STACKED ODDS

How lifelong inequality shapes women and girls' experience of modern slavery

WALK FREE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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We also extend our deepest gratitude to the essay authors – Yeonmi Park, Nasreen Sheikh, Dr Sunitha Krishnan, Shada Nasser, and This is Lebanon – for their invaluable contribution and their own efforts to address inequality and reduce the risks faced by women and girls all over the world.

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All quotes and references to interview respondents in the report are anonymised for their protection, unless otherwise agreed.

(Cover) Rajasthan, India. Woman drawing water from the local well, while her children wait for her. Once she has drawn the water, the family will carry it together to the village. Rajasthani women and children often walk long distances through the desert alone to bring back jugs of water that they carry on their heads. Photo credit: Hadynyah via Getty Images

"Let's empower the woman. Let's put her rights in the constitution. Let's enshrine them in law, and then she'll start to feel safe."

Sophie Otiende,
Feminist and survivor advocate

Jaipur, India, 2019: A girl sits on stacks of bricks drying in the sun at a brick kiln. In India, while discrimination based on caste has been outlawed since India's independence, "lower castes" still experience caste related violence and, in many parts of the country, are obliged to perform undesirable work, often experience debt bondage, and work in sectors with known risks of modern slavery, including brick kilns and stone quarries. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

"Women's rights are an essential part of the overall human rights agenda, trained on the equal dignity and ability to live in freedom all people should enjoy."

Ruth Bader Ginsburg
Supreme Court Justice
1933–2020

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1 IN 130 WOMEN & GIRLS GLOBALLY IS LIVING IN MODERN SLAVERY

This is why:

0–2 Years
Conception to infancy

- Less value placed in girls than boys.
- Boys inherit family assets, believed to have more earning potential, and so will look after parents in old age
- Preference for boys drives female infanticide and contributes to the 130 million missing women and girls in the world
- This gender imbalance fuels bride trafficking

3–12 Years
Childhood

- 15 million girls each year will never go to school
- This increases the risk of child marriage and forced labour

13–17 Years
Adolescence

- 2 in 5 complete secondary school
- 13 million have experienced forced sex in their lifetime
- Increases risk of child marriage and forced labour exploitation

18–44 Years
Adulthood

- Women do 2.6 times the unpaid care and domestic work that men do
- Less than half of all women participate in the labour force compared to 75% of men
- Globally, there are 122 women (aged 25-34) in extreme poverty for every 100 men of the same age

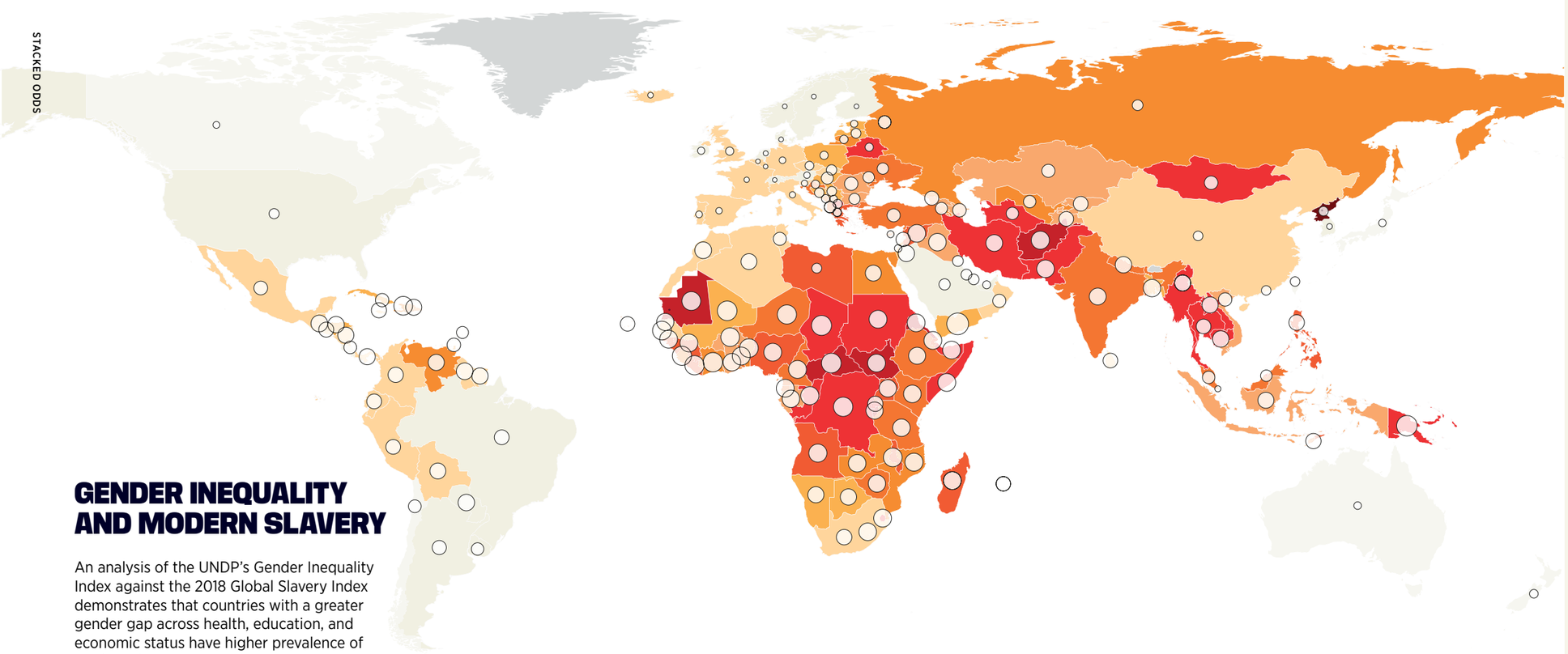
45+ Years
Late Adulthood

- At this stage have less value than a girl because female value is linked to fertility
- Own only 13 percent of agricultural land across the globe
- Compounded impact of lack of education and access to assets means increased risk of modern slavery – eg garment workers and domestic workers in private homes

Biases that stack the odds against girls start with not being valued as much as boys and lead to fewer girls in school, fewer opportunities for quality work, and an increased risk of exploitation and modern slavery across their lifetime.

GENDER INEQUALITY AND MODERN SLAVERY

An analysis of the UNDP's Gender Inequality Index against the 2018 Global Slavery Index demonstrates that countries with a greater gender gap across health, education, and economic status have higher prevalence of modern slavery.



Women and Girls are:

99% Of all victims of forced sexual exploitation

84% Of all forced marriage victims

58% Of all forced labour victims

41% Of all state imposed forced labour victims

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LEGISLATION ALONE WILL NOT ADDRESS THE RISKS TO MODERN SLAVERY FACED BY WOMEN AND GIRLS, HOWEVER IT SETS THE STANDARD FOR COMMUNITIES ON WHAT IS, AND IS NOT, ACCEPTABLE FOR WOMEN AT HOME OR AT WORK.

OF 188 COUNTRIES

181

governments have pledged to end all forms of discrimination against women by ratifying CEDAW

15

countries have set the minimum legal age of marriage at 18

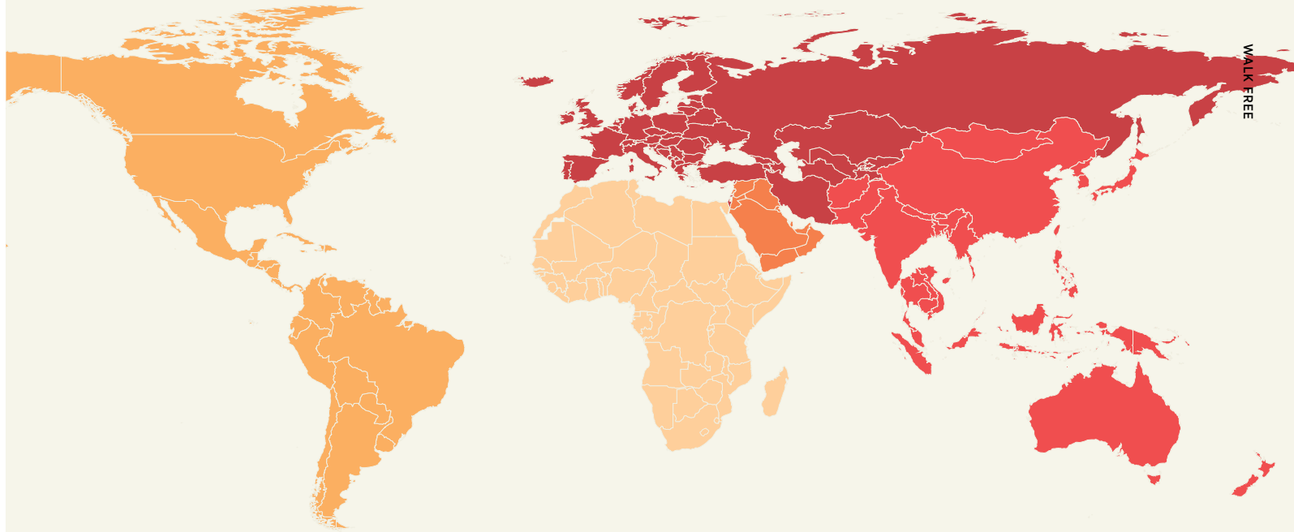
52

countries have criminalised forced marriage

30

countries have ratified the ILO Domestic Worker Convention

From: data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/child-marriage/



PROTECTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW

Domestic work, gender discrimination and child and forced marriage (% countries by region)

CEDAW

AFRICA	96%
AMERICAS	97%
ARAB STATES	100%
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	92%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	98%

CONVENTION ON CONSENT TO MARRIAGE, MINIMUM AGE FOR MARRIAGE AND REGISTRATION OF MARRIAGES

AFRICA	23%
AMERICAS	31%
ARAB STATES	18%
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	16%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	46%

FORCED MARRIAGE CRIMINALISED IN NATIONAL LAW

AFRICA	15%
AMERICAS	23%
ARAB STATES	0%
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	26%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	50%

MINIMUM AGE OF MARRIAGE 18

AFRICA	10%
AMERICAS	0%
ARAB STATES	0%
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	21%
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	4%

ILO DOMESTIC WORKER CONVENTION RATIFIED

AFRICA	8%
AMERICAS	49%
ARAB STATES	0%
ASIA AND THE PACIFIC	3%*
EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA	15%

*This is actually only one country - the Philippines.

ESSAYS

Beirut, Lebanon, September 2020. A former domestic worker from Sierra Leone uses her mobile phone while waiting to be repatriated home later that evening. Lebanon's economic collapse as well COVID-19 and the August 4 blast have left a significant number of migrant workers in a humanitarian crisis. Many domestic workers, forced to live on the streets, are desperate to leave but cannot afford to buy a plane ticket home. Photo credit: Aline Deschamps via Getty Images

GOODWILL DECIDES IF YOU GO HOME IN CABIN OR CARGO

Life as a migrant domestic worker in Lebanon

By Patricia*, Director of Casework and Co-Founder, This is Lebanon

In Lebanon, crisis is becoming the norm. In the early months of 2020, the economy collapsed and was swiftly followed by both the COVID-19 pandemic and an explosion in the port of Beirut which crippled the city in August. Nobody in Lebanon has been spared from the impact of the consecutive disasters. Yet, the hardest hit are the vulnerable migrant domestic workers, who were already exploited and abused in the country, long before these tragedies took place.

We conservatively estimate that Lebanon is home to at least 500,000 migrant domestic workers who travel from countries such as Ethiopia, the Philippines, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Ghana, to work in private households. These women are systematically deceived by recruitment agents and traffickers, who promise them the moon about the jobs awaiting them: regular working hours, days off, and wages much better than they could dream to earn in their own, often rural, villages. For these migrant women, the chance to rise out of poverty and provide for their families can seem like a godsend.

The real job they come to find is more like a prison sentence. As soon as they arrive, their passport is taken and is usually not seen again until, or rather if, they leave – and it is simply down to the goodwill of their employers if they go home in cabin, or in cargo.

Even before the financial collapse all but bankrupted their employers, these migrant women were used as underpaid or free labourers and were responsible for taking care of children, elderly and disabled family members, and maintaining the household, at all hours of the night and day. They were generally not allowed to leave their employer's home, and suffered significant physical, mental, and sexual abuse behind those closed doors, long before COVID-19 restricted movement. Despite the horrific acts committed by employers, they effectively operate in a climate of impunity fuelled by widespread disregard for 'women's work', vitriolic racism, and the unchecked power they have under the kafala system, a restrictive immigration regime that ties migrant's workers legal rights to their employer.

This has only worsened in the wake of the crises. Previously, This is Lebanon could negotiate with employers and leverage their platform to publicly shame employers who refused to pay domestic workers their wages, or would not let the workers go home. However, shame is no longer an effective tool: Lebanon has been struck by disaster time and again, and the care fatigue is palpable. Today, fewer employers are concerned about being outed as abusive. Instead, domestic workers are typically left with only two options: work unpaid in their employers' homes, or be forced onto the street, where they live in front of their embassies. Even on the streets, they cannot escape the risk of sexual violence and exploitation, and are targeted time and again, including by fraudulent 'employers' looking for a new source of unpaid labour.

Responses from embassies have been mixed. While some have tried their best and brought home thousands of their nationals – although thousands more remain in Lebanon – the majority have done nothing.

Few have funded plane tickets home, the cost of which have sky-rocketed. Lebanese General Security is still detaining women at the airport due to false accusations of theft lodged by spiteful employers. This is a common occurrence, and even where they are still carrying shards of glass in their bodies from the blast, there is no mercy for domestic workers. Despite these abuses, new migrant women continue to come into the country from across Africa and Asia. They are an important revenue stream for the economically unstable country and the government continues to issue new visas for domestic workers.

While the kafala system needs to be abolished, there is an urgent and pressing need for the international community to step in and put pressure on the Lebanese government to stop issuing visas and help manage this humanitarian crisis from spiralling out of control. At the very least, we need to stop new victims from coming in; and once the flow has stopped, we must demand change and help the women who are effectively imprisoned in Lebanon. If not – then despite growing global rhetoric of gender equality, delayed action will reveal just how little has changed – and these women will pay the price for that indifference.

*Name has been changed for security purposes

TURNING TRAUMA INTO POWER

By Nasreen Sheikh

Global advocate for women's empowerment, social entrepreneur, former child labourer, and forced marriage survivor

Manikganj, Bangladesh, August 2015. Gold wedding jewelry is laid out for a 15 –year-old child bride, on the day of her wedding to a 32-year-old man. Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of child marriage in the world. The detrimental effects of early marriage on a girl cannot be overstated. Child marriage is attributed to both cultural tradition and poverty. Parents believe that it 'protects' girls from sexual assault and harassment. Larger dowries are not required for young girls, and economically, women's earnings are insignificant as compared to men. Photo credit: Allison Joyce via Getty Images

I've been actively organizing women to work and protect each other since I escaped child slave labour in the garment industry in Kathmandu when I was about 12 years old. Like most births where I was born, mine was undocumented so I'm not sure how old I am. My guess is 27 to 29 years old. From birth, the society of the rural village I come from teaches girls that their existence is insignificant. If one's own birth does not matter, then the conditions in which she lives, works, strives, suffers, and dies also do not matter. At an early age I came to believe that girls are simply commodities that are bought and traded as such. We are not human beings.

Growing up, I witnessed unconscionable atrocities against children and women, including some of my own female family members being murdered for speaking up for themselves.

By age 9 or 10, my life seemed destined for the same oppressive path. So I escaped for the capital city of Kathmandu, where I worked 12-15 hours per day in a textile sweatshop as a child labourer, receiving less than $2 per gruelling shift — only if I completed the hundreds of garments demanded of me. I ate, slept, and toiled in a sweatshop workstation the size of a prison cell, often picking sewing threads out of my food and being too afraid to look out the window. I was surrounded by pieces of clothing day and night. I HATED those clothes. They were woven with the energy of my suffering. At the end of each day, I would collapse onto the large bundles of clothes and daydream about where they would end up and who would wear them. Some of you may be wearing those clothes right now.

As a young village girl, I would look at the stars and think about the connection of all things throughout the universe.

I believe everyone on this planet and all life is in a reciprocal relationship, where each individual action affects the whole.

This understanding drives the holistic approach I've created to incorporate all 17 sustainable development goals into my work. I'm currently achieving this by building women's empowerment training centres through my non-profit organization, Empowerment Collective, and my social fashion business, Local Women's Handicrafts. I organized hunger relief efforts during the 2015 Nepal earthquake, helping thousands of women feed their families, and more recently, we served over 360,000 meals to rural villages affected by COVID 19. To support women's hygiene, we've distributed over 7,500 menstruation hygiene kits since 2014. Additionally, we brought the first water sanitisation system to a rural village in Nepal, where 71 per cent of its water sources were toxically polluted.

Our online store brings ethical and fair-trade goods to the world and we share the stories of the women who make these products. Our empowerment centres use affordable, clean, and sustainable energy by utilizing both solar power and bio-gas units. We have shown innovation in the fashion industry by using recycled materials and non-electric looms to create our products, while preserving generations-old handicraft traditions. We have reduced income inequality by training women in a country where currently only .01 per cent of business owners are women. We've promoted sustainability by distributing thousands of reusable shopping bags in Kathmandu, one the most polluted cities in Asia. We have advocated for responsible consumption through our million-mask initiative, which encourages people to use sustainable, reusable masks during the COVID-19 pandemic.

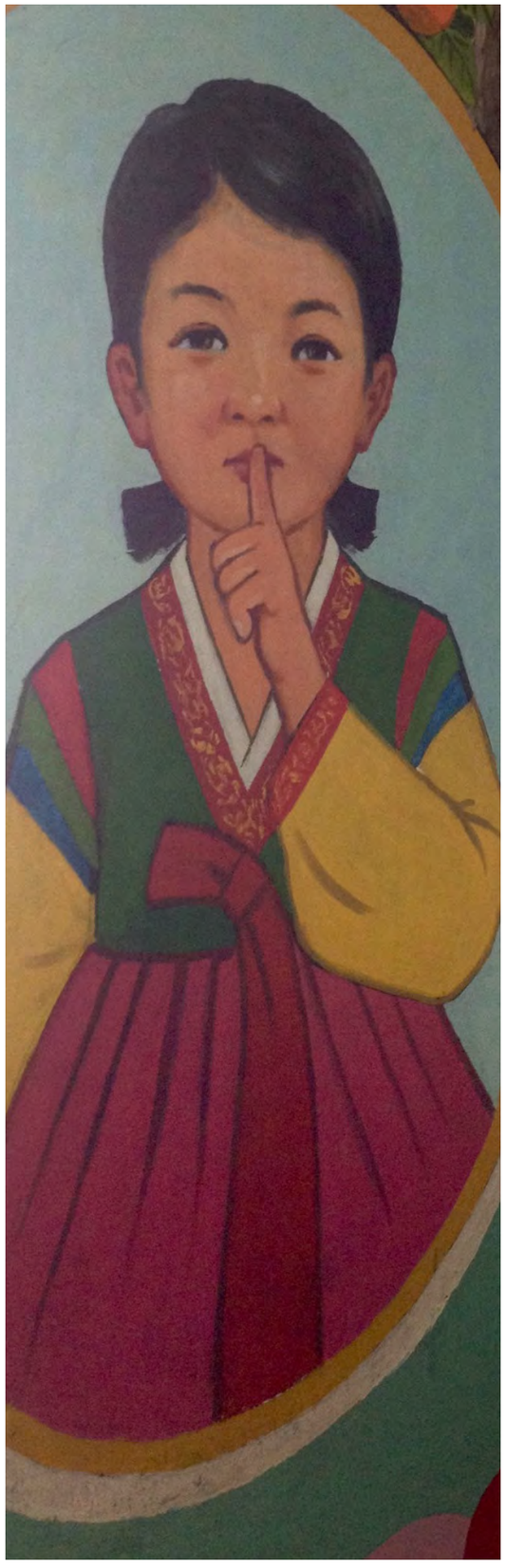
Our use of natural dyes considers the effect we have on life below water and the textile developments we've created in with local hemp farmers support life on land as well as local animal habitat preservation.

Since 2008, we've offered quality education through 1,950 skills training program workshops, educating over 5,000 women with real-world work skills. After becoming the first girl in my village to escape forced marriage, I've been an outspoken proponent of gender equality. We provide women with decent work and economic growth by following the 10 principles of fair trade. We honour the concept of peace, justice, and strong institutions by creating safe space centres for women to work in areas where they are most at risk. In order to reach our goals, we've partnered with many different organizations, including Fashion Revolution, LA Summit, Activists, and several universities.

For most of my life, I've worked in service to the world by supporting the empowerment of women. I've watched the exponential effect it's had on sustainable development goals. I've seen firsthand the positive impact it has had on the lives of vulnerable women.

I envision a world where women are leaders in their communities, they are in control of their own lives, their own rights, and their own decisions. Our collective action in an increasingly interconnected world will make this a reality. I welcome you to start on this path by connecting with us via our websites or social media to read the stories of the many women I work with.

I would love to hear more about what you are doing to end modern slavery.



NORTH KOREA'S SILENCED WOMEN AND GIRLS

By Yeonmi Park

Wŏnsan, Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Painting of a young girl being quiet, painted on the wall of an orphanage in North Korea. This image was taken clandestinely as foreigners are often detained for taking unauthorised photographs in the Hermit Kingdom, where the government closely guards information that contradicts national propaganda. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

There is an old saying in the Hermit Kingdom: *Men are the sky, and women are the ground*. We are taught that the gap between them can never be bridged, and our society is built on its foundations.

This idea was not brought to my country by the dictator Kim Jong-Un, or his forebears who held the office of Supreme Leader. North Korea has always been a conservative country, heavily influenced by the Confucian gender hierarchy that demanded the subordination of women. But under the regime, these beliefs about the role of women were made immovable. Today, while everyone in the country I once called home suffers, it is North Korea's women who endure more than one 'Arduous March'.

While the regime forces men to work in abusive conditions, often without any pay, the women are left behind with their starving families. Even where the men are paid, the State wage is not liveable or realistic. The regime uses its control over resources, like food, as a weapon to keep its people weak and silent – preoccupied with survival. They are systematically starving their people and any sign of rebellion.

Still, our women persevere. They barter and bargain for food on the black market, notoriously dangerous places for women, that are also illegal in the eyes of the State but overrun by corrupt government officials. They are raped and beaten by guards and market operators. When they return home with bread to feed their families, their husbands – who often turn to alcohol and gambling to cope with their own experiences of labour exploitation and abuse – beat them. Nobody speaks about the violence in their homes. Again, our focus is on the most basic needs of survival.

North Korean women suffer in silence, as they are taught that their only job is to be loyal to the regime and serve their men, consistently reminded that they are the bottom of the value chain.

My starvation led me to defect at the age of 13. On a freezing night along the border that separates China and North Korea, an exploitative broker told my mother and I that we had to choose: either return to North Korea, and starve, or flee to China the only way he would allow – as property to be traded, to be trafficked as brides. There was no real choice, it was this or death. We had no option but China.

We hid from the regime in China for two years. During that time, my mother and I were sold, and raped, many times. Tragically, our stories are in no way unique. As a female North Korean defector hiding illegally in China, it does not matter how young or old you are: you are an object to be traded and abused. North Korean women are steadily imported into China by human traffickers to marry or be otherwise sexually exploited by Chinese men, who are left lonely after their own countries 'One Child Policy' encouraged toxic male preference to fester within communities, and led to over 30 million women and girls going missing from the national population. Now China's unwed and unwanted bachelors buy women and girls fleeing the North Korean regime in search of freedom, and trap them once more in another country that does not care if they live or die.

In North Korea, rape is inescapable for women no matter what caste, or *songbun*, you hail from. The only difference a higher social status makes is who is your abuser: a low-level market inspector, a mid-ranking official, or even the dictator himself. When I was in middle school, I was chosen for a prestigious group that entertains the Supreme Leader with singing and dancing – and suffers the onslaught of his sexual abuse – commonly known as the 'Pleasure Squad' but more accurately termed sex slaves. While I was ultimately spared as my family was from a low *songbun*, approximately 2,000 girls are trapped in this group today. To refuse is to die.

The idea that a woman could be sexually victimised by a man is missing in North Korea: she is the one considered immoral and shunned for losing her virginity. Victims are also left to deal with the consequences of abuse alone, with no support or medical assistance. For pregnant defectors brought back to North Korea, they are often beaten by state officers until they miscarry, or forcibly given an abortion without any anaesthesia. All this, for escaping in search of food, and maybe freedom.

And yet, despite the impossible conditions they are raised to accept as their fate, North Korean women continue to find and put food on the table and keep their families alive. They are the silent backbone of the so-called Socialist paradise.

I will always be proud to be a North Korean, as I come from a country of incredibly strong women. They are tough, resilient, and their stories are deserving of public attention. They are orphaned in a country that tells them they are the ground, and then grinds them into it. And when they flee for their lives, they are ground down further still by neighbouring countries who turn a blind eye to the people who commodify and exploit them.

They do not want your tears, or your outrage. What they need is your voice to call for change as loudly as it can carry, even where it might be inconvenient to speak. We all need to fight for their freedom and equality – because they are busy trying to survive.

WAR, CUSTOM, AND LAW

Barriers to ending child marriage in Yemen

By Shada Nasser, Lawyer
and Human Rights Activist

In 2008, ten-year old Nujood Ali sought a divorce from her 30 year-old husband. Her case highlighted the tragic fate of child-brides in Yemen, making it one of the most important issues of public opinion at both local and international levels. It added to other persistent problems that Yemen faces, such as poverty, terrorism and conflict between the state and its opposition that calls for ending unity between South and North Yemen.

Child marriage is a very old custom in the country and inherent to the Yemeni tribal customs and traditions. It disappeared gradually in South Yemen as the rule of the sultanate came to an end. The Marxist-socialist government that came into power following independence from the British occupation in 1967 granted women equal rights in its constitution and passed the Family Act, which stipulated marriageable age to be 16 years.

The experience in Sanaa in North Yemen was totally different. Despite the September 1962 revolution that ended the rule of Hamidul Deen dynasty, the new republican government did not make any legal or constitutional changes that would benefit women. Legislation stipulating the age of marriage as 15 was passed, however child marriages continued as before in cities and villages, allowing the conservative social traditions and tribal customs prevalent prior to the revolution to continue.

After the unification of the two parts of Yemen in 1990, legislation stipulating marriageable age for both sexes to be 15 years (Civil Status Act, A(15)) came into force by presidential decree. However, the landslide victory of the General People's Congress and the Islamist Yemeni Congregation for Reform in the 1997 parliamentary elections led to changes in many articles that supported the rights of women and families. A new amendment made it permissible for a guardian to marry off a female child if they deemed it to be in her best interest.

Current challenges: war, tribal customs, and legislative barriers

The war against Yemen which started on 25 March 2015 has brought the country into an economic and security disaster, tearing social cohesion, increasing family violence, crippling most state institutions, and sending political leadership into exile.

As a result of the war, destitution among the population has increased from 40 to 60 per cent. This has in turn led to an increase in child marriages due to poverty and the inability of authorities to prevent them as they used to in the past. An additional fallout from the situation is the inability of young girls to continue their education due to both poverty and child marriage.

Tribal customs and traditions in Yemen contribute to the continuation of child marriages, especially now, due to the absence of state and civil society institutions that played a role in combating the practice. The widespread use of arms in all the provinces of Yemen threatens social security and contributes to the continuation of the practice.

The Civil Status Act, specifically A(15), needs to be amended to stipulate marriageable age as 17 years, as agreed on in the outcomes of the 2014 National Dialogue Conference held in Sanaa. However, such an amendment will need a functional single parliament. At the moment, due to the war and the lack of security, there is a de facto parliament in Sanaa and another currently in permanent exile overseas.

The Yemeni Penal Code does not criminalise child marriages and does not set any penalties, be that fines or imprisonment, for the father, the husband or the legal guardian who contracted the marriage. In addition, A(18) of the General Education Act No. 45 (1992) stipulates that compulsory education starts at the age of six, but does not set penalties for families that prevent their children from attending or continuing education. Such penalties are especially important in providing some protection for girls that cease education because they are married off.

Conclusion

Ending the practice of child marriage is crucial to the future of Yemen which needs a generation of educated young people. Given that women constitute half of the society, accepting the practice would mean an inability to build a new Yemen. The responsibility for making this happen falls squarely on the shoulders of the officialdom, civil society organisations, and Yemeni families.

Ending child marriage requires legislative change. First, it requires new laws that are compatible with the 21st century. One of the major barriers to this is the number of parliamentarians who support the practice. The second requirement is to prohibit child marriages and impose penalties against offenders in the constitution itself. In addition, social and economic dimensions also play an important role as the majority of child marriages occur because of poverty. It is worth noting that child marriages do not occur among the wealthy and educated.

For me as a lawyer, ending child marriage is a victory of child rights and freedoms. Nujood's case was the first of its kind in Yemen, but it will not be the last. It allowed us all to hear the calls for help, justice, and mercy.

Nujood and other child brides like Reem, Arwa, Sally, Duaa, Ibtisam, Elham, and Fawzia shall forever form a beautiful memory in my mind.

*English translation from article originally authored in Arabic language

الحرب والتقاليد والقانون

معوقات في وجه منع زواج الصغيرات في اليمن

شذى ناصر، محامية ومدافعة عن حقوق الإنسان

عام ٢٠٠٨ طالبت الطفلة نجود علي البالغة من العمر عشر السنوات بتطليقها من زوجها البالغ من العمر ثلاثين عاما، مفجرة بذلك قضية زواج الصغيرات المأسوية في اليمن لتصبح من أهم القضايا التي أثارت الرأي العام المحلي والدولي، مضيفة إلى مشاكل ذلك البلد المستدامة من فقر وإرهاب وصدام بين السلطة والمعارضة ودعوات جنوب اليمن بإنهاء الوحدة مع الشمال.

زواج الصغيرات قضية قديمة جداً تعتبر جزءًا من العادات والتقاليد القبلية اليمنية، مع العلم بأن هذه التقاليد اختفت تدريجيا في جنوب اليمن - عدن بعد نهاية حكم السلاطين واستقلال جنوب اليمن في ١٩٦٧ من المستعمر البريطاني، وذلك على أثر قيام القيادة ذات التوجه الاشتراكي الماركسي التي أمسكت بزمام السلطة بعد الاستقلال بمنح المرأة حقوق متساوية مع الرجل عبر الدستور، وقانون الانتخابات، وقانون الأسرة الذي حدد سن الزواج بستة عشرة سنة.

في مقابل ذلك كانت التجربة في اليمن الشمالي - صنعاء مختلفة تماما، فعلى الرغم من ثورة سبتمبر ١٩٦٢ التي أنهت حكم أسرة حميد الدين فأن النظام الجمهوري الجديد لم يأت بأي تغير تشريعي أو دستوري لصالح المرأة. فقط حدد قانون الأسرة سن الزواج بخمسة عشر سنة، ولكن هذا القانون ظل نظريا واستمرت ظاهرة زواج الصغيرات كما كانت في المدن والأرياف تكريسا للتقاليد المحافظة في هذه المجتمعات والأعراف القبلية السابقة على الثورة.

وبعد قيام دولة الوحدة اليمنية عام ١٩٩٠ صدر قرار جمهوري بالقانون رقم ٢٠ لسنة ١٩٩٢ بشأن الأحول الشخصية - قانون الأسرة حيث حددت المادة ١٥ سن الزواج بخمسة عشر سنة. ولكن على أثر الفوز الساحق لحزب المؤتمر الشعبي العام الحاكم وحزب التجمع اليمني للإصلاح الإسلامي المحافظين في الانتخابات البرلمانية لعام ١٩٩٧ أجريت تغييرات على مواد كثيرة من قانون الأحوال الشخصية التي كانت تدعم حقوق المرأة والأسرة، حيث أجاز التعديل تزويج الصغيرة بإعطاء الحق لولي الأمر بتزويجها تحت مبرر لما هو مصلحتها.

منذ اندلاع الحرب على اليمن في ٢٥ مارس ٢٠١٥، أصبح الوضع الاقتصادي والأمني كارثي وتمزق النسيج الاجتماعي وارتفعت حالات العنف الأسري وتعطلت معظم مؤسسات الدولة بالإضافة إلى لجوء القيادات السياسية إلى خارج اليمن. نتج عن ذلك ارتفاع نسبة الفقر من ٤٠٪ إلى ٦٠٪ مما ساهم بدوره في ارتفاع نسبة زواج الصغيرات بسبب الفقر وشلل الأجهزة الأمنية التي كانت في السابق تقوم بدورها في وقف زواج الصغيرات. وأضيف إلى ذلك توقف الفتيات الصغيرات عن مواصلة التعليم بسبب الزواج والفقر.

تساهم العادات والتقاليد القبلية في اليمن في استمرار ظاهرة زواج الصغيرات، خصوصا في الوقت الراهن بسبب غياب لدور مؤسسات الدولة والمجتمع المدني في مكافحة هذه الظاهرة كما كانت تفعل في السابق. كما يهدد استمرار انتشار السلاح في جميع المحافظات سلامة المجتمع ويساهم في استمرار ظاهرة زواج الصغيرات.

ومن الناحية القانونية فإن قانون الأحوال الشخصية بحاجة إلى تعديل وخاصة المادة منه ١٥ بحيث يرفع سن الزواج إلى سبعة عشر سنة بحسب الاتفاق الذي تم عليه في مخرجات مؤتمر الحوار الوطني صنعاء ٢٠١٤. إلا أن تعديل القانون يحتاج إلى وجود برلمان واحد فعال. أما حاليا وفي ظل ظروف الحرب وعدم الاستقرار فهناك برلمان بأمر الواقع في صنعاء وآخر مقيم في المنفى بشكل دائم.

قانون العقوبات اليمني لا ينص على تجريم زواج الصغيرات، ولا توجد أي عقوبة بالغرامة أو السجن بحق الأب - الزوج أو الأمين الشرعي الذي أبرم عقد الزواج. كما أن المادة ١٨ من قانون العام للتربية والتعليم رقم ٤٥ لسنة ١٩٩٢ نصت بأن التعليم إلزامي يبدأ من سن ست سنوات، ولم يحدد أي عقوبة للأسرة التي تمنع أطفالها من التعليم أو مواصلة الدراسة، في حين هناك ضرورة لمثل هذه العقوبات وخصوصا لحماية الصغيرات اللاتي ينقطع تعليمهن بسبب الزواج.

قضية زواج الصغيرات جوهرية بوضوح لأنها تعنى مستقبل اليمن الذي يبنى بالأجيال الشابة المتعلمة. وندرك أن المرأة تمثل نصف المجتمع، فإذا قبلنا بظاهرة تزويج الصغيرات كأمر واقع فهذا يعني أننا لا نستطيع أن نبني يمن جديد. المسؤولية تقع على الجهات الرسمية ومنظمات المجتمع المدني وعلى الأسرة اليمنية.

نستنتج مما سبق أن قضية زواج الصغيرات لها عدة أبعاد تشريعية: أولها ضرورة سن تشريعات جديدة تتماشى مع القرن الواحد والعشرين والمشكلة هنا في هذا الجانب تكمن في أن عدد من نواب البرلمان يساندون زواج الصغيرات. ثانيًا يجب وضع نص في الدستور يحظر زواج الصغيرات وتشديد العقوبات لمن يخالف ذلك. إلى جانب ذلك فأن البعد الاجتماعي والاقتصادي يمثلان عناصر مهمة في استفحال ظاهرة زواج الصغيرات لأن غالبية هذه الزيجات تمت بسبب الفقر، ونلاحظ هنا تحديدا أن زواج الصغيرات لا يتم بين الأسر الغنية والمثقفة.

زواج الصغيرات بالنسبة لي كمحامية هو قضية انتصار الحق والطفولة ويوم جديد من الحرية. قضية نجود علي هي القضية الأولى في اليمن ولن تكون الأخيرة هي فتحت النافذة لنسمع جميعا الصرخات والاستغاثة التي تطالب بالعدل والرحمة.

