A life free of violence and discrimination is the right of every woman.
Discrimination and violence against women and girls is preventable, not inevitable.

Violence against women and girls is a grave violation of human rights. It is not just a women’s issue but a human rights issue. The rights to safety, security and a life of dignity are the inalienable rights of every citizen, including women and girls. Gender discrimination and violence prevents women and girls from fully participating in society. Harmful practices such as gender-biased sex selection and child marriage pose a serious risk factor for violence.

Decades of mobilizing by civil society and women’s movements has put ending gender-based violence high on national and international agendas. An unprecedented number of countries have laws against domestic violence, sexual assault and other forms of violence. Challenges remain, however, in implementing these laws, limiting women’s and girls’ access to safety and justice. Gender-based violence also impacts economic productivity and growth as women are denied or unable to exercise basic rights of education, skill development and employment.

Progressive legislation to end violence is in place, but implementation is key.

India has enacted a number of progressive laws in recent years. They include the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (Prohibition Of Sex Selection) Act, the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, and the Prohibition of Child Marriage and Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. Many progressive reforms and changes have resulted in the past year alone – for example, the Criminal Amendment Act of 2013 that calls for an end to impunity and recognizes a broad range of sexual crimes against women.
In four months, sisters-in-law Sunita and Manisha Chchadi learnt to read and write as part of a UN Women project. With its partner CECODECON, UN Women has ensured that 20 women of Sunita’s community, who traditionally send their daughters to work in urban areas, were able to get an education.
Women speak about the violence they face, water shortage and the need for a primary school in the presence of district officials during a special mahila sabha (women’s meeting) supported by UN Women in Rajasthan’s Dungarpur district.

Laws alone are not enough – changes in mindsets are needed. As part of the Safe Cities programme with the Delhi Government and Jagori, UN Women found that in cases of sexual violence, three out of four respondents agreed with the statement, “women provoke men by the way they dress,” and two men out of five agreed with the statement, “women moving around at night deserve to be sexually harassed.”

A life cycle of discrimination

Women experience violence at every possible stage of their life cycle – from infancy, childhood and adolescence through adulthood and old age. In India, patriarchal values are embedded in social life and reflected in institutions, including the family. Households and communities use the notion of ‘family honour’ to restrict women’s mobility and freedom, which in turn controls women’s life choices, status and access to employment. Social, legal and economic barriers also constrain women’s ability to have an effective voice in the private and public spheres.
Duli Bai helps Amir Yadav to get ready to visit other widows in their community. They spread the message to reduce the social ostracism of widows and help them join support groups.
Research demonstrates that the presence of street vendors make bus stops and footpaths safe for communities and pedestrians. In this photo, flower vendors keep a vigilant eye on the safety of their streets.
TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS ACROSS AND OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

India is a source, destination and transit country for men, women and children who are subjected to forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, domestic servitude, child marriage and other forms of exploitation. Almost 90 per cent of the trafficking is internal. According to the Ministry of Women and Child Development, in 2007 there were at least 2.8 million sex workers in India, with 35 per cent of them entering the trade before the age of 18. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, from 2009-2011, there were 1,77,660 (approx.) children missing, out of which 1,22,190 were traced and 55,470 remain missing. Of this, 64 per cent were minor girls. According to the 2012 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, women account for 55-60 per cent of all trafficked victims globally.

Violence in public spaces

Statistics say that one-third of the women aged between 15-49 years have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. Women and girls face sexual harassment and assault in public spaces every day: on city streets and public transportation, in parks, and on their route to and from work or school. A UN Women study found that women living in Delhi experience high levels of insecurity. Nearly 95 per cent women believe public spaces are unsafe and 73 per cent said they do not feel safe even in their own surroundings.
Violence against children

In India, a total of 48,338 child rape cases were recorded from 2001 to 2011. The registration of cases of child rape increased by 336 per cent between 2001 and 2011. Of the 24,270 reported cases in 2011, a staggering 30 per cent were girls under 18 years of age. Sexual violence affects children’s physical and mental health, compromises their ability to learn and socialize, and undermines their development as functional adults and good parents later in life. Fear of social stigma and victimization often stop children and their families from reporting these crimes.

PREVENTING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Dowry-related violence is widespread in India. In 2012, the National Crime Records Bureau reported over 8,000 dowry harassment deaths. These are the official figures, but unofficial figures indicate the number is at least three times higher. According to the National Family Healthy Survey 3, in 2005-6, 35 per cent of married women aged 15-49 had experienced physical spousal violence. The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act of 2005 underscores the need to enable women to negotiate a life free of violence. It thereby breaks the myth that for victims, justice is limited to tougher penalties. The latest monitoring report shows that the number of protection officers has indeed increased, with a larger numbers of complaints being filed by women. Much more needs to be done to ensure that dedicated personnel are deployed in all states.

“All forms of violence against women must stop – from the use of rape as a weapon of war to the use of violence by a husband to terrorize his wife within her own home.”

Asha-Rose Migiro,
Former UN Deputy Secretary-General
Shehnaz Bano endured a life of violence in her marriage. She fought back and got justice under the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, with the support of the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women and Lawyers Collective. UN Women in India works to prevent violence against women – from domestic violence, trafficking of women and girls, to violence in public spaces. UN Women works on creating safer cities together with UN Habitat, the Government of Delhi, Jagori and other civil society groups. Safety for women must be the collective resolve of society, government, law enforcement authorities and, above all, boys and men.
GENDER-BIASED SEX SELECTION: A MANIFESTATION OF GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender-biased sex selection is a discriminatory practice against girls, perpetuated by a complex web of socio-economic and cultural factors. Major contributing factors include deeply entrenched preference for sons, rapid decline in fertility, and misuse of modern medical technology. The child sex ratio calculated as the number of girls per 1,000 boys in the 0-6 years age group, has shown a sharp decline from 976 girls per 1,000 boys in 1961 to 919, as per the 2011 census. According to global trends, the normal child sex ratio should be above 950. However, in certain parts of Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and even Delhi, there are less than 850 girls for every 1,000 boys.

Recommendations

Public apathy must be converted into public empathy. Communities and individuals must be a part of the change in mindsets, attitudes and beliefs. Gender discrimination and violence against women should become unacceptable. The United Nations in India supports community mobilisation, school and sports-based programmes, and engagement with leaders who influence culture and other key stakeholders such as administrators, law and policy makers and civil society actors. We also champion positive role models for young men to end violence against women and promote gender equality. Higher conviction rates, more accessible quality services, and quicker responses can all act as deterrents to violence and encourage increased reporting of crimes. Stronger action by law enforcement personnel and the legal system, increased budget allocation and most of all, galvanizing political will can translate commitments into action.
“Teach your sons to respect women,” is the singularly important message communicated by Tash McCarroll, winner of UN Women’s ‘Freedom from Violence’ photo competition.
“We must unite. Violence against women cannot be tolerated, in any form, in any context, in any circumstance, by any political leader or by any government.”

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General

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