



The “added benefit” – Female peacekeepers in UN peacekeeping missions

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, the United Nations (UN) has advocated for an increased presence of female peacekeepers in peacekeeping missions to mitigate incidents of sexual violence against civilian populations. The rationale behind this initiative posits that women possess a unique capability to recognise and address the specific needs of fellow females while exerting a positive influence on their male colleagues. However, this dual role, encompassing both tending to local populations' needs and regulating the behaviour of male peacekeepers, places female peacekeepers under a double burden.

This article evaluates the possible relationship between the proportion of female military personnel in peacekeeping missions and reported sexual violence cases. Through a comparative analysis of two missions, it explores the impact of female peacekeepers on local populations and trust in peacekeeping operations. This research addresses a significant gap in academic discourse, as the influence of women in peacekeeping is infrequently discussed, and scholarly opinions on their actual impact differ. The study employs a hybrid approach, combining qualitative small-N analysis and quantitative data.

Despite observing a potential positive influence on reported sexual violence cases in the selected peacekeeping mission, the study underscores the limited actual impact of female peacekeepers. Importantly, the author contends that the current UN approach—simply deploying women to peacekeeping missions—fails to address the underlying issues rooted in military deployment, signalling a need for more comprehensive strategies to effect lasting change.

Keywords

peacekeeping, sexual violence, female peacekeepers.



1. Introduction

In the context of armed conflict, sexual violence is a tool commonly used (McKay 1998) to reinforce military goals and affects not just the conflict setting but continues to shape societies post-conflict (Allais 2011; Westendorf/Searle 2017). Women and girls remain the primary target of sexual violence (UNGA 1996; Bastick/Grimm/Kunz 2007; Allais 2011), leading to it being considered a gender-based issue due to its characterisation as the “manifestation of male dominance” (Karim/Beardsley 2016: 102).

Interveners to situations of conflict have also been involved in acts of sexual violence directed at the civilian¹ population (Kent 2007; Csáky 2008) with peacekeepers deployed to United Nations (UN) peacekeeping missions² being no exception. In spite of the fact that sexual violence has been present in nearly every peacekeeping mission (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz 2007; Westendorf 2019), the UN has long framed instances of sexual transgression as “unintended consequence[s]” of peace operations (Aoi, de Coning & Thakur 2007: 3). Sexual violence in the context of peacekeeping operations is often summed up and referred to as sexual misconduct (UN Secretariat 2003). That being said, this term is deemed too “euphemistic” (Code Blue 2016) and thus avoided in the following paper. Over the past few years, the number of reports on sexual violence by UN peacekeeping personnel has increased (Jennings 2008), drawing much-needed attention to the phenomenon (UN 2022d).

Women in peacekeeping missions are generally rarely considered in the context of academic research (Sion 2008; Karim & Beardsley 2013), especially when it comes to the role(s) they play in the context of sexual violence. Thus, there is not just a lack of information on women as perpetrators of sexual violence but also the effect female peacekeepers can have on the number of reported cases during peace operations (Mazurana 2003; Jennings 2012). Nonetheless, in an overall slowly progressing effort (Mazurana 2003), the UN continues to encourage troop-contributing countries to deploy more female personnel to eventually eliminate sexual violence by peacekeepers in future peacekeeping missions (UNGA 2005). This is done under the presumption that the deployment of female peacekeepers prevents male peacekeepers from partaking in acts of sexual violence (Mazurana 2003).

However, researcher’s conclusions differ on whether increasing the presence of female peacekeepers in peacekeeping operations decreases the number of reported cases concerning

¹ According to the UN, all individuals are considered civilians as long as they are not identified as parties to a conflict (DPKO 2019).

² In the following, the terms *peacekeeping mission* and *peacekeeping operation* will be used interchangeably.

sexual violence or if the opposite is true: that the overall number of reported cases increases as the local population is encouraged to report cases of sexual transgression (Pruitt 2016; Narang & Liu 2022). The UN's peace operation in Liberia (UNMIL) is one example in which an all-female police unit was deployed and encouraged the reporting of sexual transgressions, which was accompanied by an overall decrease of reported cases (Pruitt 2016). Then again, Heineken (2015) argues that the effect of deploying women as peacekeepers on the number of reported cases is insignificant. Moreover, both Csáky (2008) and Russo (2022) assert that female peacekeepers are also taking part in the abuse of the local population. These considerations create an interesting puzzle that this article will try to address, resulting in the research question: *How does the presence of deployed female peacekeeping personnel influence the number of reported cases of sexual violence by UN peacekeepers in the context of peacekeeping missions?*

For the purpose of the present analysis, sexual violence by peacekeepers against local civilians serves as the dependent variable (DV). In recent decades, various sources have reported on the issue of sexual violence (Human Rights Watch 2002). Over the course of this article, the dependent variable is recognised as the variation in the number of reported cases (meaning low or high levels) of sexual violence during UN peacekeeping missions. This will be contrasted with the percentage of female personnel deployed to UN peacekeeping missions, which represents the independent variable (IV). To try and analyse a possible pattern, the United Nations *Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic* (MINUSCA) was chosen as a case, and for comparison the *United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali* (MINUSMA) as the non-case. For the purpose of this article, the non-case is represented by a peacekeeping mission during which only very few cases of sexual violence were reported.

