

United Nations Report Focuses on Global Lot of Women

By NEIL MacFARQUHAR

UNITED NATIONS — American men who maintain they are doing more housework have a second source to back their claim — a United Nations report released Wednesday — although it would be premature to argue that the sexes had reached parity on domestic chores or nearly any other issue.

Housework statistics are perhaps the lightest slice from a welter of numbers in the report, which focused on the global lot of women. The latest in a series of compilations published every five years, the World's Women 2010 was released to mark World Statistics Day. (When the United Nations wants to draw attention to an issue, it usually gets a day. For a particularly intractable problem, it often gets a year.)

Statistics Day is being honored in 100 countries to underscore the need for data as a development tool. (The list of events started with Afghanistan, where President Hamid Karzai was to participate in a statistical celebration

that was presumably not the disqualification of a quarter of the votes from the recent polls.)

Although the 255-page report shows that women have made progress in areas like health and education — elementary school enrollment is now the same for boys and girls — they still lag over all. “Much more needs to be done, in particular the need to close the gender gap in public life and to prevent many forms of violence against women,” said Jomo Kwame Sundaram, the assistant secretary general who released the report here.

A second hefty report by the United Nations Population Fund, also released Wednesday, digs deep into areas where positive news is much harder to find: the harm visited on women.

It suggested that helping women and children recover from the sexual violence and other trauma they suffer in war or natural disasters is a key to moving countries forward on all fronts. Women savagely raped during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina still

suffer from limited access to counseling 15 years after the peace treaty, the reported noted.

Among the world's nearly seven billion people, men outnumber women by 57 million, concentrated mainly in China, India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Those countries also have the highest female child mortality rates, the statistics report said. Though obesity has become a national preoccupation in the United States, it did not make the chart of 17 countries where more than 20 percent of the women are obese. That roster was led by Qatar with about 45 percent of its women (versus 34 percent of the men). Men and women in Canada are in a dead heat on this score at about 23 percent, whereas, among the most obese countries, only in the Czech Republic do men pull ahead of women — 25 percent versus 22 percent.

On housework, there are wide latitudes on chores — women tend to cook more than men, but men spend time shopping. In the United States, they have moved

toward parity, the report says.

Generally in developed nations, women spend close to five hours a day on child-care and domestic chores, whereas men spend two and a half. But the numbers vary markedly. Women in Italy, Japan, Portugal and Spain among the developed, for example, do three to four times as much domestic work as men.

On education, the statistics have flopped; women pursuing higher education now dominate, making up 51 percent of college students. That has yet to translate into earning gains: women earn 70 percent to 90 percent of their male counterparts.

In politics, 14 women were either head of state or government in 2009, and just 23 countries had what the United Nations considers critical mass in Parliaments, 30 percent. Absolute gender parity for women is not exactly a United Nations goal. Officials noted, for example, that women worldwide live longer, and they would not want to pull women down even with men.

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