Women Empowerment and Security in the Middle East

Avesta Baraki
University of San Diego

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Abstract

Feminist theory posits that women play an important role in bringing about peace in post-conflict societies. Several studies have found that the systematic and representative inclusion of women in conflict resolution processes significantly increase the chances of sustainable peace. However, women’s contribution to peace processes are often underemphasized or ignored in conflict management research and praxis. Excluding women from actively participating in a society is key to instability while women’s empowerment and gender equality are keys to a more peaceful and stable society. Utilizing a statistical analysis of the effect of women empowerment (as measured by level of women education and employment) on battlefield deaths and homicide, this paper provides an empirical assessment of the relationship between women empowerment and the level of conflict and violence in society.
Introduction

Currently, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is engulfed by violent conflict with a few countries relatively in peace (including those with the highest levels of female empowerment). According to the Armed Conflict Survey Report 2019, MENA regions stayed the most volatile in the world. None of its seven ongoing conflicts in Egypt, Iraq, Israel-Palestine, Libya, Syria, Turkey and Yemen saw any serious signs of settlement. Out of the seven countries Yemen and Syria remained the most unstable countries in the region. By the end of 2018 humanitarian situation remained catastrophic in Yemen, with 28 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, with fighting and bombardments going on in most part of the country. Thus, without any question peace and security are essential needs, perhaps for increasing stability and security not only in the MENA but globally. Perhaps gender equality and female empowerment can help bring about peace, stability and security. Malala Yousufzai a young Pakistani education activist and Manal Al Sharif the Saudi women who started Women to drive movement in Saudi Arabia are great examples of women empowerment. These women’s resilience and contribution cannot be ignored.

Still, the possible role that gender could play in facilitating or restoring peace and security in the MENA region requires further study. In the past few decades, there has been an increased feminist scholarly research in the area of peace studies, with a call for the inclusion of previously marginalized feminist and women’s perspectives to peacebuilding, as well as examination of the processes that have sanctioned these exclusions. Understanding conflict and violence around the world requires greater attention to the role of gender and women empowerment, which can help to identify ways to address these problems more effectively. Indeed, several qualitative studies suggest that women can play an important role in conflict resolution and violence reduction. Specifically, feminist argue that women’s daily experiences and struggles enable them to articulate different perspectives on peacebuilding that challenges dominant male discourse on conflict and peacebuilding and help to address social problems that lead to violence in a more wholistic manner. However, there is limited literature available on female empowerment and reduction of conflict and violence.

With an eye to understanding the possible implications for the MENA region, this paper asks whether gender does indeed play a role in reducing violent conflict, and specifically tests the hypothesis that countries where women are empowered and enjoy their social, political and economic rights are more peaceful with lower levels of violence and conflict compared to countries that have lower level of women empowerment. For this purposes of this paper, women empowerment is seen as a key factor or variable that: 1) reduces conflict (as measured by battle deaths), and 2) reduces interpersonal violence (as measured by homicides per capita).

My findings support the hypothesis that women empowerment is associated with peaceful nations. Not only this but also, in countries where women are empowered and
have equal rights, they tend to use less military force to solve their international disputes. This argument is substantiated with qualitative and quantitative evidence which demonstrates how female empowerment reduces conflict and violence. Specifically, the World Bank’s data on women’s political, social and economic empowerment is used as proxies for female empowerment as the independent variables, and employ a regression model to test the relationship between these variables and the above-noted indicators of conflict and violence.

**Defining Terms**

**Women Empowerment and Types of Empowerment**

In almost every sphere of life women assume unequal position and right; therefore it becomes necessary that women are empowered by being provided equal opportunities. By Women empowerment, the author refers to the ability to make one’s own choices and have equal human rights. According to Beyah (2016) empowerment is the process of creating power in individuals to their decision, which includes raising the status of women through education, raising awareness, literacy and training. Overall, female empowerment is about enabling women to make life determining decisions in a given society (Beyah, 2016).

