iJRASET
International Journal For Research in Applied Science and Engineering Technology

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR RESEARCH

IN APPLIED SCIENCE & ENGINEERING TECHNOLOGY

Volume: 8 **Issue:** XII **Month of publication:** December 2020

DOI: https://doi.org/10.22214/ijraset.2020.32688

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International Journal for Research in Applied Science & Engineering Technology (IJRASET)
ISSN: 2321-9653; IC Value: 45.98; SJ Impact Factor: 7.429
Volume 8 Issue XII Dec 2020- Available at www.ijraset.com

Growing Responsibilities of 'Women' Bridging Gender Discrimination in India

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Abstract: ***Purpose: Women have always been ill-treated and underrepresented in our society. They were only confined to household chores and not given platforms to showcase their invaluable hidden abilities. They were always considered inferior to men, thereby widening the gender discrimination rate. But today, women are not only getting ample opportunities but also creating new ones, thereby curbing gender discrimination. Women are efficiently managing both personal and professional responsibilities. The present work thus, aims to study how the growing responsibilities of women are leading to bridge gender discrimination in India.***
Design/methodology/approach: The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. The three aspects on which women's responsibilities have been analyzed are education, employment, and work-life balance.
Findings: From the study, it was found that as compared to the past, women today are excelling in all the three major aspects, education, employment, and work-life balance. At the same time, various constraints still limit gender equality to prevail in society.
Originality/Value: Though there have been many studies conducted on gender discrimination with respect to education, employment, and work-life balance, only a handful of studies have concentrated on all three aspects simultaneously. Thus, the present study bridges this gap and adds to the existing literature.
Keywords: Gender Discrimination; Gender Equality; Education; Employment; Work-life balance.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since times immemorial, society has been male-dominated and women have been looked down upon. The responsibilities of both the genders were fixed, the male being the head and earning member of the family while females were confined to household chores and taking care of husband, children, and family. Women were ill-treated in the name of different customs. They were tortured and harassed at mental and physical levels. Though they were the victims, they were not able to raise their voice against injustice done to them. Thus, gender discrimination was so much prevalent in society. Gender discrimination started at the root level of the society, that is, family. Girls were considered a burden and providing them with even primary education was considered a waste of money. From childhood, siblings were discriminated against on the basis of genders. But after the neo-classical period, people started to realize the importance of literacy among women. From then onwards, girls were sent to primary schools from which ways to higher education paved to them. With good knowledge and education, women started to look for employment opportunities. The education blended with employment helped in boosting women's empowerment in society. Initially, women were not offered good job opportunities. Gradually, women made their space and today, they have marked their presence in every field. From corporates to military, and from teaching to aircraft, women are moving together in coordination with men to explore and excel in all the opportunities coming their way. Amidst these growing responsibilities, women have proven themselves to be good managers in life. They are efficiently managing personal responsibilities with professional ones, setting up the road to curb gender discrimination. Thus, a bright picture of growing women's responsibilities bridging gender discrimination is emerging.

The present paper aims to evaluate the growing women's responsibilities reducing gender discrimination on the parameters of education, employment, and work-life balance.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Huang et al. (2020) summarised the gender inequality in scientific careers across countries. To collect the data, the full publishing career of 7,863,861 scientists was reconstructed from their publication record of Web of Science (WoS) database between 1900 and 2016. The gender of over 3 million authors from 83 countries was analyzed. Using bibliometric analysis, it was found that with the increase of participation of women in science, there is an increase in gender differences in productivity and impact. Another significant difference found in the publishing career was career lengths and dropout rates. Women are underrepresented and publish fewer articles throughout their careers.

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García-González et al. (2019) studied gender inequality for the insufficient representation of women in leadership positions. For collecting the data, a questionnaire based on the British Athena Survey of Science, Engineering, and Technology was distributed among the researchers in Spain. It was found that women perceived a greater degree of discrimination than men. This scenario was found to be consistent from junior to senior positions in both public and private research institutes in all disciplines. Comparing with UK-based questionnaires, it was found that researchers of Spain felt that women and men are treated equally at work, but the scenario is different when it comes to maintaining the home. Also, men occupied the majority of senior positions.

