



The Impact of War on Women and Children in *Mother Courage and Her Children*

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ABSTRACT

Wars cause significant morbidity and mortality among women and children. The direct and indirect health effects of war on women and children around the world are the main topic of this research paper. In the past few years, an estimated millions of women and children have been displaced. Nearby war significantly raises the risk of non-violent causes of death and struggles for women and children, with more severe and protracted conflicts resulting in higher mortality increases. In last 30 years, war was responsible for more than 10 million deaths in children under the age of five worldwide. The mortality rate for women of reproductive age who live close to intense wars is three times higher than that of women who live in quiet environments. With special reference to *Mother Courage and Her Children* by Bertolt Brecht, the current research paper discusses how war indirectly affects women's and children's survival chances through malnutrition, physical and mental injuries, infectious diseases, poor mental health, and poor sexual and reproductive health. However, there is a lack of significant systematic evidence, which makes it difficult to design and implement crucial interventions for mitigating the harms of wars. He was a well-known German theater director and playwright of the 20th century.



Introduction:

The critic Bertrand Russell's definition of war as "conflict between two groups, each of which attempts to kill and maim as many as possible of the other group in order to achieve some object which it desires". Russell claims that "power" or "wealth" is usually the main reasons why men fight. Reducing the frequency and intensity of violent conflicts is one particular goal and recurrent theme of the Sustainable Development. Women as victims of war in literature serve as a poignant reminder of the profound impact of wars on half of the world's population. Through the exploration of their experiences, literature fosters empathy, deepens our understanding, and calls for action to address the hardships faced by women in war-torn regions. Furthermore, literature serves as a powerful tool to challenge patriarchal systems, advocate for gender equality, and promote efforts in peace building that can prevent future suffering and victimization. The atrocities of war, such as sexual assault and other types of violence, the loss of male breadwinners, property damage, displacement, and the lack of reproductive or other health care, frequently affect women disproportionately as civilians. The play *Mother Courage and Her Children* questions the conventional maternal impulses while exposing the realities of war, business, and morality. On the other hand, children are vulnerable since they are often recruited into armed groups or the military, often under duress. This forced or voluntary enlistment at a time when their psychological development is still maturing could have a long-term detrimental effect on their future. The fact that families are regularly uprooted by violence and their educational chances are disrupted often exacerbates this. More thought must be given to these vulnerable groups, and the special consequences that war may have on them must be examined. Diplomacy, Law, and Policy Forum will address women and children in war. This paper aims to increase understanding of the various ways that conflict affects women and children. The drama centers on a woman and her kids who rely on war for their own life and who defend their belongings from enemy fire. The deaths of her three children, one by one, do not stop her from making money.

Women in War:

Compared to men, women frequently suffer the most from war in rather different ways. War has varying consequences on women based on their cultural and societal responsibilities, but it frequently makes pre-war injustices and inequalities worse. Women who lack education or training find it more difficult to provide for their families and themselves, and food scarcity frequently results in malnourishment. Additionally, because male breadwinners are frequently lost to families, they are even more vulnerable when conflict breaks out. They might also experience sexual violence while fighting is



going on, or they might be subjected to similar abuse after being uprooted because of the fighting. Moreover, women may be more negatively impacted by penalties that are put in place during a war.

In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, women are portrayed as war victims who must endure the suffering caused by the ongoing struggle and bear the weight of catastrophic outcomes. The drama skillfully illustrates the difficulties and weaknesses that women encounter, highlighting the significant effects of war on their lives and the lives of their families. It is largely regarded as the best anti-war play of the 20th century, demonstrating Bertolt Brecht's intense dislike of war. He views war as a terrible experience, and this play is his most passionate and profound critique of it. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, women's unrelenting battles, selfless sacrifices, and unshakeable fortitude in the face of war's horrors are masterfully shown. The play offers a provocative indictment of the destructive nature of war and its deep impact on innocent lives while powerfully illustrating the hard realities faced by women stuck in violent situations throughout the tale. By carefully examining each female character, viewers are given important insights into how they manage the victimization brought on by the horrors of war.

Populations impacted by Wars :

Determining and quantifying the size of the populations impacted by war is therefore the most logical place to start when attempting to estimate the boundaries of the health burden of war. Depending on the implications being considered, there are various ways to think about the individuals impacted by conflict. Unless otherwise noted, affected populations include women and children who are internally displaced refugees, asylum seekers, internally displaced people, or people who are not internally displaced but are at higher risk of direct or indirect mortality and morbidity due to local wars.

The main theme of *Mother Courage and Her Children* is war, which destroys a family and a community. The devastation of the Thirty Years' War and the heartbreaking deaths of Mother Courage's three children demonstrate that population is a major casualty of war. The play shows how people get corrupted and eventually lose their humanity in the chase of wealth during a war, and how the protracted battle has terrible effects on the populace, resulting in deaths from sickness, malnutrition, and violence. A microcosm of the larger societal collapse brought on by war, Mother Courage's story demonstrates how the pursuit of profit through conflict results in personal devastation and the breakdown of the family.

Women and children displaced in War:

Refugee numbers should be viewed cautiously because criteria and data collection techniques can differ by nation and collecting organization. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, violent conflict displaces



and harms women and children in a variety of ways. In order to benefit from the war, Mother Courage's family is uprooted and her children are slain as a result of the fighting. Her daughter Katrin is traumatized to the point of being mute, and she ultimately gives her life to protect a village from an attack. The conflict also has a significant impact on other women, such as the prostitute Yvette, who is compelled to take on new roles and situations.

