

GENDER STEREOTYPING AS A CAUSE OF GENDER INEQUALITY: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Discrimination and inequality towards women is not a myth, but a reality; it exists and exists everywhere. It may be noted that, gender stereotyping is like a disease and it is as old as the world in cosmologies, mythologies and legends. If we look into deeply this mental psychology of gender stereotype has been there in every society and women have been facing this mental sickness on the basis of their so called 'Gender.' It is well known for all of us that 'Sex' is biological and 'Gender' is Constructed, and it is a matter of ill-luck that this construction is made by our society. A gender stereotype is, at its core, a belief and that belief may cause its holder to make assumptions about members of the subject group, women and to some extent men. In contrast, gender stereotyping is the practice of applying that stereotypical belief to a person and basically they are the women who are victimized to a great extent.

Key words: Cosmologies, Discrimination, inequality mental sickness, stereotype, victim.

Introduction

“Moving beyond recognition that gender stereotyping is an obstacle to women’s rights to meaningful progress in implementing human rights obligations to address harmful stereotypes and wrongful stereotyping will require all of us -- treaty bodies, special procedures, states parties, civil society, academics and many others ---to give this issue the serious attention it deserves.”

OHCHR commissioned report- ‘Gender stereotyping as a human rights violation’

Inequality against women could be seen in every society since traditions. Earlier the women issues were regarded or treated as a private matter. It was only after the ‘women’s movement’ and ‘the committee of elimination of discrimination against women’, it was termed as an international issue.

Women have fought long and hard to question and redefine traditional gender roles and gender inequality that exist in the society, yet all in vain. Education system has not made any desirable change in the attitudes and mindsets of the people.

Gender Stereotypes exist in all cultures and societies. All of us, no matter what our gender identity might be, are affected by the stereotypes surrounding us. Gender stereotype is a generalized view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or the roles that are should be performed by men and women. Gender stereotype can be both positive and negative; for example, ‘women are nurturing’ or ‘women are weak.’

Objectives of the study

- To understand the role of gender stereotyping in the society.
- To evaluate the causes of gender stereotypes.
- To critically examine the role of books, institutions, traditions and media in promoting negative stereotyping among children.
- To identify possible solutions to eliminate stereotyping.

Methodology

The paper is both descriptive and analytical. The author is mainly relying on secondary sources. Data are collected from books, scholarly articles, reviews, official sources and so on. No field study or empirical analysis is attempted in this paper.

What Gender stereotype is?

Gender stereotype is a crude simplification about the character and behavior of individuals based on their traditional roles and sexual characteristics. It can be both positive and negative, but they rarely communicate accurate information about others. When people automatically apply gender assumptions to others regardless of evidence to the contrary, they are perpetuating gender stereotyping.

Gender stereotyping refers to discrimination based on one's sex. It may involve unfair treatment or infringement upon the rights of certain sex requiring them to act in a certain manner.

It is a stubborn problem worldwide. Many people recognize the dangers of gender-stereotyping, yet continue to make these types a generalization. It is greatly influenced by culture and upbringing.

Gender stereotyping has been clearly identified in the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) as *"something that impedes the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of women"*.

Stereotypes that exist in the society

In our society, whether we are women or men includes a complex mix of beliefs, behaviours and characteristics. How do you act, talk and behave like a woman or man? Are you a feminine or masculine, both, or neither?

Also, in the existing culture, the ideal male is perhaps seen as competent, stable, tough, strong, accomplished, non-conforming aggressive and is the leader. The male stereotypic role is to be the financial provider. He is also to be assertive, competitive, independent courageous, and career-focused; hold his emotions in check.

The ideal female is perhaps seen as warm, emotional, kind, polite, sensitive, friendly, fashionable, gentle, soft and is the follower. Traditionally, the female stereotypic role is to marry and have children. She is also to put her family's welfare before her own; be loving, compassionate, caring, nurturing and sympathetic; and find time to be sexy and feel beautiful.

This ideology of ideal female and ideal male shows the division of the society into the binaries of male and female, the female being the dominated part.

Our practice since traditions

"Traditional attitudes by which women are regarded as subordinate to men or as having stereotyped roles," perpetuate widespread practices involving violence or coercion (General Recommendation No.19).

Cases of Sati show that the wife's place is with her husband in life and in death. Women's helplessness and powerlessness contribute to the idea of the wifely duty and obligation to follow her husband onto the funeral pyre.

Causes of gender stereotypes

Here we would like to highlight some basic causes of gender stereotype--

1. Family prepares its members for social life, forms gender stereotypes and perceptions of division of labor between the sexes.
2. An important part of one's identity and individuality, gender roles are formed through socialization.
3. Today, not only the family, school and workplace influence such socialization, but also through media messages including television, Information Technologies, music and films; religions and cultural institutions; and even toys.

4. Both traditional and new socializing forces serve to preserve and transmit gender stereotypes.

Women are more likely than men to be poor and illiterate. They usually have less access than men to medical care, property ownership, credit, training and employment. They are far less likely than men to be politically active and far more likely to be victims of domestic violence.

5. Many institutions of society reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. In the media for example, women predominantly appear as objects of action, as victims and as caretakers, whereas men are

usually portrayed as creative, strong, clever and full of initiative. In this way, it transmits stereotypes about men and women.

6. Gender stereotypes persist throughout childhood, with parents choosing and rewarding, certain stereotypical activities for their children. Studies have shown that parents treat even new born boys and girls differently.

7. Scientific evidence shows that children learn gender stereotype from adults. Socializing agents—parents, teachers, peers, religious leaders and the media—all pass gender stereotypes down from one generation to the next.

