

Committee: Special Conference on the preservation of cultural heritage and art

Issue: The issue of harmful cultural practices towards women and girls

Student Officer: Xenia Mitsi

Position: Deputy President

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Xenia Mitsi, and I am a High-School student at Arsakeio of Ioannina. I have the honor to serve as a Deputy President in the SPECON committee of this year's conference and I am very excited to meet you and work with you. As we all know, MUN conferences have many benefits, as they offer an opportunity to bolster a great deal of skills. These include leadership abilities, public speaking, and problem-solving skills, as well as insight into political and social issues that are highly relevant to this day and age, much like our topic. Harmful cultural practices against women and girls, has been a widely discussed issue for years now, though it remains controversial. With this Study Guide, I am hoping to assist you into gaining basic understanding and information on the mentioned subject. However, it should not be your only source, as you are expected to conduct further research, in order to compose your position papers and resolutions, as well as to have the ability to express your arguments regarding your countries' policies. Do not hesitate to contact me via e-mail (xeniamitsi5@gmail.com), if you have any questions or you need help with your papers.

I am looking forward to meeting you all and to hearing your arguments, solutions, and constructive ideas towards tackling this issue. Let us hope for an insightful and effective debate.

Kindest Regards,

Xenia Mitsi

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

Harmful cultural practices are being committed regularly around the world, even in the “modern” day and age, especially towards women and girls. The cultures which reinforce these actions, seem to hold females in low regard, as their traditions are means towards exploiting, harming, and objectifying them. UNICEF reports, that about 650 million girls and women around the world today have been married as minors, and over 200 million have undergone female genital mutilation (FGM).

These practices have numerous negative effects on women. According to the WHO, FGM has no health benefits and can only cause serious health problems and even death, as the operations are usually conducted under poor conditions. Furthermore, just like child marriage and honour-based abuse, several psychological issues may arise and heavily affect the women involved in these practices.

No matter which culture or region of the world conducts these actions, the ability of girls to determine their future and their right to equality and freedom of choice is taken away from them. Moreover, their health and well-being are at risk. Since all those problems arise from the same issue (of harmful cultural practices), there should be solutions so as to tackle it and offer the liberty of choice to females who are victims of it.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Cultural Practices

Objects, events, activities, social groupings, and language that participants use, produce, and reproduce in the context of making meaning in everyday life. (IGI Global)

Gender Equality

Equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. (European Institute for Gender Equality)

Honour Killing

Honor killing, most often, the murder of a woman or girl by male family members. The killers justify their actions by claiming that the victim has brought dishonor upon the family name or prestige. (Britannica)

FGM

Female genital mutilation (FGM) involves the partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons. The practice has no health benefits for girls and women. (WHO)

Child Marriage

Child marriage is any marriage where at least one of the parties is under 18 years of age. (OHCHR)

Female Infanticide

Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of female babies. (Indian Journal of Applied Research)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The issue of harmful traditional practices against women is particularly difficult to solve, as these customs are embedded in the culture of certain countries which is something challenging to alter. Although every culture must be respected and valued, extreme traditions that harm innocent humans must not be tolerated. Every human - in this case women and girls - must be given the right to freedom and to make their own choices regarding their bodies and futures, which is sometimes prevented in certain countries due to several harmful traditions.

Practices Which Violate Human Rights

FGM

Female Genital Mutilation is a common practice among several countries. However, as stated by the WHO, it does not have any health benefits and on the contrary, can cause serious harm to women and girls who are subjected to it. It is mostly carried out on girls until they reach the age of 15 and in 30 nations of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia where FGM is prevalent, more than 200 million girls and women have been mutilated. Female genital mutilation is practiced for a variety of reasons that vary by location and involve a combination of sociocultural factors within families and communities. First, FGM is

