

FEMINIST TASK FORCE

FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY: WOMEN AT THE MARGINS



What is Feminization of Poverty?



According to the Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995), "because of the gender division of labor and responsibilities for household welfare, **women bear a disproportionate burden**, attempting to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity".

The Beijing Platform for Action (BPfA) further adds that '**women's poverty is directly related to the absence of economic opportunities and autonomy, lack of access to economic resources**, including credit, land ownership and inheritance, lack of access to education and support services and their minimal participation in the decision-making process.'

Thus, **feminization of poverty is the term used to underscore the disproportionate socio economic precarity women face** relative to men due to gender stereotypes and norms, and systemic disparities, such as unpaid domestic labor and gender-based violence. Financial market regulations and orthodox macroeconomic policies further exacerbate this problem by not incorporating a gender perspective or a human rights approach into their evaluations and analysis. Thus, market "efficiency" ought to be redefined in order to mean minimization of inequality, and not, maximization of profits (UNIFEM 2006).



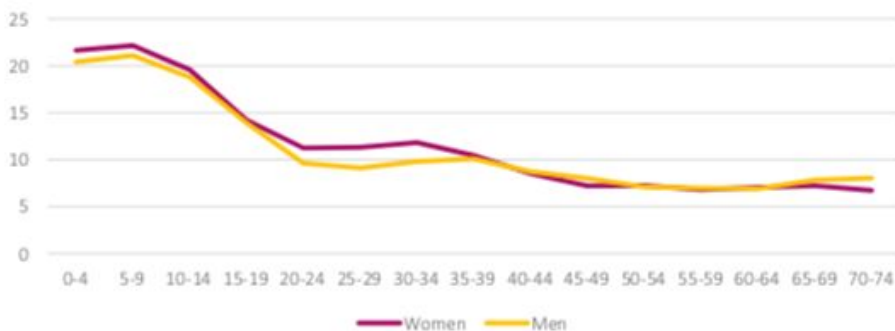
Evidence on the Feminization of Poverty

Income and consumption are traditionally measured at the household level, making it difficult to assess individual gender-based differences in material wealth given that **neither income or consumption are distributed equally between household members**. A World Bank study (2018) finds that “household income may bear no relation to women’s poverty because women may not necessarily be able to access it”.

An alternative to measure poverty across women and men is to compare male versus female-led households. However, **the term “household headship” is loaded with gender biases and is often subject to interpretation**. As a result, current poverty indicators mask the truth of the differences in poverty across women and men. Despite the difficulties to measure female poverty compared to male poverty, studies find the following:

- Slightly more than half of the poor are female and 51% of the world’s poor live in sub-Saharan Africa, followed by South Asia (World Bank 2018).
- By age 25, women are 2 percentage points poorer than men, a sizeable difference. This means that at age 25, 120 women live in poor households (less than \$1.90 per day) for every 100 men living in poor households (World Bank 2018).
- Working-age women are more likely than men to be poor when they have dependent children and no partner to contribute to the household income (UN 2015).
- At older ages, women in developed countries are more likely than men to be poor, particularly when living in one-person household (UN 2015).
- Among females, girls under 15 are the poorest (World Bank 2018).

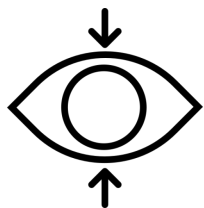
Figure 3. Female and male poverty rates by age group



Note: Total sample 89 countries

Source: WB Staff's calculations based on GMD.

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Women at the Margins

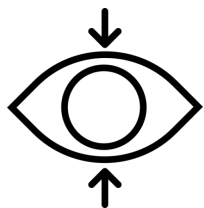
Indigenous Women

Triple Discrimination: Indigenous women face multiple forms of discrimination, often restricting their access to labor and financial markets, traditional indigenous lands, water, public services and political representation. Statistics also show that indigenous women around the globe have lower literacy rates and lower healthcare enrollment rates. In addition, they are more likely to be informal workers which excludes them from social security nets and services (IACHR 2017).

Why Community Land Rights Matter: Approximately 2.5 billion people rely on indigenous lands for food and water. Nonetheless, indigenous peoples legally own one fifth of the lands that traditionally belonged to them, and of which only a small share belong to women (OXFAM). Loss of their land and natural resources displaces indigenous peoples and forces them to alter their traditional way of life and their productive means (IACHR 2017). Moreover, lack of community land rights threatens humanity's ability to achieve food security and fight climate change. Seventy percent of the world's food is produced by small-scale producers in biodiverse locations that maintain the world's ecological planet. Undermining small-scale production thus leads to accelerated climate change and more precarious resources for survival. Lastly, women's land rights are key to economic empowerment and fulfillment of their human rights.. Studies show that closing the gender gap in agriculture will lead to better health, nutrition and larger scales of production (OXFAM).

