

Essay: Gender Equality: A Popular Slogan

Outline

Thesis statement: Gender equality continues to be a popular slogan, driven by ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence, discrimination and the objectification of women

Introduction

I. Definition of gender

II. An overview of the struggle for gender equality

III. Factors behind gender equality as a popular slogan

A. Gender-based violence

i. Domestic violence

i. 40 percent to 50 percent of female homicides in India result from dowry dispute, UN study

ii. Over 2,000 women are killed each year in dowry ~~violence~~ related

violence incidents in Pakistan, Human Rights Commission of Pakistan

2. Physical violence

i. 5,000 honor killings internationally per year and 1/5th of total honor killings happen in Pakistan each year, Honor based violence awareness network

ii. Acid attacks

3. Sexual violence

i. More than 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation in 30 countries of Africa, Asia and Middle East, WHO

4. Psychological violence

i. In 2017, at least 1136 women in the EU committed suicide due to repeated psychological partner violence

B - Gender-based discrimination

1 - Social discrimination

a - Educational disparity

i. Two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women, UN

ii. Girls are more likely to be

out of school at a lower secondary age than boys, regardless of wealth and location of the household, WB survey in developing countries

b. Anti-female bias in health

2- Economic discrimination:

i. Almost 40 percent of women ^{in Pakistan} who are not working, report that they were not granted permission to work by male

family members, Asian Development Bank

ii. Almost 90 percent of the CEOs at the largest US corporations are men, Fortune 500

iii. 68 percent of the women are the minimum wage workers in the US, Institute for Policy Studies

3- Political discrimination

i. More than three-quarters of seats in parliament are held by men, UN Women

C. Objectification of women

IV. Way forward to achieve gender equality

A. Strengthening legal reforms and their enforcement

Iceland case study

B. Introducing comprehensive education and public awareness programs

HeForShe movement by UN

C. Empowering women economically

Rwanda case study

V. Conclusion

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, at the current rate of progress, it will take 162 years to close the political empowerment gender gap, 169 years for the economic participation and opportunity gender gap and 16 years for the educational attainment ~~gap~~ gender gap. The time to close the health and survival gender gap remains undefined. These staggering figures highlight the need to keep making strides to achieve the yet unaccomplished goal of gender equality, as this is essential to combat gender-based violence that takes the form of domestic, physical, sexual and psychological abuse. Whether it is a woman from a patriarchal society like India, or it is someone residing in a region like Europe that

is one of the world's most advanced regions, she is still subjected to all these kinds of violence. In addition, women continue to be discriminated socially, economically and politically. An organized struggle for gender equality began nearly 200 years ago and since then four waves of feminism have come. Although, some extent of parity has been achieved through these movements, much more remains to be accomplished.

Therefore, gender equality continues to be a popular slogan, driven by ongoing prevalence of gender-based violence, discrimination and the objectification of women.

This essay begins with defining the term "gender." It then provides an overview of the struggle for gender equality. The next section explains the factors behind gender equality as a popular slogan. It then gives suggestions to narrow the gender gap.

Gender refers to socially constructed characteristics of men and women—such as norms, roles and relations of and between groups of women and men. Gender norms, roles and relations vary from society to society and evolve overtime. They are often upheld and reproduced in the values, legislation, education systems, religion, media and other institutions of the society in

2

تاریخ:

which they exist. Gender interacts with but is different from sex. The two terms are distinct. Gender is a social construct, as aforementioned, while sex is a biological characteristic. Sex is mainly associated physical and physiological features including chromosomes, gene expression, hormone level and function, and reproductive and sexual ~~anatom~~ anatomy. It is assigned at the time of birth, and is often categorized as females and males. Those with natural variations in biological characteristics that do not fit traditional definitions of male and or female are termed intersex. Hence, Hence, although related but gender and sex are different concepts.

