GENDER DIMENSIONS OF POVERTY AND THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDGS) IN NAMIBIA

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Abstract

This paper assesses progress towards achieving Millennium Development Goal (MDG3) and its effects on women poverty in Namibia. It focuses at Namibia's performance on MDG3's official indicators: *1)* the ratio of girls to boys' enrolment in schools, *2)* ratio of literate females to males aged 15-24; 3) proportion of women in non-agricultural employment and *4)* proportion of women's seats in parliaments. The paper reviewed research materials and documents on Namibia. Findings indicate that Namibia has made progress towards achieving MDG3 indicators. Although the indicators are critical to measuring development, they do not sufficiently measure aspects of gender equality and empowerment. They do not capture the quality and outcome of education nor do they quantify barriers that inhibit women's participation in labour markets and parliaments. Consequently, achievements based on these indicators do not truly reflect progress toward gender equality and empowerment and their potential multiplier effects on women poverty are weak.

Key words: Namibia, MDG3, gender equality, empowerment, capabilities

Introduction

"As women are generally the poorest of the poor [...] eliminating social, cultural, political and economic discrimination against women is a prerequisite of eradicating poverty [...] in the context of sustainable development."

International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD 1994)

Millennium Development Goal3 (MDG3) that aims at the promotion of gender equality and women empowerment can be seen as cutting across all the other seven goals and thus calls for "engendering" the development process. Because the goals are mutually reinforcing, progress towards gender equality has potential of advancing other goals, likewise, success in achieving other goals may also positively affect gender equality. This paper reviewed various national and international research materials and documents to assess the progress made towards the achievement of MDG3 and its potential effects on poverty reduction among women in Namibia. It evaluates Namibia's performance on the four official indicators for MDG3 that were initially adopted at the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000: 1) the ratio of girls to boys' enrolment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; 2) the ratio of literate females to males aged 15-24; 3) Share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector; and 4) proportion of seats held by women in parliaments. Firstly the paper discusses the conceptual framework through which gender and poverty is often analysed. The second part presents the findings on the progress made towards the achievement of MDG3 in Namibia; and emphasises the role of institutions and ideologies in positioning women and men and

ascribing different meaning to their lives. The paper concludes with practical policy recommendations for enhancing gendered dimensions in Namibia.

Theoretical background

Women are considered in some degree inferior to men, a phenomenon that manifests itself in what has been referred to as 'gender inequalities' and women's subordination. One important result of this social arrangement is the exclusion of women from participation in, or contact with, those areas of the particular society believed to be most powerful, whether they are religious or secular (Tischler 2006: 325).

Many theoretical arguments have been put forward to describe, explain and trace the origin and implications of differences in the behaviour and experiences of men and women. Following the essentialist argument, structural functionalism claims that gender differences (e.g. division of labour) between men and women are immutable, and therefore universal. The immutability is traced back to biology (reproduction role of women) and the social institutional needs for men and women to fill different roles, especially but not exclusively in the family (Tischler 2006). Functionalists recognise that men and women are socially assigned different roles and expectations; but they failed to question aspects of inequality, power relations between men and women that underlie the gender division of labour. Whereas women's expressive skills are mostly unpaid or lower-paid, men's instrumental skills are highly rewarded, either in terms of money, power or prestige, freedom, opportunity to grow etc. (Ritzer 2003; Schaefer 2006).

The structural oppression theorists (e.g. Marxist, Socialist feminism, Third World feminism, Black feminism) on the other hand contend that women's experiences of differences, inequality and oppression varies by their social location within capitalism, patriarchy, class, nationality, race and ethnicity etc. (Ritzer and Goodmen 2003). The combined views from the structural oppression theorists, underpin the notion that women are not a homogenous group and therefore analysis of women's condition should not be reduced to gender relations only, even though these have a powerful effect on their development as social subjects. Marxists, particularly Friedrich Engels (1942) argues that though traditional societies were not necessarily equal, men gain more power through the introduction of private property by the capitalist system. A major consequence of this domination is the exploitation of women by men. By subordinating women, men gain greater economic, political, and social power (Tischler 2006). Marxists theorists, thus, blame women subordination on the capitalist system, and thus believe that the solution to gender inequality lies in the abolition of private properties and other capitalistic institutions (Schaefer, 2006). In contrast socialist feminism sets out to bring together the dual knowledge- that is the knowledge of oppression under capitalism and of oppression under patriarchy into a unified explanation of all forms of social oppression (Ritzer and Goodmen 2003: 458).

Although women from the third world have always been engaged in the feminism movement, they felt that the mainstream feminist (Western) have been looking at women's experiences as homogenous, based on the perspectives of middle-class white women. They maintain that the mainstream feminism bases the understanding of women on "internal racism, classism and homophobia" (Mohanty 1991). However, in many of

the Third World countries (including Namibia), the struggle for women's liberation has been inseparable from the one for liberation from Western political oppression. Another criticism labeled against the mainstream feminism is that certain feminist scholars tend to portray African women (black) as indolent and fatalistic victims of patriarchy (Mohanty 1991). For example, although there is now sizeable body of scholarship on women's involvement in liberation movement in these countries, this is usually not featured in feminists work. Additionally Western women and women in developing countries tend to have different focus. In poor countries such as in Africa, Asia and Latin America, daily economic survival usually takes precedence over any attempts to win formal legal rights for women (Renzetti and Curran 2003). Consequently the main concern in the discourse of African feminism appears to be the creation of spaces for women to participate in the management of their society through access to key resources such as education, health, and housing. However the sheer size of Africa and the complexities of issues in different regions make it difficult to depict a single African feminism. Among other things, the debate here has two faces: those who call themselves feminist and those who do not (Mohanty 1991; Oyewumi 1997).

