Fostering Inclusivity in Peacekeeping: Challenging Gender Stereotypes, Navigating Cultural Understanding, and Promoting Diversity in Recruitment

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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Peacekeeping operations involve a diverse array of stakeholders on the decision-making and emnforcement side, ranging from senior officials to troops and civilian personnel, whose backgrounds and perspectives significantly impact mission effectiveness. Gender considerations within recruitment does form an important part of UN's engagement especially withinits foundational mandate of Women, Peace, and Security as outlined in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Intersectionality along with cultural contexts within host countries further complicate the recruitment process. Furthermore, while the eliberate inclusion of women is advocated, it often leads to reinforcing stereotypical roles and 'sidestreaming; of gender rather than genuine 'mainstreaming; practices. This paper examines the interconnected challenges of gender stereotypes, cultural understanding, and diversity and inclusivity in peacekeeping recruitment. It argues for a strategic, asset-based, inclusive approach to recruitment and deployment of female peacekeepers, coupled with enhanced cultural sensitivity. Drawing on existing literature and examples, the paper proposes policy recommendations aimed at fostering effective peacekeeping without reinforcing gender stereotypes.

Introduction

United Nations Peacekeeping operations are complex and require important decisions at every step. Recruitment is one such decision. From senior officials to troops and other civilian personnel, a complex set of actors with diverse backgrounds are involved and in most cases, should be involved. One of the factors of consideration is gender. This consideration goes beyond the UN's initial mandate on Women, Peace, and Security situated by UNSC Resolution 1325 which recognizes the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women and the importance of the equal participation of women in peace, security, and related decision-making (UNSC 2000). The discourse on the existing mandate signals the consideration of a spectrum of the gender of individuals beyond the traditional binary sense, as well as the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, religion and more. Intersectionality adds a dual layer of complexity: one pertaining to the recruitment of a diverse range of senior-level decision-makers, and the other in terms of understanding the cultural context and demographic of the host country of the mission. This also corresponds to the cascading effects of lack of representation might have on the mission itself. The consideration of gender beyond 'women' is a part of the problem of this lack of representation, the research on which is fairly limited.

When women are involved deliberately, it might pivot the focus and intention of the act toward simply reinforcing stereotypical roles of a woman in a traditional sense. Women are often seen as peacemakers and those who can calmly pacify the situation rather than be a part of the peacekeeper troops just as men are. This may lead to gender 'sidestreaming' rather than the UN-intended 'mainstreaming' practice (Newby and Sebag 2020, 248). Sometimes the presence of women may be necessary to the mission where the host nation's cultural norms disallow male-female interactions outside the family. However, recruiting women solely because of their stereotypical 'nature' rather than their unique advantage and merit often worsens gender-power relations and existing inequalities in the host nations (Olsson 2009, 4). This may also serve as a deterrent to recruitment in some cases. Other deterrents also include social stigmas, the possibility of discrimination against female staff within the UN, and cases of sexual assault and harassment among peacekeepers, some of which this paper will explore.

Women's representation in Peacekeeping has been a dynamic topic of discussion and will continue to attract discourse and discussion with time. This paper aims to investigate the interconnected challenges of gender stereotypes, cultural understanding, and the broader significance of diversity and inclusivity in recruitment in alignment with achieving mission success. It will argue that a strategic, asset-based, inclusive recruitment process and deployment of female peacekeepers, along with an emphasis on cultural understanding and sensitivity, can make Peace Operations more effective during and post-conflict. Furthermore, the paper will argue that this can be done without reinforcing gender stereotypes and with the timely re-evaluation of existing mandates and institutions that can be improved with time. This paper will start by discussing the positive outcomes of female

participation in peacekeeping followed by the successes of existing programs, along with an evaluation of the above-mentioned challenges by employing examples from existing literature on gender and related issues, to then offer policy recommendations in response.