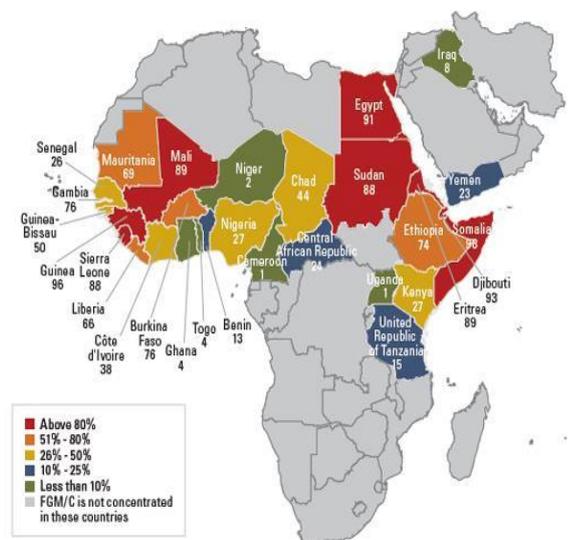


Figure 1: Prevalence of FMG (WHO)

frequently viewed as a vital element of raising a girl, as well as a means of preparing her for adulthood and marriage. Secondly, FGM is linked to cultural standards of femininity and modesty, such as the belief that girls are clean and attractive after getting “unclean”, “unfeminine”, or “male” body parts removed. As a result, FGM is considered a cultural tradition in most societies where it is practiced, which is sometimes offered as an explanation for its continued practice. In Africa, 26 of the 29 countries where female genital mutilation (FGM) is still practiced have legislation outlawing it. The punishments for FGM in African countries with legislation against it range from monetary fines to a minimum of three months in prison to life in prison. Others are still having difficulty enforcing laws. In Mali, there is presently no legislation prohibiting female genital mutilation. Mali, Liberia, and Sierra Leone are the only West African countries without legislation against female genital mutilation.

Child Marriage

Child marriage is another common tradition, which mostly occurs in Africa and South Asia and even though international agreements forbid it, and it is illegal in many nations, the practice remains. Child marriage is majorly about control mechanisms, ensuring that young girls stay pure and chaste, and molding them into submissive wives, according to various societies' opinions regarding child marriage. In many traditional approaches, a man pays the girl's family a bride price in order to marry her. As a girl grows older in many regions of Africa, the payment, whether in cash, livestock, or other valuables, reduces. It is typical for a married girl to leave her parents before she enters puberty to be with her husband. Many marriages are based on poverty, with parents requiring the bride price of a daughter in order to feed, clothe, educate, and house the rest of the family. Child marriage is seen differently in different countries. Some make child marriage illegal, others prohibit or invalidate marriage before the legal minimum age, and still others

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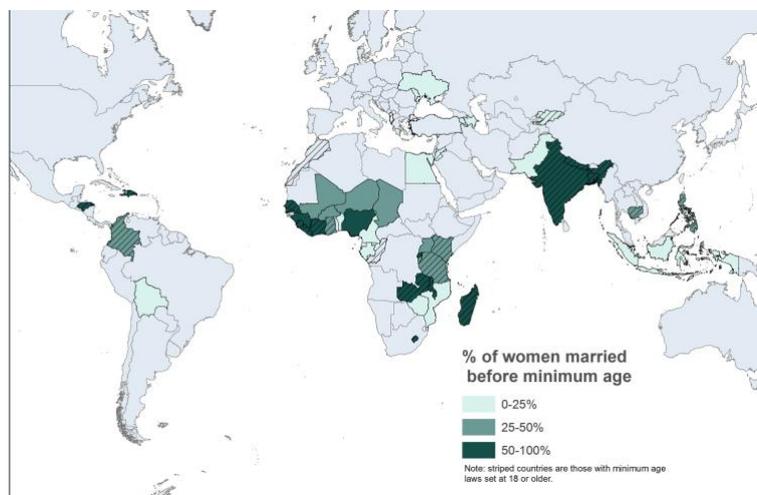


Figure 2: Percentage of women married before minimum age. (Centre for Global Development)

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just set a minimum age for marriage without criminalizing or prohibiting it. Many countries do not have a specific rule prohibiting child marriage; instead, it is governed by other laws such as civil law, criminal law, and family law. There are also local customs and religious rules that vary per country. Individual chiefs and community or traditional tribunals can interpret these at the subnational level because they are typically peculiar to a locality.