Radical feminists reject the idea that gender inequality is somehow natural. In their view women's exploitation is firmly embedded in the patriarchal system. Some radical feminists acknowledge the simultaneity or intersectionality of different types of oppression which they see in every institution and in society's most basic structures; - heterosexuality, class, caste, race, ethnicity, age and gender systems of oppression in which people dominate others. Yet, they still affirm that of all these systems of domination and subordination, the most fundamental structure of oppression is gender,

the system of patriarchy. They reason that women are not just treated differently and unequal to men, but they are actively restrained, subordinated, moulded, used and abused by men (Ritzer and Goodman 2003: 449-450, 453). Radical feminism focuses on the sexual exploitation of women by men and especially on men's violence against women (Renzetti and Curran 2003:22). To defeat the patriarchal system, radical feminists suggest two strategies: 1) a critical confrontation with any facet of patriarchal domination whenever it is encountered, and 2) a degree of separatism as women withdraw into women-run businesses, households, communities, centres of artistic creativity, and lesbian love relationships (Ritzer and Goodman 2003: 445). Hence, the radical feminism do not only focus on how women's idea and experiences are different from those of men, but also urge women to break away from male dominance by forming separate , women-only organisations and communities (Renzetti and Curran 2003:22).

Liberal feminists explain gender inequality in terms of social and cultural attitudes that pattern the division of labour in social institutions. They tend to emphasis the similarities rather than the differences between women and men. Contrary to radical feminism, liberal feminism argues that equality for women can be achieved through legal means and social reform, and that men as a group need not be challenged (Renzetti and Curran 2003; Ritzer and Goodman 2003). Consequently, they suggest that gender equality can be achieved by a social transformation of the division of labour in key institutions such as law, family, education, work and media etc. Thus, liberal feminism focuses on securing the same legal rights for women that men enjoy (Renzetti and Curran 2003; Ritzer and Goodman 2003). Hence they seek to confront and change exist social arrangements

which they regard as inhumane and unjust. They wish to eliminate gender as an organizing principle in the distribution of social 'goods' and they are willing to invoke universal principles in their pursuit of equality (Ritzer and Goodman 2003: 446, 449, Renzenti and Curran 2003:22).

Conceptual background

Gender equality and women empowerment

One way of thinking about power is in terms of the ability to make choices (Kabeer 2003). For example, the UNDP emphasis that the concepts of "Human Poverty" used to describe the Human Development Index (HDI), in its report "does not focus on what people do or do not have, but on what they can or cannot do". Human poverty in that sense refers to the condition where people's choices are limited. In contrast human development refers to the process of enlarging people's choices (UNDP 2000/2002). Thus, HDI does not measure wellbeing or happiness; instead it measures 'empowerment'. Empowerment is defined as "the process by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability" (Kabeer 2003: 32).

Kabeer (2003) emphasises that for there to be a real choice, there must be alternatives. In other words a person must be able to choose something different. Due to gender related inequality the absence of choice is likely to affect women and men differently. Consequently, a large number of women are often at greater risk of becoming poor than men. This scenario underscores the notion that even though poverty is often perceived as material deprivation, its causes can be traced in the social power relations that govern how valued resources are distributed. Thus, poor people do not only lack material

resources to meet their basic needs but also lack power to seize and access opportunities that allow them to pursue their own choices and avoid extreme deprivations in outcomes (The World Bank Group 2005).

Kabeer (2003: 32) also stresses that "alternatives must not only exist, they must also be seen to exist". She maintains that power relations tend to be most effective when they are not perceived as such. In most situations gender relations take broader form of accepted legitimacy rather than legal rights enforced in a court (Dreze and Sen 1995a). For example, women with lesser claim on household resources generally tolerate violence from husbands, because if she behaves otherwise she might not only lose access to the resources but also access to her children. Alternatively women internalise and remain in low-paid jobs for years because they cannot imagine a life without it. These forms of behaviour cannot be said to reflect choice but are really based on the absence of choice.

Women's autonomy

Another related concept that is quite useful for the analysis of women empowerment and other social subjects who seek to transform their subordinated condition is autonomy. Galtung (1980) in Meynen and Vargas (1991: 29-30) associates the concept of autonomy with an individual's capacity to develop power over his/her life. Yet, Galtung (1980) argues that autonomy cannot be acquired alone or in isolation to others, nor through social and political rights (even if these open up important grounds for manoeuvring). Autonomy is acquired through the development of the material and non-material means to overcome oppression caused by different forms of power 'power over others' (the kind

of power that is acquired at the expense of others). As such, autonomy does not give individuals the right to exert power over others but to have power over their own lives. However, autonomy should enable an individual to define her/his own agenda even in the face of others' opposition ('power to'). Therefore women autonomy refers to the aspect of women empowerment that would enable her to control or manage a situation to her benefit. Meynen and Vargas (1991) identified four dimensions of autonomy that relate to the process women autonomy –*physical autonomy* (which implies control over sexuality and fertility); *economic autonomy* (based on equitable access to control over the means of production); *political autonomy* (referring to basic political rights, including self-determination and the creation of pressure groups with particular orientation and proposals) and *socio-cultural autonomy* (which refers to the capacity to assert one's own identity and to self-esteem).

Conceptualisation of poverty and gender analysis

Despite the huge differences surrounding the idea of development, what exactly it means and how it is to be achieved, there is general agreement that its main goals should include eliminating poverty and reduction of social inequality (Thomas 2002). The Millennium Development Goals adopted by 189 UN member nations in 2000 aims to eradicated extreme poverty and hunger between 1990 and 2015. The causes and outcomes of poverty are complex and multidimensional. They encompass aspects of economic, social and political and religious institutions and processes implicated in the production and perpetuation of poverty (Baden 1999). Poverty, then, is not merely a function of material

conditions but also reflects the role of institutions and ideologies in positioning women and men and ascribing different meaning to their lives (Beneria and Bisnath 1996).

Giddens (1989: 206) argues that, "inequalities exist in all societies". For most people in the world today every step of life from infancy to old age is taken under the twin shadows of poverty and inequality and the double burden of suffering from diseases (Gilbert et al. 2002: 99). Social inequality entails different access to resources, facilities, services, choices and opportunities by different social groups (Gilbert et al. 2002). By virtue of gender inequality women get less material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualization than do men who share their social location base on class, race, education, occupation, religion or any intersection of these factors *(Baden 1999).*

Even though poverty is pervasive in all societies, its definition differs relative to the normative values of each society. The concept is also fluid in a sense that, it is consistently changing with social change and social transformation. Chambers (1994) maintain that definition of poverty at a specific point in time is also implicated by power relations, between various social groups, institutions and organisations. Chambers suggest that whenever we analyse poverty; the question to ask should be: 'who defines poverty, and for whom?' At the same time Chambers also insists "that contrary to popular belief, the poor are not necessarily indolent, improvident or fatalistic, "Many of them want to exist autonomously and with self-respect" (Chamber 1994 in Mufune, 2002). The idea from Chambers tie with the criticism from African women scholars

(discussed earlier) that certain feminist analyses tend to portray African women as victims, especially in relation to issues of power. However, Mcfadden (1992) has pointed out that whenever one discusses the real lived situations of poor women in most societies one is often faced with an intellectual dilemma. For example, whilst one is fully aware of numerous key roles played by women (as agencies of change) in their daily survival during periods of crises and deteriorating living standards, on the one hand, how does one deny that being a woman/female lends oneself to being a victim in a patriarchal system? Consider the situation of a battered woman by a man she cannot leave or a woman who is sexual abused (rape, incest and assault) or a sex worker who is forced into selling her body through poverty, racism and gender; are they not all victims of social inequality? This paper considers women as victims in the various oppressive social structures but also as active agencies in the social transformation of those social structures whenever empowered to do so.

