

Women's Lives in the Highlands of New Guinea

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Introduction

It is well known that the life of a woman in New Guinea is not an easy one, especially not in the Highlands. She has to live in a very low house in which she cannot stand upright and where there is no comfort of any kind. She usually sleeps on a rain-mat on the ground. The smoke that fills her house hardly allows her to breathe. She lives together with pigs, separated from them only by a fence of sticks. Imagine the constant stench from the pigsties! A woman's house is usually infested with lice, bed-bugs, fleas, and cockroaches.

She is expected to do most of the garden work: the planting, weeding, collecting and carrying home of all the food in heavy netbags on her back. It may be said that she has to work in her garden practically every day. Moreover, she must watch over her children, her pigs, and the family treasures. Needless to say, she has to do the cooking for all her folks and to feed the pigs and fowls. What little spare time she has is taken up with knitting netbags or men's and women's caps. And yet she often enough gets abused or even beaten up by her husband. If we add to all this the terror she undergoes on