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# Crisis and Gender: Addressing the Psychosocial Needs of Women in International Disasters

**by**

**Amy C. Hudnall, M.A.**

**Institute of Rural Health, Idaho State University**

**Evelin Gerda Lindner, MD, PhD, PhD**

**University of Oslo, Department of Psychology**

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"we lose husbands, children [all of our] lives are made fragile" by war.

—e-mail from an African woman (Hudnall, 2003, p. 101)[1]

## Introduction

Why is it necessary to include in these volumes a chapter devoted to the special problems that women may encounter during and after disasters? Everyone suffers: men, children, and women. Are women more vulnerable? Have their interests been largely ignored? "Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma, the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force" (Herman, 1997, p. 33). How often are these words, which here describe the affect of traumatic incidents, used when women describe events in their lives? Women often are more vulnerable; however, since they occupy a central role in community life, they also can be empowered to protect communities from disasters. In a speech entitled *The Role of Women in Protecting Communities for Disasters*, Natalie Domeisen (1997) states:

> Women do have specific issues that make them more vulnerable. This needs to be more widely understood or accepted. Until recently, researchers felt that natural disasters didn't discriminate among their victims. But recent research shows that at least for famines and earthquakes, there is a convincing case that mortality rates are higher for women than for men. A recent Canadian study on post-disaster stress shows that women and children are the first to be marginalized or abused. Stressful situations are harder for women because they lack control over resources and have more family responsibilities" (Domeisen, 1997).

[1] Amy Hudnall is a member of the Advisory Board of Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies (HumanDHS) that has been founded and is currently being developed by Evelin G. Lindner.

Indeed, recent studies seem to indicate that in many instances women are more vulnerable to the effects of trauma than men, although it is not yet clear what other factors, such as culture, may play a role in these outcomes (Norris et al., 2001; Holbrook & Hoyt, 2004; Murray & Lopez, 1996).

Cultural influences on psychosocial needs of women are significant in a multitude of ways. It has, just to name one area, been widely acknowledged that rape (of men and women) has acquired an infamous frequency in armed conflicts around the world, including resulting pregnancies for women. Particularly women are often too ashamed and humiliated to seek adequate help for their plight. Hartling has found that these dynamics particularly affect women, who reported greater "cumulative humiliation" and greater "fear of humiliation" than men (Hartling & Luchetta, 1999). A raped girl is a "living dead" person, if not physically dead, then at least socially dead, reports Victoria Firmo-Fontan (2004) from her fieldwork in Iraq. Moreover, the consequences to women for being perceived to have humiliated men are grave indeed. In cultural contexts that endorse so-called honor killings, they face the prospect of death by the hands of their male relatives. Domeisen provides the following example:

> One woman from a development NGO in Bangladesh noted that "A woman is under great pressure because of the practice of purdah, a traditional custom not to leave the house when the husband is away. Without her husband to escort her, she cannot go alone to the cyclone shelter. And many husbands work away from home... After a cyclone, women have often been left alone in their damaged homes, unreached by aid workers, unable to contribute to community rehabilitation decisions!" (1997)

In other words, Domeisen concludes, failing to address cultural issues which cause women to stay behind the scenes in disasters (as in everyday life) makes it more difficult to access their

concerns or contribution. This can keep valuable female perspectives from being incorporated in planning of suitable crisis interventions, more so, when taken to an extreme, it can put women's lives in danger.

Wiest, Mocellin, and Motsisi (1994) warn that:

> "Widespread subordination of women has meant that women typically must bear more stress than men, including preoccupation with dependent children. Sexual abuse of girls is common. . . . In some countries, many displaced women may end up as prostitutes, hoping to gain income to sustain their families. The longer the situation of unemployment remains unresolved, the greater the likely incidence of prostitution. The magnitude of both physical and mental abuse arising out of the sexual exploitation of displaced women and girls has not been adequately documented." (Executive Summary)

We may conclude that if indeed it is the case that women are more vulnerable, it is important, as aid workers, to understand what different kinds of situations women may face and to which they must respond. Not least female aid workers might face stress and subsequent burnout, compassion fatigue, or vicarious traumatization that is related to the faring of female victims of disaster. By the end of this chapter, we hope that you can more clearly relate to how gender difference and cultural roles create unique and demanding expectations on women, making their suffering, sometimes, even worse. Because of this, helpers in the field have to approach their work with women in different ways.

We begin this chapter by discussing a brief, modern history of the international women's human rights movement. We will then move into a discussion of the forms of human rights violations that are unique to women. This will include a section on women in wartime and the multitudinous roles that women are expected to take on during conflict: psychologically and

physically. To elucidate, we will provide a number of historical examples of these unique and often unanticipated burdens. By gaining an understanding of women's history, one can naturally move into the next section of the chapter, a discussion of how, as aid workers, to best support the women enmeshed in disasters and/or violent conflicts.