Multiple factors seem to have an influence on the relationship between women peacekeepers and the number of sexual violence reporting during a peacekeeping mission. The UN supports the notion that a female presence in peacekeeping troops reduces the troops' "aggressiveness and hyper-masculinity" (DPKO 2000), commonly associated with military forces (Eichler 2014). Women in peacekeeping are accordingly thought to harbour a "pacifying presence" (DPKO 2000) as well as a "civilising effect" on their male colleagues – all of which would lead to a decrease of reported cases of sexual transgression (Jennings 2011). Hernandez (2020) criticises that women are instrumentalised by the UN, deployed to serve as a "quick fix" to the problem. This effectively transfers the responsibility to female peacekeepers rather than addressing and eventually eradicating its root causes.

To answer the selected research question, this article considers the theoretical implication that female peacekeepers are better at establishing contact with the local population (Wilén 2020b) as they are believed to harbour a particular sensitivity to the population's necessities (Jennings 2012). This is especially believed to be the case with regards to sexual violence (Karim & Beardsley 2013) and leads to an increase in the trust the local population has in the UN (Bridges & Horsfall 2009). As female peacekeepers are additionally credited with spreading awareness and encouraging the reporting of sexual violence cases, the deployment of females is believed to promote the reduction of the number of reported cases of sexual violence through deterrence (UNGA 2005; Jennings 2012). And yet, scholars point out that female peacekeepers are often restricted in their contribution to peace operations (Sion 2008; Karim 2019; Baldwin & Taylor 2020) while carrying weight of added responsibility (Anania, Mendes & Nagel 2020; Wilén 2020a). This, Wilén (2020a: 1586) notes, harbours the risk that the presumed "added value" of female peacekeepers will turn out to be an "added burden" carried solely by deployed female personnel.

The results derived from the following analysis indicate a covariation between the percentage of deployed female peacekeeping personnel and a decrease in reports of sexual violence. This conclusion is drawn tentatively, as this possible relationship was only observed in the case of the peacekeeping mission in the Central African Republic, MINUSCA. It can, however, not be ruled out that an increase in the percentage of women deployed to UN peacekeeping missions also reduces the number of reported sexual transgressions in the case of other peacekeeping missions, an argument supported by the United Nations as well as various scholars (DPKO 2000; Mazurana 2003; UNGA 2005; Pruitt 2016). And yet, simply deploying female peacekeepers into a male dominated field cannot be viewed as a sufficient solution to the issue that sexual violence in the context of UN peace operations represents. Further, alternative explanations to the proposed causal mechanisms include the effect a female presence has on male peacekeepers as well as the overall masculine culture in the military context (DPKO 2000; Jennings 2011), and will be considered in the discussion section of this article.

This article will proceed as follows; In the next paragraph, the theory on which the analysis is based will be laid out. Afterwards, the research design is outlined. Further, the operationalisation process will be presented and a first reflection on the research design provided. Then, the analysis of the theory in application to the chosen case will be presented. Last, the findings will be concluded as well as an outlook proposed for future research. This article strives to achieve a scientific contribution by using both qualitative and quantitative

methods to evaluate the possible correlation of the percentage of female peacekeepers and the development of cases of sexual violence by peacekeepers during UN peacekeeping missions.

2. Theory

The phenomenon of *violence against civilians* occurs in different conflict settings and encompasses any threat of physical violence directed at the civilian population of a country (DPKO 2019). In the following, this article will follow Balcells' and Stanton's (2021) definition of *violence against civilians*, referring to "any acts that, through the use of force, harm or damage civilians or civilian targets, including lethal as well as nonlethal forms of violence," which includes sexual violence (DPKO 2019).

The use of sexual violence aims at the domination and humiliation of the victims (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz 2007) and in times of conflict, rape in particular is often used as a strategic tool (Wood 2018: 514). The frequency with which sexual violence is strategically used against civilian populations varies as much as its manifestation (Wood (2009). The fact that this phenomenon presents a clear gender-focus, with women and girls remaining to be primarily targeted, cannot be disregarded (UNGA 1996; Bastick/Grimm/Kunz 2007; Allais 2011). And yet, not only are instances of sexual violence going unreported in general, but sexual transgressions directed at males specifically are less likely to be reported (Wood 2009; Wood 2018).

