

Gender inequality

The experience of inequality is by no means confined to women and girls. Differences occur between males on questions of race, sexuality, class, age, disability and geography. But on key questions of economic security, health, well-being and political participation - within and across cultures - women more commonly experience greater disadvantage and discrimination relative to men.

Although gender-based inequalities exist in the majority of the world's cultures, religions, nations and income groups, there are differences in the way these disparities manifest themselves and how they evolve over time.

The Global Gender Gap Report, World Economic Forum 2008 p.3.

Gender inequality comes at significant costs.

Low levels of literacy and educational attainment among women and girls mean that the skills and resources pool of all people are not fully utilised. Women's experience of poverty and income inequality hinders economic development. Gender inequalities are fertile ground for social distress, resentment, polarisation and the denial of basic human rights. Low levels of literacy and educational attainment mean that the skills and resources pool of all people are not fully utilised.

Violence against women and girls creates huge personal, social and economic costs. Poor maternal health impacts negatively on children, the care of elderly family members and health systems. Sexual harassment in the workplace can lead to staff turnover, lower productivity and morale. The flip side of the under-representation of women in senior levels of business and politics is the direct omission of further talent and experience.

An awareness of gender helps to understand the processes and institutions that create and maintain disadvantage and discrimination. In turn, it becomes easier to identify the entry points for strategies and actions to reduce global gender inequalities.