Current implications of the war in Ukraine on women’s rights.

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Abstract: In February 2022 the lives of millions of people all over Europe have been divided into two parts – before and after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Fearing for their lives, 5.2 million Ukrainians were forced to relocate to neighbouring countries, women and children accounting for about 90% of all refugees leaving Ukraine, as with few exceptions men are prohibited from leaving Ukraine by law. The law has created an advantage and an ethical dilemma for numerous women: they can either seek safety outside Ukraine, meaning they would have to leave their husbands, brothers, and fathers, or stay together but risk their own lives instead.

This thesis aims to investigate the effect of the war on women’s rights and the nature of artificially created gender advantage. It aims to answer the following research questions: what current implications does the war in Ukraine have on women’s rights and how do these implications affect women’s decision to leave Ukraine?

Through interviewing volunteers who work with Ukrainian refugees it was discovered that what creates a gender difference and a foundation of an advantage to a certain extent is that women are much more exposed to the danger of sexual violence and human trafficking. They also experience larger financial difficulties resulting in poverty and health complications. But it is the parenthood and the desire to protect their children that actually drives women’s decision to leave Ukraine and seek shelter in other countries, even if it means that they will be separated from their families. By creating a gender advantage, government is trying to rescue children and future generations. They cannot leave alone because someone has to take care of them, and it is usually a mother who would do this in Ukraine due to an existing gender order, so women gain an advantage by proxy, while an actual advantage is given to children.

Keywords: women’s rights, Ukraine, war refugees, human rights, gender order, parenthood.
Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all people of Ukraine who have been suffering a horrible war started by Russia in 2014 and escalated in 2022. I would like to thank every person who has helped Ukraine by collecting donations, hosting the refugees, raising the awareness by attending demonstrations all over the world, or in any other way. I would like to express my enormous respect and gratitude to all soldiers of the Ukrainian army protecting our homeland. You are the true heroes and heroines.

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Introduction

“They did not want to leave, they wanted to live.”

In February 2022 the lives of millions of people all over Europe have been divided into two parts – before and after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR-a, 2022), within a period of less than a month more than 1400 civilians have died, including 121 children. No wonder that fearing for their lives, 5.2 million Ukrainians were forced to relocate to neighbouring countries, e.g., as of April 2022, only Poland has opened its doors to 2.8 million people fleeing the war (OHCHR-b, 2022). According to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR, 2022), women and children account for about 90% of all refugees leaving Ukraine, as with few exceptions men are prohibited from leaving Ukraine during the period of martial law, which was declared on February 24, 2022, under the Law of Ukraine "On the Legal Regime of Martial Law" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2022).

This creates an ethical dilemma for numerous families: women and children can either seek safety outside Ukraine, meaning that they would have to leave their husbands, brothers, and fathers, or instead stay together but risk their lives. It also creates injustice in a patriarchal society, shifting common power dynamics when men usually have a higher degree of freedom while women, people with disabilities, and elderly people experience discrimination. At the same time by providing women a choice, the law also implies that women are “less useful” to the country, which is also consistent with patriarchal power structure in Ukraine (Koulaeva, 2022), that presumes that women need to be protected for multiple reasons, e.g., their incapability of defending themselves.

Aim, objectives, and research question

This thesis aims to investigate the effect of the war on women’s rights and the nature of the artificially created privilege during martial law. It aims to answer the following research questions: what current implications does the war in Ukraine have on women’s rights and how do these implications affect women’s decision to leave Ukraine?

The research reflects on the current conditions Ukrainian women face because of the war. It is based on the documents compiled by international organizations like the UN and OHCHR, as well as articles written on the topic of women’s rights in times of war.
Motivation

It is impossible to believe that war is only a man's domain: women throughout the history of humankind were forced to bear the burden of military conflicts no less (and perhaps even more) than men. This has been verified by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2020 when Human Rights Council has adopted the Resolution 1325 A/HRC/RES/45/28 on the disproportionate impact of the military conflict on girls and women, while also acknowledging their crucial role in peacebuilding, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction (UN, 2020). Directly or indirectly, women participate in the war on both sides of the front lines, but due to gender inequality that is embedded in our society, their experience of the war and its consequences is very different compared to men (Wonderzine, 2022). For example, Ainamani et al. (2020) claim that women experience PTSD symptoms after the war to a greater extent than men, notably due to the risk of sexual violence.

Resolution 1325 A/HRC/RES/45/28 urges all parties to take exceptional efforts to safeguard women and girls from gender-based violence, specifically rape and other forms of sexual abuse during wars and military conflicts. It also gives a guideline for several essential operational mandates that have ramifications for both Member States and UN agencies, most of them being violated right now by Russia (Bellinger, 2022).

Injustice and violation of human rights are direct outcomes of any war. It is crucially important to evaluate current legal conditions created by the government in the circumstances of martial law, as well as understand what implications the war has on the life of more than 40 million residents of Ukraine.

State of the art and knowledge gaps

The material used for this thesis is built based on the existing research on the topic of women’s rights during crises, the implications of war, and crisis management. As the war in Ukraine has developed only recently (to the extent of mass refugee relocation needed), there is little to no research available about it, however, looking into the research regarding human rights during crises is relevant. The key difference is that crisis management can be different depending on the nature of the crisis, therefore, it is crucial to select the studies relevant to the war and not a pandemic, for example. There has been extensive research conducted on the protection of the vulnerable groups in case of hazards, as when someone is marginalized, there is always a greater risk of negative impacts compared to someone who has power and privilege (Kuran et
al, 2020). However, during war people do not get to keep their power and privilege, which shifts the power dynamics in the society. Already existing research also normally focuses on the people who are actively participating in the war (combatants). Giri (2021) has investigated intersectionality from the perspective of women combatants in Nepal comparing if women combatants experience war and peace uniformly, while Crenshaw (1997) investigated the topic of women in the Gulf War which focused on the privilege among women, creating an advantage for white US women.

There is also extensive research done on the topic of the implications of the war on the refugees (Ahmad et al., 2021, Kelly et al., 2021, Salzman, 2007, Torrisi, 2020, Soeiro et al., 2021), however, there is a knowledge gap that will be filled by this research. Women in Ukraine are in a unique position when they have to choose whether to save themselves and leave the country or risk their lives but stay with their families, as men are not allowed to leave the country by law. This puts Ukrainian women in a totally different position compared to the victims of other wars, as they always had a choice of staying or leaving the country, but not their families because of the law restrictions.

This choice given by the government creates an advantage based on gender, but also has other implications, for example, it affects the circumstances of the refugee relocation and crisis management in the refugee-welcoming countries. There have already been reports of differential treatment of Ukrainian refugees in Europe compared to the refugee crisis in 2015-2016 when thousands of refugees arrived in Europe from Syria, the Middle East, and Africa (Parekh, 2022). Serena Parekh, author of the book “No Refuge: Ethics and the Global Refugee Crisis” tells Aljazeera (2022) that because Europeans did not know anything about the people arriving in 2015, there was a worry that they may be linked to terrorist organizations. Existing islamophobia has generated a negative attitude to male Middle Eastern refugees while Ukrainian female refugees were significantly less threatening and therefore sympathetic. Parekh (2022) says that while arriving mothers seeking safety for their children evoked compassion, female Ukrainian soldiers and volunteers who stayed to protect the country were seen as a symbol of egalitarianism, one of the core values of the European society. One of the volunteers in Poland mentioned that she would have been happy to help Syrian mothers in 2015, but at the same time, mostly men arrived, which made them suspicious (Zabrowska, 2022).
Gender disproportion among refugees forced many Europeans to believe that Syrian refugees were coming to Europe more for economic reasons than safety, while Ukrainian men had no other choice than to stay and fight for their country (Vohra, 2022). However, experts believe that lack of female of refugees from Syria could have been explained by the danger and complexity of the journey, that forced men to go first trying to find a safer way and a source of income for their families (Vohra, 2022).

Either way, an advantage available to women in Ukraine creates different circumstances for women’s decision to leave. It was not covered by previous research, thus there is a knowledge gap to be filled.

*Positioning*

To clarify the nature of certain assumptions in the thesis, I would like to mention my position on the topic of the thesis. I am a 25-year-old woman (she/her), and I am a strong supporter of equal rights for women and men, as well as non-violent resolution of international conflicts. Even though I have been living in Sweden since 2014, I am originally from Kyiv, Ukraine, therefore, I have a personal connection to the research. Moreover, I am a member of the Help in Change, non-profit organization, which was used to find the volunteers for the focus group interview, but I am not affiliated with the selected volunteers in any other way.

