

Talitha Kum's Study, Prayer and Action Pack: Women and Human Trafficking

Part 1: Introduction

The International Assembly of Talitha Kum in 2019 identified three priority areas of structural injustice in order to address the fight to end human trafficking. This discussion paper addresses the first priority:

***“The difference in power between men and women in all sectors:
economic, social, familial, political, cultural and religious”***

We denounce: the objectification and denigration of women that contributes to a world culture of exploitation and violence against them, reflected in the trafficking of human beings. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 72% of those exploited in human trafficking are women and girls. There are many forms of human trafficking including sexual exploitation, labor exploitation, and illegal organ harvesting. When it comes to trafficking for sexual purposes, women constitute an even higher percentage of victims.

We call on the Church, as the Body of Christ and as an example for society, to bear witness to the value and dignity of women and girls by promoting an appropriate role in all sectors. May this commitment be reflected in the Church by involving women in decision-making processes, especially in matters that directly affect women. We call on the Episcopal Conferences, male and female congregations and Diocesan clergy to partner with women on an equal basis in order to achieve the transformation of the culture of domination and to engage with the Talitha Kum networks in their diocese and local communities. We also urge governments around the world to ensure that laws and policies promote and protect the dignity and rights of women and girls.

We commit ourselves to empower each other as leaders in the fight against human trafficking, to strengthen the inclusive model in our joint networks; to stand in solidarity with all the oppressed - especially women and girls, and to promote the dignity and equality of all people.

Challenges faced by women today

The participation of women is essential for social, ecclesial and economic development in the world. However, many barriers keep them invisible and without the essential tools for their empowerment and full inclusion in society. Kristalina Georgieva, Interim President of the World Bank Group said: “If women had equal opportunities to develop their full potential, the world would not only be fairer, but also more prosperous.”¹

According to *unwomen.org* the full and equitable participation of women in all areas of society is a fundamental human right. Yet around the world, women and girls are considerably underrepresented: from politics and entertainment to the workplace and beyond. Building a sustainable future for everyone means leaving no one behind. Women and girls are fundamental to finding solutions to the most important challenges we face today and they must be heard, valued and celebrated by all of society, in such a way that their perspectives and choices regarding their future and the progress of humankind are reflected.¹

Education: Two thirds of illiterate people in the world are women. Across the globe, instances of exclusion of women from education are repetitive and ongoing. Women and girls are consistently undereducated, with the disparity increasing at higher levels of education.^{2,3}

Work: Women's economic empowerment includes the ability to have access to decent work, and to increased voice, agency and meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the home to international institutions. However, the reality is that globally, over 2.7 billion women are legally restricted from having the same choice of jobs as men. Women who are employed are likely to be paid less than men; the global wage gap is estimated at 23%. And women bear disproportionate

responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work which, though essential to the functioning of the economy, often goes uncounted and unrecognized.^{4, 5.}

Politics: Despite increases in the number of women at the highest levels of political power over the past decade, widespread gender inequalities persist: progression in women holding ministerial portfolios has slowed, with just a small increase to from 21.3 per cent in 2020 to 21.9 per cent in 2021. The number of countries with no women in government has increased; and only 25.5 per cent of national parliamentarians are women, compared to 24.9 per cent the year before. Twenty-six years after the *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*, which set the international target for reaching gender balance in political decision-making, women are underrepresented across all levels of power.^{6, 7.} The prevalence of cultural and traditional practices continues to be an obstacle for women to fully participate in political life. Women are universally underrepresented at all levels of decision-making.

Violence Against Women and Girls: The objectification of women is a significant factor that contributes to a climate in which violence and exploitation is both tolerated and tacitly encouraged. As Geraldina Céspedes, OP, noted: “We are in an era of economic exploitation of women's bodies, in which it is primarily men who, in a planned and organized way, extract significant economic benefits. This commodification and exploitation of women's bodies is one of the components at the heart of the current capitalist accumulation.”^{8.}

The United Nations reports that violence against women and girls (VAWG) is one of the most widespread, persistent and devastating human rights violations in our world today. It remains largely unreported due to the impunity, silence, stigma and shame surrounding it.

