



# GENDER EQUALITY: THE KEY TO ENDING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In the 1993 **Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women**, the UN General Assembly recognized that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women.

## WHAT IS GENDER INEQUALITY?

The World Health Organization defines sex as “the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women.” Gender is defined as the “socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.” Gender is chiefly about the characteristics and roles that societies attribute to women and men. Gender is not “predetermined” – it is constructed by societies.

Gender inequality occurs when men have a higher status over women and have the ability to control women in different spheres of life.

## GENDER INEQUALITY IN PRACTICE

- There is no country where women and men are equal in all spheres of life. Women and girls are given inferior status and protection before the law, limited and restricted access to services (health, financial, education), unequal access to and control over resources including land, property and income, less food, poverty and marginalization.
- There is compelling evidence that gender is the most significant predictor of poverty and powerlessness.
- This discrimination happens because of the belief that, because of their gender, women are inferior to men, and therefore should not be treated equally.

Recognizing these links, the 2000 Millennium Development Goals acknowledge gender equality as a prerequisite to eradicating poverty and promoting development. Governments agreed in the MDGs “to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combat poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate development that is truly sustainable.”

Violence against women is caused by gender inequality – including unequal power relations between women and men, rigid gender roles, norms and hierarchies, and ascribing women lower status in society. Promoting and achieving gender equality is a critical element of the prevention of violence against women.

## GENDER INEQUALITY & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Achieving gender equality means eradicating all forms of discrimination against women and removing barriers that prevent women from being fully equal with men and realizing their rights. One of the most widespread and pervasive barriers is violence against women.

*Achieving gender equality means eradicating all forms of discrimination against women.*

- Violence against women is fundamental violation of women’s and girls’ basic human rights (including the right to life and the right to bodily integrity), and is a barrier to women’s full participation in all spheres of life.
- Violence against women is both a cause and consequence of gender inequality and is an abuse of the power imbalance between women and men. It is a means of social control that maintains unequal power relations between women and men and reinforces women’s subordinate status.
- Violence against women is used to enforce gender roles and norms, assumes that women are inferior to men, and that men have the right to control women.<sup>2</sup>

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In 1998, the Commission on the Status of Women at its 42nd meeting agreed to “Work to create violence-free societies by implementing participatory educational programmes on human rights, conflict resolution and gender equality, for women and men of all ages, beginning with girls and boys, (Agreed Conclusions CSW 42, 1998) barrier to women’s full participation in all spheres of life.

- With up to 70 percent of women experiencing physical or sexual violence from men in their lifetime<sup>3</sup>, this commitment to ending violence against women is more relevant now than ever.

*Violence, perpetuated because of gender inequality, affects women at every phase in their lives.*

PHASE <sup>4</sup>	TYPE
Prenatal	Prenatal sex selection, battering during pregnancy, coerced pregnancy
Infancy	Female infanticide, neglect, emotional and physical abuse, differential access to food and medical care
Childhood	Genital mutilation/cutting; incest and sexual abuse; differential access to food, medical care, and education; children who are engaged in sex work, differential access to food and medical care, early and forced marriage
Adolescence	Dating and courtship violence, sexual abuse in the workplace, economically coerced sex, rape, sexual harassment, forced sex work, differential access to food and medical care
Reproductive/ Adulthood	Abuse of women by intimate partners, marital rape, dowry abuse and murders, partner homicide, psychological abuse, sexual abuse in the workplace, sexual harassment, rape, abuse of women with disabilities, differential access to food and medical care, coerced pregnancy, forced sterilization
Old Age	Abuse of widows, elder abuse (which affects mostly women), differential access to food and medical care

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Member States must:

- Address gender inequality as a core element of efforts to tackle violence against women.
- Promote, protect and fulfill the human rights of women and girls, including, among others, their right to the highest attainable standard of health; their right to have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality, including sexual and reproductive health, free of discrimination, coercion and violence; and their reproductive rights.
- Develop policies and programmes to promote education for women and girls as a means of empowering and protecting them and achieving gender equality in society, along with programmes to address potential backlash.
- Ensure that programmes to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger are designed specifically to promote women’s economic participation, independence and sexual and reproductive autonomy, and incorporate linkages to programmes to prevent violence and provide services to female survivors of violence.
- Ensure that efforts to reduce maternal, infant and child mortality and morbidity include measures to reduce partner violence against women, and to support women’s rights to choose when and whether they want to have children.
- Involve men and boys in programmes to prevent violence against women.
- Amend old or adopt new legislation to address sexual and domestic violence that is in line with international best practice standards and commitments to comply with human rights treaties.

### REFERENCES

- 1 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) defined violence against women and girls as “...any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”
- 2 Secretary-General’s in-depth study on all forms of violence against women. (A/61/122/Add.1) 2006
- 3 WHO. November 2012. Fact sheet 239: Violence against women. Geneva, 2012.
- 4 Table adapted from: Heise, L. Violence Against Women: The Hidden Health Burden. World Bank Discussion Paper. Washington. D.C. 1994.