



Columbia University
MAILMAN SCHOOL
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The Girl as Soldier & Slave: Bridging Public Health & Human Rights in Violence Prevention

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Objectives

- Enumerate the Human Rights treaties applicable to the girl child soldiers
- Elaborate a 'vector' approach to rights, addressing the multiple & overlapping harms to girl child soldiers



The “Girl Child” in Fighting Forces: The Sierra Leone Civil War

- “One day the rebels attacked the village where I lived. I hid and watched as they killed my relatives and raped my mother and sisters. I thought if I joined their army, I would be safe. In the army, I was trained to use a gun and I performed guard duty. I was often beaten and raped by the other soldiers. One day, a commander wanted me to become his “wife,” so I tried to escape. They caught me, whipped me, and raped me everyday for many days. When I was just 14, I had a baby.”
 - L. Taylor & JB Kroc. Global Dispatch: Girl Child Soldiers. FAWE-Sierra Leone; March 8, 2007



Gender- and Age-Specific Harms

- **Reproductive harms**
- **Sexual harms**
- **Mental Health harms**
- **Social & Economic harms**
- **Continuing harms**

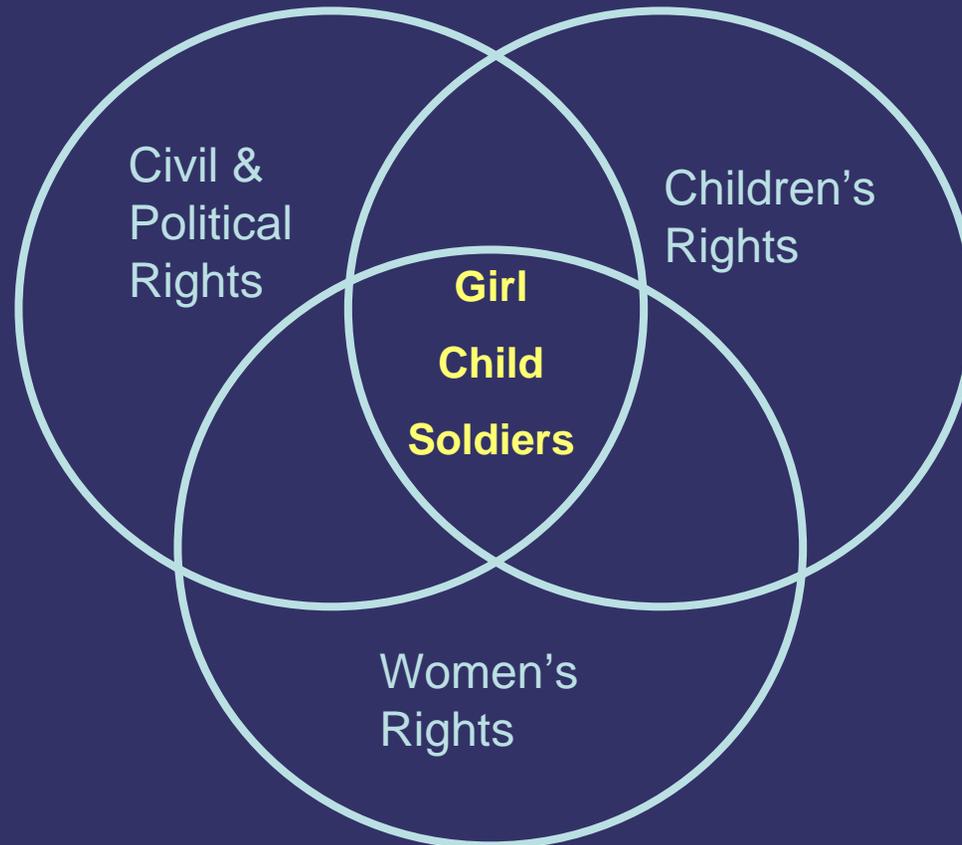


Human Rights

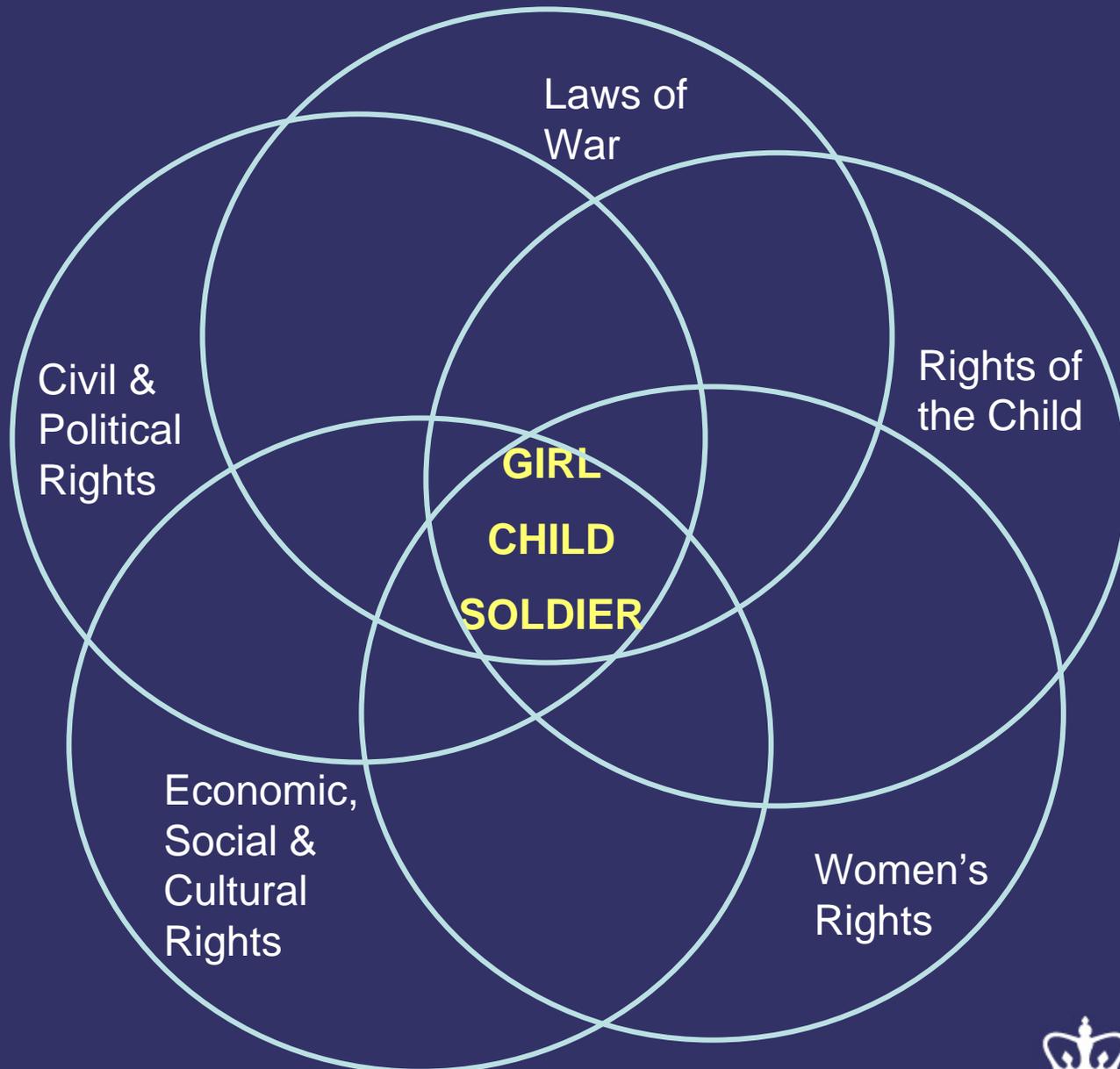
- The “girl child” soldier
 - A case study of the Sierra Leone civil war
- **International Human Rights: The current framework**
- Rights implicated by the complex health harms to girls as soldiers & slaves
- Need for a *new* framework: A ‘vector’ approach to rights
- Conclusion: A Public Health Approach
- **International Covenant on Civil & Political Rights (ICCPR) - 1961**
 - Human Rights Committee (HRC) in OHCHR
- **Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) - 1978**
 - CEDAW Committee in Div. for Advancement of Women
- **Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) - 1989**
 - CRC Committee in OHCHR



Rights Implicated by the Complex Reality



We Need A NEW Human Rights Framework!!!



A Vector Approach to Girl Child Soldiers

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- Conclusion: A Public Health Approach
- **A complex whole—interaction of multiple, overlapping gender- & age-specific harms**
 - Relationship between whole & parts is dynamic & inter-dependent.
