

## Equal Pay and Equal Opportunities

Despite several decades of legislation and campaigns aimed at eliminating the pay gap between women and men there are still significant differences in earnings. It is estimated that women on average earn only 50 to 80 per cent of men's wages throughout the world. Differences in pay are particularly marked in certain developing countries which have chosen to boost their exports on the basis of a predominantly female workforce. However, even across the "old" 15 European Union states on average women earned about 75% of men's earnings.

There are many reasons for this inequality. Some of the key factors are outlined below.

### **Discrimination**

Underlying all the factors affecting pay and opportunities listed below is the issue of gender discrimination. In economic, political and social decision-making and activity women are disadvantaged solely because of their sex. Gender discriminations are first of all embedded in social perceptions and cultural and social norms. As shown in the ILO publication "Decent work for women", in the labor market gender roles often define perceptions about abilities and can lead to discriminatory hiring and pay practices. For example men are often still seen as primary bread winners and women at best as helpers.

As perception, the social and cultural norms can restrict the women's economic options and opportunities.

### **Pay Systems and Pay Determination**

The way pay is decided has a big effect on the gender pay gap. Employers often hold stereotypical views of how valuable women are as workers. They are not as good at mechanical jobs; they can't do heavy lifting; they will just go off and have babies etc. These attitudes can often have the effect of lowering women's pay levels.

Also, the skills that women do possess are often not highly rated compared to those of men and this also leads to lower pay. It can seem like men are regarded as highly skilled simply because they are doing 'men's work'.

But the process of arriving at pay rates is itself a problem. Employers use wages to achieve many things – to allocate labor where there is greatest demand, to retain employees who have skills specific to the company or sector, to motivate employees. Although this may sound reasonable, such decisions are often based on the stereotypical assumptions already mentioned above and in the wage bargaining process.

This process has often been the same for many years, even decades. The negotiators are mainly men and the bargaining agenda reflects their interests – wages, hours and holidays are typical examples. While these issues are important to women too, they are frequently biased toward men's primary concerns – e.g. while shortening basic working hours may provide opportunities for enhanced pay rates for men, this does little to help women juggle home and family life unless working patterns are part of the negotiation and simply increases the pay gap as men get the enhanced rates and women get the childcare.

Grading systems may simply operate so that each successful pay negotiation reinforces women's position at the bottom of the pay scale. The differences in the way this works can be seen in the different way the gender pay gap reveals itself in different countries. Using Europe as an example, in Belgium, Denmark,

Finland, France, Italy and Sweden women earn, on average, over 90% of what men earn at the lower end of the pay structure; while in the UK, Ireland and Austria rates are below 80%. At the top end of the pay structure in Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and Portugal women earn 90% of equivalent male earnings while Finland, and the UK are at 77% or lower.

These problems are worse where there is little collective bargaining, pay systems are decentralized, or women are working in the informal economy or atypical jobs, such as casual or temporary agency work.

There are also many other factors that support the way pay systems develop, such as the following:

### **Job segregation**

Women often find themselves segregated into particular jobs. This can reveal itself within companies or in the wider economy. Women are overwhelmingly found in a limited range of occupations, especially in service sectors, that tend to be badly paid, or in the informal economy. But even where women manage to get out of these ghettos and into sectors which are more mixed they often find themselves in the lowest paid jobs within the factory, shop or office while the men occupy the top jobs.

### **Training and education**

In developing countries, girls and young women generally have a lower level of education than boys and men. Because they are less qualified women have less opportunity to access to skilled jobs.

In industrialized countries, the argument is that women are not as well trained as men and do not invest as much time and money in acquiring qualifications. The result is that employers believe that women are not worth as much to the company.

Even though there is evidence to show that the gap in skills and knowledge has narrowed between women and men, this has not reduced the pay gap. In addition experience can often be a means of acquiring extra pay – sometimes this genuinely reflects increased ability, but this is not always the case.

### **Working Patterns**

The number of hours that women holding jobs work and the pattern of those hours have an effect on the gap in earnings between women and men. Men tend to spend longer hours, on average, than women in paid activity and to work shift patterns more often than women. Both these factors result in additional pay for men. Part-time working also generally imposes a penalty on women.