Different scholars have tried to define empowerment from their own perspective (Mandal, 2013). Which ranges from self-strength to efficiency building of women. Empowerment is divided into following five categories: 1) social empowerment, 2) educational empowerment, 3) economic empowerment, 4) political empowerment, and 5) psychological empowerment (Mandal, 2013).
Women and Security in the Middle East:

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The 2001 attacks and the 2011 Arab uprisings have especially had profound effects on women in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). Women in the MENA region are still facing policy dilemmas and struggling to address those dilemmas. Despite increased access to education, women's conspicuous absence from the labor market in the MENA is a key issue (Barsoum, 2018). Conflict in MENA has seen some progress as it relates to health and Education in the MENA region, however, access to employment, political participation and legal equalities are still major issues women face.

*Figure 1. Percentage of female (age 15+) in the labor force by region.*


It is clear that the MENA region has the lowest percentage of women in the labor force compared to other parts of the world. Using World Bank’s 2017 data I compared the percentage of women in the labor force among MENA countries. As a result, Israel and Qatar stood out with 59.21% and 58.06% of female in the labor with Yemen being the last and Syria the second last respectively with only 6.14% and 12.24% (See figure 2).
Elthahawy (2012) sheds light into some interesting facts about the female situation in Egypt, which provides evidence that 90% of currently or formerly ever-married women in Egypt have had their genitals cut. Authoritarian regimes have long been using religion and culture to defend their unethical decision and to oppress human rights (Elthahawy, 2012). Violent conflicts which erupted as a result of the Arab uprising, women faced a backlash in terms of their human rights and political role (Dalacoura, 2019). Gender equality and women's rights are linked not only to economic development and democracy but also with security (Dalacoura, 2019). Countries where women are empowered and have equal economical, social, and political participation those countries face less conflict compare to the countries where women rights are marginalized. As we see can in figure 2, Yemen and Syria have the least percentage of women in labor force (shows low level of economical participation) and according to the armed conflict survey recent report Syria and Yemen are two of the unsecure countries in the region as well. Thus, it is important to pay attention to this issue.

**Problem statement and research question**

The existing literature suggests that women can play an important role in promoting peace globally. A review of the literature on women’s participation in the peace processes or their role as peacemakers requires that we look at women’s situation in the conflict zones. It is important to understand that in most countries’ women are considered as another “being” and one that is inherently secondary and inferior to the dominant male gender (Beauvoir, 1994). Women and men suffer from war disproportionately. While more men are killed in war, women often experience more violence, forced pregnancy, abduction and sexual abuse and slavery. Their bodies, sometimes deliberately infected with HIV/AIDS or subject to a child conceived in rape, have been used as envelopes to send messages to the perceived ‘enemy’. The harm, silence and shame women experience in war is pervasive; their redress, almost non-existent. The plight of women is “systematically neglected by
authorities. Women’s lives are being shattered by war before, during and after the conflict (Rehn et al, 2002).

A study by SIPRI argues that the inclusion of women and their meaningful participation in the peace processes is central to having a gender balanced perspective in peace processes. According to the figures presented by SIPRI, indicators of the inclusion of women in a peace processes do not focus solely on direct representation at the negotiating table. Gender inclusion ranges from direct representation, consultative mechanisms, commissions and high-level problem-solving workshops, to public decision-making and mass action. Furthermore, a peace process is more likely to be successful and lasting when a combination of modes of inclusion are introduced throughout the process.

Accordingly, when women are excluded from peace negotiations there often exists fragile political settlements that come at the expense of women’s increased suffering. For example, scholars studying the Sudan-South Sudan peace process have found that exclusion and marginalization of women has led to gender-blind institutions in the post-war period where women in South Sudan remain largely absent from decision-making and political power (Westendorf, 2018). In contrast, cases where peace processes are inclusive of women have been demonstrated to provide a more stable and durable peace (for example, in 2016 peace agreement between Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and government of Colombia ended 50 years of armed civil conflict in the country and set an international example for women’s involvement in the peace negotiations. The formal talks opened in Cuba in 2012, and at that time only one of twenty negotiators were women. In 2013, civil society leaders organized a national summit of women and peace to include women in peace process of the government negotiating team. By 2015, 20% of the government negotiating team were women and at the side of FARC, 43 % of delegates were female fighters in guerrillas’ group. In the last round of negotiations 33% of negotiators in the negotiation team from the government’s side were women, with 3% women mediators and 2 % signatories (Salamanca 2018). On the ground, the involvement of women improved the security situation in local communities by mediating cease-fires, convincing guerrillas to lift roadblocks and negotiating the release of hostages (Salamanca 2018).

