

United Nations Women Chair Report

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Committee topics:

1. The question of domestic violence.
2. Addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality in education

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1. Committee Introduction

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, otherwise known as UN Women, was established in 2010 through unanimous decision by the General Assembly under resolution 64/289. In the creation of such a committee, four previously separate UN components were brought into one. The following entities of the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) were all streamlined into helping to establish and coordinate global efforts towards reaching the UN sustainable development goals, in which elimination of gender inequality was a primary focus.

The entity is governed by a multi-tiered intergovernmental governance structure which consists of several UN bodies responsible for the normative policies and principles guiding the organisation. Such bodies are; the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). The Executive Board of the UN women committee is further responsible for the oversight and provision of operational policies. The Board consists of forty one members elected by the Economic and Social Council and serve a term turnover of three years, ensuring that proper democratic procedures are carried out. Minimum quotas are set for sub-member groups of the UN with two remaining seats reserved for developing country representatives who are not members of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (DAC/OECD).

The UN women entity is committed to tackling global women's issues through the development and improvement of Women's Intergovernmental agencies, including, but not limited to the Commission on the Status of Women, in their creation of global policies, standards, and norms. These policies aim to set the international precedent in dealing with such matters and ensuring there is a co-ordinated and consistent global response in line with the United Nations principles of equity and justice. Issues include the disproportionate under provision of education, resources and rights allocated to women and young girls, from an array of socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. A policy of non-discrimination is paramount in the achievement of such listed policies and aims. While many social-economic issues are addressed by various UN bodies, such as ECOSOC, UN Women focus predominantly on the issues and situations that arise through gender disparity and discrimination.

Agenda 1: The question of domestic violence.

1. Agenda Introduction

i) General Overview

The first agenda in need of addressing is the growing concern of domestic violence which has seen a reported rise of fifty to sixty percent based on calls to Domestic Violence Women's Organisations Helplines during the course of the Covid-19 Pandemic. The World Health Organisation's Regional Offices for the Mediterranean report the second highest (37%) prevalence of violence against women worldwide. Reports suggest that additional financial and social stress, losing a job, redundancy and potential 'covid anxiety' has contributed to the rise in 'aggressive tendencies' displayed by romantic partners or family members. Along with the introduction of lockdown measures, the time spent at home and around aggressive family members has significantly increased, thus making women and children vulnerable to violent attacks or outbreaks.

ii) Key Terms:

a) Domestic Violence

: any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) that occurs between adults who are or have been intimate, partners or family members.

b) UN Declaration of Human Rights

: an international document adopted by the United Nations General Assembly that enshrines the rights and freedoms of all human beings.

c) Discrimination

: the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people or things, on the grounds of race, age, or sex.

2. History

The History of domestic violence is one that has perpetrated all of known history. While the origins still remain somewhat of a topic of debate, many historians point towards the rise of male dominance rooted in religion as a main driving point. Sarah Pomeroy, an American professor of Classics, described in her books the commonality of a husband to 'discipline' his wife, had she been acting accordingly to her husband. Saint Augustine dating back to 430 AD, accounts that "wives often bore the marks of blows", and his mother, (saint) Monica, patiently tolerated her husband's violence. Past explanations for the violence and aggression towards women stemmed

often from the pressure of patriarchal values, and the desire for men to prove strength and assertiveness. Religious texts and ancient religious fables often depict stories of excessive violence and punishment. One such tale tells the story of Dinah (Genesis 34), who was raped at the hands of prince Shechem. While her father arranged a marriage with the prince to undo the 'sin', her brothers sought vengeance upon the prince, by killing every man in his village and taking their wives and children. The story is one such demonstration of how women are perceived with such little power to protect themselves, and the expectations of violence and aggression men 'should' display.

Until the 1970's, 'wife-beating' was still considered a relatively trivial offence by law enforcement, and often brushed off with 'a light slap on the wrist'. It further made its way into popular culture, with the rise of 'rape jokes' and a culture of accepted sexism. Today, domestic violence is still an increasingly worrying issue, particularly amidst the current COVID-19 pandemic and increasing economic, social stress combined with lockdown measures in many countries, which sets a perfect scene for the increasing rates of domestic violence reports.