### **Caring responsibilities**

In industrialized countries, the question of the hours that women spend in paid activities is often affected by their caring responsibilities. Women still tend to be the main carers of children. As many countries face an increasingly ageing population, they also tend to have the main responsibility of caring for elderly and disabled adults in the family. This means that women often have to reduce their working hours or find enough money to pay for additional help. Employers are rarely understanding about these responsibilities and believe that women are not worth investing in.

In developing countries the amount of unpaid work carried out by women is even larger. These tasks are linked to their family responsibilities such as taking care of house and the children, carrying water, cultivating food.

### **Women in decision-making positions**

In most organizations, whether it is companies, governments or trade unions, men still tend to dominate the decision-making process. Some men are opposed to making 'concessions' for women's characteristics, others are ignorant of women's needs. This is where the issue of mainstreaming is raised.

There are two ways to affect decision-making – by getting more women into positions of power and by getting existing decision-makers recognize the effects their decisions will have on women (gender mainstreaming).

### **Workplace activity**

While women dominate some occupations, in others they are the minority. But in both cases it is still necessary, at present, to get the support of men to effect real change. Here there is a question of solidarity between workers in getting changes in the wages structure. The ability to do this is also affected by the existing culture of the workplace.

### **So What Can We Do?**

There are two types of strategy available: legal and institutional.

Legal – but in some countries the law is very much based on individual rights. So each equal pay case only helps one woman. However, the law could be extended to allow class or group actions where many women could mount a legal challenge through one case. But the law is still a route that has a very uncertain destination – cases fail at least as often as they succeed.

#### **Example of a class action**

**Wal-Mart:** The US campaign against walmartization of working life has come up with revelations about the company's discrimination of its women workers. The Bentonville-based retail multinational is involved in the biggest class action lawsuit ever, accused of gender discrimination in pay and promotions.

Disclose their wage data has been requested for review so the US Congress can "further understand why Wal-Mart pays its women associates less than men and promotes its female workers less frequently than their male counterparts".

[http://www.union-network.org/unisite/sectors/commerce/Multinationals/wal\\_mart\\_campaign\\_index\\_page.htm](http://www.union-network.org/unisite/sectors/commerce/Multinationals/wal_mart_campaign_index_page.htm)

[WakeupWalmart.com](http://www.wakeupwalmart.com) campaign (backed by UNI affiliate UFCW)

See also: "The Wal-Martization of the World – UNI's Global Response", on the UNI Commerce website

Institutional – every policy, practice or procedure that affects pay determination needs to be systematically monitored for gender bias. But it is no good if this happens only as an addition to normal procedures – it needs to be included from the start. For instance in collective bargaining the agenda for a negotiation should be devised so that each item benefits men and women equally; women should not have to fight for equal treatment after the agenda has been determined.

This process has a name – Gender Mainstreaming.

Every decision, action, policy, procedure, all custom and practice should be examined to remove gender bias at the outset. The benefit of this system is that it benefits all women covered by the decisions taken and does not require retrospective action to put right what has been missed.

The purpose of the debate is to establish how we can influence the economic, political and social factors that lead to lower pay for women. We have to consider what we can achieve as trade union members in all these areas to affect the factors outlined in this paper. Five questions are of key importance in working out a strategy that unions can adopt to eliminate the pay gap between women and men once and for all. They are:

- 1) How do we get equal pay on the collective bargaining agenda?
- 2) What do we need to include in collective agreements to ensure pay equity?
- 3) What needs to be included in a collective agreement to ensure that women have access to jobs and training? How can the effects of the agreement be monitored?
- 4) What changes to working patterns would assist women in getting access to jobs and training? What safeguards need to be negotiated?
- 5) How do we incorporate the needs of young women, ethnic minorities and migrants?

#### **Sources and useful links:**

##### **Human development indicators, UNDP**

<http://hdr.undp.org/statistics/data/>

##### **World Bank Development Indicators**

<http://www.worldbank.org/data/wdi2005/>

On this Website, also "Gender Stats" available by country

##### **International Wage Indicator (with UNI involvement)**

Online Wage Indicators of 9 European countries. India, South Korea, South Africa, Brazil. United States and Hungary are online half way 2005.

