

## UN Women's Initiatives in Combating Sexual Violence Against Ukrainian Women Amidst the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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### Abstract

The objective of this study is to evaluate the initiatives of UN Women, an organizational entity of the United Nations that specializes in the field of women, in addressing the issues and instances of sexual violence that have been experienced by numerous Ukrainian female civilians as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This study uses a qualitative descriptive methodology, utilizing sources such as books, journals, news portals, and films. The theory of International Organizations and Sexual assault is employed as a framework to examine the activities of UN Women in addressing instances of sexual assault endured by Ukrainian women as a result of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The findings indicate that UN Women has implemented numerous initiatives, such as utilizing social media to encourage all segments of society to take action in response to the numerous cases that occur in Ukraine, collaborating with international women's organizations, and addressing the needs of women in the areas of peacebuilding and humanitarian assistance. Additionally, UN Women conducts gender analyses to motivate the entire community to assist in the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. In addition to psychological support, UN Women offers legal assistance, social service assistance, and aid funds provided by the organization.

*Keywords: Female Victim, UN Women, Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Sexual Violence*

### Introduction

Sexual violence against women is a dramatic problem that has consistently captured global attention. Both women and men can fall victim to various forms of sexual violence, however the majority of victims of sexual violence are women. The occurrence of rape and sexual assault can be attributed to society's development of gender norms and stereotypes around women and men (Chrisler, 2023). The negative consequences arise from the fact that social acceptance portrays women as inferior to men, hence contributing to the prevalence of rape and sexual assault against women (Mulyani et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the societal prejudice against women as a subordinate gender makes them more susceptible to violence, and their interactions can also serve as catalysts for such violence. Typically, humans engage in social interactions, but occasionally these patterns of engagement can lead to negative outcomes and escalate into conflicts (Badruzaman et al., 2020). Conflicts in encounters typically occur when the individuals involved have divergent interests and opinions. Consistently and constantly occurring conflicts have the potential to incite phenomena such as war (Susila et al., 2022).

A conflict arose between Russia and Ukraine due to their divergent interests. This long-standing conflict escalated when Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky sought to officially

register Ukraine as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). In response, Russia invaded several areas in Ukraine with the intention of pressuring Ukraine to refrain from joining NATO. Russia perceives Ukraine's NATO membership as a threat to its defense capabilities (Midhol, 2022).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine had far-reaching consequences, including negative effects on the region's stability and Ukraine's economy. Additionally, it resulted in a humanitarian crisis, with numerous reports of casualties and fatalities as a result of the conflict (Siahaan & Dewi, 2023). Consequently, the Ukrainian government had to provide humanitarian aid during the evacuation process to address the crisis (Akbar et al., 2023). Furthermore, the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine has resulted in significant human and social costs, with individuals affected experiencing profound mental and psychological distress. Russia pledges to halt the invasion on the condition that Ukraine complies with its demands. Russia is requesting a modification to the constitution that acknowledges Ukraine's commitment to neutrality and prohibits its membership in military alliances like NATO. Subsequently, Russia requested that Ukraine cease its military operations and engage in a conversation with the President of Russia (Atok, 2022).

President Zelensky asserted that Ukraine is prepared for service as a mediator with Russia, but emphasized that Ukraine is a sovereign nation that will not be subservient to any other country. Consequently, Ukraine will govern itself independently, without surrendering to the demands of any foreign power. Zelensky expressed Ukraine's willingness to evaluate a number of additional terms proposed by Russia, including the termination of the interim truce, in order to safeguard the security of the nation (Hakim, 2022). Russia and Ukraine have taken part in several conversations and exerted significant efforts to negotiate a mutually beneficial deal. However, despite their persistent pursuit of peace, both countries have incurred substantial losses. The losses referred to encompass both tangible and intangible costs, encompassing both physical and psychological damages resulting from the conflict between the two nations (Puspita et al., 2022). Rape and sexual violence frequently occur as a consequence of armed conflict, with women being targeted as a deliberate tactic to advance political agendas and carry out ethnic cleansing. This includes targeting people from enemy territories (Hutomo & Hanura, 2021). Cases of violence and rape have taken place within the borders of Ukraine. Ukrainian society asserts that these crimes were committed multiple times by Russian soldiers on Ukrainian soil. Some Russian soldiers unlawfully entered homes, armed themselves, attempted to sexually assault Ukrainian women, and also killed their husbands (Limaye, 2022).

