



STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE L

THE GIRL-CHILD

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES L

Objective L.1 Eliminate all forms of discrimination against the girl-child.

Objective L.2 Eliminate negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.

Objective L.3 Promote and protect the rights of the girl-child and increase awareness of her needs and potential.

Objective L.4 Eliminate discrimination against girls in education, skills development and training.

Objective L.5 Eliminate discrimination against girls in health and nutrition.

Objective L.6 Eliminate the economic exploitation of child labour and protect young girls at work.

Objective L.7 Eradicate violence against the girl child.

Objective L.8 Promote the girl-child's awareness of and participation in social, economic and political life.

Objective L.9 Strengthen the role of the family in improving the status of the girl-child.

(259) Recognising the Convention on the Rights of the Child (259)... "in many countries available indicators show that the girl-child is discriminated against from the earliest stages of life, through her childhood and into adulthood. In some areas of the world, men outnumber women by 5 in every 100. The reasons for the discrepancy include, among other things, harmful attitudes and practices, such as female genital mutilation, son preference – which results in female infanticide and prenatal sex selection – early marriage, including child marriage, violence against women, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, discrimination against girls in food allocation and other practices related to health and well-being. As a result fewer girls than boys survive into adulthood."

(Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA))

OVERARCHING CONCERNS

The opportunities for girls and young women to be included in discussion, debate or decision making on local, national or international issues has received insufficient attention in the national and international mechanisms for the advancement of women and girls. Social isolation, stereotyping, sexualisation of girls by the media, the impact of new and emerging technologies, increasing violence against girls and young women and by girls and young women and lack of information and education on sexual and reproductive health, all impact on the full realisation of girls potential in Australia.

Insufficient girl centred activities, including sporting activities, combined with the diminishing of safe public recreational space is resulting in increasing boredom, drug taking, drinking and early sexual activity amongst school aged girls. In rural and remote towns, camps and homesteads, entertainment facilities, such as cinemas and theatres are not available. There are programs available for women and younger women, but not specifically for girls, and especially not for Indigenous, CALD or refugee girls. Living in remote and rural areas presents few opportunities to participate in girls events. Sport in these areas is targeted towards boys with girls being left behind. Playing fields are a danger at night with poor or no lighting where groups of boys and young men hanging around, quickly become the stage for sexual assault and rape. Lack of suitable and safe public transport prohibits movement at night, further limiting social activity to near home. Girls with disability are especially impacted as this further limits access and opportunities to attend social activities.

Girls are a demographic specifically targeted by advertising and the media, where unrealistic body images, latest fashions and lifestyles constantly impact on their identity and feelings of self-worth. A lack of strong and 'real' role models in the media serves to reinforce the myth of having to 'fit' to media representations.

Body image was a key area of concern throughout the Australian national consultations on the Beijing Platform for Action 15 year review. This concern is also supported by the Mission Australia National Survey of Young Australians (2009) (full report at http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/cat_view/132-annual-mission-australia-youth-survey downloaded 20 December, 2009). This survey of young Australians between the ages of 11-24 found that the most significant concerns for girls was body image and included mental health issues, depression and coping with stress, suicide, family conflict, personal safety and bullying/emotional abuse.

The physical and emotional damage caused by the currently media-driven obsession with achieving physical perfection leads to many young women who feel they can't live up to these stereotypes, are becoming socially isolated by turning to the internet and virtual social networking sites such as Bebo, Facebook, Wikki and MySpace, where the personal body imagery is of secondary importance and cartoons and avatars replace reality. Tragically, the result of this social exclusion into a virtual world is resulting in cyber bullying, 'happy slapping' and, in some cases, suicides amongst girls.

'Happy slapping' (where someone is attacked, the act is videoed on a mobile phone and then uploaded to a social networking sites) and cyber bullying are emerging issues for girls. There is an increase in bullying in schools, and where programmes do exist to address this, there are very few anger management programs targeting girls. Failure in some reporting systems for girls in schools resulting in breaches of confidentiality, have impacted on girls' confidence in reporting incidences of bullying, harassment and sexual abuse. Girls struggling with their sexual identity are bullied and ostracised at a crucial time of their development.