<http://www.wageindicator.org/>

Euro (European Industrial Relations Observatory, Dublin)

##### **Gender pay equity in Europe**

January 2002

Comparative study

<http://www.eiro.eurofound.eu.int/2002/01/study/index.html>

##### **European Commission**

##### **Information on Gender Related Community Policies:**

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/equ\\_opp/information\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/equ_opp/information_en.html)

Including: Equal Pay

##### **European Project on Equal Pay BETSY**

<http://www.equalpay.nu/>

English, Deutsch, Italiano, Español, Skandinaviska

## Women, Informal work and precarious jobs

"In the world today, a majority of people work in the informal economy – because most of them are unable to find other jobs or start businesses in the formal economy", the Conclusions concerning decent work and the informal economy adopted at the International Labor Conference 2002 stated.

Since the beginning of the 1980's the participation of women in paid work has increased significantly. ILO speaks of the "world-wide feminization of the labor force and employment". Today, world wide some 45 per cent of women between 15 and 64 have jobs or are seeking jobs. However, have women benefited in terms of the quality of their work? Although there were many positive developments regarding the access of women to decent work, women continue to be concentrated in the informal economy and in precarious jobs with a low pay and no social protection.

The UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2005 again repeated that "Although women have increased their share in paid non-agricultural employment, they remain a small minority in salaried jobs in many regions, while they are over-represented in the informal economy."

As to the latest European Union Labor Survey (2005), while noting an increase in female employment rate, showed significant increases in part-time jobs and temporary contracts – both more pronounced for women than for men.

### Decent work

- the pay you receive means you have sufficient for the needs of you and your family
- the hours you have to work allow you time for your family life and others interests
- the conditions you work in are safe
- you do not suffer discrimination or your work is valued or rewarded the same as similar work done by others
- you are treated with respect by others and you do not suffer harassment or bullying
- there are adequate measures in place to protect you for your old age, and against the risk of illness and unemployment
- you are able to come together with your colleagues and fellow workers to improve your situation collectively

Source: UNI global union: *Imagine...*

### Precarious jobs

include occasional work, subcontracting, fixed term jobs and work at home.

Clandestine or unregistered employment – particularly widespread among migrants - forms part of the universe of precarious employment as it is more vulnerable and exposed to the employer's decisions; it is characterized by not being registered with the labor or social security institutions so as to avoid the payment of benefits, contributions, minimum or active wages, to obstruct the action of trade unions, or to contribute to tax evasion.

Source: Union Women for Development and Change, 2<sup>nd</sup> Women's Conference UNI Americas, 2004

## **Women and informal economy: Some trends**

According to the ILO publication "Decent Work for Women", informal economy has grown in all regions of the world in the 1980's and new segments have emerged due to globalization, restructuring and flexibilization of production. Coexisting with the traditional informal economy -low skilled and low productivity activities- jobs that have been either "informalized" within formal enterprises or outsourced and subcontracted by formal economy companies have proliferated. The objectives for the enterprises are varied: search for flexibility, lower labor costs, the desire to limit the influence of trade unions.

In many countries, both developing and industrialized ones, there are linkages between changes in the organization of work and the growth of the informal economy. Workers and economic units are increasingly engaged in flexible work arrangements, including outsourcing and subcontracting.

The growth of informal economy is accompanied by a spreading of precariousness of employment. Work in the informal economy offers less social protection and security than jobs in the formal economy. In many cases working in informal economy means earning a much lower salary than in formal sectors, working part-time, working without a written contract.

Women are more affected by this insecurity than men as their proportion working in the informal economy is significantly higher than the proportion of men. In many countries, because of the increased number of households headed by women, these are compelled to accept poorly remunerated informal jobs for the survival of their families. Informal sectors provide jobs for low skilled and low productivity female labor.

## **Social protection**

Workers in the informal economy are not recognized, registered, regulated or protected under labor legislation and social protection, including in areas which are particularly important for women such as education, skill building, training, health care and childcare.

The formal economy normally offers a better social protection than the informal economy. However, in the formal sectors workers are covered differently depending on their respective terms and conditions of employment. The growth in precarious forms of employment has introduced more diversity in individual situations for all workers. Because of their lower wages and their irregular employment patterns, women have less opportunity to benefit from traditional contributory social insurance schemes.

As it is shown in the ILO publication "Decent work for Women, women all over the world are affected by this phenomenon. Developed countries have not yet responded sufficiently to that proliferation of "atypical" jobs (part-time, intermittent wage earning jobs...). In developing countries programs are designed to cover only workers of the formal economy, of whom women represent a small proportion. In the economies of transition, there is a danger of regression linked to the effects of economic adjustment on employment and social security schemes.

