



DECEMBER 2006 NO. 25

GIRLS: PROTECTED AND EMPOWERED

The upcoming *State of the World's Children Report 2007*, which UNICEF will launch on 11 December on UNICEF's 60th anniversary, explores the impact that violence and discrimination against women has on children. This issue of "What Young People Are Saying" complements the report by discussing young people's experiences with and perceptions of violence and discrimination against girls, and their ideas for making sure every girl's right to be protected and to develop and grow to their greatest potential is fulfilled.

OVERVIEW

Violence against girls and women is everywhere. The recent studies conducted as part of the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children reveal alarming levels of gender-based violence across the world. In the household, at school, in the workplace or in the community, girls and women experience physical, sexual and psychosocial violence on a regular basis. This must stop.

Eliminating violence and discrimination against girls is not only critical to ensuring every person's rights are respected, but is also key to the development of every country and community – and to achieving the Millennium Development Goals. But before we can say how to do this, we must better understand the impact of violence from the perspective of young people, and in particular girls.



AUSTRALIA

"Exploitation is focused on more girls than boys because we are seen in some countries as not having much value or status compared to them. In fact we have AS MUCH status and should be treated right." *girl, 18*

Like other initiatives affecting young people, the elimination of violence

and discrimination against girls can only be achieved if children and young people are made partners in the process. For this reason, their voices must not just be heard but also be listened to; their perceptions and ideas must become part of the decision-making process – as is their right.

Gender: a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a female or male, girl or boy by society.

Young people on *Voices of Youth* recognize gender-based discrimination in their own communities and express their frustration at the injustice of unfair treatment. They call for a particular focus on situations where girls are especially vulnerable, and demonstrate their understanding of the different factors that lead to vulnerability. VOY members want governments and families to partner with them to protect and empower girls. They ask that every duty-bearer, including young people themselves, hold themselves accountable and take action – together.

For more information contact: Amber Oliver, Coordinator, voy@unicef.org

NEW ON VOY

EXPLORE

[Voices of Youth is now in Arabic!](#)

[Visit the new module on the State of the World's Children Report 2007](#) when it launches 11 December

SPEAK OUT

Tell government leaders how you think violence and discrimination against girls can be stopped. [Inform this year's Commission on the Status of Women.](#)

TAKE ACTION

Want to help other young people be change makers? [Submit your profile to Voices of Youth today!](#)

FROM OUR ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

"Women should read and get educated so they would be able to fight for their rights. We, women, live in a male-dominated society which has prevented women from doing almost anything and leaving us to take care of kids and cook and do the house work. If we were given the ability to search for more why shouldn't we?" *girl, 17, Bulgaria*

[Join the discussions!](#)

COMING SOON ON VOY

A new module on violence

UPCOMING ISSUE
CHILD LABOUR

GIRLS: PROTECTED AND EMPOWERED

ISSUES IN CONTEXT

December 2006

Click on a link to read what young people are saying about protecting and empowering girls

[Discrimination](#) [Vulnerable situations](#) [Protection](#) [Empowerment](#) [Conclusion](#)

DISCRIMINATION

VOY members recognize that girls are often discriminated against solely because they are girls. Girls are kept out of school, hit, ignored, forced to marry and have sex, sold as slaves, made to fight in wars, and asked to sit silently as decisions are made for them – about them.



UGANDA

"Especially in developing countries, girls have less access to education or no education at all. It all goes back to gender relations where the role of women is considered unproductive and not appreciated by society." *girl, >21*

This discrimination is sometimes justified by tradition or a perception that girls benefit from such practices.



UNITED STATES

"Females are 'riskier'- their honor is one that must be safe-guarded constantly, and that becomes a burden (many families are less likely to send females out to seek education and work simply because of the nature of society). As a result, girls end up becoming a financial burden." *gender undisclosed, 17*

One VOY member observes that gender discrimination exists everywhere – in poor and wealthy communities and countries and in the home and school.



INDIA

"A poor person who can afford to educate only one of his children will send his son to the school, but in a wealthy, educated family, where the parents boast of treating their children equally, they do exhibit difference in their children, but in a very quiet, subtle manner! They may give the best of education and facilities to

both their kids, but when it comes to grooming them to handle the family business, it is always the son!" *girl, 19*

When girls are discriminated against in all settings, the home, school and community, they sometimes come to believe they are lesser than boys and deserve this unfair treatment.



