

From:

<http://www.lse.ac.uk/researchAndExpertise/researchHighlights/societyMediaAndScience/Gender-training-for-the-troops.aspx>

Gender training for the troops

[London School of Economics](#)

It is 15 years since the United Nations adopted [Resolution 1325](#), linking women's experiences in war to the international peace and security agenda. Despite some progress, sexual violence is still a major problem in conflict zones and women remain vastly under represented in peacebuilding and prevention efforts.

Actor and UN special envoy Angelina Jolie Pitt has called it "the most violent, brutal, terrorising weapon of war" – sexual violence against women.

In June 2014 the celebrity used her profile – along with former British Foreign Secretary William Hague – to highlight the use of rape as a weapon of war, co-chairing a global summit in London to address the long-standing issue.

Just months later, the pair also launched the UK's first academic [Centre on Women, Peace and Security](#) at LSE, led by [Professor Christine Chinkin](#), to promote justice, human rights and women's participation in conflict-affected regions around the world.

Aiko Holvikivi is a 30-year-old political science graduate who has spent the past five years working at the European Commission and at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF).

In September 2015 Aiko enrolled at LSE to pursue doctoral research closely aligned to the objectives of the School's WPS Centre. Her focus will be on exploring how gender training is changing the culture of the military worldwide.

"Throughout history, warfare has left its mark on women, not just through sexual assault but also the exclusion of women from matters related to the governance of peace and security," Aiko said.

"Their voices and concerns have been marginalised and it's time we addressed these issues. Changing how security institutions – especially the military – operate and interact with the local population is one way to ensure women's security needs are met. Gender training for the troops is one aspect of this."

Aiko's work with the European Commission covered a number of aspects relating to gender and security, including targeting human trafficking and the sexual exploitation of children. She was then employed by DCAF in their gender and security team in Geneva, working with police and military services on human rights and gender equality issues.

“While based in Geneva, I worked with security institutions in the Western Balkans, the Southern Caucasus, in NATO’s Partnership for Peace area, as well as many countries in West and Southern Africa. The experience has motivated my desire to learn how the women, peace and security agenda is implemented in varied contexts, and how we can work together to create more inclusive approaches to security and more equitable visions of peace,” Aiko said.

Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 by the UN Security Council and signed off by 46 countries. It requires all signatories to increase the participation of women in UN peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict.

“It was seen as a ground breaking step at the time, that women’s security concerns were finally being considered on an international scale,” Aiko said. “I think it is too early to say whether we are making headway in the military for women but at least we now have a real focus on addressing sexual violence in conflict.”

Gender training for military troops and police peacekeepers is one of the key recommendations of Resolution 1325 and is now being incorporated by an increasing number of organisations involved in conflict areas.

Of course, women are not the only victims of rape, nor are men the sole perpetrators, Aiko acknowledges.

“Questions related to sexual violence and male victims involve a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, gender trainers in the military want to avoid reinforcing the notion that women are ‘naturally’ or, inevitably, victims and men, perpetrators. At the same time, they don’t want to understate or belittle the extent to which women have overwhelmingly suffered from conflict and been discriminated against by gender norms.”

Aiko’s PhD research will look at how different countries and organisations such as the UN and NATO approach gender training and the effect it has on the armed forces and their relations with the civilian population.

“Gender training aims to change how military and peacekeeping operations are run, and to make them more gender responsive. This involves tackling both entrenched cultural norms and institutional behaviour,” she said.