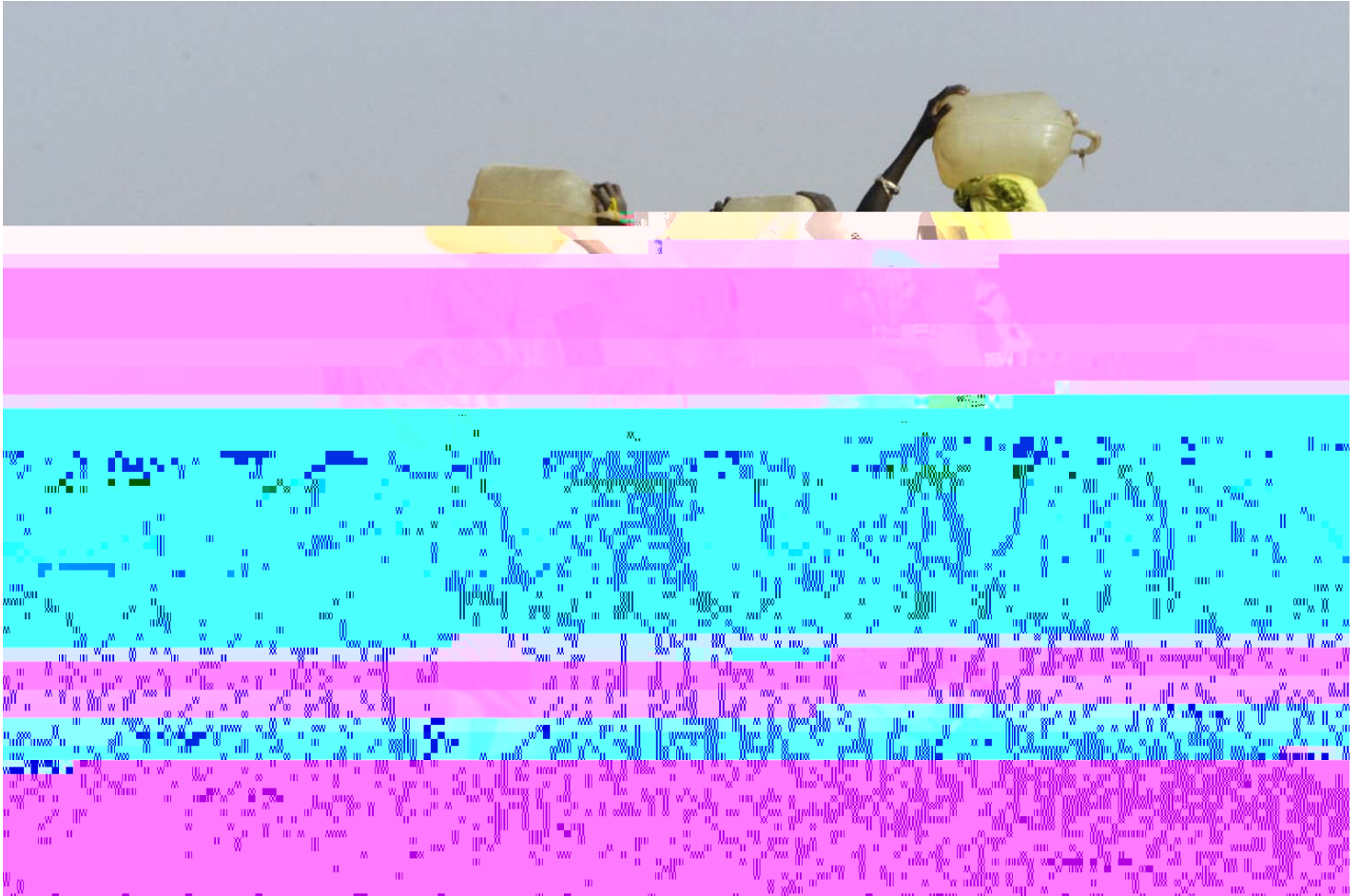


**United Nations**  
**Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW)**  
**in collaboration with UNICEF**  
**Expert Group Meeting**  
**Elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence**  
**against the girl child**  
**UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre**  
**Florence, Italy, 25-28 September 2006**

*Violence and discrimination*  
*Voices of young people: Girls about girls*

Prepared by  
**UNICEF**

# Violence and Discrimination Voices of Young People: Girls about Girls



**The Expert Group Meeting on the Elimination of all Forms of  
Discrimination and Violence against the Girl Child**

**Florence, 25-28 September 2006**

## Introduction

Violence against girls and women is pervasive. The recent studies by the UN Secretary General on violence against women and violence against children have revealed alarming levels of gender-based violence across the world. In the household, at school, in the workplace or the community, girls and women experience physical, sexual and psychosocial violence on a regular basis.