نجود، ريم، أروى، سالي، دعاء، ابتسام، إلهام، فوزية وغيرهن من الصغيرات اللاتي تم تزويجهن قصرًا هن لوحة جميلة في سماء ذاكرتي.

*على ظهر هذه المقالة ترجمتها إلى الإنجليزية من أصلها بالعربية

DISPOSABLE DAUGHTERS: CHANGING THE NARRATIVE FOR GIRLS

By Dr Sunitha Krishnan, Prajwala

Varanasi, India, 2015. "Sometimes I wish I could be a boy. Then I could just work, working is ok. When we get to a certain age, other things are expected of us. Being a boy seems so much more simple." Photo credit: Grace Forrest

Does she have the right to live?

In India where I come from, girls have an uneven start even before life begins. The widely held opinion that girls are a burden on the family and a drain on resources – as they represent a future dowry payment in waiting – leads many literate and economically capable families to choose to abort female foetuses, or kill their female infants. They hope for a boy, as sons are an investment in the family dynasty: the way to maintain a connection between the past, present and future in a culture that prides itself on tradition. In the wake of this extreme son preference, India is haemorrhaging women and girls.

In addition to the millions of women and girls that are missing at birth, many millions are at risk of extreme physical and sexual violence every day. What comes next for a girl who survives her infancy is a lifetime of being denied opportunities to education, employment, and even the opportunity to exercise her basic human rights. Their roles are confined to cooking, cleaning, and not complaining until an unwanted girl can be passed off to her husband's family as their burden to carry. This social indoctrination tells a girl she is worth less than a male peer, and sits behind the entire framework of buying, selling, and trafficking of human beings.

Universally, gender inequality and patriarchal norms have created a world where the female body is seen as an object solely designed to satisfy the sexual urges of men, and conditions them to accept sexual abuse as their birthright. In India, the pandemic of sexual violence against women and girls has raged for longer, and affected more lives, than the current COVID-19 pandemic. Victims of all ages and experiences have come through Prajwala's doors, including victims of commercial sexual exploitation as young as three years.

Nothing can prepare you for the damage that comes from placing such little social value on the lives of girls. I have seen toddlers die from HIV/AIDs, and countless parents sell their daughters into commercial sexual exploitation, because she was surplus to needs. Following COVID-19 and the consequent economic devastation, more and more unemployed parents are offering their daughters for sale to pimps to make an income, where they will be forced into commercial sexual exploitation. There is no shame in disposing of unwanted daughters in this manner. This is expected behaviour.

The strength of the prejudices that make it dangerous to be a girl, also make it dangerous to campaign for them. I have seen that people are willing to maim and kill to protect the status quo that subjugate women and girls. Over the more than three decades I have worked with victims of sexual exploitation, gangs of traffickers have attacked me repeatedly, and have even murdered my colleagues, for helping to break the cycle of sexual exploitation for girls in India. Yet, the violent reactions are a sign that we are on the right track: tackling cultural norms that discriminate against girls is key to ending modern slavery.

None of this is unique to India. No matter where in the world you are born, if you are a girl, you are born at a disadvantage. Despite what is commonly thought, the significant problems that confront girls are not only found in the so-called Global South: in every country, gender equality is still a dream and not a lived reality. Neither is this gender-fuelled exploitation limited to the poor or illiterate – prejudices, stereotypes, and gender-based biases percolate within all classes and societies.

Modern slavery thrives in the shadow of an intricate world of inequality that not only leaves women and girls more vulnerable to exploitation, but it punishes them for surviving it. Survivors of sexual violence are also victimised by their communities who teach them that they are only good for one thing, and then stigmatise and shun them for being impure, rather than help them heal. It is little wonder that girls are conditioned into sharing these opinions.

Starved of opportunity and acceptance, they lose sight of a life outside of abuse. Eventually, many victims of commercial sexual exploitation see it as their fate – the only option available to them in a sea of closed doors.

To disrupt modern slavery around the world, we must reach a day where it is not dangerous to be born female, daughters are not disposable, and girls are not be socialised to accept exploitation and inferiority as their due. To get there, the problem must be attacked from all directions, and in ways specific to each context and community. However, it also requires a shift in global thinking: and we must all subscribe to a new counterculture where girls' lives are valued properly, and their dignity and agency respected. Every family, society, and country must un-learn the social norms that have put girls at a disadvantage and exposed them to greater risk of exploitation – and the work must begin now. It is well past time that we change the narrative for girls.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

One in every 130 females globally is living in modern slavery. In fact, women and girls account for nearly three quarters (71 per cent) of all victims of modern slavery.[1] Although modern slavery affects everyone, there is no escaping the fact that it is a gendered issue. Females account for a staggering 99 per cent of all victims of forced sexual exploitation, 84 per cent of all victims of forced marriage, and 58 per cent of all victims of forced labour.[2]

Fundamentally, modern slavery is enabled by power imbalances. For women and girls, this imbalance is exacerbated by gender inequality and discrimination, which, as this report shows, is embedded in the fabric of our lives – the laws and social norms we live by, the different expectations imposed on daughters as compared to sons.

Gender stacks the odds against girls from before they are born, to the end of their life. Sex selection during pregnancy, combined with infanticide, reduces the birth rates and survival of infant girls in societies that consider them economic burdens. As they transition through childhood, adolescence and adult life, the impacts of discrimination multiply and gender inequality grows. In most countries, fewer girls attend school and have access to medical care than boys, and women are more likely to end up in poverty, to work in the riskiest sectors of the informal economy – and ultimately, in modern slavery – than men.

In many countries, laws can exacerbate, rather than protect from modern slavery. They prevent women from inheriting land and assets, conferring citizenship on their children, traveling freely, and working without their husbands' permission. In some countries, laws grant rapists exemption from prosecution if they are married to, or later marry, their victims.

Crises such as COVID-19 or conflict trigger the economic instability and lapses in law and order that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to violence and exploitation. Women and girls who sit at the intersection of multiple vulnerabilities, for example, those who are disabled, belong to an ethnic minority, or are LGBTQIA+, experience increased risk of modern slavery.

Regardless of where you live in the world, gender has a significant impact on vulnerability to modern slavery. Females outnumber males as victims of modern slavery in four of the five world regions. They account for 73 per cent of victims in the Asia and Pacific, 71 per cent in Africa, 67 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, and 63 per cent in the Americas. Even in the Arab States, where estimates are significantly impeded by a lack of data on forced marriages and the forced labour of domestic workers, nearly 40 per cent of all people living in modern slavery are female.[3]

ONE IN EVERY 130 FEMALES GLOBALLY IS LIVING IN MODERN SLAVERY.

Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2018. A Nepali woman enters a Women's centre in Kathmandu, which provides local literacy and English language education to women who have never had any formal education. Rates of women's education in Nepal is far lower than that of men, with female literacy at only 30 per cent compared to male literacy at over 66 per cent. Many of the women, aged 32 to 75, who attend the centre heard about it through word of mouth, and encourage each other to attend and to study. Photo credit: Lauren DeCicca via Getty Images

Evening the odds

The need to address the disproportionate risk of modern slavery among women and girls is clear and has never been more urgent. This report highlights how and why women are disproportionately affected by modern slavery from conception to adulthood.

The current reality is bleak, but there is a way ahead – and this report sets out actions that will improve the situation. Survivor voice is critical here. This report reinforces the need to involve survivors in decision-making to ensure their voices are heard and the insights of their lived experience translates into effective solutions. Through an analysis of our data, promising practices, and frontline voices in the anti-slavery field, we provide recommendations to government, business, and faith to end the enslavement of women and girls.

We are ten years from the deadline that global leaders set to achieve the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), yet we are far from achieving many of them. The need to end modern slavery and gender inequality is reflected in SDG Target 8.7, in addition to Targets 5 and 16.2. However, as this report illustrates, these issues are inextricably linked with poverty, education, healthcare, and many other factors. Modern slavery, and its gendered nature, is both a symptom and a driver of many social ills and will not be solved in isolation.

At its core, the fight against modern slavery is about ensuring people have the most basic of human rights – freedom.[4] This includes the freedom to control your own body, to refuse certain work or to stop working, to decide when and whom to marry. Protecting that freedom, particularly in women and girls, will transform our economies and societies for the better.[5]

Without addressing modern slavery and protecting the right to freedom, we cannot claim to achieve the broader goals of ending inequality and improving opportunity for women and girls.

It is a challenge that will require governments, faith leaders, and the business sector to work with a greater sense of urgency with the international and non-government organisations who have long been at the frontline of these issues. Action must include:

- criminalising all forms of modern slavery,
- reform in all countries where laws still enable children to be married,
- valuing and prioritising education for girls as a critical circuit breaker to a lifetime of vulnerability,
- challenging cultural norms, such as male preference, restrictions on freedom of movement outside the home, and lack of control over finances and assets, which allow harmful and exploitative practices to continue,
- overturning laws and policies that strip women of their rights and agency or exacerbate their vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation; for example, inheritance rights, land ownership laws, and the kafala system, and
- prioritising supply chain transparency to ensure workers are protected, taking specific action to understand and address the vulnerabilities experienced by women, including protection mechanisms in crisis situations.

Further, governments must acknowledge the clear link between gender and risk of modern slavery in their gender and development programming and budgets.

It is only by protecting this freedom that we will achieve true gender equality, and in doing so, unlock the untapped potential of half the world's population.

> *"It is very hard to live. But I have hope of seeing a bright dawn. My children are being sponsored by [NGO]. I know when they get good education which will one day change their lives and mine. I wish I was not married young; my life would be so different now."*
>
> Purity, 38, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 14

Rome, Italy, June 2020. Women from the Non Una Di Meno collective protest against rape and discrimination after lockdown. In a statement announcing the protest, the collective stated: "Now it is time to take back the streets, the visibility, the word they tried to take away from us. It is time to shout all our anger to announce that we do not accept that the reconstruction and cohabitation with Covid-19 will take place at the price of our exploitation, of the intensification of the sexual division of labour and racism. … Faced with the consequences of this crisis and the new unbearable normality that it announces, we will not remain silent!" Photo credit: Simona Granati – Corbis via Getty Images

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reducing vulnerability to modern slavery

Conception to infancy

Governments must:

- Ensure that no child is born stateless by strengthening legal safeguards and ensuring birth registration.
- Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws, including preventing the denial, loss, or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds.
- Criminalise Female Genital Mutilation/ Cutting.

Civil society and faith-based organisations should conduct community education programs that challenge patriarchal norms and recast girls as valuable and valued members of society.

Childhood

Governments should:

- Increase access to primary school education for all children and particularly girls.
- Criminalise commercial sexual exploitation of children, including buying and selling children for online exploitation.
- Raise awareness of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, particularly in the context of online safety, including for vulnerable children.

Civil society and faith-based organisations should educate women and their families, including men and boys, about their equal responsibilities in domestic and care work.

Adolescence

Governments should:

- Remove barriers to adolescent girls remaining in school, via campaigns that raise awareness about child marriage, reproductive health, and safe migration.
- Criminalise forced marriage, and work with communities to provide access to justice for adolescent girls facing early marriage.

Civil society and faith-based organisations should implement programs focused on vocational and entrepreneurship training and provide leadership and mentorship programs for adolescent girls.

Adulthood

Governments (and businesses) should:

- Improve labour protections and working conditions in informal sectors where women are over-represented, such as the garment, domestic and care work, and sex industries.
- Place particular focus on migrant workers by:
  - Ensuring they are protected in their workplaces and along their migration routes.
  - Requiring employers, not employees, to pay any fees or costs associated with recruitment to prevent debt bondage.
  - Increasing access to information relating to the migration experience.
- Prevent discrimination against women on grounds of marriage or maternity, including prohibiting dismissal on grounds of pregnancy and introducing parental leave.

Humanitarian organisations should embed anti-slavery action within all crisis responses.

Later adulthood

Governments should:

- Prohibit practices that allow women to be inherited by a male relative of her husband and enforce these prohibitions.
- Improve legal rights for older women, allowing them to inherit land and property and maintain control of their assets regardless of marital status.
- Work with communities and faith leaders to change social norms around widow cleansing, witchcraft accusations, and other harmful practices.
- Protect vulnerable older women, such as those living in poor health and/or poverty or those who have been affected by conflict, climate change, and other disasters.
- Fund research focused on older women, particularly on the types and drivers of exploitation.

Port of Spain, Trinidad, March 11, 2017. Stephanie Leitch (C), co-director of Womantra, leads women's rights supporters during a Women's Rights March as part of International Women's Day. The event was organised by Coalition of Organizations Against Gender Based Violence. Sexual violence and exploitation, the unequal division of unpaid care and domestic work, and discrimination in public office all remain huge barriers to gender equality in Trinidad and Tobago. Photo credit: Sean Drakes / LatinContent via Getty Images

INTRODUCTION

Over 70 years since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights proclaimed equality between women and men,[1] governments have pledged to end all forms of discrimination against women,[2] agreed on written targets to achieve gender equality,[3] and adopted a protocol setting out a comprehensive international approach to ending human trafficking, especially of women and children.[4] Yet, an uncomfortable truth persists: women and girls experience discrimination, exploitation, and modern slavery at disproportionate levels. What is more, these experiences are inextricably linked.

Women and girls account for 71 per cent – that is, nearly 29 million – of all victims of modern slavery globally. The gendered nature of modern slavery becomes even more apparent when examining the different forms in which it manifests. Women and girls are overrepresented in three out of the four types of modern slavery assessed by the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: they make up 58 per cent of all victims of forced labour, 84 per cent of all victims of forced marriage, and a staggering 99 per cent of all victims of forced sexual exploitation.[5] In fact, women and girls are overwhelmingly at risk of sexual exploitation regardless of the form of modern slavery they are subjected to. These findings reflect highly gendered patterns of employment and migration and point to the relevance of broader patterns of human rights abuses that disproportionately affect women and girls.

Regardless of where you live in the world, gender has a significant impact on vulnerability to modern slavery. Women are far more likely than men to experience exploitation and other forms of modern slavery in four of the five world regions. According to the Global Estimates of Modern Slavery, they account for 73 per cent of victims in the Asia and Pacific, 71 per cent in Africa, 67 per cent in Europe and Central Asia, and 63 per cent in the Americas. Even in the Arab States, where estimates are significantly impeded by an inability to adequately survey forms of modern slavery that predominantly affect women and girls, nearly 40 per cent of all people living in modern slavery are female.[6] Data from other sources suggests this is an underrepresentation. The Arab States hosts an estimated 2.1 million migrant domestic workers; a group of workers highly vulnerable to modern slavery – the majority are women working under the restrictive kafala (sponsorship) system.[7] Further, data published by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime in 2018 reported that females accounted for 53 per cent of reported victims of trafficking in the Middle East.[8]

Why are women and girls more at risk?

The factors that increase the vulnerability of women and girls to modern slavery are wide-ranging. Broader socio-economic disadvantages, from factors including poverty, lack of political representation, and a lack of access to education, are all magnified by gender. Women and girls also contend with disproportionately high rates of gender-based violence and a myriad of biases and harmful cultural norms. The impact of these factors is heavily influenced by geography as inequalities both within and between countries can significantly alter a woman or girl's vulnerability to exploitation.[9]

At the core of this inequality is the idea that women and girls are inferior to men and boys – a mistruth that underpins their greater risk of violence, exploitation, and modern slavery. Understanding the impact of the patriarchal social norms which exclude women and girls from exercising power and agency across their lifetime is ultimately necessary to ensure that no female, of any age, is left behind. Currently, no country is on track to achieve the gender equality goals set out in the 2030 SDGs.[10] From the point at which they are conceived, and throughout their lives, girls lack the same opportunities as boys.

For example, girls are still missing from the school room. Despite recent progress in improving access to education for girls, an estimated 15 million girls annually will never get the chance to learn to read or write in primary school, compared to about 10 million boys.[11] While gender disparity in completion of primary school has significantly declined in the past decade across the world, adolescent girls are still less likely than boys to complete secondary school. Globally, four in five girls now finish primary school – but only two of five girls complete upper secondary school, exposing adolescent girls to greater risk of child marriage, and exploitation in precarious or unskilled work.[12]

Within the workforce, gender discrimination financially penalises women. Women are often paid far less than men for the same work and are less likely to be considered for leadership roles than men. In fact, an estimated US $172 trillion in global wealth is lost due to the gender pay gap and differences in lifetime earnings between women and men.[13] Further, women and girls are more likely to work in the riskiest sectors of the informal economy, placing them at greater risk of exploitation.[14] For example, women currently dedicate three times as many hours per day to unpaid domestic and care work as men, limiting the time they have for paid work, education or leisure[15] and increasing their risk of falling into poverty.[16] Not only are women and girls more likely to live in extreme poverty than men and boys,[17] but the gender gap is widest for women aged 25 to 34, who are 25 per cent more likely than men to live in extreme poverty.[18]

Women are also underrepresented at all levels of political leadership: on average, just 25 per cent of people in national parliaments in 2020 are female.[19] This situation reflects entrenched gender discrimination internalised by both sexes. For example, a recent United Nations report on gender bias found that almost half of all men and women surveyed believed that men make better politicians and business leaders than women.[20] However, the relative absence of women in traditionally male roles means that there are comparatively few female voices shaping national law and policy. As a result, legal systems remain gender biased. Females have fewer rights to confer citizenship on children, for example, and fewer land and inheritance rights. More than 30 per cent of countries legally restrict the freedom of movement of women,[21] and more than 100 countries have labour laws that restrict the types of jobs women are able to have, affecting 2.7 billion women.[22]

Normalisation of gender-based violence also increases female vulnerability to modern slavery. At present, women and girls experience such high levels of gender-based violence that it has been called a pandemic.[23] Globally, one in three women and girls experience physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.[24] Many victims of domestic violence eschew support services due to stigma, shame and pressure exerted by their communities and families to remain silent.[25] These attitudes are inherently linked to the widespread acceptance of violence within the home as a "private family matter" – which implicitly justifies violence against women and girls through inaction and indifference.[26] Anecdotal evidence also suggests that women who experience domestic violence are more likely to accept fraudulent or risky job offers in an effort to escape dangerous situations at home, which in turn increases their risk of forced sexual exploitation and HIV/AIDs.[27] Survivors may be ostracised by their families and communities, preventing reintegration and increasing the risk that they will be re-victimised.[28]

These issues intensify for women and girls who belong to other marginalised groups. While not an exhaustive list, a recent UN Women report found, the most common factors that exacerbate discrimination against women and girls include sexual orientation and gender identity, Indigenous status, disability, age, caste, origin or nationality, race and ethnicity, immigration status, family status, religion, geography, income, HIV/AIDS, and marital status.[29]

The risks faced by women and girls are also exacerbated by humanitarian crises, such as conflict, natural disasters, and public health risks,[30] including the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.[31] The consequences are often fatal. For instance, it is estimated that 60 per cent of preventable maternal mortality deaths in 2015 occurred in regions experiencing a crisis.[32] Women and girls are also at greater risk of homicide and violence in conflict, including rape, sex slavery, or forced sterilisation.[33] Displacement in the wake of conflict also disproportionally affects food security for women and children.[34] Where rule of law and access to basic needs break down, the vulnerability of women and girls rises higher still.

MODERN SLAVERY CANNOT BE ADDRESSED IN ISOLATION. IT IS BOTH A SYMPTOM AND A CAUSE OF MANY SOCIAL ILLS. TACKLING THE ROOT CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY AND THE DISCRIMINATION IT LEADS TO WILL HAVE A MULTIPLIER EFFECT ACROSS ALL DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INCLUDING THE ERADICATION OF MODERN SLAVERY.

Gender and the SGDs

The international community has recognised the many inequalities faced by women, leading to an increased focus on gender in development work. Gender equality and women's empowerment feature within the SDGs. SDG 5, in particular, presents gender equality as a necessary foundation for a peaceful and sustainable global community. It aims to eliminate various forms of discrimination and violence against women, including trafficking and sexual exploitation (Target 5.2), forced marriage in children and adults, and female genital mutilation (Target 5.3).

In fact, the UN and Member States recognised that gender equality is a cross-cutting issue and one that is fundamental to the achievement of all 17 Global Goals. This recognition is important because it is well-documented that due to higher levels of discrimination, women perform worse than men on several measures of wellbeing.[35] Globally, women are more likely than men to live in extreme poverty and to report food insecurity. This impacts their access to education with data revealing those living in poor households have higher rates of illiteracy – and of those, women in poor households are the most disadvantaged of all.[36] Lack of education restricts employment opportunities for women – globally, women's labour force participation is 31 percentage points below that of men.[37] In light of this, it comes as no surprise that women have access to fewer economic resources than men, for example, they make up just 13 per cent of agricultural landowners across the globe.[38] Without access to education, better employment opportunities, and economic resources, women are at greater risk of modern slavery.

All but six of the SDGs have gender-specific indicators to track progress for women and girls. In addition to highlighting the need for gender-specific indicators across all SDGs, UN Women has noted the gaps in data that must be addressed to ensure that no woman or girl is left behind.[39]

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, March 2020. Kyrgyz police arrest a woman protesting against gender-based violence to mark International Women's Day. The arrests followed attacks by men wearing face masks and pointed national hats on the crowd, tearing up their posters, popping balloons with toy pistols and throwing eggs at the women before fleeing the scene. Photo credit: Vyacheslav Oseledko/AFP via Getty Images

About the report

This report examines why most victims of modern slavery are female. The report sets out the impact of social, cultural, economic, legal, and political factors on the vulnerability of women and girls to modern slavery, and how these factors shape experiences of modern slavery at each stage of life, from conception to late adulthood.

The report also steps out actions that can improve the situation for women and girls. Through an analysis of promising practices and frontline voices in the space, we provide recommendations to government, business, and faith groups to end the enslavement of women and girls.

Changemakers: Spotlighting local voices

While the situation for women and girls is still steeped in discrimination, inequality, and abuse, there are pockets of progress around the world, which inspire hope that the odds can improve for women and girls. Of course, there are changemakers already working on the ground, and we have highlighted some throughout the report to paint a fuller picture of what is happening – and what more can be done – to help women and girls globally.

What is modern slavery?

In the context of this report, modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and the sale and exploitation of children.

Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on the commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power. Refer to Appendix 1 for full terminology.

Methodology

This study draws on existing literature, interviews with survivors and frontline organisations, publicly available data on risk factors collated by international and UN organisations, and evaluations of anti-slavery and related interventions which show promise.

Case studies of 88 survivors regarding their experiences of modern slavery and support services were collated by anti-slavery organisations in 18 countries across the five world regions. In addition, remote interviews were conducted with 18 civil society organisations in 13 countries, including those providing support services and shelters, emergency assistance, and advocacy and training. Again, these organisations were spread across the five world regions. The input from these organisations contributed to a more informed understanding of the drivers of risk, and of those programs that hold promise for improving the odds for women and girls.

Every effort was made to highlight experiences and programs across all regions, however, this was hampered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number and geographic scope of interviews with survivors and frontline organisations was scaled back due to the need to prioritise safety and emergency assistance to survivors.

In this report, we cover several risks to, and forms of, modern slavery which occur at multiple points in the lives of women and girls. Although relevant in several chapters, these risks are covered in detail within the chapter that represents the age group for which they have the biggest impact.

All data and information presented in the report is current as of 31 August 2020. Names of all survivors who consented to have their experiences presented in the report have been changed.

WHAT IS THE PROMISING PRACTICES DATABASE?

The Promising Practices Database was created in 2015 to collate evaluations of anti-slavery and counter-trafficking programs in a searchable format – allowing stakeholders to quickly identify what works, and what does not, through a simple search by country, population, type of slavery, sector, or intervention. The theory is that we can learn from the evaluations already undertaken, even if the learning is 'there is a lot we don't know'. The evaluations discussed in this report were selected for inclusion after filtering the Database by gender, impact, and key areas of interest such as education, empowerment, and attitudinal change.

About Walk Free

Walk Free is an international human rights organisation founded in 2010 with a mission to end modern slavery globally within our generation. It is the producer of the world's leading dataset on measuring and understanding slavery and works on systems change through government, business, and faith, to ensure slavery is tackled through both a legal and cultural framework.

Walk Free is part of, and funded by, Minderoo Foundation, a modern philanthropic organisation working to arrest unfairness and create opportunities to better the world.

We work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal Targets 5.3, 8.7, and 16.2

We believe a strong, multifaceted global approach is needed to end modern slavery in all its forms. SDG Target 8.7 seeks to end modern slavery, Target 5.3 seeks to eliminate child, early, and forced marriage, and 16.2 seeks to end abuse, exploitation, trafficking, and all forms of violence against children. Our approach to achieving these SDGs involves building a robust knowledge base to inform action and driving legislative change in key countries in collaboration with faiths, businesses, academics, NGOs, and governments around the world. Through these collaborations, as well as through direct implementation and grassroots community engagement, we believe we can end modern slavery.

We produce comprehensive research

Walk Free's Global Slavery Index provides world-leading measurement of the size and scale of modern slavery and assesses country-level vulnerability and government responses to the problem. Building on this research, Walk Free collaborated with International Labour Organization and the International Organization for Migration to develop the joint Global Estimates of Modern Slavery.

We campaign for our cause

Walk Free is the Secretariat for the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime Government and Business Forum, and champions business sector engagement in this regional program. We are also strong advocates for all leading global economies to enact laws that require organisations to take proactive steps to identify and remove modern slavery from their supply chains, and to be held accountable for their response. Engagement with faith leaders has been a key pillar of Walk Free since the establishment of the Global Freedom Network (GFN) in December 2014. The GFN is committed to delivering systemic change by engaging and uniting faith leaders around the world to take spiritual and practical action to end modern slavery.

We collaborate directly with stakeholders to liberate people and drive system change

In collaboration with The Freedom Fund, Walk Free is scaling effective frontline anti-slavery responses and campaigning for change through global activist movements from across the areas of human rights, labour rights, minority rights, anti-slavery, and women's empowerment.

Chapter 1

CONCEPTION TO INFANCY (0–2 YEARS)

Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, 2016. A young Syrian girl holds her sister in a refugee camp in Lebanon. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

ALMOST 40 PER CENT (1.4 BILLION) OF THE WORLD'S WOMEN AND GIRLS ARE STILL LIVING IN COUNTRIES THAT ARE FAILING TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY.

With only one decade left to achieve the SDGs, almost 40 per cent (1.4 billion) of the world's women and girls are still living in countries that are failing to achieve gender equality. [1] The severity of gender bias varies across the world,[2] yet a girl born today will still face some form of inequality even if she is born in Denmark, the highest performing country in terms of gender equality.[3] Born into societies and cultures that systematically devalue women and girls, infant girls are at high risk of exploitation, and modern slavery, from birth.

Why are infant girls vulnerable to modern slavery?

Conceived in the patriarchy

In some parts of the world, by the time an infant girl has taken her first breath, she has already survived her first brush with gender inequality in the form of male preference – which at an extreme can lead to female infanticide.[4] While the average natural sex ratio is 100 females for every 105 males (which accounts for the shorter lifespan of males), a strong preference for boys has shifted that ratio in many countries. The ten countries with the greatest bias towards male births in 2019 were: China (1.13), Azerbaijan (1.13), Vietnam (1.12), Armenia (1.12), India (1.10), Pakistan (1.09), Albania (1.09), Suriname (1.08), Hong Kong (1.08) and Taiwan (1.08).[5] In 2010, there were an estimated 126 million missing women and girls as a result of prenatal sex selection in countries with high male preference and low fertility rates, and a higher risk of postnatal female mortality.[6] The unnatural distortion in the sex ratio has fuelled bride trafficking in countries such as India and China,[7] which together account for 84 per cent of the global total of missing females.[8] The number of missing women is set to rise; recent projections of sex ratios at birth in India estimate that a further 6.8 million girls will be missing at birth from 2017 to 2030.[9]

> *"I am under the authority of the man. You know in Africa, or rather, in Maasailand, you are just under the men. Under forever. They want to take charge, you have no say. Even if you are on the right side, the men will always win because they are in power."*
>
> Sarah, now 30, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 13

Historically unequal power dynamics between men and women drive the value ascribed to each today – male value is linked to their ability to earn and provide for their families, while women's value is entwined with their sexuality and ability to reproduce.[10]

In India, male preference is so culturally embedded that there is a term specifically for girls – *paraya dhan*, which translates to 'other's property'.[11] This attitude reflects the perceived value of Indian daughters only in their future roles as wives and mothers, and the bride price they subsequently bring to the family home, while boys continue the family legacy and so are considered more deserving of educational and health investments.[12] These gender-biased beliefs form the backbone of inheritance laws across the gamut of social structures from present day Benin[13] to the aristocracy in England, where bills to remove primogeniture from the inheritance of titles and hereditary peerages have been consistently rejected by the House of Lords and Parliament.[14] While primogeniture is no longer the global standard for inheritance, it enshrined the idea that males are the rightful guardians of family wealth, land, and power.[15]

Gender-based discrimination within legal systems can also affect the most basic rights of citizenship. In more than 50 countries, women – unlike men – cannot confer their nationality on foreign spouses, which disproportionately affects children born in the marriage.[16] In countries throughout the Arab States and Africa, such as Brunei, Iran, Kuwait, Lebanon, Qatar, Somalia, and Eswatini, women are effectively unable to pass their nationality onto their children. For poor children, statelessness adds to the already considerable barriers to education, adequate health care, and future economic opportunities.[17] These barriers are exacerbated for girls, who are often considered economic burdens for the family and are more likely to live in extreme poverty than boys[18] while also being less likely to receive the food, medical care, and education they need.[19] A girl born into poverty will feel the impact of this early gender discrimination throughout her life; as will her children, and her grandchildren. It is estimated to take an average of four to five generations before a household in poverty reaches the average national income.[20] In the intervening generations, each female infant born faces greater risk of infanticide or exploitation.

CULTURE AND MODERN SLAVERY

Cultural norms shape identities, create communities, and build nations. While culture is dynamic,[21] the continued existence of traditional gender roles, which confine women to their roles as homemakers, are a result of persistent cultural norms that consider females unable to exercise agency or protect themselves. Religion, as an integral part of culture and a marker of cultural identity itself,[22] can also influence the persistence of harmful cultural practices, including child marriage.[23] The harmful effects of the patriarchal norms embedded within culture and religion can increase vulnerability to modern slavery among women and girls.[24] These paternalistic attitudes are increasingly reflected in national laws and policies, as conservative governments worldwide comprised of (or influenced by) right wing populist groups systematically remove and limit women's rights.[25]

> *"Women are for marriage. Women are for babies. Our culture enslaves women. She has no confidence in her ability or capacity. People don't want to see women succeed or survive without the support of men."*
>
> NGO contact, Iraq

Chief among problematic norms is the ubiquitous acceptance of violence against women and girls. This both fuels the use of violence, and prevents victims from seeking support, which ultimately ensures harmful traditions will continue.[26] Early socialisation of young girls to adhere to cultural norms that idealise passivity in women condition them to accept violence and their early sexualisation by males.[27] For example, socio-cultural and religious traditions are among the many reasons why girls are married at a young age.[28] Antiquated and harmful cultural traditions such as marriage by abduction, a practice predicated on patriarchal norms and gender inequality,[29] are still accepted in communities in South Africa,[30] Ethiopia,[31] and across post-Soviet Europe, Central Asia, and the Caucasus among certain ethnic groups, including Armenians, Azeris, Chechens, Georgians, Karakalpaks, Kazakhs, and Kyrgyz.[32] Evidently, to make real change in the risk profile for women and girls, culture must be refashioned in a more equitable image.

Jalandhar, India, September 2017. An Indian woman working at a brick kiln. Brick kiln workers are often trapped in a cycle of bonded labour and regularly cheated out of promised wages. Once free of the kiln, some workers are lured back to reclaim withheld wages. Photo credit: Shammi Mehra/AFP via Getty Images

SOCIO-CULTURAL & RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS ARE AMONG THE MANY REASONS WHY GIRLS ARE MARRIED AT A YOUNG AGE.

Sexualised in infancy

Patriarchal ideas on femininity, sexuality, gender, marriage, and what differentiates 'good' from 'deviant' behaviour are also imposed on girls from a young age. The cost of contravening these strict rules can be dire, particularly in cultures with low tolerance for deviance.[33] Even in relatively liberal societies like Australia and New Zealand, shame, stigma, and community ostracisation can prevent female victims from exiting a forced marriage – for example, by discrediting them as mentally infirm or overly dramatic.[34]

The patriarchal urge to control female sexuality due to perceived female weakness also fuels child marriage and female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C) – even among infant girls. Traditionally FGM/C, which refers to any procedure that results in cutting, injury, or partial or total removal of the female external genitalia or genital organs for non-medical purposes,[35] is performed on girls who have reached puberty in an attempt to promote chastity and modesty by reducing female sex drive.[36] However, reports have emerged of FGM/C being performed on infant girls – one as young as one month old in the United Kingdom[37] – in order to circumvent legal prohibitions and increased activity by regulatory bodies to curtail the practice. The negative impacts of FGM/C are lifelong, potentially life-threatening,[38] and more dangerous when experienced by infant girls, who are in the earliest stages of development.

VULNERABILITY AND LEGAL PLURALISM

The coexistence of statutory and traditional laws can place women and girls at increased risk of discrimination. For example, in both South Africa[39] and Kenya,[40] customary and religious laws undermine national laws, curtailing the marriage, burial, and inheritance rights of women. In Mozambique, customary law prevents women from asserting their rights to own and inherit land, which increases the vulnerability of the large female agricultural force who, like the majority of the rural population, depend on agriculture for economic and food security.[41] The contradiction between customary and religious laws on the one hand and statutory law on the other, may alienate communities with strict social norms. In Liberia, women often prefer state law to settle gender-based violence cases, while males generally favour the more forgiving customary legal system.[42] Nonetheless, social pressures and financial dependence on men due to gender norms surrounding work often curb women's access to state justice.[43] Women can face further discrimination where courts themselves adopt customary laws. In the Solomon Islands, state law that sets a minimum age for marriage is undermined by customary laws that legitimise child marriage among some communities.[44]

Pluralist legal systems can also offer protection for women. These systems are often borne out of post-conflict state building processes, which have the potential to dismantle rigid social orders by embedding gender equality in national law.[45] In some post-war countries, statutory laws that formally recognise gender equality have altered the course of justice for women. In Chechnya, religious and customary laws are discriminatory towards women; consequently, women are more likely than men to choose state law pathways to settle issues with strong gender implications, such as bride kidnapping, honour killing, inheritance, and property.[46] While traditional practices threaten to undermine efforts to embed gender equality, they can also be harnessed to secure greater gender equality.[47] In post-conflict settings, such as in Afghanistan and Timor-Leste, non-state justice systems have also played a role in maintaining legal order amid upheaval and uncertainty.[48]

Legal pluralism can strengthen women's agency in communities where Indigenous women face intersectional discrimination.[49] In the Andes, empowered Indigenous women are reimagining patriarchal systems, advocating for political autonomy, and eradicating harmful gender customs via community-based governance systems.[50] While customary decisions may often favour men due to institutionalised gender bias, in some cases, customary law can offer women the flexibility to negotiate better outcomes for themselves.[51] As such, customary law cannot be disregarded – instead, more work must be done to understand how customary laws can be harnessed to protect women and girls.

Palwasha's story

Palwasha is a 28-year old Afghan woman who survived continuous exploitation at the hands of her family when she lived in the Logar Province of Afghanistan.

Like most girls in that region, she was not allowed to go to school. She could neither read nor write and was deprived of many rights, such as the choice of whom to marry and freedom of movement. Palwasha was expected to fulfil the wishes of her large family and become a badal for her brother. A badal is a cultural practice which usually involves marriages of pairs of blood relatives from different households, such as pairs of brothers and sisters, uncles and nieces, or cousins. This practice is used by families who cannot afford to pay dowries, and at times as a way to restore peace between feuding families.

Palwasha was forced to marry three times. In the first marriage, she was a badal on behalf of her brother to another family. When her family realised that her brother's fiancée had mental health issues, they broke the badal agreement to please her brother.