However, despite all the above-mentioned qualitative data available, the empirical evidence is generally quite weak. Further, there is also overwhelming evidence that gender (especially maleness) matters as a factor in conflict, including the fact that men are statistically the most likely perpetrators and victims of violence. There are many factors that help to explain why this seems to be the case, including biological tendencies and socialization. This paper seeks to deepen the understanding of how women play a role in reducing conflict and violence in different societies. In particular the paper asks: what is the role of female empowerment on reducing conflict and violence around the world? This paper provides evidence that a set of communities with more empowered women in these countries experienced more conflict and violence reduction. There are studies which provides evidence that women empowerment can reduce conflict and that in countries where women are empowered, they tend to use less force in solving their international
disputes (Caprioli, 2003). A report produced for USAID by Petesch (2011), investigated 125 women’s lives between 1995 and 2005 in the four conflict-affected countries of Colombia, Indonesia, Philippines, and Sri Lanka. Finding of USAID’s report supports the claim that women empowerment is a key to development of countries that have experienced war.

In short, there appears to be strong support for the notion that gender matters in international security, conflict and violence. In particular, there is a need for greater attention to the ways in which women empowerment play a role in reducing or mitigating violence and conflict scenarios around the world. However, many of the aforementioned studies rely primarily on qualitative indicators and individuals case studies to assess this problem. There is a lack of statistically analysis and hypothesis testing of the relationship between gender, conflict, and violence. Besides the literature available, Feminist theory supports the claim that gender equality can result in more peaceful states and Social Constructivist theory describes very well that lack of women participation in the society is socially constructed and can be changed which also supports the claim that men and women are equal at birth. It is the society which assigns the roles to them.

**Feminism and Social Constructionism**

Feminist Scholars have been arguing for decades that gender inequality is crucial in understanding international relations, violence, and conflict. Gender inequality is an important and fundamental pillar of the argument, or we can say that exploitation and domination that benefits males compared to the females itself is a form of violence (Enloe, 2014). It is on the basis of gender that in most countries, especially in the Middle East, inequality is justified. Women are mostly identified with motherhood and are expected to take care of home and obey their male counterparts. Feminists analyze power, defined as equal access, and theorize that gender and power hierarchies are inextricably intertwined (Tickner, 1992: 19). Control is often used as the rationale for female subjugation. Feminists claim that power should be conceptualized as a divisible, infinite resource and/or as the ability to reach goals (Iannello,1992: 43). States that are not organized according to strict hierarchical models based on gender would be socialized to treat others, regardless of differences, as equal and due equal treatment.

According to Caprioli gender inequality increases chances of conflict in a state. Further her study provides evidence that countries with high fertility rates are more than twice as likely to experience conflict (2003). In an earlier study, Caprioli and Boyer (2001) found a strong link between gender inequality and the severity of violence in a crisis. Another study by Caprioli (2000) quantitatively tests the relationship between state militarism and domestic gender equality. Using Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset and World Bank data on gender equality Caprioli (2000) provides evidence, which suggests that, states with a higher rate of gender equality or with more women in power correlates to lower level of military action to settle international disputes. These studies pave the way for further studies on how women empowerment should be promoted.
As mentioned earlier, the role of gender matters as a factor in conflict. Similarly, two other school of thoughts (Social Constructivism and Biological Determinism) posit physiological differences between men and women as the basis of social roles (Caprioli, 2000).