Absolute poverty and relative poverty

Charles Booth (1890) was one of the first to establish a consistent standard of subsistence. *Subsistence or absolute poverty* is tied to a lack of access to basic minimum requirements; such as productive resources, physical goods and income which results in individual or group deprivation, vulnerability and powerlessness (Beneria and Bisneth 1996). People who are subjected to absolute poverty are continuously suffering from hunger and malnutrition, ill-health, and have limited access to education, health care, safe housing and opportunities to [paid] work (Beneria and Bisneth 1996). Development actors dealing with poverty reduction use a single poverty line approach that measures

the economic means that households and individuals have to meet their basic needs (Kabeer 2003). The poverty line approach categorises people as extremely poor when their income is less that U$ 1 per day (measured in 1985 adjusted for purchasing power parity (PPP). This approach simplifies poverty measures to some criteria or cut-off point that separates the poor from the non-poor (Thomas 2002; Kabeer 2003). Poverty line approach presents the poor as group without taking into consideration their separate identities or the reasons why they happen to be poor (Mufune 2002:181). In other words, it does not reflect the role of institutions and ideologies that create and perpetuate inequality, and consequently renders people to poverty (Kabeer 2003). Income data used in poverty line measurements are collected on a household level and do not consider how gender dimensions of poverty relate to relations within the household. The decomposition into per capita terms assumes the conventional economics that sees the household as organised around the pooling of income and meeting the welfare needs of all members (Jackson 1998). However, decomposed household income does not capture widespread and systematic inequalities within households that related to gender, age, life cycle status, relationship to household head and others. Kabeer (2003) maintains that the most pervasive, among all the disguised intra-households inequality are those related to gender.

Yet, though household-level poverty measures do not penetrate the household; they have revealed one important aspect of the interaction between gender and poverty. Findings from surveys show that the number of female-headed households in both developing and developed countries has been increasing (Jackson 1998). Many of these live below the

poverty line- 'feminisation of poverty' (Jackson 1998). This is so because female headship can occur through a variety of processes; custom, widowhood, divorce, separation, polygamy, migration by male members and so on (Kabeer 2003). Nevertheless, the notion of assumed association between female headship and poverty have also been widely criticised because its evidence rests heavily on rising incidence of female-headed of households. On that basis, development analysts have questioned the utility of female headship as basis for targeting in poverty reduction strategies (Baden 1999). Jackson (1998) and Baden (1999) suggests that there is a danger of assuming that female headships always represent disadvantaged. The processes leading to female headship are many and in some cases they represent positive choices (e.g. divorce from an abusive marriage or de facto female-headed household that receive remittances from absent male members), and in this case the connotations of powerlessness are inappropriate. Female headed households were often found to have greater autonomy and control over resources and outcome of women and children were in some cases better than in male households with the same level of income. Still, this criticism does not allude to the fact that it is inappropriate to design interventions that focuses on female headed households, it rather emphases the importance of a careful contextual analysis prior to the implementation of any potential targets for poverty interventions.

Relative poverty by contrast, emerged on the development agenda as a response to weaknesses identified in the definition of poverty in absolute terms. This approach defines poverty as a relative deprivation, for example as half mean income, or as exclusion from participation in normal routines of specific society, at a point in time

(Thomas 2002: 13). Graaff (2000) maintains that an individual, who is unable to participates in activities that are customary or widely accepted in her/his society, would experience a poverty of life which might be equally as painful as physical. The concept of relative poverty refers to the individual's or group's position in the social scale that is, to low position in the hierarchies of class and other inequalities, a dimension that is not captured by absolute poverty. Measures of relative poverty suggest that the experiences of poverty are not only confined to material deprivation. "Being poor frequently also means being subjected to physical abuse and violence, humiliation and indignity, being subjected to exploitation by the powerful and the wealth …" (Graaff 2006: 8). Affirming, Graaff (2007)'s view, approximately 350 delegates at the Gender-Based Violence conference in Windhoek (June 2007), also stated that poverty and the economic disempowerment of women make them even more vulnerable to gender-based violence. Consequently, they have recommended poverty alleviation as one of the measure of combating gender-based violence (The Namibian Newspaper June 25, 2007).

Entitlements, Capabilities and Functionings

Amatya Sen's entitlement approach (1981) has become an important conceptual framework in the discourse of gendered dimension of poverty because it shifts the unit of analyses from households to individuals. It also recast the focus from the resources themselves to command over resources. In Sen's (1990a) poverty is a result of social relations and processes that determine which individual and social groups gain command (entitlement) over resources. Entitlements are therefore determined by a person's social position in society (occupation, class in relation to production, location such as

urban/rural, the knowledge and skills they possess, age, gender etc.). Contrary to the conventional approaches to poverty definition and measurement, Sen's approach stresses a range of means that are available to a person to achieve human capabilities (Baden 1999). They include both legal rights and extended informal rights that regulate how people gain command over commodities, inside and outside the households. Sen's original entitlement theory only emphasised the legal basis over commodities, but this was later extended to cover the informal rights to command over commodities, which are embodied in norms and social notions of legitimacy (Dreze and Sen 1995b). The entitlement theory separates a legalistic notion of rules of entitlement outside the household from moral rules of entitlement within it. However, Gore (1993) argues that Sen's separation fails to recognise how the interplay of legal and moral rules about command over commodities, inside and outside households, creates the actual rules of entitlement (Jackson 1998). For example, feminists analyses show that "legal rights…authorise particular patterns of power relationships within the household, such as those vested in households heads" (Gore 1993: 444 in Jackson 1998).

