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**From Peacekeepers to Perpetrators: Exploring the  
Role of Country and Gender**

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## Abstract and keywords

This thesis examines the underlying factors contributing to sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping operations on an individual and systematic level and emphasises the need for new and effective solutions that treat the causes of sexual abuse, not the consequences. A substantial amount of UN data on troop contributions, allegations, and female peacekeepers over a span of 7 years (2015 to 2022) has been combined and analysed to offer new perspectives and insights into the debates surrounding the role of women, gender, and troop-contributing countries. The research aims to understand the prevalence of perpetrators and the impact which country and gender have on the level of sexual abuse allegations.

Hopefully, the new table on UN Peacekeepers and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse can be a reminder of how misleading data presentation can be and inspire others to conduct more in-depth research to answer the many questions raised throughout this study. Certain gaps within peacekeeping need to be filled through comprehensive measures that focus on the equal contributions of troops from all Member States, increased participation of women and gender sensitivity training that covers all dimensions of peacekeeping. Ultimately, the objective is to make well-equipped peacekeepers that are better prepared for the challenges in the field and to combat the risks and causes that might make a peacekeeper become a perpetrator.

*Keywords:* United Nations, Peacekeeping, SEA, Gender Equality, Women, Representation

## List of Abbreviations

<b>Abbreviation</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
CRSV	Conflict-related Sexual Violence
CAR	Central African Republic
DPKO	UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
HDI	Human Development Index
MONUSCO	UN Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the DRC
PDT	Pre-Deployment Training
PKT	Peacekeeping Troops
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SEA	Sexual Exploitation and Abuse
TCC	Troop-Contributing Country
UN	United Nations
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

Sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in peacekeeping has been a long-standing issue for the United Nations that continues to undermine the credibility of its peacekeeping missions. Peacekeeping success gets overshadowed by peacekeepers turning perpetrators and despite two decades of efforts to combat this obstacle, SEA is very much a still prevalent issue. The literature on the topic has grown substantially during this time (Simić, 2015) due to an enhanced focus on gender mainstreaming, zero tolerance policies and the media revealing cases of misconduct, but there are still gaps that remain to be covered. Understanding the root causes of SEA, from an individual and systematic level, is essential for developing effective prevention strategies, ensuring accountability, and building the necessary foundation for change. But so far, there have been no research that comprehensively examine the correlation between perpetrators and allegations, the percentage of female peacekeepers in SEA prevention and the role of Troop Contributing Countries (TCC). Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by conducting a thorough investigation into SEA aspects: revealing the extent of sexual exploitation and abuse allegations, the impact of adding more female peacekeepers, the role of TCCs and how gender equality correlates with SEA.

No comparative analysis of the relation between contributed troops, allegations, gender, and gender equality exists, and neither does any study include the true-scale number of perpetrators in UN peacekeeping missions. To properly understand the prevalence of SEA, the aims of this research is to uncover this number and shed light on the scope and scale of the problem. By examining these factors, the goal is to contribute to a better understanding of SEA that acknowledges the flaws of the current system, offers insight into TCCs with high rates of allegations and finally suggests potential reasons that enable it and strategies to prevent it.

## 1.1. Conceptualizing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

According to the Secretary General's (SG) bulletin on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, the UN defines sexual exploitation as *“any actual or attempted abuse of a position of vulnerability, differential power, or trust, for sexual purposes, including, but not limited to, profiting monetarily, socially or politically from the sexual exploitation of another”* and sexual abuse as *“the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions”* (ST/SGB/2003/13, p.1). The Secretary-General also emphasises that the rules and definitions put down apply to all staff of the UN and prohibit forces from committing SEA. It also states its duty to protect women and children (ST/SGB/2003/13, p.1). Despite this prohibition and the efforts made to tackle the issue in the 20 years since the publication of the bulletin, the problem remains.

Sexual exploitation and abuse within peacekeeping come in different forms, such as rape, sexual abuse of minors, and sexual exploitation. Within sexual exploitation we can differentiate between prostitution and transactional sex (money, food, medication, etc.), exploitative relationships and trafficking (Nordås & Rustad, 2013). All sexual activity with someone under 18 is considered abuse by the UN. Data on allegations from 2015 to 2022 shows there were 199 reports of sexual abuse and 352 reports of sexual exploitation (United Nations, n.d.). It is important to acknowledge that these are just the reports, so the number of victims is likely much higher. In fact, when FRONTLINE producer Ramita Navai visited the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the Central African Republic (CAR) to look for unidentified abuse, she found countless women in both countries that have not reported the abuse to the UN (Miller, 2018). Thus, the numbers presented by the UN and in this research should be treated as the mere tip of the iceberg.

Another aspect to consider is the UN's ban on all sexual relationships, meaning that even if a peacekeeper enters a consensual relationship with a local woman, it is considered an exploitative relationship because of power imbalance and the victim's positions of vulnerability, and therefore falls underneath the category of sexual exploitation (Simić, 2010). It is however not likely that peacekeepers report everyone they have sexual relationships with during their stay, consensual or not, so even this proves a challenge when it comes to underreporting.



## 1.2. SEA in Peacekeeping and its relation to the SDGs

The topic is connected to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in various ways, mainly because SEA in peacekeeping operations makes the implementation of the goals a lot more difficult. In order to advance objectives such as gender equality and human rights, we need to put SEA in context with the SDGs.

*SDG 5: Gender equality.* Within this objective, there are several goal targets related to SEA and peacekeeping. It states that all forms of discrimination against women and girls everywhere should be ended, as well as all forms of violence – including sexual violence and exploitation (UNDP, 2023). The fact that UN forces are found guilty of sexual exploitation and abuse of the women and girls they are supposed to protect goes directly against these targets, undermining the efforts of the UN on multiple levels.

*SDG 10: Reduced inequality.* Reducing inequalities and making sure no one is left behind is the main objective (UNDP, 2023). Like SDG 5, we can see that the main objective is threatened because SEA happens in conflict areas where vulnerable women and girls are the victims. Conditions such as poverty and instability make the risk of exploitation high, and peacekeepers are the ones with all the power. Because of this, SDG 10 is jeopardised by power imbalances and exploitation of marginalised groups.

*SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions.* This SDG aims to significantly reduce all forms of violence and to work with governments to end conflict and insecurity (UNDP, 2023). When it comes to peacekeeping, goals targets such as ending abuse and exploitation against children, it also emphasises the need for accountable and transparent institutions and ensuring equal access to justice for all. SEA in peacekeeping is categorised by a trend of impunity and lack of transparency – not to mention, a lack of justice for the victims- which reveals that significant work is left to be done. The ultimate goal of peacekeeping is peace and justice, and the UN needs to find ways to prevent misconduct if they wish to achieve it.

