

**Special Committee on
Women
Briefing Papers**



The Issue of Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is a term which refers to all practices involving partial or total removal of any part of the external female genitalia or any procedure which involves injury to the female genitals for non-medical reasons. The procedure has no health benefits for women and girls (and is therefore a ritual practice mainly done for cultural and social reasons), but instead there are many negative consequences for girls' health. These could include severe bleeding and pain, swelling and infections: examples include tetanus, long-term urinary and menstrual problems, complications during childbirth, and increased risk of newborn death.

The significant lack of health benefits but the extent of health implications mean that FGM is viewed as a violation of women and girls' human rights and is even categorised by the UN as torture. It reflects the perceived intrinsic inequality between men and women present in the societies which tend to perform FGM, thus displaying discrimination against women. As well as this, the practice is mostly carried out on girls younger than 15 years old, and so is also a violation of the human rights of children. The right to healthy, to be free from torture and, in cases where the practice leads to death, the right to life.

FGM is a widely practiced procedure in many countries, particularly in Africa where 30 countries are known to carry out the practice. Somalia, Egypt and Guinea are examples of countries where a huge number of the female population have undergone the procedure (the highest percentage is 98% of girls going through it in Somalia). It is important to remember, however, that this is a global issue as there are other countries across the world where FGM has been reported such as India, Iraq, Oman and United Arab Emirates, and migrants from these countries and communities may have already been affected or at risk too. In some cases, girls are taken to other countries where FGM is more common by their families specifically for the purpose of performing FGM on them (known as 'vacation cutting'). According to the WHO, more than 200 million girls around the world today have been cut, and it is estimated that more than 3 million are at risk annually of having the procedure done to them.

There are many reasons cited as to why FGM occurs, for example it is seen as encouraging acceptable sexual behaviour, for example that a woman's sexual libido would be diminished due to reducing the probability that she would have sex outside of her marriage. This belief means that, in some communities, undergoing FGM can increase a girl's chance of getting married. Societal reasons are usually the main factors in why FGM continues today: in most places where it happens, it is accepted as a social norm by both men and women; the social pressure put on girls to undergo the procedure is huge as they fear being rejected from their community

(meaning that it often goes unquestioned despite the pain for the girls); it is often considered 'necessary' for girls to be cut as their family prepare them for adulthood and marriage.

Despite the fact that people claim and believe that there are religious reasons for FGM, there are no religious scripts that advocate it, and so it is clear just how damaging a false belief like this can be.

There have been efforts to try and tackle the issue of Female Genital Mutilation, and although the prevalence of FGM has begun to decrease, there is still so much work to be done. FGM has been criminalised in many African countries and other nations that receive immigrants from places where FGM is practiced. Due to the reasons for it are often so deeply entrenched in these communities, the right balance must be struck when trying to prevent it from happening further; for example, if the community as a whole abandons the practice, this could be the most effective way of stopping FGM from happening. The UN has already implemented several measures to try and eliminate FGM, including a joint programme launched by the UNFPA and UNICEF in 2008, which focuses on prevention by working with communities to eliminate and help those affected by FGM in 17 African countries.

As a violation of human rights and as an extremely harmful practice to young girls and women, FGM is an issue that the international community needs to come together to solve. The sheer number of women and girls affected and at risk of the procedure means that the focus should be on how to reduce the risk of FGM so that all young girls can live unaffected by the physical and mental pain of Female Genital Mutilation.

Points to Consider

- How can the UN convince communities practicing FGM to abandon it without alienating them?
- What support can the UN give to women and girls who have gone through FGM?
- What can be done to help women and girls experiencing FGM in countries where it is less common?
- What steps can we take to prevent families from taking their daughters abroad for 'vacation cutting'?
- How can the prevention of FGM be enforced in countries where it is already illegal?

The Issue of Sexual Violence Against Women in Conflict Zones

Sexual violence of any kind is a violation of basic human rights, and is something that must be combatted as a whole; however in conflict zones the issue of sexual violence is particularly important and devastating to the victims. Sexual violence in conflict zones can be defined as a number of acts, including rape, sexual mutilation, sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, and forced pregnancy, whether this violence is directly or indirectly a result of the conflict. Often sexual violence is committed along with other crimes such as killing, looting and pillage the victims (often girls and women), usually reflecting the conflict by being a part of the opposing ethnic, religious or political group to the perpetrators.

In conflict, sexual violence is used often to spread terror and is used as a war tactic in order to humiliate and dominate the civilian population in these areas and to assert their power. It is done across the world in different conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq. Sexual violence in conflict is something which has been seen in wars and conflicts of times past as well: for example, in the Rwandan genocide, between 10,000 and 250,000 women were raped during the genocide's three month duration in 1994. Whilst many countries could face the threat of sexual violence in conflict, the UN released a report focusing on 19 countries, for which information is available: these countries include Afghanistan, Myanmar, Central African Republic, Iraq, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Mali. The fact that this is an ongoing issue demonstrates clearly the necessity for immediate action.