I condemn any military actions that Russia is taking against Ukraine as well as the silent support of the war by some people. I find the war unfair, unnecessary, and inhumane.

*Limitations and implications*

Due to the scope and time frame of the research, the following limitations and implications have been met:

1. By saying women, the research implies people who have ‘female’ sex written in their official documents needed to cross the border, even though it is acknowledged that not all such people identify themselves as women.

2. The research focuses on the period of the Russia-Ukraine war that escalated in February 2022, even though there were military actions on the Ukrainian territories since 2014, notably in the Crimea and Donbas region. This is due to the relevance to the research
question, as the research aims to investigate the current implications of the war on women’s rights and not historical data.

3. The research mentions but does not investigate the implications of the war on people who fall into the exceptions of Ukrainian laws that forbid crossing the border, such as women conscripts, men with disabilities, etc.

4. This research is limited to gender aspect of intersectional approach (explained further), as gender is a foundation for the major advantage that the refugees currently have. Intersectionality does imply an intersection of different factors, like race/ethnicity/age/ability/etc, however the thesis will focus on the gender inequality and gender privilege/discrimination due to a limitation of time and scope of the research.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the idea that it is impossible to look at one’s privilege only from one perspective, e.g., someone is discriminated or privileged due to only gender, or only skin colour. It creates a framework to evaluate how different factors form one’s identity (gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, disability, appearance, etc) combine and intersect with each other creating privilege or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989).

When people make a decision to leave or to stay in the warzone, there are many intersectional factors that affect them. For people with more financial possibilities, it will be easier to find ways to relocate with higher comfort, e.g., they might own a car or be able to afford better accommodation than in refugee camps, however, some may not want to leave their valuable possessions, unlike people who have nothing to lose. People with disabilities already have more difficult conditions for survival, and in wartime, it gets only worse, e.g., the bomb shelters are not accessible due to mobility limitations and evacuation plans are not designed for people with special needs (IDA, 2022). People who live in cities or villages might experience different conditions, for example, it might be more complicated for people in villages to leave their domestic animals, but on the other hand, they might have easier access to cellars that can be used as bomb shelters, and they are less dependent on supplies as they have their own produce.

People whose work can be done remotely will have an advantage over the people who are tied to a physical workplace. People who have relatives and friends outside Ukraine will have an advantage as they will not have to rely on the support from volunteers or local governments,
and their level of insecurity will be significantly lower compared to people who are leaving to the countries where they know no one. International students and expats living in Ukraine have a disadvantage as they may not speak Ukrainian and therefore cannot understand the information to the same extent as the native speakers. On the other hand, they can receive the support of the embassies of their own countries.

All these factors can be perceived as quite subjective and personal. They intersect with each other and create different conditions for people in war, and it is important to consider different axes of power when evaluating one’s privilege during martial law. However, the most common and largest factor that affects objectively all people in Ukraine now is the gender. By the law of Ukraine, women are allowed to leave the country freely, unlike men who are either not allowed to leave at all or need to fall into the exception list. This creates a gender advantage which this thesis is focused on, however, it will be crucial to continue analysing this advantage from the intersectional perspective in order to form more comprehensive understanding of the issue.
**Background**

“Those who do not move, do not notice their chains.”

-- Rosa Luxemburg

Wars and other military confrontations throughout the history of the battle for women's rights contributed to economic growth for some women but inevitably resulted in disaster for others. Any war nowadays is a harmful threat for all those who are fighting for equality. Military clashes lead to numerous incidents where women’s rights are violated, delaying the day when both men and women will have truly equal rights.

**Historical overview, women’s rights, and emancipation**

On September 30th, 1918, American President and Nobel Peace Prize winner Woodrow Wilson gave a speech before Congress in which he called on American parliamentarians to approve the 19th amendment to the Constitution which granted American women the right to vote (Staff, 2013). Interestingly, only a few years before that he did not support female suffrage, however, his decision was influenced by the First World War's outcomes: Wilson conceded that women, working in the rear, contributed just as much to the Entente and its allies' triumph as men on the frontlines. He notably said: “We have made partners of the women in this war... Shall we admit them only to a partnership of suffering and sacrifice and toil and not to a partnership of privilege and right?” (Wilson, 1918).

Women’s emancipation has been accelerated by the world wars and was driven by economical rather than ethical reasons. In 1914, there were 3,3 million working women in the United Kingdom, and by the end of the war, in 1917, the figure had increased to 4,7 million. In 1914, there were essentially no female employees working for the German military corporation Krupp, but after three years, they made up a third of the entire workforce (National WWI Museum and Memorial, n.d.).

The work previously done by men who joined the army was given to women, letting them earn money on their own and allowing the enterprises to survive. Before the World War II, for example, 98% of the people who worked on rail networks were men, however, as the war erupted in Europe, women on the railroad became increasingly more visible when 49% of the railway workers of fighting age joined the army during August of 1940 (Adlington, 2019). From security guards to engine attendants, women worked in every job on the railway.
Women's labour rights were taken away from them straight after the war ended: as soon as the men returned from the frontlines, they forced women out of the newly occupied jobs, forcing the women to either return to "women's" domestic work with "female" (that is, lower than male) pay or do housework.

Women in Western Europe gained and then lost equal economic rights as a result of two world wars. Countries with established capitalist economies have made tremendous headway in ensuring equitable economic freedom during this time (although, of course, the problem of labour inequality has not been fully resolved in any country in the world). Wars did not end there however, the growth of mass media and the establishment of transnational corporations have made it possible to document the aftermath of various conflicts, proving that there are many more consequences, other than accelerated emancipation.

Women are not a homogeneous group, they are affected by a conflict in a variety of ways, including as victims, soldiers, volunteers, and peacemakers (ICRC, n.d.). According to the Red Cross (n.d.), violence, terror, loss of beloved ones, sexual abuse, abandonment, higher care for family members, confinement, relocation, and death are all possible outcomes of war. It pushes women and girls into undertaking new roles, requiring them to toughen current coping mechanisms while also learning new ones. The effect of war on women is determined to a large extent by how a woman's personal safety is impacted, how well equipped she is to secure her and her family's survival if she suffers physical damage or emotional loss, and how she handles it (ICRC, n.d.). The extent of the effect is also frequently a result of what happened to her partner.

What is key to the effect of wars on women’s rights is the location of the conflict. Historically, women had a chance to work or volunteer only when the military actions were far, therefore it was relatively not dangerous to stay in the country even if it was actively participating in war (Adlington, 2019, National WWI Museum and Memorial, n.d.). Now with the Russian army entering the cities and advanced technological progress in military engineering, staying in the country becomes more and more dangerous, therefore women and children are strongly advised by the government to evacuate (Harding & Sabbagh, 2022).

Russia-Ukraine war

Paul Kirby for BBC (2022) writes that with an argument that modern, Western-leaning Ukraine was a continual threat and Russia could not "feel secure, develop, and exist", Vladimir Putin
has launched the largest conflict in Europe since World War II. On the day he launched the invasion, Putin informed the Russian people that his purpose was to "demilitarize and de-Nazify Ukraine and to defend people who had been subjected to eight years of bullying by the Kyiv regime”, both statements that have nothing to do with reality (Waxman, 2022). Russia's president has also refused to call it an invasion or a war, and even made it illegal to do so for Russian media and civilians.

BBC hypothesizes that Russia’s primary objective was to invade Ukraine and topple its government, thereby putting a stop to Ukraine's intentions to join NATO. After failing to conquer Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, and months of failures to overtake any large Ukrainian city, Putin’s government shifted its focus to the east and south of the country (Kirby, 2022).

Following the progress of the airstrikes and military actions of Russian soldiers, Iryna Vereshchuk, Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister, ordered civilians to escape or risk their lives in the face of the current Russian attack as local governments would not be able to help all residents once full-scale combat started (Harding & Sabbagh, 2022).

