



An assessment of the effects of civil war on gender equality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

MB Zwane

 [rcid.org/0009-0009-2404-7253](https://orcid.org/0009-0009-2404-7253)



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Supervisor: Dr JCM Venter

Co-supervisor: Dr CO Mongale

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DECLARATION

I, Mbalenhle Belinah Zwane, student number 31250823, declare that the dissertation titled: "An assessment of the effects of civil war on gender equality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo" hereby submitted by me for the degree of Master of Arts in Political Studies at the North-West University state that this is my own work, and has not been submitted for a degree at this or any other university. Every piece of literature or work by another person that is referenced in this dissertation has been properly acknowledged and is mentioned in the reference section.



Signature

04 September 2025

Date

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I gratefully acknowledge the North-West University for their financial support that made this research possible.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Dimakatso Zwane and Solomon Zwane. I am extremely grateful for their love, prayers, caring, and sacrifices, for educating and preparing me for my future. Thank you so much for everything. There are not enough words to express how grateful and appreciative I am of you, and my late grandmother Belinah, whose resilience and grace inspire me; the name I bear, that of Belinah, is a reminder to strive for excellence.

To every African woman working hard to be heard in the area of education, leadership and peace building; this is for you.

Proposal Overview of the study

Abstract

In the area of wars in the international and intra-state conflicts which has adversely affected poverty, resource scarcity and human rights violations, resulting in serious consequences for women and girls. In the DRC women are going through traumatic experiences such as sexual assault, mass executions, famine, public bombings, epidemics, torture, arbitrary incarceration, forced migration, ethnic cleansing, threats, intimidation and displacement particularly in conflict-affected areas. These challenges deepen existing inequalities women in conflict-affected settings are experiencing the difficulties of gender equality and women empowerment in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

The study employs a qualitative research method utilizing a desktop research design to explore the relationship between civil war and gender inequality. It gathers secondary data from various sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, reports by international organizations, and policy documents. Data analysis is applied to examine the data through feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and post-colonial theory. These perspectives facilitate a deep understanding of how gendered power relations, intersecting forms of inequality, and historical structural conditions influence women's experiences in conflict situations. The study looks at how war makes women more vulnerable by looking at trauma, health problems, being forced to leave their homes, sexual and gender-based violence, lack of economic and social stability, and difficulties in getting involved in society and education. .

According to the findings, protracted civil conflicts have exacerbated gender inequality by subjecting women to extend beyond sexual and gender-based violence, leaving them homeless, denying them access to education, medical consequences, and employment opportunities, and preventing them from participating in choices regarding peace and national governance. Despite the fact that the Women, Peace, and Security agenda has increased global awareness of women's rights, persistent violence, weak governments, and entrenched cultural views that favour males make it difficult to put these concepts into practice.

The study comes to the conclusion that improved institutional responses, successful implementation of gender-responsive policies, increased participation of women in peacebuilding and decision-making processes, and improved cooperation between the government, regional organizations, and international stakeholders are all necessary for sustainable peace and gender equality in DRC. By offering a comprehensive examination of the consequences of protracted civil war on women's vulnerability and gender equality in the DRC, the study adds to the body of information already available on conflict, gender equality, and peacebuilding.

Key terms: Civil war; Democratic Republic of the Congo; Gender Equality; Women, Peace and Security; Women Vulnerability.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AFDB	- African Development Bank
CEDAW	- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CNDP	- National Congress for the Defence of the People
DRC	- Democratic Republic of the Congo
FARDC	- The Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo
GBV	- Gender-Based Violence
HRW	- Human Rights Watch
ICRW	- International Center for Research on Women
INSTRAW	-International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women
IRC	- International Rescue Committee
IWPR	- Institute for Women's Policy Research
MDG	- Millennium Development Goals
MLC	- Movement for the Liberation of Congo
MONUSCO	-United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo
NGO	- Non-Governmental Organisation
NOW	- National Organization for Women
PKO	- Peace Keeping Operations
RCD	- Rally for Congolese Democratic
SADC	- South African Development Community
SDGEA	- Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
UDHR	- Universal Declaration of Human Rights

UN - United Nations

UNESCO - United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNIFEM - United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM

UNSCR - United Nations Security Council Resolutions

UNW - United Nations Women

WPS - Women, Peace, and Security

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Chapter 1

1.1. Orientation and Background

Millions of people have been killed and displaced by the ongoing civil wars that have affected the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the 1990s (Al Jazeera, 2024). Women and girls have suffered because of the continued violence, as they are affected by sexual abuse and exploitation (Ward & Marsh, 2006). Congolese women face significant barriers in economic opportunities and empowerment, and gender-based violence, due to political instability, cultural differences, and societal dominance (Sahin & Kula, 2018).

The DRC has always been the focus of extensive media coverage due to violent conflicts in the country. This has added to the idea that the nation is little more than “a morass of rebel groups fighting over minerals in the ruins of a failed state” in the eyes of the local population (Stearns, 2011: 328). Particularly horrifying accounts of brutality against women, rape, mutilation, and even cannibalism have been prominently displayed in headlines and news articles about the battles in the nation. In contexts influenced by conflict, numerous obstacles impede efforts to advance women's empowerment, which is defined as the extension of agency and access to resources, and gender equality, which emphasizes the significance of justice and fairness in the allocation of opportunities. Traditional gender roles and patriarchal norms, weak institutional capability, inadequate legal frameworks, scarce resources, political unpredictability, cultural hurdles, and opposition to change are some of these obstacles. Efforts to effectively address gender inequality are complicated by the intersectionality of gender with other forms of discrimination, such as race, ethnicity, class, and religion (Haq, 2013).

Since 2004, women and girls in the eastern DRC have faced significant violence, including sexual assault, rape, and forced enlistment into armed groups. These incidents highlight systemic inequalities and discrimination faced by women in work, education, politics, healthcare, and decision-making positions, contributing to systemic impediments to women's empowerment and gender equality (Miller et al., 2014). According to Hudson et al. (2012: 47), sexual assault has been utilized as a weapon of war in the DRC, demonstrating how systemic gender discrimination causes wider instability. According to Jacqui True (2012: 103), the DRC's political and economic

instability, resource exploitation, and inadequate governance frameworks all play a role in gender-based violence against women, with the illicit mining trade and the exploitation of foreign resources being two major contributing causes. True (2012) highlights the direct influence of economic and political institutions on the incidences of sexual assault in conflict areas, linking gender violence to socio-political concerns.

From the years 2004 and 2006, the civilian population paid a heavy price from the conflict, with women and girl children most devastatingly bearing the brunt of the insurgency (Al-Makura, 2021). The purpose of this research is to investigate how women's vulnerability, and ability to achieve gender equality in the DRC have been impacted by the ongoing civil war. The vulnerability of women has drawn the attention of governments, investors and international development groups. Progress of the World's Women, a 1999 publication by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), examined the gendered impacts of global political and economic shifts during the preceding decades (Bessis, 2004). The study attracted a lot of attention to both novel and recurrent concerns that affect women in conflict settings (Schnable et al., 2021).

In order to promote gender inclusivity, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security (WPS) in June 2000 (O'Rourke, 2024: 2). Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council is regarded as a crucial first step towards allowing women to participate in negotiations for peace, humanitarian assistance, peacekeeping operations, conflict prevention and resolution, and rebuilding after conflicts. The Beijing Platform for Action and the outcomes and discussions from the Fourth World Conference on Women served as some of the foundations for this resolution (O'Rourke, 2024). The development and presentation of Resolution 1325 needed careful preparation and strategy. This highlights the political and strategic aspects of bringing women's voices into the peace and security domains that have historically been dominated by men (Hoewer, 2016). It was not an instinctive or natural process.

The Women, Peace, and Security agenda is a global policy structure which points out the necessity for women to play a role in peace-building efforts, and in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. Indeed, the WPS agenda was formally launched by an unprecedented UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR, 2000), which

reconfirmed the indispensable pillars of women's participation, protection, prevention, and recovery in post-conflict scenarios (Snider, 2022: 3). These four pillars of the WPS agenda seek to advocate for women empowerment and gender equality in the DRC.

UNSCR 1325 reaffirmed the significance of women's involvement in peacebuilding efforts, and the avoidance and settlement of conflicts (Justino, 2018). The literature on conflict and peacebuilding has long acknowledged that women are disproportionately affected by war (Moser & Clark, 2002). Women have historically been underrepresented in the fields of peace and security, particularly in areas where important choices on policy and resource distribution are made.

Sexual assault on women and girls was widespread, and it was frequently used as a tool to control, terrorize, and demoralize communities. These actions have terrible, long-lasting effects on people's bodily and mental health. UN troops in the DRC face accusations of sexual exploitation and abuse; together with the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of Congo (FARDC), troops are held accountable for their own atrocities (Linje, 2015: 244). Women and girls have allegedly been killed and suffered sexual abuse by rebel groups such as M23 (Linje, 2015: 244).

History demonstrates that the reality of rape during wartime is nuanced, and differs depending on the battle, with various groups employing sexual violence in diverse ways. Cohen (2014: 418) emphasizes how recruitment practices and group norms influence the prevalence of sexual violence, while Wood (2009) studies the strategic use of sexual violence by armed groups. Buss (2009: 145) further puts into perspective warfare rape as a weapon of war through wider discussions of gender-based violence in conflict settings. While rape is uncommon in conflicts in Israel-Palestine and El Salvador, it is common in Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and the DRC (Wood, 2009). The Mai Mai militia, formed in the 1960s as part of the Mulelist Rebellion, became a powerful force in the eastern DRC, fighting against Mobutu's government and foreign armed militias. Following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, several of these local militias underwent reorganization in order to defend their towns against Mobutu's army and the invasion of foreign armed groups (Smith, 2005). The remnants of the 1994 Rwandan genocide continue to haunt the contemporary DRC, as rebels representing the Tutsis in the DRC have contributed extensively to the political instability of the country. A recent case is that of the resurgence of the M23 rebel group (allegedly

backed by Rwanda), which has captured territories in the eastern DRC as of 2025. This resurgence of the rebel group has increased the vulnerability of women, as the conflict has displaced over 2 million people; the majority of those vulnerable to such displacement are women and children.

Since 2003, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) has aided more than 40,000 victims of sexual assault in the DRC. A UN Population Fund assessment revealed 50,000 incidents of rape, and 2000 cases of women being enslaved (Wakabi, 2008). There are about 16,000 Congolese who have left their country and gone into Uganda, while 800,000 are internally displaced in north Kivu (Wakabi, 2008). Women have died after being raped by dozens of men, they have been kidnapped and kept as sex slaves for months, and they have had their private parts broken by pistol butts, maize cobs, or bayonets after being raped (Wakabi, 2008).

The current conflict in the DRC is rooted in colonialism, particularly during the Leopoldian period; this led to a large amount of exploitation of natural resources, particularly ivory and rubber (Gordon, 2017: 2), as well as human labor through violent forced labor systems. In addition to causing millions of deaths, and migration of people, the colonial period established a standard for systematic underdevelopment and exploitation. Socio-economic inequalities and instability brought about by the severe policies of this era resulted in post-colonial difficulties, and the conflicts that followed in the late 20th century. Even though there have been efforts from around the world and within regions to address the issue, fighting continues to harm women's rights and prevent gender equality.

1.2. Problem Statement

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) has experienced continuous war and lacked peace since gaining independence in 1960, and its issues have existed for a very long time, since the colonial era (Al Jazeera, 2024). The purpose of this research is to examine how gender inequality, specifically violence against women, has been made worse by the ongoing civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Women and girls have been subjected to pervasive sexual abuse, exploitation, and discrimination as a result of the conflict, which has had a substantial negative influence on their social standing, economic opportunities, and overall health. The nexus of

gender-based violence and armed conflict will be the specific focus of this study, which will investigate how these issues affect efforts to achieve gender equality in the DRC.

The continuing civil war makes it difficult for women to participate in governance and peacebuilding (McCarthy, 2011: 72). Women and girls are disproportionately targeted by armed groups, which exacerbates gender inequality by causing humiliation, trauma, and fear by using widespread sexual violence (McCarthy, 2011: 28). Women are more at risk of being raped in refugee camps and while traveling (McCarthy, 2011: 28). It raises the burden of sickness in a community, increasing the risk of HIV/AIDS among other diseases (Bolseth, 2013: 48). A multifactional civil war that engulfed all of the DRC's neighbors in combat on its territory has raged for several years, with an estimated 4 million people dying in the conflict (Dobbins, 2008: 4). The DRC is home to a longstanding conflict with sad undertones, which is putting sub-regional players and the global community to the test, especially in terms of ensuring global peace and stability (Bolseth, 2013: 3). Due to the high rate of rape of women and girls in the DRC, the country has been described as “the rape capital of the world” (Ruffer, 2015).

The war that is happening in the DRC has grown worse as government neglects civilians, leading to displacement, conflict, and a daily death rate. Raped women face limited justice due to impunity. Violence is primarily related to extraction of the natural resources, with sexual violence being committed by security personnel and rebel groups (Cone & Halakhe, 2024). As Sadie (2015) says “poverty, disrespect, and unequal gender standards in society are blamed for the problem” (Sadie, 2015). It has caused serious harm to social life, marriage relationships, and the sense of community (Mertens & Pardy, 2017).

Women and girls are being increasingly affected by current wars, and because of their susceptibility and being a sizeable part of the civilian population, they are often at the center of conflict (Bellizzi *et al.*, 2024). The DRC has been embroiled in intermittent armed conflict for over 10 years, with the largest human cost of any nation post-World War II. Women and girls are among the citizens whose rights are most frequently violated in the DRC (Bellizzi, 2024). Since March 2022, there has been a revival of violence between government forces and non-state armed groups in the eastern regions of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, leading to the displacement of around 2.8 million people nationwide, and human rights violations (UNHCR, 2023).

The DRC's civil wars have hindered women's advancement and gender equality, necessitating the development of effective strategies and interventions to promote long-term peace and development (Onditi & Odera, 2018).

While the government continues to struggle to extend state control and authority in many sections of the nation, the violence in the DRC also reflects a massive security vacuum and weak institutional capacity. UNICEF highlights the worsening situation of women due to inadequate participation in political representation, a gender bias that hinders efforts to promote gender equality and empowerment (UNICEF, 2008). In the current situation, in 2025, the DRC continues to face a complex humanitarian crisis due to decades of clashes, human rights violations, and gender-based violence. Over 7 million people have been displaced within the country, and over 1 million have sought asylum beyond its borders (UNHCR, 2025: 2). Fighting in the DRC escalated in 2024, and this can be attributed to the resurgence of the M23 rebel group. Due to the intensity of the conflict, this resulted in over 738,000 people being displaced between January and March, and numerous casualties. This was prevalent in the eastern provinces, particularly in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Ituri, where the security conditions have worsened.

More than 940,000 people had to leave their homes due to violent clashes in the first half of 2024 (UNHCR, 2025: 2). However, there is little precise data on the number of women who have been moved in recent years. The UNHCR draws attention to the growing number of women and children in the DRC who are displaced. The humanitarian situation has become worse due to the continued war, particularly with the M23 rebel groups, which has increased the vulnerability of women and children and caused more displacement (The Guardian, 2024). Social and cultural norms can perpetuate gender inequality, hindering women's efforts at emancipation. Obstacles include ingrained attitudes, discrimination, and barriers such as genital mutilation, forced marriages, and limited educational opportunities (UNICEF, 2008).

In the DRC, women's access to economic opportunities, education, and positions of decision-making may be restricted by harmful behaviors, discrimination, and traditional gender norms. Settings where there is conflict frequently have higher than average levels of insecurity, which include gender- and sexual- based violence. In this

regard, it is difficult to effectively promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the prevailing context of fear and violence.

Many studies have looked closely at sexual violence connected to conflicts, people being forced to leave their homes, and the effects of the civil war on humanitarian efforts in the DRC. International organizations and policy efforts, like the Women, Peace and Security agenda, have stressed the need to protect women and encourage their involvement in peacebuilding efforts. However, most of the current studies have looked at the experiences of women during wars, rather than fully examining how long-lasting civil conflicts keep affecting gender equality by linking together political, social, and historical issues. So far, not much focus has been placed on understanding these dynamics by using a combined approach that includes feminist, intersectional, and post-colonial viewpoints. This means there is a need for more study to understand how the long-lasting conflict keeps affecting women's risk and equality in the DRC.

The specific research problem that this study will address is the analysis of the effects of civil war on gender equality in the DRC.

1.3. General research questions

What impact has the civil war had on gender equality in DRC?

Specific Research Questions:

1. How relevant are feminist, intersectionality, and post-colonial theories in analyzing the effect of civil war situations on the status of women and gender relations?
2. What are the effects of civil war on women's vulnerability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)?
3. What are the principal obstacles and problems in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the DRC?

These research questions can be used to investigate the complicated issues surrounding gender equality, as defined by the United Nations, working with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, and programmes. The research focuses on four strategic priorities: equal participation in governance systems; income security, decent work, and economic autonomy; freedom from

violence, and greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience in the DRC, as well as the varied effects of civil conflicts on the vulnerability of women.

1.4. Research Objectives

1. To investigate the relevance of feminist, intersectionality, and post-colonial theories in analyzing civil war situations on the status of women and gender relations.

Conceptual and theoretical analysis will be used to accomplish this, and relationships between important concepts will be presented using visual frameworks such as theory diagrams and typologies.

2. To analyze the effects of civil conflicts on women's vulnerability in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These will be analyzed in terms of existing data such as reports, statistics, and other scholarly works. The data will be presented and interpreted through graphs and tables.

3. To explore the principal obstacles and problems in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

This research will pull together different secondary data sources, such as reports by international organizations such as the United Nations or World Bank, national policy documents, academic literature, and publications from non-governmental organizations, where available data on women's political participation, levels of education, and economic involvement will be obtained.

1.5. Central Theoretical Statement

The first step of the research will involve defining what exactly is meant by 'civil war'. This is something that often sparks debate among academics (Collier & Hoeffler, 2007). This research conflates three interrelated theories together with feminist theory but focuses on the middle scope within intersectionality and post-colonial theory. Thus, these frameworks are employed as integrated in a comprehensive understanding of civil conflict's gendered effects on women within the DRC. Thereafter, methods and interventions that effectively tackle these obstacles and dynamics, and systemic inequalities that shape women's experiences are devised.

According to Young (2008), feminist theory provides a critical viewpoint for examining and addressing the structural and systemic inequalities that give rise to gender

discrimination. In the context of war, the second wave of feminism aimed for women's liberation, with liberal feminists advocating for equality laws and reforms, while radical feminists argued patriarchy perpetuates gender-based violence and inequalities, with war exacerbated by militarized responses (Council of Europe, 2025). Feminist theory is important for this research, as feminist theory is intended to challenge systems of patriarchy and expose how wars have negative effects on women, specifically socially, politically, and economically. The findings also show how critical it is to address issues related to unequal power dynamics, gender-based violence, and the inclusion of women's voices. In response, feminist theory defines the term as "power over which those who are dominant in social, political, economic, or cultural groups exert authority" (Rowlands, 1997: 11).

Intersectionality theory that demonstrates feminist insights will be utilized to examine how women's experiences in conflict are conditioned not only by their gender but also by overlapping identities of ethnicity, socio-economic class, and geographic location. According to Warner and Shields (2013), the central tenet of intersectionality as a theory of social identities is how social identities interact with one another. By using an intersectional lens, one can recognize the variety of experiences and aspects of discrimination that women encounter in contexts where there is conflict. To truly achieve gender equality and women's empowerment, it draws attention to the connections between different oppressions and the necessity of addressing overlapping disparities.

Post-colonial theory provides a complementing discourse in putting the gendered oppression and conflict within the larger historical and structural legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of exploitation – an increasingly salient consideration within the African context, where colonial power relationships continue to operate through political instability and gender inequality. Postcolonial theory, according to Nayar (2008: 18), examines how colonialism continues to influence gender relations today, particularly how gender-based oppression and violence are frequently made worse in areas of conflict. In addition to opposing neo-colonial tendencies and rethinking Western-centric peacebuilding tactics, the WPS agenda promotes decolonizing research, assessing international initiatives, and highlighting local voices. External frameworks that devalue indigenous knowledge systems and the agency of local women in peace processes are criticized by the WPS agenda.

These theories function together in integrated applications and not merely in isolation. Intersectionality serves to deepen feminist theory by embedding layered social identities, while postcolonial theory brings in historical and geopolitical context to all three. These theories also provide a multidimensional tool for analysis in political studies, focusing especially on state power, governance, identity, and social justice in an area afflicted by conflict.

1.6. Research Methodology

This methodology includes case studies, individual experiences, introspective, life stories, historical, interactive, and visual texts. Feminist theory emphasizes women's experiences, and challenges patriarchal structures, which perpetuate gender inequality, such as education, employment, and income disparities; and normalize gender-based violence, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment (Peluso, 2024). The focus of intersectional feminism is on the intersection of social identities and how they might exacerbate discriminatory experiences. In order to comprehend the extent of inequalities and their connections, especially in wartime situations, it takes into account overlapping forms of oppression, including gender, race, and class, which increase vulnerability (UN, 2020). Postcolonial studies highlight how colonial legacies shape power dynamics and structural inequities in war-torn societies, improving our knowledge of their effects on social structures, identities, and relationships (Shakun et al., 2024). Furthermore, colonial legacies still have an impact on gender norms and relationships today (Shakun et al., 2024: 197).

This study critically examines socio-political institutions that sustain inequality by examining phenomena in their natural settings, using qualitative methodologies and an interpretive approach that centre on the voices and experiences of women. The nature of reality (whether there is a world of social objects and forces apart from the observer's perception of them), the object fields deemed suitable for study (ranging from entire institutions or communities to brief encounters), the merits of various research methods and ways of representing findings, and the criteria for judging studies, are further divisions within qualitative research (Smith, 1987: 173).

Interpretative theory leads us to a further link between “epistemology and methodology” (Cordella & Shaikh, 2006). The positivist methodology was always plagued by fears of “reification;” that is, that social science would mistake abstractions

for actual things in its quest to understand what society or social institutions “really are” (Goulart & Torres, 2021).

The study will employ secondary data, from official DRC government databases, the World Bank, and UN Women. These ideas will then serve as the foundation for a study of qualitative findings related to issues such as community citizenship, education, and violence. It will also look at secondary data in terms of reports from UN Women, World Bank, and DRC government databases associated with qualitative data. Presenting results using descriptive graphs and tables will show trends such as progression in women's involvement in governance, education levels, or violence through the ages. This guarantees that every research question is handled from both an empirical and conceptual perspective.

1.6.1 Research Approach

The study issues are addressed by managing the investigation from qualitative methods. Qualitative research is multimethod in nature and approaches its subject matter via an interpretive, naturalistic lens (Denzin, 2008). This study used a qualitative research method to gain a deep understanding of how the civil war has affected gender equality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Qualitative research is suitable for studies that aim to understand social situations, people's experiences, their views, and what things mean to them in real-life settings, instead of focusing on measuring connections between different factors (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Because armed conflict is a complicated issue that affects women's safety and equality in many ways, the researcher used a qualitative method to closely look at how politics, society, history, and gender play a role in the conflict.

Qualitative research is good for looking into conflicts and gender issues because it lets you understand different viewpoints based on documents and existing writings. Qualitative research is different from quantitative research because it doesn't rely on numbers or statistical methods. Instead, it helps us understand more deeply how women live and what challenges they face during times of war, including things like social inequalities and the specific situations they are in (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This method allowed the researcher to look at how civil war, women's vulnerability, and gender equality are connected in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The qualitative approach also lets the study make sense of information from many different

secondary sources, like peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government reports, policy documents, and papers from international and non-governmental organizations. The analysis of these sources gives a clear understanding of the experiences of women during conflict, the difficulties in making gender equality programs work, and the wider social and political factors that affect peace efforts in the DRC, as found by Merriam and Tisdell in 2016. So, the qualitative research method is chosen because it best fits the goals of this study and helps answer the research questions. Qualitative approach maintains the method's integrity while maintaining its theoretical foundations in a political study.

1.6.2 Research Design

This study uses a desktop research approach, which involves gathering and analyzing existing data from previous sources to achieve the research goals. Desktop research is useful when a study wants to look at existing information, like policy papers, official reports, and academic writings, without gathering new data directly from people (Johnston, 2017). The design allows researchers to gather information from various reliable sources to gain a full understanding of a specific research issue.

A desktop research design is chosen for this study because it looks at how civil war has affected gender equality in the DRC. This topic has been widely studied by academics, government groups, international organizations, and humanitarian agencies. Using secondary sources allows the researcher to look at different views on conflict, women's vulnerability, gender inequality, and peacebuilding, while using evidence that was collected over a long time. This method also gives access to information that would have been hard to get by collecting data directly because of the continued safety issues and humanitarian problems in conflict areas of the DRC.

The researcher is consequently able to critically analyze the available data, spot recurrent themes and patterns, and provide an educated study of the connection between gender equality and civil war thanks to the desktop research approach.

1.6.3. Data Collection

The data in this study came only from secondary sources, gathered through a careful and organized review of existing information. Secondary data is information that has already been gathered, studied, and shared by other researchers, governments, international groups, or organizations for reasons different from the current study

(Johnston, 2017). Using secondary data is a good choice because it allowed access to a lot of reliable information about how civil war affected gender equality in the DRC.

