

# **GENDER ISSUES**

## **STUDENT'S BOOK**



**A social science module in simplified  
English for Myanmar adults**



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# 1. Introduction

## Key Words:

*characteristic (n) - a word to describe the way someone or something behaves*

*gender (n) - refers to how we think people should act based on their biological sex*

*gender injustice (n) - the difference in power between women and men*

*injustice (n) - unfair treatment of people*

*racism (n) - a belief that a racial group is better or worse than others*

*sex (n) - the biological female and male of a species*

*stereotype (n) - a statement about an entire group of people that isn't entirely true*

## Why are we talking about gender?

In this unit, we will talk about the differences between women and men. Everyone knows there are a lot of differences! Let's look at *why* there are differences. Are we born with them? Or are women and men, girls and boys, taught to act differently?



Why is this important? Men and women not only act differently in most societies, but they are also treated differently. We need to ask

ourselves if this is fair, or if it is a type of *injustice*. We all want to see more justice in the world, but we also need to make sure there is justice in our communities. Is it fair that women are expected to do most of the housework? Is it fair that only men are soldiers? We will talk about the advantages and disadvantages of differences between women and men. We will also decide if there are changes we should make so that women and men become more equal.



## Stereotypes

A *stereotype* is a statement about an entire group of people based on how we think that group acts or thinks. Stereotypes can be positive or negative. Stereotypes are never entirely true, but many people think they are.

One example is: "Women are good cooks." You probably know a woman who is not very good at cooking. Saying that *all* women are good cooks is a stereotype. Another example is "African people are lazy, but they are good musicians". This is a stereotype too. Negative stereotypes about a culture, nationality or ethnic group are a type of *racism*.

### group work

Look at the following statements. Are they stereotypes?

1. Boys are good at football.
2. Buddhists are gentle, peaceful people.
3. Americans have light skin.
4. My sisters are very good at football.
5. The Chinese government is undemocratic.
6. Muslims have dark skin.
7. English people are Christians.
8. People from Lek Tho village are untrustworthy.
9. Westerners don't like spicy food.
10. Daw Tin Kyi's sister is dishonest.

Look at statement number 3. It is definitely a stereotype. Many Americans have light skin, but many other Americans do not have light skin. If we say, “Americans have light skin,” then we are forgetting about all the Americans with darker skin. They are Americans. It is not fair to use stereotypes when talking about people.

Instead of starting a statement with, “All women do...” or “All men are...” we can say:

I know a few women who...  
 I think that some men...  
 A lot of Chinese people...

If you use these statements, everyone will know you are talking about your own experience, instead of saying you know all men and all women and how they act.



American and Australian actors in 'Lethal Weapon 4'

### exercise

Look back at the statements on page 2. If they are *stereotypical* rewrite them so they are fair.

### case study

“I was teaching a class of students in Myanmar. One young woman was going to work in Singapore – her sister was already living there, working in a restaurant. She was very worried about going to Singapore. ‘My sister said that everyone there looks down on Myanmar people. They think Myanmar people are dirty and dishonest. They are not friendly, and they treat Myanmar people badly’ She asked my opinion of this. I wasn’t sure how to answer her - I have never been to Singapore.”

- a teacher from Australia

1. There are two examples of stereotyping in this story. What are they?
2. If you were the teacher, how would you have answered the student?

“I told her that probably there are some people in Singapore who have negative stereotypes about people from Myanmar. Her sister has met people like this. Also there are probably a lot of kind, friendly people in Singapore, too. Perhaps the people who her sister works with treat Myanmar people badly. I hope she – and her sister – get a chance to meet better Singaporean people.”

### discussion

Was the teacher’s answer helpful?



Migrant workers in Singapore at a women’s shelter, run by a Singaporean women.

## Gender stereotypes

### class activity

1. The teacher will read several statements about women and men. Listen carefully, and decide how much you agree with each statement.
2. One end of the room is "100% Agree" and another end is "0% Agree". You must stand in the area that matches how much you agree with the statement. A lot of the time, you will not completely agree or disagree, so you can stand somewhere in the middle. For example, if you agree most of the time, but not all of the time, stand around the 75% mark.
3. The teacher will ask why you chose to stand there. You might be standing in the same place as other students, but you might have different reasons why you agree or disagree with the statement. Listen to other students and if you change your mind about the statement, you can move to another spot. On the board, the teacher will make a list of the words students use to describe women and men.
4. After the teacher has finished reading the statements, sit down. Copy the list from the board.



5. Have a discussion about the lists. Circle any *characteristics* that can be true for both men and women.

## Sex and gender

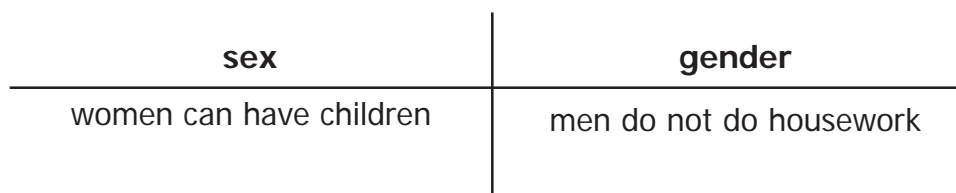
There are two types of differences between men and women, *sex* and *gender*.

*Sex*- biological differences between women and men; being born male or female

*Gender* - how we think people should act based on their biological sex.

### brainstorm

What are some examples of sex? What are some examples of gender?



### class activity

The teacher will give slips of paper to some students. These students will read a statement from the paper, one at a time. Listen carefully to each statement. You have to decide if the statement is true because of gender or sex.

- If you think the statement is a result of *gender*, stand up.
- If you think the statement is a result of *sex*, do not stand up.

## Physical differences

### group work

1. Work in groups. Some groups will draw a picture of a woman, and the other groups will draw a picture of a man. Take turns drawing - only one person will draw at a time. Each student will draw only one body part or clothing item. Do not speak to students in your group or in the other groups during this exercise.
2. When you have finished, work with a group that drew the opposite sex. Compare the drawings carefully. List the differences between the drawings.
3. Are these differences biological, or are they because of gender?

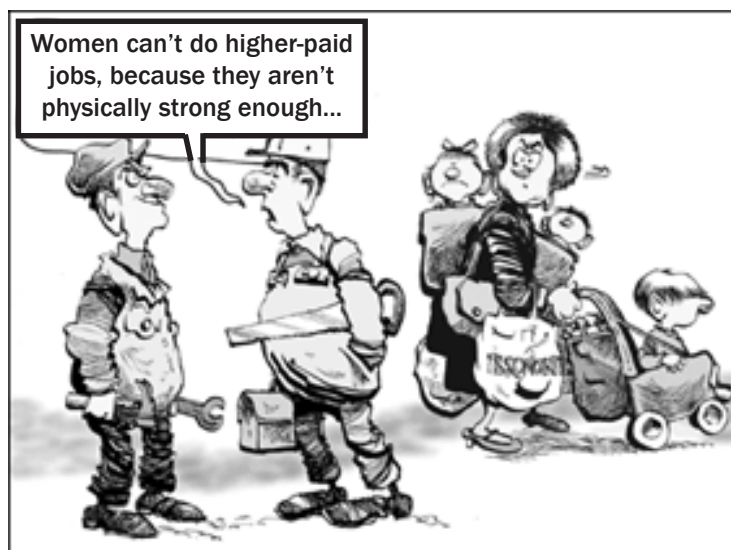
### exercises

Write a short answer to each question:

1. *If a woman cuts her hair short and wears men's clothing, is she still female?*
2. *Do you think someone can change her/his gender?*
3. *Can someone change his/her sex?*
4. *Does a person's sex decide what gender they will have? Who or what decides that?*

### group work

Look at this cartoon from England. What point does it make?  
Is the situation similar, or different in your community?



## Gender injustice

### discussion

Read the text and discuss what *gender injustice* means.

*Gender injustice* is an imbalance of power between men and women. Remember that there are different kinds of power. While you might say that men are physically stronger than women and therefore have more power, think also about political and economic power.

Do you think there is *gender injustice* in your community? In your class? In your family?

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Answer these questions:

1. *Write a definition of stereotype in your own language.*
2. *Write down any examples of when you have used or heard others use stereotypes.*
3. *Write a definition of sex and a definition of gender in your own language.*

## 2. Work and Gender

### Key Words:

*undervalued (adj) - given too little respect or value*

*formal sector (n) - jobs that get fixed wages and have to follow labour regulations (i.e. teachers and factory workers)*

*informal sector (n) - jobs which are unregistered with no benefits or security*

*piece rate work (n) - work in which each product is paid for individually; usually done in the home*

*unregulated (adj) - without rules or laws*

*fixed wages (n) - payment for work that is based on hours or days worked*

*aviation (n) - anything related to flying airplanes and helicopters*

*qualification (n) - a certificate of formal training in a skill or subject*

*breadwinner (n) - the person who earns money for the family*

*trade union (n) - organisation of workers in the same industry that try to get better working conditions*

### Women's and men's work

#### brainstorm

Brainstorm types of work and duties that are usually done by women in your community. Then make a list of work that is usually done by men. Be sure to include work that is not paid for, like parenting and household duties.