Social constructionism holds that reality is constructed through the use of language in interactions with others and is primarily influenced by history, society, and culture. Constructivism holds that reality is constructed more through one's biological forces through developmental processes, cognitive structures, and the human mind. Social constructivism combines both social constructionism and constructivism by placing the emphasis of reality construction on both societal and biological factors. There is a joint focus on reality construction being influenced by both nature and nurture. Social constructivist theories have underpinned several theories often used within social work practice. Symbolic interactionism focuses on three core principles of meaning, language, and thought. The theory proposed that people use symbols (words, rules, roles) to give meaning and to make sense of the world. The meanings are transmitted to others through language. People are believed to interact with others and society, and assign meaning and symbols to these types of interactions and relationships (DeLamater and Myers, 2011). Future interactions are, therefore, dependent on the types of meanings and symbols one has attributed to that relationship or situation, thus, individuals act on what they believe versus what is objectively true. Role theory examines how people play out socially defined roles (e.g., mother, sister, wife, manager, teacher) and their ability to adhere to society's expectations of acceptable and unacceptable forms of behavior for the particular role (Teater, 2015). In Middle Eastern countries, females are stuck with their socially constructed roles of being responsible to only take care of the kids and family and must obey their male counterparts (or breadwinner/decision maker of the family). Of course, religion has been long used as an excuse to make this domination justified.

Methodology

In attempting to answer the above-described research question I first attempted to find empirical evidence to evaluate the role of women in peace negotiations and conflict mediation in different countries and regions, with a special emphasis on the Middle East, but found almost none. Further, I reviewed reports produced by UN Women, UNDP, and Amnesty International. The results were disappointing; almost 20 years after the United Nations Security Council 1325 Resolution in October, none out of all Middle Eastern and North African countries had successfully adopted the resolution (UNSCR 1325 Report, 2016). However, a thematic review of the literature suggested that there is an important connection between women's broader participation in peace negotiations and durability of peace (Krous. J et al., 2018). It also suggests that in countries ruled by authoritarian leaders and where women rights are more oppressed, there are higher levels of conflicts. As it relates to women participation in peace processes as negotiators, mediators, witnesses and signatories, a recent study done for London Economic Center for Peace and Security found that among 31 major peace processes between the year 1992 and 2011, women made only 9% of negotiating teams and only 4% of signatories of peace agreements (Nagel, 2019).
Furthermore, the databases available share same limitations, data availability, reliability, comparability and robustness. Most databases, like University of Notre Dame’s Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, keep records of peace agreements and formal female participants in the peace processes. However, there is very limited data available for female’s participation in Track II or informal talks which has an important effect on the peace agreements such as civil society groups, women activists, and social groups as it has been shown in Colombia’s peace process (Dayal, 2019). Unfortunately, the I was not able to find a database which track such information. Georgetown University’s Institute for women, peace, and security is completing a database which will connect Track I and Track II data. Once complete and disseminated, it will provide for better data to evaluate.

This makes it difficult to test the hypothesis that women can play a specific role in peace building. However, the I was able to test whether women are associated with reducing conflict and violence affected by the level of female empowerment. Specifically, I used the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, which measures adolescent fertility rate, fertility rate, labor force participation rate, and proportion of seats held by women national parliaments as proxies for female empowerment as the independent variable. I then used a multivariate regression analysis to test two related hypotheses: 1) that female empowerment reduces conflict (as measured by battle deaths), and 2) that female empowerment reduces violence (as measured by homicides per capita).

**Measures of Independent Variables**

In this paper women empowerment is measured by evaluating women’s’ political, social and economic empowerment around the world. Another reason world data is used is due to lack of data availability for the Middle Eastern and North African Countries. In fact, most Middle Eastern and North African countries are non-democracies and women empowerment level is already very low and did not show a good variation of data.

