



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

*It's time to*

## **MONMUNC' 22 | RENEWAL**

**Topic A: Addressing the taboo of sexual  
harassment in developing countries**

**Topic B: Ensuring equitable access to  
tertiary education for women**

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*United Nations Women (UNW)*



@monashmunmalaysia

## Chairs Introduction

### Head-Chair: Carmen

What's up my dudes, my name is Carmen and I am your Chair along with *Dee* very lovely Dee, nervous, trying my best, sleep-deprived and a barely discernible blob who makes terrible puns. Here's a special message to first-timers and if you are an experienced delegate, *sigh* I suppose you can stay.

Welcome to the Malaysian MUN Community! **\*Insert Super Smash Bros Melee Menu Theme and maniacal laughing\*** Just kidding, a few quick pieces of advice - Don't be afraid of the fancy jargon and don't let the experienced delegates intimidate you. Don't worry, we are in the same boat and I am probably as terrified as you are. You will only regret it if you don't put yourself out there so just fake it till you make it! Feel free to contact me or if you have any questions about MUN or if you just need an electronic or physical hug.

Best of luck!

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### Co-Chair: Dee Emeraldalda

Dee has been in the Malaysian MUN scene since 2018. Ever since then, they had been focusing on honing and perfecting their skills in order to be a good teacher advisor to their former highschool MUN club to this day.

While Dee can often be spotted chairing in many places, they have also hosted three MUN conferences as a Secretary-General in 2021 alone, including the revival of HELPMUNC. Dee has also chaired alongside Carmen/Bee Jing Ping on last year's iteration of MonashMUN, and they have returned to once again deliver a smooth-sailing experience to many delegates.

In any case, Dee also enjoys droning hours into Terraria and dwelling in mid 2010s dubstep whilst understanding that solid hard boiled eggs are exclusively disgusting.

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## **Welcome Note from the Dais**

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Women (UNW) Council of Monash Model United Nations Conference 2022! It will be our greatest pleasure to serve as the Dais for this committee, and we look forward to meeting delegates who seek to challenge themselves to their fullest and demonstrate passion in taking on the responsibility of debating pertinent world issues.

In this session of the UNW, delegates will be tackling two topics: Addressing the Taboo of Sexual Harassment in Developing Countries and Ensuring Equitable Access to Tertiary Education for women. When reading this research report, you may notice that some of the contents from each topic may overlap with each other. Please do not take this as an opportunity to skip these parts (please don't, we worked really hard on this) but rather to consider how taking an intersectional perspective on these issues may help you as a delegate diagnose, prioritise and solve the underlying root causes of these issues.

Please use this Research Report as a starting point for your own research, knowledge is power and without research at a MUN Conference, you will not be able to perform to your fullest potential. ~~We are begging you please do your research.~~ We hope that this Research Report will provide useful information and inspire you to delve deeper into the world of MUN. See you soon!

*Carmen and Dee*

## Position Paper Guidelines

As this council will be conducted in the Malaysian standard HarvardMUN Rules of Procedure by MYADP, position papers are *unfortunately* compulsory. On the bright side, it does help prepare delegates with research in lieu of the conference.

That being said, the guidelines are as followed:

- **Font:** Roboto, 11pt
- **Alignment:** Justified, 1.5 spacing
- You are allowed to use **bold**, underline, and *italics*
- **Maximum 2 pages** for content (EXCLUDING Bibliography/References)
- Page number at bottom right corner
- Please cite your position paper in APA 7th Edition
- Please title the paper with the format of [Country]\_[Council]\_PP
  - Sample: Malaysia\_UNW\_PP
- Please **do not** include your personal name or information
  - To label your paper, do add [Country]\_[Council] on the top left Header
- Please write the position paper in English
  - While both chairs are bilingual, considering the conference and council will be conducted in English, the position paper will follow accordingly too
- Please send the paper as a **PDF file**
- Upon submission, email the paper to **BOTH** head chair and co-chair (do refer to the Chair Introduction for the email(s))
- Delegates are encouraged to run their papers through an online plagiarism checker as academic integrity vital within Model UN
  - The chairs will **not** look highly upon any papers with plagiarism over 25%
- If any of the above standards are not followed, **it will result in the deduction of marks from your PP.**

The due date for PPs are on **Thursday, April 21, 2022, 23:59**. Any non-submissions will automatically disqualify you for any awards in the event.