## Modern History of Feminism and the International Women's Human Rights Movement

It is difficult to disentangle the feminist movements from the peace movements and emancipation movements. Since the 1800s, those women involved in some form of activism—e.g., anti-slavery, civil rights, or anti-war—also led to their demands for women's rights. In other words, these activists were ultimately always fighting for human rights. It is important to consider, however, that women fomenting for human rights originated first from regions of the world that are today called the Economic North, also called the West or "developing nations." Geographically, the demand for women's rights as an organized movement began in the United States and Western Europe, spreading to Eastern Europe and then parts of Asia, Latin America, and Africa and the Middle East. Certainly there were pockets of resistance/repression that do not fit this chronology. Israel (since the 1920s), for example, has always been more gender-egalitarian than some other Middle Eastern countries. The former Soviet Union enacted laws that supported equal rights, such as communal kitchens, but social repression of women in Russia evolved in other more subtle ways. Often, the success of these changes is attributable to the economic stability of the country.

Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, European and American women fought for the rights to an education and to vote, fervently believing that these two rights were necessary to gain a voice in the political process. Not until the twentieth century, however, did women begin

to gain suffrage and the right to higher education on a large scale. The United States gave women the vote by a narrow margin in 1920, Great Britain in 1928, Switzerland in 1971, while much of Africa, Asia, and Latin America granted women suffrage after 1980. For many, it felt as if female emancipation was achieved. But the pursuit of full justice and participation for women has been a long and difficult struggle.

Women's rights in every day life and women as a unique party in war were not recognized until 1979 (see International Committee of the Red Cross, 2004, 2001). From the creation of the United Nations' (UN) document, the Convention[2] on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979) to the UN-sponsored Beijing Conference on Women's Rights in 1995, the majority of the world's nations today agree that women have not achieved equality and in fact, face singular and unusual violations of their person strictly *because* of their gender.

CEDAW, often described as an international bill of rights for women, is comprised of a preamble and thirty articles. It defines discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (UNGA, 1979, Introduction). Further, CEDAW set up an agenda for national action to end discrimination against women. Signatory states committed themselves to:

[2] A convention is a legally binding instrument concluded by the UN, signed by UN body members and established by international law. This is in contrast to the other document that the UN can pass, a declaration, which is not legally binding.

- legally incorporate the *principle of equality* of men and women in their government, abolish all discriminatory laws, and prohibit discrimination against women;
- establish public institutions that will ensure the protection of women against discrimination; and
- ensure the elimination of discrimination against women by persons, organizations, or enterprises. (UN Development Programme, 2000)

Thus CEDAW is intended to provide the basis for "ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, as well as education, health, and employment" (UNGA, 1979, Introduction). Interestingly, CEDAW is the only human rights treaty acknowledging that gender-specific demands are shaped by culture, and the only treaty that demands reproductive rights for women. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They must also submit to providing national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with the treaty.[3]

## Women's Roles During Natural Disasters and Violent Conflict

Women play, willingly and unwillingly, a variety of roles during disasters. Many of these are not new, although some tasks during violent conflict seem to have been honed to a fine edge in the 20th century. Most frequently women provide the following forms of support:

- As nurses or some form of healer
- As tools to dilute or destroy a culture or ethnic group

[3] Today, most of the world's nations have adopted CEDAW, although the outcome of the Convention is mixed. It is interesting to note that only two nations have signed but not ratified CEDAW, Afghanistan and the United States. Those states who have neither signed nor ratified the convention include Sudan, Somalia, Iran, Oman, Syria Micronesia, Brunei (this is not an inclusive list) (Seager, 2003)

- As sex slaves and rape victims
- Keeping the "home fires" burning
- To support the war effort
- To instigate wars
- To hold together family and communal systems while signifying their group identity
- To provide emotional support for returning "frontline" workers, i.e., soldiers and disaster workers
- As combatants

**Women as Nurses**

Women have nursed wounded soldiers on and off the battlefield since the first wars. However, Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) is often considered the pioneer of modern nursing and nursing during wartime. Nightingale and women like her fought public and private opposition to revolutionize the nursing field and formalize the recognition of women as trained professional nurses in wartime. By 1914, for example, the British opened uniformed services to women. Gaining this recognition afforded female nurses some measure of protection. Unfortunately, in the last twenty years, ignoring the sanctity of medical workers, male or female, is becoming more and more common.

