

GENDER INEQUALITY IN INDIAN FAMILIES

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Anil Kashyap

Introduction

Gender inequality is a social and cultural problem, as well as a political and economic one, where discrimination is made between men and women. However, the issue of gender inequality primarily highlights the poor condition of women, where they face discrimination and bias in society and even within their own families. Often, they are given fewer rights and opportunities compared to men. In both home and society, women suffer from exploitation, disrespect, and discrimination.

Gender inequality is a social, cultural, political, and economic problem that exists worldwide, but is particularly prevalent in Indian families. Women face discrimination and bias in society and even within their own families, and are often given fewer rights and opportunities compared to men. This discrimination starts from birth, with many families preferring to have sons over daughters. In ancient India, women had equal rights and participated in religious ceremonies, but with the arrival of Muslim, Mughal, and colonial powers, gender inequality increased. Although practices like purdah and sati have been abolished, women are still treated as objects of consumption and exploited in various ways, starting from their own families. Every family wants a son, considering them the light of the house and the carrier of the family lineage, while daughters are seen as outsiders and a loss.

Gender Inequality based on Death

The death of a boy in a family is met with profound grief, whereas the death of a girl is often treated with relative indifference, as if it were a mundane occurrence. When a woman loses her husband and becomes a widow, she is subjected to various

Anil Kashyap

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology Raghunath Girls PG College Meerut

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social restrictions, including wearing white clothing and adhering to dietary limitations. In contrast, when a woman passes away, her husband is not similarly stigmatized or referred to as a widower, and he continues to receive the same respect and freedoms as before. However, when a girl loses her husband, she is often viewed with suspicion and disdain by society. Similarly, the death of a girl is frequently dismissed as a normal event, whereas the death of a boy is often lamented as if the family's guiding light has been extinguished, its support system has collapsed, and its future heir has been lost.

Gender Inequality based on Food

Women and girls are frequently subjected to discriminatory food practices, including being served low-quality or leftover food, and receiving smaller portions that put them at risk of hunger and malnutrition. They are often denied involvement in food selection, resulting in limited access to their preferred meals. Furthermore, women and girls are often expected to eat after men and boys, leading to reduced consumption time and frequent hunger. Girls are often provided with meals lacking essential nutrients like protein and vitamins, whereas boys are given priority access to nutrient-rich food, perpetuating a cycle of nutritional inequality.

Gender Inequality based on Sleep

Women and girls frequently suffer from suboptimal sleep quality, characterized by recurrent awakenings or insomnia, leading to sleep disturbances. They often receive inadequate sleep, culminating in fatigue and stress. Compared to men and boys, women and girls are often expected to remain awake for extended periods, undertaking responsibilities like household chores or childcare. Furthermore, sleep is often not prioritized for women and girls, who may be required to work late into the night or perform domestic duties.

Gender Inequality based on Work

Women and girls are disproportionately responsible for household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and childcare. They are often expected to perform tasks that are time-consuming and physically demanding. Despite their significant contributions, their household work frequently goes unacknowledged and unrewarded. Meanwhile, men and boys are often discouraged from participating in household work, exacerbating the burden on women and girls.

Gender Inequality based on Health

Women and girls often face challenges in accessing healthcare including: Limited availability of health services in remote areas or economic constraints, Misdiagnosis or neglect of their health issues, such as heart disease or mental health concerns, Receiving lower quality treatment and care, including ineffective medications or less experienced healthcare providers, Being denied opportunities for health education and awareness, leaving them uninformed about their health, Having their health issues underestimated and underdiagnosed, Girls often receive

less effective treatment and are prescribed fewer medications compared to boys, Additionally, women and girls may experience: Stigma and discrimination in healthcare settings, Limited access to specialized care, such as reproductive health services, Inadequate address of social determinants of health, such as housing and nutrition, Insufficient data collection and research on women’s and girls’ health issues. Lack of representation in healthcare decision-making and policy development.

Gender Inequality based on Marriages

Girls and women often face unequal rights and responsibilities in marriage, including: Forced early marriage for girls, while boys are allowed to marry at an older age. Denial of marriage rights, such as the right to consent or retain their name after marriage. Unequal value placed on women’s roles in marriage, such as household chores or childcare. Denial of post-marriage rights, such as property ownership or child custody.

Gender Inequality in Sports & Childhood Games

Discrimination in recreational opportunities between boys and girls is a common problem. Girls are often engaged in household chores and other responsibilities, while boys are encouraged to participate in sports, games, and other leisure activities. This inequality deprives girls of opportunities to relax and have fun in their free time. Furthermore, girls are often restricted from participating in safe and suitable recreational activities, such as going out at night or spending time with friends. To change this, we need to understand the role of women and provide them with equal rights, so they can also relax and have fun in their free time.

Literature Review

Birth-based gender inequality occurs when boys are born, there is a festive atmosphere with celebrations such as drumming, fasting, and organizing entertainment programs. However, when girls are born, there is no such celebration and festive atmosphere, which reflects the society gives less importance to girls. This inequality is deeply rooted in society where boys are often given more importance and rights than girls from the moment of birth. Girls and boys are confronted with social norms and expectations around gender roles, access to resources and opportunities. Gender inequality is perfectly woven into the fabric of society and family, stemming from sexism, prejudice, and discrimination against individuals based on their sex and gender.

Amratya sen: 2001

“A well-balanced diet is essential for all individuals, regardless of age or gender, to maintain optimal health and strength. Women are disproportionately affected by malnutrition due to their generally smaller and less muscular body composition, requiring approximately 25% less energy daily. However, their nutrient requirements remain equivalent to those of men, necessitating a diet rich in nutrient-

dense foods. Unfortunately, these foods, such as fruits, vegetables, and proteins, are often unaffordable due to their high cost.