Back in the year 2000, the UN Security Council voiced their unease towards the increasing numbers of civilians harmed in conflict within resolution 1325 on *Women, Peace and Security* (UN Security Council 2000). Said resolution has been received with criticism regarding the UN's portrayal of women as victims in need of protection, depicting females as the "weaker gender" and emphasising stereotypical thinking (Kreft 2017: 154). In line with this resolution, peacekeeping personnel are mandated to include the protection of women and girls from gender-based and sexual violence, both during and after conflict whilst on mission (Kreft 2017; Westendorf 2019).

2.1 More women, less sexual violence? Introducing the causal mechanism

In the 1990s, coinciding with the first official reports of sexual violence by peacekeepers during peace operations, the United Nations specifically requested female peacekeepers for the first time (Simić 2010; Karim & Beardsley 2013; UN 2022a). Calls to increase the number of female peacekeepers have gained increasing traction as more scandals

concerning sexual transgressions became public (Wilén 2020a). Since the early 2000s the UN has adopted a total of ten resolutions dedicated to striving to further the agenda of Women, Peace and Security (UN Women 2023). Concurrently, the UN has officially set the integration of a “gender³ perspective” as one of their goals for future peacekeeping operations (UNSC 2000), and officially committed itself to not only increasing the gender ratio in the context of their diverse peacekeeping activities (Karim & Beardsley 2013; Jennings 2012) but across the board (UN 2017).

Through gender balancing, the equal representation of women and men within future peace operations is supposed to be achieved. This is aimed at with the hope that it will enhance future peacekeeping missions’ effectiveness, thereby increasing the ability of peacekeepers to attend to civilians’ needs (Jennings 2012; Karim & Beardsley 2013). It is assumed that the accrued presence of female peacekeepers increases the level of care granted to the local population, especially to women and girls, which leads civilians to install higher amounts of trust in the UN and their peacekeeping mission (UNGA 2005; Jennings 2012; Wilén 2020b). These factors – *access to the local population* and *trust in peacekeeping operation* – were selected as part of the two-step causal mechanism with the objective to explain the effect the percentage of deployed female peacekeepers has on reported cases of sexual violence within peacekeeping missions.

2.2 Female Peacekeepers and local populations

According to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (2000) the *access to the local population* increases by having more female peacekeepers present in UN peacekeeping operations. This is due to female peacekeepers being credited with harbouring certain characteristics that allow them to establish increasing contact with, and therefore access to civilians. In this case, women and children in particular (Karim & Beardsley 2013; Wilén 2020b) who are considered to be the most vulnerable in (post-)conflict settings (UN 2023c; UNGA 2005; Jennings 2012: 20). Female peacekeepers are thought to display a sensitivity to and awareness of other women’s “particular needs and challenges” (Jennings 2012: 20), especially when it comes to victims of sexual violence (Karim & Beardsley 2013; Wilén 2020a).

³ Gender refers to “the socially constructed roles and expectations related to biological sex” (Wilén 2020).

This contact – between women peacekeepers and local populations – is deemed especially important as violence by military personnel is said to noticeably decrease the security of the local female population, especially in a context where ongoing conflict and poverty intersect (Karamé 2001; Eichler 2014; Wheeler 2020). By the same token, female peacekeepers have been attributed the ability to improve the civilian populations' perception of their personal security (Jennings 2012; UN 2022f; Russo 2022). Furthermore, female peacekeepers are said to encourage the local population to report cases of sexual violence more, which in turn deters the widespread use of sexual violence (UNGA 2005). As a result, they are also credited with enhancing the population's *trust in the UN peacekeeping missions* (Bridges & Horsfall 2009). This increase in both the access to the local population as well as the trust in the UN is credited to female peacekeepers especially in communities where women are restricted from communicating with men (UN 2023c).

A study conducted by Karim and Beardsley in 2016, based on data from 2009 to 2013, indicates that an increase of five per cent in female peacekeepers would decrease the estimated reports of sexual violence by "more than half" (Karim & Beardsley 2016: 109). This empirical result will be evaluated over the course of the analysis and the possible transfer to the selected cases, considered. These considerations result in the following hypothesis, which this article strives to test:

H1: *If the percentages of female peacekeepers in a UN peacekeeping mission are increased, then the number of reported cases of sexual violence by peacekeepers will decrease.*

3. Research Design and Methods

The goal of this research is to test how the percentages of female peacekeepers deployed to UN peacekeeping missions affect the rate of reported cases of sexual violence. To do so, a qualitative small-N study combined with quantitative data was designed. This includes the strategic selection of a case – one specific peacekeeping mission – in addition to a structured focused comparison with a non-case. The focused as well as structured collection of data makes the comparison of both selected cases possible (George & Bennett 2005).

