

Uncovering Gender Inequality within Families: A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract: *This research paper examines the multifaceted nature of gender inequality, particularly focusing on its origins, manifestations, and potential solutions within family structures and broader societal contexts. It highlights how gender roles are socially constructed and perpetuated through family dynamics, cultural norms, and educational practices. Drawing on various scholarly sources, the paper discusses the impact of patriarchal ideologies and stereotypes on children's development, emphasizing the importance of early intervention in promoting gender equality. The analysis further explores the roles of organizations such as Save the Children and UNICEF in combating gender discrimination and advancing equal opportunities for all genders. By advocating for equitable distribution of household responsibilities, engaging children in conversations about gender rights, and challenging societal norms, this paper aims to provide actionable strategies for fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Ultimately, it underscores the necessity of collective efforts from families, communities, and institutions to realize gender parity, beginning with fundamental changes at the household level.*

Keywords: Gender Inequality, Gender Roles, Family Dynamics, Gender Equality, Social Norms

1. Introduction

The concept of gender is complex, with its foundation traditionally linked to inherent femininity and masculinity derived from biological factors, specifically sex. However, in many societies, the process of shaping gender identity begins through childrearing practices before children become conscious of their biological characteristics. Parental biases, favoring children of the desired gender over those of the opposite, are subtly expressed in various ways during upbringing. Consequently, the behavior, personality traits, and experiences of boys and girls are shaped more by parental and societal influences than by their biological identities. In our country, girls continue to face restricted access to religious institutions. Regardless of the reasoning behind this, it ultimately reflects patriarchal efforts to uphold the notion of female inferiority within the domestic sphere.

Objective:

To uncover gender inequality within family structures and explore effective strategies for promoting gender equality in domestic settings.

2. Review of Related Literature

The ideology surrounding gender roles is purposefully constructed to appear natural, which perpetuates gender inequality in various aspects of life (Rokhimah, 2014). Within religious contexts, particularly Islam, the superiority assigned to men often reinforces women's subservience, particularly within the framework of marriage and the relationship between husband and wife, as seen in gender-biased religious teachings, including marriage sermons (Nurhilaliati & Nor, 2015). Moreover, the physical maturation of reproductive organs, coupled with entrenched societal inequalities in gender roles, heightens the risk of sexual coercion among young women. According to Johnson

(as cited in PDR, 2012), a family is defined as the smallest social unit consisting of two or more individuals with biological ties, shared responsibilities, and continuous cohabitation under one roof. Duvall and Logan (1986) expand on this, describing a family as a group of individuals united by marriage, birth, or adoption, who work to sustain a culture while fostering the mental, physical, and emotional development of each member. Logan (1979) further elaborates on this by emphasizing the interaction between a social system and its individual components, with the family serving as a social institution critical to the formation of behavioral patterns and the internalization of norms. As the primary educational institution, the family plays a pivotal role in imparting moral values (Syarbini, 2014). Achieving equality in family relationships, particularly between spouses and between sons and daughters, requires a fair allocation of responsibilities and roles across all areas of life (Anita, 2015). The social and cultural frameworks significantly influence how these responsibilities are distributed, thereby affecting family dynamics (Nuraida & Zaki, 2018). Consequently, the family serves as a pivotal unit for fostering social change. When grounded in principles of harmony, equality, transparency, and unity, families cultivate children who reflect these values. In contrast, detrimental behaviors within the family can have negative repercussions on its members. Furthermore, societal and cultural norms play a crucial role in shaping the roles of husbands and wives within the family structure (Aisyah, 2014).

Why gender inequality typically begins at home:

The family environment undeniably plays a crucial role in shaping gender roles and development, as parents often serve as models for their children, transmitting gender attitudes through their behaviors. Parent modeling, a therapeutic technique used to help parents influence their children's behavior, underscores the importance of this

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dynamic. In many patriarchal societies, sons are generally preferred over daughters. Research in North America indicates that families are more inclined to have additional children if they have only daughters, whereas this tendency diminishes if they have sons, reflecting a preference for male children.

In low - income nations, where a substantial number of individuals reside beneath the poverty line, parents with restricted financial means frequently place a higher value on having sons due to various gender - related considerations. Sons are viewed as more "valuable" and a better investment, particularly in terms of education. For example, the decision to prioritize boys' schooling over girls' stems from the belief that girls will eventually marry and, therefore, investing in their education yields less return. A girl who remains at home to learn domestic skills is seen as more advantageous to a future spouse. Moreover, in numerous cultures, it is customary for girls to move into their husband's family upon marriage, a process that frequently entails the bride's family paying a dowry.

Property rights are another area where gender inequality persists, as in many countries, women and girls are denied the right to own or inherit property. In contrast, sons ensure that family assets remain within the extended family, providing security for aging parents. When physical labor is required, especially in agricultural or labor - intensive livelihoods, boys are perceived as more capable due to their presumed greater strength and endurance.