3. Stance of involved of Nations

China: Intimate partner violence (IPV) by a man toward a woman is the most common form of domestic abuse in China. It was reported that in 2005, 1 out of 4 Chinese women experienced physical violence from their partner in the past year. Historically, Chinese families follow a hierarchical structure where men exercise dominance by having the authority to make household decisions, and generally having the most power in any dynamic. As a consequence of this structure, wife-beating is considered an acceptable form of asserting male dominance and still a regularly occurring practice in the early 20th century.

Poland: A study commissioned by the government has found that 57% of Poles say they have experienced some form of domestic violence in their lives. Among women, the figure is 63%. Under new legislation, in Poland, perpetrators of domestic violence will be immediately separated from their victims. Under the new law, police will have power to issue orders forbidding offenders who "endanger the life or health of household members" from entering the household or its immediate surroundings for 14 days. This period has the ability to be extended under an expedited court procedure upon the victim's request.

Saudi Arabia: In Saudi Arabia, cultural taboos rooted within the country allow for domestic violence to be very prevalent. Being a predominantly male dominated culture, citizens often see men exhibiting greater control over decision making, where women, due to the notion that they are responsible for keeping the family intact, avoid speaking up or asking for assistance when in an unhappy or abusive relationship.

Switzerland: Domestic violence and general violence towards women is common in Switzerland, with violence related deaths occurring every 2.5 weeks. On April 1st, 2018, Switzerland ratified the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, requiring them to make consistent progress in developing their measures on prevention, victim protection and prosecution practices with respect to violence against women.

4. Potential solutions and outlook

To address the issue of domestic violence, a multi-pronged approach must be implemented. Focus should lie in provision of the necessary educational, psychiatric and medical resources and services to the general public and survivors of domestic violence. Increased economic independence may lessen interdependence on abusive partners or family members and allow physical and financial freedom. Widespread training and awareness campaigns must be considered to equip teachers, employers, caretakers to correctly handle domestic violence incidents. Legal procedures and criminal sentencing regarding domestic violence should also be re-evaluated given the remarkable low conviction rates of domestic abuse allegations. Furthermore, the establishment of greater rehabilitation and learning programs may be considered in regards to re-educating perpetrators of domestic violence. Psychological, physical care and therapy may be included. To combat cultural issues and taboos, there must be greater care over the use and misuse of 'common language' and popular media. There may be a push for greater regulation.

5. Conclusion

Combating this issue requires delegates to consider an extensive, multi-faceted approach in response to the threat of domestic violence. Great care needs to be exercised when dealing with such a topic as to ensure the physical and emotional safety of all parties involved in. A solution should be put forward as a long-term generational change in the attitudes, behaviours and patterns of domestic violence, aiding the understanding of the general public as well as the support and care of survivors of domestic violence.

6. Questions to consider

- a) Should the UN Women entity extend its audience to include male survivors of domestic violence? How would this change impact the perceptions and functioning of the entity?
- b) *Should* we always believe the victim?
- c) How far does the role of culture and religion extend so far as to provide a justification for discrimination against women?

- d) Has the 'criteria' for what is considered domestic violence become more lenient?
- e) Is it possible for the issue of domestic violence to be improved without the potential infringement on the personal liberties of rights to privacy of individuals? If not, is such intervention justifiable?
- f) How far should Kantian principles be upheld in respect to responding to domestic violence?

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**Agenda 2: Addressing gender disparities and promoting gender equality
in education.**

1. Agenda Introduction

i) General Overview

The second agenda in need of addressing is the issues of gender disparities and promoting gender equality in education. At current, there are 129 million girls worldwide, out of school, with particular focus on under-education in rural areas. In line with research carried out by UN Women, an estimated 39% of girls living in rural areas will attend secondary school, in comparison with 45% of boys surveyed in the same area. However, this does not just impact the development of young girls but carries forward issues into adulthood, as women make up two thirds of the illiterate population of 796 million people worldwide. Further implications run much deeper in regards to the social cultural setbacks that women face as a result of the discrepancies in education. A report conducted by 'The State of Food and Agriculture' suggested in Tanzania women worked 14 more hours a week than men due to the nature of low-value and low-skilled employment, resulting in educational discrepancies. This generates much deeper issues which may stem into overdependence on a male counterpart and infringement on financial and social liberties (including but not limited to, low credit, inability to open a bank account, inability to access their own trusts/finances). The clear link to domestic violence and indirect methods of control as in Peru, with a reported 60% of undereducated women in rural areas experiencing at least one instance of domestic violence.

ii) Key Terms:

a) Discrepancies

: differences or inconsistencies between variables

b) Gender disparity

: differences in women's and men's access to resources, status and well-being, which usually favour men and are often institutionalized through law, justice and social norms.

c) Gender equality

: the state of equal access to resources, treatment, opportunities (financial, social, economic, religious, cultural), and basic needs, irrespective of gender.

d) Undereducation

: receiving less than sufficient access, years, quality or level of education required of the law or in comparison to male counterparts.

e) Rural

: characteristics of a geographical area located outside of a town or city.

f) Illiterate

: unable to read or write.