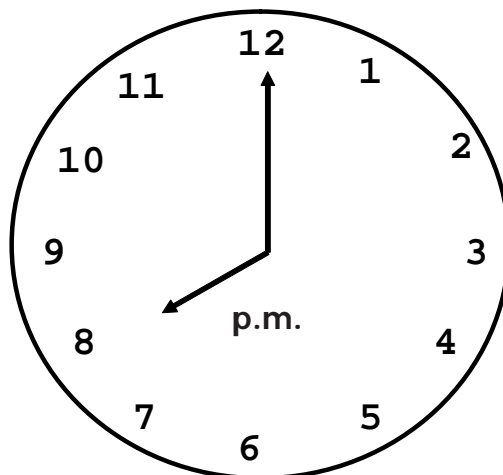
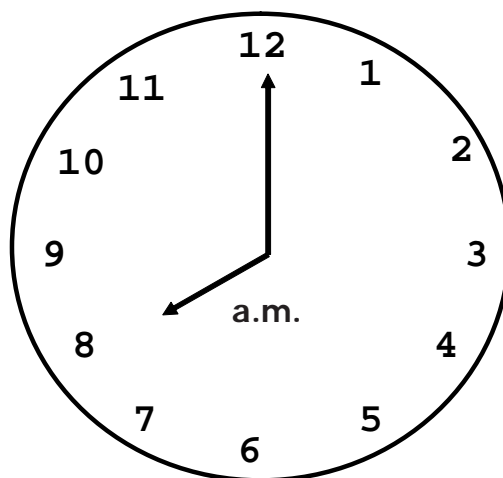
#### group work

Think about all the things that your mother and father do during a typical day. Draw four clocks on a large piece of paper. Make sure there is enough room to write on and around each clock.

Now describe your mother's typical day by filling in two clocks with the activities she does in each hour. It is important to list every household task she completes and all paid work. You should also include leisure activities.

Do the same on the other clocks, about your father's day. Fill the clocks with your father's activities.

Work in mixed-gender groups (or as a class). Talk about your parents' activities. Think about the similarities and differences in the clocks of women and men in your class. Who spends a lot of time working in the home? Outside the home? Who spends more time taking care of children and the family?



### class activity

Write a definition of the word *work*. Give examples that fit your definition.

### exercise

Now look at your clocks and decide if each activity is work or not. Use the definition of work that the class decided upon.

1. *Put a plus sign (+) if it fits the group's definition of work.*
2. *Put a minus sign (-) if it is not work.*
3. *Put a question mark for those activities that you are unsure about.*
4. *Circle any activities for which you receive money.*

Now answer these questions by yourself:

1. *What percentage of your parents' daily activities are work?*
2. *What percentage of your parents' work activities are paid work?*
3. *How much to you think it would cost to hire someone to do all the things listed as unpaid work?*

### group work

Share your answers with the class or in small groups. With your group, think about and discuss these next questions:

1. *Are all of the "work" activities unpleasant or difficult?*
2. *Are all the activities you listed as "not work" pleasant or fun?*
3. *What does it mean to say, "My wife (or mother/sister/daughter) doesn't work?"*
4. *What definition of "work" does this statement imply?*

### case study

#### **A woman from Kachin State:**

"In our Kachin tradition, women work very hard. I wake up at 3am every day! I have to collect water from the government distribution, then if we don't get that water, I have to go down the hill to get it. It's very heavy, but I must carry it by myself. This takes me a long time usually. When I come back home I pound the rice and cook the rice. After that my husband gets up. He eats breakfast, but most of it is gone by the time I am done washing, so I usually eat a very small breakfast. We walk to the paddy fields together with other families. The women have to lead the way, carry the children, and carry other things as well. And when we come back from the paddy fields or work, the women have to carry the children and the firewood. The men only carry their hunting rifles. And when the women arrive, they have to cook, wash, feed the pigs and do everything. The men can come back and sleep or talk to the neighbours. Even now, most of the Kachin men will not go into the kitchen. They won't cook and they won't wash. They just sit in the front room."

### discussion

*Does this woman earn any wages from her work?*

*Does she work?*

*What kind of work does she do?*

## Looking at women's work

In many cultures, women and men both work very hard. But men's work is often seen as more important and more valuable than women's work. Throughout the world, the work that women do is often not called work. The role women play in the economy remains *undervalued*.

Did you know that women make up half of the world's population, yet:

- women do two-thirds of the world's work
- women get one-tenth of the world's wages
- women own one-hundredth of the world's wealth

(These numbers were produced by the United Nations after a lot of research into the working lives of women and men.)



### discussion

*Do women really work much harder than men? What do you think?*

### Two-thirds of the World's Work...

Women often do three different kinds of work: family work, paid work and community work.

**FAMILY WORK:** Women bear children and take care of them. They feed and clothe the family, and care for the sick and elderly. In rural areas, women have to get fuel and water. In the whole world, women grow half of all the food. In Africa and Asia, women grow 80% of the food.

**PAID WORK:** There are many different kinds of paid work. Some women work in the *formal sector*. They may be teachers, factory workers, shop workers or

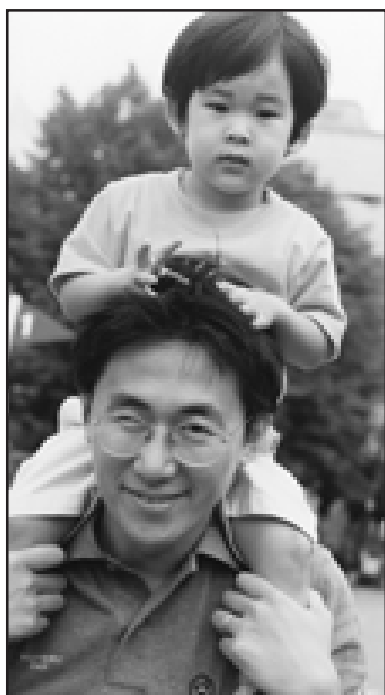
have another paid job. Other women work in the *informal sector*. Many

women in Myanmar

work in the informal sector. The informal sector is different from doing housework. Work in the informal sector involves the exchange of money. This kind of work includes selling snacks at the market, washing the neighbours' clothes for pay, cleaning someone else's house, home-based business and growing food to sell. Some women do *piece rate work* at home, such as sewing pieces of clothing together or rolling cheroots. But the informal sector is *unregulated* which means that there are no laws to protect women doing this kind of work. Women do not get *fixed wages* and work conditions are not always safe. In Africa, more than one third of women work in the informal sector, not counting agricultural work. In Indonesia 65% of women work in the informal sector, and in South Korea the rate is 41%.

There are some men who like to carry the kids around. Some fathers, when they have time, are very affectionate and when they do have time, they like to come home and carry the kids around... You do see that. But major things, being with the children all day, feeding, bathing them, mostly women do that. Women do the cooking and cleaning. You rarely see a Myanmar guy in the kitchen. You rarely see a Myanmar guy going to the market to buy groceries. You rarely see a Myanmar guy washing all the clothes for the family. It's mostly women. If you're really lucky, you might have a man who washes his *own* clothes!

- *Women's voices, 1999*





**COMMUNITY WORK:** Women often carry out extra, unpaid jobs in the community. They help neighbours and relatives, take care of the sick, and organise community projects like water supplies and childcare. Women do a lot of volunteer work in their communities all over the world. In some places in Africa, women are responsible for digging wells to provide water for the whole village. They don't get paid for this work, but it is still their job.

#### group work

Answer these questions about women's and men's work in your community:

1. *Throughout Asia and Africa, women grow 80% of the food. Is this true in your community? What percentage of food is grown by women, and what by men?*
2. *Think of an example of a man and a woman with jobs in the formal sector, and a man and a woman with jobs in the informal sector.*
3. *Do you know anyone who does piece rate work? What work does he or she do? Is he/she happy with the pay and working conditions? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this type of work?*
4. *Think of some examples of community work that is done by men, and some that is done by women in your community.*

#### Gendered work in Myanmar?

While more and more women are working outside of the home, the jobs they get and how much they earn is affected by gender. In Myanmar, women almost never work as bus drivers, postal delivery workers, or firefighters. There are very few women in the civil police force or the armed forces. Women cannot work as sailors, either in the Navy or the merchant marines. Women in Myanmar are not allowed to work in *aviation*, mining, petroleum development or logging.

For women, we can't be taxi drivers and stuff. I wish I could be a taxi driver. They have so much freedom! They are their own bosses. That would be completely outrageous. No woman could drive a taxi for cultural reasons, because no woman has done it before.

- *Women's voices, 1999*

#### discussion

Answer these questions about women's work in your community:

1. *Why do you think women don't work as bus or taxi drivers?*
2. *Can you think of any other jobs that women don't do very often?*
3. *Can you think of any other jobs that men don't do very often?*



## One-tenth of the world's wages

If women work so hard, why do they receive so little income? One reason is that much of women's work is unpaid. Even when women take paying jobs, their wages are often lower than men's. This happens in rich countries, too. Here are some reasons:

- Jobs that women are trained to do well (cooking, sewing, cleaning, etc.) often pay less than jobs men are trained to do (building, mining, working with heavy machines, etc.).
- Women often get less education than men, so they are frequently not offered the highly skilled and well-paid jobs. Even when they have the same *qualifications* as men, women are often still paid less because men are seen to be the *breadwinners* who need to earn more to support the family.
- Women often take part-time jobs because of other responsibilities. Part-time work pays less.
- Fewer women belong to *trade unions* or other associations that help workers get better wages.
- Men often get promoted to high positions, ahead of women, even when women are good at the job.
- Some women don't have a lot of confidence; although they could do a job, they might not apply for it because they don't think they are good enough or they know that the company favours men.

They choose the man for the high position. In their minds, they think a man can work more than a woman. Women have their families. There will be things to do for the kids. Men do not have many of those things to do. I think that's why they choose men over women even if they are of the same education level. Men can do all kinds of jobs. If the job requires going to the districts, they choose men. Women are always associated with their families and taking care of their families. That's difficult for women. Men have better opportunities.

- *Women's voices, 1999*

## One-hundredth of the world's wealth

In many parts of the world, women do not have the same rights as men to own land, houses or businesses. When a woman gets married, her husband often takes control of whatever she owns.

In a lot of countries, women's groups have been trying to change these laws to remove discrimination, but it takes a long time. In some parts of the world, women still lack full rights to ownership. For example, in some African and Middle Eastern countries, women still need the signature of a male relative on all legal documents.

