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Girls are weighed down by restrictions, boys with demands — two equally harmful disciplines. (UPSC - 2023)

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Essay :

"The first act of violence that patriarchy demands of males is not just to unleash violence toward women. Instead, patriarchy demands of all males that they engage in acts of psychic self-mutilation, that they kill off the emotional parts of themselves."

This quotation of Bell Hooks — a prominent

feminist clearly expresses that roles and expectations that are enforced by patriarchy — can be interpreted as society — have adversely impacted both boys and girls. This framework of society has undermined growth of both gender. Girls are often weighed down by restrictions in the form of ban on joining the educational institutions, ~~forefront~~ forced to indulge in traditional chores. Similarly, growth of boys is weighed down by imposing a set of demands on them. ~~and such as~~ They are often expected to become breadwinners and also pressurized to gain academic excellence. These restrictions and demands are harmful for both of them as they perpetuate gender disparities and ~~also~~ severely undermine career choices. In order to break these molds, several steps can be taken. These include, imparting awareness through education, encourage positive role of media.

To begin with, girls are weighed down by imposing educational constraints. In many societies, education of girls encounters social restrictions. Their right to education is violated and they are being deprived to excel in their career. For instance, the Taliban government in Afghanistan has imposed ban on girls to join educational institutions. This ban has deprived the half of population of Afghanistan from getting education. Thus, restricting the opportunities for girls in the society.

Further, girls are expected to conform appearance standards in a society. In traditional and even in modern societies, girls are expected to conform appearance standards. Their inclusion at certain places is often subjected to their appearance styles. The cases of France and Iran are pertinent to be mentioned. In 2022, France announced ~~that~~ ban on wearing hijab — a veil — in their educational institutions. This decision limited participation of Muslim girls in educational institutions as they are expected to wear veil.

Similarly, a law in Iran mandates girls to completely cover their body. Violation of this law recently resulted in death of Mahsa Amini of Iran. In either case, girls are being restricted to conform a code of dressing. Thus, violating their freedom of choice which results in limitation of opportunities for girls. Hence, girls are weighed down by expectation to abide by appearance standards.

Furthermore, girls are also weighed down by restriction to adhere to traditional chores. According to Judith Butler, society has divided roles on the basis of gender. Girls have been given role inside homes and they are expected to do home chores. When women try to deviate from their traditional roles, they are encountered with restriction. For instance, in 2023, some women organized a cycle rally in Gilgit Baltistan. However, they faced several hurdles including allegations of westernized propaganda. The reservations from traditionalists became so intense that ^{the} women were forced to call off the rally. Thus, girls were restricted to participate in that rally which

restricted
to their physical and mental growth along with restriction on participating in such kinds of sports activities. Therefore, conformity to traditional chores weighs down growth of girls.

imposition of
~~constraints~~ Moving forward, the demands on boys weighs them down. Firstly, boys are expected to become breadwinner for their families. As described in the previous paragraph, the division of roles in a society has imposed burdens on boys too along with showering privileges on them. Boys are expected lead economic duties of their family. This burden, particularly in low-income countries, has weighed boys down. Resultantly, they engage in even high risk activities to seek economic opportunities. The boat tragedy of 2023 is an apt illustration. In August 2023, a boat carrying at least two-hundred ~~Russia~~ passengers who were illegelley trying to enter Eurpe Sank near Spain. Among them, fourty hapless were the Pakistanis. Their families told that they were going to find employment opportunities in Europe. This explains that

breadwinning demand of society has weighed boys down.

Secondly, boys are also weighed down by the demand of pursuing academic excellence. The masculine traits — as has been described by society — demand boys for higher grades and excellence in their educational career. Educational excellence is largely described as a form of success for boys. Families often pressurize them for that pursuit. The bollywood movie, "Three- Idiots" aptly describes this sad story. Farhan Qureshi — a central character in the Movie — wants to pursue his career in photography as a career of his choice. However, his father remains adamant that he should become an engineer which is a field of privilege in society. This pressure undermines his passion for photography and pushes for academic excellence. Thus, weighing boys down by the demand of ~~high~~ academic excellence.

