

The Lack of Women's Rights as Taken From Them by Their Religion, Culture and Tradition.

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## Preface

The purpose of this report is to outline the lack of women's rights as taken from them by their religion, traditions and/or culture. For thousands of years, women have been viewed as the weaker sex, inferior both mentally and physically to men (Rooke 10). As a result of this, women have been stripped of basic rights in life. All over the world today, women are still being singled out as of lesser importance than men, particularly in developing countries.

Women have been limited by their gender since ancient times. As women bear children, they are automatically viewed as caretakers in every society. Men are left to provide for the family, placing them in a position of power in the household. Women are labeled as inferior to men in many cultures. For example, all around the world women are not treated fairly in the work force with respect to wages, and position. In industrial nations, men earn fifty-seven percent more than women. In Sub-Sahara Africa men earn fifty-one percent more than women and in East Asia and Pacific areas men earn sixty-two percent more than women (Shah 1). In this report Asian, Muslim and Colombian culture are outlined, specifically on its discrimination of women. Injustices in Colombia, sex selection in Asia and abuse and isolation of women in Afghanistan, together with many more issues, leave women with no power over their lives, or even their bodies.

The lack of women's rights is terrifying in too many parts of the world. On December 10, 1948 the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This declaration covered many human rights for men and women of any race, colour, religion, language, political or any other opinion. This declaration states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and

conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.” “No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.” and “Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work” (Universal 1). This declaration also states that everyone has the right of freedom of speech, and opinion (Universal 1). All of these rights and so many more, are ignored by governments, religions, and in general men, when it comes to women.

## Summary

This report provides an overview of the lack of women's rights today in the world. It focuses on how religion, tradition and culture have carried on throughout history to limit women's rights. The three case studies within this report provide an in-depth look at specific examples of how women are treated as a lesser being than men around the world. Lydia Becker, a woman who has done remarkable things for women's rights in the past is also highlighted in this report. Who has control over these issues is reviewed by outlining the control held by government, church, tradition and men, as well as the desire for control by women. Magazine and academic articles were used to find personal accounts and view of the control by men and desire of control by women. Throughout this entire report many sources were used to find information such as encyclopedias, news articles, academic articles, women's organization's web pages, documented interviews and more.

## Background

The lack of women's rights, as taken from them by their culture, religion and traditions, has been a global issue for a very long time. Historically, religion held a greater control on our world. Religion has and still holds many restrictions for women. In the religion of Christianity, the Bible supports the equality of men and women. The church society however, was dominated by men, and women were forced into roles of obedient wives and mothers (Henderson 274). Hinduism states, "By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead, to her sons;

a woman must never be independent” (Laws 5.147-148). For Orthodox Jewish women, a primary occupation was being a wife and mother. In addition, men and women were separated during prayer because it is believed that the presence of the opposite sex could be distracting. Orthodox Judaism regards practices and activities in terms of duties and obligations, not in terms of equal rights for women (Henderson 224). In the Muslim religion, women are to be viewed as equals. However, there are some areas in the religion that interprets Islam too literally, and it is apparent that women in these situations are not treated equally. Within the Islamic tradition, a man can marry up to four women. As stated in the Qur’an,

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans  
(then)marry women of your choice two or three or four; but if ye fear that  
ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them)then only one or (a  
captive)that your right hands possess. That will be more suitable to prevent  
you from doing injustice. (Qur’an 4:3)

In Sikhism, before the revolution of the gurus, there were traditions such as purdah and suttee. Purdah is the veil usually worn by Muslim women. Suttee is the former Hindu custom whereby a widow burned herself to death on her husband’s funeral pyre (Henderson 369). Suttee proves that religion is a remarkably strong power.

The desire for women’s rights has been present since ancient times. A women’s place was in the house taking care of the children and household. Women were seen as having less intelligence than men, also generally women are more petite than men. Women were viewed, to be not as capable as men. As these assumptions were disproved by science, tradition has left women in the

same caretaking positions as before. It has only been in the last few hundred years that women have made movements to improve their social standings in society. Women all over the world have had to fight for basic rights such as, the right to have control over their body. Women have also fought for the right to an education, the right to vote, the right to work the same jobs as men, the right to receive the same pay as men and many other rights. There are still countries however, where women don't have these rights.

"We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.....The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her" (Declaration 1).