All these employment conditions and patterns do not only mean poor working conditions today but they also jeopardize women's future development as they will not have benefits equivalent to men's at the time of retiring because no adequate contributions to social security are made for them while they are employed.

### **Offshoring and outsourcing: Effects on women**

Offshoring is one of the main characteristics of the global economy. Many companies move the part of the production that requires less skills and technological development to poorer countries, paying lower wages to their workers who, given the high rates of unemployment, accept jobs with lower salary and sometimes with no social protection. In these new locations labor rights such as the right to organize or to join unions and bargain collectively are not always respected. Many reports on outsourced call centers in India highlight the fact that workers of these centers have to face many barriers to joining unions.

Many women – more than men - are willing to accept these less favorable working conditions, partly because the unemployment rates are usually higher for women and because with a lower level of education, they are more at risk than men to lose their jobs.

Women are more vulnerable to exploitation in these new locations. They are often paid less than men.

### **What can we do?**

Unions should continue to join all campaigns for decent work, fighting for decent working conditions and building equal opportunities and treatment for women and men. They should also participate in and intensify the campaigns for the ratification and effective implementation of fundamental principles and rights stated in the international instruments – in particular conventions n°s 100, 111, 156, 175, 177, 182 and 183 and the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work in 1998.

Women and youth make up the bulk of workers in the informal economy and with precarious jobs, and are especially without or little representation and voice. UNI and affiliates will therefore contribute to the struggle to secure rights for them too as provided for in the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. They should take action to help workers in their industries, irrespective of where they work, to organize.

They should press for social protection to be extended to workers who are now excluded and work with governments and employer organizations to design new social security schemes especially for workers with precarious jobs and those in the informal economy.

Initiatives like the UNI Outsourcing Charter should be used by affiliates to take action to implement this charter with any company currently outsourcing work.

**Sources and useful links:**

*Union Women for Development and Change*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Regional Women's Conference UNI Americas, 2004

*Outsourcing and contracting out: Failing to deliver quality services, secure jobs and a sustainable telecom industry*, UNI Telecom, June 2005

Conclusions concerning decent work and the informal economy , ILC 2002  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/ilc/ilc90/pdf/pr-25.pdf>

Action Plan on Migrant Workers (ILO International Labour Conference 2004)  
<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/migrant/new/index.htm>

UN Millennium Development Goals Report 2005  
<http://unstats.un.org/unsd/mi/pdf/MDG%20Book.pdf>

European Labour Market Survey (2005)  
<http://www.union-network.org/UNIEuropaNews.nsf/By+Date/456AFCA86740EF73C125703500464238?OpenDocument>

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

# Women, Violence and AIDS

## Women and violence

Gender-based violence continues to be a chronic threat to women's lives and well-being. It exists on a continuum, from domestic violence in the privacy of the home, via violence at the workplace, to violence as a weapon of war, where rape and other forms of sexual exploitation are committed.

Violence affects the lives of millions of women worldwide, in all socio-economic and educational classes. It knows no boundaries. It cuts across cultural and religious barriers. It takes various forms.<sup>1</sup> Women are subject to violence in the family (battering, sexual abuse of female children, dowry related violence, incest, deprivation of food, marital rape, female genital mutilation), to violence in the community (rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment, trafficking in women, forced prostitution) and violence by the State (women in detention and rape during times of armed conflict).

Several interconnected social and cultural factors have kept women particularly vulnerable to the violence directed at them. These factors are a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women. Factors responsible for the unequal power relations include:

- Economic and social forces which exploit female labor and the female body
- The family, that can be an institution where labor is exploited, where male sexual power is violently expressed and where a certain type of socialization disempowers women
- Beliefs and ideologies which justify the use of violence against women by the superiority of men
- Legislation and cultural sanctions that have denied women and children an independent and legal status

Therefore the root-causes of violence, including women's poor economic, social and political status as well as attitudes and perceptions concerning women's human rights must be addressed.

### ***Some forms of violence against women***

#### **Domestic Violence**

Domestic violence is perhaps the most widespread form of violence against women. Nearly one in four women may experience sexual violence by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Women are subject to physical assault such as punching, strangling, and burning in their homes.

