CROSS America, scores

pointments to teaching and

administrative posts appear

every day in the local and

national print media. Many of

them routinely carry, at the

bottom and in small print, one

line to the effect that the insti-

tutions concerned are equal

opportunities places meaning

that there is no discrimination

in recruitment on the basis of colour or gender. Unfortu-

nately, inspite of some efforts

by a number of these

institutions, available evidence

suggest that gender bias is

quite still deeprooted in

years ago by the American

Association of University

Women, asserted that sexism

may be the most widespread

and damaging form of bias not

just in the case of staff re-

cruitment and promotion but

what is even more pernicious.

in the treatment of students by

The report presents a pat-

teachers and authorities alike.

tern of downward intellectual

mobility for girls so much so

that girls who enter the first

grade of a secondary school

with the same or better skills

and ambitions as boys all to

often end up behind boys in

almost every subject.

According to the report this

happens primarily because

girls receive considerably less

attention from classroom

teachers than boys do. Such

gender bias undermines girls'

self-confidence and often dis-

courages them from taking

mathematics and science

courses. Even among teachers

who consciously try to avoid

sexist attitudes, bias was found

to assume subtler from as was

borne out by videotapes taken

starts much earlier - right at

the elementary schools where

teachers were found to call on

and encourage boys much

more often. As boys frequently

require help with reading.

many schools regularly arrange

for remedial reading classes

for them. But girls, who just as

often need help with their

maths, are rarely provided

with similar extra care. While

boys get credit for intellectual

quality of their work girls are

more likely to praised instead

for neatness. For similar of-

fences girls are reprimanded

but boys are ignored. Research

shows that girls in schools

To be sure, the process

of their classes.

One report, published two

American education.



'Samia Khatun of Lalmonirhat working with her sewing machine

- photo RDRS

Tailoring one Poor Family's Future

by A M Akbar

N Bangladesh, the harsh constraints of conservative rural society actively discou-I rage women from involvement in many opportunities to earn income. Dressmaking is one which is increasingly accepted.

Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) is one of many NGOs promoting women's tailoring enterprise through 6-month courses throughout its working area aimed at developing economic skills among disadvantaged women and providing them with the practical means to support themselves and the families in future.

Forty year-old Samia Khatun of Dalalpara village in Lalmonirhat District in northern Bangladesh, is one example of how poor and destitute women struggle successfully to earn a living for themselves and their family through tailoring.

Abandoned by her husband, Samia lives with 4 children aged 16,7,5 and 2 respectively. The youngest one is from her husband's second wife who also left the house leaving behind her own daughter. Her troubles didn't end there: her husband visits Samia occasionally and tries to grab whatever money Samia earns through her own hard work.

A couple of years back, Samia joined a women's group organised by nongovernmental development agency Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) and began receiving the motivation, education and training which have started to change her life.

Three months back in October 1993, Samia enrolled in a RDRS Tailoring Training Project in the hope of starting her own small business. In the short period since, Samia has acquired enough skill to sew simple dresses for the village men and women and now earns about Taka 1,000 (US\$ 25) per month. Once she completes the full training course, she plans to start her independent tailoring business in the village. By then, she will have paid off the loan on her sewing machine which will be entirely

Samia's prospects are much brighter nowadays. Tailoring will provided her a regular source of income, which she can supplement through vegetable gardening on her tiny homestead plot for sale and consumption. Her 16 year-old son has been able to start a small kiosk shop in the village and earn some income for the family. Two young children are now attending primary school. Her standing in the community has also grown; she acts as Cashier for her group.

Samia is thankful for how things have worked out "I thought my family and I would not survive after my husband abandoned us with nothing. Without this education and the chance to earn a little money from tailoring, we might not be here now. Who could have expected us to do so well?"

The writer is associated with RDRS.

FAILING AT FAIRNESS of advertisements by d educational institutions seeking candidates for ap-

Gender Bias in an Affluent Society

by Zaheda Ahmad

One report, published two years ago by the American Association of University Women, asserted that sexism may be the most widespread and damaging form of bias not just in the case of staff recruitment and promotion but what is even more pernicious, in the treatment of students by teachers and authorities alike.

perform better in/co-operative atmosphere, where students work together but a compétitive setting is more congenial for boys. And yet a majority of the schools had been established on a competitive model. Another finding of the report - no less disturbing - was that schools had become, over the years, more tolerant of boys sexually harassing girls.

