

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

**CHILDREN OF WAR: RETHINKING STRATEGIES FOR THE
PROTECTION OF CHILDREN IN ARMED CONFLICTS**



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Abstract

Children have been suffering from unimaginable miseries due to war conditions for decades. Despite the technological evolution and development of humans in the present era, children belonging to war ravaged regions are still going through unspeakable afflictions and struggles. This research proposes possible strategic and significant measures that must be taken in order to protect children from misery, pain and unjust killing. Proper implementation of UN conventions, cancellation of veto power and effective monitoring system should be exercised to mitigate violence and to ensure a system of stability. In order to save children and guarantee their well being, effective mechanisms are needed to curtail the authority of those state politicians and capitalists who commit war crimes against innocent children. The study emphasizes that all children irrespective of their nationality, religion, culture and race deserve to live in a world of harmony, affection and peace.

Keywords: War affected children, ICC, International law, peace, UN conventions, Veto power

1. Introduction

In his book entitled *Children of War*, Rosenblatt explained that there are several countries in the world where children have only been experiencing violence and destruction since birth due to persistent war situations (Rosenblatt, 1983). Alongside physical violence, children face mental health issues, trauma, anxiety, depression and post stress traumatic disorder after being directly exposed to war horrors. This leads to the hindrance in the proper functioning of children's brain and physical body. Reports and research surveys claim that when war traumatized children become adults, they show several serious medical conditions including heart diseases (Werner, 2012). The children of Africa, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Syria, Gaza and all other war torn countries experience the exact same fate of misery and dehumanization.

In World War two, 1.4 million people faced displacement and in the present world, there are almost 14 million displaced refugee people among whom three-fourth are women and children (Berman, 2001). The crisis that children are facing in the present age is far greater than what was created in the 1950s. Children turn into unaccompanied kids after losing their parents in war, making them more prone to danger. During war, they lose the opportunity for education which affects them deeply in post war conditions. The children who become disabled during war bear the burden of violence throughout their life in the form of their broken limbs (Santa, 2006).

Children's mental health and normal functioning of the brain is highly disturbed by exposure to terror and violence in armed conflicts (Barenbaum et al., 2004). Studies indicate that more than half of children show serious symptoms of PTSD and anxiety after going through brutal experience of war (Allwood et al., 2002). Studies conducted on children of war affected regions of Southern Darfur revealed that 75 percent of children had PTSD problems and 38 percent showed symptoms of depression (Morgos, 2008). In order to ensure the well-being of children and to protect them from violent hostilities of armed conflicts, it is imperative to take sustainable actions with concrete strategy.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What are the main reasons global platforms failed to protect the rights of children?
2. What are the robust measures that should be taken to ensure the safety of war affected children?

2. Literature Review

Heidari and Yoosefee (2026) examined the long term consequences of war and armed conflicts on children. The study highlighted that war does not only cause immediate death of thousands of people, it causes lasting psychological and physical harm by inducing trauma and destroying entire infrastructures. Children are the most vulnerable to such effects as they are more sensitive towards violence, explosive sounds and aggression. Since 2017, blockade of Gaza has started which has destroyed the life quality of people living there, resulting in mass displacement of children.

Elaborating the evolution of armed conflicts, Goldson (1996) described that the nature of war has changed in the 20th century. In the past, wars used to be conventional and soldiers were at the front row to fight. On the contrary, the modern armed conflicts are designed in such a way that civilians and infrastructures of countries are directly targeted. Children are the one most affected by this change as they are confronted with challenges beyond their understanding and coping ability. They lose their family, education, home and every basic thing they need as humans. War extends beyond the challenges of today, it also has an ever-lasting impact on the future of affected children. The paper explained that wars in the 20th century have increasingly shifted from conventional battles to “low-intensity” conflicts targeting civilians and infrastructure. In such wars, children suffer heavily as homes, families, and essential services are destroyed, leading to long-term harm. It concludes that these conditions severely disrupt children’s development and their future roles in society.

Glasgow and Baer (2011) described the hardships faced by children during African wars like conflicts of Sudan, Uganda, Liberia, DRC and Sierra Leone. Children in these regions are forced to join armed forces and lift weapons in those early years of their life when they should only play and study. They suffer extreme torture and abuse and are often forced to take drugs to become fearless. After committing murders and violent crimes, these children become psychologically fragmented and disturbed because of guilt. Ehlers and Clark (2000) explained in their research that the mental disease of PTSD is related to human memory because it is always related to some past traumatic experience. The traumatic experiences of the past negatively impact the life of war survivors, and the lasting impact of war destruction never goes away. The survivors of conflict continue to face its lasting psychological consequences even after the war stops (Lie, 2002; Carlsson et al., 2006; Roth et al., 2006).

