GENDER ISSUES

# Definition of Terms

## Gender

"**Gender**" refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. It can be defined as 'more than biological differences between men and women. It includes the ways in which those differences, whether real or perceived, have been valued, used and relied upon to classify women and men and to assign roles and expectations to them. The significance of this is that the lives and experiences of women and men, including their experience of the legal system, occur within complex sets of differing social and cultural expectations'.

* It is the men and women’s roles and responsibilities that are socially determined (socially constructed)
* The condition of being male or female. Gender is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act as women and men. This is as a result of how society is organized and not because of our biological differences. It is the range of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, [masculinity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masculinity) and [femininity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Femininity).(i.e. the state of being male, female), sex-based [social structures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_structure) (including [gender roles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_role) and other [social roles](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Role)), or [gender identity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity)
* Biologically people are born as either or female but learn to be men or women.
* The role of men and women differs from culture to culture - it is changeable with time.

## Sex

* **Sex"** refers to the biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women
* Biological and physiological make up of men and women
* It is permanent and not determined by society.

To put it another way:

**"Male" and "female" are sex categories, while "masculine" and "feminine" are gender categories.**

Aspects of sex will not vary substantially between different human societies, while aspects of gender may vary greatly.

Some examples of sex characteristics:

* Women menstruate while men do not
* Men have testicles while women do not
* Women have developed breasts that are usually capable of lactating, while men have not
* Men generally have more massive bones than women

Some examples of gender characteristics:

* In most countries, women earn significantly less money than men for similar work
* In most countries, many more men than women smoke, as female smoking has not traditionally been considered appropriate
* In Saudi Arabia men are allowed to drive cars while women are not
* In most of the world, women do more housework than men

## Gender Roles

* Responsibilities based on biological and physiological make up as constructed and defined by a given culture. They are learned behavior in a given society. They are those roles which are considered masculine or feminine. Gender roles are interchangeable
* Social conformity with expectations for either of the two main sexes.
* Gender role is the cultural stereotype of what is masculine and feminine.

When a child is first born it has a biological sex but no social gender. As the child grows, "...society provides a string of prescriptions, templates, or models of behaviors appropriate to the one sex or the other. This socializes the child into belonging to a culturally specific gender. This socialization and gender shaping, provides the individual with opportunities for education, work, family, sexuality, reproduction, authority etc. Adults who do not perform these ascribed roles are perceived from this perspective as deviant and improperly socialized.

Gender is implicated in the fundamental, ongoing processes of creating and conceptualising social structures.

Gendering occurs in different interacting social processes, like:

* Divisions along the lines of gender, such as labor, power, family, the state, even allowed behaviors and locations in physical space.
* Symbols and images such as language, ideology, dress, Posture, etc.
* Interactions between men and women, women and women and men and men. In ordinary talking between men and women, there is some form of dominance and submission in terms of the setting of topics and the flow of the conversation.

The above processes help to produce gendered components of individual identity, i.e., the way they create and maintain an image of a gendered self

## Sex roles

Roles that a male or a female perform by virtue of their biological make up. A sex role can be performed by only one of the sexes. There are very few sex roles.

e.g.

* Breast feeding can only done by females
* Carrying of a pregnancy can only be done by females

*It can therefore be concluded that: Sex is what you are biologically; gender is what you become socially.*

## Equality

* The even distribution of resources to all.
* ***Gender equality*** is based on the premise that women and men should be treated in the same way.

***Gender equity***

Takes into consideration the differences in women's and men's lives and recognises that different approaches may be needed to produce outcomes that are equitable.

## Gender Identity

* The subjective feeling of maleness or femaleness, irrespective of one’s sex. It is therefore possible for one to be of one sex but with a gender identity of the other sex. gender identity is your own sense or conviction of maleness or femaleness;
* one’s sense of oneself as a [man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Man) or [woman](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woman)

## Gender Bias

* Leaning towards one side just because of being male or female

## Gender Sensitive

* Appreciating that men and women are different and their roles are different.

## Gender Violence

* Using or tending to aggressive force against a person of the opposite sex.
* Violence meted on a person by a person of the opposite sex.
* Violence to person because of his sex and not for any other reason

## Gender Discrimination

* People of different sexes not being given equal opportunities to participate

## Gender Affirmative action

* Deliberate effort to bring men and women to participate and be involved

# Gender Awareness

* The recognition that the life experiences, expectations, and needs of women and men are different.
* The perception and realization of the ways in which women and men participate in the development process, how they are affected by it, and how they benefit from it.
* Gender awareness refers to a state of knowledge regarding the diversity and variation within the roles and relations of men and women. The diversity and variation between the two result in differences observed in power relations, statuses, privileges, and needs.