For this research, the researcher will use several different tools which are:

a. Books

The book by Buss et al. (2014) *Sexual Violence in Conflict and Post-Conflict Societies: International Agendas and African Contexts* which supports the focus on rape as a weapon of war and gender-based violence in conflict zones, especially in Africa, provides a thorough understanding of the role of sexual violence in armed conflict and its impact on gender dynamics in war and peacebuilding efforts.

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja's (2013) book *The Congo: From Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* offers a thorough historical and political backdrop for comprehending the underlying reasons for war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In order to frame the gendered effects of violence, it will be crucial to comprehend the historical context of the DRC's civil war.

This research will also refer to Jill Steans and Daniela Tepe-Belfrage's book, *Gender, and International Relations: Theory, Practice, Policy* (2016).

The theoretical framework in this book gives a better understanding of the gender dynamics of civil conflicts in sub-Saharan countries such as the DRC, as it addresses feminist theories and how gender interacts with social factors such as ethnicity, race, and sexual orientation.

b. Journals

In *Half of the Yellow Sun*, the journal conducted by Mogoboya, Montle, and Seanego (2022) investigates how African women's cultural representations of feminism are shaped by socioeconomic and ethnic factors. The study aims to determine if there is a significant difference in how feminism impacts diverse societies and whether educational background or socio-economic factors influence women's perception (Seanego, 2022: 492). Taking an in-depth look at Chimamanda Adichie Ngozi's novels reveals how patriarchal structures and gender norms persist in women's lives, requiring a thorough understanding of both cultural and social factors. As a result of

the publication's examination of gender roles and equality, it plays a crucial role in my research.

This study is qualitative in nature and is based on feminist theory. This study depicts feminism through the portrayal of female characters. Additionally, the study will examine Kokkonen and Wängnerud's (2017) findings on men's attitudes towards gender equality, and their willingness to support it as a result of women's presence in politics. The study found a negative association between women's presence and personal willingness to strive for women's interests, but no effect on support for gender equality as an abstract ideal (Kokkonen & Wängnerud, 2017). This approach will assess obstacles preventing women's active participation in decision-making and challenges in advocating for gender-neutral policies in conflict-affected DRC regions.

These journals provide a good perspective in comprehending the gendered effects of the DRC civil war. They emphasize the disintegration of social and political structures, the marginalization of women, and the persistence of gender inequality.

c. Internet Sources

United Nations Women (www.unwomen.org)

Information about women's leadership and political participation, ending violence against women, peace and security, women empowerment and humanitarian action are found on this website. The United Nations organization known as UN Women works to guarantee that every woman and girl realizes her full potential by promoting human rights for women and girls, and by implementing policies, standards, and programmes. UN Women is also responsible for coordinating and promoting the efforts of the UN system to advance gender equality in all discussions and agreements related to the 2030 Agenda.

International Center for Research on Women (www.icrw.org)

The ICRW has been a global leader in action-oriented research and solutions for gender equity, inclusion, and shared prosperity for 47 years. This website offers papers that will help my research, and policy analysis on gender issues, especially women's empowerment in situations affected by conflict.

Institute for Women's Policy Research (www.iwpr.org)

The goal of IWPR, which is to strengthen local voices, is more crucial than ever. IWPR contributes to the development of more inclusive, fair, and stable societies. IWPR advocates a paradigm wherein increased social cohesion is facilitated by variety and voice. Information about women's lives, including their participation in decision-making, access to education, and financial security, is shared here on this website.

These websites are important for my research. They are the world's leading research institutes, addressing issues that affect women and girls everywhere. Additionally, they uphold the peace and security of the world.

d. Dictionaries

The Oxford English Dictionary will be one resource because it offers thorough definitions. It is important because it covers a wide range of concepts and how they have changed over time.

The Cambridge Dictionary will also be utilized for English words, because it provides definitions and synonyms.

e. Published articles.

An article by Al Jazeera (2024) titled *A guide to the decades-long conflict in DR Congo* will be used for this research.

An article published by The Guardian (2025), *Who are the M23 rebels fighting in eastern DRC?* will also be used.

A published article titled *Gendering Constitutional Change and Policy Outcomes: Substantive Representation and Domestic Violence Policy in Scotland* by Fiona MacKay (2010) will be used for this research.

The research will also use an article that was published by Alexandra Amling and Marie O'Reilly, titled *From Global Promise to National Action: Advancing Women, Peace, and Security in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Philippines, Serbia, and Sierra Leone* (2016).

An article titled *Children executed and women raped in front of their families as M23 militia unleashes fresh terror on DRC* by The Guardian will be used.

f. Government publications and legislative frameworks

National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution 1325

The DRC has issued a NAP for improving women's rights and helping them to be involved in peace and security processes. Around June 2005 and October 2008, NAP was enacted in response to UNSCR 1325 on WPS (Fritz, 2009: 1). The goal of National Action Plans (NAPs), which are collections of policies created to carry out UNSCR 1325, and the state resolutions on WPS that followed (AU Commission 2016b), is to facilitate revolutionary transformation toward gender equality (Monjap, 2017: 26).

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Evaluation Framework

The DRC developed a framework to talk about GBV in violent areas, and this framework is a result-based approach that was enacted by InterAction to assist the organizations to measure and evaluate the result of GBV prevention work in humanitarian contexts ("Gender-Based Violence Prevention - InterAction"). It focuses on reducing GBV risks faced by communities and individuals during crises, addressing weak risk analysis (Brixander, 2023: 17).

g. Useful Resources

UN Security Council Resolutions

UNSCR 1325(2000), UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960 (2010), UNSCR 2106 (2013), UNSCR 2122 (2013), UNSCR 2242 (2015) and UNSCR 2272 (2016).

UNSCRs offer analyses of the causes in conflict-affected regions such as the DRC. These resolutions offer a framework for international policy that addresses security, peace, and conflict, with a special emphasis on WPS. They oversee the global approach to mitigating the impact of conflict on women and girls, and provide a legal framework. The resolutions highlight the protection, involvement, and empowerment of women and girls while acknowledging the distinct effects of conflict on them. With an emphasis on women, peace, and security, UNSCRs offer a comprehensive framework for international policy in conflict-affected areas, directing global policies to mitigate the effects of violence on women and girls. UNSCR highlights how important it is to stop GBV, enhance women's rights, and ensure that women have a significant voice in peace talks and decision-making.

Many studies have investigated the GBV that happens against women and girls during civil wars in DRC and the mass displacement of populations. Looking at the study by Twesigye Victor (2013), he investigated the relationship between foreign intervention and continued conflict in North Kivu, DRC, focusing on the level of intervention, level of conflict, and the relationship between foreign intervention and conflict. The study is based on realism theory, assuming states' actions are guided by national interests and anarchic international systems.

This systematic approach ensures credibility and relevance for a comprehensive analysis of civil war's effects on gender equality in the region. To improve the accuracy and importance of the data, certain rules were followed to decide which data to include and which to leave out. Peer-reviewed publications, novels, official papers, and reports from reliable organizations on gender equality, the civil war, and women's contributions to peacebuilding in the DRC are all included in the study. Blogs, opinion articles, duplicated material, non-academic sources, and additional information were all excluded.

This study will help the existing studies by providing insight into the challenges of gender-based violence, the effects of women's economic responsibilities, and the availability of resources. Examining the experiences of women and girls will be aided by concentrating on the eastern DRC, which is the main conflict hotspot. Additionally, this study will examine the long-term effects of civil war and warfare on women's lives.

1.6.4 Data Analysis

According to Bhattacharjee (2012: 38), data analysis is a research procedure that entails using previously acquired data in areas related to the researcher's interests. It is crucial for acquainting the researcher with previously published works that center on areas of interest. Researchers may easily interact with a variety of literature based on the topic they are trying to learn more about thanks to data analysis (Johnson and Christensen, 2014).

This study is using data analysis to examine secondary data gathered from publications, policy papers, academic literature, and reports from non-governmental and international organizations. A qualitative method called thematic analysis is used to find, arrange, examine, and interpret recurrent themes or patterns in a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach proved to be suitable as it allowed the

researcher to methodically review the material already in existence and find recurring themes concerning how civil conflict affects gender equality in the DRC.

The data analysis is involved in different stages; firstly, is to have a solid understanding of the study problem, the gathered literary and documentary materials were first read several times (Myers et al., 2010). The researcher is able to recognize important ideas, recurrent problems, and trends pertaining to civil war, women's vulnerability, gender inequality, and peacebuilding due to this familiarization process. Secondly, pertinent data is methodically coded in accordance with the study's objectives. Following that, similar codes were categorized into more general themes that represented the main concerns raised by the literature.

Conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, forced displacement, women's involvement in peacebuilding, socioeconomic inequality, political marginalization, and the execution of the Women, Peace, and Security agenda are among the themes identified during the research. In order to give a comprehensive overview of how long civil war continues to affect gender equality in the DRC, these themes are examining and interpreting through the use of feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and post-colonial theory. The researcher is able to investigate the structural, historical, political, and social elements that contribute to women's vulnerability during armed conflict by integrating various theoretical viewpoints.

Data analysis is chosen because it offers a methodical and adaptable way to analyse qualitative data, helping the researcher to evaluate results from various sources and establish connections between recurrent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017). By ensuring that conclusions are drawn from similar patterns seen across several sources of information, the application of this strategy is improving the analysis's depth and reliability.

1.7. Literature Review

According to Rigway et al., (2004), a literature review “is crucial for supporting the choice of a research question, topic, or hypothesis; identifying the body of literature that the research will add to and placing the research within that body of literature; developing theoretical terminology and concept knowledge; aiding in the creation of a bibliography or list of the sources used; suggesting potential research techniques and in analyzing and evaluating outcomes.”

Jesson et al. (2011) defines the literature review as a “critical description and appraisal of a topic.” Lambert (2012) defines a literature review as a “critical analysis of what is known about the study topic, the themes related to it, and the various perspectives expressed regarding the topic.” A literature review does not just list what other studies have found. Instead, it closely examines and compares different research works to show how this study adds to new information and understanding to the overall field. In the case of the DRC, a lot of research has looked into problems like civil war, sexual and gender-based violence during conflicts, people being forced to leave their homes, women's roles in building peace, and efforts to provide humanitarian help. These studies have helped a lot in understanding how armed conflict affects women, but not much attention has been paid to looking at how long-lasting civil wars keep affecting gender equality. This is because gender equality is shaped by many connected factors like politics, society, history, and the economy, which all influence the lives of women. This study aims to add to what others have written by looking at how civil war has affected gender equality in the DRC.

Women's responsibilities, vulnerabilities, and agency during and after war are the main topics of the growing field of gender and civil war studies in political studies. The integration of these theoretical stances to explain women's experiences in protracted, resource-driven conflicts such as the DRC is, nevertheless, not well understood. In studies that are now available, existing research tends to concentrate on sexual violence and humanitarian interventions, but they pay little attention to systemic gender inequality and the agency of local women.

This chapter looks at existing research in four main areas: conceptual, theoretical, and empirical reviews, and then points out the specific gap in knowledge that this study aims to fill. This chapter gives the academic background for the study and shows how previous research helps shape the study's goals and questions.

1.8. Ethical matters

Maintaining a set of ethical principles is important while addressing the research topic of assessing the effects and civil wars on women vulnerability and the difficulties of bringing about gender equality in the DRC. Studying in environments where conflicts exist requires respecting cultural customs in the area, and working to promote trust

and understanding between people is important. Since there will not be any active participants in the study, no one will suffer injury or be forced to divulge information.

The study will be conducted as a desktop study using pre-existing data. There will be no instances of plagiarism, and all authors whose writing has been included in this body of knowledge will receive due credit. Every paraphrased paragraph in the research will have references, especially those that are directly relevant to the content. The author will follow the rules outlined in North-West University's plagiarism policy (NWU, 2013: 2).

This particular endeavour seeks to close the gap by observing the workings of civil war in the DRC through a confluence of multi-theoretical feminist-intersectional post-colonial lenses, particularly as it relates to placing women in vulnerable positions, influencing policies that address those vulnerabilities, and inspiring activism. It starts by seeking to integrate a condensed analysis of the gendered effects of conflict into political studies and connecting theoretical approaches to policies. This is a very significant contribution to the field.

1.9. Limitations of the study

There are limitations to this study. The study uses the secondary data from books, publications, academic literature, policy papers, and reports from non-governmental and international organizations. This study didn't include the primary data such as surveys, interviews, or direct interaction with women impacted by the DRC. As a result, the results rely on the accessibility, and precision of previously published sources.

The researcher will not be visiting the DRC because this will be a desktop study. To obtain the required data and insights, the research will instead rely on secondary data and already-published information. This study will draw secondary data from published academic research articles and journals, government reports and publications, NGOs, international organizations report, books, news articles, and media sources. Scholarly publications, reports, and datasets pertinent to the topic can be accessed through a variety of digital libraries, online repositories, and academic databases.

Political and security developments in the DRC are always changing due to the dynamic nature of armed conflict. Therefore, when this study is over, new

developments, laws, or humanitarian efforts may have an impact on how we perceive gender equality and women's experiences in crisis situations in the future.

1.10. Significance of the Study

The goal of this study is to advance a realistic understanding of the difficulties and abuse that women affected by war endure in the DRC. Through examining the ways in which gender roles have changed, how resources have become more accessible, and how women have adapted to survive on their own, it aims to determine the degree to which conflicts have impacted women's vulnerability and gender equality. As a result, this can aid in our understanding of how to better assist and support these women now, as well as how to stop such incidents from happening in the future.

This research adds to what is already known about civil wars, gender equality, and the study of conflicts. It helps to better understand how wars and conflicts affect women's risk and safety in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It helps feminist, intersectional, and post-colonial studies by looking at the topic from different theory angles.

These results could be helpful for policymakers, the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the African Union, the United Nations, humanitarian groups, and civil society groups working on peacebuilding and gender equality efforts. This study could help these groups create policies and plans that are based on real evidence. These policies and plans would focus on better protecting women, encouraging their active involvement in peace efforts and making decisions, and making sure the Women, Peace and Security agenda is carried out properly.

The study aims to aid humanitarian practitioners, development organizations, and local communities by offering insights for interventions supporting women affected by conflict. It contributes to designing programs addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's socio-economic empowerment, enhancing access to justice and support services, and bolstering community peacebuilding initiatives, ultimately advancing gender equality and sustainable peace in the DRC.

Chapter layout

The structure of this thesis is as follows:

Chapter One - Background of the study

The background of the protracted civil wars in the DRC and their disproportionate effect on women's vulnerability are outlined in Chapter 1, which provides the study with the important context. Following that, it outlines the problem statement, research questions, and main goal, all of which are focused on determining how applicable theoretical frameworks such as intersectionality, feminist theory, and post-colonial theory are for understanding the difficulties associated with achieving gender equality in contexts affected by conflict. The chapter also provides a literature review, research methodology, and discussion of the study's significance, ethical considerations, and limitations, laying the groundwork for further examination of the DRC in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two - Theoretical Framework

The second chapter explores various theoretical frameworks to understand women's experiences in civil conflict situations. It uses feminist theory to understand gendered conflict, intersectionality theory to analyze intersecting identities, human rights method to evaluate international instruments, and post-colonial theory to understand colonialism's effects on women's experiences. Integrating these perspectives helps guide change-management techniques for gender equality in conflict situations.

Chapter Three - The impact of civil war on women's vulnerability in the DRC

The influence of civil conflicts on women's vulnerability in the DRC is examined in Chapter 3, with particular attention paid to the intersections of gender, ethnicity, class, and other factors, building on the theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. The chapter examines the recorded instances of displacement, gender-based violence, and the interruption of women's lives and access to basic services during conflict. The chapter will assess the challenges and obstacles that hinder the attainment of gender equality and the protection of women's rights in the conflict-impacted populations.

Chapter Four - The challenges of gender equality and women empowerment in the DRC

Chapter 4 will explore the DRC's challenges around gender equality and women's empowerment by focusing on institutional restrictions, deeply set norms, and social,

cultural, and political factors that have disadvantaged women and hindered their participation in decision-making processes.

Chapter Five - Conclusion and recommendations

In this chapter, the study will draw conclusions from previous chapters through summarizing key findings from the literature. Also, this chapter will provide recommendations based on the problem identified, and findings of the study.

Chapter 2

Applying Feminist, Intersectional, and Post-Colonial Theories to investigate gender equality in civil war

2.1. Introduction

The previous chapter is the opening of the study, which summarises the study as the foundation for more in-depth analysis in the coming chapters. It provided an overview of the DRC's history, and indicated the research questions which will guide the dissertation. A literature review is a piece of writing that examines the important aspects of current knowledge, including significant discoveries, as well as theoretical and methodological advancements in a certain subject. Chapter two looks at how the DRC's civil war has affected gender equality. This analysis explores gendered conflict within feminist, intersectional, and post-colonial theory frameworks, providing a theoretical and conceptual analysis for the study. Looking through the lens of intersectional feminism may enhance better understanding of one another, and so work for a more equitable future for humanity. Understanding the scope of the disparities and their connections within a particular context requires that intersectional feminism focuses on the perspectives of people who are subjected to overlapping, contemporaneous forms of oppression (UN Women, 2020). Post-colonial theory gives a better comprehension of the past and present issues of the DRC.

2.2. Feminism Theory

Feminism theory was first developed to address the issue of women's oppression in society, and criticized the disparities in how people are treated based only on their perceived gender. According to this perspective, a conflict can exacerbate already-existing injustices in society and governance rather than making gender disparity worse. Feminism is an ideology and movement that opposes sexism and patriarchy, and promotes social equality for men and women (Mohajan, 2022). Feminist theory aims for gender equality, challenging gender-based oppression and discrimination. It focuses on making society more inclusive and equitable, by analysing social behaviour towards others, considering the power in understanding this concept. Ramohlale et al., (2023) asserts that feminism is based on the defence of women's rights in the fight for gender equality. The term 'feminism' refers to a broad spectrum of social movements, ideas, and definitions of political, economic, personal, and social rights

for women. Creating equal opportunities for women in the workplace and in education is part of this.

Feminist theory is very important in the DRC where long-lasting conflict has put women at risk of various kinds of GBV and made them more vulnerable in terms of social and economic situations. A feminist view lets the study look into whether the effects of conflict make gender inequality worse and limit women's chances to take part in politics, the economy, and efforts to bring about peace. It also helps in looking at how women take action and get involved in efforts to deal with and bounce back from conflict. For this study, feminist theory is used to analyze the situation rather than just to describe what women experience.

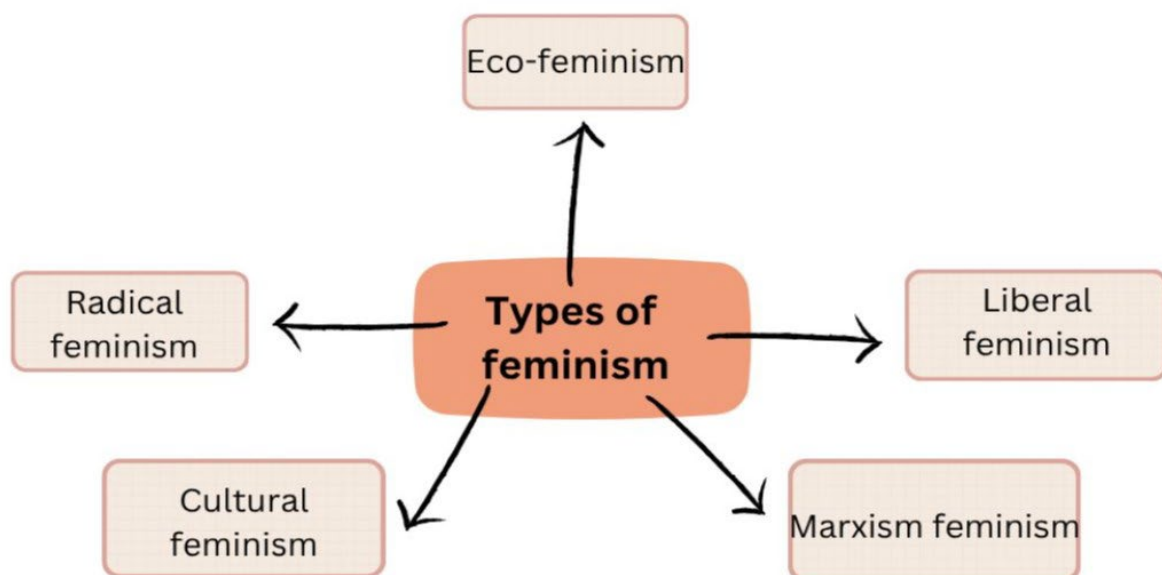


Figure 1: Types of Feminism (Author's own compilation, 2025)

There are various subfields of feminist thought within feminism, including eco, liberal, radical, Marxist and postcolonial feminism.

a. Eco-feminism

In the late 20th century, eco-feminism arose, which emphasizes the connection between women's oppression and nature's dominance, advocating for women's liberation and a sustainable environment. According to Braidotti et al. (1994), eco-

feminism is *“the feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation.”* It is composed of two key elements: ecology and femininity.

Eco-feminism is an aspect of feminism which examines the relationship between women and the natural environment, while advocating for equality, non-patriarchal systems, and an all-encompassing perspective. French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne came up with the name in 1974 (d'Eaubonne, 2022). According to Warren (1990), eco-feminism contends that because patriarchy oppresses women and aids in their oppression, its dominance and control are detrimental to people, other living things, and the environment. It emphasizes that for ecological balance and sustainable development to be maintained, humans and nature must coexist (Zhang, 2021). In order to benefit all living things, it upholds women's rights and empowerment in relation to political, economic, social, and cultural concerns (Haradhan, 2022: 19).

Elizabeth Diggs and Brooke Williams introduced the term ‘cultural feminism’ in 1972 and 1975 respectively, referring to the depoliticization of radical feminism (Diggs, 1972; Taylor & Rupp, 1993). Cultural feminism is an ideology of the women's movement, which redefines women's worth in society while highlighting their perspective and position in the world (Alcoff, 1988). The concept of cultural feminism holds that women have a unique essence or nature that sets them apart from men and, according to some views, confers a social benefit (Alcoff, 1988). Cultural feminists think that women's perspectives should be given more weight, and that their apparent gender ‘weaknesses’ are assets that make them far more mature. Cultural feminism highlights the biological distinctions between men and women based on reproductive potential, and highlights the feminine character, emphasizing partnerships, cooperation, and peace (Haradhan, 2022: 19). It seeks to affirm devalued feminine qualities in patriarchal settings, emphasizing gender conflict and culturally constructed disparities rather than inherent biological inequalities (Lewis, 2021).

b. Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism, inspired by the French Revolution, is a political theory promoting equality, autonomy, universal rights, equal citizenship, and democracy (Haradhan, 2022: 8). Liberalism *“is a feminist ideology that holds that denying women and girls access to civil rights and social resources like jobs and education leads to gender inequity”* (Giddens, 2001). The political and economic principles of liberalism uphold

the rule of law, civil and human rights, democracy, freedom of speech, liberty, and equality for all people (Haradhan, 2022: 8). Liberal feminism emerged in the 17th-18th centuries, promoting liberal ideas for women's education and advocating for equal rights in property and voting (Haradhan, 2022: 8). Regardless of gender, liberal feminism promotes equal rights in the workplace, in education, and in civil rights, emphasizing these areas for all citizens (Jaggar, 1983; Hackett & Haslanger, 2006).

The two well-known German scholars, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and Karl Marx (1818–1883), served as the inspiration and founders of Marxism, a left-wing political ideology commonly known as the economic theory of history (Haradhan, 2022: 11). With an emphasis on law, religion, race, and the sources of production, the upper class applies the political ideology of liberation from oppression. The bourgeoisie and proletariat are the two social classes that capitalism produces, and the bourgeoisie benefits from exploitation (Marx, 1867; Abbasi, 2015).

c. Postcolonial feminism

Postcolonial feminism addresses racism, politics, economics, and the impact of colonialism on non-white women, while concentrating on gender freedom for non-Western women, especially those in former colonies (Hamill, 2024). These women differ from women in the West because they have endured racism, slavery, forced migration, and many other atrocities. A theoretical and scholarly framework known as postcolonial feminism looks at the effects of colonialism and imperialism, with an emphasis on the viewpoints and experiences of women in postcolonial cultures. The detrimental effects of colonial dominance on Indigenous peoples, who frequently have felt neglected and silenced for generations, are highlighted in Ania Loomba's (2015) work on postcolonialism. Loomba writes "Postcolonialism has been argued to be a contestation of colonial dominance and legacies, integrating anti-colonial resistance such as Asian/Caribbean immigrants and African Americans" (Loomba, 2015).

d. Marxism feminism

Marxist feminism is a subset of feminist philosophy that contends capitalism is the primary driver of women's oppression (Brenner & Ramas, 1984). Marxist feminists view the family as a tool of capitalism, oppressing women. Women support capitalism by reproducing the workforce, absorbing men's anger, and acting as a reserve army of cheap labour. Marxist feminism can still be used to examine how the political

economy is gendered in late-stage capitalism and how the social reproduction of individuals and communities renews capitalism, even though some Marxist concepts may not be as pertinent now (Armstrong, 2020).

e. Radical feminism

Radical feminism, established in the 1960s by women involved in anti-war and civil rights movements, contends that patriarchy is the main source of discrimination and oppression against women (Vukoičić, 2017; Millet, 1969). Disregarding other types of discrimination, such as those based on race, colour, age, religion, ethnicity, culture, handicap, caste, and economic status, patriarchy and sexism are the main causes of discrimination against women (Nachescu, 2009). The radical development and evolution of liberal feminists over the 20th century is known as radical feminism (Graham, 1994). Radical feminism also draws attention to male coercion and violence, including rape, sexual harassment, child sexual assault, domestic violence, and abuse of women, children, and anyone who is disadvantaged (Haradhan, 2022: 15).