Reported slow police response times and perceived lack of response to call outs from girls suffering from domestic, family and relationship violence, or reporting abuse of their mothers, is a key barrier for reporting of violent incidences, and protection of women and girls. This leaves women and girls vulnerable to further violence, continuing the cycle of violence and creating an environment of perceived impunity of the offender. Indigenous women, and women and girls from rural and regional areas, are especially impacted by this, with one girl and her neighbour reporting they had independently phoned the police as the violence started and they had still not arrived until after the ambulance took her mother away to be treated at the hospital

an hour later. This is not an isolated incident and impacts girls and women from all geographical, ethnic, economic and social groups. Despite advances in this area, the perception is that domestic, family and relationship violence remains under-reported and impunity exists for perpetrators of such violence.

The Northern Territory intervention has exacerbated the incidences of violence against Indigenous girls who are being: 'socialised in an environment where they learn that violence is an acceptable and legitimate way in which to deal with any emotional or social discord... The number of girls in remote indigenous communities exposed to the damaging effects of witnessing or being victims of domestic violence is unacceptable..' Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council (NPYWC) Domestic and Family Violence Service Report 2009, Beijing+15 Review).

Female Genital Mutilation remains common amongst some refugee and migrant communities. This illegal practice mutilates and damages young girls, often at an early age

In rural and remote areas, a lack of quality sexual and reproductive health services for pregnant girls who need to wait until the clinic comes to town to confirm pregnancies means that, in some cases, the pregnancy progresses beyond the date for legal abortion. This limits the choices of the girl, impacting on her future as a young, single mother. Lack of birthing facilities in rural and regional areas result in girls having to be away from their family and friends to deliver their babies, and for indigenous girls this requires having to give birth 'away from country'. While court or tribunal authorisation must be sought, girls with disabilities continue to face the threat of forced sterilisation and in instances where there is no serious threat to health or life, this denies the girl the future enjoyment of her human rights.

GAINS

- ✿ There has been increased protection in the areas of violence against girls such as amendments to the Family Law Act 1975.

GAPS

- ✿ There is a lack of access to information, education and services as well as a lack of meaningful participation in the community at various levels of the decision making process, reinforcing the exploited and vulnerable position of the girl child.
- ✿ Inadequate provision of accessible holistic health care services and reproductive health care services for all girls and young women, especially recognising their diversity including sexual orientation, race, indigenous identities, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, disability, migrant and refugee status, rural and remote location and the impact of socio-economic status.
- ✿ The rate of teenage motherhood is significantly higher for indigenous girls (20%) compared to non-indigenous (4%) and the fertility rate 4 times higher than for all teenage females.
- ✿ Gender-based stereotyping continues to pressure girls through various media mechanisms.

- ✿ Female Genital Mutilation remains common amongst some refugee and migrant communities. This illegal practice mutilates and damages young girls, often at an early age.
- ✿ Female Genital Mutilation of young women in resettlement remains an issue.
- ✿ Lack of regulation and legislation to support women affected by on ICT's and measures to address the growing impact of ICT on young women.
- ✿ Sexualisation of younger women through targeting of the younger audience in fashion and sexual behaviour.
- ✿ 'Happy Slapping' – where a girl attacks another girl and gets a friend to video it on her mobile phone, then these images are uploaded to 'You Tube' and circulated via mobile phone throughout the school.
- ✿ Review and monitor police response mechanisms, particularly in rural and indigenous communities

EMERGING ISSUES

- ✿ Increased signs of rising aggression of girl-on-girl violence, specifically, bullying and high levels of anger and aggressive behaviour in 14-to-15-year-old girls had been noticed, inside and outside the school setting. There is a rise in the number of young women arrested over physical assaults and a surge of physical violence perpetrated by teenage girls in the home. Police figures indicate a third of the child perpetrators of family violence are girls aged 12 to 17, and that mothers are their main victims.
- ✿ Increasing 'behind-the-doors' violence, "Happy Slapping" and the use of ICT's to bully and abuse is rising.
- ✿ Alcohol is a growing concern, with many young women drinking at least once a week and consuming 5 or more standard drinks on an average drinking occasion, drinking at levels which place them at risk and leading to alcohol abuse disorders.