Eliminating violence and discrimination against girls is a critical development challenge. While studies and analyses raise key themes and produce important insights, formulating recommendations requires understanding the impact of violence from the perspective of young people, girls in particular.

Over the years, the participation of young people in development debates has struck a cord among UN agencies, international organizations, and development practitioners. Children's participation can be instrumental in improving a programme's effectiveness, while also empowering young people to take actions that will improve their lives.<sup>1</sup> UNICEF is convinced that, like other initiatives affecting young people, the elimination of violence and discrimination against the girl child can only be achieved if young people are made partners in the process. For this reason, their voices must not just be heard but also be listened to; their perceptions and ideas must become part of decision-making process.

Although young people are absent from the Expert's Group Meeting (EGM) on eliminating discrimination and violence of the girl child, UNICEF is committed to including their voices in another way. Drawing from multiple sources, this paper presents the voices of girls [and boys] on how violence and discrimination affect their lives. The paper goes even farther by presenting young

people's ideas about how to end discrimination and violence against the girl child. Many of these voices are drawn from *Voices of Youth (VOY)*, UNICEF's website dedicated to the promotion of youth rights ([www.unicef.org/voy](http://www.unicef.org/voy)).<sup>2</sup> Other voices come from additional sources, primarily documents which capture the stories of young people involved in particular projects or other activities that address key issues related to violence and discrimination against girls.

This briefing is not meant to be an analytic or technical paper or to advocate for specific recommendations. Its aim is to share with you the perspective and opinions of children and young people on the issues of violence and discrimination against girls to help enrich our work here.

Four main conceptual issues were identified to frame the EGM's discussion:

- § Protection
- § Vulnerable situations
- § Empowerment
- § Institutional arrangements

The following sections present young people's ideas on these issues, primarily the first three. In some cases, their thoughts and views may go beyond the confines of these terms but are included because their relevance to the broader discussion of the task at hand.

## Discrimination

Young people see that girls are treated differently, and that this discrimination on the basis of gender restricts girls' access to education, health and other services.

Some, like one 22-year-old female youth from

*feticide, genital mutilation, domestic abuse, incest, sexual exploitation, non-accessibility of primary education and child labor. . .”*

Others see discrimination against girls in the day-to-day choices made by families. As one 20-year-old female youth from the Republic of Korea describes, *“[i]n a number of countries, girls are given less food than boy. Girls may also be given poorer quality food than their brothers. And because girls may receive less medical care than boys, girl’s undernutrition may go undetected, leading to serious health problems. . .”*

As a 15-year-old Turkish girl points out, such choices are made by adults who do not fully appreciate girls’ potential: *“I never ever understand why boys and girls are not equal to each other. In rural areas elders think that girls are born to give birth and to marry and for cleaning the house.*

*Providing midday meals, employment and free education to children is being discussed at a variety of levels. But for whom? For those boys who work as chaiwallas along roadsides, or those who work in the carpet industry? [And what about the] girls who work as maids in Indian households?"*

## Protection

Young people see that girls need to be better protected from the violence they face in schools as well as the sexual, physical and emotional abuse in their homes and communities. The lack of safety and support in communities, within families and by governments for girls suffering violations of their rights to protection increases their vulnerability to violence.

A 16-year-old girl from India describes how violence against girls has become the norm: *"[v]iolence against children, especially girls, has crossed all limits. Every day in almost every part of India a girl is raped in public transport, or one is molested at malls & market places in front of people who remain silent and do nothing. Even the police constables abuse and insult the victims and their families.*

*People feel that a girl is meant to be used - either as a doormat, a maid, a birth-giving machine or as a source of physical pleasure. Something concrete seriously needs to be done to change the current scenario because now a girl does not feel safe even in her own house, let alone the streets."*

Not even schools are safe spaces for girls, according to one 21-year-old female youth from Thailand: *"It is in school where Thai girls are seduced by local Thai boys, who have sex with them, then get them pregnant. Once pregnant, the girl will be forced to drop out of school, and [no one does] anything... The thousands of girls who get pregnant at such an early age ... will be stuck with a baby, no job, and no father to help out. So what will they do?"*

One young girl in Latin America described how teachers commit violence against girls:

*"The teachers bring things for the adolescent girls and tell them lies, they say that they are going to eat at home and take them to their houses where they can abuse them, or rather, abuse them sexually and they can be traumatized."* A group of indigenous girls from Latin America said that teachers would lock adolescent girls in the bathroom and try to abuse them sexually, threatening them with lower grades if they refused.

