Advances in the Analysis of Contributor-Level Peacekeeping Data, with a Focus on Gender Data

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UN peacekeeping missions rely on contributions from many Member States.¹ For example, in 2007, the UNMIS mission in Sudan had 74 different countries contribute forces to the mission.² Recent empirical studies have begun to explore both the sources of variation in country contributions to UN missions and the consequences of that variation. This essay surveys the advances that some of those studies have made, discusses limitations to the data collection and analysis efforts, and recommends investments that might be made to improve related data-driven research agendas going forward. In particular, the essay argues that the available data only allow for researchers to scratch the surface with regard to assessing gender inequity in peacekeeping operations. Adding additional demographic information of the peacekeepers, as well as more specific information on the roles that the peacekeepers play, would greatly improve our understanding of improvements that have been realized and challenges that remain in the ability for women to fully participate as peacekeepers.

Existing research

The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) publishes monthly data on its website regarding the contributions of countries to peacekeeping missions. From 1990 to 2000, the data include the total number of contributions that each contributor made, but the data are inconsistent in whether they also include information that pairs the contributions to the destination missions. In 2001, the monthly data began to consistently include the pairings of contributor countries and missions. Moreover, from 2002 on, the data include both the contributor-mission pairings and the breakdowns by post (e.g., observers, troops and police). Starting in November of 2009, the UNDPKO began to publish this information further broken down by gender (male or female). So, after 2009, we now know how many men and women of each type of peacekeeper post each contributing country sent to each mission in each month.

¹ This paper focuses exclusively on UN peacekeeping missions and the respective available data.
² This was the highest number of contributors to any mission in Kathman’s data (Kathman, ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Personnel Commitments’).
Kathman has aggregated the basic contributor-mission-post data from the UN website and has begun to update these data periodically.\(^3\) A number of studies have either used Kathman’s data or their own versions to study dynamics related to UN peacekeeping.

Some studies consider variation in contributions as something interesting to explain using theories of international politics. For example, Bove and Elia explore a number of contributor-level and conflict-level characteristics that help drive peacekeeping contributions—they particularly find strong support for the argument that contributions are driven by comparative advantages in the availability and costs of labor.\(^4\) Kathman and Melin discover that the military challenges and coup threats in the contributing countries can affect their willingness to deploy peacekeepers.\(^5\) Uzony finds that countries are more likely to contribute when the mission has the possibility of attenuating costly refugee flows into the contributing countries.\(^6\) Ward and Dorussen use a network approach and conclude that a contributing country’s network placement relative to other contributors strongly shapes its allocation of peacekeepers.\(^7\) All of these studies complement the volume edited by Bellamy and Williams, which looks both quantitatively and qualitatively at choices that a number of specific contributing countries make in allocating peacekeeping force deployments.\(^8\)

Relatedly, studies have used the UN’s publication of the gender breakdowns of peacekeeping contributions to explore variation in the deployment of women to missions. Karim and Beardsley find that the proportion of women in domestic security institutions shapes the proportion of women in peacekeeping contributions, as well as the participation of women in the labor force.\(^9\) Moreover, they find that a gendered protection norm appears to reduce the willingness of contributing countries to send women to the missions that pose the greatest risk to the peacekeeping personnel. Crawford, Lebovic and MacDonald additionally find that contributing countries are more likely to deploy women when domestic institutions and norms are more favorable to women’s rights.\(^10\)

In addition to exploring the determinants of variation in peacekeeping contributions, other studies have explored the consequences of such variation. Bove and Ruggeri have found that less homogenous missions are less prone to acts of violence against civilians.\(^11\) Karim and

\(^3\) Kathman, ‘United Nations Peacekeeping Personnel Commitments’.
\(^4\) Bove and Elia, ‘Supplying Peace’.
\(^5\) Kathman and Melin, ‘Who Keeps the Peace?’.
\(^6\) Uzonyi, ‘Refugee Flows’.
\(^7\) Ward and Dorussen, ‘Standing alongside Your Friends’.
\(^8\) Bellamy and Williams, Providing Peacekeepers.
\(^9\) Karim and Beardsley, ‘Female Peacekeepers’; Karim and Beardsley, ‘Ladies Last’.
\(^10\) Crawford, Lebovic and MacDonald, ‘Explaining the Variation’.
\(^11\) Bove and Ruggeri, ‘Kinds of Blue’.
Beardsley have found that missions that consist of more contributions from countries with relatively strong records of gender equality are less prone to allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse; moreover, this effect appears stronger than the observed effect related to increases in the representation of women in missions.\footnote{12 Karim and Beardsley, ‘Explaining Sexual Exploitation’.}