• **Trauma and displacement:**

The main family in the play is always moving, following the army to profit from the conflict, but this renders them susceptible to its atrocities. Due to psychological trauma that has left her speechless, Katrin is especially vulnerable.

• **Loss of children:**

The conflict either directly or indirectly causes the deaths of Mother Courage's children, Eilif, Swiss Cheese, and Katrin. Swiss Cheese is killed for his integrity, her son Eilif perishes in combat, and Katrin is killed while attempting to save others.

• **Other women's experiences:**

The drama portrays other women who are compelled by the war to enter new, frequently hopeless situations. Yvette, a prostitute, eventually marries an older colonel in order to ensure her own survival after being pushed into a life of prostitution.

• **Critique of war:**

The play examines the devastating and dehumanizing consequences of war via the experiences of these characters, demonstrating how it not only directly harms people but also compels them to give up their humanity in order to survive.

Mortality:

The burden of war-related mortality has been discussed in great detail. Estimates are frequently used to determine how many people have died as a direct or indirect result of war. The play *Mother Courage and Her Children* examines morality through the prisms of survival, profit, and conflict, demonstrating how these factors distort moral conduct. Mother Courage puts her economic goals ahead of her kids' safety, which results in their demise. Brecht utilizes her persona to criticize how capitalism and war dehumanize people by making them "amoral" because they put their own interests ahead of humanity and



compassion. The main struggle is between Mother Courage's obligation to protect her children and her wish to profit from the battle. Her family experiences are closely related to her aspirations to make money. Brecht uses the play to demonstrate that war is a system that fosters moral deterioration as well as a political occurrence. When a youngster tries to warn of an attack, it silences them, turning them into profiteers and dehumanizing them. To keep the audience from emotionally connecting with Mother Courage, the playwright employs strategies like inconsistent personality traits. This is meant to promote critical thinking regarding the deeds of characters such as her and, consequently, the effects of capitalism and war. Despite her attempts to profit from the war, Mother Courage has lost all of her children and belongings by the play's conclusion. This illustrates Brecht's argument that only the "fat cats at the top" actually gain from conflict, while those who attempt to profit from it are destined to be its victims.

Physical injuries and disabilities:

Despite being a clearly evident direct result of explosives and guns, the burden of physical and mental trauma is surprisingly underestimated. Firearms and explosive weapons, including mines, artillery, explosives, and improvised explosive devices, are frequently linked to bodily harm. Either during a planned detonation or as unexploded bombs and munitions that result in injuries during an acute conflict episode, explosive weapons can cause damage. Since women and children are civilians who do not participate in the conflict, they are the ones who sustain the majority of damage from its aftereffects. The physical wounds and infirmities, especially those of Kattrin and other characters, are not only regrettable incidents in Bertolt Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children*; rather, they are symbolic representations of the cruelty and human cost of war. They also play a significant role in Brecht's alienation effect, which compels viewers to consider the nature of war and the decisions made by the characters rather than just feeling sympathy for them.

Psychological Impact of War in the Play:

Direct exposure to violence, disruption of family structures, and social breakdown are some of the traumatic experiences that women and children impacted by conflict more frequently endure. Displacement, including extended stays in refugee camps, occurs on a massive scale. Due to the patterns of protracted, intricate conflicts that appear to be happening more frequently in urban areas and impacting civilians more, every civilian will experience more traumatic incidents. The catastrophic repercussions of war on the characters, alienation, and the conflict between maternal love and the needs of war profiteering are some of *Mother Courage and Her Children*'s psychological effects. Through its characters, the play examines the psychological trauma of war, specifically the repression of emotion and



erratic behavior that result from an ongoing state of struggle and loss. It also illustrates how a mother's natural desire to protect her children can be subordinated to the quest of wealth through war, resulting in severe psychological struggle and a loss of empathy.

Conclusion:

Women and children are more likely to die indirectly as a result of wars. In a dose-response relationship with the intensity of the war, children and women of reproductive age are more likely to perish if there is a war in the vicinity of their residence. Women in reproductive age are three times more likely to be exposed to the dangers, and babies exposed to conflicts in the upper quartile of severity are more likely to die. Food security is threatened by war, and there are enough signs that acute malnutrition is becoming more common in children. These days, only war-torn nations experience famines. Additionally, children who live close to conflict hotspots are more likely to suffer from chronic malnutrition. The risk of infection is claimed to be increased by deteriorating immunization programs, crowding, mobility, and water and sanitation abilities. War-affected nations are concerned about both the immediate local consequences and the global ones. The prevalence of sexual assault against women and children is high, and obtaining accurate population-based data is extremely difficult.

Women and children participate in and are impacted by war in a variety of ways, most of which are directly related to structural problems that existed before to the start of hostilities. Therefore, understanding people's problems and the best ways to solve them requires a sensitive approach. Achieving the ideal balance between empowerment and protection is crucial, and an intervention must not compromise the agency of the people it is intended for. In the case of women, this can be accomplished by top-down initiatives that improve representation and place more women in positions of decision-making or through grassroots campaigns that bring about significant change. One must comprehend the factors that drive children to join armed groups or the armed forces in the first place, such as whether or not they are trying to break the cycle of poverty that has plagued their generation.

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