A multitude of reports, along with substantial evidence and eyewitness testimonies, have been gathered to substantiate the reality of the sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers. These acts of sexual violence took place within the territories under Russian occupation, including the Kyiv region, Chernihiv region, Khariv region, Donetsk region, and Kherson region (Laoli, 2023). In October 2022, Ukrainian investigators and the UN Human Rights Commission gathered evidence of sexual abuse. The Human Rights Commission's report confirmed around 125 occurrences of sexual violence in Ukraine. The investigation indicated several instances of brutality perpetrated by Russian troops, involving the mistreatment of Ukrainian women across various age groups, including children and the elderly. Additionally, men who attempted to intervene were killed in response to their efforts to halt these abhorrent acts (Kit, 2022).

UN Women, the organization that is usually the main UN council that works for gender equality and women's empowerment in the midst of the crisis that is occurring, has finally taken notice of the numerous cases of violence against women and rape that Ukrainian women have experienced (Susetio & Muliawan, 2023). One of UN Women's efforts is to call on all local and international activists to counteract systematic gender-based issues by educating those who have the potential to become victims, who are typically women, because, as the UN Women article states, women are the ones who suffer and are exploited the most during war. Sexual violence resulting from conflict causes significant physical, material, and psychological harm. Therefore, it is imperative to make concerted measures to decrease the occurrence of such violence (Ismail, 2020). According to data given by Ukraine, a staggering 80% of Ukrainian women are at risk of becoming victims of sexual abuse during times of war.

## **Conceptual Framework**

### **1. International Organization**

International organizations are essentially comprised of two terms: "Organization" and "International". "Organization" refers to a social platform aimed at achieving shared objectives, while "International" denotes the collaboration of nations with diverse cultural, customary, and national elements, expressing their willingness to engage in a collective association. Put simply, an International Organization is a group of countries that work together to achieve the common objective of aligning their Vision and Mission. This is accomplished through a process called accommodation, which involves collaboration and talks between countries.

In 1919, international organizations started to emerge and gain global significance, capturing the world's attention. This was evident during the Versailles peace conference, where the victorious nations of World War I gathered to negotiate a peace agreement. The conference focused on establishing regulations pertaining to the laws of war. Additionally, discussions were held regarding the establishment of a permanent organization that would address social issues, promote peace and security, and tackle economic challenges (Luerdi & Mardiyanti, 2021). Originally, international organizations referred to groups comprising multiple countries with independent governments, commonly known as International Governmental Organizations (IGOs). Subsequently, this progress started to broaden and encompass non-state entities known as (International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) (Golia dan Peters 2020).

An INGO is an independent group that operates without government or corporate involvement. These non-governmental organizations, such as Greenpeace and Oxfam, have significant influence in international politics while not being affiliated with the government. Unlike non-governmental organizations (NGOs), IGOs are government organizations composed of sovereign countries. This intergovernmental institution holds the utmost significance in the realm of international law from a theoretical standpoint. The United Nations (UN) is the most renowned IGOs. The UN was established in the aftermath of World War II with the primary objective of ensuring global peace and preventing future conflicts.

The efficacy of International Organizations in addressing the challenges encountered by nations has gained recognition in the global arena. The existence of International

Organizations signifies the necessity for human beings to collaborate with one another and serves as a mechanism for addressing prevailing issues (Adelia et al., 2024). Chlive Archer categorizes the role of International Organizations into three distinct categories. The first category is "Organizations as Instruments," where member countries utilize these organizations to achieve specific goals aligned with their political objectives. The second category is "Organizations as Arenas," where member countries utilize these organizations as platforms to discuss and address the challenges they face. Often, these countries leverage these International Organizations to draw international attention to the issues they are grappling with domestically. The third category is "Organizations as Independent Actors," wherein international organizations possess the autonomy to make decisions without external influence or coercion. UN Women has effectively fulfilled its duty as an instrument, arena, and independent player in this case. The case study examines UN Women's endeavors to combat sexual violence against Ukrainian women during the Russian-Ukrainian war. Given the significant impact of this conflict on the prevalence of violence against women in Ukraine, it is imperative for UN Women, an organization dedicated to promoting feminism, to prioritize addressing this issue. This study investigates the application of the idea of International Organization to analyze the approach of UN Women in addressing issues that arise in Ukraine.

