

Forum: Human Rights Council

Issue: The question of eliminating all forms of discrimination against women and girls

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Introduction

Gender discrimination is a concept progression initiated by sexism, misogyny and the development of the patriarchy. For centuries, from suffragist movements to the #MeToo movement, gender discrimination is an issue at the forefront of the public sphere and one that remains at the tip of our tongues.

Gender discrimination is a subject that, in the majority, affect women and girls far more than other genders. From inequality spreading between The Gender Wage Gap to the Sexual Assault rates, women are at the forefront of the victims and men at the forefront of the perpetrators. The patriarchy and the way that society has wired our mindsets to what we are forced to believe, as well as the lack of perception of what is right and wrong play a large role in the acts of violence and discrimination against women and girls. The ideas that: women are inferior to men, women are objects of desire and nothing more, women have one objective of existence and that is to obey men, all play a role in igniting the inequality.

Inequality, which stems and manifests itself into different spheres is always reinforced by an oppressive system; an oppressive system that allows for the inequality to grow and expand as one party continually benefits and as another disadvantages. To address the topic of eliminating gendered discrimination against women and girls entirely we first have to identify the root of the problem, discover the heart of the inequality. The

Patriarchy is a cultural and societal complement of every norm embedded within humanity and encased into a reality with privileged men. However, The Patriarchy would be worthless without another larger, more powerful system acting as its back brace - Capitalism.

In the face of justice, at work, and in everyday life, violence, rhetoric, and stereotypes naturalise and excuse asymmetrical gender relations. Under Capitalism, the sexual division of labour - whether paid or domestic - is one of the foundations for the creation of gender identities, which forces individuals to conform to pre-established roles, obstructing all perspectives of freedom and true equality. Women's roles and perceptions have been historically altered in connection to economic changes, notably in Western Europe, the birthplace of capitalism. Therefore, Capitalism and patriarchy end up supporting one another as a result of economic and social developments. In simple terms: Capitalism openly supports The Patriarchy by enabling female subjugation. The Patriarchy, on the other hand, is beneficial to Capitalism because it offers an undervalued population from whom it can draw the greatest advantage and efficiency. This is why progressive activists often claim that it is naive to assume that gender equality and female liberation can be attained by rights, reforms and legislation. These activists promote systemic change to combat a systemic issue. However, that does not mean progress cannot be made through legislation, it already has, but it is incredibly relevant to question whether gender discrimination against women and children can be eliminated simply through legal reform.

While measures have been put into place to battle the issues regarding gender disparities against women and girls, by no means is it eliminated. Policies that have been implemented lack systemic change, enforcement or scope, while many governments culturally are reluctant to pour resources into the development of the female population. In accordance to Sustainable Development Goal 5, 10 and 16 (Gender Equality, Reduced Inequalities and Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions respectively), the UN, specifically

The United Nations Human Rights Council - should address this problem urgently, remembering that billions of lives and the well-being of half of our population will continue to be at risk.

Definition of Key Terms

Gender Inequality

The unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals based on their gender.

Gender wage gap

The systemic differences between the average wages or salaries of men and those of women.

Feminism

A social theory or political movement which argues that legal and social restrictions on women must be removed in order to bring about equality of the sexes in all aspects of public and private life.

Female Genital Mutilation

The partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injuries to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.

Intersectionality

The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups.

Capitalism

An economic system is characterized by private or corporate ownership of capital goods, by investments that are determined by private decisions, and by prices, production, and the distribution of goods that are determined mainly by competition in a free market.

Gender Roles

Sets of social and behavioural norms that are generally considered appropriate for either a man or a woman in a social or interpersonal relationship.

Social Constructionism

The idea that social institutions and knowledge are created by actors within the system, rather than having any inherent truth on their own.

The Patriarchy

The dominance of men in social or cultural systems.

Sociobiology

The modern term for using biological explanations to explain social phenomena

Key Issues

The Patriarchy and Its Consequence of Perception

People in every community, whether male and female, are expected to play a specific role. This role internalisation occurs as a result of The Patriarchy and a gender socialisation process. Historically, the female's anticipated role performance placed her in a subordinate position in the social system. Men have controlled all institutions—social, economic, political, religious, and ideological. Despite legislative efforts, customary solutions and educating attitudes, behaviours continue to discriminate against women, and no country can claim to have achieved full gender equality.

