

For Group #2

MARY'S STORY – GENDER

After many years kept captive in an army camp, Mary tried to return home, but was rejected by her family. They saw her as an unclean person who brought shame to the family because of the life she had been forced to lead in the army camp. While there, she was at the mercy of the soldiers, who used Mary and the other abducted girls for their own sexual pleasure. This meant that Mary was raped numerous times. Mary would often ask the men to use condoms when having sex with her, but they would always refuse. She soon found herself the mother of two children at a very young age.

Mary had hoped her family would help her with the children by providing the fees necessary to send her daughter to school, but they said that they were already paying too many school fees for the boys in the family and didn't have the money to send any girls to school. She also found out that her father had died during her time in the army camp. Although this was sad news, she was hopeful that she might get some financial benefit from the division of her father's estate. Unfortunately in her tribe, all benefits were divided between the sons, which meant that she got nothing. Because Mary couldn't go home and her family couldn't assist her with any money, she decided to move to a nearby city to look for work.

Gender and HIV/AIDS

Social and cultural norms in all societies have issues related to gender. In many developing countries this can mean that there are definite inequalities between men and women. In many countries women have little or not control over decisions concerning their sex lives and that of their spouse. This lack of control has made women (particularly married women) highly vulnerable to HIV infection. Women are faced with discriminatory laws and traditions and are less likely to be educated. This often leaves women many economically and socially dependent on men.

Discuss the possible gender issues that contributed to Mary's situation.



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Located in Mahomet, Ill., ELI is a community-based nonprofit organization emphasizing life skills for emerging youth leaders in third world countries. ELI has been formed by Paul and Virginia who have been working with youth in United States and abroad for more than 30 years. For further information on ELI, please call (217) 377-9444.