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# UN Women Study Guide



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality  
and the Empowerment of Women

**Topic A: Combating Health Issues  
Faced by Women and Improving Health  
Care Services**

**Topic B: Religion, Faith, and Women's  
Rights**



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## CHAIR LETTER

Dear Delegates,

Welcome to the UN WOMEN Committee!

We, your chairs, are very excited to host this fantastic committee and to meet all of you. The UN Women committee is incredibly close to our hearts because the global issues and standards that this committee sets affect women worldwide and continue to progress our globe closer to equality.

The first topic of the committee is “Combating Health Issues Faced by Women and Improving Health Care Services”. Discussing this issue is vital to ensure a good quality of life for every woman, as they all deserve that. The organization's utmost priority is to promote social progress, better living standards, and human rights. In this topic, we explore the financial and health setbacks women experience in their day-to-day lives, what has been done in the past, and what we can do in the future to improve half of the population's fundamental human rights.

The second topic of the committee is “Religion, Faith, and Women’s Rights”. This topic highlights the discrimination women worldwide face regarding their religion and beliefs. It is the UN’s responsibility to keep women from finding themselves in these horrible situations. In this topic, we will showcase the horrors many women face because of prejudice and social stigmas. During this committee, we must work together to protect women and allow them to practice their religions and beliefs freely and openly.

If you need ANY help or have ANY questions at all, please feel free to contact us and we will do our best to assist you.

Good Luck!

Sincerely,

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMITTEE

UN Women, founded in July 2010, is a committee that works to advance gender equality and works with governments and civil society to address women's challenges and discrimination. The committee plays a pivotal role in shaping policies and laws, advocating for women's rights, and creating programs and services needed to implement these standards.

The Committee consists of one representative from each of the 45 Member States elected by the Economic and Social Council based on equitable geographical distribution, meaning 13 members from Africa and 11 from Asia.

### **UN Women's Prominent Roles**

- To support inter-governmental bodies and collaborate with governments, civil society, and other UN agencies to strengthen partnerships and mobilize resources for gender equality initiatives. It engages with stakeholders to foster a collective approach toward women's empowerment and eliminating gender-based violence.
- To help Member States implement these standards, standing ready to provide suitable technical and financial support to those who request it, and monitoring and evaluating the progress made.
- To formulate policies and strategies to address the systematic barriers to gender equality and women's rights. The committee actively advocates and urges governments to include gender perspectives in various aspects of life, such as healthcare, education, politics, and employment.



## TOPIC A: COMBATING HEALTH ISSUES FACED BY WOMEN AND IMPROVING HEALTH CARE SERVICES

### *BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE*

#### THE “PINK TAX”

The “Pink Tax” is a discriminatory price markup on products marketed to women. As a result, everyday items tend to be 13% higher on average for women compared to equivalent products marketed to men. This unjust practice places women at a substantial economic disadvantage, forcing them to bear an additional financial burden simply because of their gender. Despite efforts to address this issue, such as introducing the Pink Tax Repeal Act in the United States in 1995 and subsequent reintroductions, the financial gap created by the Pink Tax persists, as the act has yet to be passed successfully.

It is essential to clarify that the “Pink Tax” is not an actual governmental tax. The additional revenue generated from the products does not go to the government but benefits the companies. This means that companies are profiting from the price discrepancy, further highlighting the unfairness of the situation.

#### THE GENDER TAX REPEAL ACT OF 1995

The Gender Tax Repeal Act of 1995 was an act that “prohibited discrimination concerning the price charged for services of similar or like kind, against a person because of the person's gender.” (California Civil Code § 51.6). On July 8, 2016, Jackie Speier introduced a similar act, the “Pink Tax Repeal Act”. The overall intention of the Pink Tax Repeal Act was to end gender-based price discrimination. Later on, in 2018, a revised version of the bill was presented, but it didn't pass, and in 2021 the bill was reintroduced; however, it gained minimal attention and still hasn't been passed.