Honor-Based Abuse

Honor-based abuse includes any kind of violence against girls and women justified by the claim that they have brought dishonor. It includes, physical abuse, psychological pressure, abandonment and even honor-killing. People who agree with the act of honor-abuse claim that there are certain causes for it, such as extramarital affairs, homosexuality and disagreements with family members or rebellion against social norms. It is a type of child abuse and a major violation of human rights for the young victims. It differs from other forms of violence and abuse in that it is frequently carried out with the consent and/or collusion of family and/or community members. HBV is more likely to be committed in 'high-context' settings, those where the family or group takes precedence over the individual. The victims may suffer from a lack of self-confidence and self-reliance as a result of this, as well as significant separation from their family.

Female Infanticide

Female infanticide is the deliberate killing of girl babies. It is also described as gender-selective killing or "gendercide". (Similar words like 'gynocide' and 'femicide' are used to describe the killing of females of any age.) Female infanticide is more common than male infanticide, and in some countries, particularly India and China, and it is likely to have serious consequences on the balance of the sexes in the population. The reasons behind it are almost always cultural, rather than directly religious beliefs.

The Effects of Harmful Cultural Practices on Women and Girls

Physical Health

FGM has countless effects on women's physical health. Some of the injuries FGM can cause include excessive bleeding (hemorrhage), genital tissue swelling, urinary problems, but also long-term complications such as menstrual problems and increased risk of childbirth



Figure 3: Photo of Meeri Koutaniemi of Dorite, 14, working to end FGM in Ethiopia. (UNICEF)

complications. In some cases, it can also result in death. Furthermore, honor-based abuse also causes bodily harm, including bruises, wounds, broken bones, missing teeth and hair, miscarriage, stillbirth, and other pregnancy issues when in the form of physical violence. Moreover, when long term, physical abuse may cause arthritis, hypertension (high blood pressure), heart disease and chronic pain syndromes.

Mental Health

When it comes to the mental health of the women involved in these harmful cultural practices, there are various issues caused. Among them, certain short-term effects and negative feelings, such as confusion, fear, hopelessness, and shame. The long-term and more serious effects consist of insomnia, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, and PTSD, which are all serious psychological disorders that require treatment. In most countries where these harmful traditions occur, there is almost no way for women and girls to deal with the mental effects they cause, as they are unable to openly discuss them and ask for help by professionals. However, in order for these serious psychological and mental issues to be tackled, professional aid is necessary.

Education

Another factor that harmful traditional practices affect is the education of the girls and women who are victims to it. Through child marriage, an end is put to the girls' academic progress, though sometimes they are not even able to even begin attending school in the first place. 32.6 million girls in Sub-Saharan Africa are out of school in primary and lower secondary school. When girls in upper secondary school

are included, the total rises to 52 million. This phenomenon causes girls to be uneducated, restricts them from gaining knowledge regarding everyday life and stops them from discovering or practicing any of their talents. Furthermore, because girls are not educated, they are unable to stand up for themselves, fight for themselves in the long term and support their rights and freedoms, and thus the issue of misogyny in their cultures is perpetuated.

Imbalanced Sex Ratio

Female infanticide has a tremendous effect on the sex ratio, which is becoming increasingly imbalanced. In countries such as India, the child sex ratio varies from state to state. Because there are more males than girls, it is getting increasingly difficult for girls for marriage to be found, which is becoming one of the leading causes of female trafficking in India. Moreover, this condition is further depriving girls of social opportunities. When it comes to societal consequences, female infanticide forces women (by their own families) to have a son as a kid, and they are subjected to mental, physical, and emotional suffering, as well as desertion, if they decline to have a sex determination test. As a result, female infanticide contributes to women's social mistreatment. The gender imbalance generated by infanticide demonstrates patriarchal standards of society even more clearly, and mothers, fearful of discrimination and ill-treatment for their daughters, accept the idea of prenatal sex determination. Rape, abduction, trafficking, and sexual exploitation are only a few of the major crimes committed against women.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, child marriage, constrained confinement in the home and "honour" killings are very common amongst millions of women and girls. Numerous Afghans, including religious authority, fortify these hurtful traditions, by invoking their interpretation of Islam. However, these practices are not supported by Afghan and international law and abuse the rights of women. Despite the Taliban's reputation for human rights breaches, a number of human rights infractions continue to occur around the country. Almost all of women's rights were taken away during the Taliban's control. In late March 2009, Afghan President Hamid Karzai ratified a "Shia Family Law" that condones apparent spousal rape (in Article 132), underage marriage, and imposes purdah on married Afghan women, which has been widely criticized globally. The law could not be implemented despite the government's repeated vows to execute UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (on women, peace, and security). Only

two women were among the 47 government and international representatives that attended the Kabul peace negotiations in June 2017.

