Pandemics And Global Security Challenges: Covid-19 As A Threat to Human Security and Peace

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Abstract
This policy paper explores the political and socioeconomic dynamics and effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global peace and security. It employs a human security approach to analyze the threats to global peace and human rights caused by socioeconomic disparities and sexual violence which have been worsened by the pandemic. It concludes with recommendations to stakeholders on how to promote peace and security during global health crises.
Keywords: Covid-19 pandemic, human rights, human security, health, sexual violence, development

1. Introduction
In the Cold war era security issues primarily focused on militarization, however, the 21st century ideology of security is more complex due to increased globalization (WHO, 2002, p.3). Security issues in contemporary times includes issues of economic disparities, public health concerns such as the emergence and re -emergence of communicable and infectious diseases (WHO,2002, p.3). Climate change (and its attendant challenges) is also now considered as a threat to global peace and security. Consequently, these global challenges have led policymakers, states, and security experts to shift away from focusing solely on military issues to the concept of human security.

2. Human Security in Contemporary Times
The human security approach acknowledges that security is a common good to be shared by all (Thomas, 2001, p .159). The United Nations Security Council has acknowledged social and economic inequality, poverty and health disparities as major threats to security because it may result in violence and civil strife. Economic disparities in contemporary times have increased human security threats (Thomas, 1999 p.225). In an address to the United Nations Security Council in 2000, the World Bank president noted that security issues are not just about military and borders but rather about poverty and human survival (Thomas, 2001 p.162). The World Bank acknowledges the importance of well-being for the development every nation. Human needs and the responsibility of states to protect the rights of persons are the main tenets on which human security is based. When people have unmet socio -economic needs, it becomes a motivation for civil strife and conflicts (Burton, 1990 p.36).

3. Health Rights and Social Justice
The right to quality health care is a basic human right enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It states that health rights are inalienable and therefore must not be constrained by a person's race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition.

Good health is a necessary condition for a person to enjoy every other human right (WHO, 2008). It is therefore part of human responsibility to safeguard our health and those of others.

Therefore, health inequality is a violation of a person's basic human right. Health care disparity is not only an issue of socioeconomic inequality but also an issue of racial and ethnic differences particularly in deeply racialized environments such as the United States of America (Braveman et. al., 2011, p.149). Racialization of the access to quality health care is a trigger for civil conflicts and riots; this is because the absence of equitable access to health care is a threat to the human security of the people. A threat to one's security is considered as an underlying factor for many violent conflicts. The unequal distribution of resources and group relative deprivation also serves as a trigger for conflict (Paffenholz, 2010. pp.272-285; Meuleman et. al, 2020 pp.593-611.).

Equally important is the concept of social justice which relates to the benefits and burdens of social and economic resources -it explains who benefits from and who is affected by the unequal distribution of social and economic resources as well as natural resources (Rawls, 1971 cited in UN Division for Social Policy, 2006, p.13). Socioeconomic inequalities are inevitable in the society however, it can be minimized. When a person or group suffer multiple forms of discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion, it has implications for their well-being and health status. For example, people who experience racism, gender discrimination and other forms of oppression,

are less likely to have access to quality health care. (Rogers & Kelly, 2011, pp. 397–407) noted that for health disparities to be eliminated the other forms of socioeconomic disparities must be addressed first.

4.   COVID-19 as a Challenge to Human Security

According to the Global Partnership for the Prevention of Armed Conflict (GPPAC, 2020) the current global pandemic has exacerbated already existing social and environmental challenges such as climate change, food insecurity, unemployment, domestic violence, among others. All these coupled with lack of social welfare initiatives and quality health care especially for the most vulnerable have led to an increase in human insecurity and also pose a threat to peace.

Secondly, the UN Secretary General has called for measures on tackling domestic violence which had increased because of lockdown imposed due to COVID-19 lockdowns (UN News, 2020, https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052). Human security challenges increased during the pandemic in conflict zones due to the already poor state of their health care systems (GPPAC, 2020). Many countries in the Global South with weak healthcare systems and existing pandemics, like the Ebola in DR Congo and HIV in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa, were further burdened by this new pandemic.

