

The Status of the World's Women

Gender equality produces a double dividend because it benefits both women and children. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident children. Through gender equality women can not only live full and productive lives, they can also improve the lives of their children, their families, and the society they are part of.ⁱ

Women and Economic Security:

Worldwide, women constitute about 70 percent of the absolute poor—those living on less than a dollar a day.ⁱⁱ

Worldwide, over 60 percent of people working in family enterprises without pay are women.ⁱⁱⁱ

75% of the refugees and internationally displaced in the world are women who have lost their families and their homes.

Rural women worldwide constitute the majority of the 1.5 billion people who live in absolute poverty.^{iv}

Women produce 75 to 90 percent of food crops in the world, but are mostly unpaid for this labor.^v

In the United States in 2004, 28.4 percent of households headed by single women were poor, while 13.5 percent of households headed by single men and 5.5 percent of married-couple households lived in poverty.^{vi}

In the U.S. in 2004, 12.7 percent of all women — or 14.3 million — compared to 9.3 percent of men, were living in poverty.^{vii}

More than one-third of all women-headed households in the U.S. fall below the poverty line.^{viii}

Two-thirds of American adults who live below the poverty line in the U.S. are women.^{ix}

A girl without a high school diploma has a 90% chance of being poor and raising children who will also live in poverty.^x

Mothers raising children are the hardest hit with poverty, which makes family status the main factor. Within the group of mothers raising children, young mothers raising young children emerge as a subgroup with the most critical need.^{xi}



Women and the Economy:

The increase in female employment in the developed world has been the main driving force of economic growth in the past couple of decades. Those women have contributed more to global GDP growth than have either new technology or the new giants, China and India.^{xii}

If women received the same wages as men who work the same number of hours, have the same education and union status, are the same age, and live in the same region of the country, and poverty rates would be cut in half. Working families would gain an astounding \$200 billion in family income annually^{xiii}, an income increase of nearly 17%.^{xiv}

The total value of a woman's unpaid house and farm work adds one-third to the world's GNP.^{xv}

Women are less likely than men to hold paid and regular jobs and are over-represented in the informal economy, which provides little financial security and few social benefits.^{xvi} Women work 2/3 of the world's working hours, yet earn only 10% of the world's income.^{xvii}

There is no country in the world where women's wages are equal to those of men.

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Women and Education:

Worldwide, 18.3 percent of the adult population (800 million people) is illiterate. Almost two-thirds of them (64 percent) are women.^{xx}

Of 137 million illiterate youths in the world, 63% are girls.^{xxi}

Literacy rates for girls worldwide have improved over the past three decades, from 55 percent in 1970 to 74 percent in 2000.^{xxii}

Women were 55% of college freshman in the U.S. in 2005.^{xxiii}

In the U.S. in 2004, women exceeded men in enrollment for higher education—9.8 million women vs. 7.3 million men^{xxiv}

Higher education in the U.S.—in 2001-2002, women earned 58.7% of all Master's degrees earned and 46.3% of all Doctoral degrees earned, as opposed to 40.1% and 14.3% in 1970-1971 and 49.9% and 34.1% in 1984-85, respectively.^{xxv} This translates to 20,500 Doctoral degrees and



283,000 Master's degrees in 2001-02, 11,200 and 142,900 in 1984-85, and 4,600 and 92,400 in 1970-71, respectively.^{xxvi}

Worldwide, an increasing number of women are continuing on to higher education. In the late 1990s, 17 percent of women were enrolled in higher education, compared to 7 percent in 1970. In most countries, however, higher education remains for the elite of both sexes.^{xxvii}

For every year beyond fourth grade that girls go to school, family size drops 20%, child deaths drop 10%, and wages rise 20%; yet, international aid dedicated to education is declining.

Women and Violence:

Each year, an estimated 800,000 people are trafficked across borders, 80 per cent of them women and girls. Most of them end up trapped in the commercial sex trade. This figure does not include the substantial number of women and girls who are bought and sold within their own countries, for which there are scant data.^{xxviii}

In the last 30 years, trafficking in women and children in Asia for sexual exploitation alone has victimized over 30 million people^{xxix}

Every year, an estimated 4 million women and girls are bought and sold worldwide, either into forced prostitution, slavery, or forced marriage^{xxx}

In Western Europe alone, about 500,000 women and girls from developing countries and countries with economies in transition are entrapped in the slave trade each year^{xxxi}

At least one in three women has been beaten, coerced into sex, or otherwise abused in her lifetime.^{xxxii}

In 2003, 22 to 33 percent of women across the world said they had experienced physical or sexual abuse by a male intimate.^{xxxiii}

In the U.S., a woman is raped every 6 minutes.^{xxxiv}

In the U.S., homicide is the top cause of death among pregnant women.^{xxxv}

In many countries, women believe that it is acceptable for a husband to beat a wife for one or more specific reasons—among them refusing sex, arguing, or burning food: 77% in Uganda, 53% in Turkmenistan, 51% in Zimbabwe, 40% in Haiti, and 32% in Armenia.^{xxxvi}

About one in four women is abused during pregnancy, which endangers both mother and child.^{xxxvii}

The United Nations estimates that, worldwide, 5,000 women and girls a year are murdered by family members, many of them for the dishonor of having been raped.^{xxxviii}



250,000 to 500,000 women were raped during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, one-third of whom were gang-raped, and more than 15,000 were raped as part of “ethnic cleansing.” Fewer than 100 rape cases have gone through ordinary courts.^{xxxix}

Women and Healthcare:

Sexual and reproductive ill health accounts for one-third of the global burden of disease among women of reproductive age and one-fifth of the burden of disease among the population overall.^{xl}

One woman dies every minute of every hour—15,000 women every day—from pregnancy or childbirth-related causes. That equals at least 529,000 deaths per year, according to estimates by WHO, UNICEF, and UNFPA—or the equivalent of five 747 jumbo jets crashing and killing all passengers and crew every day.^{xli}

One million children worldwide die each year because their mothers have died. When a mother dies at childbirth, her children under the age of 5 are twice as likely to die.^{xlii}

In some developing countries, a pregnant woman’s chance of dying is one in eight.^{xliii}

When a mother dies or is in ill health, children are more likely to be stunted and to receive less schooling and healthcare.^{xliv}

Lack of access to family planning is a major factor behind the 76 million unintended pregnancies every year in the developing world.^{xlv} These lead to 19 million annual unsafe abortions, causing some 68,000 deaths.^{xlvi}

Despite improvements in access to family planning services and contraceptive use, nearly 30 percent of the 205 million pregnancies that occur each year are unintended. Over 120 million women who wish to space or delay their next birth still do not have access to modern methods of contraception.^{xlvii}

In the U.S., 27% of low-income women (with incomes below 200% of the poverty level) put off getting healthcare because they cannot take time off from work. 18% of women at all income levels face this situation.^{xlviii}

More than 22 million working women in the U.S. do not have paid sick days.^{xlix}

600,000 women – one every minute – die each year from pregnancy-related causes. Most of these deaths are preventable.

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