Evaluating Successes I: The Case for Gender Diversity and Inclusivity

Gender mainstreaming and women's representation in peace and security has risen in the past few decades until 2020 when it stood at 23% (United Nations Women 2022). In the existing literature, this attempt has been referred to as 'gender balancing', 'female ratio balancing' or 'gender parity' with an aim to have equal adequate representation of women and men in peacekeeping (Narang and Liu 2022, 175; United Nations 2018). Research has found that a greater proportion of female peacekeepers is associated with greater reporting of sexual and gender-based violence to agencies by victims who feel more willing to approach female peacekeepers; greater protection of women's rights and consequent positive outcomes in the implementation of women's rights provisions in peace agreements and political institutions in post-conflict situations (Narang and Liu 2022, 176). Findings also indicate that greater levels of gender equality in a country reduce the chances of a militarised conflict, first-use of violence under conflict, and the violation of peace treaties (Narang and Liu 2022, 177). Overall, the unique set of assets that female peacekeepers bring to a conflict situation serves as effective guidance mechanisms when implementing policies of gender equality and challenging stereotypical assumptions.

Women can play a strategic role in 'early peacebuilding' and promoting gender equality in the host countries as well (Fadillah et al. 2020, 125). The case of Indonesian female peacekeepers serves as a notable unique example of early peacebuilding through community engagement activities termed 'Civil-Military Cooperation' (CIMIC) in the form of a human-focused response (Fadillah et al. 2020, 125). These women facilitated health campaigns, built libraries for schools, and shared their culture with local populations, thus building trust, diminishing the conflict impact, and serving as role models for local women, in turn, promoting gender equality (Fadillah et al. 2020, 125). Cultural understanding of the host country's environment such as norms limiting access to men or heightened cases of gender-based violence perpetrated by men can help the UN strategically deploy women along with cultural sensitivity training for men. This method, also called a 'psycho-social' approach can create opportunities for gender parity without reinforcing stereotypical roles. Women's participation consequently also legitimises the perception of peacekeeping missions and promotes public support for women's rights and equality in professional roles (Huber 2022, 1). This may serve as a useful tool for the recruitment of peacekeepers, especially diverse peacekeepers, in countries in the Global South that are popular Troop/Police Contributing Countries (T/PCCs).

Evaluating Successes II:
Institutional Mechanisms

The overarching gender response in UN Peacekeeping is guided by UNSC Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 (2000) plus eight other UN-SCRs including 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2010), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), and 2538 (2020). The UN Department of Operations (DPO/DPKO) has several active initiatives to implement the Women, Peace and Security agenda of UNSCR 1325. Some of these initiatives have proven especially successful while the impact of some others remains to be seen. For instance, the UN Secretary-General launched the Action for Peacekeeping (A4P) in 2018 which aims to support "women's full participation in peace processes and mak[e] peacekeeping more gender-responsive, including through increasing the number of civilian and uniformed women in peacekeeping at all levels and in key positions", as endorsed by several member states (United Nations Peacekeeping 2022). This was preceded and followed by 2 global outreach campaigns in 2017 and 2019 aimed at improving women's representation, resulting in a "rich pool of diverse candidates" and a staggering 50% ratio of women as Senior Corrections Officers in the field (United Nations Peacekeeping 2022).

The UNDPO has a specialised Gender Unit that also produces guidelines and policies for gender response in Peacekeeping. This unit takes into consideration recommendations and the "changing landscape emerging standards for gender equality", as reflected in the latest Gender Responsive UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy for DPKO and DFO (Department of Field Operations) (United Nations 2018). This document highlights the outcomes, goals, roles and responsibilities of leadership, staff as well as all Gender Advisors, Units, and Focal Points at the UN in implementing a renewed gender equality outlook to the existing WPS mandate that was called out by the 2015 High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO) Report for being seen as a 'women's issue' (United Nations 2018; 2020).

Additionally, the UN insists that Member States are responsible for the deployment of women to uniformed functions (United Nations 2018). Member States have taken initiatives in response to contribute to more inclusive peacekeeping missions. The UN Peacekeeping Ministerial meeting in Vancouver, Canada in 2017 launched the Canadian government-led landmark Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations, currently functional until 2027, focusing on this very call for more women in uniformed roles, in non-traditional positions of authority with parity of deployment conditions and work culture (Government of Canada 2022). The Elsie Initiative is a prime example of how international collaboration through a focus on inclusivity, representation, and equality of opportunity can be an effective tool to achieve Gender Parity goals. Some extent of its effectiveness has been attested by the Elsie Initiative Fund managed by UN Women, which has contributed monetarily to projects in Zambia, Ghana, and Senegal to target Gender Parity in their forces, along with specific missions including MINUSMA and UNIFIL (United Nations News 2023).