#### THE PINK TAX IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The Pink Tax in developing countries worsens the disadvantages faced by women. In these countries, the wage gaps are enormous, with women earning only 33 cents for every dollar men make on average. This economic disparity makes women in developing countries constantly



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struggle for financial stability. Additionally, the burden of paying hundreds of extra dollars per year simply for being a woman adds to their challenges, leaving them in a lose-lose situation.

The impact of lower socioeconomic status on women's rights is significant, with a direct correlation to access to healthcare in those areas. Women in economically disadvantaged communities often face multiple barriers to healthcare services, severely affecting their overall well-being and rights. Limited financial resources can lead to inadequate healthcare facilities, insufficient medical personnel, and a lack of essential medical equipment and medication. As a result, women may have reduced access to prenatal care, maternal health services, family planning resources, and preventative screenings. Additionally, economic hardships can force women to prioritize basic needs over healthcare, leading to delayed treatment and worsening health conditions. Furthermore, cultural and social norms that are widespread in such areas may restrict women's autonomy, decision-making power, and access to education, further exacerbating the gender disparities in healthcare. Thus, addressing the economic inequalities and improving healthcare infrastructure and services in lower socio-economic areas are crucial steps towards promoting women's rights and ensuring equitable access to healthcare for all women.

Reproductive healthcare in developing countries is very often neglected, underfunded, and inadequately prioritized, resulting in over 60% of the population on average being infected with HIV - a sexually transmitted infection more prominent in women coming from these regions. This neglect is one of the many consequences of insufficient attention to women's health. Furthermore, women in developing countries face challenges in managing menstrual hygiene due to a lack of support and the stigma surrounding menstruation. The shame associated with discussing menstrual issues discourages women from seeking help, leading to absences from school or work during their periods. Over one-third of girls were reported staying home on the first day of their period in Egypt. Similarly, more than half of the girls in Ethiopia reported being home throughout their menstruation.

Addressing economic disparities, promoting women's rights, and investing in healthcare infrastructure are crucial for empowering women in developing countries, ensuring their well-being, and fostering a more equitable and inclusive society. By removing barriers and providing support, we can enable women to thrive and contribute to the progress of their communities and the world.



## THE NEGLECT OF WOMEN'S HEALTHCARE

Women's healthcare has historically been neglected and overlooked, with insufficient research and treatment options available for health issues specific to women. Funding and information dedicated to understanding women's bodies and their unique workings have been scarce, leading to preventable health problems for many women.

Women's healthcare has been largely disregarded and overlooked, and research on viruses and vaccines is predominantly tested on men. At the same time, product testing is often adapted to men's needs, neglecting specific issues faced by women.

A striking example highlighting the disparity in emphasis on women's healthcare is the use of average male crash test dummies in car safety research. This design approach leaves women with anatomically different bodies 17% more likely to die in car crashes, underscoring the importance of considering women's safety in product development.

Research on chemical exposure in the healthcare industry focuses primarily on how men get exposed, disregarding that women absorb chemicals differently, leading to increased cancer risks and hormonal imbalances. This imbalance in research sustains numerous dangers to women's health. Moreover, women's reproductive health has been historically ignored, even in the training of doctors, with menopause only recently becoming a part of medical school training. Women's sexual and reproductive health is underfunded and lacks sufficient research, leaving diseases like HIV under-addressed despite their higher prevalence in women than men.

The lack of attention to women's healthcare affects all women but significantly impacts women of color. The exclusion of women from research studies, combined with racial discrimination, poses challenges in obtaining proper healthcare for women of color. Black women, for instance, face a disproportionate likelihood of dying during pregnancy compared to white women, and women of color experience higher rates of diabetes and heart diseases.

Additionally, women with disabilities encounter significant hardships within the healthcare industry, which is not adequately accommodating their needs. Given that women are more likely to have disabilities than men, it is crucial to prioritize and provide proper attention to the healthcare requirements of women with disabilities.