Refugee relocation

According to the United Nations (UN-a, 2022), more than 11 million people have abandoned their homes in Ukraine since the war began out of which 6,5 million people are internally displaced within Ukraine, in addition to the 5,1 million who have fled to neighbouring countries. The numbers are based on the research conducted by the International Organization for Migration between the 9th and 16th of March. The IOM studied 2000 internally relocated people and concluded that among all people who were forced to relocate, almost 30% had fled from Kyiv, more than 36% had fled from the east of Ukraine, and 20% had fled from the north (IOM, 2022). More than half of those who have been displaced are particularly vulnerable, including pregnant and nursing mothers, the elderly, victims of violence, people with disabilities, and chronic diseases. More than 60% of relocated heads of households were fleeing with children and women made up over 53% of those who have been internally displaced (IOM, 2022). The data also shows that 13.5% of newly displaced individuals have already experienced relocation in 2014-2015 due to military conflict in the Donbas region. According to the IOM Director-General António Vitorino: “The scale of human suffering and forced displacement due to the war far exceeds any worst-case scenario planning” (IOM, 2022).
United Nations (2022) declared that as of April 21, 5.1 million who managed to relocate externally were crossing the border in Poland (2,867,241 people), Romania (769,616 people), Russia (578,255 people), Hungary (480,974 people), Moldova (430,170 people), Slovakia (349,286 people), and Belarus (23,900 people). As many of the neighbouring Ukraine countries are part of the Schengen area where there are no internal border controls, refugees have proceeded to other countries, for example, Sweden's Minister for Migration has reported that more than 21,000 refugees from Ukraine have applied for a temporary residence permit in Sweden since the invasion, and Sweden is expecting the numbers to increase up to 76,000 people (Pelling, 2022).

**Who can leave?**

Almost an equal split between internal and external relocation is majorly affected by two Ukrainian laws that with certain exceptions forbid crossing the border to men. According to the laws “On mobilization training and mobilization” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine-a, 2022) and “On the Legal Regime of Martial Law” (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine-b, 2022), currently, only women, children under the age of 18, people with disabilities, and men over 60 years can leave Ukraine without any restrictions.

There are also exceptions to the restrictions of travel outside Ukraine for the period of martial law for men aged 18 to 60 years. Thus, during the war, a man aged 18 to 60 can leave Ukraine if he:

- has a certificate of deferment of conscription and notification of enrolment in special military registration;
- has the conclusion of the medical commission on unfitness for military service;
- has three or more children under the age of 18;
- independently raises a child (children) under the age of 18;
- has a dependent child with a disability;
- is an adoptive parent, guardian;
- has close relatives who died or went missing during the anti-terrorist operation in the Donbas region.
**Literature review**

“We learn so little from peace.”

-- Chuck Palahniuk

**Literature search**

The research is based on articles related to human rights and gender advantages and disadvantages during crisis situations. A meta-analytic method was used in order to create a comprehensive review of the current literature on the impact of war on women's rights. By comparing data from prior independent research, fifteen separate articles were evaluated, all of which were published between 2007 and 2022. This time frame was chosen because of the importance of the information relevance in today's rapidly changing society. The articles were found through the UniSearch database (library of Linköping university) and were chosen based on the following criteria: source reliability (journal), number of times cited (at least 10), size, method, and findings. Furthermore, five more articles were selected from the Taylor & Francis online portal using the "Related Research" feature. The Review of International Political Economy, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, and other peer-reviewed journals were examined in the literature study. Further analysis also included references from the materials of internationally recognized organizations such as the United Nations, OHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights), and UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees).

Selected articles were related to the topics of public health, crisis management, and economics. Only articles related to wars and military conflicts were selected as the societies respond differently depending on the nature of the crisis. The advantage gained by the Ukrainian women puts them in a unique situation as for example during the covid outbreak, where privilege dynamics did not shift drastically.

The following keywords were used during the search in the UniSearch database: “women’s rights”, “war”, “gender”, and “gender order”. The terms “equality” and “crisis” were added in order to reduce the number of articles to the most relevant ones. Initially, 25 studies were picked since they all suited the stated topic and could supply vital information. Later, five papers were deleted from the list because the studies undertaken in them included too many factors; five additional articles were removed because the findings of the researches were extremely culturally-related and they were conducted in non-European countries, such as China, Nepal,
and India. They were still relevant to the topic of human rights; however, the literature review was mostly focused on the countries that are closer to Ukraine as a large difference in cultures makes these articles irrelevant for comparison. Therefore, five articles directly related to Ukraine were prioritized.

Finally, all fifteen papers were reviewed and processed to construct a chronological list that included the following information: title, authors, year, journals, research topic, and findings. The table made it easier to retrieve the conclusions of the papers, compare the materials, and retain a record for future referencing. With a comprehensive framework in place, all studies were re-examined in order to address the original research question: what current implications does the war in Ukraine have on women’s rights?

**Analysis and interpretation**

Most of the articles selected for the literature review have been written after 2010. Years of the published articles correlate with the military conflicts happening all over the world, and they cover different perspectives from economics to psychology. The vast majority of the research explores the theme of the effects of war on public health though, and the methodology most commonly comprises of the interviews with the women who have directly participated in war, e.g., combatants.

Lapėnaitė (2021) investigates the factors that motivate women to participate in military conflicts with an example of the war in Ukraine (Donbas region 2014-current). The author argues that often it is revenge and feminism that drives women to join the army, notably: patriotism, grievances, personal loss and suffering, and women’s empowerment. Equal rights have been in the centre of another study done by Koshulko and Dluhopolskyi (2022), where the authors claim that women in Ukraine have succeeded in changing gender preconceptions and paradigms in the military and society overall, as women have always strongly participated in the resistance, but their efforts were frequently overlooked.

Economic instability has been a highlight of some studies done on the topic of crisis management. Bluszcz and Valente investigate the macroeconomic damage done to the economy of Ukraine already and conclude that on average between 2013 and 2017, GDP per capita in Ukraine has fallen by 15,1% due to the war in Donbas (Bluszcz and Valente, 2022). Mathers (2020) confirms the theory that all military conflicts hurt the economy significantly and the aid provided by the International Financial Institutions fails to be distributed equally.
between men and women, sometimes increasing the burden on households, particularly on women. Moreover, according to O'Sullivan (2020), even the aid meant to be directed towards women such as the one managed under WPS (Women, Peace, and Security agenda by UN Security Council) focuses on the military and fails to connect the economy and gender inequality. Because of a deep gender inequality embedded in society, women’s needs are often overlooked when allocating aid, just like in north-western Brazil where the needs of migrant Venezuelan women are ignored despite obvious period poverty (Soeiro, 2021). Soeiro (2021) also argues that lack of access to menstrual products has an extreme effect on menstrual health causing a lot of other hygiene issues and health implications.

Domestic and non-domestic violence has become the centrepiece of health-related studies regarding the effect of war on women’s lives. Capasso (2021) claims that non-domestic gender-based violence episodes including sexual abuse were more likely to be reported by the women who were forced to relocate because of the war. The author also indicates that there is a need to implement violence prevention initiatives to meet relocated women's vulnerabilities before, during, and after displacement. Salzman (2007) and Yuyun (2020) prove that discrimination based on gender makes women subject to sexual assaults. Yuyun (2020) says that rape is one of the most common weapons of genocide and war, and Younis and Khudhiar Lafta (2021) confirm that with the increased rates of domestic violence and gendered health issues. It is only natural that women experience higher rates of depression and anxiety as a result (Younis & Khudhiar Lafta, 2021). Bendavid et al. (2021) also investigate the medical implications of war and find out that women's and children's death risk from non-violent reasons rises significantly in reaction to military conflicts, with more severe and longer-lasting conflicts resulting in higher mortality rates. Kelly et al. (2021) prove that women and children who live in areas affected by armed conflicts may face increased violence even after the conflict is over.

Public health has been affected to a great extent by any conflicts, but especially by the armed ones. Torrisi (2020) looked into the correlation between the timing of childbearing and armed conflicts in Karabakh and found out that women who have never relocated have a considerably higher chance of having their first child. According to the research, women who have been exposed to military conflicts have a 42-45% higher chance of having a second child than women who have not been exposed to violence, however, women who lost a child during peak conflict years have much more favourable reproductive outcomes (Torrisi, 2020). Such fertility responses might be caused by risk insurance and replacement effects. Lewtak (2022) reflects on the war in Ukraine and claims that as a result of refugees' relocation, European countries
may face public health hazards. The countries should be well-organized in order to provide medical treatment to both refugees and citizens focusing on infectious disease control, e.g., testing and implementation of preventative immunizations, particularly covid-19. Going forward, it is important not only to provide support through healthcare but also to consider the refugees’ needs in many other areas. Researching conflict resolution in Syria, Ahmad et al. (2019) have concluded that social aspects and support of the formal and informal neighbourhoods are more important to women’s health than environmental conditions and physical infrastructure.

