

LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

By Catherine Baillie Abidi & Dustin Johnson

Allons-y: Journal of Children, Peace and Security focuses on centering children in evolving peace and security practices by exploring children's significance to long term peace and security. A Children, Peace and Security (CPS) framework builds from the perspective that if children are prioritized in the peace and security agenda, global interventions would shift from responding to violations and temporarily disrupting cycles of violence, to instead focus on the prevention of violence. Lt General (ret'd) Roméo Dallaire has conveyed this perspective for many years by sharing the consequences of encountering children recruited and used in violence, and the limitations of intervening after violence. Inspired by General Dallaire's experiences during the genocide in Rwanda, and the many armed forces personnel who have shared their stories of the personal and operational impacts of encountering children during deployments, this seventh volume of *Allons-y* explores the increasing moral complexities of armed conflict, the mental health consequences of encountering children in conflict contexts, and the importance of effectively caring for those who endure moral injuries.

As authors in this volume articulate, the psychological effects of encountering children in armed conflict can be significant and are increasingly understood as distinct from other forms of trauma due to complex social, ethical, and moral elements. The Vancouver Principles on Peacekeeping and the Prevention of the Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers, a leading instrument championing the importance of understanding children within peace operations, commits to ongoing support for research on the impacts of encountering children and to improving pre-deployment preparation as well as post-deployment mental health support. Principle 13 – Mental Health – recognizes that encountering children can involve a “sharp dichotomy between the simultaneous perception of child soldiers as both threats and victims” (Government of Canada, 2019). In this regard, the Dallaire Institute, in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, the Lawson Health Research Institute, the Canadian Institute for Military and Veteran Health Research,

the Atlas Institute for Veterans and Families, and Director General Military Personnel and Research are in the process of conducting a multi-phased research study on the effects of exposure to children during military service. The aim of the research is to inform and enhance training, policy and prevention strategies to better prepare personnel for complex deployments that involve children, and to improve care for those who have experienced mental health difficulties in the aftermath of these experiences. Publication of the research findings are anticipated in the fall of 2023.

We hope the reflections from Veterans who share personal stories of encountering children during deployments, the impacts of these encounters, and their hopes for the future inspire further understanding and dialogue. We hope the insights from practitioners who analyze current practice and policy in relation to care and spiritual support will lead to enhanced prevention and care practices. And we hope that the research articles which challenge the language and social frameworks we use to describe and understand moral injury, and that illustrate the significant impacts that recruiting and using children in violence has on children, communities and armed forces personnel, will create opportunities for continued dialogue, prevention-oriented actions, and new collaborations in support of a world where children are at the heart of peace and security.