Entitlements are defined as a bundle of goods over which a person can establish ownership through production, exchange and trade, using their own means (Beneria and Bisneth 1996). Capabilities, on the other hand, are defined as the alternative combination of "the potential of being and doings" or "functionings" a person can achieve (Dreze and Sen 1995b). Functionings are thus the achievements from those beings and doings. For instance, Jackson (1998) maintains that the question of women's rights is not one of mere possession, but of what such possession allows them to be and to do. For example,

whether the women will be able to convert the commodity of land into 'funtionings' may depend on access to labour to cultivate it, physical proximity to land and social acceptability of farm labouring or management by women. Human capabilities in this sense might also include 'intangibles' such as self-esteem, personal security and community participation as well as basic functioning such as literacy, longevity and access to income (Baden 1999).

Gender dimension of poverty, entitlements and social exclusion

The feminists approach argues that, "women are present in all social spheres- where they are not, it is not because they lack ability or interest but because there have been deliberate efforts to exclude them" (Ritzer and Goodman 2003: 437)

Sen's theory of entitlements and capabilities provides an essential framework that highlights the rules, norms and unruly practices from which entitlements, gender constraints and biases are derived. In a given context, a women's ability to make a choice from a range of entitlements may be circumscribed by rules, norms and practices which limit their access to land, capital goods, credit and other productive resources (Baden 1999). Formal and informal rules may also limits women's market engagements, such as the social stereotypes on what women are able to do, husbands' prohibitions on wives working, and usually coupled with the expectations that their reproductive role calls for a primary concentration on households work (Baden 1999). Women may also have lesser endowments, due to biases in educational investments and inheritance patterns (Hemmati and Gardiner 2002). Women often claims lower returns on their endowments in the labour market because of gender labour segregation and under-payments. Institutional rules, norms and practices, particularly those governing families and kinship, subvert

women's claims on endowments, for example when in-laws inherit all the properties leaving the bereaved wife and children destitute (Baden 1999). Patrilineal inheritance customs usually mean that private control of land and other productive resources falls under ownership of men.

Conclusion

The theories analysed under this section point to the fact that gender is not an isolated category. It is a social relation between men and women which modifies and has an influence over other relationships and is in turn, influenced and modified by them (Meynen and Vargas 1994. Therefore gender is not just a relationship between women and men; it is a constitutive element of social relations in general. Gender is expressed along the fabric of relations and institutions through symbols, political, social practices and in subjective identities. Similarly, the concept of poverty is multidimensional and therefore its eradication cannot be accomplished through anti-poverty programmes alone. It requires democratic participation and changes in economic structures in order to ensure access for all to resources and opportunities.

Findings: Gender equality, women empowerment and poverty eradication in Namibia

Evidence suggests that progress on gender equality in access to service and resources increases women's productivity, and reduce poverty and hunger. For example, economically empowered women play a more active role in household decision-making, with greater bargaining power to increase spending on education and health (Department

for International Development 2007). The official target for MDG3 is to achieve gender parity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and tertiary education by 2015. Progress toward this target is monitored by the four indicators. The first two indicators measures gender equality in the household, *1)* the ratio of girls to boys' enrolment in primary, secondary and tertiary education; *2)* the ratio of literate females to males among 15-24 years-olds; 3*)* the share or women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector, measures progress in the economy; and *4)* the *proportion* of seats held by women in national parliaments measures progress in society (UN Millennium Declaration 2000).

Table 1: Namibia MDG1 and MDG3 indicators and Targets

Goal	1992/ 1993	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 targets	Progress towards target
1.1.MGG1: Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger							
Proportion of households living in relative poverty[a]	38%			28%		28%	Good
Proportion of households living in extreme poverty[a]	9%			4%		4%	Good
Total GDP (PPP)[b]				U$ 14.76 billion	U$ 15.14 billion		
Gross National Income (GNI) - per capita[b]		U$ 1740	U$ 1990	U$ 2380	U$ 2.990	U$ 3.230	Good
Gini coefficient[b]	0.701			0.604			Slow
1.2. MDG3: Promote gender equality and empower women							
Net ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary education (GPI)[c]		1.02	1.02	1.03	1.04	1.00	Good
Ratio of literate women to men, 15-24 years old (GPI) [a]				1.03		1.00	Good
Share of women in wage employment in the non-agriculture sector [d]	48%			71%			Good
Proportion of seats held by women in the National Assembly (lower house)[e]	9%		19%	25%	29%	30%	Good
Proportion of seats held by women in the National Council (upper house)[e]				8%	30%		Good

Sources:
a NPCS, Namibia Household Income and Expenditure Survey (NHIES 2003/04)
b World Development Indicators Report 2006
c Ministry of Education – Education Management Information Surveys (EMIS 2002-2005)
d Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (Namibia Labour Survey 2004)
e SADC Gender Monitoring (2006) and Gender Links

Table: 1.3.Literacy rates and ratio of literate women to men (GPI) 15-24 years (National and high and low performing regions) – Source: NHIES 2003/2004					
	Both sexes	Female	Male	Gender Parity Index (GPI)	Progress
National	92.9	94.4	91.3	1.03	Good
Khomas	97.9	99.1	96.5	1.03	Good
Erongo	97.6	98.3	97.0	1.01	Good
Omaheke	75.5	78.8	72.2	1.09	Disadvantage for males
Kunene	82.4	81.2	83.8	0.94	low
Kavango	75.5	89.7	95.2	0.94	low

Table 2: National educational Enrolment rates (calculated from Ministry of Education - EMIS 2002-2005)

	2002	2003	2004	2005
Primary				
Both sexes	**93.7**	**95.7**	**94.0**	**93.6**
Females	94.4	96.3	95.2	95.4
Males	92.7	95.0	92.7	91.7
GPI	1.02	1.01	1.03	1.04
Junior Secondary				
Both sexes	**93.0**	**95.4**	**94.8**	**93.0**
Females	94.2	96.4	96.4	95.0
Males	91.8	94.4	93.2	90.0
GPI	1.03	1.02	1.03	1.06
Senior Secondary				
Both sexes	**51.1**	**70.3**	**68.1**	**63.0**
Females	56.0	73.2	71.1	66.0
Males	45.9	67.2	65.0	59.8
GPI	1.22	1.09	1.09	1.10