**Social Empowerment (Fertility rate and adolescent fertility rate)**

Women lives are a complex combination of political, social and economic aspects are represented with this variable, and data for this variable is taken from World Bank database. In the societies where women have low social status their lives are generally correlated with motherhood and mostly have higher rate of fertility rate, making this an important measure of women’s social equality. Fertility rate can be an indicator of women access to the health services, restriction to their social participation, and limited access to information due to illiteracy (Sadik, 1997). Furthermore, women who do not have control over their own fertility rate are less likely to join labor force (Dixon-Mueller, 1993: ch. 5 and 6). This is evident from percentage of adolescent fertility rate. Higher rates of fertility have a direct and negative impact in women’s social, economic and political lives, it results in poorer health, and lower level of education, employment, and decision making in both and community and state level (Caprioli 2012), UN, 1995:15). Overall, lower fertility rates result women empowerment in that they have control over their own lives and can make their own choices (Caprioli, 2012 UNDP, 1995:111
According to studies conducted by the United Nation (UN), United Nations Population Fund, and the United Nations Development Program, women’s education is linked to lower fertility rate. In addition, this relation of education and fertility is linked together regardless of region, culture, or level of development and is a result of five or six years of schooling (Caprioli, Sadik 1997: ch.2). Therefore, fertility rate is used an indicator of female social empowerment. There is also a strong relationship between women economic standing and fertility rate. If women have better health service and are healthier, they will have better self-confidence and can participate in political and community life (Sadik, 1997: Ch.2).

**Political empowerment (Proportion of Seats Held by Women in National Parliament)**

To measure political empowerment, I used the number seats held by women in national parliament: Number of seats held by women in a state’s parliament give women political equality. Which they gain beyond influence with voting in democracies. Generally, having political power and role in government is an indicator of female empowerment. Furthermore, it also gives the power to influence policies and raise their voices, at least in democracies (Caprioli, 2012).

**Economic Empowerment (Percentage of Women in the Labor Force)**

Economic independency is an important indicator of women empowerment, and it is measured by percentage of women in the labor force and the percentage of unemployed women. Access to economic equality not only make women independent but make them active participants in the society. Labor force and unemployment rate is also used as measure of economic equality because they are the most reliable and widely available data. World Banks statistics on percent of women in labor force and female unemployment is used for this indicator as well.

**Dependent Variable**

Once again, this study substantiates the theory that higher-level of women empowerment yields to lower level of conflict and violence. My dependent variable is the level of conflict measured by number of battle related deaths and level of violence measured by homicides per capita.

Statistics to test these hypotheses are taken from the World Bank due to reliability and availability of data.

**Data Gathering and limitations**

It is worth noting the limitations of quantitative data availability. According to the literature available, most conflict related data is an estimation, at best incomplete, at worst politically motivated. These limitations made it difficult to test the hypothesis that women participation in the peace processes do make difference, however, we can make the qualitative argument that women do make a difference in the making peace (Nagel, 2019).

Research on sexual violence is limited by the “tip of the iceberg” phenomenon, i.e. low level of reporting despite high prevalence. This renders an accurate count of incidents
of sexual violence virtually impossible. The SVAC dataset attempts to attenuate this problem by providing four prevalence categories: 0–no reports of sexual violence; 1–some reports of sexual violence (up to 25 reported incidents); 2–sexual violence is reported as widespread (25–999 reported incidents); 3–sexual violence is reported as massive, systematic, “terror tactic” or “tool of war” (1,000 or more reported incidents). However, this risk conflating prevalence (“massive”) with intent (“terror tactic”), which further highlights the political nature of data collection and coding (Nagel, 2019). However, there is a recent addition is the WPS Index created by Georgetown University’s Institute for Women, Peace and Security in collaboration with the Peace Research Institute of Oslo. The index focuses on three dimensions of women’s position relative to men: inclusion, justice, and security. In calculating and ranking the 153 country scores, the index draws on recognized data sources, including peer reviewed publications, national statistical offices, and UN organizations (Georgetown University WPS Index).

These initiatives in data collection, however, are no cause for complacency. As promising as they might be, they share the same limitations: data availability, reliability, comparability, and robustness. Sex-disaggregated data are limited in their temporal scope. For example, one of the reasons that fertility rate data are frequently used in statistical analyses (as I had to use in my analysis as well) is that it is one of the few measures that are available from the 1960s onwards, while most sex-disaggregated data collection only started in 1990. As a result, recent projects such as Woman Stats (earliest data available from 2007) or the Women, Peace, and Security Index (2017) are restricted to cross-sectional analyses and do not allow temporal analyses. The temporal dimension, however, is crucial if we are to accurately assess the changing situation of women across and within countries (Nagel 2019).