Pregnant and breastfeeding women, in particular, require access to nutrient-dense foods to sustain their energy and nutritional levels. Inadequate access to healthy food increases the risk of complications during pregnancy and childbirth. In developing countries, poor maternal nutrition is a leading cause of infant and young child mortality. Adolescent mothers and their children are also particularly vulnerable to malnutrition.” **Action Against Hunger: 2020**

Approximately 12% of women wake up every night to care for others, which is double the number of men who report doing so. This added responsibility can take a toll on mental health: women in this group are 9% more likely to lose sleep due to caregiving concerns and 13% more likely to lose sleep due to household responsibilities compared to men. Women with children are three times more likely to lose sleep due to concerns about their responsibilities as caregivers compared to non-parents, and slightly more likely to lose sleep due to these concerns than men with children. **S Naagle Yang: 2022**

The mental load, which disproportionately affects women, encompasses a broad range of responsibilities that men often neglect. These include managing details, logistics, planning, organizing, and maintaining social connections through “kinwork”. The weight of these responsibilities can be overwhelming, leading to exhaustion and demoralization when they go unrecognized. Unlike tangible tasks like laundry, the mental load is invisible until its absence causes chaos or emotional turmoil. Furthermore, it involves emotional labor, requiring women to monitor and manage the emotional well-being of those around them, ensuring everyone’s needs are met. This added burden can be equally draining, leading to frustration and disillusionment when ignored. **Teery Gross: 2020**

Societal structures in numerous countries perpetuate gender inequality, leading to women’s marginalization and oppression. This unequal social order restricts women’s access to and control over healthcare resources, rendering them more susceptible to health issues than men. Women in low-income areas face significant barriers, including limited access to education and employment, further exacerbating health disparities. Consequently, women often experience lower life expectancy, poorer nutritional outcomes, and reduced immunity to communicable and non-communicable diseases compared to men. **WHO: 2012**

Gender inequalities are linked to distinct health-risk behavior patterns and lifestyle choices, access to healthcare, gender biases in health systems and resource allocation, and disparities in health research and clinical data collection. Gender-related differences in health outcomes persist throughout life, resulting in avoidable mortality and morbidity rates. Women are at a higher risk of depression and anxiety-related disorders. Women also experience delayed diagnosis and less aggressive

treatment of heart diseases. Breast, cervical, and uterine carcinomas are the most prevalent cancers in women, yet are largely preventable, highlighting disparities in healthcare access. Men, on the other hand, are more susceptible to violence-related mortality rates (accidents, homicides, substance abuse), suicide (with a three to four times higher risk), and diseases related to health-risk behaviors (lung cancer, cirrhosis). Research suggests that these inequalities may be linked to gender stereotypes. **Sesliya Bes: 2021**

Child marriage is a major obstacle to gender equality, denying girls their fundamental rights and harming their health and economic prospects. It contributes to high rates of adolescent pregnancies and childbirth, increasing health risks for young girls. In low- and middle-income countries, pregnancy is a leading cause of death among girls aged 15-19. Child marriage and adolescent pregnancies limit girls' educational opportunities, and its prevalence varies across countries and cultures, often driven by poverty and limited access to education. Climate change can exacerbate this issue, as families may resort to coping mechanisms like child marriage when facing income losses due to climate-related events. **Divyanshi Vadhva: 2023**

Gender inequality means that women and girls are treated as second-class citizens, denied their human rights, and devalued because of their gender. Child marriage is an expression of this gender inequality. Patriarchal systems - controlled by men - value girls based on their virginity, imposing limits on female sexuality and reproductive choices. This can lead to controlling how a girl behaves, dresses, where she goes, who she sees, and if she marries, whom and when. Her sexuality can be criminalized, and access to care and information blocked. In many places, girls who engage in relationships outside marriage or become pregnant are shamed for disgracing their families or even barred from attending school.

Fran Amroso: 2002

Female athletes have been shattering expectations for over a century. Yet, society remains stuck on the same old, gender- based misconceptions. These misconceptions remain a significant problem, despite countless determined female athletes disproving them. This is because myths about women in sports shape the environment in which girls and women grow up and strive for excellence. The consequences of negative attitudes towards female athletes include higher dropout rates, fewer athletic opportunities for women and girls, and gender inequality in many sports. Outdated perceptions are also linked to pay disparities and underrepresentation of women in influential positions in corporate sponsorships, media, and the sports industry.

Kevin Guyeen: 2022

Research Methodology

This research paper is based on secondary data, which has been collected from various sources, including:

- National and international research Journals

- Research articles
- Newspapers
- Books
- Government reports
- Data available on government websites

This study relies on existing literature and data to explore the issue of gender inequality in India.

Conclusion

There is no problem that does not have a solution. Gender inequality in India can also be addressed with good intentions and appropriate solutions. The government can do more to reduce gender inequality in India through policies. However, it is also our responsibility. The government should provide free higher education to girls to empower them. The government should also develop various policies to prevent gender-based violence and gender-selective abortion. NGOs can play a crucial role in reducing and eventually eliminating gender inequality in India. The 'Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao' campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi can only be successful if the society's attitude towards women changes at the grassroots level. This change should start from the family, where gender inequality begins at birth. If the family does not discriminate between boys and girls, then positive results will be seen. The same respect, rights, and powers that are given to a boy should also be given to a girl. Only then can gender inequality be addressed. Since the family is the smallest unit of society, if gender inequality is addressed here, then positive results can be achieved.

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