



## Can we end all forms of violence against women and girls?

Even in the year 2021 we live in a patriarchal society. People in positions of power are predominantly men. Even in our homes, who makes the decisions? Who looks after the money?

At the same time, we may ask, who goes through the pains of giving birth? Who works hardest for the family and in the home?

Is it the case in some families that sons are seen as being superior to daughters? If so, why?

A few months ago, it was pointed out that those countries that had handled the COVID pandemic most successfully were led by women. Women are also more likely than men to work for reconciliation and less likely to take up arms.

So why, in so many homes, societies and countries, are men seen as being superior to women, and why are women and girls so often subject to violence? And why, astonishingly, do many women (one third of the population in some countries) say that it is acceptable for men to beat their wives?

What is your opinion?

If you agree that domestic violence is wrong and that women should be treated with respect and have equal rights to men, what can we do to change the situation?

I make two important suggestions:

1. Girls must be educated at school.
2. Boys must receive more education in the home-

### Education for girls

“Educate a girl and you educate a family” said Queen Rania of Jordan. Education contributes to girls developing self-confidence. With self-confidence, girls say “No!” at an early stage when men (even teachers) try to take sexual advantage of them. With self-confidence girls express their opinions and do not accept every word from older men, their husbands or from men in positions of authority.

In Uganda, 10% of girls are married before they are 15 years old. How can they possibly develop the self-confidence to become mature adults capable of making their own decisions? Tragically the lockdown associated with the COVID pandemic has made things worse, not better.



**Ellen Johnson Sirleaf** served as president of Liberia (2006–18), being the first woman elected head of state of an African country. As president, she secured millions of dollars of foreign investment and established a Truth and Reconciliation Committee to probe corruption and heal ethnic tensions.

Be inspired!

I believe that once girls are educated:

1. The dowry system will be challenged. If a man pays for the right to marry a man's daughter, then he may think that he owns his wife and therefore has rights over her.
2. The right for men to have more than one wife will be challenged, on the basis that



Tamima, Beldine, Linet and Saline of the Fweny Network in South Nyanza, Kenya. These women are members of the 6 strong executive committee that coordinate the activities of about 12 self-help groups – whose active members are mostly women. Where community activity is concerned, women most often take the lead.

then women should have the right to have more than one husband!

3. They will refuse to accept a husband who is much older than themselves.

### **Home education for boys**

Traditionally, boys are treated differently from girls. Girls are expected to help with washing clothes, preparing food and cleaning the house, while boys are treated more generously and simply expected to help with heavy work like splitting firewood.

Is this fair?

Do you agree that boys should also help with housework and with fetching water, and should know how to cook and to wash clothes?

I have no blueprint for the way forward. But, I implore you, in every encounter with other people, in every decision you make and in every situation, ask yourself,

*“Am I giving the same amount of respect and honour to women as I am to men?”*

### **Some suggestions**

- Engage with groups of young people and talk about these issues openly and honestly – including tabu subjects of sex and relationships between girls and boys, and men and women.
- Use music, dance and drama to challenge unhelpful traditions. Child marriage, female genital mutilation, dowries, domestic violence, men demanding sex at any time ....
- Speak out whenever you hear sexist language or see sexist behaviour.
- In a training seminar, in your church or mosque, or in your community, invite women in one group to discuss these issues and men in a men's group to discuss the issues. Then bring the groups together to have an exchange of views. I promise you, the conversation will be very lively!!!

With my best wishes,

Keith Lindsey