## **2. Sexual Violence**

Sexual violence refers to an act perpetrated by the offender against the victim that involves sexual stimulation and can result in both physical and psychological illnesses due to the use of violence and coercion (Mas'udah, 2022). Acts of violence can be categorized into three distinct types: physical violence and sexual violence. According to the given interpretation, physical violence refers to an action that leads to the experience of pain, disease, or severe harm. Psychological violence refers to actions that induce dread, diminish self-assurance, impede one's capacity to take action, and generate a sense of powerlessness, ultimately leading to psychological distress and suicidal ideation. Sexual violence refers to the act of coercing or compelling someone to engage in sexual behavior against their will, encompassing various forms and manifestations (Jadi, 2021).

According to WHKoster Hanke-Van't Hoff's definition, violence refers to the utilization of force or illegitimate power. Sexual violence can also be referred to as a sexual crime, as it involves committing an offense against individuals and is seen as a grave wrongdoing. According to Sylvia Walby, sexual violence refers to the use of compulsion or physical force to engage in sexual acts with someone against their will (Walby, 2023).

There are a total of 15 distinct forms of sexual violence, encompassing acts such as rape, sexual intimidation involving threats and attempted rape, sexual harassment, sexual exploitation, sexual trafficking for the purpose of sexual exploitation, coerced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced marriage including divorce, compelled pregnancy, forced abortion, coerced contraception or forced sexual intercourse, sexual torture, inhumane and sexually motivated punishment, traditional practices with sexual undertones that pose a risk or discriminate against women, and sexual control through regulatory measures. Discrimination arises as a result of moral and religious beliefs (Sianturi & Thamrin, 2023).

The text discusses a case study that focuses on UN Women's initiatives to combat sexual violence targeting Ukrainian women during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Acts of sexual violence perpetrated by Russia, as well as violence that took place in Ukraine, should be

categorized as severe sexual offenses, necessitating additional measures to address the acts of sexual violence done by Russia. Russia's perpetration of sexual violence falls within the four categories of violence mentioned before, namely rape, sexual coercion through threats, sexual harassment, and sexual exploitation.

## Method

Creswell (Creswell, 2013) states that a research method is a set of instructions that includes stages for gathering data, analyzing that data, and interpreting the results. Since this is a qualitative technique using a descriptive research type, the research method employed is that of a research method (Salmaa, 2023). The research use qualitative method to describe the war phenomenon of Russia-Ukraine conflict to gain comprehensive knowledge, by timeline spans from March 2022 to July 2024, coinciding with the duration of the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict until a ceasefire is established. The secondary data utilized comprises scholarly articles, mass media articles, news from verified YouTube channels, and official comments from the Ukrainian and Russian governments pertaining to the war between the two nations.

## Finding and Discussion

### *Sexual Violence during Armed Conflicts*

Sexual violence encompasses various forms of aggression, coercion, or intimidation perpetrated by one individual against another, such as rape, sexual slavery, and forced prostitution. Sexual violence during times of war or armed conflict is a pervasive issue that affects individuals of all genders and age groups, including men, women, children, and the elderly (Octaviani & Nurwati, 2021). While sexual violence can affect both men and women, certain groups may be more susceptible to such crimes. Research by Puspita suggests that women are particularly vulnerable to experiencing sexual violence during times of war. Sexual violence perpetrated during times of war is classified as a war crime and falls under the purview of humanitarian law. It is important to note that humanitarian law does not explicitly prohibit armed conflicts between tribes, nations, or countries. However, its primary purpose is to safeguard human rights during times of war (Puspita et al., 2022) Therefore, the existence of humanitarian law serves to establish regulations and accountability for all parties involved in armed conflicts (Arrumaisha, 2023). The objective is for all individuals, whether directly or indirectly involved in warfare, to adhere to the values of humanity. Humanitarian law governs the rules of warfare, ensuring that it does not result in undue harm or suffering, and upholds the concepts of compassion and empathy. It is evident that if there is a correlation with sexual assault that frequently takes place in armed conflict, it is a breach of humanitarian law as it disregards the ideals of humanity (Hutomo, Raden Maulana, 2021).