To conclude, the literature review has identified the major domains investigated by the researchers, e.g., the effect of the war on economics, public health, and gender equality. This shaped the framework for the interview guide conducted to identify the major implications of the war in Ukraine that women are facing now, and how these implications influence women’s decision to leave Ukraine.

Gradus Research

In order to better understand the intentions of the women who either choose to stay in Ukraine or to leave the country, an analysis done by the sociological research company Gradus Research has been studied. They have conducted a questionnaire asking Ukrainian women why they did not relocate internally or externally during the war. The research was conducted among two respondent groups: people who do not consider leaving their homes (internal relocation) and people who do not consider leaving Ukraine (external relocation). Important to mention that respondents could pick several options, therefore the total percentage split does not add up to 100.

More than a third of respondents in each group (39%) think that leaving Ukraine even during the war is wrong and inappropriate and therefore they decided to stay (Barsukova, 2022). Another major reason that motivated Ukrainians not to move abroad is the desire to stay with their loved ones (35%). Financial capabilities were the third common reason against moving abroad as 24% of those who stayed in Ukraine cannot afford to move abroad.

22% of people who stayed in Ukraine have relocated internally into relatively safe parts therefore do not see a need to move and 18% think that they will not be able to adapt to life in another country. 15% decided to stay within the country due to age or physical limitations and
13% do not want to leave their pets and domestic animals. 9% of the respondents are afraid to lose their jobs if they move abroad and 8% are afraid of looting.

More than half (53%) of the Ukrainians who did not flee abroad stated that they planned to remain in their own country even if the situation worsened, 16% will continue relocating internally and only 6% would consider moving abroad, but only if there will be no option of internal relocation. At the same time, 8% said they would prefer to relocate in case of the escalation of the conflict but do not have the opportunity.

Important to mention that the great majority of Ukrainians (93%) believe that Russia will not win the war and 79% of all people who were forced to relocate are planning to come back home after the conflict is over.
Theoretical framework

“The history of men’s opposition to women's emancipation is more interesting perhaps than the story of that emancipation itself.”
-- Virginia Woolf

Gender and gender order

According to Hooks (2000), feminism is a movement to eradicate the oppression of women. The word “women” in this quote can be perceived through the concept of sex: woman is a human female based on certain biological and anatomical characteristics (hormones, chromosomes, organs). Another way of looking at this claim is through the concept of gender, which focuses more on the social and cultural aspects such as social roles and patterns of behaviour. Binarity of gender is conditioned by masculine or feminine behaviour, which further constructs gender roles based on different characteristics. Masculine behaviour is usually defined by courage, risk-taking, independence and competitiveness, while feminine behaviour refers to compassion, emotionality, flexibility and collaboration (Rubin, 1975).

Gender is relational, so the concepts or femininity and masculinity coexist only in relation to each other. Even though masculinity is linked to power, not to men, gender essentialism states that certain psychological characteristics are either fixed or more “natural” for a certain gender (Steans, 2013). Social structures in society have been used to marginalize women and keep them out of public and political life by claiming that they are emotion-driven and illogical. In patriarchal society, women are viewed as a “weaker” sex, especially in a context of military conflicts (Steans, 2013). The belief that women are weak and in need of protection supports the notion that unlike men, women and children are innocent. Men are viewed to be the nation's guardians and defenders, which results in a correlation between masculinity, violence and willing to use force (Steans, 2013). The idea of peace is in return feminized and criticized as unreachable, impractical, and passive. Due to these societal structures, men predominately fill military jobs and as a result, forcible recruitment and arbitrary detention becomes more common for men than women.

Because gender is also fluid and variable, what constitutes masculine and feminine behaviour varies depending on the demands of power in various contexts, periods, and settings. In English distinguishing between sex and gender can be made by using the terms female vs woman and male vs man, however, in many other languages, e.g., Ukrainian, there is no linguistic
difference between terms, therefore, the concepts of sex and gender are commonly mixed up. Differentiating sex and gender gives an opportunity to claim that a number of the inequalities between men and women were socially created, thus, can be challenged and modified. Rubin (1975) states that women are oppressed as women by having to be women. But as the concept of gender is socially constructed, strong social change may end women’s oppression, and feminism’s goal should be directed towards creating not sexless, but genderless society in which anatomical differences do not create a foundation for unequal experience of societal issues. This would be an opposite to the society with a strict gender order, or a historically created system and behaviour framework that guides people how they should behave based on their gender (Connell & Pearse, 2015). In other words, gender order dictates what is expected, permitted, and promoted in respect to what women and men do in various circumstances and how the society is organized around these activities.

Connell and Pearse (2015) argue that it is the individuals themselves who shape their gender e.g., choose to act more in a masculine or feminine way, but there is never a full freedom to design it fully per their own liking. By acting in a certain way, people claim their place in a historically predetermined gender order or accept the place they are given. The way individuals perceive the ideas of gender and gender roles is influenced by the environment they grew up in and therefore, womanhood and manhood neither natural, nor can be imposed by societal standards and governmental pressure (Connell & Pearse, 2015).

Connell and Pearse (2015) also argue that gender order creates inequality in the society as it rarely forms equal conditions for different genders. It shapes an environment for gender disbalance, creating gender advantages or disadvantages. For example, in a strong patriarchal gender order, women could not have the same education and career possibilities, while men could be limited in emotional bonding with their children as there is an expectation on them to spend more time outside home, working and providing for the family, while women take care of the children. Feminists of early twentieth century argued that motherhood and peacefulness pursuit is a foundation for women’s moral preponderance and higher representation of women in politics will positively affect peaceful world order (Steans, 2013). Au contraire, the liberal feminist movement of the 1970s claimed that gender disparity is a reason to keep women out of combat and women should defend their right to fight.
Gender essentialism strengthens gender order, deepening gender inequality in the society. Due to a link between masculinity, aggression and the idea that refusing to fight is a sign of weakness, war is justified as being advantageous and prestigious. Driving masculine forces create power asymmetry, which is suboptimal in the peaceful times, and armed conflicts worsen the situation even more by significantly increasing the levels of gender-based violence.

Gender-based violence is a form of aggression directed towards an individual based on their gender or sex (Handrahan, 2004). Sexual abuse is encountered during military conflicts more frequently than during peaceful times and can be ordered or approved from the highest political levels. During wars, women are often attacked to emotionally damage them and, by extension, whole communities. Abuse victims need medical care, but there are frequently not enough resources available so as result effects of the physical, psychological, and emotional harm continue even after conflict resolution. In military conflicts, women are a particularly exposed to the risk of gender-based violence and therefore, it is essential to involve women in the effort to eliminate violence (Steans, 2013).

Feminist theory during armed conflicts has been commonly discussed by journalist and activist Susan Brownmiller. She highlights that men perform sexual abuse because they are capable of doing so physiologically and war creates a perfect context to exercise male dominance and misogyny as sexual violence is much more about power than desire (Brownmiller, 1975).

Brownmiller (1975) also argues that besides the biological context of rape, there are also social and political aspects. Usually, rape and sexual violence are controlled in society through the legislative framework and a strict system of punishments, however, during anarchical times of war, men feel freedom and impunity which can be especially dangerous when they have access to firearms. This combined with soldiers’ drive to reach a sense of achievement results in an increased number of rapes. Not only does it generate the fear on women’s side, but also constant worry and humiliation of the soldiers whose loved ones are abused. In patriarchal societies, masculine pride includes defending and protecting women, and dominance over women is a symbol of success (Salzman, 2007).

By combining the research on gender and military conflicts with feminist work on ethnicity, Dr. Lori Handrahan (2004) has created a Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework for the examination of negative effect of gender and ethnicity in
conflict and post-conflict context. The framework addresses issues related to gender, masculine honour, female boundary-markers, and the effects of post-war policies. Handrahan (2004) states that women become victims in any system of male violence regardless of if it is a conflict or post-conflict situation, therefore, it is relevant for examination of conflict effect on women’s rights even during ongoing war.

It is apparent that various male “fraternities” play a significant role in perpetuating wars, but Handrahan (2004) argues that the international community has failed to recognize the gravity of “fraternity”, or male group identification, in connection to violent conflicts. She claims that feminist research has proven that different genders experience conflict situations differently due to challenges in power and identity, as conflict and post-conflict setting are designed to support male power structures and identity transformation. Traumas and horrors of war drive the change in individual’s identities, leading to a massive shift in a nation’s group identity. Women have a lesser value to the society and their identities are shaped in order to be a support function in a male-controlled patriarchal community (Handrahan, 2004). Moreover, men get an advantage from the policies implemented by international community such as conflict resolution agreements or humanitarian aid due to lack of women representation in international politics. Women’s vulnerability and insecurity increase during wars because they are more exposed to economic insecurity, domestic violence, and sexual abuse. Furthermore, women often struggle to get proper medical care after gender based sexual violence as woman’s body image is constructed by male-defined identity and women are expected to experience sexuality exclusively within their own community. After undergoing sexual abuse, women are less likely to disclose it due to the pressure and shame to themselves and their male partners or relatives (Handrahan, 2004).