Khanal (2018) studied gender discrimination in the education expenditure in Nepal. According to the study, net enrolment rates have increased at all levels of schooling. But some other kinds of discrimination, such as the process of socialization in the classroom, discriminating behaviors, and the related, have been observed. To identify the level of discrimination in the education expenditure, data was collected from three rounds of Nepal Living Standard Survey conducted in 1995-96, 2003-04, 2010-11. Samples from rural and urban households from all three geographical regions were collected. The obtained data were analyzed by applying regression analysis. The findings showed a discrepancy in education expenditure between boys and girls. It was found that the total expenditure on boys was slightly more significant than those of girls.

Gupta (2017) examined gender discrimination in working organizations in India. The study analyzed how and to what extent gender inequalities are incorporated in the organizations that employ educated professionals. For collecting the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with men and women scientists of two pharmaceutical laboratories. It was found that two types of norms and practices prevail to reproduce gendered normative order. First being the practices that favor men, and the second being socio-cultural norms that devalue women in a public place and thus increasing male domination. Because of this, only a few women reach up to the level of leadership and decision making.

Barthelemy et al. (2016) studied gender discrimination among graduate students in physics and astronomy. To address the issue of gender discrimination in physics and astronomy, 21 women graduate in physics and astronomy were interviewed, and their opinions were thoroughly examined. It was observed that a subset of women did not report any kind of gender discrimination, but the majority of them experienced subtle insults and microaggressions. Some of them reported experiencing sexual harassment, gender role stereotypes, and overt discouragement.

III. REASONS FOR GENDER DISCRIMINATION

Gender discrimination has remained an alarming issue for a long time. It is high time that women should take an independent stand for their rights and share responsibilities in bridging the gap between the two genders. There is a long list of causes that go around into various parts of the world, giving rise to umpteen forms of gender discrimination. Some of the fundamental reasons leading to gender discrimination are:

A. Psychological Reasons

Going by the psychological makeup of both genders, women are hit by a double-edged sword in terms of discrimination. Owing to their ego, which has been fed through generations, males continue to immerse in habits of discriminating against women and enjoy greater rights and freedom. On the other hand, females' superego shaped faultily by their experiences sets everything that happens around them as the "right thing." This starts a new loop of discrimination where the young females are targeted by both the above groups, with hardly anyone to confide into. Further, women tend to discriminate against other women subconsciously because of the years of evolutionary biases and heuristics formulated by their brains.

B. Socio-economic Reasons

There are many societies worldwide where females are consistently objectified and deemed unfit to work for themselves, pushing them harder into the black hole of poverty. Many women lack property rights and therefore are dependent on their families in one way or another for their survival.

Lack of education or the inability to pursue higher education is another contributing factor that spirals women deep into the dark pits of eternal discrimination.

There are certain sections of societies where it is considered unethical for women to work post getting married. Although such conceptions have been changing, the "ideals" continue to remain the same in the remote parts of the world, making it difficult for women to push through these stagnant cycles of so-called ethical reasoning. However, their immediate society is fair to it because of a lack of safety and increased crimes against women, which are severe issues in many parts of the world.

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C. Biological Factors

Many people cite the biological reasons behind the discrimination imposed upon women. While it is true that anatomically, there are certain limitations on females in terms of physical availability, there are hardly any jobs where women have not proven their worth to the world. Yet, the gender gap in pay is not uncommon and quite persistent in every part of the world. Adding to this are excuses formulated by hiring firms and individuals that discriminate in the payment based on the maternity experience and responsibilities.

IV. FACTORS LIMITING GENDER EQUALITY

Over the years, the world is getting together in achieving gender equality, and women are considered to be equivalent to men. But it will take another century for the people of the society to accept women equally as men. Some of the factors that limit gender equality:

A. Inequality In Education Accessibility

Despite awareness of educating a girl child, women still have less access to education as compared to men. Around 58% of women do not get access to primary education, making about 2/3 of the illiterate population. The scenario is worst in rural areas. Sometimes girls are not educated at all and married at an early age. There are many other barriers that women face in the path to be educated. In rural areas, people think that ultimately girls have to handle the house, then what's the point of educating them. When the family size increases in low or middle-class families, boys are preferred for education over girls. So, when the girls are not educated, their future gets affected, and they face problems in job opportunities.