In general terms, it manifests itself in physical, sexual and psychological forms, including:

- intimate partner violence (battering, psychological abuse, marital rape, femicide);
- sexual violence and harassment (rape, forced sexual acts, unwanted sexual advances, child sexual abuse, forced marriage, street harassment, stalking, cyber- harassment);
- human trafficking (slavery, sexual exploitation);
- female genital mutilation; and
- child marriage.^{9, 10.}

The following statistics illustrate the shocking levels of violence against women worldwide:

- Globally, an estimated 736 million women—almost one in three—have been subjected to intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both at least once in their life (30 per cent of women aged 15 and older).
- One hundred thirty-seven women are killed by a member of their family every day. It is estimated that of the 87,000 women who were intentionally killed in 2017 globally, more than half (50,000) were killed by intimate partners or family members. More than one third (30,000) of the women intentionally killed in 2017 were killed by their current or former intimate partner.
- Globally, violence against women disproportionately affects low- and lower-middle-income countries and regions. Thirty-seven per cent of women aged 15 to 49 living in countries classified by the Sustainable Development Goals as “least developed” have been subject to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in their life. Twenty-two per cent of women living in “least developed countries” have been subjected to intimate partner violence in the past 12 months—substantially higher than the world average of 13 per cent.
- Women and girls together account for 72 per cent of all human trafficking victims globally, with girls representing more than three out of every four child trafficking victims. Most women and girls are trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation.
- At least 200 million women and girls, aged 15–49 years, have undergone female genital mutilation in 31 countries where the practice is concentrated. Half of these countries are in West Africa. There are still countries where female genital mutilation is almost universal, where at least 9 in 10 girls and women, aged 15–49 years, have been cut.^{11.}
- In 2016, there were an estimated 15.4 million people in forced marriages. 88% of victims were women and girls. 37% of victims were under 18 at the time of the marriage. Of these, 44% were under 15 at the time of the marriage.^{12.}

Women and migration: There is an estimated 272 million migrants in the world, about half of whom are women. Migration is a gendered process where women and men are treated differently. Women face entrenched limits to their opportunities, autonomy, freedoms and safety, rendering them vulnerable to systemic violations of their human rights.¹³

Women and Human Trafficking: A great scourge emerging from consumer society is human exploitation and human trafficking. The UNODC 2020 Global Report on Human Trafficking¹⁴ states that globally women and girls represent 65% of detected victims of human trafficking. The most frequent forms of human trafficking of women are sexual exploitation (77%) and forced labor (14%). Globally, forced marriages represent 1% of exploitation among detected victims of trafficking, though this figure is much higher in some regions. Emerging data shows that LGBTQI+ individuals are at higher risk of becoming victims of human trafficking.

Women and Social Protection Systems: The United Nations has determined a set of basic social security guarantees to ensure universal and equal access to essential health care and income security. National social protection floors should comprise at least the following four social security guarantees, as defined at the national level:

1. access to essential health care, including maternity care;
2. basic income security for children, providing access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
3. basic income security for persons in active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability;
4. basic income security for older persons.¹⁵

Recent studies have identified ongoing failures towards women in responses to Covid-19 and reiterated need for universal gender-responsive social protection systems.¹⁶

A Global Agenda for Gender Equality: The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals provide a global agenda towards achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls – based on the assertion that “gender equality is not only a human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world”.¹⁷ The following SDG’s specifically address women and girls, and human trafficking:

- SDG 5 Gender equality, Target 2, which calls on the elimination of “all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”, and Target 3, which provides for the elimination of all harmful practices such as child, early, and forced marriages;
- SDG 8 Decent work and economic growth, Target 7 that requires to “take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labour, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labour in all its forms”;
- SDG 10 Reduced inequalities, Target 4, which calls for “adopting policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality”; and Target 7 that prompts States to “facilitate orderly, safe, regular and responsible migration and mobility of people, including through the implementation of planned and well-managed migration policies”;
- SDG 16 Peace, justice and strong institutions, Target 2, which calls to “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children”.

Talitha Kum: Women and Human Trafficking

Part 2: What Our Catholic Tradition Teaches About the Dignity of Women

Inspiration from Scripture

1. Created in God's own image (Genesis 1:27)
2. Miriam, the prophetess (Exodus 15:20-21)
3. God...brought you out...of slavery (Exodus 20:2)
4. O Deborah, you rose up, a mother in Israel (Judges 5:7)
5. Rejoice, so highly favored! The Lord is with you (Luke 1:28)
6. All generations shall call me blessed (Luke 1:48)
7. On the strength of the woman's testimony (John 4:39)
8. It was the women who stayed with Jesus (John 19:25)
9. Jesus appears to the women (Matthew 28:8-10)
10. (The women) must go and tell his disciples (Mark 16:1-8)
11. The apostles refuse to believe the women (Luke 24:1-11)
12. Jesus said, 'Mary!' She recognized him (John 20:17-18)
13. When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together (Acts 2:1,4)
14. (On) both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit (Acts 2:17-18)
15. I commend to you our sister Phoebe (Romans 16:1-3)
16. All are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:26-28)