According to Handrahan (2004), women are frequently excluded from conflict and post-conflict development strategies considering their experiences are seen to be less significant comparing to male-combatants. Women are supposed to go back to "how they were before the war," which frequently implies disadvantage because of the patriarchal system in place. As a result, women do not get the proper assistance both during and after war.

The concept of gender order was chosen as it gives insights on the division of gender roles in Ukrainian society and proves that it is common for men and women to have certain privileges or disadvantages. It also complements the idea of gender essentialism in the discussion whether “natural” biological differences should dictate those advantages and disadvantages in times of
military conflicts. Handrahan’s Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework specifies how military conflicts affect different genders, and states that risk of economic uncertainty and gender-based violence is significantly higher for women, which will be confirmed and complimented further by the results of the research.
Research design and methodology

“Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence.”
-- Leonardo da Vinci

Choice of method and research approach

While considering different research methods and the connection between theoretical foundations and academic study, Bryman and Bell (2011) distinguish two research techniques: deductive and inductive. The deductive technique is more common in quantitative research, it refers to when the theory is exploited before a researcher conducts an experiment and comes up with conclusions. After studying the theoretical framework, the researcher creates a hypothesis, collects the data, analyses the findings, alters the hypotheses, and if needed reviews the theory. The deductive technique is logical and rational, research planning is more straightforward, however, the outcomes depend a lot on a good correlation between the data and the original theoretical framework and hypotheses.

The inductive research technique follows the reverse logic of the deductive approach in a way that the results of the experiments are used as the ground for the theories, so the outcome of the data collection is driving the choice of the theoretical framework. Inductive research is commonly used in qualitative research; however, it often happens that the researcher combines both deductive and inductive research approaches, which is also known as the abductive technique.

It is the abductive research approach that is used in this thesis as it creates a possibility to investigate the research topic from different angles by going back and forth between the theories and data, in comparison to just testing well-known theories. However, it is also possible to argue that the deductive approach is relevant to some extent as the method has been driven by the literature review and a theoretical framework has been established before the data collection.

Qualitative vs quantitative study

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the implications of the artificially created privilege during martial law from an intersectional (gender) perspective. A qualitative research strategy was used with a focus group interview serving as the primary data collection method. This strategy was picked in order to understand the motivations and underlying ideas that were driving the participants’ answers in comparison to collecting a big sample of statistical data.
without the possibility to ask follow-up questions. A qualitative study with a single focus group interview has been also selected due to the time frame chosen for the research.

**Selection of participants and consent form**

The research is based on a focus group interview with the volunteers of a non-profit organization Help in Change. The organization was formed in Stockholm in February 2022, following an escalation of the military conflict to the extent when mass relocation of the civilians was needed. Most of the volunteers in the organization are Ukrainian- or Russian-speaking people who have lived in Sweden long enough to understand Swedish system and be able to give valuable tips on building life in Sweden. They have expert knowledge in cultural integration, job search while having limited language skills, and other aspects one meets when relocating to Sweden. The group was selected as they have a better understanding of the situation due to their similar cultural heritage.

The original call for interest was posted in the Help in Change Facebook group describing the project and the requirements for the participants. The major requirement included extensive experience working closely with Ukrainian refugees since the invasion. The applications were sorted and shortlisted based on their various backgrounds, gender, and age, as having an interview with a very homogenous group could potentially lead to biased results (Eklöf et al., 2017). The final check was made to ensure the convenience of the suggested interview timing. Five applicants were chosen for the final sample, all with different backgrounds.

By submitting the application form, potential participants also confirmed that:

- They are 18 years or older, participating in the research voluntarily, and can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.
- Information about the research, participants’ participation, and data management is read and understood clearly.
- In case anything was not clear, the participant had an opportunity to ask the questions and receive a clear answer. In case the participants would have further questions, they could contact the researcher.
- They grant permission that the data and answers shared during the interview will be saved and used for the purpose of the research, including the direct quotations.
- They agree to participate in the research by taking part in the online group interview by submitting the form that is counted as a signature.
Focus group interview

A focus group is a demographically varied sample of individuals who get together in an open conversation to offer their opinions on a particular product or subject (Eklöf et al., 2017). During the discussion, the participants are asked a series of questions and they are free to converse with one another. Often to make the conclusions, all of the participants’ opinions are recorded.

An interview guide was used to conduct the interviews (appendix 1). The guide was created after formulating the research question and conducting a literature review to understand present knowledge gaps and how they can be filled with the research.

After the participants have been shortlisted and an interview guide has been established, a focus group interview with all of the interviewees has been planned. Because open-ended questions allow for a more in-depth discussion than yes/no questions, the semi-structured group interview was chosen to present a more complete and comprehensive picture of the situation. Due to current covid recommendations and for the sake of participants’ convenience, a video call interview was organized, and it was recorded for further examination to avoid the chance of misinterpreting.

Data collection and processing

The European Data Protection Regulation, supplemented by multiple Swedish laws, establishes tight guidelines for the processing of personal data in different processes. The interview was recorded. It was conducted in Russian, however, later transcribed in English and the participants could receive both a Russian transcript and an English translation upon request. All data, both in the transcript and in the research, was anonymized, which means the participants’ identities were substituted with a code word, Participant A–E. Code words were later skipped in the quotes due to the nature and dynamics of group discussion and lack of the relevance of the referral to the particular participants. The interview recording was transcribed and anonymized within 72 hours after conducting and then destroyed. The participants were informed that they could request the data to be deleted from the transcript at all stages of the research. Transcripts of the interview, as well as the consent forms, are stored on the password-protected encrypted cloud storage for five years and then will be deleted. By signing the application form the participants were also providing their consent to data collection and processing.
Ethical considerations

An extremely important aspect to consider is the ethical implications of the research, as interviewing vulnerable groups can be quite sensitive. Eklöf et al. (2017) argue that the researcher's competence in the topic, skills to create a respectful and trustful environment, recognition of refugees as both individuals and members of cultural and communal groups, and cautious planning of the interpreter's role during the interviews all contribute to a culturally, methodologically, and ethically high-quality focus group interview.

Birks and Francis (2007) argue that in comparison to other individuals, research undertaken with refugees and asylum seekers requires specific attention to methodological, logistical, and ethical challenges due to their fragile situation and unknown future. For researchers, this necessitates not only cultural competence, but also knowledge and understanding of refugees’ past, present, and potential future situations, which can be gained through education, collaboration with other researchers and reception centres, community leaders, or other ethnic or cultural group representatives.

A focus group interview with the volunteers who are working with Ukrainian refugees in Sweden was chosen even though the original suggestion was to interview the Ukrainian refugees themselves. Given the sensitivity of the topic and ethical considerations, it was decided not to proceed with it and focus on the group interview with volunteers instead.

Studying previous research showed that one of the biggest aspects affecting the decision not to stay in the crisis area is the risk of sexual violence, therefore, discussing such topics with female refugees from Ukraine was problematic from an ethical point of view. Refugees often experience hidden symptoms of PTSD and other stress-related issues; therefore, the validity and reliability of the results could be affected too. Interviewing volunteers instead of refugees provided, however, subjective insights on the refugees’ experiences, as received insights were communicated through the prism of volunteers’ individual believes, opinions and situations.

Even though it was decided not to proceed with interviewing the refugees, basic principles of the ethical focus group interview had to be complied with. Identifying the potential obstacles in all phases of the focus group interview and utilizing careful planning raises the credibility of the focus group interview (Birks & Francis, 2007). In order to maintain a high level of ethical principles, the research on conducting focus group interviews with refugees themselves was
still studied as it was crucial to understanding the direction of the questions asked, even if they were not asked directly to the refugees.

