



A GLIMPSE AT LIFE FOR WOMEN TODAY

10 EXAMPLES OF GENDER INEQUALITY AROUND THE WORLD - MOLLY EDMONDS

“No society treats its women as well as its men.” That’s the conclusion from the UN Development Programme, as written in its 1997 Human Development Report. This report, as well as every other report that followed, has highlighted that each country falls short here in some respect, or many. The severity of this shortfall varies by country; Nordic countries such as Sweden, Norway and Iceland are routinely hailed as having the smallest gender gaps in the world today; however, women face unfairness that can be hard to fathom. We’ll take a trip around the world to examine 10 examples of gender inequality existing today.

10: Professional Obstacles

Women fought for decades to take their place in work alongside men, but the fight isn’t over yet. The US Census (2010) established that women earn just 77% of what men earn for the same amount of work. In addition, there is often the glass ceiling when it comes to promotions, women in business leadership is a debatable point everywhere and the woman who takes time off to have children often suffers discrimination. Jobs such as teaching and nursing are still seen as traditional women’s work and are often some of the lowest-paying fields worldwide. For some women, there is the right to go from home to the workplace, but other women have no right to leave their own homes.

9: Limited Mobility

Saudi Arabia provides the most extreme example of limited mobility for women as women are not allowed to drive a car or ride a bicycle on public roads. Strict Islamic law prohibits women from leaving home without a man’s permission. Other countries restrict women’s overseas travel by limiting their access to passports, and even women in developed countries may complain of restricted mobility.

8: Violence

In 2008 U.N. Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon reported that one in every three women is “likely to be beaten, coerced into sex or otherwise abused in her lifetime.” In the developed and developing world violence against women in the form of rape, spousal abuse, child abuse or spousal killing is routine behaviour and might not even make the news. In conflict zones violence against women and children is increasingly used as a weapon of war. In other countries, marital rape is condoned. In developed societies women are often blamed and questions about their actions if they are the victims of rape or physical abuse. For many women violence is a stigma and goes unreported, so we never know the true extent of the problem.

7: Feticide and Infanticide

You’ll often hear expectant parents say that they don’t care if they have a boy or a girl, as long as the baby is healthy. In China and India, as just two examples, a male child is more valuable than a female child, and this gender bias causes parents to make decisions. With advances in genetic testing they may elect to end a pregnancy. China’s earlier emphasis on the one child policy may have led to many sex-selective abortions. In India there were 927 girls per 1000 boys born in 2001. The female foetuses and infants who are killed are sometimes referred to as the world’s “missing women.”



6: Restricted Land Ownership

In China and Lesotho, as examples, women lack the right to own land as deeds must include the name of a man, her husband or father. If one of these men were to die, the woman has no legal claim to land that she may have lived on or worked all her life. Widows are often left homeless; women remain in abusive marriages so that they won't lose a place to live. Such restricted rights can be particularly frustrating in rural areas where agriculture is dominant. The inability to hold land is a factor in the next item on our list.

5: The Feminization of Poverty

More than 1.5 billion people in the world live on less than one dollar a day, and the majority of these people are women. The U.N. often cites the statistic that women do two-thirds of the world's work, receive 10% of the world's income and own 1% of the means of production. Land is a major factor for securing credit from financial associations or co-ops, which means that women cannot apply for loans if they are essentially managing a farm while the husband is absent (military service; incarcerated etc.). Without financial support, the woman cannot upgrade her equipment, expand production or deal with competition. Small loan banks are attempting to assist women as they undertake small business ventures to combat the feminization of poverty. The Millennium Development Goals have also focused on this issue to improve the lot for women.

4: Access to Health Care

World Health Organisation statistics show that a woman dies in childbirth every minute of every day. That is more than 500 000 deaths per annum. In developed countries care in pregnancy and childbirth is taken for granted but millions live in different circumstances. Many deaths in pregnancy and childbirth could have been prevented if the woman had been allowed to leave her home for treatment and simple procedures, or if she had a skilled attendant by her side at the time of birth. A growing number of women are now infected with HIV/AIDS; in Sub-Saharan Africa women form half of the infected persons; husbands are adulterous and there is no freedom for the women to escape the marriage.

3: Freedom to Marry and Divorce

In Australia and the US love is a subject for romantic comedy but in some countries, love may not enter the discussion at all when it comes to marriage. Young girls are forced to marry men two or three times their age. Marriage is often an agreement based on other considerations: The Canadian Press (2007) condemned a father's agreement to engage his daughter to a seven year old cousin. According to UNICEF, more than one-third of women aged 20-24 were married before they turned 18, which is considered the minimum legal age of marriage in most countries. Child brides give birth at early ages, with an increase in complications in childbirth, and the risk of post-natal infection. Their education and any general skills' development contributing to personal independence are curtailed. Options are limited for many women to leave a marriage; the court automatically grants custody of children to the husband; there is no financial report for the woman and the woman is often treated as an out-cast.



2: Political Participation

Analysts often posit that many of the issues on this list could be solved if women had higher levels of political participation. Despite making up half the global population, women hold only 15.6% of elected parliamentary seats in the world. They are missing at all levels - local, regional and national. A study that examined women in leadership in Bolivia, Cameroon and Malaysia found that when women could take part in shaping spending priorities, they were more likely to invest in family and community resources, health, education and the eradication of poverty than men, who were more likely to invest in the military. Some countries have experimented with quota systems to increase female participation and even in developed nations this is often criticised as women getting involved simply because they are women, as opposed to their qualifications.

1: Educational Attainment

Of the children that aren't in school right now, the majority of them are girls. Women make up more than two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults. Girls are often kept out of school to help with household chores and that happens everywhere! If a family has money to educate one child only, that will be the eldest boy. Girls who complete school are less likely to marry young, more likely to have smaller families and exhibit better health outcomes in relation to maternal mortality and HIV/AIDS. Moreover, when a girl is educated there are clear positive communal outcomes.

- An abridged overview based on the internet article of the same title.



QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION & SHARING:

- How does this article connect with what you read and hear in the media each day?
- As sisters to all women, what moves us and with whom might we link in addressing some of these inequalities?

PRAYER: *Loving God, you created us in your image, male and female you created us. Yet, in a myriad of ways women are still not recognized as such. They are denied their rights in both society and in the Church. We cry out to you as Esther cried for her people. Stay with us as we who have been gifted in so many ways claim our birthright and work to bring justice for all people. Amen.*