These problems notwithstanding, girls secure higher grades and are more likely to go on to college. But even these successful girls, according to the report, find themselves handicapped by a lack of confidence in their abilities Consequently they have higher expectations of failure, are more modest in their aspirations and less likely to realise their full potential the boys.

This gender gap shows up in the most acute form in science subjects. Thus one finds that between 1978 and 1980 the national science achievement test scores of 9 and 13 year old boys and girls had widened to the disadvantage of the girls. Although boys and girls take more or less the same number of science courses, girls tend more to take advanced biology and boys go more for physics and chemistry. According to another study 64 per cent of the boys taking physics and calculus courses went to major in science or engineering compared with just 18.6 per cent of the girls who took the same

As for the attitude of teachers, two-thirds of whom are females, the evidence of another report is quite striking but nonetheless common also. Here gender stereotypes are familiar - the students they

like most are assertive males and those they like least are assertive females. Surely, equity in the classroom would not make all girls - or boys into physicists but equal treatment on the part of teachers would go a long way in establishing the right bal

This realisation on the part



Dr Elena Aprile

of parents and girls, it is now asserted, has led to a resurgence in popularity of girls only colleges in America. Since 1991, application for admissions, into the 84 women's colleges in America have gone up by 14 per cent and enrollment has reached a 14 year high record of 98,000 students. Differential treatment apart, concern over sexual harassment and the impact of what has come to be known as the "Hillary Factor" have contributed to this rise in popularity. The image of Hillary Rodham Clinton, a graduate of one of the prestigious women's college - Wellesly, as a strong role model for successful career woman - has helped at tract a record number of ap-

plications to that college itself Till the mid 1970's the Ivy Leagues and other colleges in America were males only institutions. So when they opened their gates to female students it was expected that the down of gender equality had arrived in American education. But the change failed to break the hold of the gender stereotypes. The millennium, sadly, did not come to materialise in the new co-educational setting. Parity with males remained an elu-

sive goal. Take, for example, the case of Sarah Carlyle Herbert, a senior at Smith College who first attended a coed junior high school here she sat in the back of the class, never asking questions or speaking up. Later, when she changed over to an all girls' school that she realised what she could achieve in a congenial atmosphere.

To be sure, students attending girls' colleges constitute a small proportion — only 2.5 per cent — of the 7.6 million female students in all types of American colleges, But the rise nonetheless is a significant reversal of twenty year fall in applications and enrollment. And with that the old image of a women's college as that of a sedate rural finishing school for future upper class wives and mothers is vanishing fast Today's colleges, old or new, emphasise careers and female

students do not live a life apart from male students in other colleges, particularly in the night - bourhood areas. Graduates of women's colleges are more than twice as likely as graduates of coed institutions to receive doctorate degrees. And 24 percent of all Congresswomen are graduates of these colleges, a much higher proportion than their share of the total female college graduates.

But the real fight for parity can not end here since the vast number of female students do graduate from coeducational institutions. Here gender bias in the case of recruitment and promotion of staff is still deeply entrenched. Women are more commonly found in the humanities than in the sciences although even in the former they lag far behind their male colleagues. In 1989, women constituted around 30 per cent of the teaching staff in the humanities and only 18 per cent in the science and engineering departments.

But irrespective of academic field, they are less likely to get tenure than their male colleagues and on the average are paid less. According to one source, it takes women two to three years more than men to get tenure when they become eligible and two to six years longer than men to become el-

In science subjects, especially in physics, the bias is very glaring. Of the 20 developed nations studied by the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences, America tied with South Korea for the smallest number of women in the physics faculties. The same study also found that American women physicists consistently earn less than their male colleagues. Reasons for this range from the physiological to the

Because of such heavy disadvantages that women science academies in America suffer from, Elena April, an associate professor of physics at Columbia University calls it a miracle" when she was finally recommended for a tenure. She is the only woman in her faculty. And she hopes that this unanimous recommendation in her favour would be accepted.

The writer, who teaches history at Dhaka University and edits 'Saptahik Samoy', recently visited USA.