*SDG 3: good health and well-being* (UNDP, 2023). SEA in peacekeeping has severe consequences for the victims, ranging from psychological stress and sexual trauma to physical consequences requiring medical care (UN, n.d.). An example can be seen with the UN's mission in Haiti, known as MINUSTAH, where peacekeepers were withdrawn in 2017 due to SEA allegations and the significant effect it has had on local's

health; the UN had to admit that its peacekeepers were responsible for not only introducing but also and starting a cholera epidemic within the country. Furthermore, poor sanitation practices at the UN peacekeeping base resulted in a major river system being compromised, causing a lack of access to safe water and sanitation for Haitians, further worsening the epidemic. In other words, SEA brings both short- and long-term effects on the victims which pose a threat to locals' health and well-being (Ivers & Guillame, 2017).

We can see a clear link between SEA and the SDGs which shows that significant work remains to be done if the United Nations wish to reach its goals before 2030. UN's mission to Haiti demonstrated the interconnection and integration between the goals: the failure of delivering on SDG 5 (no sexual violence) led to the failure of delivering on SDG 3 (severe health consequences) and ultimately it led to the failure of SDG 10 due to the disproportionate effects the epidemic had on the poorest (Ivers & Guillame, 2017). Cases like this highlight how peacekeeping forces implicated in SEA are hindering UN efforts for peace and prosperity and that only by solving the sexual abuse problem, there will be hope for achieving the sustainable goals agenda.

## Chapter 2 – The Man and the System in the Face of SEA

This chapter is divided into two sections: the man and the system in the face of sexual exploitation and abuse. This division is useful for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the issue: by examining the root causes from an individual level (“the man”), they can be held accountable, and we can understand the motivations and behaviours of peacekeepers. This might aid in creating strategies to tackle challenges related to militarised masculinity, power dynamics and gender inequality. Similarly, analysing the system lets us identify the systematic factors that contribute to and enable SEA, such as the TCC system, lack of training, inadequate gender policies, impunity, and weak reporting mechanisms.

Combining both sections, we are left with a holistic approach to understanding the issue at hand which allows us to address flaws at multiple levels and develop more complete strategies to tackle it.

### The Man: Determinants on an Individual Level

#### 2.1. Militarised masculinity

An often-used argument when discussing SEA in peacekeeping is that of militarised masculinity. It is believed that the hypermasculine military environment in which peacekeepers operate enables the exploitation and abuse of local women and makes it easier for the UN and state officials to overlook misconduct (Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, 2010). The term is relevant in peacekeeping because most peacekeeping forces have been shaped through the military institutions in their home countries, not the UN, and thus are fed the traditional idea that “real men are soldiers and real soldiers are men” (Eichler, 2014). In other words, the soldiers are a result of military service and training which often carries an inherent focus on power and violence. This hypermasculine culture is further described to reward strength and aggressiveness (Duncanson, 2009) while reducing women to feminine, inferior roles (Simić, 2010). Therefore, the true man “must be devoid of any feminine attributions” (Abrahamyan, 2017).

Reinforcing this mindset is the United Nations' call for more women in militaries, police forces and uniformed peacekeeping (Baldwin & Hynes, 2022). More women make peacekeeping more effective, but they are also in a unique position to build trust and reduce conflict and confrontation (United Nations, n.d.). The foundation for these arguments is based on the thinking that women are more peaceful and nurturing (Simić, 2010), implying that men are lacking or in need of these qualities. Moreover, female peacekeepers are believed to be a tool against SEA because they are seen as problem solvers who can protect local women and “influence their male colleagues to behave better” (Hernandez, 2020). This sentiment is problematic on multiple levels, not only because it implies that women are needed to mediate the aggressive tendencies of men, but also because it once again differentiates women and men. Instead of acknowledging the dangers of militarised masculinity, the focus is on adding women and stirring – hoping they can make a big change through a quick fix (Dharmapuri, 2011).

Perhaps this acceptance of militarised masculinity, where the traditional narrative of male peacekeepers is not challenged but viewed as something that needs outside influence to improve, is the problem. There is a sense of “boys will be boys” and that these boys sometimes commit SEA and that it’s a natural consequence of the environment they are in (Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, 2010). It might help us understand the issue of underreporting: if there is room for thinking that militarised masculinity shapes the action of peacekeepers (Nordås & Rustad, 2013) and that sexual exploitation is attributed to the nature of men (Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, 2010), then SEA becomes “inevitable”. Paired with the sense of brotherhood that the military produces, perhaps the choice to remain silent about misconduct is due to silent acceptance of how they are viewed.

Lastly, the belief that a true man must be devoid of feminine attributions is challenging because peacekeepers and peacekeeping roles have evolved in the last decades. Now, peacekeepers are expected to “combine qualities of a soldier and social worker” which conflicts with the traditional views on militarised masculinity (Nordås & Rustad, 2013). The upheld belief of militarised masculinity in combination with these goals does not harmonise, which means that the UN would benefit from having a look at their own gender assumptions and challenging the traditional notions of military and male peacekeepers. Moreover, gender sensitivity training and gender mainstreaming should

be prioritised and challenged (Consortium on Gender, Security, and Human Rights, 2010) to deal with the issue of militarised masculinity and create the foundation of peacekeeping operations that are built on both masculine and feminine attributions.

## 2.2. Power imbalances

Sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peacekeeping forces have been described to be a *“reflection of the existing gender stereotypes and reinforced by racial and class discrimination where the perpetrator is subconsciously exercising their belief that women/children are inferior to men, and those of the “third world” of inferior status than one is”* (ElMorally, 2017).

To properly understand the issue of SEA in peacekeeping, we need to understand the context and environment of peacekeeping missions. The UN deploys peacekeeping forces in conflict-torn areas that struggle with instability, violence, and humanitarian crises, and it seeks to aid the host countries with security and the protection of civilians. Its main mission is to help countries on their path from conflict to peace (UN, n.d.). In other words, the countries peacekeepers operate in are often categorised by poverty, corruption, and poor infrastructures. The victims feel these consequences and are usually left without access to income opportunities that cover basic, fundamental needs (ElMorally, 2017). It is also important to acknowledge that women and girls already are endangered in conflict zones, which is why many of the current peacekeepers have specific mandates to protect them against conflicted-related sexual violence (CRSV) (Russo, 2022).

Let us look at the context within the two biggest UN missions, MONUSCO in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNMISS in South Sudan. DRC scores 0.479 on the Human Development Index and South Sudan scores 0.385. Both countries fall within categories of low human development, which indicates challenges when it comes to education, life and well-being and income (UNDP, 2021). When it comes to average income levels, both South Sudan and DRC are among the poorest nations in the world: in DRC, nearly 62% of the population lives on less than 2.15 US dollars a day while 1/6 people live in extreme poverty (World Bank, 2023). For South Sudan, the

situation is even worse and GDP projections suggest that 73% of the population will live in extreme poverty by 2024 (World Bank, 2023).