 - National & International obligation for
- **‘Vector’ of rights addresses cumulative vulnerability that is not merely additive in nature—a complex public health problem**



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- **Conclusion: A Public Health Approach**
- **Theoretical backbone: what does a ‘vector’ of rights do?**
 - **Inter-sectionality: acknowledges that rights are indivisible, inter-dependent & inter-related.**
 - **A breach of any one right impacts the realisation of another, violating the whole ‘vector of rights’—the net effect is greater than the sum of its parts**



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- **Theoretical backbone: what does a ‘vector’ of rights do?**
 - **Changed national obligations: effective implementation of HRs to capture the unique position of GCS not assimilable in either women’s or child’s rights**
 - **A dual duty on the State: prevention and treatment of the harms suffered by girl child soldiers**



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- **Theoretical backbone: what does a ‘vector’ of rights do?**
 - **National & International obligations for dissolved states apply to *all states & non-states*—a duty on all actors to cooperate to prevent & treat harms belongs to whole internat’l community**



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- **Operationalising the ‘vector:’ what can we do with it?**
 - 1. Litigation: International Court of Justice; TRC; etc.**
 - 2. HRs monitoring: state reporting; general comments**
 - 3. Condition foreign aid & funding for NGO projects on the ‘vector’**
 - 4. Special Rapporteur on Rights of the GCS**
 - 5. Develop ‘dialogic relations’ through an Inter-Agency Committee on GCS**



How the Vector Supports Public Health

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- Need for a *new* framework: A ‘vector’ approach to rights
- **Conclusion: A Public Health Approach**
- ‘Vector’ of rights considers multiple rights from many perspectives through different institutions
 - PH is an inter-disciplinary method to collective health problems
 - PH examines underlying causes of disease- ‘vector’ responds to structural factors impacting health
- PH is a unified framework that makes NO distinction b/w prevention & treatment



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