She was made a badal for her brother a second time. This time it was to a man she liked, and they were both happy; but after two years her brother's fiancé died and the families once again broke this badal to please her brother, not caring about Palwasha's happiness and wellbeing.

"My father promised to protect me from this bad cultural practice that exploits women but he did not keep his promise. He gave me away as badal for the third time."

The third time was the worst. This husband abused her, but she was not able to return home because she would have faced grave consequences. She went to the woloswali (local police station) but was advised to return to her husband. She later escaped and got in touch with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

> *"I had to leave the situation or be killed. I know I can never return home because I am considered a dead person for breaking the culture and bringing shame to the families. According to my father, I am dead."*

At [NGO]'s protection centre, she was able to become more resilient. At the centre, she had access to education, and programs that taught her life and job readiness skills. These prepared her for her first job as well as living on her own. She now works at an orphanage as a house mother. Through her job, she can now live in a decent and safe place.

"My past life motivates me to have a better future and develop skills that will enable me to survive on my own. I am happy that I was given the opportunity to set goals for my future. I became brave and courageous enough to live in the community again."

Changemakers: Tostan

Since 1991, Tostan has brought its Community Empowerment Program (CEP) to more than 3,000 communities across West Africa, transforming gender norms and empowering women and girls to become leaders in their communities. Women and girls who take part in the program are empowered to make their own decisions regarding health, education, and finances, promoting better life outcomes for themselves, their families, and future generations.[52] The CEP is a three-year holistic, non-formal education program developed in consultation with local communities over the past 30 years. The CEP enables participants to discuss and define their vision for the future of their community, aligning it with their fundamental values reflected in religion and in human rights. Sessions take place three times a week and are guided by a local, trained facilitator who lives in the community. The program is conducted in local languages and consists of carefully sequenced participatory sessions on democracy and human rights (with a focus on the rights of women and children), as well as problem solving, health and hygiene, literacy and numeracy, and project management. Empowered by new knowledge and agency, participants identify harmful social practices and find their own solutions to change them. Community Management Committees (CMCs), comprising at minimum 50 per cent women members, play a central role in implementing and sustaining positive change after the CEP has concluded.

The CEP has helped boost enrolment of girls in formal schooling,[53] and has successfully led nearly 9,000 communities to declare their intent to abandon harmful practices including FGC and child marriage. According to a 2014 evaluation of Tostan's programs in Senegal, not only did participants' attitudes towards child and forced marriage change, but child marriages in the community declined as a result.[54] The CEP has also seen more than 30,000 women take on leadership positions in their communities, with many running for public office. Through its CEP, Tostan is fostering meaningful community-led change in Africa, reducing women and girls' risk of modern slavery and empowering youth, families, and entire villages.

Southern Lebanon, 2016. "When you go through as much as we have gone through everyone learns to look out for each other. You are the mother of your children, but you watch and care for everyone else's children also. When we first came here a child from another camp became very sick, both of his kidneys had stopped. His father had died and his mother was told that she would not survive the surgery if she donated her kidney. So… I put my hand up." Photo credit: Grace Forrest

How do infant girls experience modern slavery?

Both traditional and modern forms of slavery inflicted on infant girls are inherently tied to attitudes towards women. In the case of traditional descent-based slavery, which is still practiced in Mauritania,[55] Niger, Mali, Chad, and Sudan, slave status is passed matrilineally.[56]

> *"Reducing the risk of modern slavery for women and girls requires education, awareness, and fostering respect for women. Education is key to helping women and girls secure decent incomes and jobs, reducing their vulnerability to trafficking and ensuring that as adults, they can instill the values of education to their children… Education is also key to ensuring that men, boys, and policy makers respect women and girls and the various roles they perform, as homemakers, child-rearers, income-earners, and peace makers. It is also essential to raise awareness of the many forms of trafficking… Finally, reducing the risk of modern slavery means ensuring that women and girls are respected and valued by their families, communities, and society."*
>
> Patricia Kailola, Pacific Dialogue, Fiji

Modern forms of slavery rely on the commodification of women and girls which puts female infants at risk of being abducted or deliberately bred for sale, such as via criminal syndicates in Vietnam,[57] Indonesia,[58] Malaysia,[59] and Nigeria.[60] In Nigeria, anecdotal reports highlight that children born into illegal baby farms face multiple forms of exploitation, including organ trafficking.[61] Further, while boys are also sold through baby farms, they typically attract higher prices than girl babies,[62] a reflection of their perceived greater value as a future economic earner. Race also plays a part in determining the purchase price of a baby: at the intersection of racism, sexism, and slavery is a dark-skinned infant girl sold for a fraction of the cost of a light-skinned boy.[63]

The life outcomes for the infant girl fall squarely in the hands of the purchaser.

Some girls may be relatively lucky compared to others in their cohort if they are sold to families seeking to adopt a child. Less fortunate girls may be sold to criminal organisations that, in turn, sell them to brothels, where they face sexual exploitation at the hands of paedophiles. Other victims are trafficked to countries such as Thailand, where anecdotal reports exist of unsold children being maimed and forced to beg.[64]

Beyond their purchase price, the social value of infant girls is also linked to their future role as a wife and mother. Betrothal at birth has been part of marriage customs across many cultures, from Afghanistan[65] to Ghana,[66] and reportedly, among some northern Indigenous populations in Australia.[67] Further, betrothals at birth can spike in response to crises as a negative coping mechanism for poor families. For example, during one four-month period in 2018, 161 children aged between one month and 16 years from two drought-affected provinces in Afghanistan were reportedly sold into marriage.[68]

In the Pacific Islands, poverty and unemployment fuel traditional practices such as informal adoption and payment of bride prices, which increase the vulnerability of infant girls to modern slavery.[69] In Papua New Guinea, media reports in 2018 warned that families living in poverty were selling their children to make ends meet,[70] while families sought to adopt girls as a potential source of future bride price income, increasing their vulnerability to exploitation.[71]

How can we improve the odds for infant girls?

> *"Building programs and supporting communities with a deeper understanding of social norms and how they change is imperative. As dialogue and awareness grows about the harms of certain social practices, such as forced child marriage and FGC, support should be provided to enable communities to share their learning and decisions to abandon harmful practices with other communities across their social network, thereby expanding the movement and consolidating new, positive social norms and practices."*
>
> Elena Bonometti, Chief Executive Officer, Tostan

Early intervention to disrupt risks faced by a girl in gestation and infancy could significantly reduce vulnerability to modern slavery across her lifetime and in the lives of her descendants.

Stakeholders should provide direct outreach and support, including maternal health services, to pregnant women and girls who are at risk of, or have experienced, modern slavery. Not only will this better assist victims themselves, but it may also reduce vulnerability among infant daughters. However, in addition to direct interventions at an individual level, challenging views about the value of a female child is essential in reducing vulnerability to all forms of exploitation and modern slavery among girls.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

Of the evaluations within the Promising Practices Database, only one program was targeted to infant girls – the Apni Beti Apna Dhan (ABAD) program, which translates to 'Our Daughter, Our Wealth', run in India. Through a conditional cash transfer program, ABAD aimed to protect young girls and alter perception of the value of girls via two conditional economic incentives: one on the birth of daughters, and another once they reached the age of 18 unmarried. The program improved girls' birth and survival rates and increased parental investment in infant girls' social capital and post-natal health investments. The program also had some (albeit weak) impacts on education: the first cohort of girls whose families were ABAD beneficiaries, while not more likely to attend school, were more likely than their peers to continue their education if they did.[72]

However, infant daughters can also be assisted through programs targeted at their mothers: daughters born to employed mothers are more likely to be employed themselves in adulthood, to hold higher status positions and to be paid a higher wage than daughters whose mothers were not employed. Further, children of employed mothers hold more egalitarian views on gender roles, and sons and daughters shared unpaid domestic and care work more equitably. Yet, while girls are more likely to be employed as adults if their mothers were employed, the status of their future work depends on the socio-economic level of the family, and whether the mother worked in manual unskilled labour.[73] As such, providing vocational training, micro-finance, and other forms of economic empowerment to adult women to promote skilled or non-manual labour can reap benefits for their daughters.

Beijing, China, January 2007: A family casts long shadows on the ground near Tiananmen Gate. China's controversial One Child Policy led to a significant imbalance in the sex-ratio due to foetus-gender testing and sex-selective abortions. In 2020, there are an estimated 30 million women missing from the national population in China. Photo credit: Peter Parks / AFP via Getty Images

Chapter 2

CHILDHOOD (3–12 YEARS)

Suruc, Turkey, March 2015. A Syrian woman and child walk between tents in Suruc refugee camp. The camp is the largest of its kind in Turkey with a population of around 35,000 Syrians who have fled the ongoing civil war in their country. Many of the stranded women and girls are put at risk by the often unsafe conditions in the camps. Photo credit: Carl Court via Getty Images

NEARLY THREE QUARTERS OF ALL MODERN SLAVERY VICTIMS ARE WOMEN AND GIRLS.

Most countries (n=132) guarantee at least nine years of free primary and secondary education in legal frameworks which means girls should be able to access primary school education. Yet only 39 countries report that at least 90 per cent of girls complete primary school.[1] Existing attitudes regarding the role of girls can prevent girls entering or completing school. Many societies consider the education of girls to be a waste of precious resources, making girls more vulnerable to child marriage, forced labour, and other forms of modern slavery.

Why are girls vulnerable to modern slavery?

Disadvantaged and destined for marriage

Childhood marks a critical phase in a girl's life – the beginning of her education. Education has the power to drastically improve a girl's life, from her future employment prospects and health outcomes, to reducing the risk of child marriage – ultimately supporting girls, households, and entire communities to emerge from poverty.[2] Despite positive trends in the education of primary school-aged girls globally, a disproportionate number of girls remain out of primary school compared to boys, with the number currently standing at over 5.5 million out of school girls.[3] The patriarchal systems that girls are born into work to keep them out of school from a young age. For many parents who cannot afford to send all of their children to school, a son's education will generally take priority as they are deemed to have greater earning potential than daughters,[4] who are traditionally destined for marriage and child-rearing instead.[5] Removing a girl from school is often justified on the basis that work in the home better prepares them for their future roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers[6] than schooling.[7]

Sanaa, Yemen, March 2010. Nujood Ali, pictured at 12 years old, attends a demonstration to support legislation banning marriage for girls under the age of 17. In 2008, a Yemeni court granted then-ten year old Nujood a divorce from her husband, who was 20 years her senior. Nujood's father forced her to marry when she was only eight years old. Photo credit: Mohamed Huwais /AFP via Getty Images

> *"I want to change the lives of my children. I want my children to be educated and don't want them to go for child marriage."*
>
> Priya, 23, Indian survivor of child marriage at age 10

Such is the strength of traditional gender roles that girl children are still disproportionately burdened with additional and unpaid domestic work in the family home, even where they are able to attend school.[8] When this 'invisible' labour is considered, girls spend up to 50 per cent more time than boys of the same age helping with household chores, such as preparing and shopping for food, caring, cleaning, fetching water, and collecting firewood.[9] In some regions, including the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, girls aged five to 14 spend nearly twice as much time performing household chores than boys of the same age.[10]

Girls also comprise the majority of the estimated 17.2 million children around the world who perform paid or unpaid domestic work in a household other than their own.[11] Given that domestic work is typically done in private residences, girls are extremely vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse by employers.[12] Girls as young as 11 in Ethiopia[13] and some as young as six in Morocco[14] working as domestic workers have reportedly suffered physical and verbal abuse in private households. In June 2020, media reported that an eight-year-old girl in Pakistan, who was illegally employed as a maid hundreds of miles away from her parents, was tortured and killed by her employers.[15]

Phoebe's story

In Kenya, Phoebe attended primary school until Grade Five when she was told by her father, a local Chief, that she was no longer allowed to go as he believed that being able to read and write her name was a sufficient education. He also arranged for Phoebe to undergo female genital mutilation. Phoebe laments her lack of autonomy in the process.

> *"I wanted people to listen to my opinion that girl's mutilation was as good as death. There was nobody to listen to me, I had no voice."*

Soon after, Phoebe was told that she was now ready to become a wife and was to be married the same day. Phoebe tried to stop the marriage by going to the police. Instead of helping her, the police referred the matter to another Chief who called Phoebe's father and sent her back home.

> *"I thought the police would help me, but they didn't, I thought the other Chiefs would also help me, but they didn't. … I couldn't trust anybody. I didn't know who to run to."*

Phoebe's father threatened to kill her if she did not marry, so she reluctantly agreed to become the wife of a stranger at the age of 12. When her husband's family came to collect her, Phoebe remembers how painful it was for her. Her mother and siblings would not stop crying. During that moment, she thought of the words of Kenyan actress, Lupita Nyong'o, during her Oscar acceptance speech: "… no matter where you're from, your dreams are valid."

Yet, Phoebe remembered feeling as if these words were no longer true. "I knew that my dreams were gone the moment I boarded the motorbike."

At her husband's home, Phoebe was hidden away and all of her movements were closely monitored. One day, an organisation came looking for someone who could translate for them at a women's workshop. As Phoebe was the only one with the language skills needed to help, she was allowed to leave home to attend the workshop. It was there that Phoebe met a woman whom she trusted enough to share her story with. She gave Phoebe a phone number to call and told her she would rescue her from the marriage, but when Phoebe called that evening there was no answer. However, her husband's family became increasingly suspicious, and eventually forbade her from attending the workshops. Phoebe grew despondent and gave up thinking that her life would amount to anything.

A year later, Phoebe was left alone while her husband's family were out shopping, and she saw her chance to escape. Leaving the homestead, Phoebe walked for hours through the bush until she reached her aunt's home. "I was tired and weary. It was a long walk without food and water. I had decided that it was forward ever, and backward never." From there she was able to go back to her parent's homestead, only to discover her mother was no longer living there and her father wanted to send her back to her husband. Phoebe hatched one last plan to escape, waking early to walk to her sister's house, and they arranged for their brother to take Phoebe to live with him in another county. "I was going far away from my problems. I couldn't control my tears, the tears of joy running down my smooth cheeks."

Phoebe was enrolled back in school and is living with her brother. Now 17 years old and in her penultimate year of high school, Phoebe is grateful to be so close to achieving her dreams.

Kathmandu, Nepal, May 2018. Children of the residents of a Nepali safe house prepare for school. The safe house provides shelter and rehabilitation services for survivors of gender-based violence and houses approximately 60 women and their children annually. Violence against women and girls is widespread across South Asia. In Nepal, three rapes are reported every day on average. Urgent action is required to achieve gender equality. Photo credit: Lauren DeCicca via Getty Images

Changemakers: Thorn

Spotlight is a ground-breaking web-based tool developed by Thorn, a US-based organisation that builds innovative technology to defend children against sexual abuse. As trafficking victims are often bought and sold online, typically through escort ads – and as traffickers are increasingly technologically savvy and able to navigate online platforms while evading detection – Thorn built Spotlight, a free tool available to law enforcement agents working on domestic human trafficking cases in both the United States and Canada.

Spotlight uses smart algorithms to rapidly sift through large amounts of online data and identify child sex trafficking victims falsely being advertised as escorts, dramatically reducing investigation times.

In fact, since its launch in 2014, Spotlight has reduced investigation times by up to 67 per cent and has helped to identify over 14,000 child victims, reaching an average of 10 children per day. Spotlight enables law enforcement officers to work together across borders to uncover situations of exploitation, and remains at the forefront of evolving technologies to protect children from sexual exploitation online. As the majority of victims of child sexual exploitation are girls, Spotlight has a large role to play in making the online world safer for girls – and reducing their risk of exploitation.

Maharashtra, India, November 2016. Five year old Nirmala, who was raped by her mother's boss, poses for a photo with her mother and father. Nirmala's mother gave her money to go to the corner store and buy food, and while Nirmala was walking the man came up to her and offered to buy her candy. He took her to a wooded area behind an apartment building complex, and raped her. She required two surgeries for her extensive injuries and stayed in the hospital for three months. Although the police caught and jailed the man, his family continue to offer Nirmala's family money to drop the court case. Nirmala's family has since moved to a different neighbourhood because of the stigma Nirmala faced from the neighbours, who would say "The girl's life is spoiled, what will you do now?" Nirmala's mother will not accept the money offered by the rapist's family, as they want justice instead. Photo credit: Getty Images

Southern Lebanon, 2016. "We have heard in some camps children are getting to go to school, but there are no such opportunities where we are. Sara (pictured) picks vegetables in the fields when its season, and her brother works in a concrete factory. Of course I worry when they are gone, of course I feel fear that someone might just take them and never bring them back, but if they don't work then their younger siblings don't eat. Their father died in the war, so we are all we've got. My oldest children going to work was really our only option" — Sara's Mother. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

Changemakers: Educate Girls

The Foundation to Educate Girls Globally, also known as Educate Girls, is an NGO based in India that is working in over 18,000 villages to improve enrolment, retention, and learning outcomes for children, with a special focus on girls. By partnering with government stakeholders and over 13,000 community volunteers (known as Team Balika), Educate Girls has helped to enrol over 750,000 out-of-school girls in school since 2007.[16] These services have been targeted at low socio-economic status communities where traditional attitudes and religious practices are strong and prevent girls from attending school.[17] Among the attitudes that Educate Girls strives to shift is the expectation that a girl's future is tied to her role as a mother, wife, and homemaker – attitudes that make the girl child bear the brunt of household chores, sometimes in lieu of school.[18] Educate Girls is making crucial progress in dismantling the social norms that encourage child marriage and other harmful practices. For example, in one village in Rajsamand, locals noted a reduction in child marriage rates. Another village reported increasing desires among mothers to delay marriage until 18 years of age so their daughters could go to school.[19]

Educate Girls works to empower communities through girls' education with the help of Team Balika, who work with Educate Girls staff to deliver program activities, embodying their motto "My village, my problem, and I am the solution."[20] Team Balika is an inspiring cohort of thousands of youth volunteers, mostly between the ages of 18 and 35, who have at least attended secondary school and are trained by Educate Girls on all aspects of the program.[21] They travel door to door, often through remote and difficult-to-access areas, to identify girls who are not in school and to transform harmful attitudes towards girls' education and early marriage by building relationships with parents and key community stakeholders. In addition to facilitating girls' entry to school, Educate Girls helps to improve learning outcomes (through remedial curriculum) and retention rates among students.[22] The organisation also assists adolescent girls in grades six to eight develop leadership and life skills, contributing to lasting community change as more girls become leaders, and are empowered to help the next girl at risk of missing out on education. Through their work on the ground, change is on its way for thousands of girls in India.

EDUCATE GIRLS HAS HELPED TO ENROL OVER 750,000 OUT-OF-SCHOOL GIRLS IN SCHOOL SINCE 2007.

Jimeta, Nigeria, February 2019. A girl runs at Malkohi refugee camp in Jimeta. Malkohi is a camp for the internally displaced who fled their homes as Boko Haram insurgents advanced across north-eastern Nigeria. Lacking sufficient protection in these camps, girl children face heightened vulnerability to various forms of exploitation and violence. Malkohi residents say they feel forgotten. Photo credit: Luis Tato / AFP via Getty Images

> *"Educating girl children about their rights, especially in communities where child marriage and other forms of exploitation are common practice, is the key to prevention and protection. The current barriers to education are both cultural and structural with extremist religious views. Men must also be educated about women's and girls' rights."*
>
> Hagar International Afghanistan

Girls are further disadvantaged by patriarchal attitudes that increase their risk of undernourishment during childhood. Access to nutritious food is intricately linked to childhood development,[23] with implications for future learning, health, economic, and productivity outcomes.[24] While hunger can severely impact both boys and girls around the world, social norms are likely to result in poorer nutrition among girls and women.[25] When there is insufficient food to feed the entire family, women's lack of decision-making power means men and boys are prioritised.[26] Aside from detrimental health outcomes, which range from poor growth and immunity to infection and even death, malnourishment can lead to cognitive problems and lowered school performance among girls.[27]

For girls living with any form of disability, the challenges are even greater. Girls with disabilities are less likely to finish primary school than both girls without disabilities and boys with disabilities.[28] In countries such as Afghanistan, which experiences some of the highest rates of disability and poverty globally, shame and stigma can lead families to intentionally keep disabled girls out of school.[29] Excluding these girls from education translates into a higher likelihood of social exclusion later in life, which can severely limit their economic participation – placing girls with disabilities at a greater, and lifelong, risk of poverty.[30] Girls with disabilities also face higher risk of gender-based violence; such abuse is often perpetrated behind closed doors by close family members, limiting victims' opportunities to report abuse, which may already be made more difficult due to their disability.[31] Having a disability also increases their vulnerability to trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.[32] Further, girls with disabilities are at higher risk of early marriage to lessen the stigma associated with disability.[33]

Risks among girls are further compounded by unstable living situations, which disproportionately increase vulnerability to sexual exploitation, forced labour, and gender-based violence.[34] Homelessness can result from, and further entrench, intergenerational poverty and female social exclusion.[35] Both girls and boys experiencing homelessness are often considered second-class citizens and additionally lack access to essential healthcare and other social services needed to emerge from poverty.[36] Sexual violence is also high among girls experiencing homelessness. For instance, the majority of girls living or working on the street in Uganda (74 per cent), Kenya (70 per cent) and Malawi (62 per cent), reported experiencing at least one form of sexual violence or harassment.[37] Girls who have been abandoned and enter care or detention institutions are also particularly at risk of sexual and physical abuse.[38]

EXPLOITATION IN INSTITUTIONALISED CARE

An estimated 5.4 million children globally live in orphanages, foster homes, and other forms of institutionalised care,[39] despite approximately four out of every five children who live in orphanages having at least one traceable parent.[40] While children may be placed in orphanages for a variety of reasons, including pandemics,[41] poverty, conflict, natural disasters, disability and neglect,[42] they are increasingly being trafficked to orphanages in what has become a highly profitable, clandestine trade. From India,[43] to Sri Lanka, Nepal,[44] and Ukraine,[45] orphanage trafficking is a global phenomenon that sees children taken from their families by unscrupulous recruiters and sold to orphanages at a profit. These children are known as 'paper orphans' as falsified documents such as parents' death certificates are used to justify their orphan status.[46] While some parents, from Southeast Asia to the Caribbean, are led to believe that institutional care can provide greater safety, health, shelter, and education for their children,[47] being in institutional care can damage children's development,[48] and place them at heightened risk of physical and sexual abuse.[49] Although it is difficult to ascertain the different experiences of boys and girls in institutional care, girls likely suffer higher rates of sexual exploitation reflecting global trends in child sexual exploitation.[50]

In some countries, in addition to being abused or denied an education, orphans may be subject to forced labour in domestic work,[51] begging,[52] or commercial sexual exploitation, with some orphanages reportedly forcing girls to work on the streets after dark.[53] Children may also be commodified to attract an income through foreign donations.[54] In Haiti for example, 'funding per child' is particularly harmful as it incentivises large-scale recruitment of children,[55] transforming orphanages into a lucrative enterprise.[56] Growth in the voluntourism market has led to trafficked children being increasingly used to attract paid volunteer experiences from well-meaning tourists[57] with predominantly American, Australian, and European tourists travelling to Southeast Asia and Africa to volunteer.[58] Some orphanages intentionally keep children in an impoverished state to garner more sympathy and monetary support.[59] By providing unsupervised accessibility,[60] voluntourism has also spurred increased rates of child sexual exploitation,[61] particularly in Southeast Asia where sexual exploitation of children in institutional care is prevalent.[62]

Not only are orphanages a destination for child trafficking, they are also a source and transit point.[63] Children are reportedly trafficked from orphanages across Afghanistan, Hungary, Latvia, Lebanon, Sudan, and Ukraine.[64] A 2020 study found that while there is evidence of children being trafficked into European institutions, children are mainly trafficked out of institutions across Europe, with girls at an increased risk of being trafficked for sexual exploitation.[65] Traffickers primarily target poorly managed institutions to lure children away,[66] or gain access through illicit adoption.[67] Children (particularly girls and those with disabilities) are additionally at risk of being trafficked if they leave care without adequate support,[68] with traffickers taking advantage of a lack of life skills and poor ability to form social bonds.[69]

These trends emphasise an urgent need for deinstitutionalisation,[70] and greater emphasis on family-based alternative care. In November 2019, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark resolution favouring the use of family and community-based care, noting the potential for institutions to harm children's growth and development.[71] The overwhelming number of children residing in institutionalised care despite having at least one living parent highlights the need to address the root causes of family separation such as poverty. Supporting families to remain together should be prioritised, or otherwise followed by the placement of children in a suitable form of family-based alternative care (such as extended kinship networks and stable foster care).[72]

AN ESTIMATED 5.4 MILLION CHILDREN GLOBALLY LIVE IN ORPHANAGES, FOSTER HOMES, AND OTHER FORMS OF INSTITUTIONALISED CARE.

Early exposure to gender-based violence

> *"For now, though, I am very weak but have decided to be strong for my children. I want them not to blame me, but to blame my culture. A culture that oppresses women. A culture that forces women to marry men they don't choose. A culture which forces young girls to marry old men. A culture that does not ever listen to women and girls."*
>
> Sharon, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 11

From an early age, girls are disproportionately at risk of gender-based violence, which limits their social and economic outcomes – and in doing so, increases the risk of child marriage, trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation.[73] Girls' experiences of violence often stem from traditional beliefs that men have a right to physically control or discipline females.[74] Across sub-Saharan Africa, the misguided belief that HIV/AIDS can be cured by having sex with a virgin puts young girls at risk of rape, including by family members.[75] If the girl child survives her injuries, she not only risks contracting HIV, but must endure ongoing trauma, marginalisation, and potential abandonment associated with the stigma of being raped, and risks losing access to education.[76]

On the other hand, some parents may keep daughters back from school precisely because they fear gender-based violence. Girls may experience violence at school, or during the isolated journey there and back, which can also lead families to divest from girls' education and keep girls in the home.[77] Sexual advances by teachers or other students may also prevent girls returning to the classroom.[78] School-related gender-based violence reportedly affects millions of children globally,[79] but girls often face higher rates of sexual violence, harassment and exploitation than boys.[80] This jeopardises their education and wellbeing, and places them at a distinct social and economic disadvantage.

Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, 2016. "I was a child. He was an adult. But I hoped that would mean he would be able to help my family and not just me. I had no choice but I hoped he would be kind… He was not kind. I understand why my mother wanted me out of the camp, these camps are not safe for young girls. But after a short time I felt just as scared with him as I had in the camps.
If he wanted something, I had to do it. I was too scared not too. He wanted a baby. But when I was pregnant the baby died, I had a miscarriage, and he began to shout and became very angry with me and my family. He said we were cursed" — Daughter. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

HARMFUL RELIGIOUS OR CULTURAL PRACTICES ALSO INCREASE THE RISK OF FORCED & EARLY MARRIAGE FOR GIRLS.

"To reduce vulnerability among women and girls, we must implement mass awareness and sensitisation campaigns on the indicators, risks, and impact of modern slavery that reaches people of all genders and all ages. In particular, children must grow up with the knowledge of what human trafficking is, how to prevent it, and how to take part in helping others escape it, so we can arm the next generation of abolitionists with our learnings."

Francisca Awah, Founding Director, Survivors' Network Cameroon

Anita's story

At the age of 14, Anita was taken out of school and sent to a traditional shrine in Mafi Dugame, Ghana, to become a "wife of the gods" and serve the priest, custodians, and the deity.

Three generations before Anita was born, her ancestor committed a crime that had to be atoned for by a Trokosi, a virgin yet to experience menarche. Traditionally, the offending family is expected to eternally replace the Trokosi when she dies, relegating their daughters to a life of servitude before they are even born. This was the case with Anita.

From her third menstruation, Anita was required to sleep with the priest at his behest, and forced to undertake domestic chores such as cooking, washing, and taking care of visitors. On top of this, she was required to farm for the priest without pay or even food provided in return. Anita was entirely dependent on her family for food and other everyday needs.

As Trokosi, Anita was denied access to education, adequate shelter, and other forms of training that would equip her for life outside of the shrine.

After 20 years of servitude, with the help of an NGO to advocate and enforce the Criminal Code Act, Anita was liberated from serving the priest. Since then, Anita has received vocational training and set up her own enterprise for a sustainable livelihood.

How do girls experience modern slavery?

The way in which the girls experience modern slavery is often intertwined with cultural or religious practices. Traditional forms of hierodulic, or ritual slavery still affect girl children in religious communities across West Africa.[81] In Benin, Togo, and Ghana, an ancient religious practice known as the *Trokosi* system continues to trap girls in intergenerational ritual servitude.[82] The practice involves sacrificing virgin girls as young as six years old to *Troxovi* shrines (temples for gods) as repayment for services obtained from the shrine, or more commonly, to atone for the sins of a family member.[83] The girls, known as *Trokosi*, are "wives of the gods."[84] In addition to forced labour on farms and to maintain the temple, *Trokosi* are groomed from a young age to endure sexual exploitation by priests and temple elders; further still, duties as a *Trokosi* include having sex with the temple priests to consummate the 'marriage' with the gods upon reaching puberty.[85] A *Trokosi*, and any daughter she may have, often remains in servitude until death – whereupon her burden is transferred to a female relative who replaces her.[86]

As a result, *Trokosi* girls may be trapped in slavery for generations.[87] While the practice is illegal in Ghana, it persists in the Volta region where deeply-ingrained fear of the gods' power to seek retribution for sins – a belief propagated by priests – prevents proper enforcement and circumvents behavioral change.[88]

Among minorities, harmful religious or cultural practices also increase the risk of forced and early marriage for girls.[89] In Southern India, prepubescent girls – from as young as four years of age[90] – typically from the Dalit community and other marginalised castes, are ritually dedicated in 'marriage' by their families to a local Hindu deity, and are forced to spend their lives as a *Devadasi* or 'female servant of God'.[91] *Devadasi* are often subjected to forced begging, forced labour, and sexual exploitation by priests, elders, and other patrons of the temple.[92] In one study of 62 *Devadasi*, approximately 98 per cent had experienced domestic violence, 92 per cent had experienced child labour, 48 per cent had never been to school, and 11 per cent had a physical disability. Seventy-four per cent had also been initiated into sex work before the age of 18, with the average age being approximately 14.5 years.[93]

Despite many legislative interventions to outlaw the practice, the dedication of girls as devadasi continues today in secret, in part due to strong adherence to superstitious beliefs, community pressure to continue the dedication practice among '*Devadasi*' families, to take care of family members, or as a means of income for disabled girls with few other perceived options in marginalised communities.[94]

Girls are vulnerable to being trafficked into domestic work,[95] particularly where traffickers take advantage of corrupt adoption or fostering processes and impoverished families struggling to survive. In Nepal, girls from the Indigenous Tharu tribe are subject to domestic servitude under the *Kamlari* system; a vestige of the Kamaiya system of bonded agricultural labour that when abolished, left families destitute and with little choice but to sell their daughters into domestic work, hoping it would lead to a better future.[96]

While in 2013 the Nepali government declared it would free girl children trapped in the *Kamlari* system, the practice persists, and *Kamlari* girls continue to work up to 14 hours a day with little food and education.[97]

Among rural and Indigenous communities in Colombia, reports are emerging of vulnerable girls being trafficked to cities for domestic work, deceiving families living in poverty with false promises to assist their girl children to access better education.[98] A similar trend has been reported in Haiti, among children as young as five who have been trafficked under the guise of adoption or fostering processes, allegedly to assist poor children access better education in exchange for work as unpaid domestic servants.[99] These *restavek* children often suffer systemic abuse, physically hard work, limited or no pay, and are rarely, if ever, sent to school.[100] Nearly two thirds of the estimated 300,000 *restavek* children are girls,[101] who are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse from males in the host household. Often degradingly referred to as *la pou sa*, a Creole term meaning "there for that," sexual abuse against girl *restaveks* is normalised.[102]

Although girls and boys both experience forced labour in mining sectors, including in cobalt mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo[103] and precious metal mines in Bolivia,[104] girls are also at risk of sexual abuse by their employers.[105] Forced begging runs adjacent to forced labour and sexual exploitation in many illegal mining camps, including in Mali, where 64 women and girls were rescued from mine sites in 2019.[106]

In communities beset by conflict, girls are at an even greater risk of sexual exploitation and trafficking. In Iraq, girls as young as 11 are sexually exploited in nightclubs and other entertainment venues, facilitated by corrupt militia groups who allegedly earn considerable income from providing security at such establishments.[107] Iraqi girls between the ages of 11 and 16 have been trafficked to the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, as well as to neighbouring countries in the Arab States including Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and the United Arab Emirates.[108] Some girls are sold by family members to traffickers, who use fake passports to move them across borders or forcibly marry them in order to divorce and sell them once they have arrived at their destination.[109] Other young girls are sold into temporary, or *mut'ah*, marriages and subjected to forced sexual exploitation.[110] In Libya, migrant and refugee girls have been targeted by criminal networks who subject them to sexual violence, including rape and forced prostitution.[111] In other countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, militia groups have abducted young girls and forced them into sexual slavery.[112] Parents desperate to safeguard their children from these exploitative practices may resort to marrying young daughters as a means to 'protect' them.[113]

Societal acceptance of gender-based violence also fuels commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). As a direct result of the early sexualisation of girls, they are at increased risk of CSEC – risk that is compounded by poverty, increased exposure to HIV/AIDS, lower rates of education, ethnic marginalisation, previous experiences of domestic violence, and in many countries, harmful cultural practices.[114] No country or region is immune to CSEC. In Cambodia, the cultural belief that sex with virgin girls will strengthen male prowess has led to a thriving trade in female virginity.[115] Virgin girls as young as 12 are sold by relatives as an escape route from poverty, yet the stigma that follows this transaction often leaves girls trapped in a life of forced sex work.[116] In rural parts of Yemen, the cultural belief that virgin girls will make more submissive and pliable wives means most girls are married by the age of 12 or 13, generally to men who are much older than them.[117]

In Latin America, sex with virgin girls is believed to bestow status upon men, leading to wider social acceptance of CSEC.[118]

> *"I have done everything to seek justice, with the hope that I will receive justice!"*
>
> Kashi, 22, Indian survivor of commercial sexual exploitation at age 5

In India, there is reportedly increasing demand for *kali*, meaning 'unblossomed' or prepubescent girls, in the sex work industry in Mumbai.[119] The girls who fulfil this demand are often the daughters of women who have been trafficked and sold into sexual slavery as children themselves.[120] In Bangladesh, young girls, in addition to women, are also at risk of being deceived and sold into sex work, sometimes after having escaped an abusive child marriage.[121] Girls as young as 12 may be forced to take steroids to give customers the false impression of maturity and wellbeing.[122]

A system of bonded sex work keeps these girl children inextricably trapped in forced sexual exploitation to repay falsified debts.[123] With some girls' entire earnings defrauded by the madams, the prospect of clearing these debts, and escaping the cycle of slavery, seems impossible.

Girls, especially those who are displaced or impoverished, face heightened vulnerability to commercial sexual exploitation due to an exponential growth in tourism and a concomitant rise in child sex tourism, spurred by cheap travel, online anonymity, and perceived impunity.[124] The ease of accessibility and low cost of travel has prompted increasing child sex tourism in Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and other Latin American countries.[125] High rates of crime and poverty in these countries cause many children to run away from home, risking homelessness and fuelling vulnerability, while gender norms that perpetuate male superiority enable widespread acceptance of child sexual exploitation, and consequent impunity for travelling sex offenders.[126] Africa is also growing as a child sex tourism destination given minimal regulations and increasingly, the incorporation of child sexual services into offerings within the travel sector.[132]

The use of child abuse websites skyrocketed during the COVID-19 pandemic, with a large number of users reportedly overwhelming illicit websites.[133]

In India, there was a 95 per cent rise in online searches for child sexual abuse material,[134] and reports of child sexual exploitation content in the United States increased by 106 per cent.[135] The restrictions associated with COVID-19 presented predators with more opportunities to groom and exploit victims, as many children were out of school and spending more unsupervised time online.[136] The details of how to take advantage of these circumstances were reportedly set out in a 'handbook' circulating the dark web, outlining how to groom, manipulate, and exploit children online over the course of the pandemic.[137]

Changemakers: CoMensha

CoMensha, a not-profit based in the Netherlands, is working towards a future where all forms of human trafficking no longer exist.[127] One of CoMensha's key tasks is to register possible human trafficking victims, and collect information on their experiences to identify obstacles, trends and success factors in policy implementation. CoMensha also operates a national helpdesk which coordinates victim's case management and access to services such as shelters and psychological care, together with regional care coordinators. Further, to disrupt the cycle of exploitation, CoMensha regularly provides information campaigns, workshops, training and education programs for employees across various sectors, including local government officials and healthcare providers.[128] Their goal is to raise awareness of human trafficking, and in doing so give the public the tools needed to identify human trafficking.