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The healthcare industry has historically favored men, mainly white-abled men, leading to increased challenges for those who do not fit this category. A more inclusive approach, considering sex and gender in healthcare, can significantly benefit women worldwide, fostering a safer world for people of all races, genders, and abilities.

While there is still much to improve, the healthcare industry took a huge step forward in developing women's healthcare during WW1 and WW2, when women were called upon to replace men's roles at home and join the healthcare industry. This step forward allowed women to take on roles as anesthetists, contract surgeons, nurses, and physicians, receiving equal responsibilities and pay as their male counterparts during the wars. Although many women lost their jobs after the wars ended, this experience inspired women worldwide to fight for equal opportunities and recognition in various industries, including healthcare.

As women face a world centered around patriarchy, it becomes evident that a fundamental change in thinking and approach is necessary. We must empower and support women's healthcare to pave the way for a healthier and more equitable future. With women constituting nearly half of Earth's population, it becomes imperative to emphasize their health and well-being. Embracing this transformation can help address existing disparities and foster a society that equally values and cares for its members.

### ***CURRENT SITUATION***

#### **THE PINK TAX TODAY**

The current worldwide stance on the pink tax reflects a growing recognition of its implications for gender equality and women's economic empowerment. The UN's discussions and legislative actions by various countries demonstrate the global effort to address this discriminatory practice. The United Nations, as a leading advocate for gender equality and women's rights, has recognized the impact of the pink tax on women's economic empowerment. Various UN bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and the UN Women, have actively discussed gender-based price discrimination.

Still, according to statistics in the US, on average, women pay 7% more for products than men, and their products were found to be more expensive 42% of the time. The same differences can be found even with kids; girls' products cost 7% more than boys'.





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The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs 2015 study found a vast price difference in similar items, from less than a single percentage difference to as much as 48 percent more for similar items. The study found that women were paying more for many everyday goods, such as an average of 48 percent more for shampoo and conditioner, 15 percent more for shirts, 13 percent more for girls' helmets and pads, 13 percent more for girls' shirts and 15 percent more for supports and braces, among other price differences.

Though the pink tax affects anyone purchasing products marketed to women, gender and racial pay gaps mean women of color already walk into a store with less purchasing power than white women. As of 2021, Black women earn 63 cents for every dollar a white man makes, while Hispanic women earn 58 cents for every dollar a white man earns, according to the U.S. Government Accountability Office. No federal laws in the US have been passed regarding the Pink Tax. However, it remains a significant issue worldwide and has placed countless women many steps behind regarding wealth, access, and overall equality.

### THE FIGHT FOR GENDER EQUALITY

The Sustainable Development Agenda, adopted by UN Member States in 2015, was a momentous step towards addressing the world's most pressing challenges, ranging from poverty and hunger to environmental degradation and gender inequality. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that constitute this transformative agenda, SDG 5 is a critical milestone dedicated to achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. With a deadline of 2030, it aimed to foster a world where women and girls could fully exercise their rights, access opportunities, and actively contribute to sustainable development.

However, as we find ourselves in 2023, the progress toward realizing SDG 5 (Gender Equality) is far from being on track. Numerous obstacles have emerged, exacerbating the pre-existing gender disparities and undermining the prospects for achieving gender equality. Notably, two major challenges have posed significant setbacks on this path: the global COVID-19 pandemic and the enduring backlash against women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in late 2019 has resulted in a widespread health crisis, leading to unprecedented disruptions in every aspect of life. Governments and communities worldwide adopted stringent measures to curb the spread of the virus. While these measures were



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necessary to safeguard public health, they have had far-reaching consequences, particularly for women and girls.

The "shadow pandemic" that emerged alongside COVID-19—a surge in violence against women and girls within their homes. Confinement measures and restricted access to support services left many women trapped with their abusers, leading to an alarming rise in domestic violence and other forms of abuse. Vulnerable women, including those facing poverty, disability, or marginalized social status, were at even greater risk, with limited resources and avenues for escape.