This is a portion of the Declaration of Sentiments, drafted by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Park 1). It was drawn from the format of the Declaration of Independence of 1776 (Park 1). It was declared to the world at the "women's rights convention" on the 19th and 20th of July, 1848, in Seneca Falls in upstate New York (Park 1). Here, some 300 women and men rallied in support of women's rights and contributed to the beginning of the feminist "movement" in America. This group of people gathered for and worked toward a common cause, the rights, interests, and well-being of American women, with organizations, conventions, rallies, and concrete goals and programs (Park 1).

Women all over the world have been fighting for the right to vote since the 1800s (Rooke 21). As the world changed rapidly with first the American

Revolutions, then further with the Industrial Revolution, the push for Human rights and equality grew immensely. This gave way for the atmosphere where the struggle for women's rights would excel. Some countries such as New Zealand, 1892, and Australia, 1902, allowed women to vote earlier in the movement (Ross 9). Countries, such as Switzerland, 1971, and Jordan, 1982, held on more strongly to tradition (Ross 9). All women in Canada were given the right to vote in 1920 however, mothers, sisters and wives of soldiers were given the right to vote during the First World War (Ross 9). This was a strategic move by the government in order to have conscription voted in. Emmeline Pankhurst, British suffragette, stated, "We women suffragist have the greatest mission the world has ever known. It is to free half the human race, and through that freedom to save the rest" (Ross 7). It could be debated if her statement is factually accurate, but never the less, the right to vote is still not present in some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, making it an ongoing mission with great power behind it (Smith 1). This power grows as the world moves forward and some countries are being left behind.

The right to an education is something many females around the world don't have to this day. Due to the traditional belief that women belong in the home caring for the children, household and husband, in countries such as Afghanistan, literacy levels are in the teens for women. In many countries around the world, women's literacy levels are more than 20% lower than the men (Afghanistan 1). Until the early 1900s, the women's place was in the home (Ross 5). All around the world women were expected to take care of the home life therefore, there was no need for an education. When women attended school as children, they were taught skills they would use to be a "good wife" such as

cooking and sewing (Rooke 78). By 1910 Cambridge and Oxford University had just over one thousand women as students. These women needed a teacher's permission to join the lectures. Some countries, such as Jordan, did not give women the right to a university education until as late as 1964 (Women 1). By the year 2000 still two thirds of the estimated 900 million illiterate adults in the world were women (Women 1).

The development of women's rights prospered during the Industrial Revolution, particularly during World War One, as well as World War Two. This was primarily because the men were not there to do their jobs since they were fighting overseas. In Canada, with the men gone, the farms still needed to produce and factories were needed to manufacture. The women took over these responsibilities with pleasure. Women who lived on farms continued to work their farms. The country still needed to be fed and so did the troops overseas. Many factories around the world were re-assembled to manufacture supplies for the war. In that day and age, women were not allowed to fight in the war, so working in the factories was a way to support their country in the war. Women also helped the war effort by working in field hospitals and hospitals as nurses. Women's fashion also changed. Skirts got shorter, hair got shorter, and women wore more jewelry. The past one hundred years has seen the most dramatic movement in women's rights.

### Lydia Becker

Lydia Becker was born in 1872 (Lydia 1). She was one of the leading ladies in the suffrage movement in Britain, beginning her work in the late 1860s (Lydia 1). This Manchester woman was educated at home and took great interest in the



field of science. Lydia lost her mother at an early age of around 28 years old and had to raise her younger siblings on her own (Lydia 1). Even with the hardship of raising her brothers and sisters, Lydia developed a strong interest in Botany. In 1866, her book Botany for Novices was published (Lydia 1).

In that same year, Lydia's life took on a different route when she attended a lecture on Women's suffrage (Lydia 1). It was that lecture which began Lydia on a quest for suffrage of women, as well as improving many issues faced by women. She began by writing articles for news papers and magazines. One such article was in The Contemporary Review, titled "Female suffrage" (Lydia 1). Following that article, Lydia and two other women, Emily Davies and Elizabeth Wolstenholme, created the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee (Lydia 1). This was the first organization of its kind in England (Lydia 1). Lynda Becker was involved with many campaigns throughout her life.

### Power of Control.

The role of control differs from country to country, religion to religion, region to region and so on. The lack of rights, as taken from women by their culture, tradition and religion, has many sources of power and control. In some situations, the church has the greatest power of control, and the government is fighting for control. In other situations, the government has control and religion does not overpower the law. Sometimes however, it is the extremists that have power and neither religion nor governments have control over anything. In the everyday lives of women all over the world, men seem to have the most control. Men control the household, but also the church and government. The strongest of all controlling powers is tradition.

