
IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT AND GENDER ROLES -A STUDY

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“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women.”

—Kofi Annan

Abstract: Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured. Gender equality describes the absence of obvious or hidden disparities among individuals based on gender. Disparities can include the discrimination in terms of opportunities, resources, services, benefits, decision-making power and influence. It is important to note that Gender is a social construct which is based on social roles, not sexual differences per se. The dichotomous nature of gender lends to the creation of inequality that manifests itself in numerous dimensions of daily life. While the world has achieved progress towards gender equality and women’s empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Today, the modern woman is so deft and self-sufficient that she can be easily called a superwoman, juggling many fronts single-handedly. Women are now fiercely ambitious and are proving their metal not only on the home front, but also in their respective professions. Women in Indian are coming up in all spheres of life. They are joining the universities and colleges in large numbers. They are entering into all kinds of professions like engineering, medicine, politics, teaching, etc. A nation’s progress and prosperity can be judged by the way it treats its women folk. There is a slow and steady awareness regarding giving the women their dues, and not mistreating them, seeing them as objects of possession. Despite progress, the very fact that women, along with being achievers, also are expected to fulfill their roles as wives or mothers, prioritising home against anything else.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Hidden Disparities, Dichotomous Nature, Prioritising Home, Roles.

Introduction: Gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (WHO). While sex and its associated biological functions are programmed genetically, gender roles and power relations and the power relations they reflect are a social construct – they vary across cultures and through time, and thus are amenable to change. Gender equality refers to the *equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men* and girls and boys. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both, women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the *diversity of different groups women and men* (for example: women belonging to ethnic minorities, lesbian women or women with disabilities). Gender equality is both, a human rights principle and a precondition for sustainable, people-centered development (adapted from UN Women). (MWIA 2002) Gender equality is achieved when women and men enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are equally valued and favoured.

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Objectives: We may describe the objectives of the present paper as follows.

1. To know about women empowerment and importance of women empowerment
2. To find out gender roles in parenting and marriage
3. To reveal about achieve gender equality and empowerment all women and girls
4. To study about gender equality as a basic human rights principle
5. To know about UN women's rights convention CEDAW etc.

Methodology: The focus of this present paper is to study on **Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in India-A Study**. Data of the current study were collected through secondary sources. Secondary data required for study have been collected from numerous books, journals, news papers and websites.

Women Empowerment: The term "Women Empowerment" is a burning issue all over the world. "Women empowerment" and "women equality with men" is a universal issue. Women Empowerment refers to the creation of an environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society. Women Empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women, to ensure equal right to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights, such as:

- Freely live their life with a sense of self-worth, respect and dignity
- Have complete control of their life, both within and outside of their home and workplace
- To make their own choices and decisions
- Have equal rights to participate in social, religious and public activities
- Have equal social status in the society
- Have equal rights for social and economic justice
- Determine financial and economic choices
- Get equal opportunity for education
- Get equal employment opportunity without any gender bias
- Get safe and comfortable working environment.

Importance of Women Empowerment: We may describe the importance of women empowerment as follows:

1. Women population constitutes around 50% of the world population. A large number of women around the world are unemployed. The world economy suffers a lot because of the unequal opportunity for women at workplaces.
2. Women are equally competent. Nowadays, women are even ahead of men in many socio-economic activities.
3. Women are as talented as men. Previously, women were not allowed higher education like men and hence their talents were wasted. But nowadays, they are also allowed to go for higher studies and it

encourages women to show their talents which will not only benefit her individually but to the whole world at large.

4. The main advantage of Women Empowerment is that there will be an overall development of the society. The money that women earn does not only help them and or their family, but it also help develop the society.
5. Women Empowerment also leads to more economic benefits not to the individuals but to the society as well. Unlike earlier days when they stayed at home only and do only kitchen stuffs, nowadays, they roam outside and also earn money like the male members of the society. Women empowerment helps women to stand on their own legs, become independent and also to earn for their family which grows country's economy.
6. Women Empowerment leads to decrease in domestic violence. Uneducated women are at higher risk for domestic violence than educated women.
7. Women Empowerment is also advantageous in case of corruption. Women empowerment helps women to get educated and know their rights and duties and hence can stop corruption.
8. Women Empowerment also reduces poverty. Sometimes, the money earned by the male member of the family is not sufficient to meet the demands of the family. The added earnings of women help the family to come out of poverty trap.
9. Women are increasingly participating in the national development process. They are making the nation proud by their outstanding performances almost every sphere including medical science, social service, engineering, etc.
10. Women are considered irreplaceable for certain jobs.