### PERIOD POVERTY

Is it a fundamental responsibility of governments to provide free menstrual necessities to females? Menstruation is a natural biological process experienced by approximately half of the global population, and access to menstrual products is essential for ensuring the health, well-being, and dignity of women and girls. By providing accessible or affordable menstrual products, the government can address a significant barrier that impedes women and girls' participation in various aspects of life, including education, work, and social activities.

Nevertheless, the cost of providing free or subsidized menstrual products to the entire population could be substantial, and allocating resources to this initiative might divert funding from other critical areas of public welfare. Some may view this as personal responsibility and question the government's role in such issues. Individuals should be responsible for managing their menstrual hygiene needs, and the country's involvement may encourage dependency rather than self-reliance.

According to Medical News Today, "Period poverty is a lack of access to menstrual products, education, hygiene facilities, waste management, or a combination of these. It affects an estimated 500 million people worldwide". People who experience period poverty cannot purchase the menstrual products they need, and, in many cases, this means that they cannot go to school or work or otherwise participate in daily life. Period poverty causes physical, mental, and emotional challenges. It can make people feel shame for menstruating, and the stigma surrounding periods prevents individuals from discussing it.

The Global Menstrual Collective defines menstrual health as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity, concerning the menstrual cycle." Some countries, states, and cities worldwide have passed laws mandating schools to provide



period products to students, deeming them as essential as toilet paper, but more work needs to be done. US federal prisons only made menstrual products accessible in 2018. “Meeting the hygiene needs of all adolescent girls is a fundamental issue of human rights, dignity, and public health,” Sanjay Wijesekera, former UNICEF Chief of Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene, said.

Menstrual health is not just a women’s issue. Globally, 1.7 billion people live without essential sanitation services. In developing countries, nearly three-quarters of people lack basic handwashing facilities at home. Not being able to use these facilities makes it harder for women and young girls to manage their periods safely and with dignity. Additionally, Girls with disabilities usually do not have access to the facilities and resources they need for proper menstrual hygiene. Living in conflict-affected areas or the aftermath of natural disasters also makes it more difficult for women and girls to manage their periods, another unfair disadvantage.

### THE ISSUES WOMEN FACE WITH REPRODUCTIVE, MATERNAL, AND MENTAL HEALTH

Should governments actively provide access to contraceptive methods to prevent the spread of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and promote public health? Countries ensuring access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including contraceptive methods, can help promote general health and gender equality. Governments can play a crucial role in providing these services to prevent unintended pregnancies, reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and empower individuals to make informed choices about their sexual health.

However, governments supplying contraceptive methods, particularly regarding religious or moral objections to specific contraceptive options, can be argued as an infringement on individual freedoms and religious beliefs, and such measures could also be perceived as promoting promiscuity or undermining traditional family values. Women also face specific health issues ranging from PPD to breast cancer, which are constant worry and risk.

The health of women and girls is of particular concern because, in many societies, they are disadvantaged by discrimination rooted in sociocultural factors. For example, women and girls face increased vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Some of the sociocultural factors that prevent women and girls from benefiting from quality health services and attaining the best possible level of health include:

- Unequal power relationships between men and women.



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- Social norms decrease education and paid employment opportunities.
- An exclusive focus on women's reproductive roles and
- Potential or actual experience of physical, sexual, and emotional violence.

Various studies have shown that in many areas of healthcare, women experience poorer outcomes. For example, in 2016, researchers at University College London found that women with dementia receive worse medical treatment than men. They found that women make fewer visits to the GP, receive less health monitoring, and take more potentially harmful medication. Another study found that in US emergency departments, women in acute pain are less likely to be given opioid painkillers than men. Women also had to wait longer to receive painkillers when they were prescribed. In addition, University of Rhode Island researcher Karen L. Calderone has found that women are half as likely to receive painkillers after surgery.

Additionally, as mentioned before, women have constant stigmas towards them, whether weak, emotional, whiny, or more. This means that with their more limited access to health care, period poverty, and the pink tax, women still need to deal with stigmas, prejudice, and constant worry about their well-being.