Humanitarian Law is characterized by its function as a regulation that restricts the consequences of armed conflict by safeguarding individuals who are either no longer involved in or do not partake in armed violence or warfare (SIMON 2023). Humanitarian law provides concise regulations for the safeguarding of non-combatants or civilians, preservation of essential infrastructure, limitations on the tactics and techniques employed in warfare, the rights and responsibilities of those engaged in armed conflict, and the enforcement of legal principles during times of war (Ikromah, 2024).

Sexual assault is a significant issue in war as it is frequently employed as a military tactic to secure victory in times of conflict. Sexual violence is frequently employed as a means of instilling fear among the populace in conflict-ridden regions, and it is also utilized as a tool for genocide. Sexual violence in conflict is classified as a war crime due to the physical and psychological harm it inflicts upon its victims (Puspita et al., 2022). From an international perspective, sexual violence is a criminal act targeting women that profoundly affects the victim's physical, psychological, and emotional well-being. This, undoubtedly, deprives individuals of their fundamental human rights, including the right to freedom, which is essential for pursuing personal or collective objectives. From a global standpoint, Article 1 of the UN Declaration explicitly addresses the issue of violence against women. "Gender-based violence encompasses any action that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women. This includes acts such as threats, coercion, or unjust restrictions on their freedom, whether they occur in public or private settings" (Salma & Hapsari, 2023).

Article 1 of the UN Declaration grants the UN Council, namely the Security Council, the authority to impose penalties on those responsible for war crimes. This is done through a judicial apparatus that is directly overseen by the UN Security Council (Tri et al., 2022). Sexual violence has garnered significant global attention, encompassing acts of sexual violence in societal contexts as well as those arising from conflicts between regions, tribes, and even nations (Khoirunnisa et al., 2022). Various international initiatives have been established to address sexual violence in times of war. One such initiative is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is an international convention aimed at promoting women's human rights. Additionally, UN Women is an organization dedicated to empowering women and addressing cases of violence against women, including mental and sexual abuse (Hartana & Pradnyandari, 2021).

The international community's extensive efforts to address instances of violence and sexual violence against women in war, including the establishment of protective laws, adherence to humanitarian law, and the presence of organizations like UN Women, validate the significance placed on combating sexual violence against women in conflict. It may be inferred that the global community is actively working to address all instances of sexual assault perpetrated against women during times of war (Hartana & Wibawa, 2021).

### ***UN Women's Initiatives Aim to Mitigate Sexual Violence***

The UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is a UN agency. UN Women is an organization that focuses on several elements of promoting gender equality and empowering women. The primary objective of UN Women is to establish a fair and equitable global society for women by disseminating knowledge on gender equality and fostering parity between women and men. UN Women was established as a direct outcome of a resolution passed during the UN session in July 2010. Its development was initiated with the aim of expediting the objectives of creating an organization dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women (Nurul, 2021).

The United Nations, as a global governing body, addresses not just inter-country conflicts, politics, and security, but also prioritizes addressing the pervasive issue of gender inequality faced by women worldwide. The United Nations has demonstrated a strong commitment to addressing the issue of gender discrimination through many declarations, agreements, and

social norms that member countries have adopted under the guidance of the UN. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international agreement that focuses on ensuring human rights, particularly for women. It was adopted in Beijing and ratified in 1981 as a means to address the issue of gender discrimination. Member countries of the United Nations subsequently ratified and implemented the convention in their respective nations, adhering to their own national laws and regulations (Reditya 2023).

UN Women commenced operations in 2011 following one year of legal authorization. The President of Chile, Michelle Bachelet, serves as the chair of UN Women. Initially, Bachelet held the position of Executive Director before being succeeded by the former vice president of UN Women South Africa on July 10, 2013. This change occurred exactly two years after UN Women began its operations focused on gender issues (Nirwana, 2021). UN Women has identified 4 strategic priorities to effectively accomplish the objectives of gender equality and women's empowerment. These priorities are:

1. Women attain leadership positions, thereby engaging in and receiving equal rights within the governmental framework.
2. Women are ensured a respectable salary, along with economic independence.
3. All females, regardless of age, lead lives devoid of any kind of violence.
4. Women and girls possess the ability to make valuable contributions and exert significant impact in the development of sustainable peace and resilience. They should be granted equal authority in the prevention of natural disasters, conflicts, and humanitarian efforts.