3.1 Data and Case Selection, Operationalisation

For the following analysis, cases reported until December 2021 – accessible via the UN’s public database on *Conduct in UN Field Missions*, in this case being sexual exploitation and abuse to be exact (UN 2022b) – as well as missions that were active until that point in time, were considered. Further, only missions installed after the year 2003 were considered, as this year represents a point in time when the UN’s awareness towards sexual violence increased (Allais 2011) and was institutionalised in the form of the “zero tolerance policy” (United Nations 2023h). This procedure was chosen as it makes the selected missions more likely to be comparable to one another. Moreover, both missions had to have female peacekeepers deployed to UN peacekeeping missions, as well as reported cases of sexual violence. These two missions were chosen because both are “integrated stabilisation missions” that work under similar mandates: focused, among others, on the protection of civilians and the promotion and protection of human rights (UN 2023a, 2023b).

A first look into the overall reported number of cases of sexual violence within the time frame from 2003 to 2021 showed that MINUSCA displayed the highest number of overall reported cases. As the non-case, MINUSMA, with the second-least reported cases of sexual violence, was selected. Because MINUSCA was installed in 2014, cases reported between 2014 and 2021 were considered. This particular case-selection was favoured to avoid cherry-picking a case that would most likely prove the selected theory. Testing the theory on MINUSCA represents a hard test (Powner 2014) as this particular mission has not been highly researched yet and therefore, other theories have not been applied to it so far.

This article will consider the percentage⁴ of female personnel who are part of the peacekeeping troops as the independent variable (IV). It was decided to carry out the following study with a focus on military personnel, since the military is considered a “highly masculine institution” (Karim & Beardsley 2013: 464). Said fact makes gender balancing harder to accomplish than for police or civilian staff within UN peacekeeping missions (Karim & Beardsley 2013). Furthermore, military staff not only have a long history of partaking in sexual violence during (post-)conflict situations but are the type of peacekeeping personnel that is most often involved in cases of sexual transgression (Kent 2007; Westendorf & Searle 2017).

Within the considered UN database, which contains reported sexual violence cases, allegations that fall under the UN’s broad term of *sexual misconduct* are divided into two main

⁴ Percentages were calculated and rounded up to the second digit after the comma.

categories: sexual exploitation⁵ and sexual abuse⁶ (UN 2022b). Besides data derived from the UN database, journal and news articles were used. The measurement of the independent variable will be based on the percentage⁷ of female peacekeepers present in each of the selected missions. To do so, data from the UN Department of Peacekeeping on Gender statistics were used (UN 2022c), which includes the categories of deployed *military troops* and *military experts*⁸. To assess the *access to the local population* as well as the established *trust in the UN*, qualitative data – in the form of information provided by various scholars – was used (Table 1). It should however be noted that access and availability of concrete data is limited in the case of the selected two-step causal mechanism.

	Indicators	
	Quantitative measure	Qualitative measure
Female peacekeepers (IV)	UN database on female peacekeepers deployed to peace operations (percentages calculated)	Reports about female peacekeepers' influence during peacekeeping missions
Access to local population/trust in UN (causal mechanisms)		Information extracted from scientific papers
Sexual misconduct (DV)	Data from UN database on sexual misconduct during peacekeeping missions	Secretary-General reports, online news/journal articles

Table 1: Operationalisation of the IV, causal mechanisms and DV

The research for this article was based on multiple sources. Research papers, journal articles and books were used in addition to official UN documents and reports by NGOs. To achieve higher validity, this article takes both qualitative as well as quantitative measures into account. Still, commonly, small-N studies are limited in their external validity (Blatter & Haverland 2012). Results derived from quantitative descriptive analyses are likely to be reproducible in the future; however, qualitative measures are considered as being more open to interpretation (Kellstedt & Whitten 2013).

Because the analysis of this article is predominantly based on documents published by the United Nations, there are limitations that need to be considered. Said documents offer only a limited insight into the issue of sexual violence, especially in terms of the magnitude (Lamont 2015). The data made public by the UN reflect only a fraction of the actual scale of the issue

⁵ This includes exploitative relationships, (attempted) transactional sex, solicitation of transactional sex and “other” (UN 2022b).

⁶ Sexual abuse is subdivided into rape, attempted rape, (attempted) sexual assault, sexual activity with a minor and “other” (UN 2022b).