In regions where religion is strongest, the church holds the most power. Many religions state that women should be treated equally and there are some religions where this belief is upheld. Unfortunately, there are religions that contradict this statement of equality, with stronger statements alienating women. For example, the Law of Manu states “Women must be honored and adorned by their fathers, husbands, and brothers, and brother-in-laws who desire welfare/Where women are honored, there the gods are pleased, but where they are not honored, no sacred rite yields reward” (The Law of Manu 3:56). The Law of Manu also states that women should never be independent as stated previously. In places where religion and the church have power, the government generally has no power, unless it has some sort of religious connection to the people. Government cannot have power because many religious people place their religion and its ways before any laws made by the government. One reason why the equality of women is not found in every religion is because of these traditions and religious belief. No one likes change, especially in their religion.

In a situation where the government has more power than the church, the movement for bettering women’s rights usually has more effect. One example of this is found in the United States. The U.S. population is made up of many immigrants, and therefore there is not one specific religion in which people have faith in, in this country, the strength of religion is not as strong. As a result of so many different religions, not one specific religion is ruling the people. The government is not directly influenced by religion when passing laws however, religious beliefs of the people may be considered. Women are still ruled by tradition however, in the US, many changes have been made as a result of the diversity of ethnic backgrounds.

In situations that are controlled by extremists, women have almost no hope of attaining their own rights. In many situations, extremist groups have a religious view that women are not equal, resulting in women becoming victims. Simply this is because women hold no importance in the eyes of the extremists. Around the world many feel as though women have no rights. For example, the Taliban in Afghanistan have put an extremist view on the Muslim religion resulting in women being viewed as inferior property of men. This image of women is based on the minor advancements woman have made throughout history and simply tradition.

Tradition has more power than any other factor since tradition has an unconscious component to it. Tradition has a lot to do with the way things are today, whether we recognize it or not. Changing a tradition is a very challenging task. The fact of the matter is that the restriction of women's rights, by religion and culture, is based on tradition. This means that women aren't just fighting laws, or the church or men, they are fighting what is already known, for the enforcement of the unknown. Women fighting for their rights are fighting tradition, they are fighting the past.

### Spiritual and Religious Views.

Religious views are discussed throughout this report. The religious view on women and their rights is addressed for many religions. An example of a religious view on women's rights is the Buddhist view. Buddhists are against any violence toward any living creatures, therefore the physical abuse of women is not tolerated. In the Buddhism religion, women are not seen as property. Women and men are considered equal. This is a very rare case where there are no apparent

contradictions to the equality of men and women. Furthermore, a huge reason why religion limits women's rights is because of the tradition involved with religion.

In this issue religion gets blamed for a lot of cruel acts done to women. Female genital mutilation is an illustration all over the world of this common mistake. One could say the adoption of FGM by Islam was an act of tradition, because it is not written in the Qur'an; it was "picked up" from pre-Islam times. With this one cannot say that religion has power over the practice of FGM because it is not a religious act, in any religion (Nielson 1). The government in Egypt has made FGM illegal, however; it continues. This is a perfect example of how tradition can hold power over the law. This procedure is extremely dangerous for girls, and even though it is illegal, cultural tradition keeps it going.

Female genital mutilation is said to have originated in ancient Egypt (Nielson 1). The earliest known cases of FGM were found in mummies. The theory is that the Egyptians believed in the bisexuality of the gods and according to this belief, mortals reflected this trait of the gods. Every individual possessed both a male and a female soul. The feminine soul of the man was located in the prepuce of the penis and the masculine soul of the woman was located in the clitoris. For healthy gender development, the female soul had to be excised from the man and the male soul from the woman. This made circumcision essential for boys to become men and girls to become women (History 1). In 2008, female genital mutilation was made illegal in all forms in Egypt (Bradley 1). However, it is not the laws that have to change in order to eliminate FGM, it's the state of mind of all who still believe in it as tradition. Ninety-six percent of Egyptian women ages fifteen to forty-nine who have been married were victims of FGM (Bradley 1). This

shows that FGM is still rampant throughout Egypt. Female genital mutilation is often performed under unsanitary conditions and is not performed by a proper doctor. The procedure is usually done by a midwife or a woman who specializes in the procedure from the village or a village nearby (Nielson 1). FGC incorporates a number of different surgeries which includes incising and removing the clitoral hood, removing the complete clitoris, removing the labia major, removing the labia minor, infibulations which narrow the vaginal orifice or all of the previously stated (Nielson 1). FGM is most predominant in rural areas and low-income families. The complications of FMG can be and are quite often deadly (Nielson 1). Many complications include excessive bleeding, infection, difficulty urinating and expelling menstrual bleeding, decreased ability to become pregnant and more (Nielson 1).