Thirdly, boys are ~~also~~ demanded to ~~ed~~ practice masculine traits. Masculine traits include assertive attitude, strength, among others. Boys are expected to abide

by these traits. Failure to conform with these traits lead to heaping terms such as un-masculine. The case of Hazim Bhagwar is relevant for substantiation. Hazim Bhagwar, a civil servant, who is also a fashion-designer wore clothes and fashioned himself in such a way the netizens found that fashion a queer. They criticized him as unmasculine and ~~other~~ uttered derogatory remarks on social media. These remarks, of course, attract psychological trauma to and also remind individuals to conform to masculine traits even if they wanted to live life according to their wishes. Thus, weighing boys down.

Now, moving forward to shed light on implications or harms these demands and restrictions inflict on the individuals. First of all, these restrictions and demands perpetuate gender disparity. Girls are being deprived of getting education. This infringement of right reduces their chances of attaining opportunities in this technology-dominated world. Whereas, boys are being demanded to become-breadwinners of their family. This obligation has curtailed their free-mobility and freedom to do their activities. At the same time, boys are gaining economic and other opportunities.

Thus, increasing their prospects of becoming independent and self-sufficient while making girls economically-dependent on boys. Thus, restrictions and demands ~~are~~ have been perpetuating gender-disparities.

Further, the restrictions and the demands are adversely impacting the ^{mental} health of both the genders. Reinforcement of traditional roles and values are compelling boys to conform societal demands. Similarly, restrictions on ~~educa~~ girls have been depriving them of attainment of their dreams.

During her speech at Johannesburg, South Africa, in December 2023, Malala Yousufzai - the noble laureate - spoke about the mental trauma of girls residing in Afghanistan. She stated that women are committing suicides as they are undergoing mental stress due to curbs of the government. Similarly, when boys are unable to meet demands, they undergo mental stress. A recent Pew Research Survey in December ²⁰²³ revealed that youth - sixty one percent boys - in Pakistan are pessimist due to unemployment. Hence, these restrictions and demands are resulting in mental stress.

However, certain recommendations are proposed that can be implemented to decrease magnitude of restrictions on girls and demands on boys. Disseminating awareness through education is the first in that regard. Education is a powerful tool that can be utilized to inculcate awareness and breaking the intransigent attitude of the individuals. The case study of feminists' struggle is important to be analyzed. If one goes back to the past century, the sensitivity to issues of LGBTQ was minimal. It became to appear when the feminists published their work and gender studies as a subject began to rear head. Currently, issues of LGBTQ are important debates in the American society. The US President in his speech at the UN General Assembly also highlighted LGBTQ's problems. This all became possible due to awareness imparted through education in the American society. Hence, education can play pivotal role in breaking restrictions and demands and also enable girls and boys to thrive in society.

Further, role of media can also become instrumental in pursuit of the cause. In the contemporary world, so media, particularly social

media plays central role in shaping perception and behaviours of individuals, according to Islamabad Policy Research Institute's report, "Harbid Warfare: Media and Perception Management". ~~Issues~~ Issues such as ban on girls' education and reinforcement of traditional values can be discussed and dismantled through positive use of social media. Recently, a video made by Behbood Foundation — an NGO based in Karachi — went viral. The video depicted that two families. ~~The~~ One family was forcing male child for getting education while the second family stressed for attainment of education for boys and girls. The crux of video was that when after divorce both returned to their father's home, the literate girl was economically independent while the illiterate was dependent on her brothers. This video was viewed by at least eleven million and shared by three hundred thousand users. This shows the positive use of media and its role for dismantling restrictions and demands.

Fostering diverse social interest for success can be another step in the right direction. According

to Strain Theory of Criminology, it is a society that defines kinds of success and means to achieve the successes. When scope of success ~~would~~ ^{will} be broad, the inhabitants of society would delve into finding different means to achieve. For instance, when in a traditionalist society, attainment of job by boys and girls will be treated equally and ascribed as success by the family, the prospect of girls joining the outside work will also be higher.

To sum up, both boys and girls are weighed down by demands and restrictions, respectively. Girls are restricted to remain adherent to traditional values and ~~are~~ divested of right to learn. Similarly, boys are weighed down by demands. They are forced to accustom masculine traits and compelled to pursue academic excellence. These restrictions and demands have brought harms such as deteriorating mental health and restricting employment opportunities for girls. Several steps, however, can be taken to reduce burdens and restrictions on boys and girls. Incentivizing positive use of media, fostering multiple social interests to gain success are some of the proposed solutions. Growing role of social media is aptly serving the cause. It is expected that the changes would be apparent in near future.