

to keep them healthier, but also make economically successful efforts and enterprises throughout their lives. It is designed to help girls through the critical period of pre-adolescence by building their selfconfidence in academics, sports, art and other activities as well as developing their interpersonal and social skills. In addition, a national 24-hour toll free "violence against women"- hot line has been created to refer thousands of women to safety.¹ Moreover, the United States still has a long way to go in dealing with interconnecting issues of race, ethnicity, and poverty which also cause women suffering. Much more still needs to be done to give women a fuller opportunity to care about their own health and lives and to hold men responsible for their actions that affect the family life. However, these efforts will definitely require the full support of the American public, both women and men.

The impact of the Cairo conference was astonishing, because when 180 countries get

together and actually agree on a serious undertaking of an action, phenomenal progress is made.

August 26, 2000, was proclaimed as women's equality day to commemorate the courageous efforts of countless brave women and men alike who have changed the nation's law and led the change for women's equality.²

Regarding the existing inequalities, it is obvious that without active intervention it will take a long time before women attain equal rights in the social, economic and political spheres.

Today a new century lies before the American women offering them a fresh opportunity to make real the ideal of equality dreamed of for more than two centuries. They should rely on their mothers, sisters and daughters, removing any lingering barriers in their path to true equality. In other words, it is primarily the duty of women themselves to fight to achieve their rights as well as respect in family and society . They will succeed, if they refuse to remain silent in the

face of social and legal injustices.

To sum up, the United States has moved with agonizing slowness toward equality for women in society and justice in front of law considering the abuse of women and girls, and ladies of color, on the whole, as well as the working conditions and social inequalities for them. Social factors such as the persistence of the wage gap, differences in women's and men's family responsibilities as well as the rise in diverse and single motherhood are expected to continue to leave many women economically and socially in a disadvantageous situation in their old age. In the foreseeable future, women will have special reasons to demand for the guaranteed social security.

Noteworthy is the fact that when given knowledge, education, and opportunity, women can be heroines and move mountains to help themselves.

1) Ibid.

2) Ibid.

must continue even further.¹

Suppression of women is still a big issue in the U.S. today. Some people believe that women have attained equality with men, but many others realize that the suppression of women in many areas of society is continuing taking place. Legally, women have the same opportunity as men, but men are almost always the boss and give more opportunities to their fellow male workers than to women.

Men have far too much control in America. Out of the total working population estimated at 118 million, women account for only 44 million. That is only about 37 percent. In addition, women earn only about 70 cents for every dollar that men make. In 20 years, women have only come 4 cents closer to equal wages.

At home the same pattern exists. There is always a "man of the house", but how often do you hear of "the woman of the house".² Women are the heads of the households only in the sense that they handle the finance and take care of the

domestic work. The reason for all this is ultimately the husband who encourages her to do her household duties, take care of the children and let him bring in the money.

As a matter of fact, according to a national youth survey conducted by *Time* magazine, the majority of both males and females believe it is easier to be a man in America today.³ There are things happening in education today that proves this to be true. There are some institutions which are unwilling to provide with equal opportunities. Often male and female students are not treated equally. They also have no sympathy or understanding for single mothers or pregnant women. The information is based on factually based research. Research shows again that girls encounter quite different psychological and physiological threats than boys do. For example, one in 20 girls has attempted a suicide which is double the rate for boys. As women grow older they face the threat of chronic and deadly diseases in their

lifetime. American women face a one in eight chance of developing breast cancer. Heart diseases, too, are the number one killer of women.⁴

In order to solve the problem of women all over the world, a conference was held in Cairo in 1994 to address various issues. Representatives from more than 180 countries from all parts of the globe were gathered there. Cairo supported the idea that women's rights are human rights as well as the view that women's value exists far beyond her reproductive capacity.

America responded to this affirmation with vigour, which also shows the importance of the problem in that society.⁵ It is now launching programs that encourage all women not only

1) Ibid.

2) Rights of Women: Their Suppression in America Today, <http://www.cyberlearning-world.com>.