⁷ Percentages were calculated and rounded up to the second digit after the comma.

⁸ The category “staff officer” was excluded, as this classification was not continuously listed.

because not every report is documented within the UN. Further, collected reports are not always adequately managed (Hampson & Hunt 2007) or investigations into sexual violence cases are obstructed (UNGA 2005; Slanjankic 2016). In addition to that, possible further limitations need to be considered as well: underreporting (Csáky 2008; Nordås & Rustad 2013) due to stigma and/or victims being forced to keep quiet (Koyama & Myrntinen 2007; Davies & True 2015). Especially when sexual violence is a widespread issue in a country, predatory behaviour is widely accepted (Kent 2007; Defeis 2008) and thus generally overlooked or ignored (Nordås & Rustad 2013; ElMorally 2017). Despite these limitations, this article provides a valuable foundation for further investigation. Future research endeavours should consider the comparison of a larger number of peacekeeping missions as well as the independent collection of data.

4. Empirical Analysis

First, background information on both missions will be given, followed by a presentation of data on the occurrence of sexual violence during both missions. To round things off, the causal mechanism and its influence on the DV will be depicted.

4.1 Background: Peacekeeping in the Central African Republic and Mali

Ever since its independence from France in 1960, political insecurity as well as violence – which includes the widespread use of systematic rape (Amnesty International 2004) – has been prominent in the Central African Republic (CAR). In 2012, the rebel group Séléka, initiated a series of armed attacks in the country (Cil 2016). Despite the 2013 peace agreement, attacks on civilians persisted (Fjelde, Hultman & Sollenberg 2016). A deployed African Union-led support mission was considered to have failed to reinstall peace (UN 2023g) at a point where sexual violence, among other human rights violations, was omnipresent in the country. Consequently, MINUSCA was installed in 2014 (UN 2023g) and the mentioned conditions explicitly mentioned in the mission's mandate (UNSC 2014).

After violent rebellion and a coup d'état destabilised Mali (UN 2023e), MINUSMA was installed in 2013 to assist transitional authorities in their efforts to improve the deteriorating security situation in the country (UN 2022e). When the peacekeeping mission was installed, the mandate emphasised the need to monitor and investigate occurring cases of sexual violence (UNSC 2013). This makes both MINUSMA and MINUSCA part of an overall

number of four peacekeeping missions that were mandated to address conflict-related sexual violence, with the other two being the peace operations sent out to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and South Sudan (UN 2023f).

4.2 Sexual violence in the context of peacekeeping missions

The highest number of cases of sexual violence during the peacekeeping mission in CAR were reported between 2014 and 2016. From 2015 onwards, the number of reported cases decreased from 64 cases to 21 cases recorded for the year 2017. Thereafter, a slight increase in reported cases is visible (to 30 cases recorded for the year 2018). After 2018, the number of reported cases decreased steadily until reaching 11 reported cases for the year 2021 (Figure 1). For MINUSMA, the number of reported cases was significantly lower than the number of instances of sexual transgressions reported during MINUSCA. For the time period of 2014 to 2021, the highest number of cases were recorded for the years 2015 and 2018, with five cases recorded for each year. Besides that, there were either two cases or just one recorded (Figure 2).