**Women as Tools to Dilute or Destroy a Culture or Ethnic Group**

Rape has always been considered an inevitable byproduct of war, and thus when it occurred in war it has largely been ignored; the Bosnian conflict (1992) brought the act of rape to a new level, by using it as a "weapon" of war. To create a "Greater Serbia," leaders enacted a policy of "ethnic cleansing" through the Serbian and Bosnian Serb armies and paramilitary

groups. Their intent was to create a "religiously, culturally, and linguistically homogenous Serbian nation" (Salzman, 1998, p. 349).

In Serbian culture, a woman is often valued merely for her reproductive abilities. This is supported and perpetuated by all aspects of the culture, from religion to the government, as a way to strengthen Serbian population numbers and nationalism. UN investigators have uncovered documentation to substantiate the claim of the existence of a Serbian military policy that designated rape as a specific means for ethnically cleansing Bosnia-Herzegovina. The RAM plan was written by Yugoslav National Army (JNA) (Serb) Psychological Operations Department officers around the end of August 1991. They intended "to drive Muslims out of Bosnia based on an analysis of Muslim behavior which 'showed that their morale, desire for battle, and will could be crushed more easily by raping women, especially minors and even children'" (Salzman, 1998, p. 356). The "rape camps" became a systematic policy of the Serbian government and military forces with the goal of creating an ethnically pure state (UN Commission of Experts, 1994). The UN Commission concluded that "the practices of 'ethnic cleansing,' sexual assault and rape have been carried out by some parties so systematically that they strongly appear to be the product of a policy" (Part V., General Conclusions and Recommendations). The UNGA asserted that it was "[c]onvinced that this heinous practice [rape and abuse of women] constitutes a deliberate weapon of war in fulfilling the policy of ethnic cleansing carried out by Serbian forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and . . . that the abhorrent policy of ethnic cleansing was a form of genocide" (UNGA, 1996). The sexual assault of women during war had been taken to unknown depths, by completely ignoring the humanness of the women involved, women were merely tools for accomplishing a larger political end.

**Women as Sex Slaves and Rape Victims**

Today, women and children are the product of a thriving commercial business, the global sex trade (Seager, 2003). In 2001-2002, it was estimated that a minimum of 700,000 women were trafficked worldwide and historically, the role of sex slave was often institutionalized.

The establishment of brothels attached to an army during war occurred in the Roman army, the Greek army, and in the American army in Vietnam, to name only a few. The term Comfort Women (Soh, 2002) is a translation of the Japanese *jugun ianfu* (military comfort women). During World War II, jugun ianfu referred to women of various ethnic, social, and national backgrounds who were forced into sexual labor for Japanese troops. Comfort Women were handpicked to fill the brothels that were organized by the government for Japanese military officers. There is no way to determine precisely how many women served as comfort women, although the estimates range from 80,000 to 200,000, about 80 % of whom were Korean. Other nationalities included Japanese, Taiwanese, Filipina, Indonesian, and Burmese women. Japanese authorities believed that providing the soldiers with recreational sex enhanced morale, allowed the government control over the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, and finally they hoped it would help prevent soldiers from random sexual violence against women in occupied territories. At the war's end, the only military tribunal concerning the comfort women took place in 1948 in Batavia (Jakarta today). Several officers were convicted of forcing 35 white Dutch women into the institutionalized brothels. The fate of other comfort women was completely ignored. In many strongly patriarchal cultures women are little more then property, thus, rape and sexual violence is an act against the perceived owner, not the woman. Even in presumed advanced countries "women quickly learn that rape is a crime only in theory; in practice the standard for what constitutes rape is set not at the level of women's experience of violation but just above the

level of coercion acceptable to men" (Herman, 1997, p. 72). This cultural attitude results in gross underreporting of rape, skewing data[4] on the victims, and hearkens back to early etymology of the word rape, which dealt solely with the idea of ownership and family honor, not victim harm. This leads to the question of whether rape is an act of sexual desire or violence and "power over" another. Perhaps it is a product of one or the other or both depending on the circumstances. Although the fact that "rape in war is at epidemic proportions" (Seager, 2003, p. 58) seems to indicate that it is more often an issue of power, not sex drive.

**Women "Keeping the Home Fires Burning"**

What can be said about women and the home? It is the most traditional of all expectations that fall to women. It is esoteric and ephemeral, it can be hard labor and never-ending. Some say it is the most important job women fulfill, nurturing her children and family, feeding the soul of her traditions. But in war all of this is disrupted. Events that should be joyful, like childbirth, become driven by fear and danger. Events that should be mundane and routine--like milking the cow or driving your child to school--are destroyed. Some women will lose their homes in fire, others will be driven from them. Women lose husbands, sons, fathers, never knowing if they survived, yet, unable to quit searching because that is their expected task. The tasks that surround "the home fires" are often invisible and difficult to quantify. For the aid worker it is easy to anticipate a woman's physical need in this regard, but it is difficult to anticipate the emotional needs of a woman who has lost her home or is at threat of losing it. The woman is expected to recreate "home" in whatever environment or condition she may find herself, her needs aside, she is to maintain a semblance of normalcy for her family and community.

