

Women, decision-making and poverty

Abstract:

Poverty among women has been linked to various social, cultural, economic, religious and political factors. This paper presents a socio--cultural analysis of structural and psychological forces within social fabric that characterize the manifestation of male chauvinism against any affirmative action to safeguard the interests of women. The focus is on the relationship between poverty and male violence as directed to women, in the process of which the women are treated and become junior partners in decision-making with regard to resource use, distribution, conservation and consolidation, within and outside the family. The structural linkages between poverty and male violence against women arise from the fact that the overall impact of such violence is differential access to rights and opportunities by both sexes, denying women the various forms of autonomy in decision making and pursuit of many opportunities in order to compete at par with their male counterparts, especially within the context of income generation, property procurement and management. Under more equitable circumstances, women should own the products of their labor, rather than having all the ownership rights vested in men, thereby depriving women of their rights in both the ownership and disposal of what they should otherwise be recognized as the major producers and rightful custodians. The empirical data from which the illustrations in this paper are drawn is based on a study of violence against women in Nairobi and Kajiado districts of Kenya. By definition, violence against women has been taken to include all gender-biased violence that results or is likely to result in physical, psychological and other forms of harm or suffering to women. Violence against women can occur at the family, community and the wider societal levels. The family-based violence covers physical, sexual and psychological violence within the family and specifically includes incest (against women and children), sexual abuse of female children in the household, marital rape, spousal violence and battering of women. At the community and wider societal levels, violence against women includes rape of women, rape of female children, various forms of sexual harassment, forced prostitution, women battering and denial of various social and economic rights.