## Case Study. Afghanistan

Women in Afghanistan have faced turmoil and war in their country for hundreds of years. Many people around the world have blamed the Muslim religion entirely for the struggles Afghan women have faced and still face today. What many of these people do not realize is that it is not the Muslim religion that restricts women's rights so strongly. It is the extremist's interpretations of the religion, as well as traditions carried over from generations to generations that affect these women. Women make up about half of the total population in Afghanistan (approximately 48.9% of 23.6 million people) (UNIFEM 1). Unfortunately, the women are very poorly represented in many areas such as military, where less than one percent of employees in police and military services (UNIFEM 1), the work force, where in seventeen of the thirty six ministries there are less than ten percent female employees (UNIFEM 1), and the economy, where only thirty eight percent of women are economically active. The restraints on women's rights have been a strong, but confused topic all over the world. Although some believe that the Muslim religion is to blame, it is also important to consider the culture and traditions that also have a strong control over women's rights.

Whether the blame is to be on religion, traditions or the ruling power, the fact of the matter is that far too many women and girls in Afghanistan have a lifestyle that is bordering on medieval. In November 2010, UNICEF declared Afghanistan the worst country in the world to be born in (Friedman 1). This is especially true for women and girls. Education is very limited for females in Afghanistan, as only thirty percent of women have access to an education (Qazi 1)

and eighty-seven percent of Afghan women are illiterate (Qazi 1). Any girls who do have the option to attend school are often threatened to the point where they fear for their lives and therefore will not take the risk. In some cases, the girls who have the courage to go to school, face terrible acts of violence. In 2008, acid was thrown on a group of fifteen year old girls going to school (Tytler 1). It was expected that after the Taliban lost power, women and girls would gain back their rights, such as the right to an education. This did not happen. In 2004, the equal rights legislation was created by the American-backed government of Hamid Karzai. This was supposed to improve the lives of women in Afghanistan, however, this has not been effectively enforced (Tytler 1). This example of the lack of power by the government, extremist actions and the power of tradition shows that there are many forces to blame in Afghanistan for the treatment of women.

Education is not the only right restriction for women in Afghanistan. Women in Afghanistan lack very basic rights. Abuse is another issue Afghan women face and even though gender abuse is illegal, it is a widespread epidemic that is not punished. Women who try to flee, for their safety, are often captured and returned to their husbands where they face further abuse, such as being beaten publicly as punishment (AFGHANISTAN 1). Another issue faced by Shia women in Afghanistan is the Shiite Personal Status Act, which has restricted these women's rights immensely. This act denies women the right to refuse their husband sex, therefore legalizing marital rape (National 1). This law also forbids women to leave their houses, unaccompanied by their husband (Shiko 1). In the case of a divorce, women are forbidden the opportunity to have custody over the

children (Shiko 1). This act is taking a step back in the movement of women's rights, a step in the direction of the previous Taliban era.

### Background

The dire issue of women's rights did not appear so predominantly in Afghanistan until the Taliban took rule in 1996 (Hanford 1). Before the Taliban took control, seventy percent of school teachers, fifty percent of civilians in the government workforce, sixty percent of teachers at Kabul University, fifty percent of student at Kabul University and forty percent of doctors in Kabul were women (Hanford 1). This all changed in 1996, when women lost all of their basic rights. Between 1996 and 2001, the Taliban gained power and placed little or no importance on the lives of women. Women were forbidden from being seen or heard, they were forced to wear full-body covering, called Burqas, and they had their windows panted. Women who accidentally showed as much as an ankle were beaten to death (Hanford 1). Women could not speak to any man she was not closely related to, nor could she speak in public, ever (Hanford 1). Women were not even allowed out of their homes unless they were accompanied by their husband or a close male relative (Hanford 1). Women accused of infidelity or prostitution were hung in public or stoned to death (Hanford 1). During this time most women doctors were not allowed to continue to work and male doctors were prohibited from treating women (Hanford 1). Therefore, many women died from untreated infections, illnesses and diseases. When the Taliban lost control in 2001, improvements were promised, but in many regions these improvements were minimal and in some regions there were no improvements made at all (Walsh 1).