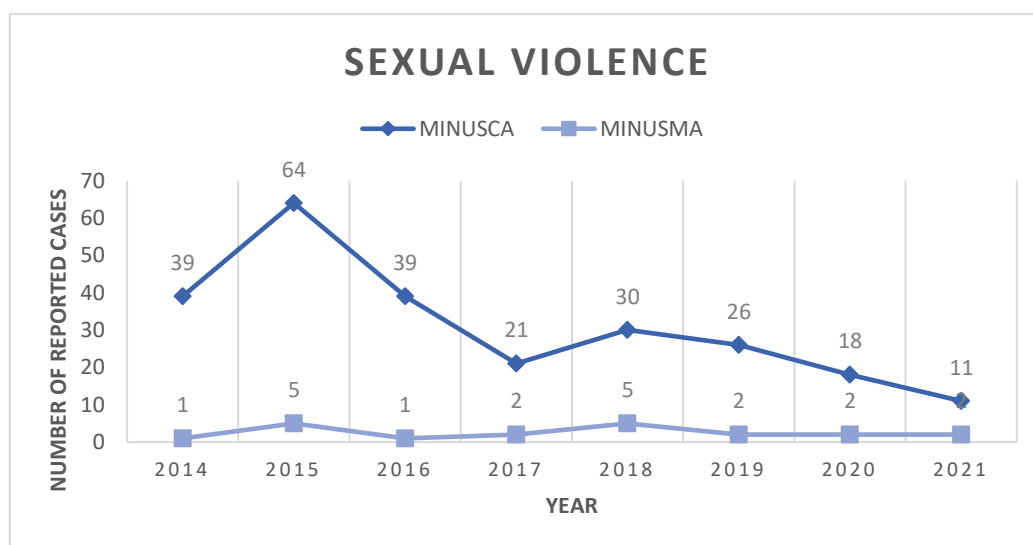


Figure 1: Overall number of reported cases of sexual violence

The most cases ever reported for MINUSMA fall in the year the mission was installed, with thirteen reported allegations concerning incidents of sexual violence (UN 2013; UNGA 2014). After that, there were no significant reports that reached media outlets or NGOs. In the case of MINUSCA, quite the opposite is the case: even before the mission was installed, a

pattern of sexual violence – peacekeepers⁹ abusing civilians – had already been established in the country (UNGA 2016). This was accompanied by a “culture of impunity”, with officials looking the other way (Deschamps, Jallow & Sooka 2015) and the UN failing to act on accusations (Laville 2015).

Because of this the UN’s demeanour has been summed up as a culture of “ignore, deny, cover up, dissemble” (Laville 2015). As further cases emerged in subsequent years, it became clear that peacekeepers systematically exploited their powerful position and continued to target vulnerable civilians (Wheeler 2020). The UN has been eager to combat the issue of sexual violence by peacekeepers deployed to CAR by installing online as well as in-person training programmes (UN 2019; UN 2023j). Yet, new allegations continue to arise to this day (Haque 2021), with the Secretary-General describing the issue as “persistent and widespread” (UNGA 2022).

4.3 Female peacekeepers’ influence within peacekeeping missions

Between the year 2014 and 2021 the overall percentage of female peacekeepers increased steadily for both missions. Over the course of this time frame, the percentage of women in the ranks of “military experts” was significantly higher and the increase was steeper than for the women serving as military staff. However, both in 2014 as well as 2021, there were no female military experts present in MINUSMA. For MINUSCA, the increase of female peacekeepers serving as military experts was especially high between 2018 and 2021 (from 8.28 to 23.19 per cent). Overall, the increase of female peacekeepers was steeper for MINUSCA than MINUSMA, both for the troops as well as military experts and the overall increase (Table 2).

⁹ In this case, the perpetrators were part of the preceding African Union led peacekeeping mission (Ferstman, Clrara (2017) *Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Peacekeeping Operations. Improving Victims' Access to Reparation, Support and Assistance*. London: Redress).

Year	MINUSCA			MINUSMA		
	<i>Military Staff</i>	<i>Military Experts</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Military Staff</i>	<i>Military Experts</i>	<i>Total</i>
2014	0.62	4.40	0.66	1.50	-	1.50
2015	1.28	4.43	1.33	1.73	7.14	1.75
2016	1.33	5.03	1.47	1.93	2.77	1.94
2017	2.66	7.24	2.73	2.22	6.25	2.24
2018	3.14	8.28	3.21	2.68	5.13	2.68
2019	4.20	23.19	4.43	3.33	10.26	3.35
2020	4.53	23.58	4.77	3.40	11.11	3.41
2021	5.79	27.54	5.87	4.17	-	4.17

Table 2: *female peacekeepers* (in per cent)

Research previously conducted by scholars indicates that women approach their tasks in manners that differ from male peacekeepers, which influences how civilians not only view them but the UN in its entirety (Jennings 2012; Wilén 2020b). In addition, women are said to work more closely with the local population by engaging them in outreach initiatives (Jennings 2011; Karim & Beardsley 2013). When the relationships peacekeepers have with people from the local population improve, it is often credited to female peacekeepers' interpersonal skills being better than the men's (Jennings 2012). Besides women being more aware of certain matters concerning women and girls, they are viewed as being more compassionate and empathetic towards victims of sexual violence (Jennings 2011). Consequently, civilians' willingness to engage with peacekeepers increases, especially with regards to female civilians (Mazurana 2003).

In addition to that, female peacekeepers are perceived as "less intimidating or provocative" than their male counterparts (Jennings 2011). Therefore, locals perceive them as less of a threat and thus, find it easier to trust them (DeGroot 2001). Yet not just the access to the local population or the trust in female peacekeepers is increased but the overall demeanour of civilians towards peacekeepers is implied to change in a positive manner (Jennings 2011). Hence, the whole peacekeeping mission is perceived as more accessible for the local civilians (Karim 2017).