It is difficult to say what the average salary for a peacekeeper is since the countries are paid by the UN, but the soldiers are paid based on the national pay scales. The average salary for a peacekeeper in Bangladesh was 155 US dollars in 2016 while it was 134 US dollars in Pakistan the same year (BBC News, 2018). This indicates a daily wage between 4-5 US dollars per soldier from these countries, which is still twice the amount that the locals live on – not to mention that this pay gap is doomed to increase with countries with higher national salaries, considering the UN reimburse 1428 US dollars per soldier a month (UN, n.d.).

As seen within the conceptualising of the topic, the UN defines sexual exploitation as abuse of position and acknowledges the power imbalance between peacekeepers and victims. It also specifically mentions sexual purposes including monetary, social, and political profit (ST/SGB/2003/13, p.1). Yet there is no hiding that peacekeeping missions regularly produce situations where women and children are exploited, often for the promise of compensation (food, security, money, marriage). Compared to the locals, the power of the peacekeepers goes far further than just their position: the victims are at a physical and socio-economic disadvantage (Simić, 2015) while the perpetrators are viewed to have “lavish accommodations”, “fancy SUVs” and carries themselves in an “arrogant and demeaning” manner (Autesserre, 2018). The pay gap between a peacekeeper and a local woman can, as discussed above, be substantial. Because of this dynamic, prostitution has become an income source for women and children and reports reveal that peacekeepers tend to exploit these situations (EIMorally, 2017) thus failing their mandate to protect against exploitation.

### 2.3 Gender inequality

The unequal conditions in which peacekeeping missions exist create a strong power imbalance between peacekeepers and the local communities. Another factor that contributes to abuse and exploitation in this setting is gender inequality. UNICEF has defined gender inequality as the “*disproportionate difference between men and women and boys and girls, particularly as reflected in attainment of development goals, access to resources and levels of participation*” (UNICEF, 2017).

When it comes to the level of participation, the ratio of males to females within peacekeeping remains low, despite the UN deploying more women. As of 2020, women constituted 4.8% of military contingents and 10.9% of formed police (UN, n.d.), which is progress from previous years, but it is not the amount that is needed to make a difference. However, since the adaptation of UN Security Resolution 1315, which urged to expand the role of women in field-based operations, the focus on women in the field has been consistent – especially when it comes to SEA and peacekeeping. The Department for Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) has even gone as far as saying it makes male peacekeepers “more reflective and responsible” (Simić, 2010). But while including more women is important to promote gender equality, it still seems like the UN considers it a tool to prevent male sexual violence rather than a way to end gender stereotypes.

Moreover, peacekeepers often come from countries with high gender inequality scores, which means there is a risk the troops in general are less sensitized about the issues related to gender equality. Many of the Troop Contributing Countries stand out with high scores on the Gender Inequality Index, such as Bangladesh (medium-high), India (medium-high), Rwanda (high), Nepal (medium-high) and Pakistan (high). The higher the score, the worse is the gender equality within the countries (UNDP, 2021). Additionally, the missions often occur in countries with very high gender inequality scores: if we look back at MONUSCO and UNMISS in DRC and South Sudan, both countries are placed highly (UNDP, 2021).

A sense of detachment from the women in the host countries might also be part of the reason: the actions done towards local women do not carry the same moral responsibility as they would if they had been towards women from their home countries (Simić, 2010). This is supported by the fact that rape is more common when the individual is devalued and the cost of rape is low, meaning that a man who is devaluing women is more likely to commit SEA than other men who value women more (Nordås & Rustad, 2013). Based on this, the solution would not be implementing more women into the field but rather focusing efforts on gender training that puts equality and women’s worth first.

Ultimately, it comes down to what we have seen before: peacekeeping is a hyper-masculine, male-dominated environment that enables men to feel superior to women and entitled to their actions, disregarding the effects it has on women and children

(EIMorally, 2017). Blame can be directed towards militarisation and masculinity in peacekeeping, and variations in socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, but if we simply compare scores from the Gender Inequality Index, it is revealed that awareness and gender disparity work, both in sending countries and host countries, is weak. Thus, it is the UN's responsibility to educate its peacekeeping troops on these issues.

#### 2.4. Peacekeeping immunity

By now it is perhaps not surprising that SEA in peacekeeping is not a private affair. We have so far looked at the sense of acceptance when it comes to militarised masculinity and male behaviour, as well as one of the main conditions for rape: a low cost. While impunity can be classified as a systematic issue, and will be addressed when discussing the system, the mere precedence that exists of peacekeepers getting away with SEA is damaging for the UN.

There are just as many bystanders as there are perpetrators of sexual abuse (EIMorally, 2017). Reports reveal girls and women passing through official and guarded gates in Somalia while women in Haiti do not even see a point in reporting assaults anymore because of two decades of impunity (Anderlini, 2017). And while individuals might keep silent for their own comfort and to not risk being seen as a whistle-blower, reporting misconduct is a tricky and extremely flawed process. If misconduct is not punished, it is no surprise that crimes increase and that it even happens out in the open (Askin, n.d.).

There is a reason why "If you could commit an illegal act without getting caught, would you still do it?" is such a common, philosophical question. Many people might admit to saying yes if it involved stealing from a store and they knew it had no consequences, sexual abuse is something else entirely. However, the psychological effect of impunity proves for the peacekeeper, again and again, that he will not face any punishment for his actions and that even if a victim were to step forward, it is not likely it will lead to repercussions. This is how the culture of impunity was created and as long as it continues, the perpetrators will be guided by a sense of entitlement. Something that started as exploitation can easily escalate into more severe allegations, simply because the perpetrator is not worried about getting caught and the mental blocks get weakened each time he successfully exploits or abuses.



The process of prosecution is challenging, but a simple adjustment in the way the UN handles allegations could deter peacekeepers from becoming perpetrators: naming and shaming. The carelessness and disregard the perpetrators have for the UN rules would change quickly if their families and communities were informed about the violations (Anderlini, 2017). Instead of honing a “what happens on the missions, stays on the missions” mindset, this would be a threat much more powerful than any peacekeeping handbook because the consequences are direct, tangible and follow the peacekeepers all the way home.

## The system: Determinants on a Systematic Level

Focusing on the man, or the individual alone when addressing SEA is useful to learn about some of the root causes for why male peacekeepers perpetrate, but for a comprehensive understanding of the issue, we also need to evaluate the systematic factors that enable sexual misconduct.