On a broader policy level, CoMensha supports research, monitors the implementation of international treaties, and actively supports government to develop and implement human trafficking solutions, including new legislation and initiatives on shelter and victim assistance.[129] CoMensha also empowers businesses to detect human trafficking in supply chains and improve their organisational responses to modern slavery.[130] This is aided by their Human Trafficking Academy, launched in 2019 to offer comprehensive socio-legal education for professionals seeking to advance knowledge on human trafficking and labour exploitation.[131] With human rights at the core of its approach, CoMensha is bringing human trafficking to the forefront of policy development.

Southern Lebanon, 2016. Syrian refugee families in a refugee settlement in Lebanon. The conflict in Syria displaced millions into neighbouring countries, where they have faced extreme vulnerability to exploitation. Forced marriage and forced and child labour increased exponentially throughout the crisis. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

Brussels, Belgium, July 2020. European Commissioner for Home Affairs Ylva Johansson speaks during an online news conference where the European Commission unveiled plans to create a European center to prevent child sexual abuse amid a spike in mistreatment in recent years and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Photo credit: Francisco Seco/POOL/AFP via Getty Images

THE SHIFT TO ONLINE EXPLOITATION

Increasingly, technology is used as a tool to recruit, transport and exert control over victims of modern slavery, playing a role in both trafficking for labour and sexual exploitation.[138] The ubiquity of the internet has allowed perpetrators to purchase or otherwise exploit victims more easily, and has led to new forms of exploitation taking place online. In 2019, the Internet Watch Foundation reported a 25 per cent increase in confirmed child sexual abuse material from 2018.[139] Over 90 per cent of victims identified in the material in 2019 were girls, an increase from 86 per cent in 2017.[140] Further, while reports continue to rise, identified victims are getting younger. The most actively traded material depicts prepubescent victims, with some cases involving infants or toddlers.[141]

Live streaming sexual violence against children, abuse facilitated via the dark web or peer-to-peer platforms, has also increased in the wake of COVID-19.[142] Victims are often young Caucasian girls from affluent homes in Western countries, with content streamed directly from their bedrooms.[143] They are typically groomed by adults masquerading as young 'loverboys,' who cultivate their friendship on social media networks and convince them to share explicit content or even to move to a new town or country where they are forced into commercial sexual exploitation.[144] Such cases have emerged in the United States,[145] the Netherlands, and in Belgium.[146] Some states, such as the Government of the Netherlands, recognise the threat of loverboys and have launched anti-trafficking campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers they pose and improve support services for their victims.[147]

Despite online platforms disproportionately impacting young girls in terms of sexually exploitive material, women are still vulnerable to trafficking and exploitation via online platforms beyond girlhood. Recruitment is increasingly online, as victims are lured through fraudulent job advertisements or direct contact with traffickers.[148] Venezuelan women offered fake jobs have been recruited and sexually exploited in major cities such as Sao Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.[149] Cases emerge across Europe of victims recruited into forced labour via online advertisements for nannies or waitresses, or jobs in cleaning, agriculture, construction, and transportation, as online recruitment provides offenders with low-risk platforms to access victims.[150]

COVID-19 PRESENTED PREDATORS WITH MORE OPPORTUNITIES TO GROOM AND EXPLOIT VICTIMS, AS CHILDREN WERE OUT OF SCHOOL AND SPENDING MORE UNSUPERVISED TIME ONLINE.

In other countries, advancing technology has facilitated a shift towards online sexual exploitation of children. While Australia is primarily a source country for child sex tourism in the Asia Pacific region, with child sex offenders travelling to neighbouring Pacific Island countries and Southeast Asia to exploit children,[151] Australia is increasingly becoming a main source country for the purchase of child sexual abuse material online.[152] This predominantly involves children in the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries.[153] Online child sex abuse material in the Philippines has dramatically increased in recent years, with abuse of young children, the majority (86 per cent) of whom are girls, spanning years, and often facilitated by female relatives with financial motivations.[154] Abusers who frequent this material are predominantly older men from Western countries, including Australia, Sweden, and the United States.[155]

Changemakers: Children of Maasai

The Children of Maasai Educational Programme is a not-for-profit organisation helping children living in poverty in rural Kenya to access quality healthcare and education.[156] Children of Maasai is driving change by educating families on the importance of health, facilitating nutrition in schools, providing mobile health clinics, and paying school fees on behalf of students who otherwise could not afford to attend school. Improving fundamental health, nutrition and learning outcomes among children equips them with the tools they need to earn an income later in life. Crucially, providing girls with access to education helps to protect them from harmful practices often born out of poverty, such as child marriage.

Children of Maasai directly assists girls at risk of child marriage by helping them to access schooling. However, there is more work to do, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, which has led to increased cases of domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, FGM/C and child marriage observed by the team. Yet Children of Maasai is unflagging, and has swiftly responded to provide direct outreach to girls at risk of early marriage and FGM/C, which often involves walking kilometres door to door, and have re-organised their services to be delivered at a safe social distance. Further, in late July 2020, Children of Maasai delivered two socially distanced educational training sessions on teenage pregnancy and provided the 110 young girls who attended with education supplies, food, and sanitary items. By making it clear that girls in need can rely on their support even during a pandemic, Children of Maasai is tireless in the fight for girls, and their fundamental right to an education.

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New Delhi, India, February 2019. A young girl seen putting her handprint over an installation during an awareness campaign program initiated by Delhi Police for children who were missing and kidnapped but later been reunited with their families. Over 130 missing children were reunited with their families by the Anti-Human Trafficking Unit of northeast district police in 2018 and 2019.
Photo credit: Biplov Bhuyan/ Hindustan Times via Getty Images

How can we improve the odds for girls?

> *"In our experience, girls are most vulnerable when poverty and patriarchy intersect, and the key to solving this challenge is education."*
>
> Safeena Husain, Founder and Executive Director, Educate Girls

Experiences of human trafficking in childhood can heighten the risk of being re-trafficked later in life and can trap young girls in a cycle of abuse and exploitation.[157] To change the trajectory of risk for girls, attitudes that devalue them must be challenged. In particular, attitudes towards investing in girls' education must be part of this shift. Educating girls is strongly intertwined with social protection, and can significantly contribute to girls' safety, wellbeing, and empowerment.[158] Girls who are not in school face increased vulnerability to child marriage, are at heightened risk of contracting HIV/AIDS, and have a shorter life expectancy.[159] Educated girls are more likely to find a job, and their earning potential increases by approximately 12 per cent for each year of schooling, helping to break the inter-generational cycle of poverty and modern slavery.[160] As such, changing deep-rooted attitudes and providing opportunities for families to invest in girls' education (including in early childhood) are among the most promising steps to improve the odds for girls, and their broader communities.[161]

Changemakers: Blue Dragon Children's Foundation

Established in 2002, the Blue Dragon Children's Foundation is a non-profit dedicated to protecting children in need in Vietnam. Through a wraparound approach to service delivery, Blue Dragon directly provides shelters, schooling, vocational training, and rescue services to boys and girls in need. While the charity originally focussed on services for boys working on the streets as shoe shiners, its services for girls have grown exponentially since 2007, which marked the first of Blue Dragon's many successful rescue operations to assist girls trafficked to China for forced marriage and other forms of sexual exploitation.

Today, Blue Dragon runs classrooms, crisis accommodation, long-term counselling and a drop-in centre at its headquarters, Dragon House, as well as multiple other residential facilities for at-risk children and transitional housing for early adults leaving the program. Beyond the services provided at Dragon House, the non-profit works to reunite children with their families and successfully reintegrate victims into society.

To do so, the organisation provides nutritious meals, legal aid, and job placement, builds family homes, and provides assistance to obtain legal papers.[162]

Since its inception, Blue Dragon has assisted over 50,000 children and as of mid-2020, has rescued over 950 trafficked people – a majority of whom were girls, including 545 girls the charity assisted to escape from commercial sexual exploitation and forced marriages in Vietnam and abroad.[163] Specific services for modern slavery victims are also available through Blue Dragon's 'Project X', which offers psychosocial support for survivors of sex trafficking, setting survivors on the pathway to recovery. Survivors receive ongoing care to help them return to education, whether it be school, university or training, as well as medical care and nutrition to facilitate their return to strong health and wellbeing.[164] Blue Dragon also strives to change the structural factors that make children vulnerable, through implementing campaigns to reform child protection laws, delivering training to law enforcement on the signs of human trafficking, and leading an initiative to fight for the rights of all victims of crime to access legal representation.[165] No matter how complex the circumstances, Blue Dragon does not give up on vulnerable children.

MORE EDUCATION IS NEEDED WITHIN COMMUNITIES.

However, changing attitudes alone will not be enough to benefit girls in the long term, and particularly not for girls living in the worst of circumstances. For girls in areas beset by climate change, conflict, or other crises, there are few perceived options beyond negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage and survival sex. To support these girls' resilience to exploitation, multi-pronged counter-trafficking and modern slavery action must be built into all humanitarian action taken to respond to crisis situations.

> *"To reduce the risk of modern slavery for women and girls, more education is needed within communities on the risks and consequences of child and forced marriage. … It is important that parents know about the debilitating impacts of this form of modern slavery. In addition, empowering the girl child to know her rights, and to know where to seek help, is key to prevention."*
>
> Mary Saruni, Co-Founder,
> The Children of Maasai Educational Programme

Beqaa Valley, Lebanon, 2016. A Syrian mother, pictured here with her youngest daughter, explains that she hopes her youngest child will get the opportunity of school instead of early marriage. Having married her eldest daughter off to a much older man earlier that year, as the only way she thought she could protect her in the camp. Photo credit: Grace Forrest.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

Among interventions for girls in the Promising Practices Database, programs targeted at keeping girls in school and rehabilitating children who have experienced trauma, including through labour and sexual exploitation, can help keep girls in and return them to school. One program implemented by the ILO in Nepal aimed to rehabilitate children and remove them from bonded labour by providing bridging courses and routes to formal education, together with broader incentives targeted at households such as vocational training, rights-based awareness raising on the risks posed to child labourers, and promoting decent work opportunities among parents. Ultimately, the program had a significant impact on preventing girls from entering bonded labour, removing them from the practice, and improving school enrolment and female literacy.[166]

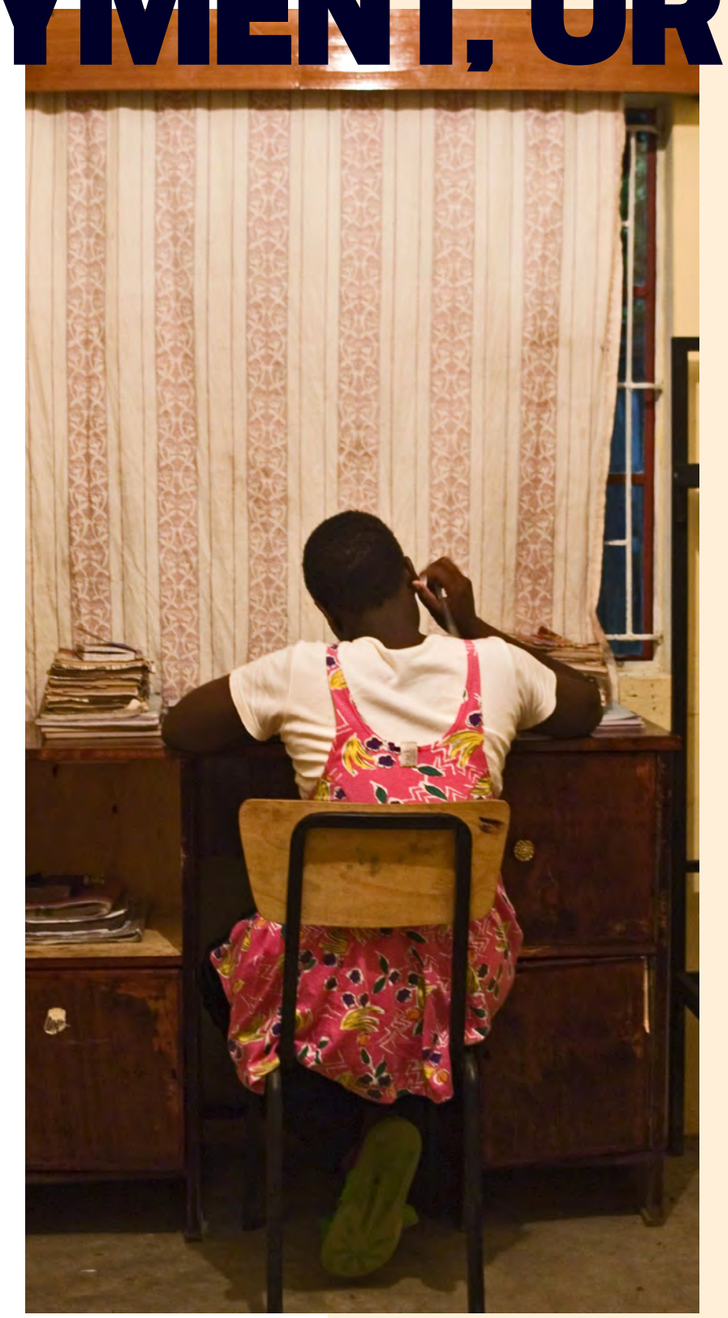
Chapter 3

ADOLESCENCE (13–17 YEARS)

Dhaka, Bangladesh, August 2019. A young teenage girl works in a local jeans factory, where they also produce ready-to-wear garments. Women and girls are the majority of garment workers in Bangladesh, particularly in small home-based factories. Many garment workers are left facing poverty and hunger in the aftermath of COVID-19. Photo credit: Ziaul Haque/ NurPhoto via Getty Images

ALMOST ONE IN FOUR GIRLS AGED 15 TO 19 ARE NOT IN EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, OR TRAINING.

Puberty brings new risks for adolescent girls. Still without decision-making power and facing further barriers to education, adolescent girls also contend with limited employment opportunities and increasing expectations to marry, fuelling their risk of exploitation.



Narok, Kenya, December 2006. A 17-year-old girl studies before the sun rises at the Tasuru Safehouse for Girls in Kenya which supports board, lodging and education of young Maasai girls who seek refuge from female circumcision and early marriage. Traditionally a young girl is expected to quit school after she is wed in order to perform her wifely duties such as cooking, cleaning, procreating and caring for the children of her husband's wives. Photo credit: Marvi Lacar/Getty Images

> *"I just wish I was sent to school like other girls my age … All of this wouldn't have happened. I want my children to have a good education. That's all I want now."*
>
> Sarah, now 30, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 13

Why are adolescent girls vulnerable to modern slavery?

Out of school, but in the home

Adolescent girls occupy a confused space in social consciousness. On one hand, they are still seen as children who cannot make their own decisions; on the other, they are considered mature beyond their years and sexualised in advertising and popular culture. In fact, some societies consider menarche a sign that adolescent girls are ready for the next step into womanhood: marriage.[1] As such, adolescent girls must also contend with gender norms that restrict them to traditional roles as homemakers, wives, and mothers.[2] These attitudes are chief among the hurdles that bar adolescent girls from accessing education and decent work, underlying perceptions that educating girls is a waste of resources.[3] Unsurprisingly, adolescent girls' education is among the first expenses sacrificed by families in times of economic stress, as the short-term opportunity cost of sending adolescent daughters to school can be prohibitive for families living in poverty.[4]

The attitudes that devalue girls in their infancy and early childhood become more pronounced in adolescence. This is evident in the low value placed on girls' secondary education compared to the higher priorities of marriage and household/care work. While many countries have made significant progress in educating girls, far fewer have made inroads in keeping adolescent girls in school.[5] Globally, almost one in four girls aged 15 to 19 are not in education, employment, or training, compared to one in 10 boys of the same age.[6] Adolescent girls living in poverty are even less likely to complete school. In low income countries, only eight per cent of girls from the poorest households finish their lower secondary school years, and even fewer – just two per cent – complete upper secondary school.[7] The disproportionate number of girls in paid or unpaid domestic work also reflects traditional views that housework is a woman's domain. Among children in domestic work, adolescent girls carry the heaviest burden. In 2012, it was estimated that nearly 80 per cent of the six million children in domestic work between the ages of 15 to 17 years were girls.[8]

Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 2020. An elderly woman and a young girl work at a brick-breaking yard amid the coronavirus outbreak.Those working in brick kilns in south Asia are vulnerable to bonded labour, which occurs when a person is forced to work to pay off a debt. This debt can be inherited, with whole families forced to work. Photo credit: K M Asad/ LightRocket via Getty Images

Maria's story

Maria is a 17-year-old single mother currently living in the Gahsyekero slum in Kigali, Rwanda. Her father died when she was seven, and her mother has since struggled to feed Maria and her six siblings.

At the age of 14, a close friend of Maria's mother offered to pay for Maria's education at a good school in Kigali, and promised to take Maria into his family's care. Excited by the prospect, Maria left her family in rural Rusizi district for the city.

Upon reaching Kigali, the family friend's wife refused to register Maria in school. Instead, she was forced to work as a housemaid without pay while the man worked away as a driver.

"I worked for six months as a house girl; I was not paid, it's like I worked for the food. When the man came back I explained to him what happened and he promised me to help me and I felt I had really someone to count on."

Maria expected that her unpaid work was in exchange for school fees. When it was clear that school was not going to happen, Maria complained to the man that she was being exploited. Instead of supporting Maria as he had previously promised, he took Maria to a lodge and raped her. From that moment on, he regularly sexually abused Maria, until eventually she became pregnant. After a few weeks, his wife kicked Maria out of the house.

Many young girls in Rwanda are promised opportunities to join relatives or friends in Kigali city, but end up becoming housemaids. [NGO] notes that this is a particular problem when girls are living with relatives or friends of their parents.

Maria sought refuge with neighbours, who told her they couldn't feed or accommodate her unless she contributed to the rent and food. Despite being a minor, they forced her into sex work.

Maria moved back with her family to give birth to her child, but returned to the city, unable to cope with rural life and hunger.

"I left my child with mom. None in my family knows what I am doing. I lied to my mom that the job I was going to look for is cleaning the offices. When I get money, I send to my mom and I pay for my child who is two years old."

Maria faces physical abuse and arrests,

> *"Some clients would invite me to their house, we would have sex, but they refuse to pay instead beat me. Sometimes, the police will arrest sex workers and I will spend days in detention."*

With the COVID-19 lockdown, she often goes nights without eating, unable to find enough money to survive. Given the opportunity, Maria would study or work.

"In general I don't take this like a career but it is just to survive. If I can find something else to do I can do it and quit this job. I wish I could get support to go back to school and learn a real profession, or to get enough funds to start a small business."

Mila's story

Born in Haiti, Mila was adopted by a family of five from a small village in the Netherlands, when she was only 9 months old. Over the years, she became estranged from her adoptive family as she always felt like an outsider. When the relationship disintegrated, Mila left the family home at 16 years and lived in a homeless shelter.

At the shelter, Mila became pregnant, so she moved to a home for teen mothers to have her first child. Soon after this, she was introduced to a man from another city in the Netherlands, who was the friend of another young girl she had met and become close to. Over time, he worked to gain Mila's trust and they eventually began a relationship.

"He knew all my fears and fear of rejection and he knew that I craved for a father figure and a friend. At a certain point he asked me to work in the prostitution, so we could have a better future. First, I said no, but after a ... while I did it."

Soon after, Mila's boyfriend became her abuser. "He drove me to work and picked me up. When he picked me up, I had to hand over the money that I had earned. At first, he took 60 per cent and I got 40 per cent. But later on, he took it all and gave me a kind of allowance." To ensure she was not hiding any money, he frequently forced Mila to undress in front of him. Although her abuser still lived in a different city, Mila felt trapped and believed she needed to please him - until she became pregnant for the second time and realised she needed to leave. Mila went to the local police station and told an officer she thought she was a victim of human trafficking.

> *"During my conversation with them, I told them that I believed that it was all my fault, that I wanted to satisfy him, although he had another girlfriend. The officers told me that this was his method, to keep power over me and that I had no blame."*

As a result of her report, her abuser was arrested, and it was discovered that he had been exploiting five other women in the same way. Unfortunately, the case was dismissed in court as there was insufficient evidence to prove Mila had been manipulated into giving her abuser her wages. Throughout the legal proceedings, Mila did not have access to any social or physical support – and was left in debt by the end of the case.

Mila tried to seek help and reached out to a care organisation specialised in helping exploited sex workers, but she did not receive the care she needed. Despite the setbacks she faced, Mila managed to return to school, and motivated herself by setting goals she could reach, step by step."... after being exploited, I got back to school on my own. I specialised myself in social work, relationship therapy, sex therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). I did this schooling because I had the feeling I had to, just to feel accepted by society."

Today, Mila works as a therapist, human trafficking consultant, life coach and motivational speaker. Mila strives to empower survivors and ensure that the support systems she had desperately needed but could not access, are available for other survivors. "I would like to encourage survivors ... so that they too can participate in society again."

Curtailed agency

> *"During my escape to the capital city, I was once again abused and exploited by the driver who was supposed to help me escape. In Afghan culture, it can be nearly impossible for some women to support themselves independently without being under the care of a male relative."*
>
> Maryam, in her 20s, Afghani survivor of forced marriage

In many countries and cultures, decision-making authority rests with older men, limiting the ability of adolescent girls to control their own lives. Although often intended to protect, the lack of power held by girls can increase their vulnerability to exploitation. For example, in the Solomon Islands, social norms that dictate adherence to male authority make it difficult for adolescent girls to refuse male relatives who broker sex work or informal marriage with workers in the logging sector.[9] Older women are also complicit in sustaining male-dominated power systems and directly facilitating exploitation of other women and girls. In Lebanon, madams are often responsible for the exploitation of domestic workers they employ.[10] In a study of forced marriages in Australia and New Zealand, while male relatives were more often responsible for arranging the marriage, female relatives were equally responsible for abuses perpetuated after the marriage took place.[11]

A lack of agency for adolescent girls can also increase their physical and social isolation. Their movement outside the home is disproportionately restricted by external pressures, such as unpaid care work forcing girls to spend more hours in the home,[12] to parents and guardians preventing girls from using public transport[13] or going outside to avoid violence on the streets[14] or in the aftermath of natural disasters[15] or conflict.[16] Paternalistic employers also curtail adolescent girls' movement, purportedly for their own safety. In the cotton spinning mills of Southern India, up to 80 per cent of workers are female – mostly adolescent girls from lower castes.[17] In a study of five mills where every worker was made to live in hostel accommodation on the factory grounds, male colleagues were more likely to be able to leave the hostel grounds compared to their female colleagues, which was attributed to cultural expectations held by parents that their daughters must be kept 'safe'. Notably, these workers also had limited access to their mobile phones to call home and a majority were not allowed to return home regularly.[18]

Changemakers: Freedom Fund

The Freedom Fund is an international non-profit organisation that seeks to identify and invest in the most effective frontline efforts to eradicate human trafficking where it is most prevalent. Together with frontline NGOs in 'hotspots' in Ethiopia, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Brazil, they tackle the underlying risks that lead to trafficking, including the specific vulnerabilities faced by women and girls.

Young female workers, who make up the majority of employees in spinning mills across Tamil Nadu, are reclaiming their rights through workers' support groups. With support from community organisations supported by the Freedom Fund, group members meet every few weeks to share the issues they face and decide on collective actions to take.

Ms Kaliyammal, a member in one of the groups, is 32 years old and has been working in spinning mills since her teens. She explained the effects of workers coming together to speak with management:

> *"Earlier if we raised any issues with management they would say that if you don't like it, you can go now. But now it's us who say that if they don't resolve our issue, we all won't work."*

Gruelling 12-hour shifts used to be the norm but, pre-COVID, this was reduced to eight hours, and the daily wage increased from Rs.180 ($2.50) to Rs.250–320 (US $3.50–$4.50). The supervisors used to verbally abuse the workers for not producing enough, but now that has stopped. These changes make a huge difference to life in the mills.

Beyond the factories, collective action is also preventing girls from becoming child labourers. In Ms Kaliyammal's community, male and female leaders have highlighted to Members of the Legislative Assembly about the long distance that children must travel to reach their local high school, with safety concerns often leading to adolescent girls dropping out of school. Due to the community's action, they now have a vehicle to take the children safely to school and as a result more girls are continuing their education.

Zahle, Lebanon, July 2019. A 13 year old girl picks radishes at a farm. Syrian refugees fleeing from war work on agricultural farms in the Bekaa Valley for 15 hours a day during summer, earning a maximum of US $8 per day. The heads of the camps connect them with local farmers. Photo credit: Eva Parey/SOPA Images/ LightRocket via Getty Images

> *"We need to shift the social norms that lead to early marriage, school dropouts and undervalued work for adolescent girls, through a whole-of-community approach that mobilises parents, community leaders, men and boys. Further, labour laws that discriminate against, or ignore, female workers must be amended. For example, women providing domestic services or contributing as unpaid or underpaid family workers should be recognised as workers and protected under labour laws. Finally, we must support more women leaders to challenge the gender discrimination that drives exploitation, and to address labour exploitation in female-dominated industries such as small-scale farming, factory work and social care."*
>
> Yuki Lo, Head of Research and Evaluation, Freedom Fund

Honour, sexuality, and stigma

> *"In our communities, girls are married off early so that they don't run away with somebody or get pushed into sex work by eloping with some boy or bring down the family's honour or prestige of the village in some other way."*
>
> Mamta, age unknown, Indian survivor of commercial sexual exploitation

Adolescence is often marked by sexual and reproductive development, which in the case of girls, is seen as a risk to their purity and to their family's honour. Research with adolescents and parents across Belgium, the United States, China, Egypt, and Nigeria, found that while adolescence offers new experiences and opportunities for boys, it leads to new restrictions on girls for their protection.[19] Gender norms which expect girls to be virgins and view their sexual activity or reproductive knowledge as a negative reflection of family honour, can lead to girls who seek contraception or engage in sexual activity facing significant stigma, whether or not they consented to the sexual experience.[20] In Nepal and India, the shame and dishonour associated with rape can lead to victims of rape or sex trafficking being abandoned by their families,[21] and unable to marry.[22]

In many cases, child marriage is used as a strategy to prevent underage sex, 'safeguard' female chastity, and/or protect individual or family honour.[23] For example, legal loopholes can exonerate rapists from punishment if they are married to, or subsequently marry, their victim.[24] Elsewhere, forced marriage is used as a 'solution' for adolescent girls who identify as LGBTQIA+.[25] In countries such as Chechnya, Iran, Iraq, and Russia, there are reports that women and girls who identify as lesbians are forced into marriage by family members to 'correct' their sexuality, or as an alternative to death.[26] Similarly, in the United Kingdom, LGBTQIA+ people have been identified as a group at high risk of forced marriages.[27]

> *"In Colombia, an adolescent girl who becomes pregnant has a 50 per cent of chance of never finishing school. This risk rises to 100 per cent if she has a second child before the age of 18. Without an education and with limited employment prospects, often the only thing that sits between a young mother and poverty is an abusive partner or marriage, or precarious work. Improving knowledge of sexual and reproductive health is needed to break this cycle, along with improving access to education to all girls and adolescents, including young mothers. Education and empowerment will be the key to create a new reality for women and girls."*
>
> Valerie Dourdin, Emergencies Director, Save the Children Colombia

Cultural phenomena such as witchcraft also carry stigma and impact a girl's ability to access education. Accusations of witchcraft are levelled at women in countries across Africa and Asia, including Ghana,[28] Nepal,[29] and Papua New Guinea.[30] In Ghana, many girls are forced to leave schools and villages due to the stigma of being the 'children of witches'.[31] Meanwhile, being educated can itself fuel witchcraft accusations against adolescent girls: across some rural parts of Nepal, pervasive ideas that brand educated girls as 'witches' prompt parents to take their daughters out of school to avoid the stigma and violence that follow accusations of witchcraft.[32]

RELIGION AND THE IMPACT OF 'PURITY' ON RISK

The religious glorification of women and girls' purity, coupled with perceptions of sex outside of marriage as a sin, can sustain harmful practices such as virginity testing,[33] sexual violence,[34] honour-based violence,[35] female genital mutilation[36], and marrying off young girls to prevent 'sin'.[37] These norms can also deny girls an education, as parents may pull daughters out of school to avoid suspicions of impurity.[38] Perceptions surrounding female virginity can also be embedded in public policy. For example, motions to outlaw child marriage have been blocked in the United States and Pakistan on the basis of religious beliefs.[39]

An obsessive emphasis on the importance of female purity reinforces harmful gender norms that cast women and girls as submissive 'gatekeepers' of virginity, while characterising men as dominant and authoritative.[40] These norms raise the risk of the sexual exploitation of girls, as they perpetuate beliefs that men can sexually dominate women and girls with impunity. In some cases, equating sexual abuse or exploitation with a lack of purity is perceived as damaging the honour of the girl's family, which is then considered the key issue rather than the abuse the victim experienced. This is evident in penal codes which include defences for violent crimes (including murder) that are perpetrated against women and girls if 'honourable motives' were present, in countries such as Jordan and Iraq.[41]

Stigma surrounding impurity and sex outside of marriage can also inhibit help-seeking behaviours. For instance, in some Pacific Island countries, stigma can lead victims and their parents to avoid seeking police assistance for rape,[42] and impede child survivors from reporting commercial sexual exploitation.[43]

Although some interpretations of religious norms and traditions can contribute to inequality, a cornerstone of all major faiths is to not discriminate against your neighbour, and to respect human life and dignity.[44] Faith leaders are often respected members of the community and as such, can play an important role in working to dismantle the harmful beliefs and practices that place women and girls at risk of modern slavery.[45] In many cases faith leaders take an active role in their communities in combating practices that impact girls such as child marriage and female genital mutilation – practices that have been linked to religious teachings in parts of the world.[46] In West Africa, faith leaders have supported communities in ending gender-based violence, such as child marriage,[47] and in Nepal, a religious network launched a campaign to combat child marriage.[48] As approximately 75 per cent of the world's population identify with a religious faith[49] and projections indicate that this will grow,[50] faith leaders have a significant role to play in empowering communities with the faith-based information and tools necessary to combat modern slavery.

Lagos, Nigeria, October 2016. The #BringBackOurGirls movement marked the 2000th day of the Chibok girls' abduction by terrorist group Boko Haram with a call on the Federal Government to step up efforts to free the remaining hostages. Members of the movement converged at the Falomo Roundabout, Ikoyi, Lagos in a sit-out in honour of the girls. The 276 girls were kidnapped from a girl's secondary school, Chibok in Borno State, on the night of April 14, 2014. Six years after their abduction, 112 of the girls are yet to be freed. Photo credit: Olukayode Jaiyeola/NurPhoto via Getty Images.

Forgotten in policy

Adolescent girls are also at risk due to a lack of protective legislation – even regarding issues as fundamental as child and early marriage. According to the Pew Research Centre, 117 countries allow child marriage, either by not specifying a minimum age of marriage, stipulating the minimum age below 18, or through exemptions to marriage age laws. These exemptions can be granted in cases where the spouses have judicial approval or parental consent, or are of a particular religion.[51] Such legislative loopholes often intersect with migration policies, enabling child marriage to take place within the context of migration. For instance, in the United States, migration policies allow for a minor to petition on behalf of a spouse or fiancé based overseas, and for an adult to petition on behalf of a minor.[52] The nexus between migration and forced marriage of young women and girls is further evident in Australia and New Zealand, where girls have been forcibly married, often overseas, with the expectation of sponsoring the husband's migration.[53] Child marriage prospers where conflicting customary or religious laws override the national minimum age of marriage, or where legal marriage registration is weak or not required.[54] This occurs in unregistered marriages in Roma communities,[55] customary marriages involving children as young as 10 in Papua New Guinea,[56] and temporary *misyar* or *mut'ah* marriages in the Arab States.[57]

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Amman, Jordan, 2016. "When my mother broke her back last year, I decided to go to the Middle East for 6 months to earn enough money to pay for her medical bills. It was always my fear that I would be exploited by an employer, but many girls told me this was "just the way it is" when you go to be a maid - so I prayed I would get a nice family. When I arrived, they took my passport straight away and told me I would have to stay for longer than my contract said. When I tried to refuse, they beat me. And when I went to the recruiter he just sent me back to my employer, who then beat me again. After that I realised I was alone, and it was best to stay silent." - Olivia. Photo credit: Grace Forrest.

IN THE CHAOS OF CONFLICT

Conflicts today are more complex and more prevalent,[58] and expose women and girls to further risk. As conflicts increasingly involve non-state belligerents,[59] antiquated humanitarian laws are often not applicable nor adequate to protect vulnerable populations.[60] Women and girls are acutely affected by discrimination,[61] as deterioration in the rule of law allows gender-based violence to prosper, and fear of retribution by perpetrators from armed groups prevents reporting of such crimes.[62]

Humanitarian crises increase risk of sexual exploitation and forced marriage as a result of heightened gender-based violence, increased poverty, reduced access to education, beliefs that marriage provides protection, stigma of pregnancy outside of marriage, and disruption of support networks,[63] exacerbated by mass displacement and the breakdown of the rule of law.[64] This is evident both during and post conflict in Iraq,[65] Venezuela,[66] Ukraine,[67] and Yemen,[68] and among refugee women escaping totalitarian regimes in North Korea[69] and Eritrea.[70] Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to rape (including as a weapon of war),[71] sexual slavery, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, and other forms of sexual violence.[72] Among female refugees worldwide, at least one fifth have suffered sexual violence and as a result, face significant and intergenerational shame and stigma within communities.[73]

Conflict-related gender violence affects women and girls globally; from the hundreds of women and girls affected by conflict-related sexual violence in the Central African Republic, including rape and forced marriage by armed groups; to the women and girls systematically abducted by Al-Shabaab in Somalia; to the thousands of Assyrian and Yazidi women and girls captured by Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), some of whom were ransomed to raise millions of dollars and many of whom remain missing.[74] Human trafficking markets maintained by terrorist groups such as ISIL, which involve the repeated sale and rape of women and girls, also generate substantial revenue to fund terrorist activities.[75] Propaganda advertising brides and sexual slavery is used to entice new recruits, both normalising and fuelling a culture of sexual violence.[76] Beyond governance deteriorating, women and girls are made vulnerable due to widespread beliefs that reduce them to 'propagators of ethnic identity.'[77] Combatants, through the forcible impregnation of women and girls with 'enemy' babies, deliberately alienate women from their families and destroy the social fabric of communities.[78]

Conflict also reinforces poverty among women and girls. Girls in conflict zones are nearly 2.5 times more likely to be out of school than boys, as fears of being abducted, killed, or otherwise targeted by combatants spurs parents to keep girls safe in the home.[79]

Desperate parents in conflict zones often resort to adverse coping strategies as a source of income, including child marriage,[80] or encouraging children to work or beg. Cultural norms which make women responsible for survival of the family force them to search for alternate, often riskier, incomes during crises.[81] Further, patriarchal social structures in place prior to the conflict are proving more devastating to women as the conflict continues. In Yemen, laws which require lifelong male guardianship over women relegate adult women to the household and legislative subservience to their husbands. Added to this, the death of male family members during conflict exposes women to the risk of relying on negative coping strategies such as sexual exploitation and child marriage to relieve the socioeconomic burdens that displacement has placed upon them.[82]

Displacement in the wake of unrest presents new dangers for women and girls. Globally, 79.5 million people are displaced, including 45.7 internally displaced persons (IDPs), 4.2 million asylum seekers, and 26 million refugees.[83] Conflict-related sexual violence can both be a driver and a result of displacement.[84] Women and girls who are displaced by conflict are exposed to multiple risks, from transit routes, to informal settlements, temporary lodgings, displacement sites, and camps. In Colombia, refugee transit routes double as pathways to trafficking for sexual exploitation; in Iraq, female-headed households face heightened risk due to perceived extremist ties; Rohingya women and girls in IDP camps face sexual violence, forced marriage, forced pregnancy, and forced labour, with vulnerability compounded by lack of economic options.[85] While refugee camps can offer protection against exploitation, women and girls can also face sexual violence by those responsible for aid provision,[86] or even risk being trafficked from the camps themselves.[87]

The under-representation of women in policymaking inhibits conflict prevention and resolution.[88] This includes work to de-radicalise women, who increasingly number among the recruits of terrorist groups such as ISIL.[89] Women play a pivotal role in conflict resolution by anchoring peace talks on reconciliation, education, and other crucial elements of peace.[90] When women are involved, the likelihood that a peace agreement will endure for more than 15 years increases by 35 per cent.[91] Yet two decades on from the adoption of UN Resolution 1325, which called for equal gender participation in peace processes, women continue to be excluded. Consequently, frameworks for peace often ignore the needs of women and girls: in 2018, less than eight per cent of peace agreements contained provisions on women, girls, or gender.[92] As such, gender-sensitive policies can make peace more durable, in addition to reducing risk to modern slavery among women and girls.