As part of the UN reform, UN Women was also established. In this case, it involved the merger of four previously separate UN entities that were solely dedicated to women's empowerment and gender equality: the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender and the Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) (Febriana, 2021).

Since its establishment in 2010, UN Women has achieved significant strides in combating gender discrimination and addressing instances of sexual assault against women. UN Women endeavors to devise, execute, and assess pragmatic approaches and strategies to eradicate instances of violence against women and children (Shamimi dan Rijal 2022). UN Women devised the 'Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces' program to build secure public spaces for women. This initiative was implemented in various countries including Quito, Ecuador; Cairo, Egypt; New Delhi, India; Port, Papua New Guinea; Moresby, and Kigali, Rwanda. This initiative has been implemented in over 20 cities worldwide, encompassing regions such as North Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific (UN Women, 2023).

UN Women in a nation typically offers help and initiatives that fit the specific requirements of that nation. For example, UN Women in Indonesia provides training to service providers who support women who have experienced sexual abuse. This training encompasses rehabilitation, handling complaints, and providing legal aid services. UN Women offers legal expertise and advocates for the protection of women's rights. Ensuring the safety of women is a collaborative effort that involves various sectors such as ministries,

institutions, academic policy makers, and the media. The active involvement of these entities has a crucial role in effectively reducing incidents of violence against women (Reditya, 2023).

UN Women in multiple nations also aids in bolstering the political empowerment of women, thereby enhancing their role and impact. This, in turn, aims to create an environment where women can live free from various forms of violence, including sexual violence, gender-based violence, and discrimination. When we delve deeper into UN Women's programs, we find that a significant number of its initiatives are designed to combat violence against women. Additionally, these programs are a component of empowerment, both economically and politically, as well as gender-based discrimination (Putri, 2023).

This aligns with Clive Archer's theory of International Organizations, which identifies three primary roles. Firstly, organizations serve as instruments, functioning as tools for countries to pursue their interests. Secondly, organizations act as arenas, providing a platform for countries to raise domestic issues and attract attention from other nations. Lastly, international organizations can function as independent actors, capable of making decisions and policies without external influence (Audreya et al., 2021). UN Women has effectively fulfilled its duty as an instrument, arena, and autonomous player. It has played a crucial part in addressing problems related to sexual violence and reducing a country's apprehension about violence. In addition to addressing situations of violence against women in a country without any intervention or influence from external parties, UN Women also makes decisions regarding such cases.

### ***UN Women's Efforts to Address Sexual Violence in Ukraine***

Russia committed war crimes in Ukraine as a result of its invasion during the conflict between the two nations. Multiple instances of sexual abuse perpetrated by Russian forces against Ukrainian civilians, particularly targeting Ukrainian women, have been documented (Simanjuntak & Uyan Wiryadi, 2023). Pramila Patten, the United Nations (UN) special representative for sexual assault, has disclosed that Russian forces in Ukraine employ sexual violence and rape as military tactics. From the perspective of women who were forcibly confined and sexually assaulted, as well as instances of sexual violence against men and boys, including reports of Russian soldiers using Viagra, it is evident that Russia is employing this military tactic to strip victims of their humanity (Karomah & Triyatno, 2023).

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) stated that extensive monitoring revealed several violations of international law during the Russian armed assault on Ukraine. Numerous accounts of torture, ill-treatment, and sexual abuse are prevalent in the detention facilities under Russian occupation. ODIHR has received multiple complaints documenting instances of extrajudicial killings and the infliction of severe physical and psychological pain on those detained in Russia. ODIHR conducted interviews with over 200 individuals who were victims of sexual abuse, including rape, threats of rape, forced nudity, and even the use of electric shocks on their genitals, perpetrated by Russian soldiers (OSCE, 2023).

