

## Book Review

### ***Women in developing countries: A reference handbook*** by Karen L. Kinnear

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This book is one of the titles in the Contemporary World Issues series, which is published by ABC-CLIO, addressing a broad range of societal issues such as autism spectrum disorder, climate change, domestic violence, genocide, sexual crime, women in combat, and so on.

The author is a sociologist, editor, writer, paralegal, and traveler to developing countries.

The book, comprising eight chapters, is clearly written. The first chapter, titled “Background and history,” first defines the key term *developing countries* and reviews basic concepts in the study of women, including women in development (WID) and gender and development (GAD). The author then provides an overview of the status and experiences of women in developing countries, under various topics such as family relations, education, health care, employment, and empowerment of women. Also covered are issues that are more critical to women’s safety and survival, including abortion, maternal mortality, female genital mutilation, sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution and sex trafficking, and violence against women.

Chapter two, “Problems, controversies, and solutions,” provide further discussion on the topics introduced in the previous chapter. The section on controversies, covering the gruesome issues of female genital mutilation, abortion, and honor killings, illuminate threats to women that are hard to imagine for those living in other parts of the world and are worth reading.

Chapter three, “U.S. concerns,” addresses issues that are of specific concern to the United States, in the context of immigration of women from developing countries, particularly requests for asylum – on the basis of female genital mutilation, domestic abuse, rape, and forced marriage – and the immigration policy responses of the United States.

Kinnear cites specific court cases that examine the cultural underpinning of various forms of violence against women and their human rights to be protected from violence. Female genital mutilation is a traditional cultural practice (considered to be female circumcision) in many African countries, several countries in Middle East, and some countries in Asia, but is prohibited by the United States federal government.

The chapter on “Chronology” lists, in chronological order, many events affecting the status and rights of women from 1919 to 2011. Providing such a comprehensive list is not an easy task, which perhaps explains why the events listed seem to be drawn primarily from some parts of the African, Latin American, Middle-Eastern, and South-Central Asian regions. There are few entries relating to East Asia and the Pacific region.

Biographical sketches of 48 women who had championed the rights of women and sought to improve their status are provided in chapter five. Similar to chapter four, the biographies also tend to feature women from Africa, Europe, Latin America, the Middle-East, South and Central Asia, with some exceptions, namely, Corazon Aquino (the Philippines), Aung San Suu Kyi (Mynamar), and Mu Sochua (Cambodia).

Chapter six, which is about “facts and data,” is organized into three parts: the first part presents international conventions and protocols promoting the status and human rights of women whereas the second part highlights conventions in two regions: inter-American and Africa. The third part provides statistical data relating to health, education, domestic violence and rape, voting and elections, labour and employment of women, and so on. This chapter also provides sources of statistical data making it easy for interested readers to find more up-to-date statistics.

In chapter 7 “Directory of organizations,” there is a comprehensive listing of international, regional, local, and private organizations that provide services to women in developing countries.

The last chapter in this book “Selected print and nonprint resources” suggests up-to-date reading and reference materials (books, agency reports, journals and journal articles, videos and electronic resources, web-sites and blogs) for those who want know more about women in developing countries.

Overall, I would recommend this book to those who want to research

the topic of women in developing countries, particularly if the focus is on violence against women, as it provides a useful overview and commendable literature review of the social issues that women struggle with and makes available data and references for those who want to delve further into the topic. The primary setback is the unbalanced focus on women in certain parts of the world and minimal information on the situation in East Asia and the Pacific. There is therefore scope for research on a regional, if not sub-regional basis, because the historical, socio-cultural, legal, economic, and political contexts are not the same, despite sharing developing countries status. The grouping of developing countries is much too broad and encompasses huge diversities, which would be difficult to capture in one volume only.

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