

Did Jewish Women Suffered More Than Men in the Holocaust?

Name: Victoria Ruan

Date: May 14th, 2018

Teachers: Ms.Cullen and Mr.Smart

Assignment: World War Two Essay

Jews had been suffering a lot from the anti-Jewish laws since Nazi Party came to power in the 1930s. Jews' rights and interests were totally deprived, and the majority of them were finally tortured to death in the concentration camps after the declaration of the Final Solution. About 6 million Jews were killed by the Nazis, whether they were men, women or children. Even though every Jew was subjected to misery, men and women experienced differently on account of the gender differences. Generally, gender differences made Jewish women's life much harder than men's during the World War Two, due to women's roles in family and society, vulnerability, and strong sense of responsibility.

Jewish women's roles in family and society gave them lower probability than men of escape. Before the anti-Jewish laws were implemented, women were primarily responsible for children and families, and men for their family's economic support (Weitzman, Lenore). As a result, most Jewish people believed that men were the crucial part of the society, and only men were in real danger under Nazi regime. The Franks in the book *The Diary of Anne Frank* is a typical German Jewish family. According to Anne Frank's diary, when she was informed that "S.S had sent a call-up notice", she worried about her father (Frank, 13). She believed her father would be caught into the camps, but she didn't think about her sister, mother or even herself. Many Jews assumed that women and children were safe, so they put most effort to ensure men's safety. On the contrary, German brutality was not confined to men, but also to women and children. As every Jew realized this cruel reality, women and children had already lost their chances to escape from the clutches of Nazi. On Black Thursday, July 16, 1942, 5,802 women and 4,051 children were captured, comparing with only 3,031 men. The statistic number continuously to be disproportionate in other camps like Auschwitz and Dachau (Ofer, Dalia, and Lenore J. Weitzman). It was difficult for women to get away from the disaster by themselves. As a consequence, they were doomed to the capture and misfortune.

Moreover, being Jewish and female during the Holocaust doubled one's vulnerabilities. Nazi's cruel ideology targeted Jewish women, and their reproductive ability made them suffered more than men did. At Auschwitz, doctor Claus Clauberg "injected chemicals into women's reproductive systems" to find out which drugs would sterilize them (Feldman, 24). Often women's sex organs were surgically removed and sent to other places for further study. Women took the responsibility of reproducing new generation, but the Nazis had long been determined to exterminate Jewish race. The Nazis always considered Jewish as inferior race, and their purpose was to wipe out the whole Jewish population since they could not tolerate the newborn with impure blood. Besides, during the deportation operation, pregnant women were forced to submit to abortions (Holocaust Encyclopedia). Jewish women tried not to become pregnant, but they were not able to avoid rape and sexual violence. They were thought to be weak, so that they were easily meet with unfair treatments. Even if some women were lucky to maintain the babies, they were more likely to be killed in the camps. Ninety percent of pregnant women were sent directly to the gas chambers, but healthy women and ordinary men were usually sent to work, and lived at least longer for a while (Feldman, 25). In the selection, the physical strength was a critical factor for survival. Pregnant women couldn't do the harsh work, and not being able to do work means valueless for the Nazis. It's better to kill the useless eaters directly to reduce the food expenditure. Jewish women incurred much more just because of their inborn physical traits.

Finally, the strong sense of responsibility put much burden on Jewish women during the wartime. Jewish women's roles in family and society had changed a lot because of the anti-Jewish laws. Jewish men were at higher risk of being deported to labor camps, and many of them were too afraid to leave their homes during the day. As a result, their wives began to take over many of their husbands' former roles. A historian of the Warsaw ghetto, Emmanuel Ringelblum wrote the

situation in the diary: “The women are everywhere... who never thought of working are now performing the most difficult physical work” (Ringelbum, Emanuel). Jewish women took all the responsibility of taking care of the family without much help from their husbands. The burden was heavy, but they accepted without escape. Fulfilling the responsibilities was further reflected at the life-or-death moment. Before healthy Jewish mothers were sent to the gas chambers with their children, they actually had the choice of “presenting themselves to be selected as workers” (Zullo, 63). Nevertheless, most of them chose to stay, and wanted to die with their children. In coping with the terrible circumstances, women not only considered their own safety, but also their children’s. It was women’s strong sense of responsibility that led to the death of numerous young Jewish women. With mothers’ sacrifice, children would get a short period of relief before the death arrived. In comparison, fathers didn’t take those responsibilities, and sustained less than women did.

Jewish women sacrificed a lot during the Holocaust, and backed up the society as the mainstay instead of men. The life of every single Jew was dull, but under the same situation, women sustained much more than men did in the torturous time. Their roles, vulnerability and responsibility let them bear more. However, at the same time, those differences gave them a stage to show their strength, and made them more esteemed.

Citations:

Frank, Anne. *The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Bantam Books, 1993.13. Print.

Ofer, Dalia, and Lenore J. Weitzman. "Women in the Holocaust." *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. Jewish Women's Archive. 1 March 2009. Web. 12 April 2018.

Feldman, George. *Undertaking the Holocaust*. U.X.L. 1998. 264. Print.

Weitzman, Lenore J. "Women in the Holocaust." The Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme. United Nations. n.d. Web. 10 April 2018.

"Women during the Holocaust." *Holocaust Encyclopedia*. Holocaust Memorial Museum. 2018.Web. 11 April. 2018.

Zullo, Allan. *Escape*. New York: Scholastic, September 2009.63. Print.

Emanuel Ringelblum, *Diary and Notes from the War Period:Warsaw Ghetto*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1992. 51-52. Web.11 April. 2018.