Kakaje et al. (2021) claimed that the Syrian regime murdered half a million people including children during war. These statistics show the adversities which fall upon children living under war conditions. The study investigated the mental health of 1951 Syrians who directly witnessed war horrors and findings revealed that 44% of people had serious mental disorders while 36.9% showed symptoms of PTSD. These people witnessed terror incidents, went through displacement again and again and had very low support from society to cope with these hardships which worsened their mental health. The research concluded that Syria's long civil war has traumatized Syrian people and it is necessary to give them mental support and proper intervention.

Defining the refugee’s challenges extensively, Veronese et al. (2021) in an interview study mentioned that due to Syrian civil war, approximately 12 million Syrians have been displaced, and credible reports reveal that 40% of these displaced Syrians are children. Based on the outcomes of 311 children’s interviews residing in Jordan as refugees, the research asserted that children are more vulnerable to violence related trauma. Destruction of family structure, lack of social support, poverty and restricted access to education are some major postwar stressors that further deteriorates

the mental health and cognitive development of children. The study also revealed that resilience plays a key role in protecting and uplifting the displaced children of Syria.

Macksoud and Aber (1996) explored the complexity and variety of psychological impact of war on children in research. Study revealed that the psychological development of children during war depends greatly on the child's age, gender, social background and their personal experience. Children who suffer loss of parents and violence due to war may become traumatized and isolated, but often they start showing prosocial behaviour. Therefore, all the war-affected children cannot be treated emotionally using one treatment or technique. Firstly, the specific psychological problem with each child should be targeted and then appropriate healing can start accordingly.

Thabet and Vostanis (1999) discussed the psychological condition of Palestinian children. Focusing on children aged from 6 to 11, the investigation revealed that almost every Palestinian child suffers from war-induced trauma. 72 percent of children showed mild symptoms of PTSD and 41 percent of children showed symptoms of having serious trauma. Those children who suffered more terror incidents suffered more emotionally. The study stressed the need for proper evaluation and intervention programs to identify PTSD problems in children who have experienced war. Wessells (1998) drew attention to the sufferings of children under conditions of war. The crisis faced by children belonging to war-affected areas is a much-ignored matter in conflict studies and it is imperative to explore and address this issue. In modern wars, children are actively affected both as victims and soldiers. When children are forcibly involved in war, it creates a cycle of chronic victimization, making it difficult to restore peace. The study also highlighted the need for in-depth exploration of the psychological impact of repeated violence on children.

3. Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a policy oriented approach to address key steps that should be taken to reduce child hostilities, mainly considering the UN conventions and universal human rights that international law provides to every child of the world. The efforts by the United Nations to protect children are constructive and commendable. It includes the 1989 Convention on the rights of children, whose Article 6 clearly states that children have the right to life under all conditions (Southall and Carballo, 1996). CRC (The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Child) is a formal regulatory framework which gives legal protection to children affected by war and its significance cannot be denied (Cohn, 1991). International Humanitarian Law (IHL) explicitly articulates that civilians, particularly children, should not be targeted in armed conflicts. UN article 38 asserts:

“In accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law to protect the civilian population in armed conflicts, States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure protection and care of children who are affected by an armed conflict.” (United Nations, 1989, Art. 38)

Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) clearly states that children must be protected from all harms even in conditions of war. According to Article 6 of UNCRC, children have an inherent right to life and under all conditions, the well being of children must be taken under consideration. According to Article 19 of UNCRC, children must be protected from abuse and violence in times of war and armed conflicts. It focuses on the rights of refugees and displaced children and how they should be provided with proper educational and healthcare facilities but this framework also has its own limitations like the Geneva convention. As emphasized by UN statements, children must not be killed and abducted, they should not be recruited as soldiers and they must not be sexually assaulted. As per the statement of article 38 UN convention:

“States Parties shall take all feasible measures to ensure that persons who have not attained the age of fifteen years do not take a direct part in hostilities. States Parties shall refrain from recruiting any person who has not attained the age of fifteen years into their armed forces.”(United Nations, 1989, Art. 38)

According to the international legal system and humanitarian documents, the legal status of children is of protected civilians; they cannot be attacked intentionally and their basic needs should be provided to them amidst all conditions. A child younger than 18 years of age cannot be a part of any armed group or army and children should be preserved from violence and torture (Djebbar, 2025). The failure to implement these laws in the practical world is alarming, leading to the poor and inadequate enforcement of legislation that should be addressed and rectified. The international legal system clearly states that children cannot be part of any army or defence force as it is devastating for them both physically and psychologically. International law gives legal protection to children during conditions of war.