### discussion

Answer these questions about women's rights in your community:

1. *Do women and men have equal rights to own land?*
2. *Are women allowed to do the following things without the approval of a male relative (husband, father, uncle, etc.)?*
  - *Get an identity card or passport?*
  - *Borrow money, either from a bank or a money lender?*
  - *Buy land or build a house?*
  - *Open a business?*
  - *Travel alone?*

## group work

1. Look at the list below and think about the jobs that men and boys and women and girls do in your community. Write **M** next to each job that mostly males do, and **F** next to jobs that mostly females do.

- |                   |                      |
|-------------------|----------------------|
| • <i>Weavers</i>  | • <i>Mechanics</i>   |
| • <i>Farmers</i>  | • <i>Nurses</i>      |
| • <i>Soldiers</i> | • <i>Doctors</i>     |
| • <i>Builders</i> | • <i>Shopkeepers</i> |
| • <i>Teachers</i> | • <i>Politicians</i> |
| • <i>Cooks</i>    | • <i>Cleaners</i>    |

2. Read this text:

- In ancient Egypt, men were responsible for weaving. In Navajo culture (an indigenous people from North America), men did much of the weaving and some Navajo men still weave. In Oaxaca, Mexico, only Zapotec men did the weaving.
- Today, both women and men are soldiers. In Israel, nearly all young women and men must serve in the army for at least one year. In ancient Greece, women of Sparta were some of the fiercest warriors, making up their own armies. In fact, a famous philosopher, Herodotus, said, “No girl shall wed till she has killed a man in battle.” Apache women (and indigenous people of North America) were also famous warriors.
- Women grow more than half of the world’s food, and as much as 80% of the food in Africa and Asia. While men are often traditionally thought to be farmers, women around the world do more farming than men.
- Women in rural Africa, Asia and South America are known for their incredible strength, balance and skill in carrying heavy loads atop their heads. Women in Africa often walk several kilometers to the well and return with over 30 kilograms of water in clay pots on their heads.
- Berber women of Morocco are responsible for building the large, animal-skin shelters for their family. The women take down and erect these shelters several times a week and each time takes several hours.
- In ancient Greece, only men could be teachers. But in the United States during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only women taught young children and people thought it very strange if a man wanted to do this job.
- Efe men of the Itui people in northeastern Congo are responsible for cooking since women are too busy with other things. Algerian Muslim men prepare their own meals separately in their own rooms.
- In many countries, women are working the same jobs as men. There are women mechanics, pilots, miners and almost every other kind of job.

3. Why do you think men and women do different jobs in different communities?

## class activity

How is our daily work affected by gender?

Think about the work that you do. Do you like it? Is there other work that you would like to do? Make lists of the work in the left column (women), or the right (men).

WOMEN SHOULD WRITE RESPONSES FOR THESE CATEGORIES ONLY:

1. *Things that I do and like that are considered "women's work"*
2. *Things that I do but don't like that are considered "women's work"*
3. *Things that I do that are considered "men's work"*
4. *Things that I don't do, but would like to do that are considered "men's work"*

MEN SHOULD WRITE RESPONSES FOR THESE CATEGORIES ONLY:

1. *Things that I do and like that are considered "men's work"*
2. *Things that I do but don't like that are considered "men's work"*
3. *Things that I do that are considered "women's work"*
4. *Things that I don't do, but would like to do that are considered "women's work"*

When you are finished, the teacher will draw a line on the board to divide it in half. On one half, women write their responses, and on the other half, men write theirs. Make sure you write your response under the correct headings.

Read over the lists together. Answer these questions:

- *What generalisations about the roles of women and men can you make from these lists?*
- *Is most of men's work paid work? Is women's?*
- *Who benefits from the work of women and who benefits from the work of men?*

Look specifically at the second and last categories in each list. Is there work that women do not like to do that is "women's work" while at the same time being work that men would like to do? Is there work that men do not like to do that is "men's work" that women might like to do? If so, should women and men switch some of these roles so that everyone can do work they like? Why or why not?

## Responsibilities

Often when women are responsible for doing all of the housework and taking care of the family, it means men are responsible for earning money for food and other things. There is a lot of pressure on men to make enough money for the family's needs. In places where jobs are really hard to find, it is difficult for anyone to find work that pays well. But men have to do this, and they are sometimes called bad husbands or bad fathers if they do not earn enough money. If women and men shared responsibilities equally, there wouldn't be so much pressure on men. Men could help with housework and spend more time with the family. Women would get to leave the house and do other work that they enjoy. Everyone benefits when work is shared equally.

Some men don't like this idea because they think women will have more power and freedom if they earn money.



## discussion

What extra powers and freedoms could women have if they earn their own money?

Why do you think some men don't like the idea of women getting more power and freedom?

## case study

### Nyein Chan joins the formal sector:

In Nyein Chan's village, many of the men went away to join the army. Most men in the village went away, far from their village. This meant that there were very few men to do the heavy work in a local steel factory. Nyein Chan had always stayed at home with her children. But when her husband joined the army and went away, she got a job in the steel factory where her husband had worked. Nyein Chan was very intelligent and she quickly learned to drive a car, so the manager at the factory gave her a job driving the heavy machines. She was the first woman to ever do that job. Because she was so good at it, she got a promotion after one year. She enjoyed her work and was very good at it. Nyein Chan got paid the same high salary as other workers and everyone respected her because she was such a good worker.

When the army men returned to the village, Nyein Chan and other female industrial workers were asked to quit their jobs so that the men could find work. Nyein Chan didn't want to quit and she protested to her boss and other workers. Many people said that women should return to the home or do other jobs that men didn't want to do.

Nobody supported Nyein Chan's arguments that she was a good worker and deserved to keep her job. Nyein Chan eventually gave up her factory job to a returning soldier. She then got more "appropriate work" selling snacks in the market for less than a quarter of her previous salary.

## exercise

Answer these questions:

1. *Why did Nyein Chan start working in the steel factory?*
2. *Was Nyein Chan discriminated against while she was working at the factory?*
3. *When did Nyein Chan experience discrimination?*
4. *Did Nyein Chan immediately quit?*
5. *What was Nyein Chan's new job? Do you think she was happy with it?*

## group work

Work in small groups. Each group will take a different role: Nyein Chan's husband, her female co-workers, her male co-workers, the community or Nyein Chan's boss. List the arguments your group used to convince Nyein Chan to give up her job.

## group work

One person from each group will play Nyein Chan and other people from the group will give their arguments why she should give up her job. Present these arguments to Nyein Chan in front of the class. The person playing Nyein Chan should try to defend her right to work in the steel factory.

## discussion

Discuss these things as a class:

- *How might Nyein Chan respond to the arguments?*
- *What support from friends, family, co-workers, bosses and other sources would Nyein Chan have needed to keep her job?*
- *If you were Nyein Chan, how would you feel about giving up your job?*
- *Are any of the arguments Nyein Chan heard still used in your community to keep women from doing certain jobs?*

## CEDAW

In 1979, the United Nations agreed on a bill of rights for women, called the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW: pronounced “see-daw”).

In 1981, countries started signing up, agreeing to adopt the CEDAW as law. As of December 2004, 179 countries had agreed to the terms of the CEDAW, making it a kind of international law protecting the rights of women and girls.

Here are just a few of the important points of the CEDAW:

- Women must have the right to vote and run for political office.
- Women must have equal rights to land and property ownership.
- Women and girls must have equal access to education and health care.
- Women must have reproductive rights and be able to make choices about their own bodies.
- Governments must do everything to prevent the trafficking and exploitation of women.
- Women must have equal opportunities in the work force and employers cannot discriminate against women based on sex.

### discussion

Think about the rights listed above.

Do you agree that women should be granted these rights? What changes need to be made in society for women to achieve these rights completely?

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Answer these questions:

1. *Women often earn less money than men. Is this because women do not work as much? Give three reasons why women might earn less money than men.*
2. *Give three examples of work in the formal sector.*
3. *Give three examples of work in the informal sector.*
4. *Why might an employer hire a man over a woman, even if the woman has equal or better skills? Give as many reasons as you can think of.*
5. *Name a woman or girl in your family and think about the work that she does. List as many types of unpaid work that she does.*

# 3. Gender, Family and Community

## Key Words:

*role (n) - a person's responsibilities according to the community or culture*

*role-model (n) - someone you admire, want to be like*

*to imply (v) - to communicate something without directly saying it*

*passive (adj) - quiet, obeys authority without questioning*

*genetic (adj) - about genes: information stored inside cells which control what a living thing will be like.*

*conform (v) - to behave in the same way as other people do*

*nuclear family (n) - a family made up of wife, husband and children*

*extended family (n) - a family made up of members from more than two generations (i.e. a mother and father living with their children, their parents, their sisters, cousins or other relatives)*

*head of household (n) - the person recognised as the leader of the family*

*custody (n) - the legal right and responsibility to take care of a child*

As you now know, gender is something that we learn from our culture and community. Almost every part of our lives is affected by gender in some way. Where do we learn how to act and who decides what our gender roles will be?

## brainstorm

*What are some characteristics of a 'good' man in your community?*

*What are some characteristics of a 'good' woman in your community?*

*Make two lists.*

*Look at the lists. Are there any characteristics that are in both lists?*

## exercise

Are these words usually used to describe a good woman, a good man or both?

*gentle assertive athletic intelligent sweet pretty energetic*

## Gender Roles

Gender *roles* are ideas about how men and women should behave. The roles of women and men are different in all societies. For example, in many cultures women are supposed to stay at home and cook and clean. Men are supposed to work and earn money. In some cultures women are seen as weak and helpless, while men are perceived as strong and capable. In some cultures women are seen as caring and emotional, and men are seen as irresponsible and violent.