On a side note, decoration of the position paper (be it with the assigned country (emblem/flag) is allowed so long as it will not be disruptive to the legibility of the document.

For more inquiries, do not hesitate to contact the chairs. Specifically for the co-chair, do use Discord rather than emails.

## **Introduction to United Nations Women**

The United Nations Women (UNW) Organisation is an individual body under the UN's General Assembly specifically targeted towards the development of women's empowerment and gender equality. Their mandate touches upon the support of member states to achieve gender equality via policies, programmes, and services.

The UNW (n.d.) works towards Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals under the mandates:

Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems

Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy

All women and girls live free from all forms of violence

Women and girls contribute to and have a greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian actions. (p. about)

Understanding where and how UNW operates upon its policies is crucial for delegates to understand in-council for the solutions to later be proposed during the conference.

## Topic A: Addressing the Taboo of Sexual Harassment in Developing Countries

### Introduction to the Topic

Upon first glance, the issue at hand may dwell upon how the act of sexual harassment is a taboo (*which is good!*), unfortunately, this isn't *exactly* the issue to be discussed during council. The case of unreported sexual harassment is common enough to be a norm by its statistical standards. According to United Nations Economic and Social Affairs (2015), less than 40% of women report on their cases of sexual harassment. The concerning taboo and discrimination that comes around sexual harassment often circulate towards the victims more than the perpetrator - and often restricts the open discussion and reports of those who had been affected. However, what really constitutes as sexual harassment?

**Defining Sexual Harassment.** To quote the direct definition used by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2005) sexual harassment constitutes as:

Any unwelcome sexual advance, request for sexual favour, verbal or physical conduct or gesture of a sexual nature, or any other behaviour of a sexual nature that might reasonably be expected or be perceived to cause offence or humiliation to another. Sexual harassment may occur when it interferes with work, is made a condition of employment or creates an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment. It can include a one-off incident or a series of incidents. Sexual harassment may be deliberate, unsolicited and coercive. Both male and female colleagues can either be the victim or offender. Sexual harassment may also occur outside the workplace and/or outside working hours. (p. 3)

From this point forward, any mention of sexual harassment will pertain to this specific definition as following the spirit of the UN Charter.

### The Issue with Developing Countries

**Statistics.** The issue at hand has a major focus towards the developing member nations. In Asia, the percentage of women who had experienced a form of sexual harassment in Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, and Vietnam is 57%, 77%, 79%, and 87% respectively (Senthilingam, 2017). More from Senthilingam (2017), in the Middle East, where a 2013 UNW report was cited, 99% of women surveyed across Egypt had experienced a form of sexual harassment; specifically with Cairo being found with 95% of the women sampled to have been victims of sexual harassment. The case gets slightly trickier in African regions where 43% of the girls under 18 were married off in Nigeria as of 2016. On a more dire situation, 1 in 5 women in Zimbabwe admitted that the first time they had sex were against

their will as of 2012. If we were to relocate to Latin America (*which really isn't any better*), 86% of women in Brazil reported to be victims of sexual harassment or violence in public as of 2016 whilst an earlier study from 2015 showed that 84% of the women were assaulted by the police. Another alarming study cited from UN Women in a 2014 study addresses Papua New Guinea, with over 90% of women and girls having experienced some form of violence on public transport.

If we compare these statistics to their “developed counterparts,” in the United States alone, 65% of women who were surveyed had experienced street harassment, with at least 37% feeling unsafe to walk home at night (Senthilingam, 2017). However, if we compare the US statistics to Canada, there is a pattern noticed where the rape or assault cases more often were perpetrated by a date or a partner rather than by strangers; with only 1% to 2% of the date rapes being reported to the police. However, another crucial aspect when comparing statistics is the population ratio when compared to continents or countries with a smaller population than the US or even Canada. Interestingly, abuse cases in Europe are at a higher rate thanks to the extensive survey conducted by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2012 (Senthilingam, 2017). Even so, the numbers are fairly tame if countries are directly compared rather than the whole of Europe. With the highest percentage being Denmark's 52%.