AN ESTIMATED 15 MILLION ADOLESCENT GIRLS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 15 TO 19 HAVE EXPERIENCED FORCED SEX ACROSS THE WORLD, AT LEAST ONCE IN THEIR LIFE.

Lily's story

Lily is a 16-year-old Venezuelan girl who arrived in Colombia in August 2019. Raised by a single mother who was struggling with drug and alcohol abuse, Lily and her family faced financial hardship. She was supported by her mother's informal work selling sweets in the markets of Maracaibo, Venezuela.

At the markets, Lily's mother met Analía, a 50-year-old woman who quickly became a regular customer and friend. Analía knew that Lily's mother faced financial difficulties and gave her clothes and food for her and her children on a regular basis, gaining the family's trust over time.

After six months, Analía offered Lily a job as a hairdresser in Barranquilla, Colombia. Lily was enticed by the opportunity offered, as she was not attending school and spent her time selling sweets with her mother. Lily accepted the job with her mother's support.

Lily and Analía travelled to Colombia by bus. At their first stop, Analía informed Lily that the only way to help her family was by working as a prostitute in Colombia, and that they would be moving to a new house the next day.

The next morning, Analía followed Lily into the shower and threatened her, telling Lily,

> *"if you tell anyone about this, I will kill you and kill your family. I know where they live."*

She then physically abused her, stubbing cigarettes out on her skin, hitting her face, and using a cable wire to stab Lily in her chest.

Lily had no one to turn to for help in Colombia, and no money to fund an escape. Due to the lack of support networks in Colombia, Lily did not have anyone to ask for help or money and felt that she had no other option but to stay with Analía.

When Lily was waiting at the bus station, another young woman from Venezuela, Juana, saw she was in trouble. She explained Lily's rights to her and took her to the police station. The police arrested Analía but did not offer any further support to Lily, who moved in with Juana.

A few months passed. Lily moved to an [NGO] clinic to receive physical and psychosocial support and open a child protection case in a safe house that provides psychosocial support for female victims of human trafficking and forced sexual exploitation.

Health and bias

Puberty brings a new wave of stigmas, biases, and cultural taboos which impede adolescent girls' access to education and health care. Perceptions that girls become sexually desirable from menarche can encourage parents to withdraw them from school in order to avoid sexual harassment from boys and male teachers and early pregnancy.[93] Cultural biases that consider menstruation as impure can also leave girls out of the schoolroom, as well as out of the home. In Nepal, menstruating girls are banished to outdoor sheds or huts for the duration due to patriarchal practices linked to Hinduism.[94] Similar anecdotal reports exist in India.[95] This not only increases the likelihood of contracting disease and other health issues, but forces girls to wait until menstruation has ended to seek health services, which can have fatal or lifelong consequences.[96] Among one rural community in Ethiopia, attitudes which consider female blood cursed push women and adolescent girls out of the home and leave them unassisted during menstruation and labour.[97] Further, a lack of access to sanitary items prevents girls from attending school during menstruation, having a substantial impact on their education.[98]

Adolescent girls are also at higher risk of health issues that can impact the rest of their lives, including complications from pregnancy, higher rates of HIV/AIDs, and HPV infection.[99] Added to this, many adolescent girls also face expectations that they will marry and become mothers.[100] If married as a minor, girls are more likely to experience rape, early pregnancy, higher maternal and infant mortality, and serious health risks such as obstetric fistula and infections associated with premature sexual activity.[101] Power imbalances as a result of age differences between the young girl and older man in most child marriages leave many girls unable to negotiate contraception use.

This leads to girls falling pregnant younger and more frequently, and increases related health risks; issues that are compounded by limited access to medical care.[102] Expectations to marry early can increase in times of crisis,[103] yet humanitarian responses often fail to address the specific needs of adolescent girls – and they are left with limited access to health services, information, and safe spaces.[104]

Violence as the norm

Adolescent girls everywhere in the world encounter violence in public, private, and virtual environments – from schoolrooms, to homes, to social media platforms. In more than one third of countries with comparable data at least one in four ever-married adolescent girls have experienced recent intimate partner violence at the hands of a spouse or partner, including emotional, physical, and sexual violence.[105] An estimated 15 million adolescent girls between the ages of 15 to 19 have experienced forced sex across the world, at least once in their life. As with older women, the majority of perpetrators are husbands or boyfriends.[106] Moreover, sexual violence can impede physical, mental, and social development in minors, and increase the risk of exploitation in later life.[107]

As previously noted, concerns over the safety of daughters reaching puberty can lead parents to limit their movement, or marry them early to protect them from sexual harassment and violence.[108] Paradoxically, child marriage in itself is a form of gender-based violence against girls that can lead to a slew of harmful medical and social consequences.[109] Child marriage and the higher risks of domestic violence[110] can lead to serious and long-term physical and mental health risks, including post-traumatic stress disorder and depression.[111]

Social norms that create tolerance of male violence against women can also be internalised by adolescent girls. Globally, almost half of girls aged between 15 and 19 believe it is sometimes justified for a man to hit or beat his wife or partner, and these beliefs are more likely to be held by girls with a lower level of education.[112] These norms are reinforced by gender-based shame, stigma, or fear of retribution, which prevent 'impure' adolescent girls from seeking support or reporting offences when they have been raped or sexually harassed.[113] Just one per cent of adolescent girls who experienced sexual violence sought professional help in a study of 30 countries, for example.[114] A sobering outcome of these significant barriers to seeking help is that the true scale of violence experienced by adolescent girls is unknown.[115]

Aisha's story

Aisha is a 20-year-old woman from Kwara State in Nigeria. In 2016, when she was 16 years old, Aisha's father remarried. Aisha moved with her father and stepmother to the capital city Abuja, but soon after the move, attempted to escape several times due to the mistreatment she endured in the home.

One day, when Aisha was out to sell goods for her stepmother, a young man approached her and told her about better opportunities and a better life in Kano State. A few weeks later the man, who had been posing as her boyfriend, took Aisha to Kano State. However, the 'boyfriend' was a trafficker planning to give Aisha to an *Alhaji* (a Muslim man who has completed a religious journey to Mecca) for marriage. Aisha was held in captivity in preparation for the marriage, in accordance with religious custom.

Her father searched for her for over three months and eventually traced her to Kano State, and found that her captors were planning to marry her off. After seeking help at the local police station without getting any positive responses, he tried to seek help from different law enforcement agents.

> *"When my trafficker realised that the news has reached my family, he pressured me to deny my family and to claim that I was 18 years old and in love with the Alhaji. During one of the times that investigators came to ask me questions, I did as instructed by my trafficker."*

Eventually, the search for Aisha reached an [NGO] volunteer, who contacted a journalist to travel to Kano State and gather more facts. [NGO] also contacted Aisha's biological mother, who confirmed that her daughter was 16 years old that year. Based on the information they were able to gather, Nigeria's National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons was engaged to rescue Aisha, and provide counselling to her family to support her reintegration. Aisha was interested in pursuing her passion of fashion design, and in 2018, [NGO] donated a sewing machine to enable her to start a local fashion shop in her community.

Changemakers: Save the Children Colombia

More than 5 million people have fled Venezuela due to economic and political stability, and 1.8 million of these migrants have fled to Colombia. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Save the Children Colombia (Save Colombia) is working across seven regions of Colombia to provide aid to the most vulnerable, who have limited access to essentials such as health services, food and water, safety, and education. To date, Save Colombia has assisted over 227,330 migrants, and a further 86,466 migrants have accessed Save Colombia's COVID-19 adapted programs since early March 2020. Many of these migrants are pregnant women and girls battling with anaemia due to limited access to food. By positioning an Emergency Health Unit clinic near the border of Colombia and Venezuela, Save Colombia has provided critical support to all women and girls with high-risk pregnancies, including adolescent mothers.[116]

Save Colombia is also working to improve the lives of women and girls more generally. The pandemic, together with the influx of Venezuelan migrants has added to the challenges already faced by vulnerable people in the country, including drought,[117] hunger,[118] corruption,[119] and the lingering aftershocks of decades-long civil conflict.[120] Cultural norms around masculinity put women and girls at significant risk of, and normalise, gender-based violence. Save Colombia plays a critical role in mitigating the impact of these risk factors on the most vulnerable women and girls in Colombia, including among hard to reach Indigenous communities.

Through an integrated case management approach, Save Colombia's programs deliver wrap-around services to help empower vulnerable women and girls, from providing them with healthy meals, delivering sexual and family planning services, to intervening to protect them against gender-based violence, including child sexual exploitation and child marriage. Further, education forms one of Save Colombia's key pillars. During crises, girl children are at particular risk of losing out on their education, which increases their vulnerability to exploitation. Save Colombia supports all children living in poverty to learn by establishing 'Temporary Learning Spaces' – and in the wake of COVID-19, Save Colombia has adapted these services to be delivered in the home.

MORE THAN 5 MILLION PEOPLE HAVE FLED VENEZUELA DUE TO ECONOMIC & POLITICAL INSTABILITY.

How do adolescent girls experience modern slavery?

While not limited to this age group, sexual exploitation and modern slavery often begin in early adolescence. Rapid physical changes associated with puberty and perceptions of developing sexual maturity expose adolescent girls to a greater risk of sexual exploitation, compared to when they are younger.[121] A range of intersecting factors such as poverty, gender inequality, insufficient sexual health and reproductive knowledge and rights, and gender-based violence converge to aggravate the risks adolescent girls face.[122] For example, in Africa and the Arab States, girls from rural and poor households are most likely to be married early.[123]

In addition, evidence suggests that exploitation during adolescence predisposes girls to further exploitation – for instance, once forced to marry, many victims are greater risk of other forms of exploitation including domestic servitude.[124]

Among adolescent girls in Mexico who had been sex trafficked, many had also been married (78 per cent), pregnant (90 per cent), or subjected to sexual violence (97 per cent) before the age of 16 years, either prior to or in the same year as being trafficked. These results suggest that a young girl in northern Mexico who is pregnant at 14, or experiences sexual violence at 11, has a one in three chance of later being trafficked for sexual exploitation.[125] In the United States, childhood maltreatment is often a predictor of sex trafficking, with many adolescent victims also reporting a history of sexual abuse.[126] This trend is also reflected in Europe, where prior experiences of abuse culminating in post-traumatic and emotional disorders were documented particularly among girls trafficked for forced sexual exploitation.[127] Girls in the US and Canada who experience homelessness are particularly at risk of being trafficked for both labour and sexual exploitation, targeted by traffickers who prey on their vulnerability. This risk is even greater for LGBTQIA+ youth, who are trafficked for sexual exploitation at higher rates than non-LGBTQIA+ youth (24 per cent and 12 per cent respectively).[128]

Bogra, Bangladesh, September 2019. 13 year-old Anita makes bidi cigarettes at a factory. Thousands of child labourers are working in the tobacco sector in Bangladesh. Millions more girls around the world have no access to education due to poverty, migration, and cultural norms, which severely limits the quality of work they can access in later life. Photo credit: Masfiqur Sohan/Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

Some adolescent girls are faced with little option but to exchange sex for necessities to support themselves and their families. Others are traded by relatives or third parties into sexual exploitation in return for goods or cash. In the logging industry in the Solomon Islands, adolescent girls are forced by relatives and parents to engage in transactional sexual relationships with male migrant workers in the logging camps in exchange for cash, cigarettes or beer.[129] Similarly, in some Pacific Island countries, local girls aged 16 to 17 years have been kidnapped by locals paid to recruit and transport them, and kept on fishing vessels for weeks at a time for the purpose of sexual exploitation.[130] Where mining projects increase rates of migration to specific areas, this puts pressure on resources and services, and can expose girls to sexual exploitation at mining sites and along transport routes.[131] Extractive sectors have been linked to the exploitation of young girls in Peru's mining and logging industries, where adolescent girls are trafficked for both sexual and labour exploitation,[132] and for sexual exploitation near gold mines in Suriname and Guyana.[133] These adolescent girls are often trafficked from rural communities, misled by false promises of hospitality work, and are forced to remain in sexual exploitation due to poverty, debt bondage, and threats of violence.[134]

> *"Educated girls have more power and financial freedom to make decisions about their future, which will in turn make the next generation of educated women better placed to educate their own families, rise out of poverty, and challenge discriminatory mind-sets."*
>
> Safeena Husain, Founder and Executive Director, Educate Girls

Economic necessity can also push women and families to migrate, rendering adolescent girls more vulnerable to exploitation. In 2018, the economic downturn in Iran lead to more than 2,000 young Iranian women and girls migrating into the Iraqi-Kurdish region. Upon arrival, many were forced into sexual exploitation in cafes, hotels, and massage centres, often facilitated by taxi drivers operating under the guise of tourism.[135] Traffickers take advantage of economically vulnerable adolescent girls by promising employment or a better life. In rural parts of Nepal, for example, young women and girls are deceived into moving to urban areas such as Kathmandu, where up to 13,000 mostly underage girls work in entertainment venues – many trapped in sex work.[136] Similar trends have been documented in Paraguay, where girls living in poverty in remote locations are promised employment as domestic workers, but are sexually exploited in urban areas.[137]

In many societies, child marriage becomes a real threat when girls reach adolescence. Child marriage pervades every region around the world,[138] with Commonwealth countries accounting for more than half (58.5 per cent) of the world's child marriages – despite having only about a third of the global population.[139] An estimated 650 million women alive today were married as children.[140] In the United Kingdom, for example, reports of forced marriage have increased by almost 47 per cent from 2017 to 2018. Where the age of victims was identified, almost one fifth (19 per cent) of cases involved victims 15 and younger, and another 16 per cent involved victims aged 16 and 17.[141] Similarly, in the United States, 90 per cent of minors married across 41 states between 2000 and 2015 were girls aged between 16 to 17 years.[142] This is enabled by the inconsistent child protections across US jurisdictions, as only two states set the minimum age of marriage as 18 without exception.[143] Canada, despite updating the Civil Marriage Act in 2015 to outlaw marriage before the age of 16, still permits adolescents aged 16 and 17 to marry with parental consent.[144] In New Zealand, adolescents from the age of 16 can marry with judicial approval,[145] a requirement mirrored in Australia in cases where one spouse is a minor (over the age of 16) and the other is an adult.[146]

> *"We must establish and implement laws and policies to protect females against early and forced marriage. Currently, laws exist which are simply 'white elephants'; effectively useless because they are not being implemented due to corruption. People are bribing the village elders, chiefs, police, and even judges. This must change for any meaningful progress to be made."*
>
> Mary Saruni, Co-Founder, The Children of Maasai Educational Programme

Child marriage can be concentrated among religious or ethnic minority groups. For example, within the Fundamentalist Church of Latter Day Saints in British Colombia, girls were forced to marry in order to continue their education.[147] Child marriage in Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine is more prevalent among ethnic minority Roma communities, as it is customary for parents to arrange marriages for girls typically 15 years old or younger, often to child grooms.[148] In Iraq, 24 per cent of girls are married before 18, a number that is even higher in the provinces of Al-Najaf (30 per cent), Al-Muthanna (29 per cent), Thi-Qar (27 per cent), and Niewa and Karbala (26 per cent).[149] A BBC investigation in 2019 found that corrupt Shi'a clerics were actively grooming and providing young Iraqi girls for short-term customary marriages for financial gain.[150] Similar accounts have arisen in Egypt, where girls are sold into temporary marriages with men travelling from wealthier neighbouring states, typically from the Gulf.[151]

Cultural practices that involve the kidnapping of young women and girls can lead to forced marriages to guard against reputational damage.[152] Due to stigma surrounding rape and perceived sexual activity outside of marriage, many families refuse to help their abducted daughters and instead support forced marriages to their kidnappers. In some communities, girls are taught to accept the abduction and are discouraged from resisting should they be kidnapped.[153] Variations of the practice occur in countries across the Africa, Asia-Pacific, and Europe and Central Asia regions,[154] and have severe physical and psychological impacts on the victims.[155] Further, adolescent girls are trafficked from Myanmar,[156] Laos,[157] Cambodia,[158] Vietnam,[159] Indonesia,[160] Nepal,[161] Pakistan,[162] and North Korea[163] into countries such as China[164] and India[165] to marry single men and fill the bride shortage, a situation ironically created by gender discrimination – sex selection and infanticide – in the first place.

> *"Our research indicates that most women who end up in forced marriages initially leave their communities in search of work, or in response to promises of work, often involving a higher salary. Addressing poverty by providing better education, income opportunities, and working conditions at home can reduce the need for women to leave their communities for well-paid work in China. Girls may also leave home for a 'boyfriend' – often someone they have met online – who invites them to meet and then tricks them across the border. Supporting schools, families, and communities to keep girls in school, educating youth about cyber-safety, and strengthening school-to-work pathways can help to reduce this risk."*
>
> Blue Dragon Children's Foundation

Marrying young often restricts adolescent girls from finishing training or education due to the burden of household chores and childcare. It also bars them from having formal jobs, and as such, they tend to be absorbed into the informal economy in sectors such as agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, and domestic work.[166] Globally, there are an estimated 11.5 million child labourers in domestic work, of which 7.5 million are girls.[167] In Kenya, many adolescent girls from neighbouring countries such as Uganda find themselves unable to leave the home in which they work, where they face slavery-like conditions.[168] In Nigeria, employers routinely beat, disfigure, and sexually abuse house girls working in their homes, paying their wages directly to recruitment agents or family members.[169] Many 'house girls' in Nigerian cities migrate from rural parts of the country or in nearby countries like Benin, and are sent to work by their impoverished families.[170]

Gender also impacts the type and condition of work in the informal sector. For example, the gendered division of labour in agriculture exposes boys and girls to different risks. Girls, rather than boys, tend to carry water and wood, but this increases the risk of injury, exhaustion and sexual abuse, Girls are also more likely to work with poultry and small animals, exposing them to disease.[171] Many adolescent girls work in India's Assam tea industry, plucking tea leaves in fields or working in tea factories rather than attending school, which is both expensive and a low priority, as they will likely be married young.[172] Poverty and extremely low wages put these adolescent girls at increased risk of being trafficked and sold into domestic servitude or sexual exploitation.[173]

Adolescent girls are also exploited at various stages of the fast fashion supply chain. In parts of India, recruiters offer adolescent girls employment opportunities in spinning mills, where they are paid a lump sum amount at the end of their contract.[174] This 'Sumangali scheme' traps young girls into a contract, forcing them to work for years in often dangerous conditions, or else risk losing their earnings.[175] Girls in the Tamil Nadu spinning industry are essentially trapped in the mills, facing restrictions on movement and outside communication, in addition to being forced to work 60 hours a week.[176] Adolescent girls working in garment factories in Bangladesh are also made to work excessively long hours in unsafe conditions, and suffer physical and verbal abuse by male managers.[177]

Although boys are more often recruited for armed conflict, adolescent girls are not immune – and are increasingly targeted. In 2019, the United Nations verified over 7,700 children, both boys and girls, have been recruited and used in armed conflict globally.[178] In 2018, girls in Yemen aged 15 to 17 were recruited by the Houthis, a Shi'ite rebel group, with the ulterior purpose of motivating male family members to join. In Syria, 40 per cent of children recruited by the YPG, the Kurdish defence force in Syria, during 2018, were adolescent girls – some of whom were below the age of 15. The majority of these girls served in combat roles.[179] Adolescent girls who live in conflict zones also face a higher risk of sexual violence, including as a weapon of war.[180] For instance, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, government forces were responsible for half of the incidences of sexual violence against girls in 2019. Cases of abduction for sexual violence were also reported in South Sudan and Nigeria.[181]

Ha's story

In 2012, Ha was studying at high school in Vietnam. One day, one of Ha's close friends invited her to visit Lag Son, which borders China. Expecting a fun day out with her friends, Ha decided to join the group.

Ha only realised that they had entered China when she noticed unfamiliar written characters on shopfronts.

When it started to get dark, she asked her friends to take her home. One of the men agreed, but Ha ended up being transferred between several Vietnamese women until one finally told her that she had been sold. Ha's mind froze. She didn't understand what it meant to be 'sold'.

> *"I didn't react at all. They said that anyone in that situation would cry, but nothing happened to me. I even asked them to send me home to go to school the day after. I had no idea what 'being sold' meant until a few days after, I realised how scary trafficking was."*

In China, she was forced to sell sex 10 to 15 times per day. If she did not cooperate, the brothel owners threatened to sell her to more brutal owners, where she would be beaten.

There were dozens of girls and women like her working in the brothel. They were all watched carefully and had no means of escape because they did not know the local language and had no idea where they were.

> *"They also appeased us that they would release us after 1.5 years. I think that was a trick so that we did not escape. Even if we escaped, we did not have any money and would be sold to another brothel, which was possibly worse."*

After a few months, the brothel owners allowed Ha to move around the brothel more freely. She managed to buy a phone and contact her family. Her mother reported the case to a Vietnamese policeman who asked for [NGO]'s assistance. After six months, Ha was rescued.

Ha was welcomed home by her family and neighbours. She continued her education at the same school where she was supported to catch up and continue her education, and after graduating, moved to Hanoi. With support from [NGO], Ha enrolled in a vocational program and received ongoing psychological support. She now lives independently and is a confident and successful woman.

Varanasi, India, 2015. A young girl stands in the sun of a back hallway. Her community deciding whether or not an early marriage or further education will decide her future. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

RISKS RISE FOR VENEZUELAN WOMEN AND GIRLS IN CRISIS

Women and girls fleeing Venezuela for the relative safety of Colombia face many risks en route: exposure to physical, sexual and psychological violence, but also limited education, increased levels of poverty, lack of access to health and reproductive services, absence of support networks, and a lack of job opportunities and income. Rather than being resolved, these risks are exacerbated upon arrival.

Finding adequate 'shelter' takes priority but options are often limited to informal settlements or slums, where migrants continue to lack access to basic services. Venezuelan women and girls face additional risks in shelters due to sexual harassment and attempts to coerce them into commercial sexual exploitation. Fears surrounding their irregular legal status and beliefs that they have no right to be protected by local authorities stop women and girls seeking help to escape or avoid abuse.

The difficulty Venezuelan migrants face in sourcing decent work and stable housing leaves them highly vulnerable to exploitation and modern slavery. In addition, the COVID-19 crisis has driven gender-based violence amongst the Venezuelan population in Colombia higher still, with more Venezuelan women reportedly seeking health and psychological support from local NGOs.

The combination of these various risks increases the risk of Venezuelan migrant women and girls to exploitation and servitude, homelessness, and deceiving practices that engage children in exploitative labour or commercial sexual exploitation. NGOs report that these issues are also increasing the rates of femicide across the region.[186]

How can we improve the odds for adolescent girls?

As with younger girls, education is key – and an adolescent girl with no education is three times more likely to marry by 18 than one who has completed secondary schooling.[182] Supporting adolescent girls' education triggers a 'positive spiral' – improving their health and work outcomes, increasing their access to better paid jobs, and better protecting girls from exploitation and trafficking.[183] By valuing and investing in adolescent girls' education and vocational training, they can become leaders in their societies.[184] Further, this supports adolescent girls to be the changemakers that fill in gaps in policy design on the specific needs of this age group.[185]

> *"It was mandatory to obey our parent's orders. I had to. My father stopped me from going to school. It's not that he did not love me, but he didn't see the importance of education. I also went through with the marriage because I did not want my father to be the laughing stock of the village. A man without a wife, only one child, and if the child refused to get married! That would have been a big blow to my loving father."*
>
> Purity, 38, Kenyan survivor of child marriage at age 14

Gender-targeted leadership and mentoring programs, alongside education and training, empower adolescent girls and reduce their risk of modern slavery. Empowering adolescent girls will also require raising awareness of the risks of exploitation that they are increasingly exposed to, both in the physical and online worlds. There is also work to be done within communities, to address gender-biased attitudes rooted in traditional attitudes and restrictive socio-cultural norms.[187] Supporting and working with faith leaders and grassroots community organisations will be key to changing community attitudes, including disrupting norms surrounding child marriage. At a broader structural level, and together with community level interventions to shift negative attitudes on the value of a girl, governments must criminalise child marriage and enforce the minimum age of marriage to be equivalent with the age of majority, without exception.[188]

Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, February 2018. Rohingya girls study the Koran at dawn outside a mosque in Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya have crossed the Myanmar border into Bangladesh since August 2017, when they fled Rakhine state after the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown described by the United Nations as an 'ethnic cleansing.' Photo credit: Tom Stoddart via Getty Images

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

There are a multitude of anti-slavery programs targeted at adolescent girls. The majority of these programs focus on preventing and delaying child marriage.[189] Ishraq, a program in Egypt, aimed to reintegrate out-of-school girls aged between 12 to 15 years back to school, and change attitudes among girl children on child marriage and agency. By providing safe spaces, group-based learning, life skills training, and bridging education holistically delivered to girls, boys, girls' parents, and community leaders, Ishraq helped transition girls back to formal schooling while improving literacy and building confidence and social capital. Further, girls reported wanting to delay marriage, and to have a say in the choice of partner.[190]

Adolescent girls consider financial independence as a means to avoid an early marriage, and to contribute to households in order to fight attitudes that girls are economic burdens. The BRAC program in Bangladesh built on these attitudes and taught financial literacy, life skills and livelihood training, in addition to providing access to flexible loans for adolescent girls and young women aged between 11 and 21 years. Further, BRAC involved girls' mothers in activities to help build social capital and drive attitudinal change – and importantly, BRAC improved attitudes regarding women's rights and gender equality, and has delayed marriage age as compared to control groups.[191] In Kishoree Kontha, another program in Bangladesh, empowering adolescent girls through rights-based awareness raising campaigns, provision of safe spaces, and educational support and financial literacy training also reduced child marriage rates.[192]

Chapter 4

ADULTHOOD (18–44 YEARS)

Meo Vac, Vietnam, October 2018. Many people in this part of Vietnam have a story about bride trafficking. The victims come from poor communities and are tricked by boyfriends and sold, kidnapped against their will, or move across the border by choice for false promises of marriage or work. Binh was 35 years old and desperate to escape her abusive husband, when a neighbour promised her a good job in China. She headed to the border with her young son and the neighbour, but was deceived and fell prey human traffickers. Photo credit: Nhac Nguyen/AFP via Getty Images

FEMALE MIGRANTS ARE AT GREATER RISK OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND DISCRIMINATION.

> *"Many women don't have the knowledge to survive. They have been guarded by men their entire lives. How will they know when a job offer is real or not? How will a woman get to the job when she cannot even travel in a car on her own?"*
>
> NGO contact, Iraq

For young adult women, new risks emerge in the workplace as these women are over-represented in unregulated sectors within the informal economy. The 2018 Global Estimates of Modern Slavery revealed that female victims of forced labour exploitation were much more likely to be in the accommodation and food services industry and in domestic work.

Why are adult women vulnerable to modern slavery?

Unprotected, but on the move

Globally, three out of four international migrants are adults aged between 20 to 64 years. In 2019, females represented nearly half (48 per cent) of the total number,[1] with adult women migrating in search of better employment, education, or to escape persecution.[2] While the reasons for migration among these women are largely similar to the reasons that drive male migration,[3] female migrants are at greater risk of gender-based violence and discrimination – particularly sexual exploitation – throughout their journey.[4] This risk of exploitation is exacerbated at flashpoints along the way, such as at recruitment agencies, along irregular migration routes, at border crossings, or in private businesses or dwellings in destination countries.[5]

Predatory recruitment agencies with local representatives are often key to luring adult women into risky work abroad. In the domestic work sector, female migrant workers can experience significant verbal, mental, physical and sexual abuses at the hands of both recruitment agencies and employers.[6] Reports of widespread abuse and exploitation of migrant domestic workers abroad has led some governments to impose bans on migration for domestic work or bans on female labour migration entirely.[7] Meanwhile, few countries comprehensively regulate recruitment agencies charging extortionate fees or related costs, and policies do not typically distinguish between the needs of male and female migrant workers.[8] Despite the implementation of bans in Nepal,[9] Indonesia,[10] Ethiopia,[11] Uganda,[12] and Myanmar,[13] push factors including natural disasters, violence, a desire to migrate, and economic necessity have continued to drive women to seek work abroad. As a result, such policies simply force women to migrate via less regulated, more dangerous routes, or rely on unscrupulous recruiters,[14] making them more vulnerable to exploitation and violence.[15]

Vulnerability of adult women to exploitation is heightened in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states due to the controversial kafala system. Under this system, a migrant worker's right to work and live in the host country is dependent on their sponsor – meaning that migrants cannot enter or leave the country, or change jobs, without the former's written consent.[16]

The power imbalance at the crux of this policy puts migrant workers, particularly migrant women who have fewer opportunities from the outset, at risk of modern slavery. Although reforms have been undertaken in Saudi Arabia,[17] Bahrain,[18] and Qatar,[19] the kafala system is still in force in the United Arab Emirates,[20] Oman,[21] Kuwait,[22] and other Arab states beyond the GCC such as Lebanon[23] and Jordan.[24]

> *"Given that migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are excluded from protection under any of Lebanon's laws due to the kafala system, for legal purposes they have the value of a pencil - and can be broken and discarded freely."*
>
> Dipendra Uprety, Co-founder, This Is Lebanon

Despite the lack of adequate protections for migrant women, women were responsible for almost half of total remittances in 2016 (US $601.3 billion), forming an important global source of income.[25] Remittances are crucial to keeping some families in the country of origin above the poverty line, ensuring that they have access to health care, education, and housing.

Remittances even help to remove the need for migration in future generations.[26] However, while women can feel empowered through improved work opportunities and financial independence,[27] the need to support families with remittances can force them to remain in exploitative jobs overseas.[28]

Hari 's story

Hari Maya is a 37-year-old Nepali woman who migrated to Kuwait twice to support her family.

Hari Maya was an orphan raised by her community. She got married at a very young age and soon gave birth to a son with a disability. Hari Maya and her husband struggled to support themselves as she had no education and he was a day labourer. Eventually, she decided to migrate overseas to find employment by herself, as it was easier for her to get a job as a domestic worker than it was for her husband to find work overseas.

The first time Hari Maya migrated to Kuwait she went as a documented worker. However, due to concerns over the treatment of domestic workers in the Gulf States, the Government of Nepal imposed a migration ban for domestic workers. The second time she migrated, she had to use a recruitment agency to help her migrate through irregular channels.

As an undocumented worker, Hari Maya was treated poorly by her employer. She worked more than 18 hours a day, without any rest, during which time she had to do all the household work as well as care for the family's baby. She was physically abused for small mistakes and sometimes her employer threatened to kill her when the baby cried.

> *"I heard that many maids like me are killed for small mistakes so I thought I'll never return home alive to see my son."*

After begging her agent to help her, she changed employers several times over the course of two years. Yet, she continued to experience exploitation, threats of violence, and hunger as food was withheld. Hari Maya tried to run away several times.

When COVID-19 hit Kuwait, she was kicked out by her employer – on the pretext that she would bring the disease into the family home. She did not want to return home because she had not earned enough money – but the pandemic left her with no choice.

"I have worked like a slave but could not earn enough money. How am I going to pay back my loans?"

Hari Maya was not accepted back into her community even after she had tested negative for COVID-19, due to the stigma and the lack of awareness associated with the disease. She is currently staying with a distant relative in another town but is planning to go home as soon as restrictions are eased.

Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, January 2018. In the refugee settlement of Balukhali over 116 widows and orphans have found shelter within a dense settlement of 50 red tents where no men or boys over the age of 10 years old are allowed. Women and girls reportedly make about 51 per cent of the distressed and traumatised Rohingya population in the refugee camps and face a high risk of being victims of human trafficking and sexual abuse. Photo credit: Allison Joyce via Getty Images

Changemakers: Ban Ying

Ban Ying, a German-based, quasi-autonomous NGO,[29] is raising awareness about the exploitation of women migrant domestic workers in Europe and providing direct assistance services for survivors. Ban Ying targets every level of stakeholder to fight for migrant worker rights: from direct outreach to workers through regular information days that raise awareness on legal rights and available protections, to working with government offices to ensure migrant domestic workers employed at embassies in Berlin are protected. Ban Ying has also helped raise awareness by running innovative and informative rights campaigns in local languages, targeted at migrant domestic workers in places they typically frequent, such as supermarkets.

Ban Ying also operates an inclusive shelter that provides specialised services to all women, including transgender women. The shelter is staffed by a team of social workers and cultural mediators. They additionally operate a counselling centre where women affected by different forms of modern slavery, such as trafficking, forced labour, and sexual exploitation, can seek assistance. To date, they have provided advice to women from over 70 countries in their local languages.[35] Ban Ying also helps women to get back on their feet by providing legal aid, advice on how to obtain a legal residence permit, and by helping them to secure housing and to send their children to school. Beyond direct care, Ban Ying is providing critical advocacy work to improve legal protections for survivors of human trafficking in Germany, and to ensure that victims are not criminalised.

Hidden exploitation in the supply of fashion

Globalisation also plays a role in the exploitation of adult women. The garment industry is an important sector in the global economy and its significant growth over the past two decades has been driven by the ever-increasing demand for fast fashion from a growing middle-class population across the globe.[30] Clothing production has roughly doubled in the past 15 years.[31] Young adult women make up the majority of workers in this sector, with 18-25 year old women accounting for 80 per cent of the industry's factory workers globally,[32] and are mainly informal workers living in low income countries.

Few workers in the industry receive a living wage – the minimum amount required for a worker to live a decent life.[33] Big brands, many of which are based in wealthy Western countries, profit from the exploitation of their mostly women workers, who are often denied the most basic rights.[34] The sector is plagued with poor human rights and working conditions, including low pay, piece-rate pay (that is, pay rate determined by amount of pieces made), unpaid overtime, irregular work, lack of benefits such as maternity leave, and health and safety risks.

Nine in ten garment workers in Bangladesh were unable to afford food in one survey, and over half of workers in Vietnam could not afford medical treatment.[36]

In Ethiopia, the majority of workers in the sector are unskilled women from rural areas, who earn some of the lowest wages in the world – US $26 per month.[37] Moreover, female workers earn far less than male colleagues in most Asian countries that are major manufacturing centres.[38] In early 2020, reports indicated that women from the Uyghur ethnic Muslim minority in China were forced to work in factories which manufactured sports apparel through exploitative labour transfer programs organised by the Chinese government.[39] Similar reports of human rights abuses intertwined with exploitation in the garment and textile industries emerge in Turkey, with respect to Syrian refugees,[40] and in India, where home-based garment workers are forced to work for as little as US $0.15 an hour, and are overwhelmingly women from marginalised ethnic communities.[41] Over the past few years, major brands have shifted their focus from Asia to emerging and even lower-cost producing countries in East Africa, such as Kenya and Ethiopia.[42]

ONE KEY SOLUTION LIES IN THE HANDS OF BIG FASHION BRANDS.