Gender Roles in Parenting and Marriage: Gender roles develop through internalisation and identification during childhood. Sigmund Freud suggested that biology determines gender identity through identification with either the mother or the father. While some people agree with Freud, others argue that the development of the "gendered self" is not completely determined by biology, but rather the interactions that one has with the primary caregiver(s). From birth, parents interact differently with children depending on their sex and through this interaction parents can instill different values or traits in their children on the basis of what is normative for their sex. This internalisation of gender norms includes the choice of toys ("feminine" toys often reinforce interaction, nurturing, and closeness, "masculine" toys often reinforce independence and competitiveness) that a parents give to their children. Education also plays an integral role in the creation of gender norms.

Gender roles that are created in childhood may permeate throughout life and help to structure parenting and marriage, especially in relation to work in and outside home. Despite the increasing number of women in the labor force, women are still responsible for the majority of domestic chores and childcare. While women split their time between work and care of the home, men in many societies are pressured into being the primary economic supporter of the home. Despite the fact that different households may divide chores more evenly, there is evidence supporting the fact that women have retained the primary caregiver role within familial life despite contributing economically to the household. This evidence suggest that women who work outside the home often put an extra 18 hours a week doing household or childcare related chores as opposed to men who average 12 minutes a day in childcare activities.

Gender equality is a human right. Women are entitled to live with dignity and with freedom from want and from fear. Gender equality is also a precondition for advancing development and reducing poverty: Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation. Still, despite solid evidence demonstrating the centrality of women's empowerment to reducing poverty, promoting development and addressing the world's most urgent challenges, gender equality remains an unfulfilled promise.

Achieve Gender Equality and Empowerment all Women and Girls: While the world has achieved progress towards Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment under the Millennium Development Goals (including equal access to primary education between girls and boys), women and girls continue

to suffer discrimination and violence in every part of the world. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. Providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes will fuel sustainable economies and benefit societies and humanity at large.

Media representations of men and women tend to conform to traditional gender norms, reinforcing the aggressive independence of men and the passive dependence of women. Although exceptions certainly exist, entertainment industries predominantly present men and women in roles that reinforce inequality between the sexes. Men are presented as career oriented, lazy, or incompetent in doing housework, and rarely are they presented as caregivers for their families. Women are almost always presented in advertisements for household care products, or conversely the archetypal “man-eater”. These presentations of gender in the media reinforce and hold up gender norms within the home as well as in the public sphere and contribute to gender inequities in society. Depending on the background of training participants, the trainer might want to facilitate a discussion on the concepts of sex, gender and gender inequality, in order to enable a more in-depth understanding of the issue of gender-based violence. Given the fact that the participants might have different ideas about the roles of women and men, it might be good to lead the discussion to the positive influences of gender equality on the health and the future of the society.

In order to be able to incorporate a gender perspective into health-care and its responses to gender-based violence, it is critical to understand the meaning of gender as opposed to sex (lesbian women or women with disabilities). Gender equality is both, a human rights principle and a precondition for sustainable, people-centered development (adapted from UN Women). Before continuing with the human rights context of the principle of gender equality, trainers may want to do a quiz exercise with participants.

Gender Equality As A Basic Human Rights Principle: The principle of equality of women and men and the corresponding prohibition of discrimination is a fundamental principle of international human rights law. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948 proclaims that:

Article 1: All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2: Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Similar anti-discrimination provisions can be found in the **International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights** (Articles 2 (1) and 3) and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights** (Articles 2 (1) and 3), which were adopted in 1966 and, together with the UDHR, constitute the “International Bill of Human Rights”. At the time when these documents were adopted, the concepts of gender and gender-based discrimination were not yet on the international agenda. Therefore, reference is made to discrimination on basis of sex.

The UN Women's Rights Convention CEDAW: In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Adopting such a women-specific treaty was considered necessary because, notwithstanding the existence of general human rights treaties, the widespread and systematic discrimination of women in all spheres of life was still a global reality. All countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have ratified CEDAW and are therefore bound obliged to implement its provisions at country level. [Click here](#) for the dates of ratification by country. CEDAW defines discrimination against as “any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality

of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.” (Article 1).

This definition covers both, intended/direct (“purpose”) as well as unintended/indirect (“effect”) discrimination. CEDAW obliges states parties not only to ensure equality of men and women before the law (de jure) but also in real life (de facto). It is also important to note that CEDAW covers not only an obligation of states to refrain from discrimination through discriminatory laws or acts of state officials, but also to take appropriate steps to protect women from discrimination by private persons (Article 2 (d), (e)).

Conclusion: Empowering women socially, economically, educationally politically and legally is going to be a herculean task. It is not going to be easy to change the culture of disregard for women which are so deep-rooted in Indian society. But it does not mean that it is implausible. Only revolutions bring changes in a day, but reforms take their time. This one, in particular, will take its time as well. The idea of women empowerment might sound hard by the yard, but by the inch, it is just a cinch. All we need is a concentrated effort focused in the right direction that would rest only with the liberation of women from all forms of evil.

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