Around one in five women have a common mental health problem, such as depression and anxiety. While these develop for many reasons, some risk factors affect many women. Women are more likely to:

- Being carer takers, which can lead to stress, anxiety, and isolation.
- Living in poverty concerns personal safety, and working mainly in the home can lead to social isolation.
- Experience physical and sexual abuse, which can impact their mental health long-term.
- Withstand sexual violence can cause PTSD and several other mental health issues.

When women find it hard to talk about complicated feelings, they internalize them. This can lead to depression, eating disorders, and self-harm. These many issues call for help from governments and the UN. While action has been taken, and certain countries have worked towards providing better access to healthcare overall and accessible menstrual products for women, much more must be done to address women's health and improve healthcare services.



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### *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

1. How does your country's healthcare system operate, and what are the key strengths and weaknesses concerning women's access to healthcare services?
2. How does your country tackle gender-based violence, and what measures are in place to support survivors and protect women's health and well-being?
3. What initiatives or programs exist to promote women's mental health and address mental health stigma in your country?
4. What role does the government play in promoting women's health and gender equality in healthcare?
5. How does your country address the affordability and accessibility of healthcare services for women, especially for marginalized and vulnerable populations?
6. What is your country's approach to women's health research and data collection? Are there any notable studies or initiatives in this area?
7. What are some successful examples of healthcare programs or interventions that have positively impacted women's health in your country?

### *SUGGESTED READING:*

<https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/issues.htm>

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/period-poverty#what-is-it>

<https://www.kiplinger.com/taxes/pink-tax-womens-products-price-discrimination>

<https://www.who.int/health-topics/women-s-health>



## TOPIC B: RELIGION, FAITH, AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

### *BACKGROUND TO THE ISSUE*

#### WOMEN'S RIGHTS & THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF

Worldwide, the issue of women's rights continues to persist. In numerous places, women are deprived of their freedom of religion and belief, which blatantly violates their fundamental human rights. Considering that females make up 49.58% of Earth's population, safeguarding and promoting women's human rights should be a top priority.

Towards the end of 1789, James Madison's Bill of Rights, one of the most critical contributors to women's rights in the United States, was passed. More specifically, the First and Fourth Amendments. The First Amendment prohibits Congress from passing a law in which one is forced to practice a religion / not practice a religion and/or takes away one's freedom of speech. This amendment guarantees women's rights to have any beliefs/religion without interference from the state. James Madison's Fourth Amendment ensures that no one may be subject to unreasonable searches or seizures. This amendment protects women from being profiled for their religion and beliefs, allowing women to be proud of their faith and not need to hide their beliefs. Madison strongly believed in the separation of church and state and protected women's rights to religious liberty.

However, while women may be able to express their religion in the United States, there are many places where it is unsafe for them to do so. We see this happening to Uighur Muslims in China. Since 2017, over 1 million Uighurs have been in re-education camps where they are deprived of their fundamental human rights. Inside the centers, Uighurs are tortured, abused, and treated inhumanely. For women, this means being forced into giving birth, mass raped, and sexually abused. Uighurs not in the camps have their phone searched for religious content, are heavily guarded, and don't have freedom of speech. Many women even get involuntarily sterilized. Many countries have recognized China's actions as genocide, including the United States, Canada, and the UK. In 2018, the United Nations Human Rights Office said these violations constitute crimes against humanity.



China, however, continues to deny these allegations. They state that these camps have two intentions: to teach Mandarin and Chinese laws and to prevent citizens from being influenced by extremist ideas. In addition, they claimed that the accusations that their policies are based on discrimination are groundless and that the survivors' pictures, videos, and stories are fabricated. In May 2022, the previous UN Human Rights chief, Michelle Bachelet, visited China per the Chinese government's invitation. She stated that everyone she met on her trip was willing to make progress on protecting human rights for all. The government of China has made it very clear that the reason for the extra surveillance and re-education camps is to keep Xinjiang safe from terrorists.