[4] According to Seager, "estimates suggest that the actual incidence of rape may be up to 50 times the numbers reported" (2003, p. 58) depending on how you define rape. In most countries forcible sex within a marriage is not considered rape or a crime. It is also important to remember that sex outside of the marriage, whether rape or consensual, is often considered a crime and a woman can be imprisoned or sentenced to death in some instances.

**Women as Supporters of the War Effort**

Across time and space women took up the cause of their culture's wars. They did the work left uncompleted by their now fighting men while continuing to mother, nurse, and take care of the home. In many cultures the division between the public and private spheres, the spheres of men and women respectively were and are clearly defined. But with the onset of war, these lines become blurred and women must move between their traditional roles and new public roles if the culture is to continue (Lorentzen & Turpin, 1998). This blurring is apt to create unusual physical and psychical hardships. Post-conflict, the stress of either re-establishing the former roles or renegotiating new ones is a tremendous burden on the whole culture.

**Women as Instigators and Perpetuators of Wars**

Women have been named as the instigators of many wars. In the book *Ten Queens: Portraits of Women of Power*, Meltzer and Andersen (1998) chose ten women in power between the 5th century BCE and 1796 CE. Esther, Cleopatra, Boudicca, Zenobia, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Isobel of Spain, Elizabeth I, Christina of Sweden, Maria Theresa, and Catherine the Great all influenced the ways of war. Fatima Mernissi, 1993, wrote about *The Forgotten Queens of Islam*. Or, consider Stanley Alpern, 1998, and his book on *The Women Warriors of Dahomey*. Read in Paul Varley, 1994, about female General Tomoe, called "the equal of a thousand," capable of dealing even with "demons and gods." In Britain, during WWI, women acted as overt and covert army recruiters (Gullace, 1997). Admiral Fitzgerald founded the *Order of the White Feather*, which encouraged women to hand a white feather to any young man who had not enlisted. To be given the white feather meant you were a coward—a stigma that you bore for the rest of your life. On June 25, 2004, a middle-aged Hutu woman stood trial in Tanzania accused of inciting rape and genocide. At the International Criminal Tribunal, multiple witnesses took the stand to

testify that Nyiramasuhuko urged the Hutu militiamen "to slaughter the Tutsi 'cockroaches'" (h-minerva@h-net.msu.edu, 2004).

Historically, women have generally been afforded little personal empowerment and even less overt power. An outcome of disempowerment is often not complete acceptance of other's wills, but the grasp for power in subversive ways, much like that of the British woman with a "white feather" or the Hutu woman "egging on" her male counterparts to commit violence.

**Holding Together Family and Communal Systems While Signifying Their Group Identity**

During conflicts, it is expected that a group's women will maintain family and community rituals, provide the emotional and physical wherewithal to stay together, and maintain the group's traditions, even to death. In addition, "discourse on the preservation of cultural values usually centers on women's sexuality, although this may not be explicitly stated" (Espín, 1999, p. 13). If the family or group is displaced, the expectations placed on women in maintaining the group's identity becomes even more inflexible. Female gender-specific behaviors "are used by enemies and friends alike as proof of the morality—or decay—of social groups or nations" (p. 6) because their status or signification is not a reflection of the signified's (i.e., woman's) actions or attributes, but a reflection of the signifier (i.e., patriarchy), their beliefs about themselves, their models, and culture (Hudnall, 2002). These responsibilities can be simple traditions like public veiling to represent their family's/group's honor. Or, they can become physically challenging, for example creating shelter after one's home is destroyed. Often, women signify the values of the community through legal dictates. In World War II Iceland, the national court forbade Icelandic women to associate with American GIs stationed there in the fear that unwanted pregnancies would dilute what they perceived as pure Icelandic blood. We are all familiar with stories of sati and honor killings perpetrated in the name of familial or communal

dignity. So not only are women expected to fulfill the physical aspects of community building during a crisis, but they are the singularly most important social and psychological representation of that community. She is expected to carry the culture; she cradles it, keeping the stories, the laws, and the morality alive. This places an enormous burden on women already pushed to the limits of their personal resources.