These roles are often taught in childhood and supported in social institutions such as schools, religion and work. As a child is growing up, depending on whether the child is a boy or a girl, the parents treat them differently. For example, boys are encouraged to play with trucks, airplanes and guns, while girls are encouraged to play with dolls. Boys are encouraged to play sports; girls are encouraged to do quieter things like cooking and weaving. These activities teach the child what they are supposed to do or are expected to do when they grow up. A gun or airplane also *implies* aggression and strength. Cooking implies soft and *passive*.

Another way that boys and girls develop ideas about gender is through male or female *role-models*. If girls see their mothers, or women in their community, taking leadership roles, they will believe that they can become leaders. If boys grow up seeing their fathers taking care of children and participating in housework, they will grow up thinking that men should do these things.

## group work

Work in groups of the same gender. Make two lists:

1. *The toys you were given as children.*
2. *The games and activities you played when you were children.*

Compare notes as a class. At what age do girls and boys start playing different games, and have different toys?

## Socialisation and internalisation

*Socialisation* is the process of teaching people about behaviours, *roles*, attitudes and belief systems. This affects how they see themselves, other people and their surroundings. This process is carried out by the family, school, religion, media, politics, economics, etc.

For example, in many cultures, we see images in the media that *imply* that people with dark skin are bad and not trustworthy. They say directly or indirectly that people with light or white skin are more civilised and more beautiful. Even though our experiences with people may be different from this, we hear the message in many different places. Sometimes we believe it, even if we don't want to. Just like this, the message that most institutions give us is that women are *passive* followers and that men are leaders.

Science teaches us that biological characteristics are passed from generation to generation through the transmission of *genetic* information from parents to children. Cultural information is passed from generation to generation through socialisation. Socialisation teaches children how to be polite, how to act in front of elders as well as the correct behaviour for boys and girls. Just as biological traits are passed through genes, values, beliefs and culture, ideas about gender, are passed on through socialisation.

*Internalisation* is the result of socialisation. People take the messages they have been taught through socialisation and believe them as 'truth' or 'natural'. They start to use the messages to guide their own behaviour, attitudes and belief systems. So, with the example of skin colour, some people with dark skin start to believe that they are not as good or not as beautiful as people with white skin. As a result, some white people start to believe that they are better than everyone else. Likewise, many women and men believe that only men can lead, which then affects women's confidence. Some women believe that they can't be good leaders just because they are women.

Human beings create cultures through the processes of socialisation and internalisation. Cultures are constantly changing, and just as socialisation and internalisation is learned, the negative messages can be unlearned so that people can be empowered to challenge and change themselves and society.



From the French comic 'Tintin in the Congo'.



A poster from the Indian movie 'Devdas'.

### group work

Discuss the pictures on the previous page. What do they say about the roles of black and white people? What do they say about the roles of women and men? Do you think many people accept these roles? How do these types of pictures relate to socialisation and internalisation?

### discussion



In Myanmar, you can see this advertisement everywhere: on billboards, in magazines, and in shops. Here it is on the front of a clinic. Appeton makes vitamins and food supplements.

1. Describe how the children in the advertisement are used as role models.
2. Do you think this advertisement is successful? Do people buy Appeton as a result of this advertisement? Why or why not?
3. Do you think this billboard could contribute to the socialisation of children? In what ways?

## Gender through generations

### group work

1. Work in groups. Each member of the group takes a turn describing a grandparent. If you are a woman, describe a grandmother. If you are a man, describe a grandfather. Think about these questions to help you describe your grandparent:
  - What qualities do you remember about your grandparent?
  - Were these qualities typical for women/men of her/his time? What qualities were expected of women/men in this generation?
  - How were women/men of her/his generation treated by friends, family and the community when they did not **conform** to these expectations?
  - Would you be comfortable living with the same expectations?
2. After everyone has had their turn to speak, take turns describing your mothers (for women) or fathers (for men), with the same questions in mind.
3. After this is finished, think about these questions and discuss them in groups:
  - Were you influenced by your grandmother/grandfather and mother/father?
  - What are your own generation's expectations of men's and women's behaviour?
  - Are you comfortable with these expectations?
  - How are men and women treated if they do not conform to the expectations?

4. Women, try to imagine and describe a woman of the next generation. Men, try to imagine and describe a man of the next generation.

- *What qualities, hopes and expectations do you wish for her/him?*
- *Do you think men and women of the next generation can live equally?*
- *What barriers will there be to men and women being equal?*
- *What can the current generation do to help men and women of the future live equally?*

## Gender and Family

### brainstorm

What is a family? Who can be in a family? Make a list of people who can be in a family.

### exercise

Look at these pictures. Are these groups a family? Why or why not?



Ehuang lives with her mother, father, two aunts, cousin and grandparents in a large house in Beijing. Because she's the only small child in the house, she gets a lot of attention and care.



David and his wife are divorced. He lives with his two daughters and son, and looks after them by himself. His wife moved to another country, and his son doesn't remember her at all.



Lester and Cliff decided to spend their lives together and raise children. They adopted Peter three years ago, and Maria just last month. Lester works as a lawyer, and Cliff stays at home with the children.

Ari and Yoko have been married for twenty-five years. They decided they didn't want to have children, as they both have demanding jobs and very busy lives.





Joyce started going out with Thabo in high school. After they graduated they got married, and now they have two small children.



Dong-sun's first wife died, leaving him with a baby daughter. He met Chan-sook, a nurse who was divorced with three daughters. Now, they all live together.

Tom is a member of a religion that encourages men to have many wives (polygamy). He has five wives and twenty-nine children. His youngest child is six months old, and the oldest is eighteen.



Paolo's father had a stroke five years ago and can't look after himself, so Paolo looks after him. They live in a large city in Brazil, where Paolo works as a building labourer. He hurries home after work each day to cook dinner for the two of them.

Aye Aye Win, Elizabeth and Saw Gyi share an apartment in downtown Yangon. The women sleep in one room and Saw Gyi has another, and they share the cooking and housework. They are not related, although they come from the same part of Kayin State. Elizabeth and Saw Gyi are PhD students and Aye Aye Win works as an accountant.



Many people assume that a family is made up of a husband, wife and children, with the husband as the *head of the household*. This type of family is called a *nuclear family*. However, in many communities around the world, families are made up of *extended family* members. Some families have many different generations living together, have only one parent, involve same-sex couples or other variations. According to a recent United Nations study, most people still get married, but they marry much later in life. In places like Western Europe and North America, divorce is very common - over half of all married couples get divorced. This leaves many single-parent families and families with children who have different parents from each other.

Individuals, NGOs, religious institutions (like churches and monasteries) and governments often assume that men are the *heads of household*. This assumption creates many problems for women. In some countries Women have difficulty in getting *custody* of their children. By assuming that the man is always the “head of the household,” women’s roles are undervalued and overlooked. For example, some governments give more social assistance (unemployment wages and other benefits) to men than women, because they assume that the man is the major breadwinner for the family, and therefore needs more money and benefits to support the family than a woman needs.

In reality, many women are heads of households. An estimated one-third of all households in the world are headed by women; in areas of conflict, the number is closer to 80%! Some of the reasons for female-headed households include:

- being single
- being divorced
- being widowed
- living with another woman or with other family or community members
- being abandoned permanently or for long periods of time (such as when the male is serving as a soldier)
- long-term migration and/or economic crisis drawing the male household member away
- war or disaster causing women and children to become refugees



There is a very strong relationship between poverty and gender. Many female-headed households are often poor because of too few social services, such as health care and childcare. Women’s lack of access to employment and lower wages also contribute to poverty. The problems can be much worse for women of minority ethnicity, and refugees. These women can face even more discrimination.

It is difficult to count the number of female-headed households because if there is a male present (even part of the time), government or NGO statistics will often consider him to be the head of household.

#### group work

Think of a few examples of female-headed households in your family or community and answer these questions.

1. *What happened to the men in these families?*
2. *What problems do these households face?*
3. *Do you know any households without women? What happened to the women in these families?*
4. *What problems do they face? Are they similar to those faced by female-headed households?*
5. *Can you think of some ways the community, or society generally, can help?*

### exercise

The chart below is an estimate of the percentage of female-headed households in three continents, in 1980 and 1990. Look at the information in the table, and answer the questions.

region	1980	1990
Africa	20.6	18.2
Asia/Pacific	14.9	17.2
Western Europe and North America	23.7	31.2

1. Which region had the highest percentage of female-headed households in 1990? What reasons can you suggest for this?
2. The number of female-headed households in Asia/Pacific region increased by 2.3 percent between 1980 and 1990. What reasons can you suggest for this?

## Gender and decision making

### brainstorm

Think about all the decisions that are made in a family, and make a class list on the board.

### exercise

Look at this list. Think about who makes these decisions in your family, or in families in your community. If it is usually a woman, mark it with a *W*. If it is usually a man, mark an *M*. If both a man and a woman participate equally in making this decision, mark it with a *B*.

Write your results on the board, and answer the questions your teacher will ask you.

### discussion

Are there any decisions that are better made only by women?  
Are there any decisions that are better made only by men?

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Answer these questions:

1. What is a role-model?
2. Explain in your own words the meanings of 'socialisation' and 'internalisation'.
3. How can the toys you play with as a child influence your beliefs about gender?
4. Give three examples of negative stereotypes used by members of your society.
5. Which is larger, a nuclear family or an extended family?
6. Give three reasons why a household might be headed by a female.
7. Why is it sometimes difficult to get accurate information about female-headed households?