Although many countries have acknowledged that domestic violence is a public health issue and have adopted legislation to address it, high levels of domestic violence persists. In many places the law is not enforced. Domestic violence is tolerated and the perpetrators are not prosecuted.

The impact of domestic violence leads to severe consequences on the physical and mental health of the women. The physical injuries (fractures, chronic disabilities such as partial or total loss of hearing or vision, burns) represent the more visible health impacts of violence on women. Domestic violence has also severe and fatal psychological consequences for women: Low self esteem, high incidence of stress, stress related illness, panic attacks, depression, sleeping and eating disturbances, drugs and alcohol abuse, suicide.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/rights/dpi1772e.htm>

Women victims of domestic violence are more vulnerable to other forms of discrimination and violence and particularly in their working environment. The loss of self esteem leads them to accept submission at work. They accept more easily lower conditions of work and lower earnings. Many women suffering domestic violence are also sexually harassed in their workplace.

Domestic violence also bears a cost for the employers as it has a direct effect on the capacity of work. The victims of domestic violence lose concentration. They are less productive. Many of them cannot or do not dare to come to work because of their physical injuries. The rate of absenteeism among the victims of domestic violence is very high.

### **Trafficking in women and girls**

Trafficking involves recruiting or transporting persons, often under the false promise of a job abroad, in order to place them in a situation of abuse or exploitation such as enforced prostitution, slavery-like work practices, battering and extreme cruelty, sweatshop labor, or exploitative domestic servitude.

Each year, roughly two million girls between the ages of 5 and 15 are trafficked, sold, or coerced into prostitution. Many women are forced into prostitution by members of their family or their partner or because they find themselves in a very difficult economical or social situation.

Persons trafficked into a foreign country are very vulnerable to economic exploitation and are subject to extensive health hazards. If forced into prostitution, the conditions of work faced by women and girls are frequently appalling. Quite a number of them are held in debt-bondage as they are expected to repay the amount paid to their parents by the recruiting agents. They may also be illegally confined to their rooms or brothels, through the practice of withholding passports or through more physically abusive means.

Conscious of the huge problem of trafficking, and convinced that unions have a role to play in combating these practices, UNI Women in 2001 launched a campaign on "Stop the Trafficking in Women". The issue was raised and discussed in UNI women's and youth meetings and seminars. In Central and Eastern Europe, countries of origin of many victims in Europe, there were intensive debates on how trade unions could contribute to put an end to this scourge by informing their members of the dangers. The UNI poster on the issue was also produced and distributed in the languages of these countries for these occasions.

### **Sexual harassment**

Sexual harassment in the workplace is a relatively widespread problem. It can encompass a wide range of behaviors, from jokes and comments to rape and sexual assault.

More vulnerable women are more likely to be sexually harassed. Financial dependence exacerbates the vulnerability of women to harassment. The kind of workplace influences also the likelihood for women of being harassed. Women working in non traditional jobs, casual and informal workers are more likely to be victims of sexual violence at work. Migrant workers, especially irregular ones, in developed or developing countries represent a group particularly at risk. Many factors contribute to the vulnerability of women migrant workers: their social isolation, their lack of language skills and financial resources.

The organization of women and their participation in unions contributes to women feeling stronger and thus be less vulnerable to sexual harassment.

<b>Examples of sexual harassment</b>	
<b>Physical conduct</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Physical violence</li><li>• Physical contact e.g. Touching, pinching</li><li>• The use of job related threats or rewards to solicit sexual favors</li></ul>
<b>Verbal conduct</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Comments on a worker's appearance, age, private life, etc</li><li>• Sexual comments, stories and jokes</li><li>• Sexual advances</li><li>• Repeated social invitations</li><li>• Insults based on the sex of the workers</li><li>• Condescending or paternalists remarks</li></ul>
<b>Non verbal Conduct</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Display of sexually or suggestive material</li><li>• Sexually suggestive gesture</li><li>• Whistling</li></ul>

Source: Sexual harassment at work: National and international responses (2005), Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 2, by D. McCann

Sexual and moral harassment has severe consequences on the health of the victims. They experience feelings ranging from nervousness and anger to humiliation. Harassment can cause illness and psychological disorders.

Sexual harassment at work has a cost for the employers. The victims are tense and pay less attention to their work. They tend to be absent or to arrive late. They are less productive.