Egypt

In 2013, it was reported that out of 29 countries across the Middle East and Africa, Egypt had the highest number of girls and women who have been subjects to FGM. The legislative framework has evolved over time. A ministerial directive prohibiting the practice and making it criminal by fine and imprisonment was issued in 1959. Later ministerial decrees permitted some forms while prohibiting others. Doctors were also not allowed to conduct the surgery in government-run hospitals. Non-medical practitioners were not allowed to practice any sort of medicine. Furthermore, child marriage is uncontrollable in Egypt, as it has the 13th highest incident rate globally.

Ethiopia

Harmful cultural practices towards women and girls in Ethiopia are very common. These include, but are not limited to: FGM, early marriage and forced marriage. In Ethiopia, the prevalence of FGM in women aged 15–49 is 65.2%. 'Crimes Committed Against Life, Person, and Health via Harmful Traditional Practices,' according to Articles 561–570 of Chapter III of the Criminal Code, make it illegal to conduct FGM in Ethiopia, yet they do not give a comprehensive definition of the practice.

India

Violence against women, including harmful practices against women, has been identified as "one of the critical societal mechanisms by which women are driven into a subservient position relative to men" in terms of equality rights. Women are victims of violence as a result of their unequal status; their vulnerability to violence is worsened by their dependency and patriarchal beliefs. Article 14 of the Indian Constitution gives women equality before the law and equal protection under the law, while Article 15 forbids discrimination based on sex. Despite these assurances, women's rights in India remain unequal.

Iraq

In Iraq, violence against women is one of the most significant obstacles to their empowerment and growth. The continuation of conflict, the expansion of terrorism and extremism, and the legal entrenchment of tribal norms have all contributed to high levels of physical and sexual violence, as well as the emergence of destructive phenomena and practices based on discrimination and inequality. These variables prevent cases of violence from being reported and perpetrators from being

prosecuted when they are combined with and strengthened by social and cultural standards. Despite the fact that the Iraqi Constitution of 2005 outlaws all forms of violence and abuse in the home and society, this continues to be the case. Moreover, the practice of female genital mutilation continues in Iraq's Kurdistan region a year after law prohibition took effect, owing to the Kurdistan Regional Government's failure to put the law into action.

Sudan

Regardless of educational level, female genital mutilation (FGM) is universally tolerated in Sudan. According to the Sudan Demographic and Health Survey conducted in 1989-90, the treatment was approved by a large majority of both men and women. The less hazardous "Sunna" kind was favored by 73 percent of men, while infibulation was favored by 18 percent. An intermediate type was favored by 4% of respondents.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi legislation does not stipulate a minimum marriage age, and Saudi media outlets continue to report on child marriages on a regular basis, including tales of females as young as eight years old. Furthermore, domestic violence affects a large number of Saudi women. The Ministry of Labor and Social Development reported 8,016 occurrences of physical and psychological abuse in the year ended October 13, 2015, the majority of which included violence between spouses. Domestic abuse was made illegal in Saudi Arabia in 2013, however activists have criticized the lack of enforcement of the ban.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1948	The General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
1964	There was the International Convention on Marriage Consent, Minimum Marriage Age, and Marriage Registration.
16 December 1966	The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which is a multilateral treaty, was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

June 1981	The African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) was adopted.
January 1995	136 states ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.
1993	At the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights" was established.
1993	The General Assembly adopted the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.
1997	Regional WHO Plan for the Acceleration of the Elimination of FGM.
31 October 2000	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325), on women, peace, and security, was adopted unanimously by the UN Security Council
2005	The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa went into effect.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

International Convention on Marriage Consent, Minimum Marriage Age, and Marriage Registration

