

# GENDER INEQUALITY IN FEMALE EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

Gender Inequality is a major concerned issue in India. Women face discrimination and gender biases in various aspects of their life. Gender which is socially constructed within the society often categorizes male and female in different domains of work. Women in India experience gender inequalities in health, education and various political and economic opportunities. This article is an attempt to explore and describe different forms of gender inequality and challenges females experience in getting education. According to census 2011 women constitute 48.46% of total population of India but the female literacy rate that is 65.46% is quite disappointing. Education of women is not only important for the development of women but also for the development of the nation. Any nation cannot be developed with its females left behind uneducated. Education empowers women and makes them aware of their rights. In this area of modernisation and globalization still some old testimonies of patriarchal mindsets exist who view female education as a waste of time and money. Such thoughts create gender inequality towards female education and act as a barrier in their academic growth. All such challenges to female education are discussed in this article.

## **Keywords**

Gender Inequality, female education, beliefs and practices.

## **Introduction**

India is a land where women are considered as “Devi” providing high value to women and girls in all cultural and religious scenarios, but in contrast to this it is also a land where women’s dignity is always subjected to male ideologies. In this global era where every country is rushing towards completing the goals of development in every sector, somewhere the women development goals are formed in due respect but lag behind in reality. Across all over the world in every society women face inequality be it in social ways, education, workplace and home itself.

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All these discriminations and inequalities are blended with the testimonies of culture and continued since time immemorial. Women are advised to fit in the society roles in the name of culture defined rules and maintaining the status quo of the society expectations. To maintain these statuses women have forgotten her main identity and put themselves secondary to these regressive traditional ideologies that are deeply ingrained in our society.

In this article we would be discussing the issue of gender inequality in education that makes females lack behind in various career opportunities. When we talk about gender inequality the very first thing that is important to understand is the difference between sex and gender. As Browne (1992) stated -

*“Gender refers to the cultural, socially-constructed differences between the two sexes. It refers to the way a society encourages and teaches the two sexes to behave in different ways through socialization.”* According to Simone De Beauvoir *“one is not born but rather becomes a woman.”* Gender which is an acquired status given by the society is completely different from sex which is innate. But in general both sex and gender are used interchangeably in society. Sex that is the biological identity of a human being whereas gender is socially constructed on the basis of society beliefs and practices. These beliefs and societal roles often create gender related disparities and inequality, which leads to the degradation of any society and also affects the development of a nation. The concept of gender specific roles is ingrained in the minds of a person since childhood and so called gender socialization. Boys are considered to be stronger than girls both physically and emotionally whereas girls are displayed as sweet and soft in nature. The main agents of this gender socialization are primarily family, school media and peer groups. According to the 2011 census report, the statistics of sex ratio in India provide terrifying records. The latest census reports provide that the total sex ratio of the country is 940 females per thousand males where the population of India is 1.22 billion. In spite of several strict rules made by government the sex selection and abortion practices are at its peak in the country due to which the child sex ratio is 914 girls per thousand boys.

*Table 1- Sex Ratio in India*

| Year | Females per thousand males of all ages | Females per thousand males age 0-6 |
|------|--|------------------------------------|
| 1951 | 946                                    | 983                                |
| 1961 | 941                                    | 976                                |
| 1971 | 930                                    | 964                                |
| 1981 | 934                                    | 962                                |
| 1991 | 927                                    | 945                                |
| 2001 | 933                                    | 927                                |
| 2011 | 943                                    | 918                                |

*Source- Census 2011 report*

These statistics do provide a concerned issue of gender inequality. Discrimination is not only seen in the selection of child, it carries along the whole journey in upbringing of the child naming it as a significant socialization process which is actually a discriminated inequality process of socialization, which degrade the society deep down knowingly and unknowingly by its members itself.

### **Gender and Social Statuses**

Social statuses are maintained by a set of roles performed by the members of the society. With the roles certain expectations are attached within the social setting. In the same society, the same period of time there are differences in gender role expectations (Kramer 2004). In a society we have a certain set of combinations of gender specific and gender irrelevant role expectations. In becoming socialized we actually learn the ways in which the social world is gendered beyond the roles we ourselves perform (ibid :60).