**Women as Providers of Emotional Support, Nurturing and Caring for Returning "Frontline" Workers**

Often, women's expected roles are best exemplified through literature. Post-World War II ushered in powerful female stereotypes in the works of F. Scott Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann, Gertrude Stein, T. S. Eliot. This was becoming acceptable because post-war literature revealed the uncertainty of the time, in which the old social rules had been dismantled with no idea if they would be replaced or reinstated. Gender rules are inevitably the most complex. Many soldiers return as different, "unknown" people. Unable to talk to their families, they are, at best, disillusioned and more mature, but more often they return home physically and emotionally wounded. They return home anticipating and expecting stability and sameness, the same wives, the same homes, the same families and friends, villages and traditions. Rarely is this possible. Women—the wives, daughters, and mothers–bear the brunt of the shock that returning soldiers face, taking on the role of counselor and nurse as well as wife, girlfriend, or daughter. The adjustments are manifested in a number of ways, from increased unemployment to increased reporting of somatic illness among soldiers. For women, the changes often lead to higher divorce rates and increasing domestic violence (Herman, 1997).

**Women as Combatants**

Women have long fought in wars, until the 20th century they usually fought in secret or if publicly fighting, they were a decided minority. For example, in October of 1778, Deborah Samson of Plympton, Massachusetts, disguised as a young man, volunteered and fought in the American army (Ellet & Diamant, 1998). The now-famous Long March in China, 1934, occurred when Mao Tse Tung's Communist Red Army was under threat by the imperial Chinese government. To escape the Chinese army, 100,000 men and women soldiers fought side by side as they fled 6000 miles to safety. Today, one can find Israeli women, Russian women, and women in several African countries serving alongside their male soldier/comrades. Many countries' military are comprised of more than 10% women, with New Zealand, the US, Australia, and South Africa leading the "ranks." In these nations, women combatants are becoming viewed as able partners, challenging the age-old stereotype of women as the protectors of peace and men as the perpetrators of violence. However, this has placed a strain not least on occupied cultures in which women remain in the private domain. For example, the US military in Afghanistan, 2002, was made up of 6% women (Seager, 2003), yet there is no way for these women to address Afghani males without inferring insult. The tensions that these kinds of strictures create among Afghani men tend to be released in violence against Afghani women while increasing the strain on the American female soldier. At its extreme, this kind of strain finds ease by "dehumanizing the dehumanizer," as in women soldiers playing leading roles in humiliating the Iraqi prisoners in Abu Ghraib Prison, Iraq.

## Challenges to Women's Roles in Crisis

A great deal of attention has been given to the variety of roles that women might play in periods of violent conflict. Usually they are fulfilling multiple roles. This is not to infer that men

do not also play important and multiple roles in conflict, however, it does highlight the fact that women, by their physical and cultural-bound difference, offer unique functions in conflict and disasters, and, as mentioned earlier, often are more vulnerable to trauma (Norris et al., 2001; Holbrook & Hoyt, 2004; Murray & Lopez, 1996).

Compounding the nature of their tasks are some global biases against women that include lack of education, lack of access to health care, lack of life-sustaining jobs. Of the nearly one billion illiterate persons in the world, 2/3s of those people are women. If women are allowed an education, it is generally only in the primary grades in which they are given the cast-off texts and often the weakest teachers. The biggest gap in education today occurs in Sub-Saharan Africa, a region fraught with violent conflict.

Many people in the world lack sufficient or even existing health care. Women typically are at an even higher risk of illness or death. Approximately 200 million women become pregnant yearly and only half of these women will survive their pregnancy. Another 50 million will be permanently disabled during the birth. Women are vulnerable to outside risks during pregnancy because of some nations' and cultures' population policies and gender preferences. Unsafe abortions, female genital mutilation (FGM), and some forms of contraception all can pose serious threats to a woman's life. Of particular concern is the ongoing practice of FGM, originally rooted in parts of Africa and the Middle East. Approximately two million young girls each year receive the "surgery," which is frequently performed in unsanitary environments without the use of anesthesia and/or sterile tools. HIV/AIDS continues to be a global problem, especially in Africa. Often, women are unwittingly infected with AIDS because of rape and their inability to negotiate safe sex partners, while too many African men still believe that sex with a virgin will cure them of HIV/AIDS, placing young women and girls in a particularly vulnerable

situation. In sum, because of women's physical differences and reproductive ability, they continue to be unable to protect their physical well being.

In addition, the functions women perform often go unnoticed, even though these jobs may require tremendous personal strength and stamina. The world's poor are disproportionately represented by women, while they form the majority of unpaid workers in family businesses and still spend at least 27 hours a week on housework.[5] Globally, women spend 65% of their time in unpaid work. When a woman finally does acquire a paying job, they are paid less than their male counterparts across all jobs. For example, in the United States women earn, on average, 24% less than men. In times of conflict, when men are either away fighting or are dead, women are unable to secure a sufficient income to support their families, thus increasing their overall risk. Ignoring the significance of women's roles in wartime only exacerbates their emotional and physical risk. Aid workers around the world face particularly difficult dilemmas when propelled into crisis situations that are fraught with the difficulties that afflict women. These dilemmas are so severe that helpers may be burnt out rapidly unless they reflect deeply on them. To generally avoid the risk of secondary trauma when working in high-risk environments consider these points:

1. Educate yourself and those with whom you work about secondary traumatic stress, check into what sort of support systems your organization provides those in the field.
2. Ensure that you have people with whom you can safely express your distress.
3. Ensure that you have a strong foundation within/about the culture you are working.
4. Develop an environment in which you can relax or rejuvenate and which is as physically and emotionally safe as you can create.
5. Never work alone.

