

ORPHAN-CAUSING ISSUE: GENDER INEQUALITY

Many people seem to be aware of gender inequality in Asian cultures; after all it is common to hear of a little girl being adopted from China because male children are deemed more valuable than females as they are the ones to carry on the family name. But female discrimination is not solely an Asian culture cue; it is a worldwide issue that significantly contributes to the cycle of an orphan. Being treated as less than their brothers can be a minor problem in comparison to the challenges that arise from the devaluing attitudes that countless young women face in their daily lives.

One of the most devastating consequences of a patriarchal culture is that women do not receive priority for education like men do. An educated female is quite taboo in some cultures, which is not surprising when you look at the staggering **62 million girls who are being denied education worldwide**. Out of the more fortunate girls who are able to receive some form of schooling in the underdeveloped world, only 43% will be able to attend secondary school.

Expectations for a woman in many cultures tend to be limited to marriage, bearing children, and maintaining a household starting at very young age. Over a third of women between the ages of 20 and 24 in underdeveloped countries were married before their eighteenth birthday.¹ While raising a family is an honorable endeavor, the issue lies in the attitude behind it- that raising families are all that women are capable of and therefore there is no point in investing in their education or in allowing them to be exposed to the world outside of their home. This absence of information and education leaves women unaware and more susceptible to exploitation. While the sex trade proves to be the biggest predator to vulnerable women and girls, and it is not the only threat to their well-being. As a result of the low regard to women in their society, over 39 million women in India are “missing” due to infanticide, the practice of killing unwanted children within the first year after their birth, and sex-selective abortions.² Globally, over 130 million women have suffered horrendous acts involving female genital mutilation (FGM)- most of them at an average age of seven.³

Every year, a further 2 million girls are at risk. The reasons that different cultures participate in FGM vary; however, it can often be associated with superiority of men over women and compliance of women to the customs of their community. Religion, preservation of virginity, increased fertility, family honor, and acceptance for marriage are among the justifications that societies make for this practice that puts women at risk for many short and long term health complications of which the lists are extensive.⁴ Another common fate for young girls in patriarchal societies is a life of a child domestic worker. More valuable and held in higher regard to carry on a family name, boys are less likely to be sold as domestic workers. In fact, the tendency to keep the boys and sell the girls is so significant that **90% of all child domestic workers are females** between the ages twelve and seventeen.⁵

Devaluing positions towards women negatively affect the men in a community as well. Young boys are taught that manliness is obtained through dominance over women, setting them up to have belittling and abusive mindsets towards the other gender for the rest of their lives. The cycle continues from generation to generation as the number of abused girls grow. One out of

every three women in the world have been victimized by some form of abuse.^{vi} Many of these girls believe that this is the way that things work and often do not cry out for help which is reflected by the statistic that between 55% and 95% of women who had been physically abused by their partners chose to never contact NGOs, shelters or the police for aid.^{vii} How tragic that so many girls do not feel enough worth to even reach for a lifeline out. If only they could be taught how incredibly much their heavenly Father loves them and desires more for their lives. What a difference that could make. What a difference it does make as God's people work to bring these truths to broken women.

After all, God himself made both men and women in His image (Genesis 1:26-27) and deems them both worthy of His approval at their creation. Just the fact that women are referenced and play significant roles in many stories of the Bible reveal his value for them in a time that it was considered disgraceful for a woman to even be mentioned in historical writing. Jesus often took time to sit and talk with women and show his appreciation for them. The woman at the well who was an adulterer (John 4), Mary and Martha who were considered Jesus' friends (Luke 10), and the prostitute Mary Magdalene (John 11-12) deemed as the scum of the earth by the rest of society were all clearly precious to our Savior. As we strive to let Christ within us shine through, we must not forget that the way in which we view women does have a greater impact than what we often realize. Uplifting and rescuing downtrodden women will leave more mothers available to care for their children and young girls with a brighter future for educating themselves and others and paving the way for a break in the cycle of abuse and neglect for abandoned and orphaned girls.

ⁱ UNICEF. www.unicef.org/publications/files/The_State_of_the_Worlds_Children_2007_e.pdf.28 January, 2008.

ⁱⁱ World Vision. http://www.worldvision.org/about_us.nsf/child/eneews_women_200703?Open&wvsrc=eneews&lpos=main&lid=women200703. 25 January, 2008.

ⁱⁱⁱ World Vision. http://www.worldvision.org/about_us.nsf/child/eneews_women_200703?Open&wvsrc=eneews&lpos=main&lid=women200703. 25 January, 2008.

^{iv} "Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet." FORWARD - Safeguarding the Health and Rights of African Women. Web. 27 Dec. 2011. <http://www.forwarduk.org.uk>.

^v "Adolescence." Unicef. Unicef. Web. http://www.unicef.org/publications/files/pub_adolescence_en.pdf.

^{vi} "The State of World Population 2000." UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund. Web. 28 Dec. 2011. <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2000/english/ch03.html>.

^{vii} "UN Women Worldwide." UN Women. United Nations. Web. http://www.unifem.org/campaigns.vaw/facts_figures.php?page=2.