### **Different Forms of Gender Inequality in India**

Although there are many forms of gender discrimination and inequality in different spheres of life. Broadly it can be considered into five categories as-

- ▶ Demographic inequality- which considers the sex decreased ratio of females to males and high rate of mortality.
- ▶ Educational inequality- the higher drop out rate of females than males and less enrollment in professional courses signifies the educational inequality. Also the making of career choice is not in the hands of females, these are either imposed on them by the family especially the male patriarchal mindsets or are given less and limited options to choose from.
- ▶ Economic inequality- women are less paid due to gender biased thought processes prevalent in most of the organizations women work in, women are supposed to be given low positions and only few restricted areas of work they can participate in. Also sexual exploitation and harassment at the workplace makes it more miserable for women to be professionally active.
- ▶ Socio-religious inequality- the traditional cultural ideologies often set gender discriminated rules. Women are given limited freedom for expression and are less involved in physical activities.
- ▶ Political inequality- it is clearly visible in women's lesser participation in political activities and those who participate still are bound by the dominant decisions made by the men, with lack of decision making power by herself (Barot and Pagi, 2012).

### **Gender Inequality in Education**

Education plays an important role in the life of every human being in the overall holistic development of an individual and inequality in education leads to the gender gap as stated by UNESCO "*Disproportionate difference between men*

*and women and boys and girls particularly as reflected in attainment of development goals, access to resources and levels of participation. A gender gap indicates gender inequality” (UNICEF,2017).*

Gender inequality is highly practiced, treating it as a cultural norm. The education system is also becoming a part in promoting gender inequalities. Male and female students are assigned different work roles and are expected to behave in a certain way. The dominant nature of male teachers restricts female students to come forward to participate in school events and programs. The teachers create a mind set of letting female students do easy tasks and males do specialized tasks of high value. Teachers stereotype behavior in schools, textbook hidden curriculum showcasing the gender based stories and images create a foul environment for female students to survive in (Lukasik, 2021). Limited access to education is the main concerned issue of inequality in education. Gender inequality is seen during the selection of course and course offering also. Some institutions categorize certain courses as only for male and female students. Also, family restrictions on female career choices restrict their professional growth. Education for girls is not considered important because of the typical mindset that one day girls have to get married and they will not get anything in return for spending on girls education. Also those females who are getting education are not allowed to choose the desired career. In rural areas the access to education for girls is very low and the dropout rate is high. The reason being a girl has to get involved in domestic chores and also have to take care of the younger siblings staying at home.

According to a UNESCO report 132 million girls across the world are not having access to education (UNESCO, 2021). The most targeted reason for women illiteracy is gender discrimination and patriarchal belief system. Gender discrimination in education is noticed from primary to higher education (Zajackowska, 2008). According to census 2011 reports India's childhood literacy rates only 65% of girls are able to read and write. According to the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), poverty and traditional cultural practices encourage gender discrimination in education in India. Other reasons include marriage at a young age that eventually lead to high dropout rates of women from academics. Family plays an important role in the upbringing of a child, the family itself is considered as the primary school of a child. The uneducated mother's put a negative impact on their children. The negative status of women in the family affects the child's thought process and creates false ideology to be carried on leading to inter-generational issues.

Thomas P Dick and Sharon F Rallis (1991) in their study analyze the perception of male and female in choosing different career courses based on the survey they concluded that both male and female career choices are very much influenced by the encouragement they get from society especially from their parents and teachers. Xenia Dalmau Valls...et al (2017-18) in their study marked the

influence of gender stereotypes that affect the adolescents in making career choices. They concluded that both male and female are stereotyped in a certain way but females are more stereotyped and bound to choose education fields that are socially accepted and constrained to make undesired career choices. Yitting Lin (2021) discusses the scenarios of gender discrimination in schools and how girls are socialized in academic institutions in a wrong way. Jiarui Luo (2022) discusses the gender disparities in education especially the discrimination seen choosing the STEM career options and only 3% of females choose a career in Information and Communication Technology due to the biased thoughts of society considering women less suitable for technical fields. Gender based prejudice often kept women off stage from STEM majors. Elaine Unterhalter...et al (2022) analyze the measures and indicators of gender disparity in education. They talked about how the operationalisation of capability approach can reach gender equality in education where the individuals need to convert various resources into capabilities and make them functionable. According to the National Institute on Aging funded longitudinal aging study in India (LASI) 2023 report it explains how education and gender inequality made Indian women have worse late life cognition. In lower and middle class families women have worse cognition than men during older phases of life due to gender disparities they have come across in achieving education (nia.nih.gov). Sarkar...et al (2017) in their study mention that parents who believe and follow high traditional practices and are more bound to cultural norms have a gender based attitude towards education. They consider education important for boys rather than girls to maintain the status quo in society and community.