Indigenous People's Know-how: Nature-based climate change mitigation strategies cost less and last more compared to technology-based solutions. By drawing from their traditional methods and promoting such nature-based solutions, indigenous peoples are at the forefront of climate change mitigation. As such, indigenous communities are key actors in the fight against climate change and be placed in the center of global discussions and debates.

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Women at the Margins

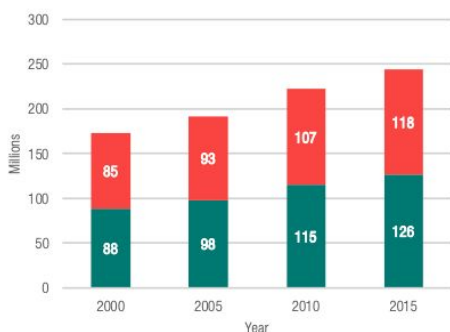
Migrants

A Gendered Phenomenon: Many women and girls migrate as a way to escape gender-based violence, family control, forced marriages or female genital mutilation. Migration also requires additional and graver risk for women. For example, women are more likely to be victims of human trafficking while migrating. Research shows that approximately 80% of trafficking victims are women. Furthermore, gender norms and social norms in countries of origin, transit and destination play a significant role in shaping migrant's experiences.

Informal and Low-paid Jobs: Women migrants tend to concentrate in informal, low paid and unregulated industries (UN Women 2016). However, despite gender-based obstacles to the market labor and the gender wage gap, female migrants send half of the \$601 global remittances (UN DESA 2017).

Migrant Women and the Global Care Chain: "The feminisation of domestic care and labor creates a global care chain", increasing the demand of female care and domestic workers (O'Neil et. al. 2016). As a result, of the 11.5 million international migrant domestic workers, 73.4% of them are women (ILO 2015).

Figure 1: Total number of international migrants by sex

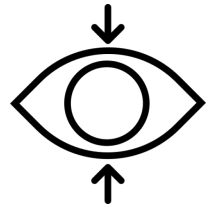


Source: UN DESA (2016b)

Women--Half of the World's Migrants:

In 2017, women made up half of the 258 million migrants who lived and worked outside of their country of birth. Migrant women and girls are more numerous in every region except Africa and Asia (UN DESA 2017).

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Women at the Margins

Dalits

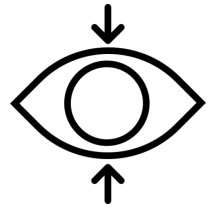
Who are the Dalits?: Dalits are communities that face severe discrimination in caste-based systems in South Asia, mainly India and Nepal. In total, there are a total of 260 million Dalits in the world (Daneil et. al. 2017). Although legislation banning caste-based discrimination has been passed in recent years, stigmatization of Dalits remains widespread. As such, Dalits are continued to be deemed "untouchable" by many.

Widespread Poverty: According to the Multidimensional Poverty Index, 55% of India's population is poor, approximately 654 million people. However, 65% of Dalits in India are classified as poor. Gender disparities tend to further aggravate poverty among Dalit women (Daneil et. al. 2017).

Dalit Women Live Fewer Years: Dalit women are particularly vulnerable situations due to disproportionate discrimination they face due to the intersection of their caste and gender. In India, the average Dalit woman lives 14.6 fewer years than women from higher castes due to the poor sanitation and lack of adequate healthcare available for lower-caste women (UN Women 2018). Poor quality drinking water is a major source of water borne diseases among Dalits and the proportion of Dalit houses without toilets is much above the Indian national average (Daneil et. al. 2017).

Overrepresentation in Informal Labor Markets: Dalit women also lack access to income-earning assets and regular employment and depend mainly on wage labor. In 2009 and 2010, 38% of Dalit women were self-employed compared to 62% of upper caste women. Moreover, most Dalit women worked as agricultural wage laborers in rural areas compared to 17% upper-caste women (Sadana et. al. 2015). A large number of Dalit women occupy unclean or polluting jobs, such as scavenging, threatening their health and livelihood (Sadana et. al. 2015). Lastly, it is not uncommon for Dalit women to be exploited as debt slaves in brick kilns, agriculture and textile industries.

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Women at the Margins

People with Disabilities

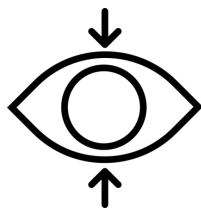
Prevalence in the World: One in five women worldwide are experiencing some type of disability. Given that infrastructure and public services around the world rarely take into account an inclusive and gender-based approach, women with disabilities face many challenges to access basic rights, such as education, sustainable employment, healthcare and a life free of violence and discrimination (UN Women 2017). For example, women with disabilities often lack reliable and efficient transportation, impeding them from getting a job and enjoying a normal life. They also face significantly high healthcare costs (NWLC 2016).

Women with Disabilities Remain in Poverty: While poverty rates among women as a whole decreased between 2015 and 2014, from 14.7% to 13.4%, women with disabilities saw no improvement at all, leveling at almost 32% (NWLC 2016).