### 2.5. The TCC system

The peacekeeping forces consist of military and police personnel provided by the Troop Contributing Countries. In return, the soldiers are paid monthly by their governments: a salary which reflects the national salary scale. The states are then paid a standard rate of 1428 US dollars per soldier per month, to cover costs associated with the missions (United Nations Peacekeeping, n.d.). This has a certain significance when it comes to peacekeeping troops and country representation. The top contributing countries from the last 7 years are Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, Rwanda, Nepal, and Pakistan (see page 27). They are all located in Asia and Africa, and we do not reach Western countries before Italy (21st), France (32nd) and Spain (34th). Moreover, these continents, along with Latin America, provide more than 90% of military and police personnel to the United Nations and about 15% of the budget (Weiss & Kuele, 2019). What this all illustrates is that there is a lack of representation in the TCC system.

Developed countries finance the missions while the hard work of peacekeeping is left to developing nations. The table below<sup>1</sup> shows the contribution based on total assessed contributions from the top 10 financial contributors in 2020-2021, the troops they have deployed from 2015 to 2022 and the total troops deployed by the top 10 Troop Contributing Countries.

**Table 1: Troops from Financial Contributors and TCCs.**

Financial Contributors, 2020-2021	Financial Contribution (%)	Troops from FCs, 2015-2022	Top TCCs, 2015-2022	Total troops from TCCs
United States	27.89%	384	Bangladesh	56071
China	15.21%	20345	India	51188
Japan	8.56%	568	Ethiopia	51175
Germany	6.09%	4267	Rwanda	49210
United Kingdom	5.79%	4027	Nepal	45423
France	5.61%	6040	Pakistan	43702
Italy	3.30%	8246	Egypt	24465
Russian Federation	30.04%	664	Indonesia	22569
Canada	2.73%	677	Senegal	21801
Republic of Korea	2.26%	4845	Ghana	21633

It seems like the West is unwilling to send its troops when the national interests are low and the financial benefits few. From the financial contributors, it is only China that stands out with a relatively high number of deployed troops while 4/10 countries on the list fall extremely short, as seen with the United States, Japan, Russia, and Canada. On the other hand, Asian and African countries use peacekeeping to ensure regional interests, recognition, and financial benefits so their numbers are significantly higher than the rest (Weiss & Kuele, 2019).

The problem starts showing when we put this information in the context of SEA. If the peacekeeping forces primarily consist of soldiers from developing countries, whose backgrounds are very different to the Western contributors, an obvious imbalance is created – one which is heightened by the North-South divide. Following the Brahimi report, which recommended that the Global South should have more access to Secretariat briefings and debates in the Security Council (SC) when it comes to

<sup>1</sup> Table on Financial Contributors and Troop Contributors.  
Source: Own findings from Table 2 and UN data from their section on “how we are funded”.

peacekeeping missions they are committed to, many of the Western financial contributors used the allegations of sexual abuse against the top TCCs, dismissing their demands for change. It was blamed on issues such as that lack of training and equipment, reliability, and cases of sexual misconduct. It is a double problem where *“the willing are not capable, and the capable not willing”* (Weiss & Kuele, 2019).

The reality of peacekeeping is, as it has been pointed out, that troops from developing countries are poorly trained and poorly equipped, and the UN budget (which equals less than 0.5% of global military spending), is not close to covering the full costs related to peacekeeping (Autesserre, 2019). Therefore, it seems that a higher percentage of developed countries are needed, for funding and for troops to improve on the issues of cheap peacekeeping.

Other criticisms of the TCC system are the lack of accountability and the lack of women. When it comes to accountability, it is due to political will and structural weaknesses (Simić, 2015). Structural because it provides UN peacekeepers with functional immunity (civilian peacekeepers as well as military observers) that protect peacekeepers from any legal prosecution in the host country. While this immunity can be waived by the Secretary-General if a serious crime has been committed, it rarely is because it puts peacekeepers' safety at risk (Jennings, 2017).

Instead, it is up to the sending country to make sure the perpetrator is prosecuted, which more often than not does not happen. An example is French soldiers in CAR in 2017, who were charged with sexually abusing six minors and sent home to be prosecuted. However, following an investigation by French judges, charges were dropped because they did not have enough evidence (Morenne, 2017).

Also, not all states have legislation for criminal acts committed abroad and there are many challenges related to conducting investigations (Jennings, 2017). In the case of the French peacekeepers, it was dismissed due to the lack of evidence; a trend which dominates peacekeeping prosecution and investigation. Not to mention that even if the prosecution did not have logistical problems, many countries are also hesitant of prosecuting their own nationals on this basis so there is no surprise that criminal sanctions under national law have proved to be elusive (Askin, n.d.).

When it comes to the lack of women, it is up to the TCCs to decide the percentage of their female peacekeepers. The UN might urge their member states to improve the

participation of women, but it is ultimately the responsibility of the Member States (UN, n.d.). Some countries restrict or have very low numbers of women in the army, which makes increasing the presence trickier since the UN does not control it. From the table on Sexual Abuse and Peacekeeping, which shows the total number of female peacekeepers contributed by each country from 2015 to 2022, 3 countries stand out with a higher percentage: the Philippines (20%), Namibia (30%) and Zimbabwe (45%). Nonetheless, none of these countries are part of the top contributors of troops so while the percentage is high, the number of female peacekeepers is only at 93, 104 and 287. In fact, from the 55 countries on the list, there are only a few countries that have deployed more than 1000 women during this period: Nigeria (1007), South Africa (1776), Senegal (1151), Ghana (2855), Zambia (1011), Bangladesh (2262), Nepal (2148), Rwanda (3356) and Ethiopia (4306). In comparison to overall deployment, the numbers are not very high, but it still exceeds the majority of countries on the list. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the current system of recruiting women is not very successful, which in turn makes it more difficult to determine if adding more women into the field actually helps.

A way around this would be to report on the number of female peacekeepers per mission, but today the UN does not offer gender-disaggregated statistics on peacekeeping missions.

## 2.6. Lack of adequate training

As briefly mentioned above, the level of peacekeeping training varies between the countries. The UN has defined the training as *“any training activity which aims to enhance mandate implementation by equipping UN military, police and civilian personnel, both individually and collectively, with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to meet the evolving challenges of UN peace operations”* (UN, n.d.).

The responsibility for the training is between the Member State (to deliver pre-deployment training, known as PDT) and the Secretariat (standards and materials) and collectively ensure it is in accordance with the principles, guidelines, and the UN’s core values. In the last decades, there have been many calls for improved training – which has led to notable progress. But Secretary-General, António Guterres, also admits there is still much to be done. Some gaps include but are not limited to, weapon

handling, first aid, human rights and protection issues (UN, 2019). To work towards filling these gaps, the Member States would need to increase funding and contribute more equipment and more trainers (UN, 2019).

