rape or other sexual violence against children, (5) abduction of children
Armed violence monitoring group ²⁰	The Inter-Agency and Expert Group (IAEG) on MDG	Secondary Database	Reports and Publications	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Uppsala University Conflict Data Program ²¹	Department of Peace and Conflict Research	Secondary Database	Online analysis and conflict mapping project	(1) Killing or maiming of children

Table 1. Summary of Grey Literature on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations of Children's Rights



Overview of Academic Literature on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations of Children's Rights				
Study	Instrument	Method	Purpose	Grave violation captured
Charak et al. (2017) ²²	Childhood Trauma Questionnaire	Survey	Measure rates of abuse and neglect in conflict	(4) Rape or other sexual violence against children
Elamein et al. (2017) ¹⁰	Monitoring Violence against Health Care alert network (WHO)	Online assessment, secondary data, interviews	Detect and verify attacks on health-care services deliver (24hr) information to partners: WHO/UN	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (3) attacks on hospitals
Arul et al. (2011) ²³	Paediatric admissions to the (military) hospital	Secondary Data	Surveillance of violations of humanitarian law	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Helweg-Larsen et al. (2004) ²⁴	International Classification of External Causes of Injury	Secondary Data	Surveillance of violations of humanitarian law	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Stark et al. (2017) ¹⁴	Mod. ISPCAN Child Abuse Screening Tool Children's Version (ICAST-C) & Modified VACS questionnaire	Online Questionnaire, Computer-Assisted Personal Interview	Identify the prevalence of violence Against adolescent girls in conflict-affected contexts	(4) Rape or other sexual violence against children
Potts et al. (2011) ²⁶	One-on-one household-based interviews, respondents'	Nationwide household Survey & Neighborhood Method	Estimate prevalence of grave violations against children by reporting on all children in their homes and in neighboring homes	(1) Killing or maiming of children, (2) recruitment or use of children by armed forces or armed groups, (4) rape or other sexual violence against children, (5) abduction of children
Mullany et al. (2007) ²⁷	Mobile healthcare workers	Household Survey	Quantification of associations between rights indicators and health outcomes	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Spinella et al. (2008) ²⁸	Paediatric admissions to the (military) hospital	Secondary Data Retrieved from Hospital, documentation	Surveillance of violations of humanitarian law via patients admitted with traumatic injuries to U.S. combat hospitals	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Rodriguez-Llanes et al. (2018) ²⁹	Violations Documentation Center in Syria	Secondary Data, victim and relative interviews, media	Epidemiological analysis of the impact of weapons on the Syrian civilian population	(1) Killing or maiming of children
Nelson et al. (2011) ³⁰	Semi structured questionnaire	Semi-structured questionnaire	Patterns and impact of sexual violence on children	(4) Rape or other sexual violence against children
Malemo Kalisya et al. (2011) ³¹	Paediatric admissions and medical documentation	Secondary Data - Hospital, documentation	Patterns and impact of militarized compared to civilian rape against children	(4) Rape or other sexual violence against children

Table 2. Summary of Academic Literature on Monitoring and Reporting Grave Violations of Children's Rights

Need for Improved Dissemination and Sharing of Data. It is crucial for timely data collection and subsequent dissemination of this information to allow for early identification of possible trends in grave violations against children in conflicts and to lead to faster mobilization of responses to these atrocities. Transparency can only serve to benefit coordination across agencies, organizations, and countries. However, the results of this study indicate that current monitoring mechanisms are not disseminating data in a timely fashion, given that only one-third of monitoring mechanisms are published in a modernized and widely accessible online platform.

Lack of Innovation in Data Collection. Innovations in technology have fundamentally changed the way in which data is collected, leveraging new tools such as: online surveys, mobile phone surveys, web tracking, and social media monitoring. The majority of the academic and grey literature used traditional data collection tools and information dissemination methods such as annual reports or publications. Based on the results of this study, merely 34% of monitoring mechanisms were accessible through online databases, dashboards, and interactive maps. Additionally, only 18% of reporting tools leverage the use of any technology to aid in the collection of data. The two exceptions to this finding were: (1) the Monitoring Violence Against Health Care alert network who leveraged the use of communication technology (WhatsApp) to produce rapid reports of violations within hours to inform partners such as the WHO and UN and (2) an online questionnaire conducted in South

Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo.^{10,14} Leveraging advances in technology to support the monitoring and reporting of violations is a transformational concept which could increase transparency, accountability and the international response to atrocities occurring during armed conflict.

Conclusion

A concerted effort is required to improve the monitoring and reporting of grave violations of children's rights in armed conflict. Timely monitoring and accurate reporting have many implications for global health including; informing the general public, directing policy makers, providing health services to meet the needs of affected populations, protecting children's rights, and documenting violations of international humanitarian law while holding perpetrators accountable. This review's finding suggest that there is a lack technology used in the collection of data pertaining to the violations of children's rights in conflict. Disparities in both grey and academic literature exist on the topic of data collection in reporting and monitoring grave violations of children's rights, highlighting the need for further research to protect vulnerable populations of children in conflict.

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Involuntary Admission Legislation and Human Rights in Low- and Middle-Income Countries

Research Article

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Abstract

This study determined the extent to which involuntary admission legislation in low- and middle- Income Countries (LMICs) meet international human rights standards by using the WHO Checklist on Mental Health Legislation. The findings suggest that, in many cases, the laws do not fully protect the rights of individuals with mental disorders in the context of involuntary admission, according to WHO standards. 43% of all standards analyzed for the LMICs in this study were rated as “Adequately covered”, thus, 57% of the standards for involuntary admission were deemed “Covered to some extent” or “Not covered at all”.

Introduction

“The fundamental aim of mental health legislation is to protect, promote, and improve the lives and mental well-being of citizens.”¹ Globally, cases of mental health are often misunderstood and/ or undiagnosed.² As of 2005, 78% of countries had mental health legislation.³ Many countries have revised or enacted mental health legislation in order to protect the rights of those with mental illness as people with mental disorders are particularly vulnerable to violation of rights and abuse.^{4,5} Progressive legislation has the potential

to serve as an effective tool to protect and promote the rights of persons with mental disorders.⁶

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) published the WHO Resource Book on Mental Health, Human Rights and Legislation (WHO Resource Book). The WHO Resource Book aims to assist countries in drafting, adopting, and implementing mental health legislation.⁷ The WHO Resource Book is WHO’s most detailed statement of human rights issues to be addressed in national legislation and regulations.