The United Nations' Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Marriage Registration is a convention on marriage standards that was agreed upon. The Commission on the Status of Women authored the treaty, which was opened for signature and ratification on November 7, 1962, by General Assembly Resolution 1763 A (XVII). It came into effect on December 9, 1964, as a result of a letter exchange. The Convention has been signed by 16 countries, and it now has 55 signatories. Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as the foundation for the Convention. The Convention stresses the voluntary character of weddings and requires the parties to enact legislation establishing a minimum marriage age and ensuring marriage registration.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) is a multilateral treaty that was accepted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966, through Resolution 2200A (XXI), and went into effect on January 3, 1976. It commits its parties to strive toward the grant of economic, social, and cultural rights (ESCR) to Non-Self-Governing and Trust Territories and individuals, including labor rights and the right to health, education, and an appropriate quality of living.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

The UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325) on women, peace, and security on October 31, 2000, after recalling resolutions 1261 (1999), 1265 (1999), 1296 (2000), and 1314 (1999). (2000). Armed conflict has a disproportionate and distinctive impact on women and girls, according to the resolution. It advocates for a gender-based approach to conflict resolution, repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration, and post-war reconstruction to consider the unique needs of women and girls.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence against Women

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1979. It was established on September 3, 1981, as a worldwide bill of rights for women, and has been approved by 189 countries. The Convention is one of the most important international human rights accords in terms of bringing the female half of humankind to the forefront of human rights concerns. The Convention's ethos is anchored in the United Nations' goals: to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, and in men and women having equal rights.

Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (commonly abbreviated as the CRC or UNCRC) is an international human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. Resolutions against child marriage and slavery are included.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

UNFPA-UNICEF Joint Programme on Eliminating Female Genital Mutilation

UNICEF and UNFPA, work to eliminate female genital mutilation by intervening in 17 countries: Burkina Faso, Djibouti, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan, Somalia, Uganda and

Yemen. The Joint Programme, which is currently in Phase III, works with communities to change social norms from the inside out, while also collaborating with governments to promote laws prohibiting the practice and ensure that girls have access to high-quality child protection and sexual and reproductive health services.

Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe

The Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe, a powerful, comprehensive international mechanism to combat violence against women by various measures, including law, has been signed by all EU Member States (though not all have ratified it). The Convention addresses the issue of harmful practices by rejecting honor as an acceptable reason for violence against women and the legality of forced marriages, as well as pushing for the criminalization of female genital mutilation (FGM).

Despite the steps taken to tackle the issue of harmful traditions against women, it continues to exist and is widespread among various nations. In order to combat it, much more worldwide initiatives are required.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Education

It is imperative for this widespread issue to be eliminated, as well as prevented from occurring again in the future and there are several measures that must be taken in order for this to be achieved. First and foremost, as we all know, education is one of the most crucial factors when dealing with problems as such. It is vital to educate populations and especially women about the risks of harmful practices by raising awareness through campaigns and cultural activities (radio, newspaper, TV, or brochures, public talks and community activities for communities which lack access to media) which emphasize not only the dangers of these traditions and the human rights of women, but also what they can do to seek help.

National and local organizations must also be encouraged to start community-based actions targeted at eradicating harmful traditional practices by providing technical assistance and mobilizing resources. Many countries have national committees to eradicate harmful cultural practices, and their expertise should be used.

Preventing FGM when migrating

Furthermore, with the migration of several groups of people, these customs are at risk of becoming more widespread. To prevent that, it must be discouraged for refugees to be informed about the criminalization of the practice in resettlement

nations before they are resettled. If instructed before departure, mass female genital mutilation surgeries can be carried out in the asylum nation before resettlement takes place. When refugees are resettled in countries with laws prohibiting female genital mutilation, the authorities of the receiving country are notified.

Legislation

In addition, states must enact legislation prohibiting these activities, including suitable punishment, in addition to other legal and policy measures, such as social measures. Attention to the core reasons of harmful practices, community empowerment at all levels, and defensive measures for women and children who have been victims of harmful practices must all be included in these efforts.

As previously mentioned, women must be able to make choices freely regarding themselves and their futures and must not be held back by culture and tradition. While all cultures must be respected, their inhuman customs must be criticized and even eliminated when harmful towards a target group. After all, we must all accept that times change, and culture must progress accordingly too.

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