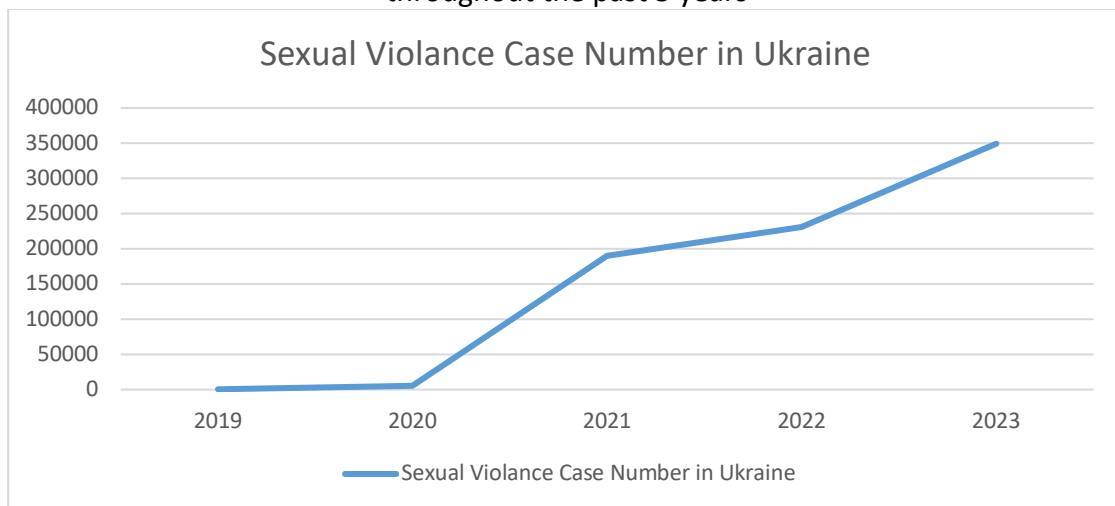
In 2023, Ukrainian authorities examined over 97,000 reports of war crimes, which encompassed instances of sexual abuse, and initiated legal proceedings against 220 individuals in national tribunals. In January, the extent of torture in Kherson increased significantly, with over 200 Ukrainians being unlawfully arrested. Numerous survivors have



reported various methods of torture, such as electric shocks, strangulation, and even sexual abuse.

Ukrainian regional investigators discovered various human rights abuses, including murder, torture, sexual violence, and violations of international humanitarian law in the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, and Sumy regions, which were the main areas of investigation. In 2022, the Commission carried out a total of 191 interviews. The examination results indicated instances of brutal rape involving victims ranging from 4 to 80 years old. The rapes were found to have taken place either at the victim's residence or in an abandoned, uninhabited house. Following the Russian incursion into Ukraine in February 2022, there has been a notable escalation in violence among numerous Ukrainian individuals. In 2023, the United Nations received numerous reports of violence, with approximately 20,000 civilians falling victim to these acts. Additionally, over 13 million civilians were compelled to evacuate and abandon their residences in search of safety. Numerous children and women fall prey to sexual violence as a consequence of armed conflicts between nations, pervasive risks to their security, loss of possessions, and even fatalities. These atrocities include rape and other forms of sexual violence, leading to a surge in rates of such heinous acts (Reditya, 2023).

Figure 1. Statistics of incidents of sexual abuse against women in Ukraine throughout the past 5 years



Source: Data processed by researchers

The table above provides full information on the prevalence of sexual violence against women in Ukraine. There was a significant spike in numbers from 2019 to 2020 and 2021, which can be attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, a conflict between the two countries led to a further rise in sexual violence cases in 2022 and 2023 (JurFem, 2023). Since 2022, there has been a surge in sexual violence crimes, primarily perpetrated by Russian military against Ukrainian citizens, as a result of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict. Sexual violence is not only a consequence of conflict, but also a result of economic and social instability. This instability leads to sexual exploitation, trafficking of women and children, and other forms of violence against women. Due to the war situation, Ukraine has encountered numerous crises, encompassing challenges in healthcare services and the escalating difficulty for survivors to access aid (Utomo, 2024).

Between 2022 and 2023, there were documented instances of direct sexual violence perpetrated by the Russian Army. The Ukraine Hotline received a total of 3,688 reports of sexual violence committed by Russian soldiers. Out of these reports, 653 cases were verified to have been committed by Russian soldiers in July 2024 (Government, 2024).