### **Different Forms of Gender Inequality in Female Education**

STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) educational fields are more prone to gender disparities. Such fields are considered high value professions and males are forced to pursue them whereas females are encouraged to pursue only arts and humanities (Beed...et al, 2011). This is due to the gender based ideologies that man is the breadwinner of the family and are considered more strong and responsible to handle such courses whereas females are idealized as weak and less intelligent. This mentality is most common in society and creates a bridge between male and female education and career choices due to no encouragement females lack interest towards science fields (Archer...et al, 2010). Sahin (2013) talks about the better privileges that are given to males than females in a society due to patriarchal beliefs. Females are believed to be less competent than males this often creates a gender gap in society.

Parents are the primary source for education to children and they are considered as the first school of any child. Children start learning gender rules firstly from parents themselves. In India mostly educational decisions are taken by parents till now. Many parents did not allow their daughters to opt for higher educational courses and considered it a waste of time and money, according to

them as at a certain age their daughters have to get married and too much education is of no use to them. According to Keller (2010) students observe their teachers and are influenced by their ideas. The ability of math and reasoning is the most common stereotype associated within the education system. Teachers admire boys more and give them special attention for solving mathematics problems in class. This affects the choice of subjects and career by female students. Such biases not only lead to low grades of female students but also block various career opportunities for females in higher education.

According to Molla (2016) gender based socialization is another important issue in the education system. Socialization is basically the interaction of individuals to each other in society. Gender socialization is the way people create gender socialized roles according to their biased beliefs and practices and pass it on to the next generation. Parents' biased gender beliefs regarding education inherit the same within their children. In schools the way male and female students are treated by teachers promote gender based socialization. The way females are portrayed in textbooks as a housewife and males as working men often encouraged biased socialization of students.

### **Consequences of Gender Inequality in Female Education**

Lack of economic opportunities is the most common consequence of gender inequality in education for women. Women who lack quality education also lag behind in employment. Education is considered to be the determining factor in getting quality employment opportunities. In this global era of Information Technology women who lack technical education find it hard to get work and are unable to become financially independent. Decreased intergenerational academic performance is another consequence of gender inequality in education. Through various researches conducted it is seen that children of uneducated mothers especially girls have low enrollment ratio in schools and higher education compared to those whose mothers have gained education or good professional education. When mothers lack quality education they are found struggling with the society norms and how to get their daughters quality education. Health issues are another consequence of gender inequality. Gender disparities in education for women also lead to poor health conditions for them as well as their children. Health literacy itself is a term that signifies individuals ability to gain and understand basic parameters about health and hygiene and therefore take required decisions towards healthcare. Illiterate women are at high risk of domestic and sexual violence. Uneducated women are unaware of their rights and often struggle to face violence in families.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This paper summarizes the various gender inequalities towards females in education such as less career opportunities and low enrollment in schools due to patriarchal beliefs and cultural practices. Various misconceptions about women restrict

them from getting desired education. The illiterate women not only affect the upbringing of children but also promote the male dominant attitude in the family. Various measures have to be taken to reinforce gender equality such as providing economic help to poor people by giving free textbooks and stationeries and food so that educating a girl child is not a burden to them. Educational facilities such as hostels for female students on low cost should be made available. Teachers should also encourage female students to go for higher education and choose their desired career. Positive school and college environment also helps in promoting female education. The patriarchal beliefs and practices should be stopped. Girls should be provided more opportunities to receive education. This would help in breaking the norms of gender disparities in schools and colleges. Various seminars and programs should be organized to break the gender discrimination related ideology and the family members and teachers should not impose discriminated career options to the students.

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