The term "gender" developed as a tool for analysing gender disparities caused by patriarchal institutional systems. It began with a gender role assessment, followed by a gender analysis, gender requirements, gender interests, and gender views. These gender roles are internalised and viewed as a fundamental part of the perception of the 'right' world. This encourages a closed mindset and aggravates the inequality against women as they are constantly being viewed as less than or inferior.

This perception is at the core of discrimination and inequality against women, to change this perception means rewiring the way the world works.

Gender Wage Gap

Despite the fact that women make up over half of the workforce, they are still paid less than males. They have a higher percentage of college degrees than men. Hispanic and African American women are paid less than males. For every 40 hours worked by an American woman, she receives only 80 cents for every dollar earned by a man. Wage discrimination is a reality.

Motherhood is frequently cited as one of the factors contributing to the development of a gender wage pay disparity, although the roots of the pay gap are more complex than a single factor. Women regularly enter and leave employment at a higher rate than males, according to some sources, while others argue that work is organised around gender norms that reward men since men are the norm on which labour is founded.

In MEDCs one of the common causes for the wage disparity is occupation and employment locations spearheaded by gender roles. After college, most women work as administrative assistants or teachers, whereas men are more statistically

likely to work in management, finance, engineering, computer science, and economics. This isn't because women can't work in these sectors but because they are male-dominated and that increases the likelihood of discrimination, crimes and inequality against women. Therefore, they resort to the reliable safety net of gender role affirmed occupations. This eventually reinforces the pre-existing, pre-conceived notions and stereotypes about women due to their lack of participation in traditionally male-dominated fields.

In LEDCs however, the situation is entirely different. Because of the lack of financial incentives and the need for traditional homemakers, women are forced into the role without much choice. Girls often also don't have access to higher education and in some cases, their caregivers refuse to pay or enrol girls into an education system. Therefore, the wage gap is statistically higher in LEDCs compared to MEDCs because women aren't given the opportunity to occupy higher-paying roles without a degree and they can't obtain said degree because of stereotypically reinforced gender roles.

Violence and Abuse Against Women and Children

Violence against women is a problem that affects all countries, including those that have achieved significant progress in other areas. 35% of women worldwide have suffered physical and/or sexually intimate relationship violence or non-partner sexual violence. The discourse about violence against women often revolves around the topics of physical and sexual harassment but violence against women can also include: female genital mutilation, psychological abuse, emotional abuse and much more. Each type of abuse leaves a prominent impact and results in long-lasting trauma.

Sexual Harassment/ Assault

Sexual harassment is a major issue concerning women and girls in MEDCs and LEDCs alike. This type of abuse links back to the idea of perceiving women as inferior to men. Because of this, men - who are the majority of perpetrators of this violence - believe that they can take advantage of a woman or girl's body. The abusive individual may even use oppression systems already set in our society to assert their privileges against the other person.

Globally, violence against women disproportionately affects low- and lower-middle-income countries and regions. Thirty-seven per cent of women aged 15 to 49 living in countries classified by the Sustainable Development Goals as “least developed” have been subject to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life. Twenty-two per cent of women living in “least developed countries” have been subjected to intimate partner violence in 2018—substantially higher than the world average of 13 per cent. LEDCs suffer the consequences of sexual harassment at a higher rate because stereotypes and misogynistic mindsets are more prevalent in these regions and therefore sexual assault is a common consequence.

However, Fewer than 40% of women/girls who have experienced violence seek any type of assistance. In the majority of nations having statistics on this problem, the majority of women/girls who seek aid turn to family and friends, with relatively few turning to formal institutions such as police and health services. Fewer than 10% of individuals seeking assistance turned to the police. This continues to drive the vicious cycle of sexual harassment as abusers don't get reported and cases continue to rise at a rate higher than police institutions can handle. This results in more women and girls getting assaulted and less getting help.

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female Genital Mutilation - otherwise known as Female Circumcision - is interesting in retrospect to other types of abuse against women and children because the main perpetrators of this type of abuse are women, women who are close to the victims. Female Genital Mutilation is mostly common in girls ageing 3-15 in countries of East Asia and Africa and is usually practised to increase male pleasure during sexual intercourse and completely eliminate female pleasure.

This practice is deeply rooted in misogyny as it conforms to the notion that women in these regions will not find a husband if they don't undergo this practice. It also completely disregards the relevance of female pleasure and disregards it as a sacrifice for heightened male pleasure. This also conforms to the perception that women should be willing to sacrifice their needs if it is to benefit their male counterparts and it is their 'duty to do so.

