

How to Guarantee the Safety of Adolescent Women: The Manifestation and Origin of Threats

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Abstract. Since ancient times, due to the influence of traditional culture and religion, the status of women is always lower than that of men, and women lack some rights that they should have. Because the body is not fully developed, and the mind is not mature, adolescent women are more vulnerable than adult women. If their security is threatened, this will affect them throughout their lives. In addition to affecting individuals, some negative effects can even affect their offspring. In order to help more adolescent girls, this article wants to research how the safety of girls is being threatened in various ways. Having found the threats to adolescent girls, this article goes on to explore the causes of these threats. In the end, this article gives some improvement measures that can help adolescent girls. The significance of this study is to provide a reference for official or unofficial organizations to protect adolescent females.

Keywords: adolescent women, safety, threats, right.

1. Introduction

Influenced by culture and religion since ancient times, women in patriarchal societies are often considered inferior to men. Women tend to have lower social status than men and access to fewer resources. However, with the development of society, women's thoughts began to awaken. Women began to speak up, protest, and stand up for their rights. After four waves of feminism, women today have more rights than ever before. But in fact, women are not exactly equal to men these days. They will still be treated unfairly and even threatened. Adolescent women are more vulnerable than adult women, and their safety is under threat from all sides. Adolescence is a very important period in a child's development. If a child's safety is threatened at this stage, it can affect their whole life. At present, the main concern of academia is the unfair treatment of women relative to men. Threats to the safety of adolescent women have rarely been specifically studied. Besides, most women's safety only means their life safety, but safety does not only include life safety. To further assist adolescent women, this article would like to research which aspects of female safety are at risk and find out why and explore solutions.

This article first studies the threats to women's safety and classifies them into education safety, life and health safety, and social relationship safety. Secondly, this paper explores the reasons why women's safety is threatened by three aspects: culture, politics, and the economy. Finally, some reasonable suggestions and practical solutions are given according to the reasons. This article provides a reference for programs to protect adolescent women and fills the gap in the research on women's safety in the academic field.

2. What are the Major Threats to Adolescent Women

Adolescent women are exposed to a variety of threats as they grow up. Adolescent girls are being robbed of their rights, and they are being harmed. This article divides the major threats to adolescent women into three categories: security of educational opportunities, security of life and health, and security of social relationships. The following sections describe the manifestations of these three hazards and their effects on adolescent women.

2.1 Security of Educational Opportunities

The right to education is a right that every child should enjoy. But sometimes adolescent girls are deprived of educational opportunities.

In poor areas, adolescent girls are asked to help on the farms or family occupations or take care of their younger sister and brother or do housework. In some poor families with large families, girls are required to drop out of school to support their brothers in school. According to a study on Valappurnadu Village in Tamil Nadu, about one in five girls does not go to school after puberty, and the most possible reason is their parents ask them to drop out [1]. In addition, child marriage and some prejudices against women also lead to the lack of adequate education for adolescent women. When girls get married and move to their husbands' homes, they are usually far away from their original schools, and some husbands' parents will mind if the girls go to school. Therefore, girls who marry in childhood often lose their right to education early [2]. In some areas, menstruation is considered unclean, so adolescent girls are restricted during menstruation. This causes them to miss school and not receive a complete education [2].

Without access to education, adolescent women themselves do not have the skills to become independent in society. Unable to escape violence in their families of origin or after marriage, they do not know what legal methods to use to help themselves. Lack of education can also harm future generations of these adolescent girls. Girls are more likely to be asked to drop out of school if their parents have a lower level of education [2]. Since mothers cannot receive education, they think that the education of their daughters is not important, and they deprive their daughters of the right to education. If this problem cannot be solved, it will become a negative cycle.

2.2 Security of Life and Health

Trafficking and harmful custom are two major threats to the life and health of adolescent girls. About 80 percent of trafficked people are women and adolescent girls, and traffickers often abduct them for sexual exploitation [3]. Trafficked girls suffer physical and psychological damage. These victims can be infected with gonorrhea, syphilis, HIV, and other viruses [3]. They may also experience pelvic pain, vaginal lacerations, fractures, burns, and other trauma [3]. Daily emotional abuse also leaves victims of sex trafficking with anxiety, depression, self-doubt, and self-denial [3].

There are harmful customs and cultures in some parts of the world that harm the health of adolescent women. In Africa, the Middle East, and some other regions, female genital mutilation might be performed on adolescent girls [4]. This causes them to suffer from infections, excessive bleeding, and urinary difficulties and can cause mental disorders [4]. In addition to depriving girls of their right to education, the child marriages mentioned previously may also increase their risk of domestic violence. Girls may be subjected to sexual abuse [4]. Early marriage is often accompanied by early pregnancy, with adolescent girls facing far greater reproductive risks than adult women, and girls who get pregnant early are more likely to give birth to children who die early [4]. In some cultures, women are murdered by a male member of the family if they do something to harm the honor of the family [4]. Things that hurt family honor include divorce, being a victim of rape, choosing their clothes, not agreeing to an arranged marriage, etc [4]. These cultures and customs greatly endanger the lives of adolescent females, causing them to suffer physical and emotional pain and even lose their lives.