This brings us back to the issue of the UN forces mostly being soldiers from developing countries. Countries must provide training and set the standards for the prohibition of sexual abuse, which requires more than just making the training materials available for the soldiers. The Code of Conduct for Blue Helmets rulebook outlines the standards expected from peacekeepers, but it does not acknowledge variations. One of the points in the guidebook is that sexual exploitation and abuse is prohibited conduct for all personnel (UN, n.), which in theory is not hard to get. But the limits of what is acceptable or moral or even exploitative are not always as clear in the field, especially when we consider the factors at play that relate to gender equality, poverty, and poor training. Some might blame the UN's cookie-cutter approach, a repeated issue within its organisation. Instead of listening to local actors, they rely on approaches that emphasise international practices (Autesserre, 2019) that are generic and not necessarily suited to the difficulties they meet in the field. Training in preventing and responding to SEA is not sufficient and as mentioned before, there needs to be more specific training on women, gender equality and the specific needs of women in conflicts. In a masculine training environment, women's perspectives need to be implemented (Simić, 2015).

## 2.7. Weak reporting mechanisms

All peacekeeping missions are supposed to have community-based complaint reception mechanisms in place to guarantee that locals can report complaints and receive assistance, but despite this standard that has been set there are cases where the lack of safe, consistent, and reliable reporting mechanisms deters victims from reporting peacekeepers. (UN, n.d.). Because of this, the Conduct and Discipline Unit was created, and it is actively working to implement tools so victims can come forward, in person or through phone or email. Nonetheless, reports have shown that in the UN mission in the Central African Republic, the promised systems were not implemented: in fact, there were no communication strategies directed towards victims (Essa, 2017). This is not the only incident of this happening. For example, when looking for

unidentified victims in DRC, it only took a few days for the FRONTLINE director to find a substantial number of women and children who have experienced sexual exploitation or abuse but not reported it – with the same thing happening in CAR, as mentioned previously in this paper when addressing underreporting.

Even in countries where the implementation of reporting mechanisms has been successful, there are still other barriers to consider. It can be everything from a lack of trust (as we saw in the case of women in Haiti who does not report because they believe the UN does not care), social and cultural barriers that complicate the process (language, shame, social stigma, and the role of women), fear of consequences (ranging from discredit to the loss of marriage opportunities in the future) and a general lack of awareness. Often there is a culture of silence, both within the peacekeeping bases and also within the local community (Miller, 2018).

## 2.8. The failure of the man and the system

“The man and the system” is ultimately a perspective on the main causes of sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping. Despite decades of research and efforts, the UN has not been able to properly address these issues and thus sexual abuse remains a massive challenge within peacekeeping. So far, there have been a few mentions of new tables and data, which will be further explained and analysed in the next chapters. The hope is that it will offer new perspectives into the differing debates on the topic, especially when it comes to troop-contributing countries, the impact of women, sexual abuse, and gender equality.

## Chapter 3 – Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology used to investigate the prevalence of SEA in UN peacekeeping operations, with a special focus on troop-contributing countries, women, and gender equality. A mixed methods approach of both qualitative and quantitative data has been used, to ensure a comprehensive and original analysis of the research problem.

### 3.1. Qualitative methods

Qualitative methods were used to understand and gain insight into the root causes of sexual exploitation and abuse in UN peacekeeping missions. Secondary information sources, such as academic research, articles from international news magazines, data, papers, and official UN sources were used to present previous literature in chapter 2 about the man and the system. This gives a solid understanding of existing research about the topic since it identifies problems within peacekeeping and the UN system, as well as the suggested solutions to combat it.

It also reveals the gaps in which quantitative research can be used to fill and understand remaining questions, some of which will be closely examined in this study.

### 3.2. Quantitative methods

To obtain a quantitative understanding, an extensive review of the official reports and datasets from the UN was conducted. The focus was mainly on the “Table of Allegations”<sup>2</sup> which is a dataset on allegations that goes back to 2015, and the annual reports on “Uniformed Personnel Contributing Countries by Ranking”<sup>3</sup> from 2015 to 2022. This information was then extracted and compiled into a dataset to 1) find the total number of peacekeepers deployed from each TCC in the 2015-2022 timeframe, 2) calculate the exact number of peacekeepers from each country implicated in SEA allegations and 3) present the number and percentage of female peacekeepers within the troops. The data was then used to present findings such as the ratio of

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<sup>2</sup> Table of Allegations by the United Nations. Retrieved from <https://conduct.unmissions.org/sea-data-introduction>

<sup>3</sup> Contributions by Country (Ranking): December 2015 to December 2022. The reports are published annually by the UN, ranking Troop Contributing Countries from largest to smallest based on the contribution of peacekeeping personnel. Retrieved from <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/troop-and-police-contributors>

peacekeepers to allegations, the percentage of SEA allegations across different TCCs and the correlation between female peacekeepers and the percentage of allegations. Moreover, data from the United Nations Developed Programme, the Gender Inequality Index, was used in combination with this data to present the possible correlation between the level of gender inequality and the level of sexual abuse.

This not only provided a deeper understanding of the prevalence of SEA but also shed light on the TCCs with the highest number of perpetrators and explores the impact that women and gender equality have on peacekeeping.

1. Table 1 on “Financial and Troop Contributors” was made in Excel by comparing findings from Table 2 and official data from the UN website on how they are funded. The purpose was to analyse the different contributions of troops between the countries that finance the missions and the top 10 contributors.
2. Table 2 on “UN Peacekeepers and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse” was constructed using Excel by summarising annual reports on Troop Contribution Countries from 2015 to 2022. The numbers were examined to create the column on “Total Peacekeepers”, which represents the total number of troops from each country. Additionally, the number of perpetrators implicated within each report was consolidated to calculate the total number of perpetrators from each TCC within the period of 2015 to 2022 to create the column on “Allegations 2015-2022”. Subsequently, the percentage of allegations was found by dividing the number of allegations by the number of troops from each country to create the “% of Allegations pr peacekeeper” column. To provide a standardised comparison, the % of allegations per peacekeeper was divided by 100 to find the percentage of allegations per 1000 Peacekeepers. Lastly, the column of “Female peacekeepers” and “% of Female Peacekeepers” was made by retrieving and summarising data from the Troop Contributing Countries.
3. Figure 1 on “Female Peacekeepers and SEA allegations” was created based on information from Table 2 and by converting this information into an Excel scatterplot to visualize the correlation between the two variables. Statistical tools were used to find the correlation coefficient to determine if the relationship is positive (+1), negative (-1) or not statistically significant (0).
4. Figure 2 on “Gender Equality and SEA allegations” was then created by comparing data from the Gender Inequality index and the “% of allegations per



1000 peacekeeper” column. This data was then also turned into a scatterplot and the correlation coefficient was found. The aim was to generate quantitative insights into the correlation between gender equality and incidents of SEA.