### OVERCOMING RELIGIOUS AND SEXUAL SHAME

The origins of the purity culture can be traced back to various historical and philosophical influences, but its most recognizable form emerged during the 1990s within the context of protestant Christianity. While some associate its beginnings with a response to the AIDS epidemic and a rejection of the free love movement of the '60s and '70s, it is essential to recognize that its roots reach much deeper into history.

The Puritans, known for their practice of Christianity, held beliefs in the superiority of white men and the inferiority of BIPOC, women, non-binary, and queer individuals. These ideas were deeply ingrained in their culture and influenced their views on sexuality and the human body.

Philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle also shaped these perspectives, emphasizing the denial, control, and condemnation of bodily desires and pleasures. Anything related to the body, sexuality, sensuality, feminine empowerment, and queer identity was often viewed with suspicion and labeled as dangerous and sinful.

The negative impact of experiencing sexual shame on women's mental health has been extensively studied. Research conducted by Tangney, Wagner, and Gramzow in 1992 revealed a strong correlation between shame proneness and psychopathological symptoms like somatization, depression, anxiety, and hostility. Purity culture relied on shame as a weapon to instill fear and self-loathing in young people.

The influence of the purity culture is most significant in the United States, where Christianity remains the majority religion. Though Christianity is also practiced in Europe, the culture's roots firmly stayed in America, shaping the perspectives of many within the nation. The impacts of the



purity culture are far-reaching, affecting many aspects of women's lives daily. From their choices in clothing to feelings of shame surrounding their own needs, women often find themselves deeply affected by the pervasive ideology.

### *CURRENT SITUATION*

#### RELIGIONS RESTRICTING RIGHTS FOR FEMALES

Women are repeatedly denied freedom of religion, for example, by being forced to adopt their husband's religion or forbidden to convert to a different religion. As of 2023, several countries are grappling with the issue of using religion to control women's rights. In some parts of the Middle East, strict interpretations of Islamic law enforce gender segregation, restrict women's mobility, and impose dress codes. Women may face legal and societal barriers to accessing education and pursuing career opportunities, often resulting in significant gender disparities in workforce participation. Similarly, in some areas of South Asia, conservative practices grounded in religious beliefs perpetuate harmful customs like denying young girls their right to education and safe childhood.

Efforts to challenge such practices face resistance from traditional religious leaders and traditionalist groups, who argue that any change would violate their religious beliefs and cultural heritage. This opposition often creates a difficult path toward progress, with advocates for women's rights facing intimidation, threats, and even violence. International human rights organizations and governmental bodies have also been pressuring these countries to address the issue of women's rights and religious discrimination. Diplomatic efforts, sanctions, and international condemnations have sometimes played a role in nudging countries to take steps toward gender equality.

While it is essential to recognize that not all religious beliefs or communities endorse restricting women's rights, addressing and challenging instances where religious teachings are misused to justify inequality and discrimination remains vital.

#### THE MAHSA AMINI PROTEST FORMED IN IRAN

The Mahsa Amini protest occurred in Iran and was a significant social movement that started in 2023. The protests were triggered by the suspicious circumstances surrounding the death of Mahsa Amini, a young university student arrested after not following the proper dress code. The incident





gained widespread attention and sparked public outrage over justice, human rights, and government accountability issues. Thousands of young and old Iranians took to the streets in various cities across the country to demand answers and call for transparency in the investigation. The protesters peacefully voiced their concerns, emphasizing the need for fair treatment of citizens and holding those responsible for any wrongdoing accountable. The Mahsa Amini protest represented a poignant moment of collective action and solidarity among Iranians seeking justice and social change.

### RELIGIOUS APPAREL

In many countries, women's choices about attire and appearance are restricted to some degree by government laws, policies, or regulations. In recent years, most of these countries have had laws or policies that ban women from wearing religious attire in public places or limit their ability to do so in some circumstances. By comparison, far fewer countries require women to wear types of apparel (such as headscarves or long dresses) for religious reasons.