# 4. Gender-based Violence

## Key Words

*liberty (n) - freedom from control or restriction*

*mental (adj) - related to the mind.*

*sex worker (n) - someone who has sexual intercourse, or does sexual acts, for money.*

*abuse (v) - to treat someone badly, using physical or mental force*

*assault (v, n) - similar to abuse, usually means physical violence*

*victim (n) - someone who suffers as a result of a crime*

*against someone's will - when a person doesn't want to do something but does it*  
*press charges (v) - to take an issue to the police and try to get someone charged with committing a crime*

*informed consent - agreeing to do something with full understanding of what you are agreeing to do.*

## brainstorm

What is gender-based violence?

**Gender-based Violence (GBV):** Violent acts that are usually committed against women. With acts of GBV, the victim's gender is a main reason for the violence. GBV can be physical, *mental* or sexual, and include threats of physical, mental and sexual acts, or removal of *liberty*. GBV can happen in public or private.

## exercise

Which of these situations are examples of gender-based violence? Why?

1. Sita is fifteen, and lives with her uncle. Her uncle makes her do all the household cleaning and cooking. At night he locks her in her room and doesn't allow her to leave, because he is afraid she might run away. He says it is her duty to work for him, as he is an older male relative.
2. Some of the boys in Mu Mu's university class always make rude comments to her. They stare at her body, make sexual comments to her, and threaten to touch her. Mu Mu is very unhappy and uncomfortable about this. She is thinking about leaving university to avoid these boys.
3. Daw San San's husband often beats her. Sometimes he beats her because he doesn't like the meal she has cooked for him. Sometimes he beats her because the children are too noisy. Sometimes he beats her because he doesn't like her clothes.
4. Mi Hla Hmaing works as a waitress in a restaurant. She finishes work at 1am. One day when she was walking home a man followed her, and told her she was a bad woman for walking around late at night. He tried to force her to have sex, but she fought back and ran away.
5. Naw Wah comes from a poor village near the border with Thailand. She wanted to make money to help her family. One day a woman offered her a job in Bangkok - she told Naw Wah she could earn good wages working in a factory. The woman took her to Bangkok, where she was forced to work as a **sex worker**. As she didn't have any ID or documents, she was afraid to escape.

## Domestic violence

Domestic violence is when a family member or partner is forcing a spouse or child to obey him/her by hurting or threatening to hurt them. Around the world 90% of women have been physically *assaulted* by someone very close to them at one time in their lives. Domestic violence is among the 10 leading causes of death for women between 15 and 44 years of age. This is true in both rich and poor countries.

Domestic violence can involve:

- physical violence (e.g. beating, kicking),
- psychological abuse (hurting someone by using words and gesture, or restricting their freedom of movement),
- rape and other sexual attacks



Lissette Ochoa from Colombia was physically *abused* by her husband after he had been drinking. Her Aunt took photographs of her and sent them around the world to raise awareness about domestic violence.

Violence in the home affects women and children of all ages. It can be used against babies or grandmothers. The most common *victims* are wives and girlfriends. It also affects children. Men who beat their wives are more likely to beat their children. Sometimes, women beat their children too. Often, a person who was beaten as a child, or saw their mother being beaten by their father, will grow up to beat their partner or children.

### discussion

Is domestic violence a problem in your community?

## Rape and sexual assault

### exercise

Are these statements true or false? Answer the questions and *then* read the text to check your answers.

1. *Most rapes happen when a victim is raped by a stranger.*
2. *Most rapes happen outside.*
3. *Most rape victims are women.*
4. *In some countries, husbands are allowed to rape their wives.*

Rape involves using violence (or the threat of violence) to force another person to have sexual intercourse, or do other sexual things. Rape is also having sex with a person who is unable to give *informed consent*, e.g. a sleeping, unconscious, drunk, injured or mentally ill person, or a child. Most rape victims are women (91%). The rapist is almost always a man.

The most common form of rape is within a marriage and takes place in the home. These rapes occur when a husband forces his wife to have sex with him *against her will*. This could involve physical force, or he might threaten her with violence or divorce. Some husbands think it is their marriage 'right' to have sex with his wife when he wants to. A lot of women think that because they are in a marriage they have to have sex even when they don't want to. It is hard to get statistics on how many women are victims of domestic rape, because very few women report this, or *press charges* against their husbands. Many people think that rape is when you are forced to have sex by a stranger. There are many countries where domestic rape is considered normal and is not illegal.

There are different motivations for rape. Rapists often think that it is their right to have sex. Some rapists are angry with a woman (or all women), so they want to make their victim feel bad. Some rapists want to control their victim.

## group work

Read the story, and answer the question in groups.

### The Story of a Rapist

When Zaw Gyi was a small boy, his father beat him a lot. When Zaw Gyi cried, his father beat him more, and told him that 'boys don't cry'. His father also beat his mother, and sometimes his mother had to run to the neighbour's house to hide. When Zaw Gyi was eight, his father went to prison for fighting with a police officer. His mother took them to live with an uncle. The uncle didn't want these extra relatives to support, and treated Zaw Gyi very badly. If Zaw Gyi was noisy, his uncle beat him, and didn't allow him to eat. Zaw Gyi became very angry with his mother, because his mother didn't stop his uncle's abuse. Zaw Gyi started drinking a lot when he was only twelve years old. He stole money to buy cheap whisky.

Zaw Gyi left home at sixteen. He got a job in a factory. He met a woman there, and they became boyfriend and girlfriend. One day he was at her house, and her family had gone out. He tried to persuade her to have sex, but she didn't agree. He raped her, and then ran away.

Over the next two years, he raped three other women. In all three situations, he met a woman and persuaded her to be alone with him. If she didn't agree to sex, he got very angry and raped her, especially when he was drinking. None of these women told anyone. When he was nineteen, he raped a woman who he met at a party. This woman told her relatives, who caught Zaw Gyi. He spent 3 years in prison.

1. *When Zaw Gyi was a child, what do you think he learned about men and women?*
2. *Why do you think the women he raped did not want to tell anyone?*
3. *What do you think can be done to prevent Zaw Gyi from raping more women?*

## Human trafficking

Human trafficking is trading in human beings. People, usually women and children, are sold through brokers that promise that they will get a job in another country and earn a better living. It can also be when a person is taken away against their will to work as a sex worker.

Trafficking is a growing problem all over the world. Every day thousands of children and women are carried off against their will or tricked by promises of a better life in another country. The UN estimates that about 1.2 million children are victims of trafficking every year. Since the activity is hidden and illegal, there are no reliable statistics on how many victims there are.

Human trafficking is a result of poverty and powerlessness. The people who are trafficked usually come from countries with high unemployment and few social services. They often go to work in richer countries where there is a demand for cheap labour or sex workers. Traffickers can make a lot of money from their trade.

## discussion

*What do you know about human trafficking?*

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Explain these terms in your own words:

1. *gender-based violence*
2. *domestic violence*
3. *rape*
4. *informed consent*
5. *human trafficking*

# 5. Gender and Religion

## Key Words:

*subjection (n) - being under the power or authority of another*

*obedient (adj) - obeying authority, orders or instructions*

*desertion (n) - the act of leaving something or someone*

*conscientious (adj) - the characteristic of taking a lot care and effort*

*sacred (adj) - concerned with religion*

*superior (n) - higher in position, status or importance*

*ordain (v) - to give religious authority*

*superstition (n) - a belief which is not based on any knowledge*

*precept (n) - a rule or instruction*

Religion is a very important part of a lot of people's lives. There is more to religion than just believing in a god or gods, and going to a mosque, temple, church or monastery. Religion affects the laws we make and the way we view other people, animals and the environment. Every major religion in the world recognises the differences between women and men, but not just the physical differences. Most religions have *sacred* or holy texts that assign gender roles to women and men. And in every major religion, there is a difference between the things women and men can do.

## exercise

The quotes below are taken from texts of some major religions. Match each quote to the religion from which it comes:

- A. Islam
- B. Hinduism
- C. Buddhism
- D. Judaism
- E. Christianity

1. *"Let the woman learn in silence with all **subjection**. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to have authority over the man, but to be in silence."*
2. *"Nothing must be done independently by a girl, a young woman, or even an aged woman, even in her own house. In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord (husband) is dead, to her sons; a woman must never be independent."*
3. *"Men are the maintainers of women and good women are **obedient**. Those that men fear **desertion** can be confined and beaten."*
4. *Morning prayer: "Blessed be God, king of the universe, that you have not made me a woman."*
5. *"No wickedness comes anywhere near the wickedness of a woman... Sin began with a woman and thanks to her we all must die."*
6. *The vow of a wife when getting married: "Towards my husband I promise to - perform my household duties efficiently, be kind to my in-laws and friends of my husband, be faithful, protect and invest our earnings, discharge my responsibilities lovingly and **conscientiously**."*

## discussion

1. *In which religions are women barred from performing religious rituals or becoming high religious officials?*
2. *The **sacred** texts of many religions state very clearly that women should serve men, instead of both men and women serving each other. Who do you think wrote these texts?*

## Religion in Myanmar: Buddhism

Buddhism has a very important place in Myanmar culture and society, even for non-Buddhists. Myanmar Buddhism puts great weight on men's possession of *pon*, which is translated as:

1. *glory, power, influence.* 2. *the result of past good deeds.*

Monks are *pon gyi*, beings who possess great power and influence as a result of their merit. Men and boys can become monks and eventually achieve spiritual enlightenment or even Buddhahood. Women cannot. While they can become nuns, *thilashin*, their position is lower than that of monks. All women must be reincarnated as men before they can become Buddhas. Buddhist practice also restricts women from participating in some ceremonies and entering some parts of the temple. They cannot apply gold leaf to Buddha statues or perform other common offerings.

Men lead the family, but we want to have the same level. We must pay respect to our husbands: when we eat, we cannot eat before our husbands. If women eat before men, their power will decrease. Even if they are out, we have to wait for them to return to eat! Why can't we put our clothes together on the line? We are told that if men cross under the laundry line, their power will decrease. We want to change these things. These are small changes that need to be made, but we need to change big things, too. We need to learn and get skills and self-confidence."