Findings

It has already been tested that higher level of gender equality yields to lower level of state militarism because women are less likely to use force as means of conflict resolution (Caprioli, 2012), which supports the case that perhaps higher level of women empowerment would yield to lower level of state conflict and violence. As outlined above, the independent variables are the percentage of women in labor force, fertility rate, adolescent fertility rate, political participation, and percentage of women unemployment. The four measures of female empowerment are correlated. However, the results of the model show that there is a weak, but positive correlation for the first hypothesis that female empowerment reduces conflict (as measured by battle deaths), with no statistical significance. The results of the model show that there is a moderate, positive correlation for the second hypothesis that female empowerment reduces violence (as measured by homicides per capita) with a relative strong statistical significance.

Hypothesis 1) Female empowerment reduces conflict (as measured by battle deaths):

Results of this model shows that there is a weak, positive correlation between the female empowerment and level of conflict in a state, according to the result of a multivariate region analysis my R square is 0.11 which shows that .11% of variation in dependent variable which is level of conflict is due to low level of women empowerment.
The correlation between battle related deaths, adolescent fertility rate is -0.04, relatively weak relation. The correlation between battle related deaths and fertility rate is 0.38, again higher level of fertility rate (which shows lower level of social empowerment) yields to higher level of conflict yields to the higher level of conflict. The correlation between battle related deaths and percent of females in the labor force is - 0.29, lower level of female economic empowerment measured by percentage of female in the labor force yields to the higher level of conflict. The correlation between battle related deaths and percent of female unemployment is -0.28, again women’s lower level of economic empowerment yields to higher level of conflict in the state.

**Hypothesis 2) Female empowerment reduces violence (as measured by homicides per capita):**

As mentioned above there is a strong and positive correlation between female empowerment and level of violence in a state. According to the results of multivariate regression analysis my R square is 0.32 with P value of 0.04 a moderate relation with our P value being smaller than 0.05. Further, the following operationalized hypothesis regarding women empowerment and level of violence in a state measured by the number of homicides per capita were also tested for correlation which showed a positive and stronger correlation than the hypothesis one. Political empowerment, states with low percentage of women in parliament states will experience higher level of violence. As tested, the correlation between my indicator of female political empowerment which is Proportion of seats held by female in national parliament, and it showed a correlation of 0.04, with lower level of female in national parliament states will experience a higher level of violence measured by number of homicides per capita. Social empowerment: States with lower level of fertility rate will experience lower level of violence and conflict. States with lower level of Adolescent fertility rate will experience lower level of violence and conflict. Correlation between adolescent fertility rate and level of violence is very strong with 0.35. This strong correlation shows that with higher level of female social empowerment states experience lower level of violence. Economic empowerment: States with higher level of female participation in labor force will exhibit lower level of violence and conflict. States with Higher level of unemployed female will experience higher level of violence. Correlation between female labor force participation and level of violence is interesting because the correlation is very strong with -0.11, means lower level of female economic empowerment yields to higher level of violence.
Analysis

The reason the correlation between number of battle related deaths and female empowerment is weak could be that there is not enough data available for the number of battle related deaths. The findings on gender and violence are more promising and suggest that more research is needed to better understand this relationship, and possibly strengthen the model used here by developing a more robust and sophisticated model to test the role of female empowerment (e.g., building in additional indicators) and how we measure conflict and violence (e.g., considering different forms of violence, such as physical assault and rape; and whether the homicide rate for women specifically decreases where there is more empowerment). Although the quantitative data shows a weak correlation there is an extensive qualitative data available which show that female empowerment does reduce level of conflict in states (Caprioli, 2000). Besides, due to limited data availability for the number of battle related deaths around the world, the hypothesis could be tested only 31 countries. These findings suggest that understanding conflict and violence around the world requires greater attention to the role of gender and female empowerment and offers some ideas about how to reduce conflict in places in the world that have low levels of female empowerment (such as the Middle East).