Table 3: Trends: Literacy rates 15 years and above (National, high and low performing regions)

	Census 2001				NHIES 2003/4			
	Both sexes	**F**	**M**	**GPI**	**Both sexes**	**F**	**M**	**GPI**
NATIONAL	81.3	81.2	81.4	1.00	83.2	82.4	84.0	0.98
Khomas	93.7	94.9	92.5	1.03	95.7	96.2	95.1	1.01
Erongo	92.3	93.6	91.1	1.03	95.0	95.5	94.6	1.01
Omaheke	66.1	66.6	65.6	1.02	63.3	64.0	62.7	1.02
Kavango	70.3	65.9	75.5	0.87	75.6	69.9	82.7	0.85
Kunene	57.1	54.5	59.7	0.91	66.0	63.7	68.7	0.93

Despite widely reported low performances among Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries, between 1990 and 2005 Namibia reported good progress towards all four official indicators for MDG3. According to the scores on the official indicators (1990-2005) Namibia ranked among 12 countries in the top quintile [Global Monitoring Report, Millennium Development Goals 2007(GMR 2007)]. Since the Millennium Declaration in 2000, shortcomings in the official indicators for monitoring progress in attaining MDG3 were widely recognised. The indicators fail to capture dimensions of equality and empowerment. Therefore the UN Millennium Project Task Force proposed 12 indicators to replace the four official MDG3 indicators, of which only two are current indicators. In response to UN Millennium Project Task Force proposal, the GMR (2007) calculated the countries' ranking scores according to the official MDG3 indicators and two of the additional indicators (the female-to-male ratio of primary completion and the under-five mortality for girls and boys). The plotted scores of 54 countries on the official MDG3 indicators against two of the additional indicators indicate that some countries, including Namibia that scored relatively high on the official indicators scored relatively low on the

additional indicators (GMR 2007). Namibia particularly slid from the top quintile to the middle (GMR 2007).

Education and women empowerment

There is no doubt that education as a social asset will enhance the process of women empowerment. In Namibia the right to education is entrenched in article 20 of the Namibian Constitution. Article 20 states that all persons shall have the right to education and children are not allowed to leave school until they have completed primary education or until they are 16 years old, whichever is sooner. In Sen's theory of entitlement education is viewed as a capability and functioning (achievement) at the same time. Education as a capability increases chances of good paying job and sufficient income to acquire nutritious food for a good health outcome for individuals and their families. In Namibia, achieving education (preferable senior secondary education and beyond) does not only increase access to employment, it also affect the level of individuals' cognitive thinking, improves communication skills, especially in the official language (English) that are necessity for participation in political and civil society (Mufune 2002; Kabeer 2003). Thus, education enlarges women's choices into seizing opportunities that allow them to transform their lives. On the other hand, since lack of education is also defined as a dimension of poverty and gender inequality, attaining it could be viewed as an outcome in itself.

The Namibian government recognises the importance of education and continues to make large budgetary allocations (24%) to education (Namibia Society for Human Rights

2006). Since independence educational enrolment rates have significantly improved. The enrolment rate for primary school was at 89% in 2001 and at 94% in 2005 [UN Namibia Common Country Assessment (UN NCCA 2004); Ministry of Education 2005]. Namibia has also achieved national gender parity where girls' enrolments are slightly higher than boys. However, the education statistics contained in the Education Management Information System (Ministry of Education 2002-2003) shows a slow decline in the enrolment rates between 2003 and 2005. For instances the net enrolment rate was 92.2% for both sexes in 2003 but declined to 88% in 2005. This seems to have been a general trend for all the rates at different levels of education (Table 2 in this paper).

Desegregations by regions show that Kavango and Kunene had very low enrolment percentage of female learners in the senior secondary phase, 40% and 45% respectively (Table 8, EMIS 2005). Gender parity indices (GPIs) for the combined primary and secondary education enrolments were lower in Kavango, Kunene, Caprivi and Omaheke, it ranged between 0.95 and 0.98 indicating a slight advantage for males (calculated from table 8, Ministry of Education 2005).

According to the education statistics contained in Ministry of Education (2002-2005) reports, gender parity index (GPI) for combined net enrolments in primary and secondary education for the period 2002 to 2005 were over 1.00, indicating a female advantage (Table 1.2 in this paper). Disaggregated enrolment ratios from Ministry of Education reports 2002-2005 indicate male advantage with a constant GPI of 0.97 at lower primary school (calculated from table 8 EMIS 2002-2005). Otherwise, females generally have a

slight advantage of high enrolments rates up to the age of 17. However, female enrolments ratios drop relatively after the age of 17 and at grades 11 to 12 (Figure 27, Ministry of Education 2002-2005). This trend conforms to cultural expectations. "Males are culturally expected to go on to higher education" (Mufune 2002:192). Females on the other hand are not expected to gain this capability as it is assumed that they will gain claim to resources through marriage. Female education is socially under-appreciated to such an extent that girls are more likely to be withdrawn from schools whenever parents or caregivers are unable to buy uniforms and pay school development fees. The AIDS epidemic also forces more teenage girls than boys out of school to take care of the sick or assume the responsibility of deceased family members. Female learners also leave school at early ages due to teenage pregnancy. According to the Namibia Demographic Health Survey [Ministry of Health and Social Services (NDHS 2000: 54)] approximately 18% of the teenage girls aged 15-19 have already begun the childbearing process.

Furthermore, female dropouts are more influenced by social inequalities that are reproduced through interactions within the school system (Kabeer 2003). Unfortunately these problems are not easily captured in education quality assessments. Studies from Kenya and Zimbabwe found teacher's attitudes as primary obstacles to girls learning. Teachers often describe girls as stupid and lazy and tolerated their being bullied by boys. They often allocate menial chores to girls and teaching tasks to boys. Boys were awarded twice as many prizes even when the girls performed nearly as well in examinations. In addition male teachers abused their position of trust and authority, where they lure poor female learners into sexual relationship by offering them money and gifts (Kabeer 2003).

