

The impact of mines and explosive remnants of war on gender groups

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Question

What does recent literature tell us about the impact of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERWs) on gender groups?

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The K4D helpdesk service provides brief summaries of current research, evidence, and lessons learned. Helpdesk reports are not rigorous or systematic reviews; they are intended to provide an introduction to the most important evidence related to a research question. They draw on a rapid desk-based review of published literature and consultation with subject specialists.

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1. Overview

There is an increasing recognition in the international community that different gender¹ groups are affected differently by the threat posed by the presence of mines/ERWs in their communities. Women, girls, boys and men often have distinct gendered roles and responsibilities within a community. Consequently, their exposure to and knowledge of mine/ERW threats will differ, as will their experience as survivors or as carers for those in their family or community who have been injured.

According to the most recent available data, in 2015 women and girls made up 14% of all casualties of mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW)² where the sex was known; representing a slight increase on the numbers in recent years. Although the majority of reported casualties are male, women and girls may be disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of mine/ERW incidents and suffer multiple forms of discrimination as survivors. Gender not only impacts the likelihood of becoming a victim of mines and ERWs, but also structures the ways in which individuals access medical care, reintegrate into society after being injured, and access mine-risk education.

The relevance of gender has only recently been integrated into the thinking and practice of stakeholders working in the area of mine action. The main treaties regulating general mine action activities (the Mine Ban Treaty and the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and its additional Protocol II) do not explicitly discuss the different impact landmines and ERW can have on women, men, girls and boys. However, there is now a clear awareness in the international community that failing to consider the significance of gender in the impact of mines/ERWs, and in the effectiveness of mine action, can increase the risk of individuals being exposed to physical harm, poverty and destitution.

Reflections on the evidence base

Global and country-specific gender-disaggregated data on casualties is made available through the annual Landmine Monitor produced by the International Campaign to Ban Landmines – Cluster Munition Coalition (ICBL-CMC). However, there appears to be little in the way of granular analysis and research to interrogate the underlying reasons behind yearly fluctuations in casualty figures. Additionally, in the time available for this report it was not possible to find casualty data disaggregated both by gender and by type of device.

There is ample evidence in the literature regarding the livelihood, social, economic and other indirect consequences of landmines and ERW on gender groups. In the time available for this rapid review, the evidence that was found was chiefly anecdotal or case-study based and was produced mainly by local and international NGOs.

There appears to be a lack of data on how ethnic or religious minority; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex (LGBTI); disabled, or other potentially socially marginalised groups are affected by mines and ERWS.

¹ For the purpose of this report, 'gender' will be used to refer to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men.

² ERW are defined here as unexploded ordnance and abandoned explosive ordnance.

Key findings

- Gender influences the risk of becoming a landmine victim and of accessing medical and psychological care, rehabilitation, long-term socioeconomic reintegration and risk education.
- Although women and girls comprise a minority of direct mine victims globally, they may be disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of incidents and suffer multiple forms of discrimination as survivors.
- Mine and ERW incidents impact not only the direct casualties but also family members struggling under new physical, psychological, and economic pressures. Women make up the largest group of indirect victims.
- The gendered division of labour and related mobility patterns, along with differences in literacy rates amongst gender groups, are key factors which explain the different types of risks faced by men and women in relation to mines and ERWs.
- Children represent a large proportion of mine and ERW victims, accounting for 38% of all civilian casualties for whom the age was known in 2015. The majority of child victims are boys.

2. The gendered impact of mines and ERWs

Gender-disaggregated data and information on casualties

Women and girls comprise a minority of direct mine victims in the world. According to the most recent data, in 2015 women and girls made up 14% of all casualties of mines and explosive remnants of war ERW where the sex was known (ICBL-CMC 2016a). According to the Landmine Monitor this represents a slight increase on the numbers in recent years, but the underlying reasons for this are not investigated (Ibid).

Examples from several countries including Afghanistan, Cambodia, Uganda, Vietnam and Yemen show that compared to men, females injured by landmines/ERW are less likely to have access to immediate health care and are therefore more likely to die from serious injuries (Varó and Hamo 2013). Additionally, certain kinds of examination by male doctors on female patients may be forbidden or restricted, which may impact on the survival rates or recovery of women and girls. For example, Berthiaume (2003) notes that in Yemen, women have poorer access to health services than men due to social laws forbidding examination of women by male doctors and a lack of female health workers.

Wider impact of mines and ERW on gender groups

According to the United Nations Gender Guidelines for Mine Action Programmes (UN 2010), women who are injured by mines and ERW are often more likely than men to face isolation and stigmatisation as a result. If disabled, they are often abandoned by their partner or family, and can encounter difficulties in finding a new partner because of their supposed inability to take care of familial and household tasks. Female landmine survivors in some countries face immediate divorce as their ability to engage in physical labour and childrearing is considered compromised. In addition, whilst women are likely to have to care for husbands and children who are injured by mines or ERWs, they may not have access to paid or fairly paid employment, or receive financial support, and are therefore at greater risk of poverty (Ibid: 37).

