

## Unseen Scars: The Human Cost of War

Research Title: Shades Of Human Relationships and Emotions Coloured by Khaled Hosseini in His Novels “A Thousand Splendid Suns” And “The Kite Runner”

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### Abstract

“Unseen Scars : The Human Cost of War” explores the profound and often hidden impacts of armed conflict on innocent lives, drawing on Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* as illustrative examples. These novels vividly depict the internal and external repercussions of war, highlighting how violence and instability inflict deep psychological trauma, disrupt personal stability, and foster despair among affected individuals. Internally, characters grapple with emotional scars, loss of identity, and a pervasive sense of hopelessness. Externally, the destruction of infrastructure, displacement, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma underscore the extensive toll of war. The narrative extends beyond the pages of fiction to reflect the global reality of countless individuals in war-torn regions, revealing the enduring and often invisible suffering that war impose on its victims. Through a nuanced examination of these themes, the article underscores the need for greater empathy and action to address the hidden wounds of conflict and to support those grappling with its far-reaching consequences.

**Keywords:** The gendered impact of war, children of conflict, emotional trauma, displacement and refugee issues, need for empathy

### Introduction

War has always left behind more than just physical destruction; it etches deep, often invisible scars into the lives of those who endure it. Khaled Hosseini’s novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*, poignantly illustrate this profound human cost. Through the stories of Mariam and Laila in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and Amir and Hassan in *The Kite Runner*, Hosseini explores how war disrupts lives, destroys relationships, and inflicts long-lasting psychological trauma. These characters are shaped by their experiences in a world marred by conflict, revealing how war undermines human dignity and integrity.

In our current era, the world continues to grapple with the devastating consequences of conflict. Modern wars exacerbate suffering by inflicting not only physical harm but also environmental damage and infrastructure collapse, contributing to a cycle of poverty and instability. The notion that war can be a solution to disputes is increasingly discredited as the true costs – lives lost, ecosystems destroyed, and communities shattered – become clearer. History and literature alike underscore that war is not a tool for achieving peace or demonstrating power, rather, it signifies a profound loss of humanity, revealing the enduring impact on those who live through it and the broader world.

“Unseen Scars : The Human Cost of War” reveals the profound and often invisible toll that conflict takes on individuals and societies. While physical injuries are recognized, the emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by war often remain hidden and unaddressed. This exploration underscores the urgent need for comprehensive support systems and compassionate policies to heal these unseen scars. Addressing the human cost of war requires acknowledging these hidden struggles, providing necessary care, and fostering a greater understanding of the enduring impact of conflict on mental health and well-being.

In the contemporary world, the persistent scourge of war continues to cast a shadow over global stability, inflicting profound suffering and exacerbating geopolitical tensions. Despite remarkable advancements in technology, medicine, and communication, our approach to resolving conflicts remains mired in violence, which only perpetuates a cycle of destruction and misery. This outdated paradigm disregards the potential for non-violent solutions such as diplomacy, dialogue and international cooperation, which are crucial for fostering lasting peace. The devastating effects of war on human lives, societies, and the environment underscore the urgent need for a paradigm shift. As stewards of our planet, it is imperative that we harness our collective ingenuity and compassion to address disputes through peaceful means, rather than resorting to barbaric practices.

## **The Gendered Impact of War**

### “ The Distinct Sufferings of Men and Women in War”

From the male perspective, wars often mean physical and psychological suffering. Men, particularly soldiers, face the brutality of combat, which includes exposure to life-threatening situations, injuries, and trauma. The constant threat of death or severe injury can lead to long-term psychological issues such as PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). In addition to physical harm, men may experience a profound sense of loss and guilt, especially if they survive when others do not. The societal pressure to remain stoic or to be seen as strong makes it difficult for men to seek help or express their emotions, leading to internalized suffering.

From the female perspective, wars bring about severe hardships. Women often face direct violence, such as sexual assault and exploitation, which is exacerbated in conflict zones where social and legal protections are weakened. Additionally, women are frequently burdened with the responsibility of managing households and caring for children amidst instability and shortages. They may suffer from loss of loved ones, displacement, and

economic hardship as a result of war. The disruption of societal structures can also lead to increased vulnerability and marginalization.

Khaled Hosseini's novels, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner*, offer poignant insights into the impact of war on both males and females, reflecting broader themes applicable to contemporary conflict zones.

#### Impact on Women :

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the impact of war on women is illustrated through the lives of Mariam and Laila. Both characters suffer under the dual burden of gender oppression and the chaos of ongoing conflict in Afghanistan. Mariam, born illegitimately, endures a life of marginalization and abuse exacerbated by the Taliban's harsh rule. Her suffering is a direct result of both patriarchal oppression and the war's destabilizing effects. Laila, though initially more privileged, faces severe challenges when the war destroys her family and forces her into a dire situation, including a forced marriage. The novel portrays how conflict intensifies gender-based violence and restricts women's rights, leaving them vulnerable yet remarkably resilient. This depiction reflects the experiences of women in many modern conflict zones where it exacerbates existing inequalities and creates new forms of suffering.

