

Editorial**Nine key issues affecting girls and women worldwide***Syed A. Aziz*

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The spelling of "woman" in English has progressed over the past millennium from wīfmann to wīmmann to wumman, and finally, the modern spelling woman but over the last many decades or should say centuries not much has been changed men has been praying on women sexually and otherwise, rape and humiliation of women has increased over the years despite new law and awareness. The part of the problem may be most of the decision pertaining to women from top are being made by men.

In an effort to overcome my lack of understanding for females, I consulted my more knowledgeable colleagues and come up with a list of 9 key issues affecting girls and women globally.

1. Access to Education

A 2013 report by UNESCO found that 31 million girls of primary school age were not in school, and about one out of every four young women in developing countries had never completed their primary school education. Of these 17 million are expected never to enter school. There are 4 million fewer boys than girls out of school. Two-thirds of the 774 million illiterate people in the world are female. Three countries have over a million girls not in school: In Nigeria there are almost five and a half million, Pakistan, over three million, and in Ethiopia, over one million girls out of school. That number represents a huge pool of untapped girl power: that same report suggests that educated women are more likely to get married later, survive childbirth, raise healthy kids, find work, and earn more money, among other positives.

2. Employment Opportunities

Even in a country as wealthy and developed as the US who talk about women rights more than any other country on the globe more powerful country on the globe and biggest economy, women still experience major inequality in the workforce: Probably the most feminist country currently is Canada, huge cry over gender disparity.

By some estimates, women earn only \$0.77 for every \$1 earned by men which is almost 25% less earning than men with the same education and skill sets. Globally, the gender gap is even wider: women earn only one tenth of the world's income despite working two thirds of the total work hours. Empowering women to earn their fair share could benefit their entire communities in a huge way:

women are likely to invest of their money back into their families and communities than men typically do.

3. Reproductive Health & Rights

225 million women in developing countries have an urgent need for family planning, since they are contributing to 74 million unplanned pregnancies and 36 million abortions every year, this according to figures cited by Women Deliver, an advocacy group. Helping women decide when to become pregnant may reduce unsafe abortions and maternal deaths by over 70% each year, and may very well conserves precious resources that would otherwise have gone toward pregnancy-related costs.

4. Maternal Health

The World Health Organization estimates that 830 women die (this is in my opinion a very underestimate figure) every day from preventable, pregnancy-related causes. That's more than 300,000 lives per year unnecessarily lost during what is fundamentally a life-creating event. 99% of all maternal deaths occur in developing countries. The causes may include,

- severe bleeding (mostly bleeding after childbirth)
- infections (usually after childbirth)
- high blood pressure during pregnancy (pre-eclampsia and eclampsia)
- complications from delivery
- unsafe abortion.

The remainder are caused by or associated with diseases such as malaria, and AIDS during pregnancy. As a matter of fact all are easily preventable with no added costs.

5. Gender-based Violence

It is estimated that 35 per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives. However, some national studies show that up to 70 per cent of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime. Evidence shows that women who have experienced physical or sexual intimate partner violence report higher rates of depression, having an abortion and acquiring HIV, compared to women who have not. Whether

it's domestic abuse, rape, or sexual trafficking, gender-based violence denies far too many women the opportunity to live happy, healthy, and fulfilling lives.

6. Child Marriage

An estimated 1-5 girls will become child brides between 2011 and 2020 globally. Girls who marry before age 18 are typically denied an education, at risk of complications related to premature childbearing, and more vulnerable to intimate partner violence.

7. Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (or FGM), defined by WHO as including "procedures that intentionally alter or cause injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons," is a complex issue with religious and cultural implications for the groups who practice it. That said, the general consensus in the international community is that FGM imposes real health consequences, violates a child's rights, and promotes inequality between the sexes.

8. Water & Sanitation

When clean drinking water and hygienic sanitation facilities are in short supply, women and girls suffer most. Girls whose schools lack proper bathrooms will often skip school during their menstrual periods for fear of embarrassment. It's also true that women in developing countries are frequently tasked with fetching water, which can be a too much time and too much energy -consuming process as they have to travel on an average five miles for filling a can of water.

9. Gender Equality

Equality (or the lack thereof) is a recurring issue when it comes to women and girls, whether it's unequal access to schooling for girls in developing countries, or unequal pay for women in the workplace. In a world where 95% of countries are led by a male head of state, it's clear that we as a global community have a long way to go before women are given a fair shake. While the 9 issues outlined above are specific to girls and women, addressing them will positively impact everyone.