### Expert



Martyred Meena was born on February 27, 1956, in Kabul Afghanistan. Throughout her life, she was a social activist who devoted her time to organizing and educating women. In 1977 she founded the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan. This organization was meant to give a voice to the deprived and silenced women of Afghanistan. Its objective was to involve an increasing number of Afghan women in social and political activities aimed at acquiring women's human rights and contributing to the struggle for the establishment of a government based on democratic and secular values in Afghanistan (RAWA 1). RAWA today believes that freedom and democracy cannot be adopted; it is the duty of the people of a country to fight and achieve these values (RAWA 1). In 1979 Meena also organized a campaign against the Russian forces. Another voice she gave to the women of Afghanistan was in a magazine called "Women's Message" in 1981. This magazine was a voice for the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan, and "exposed the criminal nature of fundamentalist groups" (Martyred 1). In 1981 Meena was invited by the French Government to represent the Afghan resistance movement at the French Socialist Party. Meena was assassinated on February 4<sup>th</sup>, 1987 by agents of KHAD, Afghanistan's branch of KGB, in Quetta, Pakistan.

### Power.

Afghanistan has a republic government and Hamid Karzai is the president. In most cases, the government holds very little power in regards to the issue of the lack of women's rights and any power that the government does hold only appears to restrict women's rights. It is the men of this country that hold the power, husbands, fathers, brothers and so on. Illegal militia groups also hold power in many communities, it was reported that two women ran away from

their homes to flee the violence they faced from their husbands, only to be captured in a neighbouring village and returned to their husbands, by a militia group. Authorities appear hesitant to punish the leader of this group, Fazul Ahad, for fear that his arrest might cause more instability (AFGHANISTAN 1).

### Religion

The Islam religion is not entirely to blame for the restriction and lack of women's rights in Afghanistan. Extremist's altered interpretations on the rules of the Islam religion have caused many problems for women. Assumptions have been made about the religion and it has been labeled with misunderstanding and ill-informed opinions. For example the rule known that prevents girls from attending school is not part of the in Islam religion. This religion encourages all Muslims to seek knowledge from birth until death, from every source possible (Maqsood 1). The burqa is also not an Islamic requirement. The Qur'an requires both men and women to behave and dress modestly, and the veiling of women was only referred to once, stating that the Prophet's wives should be behind a hijab when his male guests conversed with them (Maqsood 1). The extremist have taken this fact to mean that all women must have their heads covered at all times. One very popular misunderstanding within the Islamic religion is that men do not own their wives, he is not her master. In fact, Muslim women have only one master, God (Maqsood 1). Polygamy is seen as a charitable act. It is ideally for women who have been widowed by war and need support for their family. In these cases a man would take this woman and all of her children into his home (Maqsood 1). Once again, the extremists have interpreted this to mean that all men may have many wives, for non-charitable reasons. The Qur'an addresses all Muslims and for the most part does not differentiate, except for the fact of the

women being the child bearer and women do not have to fast during their menstruation nor when they are pregnant (Maqsood 1). All of these examples are not common knowledge in our society therefore, Islam often holds the most blame for the mistreatment of women.

Case study. India.

The female children in India are seen as burdens to many families. Traditionally daughters have been expensive because of the dowry the family must pay at time of marriage (Ramachandran 1). The definition of a dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash and or material by the bride's family to the bridegroom's family, along with the giving away of the bride in Indian marriage (Dowry 1). This practice was made illegal in 1961; however, it still happens, predominantly in rural areas, to this day (Dowry 1). Dowry deaths are a serious issue in India (Dowry 1). If the bride's dowry is not satisfactory with the groom's family, the wife will be murdered, often by being burned, by the groom's family (Dowry 1). In India forty percent of women are married before the legal age of eighteen (Hitchcock 1). Also, women are not seen as valuable workers on farms. With these outlooks on daughters sons have been favored in India for some time.

With boys being preferred over girls a serious issue raging in India today is sex selection. Advances in technology are making gender selection much easier for families. In 1996, a law was established to make prenatal testing for sex selection illegal (Ramachandran 1). This has not had much impact upon the continuously growing industry of gender selection, except for increasing the cost for prenatal services (Ramachandran 1). The preference for sons has been an ever going issue for girls and it is a mutual view for both rich and poor in India (Ridge 2). This has led to a female to male ratio of 933 to 1000, in India, according to the

latest census, from 2001 (Ridge 1). Women's lives in India are not of great significant value, rather they are seen as great financial burdens.

### Background

Women were seen as slaves to their husbands and their lives were surrounded with hard labor (Lalit 1). Women had to work in the fields then they had to cook and clean as well. Women were denied education and were often not allowed out of the house, without their husband's permission (Lalit 1). Women were also expected to have dowry. The tradition of a dowry has been carried on from ancient times, however before dowries were oats or materials similar were used (Dowry 1).

