

Round Table 1 - Gender

Quotes

If women are expected to do the same work as men, we must teach them the same things. (Plato)

*One of the things about equality is not just that you be treated equally to a man, but that you treat yourself equally to the way you treat a man.
(Marlo Thomas)*

Questions to cover

What are the roles of women and men in Faith communities?

- compare between the faiths present - what is the status quo?
- Is this how the public perceive it? And others in your faith?
- Should outsiders have a say in how men/women interact in your faith?

What action should faith communities consider taking (be prepared to take) with regard to ...

... inequalities in education for women?

- Is this a cultural difficulty? Are faiths - singly or together - in a position to help with this problem (already identified by Iffat and others in Pakistani community)
- What is needed? What steps can be taken (working with rather than working for or working at)

... honour killing?

- problem shared by Muslim Sikh and Hindu faiths as cultural.
- Is it a problem for people in Slough today? For families at home?

... forced marriage?

- difference between forced marriage and arranged marriage (if people present who are unaware, we must focus on this at the start)
- Is it a problem for people in Slough today? For families at home?

... domestic violence?

- what is culturally acceptable, and what is always unacceptable?
- Physical violence may be obvious, what about emotional violence and hidden coercion, bullying, attitude to children?

Do women find it easier than men to express thoughts and feelings about spiritual things?

- Is this the case? Or a fallacy? Do all cultures/faiths experience it?
- Is this particular to religion or faith, or is it general with feelings/emotions?
- If so, what should women do about this? What should men do about it? Or does nothing need to be done?

What is meant by 'domestic violence'?

Domestic violence is any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between adults who are or have been in a relationship together, or between family members, regardless of gender or sexuality. Whatever form it takes, domestic violence is rarely a one-off incident. More usually it's a pattern of abusive and controlling behaviour through which the abuser seeks power over their victim. Domestic violence occurs across society, regardless of age, gender, race, sexuality, wealth and geography. The figures show, however, that it consists mainly of violence by men against women. Victims of domestic violence suffer on many levels - health, housing, education - and lose the freedom to live their lives how they want, and without fear. We aim to support victims of domestic violence with a range of new measures Royal College of Psychiatrists research points

Forced marriage

'A marriage should be entered into with the free and full consent of both parties' - UK advisory

...there is no justification on religious grounds. Every major faith condemns it and freely-given consent is a prerequisite of Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh marriages ... some parents come under significant pressure from their extended families to get their children married ... While it is important to have an understanding of the motives that drive parents to force their children to marry, these motives should not be accepted as justification for denying them the right to choose a marriage partner. Forced marriage should be recognised as a human rights abuse." (Manchester report on FM)

Honour Killing

In the UK, murders have sometimes taken place after a family has reacted violently to their son or daughter taking on the trappings of western culture. Killings are often disguised as suicide, fire or an accident. Police believe there may be as many as 12 honour killings in the UK every year. They will typically occur within Asian and Middle Eastern families when a person is believed to have 'dishonoured' their loved ones.

Cherie Booth's interview with 'Today'

Differences of culture or religion cannot be used as a justification for denying equal rights to women anywhere in the world, Cherie Booth said. In a high profile speech Ms Booth, denounced the unequal treatment of women on religious grounds in some societies as a "distortion" of the true message of faiths. In many areas "proclaimed adherence to a specific religion or system of belief or culture is intimately tied to women's continuing discrimination and abuse," she said.

Women's rights are a "universal ethic that cuts across all cultures and all religions ... and imperative for our shared humanity," she said. In some parts of the world, domestic violence was still not regarded as a crime, widows were ostracised and women were treated effectively as their husbands' property, she said. "We can be certain that the overwhelming majority of people in our country, along with legal experts and campaigners, would be appalled if they thought that such mistreatment was taking place within their family or local community," said Ms Booth. "But what is striking is that there remain those who try to justify or excuse such discrimination and denial of human rights elsewhere by reference to different cultural or religious standards. We simply can't go along with this view." Ms Booth said religion could instead be a useful weapon in the fight for women's rights. She said: "Whatever their differences, all converge in their understanding of the irreducible worth of each human being."