The feminist movement, which emphasizes the dominance of men and patriarchy, fights against female abuse and patriarchal tyranny. Because of patriarchy, it sees women as positive in society and also violently repressed. Although it does not support marriage or families, it does regard women as a political class. It highlights the necessity for males to have equal rights, as well as the special rights of women. Its ideas, though, might be impractical and incite bloodshed (Jensen, 2017; Atkinson, 2000; Rowland & Klein, 2013). Betty Friedan, one of the first radical feminists, recognized that women's sex is the reason they are oppressed by the way society is culturally constructed (Haradhan, 2022: 17).

This study will investigate Marxist feminism and radical feminism. According to radical feminism, these sexual distinctions have an impact on women's abilities (Rhodes, 2012). The goal of radical feminism is to elevate women's unique embodiments (Rubin et al., 2004), as the recognition of their embodiments have traditionally been viewed as inferior to men's. Radical feminism advocates for a mainstreaming strategy that acknowledges women's unique experiences in conflict, and uses their insights in peacebuilding, which are often overlooked in masculine-dominated fields (Vandason, 2017). Women are said to play supportive roles, as domestic helpers, sexual slaves, and caregivers, from a radical feminist perspective.

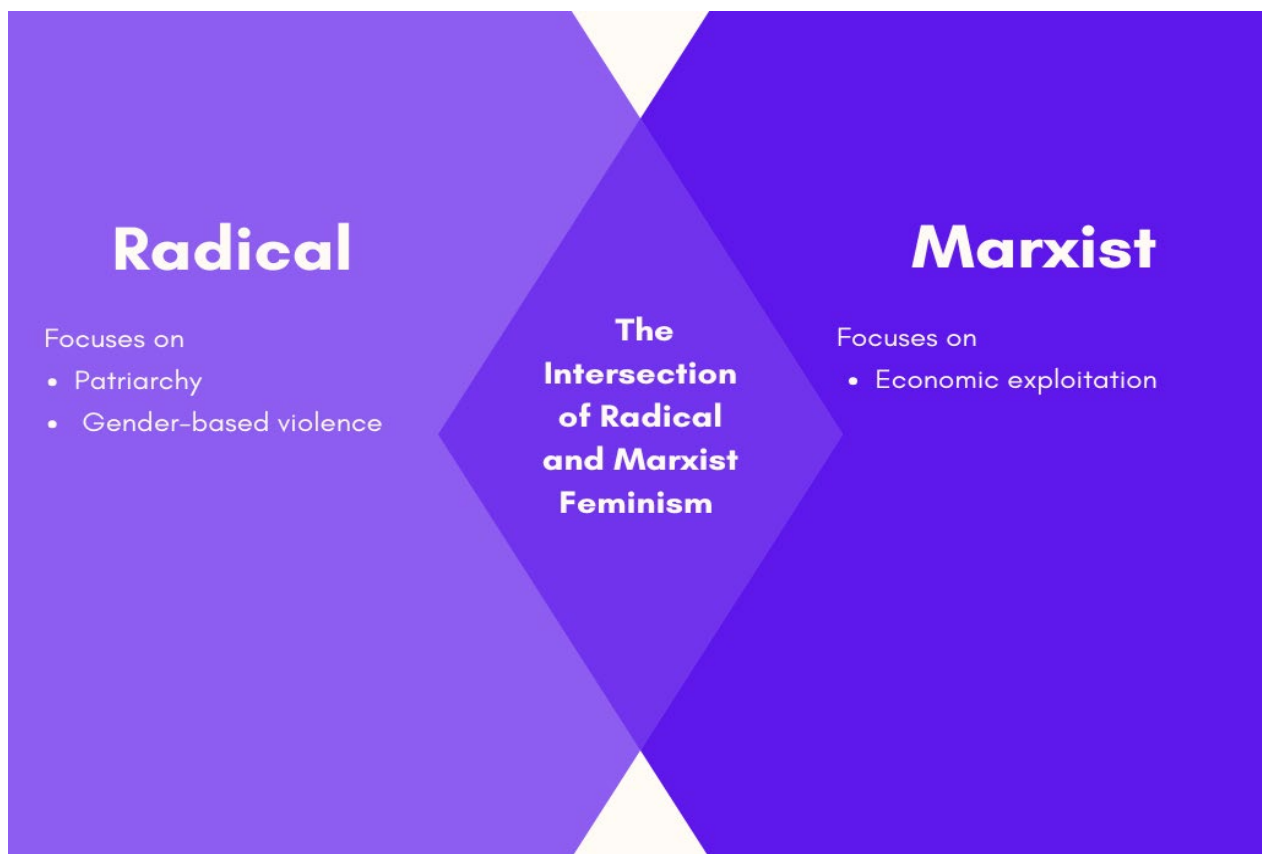


Figure 2: The Intersection of Radical and Marxist Feminism (IGG, 2021; Haradhan, 2022: 13).

Radical feminism argues that the primary source of women's oppression is patriarchy, or male supremacy, and demands that society as a whole should change in order to end it. This idea is essential to comprehending the institutionalized use of sexual violence in conflict situations. According to radical feminists (Firestone, 1970), gendered violence during times of conflict perpetuates patriarchy, which is a deeply embedded system that governs all facets of society, including war. As an example of patriarchal dominance, radical feminists argue that sexual violence and rape during times of conflict are purposefully employed to exert control over women's bodies and demoralize communities (Brown, 2000).

Radical feminists argue that larger social institutions that see women as inferior and compromise their safety and agency are to blame for the subjugation of women during times of war (Firestone, 1970). During the DRC conflict, sexual violence and rape are strategies used by rebel groups to control women's bodies, demoralize males, and scare communities, all of which increase women's vulnerability and patriarchal control. Women's bodies are utilized as battlefields in a larger system of gendered oppression,

which includes sexual violence in conflicts (Brown, 2000: 19). According to radical feminists (Firestone, 1970: 102), “patriarchy is a structural problem that governs all facets of society, including war.”

Marxist feminism argues that the economic reliance of the capitalist system on men and its profit-driven structures are the root causes of women's oppression. It draws attention to the twofold exploitation of women in the DRC. According to Engels (1884), Marxist feminists argue that capitalism exacerbates the exploitation of women, particularly in the labour market and in areas of conflict. Their ability to leave oppressive environments, such as the DRC, is limited by their economic reliance on men and patriarchal systems (Smith, 1998). According to Marxist feminism (Engels, 1884: 60), the liberation of women is inextricably linked to the destruction of capitalist structures that uphold their economic oppression. The DRC conflict brings to light the unseen and underpaid labour of women in mining settlements, a situation that Marxist feminism portrays as a component of a capitalist system that exploits their labour (Smith, 1998: 42). Marxist feminist theory emphasizes the worsened gender and class-based inequities that women widowed or displaced by war experience, together with their increased vulnerability and extreme economic suffering.

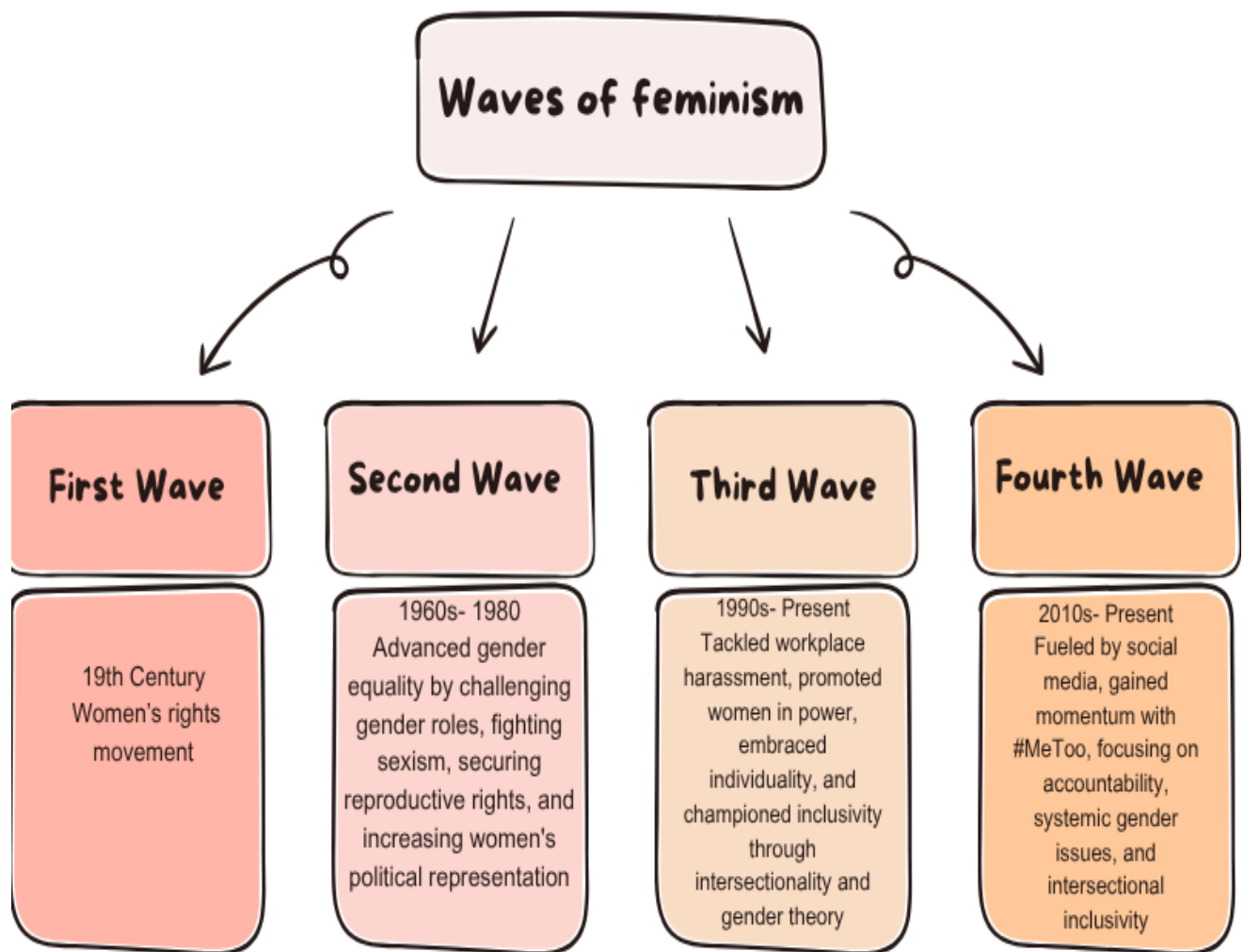


Figure 3: Four Waves of Feminism (Sarah Pruitt, 2023).

Around 1848, the first wave of feminism began with the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, led by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Tetrault, 2014). According to Malinowska (2010), activists participated in social campaigns that voiced their displeasure with women's restricted rights to employment, education, property, reproduction, marriage, and social agency. The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s to 1980s, inspired by the US civil rights and UK labour rights movements (Dicker, 2016). After winning the vote for women, the feminist movement shifted its focus to addressing societal inequality, leading to women questioning their roles in the workplace and family. The third wave of feminism, spanning from the late 1980s to the 1990s, aimed to eliminate the rigid ideology of the second-wave feminists. During this time, young feminists, often second-wave children, grew up surrounded by

technology and mass media, and saw themselves as more media-savvy than their mothers' generation. The existence of a fourth wave of feminism is widely acknowledged, despite some controversy. It may have begun between 2007 and 2012 and is still going strong (Sternadori, 2019). The fourth wave, according to Prudence Chamberlain (2017), is characterized by its emphasis on justice for women, especially those who have been victims of sexual abuse. With a greater emphasis on intersectionality and sub-narratives like transgender activism, the current wave incorporates elements of the earlier waves.

2.2.1. First Wave 19th – 20th Century

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a climate of liberal, socialist politics and urban industrialism gave rise to the first wave of feminism (Ganie, 2019). This wave aimed to provide women more opportunities, with a particular emphasis on suffrage (Rampton, 2008).

The Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York, organized by Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who were among the other 300 attendees, was associated with the first wave of feminism (Presnell, 2013). Stanton supported the advancement of women in leadership, education, and property ownership. Women's voting rights were the primary objective for the following 70 years (Weatherford, 2020). Women's collective participation in earlier reform movements and the writings of Wollstonecraft and Mill served as inspiration for early feminists.

The first wave of feminism concentrated on securing fundamental legal rights for women, including the ability to vote, own property, pursue higher education, and file for divorce (Rampton, 2015). The suffrage of women and the advancement of women's access to jobs and education were major goals.

The women's suffrage movement, focused around public gatherings, speeches, and writings, fought for women's right to vote. Despite biased press coverage, the movement was prominent in the UK and Northern Ireland, often involving violence. First wave feminism, primarily aimed at white women, faced criticism for being exclusively white (Breines, 2002). Women of colour, who were not part of the white upper-class, faced sexism, racism, and classism. Despite their struggles, they were often excluded from feminist organizations and had to join segregated suffrage associations. In 1918, the UK passed the Representation of the People Bill, granting

women and men over 21 the right to vote (McCrillis, 1998). In the US, women were allowed to vote in 1920 (Harvey, 1998). The feminist movement weakened after 1920, but activists continued advocating for their rights.

2.2.2. Second Wave 1960s- 1980s

The second wave of feminism resulted in the opening of official safe homes, the re-examination of family, work, childbearing rights, sexuality, and intellectual and economic independence for women (Laughlin & Castledine, 2011; Mitchell, 2015).

The 1960s saw the start of the second wave, which lasted into the 1990s. The civil rights and anti-war movements, as well as the increasing self-awareness of several minority groups worldwide, were the backdrop against which this wave developed. The second wave's voice was becoming more extreme, and the New Left was growing. Sexuality and reproductive rights were major concerns during this time, and the movement's focus was on ratifying the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution, which would have guaranteed social equality for all people, regardless of gender (Rampton, 2008).

The second wave of feminism emphasized women's autonomy, legalizing abortions, promoting safer contraception, and fighting against racist birth-control programmes. It addressed sexual discrimination and harassment, focusing on workplace settings, questioning gender roles and women's sexuality using the phrase 'the personal is political' to highlight sexism's impact on women's private lives (Munro, 2013). At the time, 'consciousness raising' was a common way to get involved in activism. There, women gathered to talk about their experiences with patriarchy, sexism, abortion, and discrimination. The term 'sisterhood' was used to signify solidarity and political consciousness as a result (Hooks, 2014).

In the second wave of feminism, the Women's Liberation Movement march in Washington, D.C., on August 26, 1970, was a landmark milestone. (Jennings, 2014). This protest, called the Women's Strike for Equality, marked the 50th anniversary of the United States' 19th Amendment, which gave women the right to vote (DuBois, 1998). In the 1970s, the National Organization for Women (NOW) planned a march to draw attention to concerns such as equal pay, reproductive rights, childcare access, and employment discrimination (Cohen, 2015). Attracting thousands of people, the

event represented the strength of the feminist movement and the necessity of structural reforms for gender equality.

2.2.3. Third Wave 1990s – Early 2000s

It is hard to say for sure when the third wave of the feminist movement started, much as the first and second waves. Nonetheless, the mainstream second wave feminism is typically viewed as the cause of this revival of women's rights activity. Beginning in the 1990s, the third wave of the feminist movement aimed to build on the work of its forebears while tackling contemporary issues and establishing a mainstream movement that included women of all racial, socioeconomic, and gender identities (Zack, 2005).

Postcolonial and postmodern thought influenced the third wave of feminism, which emerged in the middle of the 1990s. Many concepts, such as 'universal womanhood' body, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity, were undermined during this phase (Chegwe, 2014). The re-adoption by young feminists of the very lipstick, high heels, and cleavage openly displayed by low-cut necklines, which the first two stages of the movement associated with male tyranny, was one facet of third wave feminism that baffled the mothers of the previous feminist movement (Rampton, 2008).

2.2.4. Fourth Wave 2010s – Present

Feminism's fourth wave remains an intriguing silhouette.

In more than 85 countries, the #MeToo campaign gained popularity on social media as people published their stories of sexual abuse and harassment to show how common sexual violence is and to foster victim solidarity (McDonald, 2019). This made it clear that sexual violence is a systemic problem rather than a personal one (Sternadori, 2019). Kira Cochrane (2013) highlights the shift in the feminist struggle, with online mobilization and hashtag campaigns referring to the fourth wave, which includes campaigns like #Feministing, #YesAllWomen, #HeForShe, and #TimesUp. Social media has been instrumental in combating women's harassment, discrimination, and gender shaming, fostering a globally inclusive and participatory feminism that welcomes women's voices from diverse backgrounds (Malinowska, 2020:5).

Understanding how various social identities such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation interact to shape experiences of privilege and oppression requires an understanding of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989: 140). The following section comprehends the connection between gender equality and civil war, and examines the intersectionality theory, which was first proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw. It focuses on the ways in which gender, race, class, and political standing affect the dynamics of conflict.

2.3. Intersectionality Theory

A framework known as intersectionality offers the perspective and vocabulary necessary to investigate the relationships and interdependencies across social categories and systems. By recognizing that gender is connected to other parts of a person's identity and unfair treatment, intersectionality makes feminist theory stronger. According to Dhamoon (2011), in the social sciences, an intersection is the meeting point of social categories and systems, including social identities (e.g. woman, Pakistani), sociodemographic (e.g. gender, ethno-cultural), social processes (e.g. racializing and gendering), and socio-systems (in the case of patriarchy and racism). Intersectionality, as defined by the United Nations (2000), refers to the structural and dynamic consequences of discrimination, including racism, patriarchy, and economic disadvantages, which contribute to inequality, and structure relative positions.

Intersectionality highlights how power affects both individual lives and societal structures by examining the multidimensional positionality of people and groups at both the micro and macro levels (McIntosh, 2012: 198). According to Brewer et al. (2002), intersectional thinking offers an all-encompassing paradigm for organizational studies that integrate theoretical, applied, and lived experiences. Lowering the possibility of essentialism, the tendency for people to take disparities in characteristics as absolute distinctions between groups, encourages a more diversified and inclusive approach (Atewologun, 2012).

According to a variety of sources cited by Fletcher and Nkomo (2016), intersectionality can be described as an ideograph (Alexander-Floyd, 2012), a concept (Knapp, 2005), a research paradigm (Dhamoon, 2011), an analytical sensibility (i.e. a way of thinking about identity and power, Crenshaw, 2015), a metaphor (Acker, 2011), or a knowledge project (Collins, 2015). On the one hand, these many conceptualizations bear witness

to the term's adaptability, scope, and complexity; on the other hand, they also demonstrate the term's relative novelty as a conceptual framework.

The intersectional social structures of gender, colour, social class, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and age, among others, are seen by intersectional feminism as interconnected and influencing one another (McLeod et al., 2024). The notion that gender inequality and oppression are universal experiences for women is rejected by intersectional feminists. Intersectional feminism views gender inequality as a complex interplay of various structures, challenging the false universality of women's oppression based on Western, middle-class white experiences. According to Collins and Bilge (2020), intersectionality is the study of "how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies as well as individual experiences in everyday life." Intersectionality in feminist theory examines how women's diverse experiences contribute to gender inequality, highlighting how oppression can arise for being both a woman and working-class (McLeod et al., 2024).

Feminist theory has made a significant contribution to the overall effort to comprehend politics and society through the concept of intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013). The term 'intersectionality' refers to the way oppressive systems interact with one another. Intersectionality is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as "the interrelated nature of social categories such as race, class, and gender, considered as generating overlapping and interdependent systems of disadvantage or discrimination." The concept of intersectionality acknowledges that each person experiences oppression and discrimination differently, and that anything and everything that can marginalize people should be taken into account. Intersectionality was first defined by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Carbado et al., 2013), and its significance in the field of women's rights became more widely acknowledged when it was included in the Oxford Dictionary in 2015.

In 1991, Kimberlé Crenshaw was the first person to use the term 'intersectionality' to refer to the unique circumstances faced by Black women, who experienced marginalization not just due to their gender but also because of their race (Brixander, 2023: 1). In her paper titled "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex," Crenshaw addressed the oppression of black women, who encounter societal inequity in two ways: first, for being black, and second, for being women (Crenshaw, 1989).

Race and gender are two “identity markers” that interact to create “categories of differences” (Davis, 2008) that give rise to unique circumstances for each person (Davis, 2014).

The concept of intersectionality calls for the creation of studies of violence that take into account the effects of race, class, culture, and other hierarchies that function concurrently, as opposed to concentrating only on gender. Crenshaw criticizes identity politics for homogenizing women's experiences and identities, ignoring the interconnectedness of social categories (Davis, 2014). She emphasizes structural intersectionality and the disregard of immigrant women experiencing domestic abuse. She also notes that black women are often excluded from feminist efforts due to a lack of recognition of these intersections (Brixander, 2023: 7).

Crenshaw's approach highlights the impact of categorical identity on social interactions, particularly in the prosecution of rape. Racist and sexist presumptions define the validity of victim and offender, highlighting the need for an intersectional perspective. This highlights the need for addressing these presumptions in progressive studies of rape (Brixander, 2023: 7). Intersectionality, a universalist approach, has been applied to various subjects and disciplines, including sexual orientation, class background, able-bodiedness, and national belonging (Davis, 2014: 22). Black feminists argue that their experiences cannot be summed up in the same way as white women and black males, as they face unique issues. The reason intersectionality is important for this study is that the impact of civil war on women in the DRC can't be fully understood just by looking at gender alone.

In order to examine how gender interacts with other social and structural elements to influence women's experiences of civil conflict in the DRC, this study employs intersectionality. It advances the research by offering a more complex picture of gender inequality and illustrating how several types of disadvantage combine to create women's vulnerability. This viewpoint is especially crucial when analyzing gender equality since real empowerment necessitates consideration of the larger social, political, and economic factors that influence women's possibilities and limitations in addition to gender-based discrimination.

2.3.1. Class-Based and Gender-Based Inequality Systems

Women are working for pay in greater numbers. By 2015, over 72% of women aged 25 to 54 were participating in the labour force, up from 54% in 1980 across the OECD countries (Thévenon, 2013). While women's income trajectories and labour market participation rates show rising intra-cohort variance, studies reveal that men and women follow different career paths as parenting approaches, and after childbirth (Christofides et al, 2013).

When examining how gender and class interact, we refer to Wood and Eagly's (Fiske, 2010: 630) concept of gender as meanings and related expectations "that males and females are attributes that people and society assign". Gender is based on the long-standing and historical division of labour between men and women, as opposed to biological classifications (Wood & Eagly, 2009). Thus, gender is always being created and reconstructed by institutional, cultural, psychological, and interactional factors (Ridgeway, 2009). Like gender, social class shapes the expectations and meanings attached to people's objective traits (Kraus, 2012). Côté (2011: 5) defines social class as "a dimension of the self that is rooted in objective material resources (income, education, and occupational prestige) and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-a-vis others." This is how we define social class.

A person's identity, relationships, and behaviour are all reflected in their social class, which is shaped by the perceived and real economic ties in a community (Côté, 2011). Household wealth, overall income, education, occupation, and subjective evaluations are all indicators of class (Kraus, 2012:546). As a reaction to conventional feminist and anti-racist ideologies that frequently ignored the experiences of oppressed communities, particularly women of colour, intersectionality was born (Crenshaw 1989: 140). The interconnection of gender discrimination is highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, which emphasizes that it is not a stand-alone problem but is instead made worse by elements such as political status, race, and class (Crenshaw, 1991: 1245). Women's distinct experiences of oppression are recognized by intersectionality in gender equality, especially in civil war situations, where marginalized women frequently endure disproportionate violence and exclusion (Collins, 2000: 229; Davis, 2008: 68).

2.3.2. The DRC's Historical Background of Intersectional Inequalities

An intersectional understanding of Rwanda's history of Hutu/Tutsi political violence makes it a valuable case study for this study. The sustainability of peace in the post-genocide era is also threatened by gendered fears, such as the consistently high incidence of GBV, despite Rwanda's strong gender equality and gender security policy, and legal frameworks. Given the low level of politicization of ethnic or other identities in society, historical interpretations of conflict portray the pre-colonial age as the heyday of identity relations (AJCR, 2007). Identity group mixing frequently happened as a result of trade, income, and talent sharing (Bayart 2005: 92-96). However, the lack of conflict-instigating circumstances or various identities was not a characteristic of pre-colonial African cultures. Instead, it was the lack of one identity – ethnicity, clan, gender, or age difference – being elevated and politicized.