**Culture and Societal Norms.** Often when exploring sexual harassment and the cases that went unreported, the culture and society is often questioned. Senthilingam (2017) compared how the issue with developing countries may stem from the culture of *male entitlement*; because men are often in control of the area and policies, there is a perceived sense of ownership of what occurs there - including that of women. This doubles down when strictly patriarchal social norms are placed in society. Taking South Asia into account, because of how unsafe the streets have become, it eventually became a reasonable excuse to discourage women from going out of their homes or to even have girls pulled out of schools, further restricting women's empowerment, be it via autonomy or even educational literacy. On the depressing case of Latin America, street sexual harassment is often normalised and dismissed by social standards.

**War and Conflict.** To refer to the Tatmadaw coup in Myanmar in early of 2021, conflicted areas tend to contribute to the issue of the taboo of sexual violence. To refer to the Joint Statement by UNFPA and UNW (2021), women who were at the forefront of protests, be it as journalists, activists, and etc, faced multiple acts of sexual violence as detainees. With Myanmar already struggling to provide appropriate sexual healthcare facilities for women, the coup led to a steeper margin of having it be available to begin with. Around this point of

the crisis, general medical healthcare is already on decline so the request or demands for *sexual* healthcare will come off as a petty whine. This health crisis led to the downfall of the support Myanmar has from its own civilians and the general wellbeing as part of general human rights.

## **Case Study**

**Malaysia.** Although Malaysia has certain basic legal frameworks that allow for sexual predators to be persecuted, there is still much that can be done in relation to providing a survivor first mentality towards policymaking. Current legal frameworks in the penal code and the employment acts have a vague definition of what consists of sexual harassment. However, many forms of sexual harassment such as marital rape, stalking, revenge porn and upskirting have not been outlawed, leading to many victims not being able to seek protection from the law. According to a report by the Asian Strategy and Leadership Institute (ASLI) in 2019, even though the victims themselves suffered through much trauma, the report claims that the helplessness that the friends and family of the victims felt when they were not able to help the victim created what was known as “secondary victims” of the crime.

After increased pressure by NGOs and political parties, the current government has tabled the Anti Sexual Harassment Bill in December 2021, the bill is currently in its first reading as of the writing of this research report and has been the focal point of criticism by many womens activist groups. The bill proposes the formation of a tribunal to help victims of sexual assault privately (ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT BILL 2021, 2021). However, NGOs such as the Women’s Aid Organisation have spoken of the need to amend the bill fully as the bill at its current state does not take a victim first approach when it comes to preventing or further protecting current and potential victims. Members of the opposition such as MP Batu Kawan and MP Segambut have consulted these groups to propose amendments that proactively asks private organisations to take part in actively preventing sexual assault from occurring and establishing a proper SOP to help victims in the event that harassment occurs in a work or private setting. (The Star Online, 2022)

Malaysia’s conservative laws on sexual harassment in addition to the perception that men do not get sexually harassed makes it difficult for men to speak out against their sexual abusers. According to government statistics, men are much less likely than women to lodge a report if they have been sexually assaulted. One of the main reasons that affects the low likelihood of lodging a police report from both women and men is due to a feeling of



helplessness and shame. A survey recorded that 54% of sexual assault victims don't report the crime as they were afraid of being embarrassed. A further breakdown showed that a couple of the reasons as to why they felt that way was because they didn't want their family and friends to know that they were sexually harassed, men especially felt that they should not have "allowed" their attackers to assault them due to the prevalence of masculine expectations for men in Malaysia. Another 38% of the survey demographic felt that they might as well not report as nobody was going to take action for them. (MURAD, 2021)

## **Past Actions**

### **DPKO/MD/03/00995**

The United Nations implemented a formal code of conduct within its own peacekeeping and security forces to deal with its own officers who have harassed civilians or other UN staff whilst on duty. The directive lays out what constitutes as a form of sexual harassment and suggests prevention measures as well as documentation guidelines when dealing with cases. (United Nations, 2003)