Gender awareness necessitates understanding to apparent gender differences between males and females in environments such as the place of work, or the place of education. To be "gender aware" is extremely important in any environment and can be very challenging for those who haven't considered gender issues and expectations in day-to-day life.

Without such awareness, not only will development and relief interventions fail to meet the needs and serve the interests of all people they are intended to help, but they may indeed hinder the situation of women.

## Gender Stereotyping

* Belief about what males and females are like and how they should behave
* It results from societal norms about men and women as perpetuated by culture.
* It is rigidly held and oversimplified belief that males and females, by virtue of their sex, poses distinct psychological traits and characteristics, e.g. men are independent, women are dependent, or women are emotional and men are rational.

## Gender Harassment

* Harassment based on one’s sex

## Gender Concern

* Issues of concern that arise out of the way society is organized and that need to be addressed.

## Gender Barriers

* Societal and cultural obstacles that prevent equality and equity
* Between men and women

## Gender Construction

A system is put in place to ensure that both boys and girls build up differently to be men and women. Preparation of boys and girls for future roles as men and women

## Gender Analysis

* The systematic effort to identify, understand and document the roles of women and men within a given context. It looks at the contribution and obligation of women, men, girls, boys and elders a given context. The key gender issues include:
* The gender division of labour.
* Access to and control over resources and benefits.
* Factors influencing the above
* Representation in decision making organs

Examines the differences in women's and men's lives, including those which lead to social and economic inequity for women, and applies this understanding to policy development and service delivery

* is concerned with the underlying causes of these inequities
* aims to achieve positive change for women

**Gender analysis recognises that:**

* women's and men's lives and therefore experiences, needs, issues and priorities are different
* women's lives are not all the same; the interests that women have in common may be determined as much by their social position or their ethnic identity as by the fact they are women
* women's life experiences, needs, issues and priorities are different for different ethnic groups
* the life experiences, needs, issues, and priorities vary for different groups of women (dependent on age, ethnicity, disability, income levels, employment status, marital status, sexual orientation and whether they have dependants)
* different strategies may be necessary to achieve equitable outcomes for women and men and different groups of women

Gender analysis aims to achieve **equity**, rather than equality.

# Gender Inequalities

This refers to unequal access to power, resources and opportunities in society. Gender inequality and discrimination harms girls and women’s health, directly and indirectly, throughout their life cycle. Unequal power relationship between men and women often limit women’s control over sexual activity and their ability to protect themselves against unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS.

In African society social cultural factors tied with traditional beliefs and practices play a great role in determining the place of women in almost all spheres of their lives. This influence begins with the socialization of young children both within and outside the home. At childhood, both boys and girls are introduced to societal beliefs, practices and values as they apply to each gender

[Gender inequality](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_inequality) is most common in women dealing with poverty. Many women must shoulder all the responsibility of the household because they must take care of the family. Oftentimes this may include tasks such as tilling land, grinding grain, carrying water and cooking. Also, women are more likely to earn low incomes because of gender discrimination, as men are more likely to receive higher pay, have more opportunities, and have overall more political and social capital then women. Approximately 75% of world's women are unable to get authorized bank loans because they have unstable jobs. It shows that there are many women in the world's population but only a few represent world's wealth. In many countries, the financial sector largely neglects women even though they play an important role in the economy

Women are more vulnerable to chronic poverty because of gender inequalities in the distribution of income, property ownership, credit, and control over earned income. Resource allocation is typically gender-biased within households, and continue on a higher level regarding state institutions.

Gender and Development (GAD) is a holistic approach to give aid to countries where gender inequality has a great effect of not improving the social and economic development. It is a program focused on the gender development of women to empower them and decrease the level of inequality between men and women.

The [United Nations Millennium Declaration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Millennium_Declaration) signed at the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000 including eight goals that were to be reached by 2015, and although it would be a difficult task to reach them, all of them could be monitored. The eight goals are:

1. Halve the proportion of people living in extreme poverty at the 1990 level by 2015.
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality rates
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Global partnership

The MDGs have three goals specifically focused on women: Goal 3, 4 and 5 but women’s issues also cut across all of the goals. These goals overall comprise all aspects of women’s lives including economic, health, and political participation.

Inequalities in the community

1. Education
2. Labour force
3. Access to medical care
4. Law of succession
5. Cultural practices such practices e.g. female genital mutilation, polygamy and wife inheritance.
6. Preference for the male child
7. Denial of rights
8. Food
9. Early marriages
10. Gender violence

## Education

Parents prefer to educate sons – women are considered to be a liability. Some people view educating girls as waste of money as they get married and leave the homestead.The [Dakar Framework for Action](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakar_Framework_for_Action) (2000) set out goals: to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and to achieve gender equality in education by 2015. The focus was on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in good quality basic education. The gender objective of the Dakar Framework for Action is somewhat different from the MDG Goal 3 (Target 1): “Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015” Educated mothers are more likely to send their children to school.