Additionally, the precarious situations of forced migrants who are one of the most vulnerable populations in the world (estimated to be about 70 million globally) have been worsened by the pandemic (SSRC, 2020, https://kujenga-amani.ssrc.org/2020/09/03/covid-19-human-security-crisis-and-the-responsibility-to-protect/).Psychological stress increased and the mental health of many people also deteriorated. The stigma attached to being infected and the fear of infecting others is also a challenge during a pandemic. These psychosocial factors are also a challenge to the social and economic security of individuals and their households. The deaths of persons (especially household heads and breadwinners) due to the pandemic also poses a risk to the survival of their dependents- the most vulnerable in the society usually do not have health or life insurance which could help in such periods of financial distress.

Furthermore, the politicization of the pandemic is a threat to global security. A report by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in September 2020, indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic is an issue of global security due to the risk of weaponization of the disease by certain perpetrators of mass violence and atrocities. The report also noted the politicization of the pandemic by certain powerful states such as the US through their withdrawal of funding to the WHO thereby constraining their efforts to eradicate the disease. The UN Security Council has the responsibility to protect and end mass atrocities through their Responsibility to Protect (R2P) principle. Although the pandemic is not an issue of direct violence it has exacerbated socioeconomic inequality. It is worth noting that the Security Council has admitted that socioeconomic inequality is an underlying factor for conflicts (UN Security Council General Assembly, 2019). The disagreements between the US and China (China currently has the UN Security Council Presidency) have also perhaps impacted upon the security council's decision to take responsibility to act on this global human security crisis. Many world leaders and Nobel laureates have reiterated the fact that global peace and sustainable development cannot be achieved without focusing on human security (UN, 2020, https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052).

Equally important, is the relationship between gender issues and human security challenges. Gender inequality is more pronounced during global crises such as environmental disasters, wars and pandemics. Pandemics affect all genders differently (de Paz et al., 2020, p.2). The COVID-19 pandemic has augmented the socioeconomic gaps that have always prevailed across genders (Noory, 2020 pp.111–117). Data available indicates that there are higher mortality rates for men than women in the low and middle-income countries; however, females bear the brunt of the care work and are therefore more exposed to the risk of being infected (Schaaf et. al., 2020, p.50). Women's vulnerability generally increased due to their burden of care and the unequal distribution of housework during the pandemic (GPPAC, 2020). It is therefore important to recognize and address the gender dimensions of the COVID-19 pandemic in policy actions.

5.   The Concept of Positive Peace

Peace is not simply the absence of direct violence; it goes beyond that- This is best understood through Johan Galtung's (1969) positive peace and negative thesis. There are different clusters of definitions to peace, for analytical clarity, this paper adopts the operational definition of peace as social justice and the absence of collective violence between groups.

6.   The Increase of Sexual Violence During Covid 19; Threat to Human Security and Peace.

Sexual violence against women is a widespread phenomenon. Every 1 out of 3 women has experienced sexual violence. (W.H.O, 2020). The act of sexual violence reaches an alarming rate in times of pandemics/plagues, COVID-19 is no exception. This is partly due to various restrictions of movements and isolation measures (UNDP,2020) introduced by governments in response to the spread of the disease, a phenomenon Mittal and Singh (2020, pp. 3-7.) termed as the 'quarantine paradox'. From Africa to Asia, from Europe to America, reports

show a significant spike in sexual-related offenses since March 2020. (Odhiambo, 2020, pp. 2-5). The associated challenges that come with sexual violence and harassment (i.e., mental, and physical injuries, sexual/reproductive problems, HIV, unplanned pregnancies, and other transmitted diseases) cannot be over-emphasized. Persoob, (2010 pp. 141-151.), argues that sexual violence against women is a violation of their human rights; it represents a threat to the survival of women and a denial of their self-worth, dignity, security, and the right to enjoy fundamental freedom. This form of violence meted against women endanger their lives and constitutes a threat to human security (Thomas et al, 2010 p. 479.).