### **Guidelines on S/RES/2272**

The resolution recognises the "continuing and serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by United Nations peacekeepers in the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), as well as in other United Nations peacekeeping operations and by non-United Nations forces" in clause 6. The resolution takes action against this by allowing the Secretary-General discretion to prevent any nation from participating in the peacekeeping forces if their government has been found to have not thoroughly investigated allegations of sexual assault against their officers. (UN Security Council, 2016)

### **UNHCR Addressing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse and Sexual Harassment Strategy, Structure and Key Actions 2018**

This report by the UNHCR and the ILO focuses on disadvantaged groups that find it difficult to speak out after suffering from sexual violence at work. The report recommends policy that targets minorities such as migrant workers who may not receive the same legal protections as a native worker. The report and guide also acknowledges the under-reporting of sexual harassment cases due to the existing taboo around sexual harassment. (UN Women & International Labour Organisation, 2019)

## **QARMA**

1. How can member states tackle social discrimination without infringing upon the sovereign cultures and beliefs being practised?
2. To what extent does social awareness become a breach in nation sovereignty?

## Topic B: Ensuring equitable access to tertiary education for women

### Introduction to the Topic

In 2016 the gender parity of tertiary education highly favoured males in much of Africa and South-East Asia, meaning that there was a disproportionate lack of female students from these regions pursuing higher education.<sup>1</sup> Several UN agencies and bodies have targeted to reduce the gender gap in not just tertiary education but have also targeted traditionally male-dominated fields such as STEM. One such goal is the UN Sustainable Development Goal Target 4.3 under Education for All which aims that “By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university.”<sup>2</sup>

Such importance is placed on access to tertiary education as the UN has identified that an increase of women in tertiary education could improve quality of life factors such as infant mortality rate, poverty and faster social development.<sup>3</sup> However, it must be noted that there are many factors that lead to tertiary education being inaccessible to women and that the council should aim to address these as well as the consequences of the lack of women in tertiary education.

One of the main anti-discriminatory frameworks by the UN is the Convention on the Elimination of All Types of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) recognised the importance of achieving equity and equality in tertiary education. Although access to tertiary education is mentioned in several articles of the CEDAW, in particular, Article 10 states that:

Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in order to ensure to them equal rights with men in the field of education and in particular to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women:

(a) The same conditions for career and vocational guidance, for access to studies and for the achievement of diplomas in educational establishments of all categories in rural as well as in urban areas; this equality shall be ensured in pre-school, general, technical, professional and higher technical education, as well as in all types of vocational training;

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<sup>1</sup> Our World in Data. (2022). *Gross enrollment ratio, tertiary, gender parity index (GPI)*. Our World in Data. <https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/gpi-tertiary-education>

<sup>2</sup> UNSDG Tracker. (2020). *Goal 4: Quality Education - SDG Tracker*. Our World in Data. <https://sdg-tracker.org/quality-education>

<sup>3</sup> Peace Corps. (2022). *Global Issues: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. Peacecorps.gov. <https://www.peacecorps.gov/educators/resources/global-issues-gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment/>

## Barriers to Accessing Education

### War and Conflict

During the US invasion of Iraq during Saddam Hussein's regime, many Iraqi universities were destroyed and looted by US military and Iraqi fringe militant groups alike. The Iraq War also led to a purge of leading Iraqi academics, leading to a loss of intellectual resources. Though the Iraq War made accessing tertiary education much more difficult, women were disproportionately affected due to the increase of militant Islamic fundamentalist groups sending death threats and actual violence towards female scholars.<sup>4</sup>

The aftereffects of conflicts were also shown to impact women entering tertiary education. After the 9/11 attacks in the United States, surveys and insider reports show that women of middle eastern heritage were discriminated against by universities admissions in the US due to fear that these women were associated with Al-Qaeda. These women also reported that they were pressured to leave their studies by both academic staff and other students due to their ethnic background.<sup>5</sup>

### Poverty

Access to tertiary education for women has been severely crippled by the COVID19 pandemic. A survey conducted by the Association of Commonwealth Universities on digital engagement in higher education in Commonwealth Universities found that 83% of students from high-income countries had access to the internet during the COVID19 pandemic in comparison to only 19% of students in low-income countries.<sup>6</sup>