Sex selection has been out of control in India since the 1970s when doctors began misusing amniocentesis (analysis of uterine fluid) (Ramachandran 1). In 1985, a survey in Bombay revealed that ninety percent of amniocentesis centers were involved in sex selection, resulting in nearly ninety-six percent of female fetuses aborted. In 2007, the Indian government started up a number of orphanages specifically for unwanted girls (Hunter 1). This is a new approach to try to decrease the number of girls who are born then often neglected or abandoned by their families, resulting in many deaths.

### Power

The government holds very little power of the issues facing women in India. There are laws in India to protect women's rights, however, many do not follow these laws and are not punished (Lalit 1). In the case of dowries, the government holds no power (Dowry 1). The groom's family holds the power. The groom's family asks for the dowry and if the dowry is not high enough, then the bride is

often killed (Dowry 1). A bride cannot refuse to pay the dowry because that would be a disgrace to her family (Dowry 1).

The Government holds very little power in the matter of sex selection. There is a law prohibiting doctors from revealing the gender of a fetus for sex selection, yet doctors are making a business of sex selection ultrasounds and abortions alone (Nita 1). Also, for doctors who have been prosecuted, very few are ever been convicted. All doctors who perform ultrasounds for gender selection do so underground and often work out of mobile clinics (Nita 1). This shows that the doctors have the most power in the matter, of sex selection. They are making money from these dealings and are not being stopped from doing so. Families also have power of this issue. Having a great disinterest in having daughters is increasing the demand for these types of doctors.

In the end, the greatest power in this issue is tradition. The traditional dowry a girl's family has to pay the husband and his family for marrying her is a large amount and this is a reason behind the preference of sons. Also, girls are seen as burdensome and require more care and protection (Ridge 1). In rural areas, it is the sons who inherit the land and sons are preferred for working (Ridge 1). All of these beliefs are brought on from centuries and centuries of women being seen as "inferior" to men.

## Case Study. Kenya

In Kenya, women's rights are not known to exist in many situations. Atrocities rage from the family level all the way up to the level of the government. Many laws are in place to improve the lives of women in Kenya, however they are meaningless because they are not followed or enforced by the government (Kenya 1). Many issues faced by women do not even have laws against to them (Kenya 1). One such issue is that there are no laws specified to eliminate violence against women (Kenya 1). Women of all ages have no rights to their own bodies. An example of this is the fact that sexual acts with a minor (younger than 14 years old), and spousal rape are not seen as criminal acts (Kenya 1). There is no minimum age for Muslim or customary marriages, which accounts for the vast majority of marriages in the country (Kenya 1). Forced marriages are also customary in Kenya, even though it is against the law (Kenya 1).

One very serious issue Kenyan women face is the violence and corruption surrounded and associated with the HIV and AIDS viruses. AIDS runs rampant and Kenya women are often blamed for the spreading of the disease (Kenya 1). However, the reality of the situation is that women are the victims. When a husband dies it is not uncommon for his brother or close relative to "inherit" his wife (Discrimination 1). This puts women at a huge risk for become infected because they do not have the right to deny their new husband sex (Discrimination 1). There are no laws against sexual violence on minors and women, which also increases the risk of infection (Discrimination 1). Another fear Kenyan woman

face is the fear of violence when their partner discovers they may be infected (Discrimination 1). According to a survey, conducted by the Kenyan Population Council in 2001, more than half of the women surveyed, who knew they had acquired HIV, said they had not disclosed their HIV status to their partners because they feared the reaction of their partner (Discrimination 1). One of the most disturbing acts upon women by men is the misconception that sex with a virgin will cleanse them (Discrimination 1). This increases the infection of young girls and the government has no laws prohibiting such atrocities (Kenya 1).

### Background

Women have always been seen as second-class citizens in Kenya (Kenya 1). Women did 80 percent of the physical labour in the fields, was expected to take care of the children, the household, cook, keep a vegetable garden, take the food to the market to sell and fetch water every day (Kenya 1). Even though women did the majority of the work, men were, and still are, in control of everything involving the family and his wife (Kenya 1). Women were not even allowed to own property (Kenya 1). Kenyan women still have many restrictions they faced years ago limiting them today. Even today, spousal rape is not considered a crime (Kenya 1). Women have met very little improvements over time.