Catholic Social Teaching concerning the dignity and rights of women

1. "Where they have not yet won it, women claim for themselves an equity with men before the law and in fact." (*Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Gaudium et Spes, #9. Promulgated by Pope Paul VI on December 7, 1965.*)
2. "... with respect to the fundamental rights of the person, every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent. For in truth it must still be regretted that fundamental personal rights are still not being universally honored. Such is the case of a woman who is denied the right to choose a husband freely, to embrace a state of life or to acquire an education or cultural benefits equal to those recognized for men". (*Gaudium et Spes, #29*)
3. "Therefore the duty most consonant with our times, especially for Christians, is that of working diligently for fundamental decisions to be taken in economic and political affairs, both on the national and international level which will everywhere recognize and satisfy the right of all to a human and social culture in conformity with the dignity of the human person without any discrimination of race, sex, nation, religion or social condition". (*Gaudium et Spes, #60*)
4. "It is universally admitted - even by people with a critical attitude towards the Christian message - that in the eyes of his contemporaries Christ became a promotor of women's true dignity and of the vocation corresponding to this dignity." (*Mulieris Dignitatem, #9, 1988*)

5. "In all of Jesus' teaching, as well as in his behaviour, one can find nothing which reflects the discrimination against women prevalent in his day. On the contrary, his words and works always express the respect and honour due to women". (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, #13)
6. "Christ's way of acting, the Gospel of his words and deeds, is a consistent protest against whatever offends the dignity of women." (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, #15)
7. "Mary Magdalene was the first eyewitness of the Risen Christ, and for this reason she was also the first to bear witness to him before the Apostles. This event, in a sense, crowns all that has been said previously about Christ entrusting divine truths to women as well as men. (*Mulieris Dignitatem*, #16)
8. "It is time to examine the past with courage, to assign responsibility where it is due in a review of the long history of humanity. Women have contributed to that history as much as men and, more often than not, they did so in much more difficult conditions. ...Sadly, very little of women's achievements in history can be registered by the science of history. But even though time may have buried the documentary evidence of those achievements, their beneficent influence can be felt as a force which has shaped the lives of successive generations, right up to our own. To this great, immense feminine "tradition" humanity owes a debt which can never be repaid." (*Pope John Paul II, Letter to Women*, #3, 1995.)
9. "And what shall we say of the obstacles which in so many parts of the world still keep women from being fully integrated into social, political and economic life? ...As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic State." (*Letter to Women*, #4)
10. "Within the community of believers there can never be room for a poverty that denies anyone what is needed for a dignified life." (*Deus Caritas Est*, #20, 2005)
11. "I readily acknowledge that many women share pastoral responsibilities with priests, helping to guide people, families and groups and offering new contributions to theological reflection. But we need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #103, 2013.)
12. "... demands that the legitimate rights of women be respected, based on the firm conviction that men and women are equal in dignity, present the Church with profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, #104)
13. "...the organization of societies worldwide is still far from reflecting clearly that women possess the same dignity and identical rights as men. We say one thing with words, but our decisions and reality tell another story. Indeed, "doubly poor are those women who endure situations of exclusion, mistreatment and violence, since they are frequently less able to defend their rights." (*Fratelli Tutti*, #23, 2020)
14. "Words like freedom, democracy or fraternity prove meaningless, for the fact that "only when our economic and social system no longer produces even a single victim, a single person cast aside, will we be able to celebrate the feast of universal fraternity." (*Fratelli Tutti*, #110)

Part 3: Discussion Guide

This guide is provided to assist discussion, reflection, and discernment. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the accompanying information pages outlining current facts, Scripture references and Catholic Social Teaching. Some additional reading is provided if participants wish to explore the issue in more detail.

Discussion Leaders may wish to supplement Part 3 with some excerpts from documents, policies, or articles published by your local Church (e.g. Catholic Bishops' Conferences), and Part 4 with articles from your own context (e.g. local media, talks, presentations, statements from Conferences of Religious).

Please modify the following to suit your particular context and group.

Process

You are invited to use the following process (or other, as best suits your group). Invite participants to read the accompanying Information Pages and at least one of the accompanying reference articles.