Some action has been taken to improve transparency and conditions in the garment sector, in the wake of the 2013 Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh, where 1,134 workers were killed when the building collapsed. Despite the discovery of large structural cracks in the building the day before, workers in a garment factory, who were mainly women, had been ordered to come to work or lose up to a months' wages.[43] In response to the disaster, legislative changes establishing national supply chain transparency guidelines for the world's largest companies in the United Kingdom in 2015,[44] France in 2017,[45] and Australia in 2018[46] have also contributed to this push for more transparency by businesses in the industry. Today, the world's biggest brands are paying greater attention to how, and where, they are producing their goods.[47] Oversight and working conditions have since improved,[48] yet many multinational brands are still putting profits over people – as evidenced by the fact that thousands of workers in Bangladesh, despite the risk of violence and job loss, took part in major demonstrations in January 2019 to protest their low wages.[49]

Women also account for most informal and home-based workers in the garments supply chain. These workers tend to lack formal contracts and operate in isolated conditions, making them even more vulnerable to working excessive hours, job insecurity, unfair wage negotiations, harassment, violence, gender discrimination, and a lack of access to benefits.[50] Reports of forced labour and underpayment are rife among home-based workers in India[51] and Pakistan, where some workers earn less than US $1 per day.[52]

One key solution lies in the hands of big fashion brands. It is estimated that the price of a garment would only need to increase by one per cent for garment workers to earn a living wage.[53] By ensuring all workers have access to decent working conditions and living wages, multinational companies can play a major role in ending gender inequality in supply chains.

Arzu's story

Arzu[54] is a 39-year-old Uyghur woman living in Xinjiang province of China, who had worked as a qualified nurse at the hospital attached to Xinjiang Medical University. In February 2017, she and her husband were both arrested and sent to a 're-education' camp run by the Chinese government.[55]

Her family allege that just three months later she was sent from the camp to work against her will at a textile company located in a technology park 30 kilometres north of Xinjiang's capital, Urumchi.

In June 2019, she was able to call her sister Reyhan in Australia by video chat and show her hand-written notes detailing her experiences in the re-education camp, fearing the call might be monitored. According to her sister, Arzu looked "very exhausted and emotionally very distressed", mentioning that she wanted to end her life.[56]

Arzu told her sister that she sleeps in the factory dormitory and is only allowed home to see her two underage children and her parents once per week. Her eyesight is poor and when she is not able to do the complicated embroidery work, she is made to clean the factory instead.

When describing life at the factory, Arzu noted that "660 people are brought in shackled and handcuffed" and that "they have no choice, they will end up in jail if they say something."[57] Little more is known about what Arzu has experienced in the factory. In addition to being forced to work, Arzu still does not know where her husband is. At time of writing, it has been more than a year since Arzu called her sister and it is unclear what her situation is today.

Cox's Bazaar, Bangladesh, February 2018. Rohingya girls study the Koran at dawn outside a mosque in Kutupalong refugee camp in Bangladesh. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim Rohingya have crossed the Myanmar border into Bangladesh since August 2017, when they fled Rakhine state after the Myanmar military launched a brutal crackdown described by the United Nations as an 'ethnic cleansing.' Photo credit: Tom Stoddart via Getty Images

Anna's story

Anna is a 35-year-old married woman from Belarus. Anna and her husband both worked hard but struggled to find enough money to feed and clothe their three children.

One day, a distant relative called Anna, and told her that his employer was recruiting at a Russian factory that processed polyethylene film. Anna was interested, as there were so few opportunities for women locally, but worried about leaving her children for such a long time. Her relative promised her that the pay was good, and no special education was required – everything would be taught in the factory. Anna eventually decided to go.

Anna spent some of the family's precious savings to pay for her travel fees to go to Russia with the other workers and a recruiter. When they arrived in the factory, they were told to leave their belongings in the factory workshop – and returned from a tour of the facilities to find many belongings had been stolen.

Anna's new employer informed her that everyone would live at the factory, sleeping in bunk beds in the workshop.

> *"In the workshop there was constantly a terrible smell, there was smoke. We worked for many hours. The shift started at 8am and sometimes ended at 3-4am. When I was working at the machine, it was impossible to even go to the toilet. To go to the toilet, you had to stop the machine, and there were fines for stopping the machine."*

Anna, like the other workers, had her passport taken away. This was allegedly so her employment contract could be signed, according to the workshop foreman. However, no contracts were signed, and Anna was never paid.

> *"We got our passports back later because it was clear that no one could escape. We didn't get paid, and we had no one to ask for money to escape from this terrible place."*

She was desperate to escape but unable to fund a journey back to Belarus.

After almost three months, Anna managed to persuade the relative who had trapped her in the situation to send her money – arguing that her family in Belarus would become suspicious and alert the police if she did not send any money home. As soon as she received the cash, Anna escaped the factory and bought a ticket home.

Once back in her homeland, Anna turned to law enforcement to help her get the money she was owed, and now hopes to prevent other people from being similarly exploited while she looks for a job that will allow her to support her children.

Hazmiyeh, Lebanon, June 2020. Ethiopian domestic workers who were dismissed by their employers in the wake of COVID-19 gather with their belongings outside their country's embassy in Hazmiyeh, east of Beirut. Thousands of migrants, usually women and a large proportion Ethiopian, work as housekeepers, nannies and carers in Lebanese homes. Some, work for as little as US $150 a month. Now, as a result of the pandemic, dozens are living on the streets. Photo credit: Joseph Eid/AFP via Getty Images

Changemakers: Survivors' Network Cameroon

The abuse endured by domestic workers is often hidden inside family homes. However, Cameroonian survivor and activist Francisca Awah is raising awareness in the Arab States. Having survived modern slavery herself, Awah's mission through her non-profit, Survivors' Network, is to help the women and children still in situations of slavery to escape and avoid exploitation – and in the course of her work, she has been recognised as a 2018 Trafficking in Persons Hero by the US Department of State.[58] Survivors' Network is a coalition of female survivors of modern slavery, led by Awah, who are actively empowering other women to escape the cycle of abuse by using education and economic empowerment to create positive change for vulnerable women and girls. A key pillar of their work is to educate communities about the risks and indicators of modern slavery to reduce the vulnerability of African women and girls to human trafficking. The organisation has successfully run multiple wide-reaching campaigns about the risks of trafficking, through awareness raising at schools, markets, churches, and public car parks, as well as via national and international radio and television.[59]

To date, Survivors' Network has rescued 28 women trapped in slavery in the Middle East, and has helped them to return home to Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, and Nigeria.[66] Upon their return, Survivors' Network provides survivors with temporary accommodation while connecting them with relatives, support networks, and legal aid to bring their abusers to justice.[67] The organisation assists survivors to reintegrate into society through micro-finance initiatives which foster economic empowerment. Survivors are assisted to write business proposals and are then given seed capital to help kickstart their small business ventures. So far, Survivors' Network has facilitated more than 1,000 business plans and has sponsored over 350 projects.[68] By creating business and entrepreneurial opportunities for returned survivors, Survivors' Network is helping to alleviate victims' concerns over returning home with nothing, which can often either prevent them from leaving their abusive employer, or increase their risk of being re-trafficked.[69] The organisation is also planning to roll out a vocational training program to assist survivors to acquire new skills, such as sewing, IT, carpentry, welding, and hair-dressing, and have more recently started working with children through awareness and education programs.

Unpaid domestic and care work

The view that men are breadwinners, while women are carers and homemakers[60] significantly devalues the unpaid domestic and care work largely performed by women and girls around the world. Women account for 76 per cent of the 16.4 billion hours spent doing unpaid care work globally.[61]

It is estimated that the value of unpaid care work performed by women and girls above 15 years of age is three times larger than that of the global tech industry, equating to an estimated US $10.8 trillion annually.[62] In Africa, the heavy burden of unpaid domestic and care work undertaken by women inhibits sustainable development and prevents progress towards gender equality.[63] Post Brexit, changes to the immigration system in Britain are driving foreign domestic and care workers from the labour market and putting pressure on women to undertake more unpaid work.[64] Unsurprisingly, paid domestic and care work are heavily female sectors.[65]

> *"I felt like my government pushed me into this since I cannot get a job that I deserve in my country."*
>
> Aminatu, 31, Gambian survivor of domestic servitude in Saudi Arabia

Demand for paid domestic and care work tends to occur in host countries in the Arab States, North America, and parts of Europe,[70] with ageing populations, where care has been commodified – that is, where care work is outsourced to the free market rather than performed by an unpaid family member.[71] However, the exodus of female care and domestic workers also creates a corresponding 'care drain' in sending countries and households,[72] shifting the caregiving burden onto other women or girls in the household.[73] This burden is amplified when a woman's partner also migrates – in this case, it is not atypical for grandmothers and daughters to take over domestic responsibilities, in addition to assuming the roles of both parents for younger children in the home.[74]

Not only are women more time poor as a result of unpaid domestic and care work – even when adjusting for time spent in paid work – but they also face financial penalties in the workplace. If the current speed of progress from 2006 to date holds, it will take over 250 years to close the gap between men and women in economic participation, pay, and opportunity.[75] This problem is exacerbated for women with dependent children, who face a 'motherhood penalty' after childbirth, including significantly lower pay and fewer job opportunities.[76]

"I was never allowed out of the home and when guests arrived, I would be locked in my bedroom. I wasn't paid anything for my services. For years, I never saw any faces other than those in the home. I repeatedly told my madame (employer) that I wanted to leave. She threatened to have me jailed by her police friends. She used racist, derogatory language and regularly threatened me. I would be locked in my room and unable to leave, except when they needed me to clean. I felt like a caged animal. I wondered whether I would spend the rest of my life locked up like this."

Lalo, in her 30s, Ethiopian survivor of domestic servitude in Lebanon

Rape culture and honour codes

The threat of gender-based violence follows women and girls throughout their lives, no matter where in the world they live.[77] As noted above, it is estimated that one in three women globally have experienced physical and/or sexual violence – and much of this at the hands of an intimate partner.[78] All over the world, male perpetrators of sexual violence against women and girls benefit from a culture of impunity and male sexual entitlement.[79] Yet, despite the scale of the problem, gender equality activists increasingly face backlash from anti-feminist and 'mens' rights activist' groups. Counter-campaigns dismissing the disproportionate risk of sexual violence faced by women as exaggerations to manufacture a 'feminist moral crisis' have occurred throughout North America.[80] In a survey of male university students in Germany, women who challenge social norms around male dominance were considered more deserving of sexual victimisation.[81] Meanwhile in Denmark, widely considered a leader in gender equality, policies trending towards 'gender neutrality' ironically exacerbate gender inequality by ignoring the disproportionate impact of sexual violence on women and girls. As such, these policies also work to silence women by making complaints of 'rape culture' or gender-based violence appear exaggerated.[82]

Victim-blaming common in rape and sexual assault cases is also embedded within cultures with 'honour codes' – codes which dictate that women maintain sexual purity in order to protect male, and family, honour. Violating these codes – even if as a victim of rape – can lead to murder, often at the hands of male relatives intent on restoring the family's honour.[83]

"If a woman makes a complaint, particularly if it involves harassment or sexual abuse, there is a risk her family will disown her or kill her. Honour and reputation are everything."

NGO Contact, Iraq

In 12 countries, the majority of which are located in North Africa and Western Asia, victims of rape are typically forced to marry their rapist – either to protect the offender from punishment or to protect the honour of their families.[84] Such concepts of purity also impact members of the LGBTQIA+ community in parts of the world, as their sexuality is perceived as impure or immoral,[85] exposing them to the risk of honour-based violence[86] and forced marriage.[87] For some migrant women who have experienced sexual violence in host countries, reintegrating into their countries of origin is often impossible due to the discrimination they face for being sexually exploited,[88] limiting their choices to either fleeing or returning to exploitative employers.[89]

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, June 2018. Kyrgyz students release white balloons as they protest against bride kidnapping in downtown Bishkek. More than a thousand people, including schoolchildren, protested against bride kidnapping after a 20-year-old woman was murdered in a police station by her kidnapper. Photo credit: Dmitry Motinov/AFP via Getty Images

Satkhira, Bangladesh, June 2020. A woman catching fish with a net at a flooded shore during the aftermath of cyclone Amphan. The factors that make women and girls vulnerable to exploitation increase exponentially in times of humanitarian crises, such as natural disasters. Photo credit: Zabed Hasnain Chowdhury/SOPA Images/ LightRocket via Getty Images

> *"A steep increase in unemployment and poverty, spurred by COVID-19, will likely intensify the risks of trafficking for women and girls in Fiji. Reducing the risk of modern slavery for women and girls therefore requires the right mix of economic policies to revive businesses and boost employment. With poverty being a major driver of modern slavery, government direct assistance to poor communities is needed to enable families to stay together and meet their basic needs. International cooperation in the wake of COVID-19 will be essential to economic recovery, so helping women, girls, and their communities escape and avoid modern slavery. Development partners, such as Australia and New Zealand, should help to alleviate poverty in Fiji and other Pacific Island countries through investment in local industries and by creating safe and legal pathways to employment."*
>
> Jone Dakuvula, Executive Director, Pacific Dialogue Fiji

COVID-19: A GENDERED PANDEMIC

In March 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organisation.[90] In just a few months, the virus has undermined decades of progress on gender equality[91] and intensified risks for women and girls.[92]

In particular, COVID-19 has disproportionately increased unemployment among women, exposing them to greater risk by increasing rates of poverty – a major driver of modern slavery.[93] Around 740 million women who work in the informal economy[94] are facing greater economic uncertainty, with the first month of the pandemic leading to a fall in income by 60 per cent on average.[95] Up to 40 million workers in the garment industry alone lost their jobs and were forced into extreme poverty as factories shut down.[96] The closure of sex establishments has left sex workers vulnerable as they often cannot access financial assistance from governments.[97] For women and girls already in situations of exploitation, COVID-19 has made bad situations worse[98] – for example, migrant domestic workers are also facing further restrictions to their mobility and heightened threat of physical and sexual abuse, as they are forced into lockdown with their employers to slow the spread of the coronavirus.[99]

Women are particularly vulnerable to infection during pandemics: they comprise the majority of the global health workforce, and are disproportionately represented among frontline responders like nurses, cleaners, and social workers. As such, they are exposed to greater risk of infection,[100] particularly where they lack adequate protective gear.[101] In the United States, Spain, Germany, Italy, and the Dominican Republic, rates of COVID-19 infection among female healthcare workers far outweigh that of males.[102] Migrant women and other marginalised groups in low paid frontline cleaning and care work must choose between risking infection or forfeiting their income.[105] Moreover, these essential workers face stigmatisation, denial of access to health services, and even violence, due to fears of contagion.[106]

For girls, school closures may encourage permanent removal from school,[107] and increase the risk of sexual exploitation, early and forced marriage, and female genital mutilation.[108] Girls are also more likely to be married early to ease household financial pressures, with child marriage expected to rise in communities economically impacted by the pandemic.[109]

Recent reports from organisations in Nepal indicate an increase in child marriages within the first three months of lockdown.[110] In the next decade, projections indicate that millions of avoidable early marriages may occur due to rising poverty and interruptions to child marriage reduction programs.[111]

Women who are already victims of modern slavery are particularly vulnerable to re-exploitation as a result of the pandemic.[112] Some shelters for trafficking victims have been forced to close, putting victims at risk of homelessness[113] which has been linked to increased risk to modern slavery.[114] COVID-19 has forced humanitarian agencies to shut down in many parts of the world, leaving many women without assistance, and travel restrictions have meant victims scheduled for repatriation are stranded in the countries and communities where they were exploited.[115] Travel restrictions may also spur increased unsafe migration, driving vulnerability to trafficking.[116] Meanwhile, interruptions to law enforcement and criminal justice procedures have put a hold on efforts to prosecute traffickers, and made it more difficult to protect victims.[117]

Changemakers: AnnieCannons

AnnieCannons is an innovative non-profit organisation that is training survivors of human trafficking and gender-based violence to become highly skilled software engineers, ultimately enabling them to reintegrate into society through the tech industry. The US-based organisation offers a six-month training program which supports survivors to learn data literacy and coding skills, before progressing onto more complex modules covering topics such as cybersecurity, and mobile development.[103]

Uniquely, students build their resume while simultaneously earning an income through paid client projects. Students are also encouraged to create their own software solutions to help victims of abuse and exploitation.[104] An example is EasyTRO, a mobile app created by AnnieCannons participants that simplifies and digitises the process of completing a temporary restraining order form – the first phase towards judicial relief. The app is among 21 innovative solutions ideated and demonstrated by survivors to help other marginalised individuals at scale.

By attracting paid client projects, the organisation enables students to build their resume while simultaneously earning an income. Graduates are also offered employment as coding bootcamp teachers and other diverse roles as product managers, engineers, website architects, app developers, and administrative professionals, or can work as engineering contractors for greater flexibility.[118] By partnering with shelters and social service providers, AnnieCannons ensures survivors can access housing, legal aid, and counselling during their program participation.[119] The organisation also offers free onsite childcare, transportation, and mentoring, as well as the option for remote and flexible work to holistically support survivors' learning.[120]

Rupa's story

Rupa grew up in Assam, India. As a child, her mother encouraged Rupa and her siblings to go to school and study. But Rupa's father, an agricultural labourer, was heavily in debt. To relieve some of his debts, and avoid taking out loans for a dowry, Rupa's father offered her for marriage.

At 14 years of age, Rupa was married to a 27-year-old man.

Rupa's mother hoped that because the man's family was rich, Rupa would be in good hands. However, this was not the case. Rupa was forced to quit school, was physically and verbally abused by her in-laws, and pressured into having children. By 20, Rupa had given birth to two children.

Rupa and her husband moved to Kolkata at the suggestion of her husband's friends. They told him that he could find work in the city and suggested he put Rupa into sex work.

As her husband's alcohol addiction developed and increasingly dried up their funds, he forced Rupa into prostitution.

Rupa sold sex in Sonagachi, the red light district – against her will. Sometimes she refused, and her husband would beat her, or his friends would threaten to harm her children. Believing that her family and society will never accept her after she has been sexually exploited, Rupa has no support networks to help her.

Now, at 24 years of age, Rupa says she is unable to stop selling sex. She knows she will never be accepted by her family or community again. She also feels that there is no alternative way to support her children.

Rupa feels helpless, and believes that NGOs and the government have not done enough to improve her economic situation. Government officials often tell her, "you women earn thousands on a daily basis. What would be your need for government benefits?" Sometimes the officers take money, promising to provide ration cards. But they do not provide anything.

Lea's story

Lea was born in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea. From a young age, Lea was repeatedly forced by the state to leave school and go to work under harsh and intensely managed conditions for little, if any, pay. There were few options for Lea to refuse to work and stay in school, as her school had also received compensation from the state for providing child labourers.

> *"You get pressures by the teachers. They hated you for not going to work. They also assigned larger quota to the parents of such students when the class had something to purchase."*

Once Lea had finished school she was forced to work in the agricultural sector, where she had few days off, worked excessively long hours, and faced gruelling work.

> *"I worked every day of the week. At the farm, I had three days off per month – on the 1st, 11th and 21st of the month. Those days were determined by the farm and we could only take days off on these dates. The management committee of my Cooperative Farm determined the dates."*

Although already pervasive, surveillance by the regime increased during the planting and harvesting seasons, often making difficult conditions worse. "It was difficult to work under surveillance… I couldn't use the toilet whenever I wanted, I had to ask for permission before using it… I got up at six in the morning and went to bed at ten in the evening. In the morning, I got up and cleaned the yard, then washed my face. They lined us up in the morning. The line-up officer talked with the head of the camp and distributed our work tasks."

Even as an adult, refusing to work was not an option for Lea as any unmarried adult in North Korea is legally obligated to have an officially registered job.

> *"The punishment for being unemployed was six months in a labour training camp. In more severe cases it was one to three years. The severe cases are people who have never worked. Those are people who continuously did not have any working experience and stayed only at home."*

Eventually, Lea herself was sent to a labour training camp. The work was hard, but the worst thing was her lack of freedom in the labour training camp. Today, Lea is free of the regime and its weaponisation of forced labour, as she has defected to South Korea.

How do adult women experience modern slavery?

> *"I thought it was my destiny to have a hard life because I never had a good life."*
>
> Sonam, 29, Nepali survivor of domestic servitude in Saudi Arabia

Adult women form the majority of identified victims of labour and sexual exploitation. Sixty per cent of identified female trafficking victims are aged between 18 and 47 years, with the majority of these women trafficked for sexual exploitation.[121] Women experience forced labour exploitation in highly feminised sectors, such as domestic and care work. They are trafficked into domestic work from the Balkans to Turkey, Bulgaria, and Greece,[122] and from Benin to Nigeria.[123] Upon arrival, instead of the promised opportunities, the women trafficked to Nigeria found themselves subjected to exploitative labour practices, including excessive hours, sexual harassment and exploitation, and emotional, verbal, and physical abuse – including the withholding of food and medical care.[124]

Exploitation in domestic work also affects migrant women from the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka and Nepal, who form the majority of migrant workers travelling to work in private homes in the GCC states.[129] Globalisation and use of technology have altered the way traffickers exploit migrant women, with media reports indicating that traffickers have moved operations online to popular social media sites to 'sell' domestic workers into servitude in the Gulf states.[130]

> *"I had a new [ISIL] husband. He took me to his house where his wife and children lived. I was there three months. I was cleaning the house. I don't know why but most of all I hated washing their dirty dishes. They would watch me standing at the sink and say to my back, 'we have killed all of your family'."*
>
> Noor (not her real name), age unknown, Yazidi survivor of forced marriage and sexual exploitation

CLIMATE CHANGE AS A DRIVER OF RISK

Climate change interlinked with rising food insecurity is a driver of exploitation of women and girls. As climate change exacerbates the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events and natural disasters, and causes sea levels to rise, livelihoods around the world are increasingly threatened – and women and girls stand to bear the overwhelming burden.[125] Women and girls are more likely to lose their lives in natural disasters as a result of cultural norms that limit female decision-making, movement, and access to information.[126] As the impacts of climate change displace people from their homes, female climate refugees face heightened risk of violence, trafficking, and forced and early marriage.[127] A Walk Free report examining modern slavery in the Pacific region found that displacement resulting from natural disasters and climate change increase vulnerability to modern slavery. Women were considered particularly vulnerable as customs around land rights often limit their access to land or put pressure on them to marry to access land.[128]

As climate change worsens resource scarcity, caring and providing for the household become increasingly onerous[131] and girls are more likely to leave school to help alleviate the burden.[132] Climate change is also a major cause of rising food insecurity, a known driver of modern slavery.[133] An estimated 750 million people (nearly 10 per cent of the world's population) were exposed to severe food insecurity in 2019, with the condition more common among individuals with low levels of education, unemployment, health issues, and those living in rural areas.[134] It follows that food insecurity is higher among women across all regions.[135] This disparity has widened between 2018 and 2019.[136]

For families unable to cope with climate-induced food insecurity, girls are at risk of being sold into sex work or early marriage to ease the financial strain,[137] sometimes through payment of bride price.[138] During times of famine in Africa, women and children have been at risk of being trafficked along irregular migration channels, misled by false promises of opportunity.[139] Women may also resort to accepting risky work, or migrating for employment opportunities to cope with food insecurity.[140]

WOMEN ARE LARGELY INVISIBLE WITHIN THE FISHING SECTOR AND UNABLE TO ACCESS THE LABOUR PROTECTIONS AVAILABLE TO MEN.

Women are largely invisible within the fishing sector. As fishing is predominantly viewed as a male activity, women tend not to be recognised as workers within the sector and are unable to access the labour protections available to 'legitimate' male workers. Yet women play an important role in maintaining equipment, and processing and marketing fish.[141] Due to increased competition and cost-cutting in the industry, most women in the workforce have been forced to become low-paid casual workers – denied social protections, and at greater risk of exploitation.[142] An example can be found in Tunisia, where clam harvesting represents a crucial source of income for many rural women – who endure poor working conditions and low wages, and are often underpaid by unscrupulous intermediaries[143] who sometimes illegally charge them fees to weigh the clams.[144] Women also experience trafficking in the illegal fishing industry, which can result in forced labour in seafood processing plants.[145] In an ILO survey conducted in 2020, five per cent of the 132 women surveyed had experienced forced labour in the Thai seafood sector. Further, women in the sector were less likely than men to have heard of an organisation to protect worker rights (11 per cent and 16 per cent respectively), reflecting the female "blind spot" in stakeholder investments to improve working conditions in the seafood sector.[146]

As a result of structural disadvantages in accessing the labour market, women (as well as young people, rural populations, and migrant workers) are often employed in the hotel sector.[147] Women make up 50 to 70 per cent of workers in the sector,[148] who in addition to experiencing the charging of recruitment fees, contract deception, withholding of pay, retention of identity documents, and poor living accommodation,[149] are also subject to poor working conditions, inequality, stress, and sexual harassment.[150]

"Along with greater awareness, we also need to improve the economic opportunities available for women and girls, as they are less at risk of modern slavery when they are empowered financially."

Francisca Awah, Founding Director, Survivors' Network Cameroon

Carpe Verde, Maio Island, July 2018. A woman carrying a tray full of fish on her head transports it to the fish market. As in other regions of the world, the fishing sector in Africa is at-risk of modern slavery. Photo credit: Andia/Universal Images Group via Getty Images

Thida's story

Thida is a 21-year-old woman from a small town in Myanmar. At the age of 18, she was approached by a female recruitment agent offering a well-paid job in Thailand without any upfront costs. Eager to leave her abusive husband, Thida left for Thailand.

Without any identification documents proving her adulthood, Thida was denied entry at the Thai border. Instead, the broker paid a motorbike taxi to 'facilitate' the rest of her journey into Thailand.

After reaching a fishing town in Prachuab Kirikhan Province, the broker organised a fish sorting job for Thida. Thida's money was paid directly to the broker, who left her with 20-30 baht (roughly US $0.60–$1) for a job – claiming that the deductions were needed to cover the cost of the journey and ongoing meals.

The constant deductions left Thida with very little money to support herself, let alone save up. Moreover, when she took a squid drying job without the broker's knowledge, Thida received 500 baht (approx. US $16), and realised the extent to which she was being exploited.

When Thida started dating a colleague, the broker and her husband did everything to stop her from seeing him, including locking her in their house for five days and falsely reporting Thida's boyfriend for molesting her.

One day the broker's husband threatened Thida, putting a knife to her neck and asking her how she would pay back her large debts. He forced her to pick one of the fishing workers under his control to be her husband. One of the workers volunteered, and a quick marriage ritual was performed.

One of the workers called an NGO hotline for help, leading to the arrest of the brokers and an 18-year imprisonment sentence. Thida, the other workers, and their families were rescued. Thida went back to her hometown with her husband. They still live together and run a small business selling fish.

The risk of sexual exploitation is ubiquitous among women and girls in any situation of modern slavery. Among victims of forced sexual exploitation alone, women are overwhelmingly represented.[151] Migrant women are also at risk of being trafficked for this purpose. Migrants from low-income households are vulnerable to coercion by traffickers who provide credit or facilitate journeys, including brokers or recruitment agents. This debt can be leveraged to coerce women into sexual exploitation, a process found among female victims of forced sexual exploitation in Brazil and Nigeria.[152]

> *"Identification is key in reducing human trafficking but sadly, women and girls are currently often not identified. To better identify victims of trafficking so that they can get out of exploitation and receive assistance, there is a need to raise awareness on the topic among people who are in contact with migrant women and girls that might be affected by trafficking, such as social workers and police officers."*
>
> Lea Rakovsky, Project Coordinator, Ban Ying

Similarly to girls, adult women continue to be at risk of forced marriage. However, at the crossroads of forced marriage and forced sexual exploitation stand the women made to fill 'bride shortages'. The controversial one child policy in China, for example, has created an immense gender imbalance, with as many as 21 million more women missing.[153] Within this context, women and girls from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea, Pakistan, and Vietnam are routinely trafficked to China to marry some of the many millions of unmarried men.[154] Women are also trafficked internally within China to become brides, from the provinces of Yunnan, Henan, Guangxi, Jilin, Anhui, Guizhou, Inner Mongolia, and Hebei.[155]

As with other traumatic experiences, forced marriages often create an opportunity for perpetrators to exploit women in other ways. For example, in Australia, female migrants report being tricked into sham marriages on partner visas, and then forced into sexual exploitation or domestic servitude under threat of their immigration status being at risk.[156] In India, where the shortage of females resulting from a preference for sons has fuelled widespread bride trafficking, 'brides' are reportedly used as unpaid labourers both in and out of the home.[157]

Amann, Jordan, 2016. A young woman in a refugee camp in Jordan. Young women in displacement camps are often at risk of gender-based violence, including forced and child marriage, and rape. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

East Java, Indonesia, September 2013. Members of a migrant workers' group called "Sumber Rejeki" gather at a training session. There are over 170 former migrant women in the support group, all women who have shared the same experiences after working abroad. Many experienced severe exploitation, including torture, human trafficking, and rape. Photo credit: Arief Priyono/ LightRocket via Getty Images

Changemakers: Hagar International Afghanistan

The decades-long conflict in Afghanistan has contributed to ongoing instability, violence, lawlessness, and poverty, and deprived many women of basic human rights. Low levels of education and literacy among women disadvantage them even further. By providing rehabilitation and reintegration services, Hagar International is fighting to overcome this gender inequality. Hagar's Empowering Women for a Better Future program targets women and girls who have suffered the worst kind of human rights abuses and provides them with a pathway to healing and recovery. Through the program, survivors of forced marriage, trafficking, and sexual exploitation are helped to overcome trauma, complete secondary education, and receive life skills and job readiness skills. Additionally, Hagar Afghanistan works with government ministries and the Trafficking in Persons High Commission to boost internal capacity to combat human trafficking, slavery, and abuse.[158]

Pushpa's story

Pushpa was 15 years old when she moved to start a job at a brick kiln in Karnataka, SW India. Though she wished to finish school, her parents desperately needed money to support the family of six children.

The owner of the brick kiln offered to loan Rs. 40,000 (US $535) to Pushpa's brother to fund his wedding, and convinced Pushpa's family that she should marry Mahesh, another worker at the kiln – a strategy to force both families to work for him. He would use Pushpa's and Mahesh's salaries to slowly pay off the loan, he promised. After much coercion by the families and the owner, the two agreed to marry.

But working conditions quickly worsened, and the owner frequently resorted to physical abuse. Other labourers were also beaten and abused. Eventually, Pushpa suffered a late-stage miscarriage.

> *"The owner of the brick kiln had refused to let me take a couple of days off even though me and my husband Mahesh asked him several times."*

They lost the baby and Pushpa ended up in hospital for a week. "The owner did not allow my husband to come to the hospital at all, so I was all alone,"

Pushpa explains. A week later, the owner of the kiln forced her to return to work. "I was very depressed and unable to work."

Mahesh took the responsibility of cooking and cleaning the house and taking care of her as she slowly recovered. "That was when we began to talk about escaping this life,"

Pushpa recalls. They frequently spoke about escape routes but were too afraid to try anything.

In August 2014, Pushpa and Mahesh saw a ray of hope.

> *"When the police and some other government officials arrived at the kiln, we were first shocked and afraid because we didn't know why they had come. But when the brick kiln owner was forced into the police car, we began to comprehend what was happening."*

They recounted their experiences to the government officials who had conducted the inquiry, amid threats and fear-tactics by the brothers and friends of the brick kiln owner. The 13 labourers were successfully taken out of the kiln and repatriated to their own homes with government attested Release Certificates, with support from the government, the Anti Human Trafficking Unit, and International Justice Mission.

In March 2017, the brick kiln owner was sentenced to ten years of imprisonment and a penalty of Rs. 16,000 (US $215) under the IPC 370 (Trafficking of Persons) and Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act, 1976. The verdict is the first of its kind in Karnataka where a perpetrator has been convicted under IPC 370 for a bonded labour trafficking crime.

CRISIS CONTINUES TO INCREASE THE RISK OF ALL FORMS OF MODERN SLAVERY FOR WOMEN.

Myronivskyi, Ukraine, February 2015. A woman cuts potatoes for a communal meal in the village library. A ceasefire agreed to by Ukraine and pro-Russian rebel forces has failed to prevent fighting in the nearby town of Debaltseve. Risk of exploitation and abuse are greater for women and girls who live in conflict zones, where limited protections fail as instability rises. Photo credit: Brendan Hoffman/ Getty Images

LIFE UNDER NORTH KOREA'S SECRET REGIME

Authoritarian leaders continue to erode women's human rights around the world, subverting traditional values and gender roles as a tactic to gain political traction at the expense of women and girls.[159] This has manifested, for example, in the decriminalisation of some forms of domestic violence in Russia,[160] restrictions on the sale of emergency contraception in Poland,[161] and the intimidation of prominent female human rights defenders in the Philippines.[162]

Yet, nowhere are attacks on human rights by an oppressive government more evident than in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, better known as North Korea. The regime controls individual freedoms through a range of measures, such as centrally organising all officially recognised work, punishing the unemployed by sending those out of work to labour training camps, and providing workers with food rations that are withheld as punishment. Social class determines the nature of employment a person receives, along with housing, access to education and other benefits. Many people received no salary for their work, and to obtain, keep or switch jobs, they are often required to bribe officials.[163]

Interviews with defectors from North Korea revealed that women are subject to excessive work hours, such as in the agriculture sectors where workers have to work significantly longer hours during planting and harvesting seasons. Women working in textile factories spoke of 70 or 100 day 'battle periods' to meet strict production targets. This could include receiving as little as two hours of sleep before returning to the machines. Workers are typically not paid for their labour, as payments are deducted from salaries or workers are required to support official donation drives. In both cases, this resulted in the worker paying money out of pocket to their employer. Unemployment, or failing to follow work instructions, could lead to being sent to a labour training camp.[168] These camps are effectively prisons where inmates have to perform hard labour, reportedly for a minimum of six months.[169]

Women from all castes in North Korea face systematic gender-based violence and discrimination.[170] Not only subjected to state-endorsed traditional gender roles, women and girls also face sexual violence at work, and in detention centres at the hands of security staff. The regime offers no access to protection or justice for these women and girls.[171] Reportedly, state actors have also been complicit in the trafficking of women for sexual exploitation and forced marriage in China.[172] Anecdotal reports suggest that up to 90 per cent of North Korean refugees who escape to China, many of whom are women and children, are trafficked into sexual exploitation.[173]

In China, Kachin women and girls who are trafficked from Myanmar to be forcibly married to Chinese bachelors have reported being allowed to leave on the condition they gave birth and left the infant behind with their abusers.[164] The exploitation and subversion of motherhood for adult women is also evident in accounts of women being forcibly violated and impregnated at 'baby farms' in Nigeria,[165] and in reports of women being forced to become surrogates in the Ukraine.[166]

Following the defeat of ISIL in Iraq in 2017, media reports noted that the exploitation and sex trafficking of Yazidi and Assyrian women and girls, who had been kidnapped and subjected to sexual slavery by the terror group, only continued to grow after its demise with women and girls trafficked by local criminal groups for sexual exploitation in casinos, brothels, and hotels across Iraq and Iran.[167]

Recent reports of forced sexual exploitation of female refugees from Venezuela and internally displaced persons in Ukraine show that current crises continue to increase the risk of exploitation.