Policy Recommendations

Promotion of female empowerment and gender equality should be a policy priority to help ensure peace. Even though the international community is united to democratize the Middle East, there is still no global consensus on the self-expression values such as social tolerance, gender equality, freedom of speech, and interpersonal trust – that are crucial to democracy in the Muslim majority countries. These divergent values integral to democracy is the real clash between Muslim societies and the West (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). Based on this evidence, I argue that if we are supposed to bring democracy in the Middle East, then we have to empower women considering the social norms and cultures which differ from the West. Women’s inclusion in peace processes should be supported, which suggests that Middle Eastern and North African countries should implement the UNSCR 1325.

United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325:

United Nation recognized the importance of gender equality and female participation in peace and security through the adoption of the landmark Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000 with emphasis on the following four areas (United States Institute for Peace, add year):

1. Participation: Calls for increased participation of women at all levels of decision making, including in national, regional, and international institutions; in mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict; in peace negotiations; in peace operations, as soldiers, police, and civilians; and as Special Representatives of the U.N. Secretary-General.
2. Protection: Calls specifically for the protection of women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence, including in emergency and humanitarian situations, such as in refugee camps.
3. Prevention: Calls for improving intervention strategies in the prevention of violence against women, including by prosecuting those responsible for violations of international law; strengthening women’s rights under national law; and supporting
local women’s peace initiatives and conflict resolution processes.

4. Relief and recovery: Call for advancement of relief and recovery measures to address international crises through a gendered lens, including by respecting the civilian and humanitarian nature of refugee camps and considering the needs of women and girls in the design of refugee camps.

As UNSCR 1325 is implemented through National Action Plans (NAP), 60 UN members have established NAP to carry out the provision of involving females in the decision making, protecting women and girls in conflict and involving them in decision-making on security, which will empower women and increase their political, social and economic status (Gienger, 2016). In a special report produced for United States Institute of Peace, Raymand and her co-authors examined implementation of UNSCR 1325 focused in Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Tunisia and the Palestinian Territories. Unfortunately, in the Middle East and North Africa Iraq was the only country to adopt the resolution but only a month later self-styled Islamic state popular as ISIS or ISL, took the north of Iraq’s control and laid plans were shelved (Just put the year here since you have mentioned the author already). As per Raymand’s findings UNSCR 1325 has not been implemented successfully in any of the five mentioned countries. In their report Raymand et. El wrote “Women’s right is perceived as a humanitarian burden and beneficial for women alone, and the link between women’s rights and security is largely misunderstood.” After taking a closer look at the security and women situation in the MENA region I came to the conclusion that the perception that women empowerment can play an important role in bringing peace and security is underestimated.

Furthermore, peace agreements tend to last longer, and agreements will be reached in shorter term when there is female participation, especially when they are influencers of the agreements (O’Reilly et al.). It is very unfortunate that it has been almost 20 years since the adoption of United Nation Security Council 1325 Resolution and still women participation in the formal or Track I peace processes are significantly low. However, female participation in the informal or Track II is significant (Dayal 2018). Key to fulfill UNSCR 1325’s agenda for full female participation in peace processes would be to increase female representation in Track I, and one way to do so would be to link Track I and Track II efforts (Dayal 2018).

The international community should work together to strengthen and fund more women empowerment projects. Specifically, countries going through a reconstruction process. Afghan women and programs implemented in Afghanistan to empower afghan women can be used as an example. A lack of healthcare, education, literacy, economic opportunity, and participation in leadership roles, combined with human rights violations have contributed to the low status of women in Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban, Afghan women had the opportunity to reclaim their rights and spaces in society. However, according to the Afghan government’s Central Statistics Organization (CSO) data from 2014, Afghan women’s participation in one area, the labor force, has been as low as 29% nationally (CSO, 2019). Perpetuation of gender inequalities, especially those that lead to low socio-economic participation levels among women and girls, decrease women’s human development outcomes compared to those of men. U.S. Agency for International
Development’s (USAID) Promote (Promoting Gender Equality in National Priority Programs) is a five-year initiative from 2015 through 2019 supporting social progress and inclusive development in Afghanistan (USAID Promote, 2019). This initiative is empowering educated Afghan women to enter and excel in social, political and economic sectors. It will also enable women to participate in decision making and leadership roles at different levels of society with the aim of improving the status of women in all levels of society. As an Afghan woman, I can say this is an effective program and have helped many young Afghan women to feel empowered and confident.