Poverty also prevents girls from accessing secondary education and thus, further education. According to a report by UNICEF, only 49% of nations as of 2019 have achieved gender parity in primary education and drops to a shocking 24% at secondary education. The report further cites practices such as female genital mutilation, child marriage and a culture of sexual violence as main factors as to why girls drop out of school.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Watson Institute, International and Public Affairs, Brown University. (2015). *Education | Costs of War*. The Costs of War. <https://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/costs/social/education>

<sup>5</sup> Ahmed, A. (2012, October 8). *The war on terror is a war on women*. University of Cambridge. <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/the-war-on-terror-is-a-war-on-women>

<sup>6</sup> The Association of Commonwealth Universities. (2020, September). *Higher education during COVID-19: a snapshot of digital engagement in Commonwealth universities*. <https://www.acu.ac.uk/news/higher-education-during-covid-19-a-snapshot-of-digital-engagement-in-commonwealth-universities/>

<sup>7</sup> *Girls' education*. (2019). Unicef.org. <https://www.unicef.org/education/girls-education>

## **Religious and Cultural Values - Afghanistan, a Case Study**

The topic of women's education has been one of the most pressing since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021. Prior to the takeover, women were allowed to go to school and attend university. This was immediately put to a stop as the Taliban believed that according to their interpretation of Islam, women should not receive an education. However, after increasing international pressure, the Taliban announced in February 2022 that existing female students were allowed to return to university.

Currently, Afghanistan ranks the lowest internationally at 1% per cohort for female enrollment rate at tertiary education institutions.<sup>8</sup> Whilst most universities in major cities have been allowed to welcome back female students, some universities in rural areas have reported not been allowed to receive female students as of the writing of this research report.

The BBC reported that a female student from Kabul was shocked when a Taliban spokesman said in a statement that women should aspire to be politicians or engineers as these were male tasks. She also mentioned that she was afraid that certain degrees would be snubbed by the Taliban for women as they were not traditionally feminine. Further restrictions on female education were placed, including separating male and female students with curtains and strict control of who the students were allowed to interact with.<sup>9</sup>

Although the Taliban has allowed current female university students to continue with their classes, the Taliban has not allowed girls to receive secondary education, barring an entire generation access to tertiary education.<sup>10</sup>

## **Gender-Based Violence and Discrimination in Schools**

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<sup>8</sup> United Nations. (2022). *Advancing Women's Higher Education in Afghanistan* | United Nations. United Nations; United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/academic-impact/advancing-womens-higher-education-afghanistan>

<sup>9</sup> Reuters. (2021, September 6). *A curtain divides male, female students as Afghan universities reopen*. Reuters; Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/curtain-divides-male-female-students-afghan-universities-reopen-2021-09-06/>

<sup>10</sup> Owen, L. (2022, February 4). *Afghanistan women: "I felt anxious going back to university."* BBC News; BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-60236826>

## **Sexual Blackmail at University - Morocco, a Case Study**

There are extremely high levels of claims of professional misconduct, usually in the terms of sexual favours by females for grades. In Morocco, the #MeTooUniv has brought up the taboo practice of sexual blackmail targeted towards women at university. Nadia, a dropout student from a Moroccan university, was blackmailed by her professor to have intercourse with him in order to achieve a passing mark. Nadia refused and when she tried to report this incident to the university administration, Nadia's professor threatened her through text that the "administration is in his pocket" and that "You are trapped now." She was soon expelled from the university after failing to meet the grade requirements. Academic staff at universities have often abused their power to sexually blackmail vulnerable female students, oftentimes, these students are coerced into dropping out or like Nadia's case, leading to expulsion from the university<sup>11</sup>

## **Sexual Assault**

Sexual assault is one of the main reasons why girls drop out or are prevented from receiving an education at any level. In developing regions where rape and sexual assault are rampant, many families may keep their girls out of school to prevent them from getting sexually harassed by their peers or teachers. Girls who were sent to school may also drop out after being sexually assaulted to care for children born out of unwanted pregnancies.<sup>12</sup>

