

## HER VOICE: exposing the Plight of Females and girls

An Issues paper from the Irish report highlights the need to address harmful practices that affect individuals particularly females due to societal expectations and norms surrounding their gender #GenderBasedViolence. Gender based violence refers to any act that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual and psychological harm or suffering including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty. It encompasses sexual violence, domestic violence, early marriages just to mention but a few.

A summary statistic cited is that one out of every three women aged fifteen to forty-nine have experienced physical violence and about one out of four women have experienced sexual violence since the age of fifteen in Zimbabwe. Violence against girls and women is not inevitable it is preventable and the message can be amplified by incorporating it into school curriculums, engaging with communities, and promoting it within society as a whole. By raising awareness and fostering understanding, we can work to eliminate gender based violence and its devastating consequences such as psychological trauma and the mistreatment of pregnant teens, even early child marriages. Its crucial to address these issues openly and constructively to create a safer and more supportive environment leaving no one behind.

Social and economic fallouts from gender based violence such as early child marriages can lead to loss of livelihood and increased gender inequalities in the long run. Young girls are deprived from their universal right to enjoy their security, freedom, and the right to equal opportunity and personal growth. Most child marriages cases go unreported as a result of the fact that most people treat these issues as private family affairs and communities have neglected these issues. As we all know children are solely dependent on adults for survival hence these young girls fear reporting their abusers because they are economically dependent on them, not only that but they are actually unaware of their property rights. After being forced into marriage at such a young age they have limited or no power at all to negotiate safe sex even though they are fully aware that their sexual partner is involved in other marital affairs. Apparently cultural and social norms have pronounced silence and submissiveness to women and girls in sexual relations, the girl child has no right whatsoever to speak against her husband because she's too young to tell her elderly husband what to do, but have you considered the fact that she was married off at a young age against her will, as if that is not enough, she is subjected to violence for speaking up. Let us call for an end to early child marriages.

Furthermore young girls fall pregnant at a very young age some willingly and some unwillingly. Either way we should invest further in prevention of teenage pregnancy. Teenage mothers often face significant challenges when it comes to completing their education. This can limit their opportunities for future career advancement and this results in long term economic implications for the both the mother and her child. Teen pregnancies can impact the emotional and psychological well-being of the mother as they may face stigma, isolation and lack of support from peers and community, family members can even reach the extent of disowning the pregnant

teen and the teen is left homeless. Children born to teen mothers may also face higher risk of experiencing abuse and neglect as well as poor cognitive and emotional development. Investing in the prevention of teen pregnancy can help young people to pursue their education, build a strong foundation for their future and be prepared well financially, emotionally for the responsibilities of parenthood. Sex education is very important and ensuring access to reproductive healthcare services, so as to mitigate the potential negative effects of teen pregnancies.

Women and girls should have access to education and opportunities that allow economic empowerment. According to research when women have independent salary they are less prone to abuse. Girls and women should be exposed to sustainable development and actions to end gender based violence should be accelerated, by doing so significant contributions can be made toward attaining the United Nation's Sustainable Development goals just to mention a few **gender quality, good health and wellbeing, and quality education.**

To conclude, these issues require a comprehensive approach that involves changing societal norms, strengthening laws, policies and providing support services for survivors.

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