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International Dimensions of Discrimination and Violence against Girls: A Human Rights Perspective

[Yvonne Rafferty](#)

Abstract

In many cultures, being born female can consign the girl child to the peripheries of society where her safety is denied and her human rights are routinely violated. At each and every stage of development, girls are more likely than boys to confront a host of disadvantages associated with discrimination and violence, although the social norms and cultural rules that influence girls are most intensely felt as she struggles to develop into adulthood. At the onset of puberty, or even before, some girls are pulled out of school and forced into early marriage and high-risk pregnancy. Others become victims of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation and dowry-related violence, or are murdered in the name of honor. Countless numbers are forced into exploitative labor as a means of survival, or trafficked for commercial sexual exploitation, while discriminatory inheritance laws and practices condemn many to poverty. Addressing discrimination and violence faced by girls across the globe, and ensuring their access to the same basic opportunities as boys, is crucial to their development and to the realization of their human rights. This paper provides an overview of the international harmful traditional or cultural practices and gender-based social and cultural norms that perpetuate the lower status accorded to girls in the family, the community and society. Recommendations for social policy are presented.

Note on the Author

Yvonne Rafferty is Professor of Psychology, Pace University, N.Y. with a joint appointment in Women's and Gender Studies. Dr. Rafferty represents SPSSI (The Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues) at the United Nations and is particularly active with two committees: (1) NGO Committee on UNICEF: Working Group on Girls; and (b) NGO Committee on Child Rights. She has just completed a manuscript entitled *International Dimensions of Discrimination and Violence against Girls: A Human Rights Perspective*.

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