3) Time p.14.

4) White House Proclamation.

5) Population at the Millennium, p.1.

of all reported AIDS cases; This compares with only 7 per cent in 1995. Heterosexual contact is now the fastest growing mode of transmission. In the United States the threat is even greater for women of color.¹

Unfortunately, respect for equality and equal rights play a minor role in the modern American society. There should be a more prosperous and fairer society where all ladies are able to thrive. They should go forward not backwards. Gail Shaffer, chief executive officer of Business and Professional Women/USA states: "We want our daughters to have full and equal opportunity in America and not have their horizon limited by gender stereotypes. Women should have a crystal-clear choice on every issue of concern to them, like equal pay, child care, family, medical leave and minimum wages."² We are preparing a plan to use the nation's prosperity to benefit women and their families.

Unfortunately, the road to the civic, economic and social equality for women in the United States has been long

and arduous, marked by frustration and set-backs. What the American women have gained in the past is largely that by mid 19th century, some states recognized the right of women to own property and to sign contracts independent of their husbands.³ Although constitution was amended and the law of land was made, and women were given the right to vote in 1920, they were still deprived of the same salary for performing the same job as men, as well as equal opportunities in education and sports programs.

Today the promise of the true equality has yet to be realized. Despite historical changes in the laws and attitudes, significant wage gaps between men and women persist in the traditional sectors as well as in emerging fields, such as information technology, while the employment of computer programmers and operators has increased at a breaking rate of 80 per cent since 1983. Strikingly enough, fewer than one in three of these higher paying jobs are filled by a woman. Still much

work must be done to promote the equal participation of women in science and technology.⁴ The year 1964 marks the passage of the Civil Rights Act which made employment discrimination based on gender illegal. As late as the year 2000 the working women of America did not enjoy equal pay and social security.

In order to tackle these inequalities and other emerging critical issues facing women, some people have been inspired by the courageous actions of many heroic Americans, women and men alike, refusing to remain silent in the face of injustice, speaking out at rallies, circulating pamphlets and petitions, lobbying state legislatures and risking public humiliation. They have changed the mind of many of their fellow Americans and even many laws of the nation. Yet, fighting the persisting inequalities

1) White House proclamation.

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid.

4) Ibid.

inferior, because they are naturally inferior to men. The abuse of women in general has been reported for more than two thousand years in every culture .

Violence against women is another issue of concern vis a vis inequalities. As a matter of fact, violence against women, which has existed over centuries, has been hidden behind the veil of the privacy of families. As late as 1840 American police department still made no arrests for wife beating. Many still believed that family violence should be resolved within the family. Arrest avoidance was justified for a variety of reasons:

- The arrest of a violent husband was viewed as an act that would break up the family.

- It was considered a norm that if the police made an arrest in a spouse abuse case, the wife would subsequently change her mind and refuse to prosecute.

- It was believed that an arrest of the husband would have a negative economic impact upon the family, because the husband was the

principal breadwinner.

- It was believed that the court could not handle all of these cases which should best be addressed within the institution of the family.¹

Violence against women is a serious problem and must not be trivialized, belittled or ignored. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (DHHS), the number of violent crimes against women reached staggering figures between 1992 and 1994 . Domestic abuse is the leading cause of injury to women in the U.S. More than 50 percent of women murdered in the U.S. are killed by their current or former male partners, and it is estimated that one in four women in the U.S. will be assaulted by a domestic partner in her lifetime.²

Other studies show that girls encounter different social, cultural, and psychological threats than boys do. It has been estimated that one in four girls will become sexually exploited by the time she reaches 18 years of age. Moreover, girls are today 15

times more likely to have begun using drugs by the age of 15 than their mothers according to the National Center for Addictions and Substance Abuse Act at Columbia University.