## **Child Marriage and Female Genital Mutilation**

Although the practice of female genital mutilation (FGM) are found worldwide, these practices are most commonly found in parts of Africa, the Middle East and Asia. FGM comes in many forms but most generally includes a permanent surgery on an underage girl's genitals for the purposes of retaining chastity, prevent girls from being sexually assaulted and more.<sup>13</sup> FGM often occurs as a rite of passage as part of child marriage and complications from FGM could cause severe painful and long-lasting health complications that could physically prevent girls from receiving an education.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Mounir, G. (2022). *Morocco's women students break their silence on "sex for grades" scandal*. Middle East Eye. <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/morocco-sex-grades-scandal-female-students-break-silence>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations. (2015, March 30). *Millions of girls remain out of school*. Africa Renewal. <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2015/millions-girls-remain-out-school>

<sup>13</sup> NHS Choices. (2022). *Overview - Female genital mutilation (FGM)*. <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/female-genital-mutilation-fgm/>

<sup>14</sup> UNICEF. (2019). *Female genital mutilation*. Unicef.org. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/female-genital-mutilation>

Child marriage is also prevalent in countries that practise FGM, it is a practice that is associated with cultural and or religious reasons where girls under 18 are forced to marry and give birth during their adolescent years. Child marriage increases the possibility of death, chronic health conditions, domestic violence and taking care of the child which prevents the mother from pursuing education. It is important to note that many countries have not outlawed FGM or child marriage and that legislative change may help bring about a better chance for women to pursue tertiary education.<sup>15</sup>

## **Issues Rooted in Inequality of Education**

### **Female Poverty**

The ability to attain tertiary education allows for women to enter professional fields which has a higher guarantee of job security and a stable income. Unfortunately, many women who do not receive a university education are only able to participate in the informal economy, putting women at the mercy of violence, crime and law enforcement. The lack of tertiary education for women has resulted in 75% of women in low-income regions globally having to resort to the dangerous informal economy as these women do not have the formal qualifications to compete in the professional labour force. In addition, due to a lack of access to quality reproductive healthcare, women in poverty tend to have a high birth rate and as women are generally expected to take on the role of a caregiver, they are usually confined to caring for their children. According to Reuters, women perform twice as much unpaid care work compared to men. This makes generations of women extremely vulnerable to being trapped in a cycle of poverty if tertiary education is not made accessible or cheaper.<sup>16</sup> See the case study on India below for a comprehensive look at the feminization of poverty.

### **Lack of Representation in Academia**

The lack of women in tertiary education has shown to have an overall negative impact on societal progression as a whole. In Nigeria, research has shown that studies that had a lack of female academics were biased and inconclusive.<sup>17</sup> The UN

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<sup>15</sup> UNICEF. (2019). *Child marriage*. Unicef.org. <https://www.unicef.org/protection/child-marriage>

<sup>16</sup> Oxfam International. (2020, January 20). *Why the majority of the world's poor are women* | Oxfam International. Oxfam International. <https://www.oxfam.org/en/why-majority-worlds-poor-are-women>

<sup>17</sup> Abur, C. C., Danyi, C. J., & Torruam, J. T. (2013). *THE EFFECT OF LOW PARTICIPATION OF FEMALE IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN NIGERIA*. Res Publication.

has also stated that a lack of female participation in tertiary education could lead to a slower progression towards developing green technology and stopping climate change.<sup>18</sup>

### **Gender Stereotyped Careers**

The concept of a “Hidden Curriculum” at school for different genders has been shown to impact the labour market in regards to gender-stereotyped careers. Many teachers practise implicit gender discrimination where boys have been pressured into stereotypically masculine career fields such as jobs in technology, finance and architecture whilst girls on the other hand, were not only encouraged to take on perceived feminine roles such as nursing, and teaching but to remain as housewives.<sup>19</sup> Unfortunately, the results of this pressure from a young age pushes the child or to pursue a degree they might not enjoy or prevents them from exploring the possibility of a career at all. We see this in the lack of women pursuing higher education in STEM, a stereotypically male-dominated field due to being discouraged. Furthermore, studies show that women were perceived to choose lower-paying jobs due to their innate interests, this reinforces the gender-based stereotype and leads to further income inequality and increased gender segregation in labour.<sup>20</sup>