Women and girls are particularly targeted in acts of sexual violence, and therefore an effort must be made by the UN to address the specific sexual violence against women. There are devastating consequences of these acts for the victims, including the risk of unwanted pregnancy as a result of rape, the sometimes deliberate infection of HIV, and damage to their reproductive organs. Women are often shunned and ostracised for being a victim of sexual violence, as well as suffering the psychological and mental impact of this trauma. Victims could face being traumatised twice, firstly as a direct result of the violence and then by their community's reaction to it for various reasons such as the loss of virginity, the fear of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (such as HIV) spreading and the stigma of maternity out of wedlock when a pregnancy as a product of rape occurs. It is this stigma which contributes to sexual violence being used as a tactic of war, and therefore the UN must seek ways to eliminate the stigma against the victims so that they can properly recover from their initial trauma without having to face more hardships.

Often, due to these acts of violence occurring in conflict zones, most of the victims never see justice for what they have endured and do not receive the necessary guidance and support in recovering from this violence, both mentally and physically.

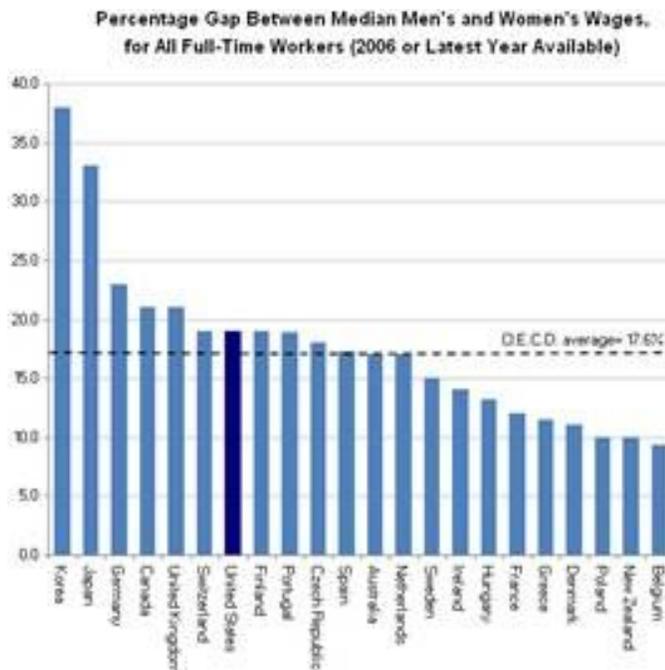
As the Secretary General of the UN, Antonio Guterres said, "Sexual violence is a brutal form of physical and psychological warfare rooted in the gender inequality extant not only in zones of conflict, but in our everyday personal lives. The persistence of such forms of violence undermines peace and security and shatters community and family ties. The prevention of sexual violence must remain one of our highest priorities". This highlights how big of an issue this is, and how much the UN needs to step up and tackle it.

Points to consider:

- What support can be offered to the victims of sexual violence to help them recover from the psychological trauma?
- What can the UN do to bring justice to the perpetrators of this crime?
- How can women and girls be protected from sexual violence in conflict?
- What different tactics must be employed to account for the fact that the violence is happening in conflict zones specifically?

The Issue of Ensuring Economic Equality in the Developing World

Economic inequality is the difference found in various measures of economic well being among individuals in a group, among groups in a population or between countries. Economic inequality can refer to income inequality, wealth inequality, or the gender pay gap.



Economic inequality still exists today due to the global gender pay gap still existing, and the WEF (World Economic Forum) predicts that, on an international level, women earn half of what men earn. It is also calculated that women could increase their income globally by up to 76% if the employment participation gap and the wage gap between women and men were closed. This is calculated to have a global value of 17 trillion US dollars.

In developing countries, when paid and unpaid work are combined, women work more than men, with less time for education, leisure, political participation and self-care. Despite some

improvements over the last 50 years, in virtually every member state, men generally spend more time on leisure each day while women spend more time doing unpaid housework. In addition to this, more women than men are working in vulnerable, low-paid, or undervalued jobs. As of 2013, 49.1% of the world's working women were in vulnerable employment, often unprotected by labour legislation, compared to 46.9% of men. Women were far more likely than men to be in vulnerable employment in East Asia (50.3% versus 42.3%), South-East Asia and the Pacific (63.1% versus 56%), South Asia (80.9% versus 74.4%), North Africa (54.7% versus 30.2%), the Middle East (33.2% versus 23.7%) and Sub-Saharan Africa (nearly 85.5% versus 70.5%).

Women tend to have less access to formal financial institutions and saving mechanisms: while 55% of men report having an account at a formal financial institution, only 47% of women do worldwide. This gap is largest among lower middle-income economies as well as in South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Although the situation is bleak, there are ways of ensuring economic equality - even in developing countries: increasing women and girls' education contributes to higher economic growth; increased educational attainment accounts for about 50% the economic growth of countries. In addition to this, if we educate more women and girls in developing countries more women will make up part of the future workforce. When more women work, economies grow. An increase in female labour force participation - or a reduction in the gap between women's and men's labour force participation - results in faster economic growth. And faster economic growth often leads to a reduction in income inequality.

Points to consider

- How can member states ensure that their citizens are paid fairly for their work?
- Is financial independence for women the key to gaining economic equality for women?
- What can the UN do to empower and educate women in developing countries to reduce the economic inequality between men and women?
- How can attitudes towards women be changed in order to gain economic equality?