Who do many young people see as responsible for protecting girls? Primarily families but also governments, schools and the community.<sup>3</sup>

Young people also recognize other forms of violence against girls which stem from harmful traditional practices. For instance, girls are married without any say and even violently "abducted" into marriage in some settings (see Panel on this page). They may undergo female genital mutilation/cutting without any choice or understanding of its potential impact on their livem, loout as2tTw[(do manst gi580

return her, but she would not go because she

*communities on the dangers of continuing with cultural rites that promote the spread of the pandemic.”*

A 20-year-old female youth from Zimbabwe feels outrage at the spread of HIV among girls, whose risk increases with poverty: *“The issue of HIV and AIDS is of great concern in most third world countries like Zimbabwe; almost everyone including the president has been affected by the pandemic . . . What worries me most is that the worst affected are young girls. . . Older men take advantage of their weak economic position. Older men should leave younger girls alone!! They are not virus dumps!! If they really want to help, they can pay school fees, buy clothing, buy food, etc., without asking for any sexual favors in return!”*

Duma Marivate, 9-year-old girl  
in “Too Poor for Safety”, UNICEF, 2001

Girls who live away from their families working as domestic workers or even working on the street are particularly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. One 18-year-old girl working as a nanny in Ethiopia recalls being raped by her employer: *“His wife was out for a traditional funeral. . . He got me, and threw me on the bed. When my stomach got bigger and bigger, they kicked me out, and I ended up on the street.”*

Both girls and boys recognize that discrimination and violence against girls increases their risk of becoming HIV-positive. Harmful traditional practices and entrenched gender norms are seen as contributing to the spread of the pandemic. As one 21-year-old male youth from Malawi says, *“There are many factors that accelerate the spread of the pandemic amongst the youths in Malawi. These include traditional or cultural practices such as chokolo [wife inheritance], fisi [the practice of a man coming to sexually initiate a young girl after her first menstruation], kulowa kufa [cleansing rituals] and kuchotsa fumbi [an initiation ceremony that may include unprotected inter-generational sex], just to mention a few.”* To change this, he says *“the best way to protect girls from being infected with HIV/AIDS is to first civic educate local*

So what do young people see as a way to counter girls’ vulnerability to the spread of HIV/AIDS? Information and education about HIV directed at adolescent girls is cited by one 21-year-old female youth from India: *“Adolescent girls from poor families should be*

*to educate our people about AIDS. In societies where it is considered taboo to talk about AIDS we can team up with other organizations at work. This might sound difficult, and I know it is, but the motto is, 'never give up.'*"

Situations of conflict and war make girls, adolescent girls in particular, especially vulnerable to being sexually assaulted, raped, recruited into armed forces, trafficked, or being infected with HIV/AIDS in the context of conflict. A 19-year-old girl from northern Uganda expresses her own harsh experience with war, *"a soldier came well-armed at the door calling 'Everybody out!' Then they picked [me]. Being new in the field [I] refused, but the second night they said 'Either you give in or death.' I still tried to refuse. There the man got serious and knifed me on the head. I became helpless and started bleeding terribly, and that was how I got involved into sex at the age of 14, because death was near."*

Many girls have been victims of sexual violence in times of war and conflict. One such story is told by a girl from the Democratic Republic of Congo in the Panel opposite. But even girls as well as boys are coerced into combat and supporting services for armed groups, they are often overlooked by demobilization and reintegration programs and therefore do not always receive the type of support (material or emotional) that boys may receive. However, as former boy soldiers reported in the Congo, 30-40 per cent of military camps are made up of girls.<sup>4</sup> Girls are often the most in need to receive support when they return home since many may have become pregnant or had children while with armed groups, and may face rejection as from their families and communities. Furthermore, even when not directly involved in fighting forces, conflict situations also contribute to girls' vulnerability by thrusting them into roles such as primary caregivers to younger siblings, and heads of households. The economic dislocation and destitution that orphaning or separation from parents may bring can even force them into prostitution.

Often overlooked, disabled children, particularly girls, are another group that is especially vulnerable to violence and discrimination. One 17-year-old girl expressed this in the following way: *"Out of all the children, disabled children [find it] especially hard to express their opinions about abuse or violence. Many of them are kept in their homes. I think abusing disabled children is one of the cruelest actions that humans can do because they are one of the weakest people."*

## Empowerment

Young people believe that greater access to education and information, essential services and opportunities to participate are critical to end violence and discrimination against girls.

## Sexual violence in conflict and war

One 17-year-old girl from the Democratic Republic of Congo describes her harsh experience with conflict that begins with six armed men breaking into her home and shooting her father in front of the entire family:







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