Use of Norplant is Unethical

HE Directorate of Family Planning and Bangladesh Institute of Research for Promotion of Essential and Reproductive and Technologies (BIRPERHT) organised a Norplant day on 29 January, 1994. The objective was to popularise the method among the users. It was a meeting of the providers. There were speakers to speak about the five-year experience of Norplant, but only from the providers' point of view. There was no user of Norplant to speak on her experience.

One important information which came out in the meeting was that the expiry date of Norplant is going to be over in 1995. So it is very urgent, according to the organisers, that they dispose of the existing norplants which are lying in the store. Obviously, these are going to be introduced in the bodies of women!

UBINIG organised a press conference at the national press club on the same day in the afternoon to protest the promotion of Norplant.

The question of expiry dates of norplant is a very serious one. UBINIG has urged the government not to use the norplant any more on the bodies of women. It should be immediately destroyed. Any further insertion of norplant is therefore questionable. It wants to ensure the security of women from this attack.

The organisation has repeatedly urged the government not to use norplant on

the following grounds: a. Norplant is not acceptable to women for the very basic reason that it is providercontrolled. It takes away control from women about their reproductive functions. Women have to depend on the provider both for insertion and removal. This concern is expressed not only by women in Bangladesh but world-wide. The international women's health organisations have refused to accept it as one of the "choices" for contraceptives as it simply violates the freedom of their decision.

b. The trials conducted in Bangladesh and other third world countries are pre-marby Farida Akhter

ket acceptability trials and are not safety trials nor are the trials suitable for women's health. Therefore the medical status of Norplant is questionable. The trials are done with a methodology that limits the possibility of a fuller evaluation of side effects.

c. Norplant trial grossly violated the bio-medical ethics. In countries like Bangladesh.

c. The users have experienced serous side-effects including bleeding for months, stop of menstruation, itching, growth of hair and a series of other side-effects. Many women have lost weight and have become permanently sick. Most women have mentioned about "too much bleeding" "long and irregular menstrual cycles "Amnnorrhea"



women were brought under trial without their knowledge. Women did not know that they were under trial, and using a contraceptive which has not yet proved to be safe. They were offered Norplant only when they wanted a suitable contraceptive, not a method to be tried on them. The socalled "voluntarism" was created by offering no other choice to women when they were asking for a safe method. Women were "motivated" with false information to accept Norplant. On occasions when the informed consent method was practiced in a few cases. women were hurriedly told about side effects just before insertion of the method giving no scope for women to decide against using it. The selection process of Norplant users is. also faulty. In order to fulfill the targets, Norplant is being inserted into the arms of women who are sterilised. women who are over the age of 40 years, and those who had

problems with other hormonal

contraceptives.

and a lot of other side-effects. These side effects are well recorded in the trial results as well, but the most serious and prevalent side-effects are being termed as "common sideeffects" to trivialize the sufferings of women. The side-effects cannot be ignored as they are being done now, because these have become a cause of economic and social problems

to women and their families. d. Norplant is given as a semi-permanent method. It is a long acting method effective as a contraceptive for five years. Many women who do not want to go for sterilisation become an easy target for Norplant with the hope that they may become pregnant when they want to. But the return of fertility is not scientifically established, nor being properly studied upon.

e. Norplant provided under population control programme takes a coercive character and often becomes a substitute for sterilisation. While removal option is provided in principle, the programme guidelines do not support implementa tion of removal. The policy guidelines suggest retention of Norplant for a complete period. To quote from the report on the The Quality of Norplant Services in Bangladesh, "while no one would deny that service providers should work with clients to retain Norplant if the side effects are experiencing are temporary and not harmful to the client, no acceptor should ever feel that she is compelled to retain the implants". It is very clear that the decision of removal depends on the judgements of the providers. This is unacceptable.

f. The potential long-term effect constitutes the possibilities of transferring the side effects to the offsprings. Lactating mothers are given Norplant even though there are contra-indications for not doing so. The effects of Norplant mothers on the daughters are not yet known. These possibilities are not being studied, therefore, no information is available.

