

Small Arms and Children

Small arms negatively impact the lives of children because:

- **Children often suffer from small arms proliferation and misuse at a higher rate than the rest of the population**
- **Small arms proliferation and misuse interfere with the fulfillment of basic needs and the provision of basic services that are essential for children**
- **Small arms contribute to the use of child soldiers**

Small arms are used to kill, injure, and commit human rights abuses against children and other civilians in armed conflicts and in countries at peace. Children are particularly vulnerable to the proliferation and misuse of small arms. In Colombia, for example, gun deaths rose 195.6 percent for the general population between 1979 and 2002, but increased 300 percent for children under 18 during the same period. In Chicago, gun deaths decreased 69 percent for the general population between 1979 and 2001, but increased 131 percent for minors. Small arms violence also causes psychosocial trauma in thousands of children. Moreover, conflicts fought with small arms often weaken traditional family structures and support systems for children by causing the death or injury of a parent or the forced separation of children from the rest of their family members. Experiencing the consequences of gun violence at an early age can be a key influence on a child's decision to become a combatant at an early age, or a key reason as to why some children come to view guns as legitimate tools for conflict resolution.

Small arms proliferation and misuse interfere with the provision of basic services upon which children depend. The excessive and destabilizing accumulation of small arms may impede the delivery of food assistance, interfere with the harvesting of foods and livestock production, and interrupt the delivery of health care.

Small arms proliferation often results in massive population displacement, uprooting millions of children and their families from their homes and making children more susceptible to disease, violence, military recruitment, and sexual assault. Approximately 20 million children have been displaced due to armed conflicts or sustained human rights violations. An estimated two thirds of these children are displaced within their own countries.

Small arms may reduce economic opportunities, resulting in increased poverty and hardship for millions of children and their families. The presence of small arms in a conflict region frequently inhibits children's educational opportunities. Schools may not function due to rampant instability or because parents and teachers fear that the children will be abducted for use as part of an armed force. In Uganda, children are often abducted by combatants while they are at school. The weight and size of small arms makes them easy for children to use and encourages the use of children as combatants. Children as young as eight years of age have been taught how to fire an assault rifle. Hundreds of thousands of children are currently serving as child soldiers in over 20 conflicts around the world.