

Yonas Gebreyosus

Women in African Refugee Camps

Gender Based Violence against Female Refugees:
The case of Mai Ayni Refugee Camp, Northern Ethiopia



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Gebreiyosus, Yonas: Women in African Refugee Camps: Gender Based Violence against Female Refugees: The case of Mai Ayni Refugee Camp, Northern Ethiopia. Hamburg, Anchor Academic Publishing 2013

Buch-ISBN: 978-3-95489-126-9

PDF-eBook-ISBN: 978-3-95489-626-4

Druck/Herstellung: Anchor Academic Publishing, Hamburg, 2013

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek:

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographical Information of the German National Library:

The German National Library lists this publication in the German National Bibliography. Detailed bibliographic data can be found at: <http://dnb.d-nb.de>

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Hermannstal 119k, 22119 Hamburg
<http://www.diplomica-verlag.de>, Hamburg 2013
Printed in Germany

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere and wholehearted gratitude to my advisor Elshaday Kifle for her genuine professional and technical assistance.

I am very grateful to all the study participants and particularly those female refugees who disclosed or let us to know their painful violence experiences. I also thank all workers in the camp for their responsible support for data collection and I appreciate their contribution in carrying out this emotionally challenging interview.

I am also thankful to my family, for putting up with me through my testing moments in write up of this paper whereby I was completely engulfed in my work and poorly responded for their needs and care. Asme and Gech you deserve great respect. My appreciation also goes to Giday Meles who deserve great respect and due regard for the support he rendered. In addition, my gratitude goes to my best friends, Elsabeth Mulu, Yikealo Tarke, Biniam Debela, Mebrahtom Guesh, Tedros Solomon, Filimon, Shewita G/biher, Melak and Tekelay who contributed me ideas and necessary materials which are important for the robustness of the paper. I also thank to Habtamu Alebachew and Yemane Zeray.

Above all my deepest thanks go to Almighty God who is the source of my strength and every achievement in my life.

Yonas Bayruau Gebreyosus

*THIS STUDY IS DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF
ERITREAN FEMALE REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA*

ACRONYMS

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
ARRA	Administration for Refugee and Returnee Affairs
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	International Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSR	Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FDRE	Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia
FGD	Focus Group Discussions
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
ICCPR	International Convention on Civil and Political Rights
IRC	International Rescue Committee
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OUA	Organization of African Unity
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TRS	Tigray Regional State
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UNHCR	United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees
WHO	World Health Organization

ABSTRACT

Gender-based violence prevents female's enjoyment of fundamental human rights and it is also central social, economic and health problem. Similarly, gender-based violence is viewed as a significant problem in refugee camps throughout the world. However, studies on gender based violence against female refugees are limited. Most researches in this area were conducted in line with other problems of refugees. Yet, in order to assess comprehensively it needs specific study. Thus, the main objective of the study was to examine the prevalence, cause and consequences of gender based violence against female refugees in Mai Ayni refugee camp. In order to achieve these objectives, qualitative methods of data collection have been employed. Hence, data were collected from in-depth interview with female refugees and five male refugees, focus group discussion with male and female refugees, key informant interviews as well as document analysis and personal observation were used. The book has found that female refugees in the camp were exposed to sexual violence, physical violence and socio-economic violence including; attempt rape, rape, gang rape, physical injuries, discrimination and stigmatization, and denial of access to services. The study also disclosed that male refugees and intimate partners of female refugees were the prime gender based violence perpetrators of female refugees in Mai Ayni refugee camp. Moreover, the study revealed that idleness, economic dependency, physical insecurity, lack of awareness, collapse of social and family structure as well as poor reporting, coordination and legal enforcement mechanisms were identified as causes/risk factors for gender based violence against female refugees in Mai Ayni refugee camp. Moreover, men's feeling of 'loss of power' in the camp, which challenges male's identity as superior to female, led male refugees to anger and makes female refugees vulnerable to different forms of gender based violence. Consequently, because of gender based violence, female refugees in the camp have short and long lasting damaging consequence on their life in terms of health, physical and psycho-social.