4. Results and Discussions

Various legal documents were written and many conventions have been passed by the international forums in order to protect children of war but the dilemma of humanity is that atrocities against children are only rising with the passage of time. From Sudan to Gaza and from Syria to Lebanon, children are still being slaughtered like bare lives in front of global organizations. The condemnations are never enough to protect people. The undenyng fact is that the practical application of UN conventions is needed to ensure the safety of war affected children across the world.

4.1 Cancellation of veto power of P5 in UN security council

In order to ensure the equal distribution of human rights across the world, the veto power must end. The veto power is exercised by five permanent members of the UN Security Council which include China, Russia, France, the United Kingdom and the United States. These countries have the authority to block any UN resolution they want even if the resolution has been passed by all other council members of UNSC. This clearly shows the hierarchical structure of the UN which is a threat to the safety of people across the world. When the UN is clearly being controlled by a few powerful states of the world, how's the UN supposed to deliver for the marginalized and vulnerable war-torn regions of the world? Countries like Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Palestine, Gaza and other African regions have been suffering because of colonial and imperialist practices of Russia, United States and the United Kingdom. The hands filled with blood of people should not be allowed to make decisions on the behalf of the world. Until the cancellation of veto power, no one can expect the implementation of human laws in favour of those innocent people who really deserve the legal protection.

History is evident that countries having veto power are the ones who have been committing the most atrocities against people particularly children across the globe. The United State of America has always been abusing the power of veto by standing against the oppressed people of Gaza and people belonging to other war torn regions (Olayiwola, 2024; Wijaya et al., 2025). Due to the repeated use of veto power by the US against Palestinian resolutions, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza escalated which led to the death of thousands of children (Antai, 2025; Hermawanto and Heriningsih, 2025). Veto power can be considered as one of the main obstacles in the path of world peace and harmony (Akter, 2026). Being an ally of a colonial aggressor state Israel, the United States has been compromising the lives of millions of innocent people in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Iran (Ali et al., 2025). Therefore, the possession of veto power by such a cruel state is alarming and a clear threat to the peace of the world.

These statistics call for the refinement of the UN 's entire structure and methodology. Every country regardless of their economic condition should have an equal opportunity to address their concerns in the global platforms like the United Nations. Although the UN declares its commitment to equality, the biased decisions and power of veto display the falsification of this claim. There is great contradiction between what international forums claim to be and what they actually practice (Ravaonoelitiana and Rasoafara, 2025). The International Court of Justice (ICJ) is a part of the UN and is meant to solve conflicts among states. The irony is that the judgments of ICJ are more 'influenced by P5

than the legal obligation' (Aidonojie et al., 2026). The power of P5 countries should at least be limited if it cannot be discarded in order to confirm the credibility of the United Nations.

4.2 Implementation of international law and UN conventions

Despite the conventions and efforts by the UN, cyclical violent conditions and persistent state of war across different regions of the world has been contributing to the sufferings of children, turning the UN conventions into a complete failure. Millions of children die and those who survive suffer from orphanhood, displacement, poverty and bodily or mental disability. It is an undenying fact that despite the presence of strong international legal frameworks for the protection of children, children of war continue to be afflicted with atrocities and systematic violence. Although UN conventions and other international legal frameworks are available, the cruel fact remains that these regulatory policies only tackle violence after it has been done (Linnarsson and Sedletzki, 2014). According to Article 19 of UN convention on children's rights:

“States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation.”
(United Nations, 1989, Art. 19)

There are plenty of international laws and legal documents that apparently exist globally but the need of the hour is that they should be enforced practically across the world so that the rights of children can be protected. It is essential to put the international laws into practice which are specifically meant for child protection during war and armed conflicts. In various war zones, involvement of children in wars as soldiers has been reported which is a heinous crime which needs to stop (Toporkova, 2024). Children are often used as soldiers in armed conflicts which marks a clear violation of global humanitarian laws (Arumbinang et al., 2023). Legal systems of different countries may vary but the main reason for children suffering in wars like the Gaza case is not lack of legal mechanisms. The main reason behind these atrocities are the political interests of global monstrous elites and the failure of global institutions to hold them accountable.