#### Impact on Men :

In *The Kite Runner*, the impact of war on men is reflected through Amir's internal struggles and his relationship with his father, Baba. The novel portrays how the Soviet invasion and subsequent Taliban rise lead to societal breakdown, affecting men's role and identities. Baba's pride and sense of honour are challenged as his social status diminishes due to the war's economic and social upheavals. Amir's personal struggle with guilt and redemption highlights how men grapple with internalized trauma and societal expectations during and after conflict. The narrative shows that male suffering often involves a complex interplay of personal failure and societal collapse. This portrayal resonates with the experiences of men in conflict zones today, who face not only physical damages but also profound psychological and social challenges as they navigate the demands of survival and personal identity amidst ongoing violence.

#### **Children of Conflict**

Children living in war-affected countries live in constant fear, experiencing grave violations of their rights, with serious impacts on their mental health. Many children living in lethal war zones are already at risk of climate change and facing unprecedented levels of hunger as well.

Today, the nature of conflict – and its impact on children – is evolving. The world is witnessing deliberate campaigns of violence against civilians, including the targeting of schools, the abduction and enslavement of girls, and deliberate starvation.

In today's armed conflicts, there is no longer a clearly demarcated battlefield : children's homes and schools are the battlefield.

The nature of conflict has changed, putting children in the frontline in new and terrible ways. Wars are lasting longer. They are more likely to be fought in urban areas amongst civilian

population leading to deaths and life-changing injuries. Attacks on schools and hospitals are up.

Children are disproportionately suffering the consequences of these brutal trends.

**Displacement and Homelessness :** Many children are forced to flee their homes, living in refugee camps or temporary shelters, often in harsh conditions.

**Lack of Education :** Schools are frequently destroyed or repurposed for military use, depriving children of education and a sense of normalcy.

**Psychological Trauma :** Exposure to violence and loss can lead to severe mental health issues, including PTSD, anxiety, and depression.

**Malnutrition and Health Issues :** Disruptions in food supplies and healthcare can result in malnutrition and the spread of diseases.

**Exploitation and Recruitment :** Children may be recruited into armed groups or exploited for labour, further endangering their well-being and future prospects.

**Loss of Family :** Many children lose one or both parents or are separated from their families, exacerbating their vulnerability.

These conditions contribute to a cycle of suffering that can impact their development and future opportunities.

The harm that is done to children in armed conflict is not only often more severe than that done to adults, it has longer lasting implications – for children themselves and for society.

In Khaled Hosseini's novels *The Kite Runner* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, the portrayal of children affected by conflict offers a poignant reflection of the broader suffering experienced by young people in war-torn region such as Afghanistan.

In *The Kite Runner*, the protagonist Amir's childhood is deeply impacted by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The novel illustrates how the instability of war disrupts the lives of children leading to loss, trauma, and displacement, loss of family, and psychological trauma. The suffering of Hassan, Amir's childhood friend, highlights how violence and political turmoil can destroy the innocence and safety of youth.

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* expands this theme by focusing on the plight of women and children during the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan. The novel shows how war exacerbates domestic abuse and neglect, profoundly affecting the development and future of children. Mariam and Laila, central characters in the story, endure hardships that deeply affect their children, illustrating a cycle of suffering that impacts generations.

In the contemporary time, in war zone areas, children are similarly caught in the crossfire. They face displacement, loss of education, and severe psychological trauma. The destruction of homes and communities, coupled with the interruption of daily life, mirrors the experiences depicted in Hosseini's novels. The resilience and vulnerability of these children underscore the enduring impact of war on the youngest members of society.

Hosseini's work highlights that beyond immediate physical damage, war scars children emotionally and psychologically, shaping their futures in profound ways. The suffering of children in today's conflicts echoes the narratives in his novels, emphasizing the urgent need for global awareness and intervention to protect and support these vulnerable populations.

### **Emotional Trauma : The Deep Emotional Toll of Wars**

Living in war-torn areas subject individuals to severe emotional trauma. Constant exposure to violence, destruction, and loss creates a pervasive sense of fear and uncertainty.

People living in war zones often experience acute stress and anxiety due to the unpredictable nature of conflict. The relentless threat of bombings, shootings, and other forms of violence can lead to chronic fear and hypervigilance. Witnessing the death or injury of loved ones, coupled with the destruction of homes and communities, fosters profound grief and a sense of helplessness. The trauma is compounded by the loss of routine, disruption of daily life, and the struggle for basic necessities like food, water, and medical care.

Children are particularly vulnerable, as they may experience developmental delays, nightmares, and difficulty trusting others. The exposure to violence and the instability of their environment can deeply affect their mental health and future well-being.

Khaled Hosseini's novels *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *The Kite Runner* poignantly illustrate the emotional trauma experienced by individuals in war-torn environments.

In *A Thousand Splendid Suns*, Hosseini depicts the profound suffering of women in Afghanistan under both Soviet occupation and the Taliban regime. Mariam and Laila, the novel's central characters, endure intense emotional trauma. The novel vividly portrays how war exacerbates personal suffering and shapes the characters' emotional landscapes.