The issue of religious apparel, particularly concerning the protests in France surrounding the Anti-Burqa Law, has sparked intense debates and divisions within the country. The Anti-Burqa Law, enacted to promote secularism and gender equality, prohibits wearing face-covering veils in public spaces. While some argue that the law upholds the principles of a secular society, others view it as an infringement on individual religious freedom and an expression of Islamophobia. Protests have erupted across France, with demonstrators advocating for the right to practice their faith and wear traditional religious garments, such as the burqa or niqab. These protests reflect the deep-rooted tensions between preserving French secular values and respecting diverse religious practices, prompting a national dialogue on balancing personal freedom and societal norms.

"Anti-Rights" groups in the United States refer to organizations and movements that actively oppose or seek to limit the rights and liberties of specific individuals or groups within society. These groups often advocate for discriminatory policies based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or immigration status. Some anti-right groups may target marginalized communities. Examples of such groups include white supremacist organizations, anti-LGBTQ+ groups, and nativist movements. While they claim to defend their interests or cultural heritage, these groups have been widely criticized for promoting hate, intolerance, and division. Their activities have been strongly opposed by civil rights organizations, activists, and concerned citizens.



who strive to protect and uphold the principles of equality, inclusivity, and social justice enshrined in the United States Constitution.

### FEMALE STEREOTYPES IN RELIGIOUS OR SOCIETAL TRADITIONS AND THEIR EFFECT ON WOMEN

Throughout history, female stereotypes in religious and societal traditions have significantly impacted women's lives. In many cultures, women have been portrayed as inferior to men, limited to domestic roles, and denied access to education and leadership positions. These stereotypes perpetuate gender inequality and restrict women's potential. For instance, certain religious beliefs have justified practices like child marriage and denied reproductive rights for women. These harmful stereotypes also reinforce biases in the workplace, where women may face wage gaps and reduced opportunities for advancement. Challenging these stereotypes is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women to fully participate in all aspects of society and break free from limiting traditional roles. By embracing more inclusive and progressive attitudes, communities can foster an environment where women's rights and contributions are valued and celebrated.

On one hand, religious freedom is a fundamental human right that grants individuals the autonomy to practice their beliefs and engage in religious activities without discrimination. However, in some cases, certain religious doctrines or cultural norms have been used to justify and perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequality. It is crucial to strike a delicate balance where religious freedom is respected while ensuring it does not infringe upon women's rights. Respecting religious diversity and promoting gender equality are not mutually exclusive goals; they should be complementary principles that foster an inclusive and just society. Through open dialogue, education, and the promotion of women's rights, it is possible to advance religious freedom while dismantling patriarchal structures that impede gender equality for women. By addressing these issues with sensitivity and understanding, societies can work towards a more harmonious coexistence that upholds religious freedom and gender equality.



## *QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER*

1. What is your country's dominant religion(s), and how does it influence the government's policies and decisions?
2. What are the legal protections and rights granted to religious minorities in your country? Are there any instances of religious discrimination or persecution?
3. What are the significant challenges religious communities face in practicing their faith freely?
4. How are religious institutions, such as places of worship and religious schools, regulated by the government in your country?
5. How does religion intersect with women's rights in your country? Are any specific laws or practices disproportionately affecting women based on religious interpretations?
6. What are the cultural and societal norms regarding women's roles and responsibilities in the family and community?
7. What are some recent developments or controversies related to religious freedom and women's rights in your country?
8. How do civil society organizations, activists, and women's rights advocates work to improve the status of women and religious minorities in your country?

## *SUGGESTED READING*

[https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/Gender\\_stereotyping.pdf](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagers/Gender_stereotyping.pdf)

<https://reproductive-health-journal.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12978-020-00919-6>

<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/04/05/restrictions-on-womens-religious-attire/>

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BBC News. (2022c, May 24). Who are the Uyghurs and why is China being accused of genocide? BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-22278037>



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