As suggested by Bigio and Volegste in their paper entitled “How Women’s Participation in Conflict Prevention and Resolution Advances U.S Interests” Female inclusion in the peace building and post conflict resolution would not only benefits the particular state or region it will have some beneficial international benefits and it is also in best interest of the United States. Research supports the notion that strengthening women’s political and social participation after conflict diminishes the chance of conflict relapse. They further suggest that, to respond effectively to modern security threats and address the failure of traditional peacemaking methods, the next U.S. administration should promote female roles in conflict resolution and post conflict processes, and ensure that the rising generation of American diplomats and security professionals recognize that women’s participation in security efforts around the world advances U.S. stability.

A Gender policy produced by the Austrian Development Cooperation (2009), acknowledges that no warfare is a purely male domain anymore, and the role of women cannot be ignored. Women and girls are abducted and forced into marrying warlords or held hostages for prostitution. According to this report more than two thirds of the poorest countries in the world are conflict regions. It is clearly mentioned that sustained peace will be possible only if women have equal political, social and economic institutions and if there is a change in cultural attitudes. It examines women’s role in three conflict phases of: 1) pre-conflict phase, 2) During and armed conflict and 3) in the post conflict phase. I agree with the suggestions presented in the gender policy to bring about sustainable social development, as there is a need to change the deep-rooted social and cultural conditions that give rise to sexism, racism, authoritarianism, hierarchies and gender stereotypes.
Conclusion

This study tested the correlation between conflict and violence reduction and women empowerment. This paper tried to ascertain empirical evidence and answer the question: what is the role of women empowerment on reducing conflict and violence around the world? A simple answer to this question would be yes, but this study discussed it in more depth and provided empirical evidence to support the claim. Gender equality is an important factor in reducing conflict around the world. Research on women, peace and security provides strong evidence that female empowerment and gender equality are associated with reduced levels of violence and conflict around the world. Caprioli and her co-authors (2007) have provided significant evidence that low level of female empowerment and violence against women are predictors of state’s violent conflict. The larger the gender gap, it is more likely that a country will be involved in conflict and will use violence as a response (Caprioli, 2003). The higher the level of gender equality and female empowerment is in a country the lower the level of violence and conflict is, and there are less chances of using military force to resolve their disputes internationally (Caprioli, 2003).

Two hypotheses were tested with the multivariate regression analysis 1) that female empowerment reduces conflict (as measured by battle deaths), and 2) that female empowerment reduces violence (as measured by homicides per capita) the results of the model showed that there is a weak correlation for the first hypothesis with intercept P value being higher than 0.05. While bivariate correlations between my Independent variable (level of conflict in a state) and Independent variable (women empowerment) were positive.

Results of second model for the second hypothesis showed that there is a relatively significant correlation between level of conflict and women empowerment. With intercept P value being lower than 0.05. Besides, there was positive correlation between the variables which supports the claim that level of violence in state is correlated to the level of women empowerment. Overall, there is a causal effect relationship between women empowerment and state stability and security. It is important that policy maker, consider this relationship and focus more on women empowerment and gender equality.

Lastly, there is one another piece of the research that calls for further analysis; correlation between women empowerment and state economic stability (measured by income per capita). There is literature available on effects of gender gaps in the labor market on aggregated productivity and income per capita (Cuberes & Teignier, 2015). “If no women worked as employer or self-employed the income per worker would drop by around 10% in the short run and 11% in the long run”. Country by country analysis has also been taken which showed that Gender inequality creates income loss of almost 14% in the short run and 15% in the long run (Cuberes & Teignier, 2015). It is important to find updated empirical evidence and test it for better understanding. Additionally, it would be a great argument for feminists to make. Despite, this argument would help strengthening women empowerment projects around the world.
References:


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