It is to be noted that the abuses of Norplant are quite rampant worldwide including countries in Asia and also in North America. The experiment of Norplant in Indonesia has been a "success" only from the provider's point of view but is a total failure and is full of violations from the user's point of view. The Population Council, the promoter of Norplant, itself has uncovered such violations in the Indonesian programme. In the United States Norplant is being provided to the black, immigrant and poor white community, specially those living on social welfare. Convicted women are given Norplant. The experiences of women using Norplant are same in terms of the abuses. This method is being used on disadvantaged women in both developing and developed coun-

tries. We would urge upon the government of Bangladesh to stop any further use of Norplant and set an example for safeguarding the interest of

The writer is Executive Director of UBINIG

When Family Planning Meets Population Control

EMBERS of a recent Ghanaian women's de-legation to Britain to raise money for medical equipment privately expressed opposition to population control policies but felt unable to voice their concerns for fear that their request for funds would be turned down.

Their dilemma illustrates the pressures for birth control measures felt to be coming from Western governments and international financial institutions.

 In part, the feeling arises from a blurring of the difference between population control - defined by the research group Committee on Population and the Economy as "the decision taken by governments or other agencies that couples should have no more than a certain number of children, followed by methods to enforce this"- and family planning - "the decision taken by couples in the light of their own beliefs and circumstances, as to the number and spacing of their own chil-

Britain's aid minister Lynda Chalker, for example, pushes family planning at every opportunity but backs it as a component of women's health and women's rights not as a population control measure.

But advice and help on contraception for individual women easily slips into pressure when packaged in expensive, large-scale family planning programmes from which officials want results. And results are measured not in quality advice and care but in "take up" among "respondents" in "the target group"— in other words, women adopting contraception.

Incentives and disincentives, like the 1984 World Bank proposal that female Tanzanian civil servants should be allowed paid maternity leave only once every three years, are less about provision of care to individuals than about shaping policy to achieve a national goal - fewer children.

Barbara Akakpo writes from Accra

An enormous international industry has sprung up in the last 30 years as Western governments put money into contraceptive programmes in developing countries. The bandwagon is currently rolling into Africa, the continent with the highest population growth rates in the world. A Gemini News Service correspondent questions the reality of the rhetoric of some of the movement's promoters.

That also partly explains why, though freedom of choice for women is the cry of the family planning enthusiasts. freedom is restricted both by what is made available and by pressure from officials and clinical personnel.

Government officials, for example, prefer permanent methods because they need no follow-up or monitoring.

So it is no coincidence that

female sterilisation is the most

fect bureaucratic device. Similarly, workers in clinics recommend what they know.

In Ghana recently a newlyqualified doctor at the prestigious Korle Bu Teaching Hospital told me that he had sterilised several women after advising them that it was in their best interests

The doctor said the women already had more than five children, and he "felt they



common modern method of child." contraception in the world to-

Once it has been done, officials can cross the woman off their list: another target hit No drop-out rate, no further expenditure required on motivation or equipment. The percouldn't cope with another

Influence may be direct, in so far as a woman asks the doctor or staff what they recommend, or it may be indirect, in the way that clinic staff present information and emphasise the advantages and

disadvantages of different methods.

They always have preferred methods, and tilt their recommendations accordingly.

In addition, their preference is heavily influenced by the limits of their knowledge. A survey of clinics in Ghana showed that most of their doctors did not know of the full range of family planning service in existence, such as the "morning after pill" or even IUDs (intra-uterine devices) But all were aware of, and quick to recommend, sterilisation and abortion.

In 1988, abortion was virtually unthinkable as an official family planning practice in Nigeria. As recently as 1990 the Planned Parenthood Federation of Nigeria was forced to defend itself against allegations that it promoted the sale and use of "contraceptives" that were abortifacient in nature. A year later - and two months after approval of a \$ 78 million World Bank population loan the government announced proposals for allowing abortion under certain conditions.

Healthcare is invariably given as a justification for family and population programmes. For example, the London-based family planning charity. Marie Stopes International, says it provides "a wide range of innovative and caring projects in the maternal health and family planning field.

For Dr Nafis Sadiq, head of the UN Population Fund, the heart of the proposals to be discussed at the forthcoming UN conference on population and development, of which she is secretary general, "is the recognition that the low status women is a root cause of inad equate reproductive health care.

that population control activists have ridden into Third World countries on the back of feminist rhetoric

Such comments suggest

The writer works for West Africa magazine