[5] In Sweden women average 33 hours a week on housework, men 24 hours. In Japan, a more patriarchal Northern nation, women spend 29 hours on housework and men only 4 hours.

6. Try to maintain healthy eating habits, exercise, sleep.[6]

Lindner's work on humiliation (see www.humiliationstudies.org) is anchored at the juncture between human rights and feelings of humiliation, as well as at the juncture between help and humiliation. These points of intersection are extremely difficult to explore, not only for victims, but also for helpers. To illustrate, consider the following situation: A health worker comes across a wife who is being battered and abused by her husband. The health worker speaks to the wife and explains to her that she should no longer accept such humiliating treatment (invoking that the handling she receives, represents a violation of her basic human rights). The wife agrees to seek refuge in a house for battered women. However, the wife returns to her husband after a short while, asserting that she does not feel humiliated by him, but loved. The husband, on his side, accuses the health worker of undue meddling and claims that it is he who feels humiliated and degraded by such treatment. And, since feelings of humiliation, albeit often translated into apathy and depression, may also lead to violence, the husband might actually intimidate the health worker with threats of violence.

Transposed into international situations of crisis, helpers might find themselves being accused that their understanding of "help" is "disrespectful of local culture" and helpers may be accused of arrogantly disregarding local customs and traditions. In certain cases, helpers indeed are insensitive to local customs and traditions; cross-cultural training is often sorely lacking. However, what about situations when helpers perceive particular aspects of local culture as humiliating to some of their members, for example their women? What do they do when helpers do not see how they can condone customs and traditions they regard as humiliating? The resulting dilemma is extremely hard to tackle.

[6] These key points are adapted from information provided in Saakvitne & Stamm (n.d.) and Stamm, et al, (2003).

In the course of her fieldwork in Africa,[7] Lindner met numerous disillusioned aid workers who had left their ideals behind and had turned tired, even cynical. Humiliation appeared to be a ubiquitous phenomenon, not only among African victims of disaster, but also among international aid workers. Their "disillusionment" had—simplified—two sources (Lindner, 2001): the first was that to many aid workers, at least at times, the higher ranks of their own aid organizations seemed to betray the very human rights ideals on which their organization was based, leaving the lower ranks with their human rights ideals looking naïve. The second source of disillusionment was the lack of appreciation for help by the recipients; help was often perceived as humiliating by recipients, and this perception in turn had humiliating effects on the helpers. In other words, even though victims often do feel demeaned by aspects entailed in the ongoing crisis itself, they can also feel humiliated again by incoming helpers. At the same time helpers see their efforts to help being sabotaged, degraded, and ridiculed, and they as caregivers feel humiliated by the lack of recognition for their help.

Lindner learned, for example, that an average African view of incoming helpers could be described as follows:

> "You . . . come here to get a kick out of our problems. You pretend to want to help, but you just want to have some fun. You have everything back home, you live in luxury, and you are blind to that. You arrogantly and stupidly believe that you suffer when you cannot take a shower or have to wait for the bus for more than two hours! Look how you cover our people with dust when bumping childishly and proudly around in your four-wheel drive cars! Look how you enjoy being a king, while you would be a nobody back

[7] Lindner conducted a four-year doctoral research project (1997-2001) at the University of Oslo, entitled *The Feeling of Being Humiliated: A Central Theme in Armed Conflicts. A Study of the Role of Humiliation in Somalia, and Rwanda/Burundi, Between the Warring Parties, and in Relation to Third Intervening Parties*. She carried out

> home in your country! All you want is having fun, getting a good salary, writing empty reports to your organization back home, in order to be able to continue this fraud. You pay lip service to human rights and empowerment, but you are hypocrites! And you know that we need help—how glad would we be if we did not need it! And how good would it be if you were really to listen to us once, not only to the greedy among us who exploit your arrogant stupidity for their own good!" (this is a condensation from statements repeated in Somalia and Rwanda, Burundi, and Kenya, qtd. from Lindner, 2000, p. 17).

Helpers, on their part, reacted with deep distress to such outbursts (see also Maren, 1997; Hancock, 1989).

What can be done? The story of Tostan is an illuminating case. Tostan (www.tostan.org), a nongovernmental organization based in Senegal, has been highly successful in eliminating what some might consider one of the most physically hurtful and humiliating forms of human rights violations, the practice of FGM (Tostan, 2002, 2003). Since 1997, their efforts have led 1,271 communities representing 600,000 people in Senegal to abandon this practice.