## Food

Traditions which dictate the kind of foods that can or cannot eat by girls, may lead to malnutrition and stunted growth that may lead to possibility of girls developing a small pelvis.

## Access to medical care

The girl-child, when sick is often denied prompt medical attention.

## Early marriage

Girls in some communities are forced to marry early so that the father can acquire bride wealth. Early marriage exposes the girl child to early sexual activity – predisposing the child to Ca cervix and obstetric complications

## Female genital mutilation

FGM is the collective name given to a number of cultural practices that involve the partial or total cutting of female genitals. It comprises all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia, or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice is mostly carried out by traditional circumcisers, who often play other central roles in communities, such as attending childbirths.

FGM has no health benefits, and it harms girls and women in many ways. It involves removing and damaging healthy and normal female genital tissue, and interferes with the natural functions of girls' and women's bodies

FGM is recognized internationally as a violation of the human rights of girls and women. It reflects deep-rooted inequality between the sexes, and constitutes an extreme form of discrimination against women. It is a violation of the rights of children. The practice also violates a person's rights to health, security and physical integrity, the right to be free from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, and the right to life when the procedure results in death.

Female genital mutilation is classified into four major types.

* Clitoridectomy: partial or total removal of the clitoris (a small, sensitive and erectile part of the female genitals) and, in very rare cases, only the prepuce (the fold of skin surrounding the clitoris).
* Excision: partial or total removal of the clitoris and the labia minora, with or without excision of the labia majora (the labia are "the lips" that surround the vagina).
* Infibulation: narrowing of the vaginal opening through cutting of the clitoris, labia minora and part of the labia majora. The two sides of the vulva are then pinned together using silk, catgut suture, or thorns
* Intermediate – removal of clitoris and some or all parts of the labia minora. All other harmful procedures to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes, e.g. pricking, piercing, incising, scraping and cauterizing the genital area.

### Negative consequences of FGM

* Immediate medical complications can include severe pain, shock, haemorrhage (bleeding), tetanus or sepsis (bacterial infection), urine retention, open sores in the genital region and injury to nearby genital tissue,pelvic infection.
* Painful intercourse
* Complications of child birth e.g. obstructed labour, due to scarring of tissues.
* Denying of women to enjoy sexual life because the clitoris plays a role in reaching organism.
* Predisposes girls to early marriages after the initiation.

Long-term consequences can include:

* recurrent bladder and urinary tract infections;
* cysts;
* infertility;
* an increased risk of childbirth complications and newborn deaths;
* The need for later surgeries. For example, the FGM procedure that seals or narrows a vaginal opening (type 3 above) needs to be cut open later to allow for sexual intercourse and childbirth. Sometimes it is stitched again several times, including after childbirth, hence the woman goes through repeated opening and closing procedures, further increasing and repeated both immediate and long-term risks.

#### Who is at risk?

Procedures are mostly carried out on young girls sometime between infancy and age 15, and occasionally on adult women. In Africa, more than three million girls have been estimated to be at risk for FGM annually.

#### Cultural, religious and social causes

The causes of female genital mutilation include a mix of cultural, religious and social factors within families and communities.

* Where FGM is a social convention, the social pressure to conform to what others do and have been doing is a strong motivation to perpetuate the practice.
* FGM is often considered a necessary part of raising a girl properly, and a way to prepare her for adulthood and marriage.
* FGM is often motivated by beliefs about what is considered proper sexual behaviour, linking procedures to premarital virginity and marital fidelity. FGM is in many communities believed to reduce a woman's libido and therefore believed to help her resist "illicit" sexual acts. When a vaginal opening is covered or narrowed (type 3 above), the fear of the pain of opening it, and the fear that this will be found out, is expected to further discourage "illicit" sexual intercourse among women with this type of FGM.
* FGM is associated with cultural ideals of femininity and modesty, which include the notion that girls are “clean” and "beautiful" after removal of body parts that are considered "male" or "unclean".
* Though no religious scripts prescribe the practice, practitioners often believe the practice has religious support.
* Religious leaders take varying positions with regard to FGM: some promote it, some consider it irrelevant to religion, and others contribute to its elimination.
* Local structures of power and authority, such as community leaders, religious leaders, circumcisers, and even some medical personnel can contribute to upholding the practice.
* In most societies, FGM is considered a cultural tradition, which is often used as an argument for its continuation.
* In some societies, recent adoption of the practice is linked to copying the traditions of neighbouring groups. Sometimes it has started as part of a wider religious or traditional revival movement. Eg Mungiki

#### WHO response

WHO efforts to eliminate female genital mutilation focus on:

* Strengthening the health sector response: guidelines, training and policy to ensure that health professionals can provide medical care and counselling to girls and women living with FGM;
* Building evidence: generating knowledge about the causes and consequences of the practice, how to eliminate it, and how to care for those who have experienced FGM;
* Increasing advocacy: developing publications and advocacy tools for international, regional and local efforts to end FGM within a generation.