Mine and ERW incidents impact not only the direct casualties but also family members struggling under new physical, psychological, and economic pressures. Women make up the largest group of indirect victims, being the spouses, mothers, sisters and daughters of men that are injured, disabled or killed by mines and ERW (UN 2010). Berthiaume (2003) also refers to the wider gendered impact of mines and ERWs on livelihoods by pointing out that landmines can leave large areas of land unusable for agriculture, which can adversely affect subsistence farmers, many of whom are women. However, there does not appear to be any data available on the way in which different gender groups are indirectly impacted as a result of mine/ERW casualties and injuries.

Factors that affect women's vulnerability to mines and ERWs

The gendered division of labour and related mobility patterns are factors which are commonly put forward in the literature to explain the different types of risks faced by men and women in relation to mines and ERWs. In particular, reports point to the gendered division of roles in agriculture. Women and men usually grow different crops and have responsibility for different tasks within the crop cycle, which can affect their risk of exposure to mines and ERWs. In a report produced in 2003 for the Global Landmine Survey, Benni and Conley note that women are at particular risk when carrying out particular household tasks for which they often have primary responsibility such as collecting water, firewood and

fodder in mined areas. On the other hand, men may be in greater danger on public roads given their greater mobility relative to women (Ibid).

Illiteracy is a further factor which may account for the different impact of mines/ERW on gender groups. In some countries women and girls have lower education and literacy rates than men, which could mean that mine-risk education material and learning programmes are less effective (SCBL 2008).

Boys and girls

Children are more likely than adults to deliberately handle explosive items, often unknowingly, out of curiosity, or by mistaking them for toys (ICBL-CMC 2016b). As such, children represent a large proportion of mine and ERW victims, accounting for 38% (1,072 of 2,805) of all civilian casualties for whom the age was known in 2015 (Ibid). This was similar to the 39% recorded for 2014 and for 2012, but a significant decrease from many past years, including 2013, when children represented 46% of civilian casualties. Since 2005, children have accounted on average for 42% of annual civilian casualties (Ibid).³

A minority of child casualties of mines and ERWs are girls, representing 18% in 2015. This percentage is identical to the average for girl casualties since 2005. It is suggested that boys tend to be more involved than girls in outdoor activities (such as herding livestock, gathering wood and food, or collecting scrap metal) in many countries contaminated with mines/ERW, exposing them to a greater risk of contact (Ibid).

Wider impact of mines and ERW on children's lives

Due to the period of physical recovery needed and the accompanying financial burden of rehabilitation on families, child survivors often have to end their education prematurely. Accessible inclusive or special education is seldom available, and insufficient training and awareness of disability issues among teachers and fellow pupils can lead to discrimination, isolation and the inability of survivors to participate in certain activities. As a result, education rates among child survivors are lower and school drop-outs are more frequent, which results in diminished employment prospects later in life (ICBL-CMC 2010).

3. Country profiles

This section presents information from three different mine-affected countries to show how the gendered impact of mines and ERW is manifested, and how gender mainstreaming is implemented in mine action programmes in response.

Sudan

Mines and ERW are primarily the result of more than 20 years of armed struggle between the Government of Sudan and non-state armed groups in the south, mainly the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army. Recent armed violence in South Sudan has added to existing contamination (ICBL-CMC 2012a).

³ Child casualties are defined as all casualties where the victim is less than 18-years of age at the time of the incident.

Gender-disaggregated data. The Landmine Monitor identified 122 mine/ERW casualties in Sudan In 2011 (ICBL-CMC 2012b). Adult men, both civilians and peacekeepers, made up the majority of all casualties (61%); six casualties were women. There were 30 child casualties of which 21 were boys and five were girls (the sex of four child casualties was unknown) (Ibid).

Factors that affect gendered vulnerability to mines/ERW. Due to the on-going conflicts, Sudan has many female-headed households, a large proportion of which are in poverty. Restricted by a lack of financial resources, time, literacy and mobility, these women tend to be left out of the main mine-action activities (SCBL 2008). Moreover, women in mine affected areas are usually illiterate in Sudan and may not be able to read warning signs or MRE materials (Ibid).

Whilst the extent of mine contamination in Sudan is unknown and estimates vary greatly, there is a consensus that men are more likely to be caught in a mine accident than women (Ibid). This is mainly explained by the different livelihood activities and mobility patterns of men and women. Men's greater mobility and movement across larger areas, in contrast to women's sometimes limited mobility, is stressed as a key factor for men being caught in more landmine accidents.

Gender-specific mine action and victim assistance. The victim assistance department of the United Nations Mine Action Office (UNMAO) has developed a National Strategic Framework that highlights the importance of ensuring a gender-balanced approach in all aspects of victim assistance in Sudan (UN 2010). The framework was implemented because data collected indicated a high prevalence of male victims, which may have resulted in most or all of the available resources being directed to male victims.