2. History

Educational discrepancies between men and women can be traced back to the nature of prehistoric schooling. Records of the earliest Aztec schools (Calmecac) consisted of rigorous military training designed to 'raise a person' or 'tlacahuapahualiztli' which directly translates as 'to bring up a man'. Naturally, such language and direction towards male-centric schooling excludes women from the scope of education. More pre-modern cathedral schools drew heavy influence from the Old Testament and Biblical stories describing the role of women as being a pillar to home life and had very little place if any in the church and wider community, as told by Corinthians 14:34-35. The requirement for women to birth and rear children further contributed to the view that education, of subjects such as mathematics, literature and science, were useless contributions to the role of women and discouraged. Overtime, the lack of access to education saw the rise of a new stance; women being less intelligent and less independent than men. This further fueled the fallacy that women were not suited to formal education and employment in the same way men were. As a result, women in the US did not receive the right to vote until 1920, 50 years after men, paternity leave was not legally recognized in India until 1972, 9 years after the Maternity Benefit Act, and Russia only reports 21.62% of the working population being female. This demonstrates the long-term impacts on women's rights, historically, and the future impacts regarding employability and social expectations regarding maternity.

3. Stance of involved of Nations

Algeria: Like many countries, education in Algeria was long reserved as a privilege for men, however, since its independence in 1962, one of the main priorities of the country was to bring all children to school. Half a century later, the goal to eradicate illiteracy and guarantee basic education to all children regardless of sex has been almost completely met. Now, the gender imbalance within education in Algeria has reemerged at the secondary and higher education levels, however, this time in favour of girls.

Chad: In addition to the chronic lack of female teachers in Chad's education system, the country is deeply marked by the gender disparities in education, reflected in their illiteracy rate for females (86%) being much higher than that of males (69%). With the large gap showing unequal access to education, generally, the rate of schooling for both sexes in Chad is already low in primary education, further dropping in the transition between primary and secondary education.

Germany: Germany has seen many initiatives in promoting gender equality in academia, mainly resulting from legal obligations, as well as incentives provided by policy and stimulatory initiatives. The 2021 “She Figures” report showed that 89 % of German higher education institutions and 62% of public research organisations have taken actions or measures towards gender equality.

India: In India, inequality in access to education between genders is visible in their childhood literacy rates, where 82% of boys are literate in comparison to 65% of girls. In addition to poverty and cultural practises within India, a lack of sanitation in schools across the country is included in the obstacles girls face to education. It has been reported that 23% of girls leave their studies once they hit puberty in India, or miss as many as 50 school days a year as a result of menstruation.

4. Potential outlooks and solutions

1. Governments may provide incentives to parents to keep their children in school, more specifically their daughters. This may include monetary incentives based on attendance, the ban of child labour to release the pressure on children to work, or provision free education.
2. Enable proper sanitation in schools, allowing for children to continue schooling without the fear of sacrificing their health and wellbeing. Including but not limited to mandatory health classes, provision of free hand sanitizer and soap, adequate hand washing and waste disposal systems.
3. Provide free transport systems, such as shuttle buses to increase accessibility for more distant households and children unable to commute.
4. Construction plans for the building of more schools in rural areas to increase access to schooling for impoverished households.

5. Conclusion

To combat this issue, not only do solutions to fight deep rooted cultural taboos need to be implemented, but also ones that can be sustained through generations. Not only will addressing the gender disparities within education promote gender equality within schools, but will address the inequalities and issues faced by women once entering adulthood, including the overdependence on their male counterparts due to a lack of knowledge on subjects needed to live and go through life independently.

6. Questions to consider

- a) What are other ways can gender disparities in education affect a country?
(i.e. fertility rate)

- b) How can we fight the cultural taboos that result in keeping girls out of school?
- c) How does promoting gender equality in education lead to gender equality in other areas?
- d) To what extent should we respect the traditions in place for women to stay at home while their male counterparts attend school?

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