According to Molly Melching, Tostan Executive Director: "It was through learning about women's human rights and responsibilities concerning health that discussions of FGC [FGM] first arose" (Wellesley Centers for Women, 2004, p. 16). Kerthio Diarra, a Senegalese village woman who has become a human rights activist after participating in the Tostan program, explained: "Before, we thought that the tradition [FGM] was a religious obligation. But when we began to learn about the dangers and consequences of the tradition, we understood that we needed to change. It was learning about human rights that changed everything for us" (p. 17).

Hartling and Baker Miller conclude,

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216 qualitative interviews addressing Somalia, Rwanda, and Burundi and their history of genocidal killings. From 1998 to 1999, the interviews were carried out in Africa and from 1997 to 2001 also in Europe.

> These women strengthened their determination to create change through building mutual empathy for each other. This empathy grew out of sharing their firsthand experiences of infections, hemorrhaging, and family deaths associated with FCG [FGM]. Empowered by their shared experience and their participation in the Tostan program, the Senegalese women in many villages have successfully made public declarations calling for their communities to unite in abandoning the practice of FGC [FGM]. Although the initial response to these public declarations was often ridicule and contempt, these women endured by doing "everything together as a group," exemplifying courage through connection. They also learned to build alliances with religious and community leaders who could support and contribute to their efforts. Ultimately, their collective courage helped them maintain a patient, empathic dialog with the most resistant members of their communities who now support their efforts. . . . It advances human rights ideals by creating new conditions of relating that promote the health and well being of Senegalese women and their families (2004, p. 22).

However, admittedly, the Tostan example is not easy to emulate. Particularly female helpers, witnessing female victims, who are trapped in human rights violations, are often particularly affected. Often, all they manage to do, is "closing their eyes," as described to Lindner in a personal message (April 10, 2004),

> When Zainab went to Afghanistan two weeks after the Taliban fell, being from Iraq, she could speak some of the Arabic required to get her to some places and not killed. She saw so many injustices to women and children, but stayed focused on her purpose and key mandate of her organization which was to provide immediate relief to the suffering and retrain the women within the context of their culture, so they could be somewhat self

reliant. She had to close her eyes to many of the political issues, and worked with what would make results, not in the big picture, but in the immediate moment—eat, find shelter, re-establish dignity.

Rising awareness of human rights turns lowliness that formerly went unseen and unquestioned into undue lowliness, and thus tends to increase the occurrence and legitimacy of feelings of humiliation. As women around the world redefine their position, many feel unduly humiliated when put down, no longer duly humbled, and translate these feelings of humiliation into resistance—sometimes destructive resistance, destructive for themselves and others and sometimes into constructive resistance leading to benign social change. However, formerly privileged elites may also develop feelings of humiliation when accused of arrogant superiority and asked to humbly descend from domination and oppression. In other words, adherents of patriarchal social structures—men and women—who are asked to dismantle the concept of male superiority may cry "foul." Julia Taft, Assistant Administrator and Director of the Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery in UNDP, urges a mainstreaming of gender in all development activities (Taft, 2002). The International Crisis Group (ICG), a private, multinational organization (with over eighty staff members on five continents, working through field-based analysis and high-level advocacy to prevent and contain conflict), developed a detailed set of recommendations as to how gender equality may be mainstreamed; even though these recommendations have been developed with Afghanistan in mind, they are referred to here since they represent a detailed example of how this task may be approached.[8]

[8] Recommendations to Afghanistan's Transitional Administration by The International Crisis Group:
1. Request the Ministry of Women's Affairs to study options for, and adopt, an administrative structure that streamlines its functioning and establishes crosscutting links within its departments.
2. Ensure that all ministries name as gender focal points officials with at least the rank of deputy minister or department head and link those gender focal points to the Gender Advisory Group, so that policy recommendations can be disseminated within the government.

And, as discussed above, since feelings of humiliation may lead to consequences that range from depression and apathy to violent reactions, spirals of acts of violence may be set in motion. And, to conclude, aid workers are the ones to be caught in the middle, a particularly sensitive position in which to be, particularly when women's faring is at stake.

## Conclusion

[Editorial Comment: Please write your own conclusions and recommendations rather than quoting another author's work. The conclusions and recommendations will be more persuasive if they are linked to what you as the authors have presented.]