2.3 Security of Social Relationships

Many adolescent girls experience social bullying at school, damaging their physical and mental health. Some adolescent girls engage in relationship bullying against other girls, including spreading rumors, isolating them, stealing girlfriends or boyfriends, etc [5]. They may also beat other girls [5]. Adolescent boys may sexually bully girls, through sexual name-calling and offensive remarks, unwanted touching, and so on. [6]. With the development of the Internet, adolescents will engage in social bullying through email, social media, and other channels [8]. Victims may suffer from anxiety,

depression, eating disorders, difficulty integrating into society, and even suicidal tendencies [5-7]. They may also hate school and miss out on educational opportunities.

3. Reasons for the Threat to the Safety of Adolescent Women

There are reasons why adolescent women are at risk. This article will explain why the safety of adolescent women is threatened by four aspects: culture, politics, and economy.

3.1 Cultural Reasons

Culturally, traditional patriarchal attitudes are the reasons why women's safety is at risk. Patriarchal attitudes make girls more vulnerable to injustice in the family. For centuries, religion and traditional culture have governed male-female relations, forming male-dominated societies in some areas [9]. In patriarchal societies, women are marginalized. For men to carry on the family line, women need to be married off and considered not part of the family [9]. In a family with insufficient resources, adolescent girls are often abandoned. For example, sometimes, girls' education is considered less important than boys' education [9]. Then, when a family cannot support two children to go to school, the right of receiving an education of the girl is deprived. Adolescent girls' lack of access to education makes it harder for them to wake up and claim some of their rights. Besides, in some cultures, people believe that women are the property of their husbands and that husbands have the right to violence against their wives [9]. This puts the health and safety of many child-married girls at risk. Violence against girls is encouraged and normalized by a culture in which men believe violence against women is a sign of masculinity [10].

Educating children about sex at an appropriate age can help them avoid the risks of sexual abuse, HIV, and premature pregnancy [15]. But in many cultures, discussing sex is taboo and shameful [15]. People often don't talk about sex in public, and conservative schools or parents don't offer sex education. Girls may be hurt by their lack of such knowledge, and boys may humiliate or unconsciously hurt girls verbally for their lack of sexual knowledge. A lack of sex education makes girls more vulnerable.

3.2 Political Reasons

In many countries and regions, the protection policies for women's rights are not perfect, and the policies are not well implemented, which makes women's rights vulnerable to threats. A policy aimed at curbing crime will succeed only when the expected cost of crime increases [11]. In 2014, for example, an Indian court declared that forced sex within marriage was not rape [11]. Such lenient policies make adolescent and adult women more vulnerable to coercion.

Some policies are designed to protect adolescent women but may not solve the problem very well. Before changing people's deep-rooted traditional ideas, some tough policies are difficult to be effective. Some cultures consider it sinful for a girl not to be circumcised, and others believe it is good for her health [12]. There are even people who insult others for not being circumcised [12]. In this case, even though the state has a punitive policy against circumcision, people still do it secretly [12]. Then, girls are more likely to be infected. Another example is that India has many laws restricting child marriage, but the rate of child marriage is still very high due to their cultural attitudes [13]. These existing policies are not effective in helping girls, and they need to be improved.

3.3 Economic Reasons

The economy of a region affects the safety of girls. The more economically developed areas are, the more secure women tend to be. According to research, a family's income is inversely proportional to a girl's chances of dropping out of school, and the distance from school to home is directly proportional to a girl's chances of dropping out [1]. In an economically developed region, basic education is universal, so girls are not easy to miss out on educational opportunities. At the same time,

the family life pressure is less than in poor areas, adolescent girls are not forced to drop out of school. Educated women are better able to support themselves without having to depend on men in the family.

In areas where women's safety is seriously threatened, social organizations and charities are absent. This makes it harder for women in areas where their safety is at risk to get outside help. Charity organizations can provide education, food, health care, and many other resources. In the absence of charitable organizations, poor girls can hardly guarantee their education and safety in life. But only when people are rich do they set up charities to help others. In Islamic countries, for example, most charities are set up by the rich [14]. In less affluent countries, there is a lack of local charities, while in other countries charities mainly help their citizens. With the help of charities, girls will face fewer threats.

4. How to Improve the Protection Mechanism of Adolescent Females

According to the reasons mentioned above that the safety of adolescent females is threatened, this paper gives corresponding measures, hoping to better guarantee the safety of adolescent females.

