

Gender Inequality

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Introduction

In terms of social injustices, gender inequality has been present for as long as anyone can remember. Since the beginning of time, the male gender was and has been considered superior in many societies. Laws were put in place to silence women, portraying them as replaceable objects with no human rights subsequently hindering them from reaching their full potential. Consequently, various movements worldwide set in to try and strike a balance between both genders. From the UK suffragette movement in the early 20th century that helped women win the right to vote, all the way up until the #metoo movement that started in 2006, women have had to fight for centuries to be seen and not heard in this patriarchal society.

The Google definition for Gender inequality is: 'The social process by which men and women are not treated as equals.' and in this essay I will aim to explore, more in-depth, the different factors contributing to the disparity between genders and how it can potentially be solved. Typically, gender inequality arises from distinctions that are either empirically or socially constructed. However, the true cause of Gender inequality is far from simple. For example, one theory, known as the materialistic theory, states that gender inequality comes from the different ways in which women and men are bound by society's economic structure (Giddens et al. 2016). This theory continues to argue that the control and distribution of a community's valued resources is an essential factor in establishing power and wealth. The women's only role is being a wife and mother and so they are devalued and denied full access to the valued resources within the community. Historically, women have had the lowest education levels compared to men even though this is changing as time goes on.

Society liberates men from domestic responsibilities allowing them to be a part of several economic responsibilities within society and giving them full access to highly valuable resources which gives rise to male privilege. Furthermore, occupational segregation leads to gender inequality in the workplace meaning that women are underrepresented in senior positions or careers in their workplace (Giddens et al. 2016). For example, globally, women's representation in national parliaments is only 23.7 % and they are just 13 per cent of agricultural landholders. Furthermore, women in Northern Africa hold less than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural sector (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021).

The impact of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality overwhelmingly affects women and it not only leads to unequal chances in the workplace and an extremely low representation of women in various sectors, such as politics but also leads to low literacy levels and poverty among women who have not been given the same opportunities as their male counterparts. On average, women earn less than men in the same job. The gap between men and women's pay for full-time workers was 9.4% in April 2015 and since then there has been little change overall. Women are also disproportionately represented in lower-paid jobs such as caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning etc. – areas where rates of pay are historically lower. Additionally, women are less likely to be employed or offered promotion compared to men. (Gender inequality – Effect of inequality on groups in society – Higher Modern Studies Revision – BBC Bitesize, n.d.)

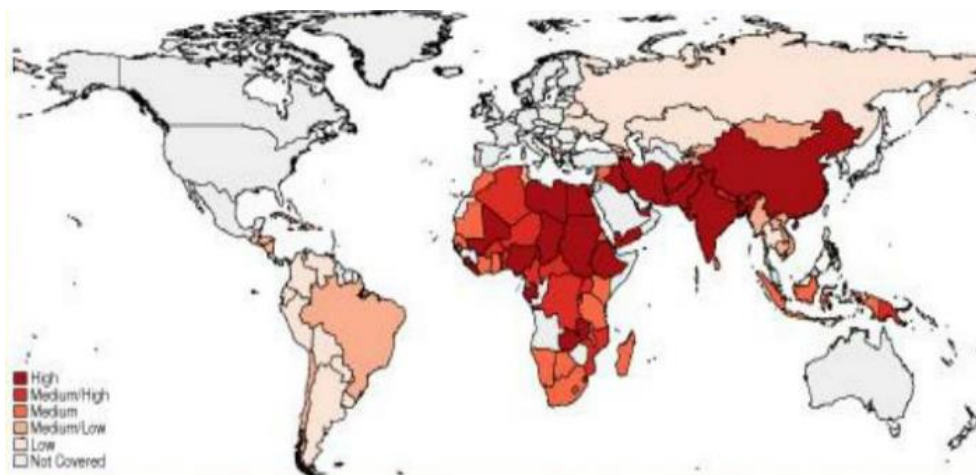
The inequality doesn't end at employment. Women have less body autonomy and globally, only 52 % of married women make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care. In addition to this, 750 million women and girls were married before the age of 18 and at least 200

million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone FGM (female genital mutilation). One in five women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months. Yet, 49 countries have no laws that specifically protect women from this violence (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021). These statistics are very alarming as they are a violation of the universal declaration of human rights. Article 1 states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights (Nations, 1948). So why in 18 countries, can husbands legally prevent their wives from working? In 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal inheritance rights; and 49 countries lack laws protecting women from domestic violence (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021). Article two adds that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms outlined in this declaration regardless of sex. These are basic human rights for men and women together – not just men.