In *The Kite Runner*, Khaled Hosseini explores the psychological scars left by the Afghan civil war through the protagonist, Amir. The novel's depiction of Amir's childhood in Kabul and his subsequent journey into exile highlights the long-lasting impact of war. The novel illustrates how war-induced trauma can permeate personal relationships, shape identity, and influence one's ability to find redemption.

Both novels of Khaled Hosseini provide a deep empathetic portrayal of how war inflicts emotional wounds that persist long after the conflict ends, shaping the lives of individuals in ways that are both profound and enduring.

### **Displacement and Refugee Issues**

Displacement and refugee issues are among the most significant and tragic impacts of war around the world. Conflicts force millions to flee their homes, leading to a complex array of humanitarian challenges.

Displacement :

War-induced displacement often involves both internal and international movements. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are forced to leave their homes but remain within their country's borders. They frequently face dire conditions in makeshift camps or urban slums, lacking access to basic necessities such as food, water, healthcare, and shelter. The loss of

homes and livelihoods disrupts their lives and often leaves them in precarious unstable situations.

The novel 'A Thousand Splendid Suns' by Khaled Hosseini vividly portrays the impact of displacement on Afghan women. After the Soviet invasion and the rise of the Taliban, the conflict displaces countless families. Laila, one of the protagonists, is forced to flee her home in Kabul after a bombing destroys her house and kills her parents. Her journey to safety, followed by her subsequent forced marriage to Mariam's abusive husband, underscores the harsh reality of displacement. Laila's experience reflects the broader plight of those who lose their homes and face the harsh conditions of both refugee camps and internally displaced persons' shelters. The novel illustrates the emotional and physical toll of displacement, as well as the challenges of adapting to a new life under dire circumstances.

#### Refugee Issues :

Those who cross international borders seeking safety are classified as refugees. The journey to safety can be perilous, involving dangerous crossings and exploitation by smugglers. Refugees often find themselves in overcrowded camps or in urban environments where they struggle to secure legal status, work, and integrate into new communities. They face significant challenges in accessing education and healthcare, and their legal and social rights can be severely restricted.

In Hosseini's novel 'The Kite Runner', the story of Amir and his father, Baba, provides insight into the refugee experience. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the rise of the Taliban, Amir and Baba flee Kabul to seek refuge in the United States. Their journey illustrates the desperation and uncertainty faced by refugees. Baba's struggle to adjust to life in America, coupled with Amir's attempt to rebuild their lives, highlights the challenges of resettlement. The novel also explores the emotional and psychological impacts of displacement, including feelings of loss, identity crisis, and the struggle to reconcile past traumas with new beginnings.

Displacement and refugee crises have long-term consequences for both individuals and host countries. Refugees often experience psychological trauma due to the violence they have witnessed and the instability they face. For host countries, managing large refugee populations can strain resources and infrastructure, potentially leading to social and economic tensions.

#### **Need for Empathy**

Addressing the hidden wounds of war and finding peaceful resolutions require a profound commitment to empathy. The emotional, psychological, and social scars left by war are often invisible but deeply affect individuals and communities.

Recognizing the depth of trauma experienced by those affected by conflict is crucial. Empathy involves acknowledging the suffering of individuals who have lost loved ones, homes, and stability. By listening to their stories and understanding their pain, we can offer support that truly addresses their needs.

Many individuals in conflict zones suffer from mental health issues like PTSD, but stigma and lack of resources can prevent them from seeking help. Empathy can help in breaking

these stigmas, encouraging open conversations about mental health, and advocating for necessary support services. Empathy is necessary to heal the hidden wounds of war and foster lasting peace. By understanding the experiences of those affected by war and committing to meaningful support and efforts, the international community can help mitigate the effects of conflict and work towards a more stable and compassionate world.

### Conclusion

The article “Unseen Scars: The Human Cost of War” reveals that war inflicts profound and often invisible scars on humanity, extending far beyond the battlefield. The true human cost of conflict is not solely measured in the lives lost and the physical injuries sustained but also in the deep psychological and emotional trauma experienced by survivors. Innocent civilians frequently bear the brunt of war’s devastation, enduring not only the immediate violence but also the long-term impacts on their mental health, communities and futures. The suffering of displaced families, the disruption of essential services, and the breakdown of social structures contribute to be a heart-wrenching reality where the losses incurred are both immeasurable and irreplaceable.

In an era marked by unprecedented advancements in technology, communication, and knowledge, the persistence of violence as a means of conflict resolution is increasingly untenable. The impact of war on innocent lives underscores the necessity for a paradigm shift in how conflicts are managed. As the world continues to evolve, so too must our methods for achieving peace. The harsh reality that war brings irreplaceable losses and suffering serves as a poignant reminder of the need to pursue peaceful solutions. By embracing non-violent approaches and prioritizing empathy and understanding, we can address disputes more effectively while mitigating the profound human cost of conflict. This shift is not only a moral imperative but also a practical necessity for ensuring a more humane and stable future for all.

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