Colonial politics are the origin of political 'tribalism' as opposed to 'moral ethnicity' which might serve as the cornerstone of a civic order. The divide between the civic public and the primordial public; the former seen as an amoral realm of rights, while the latter is moral and subject to customs; is one aspect of Africa's issues, according to Peter Ekeh (1975). Africa faces challenges in addressing colonial-inherited bifurcated spheres, resulting in two patterns of rights and obligations, as ethnicisation of politics elevates ethnicity over population characteristics. Race and tribe became fixed denominators in the colonial legal project as a result of this process (Mamdani, 2003). Ethnicity was a key component of the colonial divide-and-rule strategy employed for wealth extraction, tax enforcement, and political control (Broch-Due 2005; Rubin 2006). The colonial state exacerbated ethnic conflicts by favouring certain identity groups through appointments, leading to ethnic rivalry and conflict, resulting in the 1994 genocide (Prunier, 1997). Due to the conflict, the DRC has been referred to as 'the worst place in the world' to be a woman or a child because of the extremely high rates of gender-based violence (GBV) (HRW, 2009). Rape in the Eastern DRC has been called a 'weapon of war' and an 'epidemic' (UNFPA, 2009; HRW, 2009).

Girls and women are particularly susceptible to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and men make up most of the perpetrators. Women have a higher risk of being raped, usually repeatedly and by several offenders, and they also typically become victims of sex labour. By concentrating on issues of race, gender, colonial history, class conflict, and cultural identity, intersectionality in post-colonial feminism

combats Eurocentric prejudice. According to Mohanty (2003: 518) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989: 140), South Asian and African feminists contend that colonial legacies, such as labour exploitation and land dispossession, are linked to gender discrimination in post-colonial states.

2.4. Post-colonial theory

The phrase 'postcolonial' (hyphenated as post-colonial) was frequently used interchangeably with the term 'post-independence' from the late nineteenth century until the 1970s (Overbey, 2012). The term 'post-colonial' describes the state of a former colony that persists or does so following the end of colonial rule (Ashcroft et al., 2007: 168). Postcolonial theory harks back to the late 1970s, as the 'post' is seen as an ideological fallout from the initial interactions between colonizers and colonized. This binary barrier ignores mixed or hybrid peoples, erases colonizer-colonized interactions, and makes a separation between indigenous, settlers, and invaders. "Postcolonial" without a hyphen refers to the socioeconomic conditions and subjectivities that existed in diasporic and transnational groups, as well as during colonial rule and after independence (Overbey, 2012: 2). The nation's history of resource exploitation, political unrest, and foreign interference provide crucial background for comprehending the ongoing war and its effects on civilian populations. Critical analysis of conflict theories that largely depict African countries via narratives of violence, instability, and victimization without adequately taking historical and global power dynamics into account is also encouraged by a post-colonial viewpoint.

Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 1994: 171) states that in order to constitute a critical practice, postcolonialism must bear testimony to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation that are implicated in the struggle for social and political power in the contemporary international order.

Postcolonial theory is a literary approach focusing on literature from colonizing countries, focusing on otherness and resistance, and addressing the subjects of these countries. One way to conceptualize 'post-colonial' is as "naïve, inadequate, or utopian" (Moore, 2001: 182). On the other hand, Slemon (1995: 101) contends that the idea of imperialism is "a concept that is itself predicated within large theories of global politics and which changes radically according to the specifics of those larger theories" is where colonialism originates. Many critics prefer the term "postcolonial"

without a hyphen, as it suggests less historical or ideological supersession, despite the past colonialism, in exchange of a flag of independence (Moore, 2001: 182). Like feminism, postcolonialism focuses on the imperial's social and physical occupancy of locals while re-evaluating moments and scope to analyze displaced subjectivities and history.

The term 'postcolonial' is defined by the prefix 'post-' which conveys two distinct meanings in a single word, a concern addressed by various theorists (Ashcroft et al., 1989: 1-4; Slemon, 1995: 45-52; 2001: 100-114; Young, 1996: 67-68; 2001: 1-10; Moore, 2001: 182-188). Postcolonial theory focuses on the 'post' in colonialism, which is not just a historical event but also considers cultures affected by imperialism, from colonization to the present day (Young, 2001:15). This continuity of preoccupations throughout the history of the colonizers' aggression highlights the ongoing political, cultural, and economic aggression (Ashcroft et al., 1989: 2). The focus of post-colonial theory is on comprehending how colonial experiences vary depending on the environment, acknowledging how they are expressed differently in different places, the resistance of colonized peoples, and the continued impact of colonial legacies on current social, political, and cultural dynamics.

Western patriarchal standards were imposed by colonial authorities in the DRC, lowering women's status and substituting hierarchical duties for matriarchal institutions. Women's involvement in peacebuilding initiatives is just one example of how this legacy still affects contemporary social structures and government (Mama, 1997).

In the 1970s, postcolonial theory was added to the critical toolkit, and many scholars believe that Edward Said's book 'Orientalism' served as its foundation. The way the West portrayed the 'Orient,' as foreign, archaic, and inferior, to defend colonial dominance, is criticized in Edward Said's 1978 book (Mart & Esen, 2010). As a result, the 'civilized West' and the 'uncivilized East' became opposing groups.

The foundation of postcolonial theory is the colonial experiences of those involved in liberation movements worldwide, but especially in the tri-continental nations of Africa, South and Southeast Asia, and Latin America (Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007: 19). Postcolonial theory challenges exploitative consequences of the past, allowing people emerging from socio-political and economic domination to reclaim their negotiating

space for equity in a dislocated culture. Postcolonial theory focuses on the psychology of both colonizer and colonized individuals in decolonisation, promoting self-consciousness and a cultural revolution against subjugation, aiming to build a society based on liberty and equity (Rukundwa & Van Aarde, 2007: 20).

Russell Jacoby's argument is used by Slemon (1995:100) to show how postcolonial theory presents challenges for academics due to its "lack of consensus and clarity". Young (2001: 67) asks the straightforward question, "Why does the language of postcolonial criticism often seem so impenetrable?" However, for some, Slemon (1995: 100) believes that "what is genuinely enabling about the field" is postcolonial theory's ambiguity, fluidity, and ambivalence. The term 'postcolonial theory' is challenging to define due to its constant change and adaptability to new forms of social collectivity in a rapidly changing world.

The example of the Banyamulenge community in South Kivu, and other Rwandan Congolese in North Kivu, were excluded from the Congo due to their Tutsi origin, exemplifying the same torture of colonialism in the postcolonial state. Critics of postcolonial theory such as McClintock (1995: 10-11) and Hulme (2001: 295-308) argue that it is based on ignored sociological concepts, and fails to distinguish between beneficiaries and casualties of colonialism. Postcolonial theory becomes a new form of influence through local agents, creating a vicious circle that hinders its true sense. This instability highlights the need for theorists to be mindful of conceptual and contextual gaps in research.

Comprehending the post-colonial, the long-term effects of colonialism and imperialism on formerly colonized countries are examined by post-colonial theory, which places a strong emphasis on resistance, identity, and power relations (Said, 1978: 94). Based on academics, colonialism modified gender relations and imposed racial hierarchies, strengthening Western patriarchal standards in conquered areas (Spivak, 1996). According to Chandra Mohanty (1988: 61), traditional feminist rhetoric is criticized for generalizing the experiences of women. Therefore, post-colonial theory aids in this study's analysis of the structural circumstances that give rise to gender inequality and women's vulnerability. In addition to highlighting whose viewpoints are included and whose experiences are frequently overlooked in discussions about conflict, it offers a framework for comprehending how historical power dynamics, economic disparities,

resource exploitation, and political institutions contribute to women's vulnerability in conflict situations.

2.4.1. Neo-Colonialism

Neo-colonialism, a new form of imperialism that has not brought economic independence or reparation for its past, continues to be active in the modern era (Slemon, 1995: 102). Neo-colonialism is a type of imperialism in which industrialized nations meddle in the political and economic affairs of countries that have gained independence. According to McCulloch (1983: 121), neo-colonialism is a form of imperialism, which emerged from classical colonialism, and is seen as the final stage where a postcolonial country struggles to manage economic domination post-independence.

The persistence of former colonial powers' economic, political, and cultural hegemony over formerly colonized countries, in spite of their declared political independence, is known as neo-colonialism (Nkrumah, 1965: ix). Neo-colonialism is "the worst form of imperialism," according to Nkrumah (1965: xi). It means authority without accountability to those who engage in it, and exploitation without compensation to those who are harmed by it. Neo-colonialism, according to Young (2001: 44-52), is "the last stage of imperialism," in which a postcolonial nation finds itself unable to cope with economic dominance that persists after gaining independence. Altbach (1995: 452) views neo-colonialism as a "continuation of the old practices" and a "partly planned policy." Global financial institutions, multinational businesses, economic dependency, and political clout, are all hallmarks of neo-colonialism, a type of global power dynamics that sustains economic exploitation and structural inequality (Fanon, 1961: 98).

2.4.2. Intersections of Postcolonial and Feminist Theories

The word 'postcolonial' implies opposition to 'colonial' power and its ideologies, which nonetheless influence many cultures, particularly those whose revolutions have severed their official connections to their colonial overlords. Therefore, the main goal of postcolonial theory is to undermine the colonizer's discourse, which aims to skew reality and experience, and impose inferiority onto the colonized people to maintain complete control. A critical framework and methodology for analysing cultural, political, and economic colonial factors is postcolonialism (George, 2006: 212; Schutte, 2007).

The hegemony of the colonial regime and the coercive way it has created the previously colonized people as diminished, simplified, and enmeshed in ideas of nativism, custom, and creed are challenged by postcolonial scholars using poststructuralist tools (deconstructive and discursive analysis) (Mama, 2001: 67).

Postcolonial theorists focus on producing literature by colonized peoples, articulating their identity and reclaiming their past, while resisting the colonizer's authority. Gender disparities in colonial and anti-colonial discourses, especially in women's literature, are examined by postcolonial feminist theory, which focuses on how women are portrayed in nations that are colonized and Western culture (Riyal, 2019). Postcolonial feminists deal with 'double colonization' which is the simultaneous experience of patriarchy and colonialism. As women and colonized subjects, they oppose colonial power, seeing their colonized brother as their oppressor rather than their collaborator (Tyagi, 2014: 1).

Postcolonial feminist theory challenges mainstream postcolonial theory, arguing it is male-centered and exploits women's concerns, causing tension between feminism and postcolonialism. Postcolonial feminist theorists have criticized postcolonial theorists for obliterating women's role in independence struggles, and misrepresenting them in nationalist discourses. Edward Said's *Orientalism* study focused on female agency, while Homi K. Bhabha's *Ambivalence* explores gender relationships (Tyagi, 2014: 2). Critics question the inclusion of women in postcolonial theory.

The Combahee River Collective (2014), a black feminist group in Boston, argues that race and sex are interconnected, as exemplified by Harriet Tubman's 1863 guerrilla action in South Carolina. They argue that rape by white men leads to racial, sexual, and political oppression, contradicting the White Western feminist separatist strategy. The Combahee River Collective (1977: 2) states that in the lives of Black women, we believe that patriarchal sexual politics are as common as racial and social politics. Separating race from class and sexual oppression is challenging, as they are often expressed simultaneously (Tyagi, 2014). Racial-sexual oppression, such as rape of black women by white men, is not solely racial or sexual. Solidarity around race is necessary for black people's situation (Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2022).

2.4.3. Post-colonialism and Gender in Feminism Perspective

Post-colonial and feminist ideologies both aim to subvert prevailing power systems and elevate the voices of people who are underrepresented. A subset of feminism, known as postcolonial feminism, studies how colonialism affects gender roles and identities. Postcolonial feminism discusses the distinct experiences of women in postcolonial cultures by examining how colonial history and cultural imperialism have influenced gender norms (Gender Studies, 2024).

With an emphasis on gender inequality and the effects of colonial legacies on women, postcolonial feminism is a feminist theory that investigates the relationship between gender and colonial history.

The undefined figure of 'woman' has been the target of feminist and deconstructive criticism, which employed the feminine idea. This is contested by subaltern history, which addresses the difficulties of creating such a figure and questions the methodology. An imprecise metaphor for the broad violence of episteme is the limited epistemic violence of imperialism (Mohanty, 1988: 5). Postcolonial feminism in Africa tackles the intricate relationship between colonial history, gender, and race. African feminists have highlighted the importance of indigenous knowledge in forming feminist ideology while criticizing the effects of colonial control on women's marginalization and traditional gender roles (Gender Study, 2024). African postcolonial feminists advocate for better representation of African women in Western media, focusing on issues such as education, reproductive rights, and political participation.

Western feminist theories are contested by postcolonial feminism, which advocates for a more inclusive, situation-specific strategy. It addresses racism, colonial history, global power systems, and women's experiences in postcolonial states while decolonizing feminist theory and practice.

2.5 Integration of the Theoretical Framework

All three theories complement one another by providing distinct yet related explanations for how gender equality in the DRC is impacted by civil war. The study primarily examines how power is unequal between the sexes, how women are more vulnerable, how they participate, and how they acquire power and control using feminist theory. Intersectionality goes further by understanding that women's experiences during conflict are affected not just by their gender, but also by other

social and structural factors that come together with it. In order to demonstrate how the consequences of colonial rule, ties with other powerful nations, the use of resources, and the types of governments established during colonial times continue to influence the current state of affairs in the DRC, post-colonial theory examines history and the wider picture.

Looking at things from an intersectional perspective without thinking about past and ongoing power dynamics might not fully explain the bigger factors that lead to inequality. Post-colonial theory brings a key historical perspective to the analysis. The theoretical framework is then used to help explain and understand the literature and real-world evidence that is discussed in the study. Feminist theory helps look at how power works between genders and how women get involved and become stronger. Intersectionality helps to understand how different kinds of disadvantage, like race or class, work together to affect women's lives. Post-colonial theory looks at the past, government, and money systems that lead to conflicts and unfair treatment of women. Using these different viewpoints together allows the study to go beyond just describing women's experiences and instead look closely at the bigger structures that affect gender inequality in times of conflict.

This study uses a combined approach to show that the impact of civil wars on gender equality is not just about the direct harm done to women. Gender inequality is created through the way gender-based power works together with other social differences and larger historical and structural factors. The theory behind this study helps explain how women in the DRC experience things and lets us understand how conflict affects gender equality and the power of women.

2.6. Conclusion

Feminism theory aims to address women's oppression in society by opposing sexism and patriarchy, promoting social equality for men and women. It focuses on making society more inclusive and equitable by analysing social behaviour towards others. Feminism encompasses various social movements, ideas, and definitions of political, economic, personal, and social rights for women, including equal opportunities in the workplace and education. Postcolonial feminism, originating in former colonial slave nations, focuses on gender freedom for non-Western women, addressing racism, politics, and economics, highlighting their unique experiences compared to Western

women. Women's gender causes them to be marginalized, oppressed, mistreated, and denied their legal rights. In the 17th century, the ancient practice of feminism took on an organized form in England, giving rise to a variety of political philosophies, including eco-feminist, and post-colonial views. Eco-feminism is a feminist perspective that combines the principles of ecology and feminism, aiming to challenge patriarchy and promote gender equality. Equal rights and advantages for men and women have been emphasized by liberal feminists. Radical feminists believe that the oppression of women stems from patriarchy. It accuses men of taking advantage of women, who have profited from their oppression. The concept of cultural feminism states that men and women have different views, and seeks to establish a place exclusively for women based on the distinctions in their biological reproductive capacities.

Chapter 3

The effects of civil conflicts on women's vulnerability in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

3. Introduction

The previous chapter, the theoretical framework chapter, examined the theories that assist in explaining the impact of the DRC's civil war on gender equality. Amongst the theories that were discussed are feminism, intersectional, and post-colonial theories. Intersectional feminism aims to understand and address disparities within overlapping forms of oppression, while post-colonial theory provides insight into DRC's past and present issues.

Chapter 3 investigates the challenges that women face in civil wars. In the DRC, armed conflicts and systemic injustices have made the ongoing violence against women and girls worse. Massive numbers of rape and its devastating effects have been amply demonstrated during numerous conflicts around the world (Danjibo & Akinkuotu, 2019). Armed conflict is a constant driver of sexual assault. The number of violent crimes against women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has increased. These crimes include forced family rape, gang rape, genital mutilation, and kidnapping for sexual slavery (Peterman et al, 2011:1060).

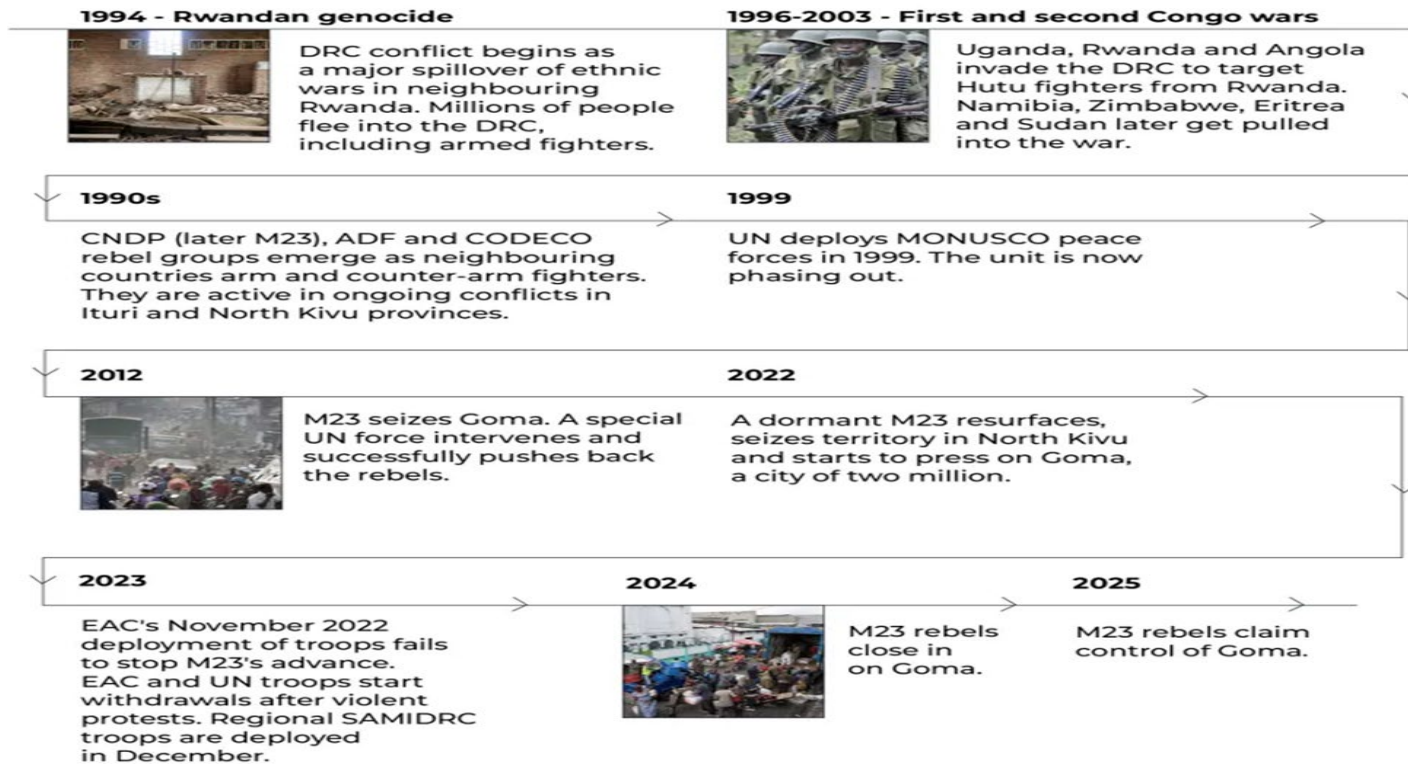
The ongoing conflict in the DRC has substantial and varied effects on women's participation in the labour force, and had a disastrous effect on girls' and women's education. Cultural, social, and economic issues all have a complex impact on women's labour force involvement. Economic progress and societal development depend heavily on education, but women and girls encounter obstacles to receiving high-quality education, where problems, including sexual abuse, forced migration, and poor health conditions, are still prevalent (Kelly et al., 2024).

3.1. The Rwandan Genocide and its links to the Conflict in the DRC

Pre-genocide Rwanda was characterized by a period of political and socioeconomic discrimination against women (Mukabera, 2019).

DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Timeline of the conflict



Source: Al Jazeera | January 29, 2025



Figure 4: DRC Timeline of the conflict (Al Jazeera, 2025)

The 1994 Rwandan Genocide was a premeditated campaign of mass killings that took place in Rwanda between April and July of that year (UNHCR, 2000: 245). The DRC crisis emerged from postcolonial power struggles following independence from Belgium in 1960, culminating in Lumumba's assassination and Mobutu Sese Seko's three-decade military rule (Al Jazeera, 2025). In the 1960s, over 300,000 Tutsi minority group refugees fled Rwanda, regrouped, and sought power after the country gained independence from Belgium in 1962 (Al Jazeera, 2025). In the early 1990s, the DRC experienced civil war and the genocide in Rwanda, triggered by the Rwandan Patriotic Front's invasion. Hutu militias attacked Tutsis and moderate Hutus, resulting in the Rwandan genocide.

Extremist members of Rwanda's overwhelmingly large Hutu population wanted to murder the country's minority Tutsi people, as well as anyone who resisted their plans for genocidal action. An estimated 200,000 Hutus took part in the genocide, after being encouraged to do so by misinformation from different media sources (UNHCR, 2000: 255). Over 800,000 civilians, mainly Tutsis and moderate Hutus, were killed during the campaign, with up to 2,000,000 fleeing the country, most of them into eastern Zaire (now the DRC) (UMKC Honors Program, 2009: 33; Lemarchand, 2025).

Giving the background, the Hutus and Tutsis are Rwanda's two largest ethnic groupings, making up more than four-fifths and one-seventh of the country's population, respectively. Less than one percent is made up of the Twa. The Twa, Hutu, and Tutsi, were the first people to settle in the region; in the 16th century, the Tutsi established a nuclear kingdom. The Hutu and Tutsi had significant social differences, with the Tutsi gaining social, economic, and political power through patron-client ties (*buhake*, or "cattle contract") (Lemarchand, 2024; 2025). However, identification was fluid due to intermarriage and the use of a common language, making the difference not always apparent. During the colonial era, Germany and Belgium used physical characteristics to differentiate ethnicity, creating a system where Hutu and Tutsi categories were no longer fluid. This indirect rule strengthened Tutsi hegemony and monarchic absolutism, which continued under Belgium after World War I.

The Tutsi monarchy was overthrown in 1961 as a result of the Hutu revolution, which was sparked by a rumour that a leader had died (Wallis, 2019). The Tutsi monarchy was formally overthrown by the revolution, with Belgian approval, making Rwanda a

republic with a transitional national government composed entirely of Hutus. The following year they declared the country's independence.

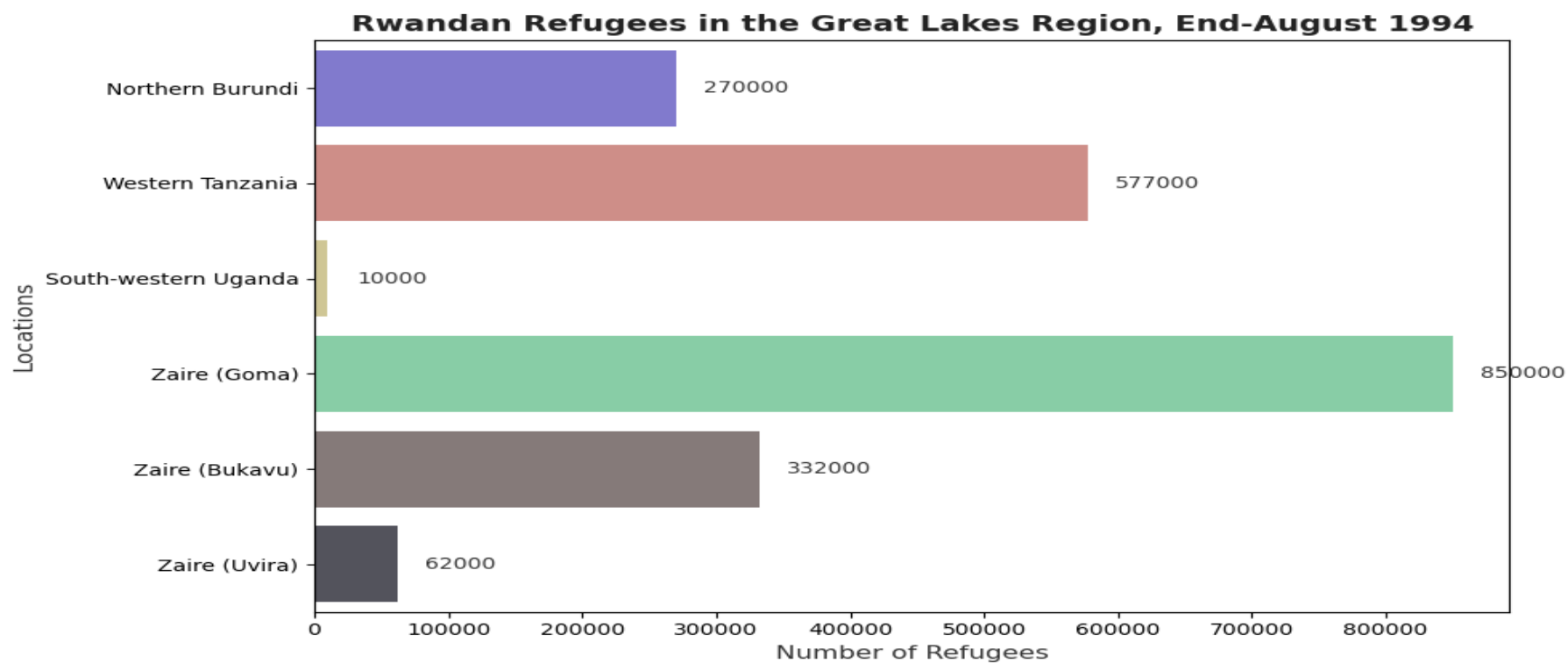


Figure 5: Rwandan Refugees in the Great Lakes Region, End-August 1994 (Source: UNHCR, 2000: 251).