As part of maternal, neonatal, and pediatric healthcare initiatives, efforts are made to encourage fathers to participate in pregnancy, childbirth, and newborn care, promoting a more involved paternal role.

Parental attitudes toward their children often reflect the societal value placed on sons versus daughters. A well - established example is the gendered division of household labor, where boys are typically assigned outdoor tasks such as lawn care or artistic endeavors, while girls are expected to handle domestic chores like cooking and cleaning. This division reinforces the expectation that gender determines one's responsibilities within the family.

Fathers, in particular, play a significant role in reinforcing gender stereotypes, as they are more likely to encourage boys to engage in activities associated with masculinity, such as playing sports or engaging in rough play, while offering gendered toys. Additionally, a father's treatment of his spouse can leave a lasting impression on his children's personalities and future life choices.

Fathers who are actively involved in childcare and household duties positively influence their children by demonstrating that men can be nurturing caregivers. This example helps boys develop into more compassionate husbands, fathers, and friends to women and girls, while simultaneously boosting girls' self - esteem and advancing gender equality. Similarly, mothers who work and contribute financially to the family challenge traditional gender roles and help dismantle stereotypes, especially in the eyes of

their daughters, fostering a broader understanding of women's capabilities.

How Save the Children Addresses Gender Discrimination and Fosters Equality:

Gender equality is an inherent right for everyone, encompassing both girls and boys. Acknowledging this principle, Save the Children emphasizes the necessity of confronting gender discrimination and inequality directly to protect children and to realize a vision of an equitable world where every child has access to the same opportunities for growth, development, and quality education in a secure environment.

Prioritizing gender equality is crucial for closing the inequality gap and ensuring that all children, especially the most marginalized, receive support. Various factors contribute to vulnerability, including age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender identity, geographical location, health, and ability, all of which can be aggravated by gender disparities.

To create a just and inclusive future devoid of gender bias, initiatives must commence during childhood. Save the Children reaches millions of children around the globe each year, advocating for equal opportunities for girls and empowering them from a young age. Since the year 2000, the organization's efforts have led to a 25% decline in child marriage worldwide, allowing 11 million girls to continue their education or enter the workforce while making their own informed choices regarding marriage and motherhood. Furthermore, Save the Children is proud to be the first non - profit organization to receive Gender Fair certification, highlighting our dedication to advancing gender equality and empowering girls around the world.

How to Establish Gender Equality: A UNICEF Guide

UNICEF is committed to advancing gender equality in India by driving progress and creating opportunities for both girls and boys. Every child deserves the chance to reach their full potential, but gender disparities, reinforced by those who care for them, hinder this reality. In India, children witness gender inequalities daily within their homes, communities, and through various media such as textbooks, films, and news outlets. These disparities foster unequal opportunities, with girls disproportionately affected by this imbalance.

Globally, girls generally experience higher survival rates at birth, are more likely to achieve developmental milestones, and have equal access to preschool education. However, India stands out as the only major country where the mortality rate for girls exceeds that of boys. Furthermore, girls in India are at a greater risk of discontinuing their education.

As children mature in India, the disparities in gender roles become increasingly pronounced. Boys enjoy greater freedoms, while girls encounter considerable limitations on their autonomy, affecting their opportunities for education, career choices, and control over social interactions and marital decisions. These constraints become even more pronounced in adulthood, where only about 25% of women engage in formal employment.

Although some Indian women hold positions of global influence and leadership across various fields, entrenched patriarchal norms, practices, and systems prevent the majority of women and girls from fully exercising their rights.

Merely being born a girl exposes individuals to unique risks, vulnerabilities, and abuses, many of which are directly linked to the economic, political, social, and cultural disadvantages they face. During times of crisis or disaster, these risks intensify.

Gender inequality, coupled with entrenched social norms and behaviors, heightens the risk of child marriage, adolescent pregnancy, domestic labor, inadequate education, poor health outcomes, sexual exploitation, and violence against girls. These issues are likely to persist unless there is a greater societal appreciation for the value of girls.

Addressing these challenges requires substantial investment in and empowerment of girls through education, life skills training, sports, and various opportunities. By acknowledging the importance of girls, we can make strides towards significant goals—improving educational access, reducing anemia in the short term, ending child marriage in the medium term, and eliminating gender - biased sex selection in the long run.

Transforming societal perceptions of girls involves the active participation of men, women, and boys, necessitating mobilization across diverse social sectors. A change in mindset is essential for realizing the rights of all children, regardless of gender, in India.

Empowering girls demands intentional investment and collaboration. Equipping them with the necessary resources, safety, education, and skills can mitigate the risks they face and enable them to contribute fully to India's development. Girls encounter substantial barriers to accessing crucial tools, information, and social networks. Programs specifically designed to address the unique needs of girls—focusing on education, life skills development, and violence prevention—can bolster the resilience of millions, particularly among vulnerable groups, including those with disabilities. Sustainable, long - term solutions created in partnership with girls can offer them transformative opportunities throughout their lives.