Teen pregnancy and birth rates have declined in the U.S. in recent years, but it is still two to seven times higher than that of other industrialized countries. Teen pregnancy most likely interrupts young ladies, education. As a result, they drop out of school, which effects their economic independence for the rest of their lives as compared to women who delay their pregnancies.³

Time Wirth, President of the U.N. Foundation, says that new education programs for women, particularly adolescent girls, play a crucial role in improving equality of life of future generations. In 1997 women comprised 22 per cent

1) Women and Justice, p. 207.

2) Population at the Millennium - the U.S. Perspective; <http://www.Usinfo State.gov>. p.3.

3) Ibid,p.2.

However, liberty does not include deeds like killing your rival in order to gain better opportunities; killing your religious opposition, because you think your religion is superior to other religions; having an abortion, because you have enough children; or battering your wife to enforce obedience to the husband's command. These are merely arbitrary rights and should never take precedence over someone else's most basic right to live.¹

What is meant by equality? It is the condition, for all people equally in society, of possessing substantially the same rights, privileges, immunities, and being liable to substantially the same duties. Equality guaranteed under an equal protection clause is equality under the same conditions and among problems similarly situated.²

The study of the rights and status of American women in society shows that their situation has not changed radically from the past. They were deprived of their due rights and faced many

inequalities, which unfortunately are still continuing to exist to a large extent. Therefore, today a social security reform is needed definitely. The social security trustees themselves have predicted that a shortfall will occur in the 2030s, if no measures are taken.

Today there is still a group of people who believe that women are not intelligent. In their views women belong to the home, to give birth, raise children and tend to domestic chores. Even their education ought to be relative to men. Women are to please men, to be useful to them, to make themselves loved and honoured by them, when young, to care for them, and after they grow, to counsel them and make life sweet and agreeable to them. These are the duties that have been allotted to women at all times.

Today, there are still some renowned male figures according to whom "nature intended women to be our slaves. Women are our property, we are not theirs. They belong to us, just as a

tree that bears fruit belongs to a gardener".³ "What an insane idea to demand equality for women, ... women are nothing but machines for producing children".⁴ These are excerpts that clearly show their opinions.

Unfortunately, after the passing of many centuries and the development of technology and general sophistication, the ideas of the so-called intellectual, renowned leaders and writers have not changed much. Little has been done to ensure and strengthen women's rights and position in society. Only very few comprehend the situation; "Women view the history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man towards them."⁵

Myths about women have been propagated to support the claim that women are socially

1) Ibid.

2) Ibid, p. 144.

3) White House Proclamation on Women's Equality; <http://www.whitehouse.gov>.

4) Decard, 1979:5.

5) Moraskin Alleman (1993).

A Survey of Women's Rights and Status in the American Society - the Past and the Present



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Abstracts

The article yields awareness of the rights of women in America, and their status in that society. Unfortunately, American women are still suffering at home as well as in society due to inadequate legal measures and the inefficient social security and family law. Proposals are given to improve the adequacy and equity of social security benefits for women. They involve both minor and substantial changes.

On the other hand, it is the duty of women themselves to fight to attain their rights, as well as respect in the family and the society. They are encouraged not to remain silent, but remove the barriers in their path to equality.

Key words:rights, equality, inequality, family law, justice, violence, social security.

A Survey of Women's Rights and Status in the American Society- the Past and the Present

The survey in the article is focused on women's rights and status in America. It is carried out on the basis of the latest data and information from the Internet. Despite making hue and cry about human rights abuse and voicing concern about the inequality of men and women in other countries, American women are still suffering at home and in society due to inadequate legal measures as well as the inefficient social security and family law which do not give equal rights to women to

enable them to claim their rights and prove their dignity.

First, it is necessary to consider the definition of rights and equality. In the dictionary of law, rights and equality are defined as "justice, ethical correctness or consonance with the rules of law or principles of morals".¹

There are two kinds of rights, the fundamental and arbitrary ones. Among the fundamental rights are the right to live and the right to have liberty. Life is the most important natural right and liberty, which means doing anything in order to obtain ease and comfort is the second.

1) Elizabeth A. Martin. Dictionary of Law. London: Oxford University Press, 1983, p.189