4.1 Strengthen the Education and the Publicity of Feminist Thoughts

Improving education is a good way to help girls avoid being threatened. Specific measures are to strengthen the popularization of basic education in different regions, improve the quality of teachers and popularize sexual education. Improving basic education can reduce the threshold to receive an education. When the monetary cost of education for girls becomes lower, the distance from home to school becomes shorter, girls are more likely to get an education and less likely to drop out [1]. Improving the quality of teachers includes treating boys and girls equally and reducing the unfair experience girls receive from teachers in schools. Teachers need to learn to solve the conflicts between male and female students in a correct way to avoid causing psychological harm to them. These protect girls' security of education and social relationship and help them learn more skills to live in society. Schools should have sex education classes that teach girls and boys about protecting themselves instead of avoiding talking about sex. Girls can learn how to protect their sexual and reproductive health through sex education, and this reduces the possibility of early pregnancy, infection, or experiencing sexual harassment [16].

Changing people's preference for sons is a long process, but it is also an effective way to fundamentally protect adolescent women. When the concept of equality between men and women becomes universal, adolescent girls will have access to the same resources and education as boys. The community should promote the idea of gender equality. Through activities, advertising posters and others gradually change the older generation's preference for sons. Schools should also cultivate the concept of equality between men and women in their daily teaching. New media or entertainment programs with high mass communication can also spread the idea of equality between men and women.

4.2 Improving Policies and Laws to Protect Women

The law is an effective tool to protect adolescent women, but some countries lack laws to protect women. Some countries also have questionable laws to protect the safety of adolescent girls. In Indonesia, for example, women can marry after the age of 16 [18]. This belongs to child marriage. Some places do not guarantee education as a citizen's right. Children may not get a good education, let alone girls. In many areas, laws are lacking to regulate some situations. For example, adolescent girls who marry young and are hurt in marriage are in many places classified as domestic matters, and there is no clear law on how to punish the perpetrators. Governments need to improve or add laws to keep girls safe.

Some countries and regions have relatively reasonable policies, but the rights of adolescent women are still not protected. This may be because policies are not being implemented well. India's male-dominated police force may believe that women dress to induce rape, and they may not enforce an

anti-rape law [11]. In this case, there are good policies but no one is enforcing them, putting women's safety at risk. Therefore, the government needs to issue some policies to ensure fair and effective law enforcement. For example, the process of law enforcement needs to be monitored or supervised, and there should be a certain proportion of women in the law enforcement team. Many countries have protection policies for adolescent girls, but the implementation is not in place. The country needs to set up powerful law enforcement agencies and set up laws to ensure the effectiveness and fairness of law enforcement.

4.3 Financial Supports

Financial support can help adolescent girls gain more resources to grow healthily and not be treated unfairly in the family. Conditional cash transfers by government and non-governmental organizations can go a long way toward helping underage girls. Economic assets benefit the lives of girls and women beyond standard poverty measures [16]. Charity organizations can provide girls with school fees, school meals, books, stationery, etc. In Malawi, teenage girls who receive cash transfers for education are less likely to initiate sex, become pregnant or marry early, and become child laborers [16]. Financial assistance provided to poor families can also reduce the burden on the whole family so that girls do not lose their right to education or be required to marry young for economic reasons. Some sympathetic institutions or individuals in developed countries could consider giving financial assistance to the poor elsewhere, not just in their own countries. When women in a region become successful with financial support, they will be able to help more local underage women. This will create a positive cycle.

5. Conclusion

This article clearly states that the educational safety, life and health safety, and social relationship safety of adolescent women are threatened to different degrees and describes the specific manifestation of the threat. The reasons for these threats are classified as cultural reasons, political reasons, and political reasons, including the traditional preference for sons over daughters, people's aversion to sex, lax laws, poor enforcement of laws, and economic underdevelopment. In view of the above reasons, this paper puts forward solutions and improvements. In terms of culture, the government needs to strengthen the popularization of education and improve the quality of teaching. Communities should also promote the concept of equality between men and women. On the political side, laws to protect underage women need to be added or improved in areas where laws are not perfect. The government should formulate measures to supervise law enforcement teams and ensure the effective implementation of laws. In terms of economy, government organizations or public welfare organizations can provide more financial aid to poor families, schools, and underage women. All of these methods can reduce the risk to the safety of underage women in different ways.

There are some deficiencies in this research, and there are many areas to be improved. The study lacked some field investigations and experiments. Most of the data and evidence come from other research. Due to the lack of discussion on women's safety, some of the references may be older. There should be some changes in the social situation today compared with that time. In addition, because of different religious cultures and political situations in different areas of the world, the solutions in Part 4 may not be applicable everywhere. In some areas, these measures are not feasible or need some improvement.

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