

The following are some facts and information about how discrimination, oppression, suppression and/or marginalization based on gender is manifested in mainstream practices both within Canada and abroad.

### **Medical**

- ⇒ Medical students are trained on the male model—the paradigm patient in medical school is the '70 kilogram man'—medical students learn what the average man's heart weighs, and what his minimum urine output should be, they treat him for allergies, appendicitis, diarrhea...they compute dosages for medication based on his weight.. the 70kg man doesn't get ovarian cysts, fibroids or any other female disorder (Tavris)
- ⇒ Medical research is overwhelmingly based on the male model—for example, females are the largest growing population being infected with the AIDS virus – yet HIV research has not included female participants...in fact, gynecological symptoms of AIDS in women were not even included in the diagnostic symptoms by the Center for Disease Control until relatively recently. This resulted in more women dying earlier due to the late diagnosis and delayed treatment. (Joanne)
- ⇒ Main killer of post-menopausal women is heart disease but research of warning signs of high cholesterol are based entirely on studies of men.

### **Genital Mutilation:** **Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)**

- ⇒ Sometimes referred to as female circumcision as a comparison to male circumcision- Although the comparison is misdirected.
- ⇒ Mildest form of female “circumcision” can kill a woman while all forms deform the female genital organs.
- ⇒ Male circumcision- it does not deform a male genital organ or reduce/impede sexual pleasure.
- ⇒ FGM effects include-women unable to experience orgasm or sexual excitement, painful intercourse and childbirth, illness and death.
- ⇒ Three types of FGM—
  1. Circumcision (removal of the sheath and the tip of the clitoris)
  2. Excision—(Clitoridectomy)—removal of the entire clitoris, parts of labia minora are removed (small lips surrounding the vagina to make childbirth easier, in fact, it makes it more difficult)
  3. Infibulation—(Pharaonic circumcision)—today this is only practiced by Muslims—Removal of the prepuce, the clitoris, and the labia minora scraping the flesh from inside the vagina—a tiny opening is left to allow the discharge of urine and menstrual blood—often when the woman marries the merged flesh has to be cut open to allow for sexual intercourse.

## Dowry Deaths

### **Dowry – Definition:**

Dowry or Dahej is the payment in cash or/and kind by the bride's family to the bridegroom' s family along with the giving away of the bride in Indian marriage .  
[http://www.indianchild.com/dowry\\_in\\_india.htm](http://www.indianchild.com/dowry_in_india.htm)

- ⇒ Indian laws specifically prohibit bride prices (payment by the bride's father to the husband)—yet the custom of bride dowry persists - recently there has been evidence of an increase in bride burnings, unreported murders of the woman by her husband or husband's family. These murders are often related to the husband and/or in-laws being unsatisfied with the amount or quality of the dowry.
- ⇒ Conservatives estimates are that every 102 minutes there is a dowry death.

## Suttee

- ⇒ Suttee is the practice of burning or burying a women alive with her dead husband – known as the tradition of widow sacrifice (This act dates back as early as fourth century B.C.) Most are aware of Suttee within India however it is also a performed by Scandinavians, Slavs, Greeks, Egyptians, Chinese, Finns and Maoris.
- ⇒ There exists incidence of a mother dying with her son. This was viewed as the highest form of sati.
- ⇒ The widow on her way to the pyre was the object of all public attention—she gave money and gifts to the crowd and was believed to have the gift of prophecy and the power to curse and bless. An unfaithful woman could not be burned thus Suttee proved that she had been virtuous all her life.
- ⇒ If a woman committed Suttee she, her husband, her husband's family, her mother's family and her father's family would be in paradise for 35 million years.
- ⇒ After a woman is married she is seen as part of her husbands family—after his death the in-laws then have no use for her, and did not want her to live on the estate and have access to the wealth of her deceased husband or his families resources —therefore Suttee was viewed as a way of eliminating this 'burden'. Suttee also increased the family's honour and standing within the community.
- ⇒ The woman's own parents and family were concerned that if she got pregnant after the death of her husband she would bring shame to the entire family.

***Eg. Roop Kanwar—1985, 18 years old—married an older man, he died of natural causes—her family was suspicious she was having an affair and the in-laws did not want to give her money or support her—she was forced to commit Suttee—against her will—she was drugged and dragged to the funeral pyre—the entire village participated by lighting the funeral pyre with desi ghee, the police watched and did nothing to stop it even though Suttee is illegal, afterwards a shrine was built for people to pay her their homage for performing the Suttee***

## **Female Infanticide**

The deliberate killing of female infants soon after birth

- ⇒ Female infanticide was practiced in many countries
- ⇒ In China as in many other countries there is a strong preference for sons—a sharp rise in female infanticide followed the enactment of a law restricting families to one child.
- ⇒ In India two main reasons were cited for female infanticide—the difficulty in paying the high costs of dowry for female children, female children were viewed as unlucky (In the 1840's Rajah of Mynpoory kept his niece alive, soon after her father died and than the Rajan—this was believed to have happened because the girl child was allowed to live.

Other forms of discrimination that impact high rates of infant mortality among females:

Deliberate discrimination against girl children takes several forms: nutritional denial such as inadequate breastfeeding and early weaning; insufficient or delayed medical care; lack of attention, causing emotional deprivation; and insufficient investment in resources. All these have been documented as leading to excess mortality in the female child. Excess female child mortality has been reported mainly from South Asian countries.

<http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/healthnet/SAsia/suchana/0225/george.html>

For additional info: Female Infanticide in Tamil Nadu, India : From Recognition Back to Denial? Sabu M George \*