Aside from the physical abuse entailed with this practice, it also leaves a prominent scar in the form of emotional and psychological trauma. Girls as young as 3 or 4 years old have to withstand the pain and force of this practice and carry around the physical implications for the rest of their life. There isn't a way to reverse this practice entirely but in some cases, Vaginal Reconstruction surgery can be done to restore feeling to the nerve endings. However, it is incredibly expensive and often not available in the hospitals near these regions; additionally, as this practice is mostly done in LEDCs, the women and girls might not have the financial resources to obtain the surgery.

More than 200 million girls and women alive today have been subjected to the practice and Female Genital Mutilation has no health advantages and affects girls and women in a variety of ways. It entails the removal and damage of healthy and normal female genital tissue, as well as interfering with the natural processes of girls' and women's bodies. FGM hazards often rise with severity (which here

correlates to the quantity of tissue destroyed), however, all kinds of FGM are associated with higher risks.

The World Health Organization performed research on the economic expenses of treating FGM-related health problems and discovered that the current expenditures for 27 countries where data was available were 1.4 billion USD during a one-year period (2018). If FGM prevalence continues unhinged, this figure is anticipated to climb to 2.3 billion in 30 years (2047), representing a 68 per cent increase in the costs of inactivity. However, if nations stop performing FGM, these expenses will drop by 60% over the following 30 years.

Major Parties Involved and Their Views

UN Women

On July 2, 2010, the United Nations General Assembly agreed overwhelmingly to establish a single UN body charged with advancing progress toward gender equality and women's empowerment - UN Women. Since its dawn, UN Women has taken the charge in solving inequality through International Relations worldwide and continue on their mission with the perspective of the time-intensive Sustainable Development Goals.

As UN Women understand, sexual assault is one of the leading consequences of inequality and therefore their solutions to tackle that issue have been plentiful. The 1993 General Assembly Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women included “a precise and complete definition of violence against women [as well as] a clear declaration of the rights to be implemented to guarantee the elimination of violence against women in all its forms.” However, their struggle starts with implementing the legislation into action. LEDCs often don't have the resources and money to fund these campaigns and when The UN aids them

financially, they still have trouble implementing these solutions in an effective manner.

UN Women also focuses on changing the mindsets as well as everyday nuances of behaviour towards discrimination. Given the importance of language in creating cultural and societal attitudes, UN women believe that adopting gender-inclusive language is an effective method to promote gender equality and eliminate gender prejudice. Gender language inclusion is speaking and writing in a way that does not discriminate against a certain sex, social gender, or gender identity, and that does not promote gender stereotypes. UN Women has organised programs around the world to educate the youth on gender-inclusive language and fight for its importance in national curriculums. For example, in South Asian countries, they ran an initiative to embed more gender-inclusive language within the curriculum(s) and encouraged teachers and students alike to use it in casual conversation as well.

Yemen

Women have been suffering from profoundly ingrained gender inequality rooted in a patriarchal culture with fixed gender roles for 13 straight years, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap index. While the Yemeni crisis has had a heinous impact on all people, women and girls have been disproportionately afflicted. Women's vulnerability to violence has been exacerbated by negative gender stereotypes and patriarchal attitudes, a biased judicial system, and economic inequalities.

Yemeni women faced prejudice in both their homes and the job prior to the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals. Women are often denied career opportunities, are under-represented in public office, and face a disproportionate share of the burden of unpaid care-giving and domestic labour.

Gender disparities are both larger and more evident in times of war. Women under the age of 18 head one-fifth of Yemeni families, while women and children make up three-quarters of the displaced. Conflict is also linked to an increase in gender-based violence, which was 36% higher in 2016 than in 2015. In addition, during times of economic difficulty, females are less likely to stay in school, more likely to marry young, and less likely to obtain essential health services, such as gynaecological and obstetric care.

Finally, to conclude and contextualize the egregious situation for women and girls in Yemen from a legal and political perspective; there are no women in parliament, there has never been a female head of state, the legislation does not require equal pay, and women have extremely limited access to financial services.

Scandinavian countries: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Iceland

First, it is important to establish the fact that Scandinavian countries aren't Socialist, instead, they're what economists call a social democracy which is something entirely different. They still run under Capitalism but this form of Capitalism is more left-winged than other Western nations and therefore is able to offer things Western nations never could. However, the system always works for the people who run the system. In Scandinavia, that's the population rather than the elite. So maybe, in that respect, it gets closer to the aims of Socialism than the Socialistic model!