### Expert.

Today, some advancements are being made to improve the lives of women in Kenya. Women self-help groups are being organized all around Kenya. GROOTS Kenya is a network of these self-help groups and community organizations and was formed to provide a platform for grassroots women's groups (GROOTS 1). The network's objective is to "ensure that grassroots women are masters of their own destiny through their direct participation in decision making processes"



(GROOTS 1). Their vision is “a society in which women and their communities participate effectively in their own development” (GROOTS 1). Their strategies for achieving their mission and have women participate is through peer learning exchanges, amplifying the voices of grassroots communities, capacity-building, advocacy and outreach and networking (GROOTS 1).

### Role of Control

Kenya has a republic government, with Mwai Kibaki as the president (Kenya 1). However, the government does not hold the power in Kenya. Tradition, religion and men have the power (Kenya 1). Many issues faced in Kenya by women, that are addressed and prohibited by the government, are held in place by tradition, religion and men. Traditions such as FMG are illegal, however, still are practiced with no consequences for such actions (Kenya 1). Religion also has a great deal of power in Kenyan society. Much of the population of Kenya is Islamic, which means that women have restrictions imposed on them by the Muslim religion (Kenya 1). Men also hold a great deal of power over women. This is shown by the inability for women to deny their husbands sex (Discrimination 1). Women have no power over their lives, not even over their own bodies.

Traditions still hold a very strong power over the rule of the government. This is made clear by the fact that female genital mutilation is still being continued today, even though the practice is illegal (Kenya 1). The practice of FGM is seen to increase the chance of marriage, prevent promiscuity and promote easy child birth (Ogodo 1). In addition, if mothers do not circumcise their daughters they are seen as irresponsible and immoral (Ogodo 1). If girls are not circumcised, it can bring great disgrace upon their families. Families are not

willing to risk the disgrace, so they break the law. Unfortunately, they are not faced with any punishment, allowing for this tradition to continue, without hindrance (Ogodo 1).

Religion also has a great deal of power over the society. Islam is a very prominent religion in Kenya, with 10 percent of all people (Kenya 1). In the case of religion, it does not overpower the government with its injustices, the government makes them legal (Kenya 1). An example of this is the law stating that the minimum age for marriage is 16, except for Muslim or customary marriages, which have no minimum ages (Kenya 1). Another example of the power of religion is the allowance of forced marriages, by law, in regards to Muslim and customary marriages (Kenya 1).

It is men who have the greatest power over women in Kenya. This is because they control everything, restricting women, government and religion. Men's power over women is shown in her everyday life. It is the women who do the majority of the family work, yet the men have power over her rights, even the most basic rights, such as her own body (Kenya 1). Women in Kenya do not have the right, by law, to deny their husband sex (Kenya 1). The immense lack of laws protecting women in Kenya is a tragedy. There being no law restricting sexual acts with minors (younger than 14) is an example of these tragedies (Kenya 1).

All of these horrors faced by women and girls in Kenya, on a daily basis show that women's rights are not considered or valued. Solutions need to be found and acted upon in order to help these people. One solution that could be considered is better education for all women and girls. This would help them become less dependent and give them the opportunity to make their own decisions. Organizations such as GOOTS could help a great deal with this solution

because it has connections with many communities all across Kenya. With giving women the chance to become self reliant this would take away some of the power men hold.

Canada.

In Canada, the issue of women's rights is not a predominant issue. Canada is a leader for the protection of women's rights, as well as the promotion of women's rights. This is not saying that Canada is perfect in any means, women's wages, for example, are still less than men. Women earn eighty-three cents for every dollar men earn (Anderson 1). Still this is higher than the rest of the world, where women earn seventy three cents for every dollar men earn (Anderson 1). However, it is clear that in a country, where women argue the national anthem is a restraint against the movement of women's rights, there is no large restraint at all.

One reason why women's rights are not as prominent of an issue in Canada as it is for the rest of the world is because Canadians for instance have addressed this issue rather than ignore the issue. The laws granting women equality in Canada are well enforced. For instance, if a man was to beat his wife, he would be punished and not ignored, which is what happens in many parts of the world. Another reason why the issue of women's rights is not as prominent in Canada as it is in other parts of the world is because women have many opportunities for support. In Canada there are women's help phone lines, women's support organization, women's shelters and women's clubs, all designed for various groups of women, facing different issues. For example, there are women's shelters all over Canada, often one in each community (Ontario 1). Women's centres are community based organizations dedicated to providing services and programs for women of all ages (Ontario 1). Women and Children shelters are also spread across Canada open to all women. The shelters offer comfort,

security, support, counselling, and encouragement, as women attempt to make life altering decisions for themselves and their children (Barrie 1).

