



General Assembly

Distr.: General
20 September 2021

English only

Human Rights Council

Forty-eighth session

13 September–1 October 2021

Agenda item 3

**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,
political, economic, social and cultural rights,
including the right to development**

Written statement* submitted by Indian Council of Education, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[20 August 2021]

* Issued as received, in the language(s) of submission only.



Bridging the gender gap and safe-guarding and promoting Women's health

To celebrate good health and longevity is among the foundations of the human existence. As healthy individuals are more energetic, vibrant, productive, have a more positive outlook and translate this positivity on the social infrastructure, they also tend to have a positive and significant effect on economic growth. As an economy improves, so does the health of its citizens but what is even more obvious is the fact that it's opposite is also true. Yes, improving the health of the citizens of a country directly results in economic growth and development. This becomes possible because of the major chunk of individuals being more productive in conducting efficient and effective activities in the workforce.

Hence, the healthier the citizens of a country, the more effective the workforce and the more developed the economy. And being healthy does not just mean to keep away from diseases. It actually means a complete state of physical mental and social well-being. In simpler words, avoiding or alleviating illness and developing and maintaining physical and mental abilities both are an essential part of human welfare on individual and social levels.

A good health for women is equally important to that of men. In the world we live in, women and men are empowered through various programs that acknowledge different norms for women and man and allow access to resources and contribution in different forms. These transformative programs take into account specific needs of both the genders with an aim to promote health equity and efficiency. But to be more specific, women have unique health issues and are of particular concern because some of the health issues that affect both men and women can, in some cases, affect women differently.

Because of biological and gender differences, being born a man for a woman has significant impacts on health. Even though several achievements have been made in women's health, there still exist several disadvantages due to the discrimination rooted in socio cultural factors. From their birth till the last they breathe women and girls face increased vulnerability to several health issues. The unequal power relationships, societal norms that lower the chances of education and paid employment opportunities to women, physical sexual and emotional violence and women's reproductive roles are some of the socio-cultural factors that keep women and girls away from getting benefited with quality health services and attaining the the best possible level of healthcare. Another important barrier that attributes to a higher burden on women and girls' health is poverty, for instance, use of unsafe cooking fuels and feeding practices (malnutrition).

What women, throughout their lives, go through are gender-based differences in life expectancy, health behaviours and healthy life years, mortality and morbidity risks, majorly due to the socially constructed norms for men and women. No denying the fact that women live longer than men but one thing that goes unnoticed is they spend fewer years in good health. The gender pay and pension gaps, gender role conflicts, total workload and unpaid work adversely affect the long-term health of women and their well-being by not only exposing them to health hazards but also making it difficult for them to take time off for healthcare. On the other hand, lack of autonomy given to women leads to lack of decision-making power which further denies them access to independent income. This makes them even more vulnerable to the health issues. And these health issues in several cases are seen to be driven out of early marriages which exposes them to the complications of early and excessive childbearing.

Gender disparity in health is manifested in traditional medical practices that put women's illnesses down to behavioural lapses by women, little or no access to modern medical services including maternal care family planning and safe abortion services. The societal norms coupled with poverty pose greatest hardships to women. Today, two to three times more women than men experience mental health problems like depression and anxiety. The inequality at work coupled with the gender pay gap puts women at higher risks of physical and mental illness.

In line with the efforts to promote the human rights of women and girls and weed out gender inequality is the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a global policy framework identified as a tool to ensure gender equality across all domains, for all individuals. Today,

25 years later, more women and girls enjoy access to free and quality education, awareness, action against violence and quality healthcare. However, there still persist gender discrimination and inequalities in the field of health. There also are some new and emerging threats to women's health with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic impacting their health and social and economic well-being in a long run.

Addressing the gender inequalities concerning the women's health is the need of the hour. There needs to be an examination of gender inequalities sustained by political cultural social and economic factors, including harmful norms and practices like sexual and gender-based violence and differential access to healthcare. There needs to be laws and policies that perpetuate any business against women and girls. To safeguard and promote the health of women throughout their life, health opportunities and risks need to be examined across the life course as there are various health hazards present at every stage of a woman's lives. There is a need to adopt comprehensive approaches to address health risks and concerns of women, girls, adolescents and adult women. Empowering women and protecting and promoting their rights, considering them the agents of change, is essential for the development of the economies, for which the men of this society should also contribute to. Improvements in any sector related to gender cannot be realized without involving men as partners. There needs to be an active participation of men to change harmful patriarchal norms and foster equitable relationships between men and women. Thus, for a sustained growth and development of a nation or an economy, every individual, irrespective of gender, class or creed, needs to be health and healthy doesn't mean just to be keeping away from the diseases but the ability to develop to their potential during their entire lives.

Health sector has an important role in preventing and addressing the gender-based violence against women and girls. And in its commitment to drive change for gender equality and upliftment and empowerment of women and girls in all domains, the World Health Organization (WHO) at the Generation Equality Forum marked the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Women. The world body committed to increase the number of countries with clinical protocols focusing on survivor-centric health response for women and girls, to working with like-minded partners to augment evidence-based prevention of violence against women and girls, among others. In the modern-day world, there persist issues concerning women and gender disparity, which make it all the way more important to involve efforts to improve the status of women in the society. They too are humans, they too have needs. They are the drivers of change, they too need to be given chances to present the world onstage.