Even though the percentage of female peacekeepers deployed to Mali did increase within the selected time frame, a five per cent increase was not reached. Also, no strong covariation could be identified between the IV and DV. The evidence – that increasing female peacekeepers by five per cent decreases the estimated reports of sexual misconduct by "more than half" (Karim & Beardsley 2016: 109) – derived from Karim and Beardsley's (2016) study, however, only holds true in the case of MINUSCA. An increase in the total percentage of

female peacekeepers from under one per cent to almost six per cent covaries with the decrease of the number of reported sexual violence cases during the peacekeeping operation by over fifty per cent. Even though tThis finding implies that an increase in female peacekeeping personnel seems to have a positive impact on the security of the local population – by somehow facilitating a decrease in the number of reported cases of sexual violence. And yet, limits imposed by data availability as well as the case-selection need to be kept in mind. It does, however, call for further research on the matter.

Even though the number of female peacekeepers deployed to MINUSCA steadily increased while the overall number of reported cases of sexual violence decreased, a correlation with the access peacekeepers have to the local population or the trust civilians display in the mission can only be indicated. All in all, the assessed hypothesis did withhold the test over the course of the preceding analysis. It could be indicated that female peacekeepers are perceived as increasing the trust locals install in the UN, due to the increasing contact they establish with civilians. Yet this conclusion must be drawn tentatively, as the causal mechanisms – namely, *access to local populations and trust in the UN* – are difficult to assess (Jennings 2011).

5. Discussion

The results derived from the preceding empirical analysis support the theoretical argument at the start of this article. The theory – that the presence of female peacekeepers decreases the number of reported incidents of sexual transgressions during peacekeeping missions – seems to hold true when looking at the selected case. Additionally, the analysis could provide suggestions that female peacekeepers are better at establishing contact with local women, which increases their trust in the UN as a whole. This does not mean, however, that the hypothesis would necessarily hold true once a thorough study was to be conducted.

There are multiple alternative factors that could influence the relationship between female peacekeepers and the number of reported cases concerning sexual violence: the United Nations accredits female peacekeepers with a so-called “pacifying presence” (DPKO 2000), or “civilising effect” on male peacekeepers (Jennings 2011). This implies that the mere presence of women in UN peacekeeping troops reduces both “aggressiveness and hyper-masculinity” (DPKO 2000). Women are said to introduce a change in culture and encourage responsibility among peacekeeping forces (Karim & Beardsley 2013), while they are “less likely” to act as perpetrators (Jennings 2011) . It has thus been suggested that with an increase

in female peacekeepers, the number of reported sexual violence cases would subsequently decrease (Jennings 2011).

As the preparation of men and women before their deployment to peacekeeping missions does not differ and there are no special trainings or skills offered on how to support victims of sexual violence, it is difficult for women to actually “make a difference” (Heinecken 2015: 247). In fact, locals reportedly exhibit no significant preference regarding the gender of the peacekeeping personnel they encounter. The uniform peacekeepers wear, thus, mitigates the potential impact a peacekeeper’s gender has on incidents of sexual violence being reported (Heinecken 2015; Wilén 2020a). There are incidents in which cases were specifically reported to male peacekeepers as local populations viewed them as having more power within the troops (Baldwin & Taylor 2020).

Further, research suggests that female (military) personnel often feel inclined to adapt to the culture and hyper-masculine atmosphere present in military structures (Jeffreys 2007; Pruitt 2016) resulting in an internalisation (Donelly, Mazurana & Papworth 2022) rather than influencing or changing existing structures positively (Jeffreys 2007; Pruitt 2016). As it happens, female peacekeepers have been found to be hesitant to report male colleagues and in other instances, cases have been disregarded to cover for male colleagues (Anania, Mendes & Nagel 2020). This is, according to Anania, Mendes and Nagel (2020) understandable as female peacekeepers having to police their colleagues’ endeavours puts them at “considerable risk.” Moreover, incidents have come to light where female personnel have participated in sexual violence (Csáky 2008; Russo 2022). This is, however, a well debated matter (Piza-Lopez 2002; Mazurana 2003). But, all of the above factors are difficult to evaluate without at the very least having access to the field and obtaining first-person reports from concerned personnel.

There are multiple additional factors that influence the variation in the selected dependent variable: besides the aforementioned issue of underreporting (Csáky 2008; Nordås & Rustad 2013), it is unknown to what proportion reports are concealed or mishandled (Hampson & Hunt 2007; Deschamps, Jallow & Sooka 2015). Additionally, UN-internal policies have increased the threshold to reporting cases (Grady 2016). Besides existing structures which encourage the use of sexual violence in the country that peacekeeping missions are deployed to, the peacekeepers’ nationality influences the cases of sexual violence as well: the more the use of sexual violence is normalised in the country of origin, the more likely are peacekeepers to engage in it while on mission. Furthermore, peacekeeper’s views on gender-equality influences the perspective they have on the local population (Westendorf &

Searle 2017). Additional research should be conducted on the issue to see whether other factors play into the reduction of cases of sexual violence during peacekeeping missions and the number of deployed female peacekeepers.

