

## Women and Gender Equality – the big ideas

What should young people know about Women and Gender Inequalities by the time they leave school?

### 1. What it is.

Gender is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of men and women) but is a socially constructed definition of men and women, therefore sex is something we are born with and gender is something we learn. Gender roles are often determined by culture, with both men and women taught appropriate norms and behaviour, reflecting society and relationships, which have been built up over thousands of years. These roles have often been legitimised by laws. Over 150 countries have at least one law that is discriminatory towards women.<sup>1</sup>

For an individual, their gender is experienced as an identity (a deeply held, internal sense of self) and also as an 'expression' (how they present their gender in the world and how society, culture, community, and family perceive, interact with, and try to shape our gender).

### 2. Gender norms.

These vary largely on culture, religion and community influences. They are internalised early in life and are used as standards and expectations to which men and women should conform. Gender norms are **socially constructed**. This results in **gender stereotypes**. These stereotypes have an impact on every woman and man e.g. in terms access to work and life choices.

Drivers of change in gender norms include economic change, the spread of communications technology, and government-led action, such as law or policy reform or the spread of education. E.g. The Democratic Republic of Congo reformed its Family Code in 2016, giving married women the right to take on work, open bank accounts and register a business without needing their husband's permission.

Social changes and new consciousness often take place first and led to legal changes e.g. the Suffragist movement and WW1 led to Women's suffrage in many European countries e.g. Poland, Germany, UK, Austria, etc. However, making progress in changing gender norms is not necessarily a linear process. Women had more power and legal rights in some Ancient World societies, such Egypt, than in later times.<sup>2</sup> The introduction of new technology (e.g. the plough) has had negative as well as positive effects on equality.

### 3. Patriarchal and matriarchal societies.

Many societies today have a predominantly **patriarchal** history. This means that the control of power, whether resources or positions (such as in government), is held by men, therefore women have faced barriers in holding these positions. However, some societies are **matrilineal**, where the line of descent is traced through the mother, and in some cases land and property is passed down through mothers to daughters. This is witnessed within the Asante people in Ghana and the Minangkabau in Sumatra, Indonesia, along with other societies across the world.

### 4. Gender concepts.

**Gender Equality** is the goal for everyone to have **equal** opportunities, **status**, **rights** and **equal access** to resources and services. However to ensure this equal access, governments may need to implement policies and strategies to address women's historical and social disadvantages. This is called **Gender Equity**, which means that everyone is treated fairly. 'Gender Equity' should lead to 'Gender Equality'.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2015/09/10/discriminating-against-women-keeps-countries-poorer>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/money/us-money-blog/2014/aug/11/women-rights-money-timeline-history>

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## 5. Women and gender inequality.

Globally, women are historically and socially disadvantaged. This is also reflected in the lack of economic opportunities and unequal rates of pay. The World Economic Forum survey 2016 measured Women as having 68% of the chances and outcomes that men have.<sup>3</sup> Women do 75% of the unpaid work in the world. In the UK, 74% of firms pay higher rates of pay to men than women. This is known as the **gender pay gap**. Although a gender pay gap is not illegal, it could reflect discrimination within a company. The income gap between men and women is widening, even though closing it could increase national wealth (GDP)<sup>4</sup> and could add as much as \$28 trillion or 26 percent to annual global GDP.<sup>5</sup> In 2018, Iceland became the first country to make it illegal to pay men more than women.

**Gender discrimination** exists, meaning women end up in insecure, low-paid jobs and constitute a small minority of those in senior positions (such as in senior managerial roles or political positions). Gender differences are written into laws in both **majority** and **minority world countries**. In 18 countries women need their husbands' permission to take a job.<sup>6</sup> Gender discrimination can be exacerbated by other forms of discrimination like racism and class. This is called **Intersectionality**. For this reason, some governments have adopted Equality Strategies covering all discrimination e.g. UK 2010.