Validity and reliability

Validity relates to whether the research was able to answer the study's established objective and research questions, while reliability assures that the outcome of the research is of good quality (Bryman & Bell, 2011). The interview was done in Russian and then translated to English within 72 hours to avoid any loss of accuracy during translation due to changed context. Russian was chosen as the interview language for the participants to easier express their thoughts and not be limited by the language barrier. It was also transcribed for higher accuracy, diminishing the risk of misunderstanding, and simpler comparison and analysis. Although the interview was recorded to limit the risk of misunderstanding, further discussion of the findings with another researcher for a more objective perspective could have been recommended.

The limitations of the focus group interview as a method also include the risk of the participants developing a feeling of being ‘under the microscope’, especially when the interview is recorded. Individuals with introverted personalities may have a hard time openly expressing themselves. As a result, there is a risk that collected information would be of a poor quality. Focus groups can also be inefficient when dealing with sensitive themes as the participants can be afraid to discuss such questions, however as all selected volunteers have been working with the refugees for more than two months, they have developed an understanding of the topic. Sensitivity of the topic has been also dealt with through conducting a focus group interview, as in comparison to the individual interviews it provides a forum for the participants to discuss shared experiences and therefore open up more easily. Also, sometimes focus groups can provide biased and motivated responses when the sample of participants is very homogenous and does not allow the discussion from different perspectives (Eklöf et al., 2017). It may also not represent the true population; therefore, careful selection of the candidates was crucial to the validity and reliability of the research.
Analysis and results

“Men are afraid that women will laugh at them. Women are afraid that men will kill them.”

-- Margaret Atwood

Gender advantages and disadvantages

Nowadays any war, regardless of where it takes place, does not do anything good to anyone. Women often do not directly participate in combat, yet this does not make their life any easier. According to the United Nations (2020), wars worsen the existing discriminatory tools, increasing the frequency of gender-based crimes such as murders, human trafficking, and other forms of violence.

According to Connell and Pearse (2015), it is significantly more common for men in patriarchal society to have a privilege, however, in the current situation when the law forbids men to flee the country, women indeed have a strong advantage based on their gender. This advantage opens a possibility to escape Russian aggression, however, it also creates an ethical dilemma whether the women should put their lives above their families (husbands, adult sons, brothers).

While some Ukrainians are not able to relocate neither internally nor externally due to escalated military aggression, some have other reasons that do not let them seek safety. There is a gender order expectation: being a natural caretaker of the family, woman will prioritise her family and stay with her partner. The results of the focus group discussion are in line with the questionnaire conducted by the sociological research company Gradus Research which proved that more than a third of the Ukrainians think that leaving their homes during the war is inappropriate (Barsukova, 2022). One may argue that what is even more important is that 35% of the Ukrainians who do not move abroad motivate it by the desire to stay together with their loved ones. Therefore, the government does not make it much easier for women to decide whether to leave or not as a great majority will still not use the opportunity to flee as they think it is inappropriate to leave their families. During the focus group interview, the participants have mentioned the following:

“The majority of the refugees I saw in Sweden were women with children. That was especially visible in the beginning. Now more and more men are finding their way to reach Sweden too.”
“One of the refugees has admitted to me that she didn’t feel that the leaving ban was fair to the men, and she wasn’t sure that she would ever leave Ukraine in case she wasn’t able to go with her husband who had a medical condition and therefore was able to cross the border.”

“The majority of the people who are coming to Sweden now are women and children. It feels like they all are so traumatized and the only thing that drives them is the idea that sooner or later everything will be over and they will come back home to their families.”

“For this woman I was helping it was a no-brainer to leave or not to leave once she saw a lot of notifications on the social media regarding the frequency and the extent of the physical and sexual abuse the civilians were facing in the territories occupied by Russian soldiers.”

Another reason creating a key advantage indirectly related to gender is parenthood. United Nations Population Fund (2022) indicates that there are 240 000 pregnant women in Ukraine as of April 2022, 80 000 of them are expected to deliver within the next three months. Thousands of the women are giving birth in poor conditions, e.g., subway stations or cellars of the maternity hospitals, or private houses with no electricity, water, or access to the medications (Kramer, 2022). Jaime Nadal, the United Nations Population Fund representative in Ukraine (2022) says that the scale of the disruption to basic health services that women need is tremendous and it will get only worse unless the war stops. As the women try to flee the country in order to have a safer delivery, it puts a lot of pressure on the healthcare in the neighbouring countries, creating a supply shortage in the hospitals (Lewtak, 2022, Nadal 2022).

“The woman I was working with reflected that in the region she was from the situation was so bad, that she was forced into a decision to leave, however, her primary motivation was to rescue her children and she wasn’t sure if she would go that far (to Sweden) if it wasn’t for the kids.”

“It is not very accurate to put refugees into the categories, as they all have their own stories, however, I noticed that quite a lot of them either had children and were trying to protect them or were considering moving from Ukraine anyway.”

“I spoke to a woman who felt incredible guilt because she had to leave her husband and sister back home. She said the decision to flee wasn’t easy, she
wanted to stay with her family until the last moment, but she also has a little daughter, so her husband has literally forced them to leave. Her sister decided to stay though, she had to take care of her husband’s elderly parents who were not able to leave... I don’t think the sister had kids.”

Parenthood and higher dependency on the partner (due to inequality embedded in gender order in Ukraine) play a key role in differentiating the implications of the war on men and women and therefore affect one’s decision to leave the country. One may argue that parenthood equally affects men and women so there is no significant difference in the effect of war. However, in Ukraine, as of 2018, 20% of families with children are raised by a single mother, with the majority of them being low-income households (Kravchenko et al., 2019). According to the statistics, one out of five children in Ukraine does not have an official father (Kravchenko et al., 2020). This combined with the fact that the caretaker’s role is usually carried by women, not men, gives mothers more criteria to consider while making a decision to leave. Therefore, women face different conditions than men even though on paper women have a clear privilege.

Sexual violence

According to the volunteers, except for the death from artillery and other weapons, sexual violence proved to be the number one threat encountered by refugees. This confirms the findings on the gender-biased violence discussed by Capasso (2021), Salzman (2007), and Yuyun (2020) and highlighted in Conflict, Gender, Ethnicity and Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework by Handrahan (2004).

In her book “Against Our Will” (1975) following the discussions around the feminist theory, a Susan Brownmiller (born in 1935) argues that rape during wars is seen as an unavoidable result of hostilities and is nearly normalized. She writes that women, according to this logic, are just annoying victims, accidental but inevitable losses - like civilian victims of bombings, children, animals, houses, personal property, churches, and crops. Her words are still relevant. By allowing themselves to perform an act of sexual violence, men demonstrate a dismissive and contemptuous attitude towards women. The war creates a framework for the women to be treated as second-class citizens having no say in what matters but instead just being passive viewers of the men’s actions (Brownmiller, 1975). This also is boosted by the hypermasculine structure of the army and patriarchal gender essentialism that views women as a “weaker” sex. According to feminist theory, rape can be perceived as a symbol of conquering as the “winning” side has the power to abuse both the property and the bodies of the “losing” side.
According to the United Nations (2020), a rise in the number of incidences of violence against women is an unavoidable result of any conflict. In 2019 with 13 in favour and only 2 nations abstaining, the UN Security Council adopted a German-drafted resolution to minimize sexual violence in conflict and eradicate rape as a weapon of war (UN, 2019). It is interesting that the two nations that abstained were China and Russia. At the same meeting UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that because sexual violence in conflicts is closely tied to wider problems of gender inequality and discrimination, it primarily affects women and girls (UN, 2019). “Promoting women's rights and gender equality in all sectors, before, during, and after conflict must be the foundation of prevention”, he added (UN, 2019).

According to the US Department of Justice, sexual violence was common during the war in the former Yugoslavia (Salzman, 2007, Bassiouni & McCormick, 1996). One of the most critical issues affecting the civilians during the Syrian and Iraqi wars against ISIS was rape (Bitar, 2015, Shahali et al., 2020). The United Nations (2021) has documented numerous incidents of rape in Afghanistan, even though data on crimes against Afghan women has been difficult to obtain owing to the extremely unpredictable political climate, systematic violations of women's rights, and the lack of an internationally recognized legislation system.

The reflections of the interview participants have also been confirmed by Pramila Patten, the representative of the UN Secretary-General, who spoke before the UN Security Council on April 13th, 2022. She emphasized that not a single of all eleven UN resolutions could safeguard women in the territories affected by the military conflicts, regardless of whether it is Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, or Ethiopia (UN-b, 2022). Pramila has also argued that rape during wartime may be combated and avoided by making punishment unavoidable, which is impossible in current military conditions. In her speech, she advocated for restricting the flow of small arms and light weapons, promoting gender-responsive justice and security reform, and giving a forum for the victims to make their voices heard. She also suggested that these challenges be addressed as part of diplomatic attempts to achieve a cease-fire.