First of all, it should be kept in mind that the overall numbers of female peacekeepers continue to be proportionally low – the UN presents an amount of 7.8 per cent of women that were part of the uniformed personnel deployed to peace operations as of December 2021 (UN 2023c). Plus, even though women may be able to establish closer contact to the local population, research into the issue has revealed an “access gap” (Karim 2017: 824) caused by the segregation of the military troops and locals, which has become “increasingly characteristic” of peacekeeping missions (Jennings 2011). This gap exists as female peacekeepers are often being constrained in their movement and kept on-base¹⁰ due to protection concerns (Karim 2019; Baldwin & Taylor 2020) or charged with non-job-related tasks, i.e., cooking or cleaning (Pruitt 2016).

Hence, the active contribution by women peacekeepers to peace operations is hindered (Sion 2008). And generally, the burden of not just having to keep their male counterparts in check (Jennings 2011; Wilén 2020a) but simultaneously protecting local populations (Russo 2022) is transferred to women peacekeepers (Anania, Mendes & Nagel 2020; Wilén 2020a). Meanwhile, male peacekeepers are let “off the hook” (Donelly, Mazurana & Papworth 2022) and female peacekeepers left to face discrimination (Pruitt 2016) and sexual violence within their own ranks – an issue which has only recently gained traction (Donelly, Mazurana & Papworth 2022). Besides, once peacekeeping personnel is “off duty” any influence women peacekeepers have on their male colleagues’ behaviour seizes (Heinecken 2015: 235). Taking all this into account, their actual influence remains limited. As the simple act of adding women into the male-dominated field of peacekeeping is deemed insufficient, this circumstance is not at all surprising (Piza-Lopez 2002; Jennings 2012). This is the case because the practice of “add[ing] women and stir” is not followed by institutional change (Jennings 2012) and consequently viewed as an act of tokenism¹¹ (Sion 2008; Karim & Beardsley 2013).

These findings indicate that female peacekeepers are granted deficient access to the local population, which makes the gender ratio of deployed peacekeeping troops redundant

¹¹ “The term token has also been used in the sociological literature to refer to persons (usually women or minorities) who are hired, admitted or appointed to a group because of their difference from other members, perhaps to serve as “proof” that the group does not discriminate against such people” (Zimmer, Lynn (Lynn Zimmer (1988). *Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory*. *Social Problems*, 35(1), 64–77).

(Jennings 2011). Plus, Karim and Beardsley (2013) point out that female peacekeepers are rarely being deployed to countries experiencing high levels of sexual violence. And yet, even where an effect might be visible, it cannot be generalised, as it remains context specific (Heinecken 2015). What Anania, Mendes and Nagel (2020) emphasise is that it is the “culture of peacekeeping” – which includes the belief in gender equality – that needs not only be addressed but changed.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

With the help of the available data, a tentative covariation between the percentage of deployed female peacekeeping personnel, their established contact with the local population and a decrease in reported cases of sexual transgressions can be drawn. In the case of MINUSCA, a possible relationship between the increase in female peacekeepers and a subsequent reduction in the number of sexual violence reports could be observed. Therefore, it is possible that this conclusion can be drawn in the case of other peace operations as well as this effect has been suggested by prior studies (DPKO 2000; Mazurana 2003; UNGA 2005; Pruitt 2016).

And yet, even if an increase in the percentage of women in peacekeeping can reduce the number of reported cases, multiple scholars stress that the burden is too often transferred to female peacekeepers (Heinecken 2015; Anania, Mendes & Nagel 2020; Wilén 2020a), who are still underrepresented within peacekeeping troops (Piza-Lopez 2002). Ultimately, concerns that peacekeepers will potentially continue to abuse their power remain. This is particularly relevant given the challenging environment UN peacekeeping forces are often deployed in (CRIN 2016). The risk is further heightened by the perception that preventing sexual violence during peace operations may be inherently challenging to a certain extent (Aoi, de Coning & Thakur 2007). It thus lies in the hands of the UN to not only address underlying issues but also the roots of sexual violence (Karim & Beardsley 2016). This could be accomplished by offering pre-deployment training (Bastick, Grimm & Kunz 2007) as well as continued training during their deployment.

Considering all this, the actual influence female peacekeepers have on the number of reports concerning sexual violence remains limited. It is not surprising that simply sending women into a field that is dominated by male peacekeepers does not seem to be a sufficient “solution” to the issue of sexual violence during UN peacekeeping operations. Therefore, the conclusion of this article remains provisional.

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