BANGLADESH

"In Bangladesh [girls] always think that they are weaker than a boy. This mentality came from their mother, because girls always stay with her mother. In school you can see that there are two lines, one for boys and one for girls. In class room one side for girls and other side for boys." *boy, >21*



TURKEY

"Even today, girls are considered of lower status compared with boys. In rural areas elders think that girls are born to give birth, marry and clean the house. Many girls are helping their mothers at home instead of going to school. They are considered stupid and useless!" *girl, 16*

Sexual violence and the prevailing attitudes surrounding this issue are a prominent theme on *Voices of Youth*. Many young people speak out against the practice of blaming women and girls instead of those who perpetrate the violence.



BAHRAIN

"When a girl is raped why does the society treat her so bad? She did not invite rape." *girl, 16*

One young person on VOY is frustrated by the different expectations of men and women that leads to women being blamed for falling victim to sexual violence.



FRANCE

"'Moral' character matters a lot, I guess. But maybe only in the case of a woman. So a girl who is date raped can also be shown to have a bad character. Result? Rapist acquitted. So very biased." *girl, 18*

One VOY member is concerned that discrimination dehumanizes girls, turning into objects that can be sold, marketed or bartered.



UNITED STATES

"Why since ancient times, girls, and women were not treated like people? Now, in rural areas, girls cannot get education. How come in such a developed world there is such an unacceptable issue going on? Why are girls discriminated against?" *girl, 16*

Young people on *Voices of Youth* recognize the need to stop discrimination against girls in all settings, including in the "hidden spaces" behind closed doors if all girls are to have equal opportunities to grow and develop.

VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Girls in especially vulnerable situations such as those living on the streets, those who are orphaned or made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS or those who are exposed to conflict and war are particularly at risk from discrimination and violence. VOY members see helping these girls as a priority.

Early and forced marriages make girls particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination.



INDIA

"[The husband] acknowledges her least of all as an individual with her own rights. The girl is advised by the elders to cooperate and adjust and not to raise any objections about the husband or his family. She is even sent to her marital home with the threat that she would not be welcome back home under any circumstances and she has now become

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the 'property' of the husband's family!" *girl, >21*

Young people wish to draw attention to the vulnerability of girls in communities where a blind-eye is turned to sexual violence.



AUSTRALIA

"A culture that says that men are free to rape women who aren't dressed to their standards also creates a culture that fails to address the real reason why rape occurs - violence and need to dominate - and will in fact promote and intensify these beliefs and fails to address other victims of rape." *girl, 20*

One member identifies girls living in poverty as especially vulnerable, particularly to the possibility of child labor and to abuse and exploitation.



CANADA

"Beaucoup de fillettes devront accomplir des travaux domestiques pour payer la dette de leur parent ou pour seulement aider à sa famille. Elles peuvent subir de la violence physique, psychologique ou même sexuelle."

[Translation: "Many little girls may have to do domestic work to pay their parents' debts or just to help their families. They can be subjected to physical or psychological or even sexual abuse." *girl, 13*]

Another member focuses on trafficking and sexual exploitation as circumstances that are particularly threatening to girl children.



ROMANIA

"Ninas son secuestradas en sucias habitaciones y obligadas a prostituirse, y ellas no tienen ninguna culpa, son raptadas de la calle."

[Translation: "Girls are held in dirty rooms and forced to prostitute themselves, it's not their fault, they are kidnapped from the street." *girl, 18*]

One young person points out the vulnerability of girls in the midst of conflict, and the

potentially devastating consequences of growing up in the midst of war.



GHANA

"Children do not start wars. Yet they are most vulnerable to its deadly effects. Millions of innocent children die in conflicts, which is of no fault of theirs - just because some greedy leaders rob powers with the barrel of the gun. During such times everything freezes, no education, no potable drinking water, no electricity, food shortages, no shelter, and most of all some girls are raped leading to HIV/ AIDS." *girl, 17*

PROTECTION

VOY members see that girls need to be better protected from the sexual, physical and emotional abuse and violence they face in all settings: home, school and community. They call on their parents and governments in particular to take responsibility for protecting girls and giving them the skills and strength to protect and value themselves. .