Evaluating Challenges I: Structural Issues

Women's participation in the field remains below 8% while their representation in peace processes has fallen since 2020 (UN Peacekeeping 2022; UN Women 2022). The flip side of Gender Mainstreaming in UN Peace Operations is Gender Sidestreaming, which relates to concentrating women in only specialised spaces in peacekeeping while attempting to simply increase their numbers, sidelining their merits (Newby and Sebag 2020, 149). This may negatively affect their experience in service while deterring overall female participation. Other related barriers to recruitment include under-representation in national militaries and societal inequalities which challenge promotions and professional development, furthermore deterring participation (Newby and Sebag 2020, 149). Findings also indicate that female peacekeepers are generally deliberately deployed to low-risk areas for gender inequality and gender-based violence or kept 'safe' on-base, limiting interactions with local populations (Baldwin and Taylor 2020, 9; Narang and Liu 2022, 176). This can be extremely detrimental to the agenda of peacekeeping as women have proven useful in helping local communities through humanitarian early peace-building and helping victims of sexual assault come forward (Fadillah et al. 2020, 127). A change in mindset to increase meaningful participation and asset-based recruitment is essential in both national militaries and peacekeepers (Newby and Sebag 2020, 149).

There are other specific barriers facing women peacekeepers that often may not even come to light easily. Preparations such as appropriate protective gear for the female body type to operate in the field, access to health services and hygienic conditions in facilities, and lack of other supplies coupled with structural discrimination against female staff, societal backlash and familial obligations are often overlooked as deterring factors to female experience and participation in peace operations (Baldwin and Taylor 2020, 8; Kumalo 2021, 1). The existing gender power-relations in host countries, often 'negative', i.e. unequal to men's advantage, make this experience worse (Olsson 2009, 8). In turn, gender power-relations are also affected by peace operations, negatively and positively (Olsson 2009, 4). For instance, in Kosovo, the UN Mission brought in patriarchal ideologies by excluding women from political participation, contrary to Kosovar practices owing to the lack of cultural understanding and representation among UN peacekeepers (Olsson 2009, 8). Contrastingly the previously mentioned case of Indonesian female peacekeepers increased the legitimacy of UN Peace Operations on a world stage (Newby and Sebag 2020, 148).

The culture in militaries worldwide is known to be highly patriarchal and masculine. Women's perception of the military and being a part of it thus involves behaving more manly to fit in, rather than stand out as uniquely advantageous, especially in soldier training that is built and facilitated by men, sidestepping the importance of gender (Alchin et al. 2018, 13). The very identity of a soldier is perceived as hyper-masculine without any space for 'feminine' traits that are devalued and dismissed (Alchin et al. 2018, 13). This may reinforce the very pa-

triarchal structures that need to be modified for inclusivity. Cultural Sensitivity training around the host nation's gender assessment could again serve to build strategy and arguments for the operational effectiveness of employing women, with proper training (Alchin et al. 2018, 13).

Evaluating Challenges II:
Realities of Existing Mechanisms

While the UN's efforts toward gender mainstreaming have produced commendable results to an extent, they have not been successful in reducing deep-rooted structural inequalities that women continue to face. The Elsie Initiative for instance has been criticized for gender sidestreaming, and taking an 'instrumentalist approach', failing to address deep-rooted issues of gender inequality, especially in countries of the Global South where most peacekeepers come from (Bouka et al. 2021, 7). The Global South through these measures introduced by the Global North is forced to implement rapid structural changes such as employing more female military personnel that often reinforce gender sidestreaming and overlook international cultural contexts of T/PCCs and the host countries (Bouka et al. 2021, 7). This can often also translate into a lack of adequate training and support systems for deployed women (Kumalo 2021, 1). These problems worsen without females in leadership roles and lack of "in-mission support networks" (Kumalo 2021, 1). These conditions create a vulnerable environment for female peacekeepers conducive to sexual abuse by male-dominated senior officials and other co-workers. Research shows that on average, nearly 1 in every 3 women peacekeepers has experienced sexual abuse while on a mission (Donnelly et al. 2022, 1). The culture of impunity and "brotherhood" in peacekeepers reinforces these vulnerabilities with a lack of justice mechanisms (Donnelly et al. 2022, 1; Kumalo 2021, 7). This threatens not only the retention and recruitment of women peacekeepers but also the integrity of the mission and gender power-relations in the organization and the host country.