Adolescent girls especially need platforms to articulate the challenges they face daily and to explore solutions that align with their needs and aspirations for brighter futures for themselves and their communities.

UNICEF's India Country Programme (2018 - 2022) was crafted in response to the various deprivations experienced by Indian children, including those linked to gender disparities. Each programmatic outcome is anchored in gender priorities, with specific goals, budgets, and expected results outlined. These priorities encompass:

- **Health:** Aiming to reduce excess female child mortality under five years of age and ensure equitable healthcare access for girls and boys (e. g., training frontline health

workers to encourage families to seek immediate medical attention for sick infant girls).

- **Education:** Delivering gender - responsive support for out - of - school children, ensuring that both girls and boys have access to learning, and promoting gender - sensitive curricula and pedagogical methods (e. g., identifying at - risk girls and boys who are not enrolled in school and revising educational materials to eliminate gender stereotypes).
- **Child Protection:** Addressing child marriage and early marriage (e. g., assisting local councils in becoming "child marriage - free" and establishing clubs for girls and boys to engage in non - traditional skills such as sports, photography, and journalism).
- **WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene):** Improving menstrual hygiene management for girls by enhancing access to well - equipped, gender - segregated toilets in schools (e. g., implementing gender guidelines within the Swachh Bharat Mission and supporting state - level menstrual hygiene management policies).
- **Social Policy:** Supporting state governments in creating gender - sensitive cash transfer programs and promoting women's involvement in local governance (e. g., cash transfer initiatives in West Bengal to facilitate girls' education and establishing a resource center for female panchayat leaders in Jharkhand).
- **Disaster Risk Reduction:** Enhancing gender - disaggregated data in disaster risk management and fostering female leadership and participation in disaster preparedness initiatives (e. g., promoting increased female leadership in village disaster management committees).

By addressing these critical areas, UNICEF aims to create a more equitable future for India's girls and boys.

What are the ways to overcome such challenges?

Promoting gender equality at home is crucial, and the COVID - 19 pandemic has created a unique opportunity to address this important issue. Since 2020, many men have been working remotely due to lockdowns, allowing them to experience firsthand the balancing act that women often perform between professional and household responsibilities. Achieving gender equality can begin within the home by breaking down traditional gender roles, encouraging men to share caregiving duties, and teaching children about gender equality and women's rights.

Open discussions about gender equality with children:

It is vital to engage children in conversations about women's rights and the importance of gender equality. Explain the actions required to create a more equitable world. It is essential to challenge traditional gender expectations, such as the notion that fathers should be "strong" and mothers "nurturing," and instead help children understand that both genders can be equally vulnerable. Encouraging girls to voice their opinions and share their thoughts on gender equality is a powerful way to foster a more inclusive mindset.

Involve boys in caregiving from a young age:

Globally, women are responsible for more than double the amount of unpaid domestic labor than men. This imbalance

restricts access to educational and employment opportunities for girls and women, while also reducing their time for rest and personal growth. A key step toward gender equality is ensuring that caregiving and household responsibilities are shared equally between men and women. Teaching both boys and girls from an early age to participate in household tasks and caregiving duties sets the foundation for a more equal division of labor in the future.

Challenge gender stereotypes, including personal biases:

Gender stereotypes are often ingrained in children from an early age, influencing their behavior and expectations. Research shows that by age three, children begin internalizing these stereotypes, limiting opportunities for girls and broadening those for boys by age ten. It is important to start conversations about gender roles early and challenge these stereotypes, both at home and in the broader community, to create more equal opportunities for all.

Address body shaming:

Body shaming is a damaging social norm that pressures individuals to conform to unrealistic beauty standards. Parents should model positive behavior by avoiding negative comments about their children's appearances and rejecting societal expectations around ideal body types. Teaching children that character and actions are more important than appearances, and introducing them to diverse role models across different genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds, fosters a more inclusive perspective.

Listen to and learn from children:

Young people around the world are at the forefront of advocating for change, speaking out on global issues like climate action, education, human rights, and gender equality. The 1.8 billion youth worldwide represent a powerful force for shaping a better future. To fully harness this potential, it is crucial for adults to listen to children's perspectives and be open to learning from their ideas and insights.

By embracing these practices, families can play a key role in advancing gender equality, creating a more inclusive society for both current and future generations.

3. Conclusion

India was ranked 112th out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, but saw a sharp decline to 140th place out of 156 nations in 2021, making it the third - worst performer in South Asia. The widening gender gap is driven by a consistent decline in female labor force participation, political representation, educational access, health, and survival rates. While policies are being introduced to support a gender - inclusive recovery, achieving gender equality fundamentally starts within the household.

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