Top of Form

## Wife inheritance

In the past this practice was beneficial to some extend as it provided stability and security to the woman and her children. Today it has been abused. Men look for widows from well- to- do homes so that they can exploit the wealth. There is also risk of spread of HIV/AIDS.

## Polygamy

Polygamy creates conflicts in the family and enhances the spread of STI/HIV/AIDS

# Gender Violence

#### Violence

Using or tending to use to use aggressive force.

#### Abuse

Systematic pattern of behavior in a relationship that is used to gain and/or to maintain control and power over another.

* Emotional abuse – hurting another persons feelings e.g. repeated harassment, interrogation or degradation.
* Psychological violence – verbal threats to do bodily harm, violent language, isolation, deprivation, property destruction e.g. clothes and furniture.
* Physical abuse – hitting to cause pain or injury
* Sexual abuse – includes rape, defilement and incest- this form violence renders the victim helpless, traumatized, and depilated. Forms of sexual abuse include:
* Forced fondling
* Touching and verbal remarks
* Incest
* Molestation
* Forced prostitution
* Oral/genital contact or fondling of genitals and breasts
* Rape- unwanted sexual contact of a woman’s body perpetrated by one or more persons. It is the sexual penetration of a person without prior consent. Rape is major tool of violence against women.
* Female genital mutilation
* Economic abuse – denying one of in terms of money and property. Patriarchal structures relegate women to an inferior status in political, social, intellectual and economic spheres. In the economic realm, women experience abuse. The value of women is often seen only in relation to that of men. A girl is value is seen in terms of bridal wealth that benefits the far and brothers. Gender roles limit women’s opportunities to get paying jobs. They can only engage in low wage professions. In case of death of a spouse the in-laws subject the widows to economic violence.

# The Role of the Health Work

1. Be sympathetic, understanding and provide emotional support to the victim.
2. Be attentive and observant to identify signs of abuse
3. Provide appropriate medical care and document in the client’s medical records the type of abuse and details of perpetrator to repair damaged self-esteem
4. Refer clients for counseling and available community resources for her safety and that of her children. When need be refer to legal organs and the police.
5. Maintain privacy and confidentiality of client information and records
6. In case of rape, provide counseling and emergency contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancy
7. Hold abusers accountable, irrespective of their social status, education or wealth.
8. Identify potential batters and assist them

**Legal Aspects of Gender**

"Everyone shall be equal before the law. Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, color, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion, or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or other personal or social circumstances shall be prohibited.

Men and women of marriageable age have the right to marry and found a family according to their free will. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and divorce."

A person's sex as male or female has legal significance—sex is indicated on government documents, and laws provide differently for men and women. Many pension systems have different retirement ages for men or women. Marriage is usually only available to opposite-sex couples; in some countries, there are [same-sex marriage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Same-sex_marriage) laws.

The question then arises as to what legally determines whether someone is female or male. In most cases this can appear obvious, but the matter is complicated for [intersex](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersex) or [transgender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transgender) people. Different jurisdictions have adopted different answers to this question. Almost all countries permit changes of legal gender status in cases of intersexualism, when the gender assignment made at birth is determined upon further investigation to be biologically inaccurate. Laws also also provide a procedure for changes of legal gender for transgender people.

[Gender assignment](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sex_assignment), when there are indications that genital sex might not be decisive in a particular case, is normally not defined by a single definition, but by a combination of conditions, including chromosomes and gonads. Thus, for example, in many jurisdictions a person with XY chromosomes but female [gonads](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gonad) could be recognized as female at birth.

The ability to [change legal gender](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_aspects_of_transsexualism) for transgender people in particular has given rise to the phenomena in some jurisdictions of the same person having different genders for the purposes of different areas of the law. For example, in Australia prior to the Re Kevin decisions, transsexual people could be recognized as having the genders they identified with under many areas of the law, including social security law, but not for the law of marriage. Thus, for a period, it was possible for the same person to have two different genders under Australian law.