What are the consequences of gender inequality?

To understand gender we have to look beyond gender norms and examine roles and stereotypes as a wide set of practices that reflect the gendered nature of power. This includes looking at the economic and political spheres of our social life.

Unchallenged cultures of male dominance lead to the subordination and even exclusion of many women, and also many men who do not conform to ‘hegemonic’ forms of masculinity. This effectively sidelines more than half of the world’s talent, experience and knowledge, leaving our societies operating at under 50 per cent capacity.

Looking specifically at women: there is a growing and compelling body of evidence which shows that women not only bear the brunt of poverty but, that women's empowerment is a central precondition for its elimination.

Read more: Pathways of Women’s Empowerment [1]. Learn more here about efforts to promote gender equality in Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia and West Africa

Poverty elimination can only be achieved by addressing the disproportionate burden of poverty, lack of access to education and health services, and lack of productive opportunities borne by women. Gender inequality represents a huge loss of human potential, with costs for men as well as for women. Gender equality is therefore integral to democracy, development and a human rights system to which all people are entitled.

Read more: Interactions Empowerment of Women and Girls [2]. Resources and information about unpaid care work, activism against gender violence, health in urban areas and women’s economic empowerment

Rigid norms related to gender and power differentials between groups of men, mean that many men are vulnerable to violence (the leading cause of death for young men worldwide) and are less likely to seek health services when needed as compared to women. Programme interventions at the local level have shown tremendous success in engaging men and boys in promoting their own health and well-being and that of women and girls.

Want to learn about ways that men and boys are working to challenge patriarchy, and create new avenues for gender equality? There are many great organisations working on these issues. A few include:

Read more: Sonke Gender Justice [3]

Read more: Engendering Men: Evidence on Routes to Gender Equality (EMERGE) [4]

Violence

Violence, privilege, injustice and impunity are intimately linked. Violent behaviour is generally perceived to be an integral part of male behaviour and as a normal feature of being a man. Violence is, in fact, culturally ‘masculinised.’ Gender-based
violence is related to systems and feelings of power – the oppression of women and certain groups of men. Gender inequality perpetuates a culture of violence. When women are viewed as something less, as persons subjected to male authority, men feel less hesitation in using and degrading women for their own satisfaction as their satisfaction is deemed to be of greater importance.

Unfortunately, culturally dominant norms of masculinity that encourage men to use violence limit not only men’s but also women’s and girls’ choices, safety and behaviour.

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