However, the full extent of these abuses will likely remain hidden due to fears of deportation[174] and other barriers to self-reporting,[175] which impede data collection. Many of the 4.5 million[176] Venezuelan refugees who have fled the country due to political and economic turmoil sought asylum in neighbouring countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Trinidad and Tobago, and Curaçao.[177] Among some stakeholders, forced sexual exploitation of Venezuelan women and girl refugees has become a significant concern.[178] Similarly, in Ukraine, widespread displacement following the combat with Russian-backed armed groups in the country's east increased the risk of forced sexual exploitation among Ukrainian women, in addition to other forms of exploitation such as forced begging and forced labour.[179] The conflict in Yemen has increased vulnerability to violence among all women, however, Somalian or Ethiopian female migrants and women from Muhamasheen communities are particularly vulnerable to sexual exploitation by armed groups involved in the conflict due to bigoted beliefs that Muhamasheen people are 'tantamount to slaves', socially justifying the abuses they endure.[180]

How can we improve the odds for adult women?

To improve the situation for adult women, attitudes and behaviours must change to value 'women's work' – both unpaid care work, and paid work in traditionally 'female' industries. All stakeholders have a role to play in this endeavour: from national legislation guaranteeing non-transferable parental leave, improving access and pay during maternal leave, and awareness-raising campaigns to highlight the impact of the current disparity and the outcomes available if we achieve care work parity.[181]

> *"There needs to be protection and recovery for survivors through economic empowerment. Projects must be designed to give women and girls a path to economic and social empowerment, with a way out to live safely in communities rather than being in institutionalized centres. A national hotline that gives women opportunities and secure access to support can help. The goal would be building resiliency, agency, education, and reintegrating women to live independently in communities where they feel safe and protected. This is the approach of Hagar's Transitional Care project."*
>
> Hagar International Afghanistan

There is also a need to 'formalise' traditionally informal industries by extending labour law protections and ensuring that workers are able to unionise. The most vulnerable female workers must also be supported, particularly migrant women. Increasing protections for victims and vulnerable migrants and reducing the capacity and opportunity for potential offenders is key.[182] Responses should concentrate on female-dominated sectors, particularly those where the work performed is largely out of sight, rendering women invisible and at greater risk of exploitation. Women are particularly vulnerable in domestic work, where their labour is at risk of not being recognised as 'work'[183] – leaving them outside the ambit of labour laws and protections. As a matter of urgency, governments must ratify and enact the Domestic Workers Convention (C189). To date only 30 countries have ratified the Convention.[184] Further, governments must review and amend domestic legislation to ensure women workers in private spaces are taken into account and treated as workers with concomitant labour rights.[185] In particular, migrant workers must be supported through increased legal protections, and prosecution and punishment of offenders must be prioritised.[186]

The situation of adult women can also be improved by embedding modern slavery action within humanitarian crises responses.[187] As violent and political disorders increase globally,[188] and conflict becomes more rampant and complex as global peace deteriorates, ensuring modern slavery issues are considered within crises responses will likely have a significant impact on the world's most young women and mothers – and in time, the children they bear.

Changemakers: This is Lebanon

This Is Lebanon, a project of Domestic Workers Unite, is fighting to end the exploitation of 'invisible' domestic workers in Lebanon under the kafala system. Formed by a coalition of former domestic workers and activists in 2017, This Is Lebanon aims to empower migrant domestic workers, who are predominantly women, by ensuring they know their rights, have access to justice and support services, and by fiercely advocating to change the laws that make them vulnerable. Exploited workers and concerned family and friends can report abuse via This is Lebanon's hotline and online platforms. The organisation uses this information to assist vulnerable migrant women to collect the wages they are owed – sums as large as US $10,000. The non-profit is also advocating to reform Article 7 of the Labor Code, which denies domestic workers critical protections and grants arbitrary power to their employers. One of This is Lebanon's co-founders, Dipendra Uprety, notes that abrogating Article 7 will grant domestic workers the right to a minimum wage, maximum working hours, workplace safety, and social security and "... help create a fairer society where domestic work is not seen as 'degrading', but as essential labor."

The demand for This is Lebanon's support has only grown with the onset of COVID-19, and the recent explosion in Beirut has made an already desperate situation for migrant women worse. Many migrant domestic workers have been abandoned by their employers, and without access to their passport and wages, have few prospects of returning home. This is Lebanon has rapidly responded to provide crisis services, including much needed essentials such as food, shelter, and medical supplies. However, the organisation believes that to best protect the estimated 500,000 vulnerable migrant women trapped in Lebanon, they need to be safely repatriated to their home countries. To do so, This is Lebanon is working to raise global awareness on the human rights abuses migrant domestic workers in Lebanon are facing in the wake of COVID-19. Despite the myriad of challenges, This is Lebanon will not stop fighting for fairness – and for domestic workers' voices to be heard.

Varanasi, India, 2015. "My whole family worked at the brick kiln (6 of us). I was promised a wage for this work, and hoped after some time to send my children to school, but we were only ever given food for survival. If we restisted or demanded any rights, we were beaten and abused, and then we would not even be given food or paid for hard labour.

We tried to escape many times, to run home to our old villages, but the slave holders would always find us and take us back forcefully. My husband wanted us to stop trying to run, but I was determined there could be a better life for us. The last time we escaped, the slaveholder dragged me back to the middle of the brick kiln, and started yelling to the other labourers to come over. Then he spat on the ground and told me to lick it, like a dog." Photo credit: Grace Forrest

Bih's story

Bih is a 25-year-old woman from Cameroon who migrated to Kuwait to build a comfortable future for her siblings. When she lost her only source of income – a small enterprise she had set up – in the ongoing armed conflict, she was forced to consider an alternative path.

Bih contacted a female friend in Kuwait to help find a job. Bih's friend helped her to borrow money from a moneylender to pay for her journey, and when she arrived, Bih began working for a family in their private home. Her contract stipulated that she was to work for three years under decent working conditions.

But Bih was forced to work long hours, eat her employer's leftovers, and told to throw away her Bible – as it was seen as bad luck. Bih was also regularly humiliated:

> *"My food was always thrown away, saying that it smells bad. I was always asked if I had taken my bath, that I have a nasty odour. I felt imprisoned and had thoughts of taking my own life."*

Bih was trapped in domestic servitude by her contract and employers, "I had no means of escape because I was threatened if I ever made an attempt, I would be imprisoned for life for breaking the terms of the contract." Her employers told her that if she left, she would have to pay the equivalent of the cost paid for her services, which amounted to three times the money she paid to come to Kuwait.

After enduring forced labour for two years, Bih contacted a friend in Germany who agreed to buy out the remaining year left in her contract. Bih hopes the original "friend" who facilitated her journey to Kuwait is prosecuted. "I hope to see my friend imprisoned and share my experiences to the world to expose my friend."

Bih also hopes to start up a small business on her own. "Before I thought that the only way I could survive is to migrate abroad, but now I am confident that with financial support, I will be able to start up my own enterprise and earn money to support my siblings and family. I will not be a victim of modern-day slavery again."

Buea, South-West Cameroon, May 2019. A lady in the thick undergrowth, near Buea. In 2017, separatists in Cameroon's Anglophone territories declared an independent state of Ambazonia, an area formerly known as Southern Cameroons, and took up arms against the Cameroonian government. The violence has forced nearly a million people from their homes into bushland where they have built temporary shelters, leaving women and girls particularly vulnerable to exploitation. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the war continues in 2020. Photo credit: Giles Clarke/UNOCHA via Getty Images

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

For adult women migrants, the key to safety and protection is awareness of migration policies. However, an evaluation of the SWiFT program, an awareness raising program on women's rights and safe migration in Nepal, found that repeat migrants were not aware of official steps required for legal migration. Yet repeat migrants had a significant role to play in empowering and promoting safe migration among first-time migrants.[189] As such, specific awareness raising campaigns should be designed for repeat migrant women so they can be better empowered and protected while at work.

In addition to awareness raising, economic empowerment programs empower adult women. For adult women from marginalised communities, improving access to income earning avenues is fundamental to reducing the risk of poverty and modern slavery. For internally displaced persons in Iraq, a micro-credit and vocational training enterprise was designed to facilitate reintegration in 2014. The program had a specific focus to ensure women were equally represented in the participant pool. Although resources were inadequate to fulfil the ambitious objectives, women reported improvements to personal and family well-being, and among women who received vocational training through sewing courses, an increase in income they contributed to the household (albeit a modest increase). In addition, some women reported the sewing courses helped ease social isolation.[190]

Chapter 5

LATE ADULTHOOD (45+ YEARS)

Varanasi, India, 2015. The quote reads: "No more will be tolerate atrocity. We will claim our rights" and is painted on the outer walls of a community recently liberated from intergenerational debt bondage. A woman sits proudly beneath the sign, reminding those who pass by of the struggle faced by the community. Photo credit: Grace Forrest.

AGE-BASED DISCRIMINATION IS ONE OF MANY PREJUDICES FACED BY OLDER WOMEN.

> *"I believed the only way out was to go to jail, as I had no money, no licence and nowhere to go. Police would not believe me as when I called them, he would tell them that I had a mental disorder and that he was trying to help me. I honestly thought I would have to harm him to go to jail."*
>
> Jade, 54, Australian survivor of domestic violence

Risks of violence and discrimination fuelled by gender biases do not disappear when a woman reaches late adulthood. These obstacles are lifelong and the cycle of poverty and oppression they create still work to put vulnerable older women at risk of exploitation. However, while exposure to risk does not diminish, there is a significant gap in data on how exactly older women experience modern slavery.

Why are middle-aged and older women vulnerable to modern slavery?

Invisible and ignored

Age-based discrimination is one of many prejudices faced by older women. While only five per cent of identified victims of sex trafficking and forced labour are over the age of 47 years,[1] older women are vulnerable to gender-based violence and discrimination that increases their risk of modern slavery.[2] Despite this, older women are far less likely to seek or access assistance.[3] These women face numerous barriers to seeking help: from internalised beliefs in traditional gender roles that females should be submissive and that private matters should be confined to the home, to financial dependence, health and mobility problems, and a lack of age-specific support services.[4] Moreover, older women are at increased risk of experiencing domestic violence. In 2018, 15 per cent of UK women killed by men – usually their husband or partner – were aged 66 and above.[5] Women facing domestic violence who are financially dependent on their spouse are likely to experience homelessness.[6] In Australia, for example, domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness.[7]

Stigma surrounding widowhood can mean that losing a husband can result in fewer employment opportunities, remarrying, or social ostracisation, which can cast older women into poverty.[8] In patriarchal societies, such as in Nepal, males are considered the breadwinners and the rightful head of households, and lower-status widows who seek work to support themselves and their families are more vulnerable to exploitation.[9] Women in camps are often overlooked during distribution of aid and can face exploitation by relief workers, caregivers, and older men.[10]

Yet, there is limited age-related data for older women. What underlies this invisibility in data (and the corresponding public policies that rely on such information) is that female value is, as discussed in preceding chapters, systematically linked to fertility. Beyond this stage in a woman's life, her social value diminishes significantly, increasing her risk of experiencing discrimination and isolation.[11] As data guides responses to a number of issues affecting women and girls, older women are effectively excluded from receiving protection and support. For older women in conflict zones, where data collection on issues such as gender-based violence does not capture women over 49,[12] the cost of not being counted can have dire consequences.[13] Without data to inform and shape responses to assist older women, or quantify their experiences during crises, these women are ignored in humanitarian action and left vulnerable to exploitation and violence.[14]

Living longer, but not better

For older women, living longer than men[15] is not necessarily a benefit: ageing can increase the risk of experiencing poverty at a point when employment is impossible, which in turn influences risk of exploitation. In countries where social protections are inadequate, older persons are vulnerable to poverty and economic insecurity due to lower wages and inadequate savings.[16] This risk is greater for older women, as the design of pension and superannuation schemes often fails to account for women's lower labour force participation, higher rates of self-employment, and time out of employment to care for children or relatives. For many older women, survivor benefits paid to them by the husband's contributory pension are their main source of income.[17] Even in relatively progressive countries such as Australia and the United States where improvements have been recently made, most older LGBTQIA+ women face significant barriers to accessing financial support[18] due to multiple forms of discrimination.[19]

Harmful cultural practices such as widow cleansing, polygamy, and wife inheritance increase the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS.[20] Older women are not only at risk of infection from partners, but from orphaned children or dependents they care for. This often results in severe financial, physical, and emotional stress for caregivers.[21]

Further, the disproportionate impact of Ebola on women was not due to greater female mortality, but to practices such as widow cleansing, widow inheritance, and mourning and burial rituals. These rites often require a widow to drink the water her deceased husband bathed in to prove her innocence in his death, which increases her risk of being infected.[22] Older women are most at risk during health pandemics, such as COVID-19, due in part to the caregiving roles they assume.[23]

There are stark inequities in life expectancy among women. A woman born in Sierra Leone can expect to live until the age of 55, compared to a woman born in Japan, who can expect to live to 87.[24] In Australia, the United States, and Canada, women in Indigenous communities have far lower life expectancies than non-Indigenous women.[25] These health disparities reflect the ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, racism and discrimination entrenched in services, and other barriers to accessing to health care.[26] Life expectancy reflects critical inequities in employment, education, income and economic wellbeing; environmental factors such as housing, sanitation, and drinking water; as well as varying social factors and health behaviours.[27] Many of these inequalities contribute to a greater vulnerability to modern slavery for marginalised populations.

Usurping widow rights through harmful practices

Echoing fairy tales and folklore that depict older women as mystical, powerful, and often evil,[31] women continue to face witchcraft accusations in countries including Indonesia,[32] Nepal,[33] Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Papua New Guinea, and India.[34] When a woman's husband dies, particularly of an unknown cause, the deceased husband's family often blames the widow.[35] Evidence from South-Eastern Nigeria shows that this exposes women to stigmatisation and violence, or death by burning, asphyxiation, stoning, or shooting.[36]

Even if the accused witch lives, the stigma of the accusation leads to widespread discrimination and abuse.[37] In Nepal, when locals seek help from the Jhakri (a male spiritual healer) to address issues such as the inability to conceive or to cure the illness of a family member, Jhakris often blame a 'witch'. To soothe the ill allegedly caused by the 'witch', Jhakris encourage and take part in the torture or killing of the accused woman.[38] In Kenya, harmful widow cleansing customs, increased HIV/AIDS infection, and witchcraft accusations due to a husband's death are interlinked issues that increase risk for older women and girls subjected to forced or early marriage.[39]

Changemakers: The Rona Foundation

In parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the grief that comes with the death of a husband can be compounded by discriminatory practices such as eviction, witchcraft accusations, and widow inheritance.[28] In Kenya, the Rona Foundation is turning the tide on these practices. The organisation works to advance widows' rights and protect them from harmful practices and discrimination, as well as providing support to fatherless orphans. By providing forgotten widows and their children with essential support services including loss counselling, legal advice, self-help groups, and monetary aid, the Rona Foundation helps widows to send their children to school and to build a new home.[29] The Foundation runs innovative income-generating programs, including micro-finance, farming, and bead-making, to help widows to overcome social and economic exclusion.[30]

The Rona Foundation supports over 8,000 widows in more than 60 widow groups across Siaya County in Kenya, and additionally supports more than 150 orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV/AIDS at their own centre, through education, nutrition, healthcare, and psychological support. The organisation has sparked a powerful movement with its model now reproduced in 12 additional counties.[40] The Rona Foundation was founded by widows' rights activist Roseline Orwa, who resisted pressure to be 'cleansed' and inherited by a male member of her husband's family when she was widowed at 32. Roseline successfully fought against these practices and has since been instrumental in driving change in Kenya. In 2015, she helped to outlaw widow cleansing, and now works to help widows learn about their rights to amplify their voices.[41] The Rona Foundation aims to transform community attitudes and cultural perceptions of sexual and gender-based violence and widow cleansing through media outreach and by educating men to become champions of social change. Their awareness raising also aims to eliminate the discriminatory practices and stigma associated with widowhood, and to protect young girls from risk in the first place.[42]

Interestingly, gender income inequality is relatively higher in countries with witchcraft accusations such as India, Nepal, and Myanmar,[43] Indonesia, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Kenya.[44] In some cases, accusations of witchcraft have been used to settle family disputes, to exact revenge, or to deny older women their succession and inheritance rights.[45]

This largely occurs in strongly patriarchal communities where women are viewed as the possession of their husband or father. Elderly widows living alone are particularly vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft.[46] Widows can also be targeted for their property through land grabs and challenges via traditional courts. Disinheritance and property theft are common in cultures where customary marriages occur, as these marriages are often not recorded in writing and are difficult for widows to enforce and assert their legal rights – a particular issue if the couple did not have a son to inherit the assets.[47]

In every country, elderly (and child) widows have far more limited access to resources, and are at significant risk of poverty.[48] Land rights function as a safety net for women in the event of widowhood or divorce, or other incidents that place a woman as the de facto head of the household. Securing land rights for women is critical in reaching the SDGs targeting poverty, hunger, and gender equality (SDGs 1, 2 and 5).[49] However, women still face barriers in procuring and retaining land rights in some countries. In Vanuatu, women play a limited role in decision-making around land use, primarily at the household or community level, while men and male chiefs control the formal processes and final decisions.[50] In Kenya, widows are unable to claim property rights if they remarry, and customary laws that discriminate against women determine ownership over land in some areas.[51]

Layla's story

Unable to find employment in Kenya despite her 12 years of education, Layla left for Lebanon in August 2011 to support her parents. Layla relied on her agent, a stranger known for transporting girls abroad, to arrange her work visa and journey.

Upon arrival in Lebanon, Layla met her employers who owned a large company in downtown Beirut. She was sent to work for their elderly mother in a small town in the mountains. She lived and worked there for almost eight years.

Although Layla had only agreed to undertake housework, her tasks quickly expanded. "When the time went by, then I started to do something totally different from what I was supposed to do". Layla recalls having to plant trees, carry bricks, and move heavy loads with wheelbarrows on top of her usual work around the house. She often did not have any time to eat or rest.

Layla's employers withheld her pay for years, despite her salary technically being $200 per month – a lower rate than most other Kenyan domestic workers. The absence of remittances worried Layla's family, who rarely heard from her. Layla's employers also restricted her communication with her family, denying her access to the phone by repeating, "don't worry: your family is well", and verbally abusing her if she persisted.

After six long years of work in Lebanon, Layla begged to go home. Her employers allowed her to return to Kenya but did not pay her the thousands of dollars of outstanding salary. Layla's family was thrilled to have her back home safely, but she was desperate to collect the money she was owed. She returned to the Lebanese family two weeks later but experienced exactly the same treatment.

Layla stayed with her abusive employers for another two years, at the end of which she was owed US $10,900. She reached out to an NGO via a friend, who intervened. Initially, her employers tried to deny knowing Layla, but they quickly gave in and tried to deduct a large amount of money from her owed salary based on travel expense and gifts Layla had supposedly bought.

Finally, in July 2019, thanks to pressure from [NGO], Layla returned home with the full amount she was owed.

Today, Layla is living in Kenya, but the difficult economic situation there, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, continues to make it difficult for her to provide for herself and her parents. She is even considering working abroad again, despite her traumatic experiences.

> *"I always live in fear… It has never disappeared because I always remember everything, everything, everything".*

Ultimately, however, Layla hopes to be able to realise her dream of working in the beauty and cosmetics industry.

"To improve the situation for widows and their children, government and religious organisations must acknowledge widows through their many platforms and policies because vulnerable widows simply cannot protect their daughters on their own. Religious organisations must further speak out against widowhood discrimination, and advocate for the protection of widows and fatherless children. Governments should seek to partner with and fund grassroots organisations supporting widows as vulnerable mothers result in vulnerable daughters, who are often left at risk of being trafficked. Scholarships should be offered to assist fatherless girls to attain higher education to break the cycle of poverty. Lastly, NGOs must 'go beyond rights' and put resources, including financial resources, in the hands of widows in need through socio-economic empowerment programs."

Roseline Orwa, Founder & Director, Rona Foundation

Abina's story

At the age of 17, Abina was forced to marry a successful farmer in Ghana, where she lived. After several years of marriage, Abina decided to start brewing a local drink made from maize and millet called 'pituo'. The business generated good profits, which Abina used to support her children, expand her husband's farming activities in the village, fund small loans to other villagers.

Abina's husband passed away in 2014. On the day of his burial, her husband's family openly accused her of causing his death and told her she had to leave the village.

"I realised this allegation from my husband family members and villagers is because they were jealous and interested to take control of all my husband's farms and investment including my pituo business; because by doing so I will have no voice hence, depriving me from asking or getting the refund of all the monies I have given out as petty loans to farmers in the village."

Abina hoped that the village traditional chief and his elders would resolve the wrongful accusation. Instead, the matter was referred to a soothsayer with spiritual powers, who was to determine whether the accusation was true.

"The soothsayer mixed some bitter concoction and gave me to drink with the saying that if I should complain of stomach bite or vomit after drinking the concoction means I am responsible for the death of my husband."

After half an hour, Abina's stomach turned and she began to vomit,

"it was then they shouted, beating me and threatened to kill me if I don't confess being responsible for my husband death."

Abina had no choice but to escape with her children. After trekking for two days, she arrived at [NGO] witch camp, where she was provided with accommodation and the chance to start a new life. Abina had lost everything – all of her husband's investments, their farmlands, her pituo business and the money she had loaned to the community members. "It is hard to live here and worse still is the fact that you don't even know when you shall one day be accepted home... however, it is better here than being lynched for a crime you never committed."

Widows are often accused of witchcraft as relatives want their possessions after the demise of their husband. There is also a strong belief among some Ghanaians that old women are witches.

Abina still resides in the witch camp, fearful of reintegrating into the community. But she believes community awareness campaigns and workshops instituted by [NGO] will one day lead to the end of such witchcraft accusations.

Hargeysa, Somaliland, February 2014. A woman who made a living for 15 years by circumcising young girls, looks into a piece of a mirror. Somalia has some of the highest rates of FGM/C in the world, and the practice has significantly increased in the wake of COVID-19 lockdowns. Photo credit: Nichole Sobecki/AFP via Getty Images

THERE IS A SIGNIFICANT GAP IN DATA ON HOW OLDER WOMEN EXPERIENCE MODERN SLAVERY.

How do middle-aged and older women experience modern slavery?

Though the proportion of identified victims of modern slavery in this age bracket is much lower than that of other age groups, this is likely due to limited data and information on this age group. Better estimates are required to better understand their experiences and identify critical points of intervention.

Anecdotal reports provide some insight into the exploitation of older women. In Japan, a skilled tailor and garment worker from China, aged almost 50, was exploited under the Technical Intern Training Program – where the victim became trapped in debt bondage and was forced to work excessive hours in poor conditions.[52] Cases of women aged between 50 and 70 who were trafficked and trapped in domestic servitude have also emerged in the United Kingdom,[53] and women nearing or above 50 in the United States who were starved, beaten, and forced to work excessive hours in private homes.[54]

In some cultures, older women are also vulnerable to being 'inherited' by a male relative of their deceased husband. This is still practiced in parts of Africa, South Asia, and Arab States. Typically, widows often do not have any real ability to refuse to be 'inherited'. For example, in Palestine, a widow can be forced to marry their deceased husband's brothers or else face having their children taken away by in-laws.[55] In Cameroon, widows who refuse to marry the deceased husband's brother in a 'levirate marriage' will be stigmatised, humiliated, and ostracised, as well as face losing the family home, her inheritance, or financial support from relatives. Widows who have refused have been kidnapped by the family of their late husband or raped and even killed as punishment.[56]

Palestinian settlement, Lebanon, 2016. An older woman sits on the street with her neighbours, in a settlement once imagined to be a temporary refugee camp. The community has now been there 80 years. Photo credit: Grace Forrest

THE JOURNEY FROM VICTIM TO OFFENDER

In 2016, over a third of trafficking offenders worldwide were women[57] – and across some regions in 2019, the number of women perpetrators is on the rise.[58] However, some female traffickers themselves are former victims.[59] In Australia, six out of nine women convicted of modern slavery offences between 2004 and 2019 had a history of sexual victimisation. Of this number, three of the traffickers had themselves originally been trafficked to Australia for forced sexual exploitation and were forced to repay alleged debts from travel costs.[60]

The reasons at the heart of this shift from the exploited to the exploiter are often linked to survival. Victims may exploit others out of fear of their trafficker or to escape further abuse and exploitation. Others see trafficking as one of few limited opportunities available to earn an income.[61] In the Netherlands, for example, women from European countries such as Latvia and Hungary have been recruited to work in the sex industry, but are promptly forced to hand over most of their earnings. In time, to earn 'promotions' and retain more money, the women begin to recruit and exploit other women and girls.[62] Victims may also consider that due to their limited education or local language proficiency, their only option is to engage in trafficking itself.[63]

> *"It is also important to address economic opportunity among vulnerable populations, namely communities that experience systemic discrimination, high unemployment, lack of economic mobility, and poor education – all of which can make victims more vulnerable to traffickers. Similarly, traffickers are often responding to low or non-existent economic opportunities themselves."*
>
> NGO Contact

In Nigeria, there are reports of former victims of sex trafficking in Europe returning to their home states, after repaying their debts and becoming madams themselves. They advertise the wealth and prosperity available to girls if they undergo ritual *juju* oaths – often involving the woman's blood, hair or item of clothing to bond her to a trafficker – and travel to Italy.[64] Similarly, an organised crime group in Argentina routinely trafficked women from the Dominican Republic for sexual exploitation, before using the victims to lure more women.[65] Victims can also be groomed to accept that their exploitation is to 'pay their dues' before they can actively participate in the criminal enterprise.[66] In this way, trafficking can self-reproduce, as victims who are deemed trustworthy may be given the opportunity – albeit under the tutelage of their madam – to recruit and exploit another.[67]

Having a relationship with a male trafficker also impacts whether a female victim later offends. Most female trafficking perpetrators co-offended with an intimate partner, and a substantial number of cases indicated the female offender had experienced domestic abuse. Sometimes a victim involved with her perpetrator may be 'promoted' into a more active role despite ongoing abuse.[68] The power imbalance inherent in such co-offending relationships is also reflected in the roles female traffickers inhabit – largely 'support' functions to enforce policies of the lead trafficker.[69] Further, female trafficking offenders are often in close contact with victims in order to gain victims' trust,[70] and typically are involved in facilitating, transporting or minding victims. These lower-level activities can also make female offenders more visible targets for law enforcement than their male counterparts.[71] Once vacant, their lower level positions can be filled relatively quickly – likely by the next victim trying to survive while trapped in a cycle of exploitation.[72]

How can we improve the odds for middle-aged and older adult women?

The issues facing middle-aged and older adult women begin with their invisibility. Recognition in research and data collection is key for informing targeted and inclusive responses to an array of issues that impact older women, from gender-based violence, to HIV/AIDS and conflict. Ensuring older women and widows have access to social protections is critical to ensuring that they do not fall into the trap of poverty, which can quickly spiral into a situation of exploitation, and can support themselves and their dependents.

> *"Eradicating modern slavery requires global efforts to prevent it happening in the first place. Reactive and proactive programs should be implemented to improve education and awareness in communities, with consideration of cultural, geographic and demographic factors. Addressing the demand through supply chain intervention, regulation, use of data, and legislation is important to ensure victims and survivors are protected. Further, eliminating modern slavery requires funding for prevention, protection, prosecution, and victim services. This must include comprehensive programs that facilitate survivors' reintegration into society, helping them to live independently with sustainable income and avoid being re-trafficked. Finally, it is crucial to promote gender equality and economic empowerment, by giving women and girls the opportunity to access education, gain skills, job opportunities, and job creation."*
>
> Shandra Woworuntu, Chief Executive Officer, Mentari Human Trafficking Survivor Empowerment Program

Social change must accompany this support. Societies which limit the rights of older women and widows to work, own land, and inherit assets not only lead to poor life outcomes for older women, but increase the vulnerability of younger women and girls by creating a system that denies them financial independence, even when they are well beyond the age of majority. For example, when the husband of a woman who only had daughters dies, and his income is diverted to his nearest male relative, the sudden need to save money for survival can oust young daughters from school and expose them to lifelong vulnerabilities to modern slavery. Keeping a widow from inheriting family wealth and assets leads to financial dependence on male relatives and in some cases, poverty.[73] Taking action to improve the situation for older women can reinforce work aimed at changing attitudes towards women and girls, leading to lower risk across all ages.

SPOTLIGHT ON PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

There are few programs which specifically target middle-aged and older adult women, consistent with the general paucity of research on this age group. Ensuring older women are assisted to escape, and avoid, modern slavery will require investment in their needs. One project in Tanzania tangentially benefited elderly people (aged 60 and over) during a child marriage re-education program, by making cash transfers conditional on attendance of elderly at health clinics. Notably, this program increased trust among community members in the local government.[74] However, while more targeted interventions will be required to better assist mid to late adult women, these interventions can be provided as part of holistic programs targeted at women and girls across the age spectrum.

Kukuo, Ghana, June 2016. The Kukuo Witch Camp located in Northern Ghana, is one of the only witch camps in the world. There are hundreds of alleged 'witches' living in Ghana's six witch camps. Most women are in the camps because of a lack of women's rights and discrimination against widows. Most of the accusations against the widows start from a death in the family or a dream somebody has, but almost every case is traced back to inheritance issues or a woman becoming a burden due to age or being widowed. Their only trial is by mob justice which is almost impossible to overturn as vulnerable women. Photo credit: Louise Wateridge/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

Chapter 6

EVENING THE ODDS FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Mosul, Iraq, August 2014. Thousands of Yezidis trapped in the Sinjar mountains fleeing from Islamic State forces are rescued by Kurdish Peshmerga forces and Peoples Protection Unit. Many Yezidi women and girls were subjected to extreme abuse, including kidnapping and sexual slavery, by the terror group. Photo credit: Emrah Yorulmaz via Getty Images

NO COUNTRY IN THE WORLD IS CURRENTLY DOING ENOUGH TO DISRUPT GENDER INEQUALITY AND MEET THE SDGs.

Mewat, India, March 2014. Sayedan was trafficked at the age of 12 from Bangladesh by a local man in Mewat. Trafficked brides are locally known as Paro or Molki (meaning "one who has a price"). These are pejorative labels in Haryana, Punjab, and western Uttar Pradesh where the skewed sex ratio and entrenched feudalism has resulted in a flourishing trade in women trafficked from Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha. Photo credit: Subrata Biswas/ Hindustan Times via Getty Images

Gender equality and women's empowerment are integral to the SDGs. However, action to date is falling short of promised outcomes – no country in the world is currently doing enough to disrupt gender inequality and meet the SDGs.[1] In fact, the problem has been made even worse by the COVID-19 pandemic. Reports of gender-based and domestic violence, in addition to child marriage, child sexual exploitation, and other forms of modern slavery, have significantly increased – partly due to a drastic decline in economic opportunity, but also to restrictions on mobility.[2]

> *"We need an integrated approach to combatting modern slavery because of the complex adaptive nature of the problem. Modern slavery is a matter of economic and structural inequality. It is a matter of social injustice and a human rights violation, a matter of harmful social norms and deeply ingrained traditional practices, a matter of unequal power structures and unjust power relations, and a matter of gender inequality and paternalistic systems and institutions. It is also a matter of dangerous dominant discourses, false consciousness, beliefs and ideologies."*
>
> Dr Foluké Abigail Badejo, Founder and Director, Grace + Grit Social Enterprise

Jaipur, India, July 2017. Students at a school located in a slum raise a victory sign after successfully opposing the child marriage of their classmate. The classmates of the 16-year-old girl protested when she went missing from school. Her classmates successfully tracked down her in-laws home address and fought for her to return to school. The young girl then sought a court annulment of her marriage. Photo credit: Himanshu Vyas/Hindustan Times via Getty Images

Gender biases which spur inequality must be challenged in every place they are found, particularly during crises. The scale of this problem, which is both highly personal as it regards individual's beliefs, and truly global as these opinions are found in every country in the world, is beyond the capacity of any single actor. Collaboration will be key to change the odds for women and girls, and ensure that all females are valued, educated, empowered, invested in, and protected.

The way ahead

The three most common solutions raised by NGOs to reduce the disproportionate risk to modern slavery among women and girls were: (1) improving access to education, (2) providing economic and vocational opportunities for women and girls, and (3) working with and within communities to change harmful and gender-biased attitudes.

When girls are valued and educated rather than forced to marry, their access to decent work increases.[3] Evidence from India shows that health outcomes subsequently improve, as educated girls are more likely to delay the birth of their first child, in addition to having fewer children over their lifetime.[4] Together with greater rights-based awareness, safe migration, and increased access to systems of redress, women and girls are empowered and their resilience to risk grows.

Effectively empowering women and girls will require investment to improve child and adolescent education rates and provide better and more avenues for adolescent and adult women to participate in formal labour markets. The goal of these interventions is to improve both the quality and quantity of opportunities available to women and girls. Enhancing the economic empowerment of women and girls will also benefit national economies: lost income due to gender discrimination accounts for an estimated US $15–$30 trillion in the global economy.[5] Education and economic empowerment, together with direct outreach that incorporates an age and gender focus into preventative action, will provide greater protections for women and girls across the age spectrum.

> *"In addition, using faith, including the church, mosques, and other religious denominations as a platform to teach parents and children about the detriment of child and forced marriage will reduce the risk of this form of modern slavery. Figures of religion are influential agents of change who can positively impact large sections of the community."*
>
> Mary Saruni, Co-Founder,
> The Children of Maasai Educational Programme

> *"First, global justice systems need to effectively punish abuse and exploitation of women, not punish the women and girls who survive abuse and exploitation if they stand up for themselves.*
>
> *Second, girls and women must be provided with truly equal access to education and work opportunities – including opportunities that acknowledge and account for the reality that caregivers of children already have full time work.*
>
> *Third, everyone must end practices of victim-blaming and victim-shaming that suppress economic opportunities for survivors, retraumatizes survivors, and imposes unfair and unreasonable costs upon them for what exploiters and abusers did."*
>
> Jessica Hubley, Co-Founder and CEO, AnnieCannons

The attitudes that devalue women and girls must be challenged at household, community, and national levels. Key stakeholders, such as government, business, faith groups, and community leaders should be involved in these discussions to help drive effective behavioural change.[6] Accepting women and girls as capable decision-makers and socio-economic contributors underpins the framework for change presented in this report – and this must equally underpin responses to address the disproportionate risk to exploitation they face, by empowering survivors to influence and design policy responses.

"To reduce the risk of modern slavery for women and girls, there needs to be community education about human trafficking, what it is and where it exists. There must also be training for justice sector actors to recognize trafficking, enforce laws against human trafficking, and ensure victim-friendly proceedings. Finally, there must be services for victims to empower them to escape trafficking and be free to live safe from further enslavement and coercion by others."

Hon. Vanessa Ruiz, President of International Association of Women Judges and District of Columbia Court of Appeals, USA

Dhaka, Bangladesh, July 2020. Bangladeshi women harvest jute in the Manikgonj area on the outskirts of Dhaka. Globally, girls are more likely than boys to be restricted from pursuing education, which can bar women and girls from accessing formal work. Photo credit Mehedi Hasan/NurPhoto via Getty Images

TABLE 1: TOP 10 GOVERNMENT RESPONSES TO MODERN SLAVERY

Country (in order of strongest responses)	Government responses ranking (per cent)	Ratification of ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)	Forced marriage is criminalised	Primary school education is available for all
United Kingdom	80.1	No	Yes	Yes
Netherlands	76.8	No	Yes	Yes
United States	74.7	No	No	Yes
Portugal	74.2	Yes	Yes	Yes
Sweden	72.9	No	Yes	Yes
Argentina	72.1	Yes	Yes	Yes
Belgium	71.3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Spain	70.4	No	Yes	Yes
Croatia	69.4	No	Yes	No
Australia	68.9	No	Yes	Yes

Argentina, Belgium, and Portugal are the only countries in the top 10 that have ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). The US is the only country that has failed to criminalise forced marriage in national legislation,[7] and while Australia criminalised forced marriage in 2013, there have been no prosecutions under the federal legislation to date.[8]

GOVERNMENTS WITH STRONG RESPONSES STILL FAILING WOMEN AND GIRLS

The 10 countries taking the most action to respond to modern slavery are: United Kingdom, Netherlands, United States, Portugal, Sweden, Argentina, Belgium, Spain, Croatia, and Australia.[9] These countries are generally characterised by strong political will and a relatively high level of resources, placing them in an ideal position to implement effective policies and programs to combat modern slavery.