8. Gender roles are socially constructed, that they are learned at an early age when children are exposed to certain things, via television and the internet, advertising and education, children's cartoon, children's books shaping their awareness of how girls, boys, men and women should behave. *Books are often the primary source for the presentation of societal values to the young child" (Arbuthnot, 1984).*

9. Children are born into a society that already has an established culture, with norms, values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural expectations of its individuals based on their gender. It is from this society that children's ideas are formed, a society where inequality in skill being perpetuated and where the superiority of one gender and the inferiority of the other is often commonplace.

Impact of gender stereotype

The worst seen impact that gender stereotype creates is the gender-based violence against women. The World Health Organization defines Violence against women as: *'physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, including battering, sexual abuse of children, dowry-related violence, rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution and violence perpetuated or condoned by the state.'*

Historically, women's productive roles have been ignored and under-valued which shows gender inequality. And this inequality keeps the women weak and suppressed which leads the domination of the male population and placed the women at risk.

Stereotypes do not give us accurate information about others, so it can have extremely damaging effects on girls and women throughout their entire life, leading to discrimination and to socio-economic disadvantages in old age.

They suffocate personal expression and thwart individual and professional development. The evidence indicates that children learn this kind of typecasting at home, at school and through the media. In this way, they are passed on from one generation to the next.

Women are getting hindrances to achieve gender equality in media, advertising, economy and decision making due to negative gender stereotypes.

Young children believe they can be anything and can do anything. But, gender stereotypes limit their dreams and experiences. For example, if a child enjoys doing something that is different from the usual, that child might feel embarrassed or uncomfortable. That child might feel that there is something wrong with him or her. Gender stereotypes have an overwhelmingly negative impact on children. Much research indicates that the reason boys and girls behave differently is likely a result of very early environmental influences, many of which parents are not even aware of.

When girls are taught that they are supposed to play with dolls, they are less likely to become a professional athlete or a doctor. The threat of being stereotyped can lower girl's math performance and boy's verbal performance.

What needs to be done to counter gender stereotypes?

The phenomenon of gender stereotypes needs to be countered and fought in multiple areas: in languages and vocabulary, laws and practices, mind-sets of people, justice systems, media and education, in different organizations and public authorities, in enterprises, and in individuals.

Empowering women

Reproductive empowerment- Focus on identity and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives. The ability of women to control their own fertility is absolutely fundamental to women's empowerment and equality. When a woman can plan her family, she can plan the rest of her life

Economic empowerment- More women than men live in poverty. Economic disparities persist partly because much of the unpaid work within families and communities falls on the shoulders of women and because they face discrimination in economic sphere.

Educational empowerment- Rigorous and corrective education curriculum development imparting education since early childhood to all levels and considering both boys and girls should be accompanied by educational campaigns for adults. Development of special educational tools at all levels, including use of e-learning.

Political empowerment- Social and legal institutions still do not guarantee women equality in basic legal and human rights, in access to or control of land or their resources, in employment and earning, and social and political participation. Laws against domestic violence are often not enforced on behalf of women. This need to be checked.

Empowerment throughout the life cycle- Experience has shown that addressing gender equality and women's empowerment requires strategic interventions at all levels of programming and policy-making

Media and publicity: Correct representation of women in media and publicity and their proactive roles as media persons in changing perceptions

Prevent gender stereotypes from affecting children:

The weight of scientific evidence demonstrates that children learn gender stereotypes from adults. Therefore,

- Making attributes carefully— Behavioural attributions are the explanations we give for someone else's behavior and the causes we offer for what someone else does. Studies have shown that parents tend to make behavioural attributes along gendered lines.
- Limiting media consumption for children-- Limiting child's television consumption to quality programming that is not designed exclusively for boys and girls.
- Encouraging cross sex play— Encouraging children to play with the other sex by scheduling play dates with siblings can help to minimize the effects of gender segregation.
- Choosing toys wisely— When children play with gendered toys, they learn gender roles. Moreover, avoid making gendered attributions for the way children play.

Make gender unimportant:

A society in which gender is constantly made salient, it can be nearly impossible to eliminate all gender in stereotyping.

- Children first and foremost learn the salience of gender from their parents, and if parents can avoid limiting their child's activities in the first few years of life, it is unlikely that the child will be strongly negatively influenced by future lessons in gender roles.
- Finally, gender equality need to be promoted. It denotes women having the same opportunities in life as men, including the ability to participate in the public sphere.
- Gender equality is fundamental to the realization of human rights and is indispensable for advancing sustainable development. The recognition that women's rights are human rights and the women experience injustices solely because of their gender. Therefore, gender equality must be a development priority in its own right.
- To achieve this, removing discrimination in opportunities for women allows them to achieve equal status to men. For this, elimination of gender stereotypes existing in the society is very much essential..

Conclusion:

Gender stereotyping is the main contributor to violence against women in the society. It has been a high profile issue in advocacy efforts on women's human rights. Children deserve to live in a world where all possibilities are open to them and in which they don't feel limited by their gender. Eliminating negative gender stereotyping in the child's early years will be a lasting benefits to girls and boys, influencing an educational and social development that is more positive in maintaining their self- esteem.

There is a need for the recognition that the path towards a prosperous future cannot be accomplished if women's insights and resources are not utilized. The patriarchal society, India's brand of religiosity and ingrained ideas, social norms, culture, men's attitudes and mindsets towards women need to be reformed.

India need to combat discriminatory practices and violence against women that were rooted in traditions and cultures. Actions from courts and police will not suffice if the community remains defiantly opposed to change. We need to improve the understanding of content and meaning of states obligations to address harmful stereotypes and the practice of wrongful gender stereotyping .

By veering away from the stubborn gender stereotypes, socially labeling children and focusing on more unified, non-gender biased ways of living, the gender-based violence against women can be eliminated.

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