

The Price of Womanhood

➤ Young women's Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in Zimbabwe

"In general, from my experience, things only change when women speak out against traditions causing inequality. If women don't speak out, nothing will change."

- Laurelle



➤ Join Progressio as we speak out to support women like Laurelle all over the world.

#ThePriceofWomanhood

What is the price of womanhood?

Progressio recently undertook research in Zimbabwe to better understand the issues around Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), both in general society and in the context of the church specifically. This document highlights the key findings of the research, but you can read the full case report online: progressio.org.uk/priceofreport. From this, we're launching our new call to action which gives you the opportunity to help change the current reality for girls who grow up knowing their value is only linked to the status of being married and having children.

We set out to better understand how social norms are passed down through traditional societies and who the key actors are in upholding the discriminatory social norms, which do not allow girls and women to reach their full potential.

24% of women aged 15-19 years have begun child-bearing already.

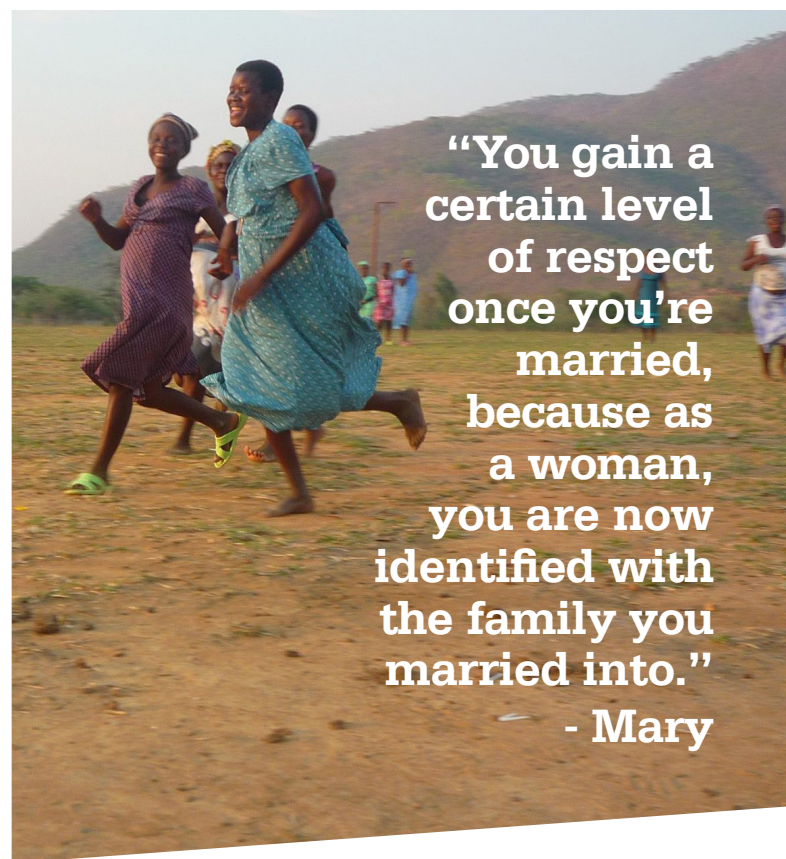
We found that the power relations governing gender relations are currently undermining the lives of women and girls living in Zimbabwe. The full case study report clearly articulates how traditional gender roles are used to reinforce patriarchal values in society. These roles trap young women and girls in a cycle of inequality, with very little say over what happens to their bodies and their futures. The impact of this is not only catastrophic for the women and girls who are affected, but it also has a wider societal affect as it limits women's and girls' empowerment, rights and choices which, in turn, negatively impacts their social and economic participation.

➤ **According to research by Human Rights Watch, one in three women surveyed, aged 20 to 49 years, married before they were 18 years, and an estimated 4% married before they were 15 years old.**¹ Customs and practices such as child marriage, and social expectations such as early child-bearing and submissiveness towards their husbands, limit women's and girls' access to their SRHR.

➤ **Sexually active, unmarried 15-19 year olds struggle to protect themselves from pregnancy.**

They have an unmet need for contraception, which has increased steadily amongst this group from 44% in 1999 to 62% in 2011.² Early child-bearing can have multiple detrimental effects on a girl's life and health. For example, girls aged 10 - 14 years are five times more likely to die in pregnancy or childbirth than those aged between 20-24 years.