Maguruza, (2017, pp.15-35) contends that human insecurity could kill more people than even hunger, genocide, and war. The unjustified violence against women is exacerbated by Covid-19 pandemic due to stay-at-home orders and restrictions. Nakyazze (2020, pp.92–95.), concluded that this global health crisis has unintendingly provided a convenient space for sexual violence to flourish, contributing to existing social injustices and human insecurity challenges the world is grappling with.

The philosophical assumptions of the human security approach advance the idea that all persons must live in freedom, and dignity, devoid of despair, violence, harassment of any kind and to enjoy equal opportunities to develop their full human potential and aspirations. (Oscar & Gasper,2004, p3). Human security recognizes freedom as the fundamental/core of life, therefore any tendencies (including sexual violence) against this freedom intolerably threatens human survival, livelihood, respect, and security. (UNDP, 2020, p.16). Women constitute about half of the world's population (UNDP,2020, p.16) and the continued harassment against women hinder their potentials and active participation in the socioeconomic and political development of their societies. (Persoob,2010 pp. 141-151,). Sexual violence is a form of injustice and therefore a threat to positive peace.

Positive peace is the ultimate peace that every society seeks to attain; meanwhile it is unachievable if sexual violence exists. Positive peace explores the need to eliminate the different forms of indirect violence i.e., sexual violence, that hitherto shortens life span, reduces the quality of life, and maintained unequal life chances. (Herath, 2019 p.104). Sexual violence as explained above is an obstacle that hinders the realization of global peace and security.

7. Lessons Learned from Previous Global Health Challenges -The Way Forward for COVID-19 and Future Global Health and Human Security Issues

The Ebola virus showed the weaknesses in the contact tracing and surveillance systems in many regions especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Afolabi et. al., 2020, p.28). Myths and stigmatization were major hindrances to formal health seeking behaviors; thereby increasing the spread of the virus (Afolabi et. al., 2020, p.28). Gender mainstreaming in health care policies and action plans have been implemented since the global HIV/AIDS and Ebola crises- these global health challenges exposed the gender disparities in the impacts of such health problems in societies, especially in the global South. Consequently, academics and other stakeholders have started to advocate for the need to include gender mainstreaming in all COVID-19 response plans and policies.

Unlike the Ebola pandemic, sub-Saharan Africa responded quickly to this pandemic. The Ebola virus pandemic exposed many socioeconomic challenges which have been partly addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, some African states instituted welfare programs such as the provision of food to help the most vulnerable in their countries. The government of Ghana implemented a free water supply policy for some months. This was part of its plan to increase hand-washing and personal hygiene practices as well as to reduce the economic shocks (Daily Graphic, 2020, https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/ghana-news-gov-t-extends-free-water-package-to-december-31.html). World leaders have implemented policies to reduce the socioeconomic shocks to its people, yet there are still major problems that threaten human security at individual, household, and community levels.

8. Conclusion

Global pandemics and human security challenges are intertwined. The inequity in access to health care and the unequal distribution of social and economic challenges which are compounded during pandemics pose a threat to peace and security. Stakeholders must consider how health crises can overwhelm socio-economic systems and threaten human security in their policies. The gendered dynamics must also be considered in any policy planning and implementation (especially in trying to contain the spread of infection during a pandemic). This will help address issues of sexual violence which was ignored in the Covid-19 response plans of most countries. There is the need to protect persons especially the most vulnerable. Human security threats can only be minimized globally if there is cooperation among states, multinational corporations, civil society, and academia. This would help to build resilient societies even in the face of a global pandemic.

9. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to states and other stakeholders such as NGOs, and the United

Nations to implement:

- Provision of microcredit by states (especially to the vulnerable) to help reduce the socioeconomic shocks.
- Response mechanisms must be put in place which will encourage victims of sexual violence to report to the security authorities for help. For example, the use of code text or SOS alert systems via mobile devices, sign language or symbols they can use to alert and communicate for help.
- National health insurance schemes for equitable access to quality and affordable healthcare.
- Rapid data sharing and early warning systems across states to predict and respond to outbreaks.
- The lobbying of the UN Security Council to include health crisis and pandemics as a threat to global security-in order to take action to protect the most vulnerable populations.

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