- *Women's voices, 1999*

### exercise

Read the following quotes from three women in Myanmar. Answer the questions and circle or underline anything you disagree with from each of the women's statements.

"Buddha in his teaching did not make a distinction between men and women; both are made of the same materials, mind and matter. But many people believe that male superiority is related to the religion. I don't believe this. I think that what people think the religion to be can lead to discrimination. Some Buddhist teachings have been written by men, by monks, and have been handed down from the past. But perhaps they are a reflection of the opinion of those men instead of Buddha's teachings. I don't believe that the idea that men are more divine than women and have more power to do things comes from Buddha's teachings. People have confused notions of what Buddhism really is. Most women I know cannot accept that men would be *superior* to women..." – Thida

1. *Who wrote Buddhist teachings, according to Thida?*
2. *Are these writing entirely true to Buddha's teachings? How do you know?*
3. *Why might men write that men are superior to women?*

"Women can be *ordained* as nuns, but I have never seen a nun become an abbot. There would be no audience if a nun were to give Dharma lectures... we have a pagoda at Kyaikami Island with separate areas for men and women to pray. If a woman enters the men's area, there will be thunder and lightning to punish her. Some people say it will happen even if a female dog enters that area. We accept this as the way things are. Sometimes we tried questioning others about it, but we never got answers. So we just accept it."

– Khaing Khaing

4. *Would you listen to a Dharma lecture given by a woman?*
5. *Do you think lightning and thunder would really come down from the sky if a woman entered the men's part of the temple?*
6. *Khaing Khaing says that she tried questioning the rules of the temple, but she didn't get any answers. Why do you think she did not get any answers?*

"I am not opposing our religion, but I feel that some of the teachings restrict the rights of women... some of these restrictions are obvious, some are not. For example, when we are offering something to the monks, they will ask, "Where is your husband?" They want to accept the donation from the husband because it is supposed to be given from the head of the house. We also can't light candles before a Buddha image as people think this is a man's duty... I think those *superstitions* are followed blindly by local people, but are not the real teachings of the religion... Even between nuns and monks there is gender discrimination. A nun cannot sit at the same level as a monk. As far as I know, the Buddha never taught such discriminations between men and women. I think that people themselves have changed the religion. I accept the ethical teaching of the Buddha such as the five *precepts*. What I am opposing is discrimination by people."

– Zin Mar Oo

7. *Why do the monks ask, "Where is your husband?" when women make offerings to them?*
8. *What does Zin Mar Oo mean when she says that "those superstitions are followed blindly by local people"?*
9. *Does Zin Mar Oo think that Buddha believed there was a difference between women and men?*

## Religion and social rules

To be a "good woman" in Buddhism, women must follow a very strict set of social rules. Some of these come from Buddhism and even non-Buddhists follow them. For example, the idea of *pon* is very powerful in Myanmar. Women must take care not to pollute or lessen men's *pon*. For example, women are not supposed to touch monks. Women should not dry their *longyis* or *tameins* in front of the house or anywhere a man might go near. Women should not do roofing or other construction work that places the lower parts of their bodies above men. Women are not supposed to put their heads higher than a man because it is believed that this reduces the man's *pon*. What do all of these rules tell us about a woman's body? Is it equal to a man's?

### group work

Think about the following questions by yourself, then discuss them in groups. Be honest with yourself and your classmates about how you feel.

For men:

- *Would you feel comfortable hanging your clothes next to a woman's?*
- *If your sister's longyi fell from the line into the mud, would you pick it up for her, or let it lie in the mud?*
- *Would you feel comfortable sitting on a chair during a discussion if there were women sitting on the floor?*
- *Would you feel comfortable sitting on the floor during a discussion if there were women sitting on chairs?*

For women:

- *Would you feel comfortable hanging your clothes next to a man's?*
- *Would you be embarrassed if a man picked up your longyi from the mud?*
- *Would you feel comfortable sitting on the floor during a discussion if there were men sitting on chairs?*
- *Would you feel comfortable sitting on a chair during a discussion if there were men sitting on the floor?*

## Other religions in Myanmar

The practice of Islam described by Muslim women in Myanmar is different in every community. In some communities, for example among Rohingyas, women are actively discouraged from leaving the house. In other communities, women are allowed to work outside of the home, but they are watched carefully since the religious leaders think that women are weak or that they are evil and want to tempt men. It is accepted that Muslim women will not progress to the same levels as men, and that women cannot hold any kind of position in the community or in politics.

"I wish my son to graduate and become a religious teacher. My daughter should become like me some day. I hope she will have a little knowledge and become a good woman. She has no chance to become a leader, but if she graduates, she can become the supervisor of the women's group. She can gather the women in her house instead of going to the mosque... We believe in Muslim religious rule that women should not hold power over men, because men naturally have more power than women." - Eh Say

However, in many Muslim communities, for example in Kayin State, Muslim women work in teashops and other businesses and vote. The culture is changing slowly. A lot of Muslim women believe that education will help them achieve more independence.

Christian women in Myanmar also experience discrimination. Some women have become pastors, for example in Chin State, but it is very rare. "The women are told that the head of a woman is a man and the head of the man is God. So whatever it is, we have to respect our husbands. That's our Christian belief," said one Christian woman.

In the Animist community, women cannot perform certain ceremonies, like the telling of the future with chicken bones. Only men can do this. Some animists believe that ceremonies will be ruined if a woman comes near, or even if a female dog enters the area.

### discussion

Think about your own religion. Answer these questions as best as you can.

- *Is the god, prophet or spirit you believe in male or female?*
- *Do you think that your god created women and men to be equal?*
- *Do you observe men and women practicing your religion in the same way?*
- *Do you feel men's and women's religious practice has the same value in your community?*
- *Are there female religious leaders in your community? Do you respect female religious leaders as much as male leaders?*

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Answer these questions:

1. *Make a list of all the different religions you know.*
2. *Write some examples of gender inequality within your own religion.*
3. *Write some of the social rules that exist for men in your own religion.*
4. *Write some of the social rules that exist for women in your own religion.*

# 6. Gender and Politics

## Key Words:

*oppression (n) - unfair use of power to make sure other people have less power*

*policy (n) - a plan for what someone (or a group or government) wants to achieve*

*mediate (v) - to solve a problem or make an agreement between people or groups who want different things*

*constitution (n) - a document that gives the rules for the government and the people of one country or place*

*citizen (n) - a person who is recognised by the law as "belonging" to a place (usually a certain country)*

*parliament (n) - A national body which creates laws and represents it's country*

## class activity

### Blue and Red People Roleplay

1. The teacher will give you a piece of blue paper or a piece of red paper. Stick the paper on your forehead or chest so that everyone can see it. People with red paper are "red people" and people with blue paper are "blue people."

2. Follow the teacher's instructions.

3. When the exercise is over, you will talk about how the exercise made you feel. Some people might feel angry, and that is okay. Try to explain *why* you feel the way you do. What made you feel that way? Think about and answer these questions during the discussion:

- *Did the exercise remind you of some parts of your life? How?*
- *What situations and issues in society are similar to this?*

For the **blue people**:

- *How did you feel during the exercise? What made you feel that way?*
- *What things in the exercise did you want to change?*
- *Did you want to resist during the exercise?*
- *What did you do to show your resistance?*

For the **red people**:

- *Did you feel uncomfortable about your privilege?*
- *Did you do anything to change it, or did you cooperate with the system the whole time?*
- *If others had tried to change the system, how do you think you might have reacted? What do you think you would have done?*

4. In small groups, describe what kind of *oppression* you saw in the exercise. Brainstorm ways that we can resist these systems of oppression.

## What Is Politics?

## brainstorm

Think of as many words as you can that are related to politics. Make a class list.

## class activity

The teacher will make two columns on the board: "related to politics" and "not related to politics." You will get a card with a word or phrase on it. You have to decide if whatever is on your card relates to politics or not. Tape your card on the board, and explain your reasons.

## How can people participate in politics?

You don't have to be a member of a political party to participate in politics. There are many ways of taking part in discussions and decision-making. One is by voting in elections. Others are by participating in demonstrations or publishing your ideas about decisions made about resources, activities and *policies*. Because politics is about decisions for our communities, you can't participate in politics alone. A good way to become involved is by joining an organisation such as a student group, farmers' association or women's organisation.

You are participating in politics when you:

- Discuss policies
- Persuade others to join you
- Elect committees
- Publicise your group's activities: write articles for newspapers, pass out newsletters, or hold public meetings

## People who are involved in politics:

- Work together with others for something important such as: the future, their job, their beliefs, family, friends or country.
- Make decisions about resources, activities or policies.
- Elect people to represent them at decision-making levels
- *Mediate* between conflicting interests, using persuasion and compromise rather than force.

Anything which has to do with power and the exercise of power is political. Anything which has to do with either maintaining a system or changing a system is political.

"Many governments in Asia only have men, so even if they really want to do something for women, how can they understand women's issues? For example, what kind of help or instruction do pregnant women need, what kind of support do young girls need, what can they do for older women... these kinds of things only women can know. If there were women, it would be better. Now, I feel like there is pressure on women not to be in the front, at any high level, in any visible place. I think they don't really try to help women, they don't do anything for women's development."

- *Women's voices, 1999*

## Self-help among women from Myanmar

Women's Development Network (WDN) is a women's group from Myanmar. WDN organises maternal and children's health programmes. It sets up nursery schools and provides educational materials for schools in remote areas. WDN also creates projects that allow women in remote areas to make money.

One of the most successful programmes is the weaving cooperative. The group has organised the purchase of cotton thread, loom construction, and distribution of materials to women in some villages. The village women produce a variety of traditional woven materials, including scarves, blankets, and bags. The cooperative sells the finished products. The money earned is given to the women who weave.