INDIA

"Parents must bring up their girls as an asset not a liability. They must give her equal rights, opportunities and privileges as the male child. A girl who has been a victim must be supported and needs tremendous care, rehabilitation and counseling." *girl, 17*



CAMEROON

"As a girl I want to tell all parents to stop giving their daughters to strangers they don't even know." *girl, 12*

Other VOY members focus on the government's responsibility to protect girls from discrimination.



AUSTRALIA

"Some countries believe that girls should not go to school, they should just get married and have kids. I am here to say that everyone deserves to go to school. ...some families can only afford to send the boys to school and the girls stay home to cook and clean. I say NO.

Governments should be able to make sure that all children get educated for the future of their country." *boy, >21*

One member identifies the crucial role of the government in reducing discrimination against girls by enforcing the end of dowry practices.



CANADA

"People think that the female child is a burden because they pay dowry when she marries. And if the practice of dowry is allowed to continue, so shall female infanticide. The government has the power to spread awareness that a girl child is no burden." *boy, 19*

EMPOWERMENT

Voices of Youth members believe that greater access to education, information, essential services and opportunities is critical to ending violence and discrimination against girls.

One VOY member focuses on the need to identify and overcome the obstacles that keep girls from getting an education.



MOROCCO

"Une fille qui quitte l'école doit avoir ses raisons, ce sont ces raisons qu'il faut essayer de changer."

[Translation: "A girl who leaves school probably has reasons, and it's those reasons we should try to change." *girl, 13*]

Many young people on *Voices of Youth* focus on education as the key to empowerment for girls. One member specifically identifies the importance of education in giving girls access to positive female role models.



OMAN

"And for us – girls - who's going to teach us? Because we're in a girls' school and no men teachers, all of our teachers are women and they're all great and doing a wonderful job and most of them have families and kids." *girl, 14*

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Other VOY members focus on the benefits of education that are specific to girls as future mothers.



UNITED KINGDOM

"It is important to remove the girl and boy divides when choosing which child is to be sent to school. Sponsorship of child can only benefit children if their parents believe in education and usually they only believe in the male child receiving one. An educated mother will ensure that all her children will go to school without discriminating according to gender of the child." *girl, >21*



UNITED STATES

"Well, girls are future mothers, right? And if they were not educated, they make their children not go to school and do house chores instead." *girl, 16*

Young people also acknowledge the threat of sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS and the importance of protecting girls from them by educating them about the virus and how to keep themselves safe.



UNITED STATES

"I think it's important for people to educate girls around the world about the risk of getting STDs/AIDs and getting pregnant if you don't have any forms of protection." *girl, 19*

One VOY member includes contraception skills and knowledge in a bigger range of tools that will empower girls and enable them to increase their decision making power in the home and in their communities as a whole.



CANADA

"There are several reasons why girls should educate themselves. First of all, education will help a girl to achieve a better quality of life. Secondly, an educated girl will yield an enormous amount of benefit in society, and finally, an educated girl will have a better understanding toward having a small family in order to fight poverty." *boy, >21*

VOY members use the discussion boards to share messages of empowerment for girls and women in their communities and around the world.



INDIA

"I think girls MUST have the full freedom to do what they want. Girls know they can make it. Just keep your head high and keep moving on." *girl, 16*

One male member expresses hope that times are changing, and offers his solidarity to girl children.



ZIMBABWE

"The girl child has been ill-treated for long but with our generation I believe that as you cry out loud and advocate for gender equality you will be emancipated. Hold on girl child and fear not, for justice and equality is coming our way. As a boy I believe in equality." *boy, 20*

Another member is confident that girls have the ability to make decisions for themselves and shape their own lives. This confidence is key to girls speaking out against discrimination and the vulnerable situations they might be put in.



NETHERLANDS

"The girl child can be whoever she wants to be." *girl, >21*

CONCLUSION

VOY members see violence and discrimination against girls everywhere. They are saddened and frustrated, but they are also inspired to become change makers. UNICEF believes that young people's participation is imperative if violence and discrimination against girls and young women is to become history. Their views can help adults better understand the complex nature of how violence and discrimination affect girls, provide new insights into addressing these conditions, and contribute to the development of practical and relevant programming and policy recommendations. Participating in these discussions also helps to equip young people with the skills they need to protect themselves and their peers from violence and abuse.