The table shows the 2,101,000 refugees in different parts of Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zaire, represented as a horizontal bar plot.

The influx of Rwandan refugees, comprising armed forces, militia, and convicts, resulted in heightened violence, theft, lawlessness, extortion, banditry, militia conflicts, and cross-border incursions into Rwanda and Burundi (UN Security Council 1994a, 1995b), leading to the disintegration of the Zairian State. The new situation strained relations between Rwandan authorities and Zairian government due to President Mobutu's paternalistic support of the ousted Rwandan regime (1973-1994) (Braeckman, 1994; Buckley-Zistel, 2009).

As a potential proxy force for the faltering Kinshasa government, refugees provided President Mobutu with an opportunity to recover worldwide recognition while diverting attention away from poor management (UNHCR, 2000: 252).

3.2. The First War 1996-97 and Second War 1998-2003 in DRC

What led to the first war was the tensions which escalated between Congolese tribes, Rwandan emigrants, and those fleeing the 1994 war, with conflicts involving Tutsis and Hutus, and emigrants being considered refugees (Al Jazeera, 2025). Hutu militants began attempting to re-establish a Hutu government in Kigali after fleeing Kagame's administration to refugee camps in the eastern DRC. The Congolese government launched attacks on Rwanda and killed Tutsis, prompting Rwanda to arm Tutsi militias in the DRC. Many Congolese resented Mobutu's corrupt rule, leading to rebel groups such as the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (AFDL), led by Laurent-Desire Kabila (Al Jazeera, 2025). In 1996, Rwanda accused Mobutu of harbouring Hutu genocide perpetrators and armed rebels, sending in Rwandan troops.

On October 24, 1996, the Tutsi-dominated AFDL and Rwandan army launched offensives in eastern DRC, sparking the First Congo War, with Uganda, Eritrea, Angola, and Burundi joining in. The AFDL seized power in 1997, ending the fighting and allowing Kabila to become president. However, Rwandan troops allegedly massacred Hutu populations, repatriated Tutsis, and controlled the diamond and coltan mines. Kabila's rise to power led to a disagreement with Kagame and the forced withdrawal of foreign troops, causing concern among ethnic Tutsis and reinforcing local tribal tensions. Rwanda supported the Rally for Congolese Democracy (RCD),

initiating the Second Congo War in 1998, and the Movement for the Liberation of Congo (MLC), aiming to overthrow Kabila (Al Jazeera, 2025).

The MLC, led by Jean-Pierre Bemba, was accused by the DRC and Human Rights Groups of being supported by Uganda, which has a history of conflict with the Kabila regime (Al Jazeera, 2025). Kabila's government armed Hutu refugees incited public lynchings against Tutsis, and deployed South African Development Community (SADC) troops to fight Rwanda and the DRC, involving Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola. In 1999, the DRC, Uganda, and Rwanda signed ceasefire agreements, which included the Lusaka and Luanda Agreements, halting military operations and deploying UN MONUSCO troops for peace monitoring. The war worsened ethnic tensions in areas such as the gold-rich Ituri, leading to ongoing fighting and further conflict.

3.3. The role of rebel groups in the DRC conflict and the influence of external forces

The Congolese government and foreign actors have armed and counter-armed rebel militias, resulting in between 120 and 140 rebel groups operating in the DRC, primarily in resource-rich areas. Despite peace agreements aimed at stopping operations and integrating fighters with the Congolese army, their activities have not been permanently ended, as seen in the Nairobi Peace Process (June 2022) and Luanda Roadmap (November 2022). M23, a group in North Kivu, was named after the March 23 Agreement of 2009, a ceasefire treaty between the DRC government and the Tutsi-majority National Congress for the Defence of the People (CNDP), aiming to integrate their fighters into the Congolese military. The M23 group for Tutsis' rights in the DRC was formed on April 4, 2012, when 300 CNDP troops rebelled. In 2013, a UN army and FARDC forced them back into the eastern highlands near the Rwandan border after they had taken control of several towns. After resurfacing in 2022 and seizing four towns in North Kivu, M23 momentarily withdrew in January 2023; however, the truce broke down in October, and fighting broke out once more between M23 rebels and FARDC.

3.4. The link between resources and conflict in the DRC

The DRC is one of the leading resource-exporting countries. The mountainous regions of the south and east host deposits of gold, copper, tin, diamond, cobalt, uranium,

tantalum, tungsten, niobium, and manganese. Natural resources, including minerals, timber, agricultural products, drugs, and land rights, have historically been used as sources or funds for conflicts (Ross, 2003). Resources are structurally linked to conflict due to their influence on economics, politics, and societies in and around the mining area. Research in the "political economy of conflict" has explored the mechanisms by which resources are linked to conflicts (Ross, 2003; Humphreys, 2005; Le Billon, 2008; Collier et al., 2009). Autesserre (2012) criticizes narratives focusing on illegal mineral resource exploitation, sexual abuse of women and girls, and extending state authority, for hindering conflict resolution. Campaigns about conflict minerals, according to Nest (2011), successfully draw attention to existing violence, but they do not always put an end to it.

In 2020, the DRC ranked 175th out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2020). Its resource richness has not been converted into its citizens' wealth. A peace agreement in 2003 marked the formal conclusion of the First Congo War (1996–1997) and the Second Congo War (1998–2003), which involved involvement by neighbouring nations. Since 2003, at least 130-armed groups have operated in eastern areas, including Mai-Mai self-defence groups and insurgent groups from nearby nations (KST, 2021).

Some FARDC units and soldiers have been involved in violence against civilians. The UN reports that Rwanda and Uganda's governments are suspected to have played a role in the conflict (UN, S/2020/482). Armed actors dominated small-scale artisanal mining in the 2000s, attacking communities, murdering people, raping, and using illicit mineral extraction to fund conflicts, according to a UN Panel/Group of Experts and NGOs (UN, S/2001/357; Global Witness, 2004). The UN Sanctions Committee claims that the UN has sent peacekeeping operations (PKO) to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to target armed groups, by enforcing travel bans, asset freezes, and arms embargoes (Al Jazeera, 2024). An embargo on conflict minerals has been halted due to concerns over the impact on local livelihoods and the complex interests of governments and corporations in industrialized nations (Grignon, 2006).

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in the DRC, exacerbated by the resurgence of M23 activism since November 2021, stems from a history of conflict and instability (World Bank, 2024). The situation has exacerbated a severe humanitarian crisis, resulting in

millions of people displaced, hundreds of cases of sexual and gender-based violence, and the forced displacement of populations. Rebel groups control of mines is a crucial factor in financing the violence prevalent in eastern DRC.

PhaseDimension	Mechanism (Code)	Explanation		
Outbreak of conflict	A1-Greedy rebels	Domestic groups exploit resources to fund revolt; high “prize” value of the state; resource concentration fuels separatism		
	A2-Greedy outsiders	External states / firms intervene to access lucrative resources		
	A3-Grievance	Development shocks	Forced migration	Perceived unfair distribution create resentment
	B1-Weak state	Untaxed citizens	Weak state capacity	Accountability
	B2-Feasibility	Resource revenue makes it easier for actors to initiate fighting		
	B3-Sparse network	Weak industry	Low internal trade reduces social cohesion, easing conflict onset	
	C1-Feasability	Ongoing resource income finances prolonged fighting		
	C2-Fragmented organization	Resource extraction shapes rebel structures, raising cost of peace		

	C3-Sparse network	Same network weakness now sustains conflict		
	D1-Military balance	Conflict situations that encourage resource exploitation can lead to the persistence of a stalemate		
	D2-Possibility of pork	The presence of natural resources that generate transferable rents makes negotiation more challenging by incentivizing subgroups to renegotiate ex-post		
	D3-Domestic conflict	Conflict-affected groups often prioritize fighting over winning, acting as spoilers to the peace process.		
	D4-International conflict	When neighbouring nations anticipate more gains from warfare than from a negotiated settlement, their		

		attitudes towards the peace process deteriorate.		
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Table 1: Mechanisms linking resources and conflict (Hanai, 2021; Humphreys, 2005)

Table 1 presents a summary of the conflict outbreaks, which were motivated by various factors, ranging from A-1 to D-4. The First Congo War in 1996 was influenced by resource-dependent economies, leading to a debt crisis and destabilizing the Mobutu regime in the 1990s, despite potential motivations from external actors (McCalpin, 2002). The Congo's economic growth, despite its abundant resources, has been linked to conflict due to its vulnerability, but it is unclear if this has triggered A-3's "grievance" and armed conflict (Nest et al., 2006).

The war was influenced by the 'greedy rebels' of A-1 and the 'greedy outsiders' of A-2, with A-1's overthrowing of Mobutu's regime resulting in the capture of resource interests. Western businesses such as Tenke Mining Corporation and American Mineral Fields helped Laurent Kabila instigate the war (Dunn, 2002; UN, S/2001/357). Since the main connection between resources and violence was a lack of development, the Mobutu government's lack of support from the international community and neighbouring nations, known as B-1, was a major factor in the start of the conflict (McCalpin, 2002). The 'sparse network mechanism' B-2 was made possible by the Congo's resource exports to its neighbours due to its lack of a transportation network. Armed organisations utilised mining concessions to secure outside assistance. For example, during the Second World War, Kabila gave Zimbabwe access to MIBA's diamond concessions, influencing the conflict through B-3, the 'feasibility mechanism' (Hanai, 2021).

Conflict-continuing (C-1 to C-3) during the Second Congo War in 1998, Rwanda, Uganda, and other war parties looted resources. The UN Panel of Experts stated that troops moved goods into vans and sought access to facilities. The depletion of resource reserves led to the emergence of an 'illicit businesses to extract resources. The IMF supervised large amounts of international aid and loans to Rwanda and Uganda. Aid money that was utilised for military reasons was resented by donor nations, but the price of military deployment to the DRC was higher than what they were allowed to pay.

(D-1 to D-4) shows resources and conflicts are connected to conflict motivation in the DRC, where armed organisations are involved in illicit economic activity. Conflict persists because the Mining Law and Regulations favour the establishment of big mines by private enterprises (Hanai, 2021). All parties involved in the fight profit from

this funding, including FARDC forces, foreign rebels, and armed groups. This cycle is facilitated by the existence of D-1, the 'military balances mechanism,' and D-3, the 'domestic conflict premium mechanism'. Conflict actors create a cycle of conflict by using resources to keep the conflict going (Hanai, 2021). Foreign forces were sluggish to leave, even after a peace deal was achieved, in part because of this kind of funding. This demonstrates that the DRC has the 'international conflict premium mechanism,' or D-4 (Hanai, 2021).

3.5. The effects of civil war on women's vulnerability in the DRC

3.5.1. Displacement and Disruption of Livelihoods

As displacement expose women and girls to a variety of interrelated types of insecurity, it is a significant component of women's vulnerability during armed conflict. In addition to being uprooted from their homes, women and girls in the DRC have also been abducted, forced into labour, and exploited by armed groups. Cases of young women and children being kidnapped in the Kahuzi-Biega Forest and made to work and deliver supplies for their kidnappers are documented by Kippenberg (2002) and MacKinnon (2007). These incidents show how confinement and displacement may cut off women from their networks of social and economic support while also making them more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

Women are pushed into exploitative circumstances or excluded from typical, protective social structures (Lugova et al., 2020; Wachter et al., 2018). Combatants abducted women and girls, holding them captive for up to a year and a half, requiring them to provide sexual services, gender-specific work, domestic labour, and food preparation (Kippenberg, 2002: 61). After experiencing violence, victims often steer clear of the scene of the incident (Danjibo, & Akinkuotu, 2019: 8). When relocating their camps or conducting raids to seize items, combatants made women and girls carry their belongings, forcing them to carry their plunder to their bases. Women and girls were frequently held captive in strange, far-off places, making escape challenging, and occasionally heavily guarded by armed men (Kippenberg, 2002: 62). In forest camps, women and girls frequently endure terrible living circumstances, including lack of shelter, exposure to inclement weather, and trouble maintaining personal hygiene. They frequently have to mix with filthy, flea-infested captors. Some Mai-Mai refuse to take a bath, even when water is available, because they feel that it weakens them

(Kippenberg, 2002: 72). In order to prevent fatigue or illness from the tough bush life, or out of dread of attacks, captors released female prisoners.

Vulnerability goes beyond the immediate loss of a home, as seen by the conditions faced by women in captivity. Inadequate sanitation, poor living circumstances, and limited independence were experienced by women and girls under the control of armed organizations. These circumstances demonstrate how women's access to personal security and basic requirements can be compromised by war. Over 110,000 people have been displaced as a result of the forced closure of settlement camps by Rwanda-backed rebels who were in control of eastern Congolese cities (UN, 2025). Rape perpetrators exploit people's fear of its recurrence to encourage flight from contested territories, often using it as a tool for forced exile (MacKinnon, 2007). The majority of genocide survivors and witnesses are frequently afraid to return to the site of the crime, which forces them to leave disputed areas.

The effects of being compelled to relocate might last for a considerable amount of time even after women have left regions where combat is taking place. According to Stover (2005), survivors may not feel secure returning to their homes because they fear rape or more violence, particularly if the perpetrators continue to threaten or attack them. This implies that women may continue be at risk from the violence even after they have physically left a violent location. If they are unable to return home, women may find it difficult to reconstruct their lives, regain social support, and fully engage in their communities. Even if women leave violent areas, the repercussions of displacement may persist.

From a feminist perspective, incidents of military conflict may exacerbate gendered power dynamics. Women, while affected as part of the general populace, often face gender-specific abuses such as exploitation and violence. Their bodies and reproductive capabilities can be subjected to control, illustrated by the coerced utilization of their labour and the heightened risk of sexual violence. Consequently, feminist theory elucidates that displacement can have differential impacts on genders, rather than uniformly affecting men and women.

Looking at displacement from intersectionality perspective shows that it affects women in different ways. Things like their socioeconomic status, how old they are, where they live, and whether they have people to help them all make a big difference and lack

social connections experience greater vulnerability more at risk than women who have money and help from organizations. The Evidence suggests that displacement exacerbates women's vulnerability and is a result of civil war. It impedes women's capacity to recover from conflict and participate equally in social and economic life by interfering with their access to homes, livelihoods, social networks, and safety. As a result, relocation has long-term impacts for women's economic independence, social standing, security, and empowerment in addition to urgent humanitarian problems.

3.5.2. Sexual Violence

In the DRC, GBV is a common kind of conflict that disproportionately affects women and girls, and results in numerous human rights abuses. Many human rights violations have resulted from decades of conflict in the DRC, with sexual violence against women being a major problem (Peterman et al., 2011). In an attempt to seize and hold onto power over citizens and the area they occupied, soldiers and combatants have sexually assaulted and mistreated women and girls (Kippenberg, 2002: 23). These patterns show that sexual assault during conflict may operate within larger systems of power and control rather than being only regarded as isolated acts of violence.

As representatives of their community, they attacked women and girls, causing harm. In addition to members of armed groups, rape and other sexual offences are increasingly committed by law enforcement members, common criminals, and bandits, who take advantage of the atmosphere of violence and impunity to harm women and girls (Human Rights Watch, 2001). This is significant because it implies that women's uneasiness is not limited to contacts with warriors or the battlefield. Rather, the normalization of violence and inadequate accountability systems may foster an atmosphere where women are endangered even when there are no ongoing armed conflicts. The counsellor in eastern Congo stated that: "There is a real madness with all this violence. This is a whole war within the war; another kind of attack on the Congolese people." (Kippenberg, 2002: 5).

According to the 2007 DRC Demographic and Health Survey, 9.9% of women between the ages of 15 and 49 had an unwanted sexual experience for the first time, 4.2% had one within the preceding 12 months, and 16% had one during their lifetime (Peterman et al., 2011).

Women who have been sexually assaulted are unable to talk about their experience for fear of stigma or mockery. Others are compelled to enter prostitution, or marriage with combatants, in order to live. Fearing embarrassment and possible stigma from community members, many women are reluctant to come forward and report (Peterman et al., 2011). Fear of retaliation, the belief that it is a personal problem, the belief that the police will not assist, or the desire to avoid bothering the perpetrator with the law are some of the reasons why domestic violence goes unreported. Domestic abuse is frequently a private matter in African societies (Beya, 2016: 12). Women and girls often struggle to identify perpetrators of rape or assault, who are often unknown to them or from outside their communities. In some cases, perpetrators mask their faces or blind victims with lights, attempting to hide their identities if they believe they might be recognized. Also, perpetrators may try to mislead witnesses and victims by speaking in a language other than their native tongue. Some victims, witnesses, and others blamed crimes on members of organizations they didn't like, since it was difficult to actually identify the criminals (Kippenberg, 2002: 26).

Women and girls are routinely subjected to physical assault by rapists, who also insult and humiliate them both during and after the crime (Kippenberg, 2002: 54). Beyond that, they also use tools such as knives or razor blades to mutilate their victims' sexual organs or puncture their vaginas with sticks; in this way, rapists frequently cause serious injuries to their victims (Kippenberg, 2002: 54). A doctor who reported examples of women with razor-blade cuts on their clitoris and vaginal lips said that "It is hatred." He also expressed the opinion that being born a woman in this country is a death sentence (ASF, 2016; Vital Voices Global Partnership, 2012). A 25-year-old woman was raped and shot three times by an RCD soldier near Nundu in 2000; fortunately, she survived, but required further surgery and treatment (HEAL Africa, 2016). This offence has not been formally investigated.

Lack of housing and widespread sexual assault compel young girls into sex work to support their families, putting them at risk for sexual violence and kidnapping. Many girls are compelled to work in brothels because they are unable to attend school. According to the DRC's 2014 DHS, almost two-thirds of women in a partnership have been the victims of emotional, physical, or sexual abuse at the hands of an intimate partner (Tlapek, 2015), placing the whole country at almost double the rate of this type of violence worldwide (WHO, 2020). Despite being more common than sexual

violence committed by armed actors, IPV is less well-known because of taboos and cultural standards that may make it difficult for victims to report or accept this type of domestic violence (Peterman et al., 2011; Hynes et al., 2004).

Impregnation is a genocidal function of rape as a weapon of war in the DRC, where sexual violence is used to ethnically change Congolese villages and achieve ethnic dominance (Wieringen, 2020: 5). The rape by armed groups in the eastern DRC frequently results in pregnancy and motherhood (Wieringen, 2020: 4). Thirteen percent of the 255 rape victims who were interviewed, most from South Kivu and others from North Kivu, had a child as a result of the rape (Kelly et al., 2011). According to a Harvard Humanitarian Initiative and Oxfam International report, sexual assault by the DRC's armed forces is frequently employed as part of ethnic cleansing tactics. For example, mass rape is used to contaminate bloodlines, and women are forcibly impregnated to generate 'ethnically cleansed' offspring (Bartels et al., 2010).

Armed groups are intentionally spreading HIV among the targeted communities through sexual violence (Wieringen, 2020). In an attempt to prevent HIV/AIDS exposure, some rapists targeted inexperienced sexual partners, thinking that having sex with a young child would eradicate the virus from them. According to NGOs in the eastern DRC, rape raids are planned to spread HIV to the populace (Bosmans, 2007). According to victims in the provinces of Kivu, armed groups encourage HIV infection, putting the targeted group's health at risk and disseminating it throughout the population (Ohambe et al., 2005; OHCHR, 2010). A woman in DRC stated that: "My body has become sad. I have no happiness" (thirty-five-year-old woman, raped by soldiers) (Kippenberg, 2002: 5).

In the DRC, armed groups frequently rape women of all ages in public and collectively, leaving them with no opportunity to conceal widespread, damaging humiliation, or avoid isolation (Farr 2009). Rapists can be extremely cruel to those who resist their assault. A mother of a twenty-year-old daughter, Monique B., shared her story. "Her family fled after being taken hostage by the attackers. They tied her husband to a pole, and the four-month-old baby cried. The attackers pursued her daughter aged twenty, who was engaged to be married, who resisted, and refused to have relationships with them, saying she would rather die. The attackers then cut off her breast, showed her

genitals, and demanded her death. She eventually died with her breast in her hand” (Kippenberg, 2002: 56).

The precise number of rape cases in the DRC is challenging to determine due to discrepancies in reporting from various international agencies such as MONUSCO. While UN agencies such as UNFPA do not look into every case based on the data they gather, MONUSCO only publishes “100% verified” cases (UNFPA; Wolfe, 2016). The methods used by international organizations and non-governmental organizations to gather data on sexual gender-based violence may differ from year to year (Peterman et al., 2011). Social, economic, and cultural factors contribute to the underreporting of intimate partner violence, especially in Africa, and UN and non-governmental organization data should be interpreted with caution. In South Kivu, Congolese military raped 52 women, including gang rape. As M23 launched its attack on the town on January 27, more than 4,000 inmates from Goma's Muzenze prison broke out, and according to DRC officials, male inmates sexually assaulted at least 165 women (UN, 2025).

Gendered power relations can be reinforced by conflict, according to feminist perspective. Sexual violence is a means of controlling women's bodies and establishing authority over people, families, and communities. In addition to highlighting the physical impact of war, the targeting of women during conflict shows how violence may worsen gender inequity. According to feminist philosophy, sexual violence is not only a humanitarian problem resulting from armed conflict, but rather a manifestation of uneven power relations.

An intersectional approach also shows that women's experiences of sexual assault differ greatly and are impacted by a number of variables, including age, geography, poverty, displacement, and access to social assistance and healthcare. Reporting abuse, getting medical attention, and obtaining justice are more difficult for women in vulnerable circumstances, such as those who are relocated or live in places without governmental protection and vital resources. Therefore, gender interacts with more general social, economic, and institutional injustices to create women's vulnerability.

3.5.3. Trauma

Conflict-related sexual assault can have long-term psychological and emotional repercussions for women and girls in addition to immediate physical harm. Women

and girls who have been raped and sexually assaulted suffer physical and psychological harm from which they frequently never fully recover. Due to rape, a considerable number of women and girls have become pregnant, and an undetermined number have contracted HIV (Morna et al., 2019: 88). These effects show that even long after the first incident, sexual assault can continue to affect a woman's health and happiness. Due of this, the effects go beyond just the direct experience of violence and can also affect women's health and their ability to recover and participate completely in society.

Women affected by humanitarian crises deal with serious trauma-related mental health issues, such as multifactorial disorders in war-zone refugees who have been sexually assaulted (Bella et al., 2019; Burkhardt, 2016). Other forms of trauma, including harm to or death of friends, family, and community members, as well as the loss of money, property, and means of subsistence, are frequently linked to sexual violence (Brown, 2011). This implies that rather than being the product of a single traumatic experience, women's susceptibility during war should be viewed as cumulative. When many types of violence and loss happen at the same time, the effects on mental health may worsen.

PTSD incidence and symptom severity may rise as a result of repeated exposure to trauma of all types, which may have a cumulative, dose-response effect (Bosch, 2019: 4). Refugees continue to have higher rates of mental health issues during the migration and resettlement processes. The difficulties of migration, relocation, and cultural adjustment cause refugees to suffer from depression and PTSD at a rate more than twice that of the US population (Mollica et al., 2004; Carballo et al., 1996).

Psychological vulnerability can coexist with other difficulties including grief, poverty, displacement, and property loss, which can result in compounding disadvantages, from intersectional perspective. Women's capacity to bounce back from such traumas frequently depends on the accessibility of medical treatment, social support, and help. Women's vulnerability in times of war must thus be viewed as a consequence of the interaction between gender and the broader challenges brought about by conflict.

From a feminist standpoint, conflict negatively affects women's social connections, autonomy, and involvement in the community in addition to physical assault. Sexual assault trauma threatens women's economic positions and gender equality.

Psychological vulnerability may exacerbate disadvantages by compounding sorrow, poverty, and relocation, looking at intersectional perspective. Access to social assistance and health treatment is associated with women's resilience. Consequently, the interaction between gender and the difficulties of conflict results in women's vulnerability during times of war.

3.5.4. Access to basic service and medical consequences

The protracted conflict and the ongoing humanitarian crises around the world have had a substantial influence on the DRC's healthcare services (World Bank, 2024).

Panzi Hospital in Bukavu, South Kivu Province, is frequently the subject of studies on medical care following sexual abuse in the DRC. Since 1999, more than 50,000 survivors of sexual violence have received care at this CEPAC-owned, holistic, specialist facility. Nevertheless, there are still few such all-inclusive services available in the region. After conflict-related sexual assault, survivors may need ongoing medical and mental assistance, therefore the significance of these services goes beyond treating acute physical injuries. This care is hardly common, even with its all-encompassing treatment (Berg & Mukwege, 2019; Bosch, 2019: 5).