**Limitations**

While these recent studies have advanced our understanding of the provision and consequences of peacekeeping operations, data limitations remain that inhibit much more than scratching-the-surface analyses of the progress that has been made and that still is needed in addressing gender inequality in and through peace operations.\footnote{13 See work by Olsson and Möller (‘Data on Women’s Participation’) for an early assessment of gender-disaggregated data related to the UN, EU and OSCE field missions.} Gender inequality is much more than an imbalance in the number of women and men, and a number of studies, both qualitative and quantitative, have explored the institutionalization of gender power imbalances in peacekeeping operations.\footnote{14 See for example, studies by Karim and Beardsley \textit{(Equal Opportunity Peacekeeping)}; Kronsell \textit{(Gender, Sex and the Postnational Defense)}; Duncanson \textit{(Forces for Good?)}; Olsson and Tryggestad \textit{(Women and International Peacekeeping)}; and Olsson and Gizelis \textit{‘Advancing Gender and Peacekeeping Research’}. See also the edited volume by Olsson and Gizelis \textit{(Gender, Peace and Security)}.}

It is possible that improvements in the representation of women belie stagnation or even steps backward in the extent to which women in peacekeeping operations are excluded from important functions, discriminated against, or are subject to abuse and sexual violence. Moreover, it is possible for improvements in these regards to occur even as the proportions of women in missions remain low.

Related to the understanding that progress on gender equality entails much more than improving the representation of female bodies, the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, recommends that

In order to strengthen accountability for the implementation of the women and peace and security agenda, the compact between the Secretary-General and heads of mission should incorporate three gender-related indicators: (a) commitment to promoting gender mainstreaming across all mandated tasks; (b) commitment to encouraging national leaders to take ownership of the women and peace and security agenda; and (c) commitment to increasing gender parity among staff.\footnote{15 United Nations \textit{Report of the High-Level Independent Panel} 80}
These “gender-related indicators” entail much more than simple counts of women and men on missions. Much more information is needed to understand how well gender is being mainstreamed, how well policy makers of Member States are providing parallel support for the women, peace and security agenda, and how well gender parity at all levels of the peacekeeping missions is being accomplished.\textsuperscript{16}

\textit{Paths Forward}

To fully capture the successes and challenges in addressing gender inequality in peacekeeping missions, it is important to recognize that regularly published quantitative data on standard indicators alone cannot tell researchers and analysts all or even most of what they need for adequate assessment. Qualitative reports, periodic surveys and other methods of assessment are also crucial for understanding the norms and institutional biases that curtail the role of women in peacekeeping operations. That being said, regular indicators that go beyond the simple reporting of numbers of women and men in peacekeeping missions can prove critical for comparing the status of gender inequality across missions and across time.

An important and feasible addition to the existing data would be the expansion of the peacekeeper demographic data. Just as the counting of women and men is relatively straightforward and easy to report, so is information related to age, education, tenure and training experiences. Gender is often correlated with these variables, and it is informative at times to either untether gender from these other demographic factors or to use the variation in how connected gender is to these indicators to understand important shifts in gender inequalities.

More detailed information on the types of positions that the peacekeepers fill would also help better inform the status of and challenges related to gender reforms in peacekeeping operations. Currently, monthly gender breakdowns of country contributions are publically available by post—e.g., police, observer, troops—but not by rank or function. Yet gender inequity can be manifested not just in the aggregate proportions of women and men but also in the proportions when disaggregated by the roles the peacekeepers serve. For example, the 2015 Report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations, which presented a snapshot of the ranks of peace operations’ senior staff broken down by gender, emphasizes the fact that the

\textsuperscript{16} Kreft (‘The Gender Mainstreaming Gap’) provides an example of a fruitful study along these lines, as she finds that gender-mainstreamed peacekeeping mandates are more likely in conflicts with high levels of sexual violence.
proportions of women are much smaller at the higher ranks. If the overall representation of women in peacekeeping missions increases but the gains are only in non-leadership positions or only in roles related to medical services, clerical duties or service provision on bases (e.g., housekeeping, food preparation), little, if any, progress toward overcoming gender power imbalances would have been made. More transparency in the roles that women play when they serve on peacekeeping missions would help researchers track important progress toward realizing operations that fully value the participation of women.

Works Cited