The 4 phases – Observe, Reflect, Interpret, Decide – can be used as a 4-step discussion outline. That is, take each phase one at a time ... pose one or more of the questions, discuss, and then move on to the next phase ... and repeat.

Prayer

Creator God,
teach us to listen to the voices of women
with attention, compassion and respect.

Open our ears to the cries of
women who have been victims of violence;
who have been denied dignity, education, food,
healthcare, economic opportunity and even life itself,
simply because they are female.

Grant, O God, that all people
may recognize women as equal partners in every aspect of life,
and value their contributions
in society and in the Church.

May your Spirit empower us
to be instruments of justice for women
in our homes, our places of work, our schools and universities,
in government, in the arts, and in leadership roles in the church.

We look forward to the future in faith and hope,
praying and working for the day
when women are truly respected,
free to develop and use their gifts,
and to share in all the benefits
of human life and work. Amen.

Saint Josephine Bakhita, pray for us.

(Adapted from the Prayers for Equality from the Education for Justice website – Center of Concern, Washington, DC)

Discussion

Observe

1. In your reading, what words, phrases stood out for you?
2. Which people or situations come to mind when you read? Who? Why?

Reflect

1. What phrases or passages were challenging / discomforting? What do you feel?
2. Who are some people, in your experience, who have been most impacted by gender inequity?
3. What connections do you see between gender inequity issues and human trafficking?
4. How do you perceive your role in patriarchal spaces in the Church?
5. How do you see gender inequity reflected in your places of interaction? Work? Community? Church? Society? Politics?
6. Can you identify any source of inspiration in the face of inequality and injustice – people (past or present), countries, literature, Scripture, sources from your local/national Church, cultural or community context?

Interpret

1. What challenges to inequality and injustices against women stand out for you and your network?
2. What can we learn from good practice and policy in selected organisations or settings?
3. What ideas do you have for how you and your Network could commit to the empowerment of women and creating gender equality?
4. How can Talitha Kum members better support and empower each other?
5. What suggestions do you have for the Talitha Kum International Network to advance this priority action?

Decide

1. What action can your Network commit to?
2. Can your Network create a statement using the "we denounce ... we appeal ... we commit ..." model regarding this Talitha Kum priority? Share your statement with Talitha Kum.
3. Inspire others to act! Share your action with the Talitha Kum Network.
 - Write a social media post about it, and share using #CareAgainstTrafficking, #EconomyWithoutTrafficking and #TalithaKum
 - Record a short video describing your action, and share it using #CareAgainstTrafficking, #EconomyWithoutTrafficking and #TalithaKum
 - Share a prayer or reflection on your action #CareAgainstTrafficking, #EconomyWithoutTrafficking and #TalithaKum

Concluding song: **Mujeres Nuevas (New Women)**, Cristóbal Fones SJ
Adaptation "Give us a heart" Text and music © 1972. Juan Antonio Espinosa.

<https://youtu.be/ZtN2eaNP4qk>

Give us a big heart to love. Give us a strong heart to fight.

New women, creators of history, builders of new humanity,
new women who live existence as the risk of a long journey.

Give us a big heart to love. Give us a strong heart to fight.

New women, fighting in hope, walkers, thirsty for truth,
new women without brakes or chains, free women, who demand freedom.

Give us a big heart to love. Give us a strong heart to fight.

New women, loving without borders, above races and places,
new women next to the poor, sharing a roof and bread with them.

Give us a big heart to love. Give us a strong heart to fight.

Mujeres Nuevas (New Women), Cristóbal Fones SJ
(Spanish Lyrics)

Danos un corazón, grande para amar. Danos un corazón, fuerte para luchar.

Mujeres nuevas creadoras de la historia, constructoras de nueva humanidad
mujeres nuevas que viven la existencia como riesgo de un largo caminar.

Danos un corazón, grande para amar. Danos un corazón, fuerte para luchar.

Mujeres nuevas luchando en esperanza, caminantes sedientas de verdad
Mujeres nuevas sin frenos ni cadenas, mujeres libres que exigen libertad.

Danos un corazón, grande para amar. Danos un corazón, fuerte para luchar.

Mujeres nuevas amando sin fronteras, por encima de razas y lugar
Mujeres nuevas al lado de los pobres, compartiendo con ellos techo y pan.

Danos un corazón, grande para amar. Danos un corazón, fuerte para luchar.

Part 4: References for reflection, analysis and further reading

References (Footnotes to Part 1)

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