Islamic law is the best model to follow as it commands that no civilian population, specifically children, women and elderly should be harmed during armed conflicts and war (Ezzerouali and Sungay, 2026). International laws and Geneva conventions have failed to protect children during the war between Russia and Ukraine, Israel and Palestine (Chincharauli, 2025). The killing and displacement of thousands of children during war despite having an entire child protection legal system showcases the complete failure of Geneva convention. Therefore, a more strong, effective and applicable mechanism is needed to ensure the well-being of children in conditions of war. The International Criminal Court (ICC) should act unbiased and must hold those accountable who have committed war crimes against humanity and children in Syria, Gaza, Palestine, Iraq and other conflicted zones.

4.3 The system of monitoring and accountability

There is an urgent need for an effective monitoring system of war-torn areas on an international level in order to ensure the safety and welfare of children. The introduction of a monitoring system developed by the UN in 1996 is commendable and there is a need for more monitoring systems like these. Later in 2005, Security Council's Resolution 1612 was developed by UN in order to track child abuse (Nylund and Hyllested, 2010). This system helps in the identification of criminals who violate children's rights and subject them to accountability. Recruitment of children as soldiers is a crime against humanity. The prosecution of criminals like Charles Taylor and Thomas Lubanga Dyilo who were involved in exploitation of children is a key step towards the enforcement of child protection laws (Francis, 2007).

Reforms are needed in the monitoring body of UNCRC to ensure the accountability of terrorist states (Gunawan et al., 2025). The people responsible for heinous war crimes against children should be held accountable and the punishment of persecution should be declared for the murderers of children so that a clear warning can be given to the war criminals. ICC is conducting an investigation on the Israel Gaza conflict but the outcomes are not impactful (Soraya et al., 2024). Article 51 of the United Nations' convention states that a country can use force against another country in self defence and the evil regimes are using this clause to attack the selective countries. Israel has been attacking people of Gaza and murdering thousands of children claiming that they are only reacting against the October 7 attack to protect themselves (Boisen, 2026). The UN needs to clarify the prohibited actions during war by setting an example of punishing the Israeli government for their war crimes.

Despite the official doctrine of International Humanitarian Law, the constant violation of IHL has been noticed in the context of Gaza by ICC. The failure of ICC (International Criminal Court) and ICJ (International Court of Justice) in safeguarding the children of Gaza by punishing the criminals illustrates the influence of evil states such as Israel and US on these international bodies (Ivana, 2025). The system of accountability can only be established when the international courts and global humanitarian forums are influenced by law instead of powerful states.

4.4 The significant role of humanitarian organizations

In order to minimize the drastic consequences of war on the development of children, governments, legal international departments and NGOs need to work in collaboration to assist war-affected children more effectively. Long exposure to terror activities, constant deaths, malnutrition and lack of basic healthcare facilities leads to the hindrance of cognitive and physical growth of children. A well structured war trauma-informed support system should be provided to war affected children so that they can psychologically heal (Buheji and Buheji, 2024). Both immediate and long term solutions must be supplied to children of war-ravaged zones so that they can be able to cope with war-related trauma. Children belonging to war-ravaged countries face extreme physical, emotional and psychological damage. They get injured, face shortage of basic human facilities and even die during war. Poverty, displacement, lack of healthcare and education impact their life for a long period of time (Lava et al., 2022). The global community should show solidarity with refugee children and it should be guaranteed that they get enough psychological and humanitarian help.

Children are mostly perceived as passive victims in war which ignores their resilience and strength. The approach of the UN security council towards children living in war-torn areas is also conventional. Children are not only victims in war times, they showcase great adaptability, toughness and endurance which may also play a major role in making their community stronger. To uphold the rights of children, it is crucial to understand them more extensively and with greater depth (Lee, 2018). It is essential to have a deeper understanding of children's personal experiences in war so that appropriate support can be provided to them (Wessells, 2016). Instead of only concentrating on issues like trauma and PTSD, children's agency should be recognized in their resilience and adaptability.

Children living in war torn countries like Palestine, Syria, Russia and Ukraine are in urgent need of humanitarian support (Melnychuk et al., 2022). They need to be evacuated safely and their basic needs should be delivered to them during war. There is a pressing need to have a committed government and robust national policy to encounter crises more effectively. Prolonged situations of war have detrimental effects on children's development and quality of life. The independent humanitarian organizations must play their part in safeguarding the rights of children during war and post-war challenges. The role of NGOs is very significant in preserving the rights of children and in the application of legal provisions. The humanitarian foundations like 'Children Not Numbers' are greatly helping the children affected by war. The organization was developed by just two women to support children of Gaza and later it turned into a great source of assistance to war torn children.