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A formal and organized struggle for gender equality began in the nineteenth century, particularly with the women's suffrage movement, which sought to secure voting rights and broader social and legal equality for women. The key feminist movements have been crucial in furthering the cause. First-wave feminism started in the 19th century and early 20th century in the UK and the US. Originally, it focused on the promotion of equal contract, ~~and~~ property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage. However, by the end of 19th century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. First-wave feminism came to

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an end when in the US when the nineteenth amendment to the US constitution was passed in 1919, granting women the right to vote in all states. Second-wave feminism began in the early 1960s and lasted through the late 1980s. It focused as much on fighting socio-cultural inequalities as political inequalities. Third wave, which began in the 1990s, emphasized diversity and intersectionality; it recognized that gender equality is intertwined with other social justice issues like race, class and sexual orientation. Fourth feminist movement began in 2010. It is characterized by digital activism and a strong focus on intersectionality. This wave

addresses issues like sexual harassment, body positivity and the influence of social media on gender norms, among others. The fourth waves continues to be relevant and active today.

The preceding paragraph has discussed the struggle for gender equality over time. The next section sheds light on the factors behind gender equality as a popular slogan.

Gender equality is a popular slogan because of the prevalence of gender-based violence. It takes many direct forms, including domestic, physical and sexual violence. Domestic

violence refers to a pattern of perpetrator behaviors used against women. This pattern consists of a variety of abusive acts occurring in multiple episodes over the course of relationship. This ~~may~~ range from crimes such as physical assault to other battering acts, such as name calling and denying women's access to family resources, among others. Dowry death is one of the most serious forms of domestic violence with South Asia as being one of its strongholds. According to a UN study, forty to fifty percent of female homicides in India result from dowry dispute. In case of Pakistan, over 2000 women are killed each year in dowry related

violence incidents in the country (Human Rights Commission of Pakistan). Furthermore, women are also subjected to physical violence, regardless of whether they have any relation with the culprit or not. Acid attacks and honor killings are two of its most heinous forms. Women face acid attacks due to many reasons. They include rejecting marriage proposals, giving birth to daughters instead of sons, and not bringing enough dowry to their in-laws' houses. Girls and women are also primary targets of honor killings.

These gender-killings are the murder of a family member for the purported reason that the person has brought dishonor or shame upon the

3/15

family. According to Honor based violence awareness network, there are 5000 honor killings internationally per year. This honor-based violence is not uniformly distributed across the globe. Unfortunately, 1/5th honor killings happen in Pakistan per year, which is one of the highest in the world. Women are also victims of sexual violence, which can take many forms under different circumstances. Whether it is the war zones where they become victims of sexual slavery or the workplaces where they are prone to face demands for sexual favors in return for job placements and promotions, they are constantly abused. Women and girls are also trafficked

: 20

for the purpose of sexual exploitation, including purposes such as prostitution and pornography. Female genital mutilation, one of the most abhorrent practices, is still prevalent today, particularly in Africa, the Middle East and Asia. According to WHO, more than 230 million girls and women alive today have undergone female genital mutilation in 30 countries of these regions. Hence, this violence that is inflicted upon women because of their gender explains why gender equality is a popular slogan.

Psychological violence is another form of gender-based assault disproportionately faced by women across the globe. ~~This~~ It includes perpetrator's

13
10
threats of harm that may be directed towards women or others important to women. The coercive and controlling behaviors, emotional abuse and economic violence are some other common ways in which psychological violence is imposed upon women. It is associated with various short-term and long-term consequences to victims' overall well-being. It creates a sense of fear and diminished self-esteem in victims; they can suffer from ~~an~~ anxiety, depression and post traumatic stress disorder. Furthermore, mental abuse hinders the capacity to seek out and afford general and specialised healthcare services, leading to a deterioration of their physical health. In addition,

victims of coercion and controlling behaviors are often isolated from their social networks, friends, families and systems of support and remain heavily reliant on perpetrators. Ultimately, all these impacts ^{of psychological abuse} sometimes reach to the point where victims commit suicide. There is an increased of women taking their lives due to psychological violence. According to European Institute for Gender Equality, in 2017, at least 1136 women in the European Union committed suicide due to repeated psychological partner violence.

