

# Syria War: Rape is a Weapon Of War

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It is reported that 90,000 women and children have fled rape and sexual torture in Syria. When these vulnerable civilians reach refugee camps designed to be places of asylum, they face continued threats of multiple rape and sexual torture. The Syrian war leaves buildings with shock wounds from [Scud missiles](#), but it is the rape of women and children that we seldom hear about and yet it is as old as war itself even though the [Geneva Convention](#) makes rape and sexual slavery crimes against humanity.

War has a strong psychological element which is generally feminized through gender based violence, including rape, forced marriage, trafficking and torture. Gender based violence and rape are tactics of war that are a pervasive and slow form of psychological "murder."

For centuries, rape has become an integral aspect of war. It is also the [least prosecuted](#). The jarring reality is that modern day wars are on immense scales; so too the [sexual violence against women and girls](#). Sadly, millennial women in Syria face the same form of warfare which has existed since [ancient times](#) and the age of HIV makes this "tactic" more egregious than ever.

[Rape is also a form of ethnic cleansing](#) since the perpetrator forces his victim/survivor to birth his lineage; in so doing, he perpetuates his ethnic genes whilst tearing the social fabric of the "raped society." For the same reason, rape as a tactic of war has also been recognized as a 'step' towards genocide by the [United Nations Security Council](#). Yet it is alarming that this form of warfare receives little attention and few resources. Perhaps this is because rape and sexual assault are a form of warfare [predominantly](#)

affecting women and girls.

It is estimated that of the 120,000 refugees along the Syria-Jordan border, **two thirds are women and children**. Far from being secure havens from armed conflict, refugee camps such as Zaatari, situated fifteen miles from the Syrian border with Jordan, are a mixture of **relentless gender based violence and human rights violations**. This reality also seems to be **pervasive of the camps in Iraq and Turkey**.

Ironically, the **sacrosanct realms of family and religion** are used to disrupt family life long after the war is over. The societal costs are immense, for instance, a survey conducted in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), indicated that as many as **12% of the female population has been raped**.

In the midst of the refugee camp crisis is the issue of **inadequate health and counselling services**. The current health care crisis in Syria was already looming before the war broke out. According to IndexMundi, **maternal mortality rates were on the rise**. Reports of **inadequate medical facilities** only add to the crisis and the possible loss of lives.

Left with no way of dealing with the traumas of sexual violence, forced marriage, human trafficking or torture, women and girls live in perpetual fear. Stigmatization of victims who survive the rapes also brings a **fear of retribution** since many of the sexual **violations are multiple and committed in public but are seldom reported**.

It is hard to believe that almost 20 years ago, a **UNICEF report** on the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war pointed to the fact that girls who become pregnant at times abandon the babies whilst others commit suicide. This is hard to believe because nothing has changed. It is reported that there are **many teenage pregnancies and an average of eleven births a day at the Zaatari refugee camp**.

The Syria refugee situation as it pertains to gender based violence is reminiscent of the **violence against women during the dissolution of Yugoslavia**. Clearly rape as a weapon of war will not disappear without a fight. Something decisive has to happen and our nation's leaders need to step up in defence of civilian lives. Millennials may need to be the ones to take the first step.

One way to lend a voice is to continue to engage on the issue of rape as a weapon of war and seek opportunities to [get involved](#). This issue is important and we need to act now.