



UBIMUN 2019

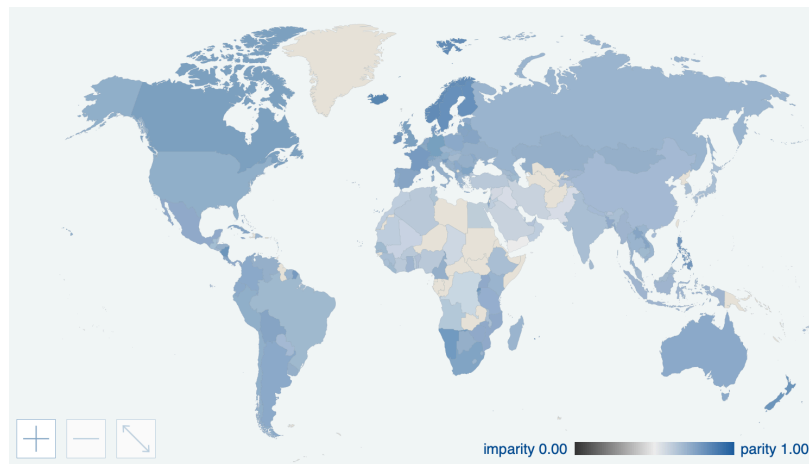
Special Committee for Gender Equality



Topic A: Male Guardianship

Equality between genders is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. According to Article 1, “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights”. This principle is, however, applied variously in individual member states. In some, the tenet of gender equality seems distant from the lived experience of women. Inequality is manifested in, *inter alia*, unequal pay, varied education options, lesser employment prospects, and exclusion from political society.

The ‘gender gap’ – based on all these areas and more – is logged in annual reports published by the World Economic Forum. In 2017, Europe’s Nordic States, Rwanda, and Nicaragua were deemed among the most gender equal. Majority Islamic states in the Middle East and North, Central and West Africa received the lowest scores.



States by gender parity, 2018

Disparity in these states is contributed to by the practice of ‘Walayah’, the guardianship or authority of, typically, male relatives over women. Rooted in ‘fiqh’ (Islamic jurisprudence), the practice of male guardianship can curtail women’s ability to make independent decisions over travel, education, healthcare, or business affairs. Walayah is not practiced in all Islamic states, and its interpretation and legal implications vary across borders. Possibly the most referenced case is that of Saudi Arabia.

Case Study: Saudi Arabia

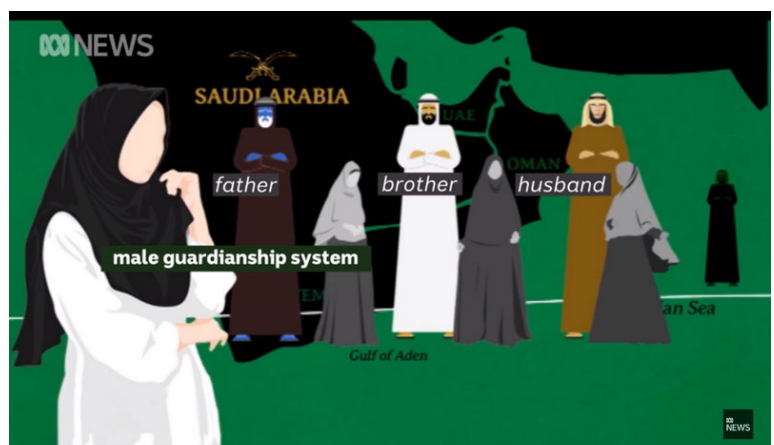
Based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law, women in Saudi Arabia remain legal dependents on male guardians, regardless of age, education level, or marital status. This continues despite Saudi's 2000 ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, and a series of legal changes made in recent years.

Saudi Arabia's education system, for instance, generally requires the permission of a woman's 'wali' (guardian) to enrol her in school. At the level of further education, permission is also required for travel to institutions in other cities or countries. Traditional customs dictate that any with the opportunity to study abroad will travel with a male chaperone.

In the area of employment, companies and offices often require a wali's consent for a woman to receive paid employment outside the home, despite this no longer being a legal requirement. It was only in 2017 that women gained the right to open businesses in their own name, although landlords often refuse to lease offices to single women. Permission to marry and procure travel documents are also subject to the approval of a male guardian.

The system of Walayah is also linked to other areas of disparity. Women are, for instance, still generally expected to wear all-covering modest attire when in public. Only recently have some public spaces become open to limited social mixing of individuals of different genders.

In Saudi Arabia, as in other Islamic states, practices of guardianship are sometimes enshrined in law, but sometimes continue as unofficial customary behaviours. Sharia law is a strict form of Islamic law which particularly enshrines the male guardianship system and restricts women's rights to travel, marry who they choose, gain access to education and accept employment. Many Islamic countries such as KSA also have strict gender segregation which restricts women's rights and freedom further.



Questions for consideration

Does the system of male guardianship in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere violate the universality of the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

Is it incumbent on individual states to set out and enforce individual policies regarding gender?

Should states take steps to halt unofficial, traditional practices of male guardianship rooted in cultural tradition?

Should male guardianship be illegal under international law?

Is Sharia law rooted in inequality between the sexes?

Should sanctions be applied to countries who forbid women to travel, work, marry, be educated etc without the consent of the male guardianship system?

How does oil wealth effect international scrutiny on states like KSA? As the US has stopped buying Saudi oil KSA has greatly improved womens rights including giving them the right to drive. Should the international community pressure KSA further to end inequalities under the male guardianship system? What does this mean for state sovereignty?