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the methodology. First, the data presented is dependent on the accuracy of the UN reports. There is reason to believe that the numbers provided by the UN might be *significantly* lower than the actual numbers due to limitations in reporting and filing SEA reports. Bjorgengen (2023) points out in her research that while following trends in statistics is important, it does not necessarily mean the numbers represent reality. As little as 10% of women who experience sexual violence worldwide report it – a percentage which can be even lower in conflict situations such as peacekeeping missions. Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that the UN database only reflects the incidents that have been handled by the UN and not the ones that have gone unnoticed (Bjorgengen, 2023).

Also, numerous reports have varying formats throughout the years, from file types to spelling variations of the country names to design choices, which demanded increased effort to be able to compile the information into one document. Despite these efforts, some numerical errors might still be present.

Initially, the goal was to find the average number of deployed peacekeepers from a specific country for each year and compare it to the countries with the most SEA allegations. However, after analysing the numbers, it was made obvious there would be certain issues of statistical significance and standard deviations. For example, Gabon had 444 peacekeepers deployed in 2021 but only 11 in 2015, which wouldn't offer a very accurate analysis. Keeping this in mind, it seemed easier to divide the total number of peacekeepers throughout the years by the total amount of allegations against soldiers from that country. That way we can analyse larger groups, which provides higher statistical significance. The hope is that by reducing the margin of error, it will strengthen the reliability of the findings. Nonetheless, for some countries, there will still be low numbers so ultimately it remains important to approach these findings with a certain degree of scepticism.

## Chapter 4 – Numbers Speak Louder: Unveiling the True Extent of Perpetrators in Peacekeeping

The data provided represent a list of countries along with the total number of peacekeepers they have deployed, the total number of allegations from 2015 to 2022, the corresponding percentage of allegations based per 1000 peacekeepers, the total number of female peacekeepers and the percentage of female peacekeepers relative to the number of peacekeepers.

The allegation rate demonstrates that the higher the percentage, the higher the rate of allegations per peacekeeper. A high percentage therefore suggests there is a relatively greater number of allegations compared to the number of peacekeepers deployed while a low rate shows the opposite. The purpose is to achieve a relative comparison between countries to gain a sense of which countries have the most perpetrators and consider the variations between the top countries and the ones at the bottom. This might help us understand if there are potential issues related to misconduct from a specific country, but it is important to keep in mind that percentages alone do not give a full understanding of a country's situation so this should at best be considered a starting point for further research.

The source material can vary due to the presentation of data collection. The data for allegations was downloaded in January, when the dataset from the UN only contained allegations from January 1, 2015, to December 31, 2022, but the same Excel sheet gets updated monthly so the number of allegations will adjust accordingly to that. <sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> UN data on reported allegations, the standard of reporting and publishing information. <https://www.un.org/preventing-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse/content/data-allegations-un-system-wide>

Country	Total peacekeepers (2015-2022)	Allegations (2015-2022)	% of Allegations per 1000 Peacekeepers	Female peacekeepers	% of Female peacekeepers
Gabon	2682	177	6.6%	156	6%
Democratic Republic of Congo	950	59	6.2%	21	2%
Congo	2702	127	4.7%	175	6%
Moldova	88	1	1.1%	11	13%
Nigeria	7687	78	1.0%	1007	13%
Burundi	6734	61	0.9%	218	3%
Cameroon	9193	76	0.8%	928	10%
Bolivia	244	2	0.8%	32	13%
Madagascar	153	1	0.7%	24	16%
South Africa	10202	63	0.6%	1776	17%
Mauritania	6487	35	0.5%	39	1%
Romania	657	3	0.5%	95	14%
Canada	677	3	0.4%	118	17%
Philippines	458	2	0.4%	93	20%
Paraguay	476	2	0.4%	32	7%
Morocco	14696	50	0.3%	225	2%
Namibia	350	1	0.3%	104	30%
Guatemala	1518	4	0.3%	115	8%
United States of America	384	1	0.3%	43	11%
Tanzania	16743	41	0.2%	226	1%
Mali	432	1	0.2%	43	10%
Benin	5827	13	0.2%	296	5%
Zimbabwe	644	1	0.2%	287	45%
Peru	2028	3	0.1%	176	9%
Senegal	21801	32	0.1%	1151	5%
Uruguay	9218	13	0.1%	594	6%
Niger	9792	12	0.1%	308	3%
El Salvador	1980	2	0.1%	174	9%
Burkina Faso	14979	14	0.1%	824	6%
Ghana	21633	20	0.1%	2855	13%
Zambia	7995	7	0.1%	1011	13%
Malawi	6922	6	0.1%	624	9%
Tunisia	2568	2	0.1%	162	6%
Cambodia	6342	4	0.1%	574	9%
Guinea	6803	4	0.1%	326	5%
Gambia	1768	1	0.1%	296	17%
Slovakia	1772	1	0.1%	179	10%
Serbia	2255	1	0.0%	290	13%
Ukraine	2690	1	0.0%	45	2%
Pakistan	43702	16	0.0%	414	1%
Togo	11618	4	0.0%	799	7%
Egypt	24465	7	0.0%	336	1%
Brazil	3535	1	0.0%	96	3%
Cote d'Ivoire	3623	1	0.0%	231	6%
Fiji	3735	1	0.0%	336	9%
Chad	11476	3	0.0%	248	2%
Germany	4267	1	0.0%	276	6%
Uganda	4334	1	0.0%	499	12%
Indonesia	22569	4	0.0%	920	4%
Nepal	45423	8	0.0%	2148	5%
Italy	8246	1	0.0%	361	4%
Bangladesh	56071	6	0.0%	2262	4%
Rwanda	49210	4	0.0%	3356	7%
Ethiopia	51175	4	0.0%	4306	8%
India	51188	4	0.0%	662	1%

Table 2: UN Peacekeepers and Sexual Exploitation and Abuse

#### 4.1. Comparative Analysis of UN Data and Independent Findings

The UN started publishing the nationalities of perpetrators in 2016 following reports of sexual abuse of minors in the Central African Republic, as a step to increase transparency and keep TCCs accountable (UN, 2016). This data identifies aspects like countries involved, the type of personnel, the type of abuse and the status of investigations. It is this data the table presented above that is based on, and it is with surprise that this has not been a bigger point of interest for the UN and researchers. If the goal is to increase accountability and transparency, it leaves the question of why the UN's findings have not been utilized more in the efforts to end SEA. Naming countries is the first step, the next should be to identify risk factors and areas of improvement.