Many refugees and volunteers had a hard time understanding the risks of sexual violence as they have never encountered anything similar. It was clear from the discussion with the volunteers, that topic of children was always sensitive in the context of violence, especially sexual violence.
“The female refugee I was working with has said that in the beginning, the whole idea of rape was so surreal that she couldn’t wrap her head around it. It was especially terrifying when children were involved.”

“I was so scared to ask her if she experienced any sexual abuse. I knew she escaped Eastern Ukraine after Russian soldiers have entered her city and I heard she was asking another volunteer about the abortions in Sweden. But I just didn’t dare.”

“It is scary and complicated, and the Swedish government does not have enough resources to provide professional help and I just think we will make it worse with our questions.”

“They are terrified. It feels like they have developed a certain coping mechanism about the deaths now, but every piece of news about rape cases especially involving children just hits differently. You cannot live peacefully with it and I don’t know what should happen so that they (and we too) will forget it.”

Sexual violence is one of the most powerful psychological attacks on the general population because in many cultures the image of women is sacred (Capasso, 2021, Yuyun, 2020). They are the mothers who bring life to the nation. Women are someone the defending soldiers love and cherish. They are home. So, by performing acts of sexual violence, men try to show that they are dominating the situation, the same way they would feel by holding a gun in their hands (Brownmiller, 1975, Steans, 2013).

It is ironic that Russian authorities have essentially banned the book “A Woman in Berlin” which is an anonymous memoir by a German woman who was raped by the Soviet soldiers (Perild, 2021). One can argue it is rewriting the history and silencing the truth that has such consequences for society.

Poverty

Another issue that women face is rising poverty, which is a natural result of any military conflict (Handrahan, 2015). It is impossible to view the issue of gender inequality, which escalates during conflicts, in isolation from other issues. Poverty reinforces this: women who stay in the war zone may be denied the bare necessities owing to a lack of financial means or a humanitarian crisis (and the necessity to transfer the resources to the front). The women who
flee become refugees with a lot of ensuing implications, which are specifically challenging when women flee with children. During war, when men are fighting on the front lines, it is the women’s obligation to protect the family. Because fleeing the country can sometimes be the most rational option, refugee programs all over the world have been created, however, they are rarely able to support the lifestyle women had in their home countries. Moreover, because aid programs in most of the countries are general, they are designed to help an “average” refugee, which does not correlate with the current refugee situation, where the majority of the refugees are women who may have different needs than male-refugees.

“Most of the refugees I have been dealing with are not satisfied with the level of humanitarian aid and financial support provided by the Swedish government. The conditions the refugees are living in are unbearable and if it wasn’t for volunteers’ help, many people would not have any clothes. The situation was especially apparent at the beginning of the conflict when Ukrainian refugees started to come to Sweden and the Migration Office (Migrationsverket) has been open only Monday-Friday 09:00-15:00, so it was unclear what the refugees arriving at different hours were supposed to do, how they would find accommodation, food, etc.”

“You could see how some women are struggling. It is so unnatural for them to ask for help even if they really need it. They are used to a completely different lifestyle…”

“How can you survive in Sweden with a financial aid of 70 SEK per day when only one bus ticket costs 39 SEK?”

“I have seen the women who left their houses with one plastic bag. They had nothing. When they came to Sweden, they needed literally everything. Some things were provided by the funds, some things were collected by the volunteers. It was not obvious from the beginning, but at a certain point, we just understood that we need to start collecting suitcases because people had no possibility to carry the aid they were given. It’s not like the aid was so large, those families just didn’t have anything with them.”

Several volunteers also mentioned that women who left Ukraine have done it to secure economic position of their children. With a drastic rise in unemployment, women were forced to start cutting on wellbeing of their children, which motivated them to seek better financial climate.
“The house of one of the women I was helping got bombed, she had nowhere to go, so she decided to flee abroad. She also lost her job in her hometown, and there were no prospects of finding another one. Her child was also supposed to start school in autumn, and she realized that she cannot afford getting an equipment needed for distance schooling on her own, so she contacted our organization.”

“We are always happy to receive clothes and toys for kids. Many refugees can afford only bare minimum needed for survival, limiting spending on important things for their kids, like gadgets and books.”

Poverty also serves as a catalyst for other issues, such as health-related ones: as a consequence of the wars women frequently lack access to both routine check-ups and emergency medical treatment. As stated in the research of Soeiro (2021), the introduction or worsening of menstrual inequity or menstruation poverty is a specific example of war poverty. During wartime, women frequently lose access to hygienic supplies, such as pads and tampons. According to the figures from 2021 (Nwadike, 2021), almost 500 million women are affected by menstrual poverty, and any war would merely add to this number. The absence of sanitary supplies affects women’s lives in all aspects, both in private and public life; many women are unable to work or study under such circumstances. Menstrual poverty also increases the stigmatization of menstruation since the natural process can be perceived as "shameful" and "dirty".

“One of the refugees that I was working with has mentioned that she couldn’t access any hygiene products as she had to flee home in a rush, and it was impossible to find anything on the road up until she arrived in Sweden. It was also hard for her to find sanitary products in the humanitarian aid packages, as well as certain products like hand creams or nail clippers, that make a world of a difference in daily life but are often overlooked by the volunteers (especially males).”

“It is ridiculous how uneven some humanitarian aid is! We are so grateful to get all the help we are getting, but sometimes you understand that people have no idea what female refugees actually need.”
**Human trafficking**

During times of military conflict, women may also become the subjects of human trafficking. Human trafficking is the abduction and detention of hostages for the purpose of subsequently raping and exploiting them (Mece, 2020). Trafficking is recognized as a gendered problem, as it is women who suffer from it to a significantly higher extent than men (UN-b, 2022, UN, 2021). Even though most countries have strong legal frameworks forbidding human trafficking, they are not operating during times of war (Yuyun, 2020, ICRC, n.d.). According to Mece (2020), human trafficking is an issue that occurs not only in the warzone itself but also far outside it. Refugee camps have not been the greatest answer to refugee relocation since camps have not always provided a safe environment for women. On one side, they do provide proper accommodation and help with humanitarian aid that can be extremely useful for people who flee their homes. On the other hand, camps also make refugees a lucrative target for human traffickers, many of whom understand and abuse the tough mental and financial conditions the refugees are in.

> “I was involved in the creation of the informational website for the refugees in Sweden. One of the most visited pages on the website is the one that explains how to protect yourself from human trafficking and prostitution and scams.”

Another issue related to human trafficking identified during the interview was related to the risk of human trafficking for children.

> “One of the refugees was talking about the risks of human trafficking for children, after the news about Russian soldiers that forcibly kidnap and relocate people to Russia. It was really scary, and you could see how it affected her.”

The risks are confirmed by the report of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights (2022) which validates that at least thirteen orphans were illegally removed from the orphanage in Mariupol and relocated to Rostov-on-Don. Under international law, it is a crime that is classified as human trafficking.

The longer the war lasts, the more vulnerable women become as they try to rebuild their lives. It is critical to act quickly and decisively to safeguard people and prevent them from becoming victims of human traffickers through the support of international organizations such as UNHCR. It is also crucial to raise awareness among refugees themselves, spread knowledge
how to identify human traffickers and how women can contact the authorities before it is too late. Providing effective integration programs, decent living conditions, and an opportunity to have a steady income can also eliminate the risk of women being forced to get involved voluntarily or involuntarily in other sex-related matters (e.g., prostitution) (ICRC, n.d., Capasso et al., 2022, Nadal, 2022, Yuyun, 2020, Salzman, 2007).
Discussion and conclusion

“Peace, in all its aspects, is now clearly a woman’s issue. Perhaps if there were less patriarchy there’d be less violence.”
-- Frances Farenthold

Discussion

One can argue that women have a strong advantage based on their gender in the times of war in Ukraine. This advantage was given to women for a reason. Research has proven that women suffer from the consequences of war to a higher extent than men (Ainamani et al., 2020, ICRC, n.d., UN, 2020). War brings pain and suffering in everyone’s lives regardless of gender, however, women are especially vulnerable to the risks of sexual violence, poverty, and human trafficking, providing them an even stronger disadvantage. Existing discriminatory tendencies in society deepen during military conflicts and even when the war is over, women’s rights are still affected negatively.