**The United Nations** is addressing Gender Inequality in its **Sustainable Development Goals**. SDG 5 aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, through promoting *women's rights, economic empowerment* and *reducing poverty*".<sup>7</sup> UN Women is the UN organisation dedicated to support this.<sup>8</sup>

## 6. Gender-based violations.

Although both men and women can be victims of **gender-based violence (GBV)**, it is widely acknowledged that the majority of victims of GBV are women and girls. International organisations often focus on violence against this group due to the overwhelming evidence that they are most at risk and can often not avoid or escape abuse. Gender-based violence is a **consequence of unequal power relations** between the genders and reaches every corner of the globe. It is a violation of women and girl's human rights. GBV impacts on a female's sexual and reproductive health, with women being disproportionately affected by **HIV/AIDS**. Some cultures and traditions negatively impact women and girls due to harmful practices such as *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*<sup>9</sup> and *child marriage*. Each year, 12 million girls are married before the age of 18. Child marriage threatens a girl's life, health and limits their future prospects. Girls pressed into child marriage often drop out of education and become pregnant while still adolescents which brings added complications to child birth. This is the leading cause of death among older adolescent girls.<sup>10</sup> Every year 13 million women and girls are **trafficked**, mostly for sexual exploitation,<sup>11</sup> women who are migrating are particularly at risk.

## 7. Women's rights groups.

There were voices advocating for **women's rights** as early as 24 centuries ago when Greek philosopher Plato argued in 'The Republic' for the provision of child care so that women could be soldiers. Many individual women such as 15<sup>th</sup> Century Christine de Pizan, who denounced **misogyny**, and 18C Sojourner

<sup>3</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index 2017 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-41844875>

<sup>4</sup> World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index 2017 [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/mgi/overview/in-the-news/the-economic-benefits-of-gender-parity>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2015/11/18-countries-where-women-need-their-husbands-permission-to-get-a-job/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>

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<sup>9</sup> At least 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, UNICEF 2018

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-pregnancy>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016\\_Global\\_Report\\_on\\_Trafficking\\_in\\_Persons.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/glotip/2016_Global_Report_on_Trafficking_in_Persons.pdf) ; <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1080/00243639.2017.1387471>

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Truth campaigned for women's rights. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> C Mary Wollstonecraft wrote *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. **Feminism** is the advocacy of women's rights on the grounds of equality. Feminists groups often participate in research, policy and advocacy to address the root causes of gender inequality – with some feminists citing the patriarchal system as the oppressor of women. Both men and women can be feminists and act for change.

## 8. International Action.

**The United Nations** is addressing Gender Inequality in its **Sustainable Development Goals**. SDG 5 aims to "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, through promoting *women's rights, economic empowerment* and *reducing poverty*".<sup>12</sup> UNWomen is the UN organisation dedicated to support this.<sup>13</sup>

**National Action** Governments are working collectively to provide equal access to education, healthcare and decent work to women and girls; issues most prevalent in **majority world** countries. Some countries have a Ministry for Women or Gender Equality e.g. Sweden, Australia, UK. "The key to gender equity lies not in a country's economic power, but rather in its governments political will" – Van der Gaag, 2008. **Local:** Change is often driven by the many individuals and local and international organisations like WEDO (Women's Environment and Development Organisation.) Among them are Authors like Chimamanda Adichie, Ding Ling, Maya Angelou; Activists like Malala Yousefzai\* & Wangari Maathai\*; Politicians like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf\*, Benazir Bhutto, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, Mary Robinson, Michelle Bachelet; Lawyers like Shirin Ebadi\*; filmmakers, Deniz Gamze Ergüven and women in all walks of life.

## 9. Benefits of gender equality for development.

Gender equality can reduce poverty, decrease child mortality and aid development. Countries like Bangladesh are encouraging female participation in the workforce. If they stay on track their female workforce will grow from 34 to 82 percent over the next decade, adding 1.8 percentage points to their GDP<sup>14</sup>. Educating girls has been demonstrated to improve children's and women's survival rates and health, delays child marriage and early pregnancies, empowers women both in the home and the workplace, and even help tackle climate change<sup>15</sup>. Globally, women politicians are more likely to support Equality, may be less likely to be involved in corruption and more collaborative in their approach to solving problems.

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/about-us/about-un-women>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/opinion/2015/09/10/discriminating-against-women-keeps-countries-poorer>

<sup>15</sup> <https://thecircle.ngo/six-positive-impacts-educating-girls/>

<sup>16</sup> <https://thecircle.ngo/six-positive-impacts-educating-girls/>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/01/this-is-why-women-must-play-a-greater-role-in-the-global-economy/>

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