Together with NGOs the UNMAO victim assistance department has been directly involved in advocating for people with disabilities and mine/ERW victims to receive free health insurance (Ibid). Available medical rehabilitation facilities (the National Association Prosthesis and Orthotics) admit and treat female and male patients without discrimination. However, the two sexes are segregated in different units or are treated in the same unit at different times for assessment, casting and functional training/physiotherapy. At the Juba Rehabilitation Centre, groups of female and male patients are admitted at different periods (Ibid).

Colombia

As a result of over 40 years of internal conflict with non-state armed groups, Colombia is considered one of the most anti-personnel landmine (APM) and ERW-contaminated countries in the world. The precise extent of contamination remains unclear, though the Colombian national database indicates that at least 30 of the 32 departments may have a mine threat (ICBL-CMC 2014a).

Gender-disaggregated data. The most recent gender-disaggregated data is from 2013, when there were five recorded casualties among women; a dramatic decrease from the 32 women casualties in 2012. More than a third (57, or 35%) of civilian casualties were children (43 boys; 14 girls). There were 12 women casualties in 2010 and 22 in 2011 (ICBL-CMC 2014b).

Factors that affect gendered vulnerability to mines/ERW. SCBL (2008) notes that men are most likely to be caught by mines in Colombia because of their daily activities such as construction, farming and herding livestock. In some places, women perform agricultural tasks and in other places their everyday jobs are limited to household activities, searching for water provisions and walking with their children to schools.

SCBL research in Colombia (SCBL 2008) indicates that both female and male victims of landmines suffer principally from their incapacity to continue life as before, either because of physical or psychological changes following the trauma. Furthermore, outcomes such as mobility restrictions, stigmatisation and difficulty in taking on economic activities lead survivors to be marginalised and, in some cases, medically under-assisted.

Gender-specific mine action and victim assistance: In comparison to Sudan, a high national literacy rate amongst both men and women allows for greater spread of mine risk education (MRE) messages, including in rural areas. There is also widespread access to radio and television throughout the country, allowing MRE messages to be conveyed through these media (Ibid).

Despite the fact that health services are made available equally to women and men, and despite women having access to both female and male doctors, SCBL (2008) research found that female victims of mines/ERWs often get less benefit from these services, partly by voluntarily cutting down on their own treatment to reduce costs and time away from their family. In contrast, members of the army – the majority of whom are male – work for the state and therefore receive more rapid attention from public health institutions than other sectors of the population.

Cambodia

Cambodia is another of the most mine-affected countries in the world. Its contamination problem stems from a series of internal and regional conflicts which started in the late 1960s and ended in 1998. The Northwest, which was a Khmer Rouge stronghold until 1998, is where the majority of mine contaminated land is located.

Gender-disaggregated data. In 2013, the Cambodia Mine/Unexploded Ordnance Victim Information System (CMVIS) recorded 111 casualties from mines, ERW, and unexploded submunitions (ICBL-CMC 2014c). The vast majority of the total casualties (80%) were civilians. 23 victims (26% of the civilian casualties) were children, a significant decrease compared to 61 (35%) in 2012. The 111 total casualties recorded in 2013 represented a continuing trend of significant decreases in the number of annual casualties, with 186 recorded in 2012, 211 in 2011, and 286 in 2010. Of the total adult civilian casualties, 55 were men and 11 were women (Ibid).

Factors that affect gendered vulnerability to mines/ERW. Men comprise the majority of mine/ERW casualties in Cambodia due to their increased exposure to landmines through activities such as ploughing and clearing new land for agriculture (ICBL-CMC 2014c). Boys and men are most commonly involved in tampering incidents which are related to gendered recreational activities such as fishing and drinking with friends (Ibid).

In a recent doctoral thesis involving primary research in Cambodia, Davies (2015) cites a national community development specialist who explained that women injured by mine accidents were seen as unattractive and were often left by their husbands because of their injuries, leaving them socially vulnerable.

Gender-specific mine action: In Cambodia, training on gender and facilitation was held in 2008 for the provincial mine action planning unit (MAPU) established by the governors of mine-affected provinces (UN 2010). At the training, participants involved with planning and prioritisation meetings learned how to work with both male and female beneficiaries. Findings were then shared with national officials.

Furthermore, a pilot project involving community organiser training took place to help village chiefs gather information from all sources, including women. Women actively participated in and/or led a majority of the meetings. Building on the positive experience of this exercise, the Cambodian Mine Action Authority (CMAA) encourages village chiefs to hold inclusive meetings before they attend commune-level meetings. The CMAA has developed instructions for the village chiefs, asking them to host meetings with male and female participants to broaden participation (Ibid).

In 2012, the CMAA established a gender team and appointed a gender focal person to oversee the implementation of the Gender Mainstreaming in Mine Action Plan (GAP) 2013-2015. A baseline survey conducted by CMAA in 2012 found mixed results. Although interviewees cited an increasing number of women in mine clearance work, the number of female participants in commune, district and provincial meetings, and the number of women in clearance teams was less than the number of participating men. Similarly, whilst it was also observed that women had been attending MRE activities, it also found out that women's participation in advocacy activities at the national and sub-national levels in the mine action sector remained low (CMAA 2013).

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