

Women's Discrimination, Exploitation and Oppression

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Abstract

Discrimination, Exploitation and Oppression against women on the basis of their sex occurs in religion, politics, education, employment, public life, social services, family and marital status, and before the law.

The causes of the inequality between women and men are directly linked with a complex historical process. The inequality also derives from political, economic, social and cultural factors. The form in which this inequality manifests itself is varied as the economic, social and cultural conditions of the world community. Throughout history and in many societies women have been sharing similar experiences. One of the basic factors causing the unequal share of women in development relates to the division of labor between the sexes. The division of labor has been justified on the basis of the childbearing function of women, which is inherent in womanhood. Consequently, the distribution of tasks and responsibilities of women and men in society has mainly restricted women to the domestic sphere and has unduly burdened them. As a result, women have often been regarded and treated as men's inferior, and unequal in their activities outside the domestic sphere and have suffered violations of their human rights. They have been given only limited access to resources and to participation in every sphere of life, notably in decision making; and in many instances institutionalized inequality in the status of women and men has also resulted.

The specific problems of women in certain cultural contexts—strict norms which limit their possibilities of social, intellectual or emotional fulfillment—are added to the general problems of underdevelopment. Very often they find themselves occupying the lowest levels of society in general, and they often lack the knowledge and consciousness to struggle for their own liberation. Or as is typical of a social group which is exploited and discriminated against, whether for ethnic, economic or sexual reasons, they discriminate against themselves and consequently consider that the discrimination imposed upon them is justified and lose interest in the struggle to free themselves from it.

Social change has meant social progress only for an elite minority of predominantly white, middle and upper-class women. For others—statistically the majority—the structural barriers of race and class remain. Discrimination, exploitation and oppression can be seen at all ages and stages of development for women in different parts of the world.

A principal focus of the middle years of childhood and adolescence is ensuring access to, and completion of, it is mostly girls who suffer from educational disadvantage. Among the greatest threats to adolescent development are abuse, exploitation and violence, and the lack of vital knowledge about sexual and reproductive health, including HIV/AIDS. These are two key periods in many women's lives when the detrimental effects of both poverty and inequality can combine—during childbirth and in old age. Shockingly, it is estimated that each year more than half a million women—roughly one woman every minute—die as a result of pregnancy complications and childbirth, 99% of which occur in developing countries. Yet many of these women's lives could be saved if they had access to basic health care services. In addition, elderly women may face double discrimination on the basis of both gender and age. Many older women are plunged into poverty

at a time of life when they are very vulnerable. According to inter press service."On a global scale, women cultivate more than half of all the food that is grown. In sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, they produce up to 80 percent of basic foodstuffs. In Asia, they account for around 50 percent of food production. In Latin America, they are mainly engaged in subsistence farming, horticulture, poultry and raising small livestock." Yet women often get little recognition for that. In fact, many go unpaid. It is very difficult for these women to get the financial resources required to by equipment etc, as many societies still do not accept, or realize, that there is a change in the "traditional" roles. Reasons for such disparity include the fact that women are generally underpaid and because they often perform low-status jobs, compared to men. UNICEF notes that the data isn't always perfect, and that generalizations can hide wider fluctuations. In Brazil, for example, women under the age of 25 earn a higher average hourly wage than their male counterparts. However, in developing nations and in most industrialized nations, men are usually paid more than their female counterparts in the same field. Wage discrimination is also prevalent in the U.S.

Millions of women throughout the world live in conditions in which they are deprived of their basic human rights for no other reason than their gender. Abuses against women are relentless, systematic, and widely tolerated, if not explicitly condoned. Violence and discrimination against women are global social epidemics. Doctors and government officials disproportionately target women from disadvantaged or marginalized communities for coercive family planning policies.

The realization of women's rights is a global struggle based on universal human rights and the rule of law. It requires all of us to unite in solidarity to end traditions, practices, and laws that harm women. It is a fight for freedom to be fully and completely human and equal without apology or permission. Ultimately, the struggle for women's human rights must be about making women's lives matter everywhere all the time. In practice, this means taking action to stop discrimination and violence against women.

References

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