B. Inequality In Employment Opportunities

Although there are women who have become successful entrepreneurs, they are still underrepresented in jobs. They do not have the same employment opportunities as men. In jobs, they are paid less for more work, suffering long-term unemployment. This condition is due to their dual role of being a worker and a caretaker. Some jobs are only offered to men, not to women due to gender biases. It has been reported that only six countries in the world provide women with equal work rights. Women are usually employed for lower-paid occupations, and thus, they make less progress. Therefore, due to gender biases, women do not get equal employment opportunities despite being eligible for the position.

C. Occupational Segregation

Although women are working in all fields today and in some roles as the leading one, the significant factor limiting gender equality is the segregation of jobs. This is due to the belief system of the society. Society predetermines that certain jobs can be performed better by men, not by women. Thus, if a woman succeeds in getting that job, she has fewer chances to be promoted to a higher position. Due to segregation, they are sometimes sexually harassed too. Thus, the mindset of society plays a significant role in discriminating jobs that only a male can do.

D. Inaccessibility to Legal Protection

Despite so many laws for protecting women from discrimination, over one billion women do not have protection against sexual violence or economic violence. Some countries even lack protection against harassment at the workplace, at school, and in public. These places become unsafe without legal protection, weakening the decision-making ability of women. This, further, forces women to quit their jobs or opt not to pursue their dreams, affecting their earning potential. Even the laws in favor of women sometimes act as a barrier in their path. Whenever they face discrimination of any kind and file a complaint against it, they are asked so many questions, the fear of which makes them decide not to file the complaint—further, the cost of litigation act as a barrier in the case of poor women. Thus, not having proper legal protection is also a factor limiting gender equality.

E. Racism

Gender inequality and racism go hand in hand. Women have been disadvantaged in lower payments for an equal amount of work and have inadequate medical facilities access. Racism comes under societal identity. In some societies, race, color, ethnicity, and national origin play a significant role. Women suffer a lot in these societies due to a lack of education and employment opportunities. For example, women of the Romani population face discrimination compared to the men of their society. The same goes for the Dalit women in India. They are given lower-level jobs and harassed in the name of racism. In some countries, there is a pay gap between white women and black women. Thus, racism is another factor that limits gender equality.

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F. Mindset of Society

This factor has vast importance in terms of gender equality. The mindset of society is something that can set a woman free or can bind her like slaves. Despite women progressing in every field, people believe that some jobs can be performed only by men, not by women. This mindset creates a massive gap in gender equality.

V. BRIDGING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN INDIA

A. Education

Gender discrimination has been one of the biggest problems in Indian society. Despite women contributing to various fields and achieving heights, there is still discrimination between males and females. It is well known that education leads to empowerment, which creates a secure social environment where women can make individual decisions. Thus, different kinds of skills are embedded in the learning programs which enables them to find good opportunities. Studies show that when women enter into higher education, they are motivated towards the professional education stream. To bring women into this stream, a merit-based education system is introduced. Scholarships are given to women to encourage them for higher education and thus offering professional education.

The government of India has launched various schemes to educate women. One such scheme is "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao," under which the government is focused on preventing gender-biased abortion, ensuring proper growth of a girl child, and providing equal opportunities for the education of a girl child. Free elementary education is offered to every young girl to bridge the gender gap. Another scheme is "Balika Samriddhi Yojna," under which an annual scholarship between Rs. 300 to 1000 is given to girls till the 10^{th} standard to promote the education of girls. (Balakrishnan, 2019)

Another scheme launched by the Indian government is the "CBSE scholarship scheme," in which girl students scoring above 60% can avail scholarship for their senior secondary education. Some other schemes, namely "National scheme of incentives to girls for secondary education," "State government schemes for girl child," promote girl education, bridging gender discrimination in our society. In every five-year plan, there is a strategy to educate the girl child and decrease gender discrimination. The "District primary education program" launched by the Central government has reduced the dropout rates to less than 10% and has reduced gender gaps to less than 5%. (Nath, 2019)

Apart from these schemes, there are various other aspects on which government and different organizations are working. One such aspect is providing residential facilities to women to travel to the location of their choices to pursue higher education. Sometimes women do not have the option to study the subject of their own choice in their place. In this direction, various women universities contribute to support them so that they can relocate and study. This facility is not only available in India but in foreign countries too. The government under the student exchange program gives opportunities to women to study abroad. Another requirement to bridge to gender gap even after pursuing higher education is to upgrade them with changing trends. For this, the organizations provide women with continuous training in order to introduce them to the changing trends and technologies.

