

ISSUE FACT SHEET: OPPRESSION

DID YOU KNOW?

In Afghanistan today there are more girls in school than ever before!

GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. How does the culture in which a girl grows up affect her future?
2. What can be done to help communities accept change?
3. How can communities be insulated against the influence of oppressive political and religious regimes?

DEFINITION

Oppression is defined as the cruel exercise of power.

OVERVIEW

For girls living under oppressive cultural expectations, life can become extremely difficult. These girls' lives are reduced to service and strictly enforced social regulations. A girl in this situation is perceived to have little value as a person and is treated like a commodity. Oppression is far more than simply taking away opportunity; it involves taking away an individual's legal rights and protections, their choice, and their voice. Oppression is about gaining complete control over someone else's life, often by extreme measures.

With each day, girls living in the shadow of oppressive regimes are finding their voice. They are rising despite daunting circumstances. They are risking their lives and fighting every day to go to school and have their voices heard.

RELATED IMPACTS: POVERTY

Developing countries generally lack the financial resources to offer aid to their citizens. The lack of aid, compounded by marginal infrastructures, insufficient school and medical facilities, and food and water shortages, can be overwhelming. People's options for daily survival are often very limited.

Oppressive political or religious regimes often seek out these vulnerable populations. These regimes purport to offer a means of earning money and an opportunity for survival, knowing that the people they target may find it necessary to disregard the severe consequences associated with compliance. Poverty has a powerful impact on the lives of those living in it and when they feel they have a way out of the extreme hardships, they often take it.

RELATED IMPACTS: EDUCATION

One of the most effective ways to oppress a girl is to deny her an education. Education ends the cycles of poverty, child marriage, poor health, and ignorance – all factors that pose obstacles not only to a girl's success, but also to the success of her country. Often education is a casualty of an oppressive regime and, as a result, a significant percentage of the population lacks an adequate education.

Educated girls help build communities. They are inclined to be civically engaged. Educated girls marry later and have fewer (and healthier) children, leading to healthier communities. Since a majority of small business in the developing world are run by women, educating girls can improve a community's economy, in turn providing more opportunities. More opportunities mean stronger communities, improved living conditions, and less poverty. Girls education is a powerful weapon against oppressive regimes.

WHAT'S WORKING

So what can be done? How are organizations helping? CARE has helped to end oppression in Afghanistan by providing:

- Community-based education for more than 50,000 girls and boys in remote areas.
- Water and sanitation projects that have provided 55,000 houses with potable water.
- Nutritional support and skills training for over 10,000 widows in Kabul.
- Emergency response programs to assist populations affected by disasters such as floods.
- Agricultural and vocational training for former soldiers to assist in their transition to civilian life.
- Income-generation programs to help build infrastructure while providing livelihoods to vulnerable groups.

RESOURCES

- CARE at www.care.org
- See Additional Resources Guide for other resources, including relevant videos (found in the Resources section).