Yet, despite their overall strong response, governments in these countries still lack adequate protections for women and girls who have experienced, or are at risk of, modern slavery. Among these 10 countries, gaps emerge in the ratification of relevant international conventions, criminalisation of forms of exploitation that disproportionately affect women, and through a lack of interventions to address underlying risk factors.

Countries with a higher level of gender equality would reasonably be expected to have a stronger response to modern slavery, yet this is not always the case. Many of the countries with the strongest responses to modern slavery have gaps in labour rights for women; for example, the United Kingdom and United States fall far behind on collective bargaining rights for women.[10]

The United States, despite being relatively wealthy and having the resources to respond to the needs of at-risk women and girls, has significant gaps in social assistance and the economic participation of women remains limited.[11]

These 10 countries also often fail to protect the most vulnerable women and girls in groups that experience multiple forms of marginalisation, such as ethnic minorities, disabilities or LGBTQIA+ groups.

For example, while Australia has had a 12-year national strategy to reduce violence against women and their children in place since 2010,[12] one in six women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or previous partner since the age of 15 – equating to 1.6 million women in total. Children, young women, Indigenous Australians, and people with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to domestic violence.[13] In the United States, Black and Hispanic women and girls have been structurally disadvantaged, affecting their ability to accumulate wealth[14] and be physically safe.[15] In Europe, Roma people are the largest ethnic minority but continue to face sustained discrimination, exclusion and stigmatisation, resulting in unequal access to education, employment, health, and housing.[16] Across 11 EU countries, including Spain and Portugal, only half of all Roma children attended preschool or kindergarten in 2011.[17]

Taez, Yemen, July 2020. A young girl touches clothes hanging out to dry across a blackboard inside an old schoolroom, now used by displaced Yemeni families as a make-shift shelter from the war. Destitution and famine have drastically increased due to the continuing conflict in Yemen, and in turn have led to a rise in child marriages which authorities are unable to prevent. Yemeni girls carry the burden of this social and political instability, and are often unable to continue their education due to the twin pressures of poverty and child marriage. Photo credit: Ahmad Al-Basha / AFP via Getty Images

Protect

> *"[It] is fundamental to actively develop joint and coordinated work with other social agents locally and nationally, creating an extensive service network capable of offering individualised, integral attention to the survivors. This will prevent some victims from falling back into the human trafficking cycle again."*
>
> Gemma Bardají Blasco, Dominican Republic Country Director, Free the Slaves

Targeted and holistic support services for all female victims of modern slavery

When the Promising Practices Database is analysed across gender and age, it is the oldest[18] and youngest[19] women and girls who have the fewest direct support programs. Rather, the oldest and youngest women and girls typically receive assistance when interventions are provided to households. Importantly, there is also a relative lack of information on these cohorts of women and girls, to inform program design. As such, the evidence base on what works to address the specific risks these groups face must first be strengthened to improve interventions.

Removing institutionalised gender inequality

Institutionalised gender inequality must be eliminated in law and policy to improve access to justice for women and girls, and ensure that measures implemented for their protection work in practice. This includes filling gaps in legal protection by enacting legislation that sets a minimum age of marriage, and ratifying the relevant international instruments to protect women and girls (see Table 2 and Appendix 2 for a full list of countries).

Laws which protect women and girls from forced and early marriages are particularly rare: 52 countries (28 per cent) have criminalised forced marriage and only 15 countries have laws which set the minimum age of marriage at 18 years (8 per cent).[20] Similarly, few countries have ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189).[21] Labour laws should also be extended to include informal sectors which are dominated by female or migrant workers.[22]

Legal restrictions which prevent women from conferring citizenship on children, inheriting and procuring assets, and accessing labour protections must also be systematically removed.[23] Regulations on mobility, particularly migration for work, disproportionately impact women workers. Where necessary, regulations should encourage safe migration – and be combined with awareness campaigns among adolescents and adult women on migrant rights and the signs of trafficking.[24] Similarly, bans on child labour must be supplemented with programs that incentivise children to stay in school: research suggests that child labour rates are unaffected by bans, but lead to lower child wages and school enrolment.[25]

TABLE 2: PROTECTIONS IN INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC LAW BY REGION (NUMBER OF COUNTRIES)

	CEDAW		Optional Protocol to CEDAW, 1999		Forced marriage criminalised in national legislation		Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 16 or older			Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 18 or older			ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)	
Region (total number of countries)	**Ratified**	**Not ratified**	**Ratified**	**Not ratified**	**Yes**	**No**	**Yes**	**No**	**No data**	**Yes**	**No**	**No data**	**Ratified**	**Not ratified**
Africa (52)	50	2	28	24	8	44	9	35	8	5	39	8	4	48
Americas (35)	34	1 [a]	19	16	8	27	10	24	1	0	34	1	17	18
Arab States (11)	11	0	0	11	0	11	0	10	1	0	10	1	0	11
Asia and the Pacific (38)	35	3	15	23	10	28	18	11	9	8	21	9	1 [c]	37
Europe and Central Asia (52)	51	1 [b]	47	5	26	26	33	19	0	2	50	0	8	44
All countries (188)	181	7	109	79	52	136	70	99	19	15	154	19	29	150

Notes:
a. The United States of America is the only country in its region that has not ratified CEDAW.
b. Kosovo has not ratified CEDAW but is not a UN member state.
c. The Philippines is the only country in its region that has ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention.

Marjayoun, Lebanon, July 2020. A woman spreads bulgur to dry in the sun after grinding it in the Lebanese southern town of Marjayoun. Women and girls globally still shoulder a disproportionate burden of domestic duties in and around the home, particularly in rural areas. Photo credit: Joseph Eid / AFP via Getty Images

EMPOWERING WOMEN JUDGES TO ADVANCE GENDER EQUALITY IN THE COURTROOM.

UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INTERVENTIONS

More is being done now to systematically combat modern slavery than ever before[26] – however, interventions themselves can have adverse effects. In fact, some programs that intend to increase the protection of women and girls can inadvertently reinforce patriarchal structures.

For example, policies which overly rely on 'raid and rescue' strategies to uncover exploitation in the sex industry can prioritise the punishment of offenders, rather than safeguarding victims' rights.[27] These interventions often adopt an 'anti-prostitution' approach that conflates voluntary adult sex work with forced sexual exploitation.[28] Moreover, many countries' laws lack legal protections for victims of modern slavery, particularly forced sexual exploitation, such that victims are seen as complicit in the crime. As a result, they may not report their situation to the authorities – for fear of being prosecuted, and/or out of fear that the criminal gangs that control them will punish them.[29] Further, forced rescues can backfire, exposing victims to more violence.[30]

Bans on migrant labour can also increase the vulnerability of women migrant workers to exploitation.[31] Travel bans that target female-dominated industries like domestic work reduce legal routes of migration, making women more susceptible to exploitation by unscrupulous recruitment agents and smugglers.[32] Even in interventions aimed at reducing the prevalence of child marriage in strong male-preferring communities, adverse impacts (such as female infanticide) can occur if programs lack behavioural change components to address underlying attitudes that devalue girls.[33]

Such unintended consequences can also impede effective monitoring and impact assessment in the anti-trafficking sector.[34] For example, strong institutional disincentives to dwell on adverse findings may account for the lack of understanding around the unintended harmful impacts of some interventions, which can lead to the repeated adoption of ineffective and even harmful policies. In some cases, discussion of the outcomes of failed interventions can be suppressed, particularly when they were expensive or had political associations.[35] To better determine what works, and what does not, and to assist women and girls at risk of modern slavery, comprehensive evaluations must be built into programs from the outset.[36]

Changemakers: International Association of Women Judges

When it comes to ensuring equal access to justice for women and girls, legal systems around the world are falling unacceptably short.[37] Whether through laws that discriminate against women, or through biases in their application, gender discrimination embedded in legal systems continues to hold women and girls back.[38] The International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) is working to correct this injustice by empowering women judges to advance gender equality in the courtroom. The organisation has been influential in ensuring the fair application and enforcement of laws to protect women and girls, as well as the elimination of discriminatory laws. IAWJ seeks to instill gender equality in societies around the world by addressing heavily gendered issues such as human trafficking, early and forced marriage, gender-based violence, inheritance, and property rights through rights-based training and local initiatives.[39]

Their flagship judicial training program, the "Jurisprudence of Equality Program", which ran in over 25 countries around the world, invited judges to share their perspectives, ideas, and experiences in order to promote gender equality in justice systems.[40] In Ghana, where traditional female leaders known as 'Queen Mothers' have jurisdiction to settle minor disputes, the Ghanaian Chapter of IAWJ found that Queen Mothers believed justice for rape victims could be achieved through arranging marriage between the victims and their attackers, due to concerns that stigma associated with the loss of virginity would render the victim unable to marry. However, IAWJ intervened with the support of psychologists and law enforcement to raise awareness among the Queen Mothers about the trauma of rape and the rights of victims. This not only transformed the Queen Mothers' approach to justice, but their attitudes to gender-based violence.[41]

For the past 10 years, human trafficking has also been a major focus for IAWJ, and members across the globe have been engaged in a range of training, outreach and network building activities in order to strengthen national justice systems and promote cross-border collaboration. In 2018, the IAWJ launched a regional counter-trafficking working group in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) with the goal of creating a platform for women judges and justice sector stakeholders to identify and share best practices and challenges, as well to coordinate and systemise victim-centered approaches. Through the regional working group, the IAWJ has leveraged its convening power to bring together hundreds of justice system actors representing over 20 countries and territories in the LAC region; the IAWJ is building a network that will improve collaboration amongst courts by streamlining communication between key regional actors so that countries can begin to see a crackdown on transnational traffickers.[42]

Invest

Remove barriers to education

To combat the use of early marriage and child labour as sources of income for families affected by poverty, cash and in-kind transfers should be utilised as an incentive to keep girls in school. Cash transfers should be implemented before girls reach adolescence, and should be provided for greater periods of time, as longer programs were more effective than short-term incentives. These incentives, regardless of whether they are conditional or non-conditional, must be implemented as part of a broader program that includes community awareness raising campaigns on the social and health risks of early marriage, provides vocational and lifeskills training to parents and daughters alike, and equips girls with the necessary supplies and confidence to fully participate in school.[43]

> *"Reimagining a new normal with girls safe and participating in a nation's growth requires drastic and cross-sectoral reforms. Educating more girls directly impacts the achievement of nine SDGs, including helping to solve the climate crisis. Therefore, not only will these measures mitigate many of the risks facing girls, but the entire planet.*
>
> *Focussing on those most at-risk benefits everyone, and an empowered female population, ensured through girls' education, is one of the best investments a country can make."*
>
> Safeena Husain, Founder and Executive Director, Educate Girls

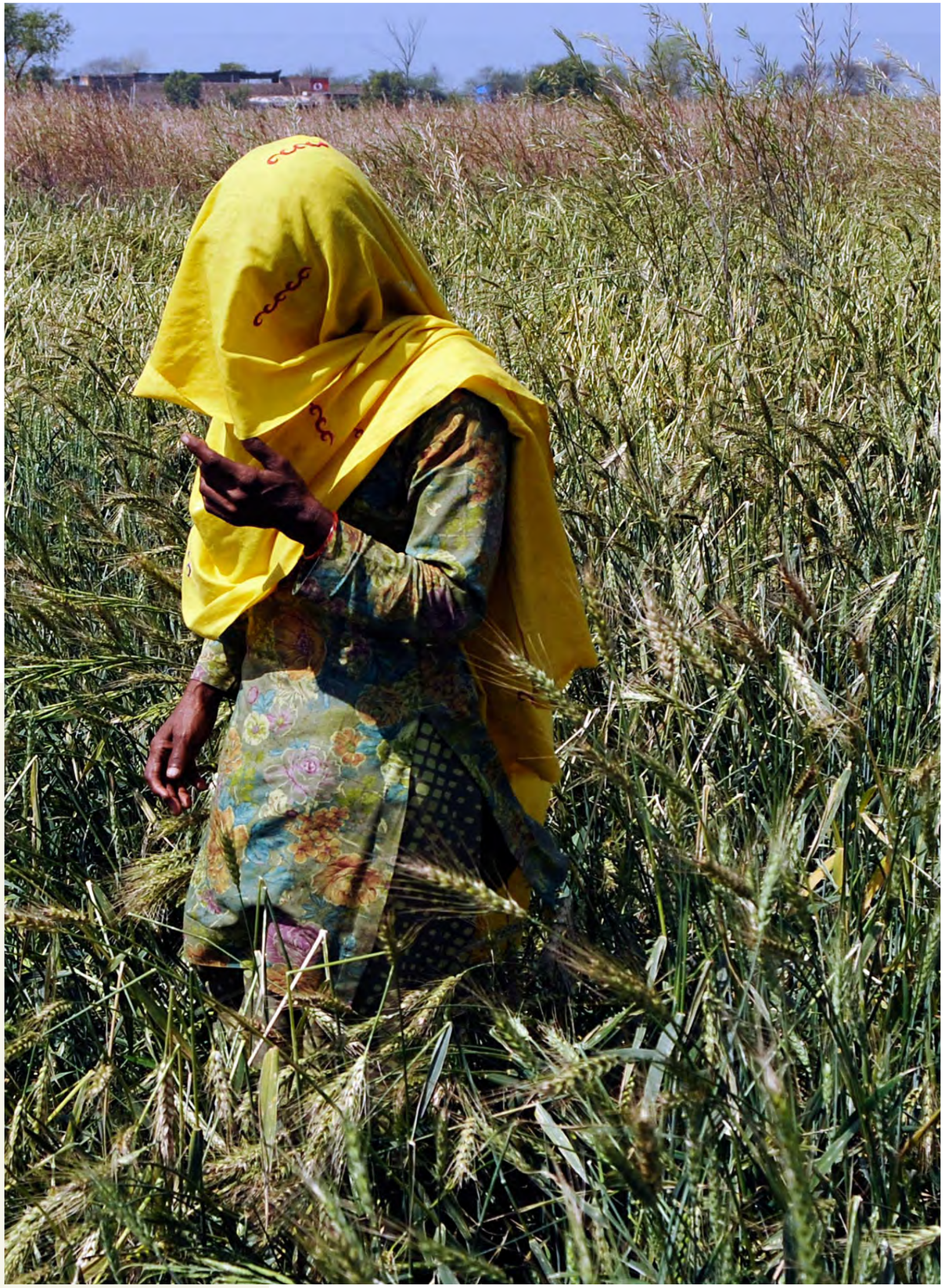
Promote female entrepreneurs

Direct investment in adolescent girls and adult women will widen the work opportunities available for women and girls. Micro-finance loans can increase family income, reduce exploitative labour such as debt bondage, the worst forms of child labour, and other forms of modern slavery, and improve family living standards.[48] However, these loans should be provided together with micro-insurance schemes to prevent these interventions creating further debt for beneficiaries if the ventures fail.[49] Alternatively, the implementation of community savings schemes can boost financial literacy and economically empower women and girls, particularly where these schemes are delivered in tandem with campaigns that raise awareness about female rights.[50] To further bolster business and leadership skills, vocational and skills-based training should be provided.[51] However, beyond training, investors and stakeholders must also work to improve meaningful access to economic opportunities through job creation, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.[52]

Changemakers: Mentari

When Shandra Woworuntu lost her job in Indonesia as a result of political and economic upheaval, a job offer in a hotel in the United States was a welcomed opportunity. However, when Woworuntu arrived, she realised she had been duped – into sexual exploitation.[44] Eventually, she escaped her abusers and brought them to justice, before setting up Mentari Human Trafficking Survivor Empowerment Program. Mentari seeks to raise awareness of the risks associated with migration and helps survivors of human trafficking to reintegrate into society. Since its founding in 2014 in the United States,[45] the organisation has helped 540 survivors, including 510 women and girls, to receive vocational training, career guidance, assistance to secure employment, mentorship, and importantly, a network of support.[46]

The organisation's Culinary Art Program, which began as a cooking class run in Woworuntu's home,[47] trains survivors in food production and builds connections among them, all the while providing a potential pathway to employment. Through the program, 200 survivors have received culinary arts training and 93 per cent have gained employment in the hospitality sector. In addition, 2019 saw Mentari open its first transitional house in New York, which provides long-term housing and holistic services to survivors trying to transition into independent living.[53] Mentari expanded its operations to Indonesia in 2015,[54] where it has since trained and assisted 40 women to establish their own home businesses and has empowered a further 20 women to participate in a leadership program. In addition to supporting survivors, Mentari is taking action to ensure children are aware of trafficking risks from an early age. By distributing 'Impian Dewi', a comic book containing information about the signs of human trafficking, Mentari has reached thousands of children across Java and Bali. Turning painful experiences into a force for change, Woworuntu and Mentari are helping trafficked women and girls in need.



Mewat, India, March 2014. Trafficked brides often have to work as bonded labourers in the fields and as domestic help. The women, who are usually promised marriage, find themselves in places like Mewat where go-betweens sell them, sometimes repeatedly, to men who cannot find local women. Cut off from their native states, they are confined and forced to work as bonded labour or pushed into forced marriages or forced sexual exploitation. Photo credit: Subrata Biswas/Hindustan Times via Getty Images

WHAT BUSINESSES CAN DO TO REDUCE RISK FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Women's rights are human rights – which businesses have an obligation to respect in their operations. Given their disproportionate risk to modern slavery, businesses must work creatively and collaboratively to address the specific risks experienced by women. Many companies acknowledge that it is good business to empower women in their workforce. In fact, a 2015 study estimated that if women had the opportunity to participate in the economy on an equal basis to men, they could add as much as US $28 trillion to global annual gross domestic product by 2025.[55] This has led to greater efforts to include women on boards and in senior leadership positions, and the promotion of gender equality in the workplace. However, to specifically address the vulnerabilities of low-paid and low-skilled female workers, women must be empowered throughout supply chains.

Some examples of business initiatives aimed at reducing vulnerability to modern slavery for women are highlighted below.

Employing survivors and vulnerable groups

Leather company Parker Clay employs former victims of exploitation and trafficking in Ethiopia, delivering skills training in leather craftmanship in partnership with a local NGO, Ellilta Women at Risk. This approach seeks to break the cycle of trafficking and exploitation by providing women with education and skills that lead to job opportunities and economic independence.[56] In their words: "Our vision is to end exploitation. We do it by making the world's best bags".

Regenesys BPO is a business process outsourcing company that works with NGO partners to recruit employees from among the most vulnerable populations in the Philippines. Their ethical business model seeks to provide access to employment for individuals living in poverty or otherwise challenging backgrounds through professional development.[57]

Outland Denim aim to bring about social change in Cambodia for females who are victims, or vulnerable to sex trafficking by providing them with a sustainable career path. Seamstresses are paid a living wage and receive training in cutting, finishing and sewing. Staff are also able to participate in education programs such as budgeting, women's and infant health, computing skills, human trafficking awareness, English, and self-defence.[58]

Investing in women to help their businesses thrive

Divine Chocolate is a Fairtrade company that is co-owned by its cocoa farmers in Ghana. Over a third of these farmers are women. Divine Chocolate invests in female farmers by providing educational opportunities in literacy and numeracy and developing practical skills to help build confidence so that their businesses can thrive.[59]

Coca-Cola's 5by20 initiative aims at empowering female entrepreneurs within their global value chain by providing access to mentoring networks, financial services, and customised business skills training courses. These women-owned businesses include farmers, suppliers, distributors, retailers, and recyclers and by 2018, Coca-Cola had worked with 3.2 million women across 92 countries.[60]

Meaningful remediation

In their Child Labour Policy,[61] ASOS commit to working with local NGO partners to ensure that any children found working in their factories are enrolled in school and their families compensated. The child and their family are invited to attend training and counselling sessions and the NGO partner will continue to monitor the child's attendance at school until they reach working age.

A Kenyan tea estate that supplies to Unilever received multiple allegations of sexual harassment concerning their female workers. In response, Unilever partnered with local experts and developed a training programme, aimed especially at men, to identify sexual harassment and prevent it. More female staff were hired into the management and supervisory teams and a confidential hotline was set up specifically for female workers.[62]

Financial inclusion reduces vulnerability to slavery

Mastercard partnered with Egypt's Ministry for Social Solidarity to launch an electronic payment method that delivers social benefits directly to women's mobile phones. The electronic payments mean women do not need to travel to ministry outlets to collect cash each month, which can be dangerous, time consuming and costly. It also gives women more control over their finances, making it harder for extended family or friends to gain access to their finances and easier to make digital payments themselves.[63]

There are many obstacles for survivors of human trafficking and modern slavery in gaining access to bank accounts and other financial services. The Liechtenstein Initiative for Finance Against Slavery and Trafficking is working with financial institutions and survivor organisations on the Survivor Inclusion Initiative[64] to improve this access. Leading banks like Bank of America, Scotiabank, Barclays, Citi and HSBC, amongst others, have developed solutions that allow survivors to eliminate barriers that would normally exclude them from financial access. These initiatives include giving survivors access to saving and checking accounts (helping them overcome lack of ID documentation or proof of permanent address), in addition to providing them with training on financial literacy, including fundamentals of banking as part of their tailored onboarding experience. Additionally, banks in this group have developed trauma sensitive guides for bank employees and trained their staff on best practices for meeting with and accommodating survivors, while making sure that their privacy is a priority and that ongoing support is offered while navigating these new systems and services.

Amsterdam, Netherlands, June 2020. Two women cry together during the Remembrance in Memory of Sarah Hegazy. Sarah Hegazy, an Egyptian LGBTQIA+ activist, was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured in prison for three months after flying a rainbow flag at a concert in 2017 in Cairo, and later took her own life while in exile in Canada. Women and girls from the LGBTQIA+ community are heavily persecuted in some countries, making them vulnerable to a range of different types of exploitation. Photo credit: Romy Arroyo Fernandez/NurPhoto via Getty Images

Empower

> *"Many specific characteristics and lived experiences can result in children being more vulnerable to trafficking and sexual exploitation, including homelessness, racial discrimination, sexual and gender orientation, and poverty. As such, the fight to end child sex trafficking globally should include educating vulnerable communities and populations about trafficking from an early age."*
>
> NGO Contact

Rights-based awareness raising

Campaigns that increase awareness among women and girls about their rights and the risks they face are key to changing attitudes and gender expectations. Campaigns should focus on the risks posed by child marriage and human trafficking, but also counter broad social norms that enable gender-based violence. To incentivise behavioural change and increase impact, programs that raise awareness can be delivered in tandem with economic empowerment programs. Among the interventions contained in the Promising Practices Database to reduce child marriage, programs that involved conditional and non-conditional cash transfers, raised awareness through the involvement of community groups, provided safe spaces and life skills training for girls, and targeted girls before they reached puberty were more successful.[65]

> *"Providing new knowledge, skills and support to women and girls as well as opportunities to take on new or expanded roles as learners, leaders, change-makers, critical thinkers, and businesspersons – all while contributing to commonly agreed family and community aspirations – is key. This creates new role models for girls and women within their own and surrounding communities, changing the scripts of what girls and women 'can' or 'should' do while sharing, learning, and co-leading alongside men."*
>
> Elena Bonometti, Chief Executive Officer, Tostan

Bringing along men and boys

> *"Working with boys and men is also vital; we can already see impacts of engaging boys and young men as advocates in reducing female genital mutilation. They must refuse to partake in forced and early marriage, signalling to the wider community the importance of free choice."*
>
> Jackson Melami Muteri, Co-Founder, The Children of Maasai Educational Programme

Raising awareness on the impact of gender inequality and risks of modern slavery among women and girls alone is not sufficient to drive values change in communities. Men and boys must also be included in rights-based awareness raising, targeted in campaigns, involved in community groups, and receive training to change norms that perpetuate and justify violence against women.[66]

RECOMMENDATIONS

Reducing vulnerability to modern slavery

Conception to infancy

1. Governments should:
   a. Ensure that no child is born stateless by establishing or strengthening legal safeguards against childhood statelessness;
   b. Remove gender discrimination from nationality laws, prevent the denial, loss, or deprivation of nationality on discriminatory grounds, grant protection status to stateless migrants and facilitate their naturalisation, and ensure all infant are registered at birth to prevent statelessness.
   c. Criminalise Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C), and support programs overseas that work with communities to prevent FGM/C.
2. Civil society and faith-based organisations should conduct community education programs that focus on challenging patriarchal norms and recasting girls as valuable and valued members of society, with a focus on expecting and new parents.

Childhood

1. Governments should:
   a. Increase access to primary school education for all children and particularly girls, which may include the removal of primary school fees, conditional provision of cash or in-kind transfers, and raising awareness among families of the benefits of educating girls. These programs should focus on those most at risk of not receiving an education, such as girls in conflict zones, with disabilities, or from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
   b. Criminalise commercial sexual exploitation of children, including buying and selling children for online exploitation.
   c. Raise awareness of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, particularly in the context of online safety, among all, but particularly, vulnerable children.
2. Civil society and faith-based organisations should educate women and their families, including men and boys, about their equal responsibilities in domestic and care work to address the disproportionate burden of care work carried by young girls and women.

Adolescence

1. Governments should:
   a. Remove barriers to adolescent girls remaining in school, via campaigns that raise awareness about child marriage, human trafficking, reproductive health, contraception and safe migration.
   b. Criminalise forced marriage, and work with communities to provide access to justice for adolescent girls facing early marriage. This can include the provision of civil protection orders, or decoupling access to protection from participation in the criminal process.
2. Civil society and faith should implement programs focused on vocational and entrepreneurship training and provide leadership and female mentorship programs for adolescent girls.

Adulthood

1. Governments (and businesses) should:
   a. Improve labour protections and working conditions in informal sectors where women are over-represented, including the garment, domestic and care work, and sex industries, including the right to unionise and access medical care.
   b. Place particular focus on migrant workers by:
      i. Ensuring they are protected in their workplaces and along their migration routes – rather than attempting to prevent their exploitation by restricting mobility.
      ii. Banning recruitment agencies from charging candidates "recruitment fees," and requiring employers to pay them, to prevent debt bondage.
      iii. Increasing access to information relating to the migration experience.
   c. Prevent discrimination against women on grounds of marriage or maternity, including prohibiting dismissal on grounds of pregnancy, introducing parental leave, providing child-care facilities, and providing special protection to women during pregnancy in harmful types of work.
2. The UN and other international organisations should embed anti-slavery and anti-trafficking action within all humanitarian responses, particularly through the Global Protection Cluster.

Thessaloniki, Greece, October 2018. A pregnant Iraqi-Kurdish woman living in a Greek refugee settlement smiles. Many refugees cross the Greek-Turkish border to reach Thessaloniki, and from there, Europe, in search of safety and work. Women and girls are exposed to a wide range of vulnerabilities in humanitarian crises, including in refugee camps. Photo credit: Nicolas Economou/NurPhoto via Getty Image

Later adulthood

1. Governments should:
   a. Fund research focused on older women, particularly the types and drivers of the exploitation they may face.
   b. Prohibit practices that allow women to be inherited by a male relative of her husband and enforce these prohibitions.
   c. Work with communities, civil society and faith leaders to create avenues for reporting crimes, improve access to protection and support services, and change social norms around widow cleansing, witchcraft accusations and other harmful practices.
   d. Improve legal rights of older women, allowing them to inherit land and property and maintain control of their assets regardless of marital status.
   e. Protect vulnerable older women, such as those living in poor health and/or poverty or those who have been affected or displaced by conflict, climate change and other disasters.

APPENDIX 1 TERMINOLOGY

Modern slavery

In the context of this report, modern slavery covers a set of specific legal concepts including forced labour, debt bondage, forced marriage, slavery and slavery-like practices, and human trafficking. Although modern slavery is not defined in law, it is used as an umbrella term that focuses attention on commonalities across these legal concepts. Essentially, it refers to situations of exploitation that a person cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, deception, and/or abuse of power. For example, their passport might be taken away if they are in a foreign country, they might experience or be threatened with violence, or their family might be threatened. Different countries use different terminologies to describe modern slavery, including the term slavery itself, but also other concepts such as human trafficking, forced labour, debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, and the sale or exploitation of children. These terms are defined in various international agreements (treaties), which many countries have voluntarily signed on and agreed to. The following are the key definitions to which most governments have agreed, thereby committing themselves to prohibit these crimes through their national laws and policies.

Human trafficking

Human trafficking is defined in the UN Trafficking in Persons Protocol as involving three steps: (1) Recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of persons. (2) By means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability, or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person. (3) With the intent of exploiting that person through: prostitution of others, sexual exploitation, forced labour, slavery (or similar practices), servitude, and removal of organs. The recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring, or receipt of a child for the purpose of exploitation shall be considered "trafficking in persons" even if this does not involve threat, use of force, or coercion.

Forced labour

Forced labour is defined in the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention on Forced Labour, 1930 (No. 29) as "all work or service which is exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily". This excludes compulsory military service, normal civil obligations, penalties imposed by a court action taken in an emergency, and minor communal services.

Slavery and slavery-like practices

Slavery is defined in the 1926 Slavery Convention as the status or condition of a person over whom any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised. In a later treaty, States agreed that there are also certain "slavery-like practices": debt bondage, forced or servile marriage, sale or exploitation of children (including in armed conflict), and descent-based slavery.

Debt bondage

Debt bondage is a status or condition where one person has pledged his or her labour or service (or that of someone under his or her control) in circumstances where the fair value of that labour or service is not reasonably applied to reducing the debt or length of debt, or the length and nature of the service is not limited or defined.

Forced or servile marriage

The following are defined as practices "similar to slavery" in the 1956 Slavery Convention. Any institution or practice whereby:

- A woman, without the right to refuse, is promised or given in marriage on payment of a consideration in money or in kind to her parents, guardian, family or any other person or group; or
- The husband of a woman, his family, or his clan, has the right to transfer her to another person for value received or otherwise; or
- A woman on the death of her husband is liable to be inherited by another person.

More recent interpretations of forced marriage are broader than the practices defined in the 1956 Slavery Convention. In 2006, the United Nations Secretary-General noted that "a forced marriage is one lacking the free and valid consent of at least one of the parties". Forced marriage therefore refers to any situations in which persons, regardless of their age, have been forced to marry without their consent.

Child, early, and forced marriages are terms that are sometimes used interchangeably. Some child marriages, particularly those involving children under the age of 16 years, are considered a form of forced marriage, given that one and or/both parties have not expressed full, free, and informed consent (as noted in the joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women). It is important to note that in many countries 16 and 17-year-olds who wish to marry are legally able to do so following a judicial ruling or parental consent.

Worst forms of child labour

Drawing on the ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999 (No. 182), the term "worst forms of child labour" comprises:

a. all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;

b. the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography, or for pornographic performances;

c. the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;

d. work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

APPENDIX 2

List of countries who have ratified international conventions and enacted domestic legislation focused on the protection of women and girls.

Country	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979[1]	Optional Protocol to CEDAW, 1999[2]	Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages[3]	Forced marriage criminalised in national legislation[4]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 16 or older[5]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 18 or older[5]	ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)[6]
Afghanistan	Yes	No	No				No
Albania	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Algeria	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Angola	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Antigua and Barbuda	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Argentina	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Armenia	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Australia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Azerbaijan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Bahamas	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Bahrain	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bangladesh	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Barbados	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Belarus	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Belize	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Benin	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Bolivia, Plurinational State of	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Botswana	Yes	Yes	No	No			No
Brazil	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Brunei Darussalam	Yes	Yes	No	No			No
Bulgaria	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Burkina Faso	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Burundi	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Cambodia	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Cameroon	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Canada	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Cape Verde	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Central African Republic	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Chad	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Chile	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
China	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Colombia	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Congo	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Congo, Democratic Republic of the	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Costa Rica	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Côte d'Ivoire	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Croatia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Cuba	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Cyprus	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Denmark	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Djibouti	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Dominica	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Dominican Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Ecuador	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Egypt	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
El Salvador	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Equatorial Guinea	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Eritrea	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Estonia	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Ethiopia	Yes	No	No	No			No
Fiji	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Finland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
France	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Gabon	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Gambia	Yes	No	No	No			No
Georgia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

Country	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979[1]	Optional Protocol to CEDAW, 1999[2]	Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages[3]	Forced marriage criminalised in national legislation[4]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 16 or older[5]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 18 or older[5]	ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)[6]
Ghana	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Grenada	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Guatemala	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Guinea	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Guinea-Bissau	Yes	Yes	No	No			No
Guyana	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Haiti	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Honduras	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Hong Kong, China	Yes	No	No	No			No
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Iceland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
India	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Indonesia	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Iran, Islamic Republic of	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Iraq	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ireland	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Israel	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Italy	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Jamaica	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Japan	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Jordan	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Kazakhstan	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Kenya	Yes	No	No	No			No
Kiribati	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Korea, Democratic People's Republic of	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Korea, Republic of	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Kosovo	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Kuwait	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Kyrgyzstan	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Lao People's Democratic Republic	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Latvia	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Lebanon	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No

Country	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979[1]	Optional Protocol to CEDAW, 1999[2]	Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages[3]	Forced marriage criminalised in national legislation[4]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 16 or older[5]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 18 or older[5]	ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)[6]
Lesotho	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Liberia	Yes	No	Yes	No			No
Libya	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Liechtenstein	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Luxembourg	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Madagascar	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Malawi	Yes	No	No	No			No
Malaysia	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Maldives, Republic of	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Mali	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Malta	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Mauritania	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Mauritius	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Mexico	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Moldova, Republic of	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Mongolia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
Montenegro	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Morocco	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Mozambique	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Myanmar	Yes	No	No	No			No
Namibia	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Nauru	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Nepal	Yes	Yes	No	Yes			No
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
New Zealand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Nicaragua	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Niger	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Nigeria	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
Oman	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Pakistan	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Palau	No	No	No	No	No	No	No

Country	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), 1979[1]	Optional Protocol to CEDAW, 1999[2]	Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages[3]	Forced marriage criminalised in national legislation[4]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 16 or older[5]	Minimum legal age of marriage when all exceptions considered is 18 or older[5]	ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189)[6]
Panama	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Papua New Guinea	Yes	No	No	No			No
Paraguay	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Peru	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Philippines	Yes	Yes	Yes	No			Yes
Poland	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Portugal	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Qatar	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Romania	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Russian Federation	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Rwanda	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Saint Kitts and Nevis	Yes	Yes	No	No			No
Saint Lucia	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Samoa	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Saudi Arabia	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Senegal	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Serbia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Seychelles	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Sierra Leone	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Singapore	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No	No
Slovakia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Solomon Islands	Yes	Yes	No	No			No
Somalia	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
South Africa	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
South Sudan	Yes	Yes	No		Yes	Yes	No
Spain	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Sri Lanka	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Sudan	No	No	No	No			No
Suriname	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Swaziland	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Syrian Arab Republic	Yes	No	No				No
Taiwan	Yes	No	No	No			No
Tajikistan	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Tanzania, United Republic of	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Thailand	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Timor-Leste	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Togo	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Tonga	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Trinidad and Tobago	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
Tunisia	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Turkey	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes	No	No
Turkmenistan	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Tuvalu	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No
Uganda	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ukraine	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
United Arab Emirates	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
United Kingdom	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
United States	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Uruguay	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes
Uzbekistan	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Vanuatu	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No	No
Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Viet Nam	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Yemen	Yes	No	No		No	No	No
Zambia	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Zimbabwe	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

1. Data from: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-8&chapter=4&lang=en
2. Data from: https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-8-b&chapter=4&clang=_en
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Notes:

- All data current as of 31 August 2020.
- [a] While Hong Kong is not a member state of the UN, China, upon resuming the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong, notified the Secretary-General that the Convention with the reservation made by China will also apply to the Hong Kong special Administrative Region.

ENDNOTES

Executive summary

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Chapter 1

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Chapter 2

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Chapter 4

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Chapter 6

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