Between 2004 and 2005 females hold an advantage of higher promotion rates and lower repetition rates than males up to grade 7 (Ministry of Education 2005). School leaving rates in Namibia are significantly higher at grades (8-10), with highest rates of 43.7% and 43.8% for female and males respectively at grades 10 (Ministry of Education 2005:56). High school leaving rates at grade 10 reflect the fact that learners in Namibia are not allowed to repeat grade 10. Learners who fail grade 10 have to enter a part-time education system through Namibian Open College of Learning (NAMCOL). Consequent to low promotion rates and high repetition rates are features of over-age learners at various grades. Education enrolments and attainment in Namibia are significantly influenced by disparities in the distribution of resources such as; qualified teachers, teacher-learner-ratios, and access to technology between schools in different regions.

Thus, even though educational enrolments ratios in Namibia are quite high, only few learners, more particularly females successfully complete senior secondary school; and progress to tertiary institutions. This pattern definitely poses potential dangers to the achievement gender equality and women empowerment. While any level of education is obviously better than no education at all; primary and junior qualifications are not sufficient to expand a woman's capability to define her interest, choices and control over her life. Findings from the Namibia Labour Force Survey [Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (NLFS 2004: 64)] shows that the rates of unemployment (strict definition) were significantly high among females 15-24 (47%) and those who attained primary education (30%), junior secondary (40%) and senior secondary (19%). Surprisingly these three

rates exceed the rate of 7.5% for those with no education. Mufune (2002: 185) maintains that this feature can be explained by the fact that those with no formal education are more likely to accept anything presented to them- "even the most menial of jobs". Females who attained junior secondary education recorded the highest rate (42%) as compared to a 39% rates for males who attained the same level of education (Figure 6.1, Ministry of Education 2004).

There is also evidence that education improves women's ability to control their sexual, reproductive health and rights. Kabeer (2003) observed that though any level of education may increase the understanding and utilisation of certain services such immunisation and family planning, an in-depth understanding of diseases and prevention is only facilitated by a high level of education (secondary school and beyond). One could also argue that empowerment in the real sense can only be acquired at high level of education. According to the NDHS (2000:157), about 34% of the women with no education and 17% of those who either completed or did not complete primary education, either indicated that they have not heard of AIDS or did not know any ways to avoid HIV/AIDS. In contrast, only 2% of the women who completed secondary school and beyond indicated that they have not heard of AIDS or did not know any ways to avoid it.

Literacy among the youth

Literacy as defined in censuses and surveys refers to persons who can read and write with understanding in any language. The UNESCO estimates that of the nearly 137 million illiterate youths in the world, 63% were female (UNESCO, EFA Global Monitoring

Report, 2005). Namibia education system has made an effort to reduce illiteracy through the National Literacy Programme based in the Directorate of Adult Basic Education. A comparison of the findings from the Census 2001 and Namibia Household Income Survey [National Planning Commission Secretariat (NHIES 2003/4), indicate that with the exception of Omaheke, all the regions improved their literacy rates and gender parity (Table 3 in this paper). The NHIES (2003/4) reveals that about 83% of the Namibian population aged 15 and above were literate and only 17% were illiterate. The Gender Parity Index (GPI) of literacy ratios was 0.98, at the national level, indicating a slight advantage for males. Literacy rates for the population aged 15-24 was 93% which higher than the national rates. The GPI for this age group was 1.03, indicating an advantage for the females. An interesting feature in these data must be noted: GPI for literacy ratios were lower in Kavango and Kunene. Omaheke region on the other hand achieved a GPI of 1.09 but recorded the lowest literacy rates among all the regions. This only explains the fact that GPIs do not reveal anything about absolute levels (GMR 2007). In the case of Omaheke, males are significantly disadvantaged within an environment where overall literacy rates need to be boosted (Table 1.2 and Table 3 in this paper).

There is a myth that illiteracy is only found among persons who have never attended school. However, poor educational outcomes and high dropouts at lower grades also pose a potential danger for learners to fall back into illiteracy. Thus, increment in enrolments ratios and elimination of gender disparity do not always guarantee high levels of literacy rates. For example, two surveys on the quality of primary education that were conducted in Namibia, showed that 69% of grade 6 learners could not read with any level of

proficiency in 1995 and 76% could not in 2000 (UN NCCA 2004: 34). Thus, there is high possibility that learners who dropout of school before or at grade 6, will still be illiterate.

Poverty and illiteracy are fundamental barriers to women's full participation in the political process, community development projects and social upliftment programmes (Hemmati and Gardiener 2002). Thus, poor illiterate women are highly deprived individuals; who do not only lack basic material necessities and services but also capabilities that could enable them to move out of poverty. They tend to be locked up in a 'poverty trap' and if no measures are taken, this could turn into a life course and intergenerational experience (Beneria and Bisneth 1996).

Because illiterate women lack information on their rights they are often subjected to abuse and exploitation both in the private and public spheres. Whenever they are employed, they tend to engage in sectors that are not regulated or do not conform to the Labour Act. They also often have less social protection from labour organisations and trade unions. Moreover, due to legal or traditional norms that regulate claims and rights to entitlements, women in Namibia have relatively low entitlements (i.e. legal land ownership, capital goods and financial capital). As result they cannot get loans or credit as they have no collateral. Efforts from governments and NGOs to lift women out of poverty generally encourage women to engage in income generating projects [e.g. Small and Medium Enterprise (SME)]. However, even the successes of these projects are often constrained by women's low levels of literacy, numeracy and lack of information about

micro-credit and financial services institutions and lack of citizen documents required by these institutions. The success of these income generating projects are only maximised if they integrate literacy and numeracy training. Adult education and literacy training are usually forgotten or underspecified in poverty reduction policies. For example, in the section on education in Namibia's National Poverty Reduction Action Programme (NPCS 2001-2005) emphasised vocational education and skills training, and the importance of parents' involvement in the education of their children and the governance of schools, yet there is no mention of adult education, or even adult literacy programmes [National Planning Commission (NPCS 2002: 26-33)]. Other aspects in the documents, for instance, HIV and AIDS, improved agriculture and SME development implied adult education, but not explicitly literacy training as such (NPCS 2002: 38-47). Although overall national illiterate rate is at 17%; the rates are as high as 34% and 36% in Kunene and Omaheke regions respectively (NHIES 2003/4: 25). Therefore the failure to include adult education and literacy training in poverty reduction programmes means that the poor are denied the opportunity develop their capabilities and rights to participation.