How can male guardianship systems expose women to a greater risk of domestic violence?

Useful Resources

<https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2018>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-46789875>

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/22/world/middleeast/saudi-women-guardianship.html>

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/saudi-arabian-women-file-petition-over-14500-signatures-end-male-guardianship-a7332436.html>

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bham/detail.action?docID=1824370>

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/saudi-arabia#49dda6>

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2016/07/16/boxed/women-and-saudi-arabias-male-guardianship-system>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/11/saudi-women-detained-demanding-basic-human-rights-181129113259702.html>

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/saudi-woman-case-father-stirs-guardianship-debate-180921102631409.html>

<http://www.arabnews.com/node/1433456>

<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/saudi-arabia-pledges-to-crack-down-on-male-guardianship-abuses-1.6908939>

Topic B: Gender Equality of Education

Whereas the issue of male guardianship is generally limited to socially conservative majority Muslim states, equality concerns are universal. One area that affects women around the world is the gender equality of education. Despite progress over the last 20 years, “girls are still more likely than boys to never set foot in a classroom”, according to UNESCO – a United Nations agency that aims to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”.

Gender gaps not only limit the number of girls who take up education, and pursue it to secondary or tertiary levels, but are manifest in the disparity of attainment. It links into other areas of concern. Girls in areas of the Global South might be excluded from education due to poverty. They might, for instance, be forced to spend hours a day doing chores and caring for relatives. Schools might lack adequate sanitary facilities to meet girls’ concerns, or sufficient security measures to ensure pupils’ safety.

Inequality in education has serious ramifications throughout women’s lives. Lower levels of education act as a barrier to equal employment. Less educated women are often excluded from work, or are less likely to get higher skilled, higher paying jobs. According to some studies, women earn less than 10% of global incomes, and own less than 1% of property. Women are also twice as likely as men to be illiterate in adulthood.

Lesser-educated women are also less likely to participate in government – either as voters or office-holders. As such, they are unable to voice women’s concerns in areas including education, limiting the chance of positive reform. Rwanda became the first country in the world to elect more women than men in 2008. It remains an outstanding case.

Gendered expectations of children also affect education in more developed states. Cultural conceptions of gender roles contribute to more boys studying STEM subjects, which often feeds into higher-paid jobs. Inequality is also shown in schools’ leadership. Nursery and primary level teachers in, for example, the United Kingdom, are far more likely to be female. Men are disproportionately over-represented among the ranks of secondary teachers and school administrators. Limited sex and relationship education also impacts women more than men, as the majority of victims of sexual and relationship abuse.

Academic performance across the board is also affected by inequality. Children in countries with higher levels of gender equality across the population generally are, as attested by The Equality Trust, more likely to do better in school. This applies especially in Finland and Japan, amongst others.

Progress towards gender equality of education has undoubtedly been made. It was one area addressed in the Millenium Development Goals, and has received focus and funding from international organisations and NGOs. There is undoubtedly further work to do. UNESCO attests that it will take until 2072 for the poorest girls in the Global South to learn to read.



6 BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION:

POVERTY: Even if education is free, the cost of uniforms and or supplies can make education inaccessible

CHILD MARRIAGE & EARLY PREGNANCY: Child brides are almost always forced to drop out of school

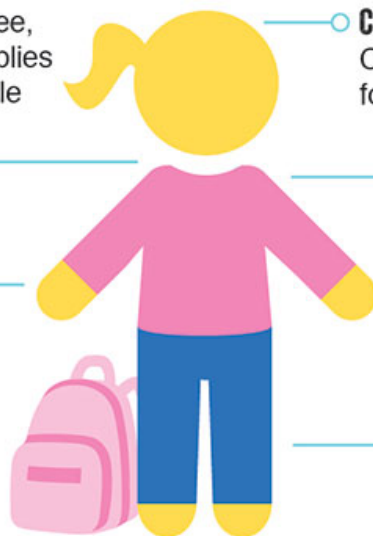
LACK OF SAFE, PRIVATE GIRLS-ONLY LATRINES:

Stigma and other factors mean 1 in 10 girls in Africa miss school during their periods

VIOLENCE : Once arriving to school, girls may face various forms of violence at the hands of teachers, peers and other people in the school environment. If parents find out school isn't safe for their daughters, they may remove them from school

GENDER INEQUALITY : Girls are often kept home from school to help with family care & housework

LONG DISTANCE TO SCHOOL: Girls are at an increased risk of experiencing violence or harassment



Questions for consideration

Who is responsible for ensuring gender equality in education around the world? Is it fair and/or practical to hold all states and regions to the same standards?

What more can be done to enforce international legislation on gender equality in education?

What steps can be taken to improve equality of education in developed states?

Is it right for the United Nations or its agencies to support the degendering of education, and how can this be achieved?

How do arranged marriages affect girls education?

How does the male guardianship system impede on girls education?

How does strict gender segregation within some countries, namely KSA, impact female education?



Useful Resources

<https://www.right-to-education.org/girlswomen>

<https://www.right-to-education.org/resource/general-recommendation-no-36-girls-and-women-s-right-education>

<https://21stcenturychallenges.org/gender-equality/>

<https://en.unesco.org/themes/women-s-and-girls-education>

<https://gemreportunesco.wordpress.com/2017/09/14/who-is-responsible-for-ensuring-gender-equality-in-education/>

<https://www.globalpartnership.org/focus-areas/girls-education>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/padr.12121>

<https://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/S1479-3679%282009%290000010012>

<https://www.devex.com/news/calls-to-tackle-gender-equality-chasm-in-education-94176>