It may seem that only women are affected by inequality but that is not the case. Even though gender inequality affects women more, men are still affected by gender discrimination too. Traditional stereotypes that men need to live up to can be emotionally and mentally damaging. There's a reason why, in the UK, three-quarters of suicides in 2018 were among men (4,903 deaths), which has been the case since the mid-1990s (Suicides in the UK - Office for National Statistics, 2019). For example, there is enormous pressure to be a 'real man' and to financially provide as the sole 'breadwinner' of the family while still showing physical and emotional strength. From a young age, boys are told 'boys don't cry' pushing the notion that showing any sign of weakness or crying makes them less manly. In every sense, men have as much a right to equality as women but society often assumes that men have no problems in their lives but worldwide men are stuck between two expectations: societies and their own.

A geographical analysis

Below shows a shaded map called the 'Geography of Inequality' which clearly highlights how high gender inequality is in some countries compared to other countries.



Source: OECD: Organisation for Economic Cooperation & Development

As can be seen by the diagram above, gender inequality is in need of resolving more in least developed countries. This is most likely because in these countries' survival depends on natural resources such as land and the unskilled physical power a human can possess. In countries where survival depends on tough agricultural and manual labour, male labour is always valued higher than female labour making females inferior in these communities. Subsequently, families want to keep their sons, marry off their daughters and take in a daughter-in-law to enable reproduction. This trend can be seen in parts of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Africa, and so on. However, in more developed countries, such as the United Kingdom, Norway, Switzerland etc. educational development and industrialisation means that manual labour is less important. Therefore, the value for male labour

and female labour is very similar and this has a more positive impact on social norms determining gender equality in that country

In many countries in parts of Africa and Asia, child marriages (which are highest in: India, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Bangladesh) are a big issue and highlights the inequality of the sexes in these countries. These young girls, between the ages of 9 and 18, are unable to finish school and are often sold to abusers who mistreated them physically and sexually leaving these girls powerless in the hands of their husbands. In many of these communities, it's clear that women and girls are not seen as humans but as a business deal (Worth of a Girl: hope and survival of child brides., 2020). However, gender inequality doesn't only affect those from poor backgrounds or religious/tribal customs. It also affects rich and developed countries such as America where more than 200,000 children under 18 have been legally married in the U.S. since 2000 (Voice for girls, 2018). Despite their development, China still has a big problem with sexism: During the one child policy, China suffered a female infanticide with millions of sex-selection abortions taking place that have led to at least 71 million women being missing from society (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021).

Ironically India is also one of the top countries with the highest gender inequality with 47% of girls marrying before the age of 18, less than 30% of girls graduated from 10th grade and only 42% of married women were involved in decisions about their health (Voice for girls, 2018). I say 'ironically' because on one hand the country's main religion, Hinduism, worships the female goddesses and on the other they treat women brutally. In 2007, 17-year-old Laxmi was brutally attacked with acid simply for refusing a marriage proposal to her mother's boss. A 32-year-old man (One India News, 2007). After hiding her face for almost 6 years, Laxmi spoke out on her experience leading to the public outrage and triggered growing efforts to stop acid attacks and abuse against women in India. Sadly, this is one of many cases of violence against women as in the Indian society a women's status is less valued than a man. In many families, the birth of a girl receives less attention and affection that is bestowed upon a boy when he is born. Worse still, in many parts of India, a girl's birth is met with silence and sometimes sorrow.

Although it may seem that gender inequality only affects these countries I've mentioned above. That is far from true and there are many laws in place, globally, that show that gender inequality is in need of resolving. Some notable mentions include: Russia's parliament voting in favour of an amendment that decriminalised domestic abuse and excused this by stating that the family is sacred and so the state has no right to intervene in people's marriages, not even to protect women at risk. Given that, it's not surprising that a woman is murdered by an intimate partner every 40 minutes in Russia. In Sudan, the law accommodates for girls as young as 10 to be married off by their guardian and 1 in 3 girls are married before they turn 18. In Iran, married women need a permission slips from their husband to apply for a passport and even to travel abroad. Lastly, like in many middle eastern countries, in Jordan honour killings for an alleged crime still happen but many countries show leniency towards murderers who use this as an excuse. In Jordan, article 340 of the penal code allows judges to give reduced sentences in cases where a murder was committed in response to adultery or during a fit of anger. (8 sexist laws you won't believe still exist, 2017). These are just a few of the countless laws that exist worldwide that restrict a women's freedom.

Barriers stopping progress

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Implications of COVID-19 on Gender Inequality

COVID-19, unsurprisingly, potentially reversed and limited the progress that has been currently made on gender equality. The outbreak worsened existing inequalities affecting women and girls around the world and led to a sharp increase in violence against girls and women worldwide as many women were trapped at home with their abusers when lockdown measures were put in place. Statistics show cases of domestic violence increased by 30% in some countries (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021) and unfortunately many women can't even access the help they need as a majority of helpline services are suffering from cuts and restrictions. Additionally, women were affected more than men by the economic impacts of the pandemic, as more work in insecure labour

markets. Nearly 60 % of women work in the informal economy, putting them at a higher risk of falling into poverty (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021).