In their discussion and debates on *Voices of Youth* about ways to end violence against women and children, a common theme is that it is every girl's right to take part in the processes that influence her life. VOY members argue that by supporting the engagement of girls, we may edge closer to eliminating the violence and discrimination girls face all over the world.

[For more information, read past newsletters from *Voices of Youth*:](#)

[February 2006: "Adolescent girls: The time for action is now!"](#)

[October 2002: "The girl child and gender inequality"](#)

VOICES OF YOUTH

<http://www.unicef.org/voy/>

Since 1995, VOY has focused on exploring the educational and community building potential of the Internet, and facilitating the active and substantive participation of young people on child rights and development related issues. Through web boards, interactive quizzes, youth leadership profiles, live chats and more, *Voices of Youth* provides thousands of young people from over 180 countries with an opportunity to self-inform, engage in lively debate, and partner—with their peers and decision makers—to create a world fit for children.

CALL TO ACTION

What do you think needs to be done to stop violence and discrimination against girls? Send us your recommendations and let governments know what is important to you!

The world needs your help!

Every day, in every part of the world, girls are kept out of school, hit, ignored, forced to marry and have sex, sold as slaves, made to fight in wars and asked to sit silently while decisions are made for them – about them.

Governments are asking how they can work to stop this violence and discrimination against girls. This question cannot be answered without you. Children know their issues best – and have clear ideas about how to solve problems.

That is why we are asking you to read this child-friendly version of an expert report and tell us if you agree or disagree with what it says. The report talks about which girls are in danger of violence and unfair treatment, and suggests ways governments, and their citizens, can protect them.

Your recommendations and suggestions will be presented at the 51st annual Commission on the Status of Women at United Nations headquarters in February 2007 and will influence how the world works to stop discrimination and violence against girls.

What to do:

Read the report, answer the questions at the end, and send your answers back to us by **15 January 2007**. You can send us your answers in 3 ways:

- **Online:** [Fill in the online questionnaire](#) on violence and discrimination against girls
- **Email:** VOY@unicef.org, with “Stop violence and discrimination against girls” in the subject line.
- **Mail:** Voices of Youth, 3 UN Plaza, New York City, NY 10017, USA.

If you have any questions, or want to join in a discussion about this report, log on to a discussion on Voices of Youth at <http://www.unicef.org/VOY/discussions/forumdisplay.php?f=130>.

YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILE: ANISA FADAEI

SUBMIT YOUR YOUTH LEADERSHIP PROFILE TO VOICES OF YOUTH

Anisa Fadaei, a 17-year old girl from the United Kingdom who comes from a family of gender equality activists, is particularly interested in the subject of violence against the girl child. She attended the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 2006, works to raise awareness at her school, and is involved in promoting the youth caucus of the National Alliance of Women's Organizations.

"It brings me great joy to know that there are other like minded people in the world, trying to build a better world for us to live in, and also for our children and the next generations to come. Thank you everyone for your wonderful contributions."



ISSUES

Being brought up in a steady family, where both my parents have equal positions, where my brothers and I are given the same rights, I have been incredibly fortunate. My mother has been involved with gender issues ever since I can remember. Even though I live in a developed country where women and men are thought to be equal, I have realized that this is not necessarily so. I have discovered that there are many issues that young women face even in this country, such as domestic violence.

ACTIVITIES

I attended CSW last year, and that is where my interest flourished. I gave an assembly to my whole school, with an audience of about 500. I then started a regular group where speakers are able to pass on their knowledge to attendees, but it is also an opportunity for young people to voice their opinions. I am also involved in promoting the youth caucus of NAWO which I hope will enable me to raise awareness of young people nationally and empower them to help make a change.

CHALLENGES AND STRENGTHS

I have always been a shy person and I think that doing that first assembly was one of the scariest things of my life! However, the result was amazing and has resulted in a regular group and the empowerment of both myself and my peers. I am a good leader, even after my initial shyness, and people like working in a team with me. I am able to empathize with girls round the world and my thirst for knowledge is so great that I love hearing about new issues, but also have an ability to act on what I hear.

FUTURE

Next year I will be attending CSW again, where I will be involved in the main event of the Baha'i International Community, with both my mother and grandmother, an event which will look at the situation of girls throughout 3 generations, and the similarities and differences between them. At home, I will continue to engage people in discussions about global affairs, and hope to promote the youth caucus of NAWO so that it becomes an agency for young people to discuss and help make a change at international level.