What scholars call 'The Nordic Model' allows for a no national minimum wage, instead, each sector has wages negotiated according to what the job is actually worth. This means that every starting salary/pay for every job underneath a sector will be exactly the same and this allows for the probability of a wage gap to be incredibly slim or non-existent entirely. According to the World Economic Forum, almost three in four working-age women in Nordic countries are part of the paid

labour force, and policy-makers explicitly support gender equality at work, at home and in public. This means that women are making decisions about women and research shows that this arrangement is destined to have the most successful outcome to eliminate gender discrimination against women and girls.

Female empowerment developed from the 1970s' strong political feminist movement and has infiltrated all facets of Icelandic culture. Women in Iceland are not forced to choose between working and raising children as a result of progressive childcare regulations. Universal daycare and generous parental leave laws – both men and women get 90 days off – assist to relieve the stress of childrearing. A woman's ability to childcare is one of the leading causes for the wage gap and therefore, when granting both the father and mother equal time off to care for the child, this alleviates the aggressive consequences of maternity leave and its impact on the wage gap.

However, surprisingly Sweden and Denmark have the highest Sexual Assault rates in Europe. The data from 'Violence against women: an EU-wide survey' shows that in Sweden and Denmark, 80 to 100 per cent of people said they were sexually harassed as adults – the highest anywhere in the continent. Based on statistics collected in 2010, the Gate stone Institute declared Sweden the "rape capital of the west" last year, placing it just behind Lesotho in southern Africa in terms of rape incidence. This pattern is incredibly unusual for a highly developed country such as Sweden and Denmark but it poses the question; even with the lean towards Socialism and the progressive policy change, is it enough to eliminate gender discrimination against women and girls?

Development of Issue/Timeline

Date	Event	Outcome
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19/03/1911	The first celebration of International Women's Day	In March 1911, Austria, Denmark, Germany, and Switzerland observed International Women's Day for the first time after delegates at a meeting in Copenhagen recommended that one day each year be set aside to celebrate the women's rights movement and develop support for universal suffrage.
26/06/1945	Gender equality enshrined in the United Nations Charter	The United Nations (UN) was founded to encourage international cooperation following the destruction of World War II, and it was the first international entity to proclaim the concept of equality between men and women in its founding declaration. Article 1 of the UN Charter states that the organization's goal is to "promote and encourage respect for human rights and basic freedoms for everyone without distinction."
18/12/1979	CEDAW: An International Bill of Rights for Women	The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, is often referred to as an international bill of rights for women: it explicitly defines discrimination against women, establishes legal obligations for countries that sign it to end discrimination in the public and private spheres, and aims to achieve substantive equality.

01/09/2000	Adoption of the Millennium Development Goals	The United Nations Millennium Declaration established eight time-bound goals (the Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs). While each goal—including those related to education, food security, and the environment—is related to the status of women and girls, Goals 3 and 5 specifically call for gender equality and improved maternal health.
02/07/2010	Creation of UN Women	The UN General Assembly reassembled and combined formerly different components of the UN system to establish UN Women, an organisation devoted to promoting worldwide gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. The establishment of UN Women addressed some of the issues that had long hampered work on the women's rights agenda, such as inadequate finance and the lack of a single driving force.
01/09/2015	Adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals	The SDGs establish concrete goals to end violence against women, improve women's health, promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making positions, and advance women's inclusion in the world's economies, including equal rights to property, inheritance, financial services, and access to natural resources.

[Previous Attempts to Solve the Issue](#)

The #MeToo Movement

Sexual harassment and assault have long been a part of our society and the culture of the globe, but the capacity to bring this type of abuse to light is a modern revolution. For a long time, many people considered sexual harassment and assault to be silent, secret, and something the victim should be embarrassed by. These societal pressures resulted in silence; while reasonable given the cultural context, this silence has come at a high cost. Individuals had to suffer not just vulgar and disrespectful behaviour from people in their lives (vile comments, opportunistic gropes, forced touching or kissing), but also the emotional and psychological repercussions.

The #MeToo movement, which helped spark an outpouring of individuals coming out against their assailants and abusers, began with a tweet. On a Sunday afternoon, actress Alyssa Milano tweeted a message urging women who had been sexually harassed or attacked to use the hashtag #MeToo.