This form of violence is an insidious problem. Compared to other forms, ~~it is~~ psychological violence is more difficult to identify. Therefore, consequently, it is

12

3/15

less criminalised and prosecuted, and therefore less reported.

Another factor behind gender equality as a popular slogan is the ~~dis~~ gender-based discrimination when it comes to access to education. This disparity is attributed to a number of socio-cultural constraints, including poverty, early marriages, safety concerns, preference for sons, among others. This is why women and girls who form half the world's population ~~address~~ makes almost two thirds of the world's illiterate adults (UN).

To **Amartya Sen**, often referred to as the father of the concept of human development, gender aspect

of education is a direct link between illiteracy and women's security. Not being able to read or write is a significant barrier for underprivileged women, since this can lead to their failure to make use of even the rather limited rights they may legally have. For instance, the right to own lands or other property, or to appeal against unfair judgement and unjust treatment. There are often legal rights in rule books that are not used because the aggrieved parties cannot read those rule books. Gaps in schooling can, therefore, directly lead to insecurity by distancing the deprived from the ways and means of fighting against that deprivation. What is more worrisome is that this

inequality in education is more pronounced in developing countries than advanced economies.

The **World Bank** surveys in 55 developing countries reveal that girls are more likely to be out of school at a lower secondary age than boys, regardless of the wealth or location of the household.

Its negative impact is tremendous, given that majority of the world's population (75 percent) reside in low- and middle-income countries (**WB**).

There is an anti-female bias in health as well, which puts their well-being at risks. Females often face greater barriers than males to accessing health information and services. These barriers

include restrictions on mobility; lack of access to decision-making power; lower literacy rates; discriminatory attitudes of communities and healthcare providers and lack of training and awareness among ~~of~~ healthcare providers ~~and~~ regarding ~~health~~ ~~systems~~ ~~of~~ ~~the~~ ~~specific~~ specific health needs and challenges of women and girls. Consequently, women and girls face greater risks of HIV, cervical cancer, malnutrition, ~~res~~ ~~and~~ respiratory infections and elder abuse, among others.

Discrimination and the associated biases and barriers to economic participation and opportunities are also the unwelcome realities for women across the globe. In countries like Pakistan, the first

barrier to economic emancipation for women is that they are not guaranteed granted permission to work. According to a research conducted by Asian Development Bank, almost 40 percent of women, who are not working, report that the main reason for this is that the male family members do not permit them to work outside the home. This is certainly the case for other patriarchal societies as well. There are, however, other causes of these economic divides as well, such as inadequate education at the first place and also, fear of harassment and intimidation at workplaces due to weak law enforcement in such societies. Nonetheless, economic discrimination is also a reality of women in

top global economies. In the US, for instance, women continue to be underrepresented in high-level, highly paid positions and overrepresented in low-paying jobs. According to Fortune 500, almost 90 percent of the CEOs at the largest US corporations are men, while 68 percent of the women are the minimum wage workers in the country (Institute for Policy Studies). Hence, these stark disparities in economic domain are also a major driver behind the widespread call for gender equality.

Just like the same scenario of disparity exists in the political domain as well. There are many impediments to women's entry in policy- and decision-making positions. They

include hidebound socio-cultural norms where women are not encouraged to be leaders from an early age. According to **Pew Research Center**, the notion that women who run for office have to do more to prove themselves than men, ~~also~~ ^{also} restricts women's entry into politics. They also tend to get less support from party leaders. Furthermore, sexual harassment continues to be a big obstacle to parity, as well as disproportionate burden of family responsibilities makes it harder for women to run for office. This is why despite women's political representation doubling in the last 25 years, more than three-quarters of seats in parliament are still held by men (**UN Women**).

This needs to be changed, as adequate women representation is a pre-requisite for gender sensitive and gender-responsive governance.