SUGGESTED UN LANGUAGE FOR KEY PRIORITY AREAS OF ACTION

- ✿ Calling on governments to provide access for girls to training, information and the media on social, cultural, economic and political issues and enable them to articulate their views.
- ✿ Urge governments to set up educational programmes and develop teaching materials and textbooks that will sensitize and inform adults about the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices on girl children.
- ✿ Calling on governments to respect and promote the right of girls to express themselves freely and to take the views of girls into account in all matters affecting them, including by taking all necessary actions to empower girls to exercise this right, according to their evolving capacity, and to build self-esteem and acquire knowledge and skills and provide them with adequate information on health, social and education services, programmes and initiatives to facilitate their participation in all sectors, including civil society.

- ✿ Urge governments to involve girls, including girls with special needs, and their representative organizations, in decision-making processes, and include them as full and active partners in identifying their own needs and in developing, planning, implementing and assessing policies and programmes to meet these needs.
- ✿ Urge all governments to emphasize the role and responsibility of adolescents in sexual and reproductive health and behaviour through the provision of appropriate services and counselling.
- ✿ Calling on governments to strengthen and reorient health education and health services, particularly primary health care programmes, including sexual and reproductive health, and design quality health programmes that meet the physical and mental needs of girls and that attend to the needs of young, expectant and nursing mothers.
- ✿ Urge governments to take all the appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children, as stipulated in article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- ✿ Urge governments to develop and implement national legislation and policies prohibiting harmful customary or traditional practices, particularly female genital mutilation, that are violations of and obstacles to the full enjoyment by women of their human rights and fundamental freedoms, and prosecute the perpetrators of such practices that are harmful to the health of women and girls.
- ✿ Urge governments, UN bodies and civil society to increase education and training among teachers and health service providers in identifying acts of violence against the girl child, and ensure that they also take action to eradicate all forms of violence against the girl child, including customary and traditional practices that are harmful to the health of the girl child.
- ✿ Call for governments to take effective actions and measures to enact and enforce legislation to protect the safety and security of girls from all forms of violence at work, including training programmes and support programmes, and take measures to eliminate incidents of sexual harassment of girls in educational and other institutions.
- ✿ Call for governments to take appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the girl child, in the household and in society, from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.
- ✿ Call for governments to recognise that eliminating stereotypes calls for a deep societal change that needs to be supported through the development of strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in all spheres of life, and foster the positive portrayal of women and girls at all levels, including as leaders and decision makers, including through developing and implementing appropriate legislation, policies and programmes, as well as awareness campaigns, to address stereotypical attitudes and behaviours that contribute to discrimination and violence against girls.
- ✿ Encourage cooperation and dialogue between governments and all relevant actors so that media contents, including the portrayal of gender stereotypes,

prejudices and violence, are reviewed, consistent with freedom of expression, and that the quality of programmes broadcast can be improved.

- ✿ Provide age-appropriate and gender-sensitive services to girls subjected to all forms of gender-based violence, including comprehensive programmes for their physical, psychological and social recovery, such as health, counselling and legal services, helplines and shelters, and ensure adequate human, material and financial resources for these services.
- ✿ Urge governments to increase education and training among teachers and health service providers in identifying acts of violence against the girl child, and ensure that they also take action to eradicate all forms of violence against the girl child, including customary and traditional practices that are harmful to the health of the girl child.

UN REFERENCES

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 Strategic Objective L.5 Action 281 (c) (g) (i)
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B+5 OD

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CEDAW

Article 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13

MDGs

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