Healthcare facilities and resources have been destroyed in the DRC, which has resulted in a lack of care, particularly in rural areas, and frequently insufficient supplies or capacity to manage complex situations (Ba & Bhopal, 2017). The health consequences of rape are catastrophic for women (Nathaniel & Adebimpe, 2019). Rape can lead to sexually transmitted infections such as HIV/ Aids (Human Security Centre, 2005: 136). Higher-ranked officers encouraged Hutu men with HIV to rape Tutsi women, causing a slow death for them due to lack of medical care and medicines in the country (Mullins, 2009). Medical consequences of sexual dysfunction include reproductive disturbances, vaginal discharge, chronic infections, back pain, headaches, fatigue, dizziness, fainting, chronic pelvic pain, hormone dysfunction, gastrointestinal pain, and eating disorders (Vlachova & Biason, 2005).

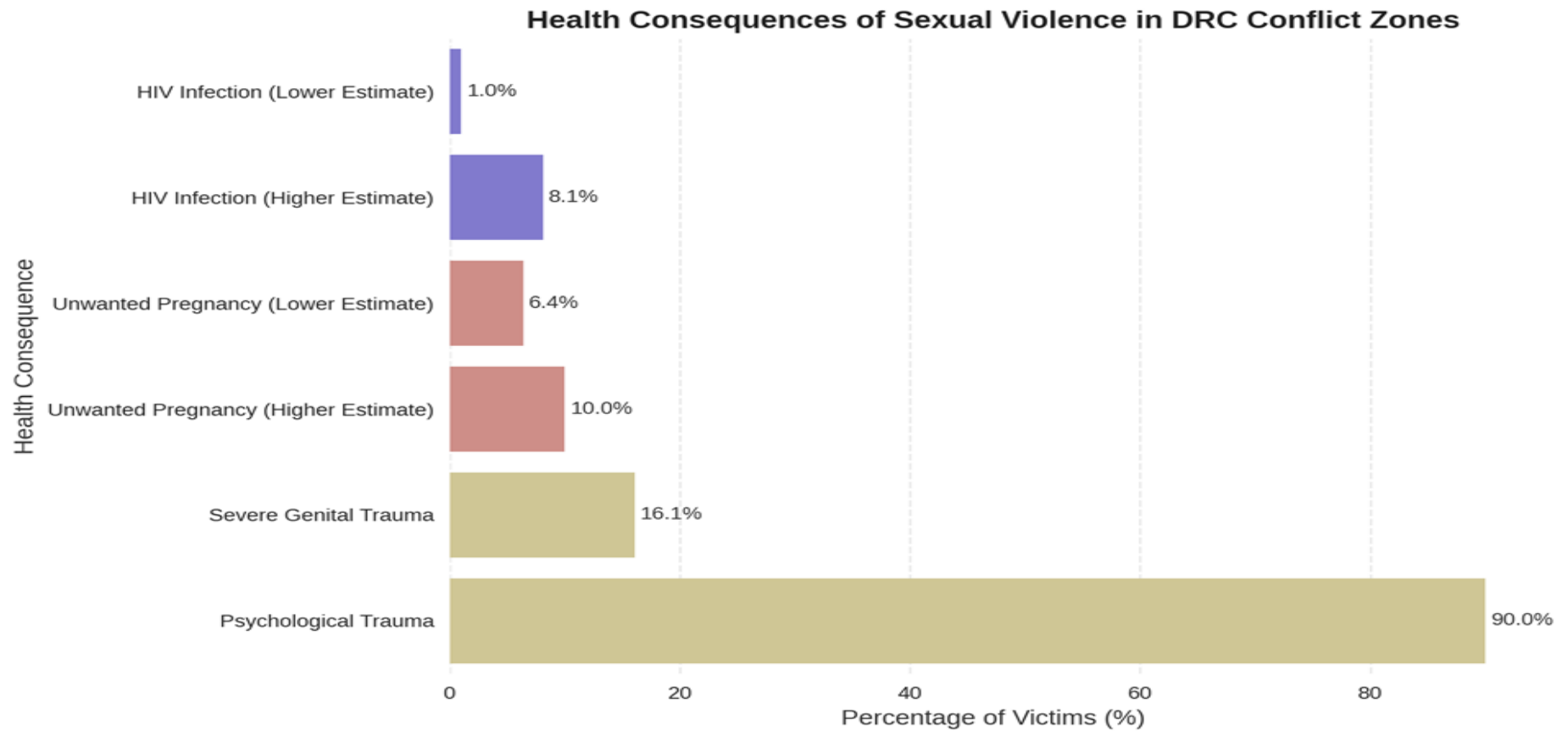
A survey by Oxfam International and Harvard Initiative found that many women who experienced sexual violence during the conflict in Congo suffer from pelvic, lumbar, and abdominal pain, and reproductive abnormalities (Harvard Humanitarian Initiative, 2010). Infertility, psychological trauma, and difficulties in maintaining normal sexual relations, difficult pregnancies and deliveries, prolonged menstrual periods

accompanied by severe pains, uterine prolapses (the descent of the uterus into the vagina or beyond), fistulas, and other injuries to the reproductive system or rectum are common among these women (Amnesty International, 2004: 35).

According to a 2011 study conducted in Goma, North Kivu province, only one hospital has all the necessary resources, and Human Rights Watch says that less than 50% of rape victims have access to basic medical facilities (Anema et al., 2008; Human Rights Watch, 2009). Due to the high rates of adolescent fertility in the DRC, early marriage puts young girls' health at danger, particularly those who lack access to reproductive health services (Girls Not Brides, 2024).

Women's engagement in social and economic arenas is hampered by limited access to healthcare during such conflicts, which prolongs their susceptibility. Research shows that the effects of civil war on women's health go beyond the acute physical harm they sustain, indicating the larger institutional issues that affect their access to care and capacity to rebuild their lives after the violence.

Figure 6: Health Consequences of Sexual Violence in DRC Conflict Zones



(Source: Author's development, based on Klot, 2012; Kiakuvue, 2024).

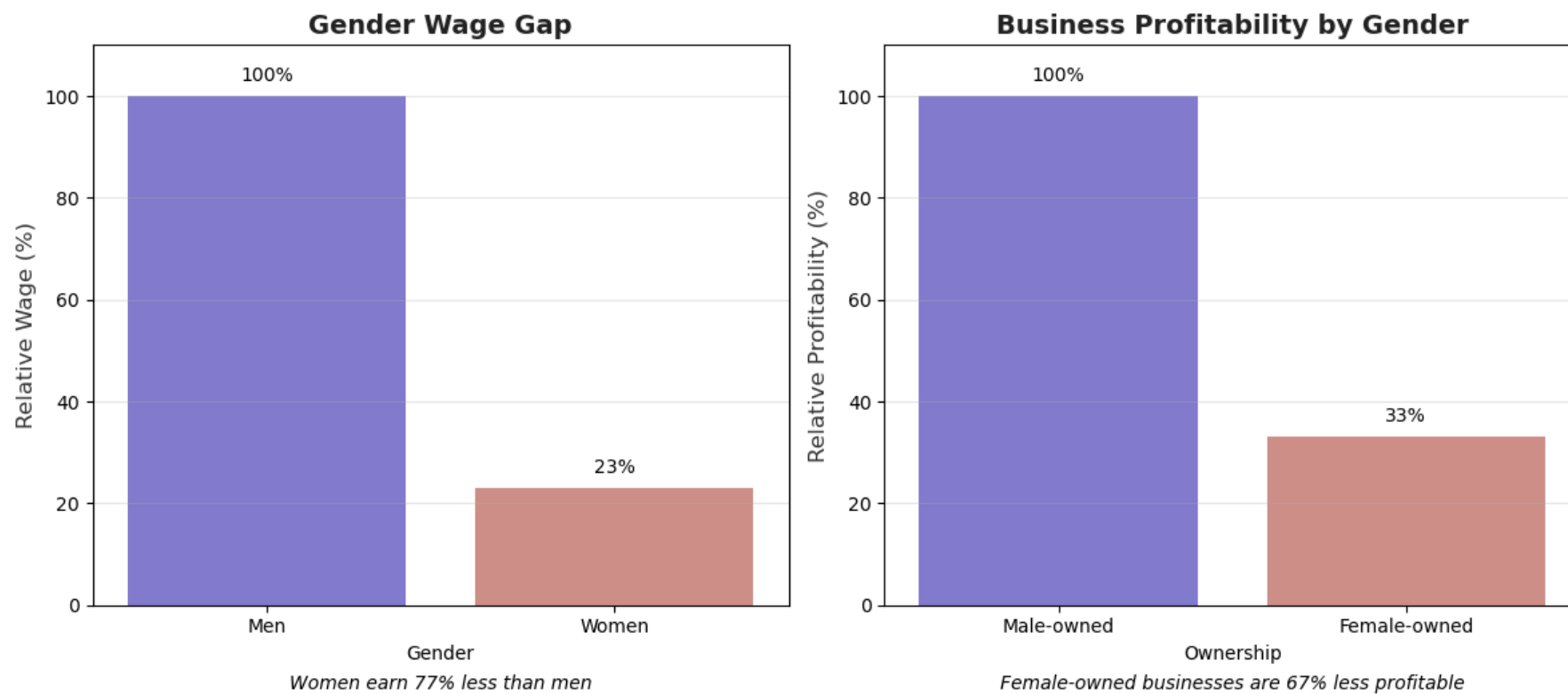
The chart in Figure 6 demonstrates the catastrophic impact. Pregnant women who experience sexual violence frequently experience major life disruptions due to unintended pregnancies (6.4–10%) and severe psychological suffering (see Figure 6 (Kiakuvue, 2024)). Only 10% of victims exhibit any significant psychological distress resulting from these assaults, so severe psychological trauma affects 90% of the victims who experienced significant psychological effects from sexual violence, including PTSD, depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues (Klot, 2012). According to the health consequences (Kiakuvue, 2024), 16.1% of victims suffered from serious genital trauma, which may affect their quality of life and have long-term health effects. Despite differences in the number of instances reported, of between 1 and 8.1%, the data shows a substantial likelihood of HIV transmission from sexual violence, underscoring the serious health risk for survivors (Klot, 2012).

3.5.5. Women's labour force participation

The ongoing instability and violence in the DRC have increased women's vulnerability to economic shocks and gender-based violence, complicating their participation in the labour force (World Bank, 2024).

GBV and discrimination are major obstacles to economic opportunities and empowerment for Congolese women (World Bank, 2024). The predictability of domestic violence is greatly influenced by economic circumstances, especially in rural areas. Although women make up a large portion of the labour force (62%), mostly in agriculture, in the DRC their income and assets are lower than those of men (World Bank, 2024). According to the data, a sizable portion of DRC women work in the informal economy and in agriculture (CNBC Africa, 2024; TheGlobalEconomy, 2024). Women's entrepreneurship and labour market growth are impeded by societal views and gender discrimination, which also denies them access to training programmes and specialized positions (AfDB, 2024).

Figure 7: Gender Wage Gap and Business Profitability by Gender



Source: World Bank, 2021

(Source: Author's Own Compilation based on World Bank, 2021).

The graphic illustrates the effects of the civil war on women in the DRC by showcasing data and patterns pertaining to economic hardship and violence. According to studies, despite high participation rates, women make 77% less money than males on average and report 67% poorer profitability in enterprises run by women (World Bank, 2021). Women's restricted control over resources and land exacerbates their economic disadvantage by limiting their ability to change their financial circumstances. Economic imbalance between men and women grants men greater authority over the women in terms of household and financial decision-making (Vetten, 2000).

According to the 2021 DRC Gender Diagnostic Report, three main factors; control over land, voice and agency, and risk and uncertainty; which includes susceptibility to shocks and GBV; are responsible for the persistence of gender disparities (World Bank, 2024). This interaction is significant for this study since women's economic fragility may be exacerbated by uneven compensation. Women's capacity to earn money, access resources, and become financially independent may be limited when they are paid less than males for equivalent or similar economic involvement. Therefore, economic inequality can increase women's reliance and hinder their ability to recover from the socioeconomic fallout from violence.

3.6. Education

Children in conflict-affected cultures are less likely to attend school; in fact, 50% of children who are not in school worldwide come from these societies (UNESCO, 2017; UNICEF, 2015). In humanitarian settings, girls are especially exposed to sexual abuse (Landis et al., 2019). According to a 2018 survey conducted in Kinshasa, Western DRC, among 18 to 24-year-olds, gender discrimination has a long history in the DRC (Freedman, 2011; Lusey, 2018: 1).

Gender inequality is a major issue in the DRC, which is among the thirteen nations with the most unequal secondary education in the world, yet foreign development aid does not give it priority (Ackerman, 2015). Teenagers are twice as likely to have completed fewer than two years of education in North Kivu Province, where primary school attendance is drastically declining (Landis, 2019; Sperling & Winthrop, 2016). Just 23% of impoverished young women can read, in normal circumstances. A student volunteer from the DRC draws attention to problems in education, such as low attendance among survivors of sexual abuse, a lack of structure for orphans, and

insufficient government involvement (Israel, 2019). She talks about cultural discrimination as well, claiming that girls are discouraged from going to school.

There is a notable gender disparity in the DRC's educational system, notably when it comes to girls' access and survival, particularly when they go from lower to upper secondary school (World Bank, 2021). Adolescent girls have a difficult time finishing their education because they are frequently compelled to stay in the home, get married young, or work for pay. This problem affects both boys and girls (World Bank, 2021). The education of about 750,000 children in areas affected by armed conflicts has been impacted by the closure of thousands of schools (Amnesty International, 2024; UNICEF, 2024). The education of over three-quarters of a million children was impacted by insecurity in 2022 and early 2023 (UNICEF, 2024). Nationally, primary completion rates are equal for both genders, but boys are more likely to transition to and complete secondary school (World Bank, 2021).

With 17% of them residing more than five kilometres from the closest secondary school, teenage females confront obstacles in secondary education as a result of a lack of schools, poor infrastructure, and subpar instruction (World Bank, 2021). Focus group participants mentioned problems:

“Like crowded schools, filthy restrooms, and inadequate security”. (World Bank, 2021).

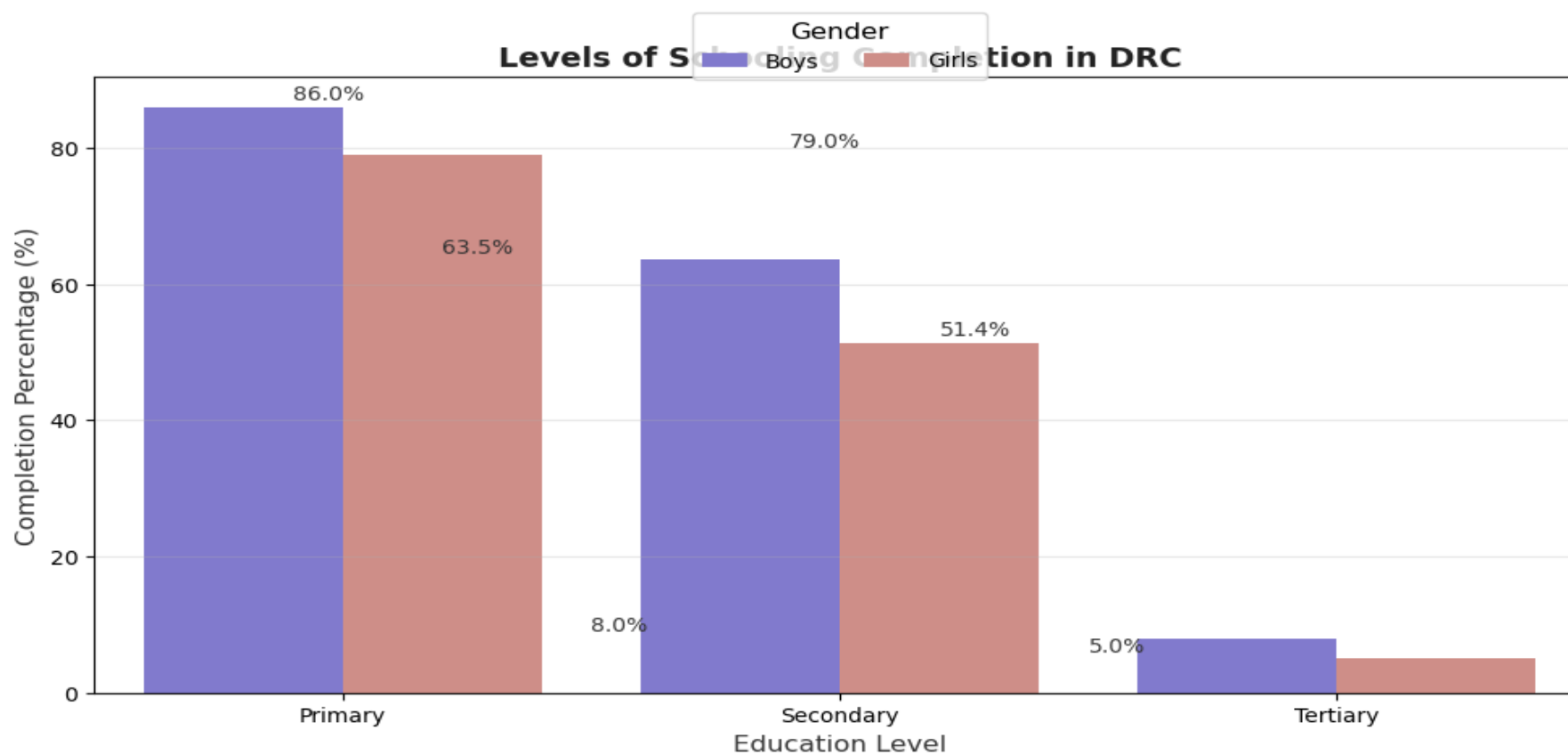
Social norms, household economic status, and insecurity all affect females' access to education, with gender disparities differing by province, and 40% to 80% of out-of-school girls are already married or living with a partner; boys are frequently given preference over girls in poorer households (World Bank, 2021).

In the DRC, early marriage has a substantial impact on girls' education in a number of ways. As seen in the instance of Lucie, “a 15-year-old girl from Pinga, who stopped going to school after being married while her husband continued his schooling; early marriage frequently causes females to drop out of school in order to become wives and mothers” (ReliefWeb, 2024).

Due to incidences of sexual abuse by military members, the risk of violence makes it difficult for females in the DRC to attend school. According to Sperling and Winthrop (2016), parents frequently put their children's safety before their education. Studies

conducted on military personnel indicate that gender-based and sexual violence has become 'normalized' and "a product of fundamental social structures of inequality within society" (Freedman, 2011: 171).

Figure 8: Levels of Schooling Completion in DRC



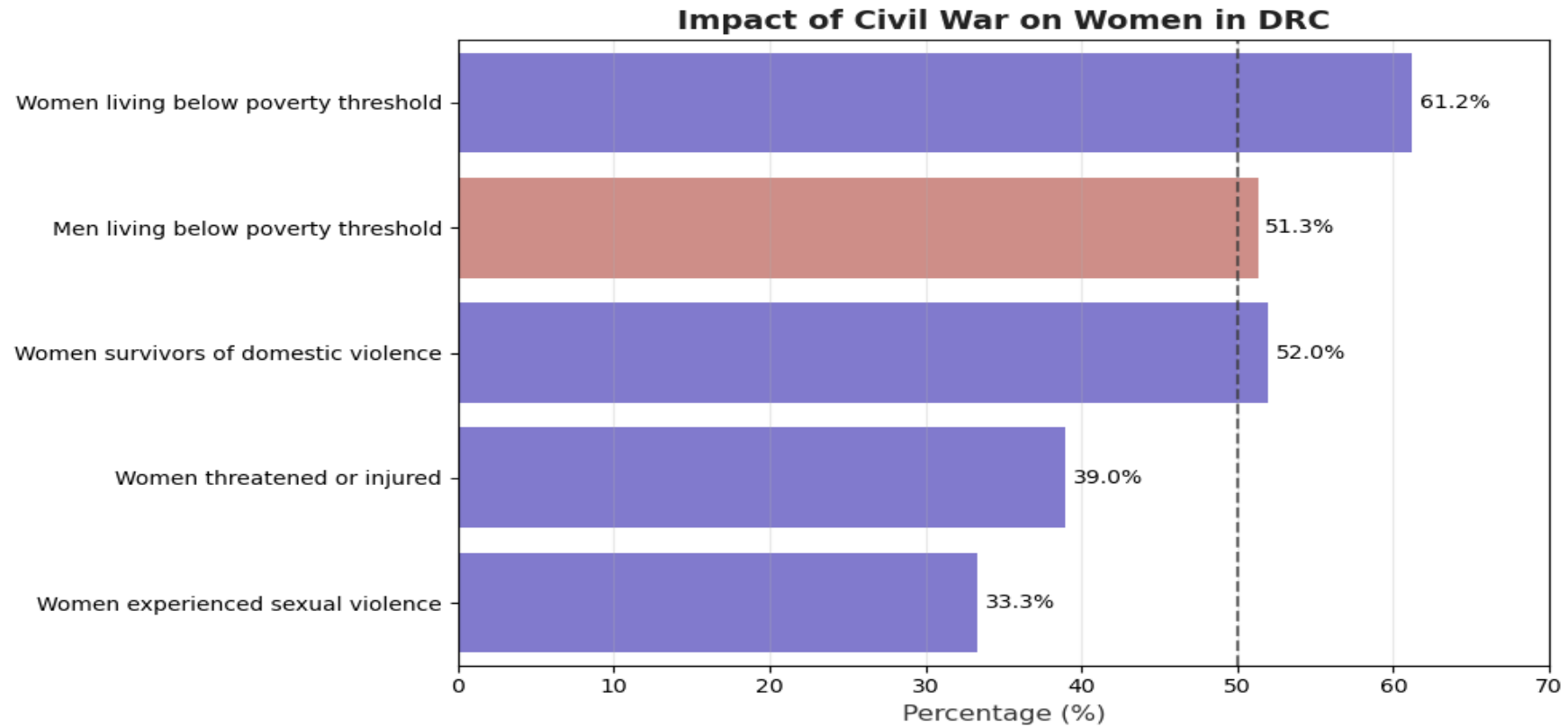
(Source: Author's own compilation based on UNESCO, 2024; UIS data, 2024).

When it comes to primary school, enrolment is increasing over time, which is a trend that is good for educational access. Figure 8 shows there is still a gender gap in educational attainment, as evidenced by the lower primary school completion rates of females, at 79%, compared to boys at 86%, despite higher enrolment (UIS data, 2024). The educational disparity is highlighted by the much lower secondary education completion rates than for primary education, with 51.4% of girls completing secondary education compared to 63.5% of boys (UNESCO, 2024). In 2020, women's tertiary enrolment was only 5%, while men's was 8% (UNESCO, 2024). This has important economic and social ramifications. There are notable gender differences in the DRC's educational attainment figures, with socioeconomic obstacles, cultural standards, and the effects of violence placing girls at a disadvantage. Reducing these differences is essential to advancing gender equality and women's empowerment.

Girls are denied the opportunity to receive an education (Elliot & Kelly 1983: 335), which is considered a fundamental human right in many parts of the world, including the DRC; due to structural gender inequities, cultural norms, and financial limitations. Therefore, it is important to consider the link between education and women's vulnerability as more than just a matter of school attendance. Women and girls may have less access to the information, abilities, and credentials needed to engage equally in political and economic life when war restricts educational chances. This may lead to a vicious cycle wherein women's ability to better their socioeconomic status is hampered by inferior educational options, which in turn impede educational achievement due to conflict-related insecurity.

From a feminist standpoint, preventing women from receiving an education is connected to more general problems of uneven access to resources, which impacts their independence and involvement in a variety of activities. In order to address gender inequality in war areas, girls and women must have ongoing access to education in addition to being protected from danger.