B. Employment

Despite managing household chores with professional work, women in Indian society face various kinds of discrimination at work. Their potential to contribute towards the economic growth of the country is huge, but it has been found that 94% of women are part of the unorganized sector, while only 6% of them work in the organized sector. As per the UNESCO report, there is a large difference in the salary structure of women when compared to men working in the corporate sector. In Indian companies, women are paid less than one-third of the payment of men annually. But in the new trend of gender equality, around 30% of women work in the IT sector where there is no inequality in terms of payment, but they do face challenges when it comes to promotions. These corporate sectors encourage women to work by providing them a healthy and safe environment. For the progress, they provide time-to-time training so that the performance of women employees can be upgraded.

Another way in which the corporate sector bridges the gender discrimination gap is by providing opportunities to women who want to resume their work after pregnancy. By the "skills to education framework," women are made employable and then offer them continuous learning opportunities to upgrade their skills. This has proven to be a boon for those women who have taken a break and want to start their career again. (Ganesh, 2013)

Apart from various initiatives taken by the organizations to bridge the gender gap, the government has also launched different schemes in order to provide women with employment and empowering them. One such scheme is "Mahila-E-haat," an online marketing platform to showcase products and services rendered by the women. Women can register themselves on the website and showcase their work to the broader market.

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Another such scheme is "working women hostels," under which food and lodging facilities are provided to women who relocate in order to work outside their home town. "STEP" (Support to Training and Employment Programme) is one of the government's initiatives under which skills are provided to women to make them employable or entrepreneurs. Some other schemes, namely "Mahila Shakti Kendra," "Sukanya Samriddhi Yojna," are focused on empowering women by providing them skills and finance. (Robert, 2019)

Thus, gender discrimination in employment can be eradicated by helping women to grow in a friendly working environment, bridging the payment gap, providing similar job opportunities, and encouraging them to fulfill their dreams, supporting them in this direction. All these schemes and campaigns will only work once society changes, keeping both males and females on the same level.

C. Work-life Balance

The roles played by men and women in Indian society are socially justified by culture or religion. Working women in Indian society means that they have to take care of professional work and family responsibilities. They need to maintain a balance between their work life and personal life. If one is unable to maintain this balance, there rise conflicts as both are equally important. Thus, work-life balance is one of the most challenging issues women face in the present scenario.

Women now are playing an important role in organizations as they are working at higher positions. But the mindset of Indian society has not changed yet. Women are required to take care of their families with their work. To maintain the harmony between these, organizations implement such norms to maintain a work-life balance. This, in turn, reduces work-life issues enabling woman employees to be more effective at work. There are various friendly policies, such as flexible working hours, part-time jobs, telecommuting, parental leave, and on-site child care facilities. Other benefits that are provided by the organization to bridge the gender gap are of health and well-being of women employees. They provide health insurance for their women employees as well as their dependents, personal holidays, access to programs and services to keep them physically and mentally fit so that they can maintain a work-life balance. Yoga and stress management workshops are also organized. Further, the conventional package of family-friendly policies comprises benefits designed to reduce tension between work and family.

Apart from the benefits provided by the organizations in order to bridge gender discrimination, there are certain policies defined by the government, which helps women to maintain a work-life balance. One such policy is maternity benefit, under which an employer cannot make a woman work for six weeks after the delivery or miscarriage. If a woman has worked in an organization for 160 days or more, she is entitled to take leave of 26 weeks up to two children and 12 weeks for more than two. They can also work from home under such conditions depending on the nature of work and mutual understanding between employer and employee. Also, the maternity benefit amount is to be paid by the employer before the due date of her delivery. They are entitled to a medical bonus. Thus, women are benefitted by the organizations and the government to maintain a friendly work-life balance. By keeping a healthy work-life balance, they can take care of their family and can take challenging roles in their jobs too.

VI. CONSTRAINTS TO OVERCOME

Women have been the victim of gender discrimination for ages. So, it is only apparent to increase their participation in bridging the gap between the two genders and break this vicious cycle for the upcoming generations. The following list discusses some of the plausible solutions to this-

A. Standing Up for Each Other

As lame as it may sound, it cannot be stressed enough how important it is for the women to stick together and stand for each other when the situation arises. We must start a new wave of brain programming and stop reiterating the mistakes we made in the past. This can only be done by women who are in better positions in society and are socio-economically safeguarded.