Violence against women and girls was already a big problem in society and domestic violence has spiked since the first lockdown. Security and money worries created a lot of tension during the pandemic and these strains were worsened by the cramped and confined living conditions of lockdown (UN women, 2020). Also, due to social distancing, requests for help (phone counselling etc.) have been decreasing instead of increasing. For example, in Italy, a domestic violence helpline reported receiving 55 % fewer calls during the first few weeks of march as many women found it difficult to ask for help during the lockdown (UN women, 2020). These statistics are very worrying as it shows many women cannot access the resources needed to help them escape the violence at home. Furthermore, women and girls weren't able to reach people (community workers, teachers, health workers etc.) that can recognise abuse and give them the support needed. In many countries, women and girls didn't have access to a phone or internet services that they could safely use at home as they were being closely by their abuser or other family members.

How Gender Inequality can be eradicated

The solution to ending gender inequality cannot be a 'one size fits all' as the biggest challenge is making sure it is addressed in all aspects, for instance, education, politics and business as it's the only way we can mould future generations and ensure success regardless of your gender. Additionally, different countries have different priorities and varying levels of gender inequality; Other factors need to be taken into account such as distinctive traditions, customs and the economical state of the country. In the western world, they are farther ahead in terms of gender inequality than in developing countries. However, some actions can be done universally to combat it.

Involving women in politics and offering higher education to girls in areas that have low literacy rates among women can also help combat gender inequality. All governments worldwide should try to provide more scholarships to girls, increase their employment to accommodate more women entering the workforce, change harmful laws limiting female rights (raising the age of consent, passing anti-child bride laws and raising the legal age of marriage to 18 etc.) and establish stronger protection programmes for women. Non-government organisations such as the National Alliance of Women's Organisations should continue educating society on the adverse effects of gender inequality and how it can be curbed (Jayachandran, 2015). One way of doing this is by utilising the use of different social media platforms (Instagram, YouTube etc.) as information can then be spread more quickly and efficiently for millions of users, young and old, to share and see.

Moreover, in countries struggling the most with gender inequality (but not limited to), communities need to be educated in equality: a woman isn't an object to be used and abused then thrown away when she is no longer needed for another person's benefit. The government should encourage families to allow their daughters to enter education and provide supports for these women that choose to do so. Men and boys need to be taught to form respectful relationships with women and girls and work alongside them instead of against them. Jobs need to be provided in communities for women so they won't feel the need to rely on a man or get married for financial support. Girls should be discouraged from dropping out of school early and if any girl is being coerced into marriage, their school should have services that they can call so support can be provided for them such as safe shelters for vulnerable girls/victims.

Lastly, Interviewers should limit themselves from asking questions like: "Do you plan on having kids/How many kids do you have?" or "Are you married?" and ask questions such as: "What are you passionate about?" or "What do you think needs to be done to help company can grow?" instead. In every country, the government should ensure that gender equality is added into all schools' curriculums and is made part of the education and training, so, from a young age, individuals are aware they can choose their life paths or careers regardless of sex. Even young people, like myself, have a role to play. We can start and fundraising campaigns to stop harmful cultural practises like

FGM or child marriages while raising awareness. Society, as a whole, needs to be more open to women having equal opportunities as men and establishments should take more initiative to hire and support women.

Conclusion

Despite the fact progress is being made and women have come a very long way, there is still lots to be done, especially within communities that have gender inequality engrained deep into their traditions and customs. Unfortunately, social norms and discriminatory laws remain in place in multiple countries, women are still underrepresented in political leadership, and 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021).

Nevertheless, there have been many improvements over the years. In Southern Asia, a girl's risk of marrying in childhood has dropped by over 40 % since 2000. More than 100 countries have taken action to track budget allocations for gender equality and the rates of girls between 15-19 who are subjected to fgm (female genital mutilation) has dropped from 1 in 2 girls in 2000 to 1 in 3 girls by 2017. (Gender equality and women's empowerment, 2021). As a young woman living in Surrey, I sit in a position of privilege knowing my parents and my country do everything to support me and my goals but it angers me that this isn't the case for so many women and girls around the world. It's upsetting to me that the gender of a person can play a role in determining your wage or lifepath – whether good or bad. I can't even begin to imagine what it would be like to live in a country that is male dominated and where women have virtually no rights.

To conclude, girls deserve the right to drive if they want to, refuse a marriage proposal, choose to start working over starting family and use their own name. It's up to everyone (not just women) to allow women to make their own life choices, making sure they can have all the same courtesies men have and vice versa. A woman shouldn't feel the need to cover her whole body in fear of being assaulted every time she leaves the house. As a society, we should continue with our group efforts to ensure gender equality by having communities and their government work together, then eventually women and men will be treated the same and given equal opportunities in life.

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