Women's participation in paid work in the non-agricultural sector

Women's participation in paid work is an important dimension in the process of empowerment. It gives an indication of women's freedom and autonomy because it suggests a greater ability on the part of women to break through the cultural norms and stereotypes that restrict them to the domestic sphere. Access to paid work might improve gender relation within the family as it provides women with an independent source of income and hence a stronger 'falls back' from which to bargain (Kabeer 2003). Studies

have also shown that with an independent income women can secure livelihoods and ensure family survival in cases of male migration, separation and widowhood (Hemmati and Gardiner 2002). Evidence from both developing and developed countries demonstrates that women are more altruistic than men in the way they spend household income. Female access to income and control of family budgets correlate with improve nutritional status and family, especially those of young children (Oxfam undated).

Taking up paid work in non-agricultural sectors is considered by the MDGs as evidence of progress towards women's empowerment. However, it has been argued that this indicator alone does not capture dimensions of job quality and outcome. The indicator does also not consider barriers that may inhibit women from participating in labour markets among others: the burden of domestic tasks, unavailability of child care, illiteracy and low education (Kabeer 2003). Women, especially in Africa are brought up to be good wives and mothers rather than to be good career women (African Labour Research Network 2004). This has resulted in them being charged with almost all household chores including childcare, care for the elder and the sick. Thus taking up paid work for women usually means a 'double burden' as they have to combine it with reproductive roles and work in family-owned farms. The concepts empowerment refers to 'the ability to choose among alternatives and being able to challenge power relations'. Therefore women's participation in paid work is more likely to be empowering if it contributes to women's sense of independence, increases their livelihood rather than simply allowing them to survive from day to day (Kabeer 2003).

The majority of employed people (men and women) in Namibia are still working in the agricultural sector. The sector accounted for 27% of the total employed population. As to be expected, the sector is more dominant in the rural areas 58% as compared to 3.4% in urban areas. In both urban and rural areas there were more males in agricultural activities than females (NLS 2004: 52). About 22% and 49% of the employed women in urban and rural respectively were in non-agricultural activities. Thus women's participation in non-agricultural sector is quite high in urban areas than in rural areas. Approximately 71% of all employed women are in non-agricultural sector [Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare 2004 (see table 1.2 in this paper)]. Findings from the NLS (2004) revealed that female employment is slightly high in the private sector in comparison to males. In contrast males dominate in government and parastatal. A large proportion of women (30%) were employed in elementary occupations, 16% were employed services, shops or markets, 14% indicated that they were skilled workers in agriculture and fishery; and only 11% were employed as professionals (NLS 2004:52). These figures concur with findings from other literature that maintain that labour markets are not favourable to women, as they are mostly concentrated in gender stereotyped, and low paying work categories (Beneria and Bisnath 1996; GMR on MDGs 2007). This type of work perpetuates women subordination and is often insufficient to generate an income that allows women to escape poverty.

A large number of young Namibian women, particularly those who could not complete senior secondary school are employed in one of Namibia's biggest Export Processing Zone (EPZ) project, Ramatex. Specialising in textile production, the factory provide jobs

to almost 10 000 people. Global trends reveal that most textile factories employ young women and Ramatex is not different (Jauch & Shindondola 2003). Interviews by Jauch and Shindondola (2003) revealed that most people employed by the factory are women, and a manager also confirmed that they prefer women employees. These women earn between N$ 300 and N$600 (approximately 43-86U$) and often work 10-12 hours to earn more. The factory environment is characterised by poor health and safety standards. Workers are continuously exposed to dust and have to sit on benches without back support while those who iron have to stand for their entire shift. Consequently, many workers visit hospitals and clinics on a regular basis at their own expenses as they have no medical insurances. Workers often send their children to their mothers in rural areas at tender young age because they have no time to take care of them. Their low income would not afford them to hire nannies nor paying for a day-care centre. There are also reports of violation of rights- women are subjected to humiliating body search at the end of each shift and compulsory pregnancy test before being hired (Jauch and Shindondola 2003).

Women's employment conditions in Namibia are also affected by policies of outsourcing and commercialisation in public services. These processes take on forms like joint ventures, partnerships, and ownerships in subsidiaries of state-owned enterprises (Mwilima 2004). One of the main key objectives behind these policies is downsizing of the public services. Downsizing poses the biggest threat to women who are employed in the public sector. In outsourcing and casualisation it is often work performed by women that is outsourced, while others might be retrenched. Others might be employed by the

contracted companies, and in many cases their working conditions change for the worse (Mwilima 2004: 39).

Commercialisation of basic services such as water and electricity has also negative consequences to impoverished communities, especially women. The ministry of Agriculture and Water Resources delegated the provision of water to NamWater, a state-owned enterprise (SOE) operating on a commercial basis. Likewise the Ministry of Mines and Energy delegated electricity supply to NamPower who in turn contracted the distribution function to municipalities and other enterprises that operate on a commercial basis. A research by LARRI (McClune 2004 in Mwilima 2004) in the 'Democratic Development Community' Democratic Resettlement Community (DRC), an informal settlement on the outskirts of Swakopmund reports that the area has no individual household connections and no sanitation facilities (McClune 2004 in Mwilima 2004: 40). The residents of DRC cannot afford to buy cards to access water [and electricity]. Though this type of deprivation affect everyone, women are worst affected because they are the ones who have to walk long distances to fetch water and [collect fuel]. By the time the work is completed, women are too exhausted to try to obtain formal work for salary (McClune 2004 in Mwilima 2004:40). Thus, the official MDG3 indicators fail to capture the value of time spent on unpaid work by women in both urban and rural areas. Besides the activity of collecting water and fuel; women in rural areas also spend time working in subsistence farming. Majority of the rural households (48%) are dependent on subsistence farming as the main source of income. Moreover, sex disaggregated data shows that 54% of the female headed households in the rural areas reported subsistence

farming as the main source of income in comparison to 48% of the male headed households (NHIES 2003/4:33).

Participation of women in the national parliaments

The right to representation is not only central to civil and political rights but it is also indicative of good governance. Hemmati and Gardner (2002:25) consider participation, the rule of law and gender equity as fundamental in the establishment of good governance system. They argue that good governance puts people first and thus it is indispensable for building peaceful, prosperous and democratic societies. However, it has been widely recognised that discourses, procedures, structures and functions of governance are not gender-neutral. [It]" remain heavily skewed in favour of men in general and certain groups of men in particular'' (Ashworth 1996 in Hemmati and Gardner 2002:25).