B. Calling out the Discrimination

This might be the only thing many women can do but even if it is the only thing that can be done, calling out against discrimination is the most basic thing that must be done. It is through years of struggle and whistleblowing that women have been able to secure some level of rights at many places, and the momentum can only be maintained if the fellow women help this cause to propagate.

C. Negotiating for Pay

Since pay difference might be the most common format of discrimination at the workplace, the women must learn to bargain for their end and question the authorities if they witness any disparities in the pay of other employees purely based on their gender.

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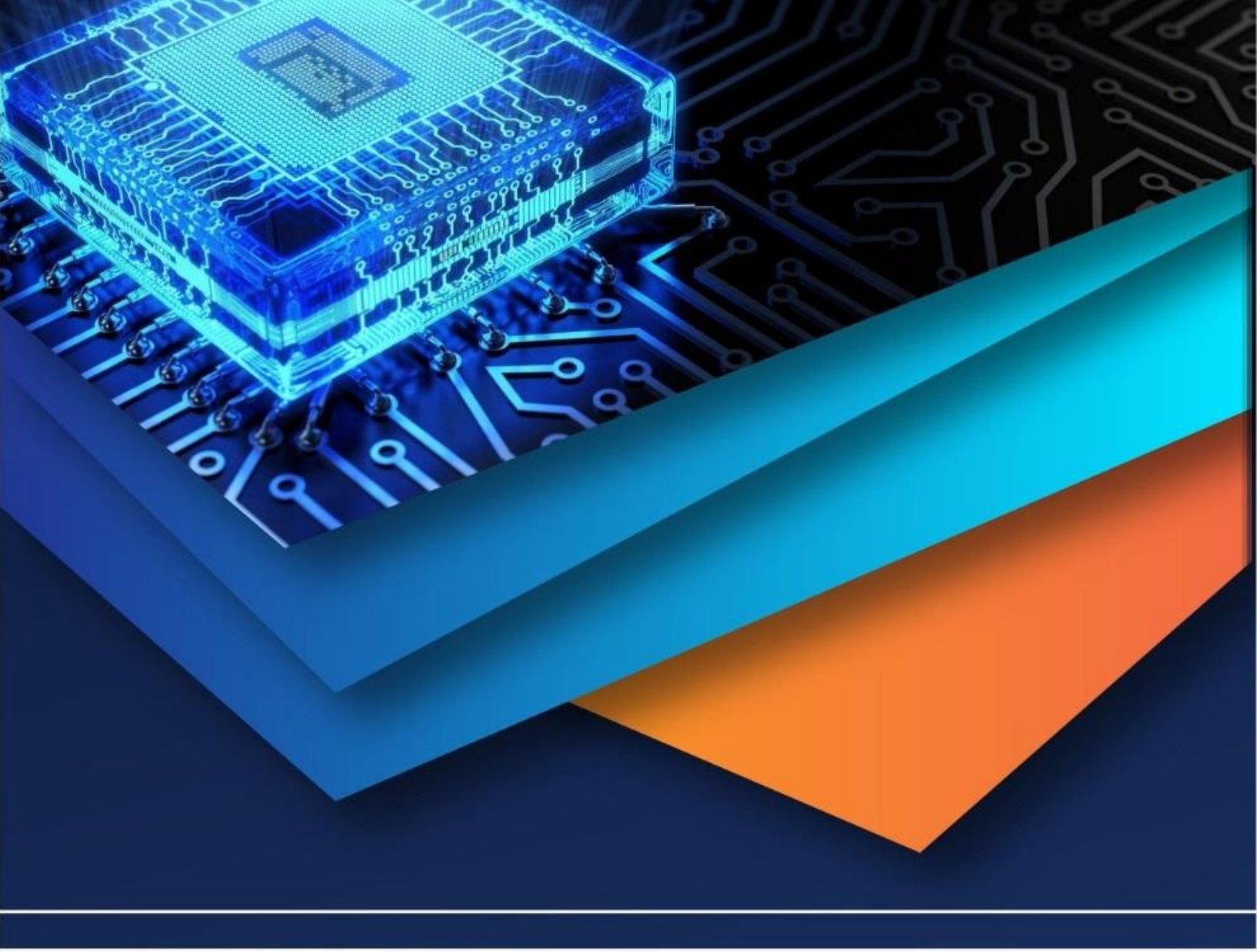

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