



Children Born of War (CBOW)

Between Stigmatization, Integration and Empowerment

Throughout history, Children Born of War (CBOW) have been born as a consequence of both sexual violence and of more or less consensual relationships in war and conflict. Nevertheless, little is known about this group of children; although, evidence suggests that their basic human rights are violated and their integration into the post-conflict society is challenged. It is becoming increasingly recognized at both the academic and the political level that this group of children deserves and needs targeted attention. In this policy brief, we will outline some of the key challenges faced by Children Born of War and suggest avenues for further research.

Brief Points

- The term “Children Born of War” (CBOW) refers to children who have one parent that is a member of the local community (usually the mother) while the other parent is part of a foreign army or peacekeeping force (usually the father).
- CBOW are often invisible as they belong to the so-called “hidden populations”.
- CBOW’s basic human rights are often violated, as they are considered as enemies in their home country due to the origins of their father.

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Definition and Categorization

In 2006, the term “Children Born of War” (CBOW) was agreed upon by an expert group. The term specifically refers to children who have one parent that is a member of the local community (usually the mother), while the other parent is part of a foreign army or peacekeeping force (usually the father). The aim of the expert group was to create a term that a) could be used to describe this particular population group across time and space, b) offers a clear separation from other war-affected groups of children, and c) provides a neutral wording for this group. Terms for this group of children have often been stigmatizing, such as “*Wehrmachtskinder*” (children of German soldiers in Europe); “*Amerasians*” (children of American soldiers in Korea); “*Vietamericans*” (children of American soldiers in Vietnam); “*tyskerunge*” (children of German soldiers in Norway and Denmark); “*war leftovers*” (children of Canadian soldiers in Europe); “*children of hate*” (genocide in Rwanda); “*bụi đời*” (“dust of life” – children of American soldiers in Vietnam); and “*Chetnik babies*” (also called “children of the enemy” – children born of war

rape in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the civil war in the 1990s).

Within the group of CBOW, it is common to differentiate between the following different categories, as introduced by Ingvill C. Mochmann:

- **Children of enemy soldiers:** These children are fathered by foreign soldiers who are located in the country or region and clearly defined as enemies, such as German soldiers in Russia during WWII, or members of the Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) in Bosnia-Herzegovina during the war in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.
- **Children of soldiers from occupation forces:** In this case, the soldiers can be seen as enemies or as allies, depending on the view of the local population. For example, the allied forces occupying Germany in the post-WWII years were conceived of as saviors by some parts of the population and as enemies by others.
- **Children born to child soldiers:** An example of this includes girls who have been abducted and held captive by the

Lord’s Resistance Army (LRA) in Uganda since the start of the conflict, and who have been impregnated by a member of the LRA.

- **Children fathered by members of peacekeeping forces:** For example, during peacekeeping missions in countries like Korea, Cambodia and Liberia.

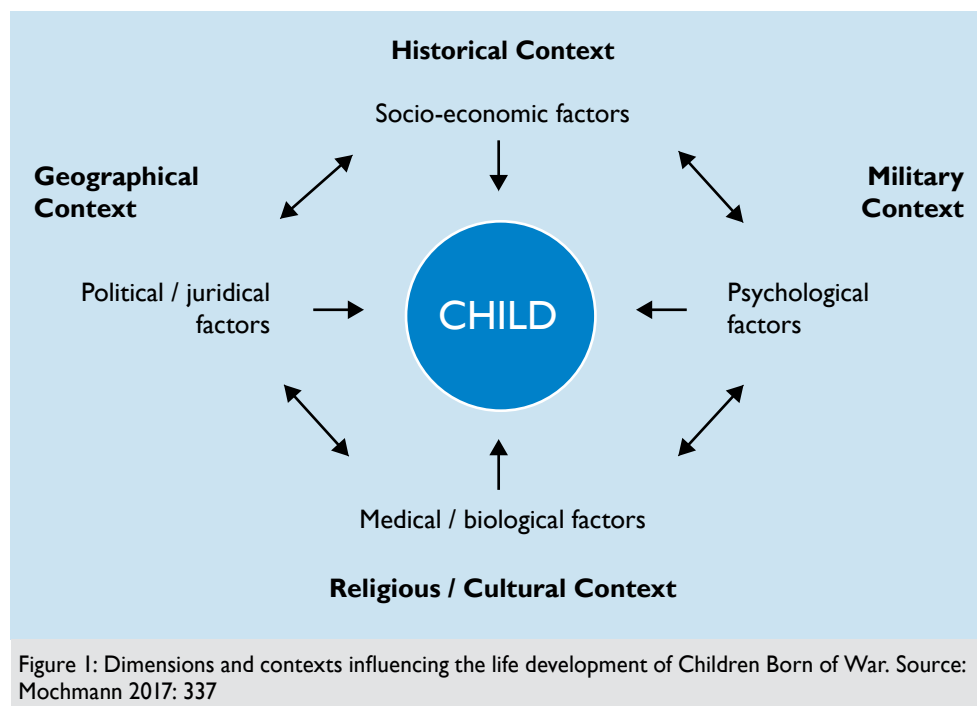
These categories, while surely not exhaustive, provide a broad cluster that can be readjusted as variations in conflict patterns also give rise to new groups of CBOW. Examples of this include the abduction and sexual assault of Nigerian school girls by Boko Haram, and the IS terror, kidnapping, rape and slavery of – amongst others – Yazidi women and girls.

