

Gender Inequality and Violence Against Women and Girls Around the World

Around the world, violence and discrimination against women and girls violates their human rights and severely compromises young people's sexual and reproductive health. Harmful practices, including female genital cutting/mutilation, femicide, gender-based violence, and early marriage, damage girls' physical being and self-worth by reinforcing gender-based marginalization and inequality. Gender inequalities and biases pervade cultures worldwide, preventing women and girls from fully realizing their rights to reproductive health and equality.

Discrimination Against Women And Girls Often Begins At Conception, Especially In Parts Of India And South Asia.

- In parts of India and South Asia, there is a strong preference for having sons.¹ Girls can be perceived as a financial burden for the family due to small income contributions and costly dowry demands.²
- In India, pre-natal sex selection and infanticide accounted for the pre-natal termination and death of half a million girls per year over the last 20 years.¹
- In the Republic of Korea, 30 percent of pregnancies identified as female fetuses were terminated. Contrastingly, over 90 percent of pregnancies identified as male fetuses resulted in normal birth.¹
- According to China's 2000 census, the ratio of newborn girls to boys was 100:119. The biological standard is 100:103.³

The Rate Of Femicide (Murder Of Women And Girls) Has Significantly Escalated Over The Last Few Years.⁴

- In Mexico, the high murder and disappearance rate of young women in Ciudad Juarez has received international attention for the last ten years, with an alarming recent resurgence.⁵
- In Guatemala, the number of femicides has risen steadily from 303 in 2001 to 722 in 2007, with the majority of the victims between ages 16 and 30. A U.N. report found that femicides are inadequately investigated in Guatemala.⁶
- Throughout Latin America, inadequate record-keeping around domestic violence and the victim's relationship to the murderer results in a problem of underreporting of gender-based deaths.⁷

"Dowry Deaths" Are Responsible For The Murders Of Thousands Of Women Every Year, Especially In South Asia.

- In some areas if a bride cannot meet the financial demand of her dowry, she is subject to torture, harassment and death by the groom's family.¹
- UNFPA estimates that 5,000 women worldwide are burnt to death in murders disguised as 'kitchen accidents' each year because their dowry was considered insufficient.³
- In India and Pakistan, thousands of women are victims of dowry deaths.³ In India alone, there were almost 7,000 dowry deaths in 2005, with the majority of victims aged 15-34.⁸

“Honor Killings” Continue To Take Place In Pakistan, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Iran, Yemen, Morocco And Other Mediterranean And Gulf Countries.⁹

- Honor killings occur when women are put to death for an act that is perceived as bringing shame to their families; this can mean killing as punishment for adultery or even for being the victim of rape.⁹
- In Pakistan nearly 500 women a year are the victims of honor killings.¹⁰
- In a study of female deaths in Egypt, 47 percent of female rape victims were then killed because of the dishonor the rape was thought to bring to the family.³
- In 2002, 315 women and girls in Bangladesh endured another form of violence against women, acid attacks. In 2005, even after the introduction of more serious punishments for the crime, over 200 women were attacked.^{9,11}

Physical And Sexual Abuse Of Girls Is A Serious Concern Across All Regions.

- In Nigeria, a treatment center reported that 15 percent of female patients requiring treatment for sexually transmitted infections were under the age of five. An additional six percent were between the ages of six and fifteen.³
- In South Africa, one in four men report having had sex with a woman against her will by the time he was 18 years old.³
- Research conducted among young women in sub-saharan Africa found that partner violence and the fear of abuse stopped girls from saying “no” to sex and jeopardized condom use.¹²
- According to the Jamaica Reproductive Health Survey, approximately 20.3 percent of young women 15-19 years old report having been forced to have sexual intercourse at some point during their life. Overall, one-fifth of Jamaican women have experienced forced sexual intercourse.¹³
- A 2009 report released by the Colombian Inspector General’s Office showed that in Colombia, at least 27,000 women and girls experienced intimate partner violence last year – with 74 percent of these being “underage girls.”¹⁴
- In the United States, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 20 percent of young women experience intimate partner violence.¹⁵

Female Genital Cutting/Mutilation (FGC/M) Causes Serious Injury To Millions Of Young Women Every Year.

