



AYDA



Support Information

How Cultural Harmful Practices Fuel Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)

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Harmful cultural practices are not traditions to be preserved. By nature, they are hidden crimes that perpetuate violence against women's and girls' rights. These practices are often cloaked in silence, normalised through social expectations, and shielded from scrutiny by deeply ingrained beliefs. Therefore, we must appreciate the unique and challenging position of the victims concerning their relationships with the perpetrators.

Many survivors do not wish to criminalise their families, communities, or culture. Some fear being ostracised, others internalise blame, believing themselves to be at fault. This painful dilemma silences voices that most need to be heard.

Recognising these complexities is vital if we are to break the cycle of silence and protect those most affected.



Understanding Harmful Cultural Practices

A significant number of survivors and perpetrators do not always recognise these acts of culturally harmful norms as forms of violence. Cultural norms may be framed as expressions of identity or tradition. Yet such practices:

- Reinforce gender inequality
- Justify physical, psychological, and sexual abuse
- Restrict the autonomy and life choices of women and girls
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Know the signs

Victims of culturally harmful practices may show a wide range of signs. Professionals may only have brief or rare contact with them, so it's essential to know the indicators:

- **Self-harm or suicidal tendencies**
 - **Physical injuries or chronic pain**
 - **Fearful, withdrawn, or low-confidence behaviour**
 - **Absence from school or work**
 - **Restricted access to finance or healthcare**
 - **Signs of being monitored or controlled**
 - **Isolation from peer network or activities**



Harmful Cultural Practices and Their Impact:

1. Child and Forced Marriages

Child marriage is deemed as a formal or informal union between two individuals under the age of 18 years. Whereas forced marriages are unions conducted under duress without the consent of the affected parties. Child and forced marriages are envisaged as a norm in some societies. Girls forced into these unions often face:

- Denial of education and independence
- Increased health risks due to early pregnancy
- Psychological and mental ill health
- Death due to domestic abuse or obstetric complications
- Little legal or social recourse as their rights are suffocated

2. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

Female Genital Mutilation is a practice where the genitalia of girls or women are partially or totally removed. FGM is often disguised and justified as a normal customary rite of passage or religious obligation, yet it:

- Causes chronic pain, urinary, gynaecological and sexual issues
- Trauma causes physical and psychological issues
- Increases the risk of childbirth complications
- Reinforces control over women's sexuality
- Robs victims' self-esteem and dignity

3. Honour-Based Violence

"Honour" based violence refers to acts which purportedly protect the family or community from shameful vices, occasioned mainly by women and girls. They are normally acts of intimidation, coercion, forcing victims into submission to a certain code of conduct, such as women speaking to men outside of family or choosing their own partner.

The consequences for victims can be:

- Community shaming
- Face violence or death
- Social isolation
- Increased gender disparity between males and females



How AYDA supports Communities

AYDA's primary task is to be a friend to those in need. We can act as a bridge of professional support for those who need it and persuade them to be open to it. AYDA advocates for the elimination of cultural practices which fuel violence against women and girls and for the establishment of safer, more supportive communities. At AYDA, we recognise that these practices are embedded in tradition and identity.

Addressing VAWG requires culturally sensitive interventions that challenge harmful norms, engaging communities (especially men leaders), and empowering women and girls through education, legal protection, and social support. To achieve this, AYDA: -

- Engages in one-to-one sessions to build trust and signposting with the survivors
- Raises awareness in the communities that are prone to many forms of VAWG and their personal and societal impact
- Promotes gender equality by challenging harmful norms and fostering respect right from the grassroots
- Connects survivors to local services, including helplines, shelters, counselling, and legal support centres
- Engages women and boys as allies and champions of healthy masculinity
- Empowers survivors through trauma-informed care and economic opportunities
- Collaborate with key stakeholders from government to grassroots groups, to improve responses to VAWG



Challenging Misconceptions

We often believe that outside efforts to intervene are seen as an imposition of “Western values”. However, harmful practices are not inherent to culture; they are systematic inequalities cloaked in cultural justifications. Indeed, many communities struggle to explain why certain customs persist; they endure because of silence, taboo, or a desire to uphold their identity.

The issue isn't culture, it's the control of women's bodies. And this is not confined to any group or region. It's a global injustice.

“VAWG is not inevitable. By addressing the inequality that underpins it, we can build a world where women and girls are safe, supported, and free. Responsibility does not lie with survivors - but with all of us.”

About AYDA

AYDA is an international charity registered in England and Wales that supports the development of all young people, including those with special educational needs and their families, through educational and training.

The charity's vision is to empower future generations and is committed to improving the quality of life for young people to fulfil their potential and to make a positive contribution to their communities.

Who we are

- AYDA is a registered charity working for the benefit of all young people, including those with additional needs and their families.
- AYDA embraces cultural diversity and health issues, focusing on harmful cultural practices and parental care, raising awareness among ethnic groups to build bridges across communities.
- AYDA is managed by a board of trustees, and our services are delivered by sessional trainers and volunteers.
- AYDA provides training opportunities, employment enhancement training, recreational activities and intervention services for all.

What AYDA does

- AYDA provides preventative and safeguarding measures to protect actual or potential victims from harmful practices under civil law by raising awareness and providing advocacy training on cultural inclusion.
- AYDA empowers the community to recognise diverse beliefs, values and customs, promoting diversity.
- AYDA facilitates a community support forum to explore ways to embrace cultural diversity, focusing on harmful practices that harm women and girls and empower them for a better future.

AYDA Community Support Forum

- AYDA support forum aims to raise awareness on harmful practices in order to build bridges across communities.
- The support group aims to offer friendship and support. We are also looking for volunteers to offer support and friendship

AYDA welcomes young people and families from all backgrounds

To get involved

AYDA is looking for volunteers to work with us delivering our exciting vision to empower future generations and to improve the quality of life for young people to fulfil their potential and to make a positive contribution to their communities.

We are also seeking to partner with like minded organisations across London and beyond to develop services to support this work.

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