Historically, war has provided women an opportunity to get jobs that were considered “only suitable for males”, but returning from the frontlines, men took those jobs back and forced women back into housework. Now when gender order in the society is more emancipated, there is another perspective on gender inequality during war. Women are capable to perform any tasks men do, they can serve in combat, work, and volunteer, however, when the war escalates, and the government is not able to protect civilians, women, and children are asked to relocate. The division of “natural” gender roles is still strong in Ukraine, dictating that men are the actual guardians of the country while women and children must be rescued, so one can argue that the advantage is not actually about allowing women to leave, but rather forbidding men to leave as the government has to secure the fighting forces. Trying to adjust to a new life, often combined with the need of taking care of children (sometimes with no help of a partner), women are forced into easier-accessible and therefore lower-paid jobs, which does not let them to invest time and resources into education. This results in increased poverty and its repercussions, such as health issues.

The threat for women to become a target of sexual violence and human trafficking occurs both in the occupied territories and outside Ukraine, and given martial law, it is especially high considering the majority of the women are leaving their houses without family members (Chatzis, 2022). Human trafficking is often referred to as sex trafficking which can be misleading, as there are no boundaries when it comes to what traffickers may inflict. It is critical
to raise awareness among the general public, support international organizations such as UNHCR and provide efficient integration programs, decent living conditions, and an opportunity for refugees to have a steady income (Capasso et al., 2022, Nadal, 2022, Yuyun, 2020, Salzman, 2007).

One can argue if an advantage given to women really is an advantage, or just a moral dilemma (leave the country and protect their lives or stay with their families in the warzone)? During the interviews, volunteers mentioned that most of the women acknowledged the risks associated with human trafficking, poverty and sexual violence. But in addition to it, one common denominator they had was their fear of how these risks will affect their children. This fear was significantly stronger than fear for their own lives, therefore, the major reason people decide to leave Ukraine is to seek safety for their children. At the same time, the advantage covers not only the mothers, but all women, so and one can argue that the government expects women to become childbearers and give birth to new generations in order to compensate for the losses on the battlefield. Is it really ethical to put such expectations on women and to let them escape the war because of their natural ability to give birth?

The law proves an oppressive view of women in Ukrainian patriarchal society. It confirms an established gender order where women are expected to become mothers or caregivers, therefore they are given an advantage to leave, regardless of if they actually want to become mothers, or are able to do that physically. However, it is fair to argue that it is parenthood that lays an actual foundation for the privilege to leave the country, as confirmed by the exception from the martial law. Single fathers can leave, but not fathers who have partners. Core advantage is given not to women, but to children, and gender order in Ukraine determines that mother is closer to a child than a father, especially considering the ratio of single mothers in the society. In addition, men are expected to join the army and protect the country to a significantly higher degree than women. Interestingly, a father of three or more children below 18 can also leave even if he has a partner. Is it fair to assume then that a mother is not capable of raising more than three children on her own, therefore, needs the vital support of her husband?

The government certainly puts Ukrainian women in a unique position; however, it does not mean women gain a privilege of freedom. Imagine, there is a mother who has two sons, one above 18, another below. She may feel a natural urge to leave the country to protect her child, however, that would mean she would have to leave her older son. How is she supposed to make a choice and prioritize the life of one child over another?
After war implications

After the combat stops, the battle for equality takes a step back. According to the United Nations (UN-b, 2022), violence against women persists owing to "a general deterioration of the rule of law, the availability of small arms, the disintegration of social institutions, and the acceptability of gender-based violence as an extra aspect of pre-existing discrimination". As a result of the restoration of patriarchal regulations on how a society should function after a military conflict (gender order), women's access to both education and independent, properly compensated labour is severely hampered.

According to Pignatti (2012), the gender gap in Ukraine is rooted in many factors, including certain gender stereotypes that drive people's motivation to choose one job or another. Some jobs are considered to be more “female-suitable” and the average income level in these jobs is lower. The government has made numerous attempts to adjust these differences from legislative perspective, however, they have not always been successful.

Pignatti (2012) investigates the labour market in Ukraine following the Orange Revolution in 2005, which marked an important period of an economic and political transition. The new government has tried to establish a number of economic reforms aiming to promote gender equality in the labour market, but women did not seem to benefit much from them or economic growth in general due to deep gender inequality in specific jobs and industries. The situation is particularly visible in the private sector which is not regulated by the government as much as the public sector. This is because a large share of the employment in the private sector is informal, so the implementation of the pro-gender equality legislation is more difficult in the absence of written and registered contracts.

Similar results were achieved by Bluszcz and Valente (2022) confirming that war in Ukraine economically affects women to a higher extent. Promoting pro-gender equality legislation should continue to be a focus in the after-war situation, however, it should be combined with the elimination of gender bias and gender stereotypes in society starting from the education at very early stages (Handrahan, 2004).

Another issue with post-conflict regulation is the exclusion of women from the peace processes mentioned by Handrahan (2004). UN Women (2021) reports that only 23% of negotiators are women which is far from optimal as there are numerous evidence that peace agreements negotiated solely by women are 64% less likely to fail than those negotiated entirely by males.
In October 2020, the United Nations passed another resolution recognizing the critical role of women in preventing and alleviating the effects of violent conflicts (UN, 2020). Its purpose is clear: it is impossible to develop an inclusive post-war society if half of the world's population is excluded from the process.

Conclusion

Every day since the beginning of the war, Ukrainian women are followed by the ceaseless fear of being killed by the Russian army. They constantly worry for their loved ones and their future, just like the men do. But what creates a gender difference and a foundation for an “advantage” to some extent is that women are much more exposed to the dangers of sexual violence and human trafficking. They experience larger financial difficulties resulting in poverty and health complications. But it is parenthood and the desire to protect their children that actually drives women’s decision to leave Ukraine and seek shelter in other countries, even if it means that they will be separated from their families. Consequently, the idea that some women will (or have already) become mothers is a stronger argument for an “advantage” gained by all women. The role of the children in society is clear. The nation will not survive without new generations; therefore, children must be protected. They cannot leave alone because someone has to take care of them, and it is usually a mother who will do this in Ukraine due to an existing gender order, so women gain an advantage by proxy, while an actual advantage is given to children.

War will stay in people’s hearts forever. Not a single crime against humanity will be forgiven nor forgotten. It is crucial to unite the forces and support all direct and indirect victims of the war either by implementing integration programs, helping out in volunteering centres and international organizations like UNHCR, Rädda Barnen, and Unicef, or raising awareness among the general public. No one can do everything, but everyone can do something!

Limitations and further knowledge

The research creates a foundation to evaluate the horrific impact of the war on women’s rights and suggests a direction for its resolution. It is limited to only women’s rights, however, there are many more parties that are affected. Further research can focus on children’s and animals’ rights, it can also explore how other intersections affect the situation for women, e.g., age and class. Another study can be conducted by interviewing men and analysing their perspectives on the law. It would be also interesting to investigate how transgender people are impacted by the advantage and martial law, as not all women have “female’’ sex written in their passports.
Moreover, if we assume that advantage based on the gender factor is not entirely fair, it would be interesting to hypothesize what is the best way to approach the martial law then, what would the effect be if everyone was free to leave or only some people, based on the criteria other than gender (e.g., parenthood, professional occupation, willingness to join the army, etc).

The burden of the war will be carried by millions of victims who never signed up for it. One can endlessly dig deeper into how far society’s development has been thrown back and what could society achieve if governments did not spend the resources on war. Further studies are recommended to understand the overall effect on the human rights and develop detailed programs for the resolution of the war consequences in Ukraine.
References


Appendix

Appendix 1. Interview guide

1. Please describe your affiliation with Help in Change. How long have you been volunteering, what position do you have?
2. Did you notice that some of the refugees coming from Ukraine were over-represented?
   a. Have you noticed any similarities between the refugees?
   b. How many of the refugees that came to Sweden had children with them?
3. Have any of the refugees you worked with reflected on their decision to leave Ukraine? Are you aware of any specific reasons why the refugees have picked Sweden?
4. From your experience, did the refugees need any humanitarian or financial aid when they came to Sweden?
   a. How would you evaluate the aid provided by the Swedish government (living conditions, financial aid, humanitarian aid)?
   b. Do you have knowledge of any aid provided by the international funds, like Red Cross, Unicef, etc?
   c. What were the major needs of the refugees not covered by the provided aid, if any?
5. In your knowledge, does the Swedish government provide the refugees with psychological assistance through medical professionals?
   a. Have you ever felt that there is a need for medical professionals to be present at refugee accommodations?