The role of international humanitarian organizations in preserving rights of children under conditions of war is significant. There are main three strategies that can be used to protect children from violence, abuse, torture and other bodily or psychological harm. The first approach is to give them legal protection, second is to protect them from physical exploitation and the third technique is to give them a title of vulnerable passive victims of war so that they are treated humanly with kindness as they rightfully deserve (Wessels and Edgerton, 2008). Christian children' Fund is an organization that follows this model to tackle crises that children may face in war. The remarkable efforts of "The Children and War Foundation" to heal war-affected children psychologically are commendable. The Children and War Foundation was founded in the 1990s when Yugoslav civil war ended. The foundation introduced new therapies like 'Writing for Recovery' and group tasks to help traumatized children. Instead of focusing on individual therapy sessions, this organization tried to heal them collectively and their techniques proved to be fruitful (Yule et al., 2013). Before the creation of this foundation, there was no proper specific treatment available to heal children of war psychologically and mentally which marks its significance in today's world.

United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) is the UN agency that particularly focuses on the assistance of affected children in different parts of the world. Nearly 40 million children faced displacement in the Syrian and Ukrainian war and UNICEF appeared as one of the most significant organizations which tried to safeguard the well-being of affected refugee children (Salian and Swamy, 2025). UNICEF does not only provide humanitarian aid to children, it also advocates for the rights and safety of children, as was seen in the context of the Gaza crisis (Piris et al., 2025). Islamic Relief Worldwide (IRW) is an organization based in the United Kingdom that provides humanitarian assistance to displaced families and communities affected by disasters. Common people from all over the world should show empathy with affected children by donating their money and resources to these kinds of foundations who are trying to protect vulnerable people across the world. 'War Child Alliance' is another notable platform which is working to give psychological support to war affected children who are suffering from trauma and anxiety. The world needs more initiative like those mentioned before to ensure the protection and well being of children.

4.5 Protecting children through the restriction of armed conflict

Limiting armed conflicts and reduction of hostilities on regional as well as global level is fundamental in order to ensure protection and well-being of children (McFarland, 1999). Racial and religious hatred needs to be discarded from the world to ensure the prevalence of peace. The most significant task for parents is to provide their children an environment of love and peace. (DeMause, 2011) Students should be educated about promoting peace and love during school years by encouraging co-ordination and peer-collaboration in class (Pepinsky, 2000). In historical wars, people and nations used to be disinterested in other's sufferings and the silence of people only helped in the enhancement of the miseries of victims. This complicity of war crimes by remaining silent needs to end so that the trust in humanity can be restored (Evans, 2009). Every war brings calamities for children and it is the moral responsibility of every human belonging to all races, religions and cultures to stand against the war crimes against children (Kadir and Kampalath, 2023).

The UN Peacebuilding Commission founded in 2005 to resolve the conflict between states is a major step towards the restoration of long term peace in the world but proper reforms are needed to ensure the safety of vulnerable and weak states (Call and Cousens, 2008). The post-war peace treaties and reconciliation agreements must include protection and welfare of children in it (Molloy, 2023). The language and linguistic style used in these deals should be careful and empowering as it holds great significance. The objectives and clauses regarding civilians and children safety should be written in explicit and precise language to ensure the effectiveness of these peace settlements. The Responsibility to Protect (R2P) is a UN authorized doctrine which emphasizes that if a state fails to protect its people, the UN and international community may intervene to protect civilians (Spitka, 2018). In the context of Gaza, the

UN's principle of Responsibility to Protect has failed to prove its efficiency. The practical application of R2P could have protected countless innocent lives (Bayeh, 2014). R2P can be a significant tool to safeguard children belonging to war ravaged areas if the international community sincerely puts efforts for the security of war afflicted children. Instead of waging wars and promoting violence, countries should adopt the path of diplomacy and peace talks. These talks can be arranged by neutral states or the UN in order to give priority to peace and stability. Collective efforts are needed from political, humanitarian, legal and social grounds to guarantee the restriction of armed conflicts in the world. Children's security and well being can only be guaranteed in a world where wars do not exist.

5. Conclusion

Children suffer the most from armed conflicts and violence even though they are never responsible for any war situations. They suffer heavy loss both physically and psychologically which leaves an unavoidable scar on their souls. Each child living in any corner of the world must be given the right to live in a kind, supportive and nurturing environment. The global community needs to reflect on its shortcomings which lead to the failure of children's safety. Targeted interventions and robust measures are needed to be taken with proactive strategy so that armed conflicts can be reduced and every child can breathe the same air of warmth and compassion.

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Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

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Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

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