Figure 2. Statistics of incidents of sexual abuse against women during Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Period	Sexual Violence Case Number
2022	125
2023	225
January- June 2024	303

Source: Data processed by researchers

During the UN Security Council conference, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky dispatched his deputy to report on the numerous instances of violence suffered by Ukrainian citizens. Additionally, Zelensky himself attended the conference and unequivocally condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine as barbaric. War crimes are among the most egregious forms of criminal activity, and this particular case is as terrifying as the events of the Second World War. During the seminar, Zelensky presented a brief film depicting numerous corpses strewn throughout the streets, extensive mutilations, and bloodshed, including children who had been mutilated in public. The regions of Irpin, Dyerka, Mariupol, and Bucha. Ukraine has alleged that Russian troops are responsible for the deaths of numerous civilians and have also been involved in acts of sexual abuse against Ukrainian women (Purwanti, 2022). The Russian Ambassador categorically refuted the claims, asserting that the Ukrainian accusations were baseless fabrications. The Ambassador claimed that Russian soldiers deliberately targeted civilians and vehemently rejected the claim that Russia employed sexual violence as a tactic in warfare. Vassily Nebenzia, the Russian Ambassador, stated that there were no instances of violence or sexual harassment against any civilians during the Russian military occupation of the Bucha region. Nevertheless, numerous Ukrainian civilian witnesses have attested to the widespread occurrence of brutality and sexual violence among civilians in Ukraine during the Russian invasion of the region (Washington Post 2023).

According to UN Political Affairs Chief Rosemary DiCarlo, the Human Rights Monitoring Council diligently continued to verify numerous allegations of murder and instances of sexual violence perpetrated by Russian soldiers in the occupied territory during the war between the countries. The Security Council conducted this monitoring in response to multiple reports of rape, including gang rape, rape in the presence of children, individual rape, and other acts of violence. UN Women, an organization dedicated to women's issues, strongly condemns the numerous cases of sexual violence inflicted upon Ukrainian women as a result of the Russia-Ukraine war. UN Women urgently calls for an immediate cessation of the alleged acts of rape perpetrated by Russian soldiers (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

UN Women has assisted Ukraine in fulfilling its gender equality obligations since its establishment, which initiated a dedication to attaining equality between men and women. Following the crisis in Ukraine, UN Women has restructured its original program to prioritize the protection of women and children's rights as an urgent matter (UN WOMEN 2024). The Chair of UN Women expressed apprehension upon discovering that Kateryna Cherepaka,

president of the Human Rights organization, proposed a strong suspicion that the sexual violence endured by Ukrainian women at the hands of Russian soldiers was a deliberate strategy employed by Russia to undermine Ukraine (Slisco 2022). UN Women, as an international organization, actively addressed the cases of sexual assault in Ukraine, suspecting that they were intended to weaken the Ukrainian side. UN Women fulfilled its duty as an instrument, actor, and arena in combating sexual violence.

UN Women implemented four efforts to address documented instances of sexual abuse in Ukraine. Initially, they utilized social media as an effective means to attract global attention and collectively advocate for an investigation. Their Twitter post featured a photograph with the Ukrainian flag in the background, along with a tweet that stated "End Sexual Violence in Ukraine Now!!!" and "We strongly denounce Rape and Sexual Violence in #Ukraine". Numerous more posts advocate for the cessation of all sorts of violence, including murder, torture, sexual violence, and other behaviors that endanger lives and infringe upon human rights.

In addition, UN Women enhances collaborations with organizations that prioritize employment opportunities for women, therefore also expanding the provision of secure environments for women and children who have suffered from violence during times of conflict. UN Women not only establishes safe spaces but also partners with the National Civil Service Agency (NAC) to design training programs that enhance the capacity of civil society to promote awareness, vigilance, and effective response to incidents of sexual violence (UN, 2024).

Furthermore, collaborating with CARE International, UN Women is doing a gender analysis to shed light on the distinct requirements and susceptibilities of women and girls in areas affected by conflict. The objective is to assess the appropriate response of UN Women towards providing humanitarian aid. UN Women and CARE International undertook a comprehensive analysis of the impact of the war on civilians. The analysis covered various areas, including the displacement of civilians, economic consequences, and the alarming rise in incidents of sexual violence. If the analysis produces results, the assistance provided by UN Women and the Ukrainian government will be impartial (Women, 2022).