➤ **Data from the most recent Demographic Health Survey for Zimbabwe from 2010-11 gives a useful overview of young women's behaviour in the country.** It shows that women and girls are sexually active from a young age. Only 6% of adolescent girls have sex before they are 15 years old, but the number rises sharply to 38% before they are 18 years old. The median age for first intercourse in Zimbabwe is 18.9 years.³ The survey also reveals that 24% of women aged 15 - 19 years have begun child-bearing already. The median age for the first birth for women aged 25-49 years was 21.1 years in urban areas, and 19.7 years in rural areas.⁴



"You gain a certain level of respect once you're married, because as a woman, you are now identified with the family you married into."
- Mary

References:

1. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/11/25/zimbabwe-scourge-childmarriage>.
2. Guttmacher Institute, 2014. Meeting the Sexual and Reproductive Health needs of Adolescents in Zimbabwe
3. <http://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR254/FR254.pdf>
4. <http://www.dhsprogram.com/pubs/pdf/FR254/FR254.pdf>, pp 66-67.

1

Girls are expected to marry young because they are not seen to be of much value until they are married. Society attaches a high value to marriage, which means girls and young women lack self-confidence and a feeling of 'power within'. Marrying young means transitioning into a new social status in which young women and girls are treated with respect. Being able to find a husband is also seen as a sign that they have been raised well, which earns their mother more respect. Lastly, early marriage is seen by parents as an opportunity to protect a young woman or girl's purity and avert pre-marital sex.

Key Messages

2

Girls are expected to give birth early after marriage because this is an opportunity to prove their fertility in a society that values family and children highly. Showing that she is able to bear children enhances her value as a woman and will increase the respect that society has for her. The expectation is attached to the payment of *lobola* that the groom's family has paid to the bride's family.

➤ "Once married, a woman's pregnancy is a major issue. Even if you don't feel the pressure immediately, you'll be stressed because you can imagine the upcoming pressure."
- Laurelle



3

Lobola is a bride-price, paid by the groom and his family to her family. *Lobola*, as a cultural tradition, manifests social norms that limit women's free decision-making over their own bodies, such as when and how often they want to get pregnant.

➤ "Lobola can be stigmatising. Every mistake is referred back to the price that was paid for you. There is even a saying - 'You are an empty tin' - meaning you haven't been worth that price. Men feel like they can do what they want because they have paid for you." - Fortunate

4

Bridal showers and kitchen parties are informal sexuality education events, used by respected women to teach younger women conservative social norms about what is expected of them as future wives. The pressure has been traditionally exercised by an aunt, but if the aunt lives far away, powerful women in the community or family put pressure on the young woman.

➤ "Women's roles, and what is expected from a woman (including in regards to SRHR) are usually discussed in a family setting with aunts. I first learnt about my body and sexuality from my aunt and mother" - Mary

5

Religious leaders of mainstream churches and traditional leaders are not the main influencers of young women's attitudes and knowledge on SRHR.

➤ "In our community, two leaders are important. First, the traditional leaders, who usually work on issues that have to do with the community, such as family disputes. And second, religious leaders, who are more focused on counselling and helping for a long term change."
- Bertha





What are we calling for?

What can you do to help?

A public renewal of commitment to Article 2(f) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Through the work of DFID, Progressio would like to see a public renewal of the commitment to Article 2(f) of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. We would like to see a report on how the department's programmes are currently contributing to the success of this article and for the department to review its current practices to ensure it is investing in community-based programming that is transformative.

The opportunity to raise youth voices

We would like DFID to do more to ensure that the voices of young people from DFID priority countries are heard in international decision-making forums, and that their voice is continually sought out to monitor progress.

More in-depth research

We would like to see DFID conduct further research with NGOs and academia to understand who in society is influencing the passing down of discriminatory social norms and to better understand how to work within different communities to bring about change. It is clear from this case study report that there must be tailored approaches to each community to realise the commitment to Article 2(f).

-  **Send your message to the Secretary of State**
Fill out and post your campaign card, or send your email through our website at: www.progressio.org.uk/priceofwomanhood
-  **Order campaign materials**
Email campaigns@progressio.org.uk to order materials to share in your community.
-  **Share on social media**
Follow Progressio and share our posts with your followers to raise further awareness.
-  **Read the full report**
The full case study report is available online at: www.progressio.org.uk/priceofreport