Figure 9: Impact of Civil War on Women in DRC

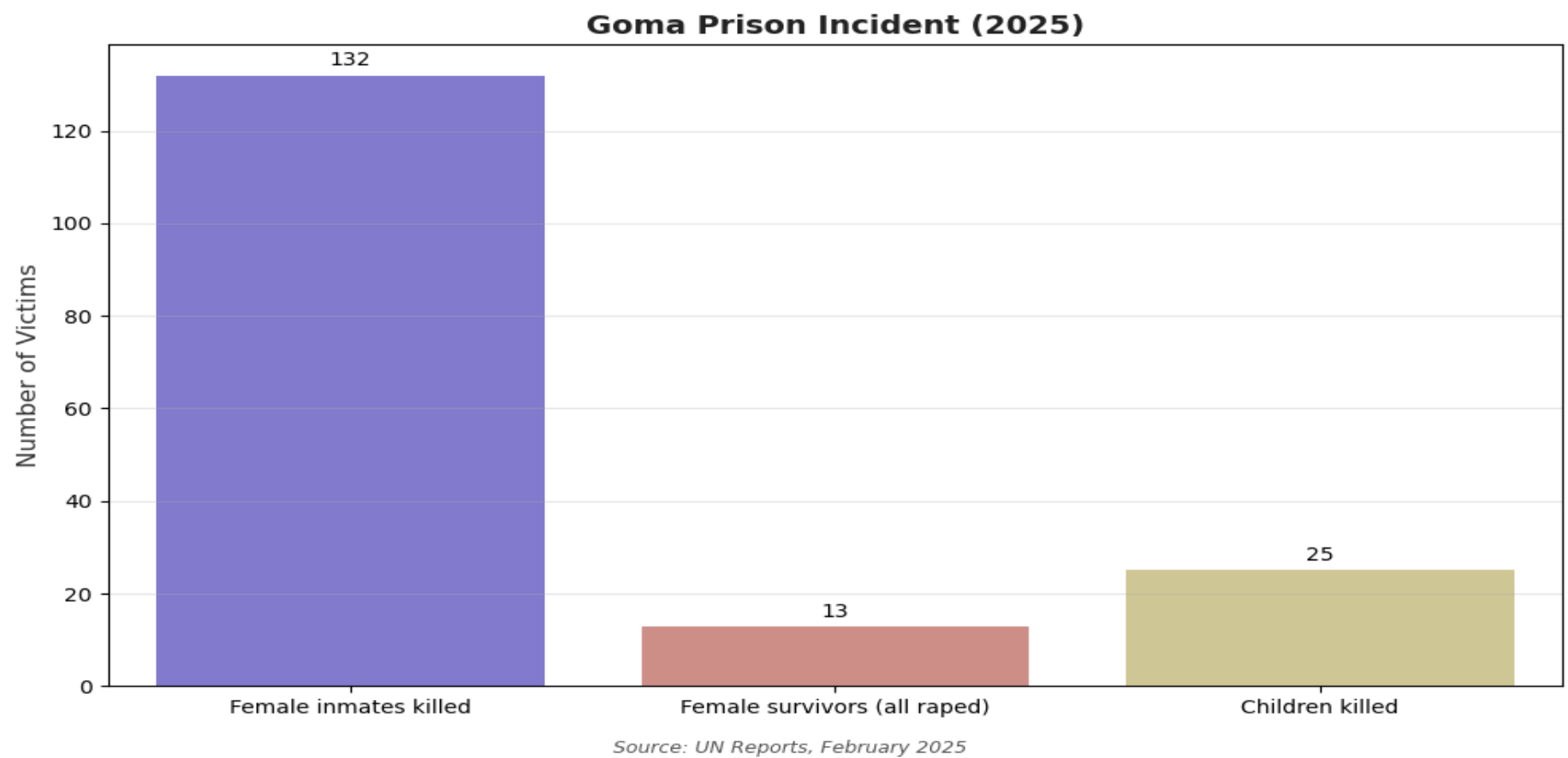


Note: Recent Goma prison incident (2025) resulted in 150+ female inmates raped and killed

(Source: Author's own compilation based on, The Guardian, 2025; UN Reports, 2025)

The data in Figure 9 highlights the disproportionate impact of the DRC civil war on women, with significantly higher poverty rates for women (61.2%) compared to men (51.3%). Over half of the women have experienced domestic violence, and substantial percentages have faced threats, injuries, or sexual violence.

Figure 10: Goma Prison Incident 2025



(Source: UN Reports, 2025)

The recorded civilian casualties in Goma in 2025 are indicative of the human cost of the resumed fighting in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. The information shown in Figure 10 shows how many people have died as a result of the conflict and gives a sense of how dire the civilian population's humanitarian condition is. The numbers are crucial for comprehending the broader environment of insecurity in which women face conflict-related vulnerability, even if they reflect mortality among the whole population rather than just women.

The tragedy of the Goma jail incident is depicted in these graphics, along with the larger gender inequities in the DRC conflict. The eastern DRC's Goma prison was set on fire (UN, 2025). That resulted in the rape and death by burning of more than 150 female convicts by male inmates; at least 132 female inmates and 25 children died in the fire, making 153 people dead overall. See Figure 10 (Guerin, 2025). Between nine and thirteen female prisoners, all of whom had also been raped, were among the few who escaped the fire (Princewill, 2025). This figure backs up the main argument of this chapter, which is that women's lack of safety cannot be fully understood just by looking at sexual violence.

3.7. Conclusion

The DRC's prolonged conflict has significantly impacted women's labour force participation, presenting both opportunities and challenges due to economic disparities, land ownership issues, and care responsibilities. Cultural conventions, economic pressures, and legal issues all contribute to early marriage in the DRC, which prevents females from completing their education. This inhibits societal progress and perpetuates gender inequality and poverty. Even though women in the DRC make up a large portion of the labour force, there are still several obstacles that prevent them from being economically empowered and productive. The jailbreak happened in the midst of anarchy, as action by the M23 rebel group emphasizes how vulnerable women are in the DRC. This chapter explored how women and girls are affected by educational hurdles, emphasizing the ways in which limited access affects their personal development and family relationships, and the results for society.

The chapter emphasizes how patriarchal systems, and colonial legacies have a major effect on women's vulnerability in the ongoing civil war in the DRC, which is linked with class and ethnic inequality. Women's employment ideas and actions are significantly

influenced by gender and class. Class-based disparities in self-other orientation may be lessened by women's gender-based orientation toward others and desire for affiliation. Additionally, because they work in fields that are dominated by women, and reside in households with little financial means, lower-income women may challenge gender and class stereotypes. Comprehending these distinctions is essential to comprehending how men and women in the workplace create meanings about themselves and others. The Kimberley and De Beers mines serve as examples of transnational resource-driven labour exploitation in Africa, reflecting the history of South Africa and emphasizing the influence of colonial legacies on postcolonial labour arrangements. The next chapter explores the effects of civil conflicts on women's vulnerability in the DRC by analysing the principal obstacles and problems in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in DRC.

Chapter 4

The principal obstacles in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in DRC

4.1. Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the effects of civil conflicts on women's vulnerability in the DRC. Instability and violence increase women's vulnerability to economic shocks, GBV, and labour force complications. Sexual violence is used as a weapon, exemplified by the 1994 Rwandan Genocide.

Chapter 4 will analyze the obstacles that hinder promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the DRC. GBV is a serious problem in the DRC, when it comes to domestic abuse of women and young girls. In addition to threatening the physical and mental health of women and girls, GBV perpetuates power imbalances that restrict women's involvement in social, political, and economic spheres. Consequently, it impedes the DRC's attempts to attain permanent peace and gender equality.

The state of gender-based violence in the DRC is extremely concerning, especially with regard to domestic abuse of women and young girls. A fragile nation emerging from two decades of armed war, the DRC is currently dealing with an unparalleled humanitarian and security crisis that is causing poverty, criminality, and instability of political institutions (Tushiminina, 2020: 6). This shows that understanding gender inequalities in the DRC requires taking into account the country's ongoing political unrest. The government's ability to shield women from discrimination and violence has diminished due to the ongoing armed conflict.

Legal frameworks in the DRC are weak because enforcement is impeded by corruption, political interference, and inadequate institutional capacity, which creates an environment of systemic impunity, and poor governance and management of resources. Weak legal systems contribute to situations where punishment for GBV making it difficult for survivors because they are not held accountable. This perpetuates violence against women and impedes progress toward gender equality. From a feminist perspective, these institutional failures reveal deep-rooted structural inequalities that disadvantage women in both public and private sectors, ultimately entrenching the issues within society.

4.2. Weak Governance and Political Representation

Women face barriers in politics in the DRC. Women and girls are more vulnerable to poverty as a result of the political and security crisis because they have less access to public services, fewer economic prospects, and lower levels of political participation (Tushiminina, 2020: 7). Women's power in the public domain is limited by social construction and socialization techniques, since politics is viewed as a public environment, and their actions are confined to private homes and public areas (Tushiminina, 2020: 8). Women's political and civic rights are impeded at the national and local levels by political and economic obstacles.

a. Political Obstacles

Women face reluctance to vote, using verbal campaigns to convince supporters, unlike traditional male campaigns that involve gifts (Cahill, 2019). Since many women find it difficult to fulfil the current election requirements for parliamentary seats, which need a three-year university degree, the democratization of political parties is essential for women's political visibility and empowerment (SOS Children's Villages Canada, 2011).

The UN Security Council emphasised the critical role that women play in conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding in its Resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace, and security. It also emphasised the necessity of expanding women's decision-making roles, and the significance of their full and equal participation in all initiatives aimed at preserving and advancing peace and security (UN, 2006). The Millennium Declaration of 2000 emphasized the importance of women's involvement in development and emphasized the need for gender equality and empowerment to combat poverty, hunger, and disease (INSTRAW, 2008; Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011: 93).

Women are being empowered and given the opportunity to participate in decision-making by governments all over the world. The 1996 Southern African Regional Symposium on Women in Local Government is one of the international and African statements on women's involvement in grassroots politics that the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has vowed to uphold (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011). As part of the 1997 SADC Declaration on Gender and Development, which was signed in Malawi, SADC heads of state pledged to ensure that women were

represented by at least 30% in all decision-making roles (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011: 94).

The third goal of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) aims to enhance women's participation and promote gender equality (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011: 96). This examines the challenging journey of women's political participation in the DRC, highlighting the ongoing inequality despite the 2006 Constitution, where Article 12 promotes equal rights for men and women in all DRC institutions (Vyas-Doorgapersad & Lukamba, 2011: 102). However, what has become apparent in the DRC is the perpetual cycle of women's exclusion and lack of representation in the political domain, which ultimately hinders the prospects of the DRC achieving the third goal of the MDG's.

b. Economic Obstacles

One of the main obstacles to the involvement of women in politics is frequently identified as poverty and a lack of financial stability. With 61% of Congolese women living below the poverty line, poverty is a reality for the majority of these women (SOS Children's Villages Canada, 2011). Given that men run the finances, women have little to no influence over their income and are therefore dependent on their male family members.

The number of children enrolled in primary education has increased significantly, reaching 21.3 million in 2023-2024 (World Bank, 2024). Secondary education enrolment doubled, but challenges persist in access, equity, and quality, particularly for girls and those of modest backgrounds. Despite progress, girls still face lower attendance rates. The climate in which the education industry is growing is marked by low learning results and internal inefficiencies (World Bank, 2024). A basic learning issue persists throughout secondary education, made worse by the quick growth of primary education. There is a youthful, unskilled labour force, and this circumstance put the Congolese economy's future productivity at danger.

4.3. The Legal Framework

Only one of the twenty-two contenders for president in the DRC in 2018 was a woman, suggesting a minor movement in political intent toward including women in decision-making (Tushiminina, 2020: 9). Jeannine Mabunda was the first female President of the National Assembly in 2019, but she was impeached in 2020. The difficulties in

attaining gender parity were brought to light when Alphonsine Kalume Asengo Cheusi became the first female member of the Constitutional Court, a male-dominated court with only 9% female representation (Selimovic et al., 2020).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which establishes gender equality in its first two sections, is one of the international legal documents that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has recognized (UDHR, 1948). The DRC ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1986, and created the Ministry of Advancement of Women in 1980 (UN, 1979).

The equality of men and women is upheld in the preamble of the DRC Constitution, which was adopted in 2006 (République Démocratique du Congo, 2006). This was a result of political institutions being tasked with promoting lasting peace and preventing GBV. Despite that, women still face challenges in exercising their rights, due to limited resources, low female representation, and societal norms, even after the abolishment of marital authorization for employment and financial independence in 2016 (Braunmiller & Dry, 2022). The DRC lacks a specific law to address the growing issue of sexual and gender-based violence. To validate a proposed law against SGBV repression, the DRC Presidency held a workshop on the 2nd of August 2022 (Journalists for Human Rights, 2023). The government passed the law, and JHR was instrumental in the process. Justice Minister Rose Mutombo defended the bill, which is currently pending Senate approval before the President signs it into law. Two legislative projects to advance women's rights are being worked on by JHR and regional partners. Even though there have been recent developments, such as legislation aimed at preventing and suppressing SGBV, those initiatives have not yet been fully enacted.

According to Article 14 of the Constitution (République Démocratique du Congo, 2006, Art. 14), “the State shall have the duty to ensure the abolishment of all forms of discrimination against women and ensure the respect and promotion of their rights.” In particular, the “right to significant representation in national, provincial, and local institutions” must be guaranteed, and the state must “take measures to address all forms of violence against women in public and private life.” It must also ensure that women participate fully in the development of the country. The state must control how

these rights are applied in order to ensure that the principle of equality between men and women is applied in these organizations. In addition, the DRC has ratified a number of regional and international legal frameworks that specifically safeguard the rights of women and young girls, including the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1998).

The “Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa,” which the DRC state adopted in 2004, suggested monitoring of gender mainstreaming (SDGEA, 2006). The DRC ratified the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa in 2009 (Makunya, 2023). Additionally, the DRC ratified the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, a legally binding pact requiring the country to swiftly advance gender equity initiatives (SADC, 2008: 465). All of these legal frameworks, however, have little effect on women's lives because they are rarely enforced, and only occasionally applied to those who can afford to pay for the privilege. The constitutional frameworks and mechanisms for women's advancement in the DRC continue to be incredibly weak.

Legal reforms over the past years have eliminated discriminatory clauses that limit women's economic empowerment (World Bank, 2021: 10). These include laws that forbid gender discrimination in financial services and employment, as well as laws that permit women to enter into contracts without their husbands' approval.

Legal and Structural Barriers Impact on Women in Congo

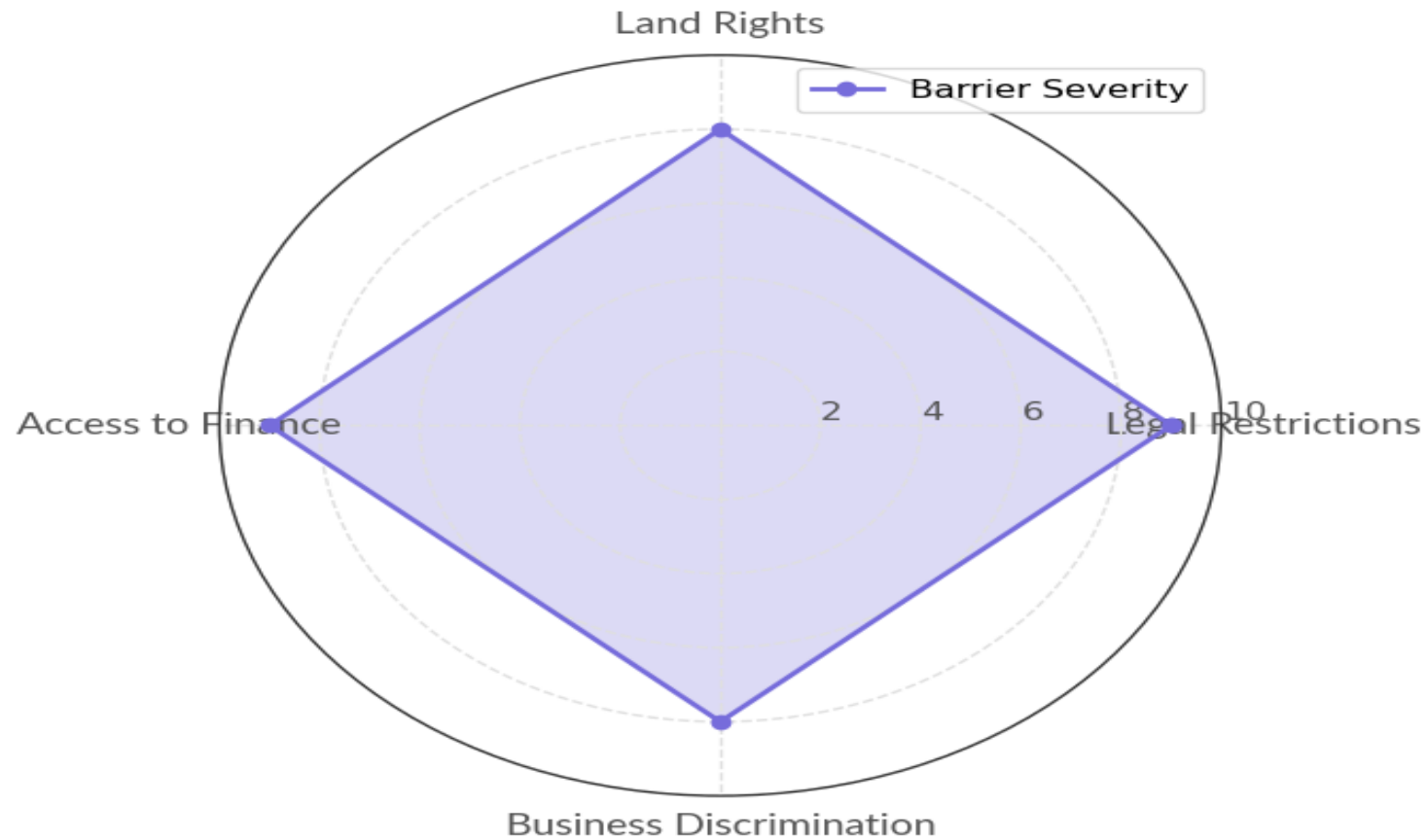


Figure 11: Legal and Structural Barriers Impact on Women in Congo (Author's Own Compilation, 2025).

A radar chart, also known as a spider chart, uses a rating scale from 0 to 10, with higher scores indicating more significant obstacles women must overcome. This approach makes it easy to compare various obstacles by enabling a simplified portrayal of complex difficulties. The graphic identifies four key areas in which structural and legislative obstacles have a major influence on women's rights and prospects in the DRC (AFB, 2017; Braunmiller & Dry, 2022; World Bank, 2023; USAID, 2021; World Bank, 2021; OECD, 2019).

1. Legal Restrictions score 9: this score indicates how much women's autonomy is restricted by legal frameworks such as the Family Code; for instance, laws may limit women's ability to make decisions about marriage, divorce, and child custody, thereby undermining their independence and agency. Limiting laws heavily restrict these women from becoming fully functioning members of society. They act to deny women access to personal freedom, work opportunities, and education. The Congolese Family Code of 1987, which was modelled after Belgian colonial law, requires married women to have their husbands' express consent before registering enterprises or performing other legal duties. Husbands have the authority to revoke agreement (Braunmiller & Dry, 2022: 1). For instance, a bank employee was fired because her spouse was unhappy with her extended work hours, according to a women's rights organisation (Braunmiller & Dry, 2022: 1).

This instance shows the necessity of obtaining the husbands' consent before hiring a married woman, and having them co-sign bank account and loan paperwork. Starting and growing a business presents challenges for women as well (Hyland, Islam, & Muzi, 2020). In an effort to persuade decision-makers to enact reforms, the World Bank Group's Women, Business, and the Law (WBL) initiative examines how laws and regulations affect women's economic opportunities in 190 nations (Braunmiller & Dry, 2022: 2).

2. The score of 8 for Rights to Land demonstrates the challenges that women face in acquiring property ownership. Land ownership is often controlled by men in many cultures, such as the DRC, where women may have limited rights to inherit or own land. Without strong land rights, women's ability to participate in agricultural productivity, or utilize land as collateral for loans is restricted, which

could hinder their economic empowerment (AFB, 2017: 4). The OECD reports that women have only 50% of the legal framework for accessing land assets, according to the SIGI (OECD, 2019).

3. Financial access scores 9. This score reflects the barriers women encounter while trying to access official banking and financial services. Women may lack the necessary documentation to open bank accounts and obtain credit facilities, or they may experience disparities in treatment (AFB, 2017: 4). Thus, this restricts the ability of women to invest in educational opportunities, to establish or expand businesses, or to improve their living conditions, by limiting access to finances. Despite legal reforms in DRC, women still face financial barriers (Bank, 2020). Married women can now create bank accounts and utilise financial services without requiring their husbands' consent to do legal activities, according to changes made to the Family Code (Law 16-008, 2016). Equal rights for women are guaranteed under microfinance laws, which include granting them access to loans and other services.

Despite legislation encouraging women to participate in the economy, women's economic empowerment is widely opposed in the nation, even though it has the potential to enhance family welfare (USAID, 2012). Women thus frequently faced economic discrimination, especially when it came to credit availability (US Department of State, 2017; CEDAW, 2013). For the majority of women in the DRC, who live in rural areas, this is especially true (CEDAW, 2013).

4. Discrimination against Women in Business score 8. The score demonstrates the experiences faced by women, with special reference to married women who apply for loans to establish businesses. Laws and religious dictates say that businesses cannot be owned by women without permission from their husbands (AFB, 2017: 4). Such discrimination thus limits the economic output of women and does harm to their innovative spirits, which fuels the poverty cycle. In the workplace, discrimination against women can take many different forms. Development practitioners are working with governments to reform laws that restrict women's employment and business, but concerns arise about inadequate enforcement, particularly in developing economies which are less well-informed (Hyland et al., 2020: 5). In 2012, the DRC scored 42.5 out of 100

on the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index, indicating women had less than half the rights of men (Hyland et al., 2020: 8). In the DRC, women face legal restrictions on their economic opportunities, including spousal permission and restrictions on work activity and night work.

The graphic helps to illustrate the complexity of the obstacles that women in the DRC must overcome.

a) Legal Obstacles

Women lack property rights, as marriage property is often registered in the husband's name due to gender prejudices, with joint land titling more common between unrelated males than between husband and wife (UN HABITAT, 2015). Limitations on the availability of credit for women creates a violation of women's equal access to credit. According to the Family Code, married women must have their husbands' express consent before registering their enterprises or completing legal requirements such as submitting a loan application or opening a bank account (Hyland et al., 2020: 1). Laws that discriminate against women in the workplace mean in the DRC, women face legal restrictions on their economic opportunities, including spousal permission and restrictions on work activity and night work. Articles 448-450 of the old 1987 Family Code require the husband's authorization for all legal acts and court proceedings (Hyland et al., 2020: 8).

b) Structural Obstacles

Restricted access to education leads to women having lower secondary and tertiary school enrolment than boys, with more women never having attended school than men. Cultural customs that prevent women from engaging in the economy means that women face challenges in land ownership due to customary practices, social norms, economic autonomy, decision-making power, and lack of access to justice (UN Habitat, 2015; Conciliation Resources, 2012; USAID, 2012). There is insufficient representation in decision-making bodies, as shown by a 2018 study, which found that both young women and men agree that a woman's primary role is to care for her family and cook, while a man should make decisions (Lusey et al., 2018).

Next the study will examine the socioeconomic barriers that women in the DRC face, such as poverty, lack of educational opportunities, and forced labour participation.

4.4. Socioeconomic Barriers

Gender equality initiatives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are hampered by major socioeconomic obstacles.

Socioeconomic Indicator	Women (%)	Men (%)
Poverty Rate	61.2%	51.3%
Secondary Education	36.7%	65.8%
Land Ownership	7.6%	21.8%
Subsistence Agriculture	70%	Data unavailable
Informal Businesses	60%	Data unavailable
Labour Force Participation	50%	50%
Income Gap (Small Businesses)	66.5% less than men	Reference

Table 2: Gender-specific socioeconomic indicators in Congo (Author's Own Compilation, 2025).

The difference in the rates of poverty, 61.2% to 51.3%, suggests that a greater proportion of women than males are living below the poverty line (Callaghan et al., 2021). Education at the secondary level is 36.7% for women and 65.8% for men, showing only a small percentage of women have completed secondary school (Braunmiller & Dry, 2022: 5). This discrepancy restricts women's access to better jobs. Compared to men (21.8%), women own a far lower percentage of land (7.6%) which limits their capacity to practice profitable agriculture and build wealth. 70% of rural women are employed in subsistence agriculture, which is sometimes unreliable and low paying (World Bank, 2021: 15). The graph focuses solely on women, as indicated by the data which is not available for men. This limitation highlights how important is to give women's opinions top priority while attempting to comprehend post-conflict realities. Sixty percent of businesses are informal, such as subsistence farming, and 60% of rural women work in informal enterprises, which usually do not offer benefits or job security (AfDB, 2017: 3). Once more, data unavailable for men suggests that this is exclusive to women. Fifty percent (50%) of workers are in the labour force (AfDB, 2017: 3). Fifty percent (50%) of all workers are women, suggesting gender parity in terms of participation but not in terms of job quality or production.

Data suggest that women have more chance of living on the edge of poverty, and an overall reduced educational attainment probably prolongs the cycle of poverty. Most women work in low-productivity industries, either as subsistence farmers or in informal businesses, limiting their economic growth potential. Women usually own less land, so they get less opportunity to invest in agriculture, which is important for rural economies. Though they account for 50 percent of labour, usually they perform lower quality jobs with lower productivity than men.

The severe gap in revenues created by small businesses signals the structural barriers to be crossed by women to equalize themselves with men. The chart presents an exhaustive enumeration of socioeconomic hurdles faced by women in Congo, urging the need for avenues for more targeted assistance.

In the DRC, women participate in the work force at comparatively high rates. Women in the qualitative case study in Goma stated that their motivation to work stems from a variety of factors, including a desire to avoid reliance on others, a desire to support their families and gain their husbands' respect, the precarity of their husbands' financial contributions to the household, and a passion for their work (World Bank, 2021: 13). Almost all women refused to quit working if their husbands made enough money to sustain the family. One interviewee who owns a hair shop and a motorbike taxi company stated that: "A woman can work to make money no matter how wealthy a man is." (World Bank, 2021: 13).

However, there are gender differences. Particularly in smaller-scale farming where women cultivate less area, gender disparities in agricultural yields and production can understate the extent of these discrepancies.