## **Social and Economic Impacts**

### **Increase in Overall Quality of Life**

Studies by Harvard University show a positive correlation between improvements in multiple components of quality of life and the increase of women in higher education. The study showed that women who been through tertiary education allowed women to make better decisions in regards to their own autonomy, their children and reproductive health. When there was an increase of women going to university, Harvard noted that there was generally a decrease in both infant and maternal

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[https://www.academia.edu/50993868/THE\\_EFFECT\\_OF\\_LOW\\_PARTICIPATION\\_OF\\_FEMALE\\_IN\\_SCIENCE\\_AND\\_TECHNOLOGY\\_IN\\_NIGERIA](https://www.academia.edu/50993868/THE_EFFECT_OF_LOW_PARTICIPATION_OF_FEMALE_IN_SCIENCE_AND_TECHNOLOGY_IN_NIGERIA)

<sup>18</sup> UN Women. (2021). *Women, Gender Equality and Climate Change*.

[https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate\\_change/downloads/Women\\_and\\_Climate\\_Change\\_Factsheet.pdf](https://www.un.org/womenwatch/feature/climate_change/downloads/Women_and_Climate_Change_Factsheet.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Giroux, H. A., & Penna, A. N. (2012). *Social Education in the Classroom: The Dynamics of the Hidden Curriculum*. Theory & Research in Social Education.

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00933104.1979.10506048>

<sup>20</sup> Sinclair, S., & Carlsson, R. (2013). What will I be when I grow up? The impact of gender identity threat on adolescents' occupational preferences. *Journal of Adolescence*, 36(3), 465–474.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2013.02.001>



mortality rates. The women involved in the study also noted that receiving tertiary education allowed them to be more fulfilled and achieve economic success.<sup>21</sup>

### **Political Participation**

Studies have found that women who have received tertiary education were more likely to have increased political participation. Perna 2005 states that women who have been to university were more likely to engage in volunteer work, civic engagements and attend political rallies and discussions. Evidence shows that countries with many educated women also has voting patterns that favour democratic governance.<sup>22</sup>

### **Case Study - the Relationship Between Female Higher Education and Quality of Life of Kerala and Rajasthan in India**

When comparing the state with the highest percentage of female tertiary education students of Kerala at 26.9% and the lowest at 14.9% in the State of Rajasthan, there is a clear indication that access to tertiary education allows for an improvement of the quality of life.<sup>23</sup>

Rajasthan faces a female dropout crisis due to several main issues. Firstly, child marriage and dowry culture is extremely prominent in Rajasthan, studies show that many child marriages occur within the state as a way to escape extreme poverty. Child marriage as a means to escape from poverty has prevented many girls from continuing with their education along with the practice of child labour. Girls are recruited from as young as the age of nine to sort through processed cotton. Encouraging girls to drop out of school at such an early age disrupts the continuity of education and traps the girls in a cycle of poverty where they are not able to apply for higher-paying jobs due to their lack of tertiary education.

This is contrasted with the state with the highest amount of female students seeking tertiary education - Kerala, which has amongst the lowest amount of recorded child marriages in 2011. The accompanied statistics of infant and maternal mortality are the lowest in India, this is possibly due to the exposure of women to sexual reproductive health services and

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<sup>21</sup> Bloom, D. E., Hartley, M., & Rosovsky, H. (2022). Beyond Private Gain: The Public Benefits of Higher Education. *International Handbook of Higher Education*, 293–308. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-4012-2_15)

<sup>22</sup> Perna, L. W. (2005). The Benefits of Higher Education: Sex, Racial/Ethnic, and Socioeconomic Group Differences. *The Review of Higher Education*, 29(1), 23–52. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2005.0073>

<sup>23</sup> Government of India Ministry of Human Resource Development. (2013). *ALL INDIA SURVEY ON HIGHER EDUCATION 2011-12 (Provisional)* GOVERNMENT OF INDIA MINISTRY OF HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION NEW DELHI. [https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload\\_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P\\_1.pdf](https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics/AISHE2011-12P_1.pdf)

resources accessible through higher education. Women were also reportedly able to support themselves and their children in a healthier financial capacity after they attended university.<sup>24</sup>