## exercise

Answer these questions about the WDN case study.

1. *Do you think the work of WDN is political? Does it fit the description you have just read about politics?*
2. *Look back at the list of rights from the CEDAW agreement on page 14. How does WDN help women achieve their rights?*

## Thinking locally

### group work

1. What kinds of organisations are there in your community? Make a list of the organisations and the kind of work they do.
2. Next, look at the list of organisations and decide how many of these involve women. Are there women in positions of leadership in these organisations? Why or why not?
3. In women's organisations, the leaders are (usually) women. Is it important for a woman to be the leader of a women's organisation? Would a man be a good leader of a women's organisation?
4. Find some organisations on your list that have very few women involved or in positions of leadership. In these organisations, is it important to hear women's voices, concerns and ideas or should that be done just in the women's groups?

## Making decisions without women

### class activity

1. As a class, make a list of four or five important decisions affecting your community or region. Try to think of real decisions that were made in the past five years. (For example: the building of a new school, building of new roads, a new rule or law, etc.)
2. In small groups, talk about one of these decisions. Answer these questions:
  - *Does this decision affect women and men in the same way?*
  - *Who made this decision? What percentage of this group is made up of women?*
  - *How might the decision have been different if 50% of those who made it were women?*
3. Share your results with the class.

### brainstorm

How many countries can you think of that have, or have ever had, a woman president or prime minister? Which countries have never elected a woman leader?

In my country at present, women have no participation in the higher levels of government. In almost every party we see only men holding the top jobs. In the previous election women won just 3 percent of the seats in parliament and they were all members of the same political party.

**- Woman politician, 1995**

### discussion

1. Read the quote and discuss some reasons why only 3 percent of the parliamentary seats were won by women.
2. The speech was made in 1995. Do you think the situation has changed around the world? Is it better or worse? Give reasons for your answer.

## National liberation struggles

In countries such as Vietnam, Kenya, Russia, the USA and Cuba, people fought wars to end colonialism or oppression. Women took part in these struggles and fought side-by-side with men. They were also arrested, wounded and even killed. For example, in the Eritrean Revolution of 1991, women made up 30% of the Liberation Army.



**Soldier from the Eritrean Liberation Army**



**Haydee Santamaria, Celia Sanchez and Fidel Castro, Cuban Revolutionaries.**

The struggle for liberation changes people's lives. Traditional views about women's roles are challenged. Women prove that they could to jobs such as fighting, providing food or taking charge of organisations just as well as men.

After independence, women insist on having the same rights as men. Therefore, the new *constitutions* state that women and men can vote and participate in all activities the same way as men. In most cases, however, even when women have fought on the front lines of liberation struggles, they have been unable to find room in the political struggles that follow. Women are rarely asked to join in the peace talks which follow conflicts and often have to fight to form even a small part of the government which is built after a war.

In fact, no matter what the constitutions say, most women do not yet enjoy the same opportunities in life as men. For a long time, women have been treated as second-class *citizens*. They have had poorer health care, lower wages and heavier workloads than men. Many women do not have the chance to go to school or have access to modern technology to make their lives easier. It will take many changes and much effort to ensure that women are treated fairly.

### discussion

Women today have the right to vote in most countries. However, in every country in the world there are more men than women in *parliament*. Why do you think this is?

### brainstorm

Think of all the barriers women could face when they try to get involved in politics. Think about the external barriers women could face: from their environment and their communities; as well as the internal barriers women may face, such as low self-confidence.

This table shows the percentage of parliamentary seats occupied by women in selected countries.

<i>Country or area</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
Afghanistan	...	...	...	27	27
Australia	10	22	25	25	25
Botswana	9	9	7	11	11
Bulgaria	13	11	26	22	22
Cambodia	6	8	10	10	10
Canada	18	21	21	21	21
China	21	22	20	20	20
Denmark	33	37	38	37	37
Ethiopia	5	2	8	22	22
Finland	34	37	38	38	42
France	6	11	12	12	12
Germany	26	31	32	32	32
Ghana	8	9	10	11	11
India	8	8	8	8	8
Iraq	11	6	...	26	26
Israel	9	12	15	14	14
Japan	3	5	7	...	9
Kenya	3	4	7	7	7
Kuwait	0	0	0	2	3
Malaysia	8	8	9	9	9
Mali	2	12	10	10	10
Nepal	...	6	6	6	17
Netherlands	31	36	37	37	37
New Zealand	21	29	28	32	32
Nigeria	...	...	6	6	6
Norway	39	36	36	38	38
Pakistan	2	2	22	21	21
Russian Federation	13	10	10	10	10
Rwanda	17	17	49	49	49
Saudi Arabia	...	...	0	...	0
Singapore	4	4	16	21	25
South Africa	25	30	33	33	33
Sweden	40	43	45	45	47
Thailand	6	6	9	...	9
United Arab Emirates	0	0	0	...	23
United Kingdom	10	18	18	20	20
USA	11	13	14	15	16
Vietnam	18	26	27	27	27
Zimbabwe	15	14	10	16	17

#### exercise

Answer these questions about the table.

- 1. How many countries had an increase in the number of women in parliament between 1995 and 2007?*
- 2. Are there any countries which have seen the number of women in parliament decrease?*
- 3. How do the countries of Southeast Asia - Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam - compare with each other?*
- 4. Which country showed the largest increase in the number of women in parliament between 1995 and 2007? Can you think of any reasons why this country has shown the largest increase?*

## Gender and government in Rwanda

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda killed 800,000 people in 100 days. Many more men were killed than women and following the genocide, 70% of Rwanda's population was female. This imbalance led to women taking roles as heads of household, community leaders and financial providers – roles traditionally held by men. These changes forced women to think differently and learn new skills.

In addition to these changing gender roles, Rwanda has shown a strong commitment to including women in its government. It is one of 15 countries in the world which has a quota system for electing women to National parliament – 24 out of 80 seats are reserved for women. In the 2003 elections women won an additional 15 seats in parliament, giving them 39 out of 80 seats, or 49% - the highest percentage in the world.

In the history of our country and society, women could not go in public with men. Where men were, women were not supposed to talk, to show their needs. Men were to talk and think for them. The women's councils have mobilised them, have educated them, it has brought self-confidence. They have acquired a confidence of leadership.

*- Betre Mukamusoni, a Rwandan parliamentarian,  
July 2002.*

Increased participation of women in politics is necessary for improved social, economic and political conditions of their families and the entire country.

*- Rwandan President  
Paul Kagame,  
April 2003.*

### exercise

Read the text and the quotes about Rwanda and answer these questions:

- 1. What are the two reasons given for increased gender equality in Rwanda's government?*
- 2. What roles do you think women played in this change?*
- 3. What roles do you think men played in this change?*
- 4. Look back at the quote on page 31 and compare the two situations. Do you think there will be a time when gender equality is present in all governments?*

## CHAPTER REVIEW

### exercise

Answer these questions.

- 1. How can people get involved in politics? Give three examples.*
- 2. Do you know any organisations that are made up of women? Led by a woman? How are these groups perceived by the community?*
- 3. What special political interests might women have that are different from men's interests?*

# 7. Gender and Education

## Key Words:

*potential (n) - the ability to do something (often something good)*

*to benefit (v) - to be helpful or useful*

*underachievement (n) - performing worse than is possible*

*numeracy (n) - the ability to do basic mathematics*

*literacy (n) - the ability to read and write*

## Socialising children

This is a Padaung legend, told by parents to their children for generations.

Once upon a time, on his way back from the fields, a young farmer called Khoo Lachrist found an egg inside the hollow of a tree-stump. He put it into his bag and set off for the farm. When he got home, he tried to fit the egg into a pot to be boiled for his supper, but the egg was too big for the pot. He took his biggest pot but it was still too small for the egg. Not knowing what to do, he found the largest basket in the house, put the egg in it and left it.

The next day, he went to the fields as usual. When he got home he found that someone had already prepared his dinner and rice-wine. On the second day the same thing happened. But on the third day, he caught a glimpse of a beautiful woman just as she ran out of the kitchen. She was about to get away, but he caught her by the hand and asked her who she was. "I came out of the egg" she replied. "I beg you to let me go. I will not try to escape. I could only disappear if you found a way of putting the egg back into the chicken." So he let go of her hand. They ate supper and made love.

The next morning Khoo Lachrist went to his uncle and told him everything that had happened. His uncle understood the mystery and they named the girl Mu Lachran because she was heaven-born and not of human making. They celebrated their union with a wedding and lived together for two years in perfect happiness.

One day when he came home, Khoo Lachrist found that his wife was gone. The next morning he went to the village shaman to ask for advice. The shaman was able to tell him that a stranger from the east had stolen his wife, but that he would be able to find her. However the shaman warned him that the journey would be both difficult and dangerous. Khoo Lachrist was not afraid; he said that he would follow his wife to hell if he had to. He killed a chicken and cooked the meat. After the meal he set off from the village.

After days of traveling under the hot sun he reached his destination on the borders of Thailand. And there he found his wife, surrounded by the men who kidnapped her. They took him prisoner as well, locked them into a house, and set it on fire. But as the house burned, the two flew out of the building and into heaven. Mu Lachran flew to the east and became the Morning star. Khoo Lachrist flew to the west and became the Evening star. Since then they meet once every seven years, but their love is eternal.

## exercise

Answer these questions.

1. *How would you describe Khoo Lachrist?*
2. *How would you describe Mu Lachran?*
3. *Think about young girls who hear this story from their grandmother or mother (women are traditionally storytellers in Padaung culture). Would they want to be like Mu Lachran? What characteristics would they need to be like Mu Lachran?*
4. *Think about young boys who hear this story. Would they want to be like Khoo Lachrist? What characteristics would they need to be like Khoo Lachrist?*

## group work

Think about other stories that you have been told as a child. Are there females in the story? What are they doing and how are they described? What do the males in the story do, and how are they described? How do you think young girls and boys are affected by these stories? Present your ideas to the class.