### ***What can we do?***

#### **Awareness raising and training**

It is important to participate in efforts to address the wide ranging gender inequalities in order to empower women and to combat the roots of violence against women. Trade unions have an important role to play in the removal of existing cultural and social barriers ignorance and gender inequality.

Many initiatives have been taken by workers organizations in order to raise awareness among members on the existence of violence at home and at work. These initiatives could take/have been taken several forms: undertaking membership/ public awareness campaigns, developing educational and awareness raising material such as booklets/ posters, campaigning for appropriate legislation and its enforcement.

Some interesting activities carried out by UNI and its affiliates to raise awareness on violence against women may be highlighted:

Acting at the request of the Women's Committees of the founding partners, on 8 March 1999, **UNI** launched a global "Stop Violence" against women campaign urging affiliates to deal with the problem of violence at work and at home by undertaking a number of actions. The repeated appeals to affiliates to turn the spotlight on violence and act against it have been widely followed by UNI unions all over the world. Approached by postal affiliates, several Postal Administrations in the Americas and Europe issued stamps on the theme, sometimes referring to the UNI campaign and in two instances even putting the UNI logo on the stamp.

UNI Graphical and affiliated unions in the Americas have run a vast campaign on violence against women in the Americas and produced a video on the issue. UNI Commerce and its European affiliates concentrated on combating Violence at Work by running campaigns and signing agreements with employers.

Union representatives and union members should be able to deal with complaints of harassment, but also identify and provide victims of domestic violence with appropriate support. Trade unions should take/have taken responsibility for training their own members.

### **Support and counseling**

The costs of domestic violence or violence at work against women are important for employers in terms of low productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover. It is therefore in their interest too to create an environment free of violence. They would benefit from supporting staff suffering from violence at home or at work. Trade unions should encourage employers to support women victims of violence by negotiating with clear policies and mechanisms to prevent and tackle violence including to provide assistance to victims and families.

Within the framework of the UNI Stop violence campaign, affiliates have been asked to provide women victims of violence with appropriate support for the victims (hot-lines, counseling, shelters, legal assistance, financial assistance) or to direct them to competent institutions or organizations.

### **Sources and useful links:**

Sexual harassment at work: National and international responses (2005), Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 2, by D. McCann <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/condtrav/pdf/2cws.pdf>

Preliminary report submitted by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Ms. Radhika Coomaraswamy, in accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1994/45, Nov. 1994, E/CN.4/1995/42  
(<http://www.unhcr.ch/Huridocda/Huridoca.nsf/TestFrame/75ccfd797b0712d08025670b005c9a7d?Opendocument>)

Domestic violence against women and girls, Innocenti digest, n°6, June 2000, Innocenti Research center, Florence, Italy

## Women and HIV/AIDS

### Gender, Inequality and Risk

Women now represent about the half of the people living with HIV. However, today the majority of persons who become HIV-positive and who die of AIDS in developing countries are women.

Several factors which are rooted in the social relations and women's economic realities contribute to the fact that women now are becoming infected at a faster rate than men.

Women often are not free to make empowered choices concerning their sexual life. Many women experience sexual and economic subordination in their relation with their partners and also at work. In many developing countries women have no social and independent status and depend on men to have access to productive resources. Unequal power relations between men and women, and financial and economic dependence make it difficult for women to negotiate for safe sex.

Because of gender inequalities linked to the limited access to education and employment, property, credit and income, women are more affected by poverty. In developing countries today the majority of poor people are women. This poverty exacerbates their dependence to their husbands and partners. It also leads women to have recourse to prostitution and to the use of their body in exchange for money or goods for survival.

In this context sexual relations between young women and older men are frequent, in particular in arranged marriages. Often, the older husband helped the girl's family financially. These intergenerational marriages increase the risk for the young women to be infected with HIV. Older men are more likely to be HIV-positive and to infect their young partner. Moreover the risk of infection for young women is more important because the lining of the neck of the womb is not fully developed.

### Factors linked to low status that raise women's risk of being infected

#### Background economic, social and cultural factors:

- Financial or material dependence on men for support
- No access to resources
- Low education, illiteracy
- No property or inheritance rights

#### Proximate social and demographic factors:

- Early marriage or early sexual relations
- Violent and abusive sexual relations inside or outside of marriage
- Recourse to sex work

Source: "Women, girls, HIV/AIDS and the world of work", *Brief, December 2004*, ILOAIDS

## **Violence and AIDS**

Violence is both a cause and a consequence of HIV/AIDS.