The #MeToo movement gained traction at a rapid rate and went viral over the course of a week. Hundreds of thousands of women came forward with their story and it sent ripples of change throughout the United States. Rallies, marches and protests were organised, women stood in solidarity with one another to implement and demand change.

As a result, almost all US states changed their workplace sexual harassment laws to decrease the amount of harassment within the workplace. To name just a few: Sexual harassment training is required for members, officials, workers, interns, and fellows of the General Assembly in New Mexico, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Missouri, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and the United States. The United States has two bills: US HR4396, the Member and Employee Training and Oversight of Congress (ME TOO) Act, and US HR4155, the Congressional Sexual Harassment

Prevention Act. Both Maryland and Alaska have laws in their legislatures concerning the investigation of discrimination and harassment. Official misconduct for sexual harassment for members of the New York state legislature was declared a class 'A' misdemeanor in New York, as was committing acts of sexual harassment by officers or employees of a state agency, members of the legislature, or legislative staff.

The implementation of these laws in a short period of time set an example for other countries to follow suit and fight gender discrimination together and many did. This also placed the way for The United States to plan the systemic implementation of change to retaliate against the core of this issue.

The Equality Act Of 2010

The Equality Act combines the previous nine pieces of equality law based on protected characteristics to establish unified equality legislation in the United Kingdom for the first time. Age, handicap, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and motherhood, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation are the nine protected characteristics.

The Equality Act 2010 includes a list of "prohibited behaviour" in addition to the Public Sector Equality Duty. Direct and indirect discrimination based on any of the nine protected qualities listed above is prohibited. Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated unfairly because of their age, ethnicity, gender reassignment – or any of the other protected criteria. For example, if you are paid less than another person doing the same work because of your gender, this is considered direct discrimination under the Equality Act 2010 and cannot be justified. It's against the law.

This is a prominent stride for the United Kingdom as before 2010, considering that they are an MEDC, they didn't have complex and detailed legislation outlining the prohibition of gender discrimination. The Equality Act of 2010 set the standard for future gender equality legislation implemented by the United Kingdom and informed the population that their demands will be met.

Possible Solutions

Systemic Economic Change

If we are serious about addressing inequality, we must confront capital's dominance directly and decisively. In 'Previous Attempts to Solve This Issue' we observe how legislation can help with easing the restrictions of inequality and reduce the immediate risk of discrimination yet legislation and its implementation can only get us halfway to the finish line when questioning how to completely eliminate gender discrimination. A systemic problem deserves a systemic solution. However, what exactly would that look like?

In terms of politics, the state would have to charge very progressive taxes, akin to the 90% applied to the highest income group between WWII and the early 1950s (in terms of the US financial regulation system). Wealth taxation on the most valuable assets would have to be confiscatory, which it should be in any case. A significant guaranteed yearly income, large enough to assure that everyone could live well without working for pay, would have to be introduced. Each person would have to have the right to a basket of commodities and services. The prison industrial complex as it is now would have to be eliminated. Housing policy would have to be reformed, with the government building decent housing and providing it as inexpensively and for free as feasible to the poorest. Work would have to be substantially redesigned in order for employment to be meaningful and worthwhile in the eyes of society.

The systemic economic change will free the challenge of systemic oppression against women and the patriarchy will be ‘destroyed’. However, mindsets will take time to unlearn. The issue of the perception of women will still remain for a few generations and can be rooted out with proper gender awareness education about systemic mindsets and how to break the cycle.

Mandated Anti-Discriminatory Legislation

Even though MEDCs have anti-gender-discriminatory legislation to an extent, in some LEDCs this is entirely deprived. Legislation is a crucial aspect to invoke change and is the first step to solving gender discrimination. LEDCs such as Pakistan and Yemen have very few laws against gender discrimination and even those aren’t implemented with strong intention. With a powerful backing force, along with palpable legislation in place, LEDCs will make huge strides toward fighting gender discrimination. Additionally, larger cases at hand that engulf many countries altogether could also be brought up to the Main UN Bodies such as the International Court of Justice or the General Assembly. They could fund international operations and legislation and promote their importance worldwide.

Considering the fact that discrimination against women and girls are the most prevalent in LEDCs, invoking change through legislation and governmental bodies allow the grip of discriminatory restrictions on women and girls to be slightly eased and paves the way for unlearning stereotypical preconceived notions and ignites hope that future change is possible.

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