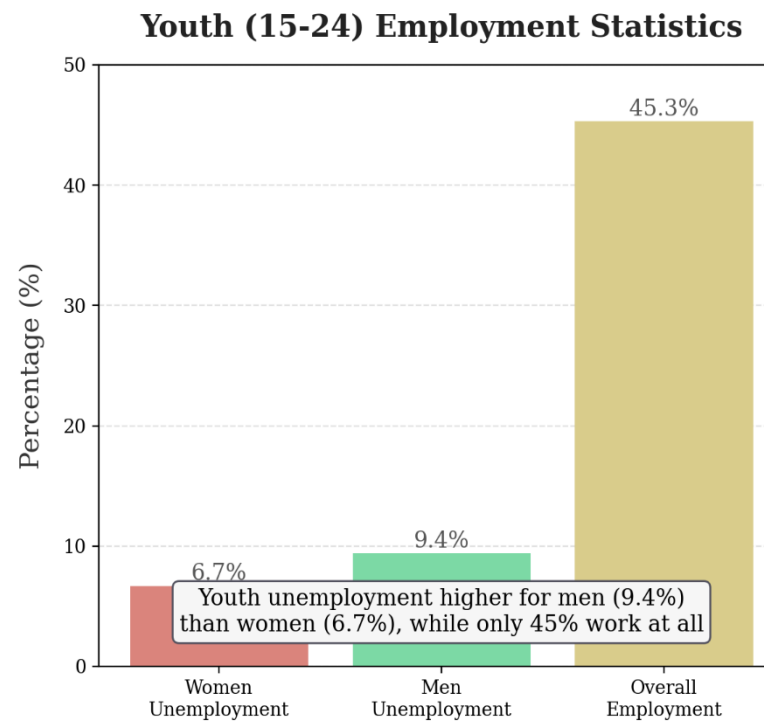
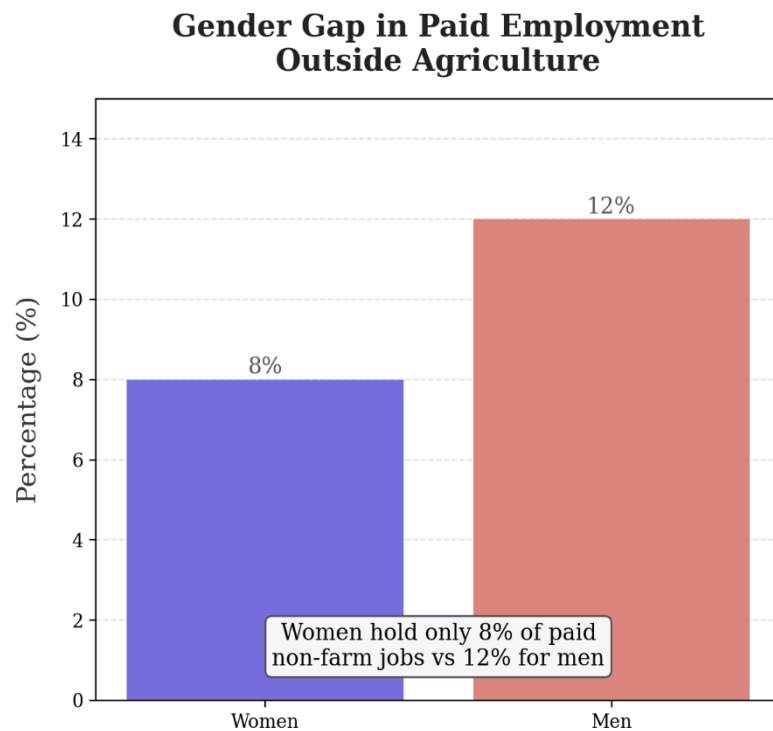
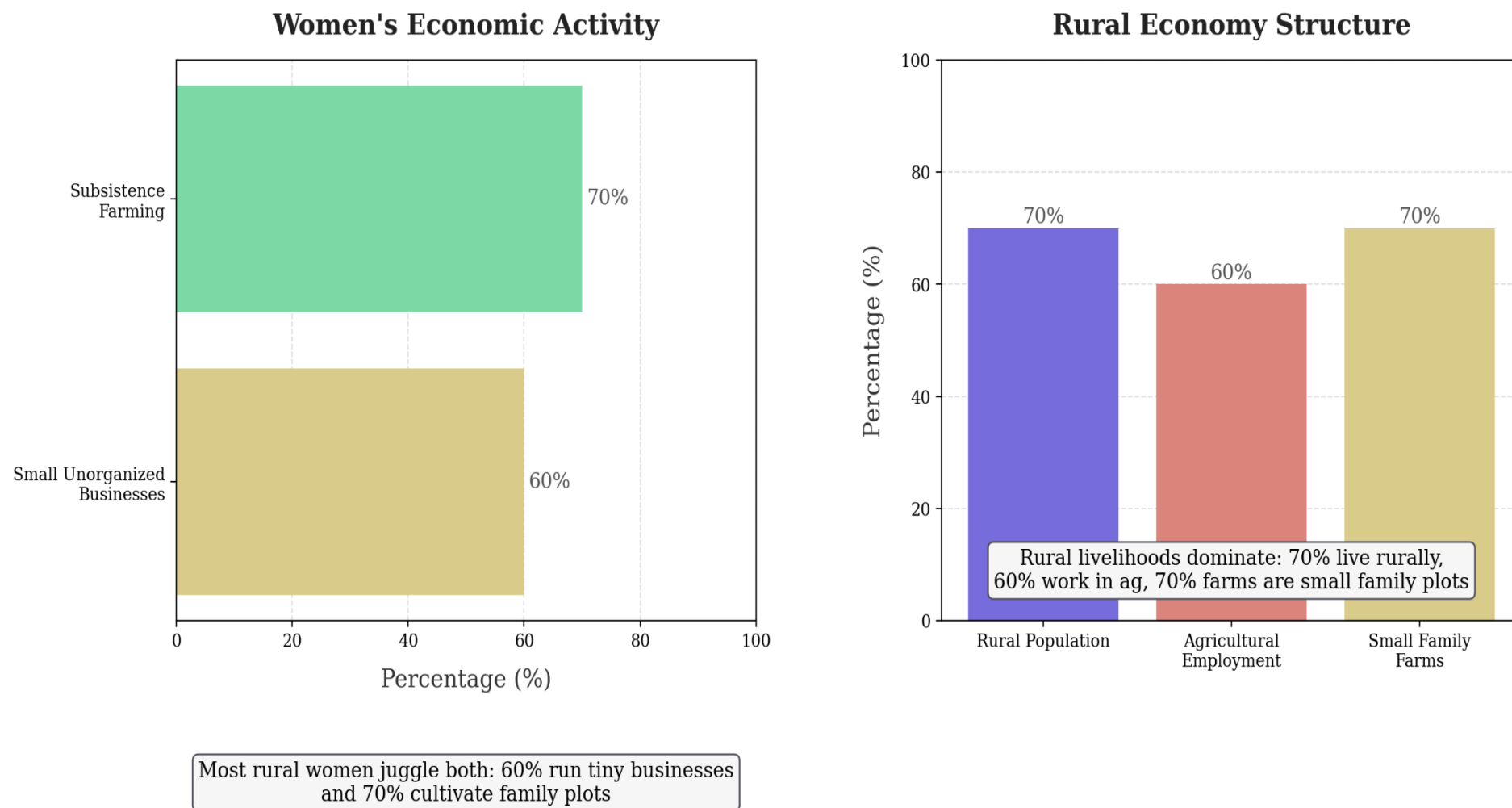


Figure 12: Economic Participation, “Gender Gap in Paid Employment Outside Agriculture and Youth (15-24) Employment Statistics”
Author’s Own Compilation based on African Development Bank (AfDB), 2017: 3.

Figure 13: Economic Participation in Women's Economic Activity and Rural Economy Structure



(Source: Author's Own Compilation based on African Development Bank (AfDB), 2017.

This data above shows that women are less likely than men to work for income in non-agricultural fields. Specifically, if 8% of women and 12% of men were employed for a living, there would be a 4% gap (AfDB, 2017: 3). The gender inequality exacerbates the low unemployment rate of 45.3% among young people aged 15 to 24 (AfDB, 2017: 3). The study demonstrates gender differences in unemployment rates, with young women facing a 6.7% rate and young men facing a 9.4% rate (AfDB, 2017: 3).

Sixty percent (60%) of women work in informal firms, and 70% of women are subsistence farmers, highlighting the lack of job security and benefits in small, informal businesses (AfDB, 2017: 3). This illustrates the limited opportunities available to women in more formal and lucrative fields. Seventy percent (70%) of the population resides in rural areas, where agriculture is the main source of income (AfDB, 2017: 3). Agriculture provides vital livelihoods for 60% of the rural population, but it also highlights barriers to economic growth and diversification (AfDB, 2017: 3).

The “Economic Participation” dashboard in Figure 11 combines two compelling labour market snapshots. The bars on the left show that, in comparison to 12 males, only around 8 adult women obtain paid jobs outside of farming. The fact that there are around one-third fewer women in paid non-farm positions, despite the 4%-point absolute disparity, highlights how gender continues to play a significant role in determining access to formal work. The extremely low rates for both sexes highlight the fact that self-employment and unpaid labour continue to be the foundation of the economy, with paid wage jobs being the exception rather than the rule.

The youth subplot on the right adds an age lens: young males are more likely than young women to be unemployed (9.4%), and less than half of those aged 15 to 24 ($\approx 45\%$) are employed at all. This disparity frequently conceals a deterrent effect; whereas young males typically continue looking for work in the wage sector, many young women leave the workforce to take on caregiving responsibilities, or other informal jobs that surveys do not record as “unemployed.” The twin charts together provide a coherent narrative: there are few formal employment channels, gender differences are apparent before maturity, and the total adolescent employment gap suggests systemic demand-side weakness.

These results have structural underpinnings that are explained in figure 13, page 96. The horizontal bars demonstrate how rural women's livelihoods are distinctly “multi-

active”: approximately 70% cultivate family plots for domestic use, while over 60% run small, unregistered companies (food trade, tailoring, petty retail). The majority do both at once, leaving little time or money to expand either hobby. The accompanying plot places this in the context of the larger rural economy, which includes an estimated 70% in small family farms, 60% in agricultural employments overall, and 70% of rural residents. The lack of non-farm wage jobs depicted in Figure 12, page 95 is less surprising in this setting, because smallholder farming with low productivity dominates the economic base and the non-farm sector is primarily informal.

The two graph collectively show a causal arc; women have a greater dual burden of farming and micro-trading; adolescent women and adult women find it difficult to obtain formal wage work; and the development of contemporary occupations is constrained by a rural structure that is dominated by small farms. In order to address these issues, a two-pronged approach is needed – increasing agricultural output and market accessibility to boost revenues on the farm while also growing rural non-farm businesses and care facilities to free up time for women and young people to pursue higher-returning possibilities.

4.5. Conclusion

In the DRC, the prevalence of GBV is still quite concerning. The DRC has a high prevalence of violence against women, especially domestic abuse, and sexual assault with marital rape. Although the DRC has legal frameworks encourage gender parity, structural, cultural, and economic barriers still exist, posing both opportunities and problems for women's political representation. Due to poor implementation, societal barriers, and GBV concerns, the DRC's legal framework for gender equality is affected, and significant structural changes are required for effective empowerment. Congolese women are paid much less than men for doing the same work, which emphasizes the necessity of addressing key restrictions in order to raise their incomes. All these demonstrate the DRC's women's fragility and the many abuses perpetrated by men as a result of societal dominance and women's subordinate status. This data analysis from the study is based on a plethora of secondary sources, most of which discuss women's involvement. The sources examined, however, did not regularly document or provide specific information regarding men. So, this study considers this as the limitation and presents whatever it found.

The chapter examined the reasons why women in the DRC are not empowered and gender equality is difficult to achieve. These challenges include historical differences in farming work and land ownership, as well as strict rules in the Family Code that let men control women's money and resources. All these factors are connected, and make it hard for women to reach their full potential and have control over their own lives. This chapter argues that women's lower position in society is supported by laws, financial systems, and government institutions. Even though there are legal protections in place, things such as corruption, weak institutions, and lack of political determination stop these laws from being properly followed. Problems such as getting access to money, or owning land, show how the bigger social and political setup affects women's lives. The chapter shows that government structures, financial systems, and laws all help keep women in a lower position. The use of constitutional rights is stopped by weak institutions, political will, and corruption. The larger social and political system is shown through issues such as access to land and finance.

The chapter highlights the persistent gender inequality in the DRC, perpetuated by intentional laws, economic systems, and cultural practices. Addressing these obstacles is crucial for sustainable development, peace, and democratic government. Urgent action includes upholding legal safeguards, modifying discriminatory legislation, and giving women more economic authority. This advocates for female empowerment and gender equality.

The next chapter explores the impact of the DRC civil war on gender equality, using feminist, intersectionality, and post-colonial theories. It highlights the need for African-led, gender-sensitive, and context-specific solutions in peacebuilding processes. The study's findings, theoretical contributions, limitations, and recommendations are presented.

Chapter 5

A final assessment of the effects of civil war on gender equality in the DRC

5.1. Introduction

This chapter concludes the investigation of the effects of the civil war on gender equality in the DRC. Feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and post-colonial theory look at how conflicts affect women's lives and gender relations, which is the foundation directing the study. The study blended on qualitative insights to offer a deeper knowledge of how civil war has affected gender equality within the DRC.

Based on secondary sources and previous research, this study emphasizes the pressing need to rethink peacebuilding processes to include African-led, gender-sensitive, and context-specific solutions.

This chapter outlines the key findings, theoretical contributions, study's limitations, and makes recommendations for further research and policy development.

Summary of Chapters: Chapter 1- 4

Chapter 1 of the study laid the foundation of the study as it provided a background of the study on the effects of civil war on gender equality in the DRC. This chapter set the tone of the study, and it highlighted the problem statement, theoretical statement, research methodology, literature review, and ethical considerations. This research is driven by the main question: *What impact has the civil war had on gender equality in DR Congo?* This investigation began because there was a clear gap in the literature, especially when it comes to the legal and institutional challenges that prevent women from being empowered after war. It used a feminist and intersectional approach to examine these complex connections.

Chapter 2 of the dissertation was aimed at discussing theories adopted in this study, which are feminist theory, intersectionality theory, and post-colonial theory. They assisted in explaining the effects of civil war on gender equality in the DRC.

Chapter 3 of the study focused on the challenges women face in civil wars, highlighting the worsening violence against women and girls in the DRC. The trauma that women and girls face include massive rape, gang rape, forced family rape, forced immigration, and sexual slavery. It explored how the ongoing war in the DRC impacts women's participation in the labour force and education, causing social, and economic issues.

Chapter 4 of the study provided an analysis on challenges in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality in the DRC, highlighting the concerning state of gender-based violence, domestic abuse, and the country's humanitarian and security crisis, and how the DRC's weak legal frameworks are characterized by widespread corruption and are rarely enforced.

5.2. Summary of Key Findings

The key findings of this research are as follows:

5.2.1. Key Findings

The results show that the DRC's civil war has a complex impact on gender equality. In addition to physical violence, other factors that contribute to women's vulnerability include relocation, poor healthcare systems, socioeconomic hardship, interrupted education, and limited involvement. Beyond times of open conflict, these impacts can perpetuate women's disadvantage by interacting with pre-existing gender inequality.

The findings in Chapter 1 illustrate that GBV was used as a weapon of war, and which still continues even today. The international organisations are helping to fight gender inequality, but the implementation of their policies are not successful.

Chapter 2 reveals the historical legacies of colonialism, warfare, and authoritarian rule in the DRC hindering the establishment of inclusive institutions. The structural remnants of colonialism, military strife, and oppressive governance have obstructed the progress of inclusive institutions, highlighting the need for change and reform. In Chapter 2, Section 2.2 (b), liberal feminism was explained as a feminist ideology that holds that denying women and girls access to civil rights and social resources such as jobs and education leads to gender inequality (See Chapter 2, section 2.2b). This theory remains relevant within the context of the DRC, because in Chapter 3, section 3.3.1, it was revealed that women in the DRC remain vulnerable to gender inequality perpetuated by the ongoing civil war. This is evident as women are subjected to low levels of access to education, civil rights etc., somewhat influenced by lack of women's representation in the political domain, which exacerbates women's suppression of basic human rights. Gender, race, class, sexual orientation, religion, ability, and age are examples of intersecting social systems. According to intersectionality theory, vulnerability is exacerbated by overlapping identities including gender, race, and class. The findings presented in Chapter 2, Section 2.3. have shown that women from

minority ethnic groups in the eastern DRC reported greater exposure to displacement and gender-based violence. The DRC's historical colonisation experience continues to have an impact on gendered vulnerabilities in a post-conflict setting, and the post-colonial theory offered a lens through which to examine these consequences. The colonial heritage contributed to the establishment of extractive economic systems, centralised government, and patriarchal social structures in the country. Chapter 2, Section 2.4 looks at how the colonial history of the DRC has influenced gender-related weaknesses in the country after conflicts. The World Bank highlights a significant gender disparity in the DRC's educational system, particularly in the access and the progress of girls from lower to upper secondary school, as shown in Chapter 3, Section 3.6. Adolescent girls often struggle to continue their education due to domestic constraints, early marriage, and labour-intensive jobs.

Chapter 4 highlights the ongoing structural challenges that women face in obtaining loans, land, and work, especially in areas that have been hit by conflict, showing how hard it is for them to achieve financial stability. As detailed in section 4.2, political and security crises disproportionately affect women and girls due to limited access to public services, economic prospects, and political participation, necessitating prioritization of economic empowerment. Chapter 4, Section 4.4, reveals that the Family Code mandates that married women obtain their husbands' explicit consent before registering enterprises, or completing legal requirements such as loan applications or bank accounts. A bank employee was fired due to her spouse's dissatisfaction with her extended work hours, highlighting the importance of obtaining the husband's consent before hiring.

When put together, these suggestions show the main idea of the thesis, that achieving gender equality in the DRC cannot happen by itself, without changes to the bigger systems in place. It needs a plan that brings together different areas, based on fairness, responsibility, and a government that includes everyone.

5.3. Theoretical Reflections

Through postcolonial, intersectional, and feminist theories, this study examines the DRC's struggle as a lived, gendered experience that is motivated by factors other than economic disadvantage and colonial subordination. The hypothesis of women activists, feminism theory highlights the centrality of considering peace and equity by

implementation of social and comprehensive systems, challenging male-dominated frameworks, and incorporating women's viewpoints in security and improvement talks. Intersectionality empowered a comprehensive understanding of sex, race, education, land, and displacement in Congolese women.

The persistence of African wars, the marginalization of indigenous knowledge, and the perpetuation of inequity are all highlighted with the aid of postcolonial philosophy. It highlights the DRC's decolonial emancipation, that is fuelled with the aid of justice and neighbouring countries.

This study emphasizes the significance of studies in disrupting, reinventing, and contributing to change, highlighting the need for brave, grounded, and committed expertise for peace within the DRC and Africa. With dedication and great thinking, the challenge of the work is continuing past these pages. As we stand beside human beings whose voices have been long ignored, we have to reinvent their destiny with clarity, care, and bravery.

5.4. Contribution of the Study

This study highlights the often-overlooked reality of women affected by the DRC's civil war. The research challenges conventional narratives that depict women as victims by highlighting their roles as survivors, resilient change agents, and change agents in governance and conflict.

This research contributes to gender studies, feminism, and postcolonial and political economy. It looks at the experiences that women face during civil war. This research also contributes to knowing and understanding where the policy gaps are, and how the history of legacy impacts the effectiveness of gender interventions in post-war societies. Instead, then focusing only on sexual assault, the study examines women's vulnerability as a multifaceted effect of war, adding to the body of current literature. The study offers a more comprehensive view of how war may perpetuate gender inequality by taking into account relocation, health, education, economic instability, and women's autonomy in addition to violence.

The study calls for fairness, recognition, and change, even highlighting the psychological, social, and emotional impact of war on women's lives.

5.5. Limitations of the Study

The research used secondary data. It did not interact with the women who were affected by the civil war. The study's design and ethical constraints limited the ability to gather first-hand accounts, potentially limiting the depth and emotional richness of the lived experiences of women affected by war. The whole illustration of grassroots voices has been impeded through language limitations and a loss of translated sources in local Congolese dialects, mainly in indigenous knowledge structures which are often oral and untranslated.

Even whilst feminist, intersectional, and postcolonial theories offer beneficial frameworks for analysis, the study's examination of complex problems, which include religion, race, and disability, lacks thorough coverage, calling for extra studies on those intersections. Though its generalizability may be constrained by localized research, this research, which is centered on the DRC setting, lays the groundwork for future research and activism by highlighting the gendered aspects of war, peacebuilding, and rebuilding.

5.6. Recommendations

Given the results of the research, the following recommendations may be made:

- The research suggests recommendations to promote global peace in reforming institutions, particularly through the active involvement and participation of women in economic growth, peace talks and governance. In order to prevent gender-based violence, ensure victims receive justice, and eradicate the stigma associated with trauma from war; this is intended to strengthen institutional and legal frameworks.
- A comprehensive strategy is needed to support the DRC's National Committee for Genocide Prevention and Punishment, fostering stronger ties between civil society and government entities.
- Coordination is needed between local civil society and government, as well as Civil Affairs Chiefs and Heads of Office, giving a clear mandate to transfer resources, processes, and expertise for atrocity prevention.
- For women empowerment, there has to be a fund for educational and skill-building initiatives for underprivileged and displaced women to restore agency and economic independence.

- Enforce laws and practices that support gender equality more strictly, and ensure that the 2016 Family Code amendment and other laws that uphold women's rights are adhered to, particularly at the local and provincial levels. After a conflict, take gender into account while governing and restoring peace. Every stage of security reforms, peace negotiations, and transitional justice should involve women, and every national strategy for recovery and reconstruction should include gender-sensitive strategies.
- Encourage civil society and grassroots women's movements, and give local women's groups engaged in community development, legal literacy, and peacebuilding, direct finance and capacity-building.
- Implement provincial and municipal preventive programmes to standardize monitoring, anticipating, and stopping violence, integrating new indicators on identification factors, land challenges, and public authorities' conduct.
- Encourage local women's organisations and civil society organisations, give them direct financial assistance, and assist them in developing their abilities, particularly in community development, legal knowledge, and peacebuilding.
- Make additional investments to support women's economic independence, help women by providing them with loans, land, and training in skills, particularly in rural and conflict-affected areas. Ensure that gender equality is a primary emphasis of mining and farming policy.
- Give women and girls greater opportunities to learn and lead, enhance their capacity to continue their studies, and establish initiatives that provide financial and advisory support to enable women to pursue professions in public service, education, and politics. Increase girls' school retention and establish mentorship and scholarship programmes that help women pursue careers in academics, politics, and public service.
- Ensure that data is gathered and monitored with gender considerations, develop an investment in data that deconstructs information on gender, conflicts, and governmental operations. This aids in implementing targeted measures and assessing progress towards SDG 5.
- Strengthen the mechanisms that prevent corruption and hold the administration responsible, develop associations that provide a platform for individuals to share their concerns and track government actions. This strategy is

instrumental in addressing corruption that undermines public services and the rights of women.

- Give the MONUSCO mission financial and human resources to ensure a seamless transition over the course of the next 5 years.
- Invest in evidence-based and locally led research projects that explore the relationships between multidimensional violence, atrocities, land conflicts, politics, and power dynamics.
- The DRC inclusive peacebuilding strategies have to shift from extraversion to introversion, making domestic players more crucial to the country's future than exterior ones.

5.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, this research has highlighted the enduring outcomes of civil war on gender equality inside the DRC, emphasizing the urgency of transforming every coverage and practice to better serve affected communities. The findings affirm that addressing gender inequality in post-war contexts is not usually optional; it is foundational to sustainable peace and development. While obstacles exist, the information produced right here contributes to ongoing scholarly and policy debates on gender, war, and justice in Africa. This observation closes with a plea for inclusive, African-led responses that understand the resilience and agency of women. Their stories need to be preserved to form the path forward. This piece finishes with a cry for reform; however, it commenced with a question concerning war. Apart from being academic, this adventure has been intensely emotional, inspiring contemplation of the means of justice, equality, and restoration within the aftermath of tragedy. Let this work be a small, however meaningful, step in that direction.

The research examined the civil war's impact on gender equality in the DRC, focusing on women's access to leadership roles, resources, and rights, highlighting the ongoing marginalization of women in political and economic structures. This research uses feminist and intersectional lenses. One important discovery is that violence in the DRC happens in more ways than just physical attacks. It also happens through structures that favour men, like unfair family rules, laws that do not treat women and men equally when it comes to owning property, limited access to money and banking services, and not letting women take part in important decisions.

Despite new legislation promoting gender equality, violence against women persists in the DRC, including physical assault, unjust family laws, property limitations, and lack of finance. Women, especially in rural areas, face barriers to economic independence, education, and government engagement. Progress is hindered by danger, corruption, and outdated ideas, highlighting the ongoing challenges faced by women in these sectors. The research demonstrates how Congolese women fight back and persevere, demonstrating their strength, and opposing unjust institutions that exclude them. Law reforms, fresh perspectives on peace, governance, and development, as well as a gender-sensitive peacebuilding strategy are all necessary to address gender disparity. It is important to address gender-based injustice in wars as a political issue rather than only a humanitarian one. Building a just society after war requires including women in decision-making at all levels.

This study stands as a provider of that change. It honours the women and girls of the DRC; survivors, leaders, mothers, and daughters whose stories need to be heard, and whose futures call for our collective attention.

“Change is coming. It’s just a matter of time”. Ruth Perry

Although the DRC has been the focus of this dissertation, its conclusions also provide important light on how gender plays a part in civil wars across the Global South. The local adaptation of feminist approaches to peace and the ways in which international efforts may support these initiatives without assuming control of them require more investigation.

In conclusion, when the war is over, gender equality in the DRC will not happen on its own. It must be vigorously advanced by just policies, equitable leadership, and a strong commitment to advancing women's rights.

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