Although the future looks bleak for girls in Rajasthan, there are NGOs and schools taking initiative to improve the condition of women in the state such as the Mrs. Helena Kaushik Women's P.G. & B.Ed. College. The college has targeted to provide disadvantaged Rajasthan women with higher education. The programme has seen an increase in the number of female entrepreneurs in Rajasthan.<sup>25</sup>

## **Past Actions Taken**

### **Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)**

In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was introduced by the United Nations General Assembly. The convention highlights methods in which women may be discriminated against in the educational field and seeks to eliminate such discrimination. Since its introduction, CEDAW has been ratified by 189 UN member states. Nations that have ratified the convention are obliged to submit a report to the UN General Assembly every four years regarding progress on the articles within the convention.<sup>26</sup>

### **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action was adopted unanimously by all members of the United Nations at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995. One of the main focuses of the Declaration was the emphasis of the “promotion of lifelong education and training for girls and women” which recognised the importance of higher education. The Declaration also called for the inclusion of counselling and distribution of resources to encourage women to pursue careers and higher education.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Avijit Mistri. (2019). *HOUSEHOLD QUALITY OF LIFE IN INDIAN STATES: ANALYSIS OF 2011 CENSUS*. Academia.edu. [https://www.academia.edu/4045925/HOUSEHOLD\\_QUALITY\\_OF\\_LIFE\\_IN\\_INDIAN\\_STATES\\_ANALYSIS\\_OF\\_2011\\_CENSUS](https://www.academia.edu/4045925/HOUSEHOLD_QUALITY_OF_LIFE_IN_INDIAN_STATES_ANALYSIS_OF_2011_CENSUS)

<sup>25</sup> Kaushik, S. K., Kaushik, S., & Kaushik, S. (2006). How higher education in rural India helps human rights and entrepreneurship. *Journal of Asian Economics*, 17(1), 29–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.asieco.2006.01.004>

<sup>26</sup> *Text of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*. (2022). Un.org. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>

<sup>27</sup> United Nations. (2020). *Fourth World Conference on Women | United Nations*. United Nations; United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/women/beijing1995>

## **UNESCO Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education**

UNESCO has published a guide for ensuring inclusion and equity in education which includes several policy recommendations targetting countries such as Macedonia and Bangladesh. Although the policy recommendation guide was published in 2017, it is unclear how many governments have successfully adopted these recommendations to increase female participation in tertiary education.<sup>28</sup>

## **Further Reading and Helpful Resources**

Girls Table: Tertiary education and the challenges facing women by the Centre for Innovation & Technology

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIQV52I7o\\_Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yIQV52I7o_Q)

UNICEF Data on Education

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/education/overview/>

UNHCR Reports on Tertiary Education

<https://www.unhcr.org/tertiary-education.html>

Access, Equity and Quality University Education for the Disadvantaged Groups in Nigeria: Myths and Agenda for Action by the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

<https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234636693.pdf>

World Higher Education Conference WHEC2022 UNESCO

<https://en.unesco.org/sites/default/files/whec2022-concept-note-en.pdf>

OECD Policy Responses to Coronavirus (COVID-19) The impact of COVID-19 on student equity and inclusion: Supporting vulnerable students during school closures and school re-openings

<https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-equity-and-inclusion-supporting-vulnerable-students-during-school-closures-and-school-re-opening-s-d593b5c8/>

No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education OECD

<https://www.oecd.org/education/school/39676364.pdf>

## **QARMAs**

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<sup>28</sup> UNESCO. (2017). *Guide for Ensuring Inclusion and Equity in Education*. Unesco.org.  
<https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000248254/PDF/248254eng.pdf.multi>

1. What are the factors preventing women from accessing tertiary education in your country and are there any metrics to identify and measure them?
2. Should the UNW push for legal change in certain countries and if so, what kind of legal change?
3. What steps can the UNW help developing countries obtaining funding for and reducing the cost of tertiary education for women?
4. What can nations do in retaining girls in the primary and secondary education system so that they will be able to proceed to the tertiary level?

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