The presentation of UN data is confusing when accountability and transparency is the objective. The thing that truly separates this research from the graphs and statistics of the UN, is the way it is presented. The aim of this paper is to unveil the true extent of perpetrators in peacekeeping. Not the number of reports, which often includes more than one perpetrator and more than one victim, but the concrete number of perpetrators from each country. The UN presents its data as "uniformed personnel who have been implicated" (UN, n.d.) without specifying the actual number of individuals involved in each incident - which can be quite misleading because it obscures the true scale and magnitude of the issue.

It fails to provide a clear understanding of the specific number of peacekeepers involved, so while it might look like South Africa is the country with the most allegations (65 according to UN official data), the country that really has the most perpetrators are Gabon, with 177 personnel members implicated in SEA allegations.

Similarly, the real number of peacekeepers involved in SEA allegations from 2015 to 2022 is 1146. The UN does acknowledge that the data on allegations are counted by the reports received and that it can implicate one or more alleged perpetrators, but the full extent is not fully displayed - which at best makes the presentation of data confusing, and at worst, deceptive. This number is almost double the number of reports during this time, which is 592 (UN, n.d.).

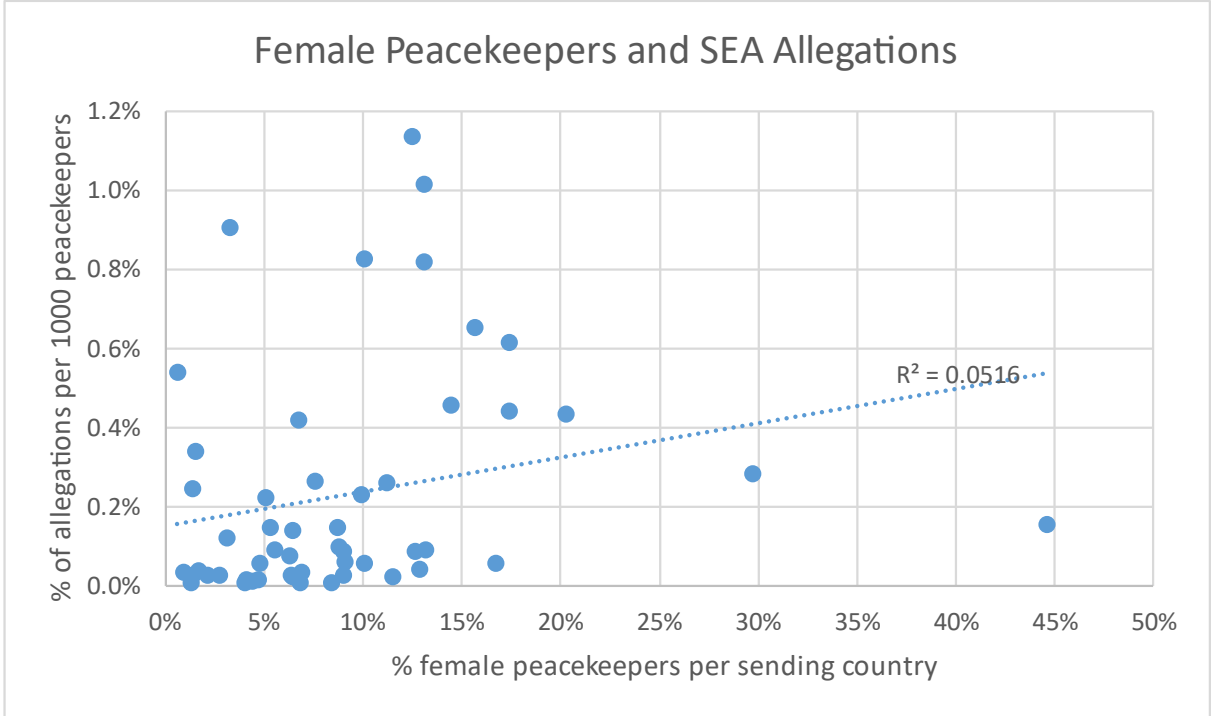
Additionally, presenting data this way might give the impression that the number of individuals involved is relatively small or insignificant. Again, in the case of Gabon, we see that one single report in 2021 involved 63 peacekeepers while it on paper does not allude to this at all. This is supported by the UN sending all Gabonese military units home from the Central African Republic due to credible reports of abuse (UN, 2021). However, while the incident in Gabon is a severe case, it is not a single, isolated incident and it is not limited to just one country.

Lastly, when it comes to solving matters like these, it is essential to present the data in a clear and precise way to ensure that people (and more importantly, decision-makers) understand it as accurately as possible. This is why identifying the number of perpetrators should be preferred over the number of reports.

4.2. Participation of Women in Peacekeeping

Increasing participation of women in uniformed peacekeeping is an argument that is popular and well-defended (and sometimes criticised) in the literature on sexual exploitation and abuse in peacekeeping. We looked at some of these arguments in the literature review, but to contribute with new data on the topic, Table 2 (which includes the number and percentage of women in peacekeeping), was used to create a graph on the correlation between female peacekeepers and SEA allegations.

Figure 1:



The data illustrates the percentage of female peacekeepers per sending country and the percentage of allegations per 1000 peacekeepers. The graph shows a correlation coefficient of 0.0516, which indicates a very weak positive correlation between the number of female peacekeepers and the number of allegations. The value being close to zero indicates weak to no correlation, which means there is almost no linear relationship between the two variables. In other words, there is no significant statistical relation, so the presence of women does not determine anything when it comes to SEA allegations. This might mean that the presence of women does not really matter, or it

might mean that there are simply not enough women yet to make a difference in peacekeeping missions.