What Factors Impact the Lives of CBOW?

Research has shown that there are several interrelated dimensions that may have an impact on the life development and life chances of Children Born of War: (1) the *socio-economic*, (2) the *psychological*, (3) the *medical/biological*



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and (4) the *political/juridical* dimension.

1. In the *socio-economic* dimension, factors such as stigma, social exclusion, poverty, and social deprivation have been found to be often present throughout the lives of CBOW.
2. The *psychological* dimension is characterized by factors such as taboo, lies, shame, and identity crises. Specifically tabooing of and silence about the child's biological origins has been an omnipresent finding in the research on CBOW and in (auto)-biographies published on the topic, and may have a strong impact on the child and its development.
3. *Medical/biological* factors may include infanticide, poor health, abuse, trauma, and HIV/AIDS.
4. Finally, the *political/juridical* dimension includes factors such as statelessness, access to personal information, and access to social services.

These factors are often interrelated in their impact on the child. It therefore needs to be

emphasized that CBOW seem to be affected by many negative factors simultaneously – and more so than other children born during war and postwar times. The findings indicate that CBOW thus experience obstacles, both at the individual and at the societal level, which negatively impact their human security and integration into society.

Their position in post-conflict settings seems inseparable with their biological background as “child of an enemy”, which again addresses the child as a potential future ‘state enemy’ him or herself. Such arguments are evident both from, for example, post-war Norway as well as the civil war in Bosnia and northern Uganda. Today, children fathered (and sometimes mothered) by European citizens who joined the IS are denied reentry to their European home countries, as national governments are concerned that these children have been radicalized and will execute terrorist attacks on European territory.

Furthermore, several contexts may have an impact on the four dimensions and thus also on the child. These contexts are military, historical, geographical, and religious/ethnic, and address questions such as: Is it a civil war? Are the

The International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War

There is strong variation in the availability of and access to different sources of information across countries, conflicts and categories of CBOW.

The International Network for Interdisciplinary Research on Children Born of War (INIRC-CBOW) was established by Ingvill C. Mochmann in 2008 with the aim to offer individuals interested in the field of CBOW a network where all relevant information could be collected and shared with the community. The primary aim of INIRC-CBOW is to firmly position the situations of Children Born of War on the political and humanitarian agenda. In order to do this, INIRC-CBOW recognizes the importance of improving the evidence base. To this end, the network is taking the following steps:

- Collecting data and information on Children Born of War across time and nations and thereby expanding the evidence base.
- Gathering research results, literature, and ongoing research projects on Children Born of War and promoting further collaborative research projects on the topic.
- Developing recommendations on best practices to secure the rights of Children Born of War in co-operation with NGOs and governmental organizations.
- Developing medical therapies focusing on the special needs of Children Born of War.

For further information, see www.childrenbornofwar.com.

military forces allied, enemy or peacekeeping? Are rape and torture used as military strategies? How are the countries/groups at war related historically (friends vs. enemies) and/or geographically (changing borders/sharing borders)? Is the conflict based on or influenced by religious and/or ethnic cleavages? While these contexts may not have a direct impact on the child, they are likely to have a significant impact on the four dimensions, and thus indirectly on the development of the child.

Avenues for Further Research

Over the past few decades, there have been several research projects conducted which give valuable insights into the life developments of different groups of CBOW, and these offer a good – although far from sufficient – basis for further systematic comparative studies. In the future, we need to continue the work of expanding and consolidating the knowledge base on CBOW. Furthermore, continuous wars, conflicts and humanitarian crises are likely to result in further CBOW.

We need to continue the elaboration of a theoretical framework which allows a systematic analysis of the dimensions, factors and contexts presented in Figure 1. Research on CBOW entails engagement from various disciplines which rely on different theories and sources for analysis. For example, medical doctors and clinical psychological researchers may analyze post-traumatic stress syndrome (PTSS) among (older) Children Born of War and compare this group with other war-affected groups. Theories on poverty or discrimination of single mothers and their children may be applied by social scientists to compare these effects on the group of Children Born of War compared to other

Key Challenges to Children Born of War

- Less education / lack of access to education
- Poorer health / lack of access to health services
- Higher exposure to poverty
- Higher rates of traumatic experiences
- Exposure to physical violence
- Higher levels of depression
- Experiences of social exclusion, mobbing
- Infanticide
- Lack of citizenship
- Lack of identity

children who are raised by single mothers. These few examples are given to emphasize that, within the different disciplines, decisions have to be taken regarding theories, hypotheses, operationalization, selection of questions, scales, control groups, etc., which are based on the knowledge prevailing within the disciplines. Only this way can we, for example, evaluate to what extent Children Born of War actually are more vulnerable compared to other exposed children.

Finally, more research is needed to understand which experiences have strengthened the CBOW in their lives. Many have coped fairly

well with their lives, and we need to learn more about what has given them strength and support. Research thus increasingly needs to focus on the resilience and empowerment of CBOW by studying good practices and case studies which can then be used to inform relevant stakeholders, such as NGOs, governments and the UN system. ■

Notes

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