Violence against women increases their vulnerability to HIV infection. A study conducted in Tanzania found that HIV-positive women were over two and half times more likely than HIV-negative ones to have experienced violence perpetrated by their current partner. Young women are particularly vulnerable to abuse and coerced sex and are more likely to be infected by the HIV. Over half of new HIV infections worldwide are occurring among young people between the ages of 15 to 24, and over 60 per cent of HIV positive youth between the ages of 15-24 are women.

The fear of violence, of being ostracized by their families and destitute by their partners prevent women from seeking information on HIV, getting tested and seeking a treatment. This obstacle bars women from access to treatment.

## **Women and the impact of HIV/AIDS**

Women are especially exposed to the consequences of HIV/ AIDS.

AIDS exacerbates the unequal division of work and responsibilities. The traditional domestic role of women means that girls and women are more likely to provide care for the sick relatives. When the family is affected by AIDS the "double burden" of women is intensified because they have to care for sick relatives in addition to work to contribute to household income. This situation reduces the educational opportunities of the girls and young women and their opportunities to achieve their financial independence. As a result the proportion of women working in informal economy, or lower paid employment is likely to increase.

In developing countries, when their partners die of AIDS, women often find themselves without any financial security, economic opportunities or social protection. HIV-positive women face the same dramatic situation. Many of them are stigmatized and abandoned because of their disease. Women working in the informal economy lack health facilities and social protection. When they are sick and forced to leave their activities they lose their precarious livelihood.

Women are more likely than men to be stigmatized and ostracized and destitute. This HIV/AIDS-related discrimination at work can encompass mandatory testing, quarantine, exclusion, and outright job loss.

## ***What can we do?***

Trade unions have vital leadership roles to play in changing attitudes in the world of work and community at large. Employment policies and practices should be reviewed to address gender inequality in the context of HIV/AIDS.

Unions should pursue several lines of actions, among them:

- To address the low status of women as the main mean to combat violence against women and girls and therefore that place them directly in harm's way
- To support HIV-positive women
- To negotiate with employers to provide financial assistance to HIV-positive workers in order for them and their family to have access to treatment or to encourage workplace medical facilities to diagnose and treat STIs which increase the risk of transmission of HIV
- To provide information and education for men and women that includes sexual and reproductive health

- To train union representatives on HIV/AIDS and how to prevent and treat it
- To campaign and make efforts to remove discrimination and stigma that are still attached to people infected with HIV.

The 1st UNI-Africa Regional Conference held in Johannesburg in October 2003, adopted a plan of action to tackle the disease in Africa that comprises the above lines of action. It also includes promoting the rights at work of persons with HIV/AIDS, stepping up education for members and campaigning for low-cost, live-saving drugs.

For several years now, every UNI education and training course in Africa and most in the Americas has included a session on HIV/AIDS.

A new UNI leaflet on "Campaigning on HIV/AIDS", including the gender dimension, will be available at the World Congress.

#### **Sources and useful links:**

*Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the crises*, a joint report by UNAIDS/UNFPA/UNIFEM, 2004

*Women, HIV/AIDS and the world of work*, ILOAIDS,

"*Women, girls, HIV/AIDS and the world of work*", Brief, December 2004, ILOAIDS

*1st UNI- Africa Conference, Johannesburg 2003, Resolutions and Statements*

"*Women and AIDS*", AIDS epidemic update: December 2004, UNAIDS

#### **UNAIDS**

[http://www.unaids.org/wad2004/press\\_releases.html](http://www.unaids.org/wad2004/press_releases.html)

Also in French, Spanish and Russian

#### **ILO/AIDS**

<http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/>

#### **World Health Organisation**

Factsheets (also available in Arabic, Chinese, Russian, French, Spanish)

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/en/index.html>

For information on specific issues go to page: <http://www.who.int/topics>

#### **UNICEF**

Violence against girls and women linked to spread of HIV/AIDS

[http://www.unicef.org/aids/index\\_24355.html](http://www.unicef.org/aids/index_24355.html) (Also available in French, Spanish and Russian)

#### **Information on the four themes :**

UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women)

<http://www.unifem.org/>