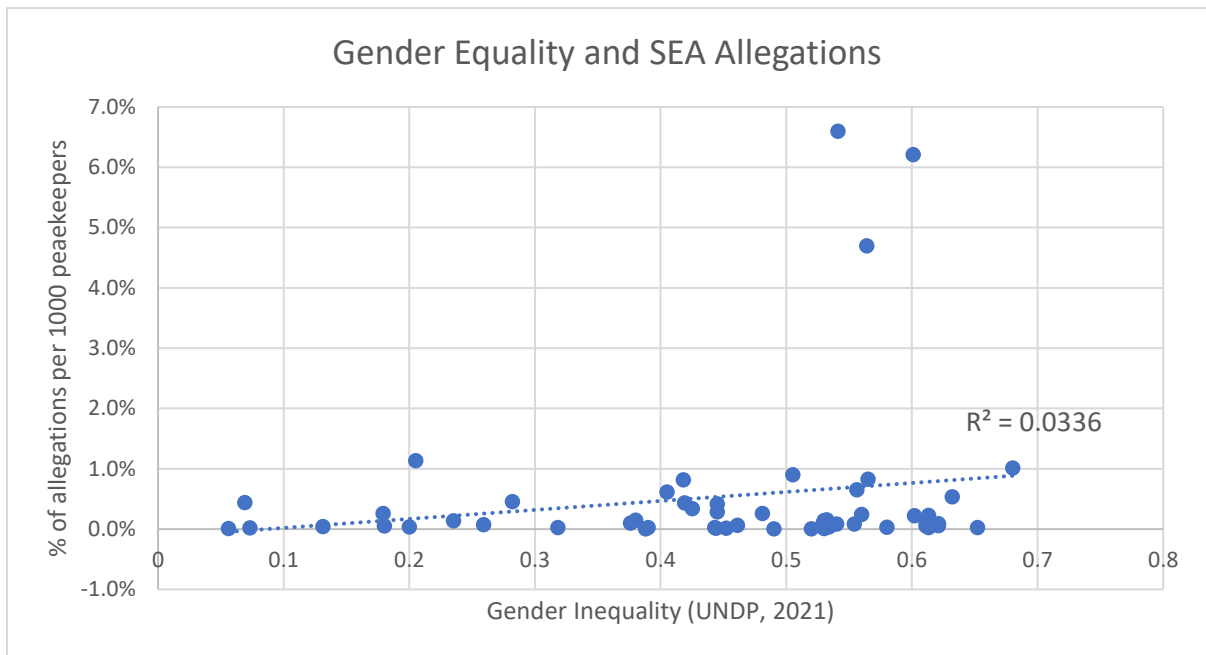
Some literature supports these suggestions. Kathleen Jennings argued in 2008 that the presence of women does not make a real difference because female peacekeepers do not want to report their male colleagues. Careers, friendships, and work environment still play a part, making reporting difficult (Simić, 2010).

When it comes to there not being *enough* women, there is not much data on this simply because this type of research has not been prevalent so far in peacekeeping literature. Looking at the outliers of the graph, we have countries with a specifically high level of female peacekeepers. To gain perspective on what percentage of female peacekeepers is required to make a change, it would be interesting to see to what missions these troops are sent to and potential case studies of missions with particularly many women.

#### 4.3. Female Peacekeepers and Gender Equality

In an effort to examine the potential factors of why some countries have a higher percentage of allegations, it seemed likely that countries with a higher level of gender equality would have fewer allegations while countries with a lower score would have more. As seen previously, many of the sending countries and host countries do struggle with low gender equality scores. Therefore, to investigate this, the percentage of allegations per 1000 peacekeepers was compared to data retrieved from United Nations Development Programme's index on gender inequality for each country (UNDP, 2021).

#### **Figure 2:**



Here we encounter another graph with a very weak positive correlation between the two variables. There are no significant findings between gender inequality and the prevalence of allegations. This does not mean there are none and it also does not seem very likely considering the weight that we put onto the fulfilment of the sustainable goals and the belief that the goals will lead to development and a better future, so more context is needed for a proper study of this.

As a bachelor's student, time and resources are limited but gender equality and the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse are both important questions. Hopefully, this study has proved that the UN and the TCCs would benefit from future research focused on quantitative studies that provide both depth and more conclusive findings.



## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the root causes of SEA from an individual and systematic level. Based on the analysis of the prevalence and correlation of SEA, troop contributing countries, gender, and equality, it can be concluded that the solution is not simply to change the peacekeepers for other peacekeepers with a different gender or a different country. The qualitative analysis illustrates weaknesses on the individual level such as militarised masculinity and power imbalances while simultaneously reinforcing gender inequality, impunity, and a culture of silence. On the systematic level, we find difficulties within the TCC system, reporting mechanisms, training, and lack of representation. There is a visible gap between the North and the Global South and between male and female peacekeepers. Ultimately, we need to evaluate the interconnection between the two levels and how they together increase the risks of sexual misconduct. Solely focusing on the “bad apples” divert attention from the fact that the tree is diseased. It overlooks the underlying systematic issues, which is where the true problems of UN peacekeeping are found.

The relationship between the North and the Global South is sort of backhanded: in one way, developed countries acknowledge the varying standards and training from developing countries and link it up to the cases of sexual exploitation and abuse, and yet they do not make any effort to increase their own representation. Let us just take a moment to imagine how different peacekeeping would look if the top contributors were from developed countries instead of developing ones. Generally, developed countries are known to have stronger systems of justice, accountability, and commitment to human rights and score a lot higher on gender equality indexes. The forces are paid and trained better, and they come from cultures where sexual abuse is harshly punished. So, if this had been the principal basis for the UN forces it is safe to assume the situation on abuse might look very different.

Naming and shaming countries is a newly started practice, but it is politically sensitive to TCCs and the UN. So far, the consequences of this have not been very visible, but there is a certain risk that the United Nations will be left without troops if this changes, and the UN continues to treat the consequences but not the causes of SEA. After all, who will contribute with peacekeeping troops if developing countries realise that they

do not want to be shamed for systematic flaws anymore? Developed states have proved themselves to be capable, but unwilling, and their financing is not nearly enough to address these issues.

Similarly, there is the idea that increasing women's participation is the key to unlocking peacekeeping practices that are untainted by sexual abuse. Indeed, the UN has long urged for increased participation of uniformed women in the field to keep male peacekeepers in line, rebuild trust and reduce the risks of sexual exploitation. Once again, the organisation fails to realise that implementing more women does not secure better peacekeepers – at least not under the current conditions. Women's participation can make a big difference and it should be prioritised on the agenda, but it should be done in a way that ensures gender equality and women's perspectives to be included in all areas of peacekeeping, including training and policymaking.

It is up to the United Nations to solve the systematic issues within their organisation, not the TCCs. In the end, it is the UN's reputation that is at stake and the facts are that many of the developing countries within peacekeeping struggle with a lack of training that makes it difficult to reach the UN's standard of conduct. To improve this, it is time to stop putting Band-Aids on wounds that needs stitches. Some tangible solutions would be to develop mechanisms that ensure the equal contribution of troops by all Member States (or at the very least fix the imbalance), improve the presentation of UN data (and utilize it to establish concrete solutions for each country), offer incentives for countries to implement more women into their forces (a reward system for countries contributing a certain percentage of female peacekeepers might prove useful) and provide gender sensitivity training in all areas of peacekeeping (to challenge traditional gender roles and create a more diverse and equal environment).

Finally, the goal is not to replace male peacekeepers with women or to only have peacekeepers from developed countries, it is to transform the average peacekeeper into diverse, balanced and gender-sensitive individuals who are better equipped to address the complex challenges of peacekeeping.

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