Objectification of women is another big reason behind gender equality being a popular slogan. While both men and women are prone to being seen and treated as objects, women are most commonly victimized in this way as a minority group. Martha Nussbaum has defined the features of objectification. It includes treating a person as "a tool for the objectifier's purposes," ... "as lacking autonomy and self determination," ... "as lacking in agency," and "as something whose experiences and feelings

need not be taken into account.

From magazine ~~shows~~ adds to television shows and commercials to movies and more, it does not take much digging to see that objectification of women is a deeply ingrained aspect of modern society. This has conditioned the women ~~that they~~ ~~should~~ to believe that they should look a certain way. Since to look that way is out of reach by natural or biological means, this leads to a host of challenges concerning self-esteem and self-acceptance for women.

Psychological difficulties, including self-objectification, appearance anxiety, body ~~stamine~~ shame, disordered eating and dissatisfaction are commonly found issues faced by women, particularly

adolescent girls. This ~~is~~ explains why there is a broad demand for gender parity.

The preceeding ~~paragraph~~ section has discussed the causes behind gender equality becoming a popular slogan. The next section ~~will~~ discusses the way forward for narrowing the gender gap.

~~The~~ One of the most critical solutions to combat gender-based violence and discrimination is the implementation and enforcement of stronger legal frameworks. Many countries already have laws in place to protect women from domestic, physical, and sexual violence, but these laws often lack enforcement due to corruption, societal

attitudes, or weak governance. Strengthening legal institutions in terms of law enforcement is imperative to counter gender-based violence and discrimination. A successful example is the case study of **Iceland**. It is the most gender-equal country in the world for the 14th consecutive year (WEF). Government legislation has been crucial in helping the country achieve gender parity. One example is of such legislation is regarding equal wages. ~~The~~ Since 2018, companies in Iceland with more than 25 employees have been legally obliged to show they are paying equal wages. It is through such steps that other countries can also ~~take~~ tackle gender disparity.

In addition, to challenge gender-based discrimination and

objectification, comprehensive education and public awareness initiatives are vital. Changing societal attitudes towards women requires shifting mindsets from early childhood through education that promotes equality, respect and human rights. ~~It is~~ ^{#HeForShe is a} global example of public awareness campaign for the advancement of gender equality. It has mobilized both ~~the~~ men and women to take action against gender disparity. Hence, ~~it is~~ ~~essential~~ ~~an~~ effective ways to challenge stereotypes and reduce discrimination ~~is to~~ include introducing gender-sensitive curricula in schools, raising awareness campaigns through media and launching public outreach programs, among others.

Finally, economic

independence is crucial in tackling gender-based violence and discrimination. Women who are financially empowered are better equipped to escape abusive situations and challenge societal norms that keep them in subservient roles. Initiatives such as microfinance programs, skills training and entrepreneurship support for women can significantly reduce economic and political discrimination. Rwanda serves as a notable case study, where a strong focus on women's economic empowerment post-genocide has helped it achieve one of the highest rates of female parliamentary representation in the world, alongside improved socio-economic indicators.

Thus, by ensuring women have access to education, resources and ~~other~~ opportunities, gender inequality can

25
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be significantly reduced.

In conclusion, the persistent issues of gender-based violence, discrimination and the objectification of women underscore the urgent need for gender equality, ~~making~~ making it a popular slogan across the globe. Despite the progress achieved ^{over} nearly two centuries of feminist movements, the journey toward full parity remains incomplete. To realize this goal, a multi-faceted approach is necessary. Strengthening legal reforms and ensuring their enforcement, as seen in Iceland's advancements in gender equality, will protect women from violence and discrimination. Equally vital is the role of education and public awareness campaigns, like the #HeForShe movement,

in promoting gender parity. Finally, empowering women economically, as demonstrated by Rwanda's success, offers a sustainable path toward gender parity by enabling women to participate fully in socio-economic and political sphere. Achieving true gender equality requires a concerted effort from government, civil society and individuals alike. By continuing to advocate for and implement these solutions the world can move closer to a future where gender equality is no longer a ^{slogan} ~~solution~~ but a reality.