- FGC/M is the removal of all or part of the young woman’s genitalia for non-medical reasons. It is most prevalent in parts of West, East, and Northeast Africa, though also practiced in Asia, the Middle East and the immigrant populations of North America and Europe.⁹
- FGC/M is practiced for sociocultural and economic reasons. Family honor, the insurance of virginity until marriage, and social integration are often used as justifications for the procedure.¹⁶
- Between 100 and 140 million women and girls have undergone female genital mutilation worldwide and 3 million girls are at risk of the procedure each year in Africa.¹⁷
- A 2005 study found that in Egypt some 97 percent of women age 15-49 had undergone FGM. In Mali, 92 percent of women age 15-49 had undergone FGC/M in 2006; Burkina Faso, 77 percent; and North Sudan, 90 percent.¹⁸

Child Marriage Continues To Put Young Girls At Great Risk For Too-Early Pregnancy And Other Sexual And Reproductive Health Issues.

- In Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, more than 30 percent of young women between 15 and 19 are married.¹
- In Nepal, 40 percent of girls are married by age 15.¹⁹
- In 2005, the Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey concluded that in Ethiopia 62 percent of young women aged 20-49 married before age 18.²⁰
- Worldwide, approximately 14 million women and girls between the ages of 15 and 19 give birth each year.²¹
- Early pregnancy and childbirth have severe consequences for adolescent mothers including complications at birth, obstetric fistula and death, often linked to unsafe abortions.²²

Cross-Generational Sex Poses Numerous Risks To Young Women.

- Particularly in parts of sub-Saharan Africa, socioeconomic pressures force many unmarried 15-19 year old women to engage in sexual activity with a male partner at least 10 years her senior in exchange for material goods, money or higher social status.²²
- Based on 2006 Demographic and Health Surveys, among young women ages 15-19, 21 percent in Nigeria, 7.5 percent in Lesotho, and 9.5 in Uganda reported they had recently engaged in high-risk sex with a partner 10 or more years their senior.²²
- Girls and young women involved in cross-generational sex have a severely reduced capacity to negotiate condom use, putting them at high risk for HIV infection. As such, young women 15-24 years old are three times more likely to be infected with HIV than young men age 15-24.²²

Advocates For Gender Equality And Reproductive Justice Are Making Progress.

- In Senegal, Tostan, a community-led development project, has successfully empowered thousands of African villages to abandon female genital mutilation and child marriage. Since 1997, 3,548 villages in Senegal, 298 villages in Guinea, and 23 villages in Burkina Faso have eliminated FGM through community-wide education on health, human rights and responsibilities and autonomy.²³ At present, over 2,460 villages have banned child marriage through public declaration.
- In Ethiopia, USAID and 3,700 local public schools have created girls' advisory groups to prevent early marriage and encourage all girls to attend school. Through conversations with parents, instructors, and religious leaders regarding the risks of child marriage and the benefits of education, this program is responsible for preventing over 4,000 child marriages and increasing the number of Ethiopian girls in school.²⁴
- In 2003, Mexico established the Special Commission to Monitor Investigations of Femicide, which is working to raise awareness of the severity of violence against women among legislators in Mexico. The Commission is also broadening this dialogue by hosting workshops for legislators from Guatemala, Spain and Mexico to discuss the existence, implications and solutions for violence against women in Latin America.⁴
- In 2004, the Young Empowered and Healthy (Y.E.A.H.) Initiative was established in Uganda by a group of local organizations, under the Uganda AIDS Commission HIV/AIDS Partnership, to reduce the incidence of HIV and early pregnancy. Through its first youth-developed campaign, "Something for Something Love," Y.E.A.H. used media and community outreach strategies, including the "Rock Point 256" radio drama series, to educate youth on safe and healthy relationships and in particular to avoid coercive cross-generational relationships.²⁵

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