UN Women and CARE International completed a gender analysis to provide assistance to individuals affected by sexual violence or violence during armed conflicts. The study revealed the research results, which contributed to a better understanding, the development of humanitarian assistance programs, and the impact on current policies. UN Women and CARE International are organizations that aim to address the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine. According to data gathered by CARE International, UN Women has provided humanitarian aid to about 45,000 women and 100,000 girls from Ukraine. The supplied assistance encompasses rescue operations for victims of sexual violence resulting from conflict in locations susceptible to such incidents, legal aid, psychological support, and referrals to sexual services. UN Women allocates financial assistance of 10.6 million USD to support women (Women, 2022).

### ***Opportunities and Challenges for UN Women in Addressing Sexual Violence Against Women Affected by the War in Russia and Ukraine***

UN Women, an organization dedicated to women's issues, is actively involved in addressing the issue of sexual violence against Ukrainian women in Ukraine. This violence is perpetrated by Russian soldiers who invaded multiple regions in Ukraine as a result of the

Russia-Ukraine war that began in 2022 (Oraimi Al & Antwi-Boateng, 2023). UN Women has made four moves to tackle cases of sexual violence against women in Ukraine. These efforts target not only sexual violence but also broader issues affecting women, such as social, economic, and human rights violations resulting from the war between Russia and Ukraine (Kratochvíl & O'Sullivan, 2023).

UN Women considers itself as an instrument, arena, and actor in combating sexual abuse suffered by Ukrainian women inside International Organizations. The implemented techniques are founded on advocacy, which include addressing instances of sexual abuse, offering humanitarian aid, collaborating with women's organizations, and promoting international norms through Twitter posts. UN Women's solution to this issue is to prioritize the implementation of international standards and rules, which aligns with their role as active participants and platforms within international organizations. UN Women has implemented legal measures, offered assistance to victims, placed importance on education, and advocated for the development of policies to address the needs of women who have experienced sexual assault in this conflict. UN Women plays a crucial role in exerting pressure on the UN to take more forceful measures against instances of sexual abuse in the Russia-Ukraine war.

UN Women faces the issue of dealing with biased media coverage that condemns Russian aggression and supports Ukraine during the Russia-Ukraine war. This coverage has garnered significant global attention, leading many countries to sympathize with Ukraine and criticize Russia's actions. Consequently, Russia has been accused of several infringements on human rights and civil liberties, leading to multiple accusations of Russian forces engaging in acts of violence, including murder and sexual violence, as a tactical approach to achieve victory in this conflict. Regrettably, the mainstream media failed to extensively cover the incidents of Ukrainian soldiers engaging in sexual aggression against Russian women, resulting in a biased portrayal of the events.

This is further aggravated by the fact that in 2023, another conflict is anticipated to arise, specifically the Palestine and Israel war, scheduled to take place on October 7, 2023. Consequently, there is concern that global focus will shift from the Russia and Ukraine war to the Israel and Palestine war, posing potential political, military, and civilian security risks to Ukraine (Sidik 2023). However, UN Women persistently endeavors to address sexual violence by utilizing social media platforms and collaborating with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to specifically target instances of sexual assault in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

Russia and Ukraine are engaged in a war to advance their respective interests, but in order to do so, they must sacrifice civilians. The war faces significant financial costs to the state, leads to the collapse of the national health sector, causes weariness and mental harm to the community, and results in the loss of human rights due to murder and sexual violence. Ukraine strategically exploits the significant number of Ukrainian women who have been subjected to assault by Russian soldiers to gain worldwide empathy and escalate allegations against Russia. Despite condemning Ukraine's conduct, UN Women remains actively engaged in Ukraine to mitigate the prevalence of sexual violence resulting from the ongoing conflict. UN Women primarily focuses on conducting social media campaigns and collaborating with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Additionally, they provide legal aid,

psychiatric support, social services, rescue operations in places where women are vulnerable to sexual violence, and financial aid. UN Women has successfully met its institutional responsibilities and has called upon the global community to provide a greater response to the humanitarian catastrophe in Ukraine.

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