

UPF New York, USA - Social Protection and Empowerment for Women and Girls

Lynn Walsh
March 14, 2019



New York, United States -- During the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 63) at the United Nations, Universal Peace Federation collaborated with United Families International and International Organization for the Family in organizing an event titled "The Thriving Family as the Best Social Protection and Empowerment for Women and Girls."

This topic reflected this year's CSW theme on social protection systems for gender equality and empowerment of women and girls.

The meeting was held on March 14, 2019, in the midtown Manhattan offices of Family Federation for World Peace and Unification, an organization that is affiliated with UPF.



Lynn Walsh, MSW, the director of the UPF Office of Marriage and Family, clarified that the use of the word "best" in the program's title is not meant pejoratively in any sense. She explained that the "best" social protection is that which reduces risks.

She referred to international data indicating that a stable marriage of a mother and father provides the best social protection for women and children against poverty, physical and sexual abuse, and mental health issues. She emphasized that single mothers love their children as much as any mother, and many are wonderfully successful; however, the research reflects the challenges that single mothers experience in providing for and raising children on their own.

Married couples are 50 percent more stable and enduring than cohabiting couples, Mrs. Walsh reported, explaining that this is related to the deliberate decision to marry and then to invest into the relationship.

Socialization is clearly a factor in how mothers and fathers parent differently, but the measurable anatomical, hormonal, reproductive, and neurological differences in the sexes are undeniable also, she said.



Mrs. Walsh stated numerous ways in which mothers and fathers contribute unique strengths and complementary elements in their parenting, all of which give advantages to children who are raised by their biological mother and father.

As a personal anecdote, she shared that she and her husband are proud of their two successful and loving adoptive sons, even bragging about how good a husband and father their elder son is. However, she related that, after a recent visit to his biological family, one son reflected, "I am ever so grateful that I was adopted, but now I know why I am the way I am." Mrs. Walsh said as happy as she and her husband have been to have their wonderful sons, it is painful to know that their sons had to deal with a fundamental uncertainty about their roots and identity.



"Adoption can be the best option for children, but it is never the ideal and would never be the first choice a child would make: to not be raised by their biological mother and father," she said.

Mrs. Walsh addressed the challenges of marriage, commenting that they are largely due to misunderstanding the opposite sex, unclear expectations, weak personal commitment, and lack of sexual and emotional fidelity.

In conclusion, she recommended that in order for youth to form stable families, they must take their time in getting to know a potential spouse before having sexual relationships and cohabitating. She added that young people need to develop habits of self-awareness, self-control, sexual integrity, and following through on commitments. "These are the same virtues that we need to keep practicing, once married, to

keep our marriages full of growth, happiness, and love," she said.

Ms. Sophia Lundy, a student at Brigham Young University -- Idaho who is originally from Haiti, gave a stirring testimony of her experiences being raised by a single mother who was emotionally unavailable and involved with numerous abusive men. She shared about the pain and lack of trust she had felt, particularly toward men. Yet, despite the emotionally debilitating circumstances, she pulled herself out of her situation to further her education in the United States, grow her faith in God and eventually marry a wonderful man. The audience was quite moved by her resilient character, having come from such disadvantages to build a loving and thriving family of her own.

The next speaker, Dr. Tim Rarick, a professor in marriage, family and child development at Brigham Young University -- Idaho, focused on the unique role of fathers and their impact on their daughters. While commending Ms. Lundy for her outstanding successes, at different points he referred to her unstable and fatherless childhood home as devastating to any girl's self-esteem and trust, leading to many vulnerabilities in life.

He presented research that showed the widespread advantages of well-fathered girls, such as in academics, emotional health, social capacities, ability to deal with frustration and disappointment, overall self-confidence, and expectation of respectful treatment from males.

Fathers help daughters develop a sense of self based not on physical appearance but instead on character, values, and heart, Dr. Rarick said. Engaged fathers can instill confidence in their daughters by recognizing and honoring their feminine traits, he said.

Girls who are raised with the love and guidance of their fathers are more likely to avoid early sexual debut, avert traffickers, and thwart abusive relationships, Dr. Rarick said. With abundant statistics he made it clear that well-fathered girls are far more likely to advance academically, succeed in careers and attain economic stability. He explained that the role of fathers needs to be fostered as a key for lifting women out of poverty and toward a successful and fulfilling life.

Dr. Rarick described how his relationship to his daughters, cherishing each one's unique talents, intelligence, and sensitivities, has made him a better and deeper human being. His gentle reverence for his daughters was evident as he recalled a touching moment when, during a father-daughter dance, his daughter whispered in his ear that this was the happiest she had ever been and she hoped it would never end. Fathers clearly provide an irreplaceable social protection and spark for the advancement of girls, starting deep within the heart of each little girl.

Next we held a lively question-and-answer segment. The panel was joined by Mrs. Marcia Barlow, MPP, vice president of policy development for United Families International; and the session moderator, Dr. Kani Diop, an adjunct instructor at Montclair State College in the state of New Jersey.

Dr. Diop answered one of the questions, about how we can help men change demeaning attitudes toward women. She starting by relating that she and her children had to flee her home in Senegal in order to protect her 9-year-old daughter from a child marriage arranged by her husband.

Dr. Diop answered that the best way to make that difference is in our home. She stated that she has loved her son and raised him to value girls and women. With a gleam of pride in her eye, she said, "He is the one that makes my dinner when I am teaching a late class and texts me a picture of it during class. He is a most caring young man."

Her words were a perfect closing to our program. She was encouraging each of us to turn our personal difficulties not to blaming but into a determination to bring a transformation of goodness, especially in raising our children.