## discussion

What role do stories play in the education of children?

What is the connection between stories, socialisation and internalisation ?

### ***Education for women and girls***

All over the world, girls do not get as much schooling as boys. Look at these facts:

- By the time they are 18, girls have an average of 4.4 fewer years of education than boys.
  - Two-thirds of children who drop out before finishing four years of school are girls.
  - Half as many women as men in developing nations are enrolled in higher education.
- Around the world, women continue to represent only a small percentage of maths and science students.

In all parts of the world, in industrialised as well as developing countries, women have had to struggle for access to equal education.

Worldwide research shows that families with educated mothers have a better life. Societies with high numbers of educated mothers have the following *benefits*:

- Fewer babies die before the age of one.
- Children are better fed.
- Families are often planned more carefully and are often smaller in size.
- Children of educated mothers do better at school because they have their mother's support.
- Educated mothers are more likely to share decisions with their husbands.
- Educated mothers can find better paid jobs to help support the family.
- The daughters of educated mothers grow up to be educated themselves, and so the cycle of improvement continues.



In an effort to end poverty and inequality around the world, the member countries of the United Nations agreed to 8 goals, called the 'Millennium Development Goals'. The third goal aims to create equal access to all levels of education for girls and boys, women and men by 2015. The progress some countries have made towards this goal at the primary level of education is shown in the table on the next page.

Enrollment in Primary education in selected countries					
	Ratio of Girls to Boys enrolled in primary education			Ratio of Girls to Boys enrolled in primary education	
Country	1999	2005	Country	1999	2005
Bangladesh	0.98	1.02	Mongolia	1.00	1.00
Cambodia	0.95	0.94	Morocco	0.94	0.96
Chile	0.98	0.99	Myanmar	1.02	0.99
Cuba	0.95	0.99	Nepal	0.76	1.00
Czech Republic	0.98	1.00	Norway	0.98	1.01
Egypt	0.96	0.96	Philippines	0.95	0.94
Germany	1.00	1.00	Poland	0.99	1.00
Guyana	1.05	0.95	Rwanda	0.97	1.00
India	0.83	0.94	South Africa	0.98	0.95
Iran	0.99	1.29	South Korea	1.02	1.00
Iraq	0.88	0.94	Sweden	0.98	0.99
Laos	0.89	0.92	United States	0.95	0.98
Maldives	1.01	1.07	Vanuata	1.00	0.96

### exercise

Answer these questions:

1. Which countries had already achieved the goal of equal access to education at the primary level by 2005?
2. Which countries made progress towards this goal between 1999 and 2005?
3. Copy and complete the table using the information.

Countries with more boys than girls enrolled in primary school in 2005	Countries with the same number of boys and girls enrolled in primary school in 2005	Countries with more girls than boys enrolled in primary school in 2005

4. Write three sentences about the information in your table.

## Boys' underachievement

In some countries there is a problem with boys' *underachievement* in schools. In England, for example, girls are performing better than boys at all levels. The differences are greatest in language and social science subjects, but also include the in traditionally 'male' subjects of maths and science. The average boy starting high school is:

- 11 months behind the average girl in speaking and listening skills
- 12 months behind in *literacy*
- 6 months behind in *numeracy*.

There are different theories for boys' underachievement. These include:

- There is a lot of evidence that girls often work harder throughout the year, whilst boys study hard before exams.
- Boys are more likely than girls to have behavioural problems, and get into trouble more often.
- Stereotypes. For many boys, it is not 'cool' to do well at school. Doing well at sports is more important.
- Role-models. Most primary school teachers are women, so boys do not have many male role-models.
- Many people believe girls mature at a younger age than boys, implying they are more likely to take their studies seriously.

## Girls at school

Boys' underachievement can be a problem, but in many countries girls tend to get lower grades than boys, especially in science and maths. There are many reasons for this difference in performance between girls and boys in school; we will explore some of the main ones.

The first barrier to a girl's success in school is internal. Research shows that girls often lack self-confidence. They don't believe they are as intelligent as boys and this holds them back. This belief comes from socialisation, internalisation, families, culture, communities and from within the girls themselves.

Unfortunately, even teachers often believe boys are more intelligent than girls and based on this belief, they often treat boys and girls differently in the classroom. Often without realising it, some teachers pay more attention to the boys in the class and value their contributions more highly than those from girls. Some teachers ask more questions to boys than to girls. Furthermore, boys are often socialised to be louder whereas girls are socialised to be quiet and polite. It is therefore more likely that boys will receive more of the teacher's attention than girls.



Home environment also has a strong impact on a child's success in education. Boys and girls often have different roles and responsibilities in their family. Girls are often obliged to help with work around the house and may spend time cooking or cleaning while their brothers are free to study and complete homework.

Beyond children, their parents and teachers, schools contribute to differences in education between boys and girls. Schools often encourage girls to study different subjects from boys. Girls often study home economics, sewing or typing while boys study maths or science.

This choice of subjects may slow girls progress later in life. Their schooling often prepares them for careers in nursing, teaching or working in a shop. These jobs are usually poorly paid. Boys are often trained to aim at careers in medicine, law and engineering, which are usually well paid.

Equal education, therefore, means more than making sure that equal numbers of boys and girls can simply go to school. It also means that they get the same standard of education while at school and the same opportunities when out of school.

Why should women and men be educated equally? Here are some reasons that are often given:

- Basic human rights must apply to everyone, and education is a right of all people.
- Women are just as intelligent as men. If girls are not educated, half the *potential* of the community or nation is wasted.
- Countries need the skills and abilities of all their people to develop.
- If women have the same right and opportunities, they can share some of the responsibilities taken by men. In this way, both women and men *benefit*.

### group work

Focus on the last paragraph – the reasons why boys and girls should get an equal education. Do you agree with these reasons? In your opinion, which is the most important reason? Add some more arguments for (or against) equal education of women.

Two girls go to school together: Cha Mu and Bathsheba. They are both nine years old and come from the same village but there are lots of differences between the two girls.

Cha Mu's mother graduated from high school and works as a teacher in the local school. Every day, she checks Cha Mu's homework when she gets home from school and helps her with any problems after dinner. Cha Mu's father helps her mother with the cooking and cleaning. Every night Cha Mu's father reads to her before she goes to sleep.

Bathsheba's mother sells snacks in the market and comes home every day very tired. She relies on Bathsheba to help cook the family's meals. In the morning, Bathsheba wakes up very early to start the family fire and start preparing breakfast. She often falls asleep in class. On her way home from school, Bathsheba always stops in the market to buy food for the evening meal and she helps her mother cook the meal and clean up afterwards. Sometimes after dinner, she helps her mother prepare snacks for sale the next day. Her father isn't at home very often and never helps her with her homework which sometimes she doesn't have time to complete.

#### exercise

Answer these questions about the case study above:

1. *Do you think one of these girls is less intelligent than the other? Are they less intelligent than the boys in their class?*
2. *At the end of the year, who do you think will get better grades? Why?*
3. *What problems do both girls face? What problems do the individual girls face?*
4. *Who can make a difference for girls in school? What can help girls succeed?*
5. *Do both girls get the same chances to succeed in school? Why not? Do you think they have the same chances as most boys?*

#### activity

1. If you can, go to a school nearby and observe a few classes. Use drawings or photographs if you can and record the following information:
  - *Where are the boys sitting? Where are the girls sitting?*
  - *Which way does the teacher face when he or she is talking?*
  - *How many questions did the teacher ask to boys? How many to girls?*
  - *How many girls put up their hand when the teacher asked a question? How many boys?*
2. If you can, visit the homes of some people you know who have children in school, preferably in the evening, and record the following information:
  - *What are the boys in the house doing? What are the girls doing?*
  - *When the children are working on schoolwork, what are the parents doing?*
  - *Is there any difference between the grades of the boy and girl in the house?*
3. If you can, investigate the structure of the school management at one of the schools in your community and record the following information:
  - *How many teachers are there at the school? How many males? How many females?*
  - *In the administration of the school, how many males are there? How many females?*
  - *Who has decision making abilities at the school? How many are female? How many are male?*

## CHAPTER REVIEW

Answer these questions:

1. *Give examples of how society benefits when men and women receive equal education.*
2. *Describe some of the barriers that can prevent girls succeeding at school.*
3. *Describe some of the gender inequalities you have seen during your own education.*

# 8. Conclusion

## group work

“Men are the front legs of the elephant, women are the hind legs of the elephant”  
- Thai proverb

What does this proverb mean? Do you agree with it? Does your culture have the same idea?  
How can you relate this proverb to:

1. *work?*
2. *family?*
3. *community?*
4. *politics?*
5. *education?*

## exercise

“Man, who has the energy, is the volatile spirit. He is also the sensitive one, easily hurt and humiliated. He is less able to bear the injustices of life, is trusting, and easily fooled by others. Woman is the conserver and guide. Not easily tricked, she is the negotiator and trader. She looks after difficult situations, advises her husband at all times and sets the price for trade purchases.”

- Mi Mi Khaing

Mi Mi Khaing was a Myanmar anthropologist who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s. In her book ‘Myanmar Women’ she describes traditional gender relations in Myanmar.

1. Explain this paragraph in your own words.
2. Do you feel that this view of gender relations is still relevant in the 21st century? In what ways are views and beliefs changing? In what ways are they the same?

## class activity

1. What does it mean for people to be ‘equal’?
2. Have a debate on the topic:

**‘Women and men are equal.’**

Use the ideas and information you have learned from this module, and any other information or ideas, to either support or oppose this statement.