Increment of women representatives in parliaments could be viewed as a functioning (achievement) in itself but alternatively could also be seen as a resource base from which further action and achievements can be taken in the next exercise (Kabeer 2003). For example, increasing the number of women seats in decision making bodies firstly suggests equality in the electoral system that accord both men and women equal opportunities to participate in political activity. Secondly, with certain qualifications, increment of women in national parliaments means that women will have greater potential to question, analyse and act on the institutional structures that constraint their full participation in development. Kabeer (2003) argues, that this process is not necessarily guaranteed because these qualifications relate to the same constraints that

prevent women from all social class and groups from having a 'strategic presence' in national parliaments. These constraints include the widely discussed issues of illiteracy and low education, lack of resources, women's work load, lack of childcare services, use of appropriate times and venues, language considerations etc. These constraints are likely to be even greater for poor women (Baden 1999).

Kabeer (2003) also argues that increasing the women representation on the parliaments does not necessarily mean an increment of participation by poor women. She maintains that women who enter national parliaments tend not to be drawn from the ranks of the poor. There is also no guarantee that women will be more responsive to the needs and priorities of the poor women than many men in parliaments.

Since the inception of parliament 1990, Namibia has made progress towards increasing women representatives. The Namibian parliament is made up of two houses; the National Assembly and the National Council. Women fared better as members of the National Assembly that uses proportional representation (PR) system. This means there are no constituencies; parties win seats according to the proportion of votes they get in the elections (Tonchi and Shifotoka 2006). Among the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) countries Namibia, Mozambique and South Africa all have proportional representative system. In all three countries, the ruling parties (ANC, Frelimo and SWAPO) have voluntary quotas of thirty percent for the representation of women in politics. Voluntary party quotas in a PR system are powerful tools for change because parties decide which candidates to get seats. They can therefore ensure that

women are elected. By 2004, South Africa and Mozambique had already achieved the 30% women in parliament while Namibia was closer to do so (SADC Gender Monitoring 2006). Up to 2004, women fared badly on the National Council where members are elected through the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system. Each regional council elects two of its members to the National Council. By 2004, only 2 out of the 26 members of the National Council were women. After the 2004 elections, Namibia achieved a 30% (8 out 26) representation of women in the National Council (National Council 2007). In 2004, Namibia was 4th in the SADC ranking of women in politics and was at as number 20 in the global scale of women in politics maintained by the Inter Parliamentary Union. By 2005, Namibia had 29% women in the National Assembly the National Assembly and 14% in the cabinet (Gender Links undated; SADC Gender Monitoring 2006). Women are also better represented as local councillors where 44% are women. This progress has been facilitated by the PR system and the legislated quota through the Local Authorities Amendment Act. 3 of 1997.

Conclusion

Gender inequality and poverty are the result of distinct though interlocking, social relation and processes. Women's experience of poverty is mediated by social relations of gender. Thus, by virtue of gender inequality women get less material resources, social status, power and opportunities for self-actualisation than do men who share their social location. In a given context, women's claim on entitlements may be circumscribed by rules, norms and practices that limit their ability to make a choice among alternatives. MDG3 aims to promote women' access to resources and services, and expand their

capabilities that allow them to pursue their own choices and avoid poverty and deprivation. Findings from this analysis concur with findings from the GMR (2007) that indicate that Namibia has made good progress towards all four official indicators for MDG3. The official indicators for monitoring achievement towards MDG3 are relevant; and provide at least some critical elements to measure development but they do not sufficiently measure aspects of gender equality and empowerment. They do not capture the quality and outcome of education nor do they quantify barriers that may inhibit women to participate in labour markets and parliaments. Namibia has achieved gender parity in both primary and secondary education. Yet, only few girls complete senior secondary successfully. Relative to boys, girls have low promotion, high repetition and high dropout rates, particularly at the level of senior secondary education. The NLS (2004) shows that female youth are the most affected with unemployment (47%) as compare to 37% for males. The indicator of share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sectors ignores the role of subsistence farming which is the main source of income for the majority of the Namibian population who lives in the rural areas. Labour markets are not favourable to women, as they are still employed in work that perpetuates women subordination and can hardly be considered as empowering (NLS 2004). Namibia made progress towards increasing women representatives in the parliament. Yet, this does not necessarily mean participation by poor women.

Recommendations for an equitable gendered poverty reduction

Among the 12 indicators proposed by the UN Task Force; some are very critical to Namibia: Prevalence of domestic violence, prevalence of gender-related crimes,

reproductive health and rights, ratio of female to male completion rates in primary, secondary, and tertiary education; measure of land ownership by male and female.

Incorporating women in the labour market is often not sufficient to generate an income that allows them to escape poverty. Policies should focus on broadening the entitlements, choices and rights of individuals. More attention should be given to the creation of equal opportunities to land ownership, housing title, access to credit and loans.

Increase human capabilities through both formal and informal education programmes. Development policies, especially poverty reduction policies, should put emphasis on literacy and adult education.

Avoid development policies, programme and acts that are formulated through a gender-blind or gender-neutral lens. Gender-neutral policies address women's lived experiences, needs, interests and constraints only to the extent to which they conform or overlap with the rules set by male actors. For example, the Land Reform Act 1995 (Amended 2003) does not compel the Tribunal to reserve a number of seats for women. Women are also not enlisted as a target groups under the resettlement programme. Traditionally, women's entitlement rights to land are weaker than those of men. Failure to include women in the decisions on land and as beneficiaries means that they are still denied right to land ownership.

Gender as a category of analysis is imperative in the formulation of all development programmes and policies, more particularly in poverty reduction. The exclusion of gender as a category within the context of poverty analyses, can lead to misdiagnoses of poverty processes through the erasure of gender dimensions.

WID and GAD can be implemented along side with each other as long as the WID approach is not seen as end in itself but as interim to the process that seeks to confront and transform inequities. WID activities are particularly required to work with women alone, to level the playing field and build capacity. For example when women lack capacity, resources, and find it difficult to articulate their interests and women who have internalised oppression.

Re-enforce the collection and analysis of gender disaggregated data in all the national studies.

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