Women With Disabilities are Not a Homogenous Group: Women and girls with disabilities include refugees, indigenous women, migrants, women in poverty, and women from different ethnicities, who require a more complex and intersectional understanding of their experiences and needs. Legal and legislative frameworks around the world have glaring gaps in regard to women and girls with disabilities, leaving them dangerously exposed to further discrimination.

Women with Disabilities Are More Vulnerable to Gender-based Violence: Women and girls with disabilities are the group most vulnerable to violence relative to their male counterparts and other women and girls without disabilities (UNFPA 2019). Research suggests that women with disabilities are not only more likely to be subject to domestic abuse and sexual assault, they are also less likely to speak up about it, perpetuating violence (OWH).

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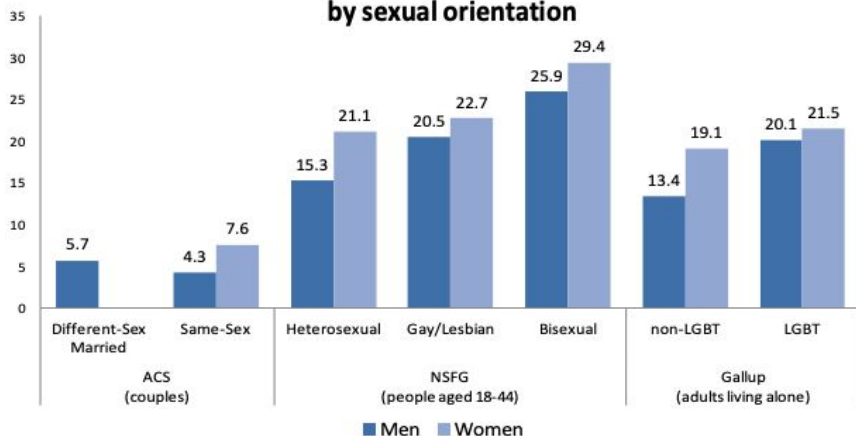
Women at the Margins

LGBTQI

Disproportionate Poverty: Studies based on the United States show that 24% of lesbians and bisexual women are poor compared with 19% of heterosexual women (Sears and Badgett 2012). Likewise, transgender people in the United States are four times as likely to have a household income under \$10,000 and twice as likely to be unemployed than a non transsexual person (Sears and Badgett 2012). Poverty among same-sex couples is also more likely to transcend generations. Children in same-sex couples households are almost twice as likely to be poor as in heterosexual couple households (Badgett et. al. 2013).

Ubiquitous Harassment Against LGBTQI: Ninety percent of people surveyed who identified as trans said they had experienced harassment, mistreatment, or discrimination. One in 5 also reported being homeless at some point in their lives (Sears and Badgett 2012).

**Summary of poverty rates from national surveys
by sexual orientation**



THE WAY FORWARD

Accomplishments So Far:

- Since the 1980s, gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls has been institutionalized in most international agencies and governments.
- **Women have become better organized at the global, local and grassroots levels.**
- Female life expectancy has increased, absolutely and relative to men.
- Over 140 countries worldwide have passed laws on domestic violence and more than 150 have laws on sexual harassment ([World Bank 2018](#)).
- From 1980 to 2018, the global female literacy rate increased from 62% to 82%.

Problematic Areas:

- The continuation of the division of labor and the **undue burden of unpaid domestic, care and reproductive labor on women.**
- Many women who have been integrated into the labor market are placed at the lower level of labor hierarchy. In addition, **female-led industries are lower paid.**
- There is **insufficient data** to unveil women's poverty rates inside and outside households across the world.
- Prevalence of broad based tax systems, such as Value Added Tax, that disproportionately affect poor women.
- **Increased privatization** of state assistance and the accumulation of odious debt and the diversion of government resources away from public services that reduce women's care burden.
- Women's **lack of access to financial markets**, credits and inheritance, as well as other material resources.
- **Insufficient efforts to mitigate climate change** as it disproportionately affects those furthest behind.
- Lack of spending on social infrastructure, especially to address climate justice.

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FEMINIST TASK FORCE

The Feminist Task Force is a coalition of women's organizations and networks, grassroots and rural women, gender equality advocates, youth and girls rooted in the Global South and dedicated to placing gender equality as central to poverty eradication. Founded in 2005 under the auspices of the Global Call to Action against Poverty, the FTF works the intersectionality of poverty, inequalities, climate change, financing for development and gender justice at the United Nations and globally to raise awareness about the increasing feminization of poverty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Feminization of Poverty: Women at the Margins is a publication focusing on socially excluded and disenfranchised women/persons in society who access limited resources and bear a disproportionate burden due to gender divisions of labor and responsibilities. We explore the nexus of poverty, social exclusion and gender inequality.

We thank FTF staff members responsible for this publication: Daniela Philipson Garcia and Rosa G. Lizarde.

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