“Because I am a Girl” is a Canadian campaign. It is a not for profit organization with includes all religions, cultures and races. Their goal is to engage one million girls to raise money for projects such as, clean water and food security, health care and education, and livelihood initiatives, like microfinance. They state that “Investing in girls is key to eliminating poverty and creating a better world” (Because 1).

Canadian troops are in Afghanistan today, defending and developing the reconstitution of Afghanistan and to improve the status of women. The Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) is the federal organization most actively engaged in addressing women’s issues in Afghanistan. CIDA funds several education and literacy projects, as well as projects that advocate for women’s rights. CIDA is investing \$14.5 million dollars in a project that aims to build four thousand community-based schools and to train nine thousand teachers. At least four thousand of these teachers will be women (Morgan 1). CIDA also funds the International Centre for Human Rights and Democratic Development (Rights and Democracy), which promotes and advocates for women’s rights in Afghanistan (Morgan 1).

## Possible solutions

There are many possible solutions for solving the world wide dilemma of the restrictions on women's rights. The lack of rights, as taken from women by their religion, could be solved by eliminating all extremists in all religions. For example, the extremist in the Muslim religion have imposed a great majority of the restrictions on Muslim women. As stated previously in this report, the restraint and denial of education for women is one example of these restrictions. If all of the extremist were eliminated, the rights of women would go back to the way the Qur'an had suggested them to be and the women would not be so controlled. Women would not be killed for showing a piece of skin. This is a very farfetched solution, but it is a way to truly help get rid of the vision of inferiority and unimportance upon women in their religion. This solution also has no room for the extremists to relocate. They would have to be eliminated completely. This is why this solution has not happened yet. Extremist take and keep their power by using violence and fear. This makes the situation, in any case, limited to progress for the reason that fear keeps rebellion down and violence cuts rebellion back.

Another possible solution to eliminate restrictions on women's rights is using the influence of the media to bring to the attention of the world all the issues women face. It is clear, in this day and age, that media has a huge influence on our society. If the media was to encourage the elimination of issues women face, such as the atrocity of female genital mutilation in the world, people would first of all be forced to realize that this is happening in our world and secondly to do something about it. This would put pressure on the government of countries where this tragedy takes place, to enforce the law more strictly and perhaps with

a longer more severe sentence to drive the message home to the rest of the country. This solution would have to be on a wide spread measure. All sources of media would have to be equally dedicated to the mission. This would be one of the least violent solutions possible. It would involve over powering the forces that restrict women, with the support of the public, but it would not eliminate them. This would leave opportunity for these forces to retake power. Therefore, the solution would be continuous publication and support of eradicating all restrictions on women from the media.

Education of women is a necessity if restrictions on women are to be eliminated. In countries where women's rights are most restricted, education is almost always restricted. Without an education, it is extremely difficult to support oneself, let alone children. By not allowing women to obtain an education, men are forcing women to be dependent. It prohibits women from any kind of progress in their lives. It forces women to live their lives entirely relying on men, from depending on their father to provide for them as a child, to depending on a husband to provide for them as an adult. Education would help break this vicious cycle. In order for the opportunity of an education, for many women, it is a dangerous risk (Handford 1). These women need outside help in getting the government to organize schooling in safe and secure areas. For the solution of educating women to work, and to help all women, education has to be available for all women. This means, education would have to be free to women and it has to be offered everywhere in the world. However, the most important factor for this solution to work is that women have to feel safe in their decision of going to school and cannot fear for their lives because of it. This solution would be the most peaceful solution, since there is no violence required at any stage. No one

needs to be forced in or out of power and land does not need to be taken. The entire process can be established through talking and papers, no guns. Financial support would be required, however with government and private funding, the money could be found. There are no restrictions that could not be beaten to have this solution work.



## Conclusion.

The lack of women's right as taken from them by their religion, traditions and culture is an issue that is not just theirs to fight, it is every ones. This is mainly because many women who need assistance the most cannot fight for themselves. Just because one is lucky enough to be born in a country where you do not have to fear for your life strictly because of your gender, does not mean the issue is not your own. In order to solve issues and restrictions faced by women and girls all over the world, first all of the issues need to be made public and everyone needs to recognize that something must be done. Secondly and most importantly the women need to be educated so that they know what their options are, also to give them support in choosing an option. The men who lay such strong and horrible limitations on women are not the majority. The reason why they have gone unchallenged is because the rest of the world has ignored their monstrosities. As much as they should not have the right to degrade women, the world should not have the right to ignore it.

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