UNSCR 1325 as a whole has been criticized for similar reasons of having a superficial focus, failing to address any deep structural inequalities, and reinforcing existing power dynamics disadvantageous to women (O'Connor 2014). Preventing and criminalizing sexual abuse and gender-based violence perpetrated by UN Peacekeepers is not a part of the original Resolution, attracting criticism (O'Connor 2014). Additionally, the overall image of this issue as a 'women's issue' and the existence of gender units that have historically solely been assigned to take responsibility for the entire WPS agenda are problematic factors associated with the UN's mandate (United Nations 2018; 2020).

Policy Recommendations

The UN calls for Member States to step up in accelerating women's recruitment into peacekeeping via effective communication strategies for information on deployment opportunities and the proliferation of national women's recruitment numbers beyond uniformed gender parity targets that stand between 15-30% at most (United Nations Peacekeeping 2022). A paradigm shift in gender equality for peacekeeping however can also be achieved

through a top-down focus on senior roles and leadership particularly. Leadership in peace operations and largely in the UN must be gender-responsive and inclusive to respond effectively to and be accountable for biases and discrimination in peace operations (Smith 2022, 1-2). In practice, this would include gendering the training of leaders using qualitative data on peacekeepers' experiences while also recruiting a diverse range of leaders (Smith 2022, 9). Similarly, recruiters themselves must also engage in gender and cultural sensitivity training to effectively recruit and retain diverse personnel. This should extend to national military training for those specific recruiters who must be free of biases and discrimination, as discussed in the context of gender-responsive leaders. Recruitment materials must additionally reflect inclusive language, culturally nuanced outreach, and tailored training programs. Training particularly is an important recommendation for soldiers too. Culturally-informed gender-responsive sensitivity training along with context-specific training and outreach for soldiers will help mitigate some of the barriers that women face in the male-dominated, patriarchal environment of peacekeeping. A gendered approach to training will improve not only the operation mandate itself but also the professional capacity of a soldier, especially female soldiers who may not see value in their position as a woman in the military, further deconstructing the perception of women as mere gender equality tokens (Alchin et al. 2018, 13). Re-gendering the identity of a soldier is an important step in the right direction (Alchin et al. 2018, 14).

Furthermore, context-specific training and recruitment will help mitigate sidestreaming by "matching the distribution of female troops to the particular needs and conflict behaviors in a particular area" (Narang and Liu 2020, 198). Additionally, the previously mentioned psycho-social approach employed by Indonesia to implement CIMIC can create an inclusive space conducive to realising the effectiveness of female participation in peacekeeping (Fadillah et al. 2020, 127). This will entail the above-mentioned re-gendering of the social identity that must value male and female traits alike, focusing on humans and their culture in the host state.

Lastly, the UNSCR 1325 was a landmark political event of its time. There are several ways to deal with its shortcomings to ensure that the larger narrative of addressing gender equality stays in place. The local cultural context again proves to be extremely important. Reaching out to the local population in ways consistent with the cultural norms of the place while gathering information from more actors in society has been proposed as a possible solution (Olsson and Tejpar 2009, 117). Interacting with local women leaders in some contexts, for example, may prove to be efficient in post-conflict peace-building beyond the conflict. Another popular recommendation is to simply include more women in decision-making processes similar to what has been discussed above in terms of leadership; upholding one of the goals of the Resolution itself and widening support of ideas (Olsson and Tejpar 2009, 117).

Conclusion

Policymakers look for windows of opportunity to introduce policy recommendations. The UN Peacekeeping Ministerial is a crucial platform for discussing and implementing many of these recommendations for women in peacekeeping. The Preparatory Meeting on Women in Peacekeeping in advance of the UN Peacekeeping Ministerial in 2023 highlighted action items for member states concerning the issue. A particular focus on implementing barrier assessments, creating a gender-responsive culture in peacekeeping, and mitigating sexual misconduct is noteworthy (UN Peacekeeping Ministerial 2023).

Until women are seen as uniquely advantageous to the peacekeeping agenda and included at every level from analysis and decision-making in senior leadership to in-field troops that are trained to understand local needs, interact with both male and female locals, and include women in humanitarian considerations, the intended goal of WPS will look bleak and superficial. Measures to encourage women to join by making the environment more inclusive and less stereotypical, in addition to safe from assault and discrimination will boost recruitment. Effective training strategies emphasising cultural understanding of T/PCCs and the host nations will tie in all of the above-mentioned goals and recommendations for effective peacekeeping.

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