Table of Contents

Contents	page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ACRONYMS.....	III
ABSTRACT.....	IV
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Introduction.....	1
1.2. Significance of the Study	5
1.3. Scope of the Study	6
1.4. Organization of the Study	7
1.5. Operational Definitions of Related Terms.....	7
CHAPTER TWO	9
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE.....	9
2.1. Conceptualizing Gender- Based Violence.....	9
2.1.1. Forms of Gender-Based Violence.....	11
2.2. Causes of Gender- Based Violence.....	12
2.3. Consequences of Gender- Based Violence	15
2.4. Gender-Based Violence and Female Refugees.....	17
2.5. Overview of Major International Human Rights Instruments on Gender-Based Violence and Refugees.....	22
CHAPTER THREE	27
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	27
3.1. Description of the Study Area.....	27
3.2. Research Strategies	27

3.3. Data Source.....	28
3.4. Sampling Techniques and Procedures	29
3.5. Methods and Tools of Data Collection	31
3.6. Data Analysis.....	34
3.7. Ethical Consideration.....	34
CHAPTER FOUR.....	36
CASE STUDY: GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST ERITREAN FEMALE REFUGEES IN ETHIOPIA (THE CASE OF MAI AYNi REFUGEE CAMP, NORTHERN ETHIOPIA)....	36
4.1. Prevalence of Gender-Based Violence	36
4.1.1. Physical Violence.....	37
4.1.2. Socio-Economic Violence	40
4.1.3. Sexual Violence	44
4.2. Causes and Risk Factors for Gender-Based Violence against Female Refugees	48
4.2.1. Forced Idleness	49
4.2.2. Physical Insecurity	51
4.2.3. Men’s ‘Loss of Power’.....	53
4.2.4. Economic Dependency	54
4.2.5. Collapse of Social and Family Support Structures	56
4.2.6. Lack of Awareness.....	58
4.2.7. Poor Reporting, Coordination and Legal Enforcement Mechanisms	59
4.3. Consequences of Gender-Based Violence.....	65
CHAPTER FIVE	72
SUMMARY	72
5.1. Summary	72
REFERENCES	78
Appendix I: Interview Guideline	86

1. Interview Guideline for Female Refugees at Mai Ayni Refugee Camp	86
2. Interview Guideline for Male Refugees at Mai Ayni Refugee Camp	89
3. Interview Guideline for Key Informants.....	91
4. Focus Group Discussion Guideline	93
5. Guideline for Personal Observation.....	94
Appendix II List of Informants	94
1. List of Female Refugee.....	94
2. List of Male Refugee	96
3. List of FGD Participant	96
4. List of Key Informants	97

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

Gender based violence has become a major concern and a serious problem throughout the world.¹ International human rights instruments recognized gender based violence as a violation of human rights. Accordingly, the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines gender-based violence as, “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”.²

On the other hand, people have been forced to escape their home and seek protection since the ancient times. In medieval times, in some parts of the world, history recorded that whole population sometimes was forced to flee and seek protection.³ Today, a number of people are displaced, refugees or seeking asylum. From an estimated 1 million refugees in 1951 when the convention⁴ dealing with refugees was adopted, in 2011 the numbers of refugees reached over 15 million people within the concern of the United Nations Higher Commissioner for Refugees (Hereinafter, referred to as, UNHCR).⁵ Thus, refugees are undoubtedly an issue of global concern.

Consequently, according to the report of UNHCR, Sub-Saharan Africa is hosting one quarter of all refugees and hence, the trend of refugee number had been increasing due to crisis in different parts of the world including in East Africa.⁶ Indeed, Ethiopia is now hosting some 370,000

¹ Heise, L. Ellsberg, M, Gottmoller. 2002. *A Global Overview of Gender Based Violence*: International Journal of Gynecology and Obstetrics 78 Suppl. 1, S5–S14, pp.1-10.

² See, Article 1 of UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (A/ RES/48/104) New York, 20 December, 1993.

³ Richard Pirre, *et al.* 2006. *Human Rights in the World Community Issues and Action*: Third edition, University of Pennsylvania, p.137.

⁴ See, Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, 28 July 1951, 189 UNTS 137 (Herein after referred to as, CSR)

⁵ UNHCR. 2012. *Global Trends, a Year of Crisis*: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva, Switzerland, p.2.

⁶ *Ibid*, p.2.