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3. Appoint permanent managerial and technical support staff to the Gender Advisory Group and other bodies that are meant to mainstream gender policy in line ministries.
4. Appoint the members of the civil service commission, give it a professional secretariat and use employment selection criteria it develops as a basis for appointment to government posts and review of existing appointments, including within the Ministry of Women's Affairs.
5. Develop methods of ensuring that gender policy concerns are incorporated within budgetary allocations of line ministries.
6. Establish family courts in each provincial centre, with jurisdiction over all matters related to divorce, compulsory marriage, child custody and inheritance, and ensure that judges presiding over the courts are fully conversant with the civil code and applicable international treaties to which Afghanistan is a party.
7. Incorporate women with experience in public life and advocacy into the Constitutional Commission to ensure visible and meaningful gender balance.
8. Ensure that input from the public consultation process, particularly with women, is reflected in the final draft of the constitution presented to the Constitutional Loya Jirga.
9. Ensure that the selection process facilitates women's participation in the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

**To the Judicial Reform Commission:**

10. Incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) into the revised civil and criminal codes, in particular with respect to family law.
11. Identify appropriate progressive Islamic statutory systems, including those of Tunisia and Malaysia, that could be sources for revision of the civil and penal codes consistent with Afghan norms.

**To the international community:**

12. Include capacity building in programming and budgeting in the aid given to the Ministry of Women's Affairs.
13. Support creation of micro-credit loan programs and training in loan management for women.
14. Ensure that gender and development assistance is based on field research and consultations with Afghan women, including market research into income-earning opportunities, women's mobility in the target areas, and accessibility of services.
15. Help the Ministry of Education develop curricula that explain women's rights under the civil code and CEDAW in terms accessible to both male and female students.
16. Support financially a consultation process on the constitution that gives women a genuine voice and identify and support initiatives to develop a constituency for women's rights within and outside the government in the run-up to the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

**To the United Nations:**

17. Refocus UNIFEM's efforts on effective needs assessments, appropriate income generation projects with the necessary auxiliary training, and projects that build women's capacity to participate in the political process.

**To the states participating in ISAF:**

It is important to remember that white middle-class women from the Economic North dominated the feminist movements. Today, many aid workers and those people creating treatment plans and policy for aid workers are also middle class and from the Economic North . Thus, most policies and treatment plans are informed from this frame of reference. Do not forget that at the heart of each of women and their families displaced by war and conflict is the struggle for life: to find food for their families and safe places to rest. These women are not concerned about whether they are diagnosed with PTSD or which NGO should be delivering food shipments. They do not know if they will live beyond the moment. Such debates become insignificant when women are fighting to stay alive, feed their children, avoid torture, or find some warm, dry place to sleep. A consequence of this is that there is no way to *fully* understand the needs of women outside of your own culture. To be successful, it is imperative to incorporate women from within the culture in which you are working into your disaster program. Allow them to inform and guide you on the needs of the women you are trying to aid and how best to fulfill those needs. You will be surprised at some of the answers.

Also, remember that you cannot remove gender from violent conflict since most social and political structures are patriarchal, i.e., structured along gendered values. Because the nature of war is defined in part by gender, then differences in gender are predefined and so one must consider the needs of men and women differently. It is in periods of great stress that gendered roles become the clearly defined and rigid. Men dominate in most cultures, thus a crisis serves to reinforce male control. Therefore, taking gender into account, more so, mainstreaming gender in public policy planning as well as in crisis management, seems to be central.

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18. Extend ISAF or an equivalent mission to additional areas of the country, beyond Kabul, especially major urban centres, so that Afghan women activists can operate there effectively.

Particularly important for the topic of this chapter is the role of UNIFEM. UNIFEM is the women's fund at the UN. We suggest that you consider the core strategies guiding UNIFEM's work (http://www.unifem.org/index.php?f_page_pid=2):

1. Strengthen the capacity and leadership of women's organizations and networks.
2. Leverage political and financial support for women from a range of stakeholders.
3. Forge new partnerships among women's organizations, governments, the UN system and the private sector.
4. Undertake pilot projects to test innovative approaches to women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming.
5. Build a knowledge base on effective strategies for engendering mainstream development.

The mainstreaming of gender equality—and capacity building as to this mainstreaming—in the spirit of Tostan, seems to be the way forward. The important point is to work for new human rights-based social environments, both in general as well as in cases of crisis, by using appropriate methods that are infused with the human rights spirit. This is all the more important when in vast regions of the world crisis is the norm; for them "normality," as it is known in the wealthier parts of the world, is a state of affairs that lies years of hard work ahead.

If we want to create human rights-based social structures and practices worldwide, both in general and in times of crisis, it is important to note that the use of strategies that humiliate the women you are trying to help—or are perceived as humiliating—are not conducive, but counterproductive. We live in an increasingly interdependent world, where human security and welfare are not safeguarded when a few people attempt to achieve their own security and welfare

against the rest of the globe; only when *all* feel included, female and male, will security be secure and welfare well.

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