

# Gender Equality Is a Myth

## Outline

### 1. Introduction

### 2. Debunking the determinants which demonstrate that gender equality is a myth.

2.1) Women are denied access to education as compared to men.

(Global Gender Gap Literacy Report, 2024

Male literacy  $\rightarrow$  90%, women literacy  $\rightarrow$  84%.)

2.2) Enforced early marriages of girls are still being practiced.

(59% girls are married before the age of 18 years in Bangladesh.)

2.3) Women are underrepresented in politics as compared to men.

(Only 21% government ministers are women worldwide, PEW research report.)



(2.4) Lower wage ratio of women as compared to men also attest that gender equality is a myth.

(Women are paid 25% less than their male counterparts for the same amount of work. PEW research report).

2.5) High death rate of women, owing to lack of resources in climate ridden areas proves the fact that gender equality is a myth.

(Report of United Nations Women on the correlation of climate change and gender equality).

### 3. Challenges to achieve gender equality.

3.1) Limited access to resources, opportunities and services.

3.2) Social norms and harmful practices against women.

3.3) Limited participation of women in decision making.

3.4) Gender based violence.



3.5) Inadequate or non-existing policies and legislation.

#### 4- Strategies to achieve gender equality.

4.1) Ensure equal access to education for girls.

→ Secondary School Stipend Project in Bangladesh.

4.2) Implement quota system to increase women political participation.

→ Rwanda gender quota system.

4.3) Introduce women entrepreneurship programmes to promote economic empowerment of women.

→ India Self Help Groups.

4.4) Provide legal protection to women against victimization.

→ Spain's Comprehensive anti-discrimination law.

5.

#### Conclusion



Gender equality has long been heralded as a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of modern society. International organizations, governments, and advocacy groups have made substantial efforts to bridge the gender gap, striving for equal opportunities and rights for all. However, despite decades of progress, true gender equality remains an illusion rather than a reality. Women across the world continue to face systematic disadvantages that hinder their economic independence, political representation, and access to education and healthcare. These persistent inequalities expose the gap between theoretical commitments to gender equality and the lived experiences of millions of women. While policies and campaigns have undoubtedly improved conditions for women in many regions, deep-rooted societal norms, economic structures, and legal loopholes continue to reinforce gender disparities. Women remain disproportionately burdened by poverty, earn less than their male counterparts for equal work, and encounter barriers to leadership roles in politics and business. Additionally, access to quality education and healthcare is still uneven, particularly in developing nations.



where cultural and economic constraints often limit women's opportunities.

Thus, the notion of gender equality, while widely promoted, is far from being fully realized - it demands concrete actions such as expanding opportunities for girls, and addressing the economic disadvantages that disproportionately affect women.

Without these fundamental changes, gender equality will remain a distant ideal rather than a tangible reality.

Despite progress in gender equality, women still face significant barriers to education compared to men, particularly in developing regions. According to UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report 2024, nearly 129 million girls worldwide are out of school, including 35 million of primary school age and 97 million of secondary school age. Cultural norms, early marriages and poverty contribute to this disparity. For example, in Afghanistan, after Taliban regained control in 2021, they banned girls from attending secondary schools and universities, depriving them of educational opportunities.



Similarly, in sub-Saharan Africa, economic hardships force many families to prioritize boys' education over girls, as seen in countries like Nigeria and Democratic Republic of the Congo. This is also reflected in the Global Gender Gap Report 2023 which showed that about 90 percent of men and a little less than 84 percent of women in the world are literate. The discrepancy in literacy levels reflects the challenges faced by females in accessing quality education and highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to address this issue.

Apart from this enforced early child marriage remains a significant barrier to women's social development. For example in Bangladesh, where 59% of girls are married before the age of 18 (UNICEF, 2023). This harmful practice deprives girls of education, economic independence, and personal growth, reinforcing cycles of poverty and gender inequality. Early marriages also result in teenage pregnancies, leading to severe health complications such as maternal mortality and malnutrition in both mothers



and children.

Similarly, women continue to be discriminated in the political front. Women are not given due importance regarding their inclusion in the legislature. Being low in effectiveness, they cannot make a significant change in the pattern of socio-political development. Consequently, countries like Pakistan, with only 20% of women in legislation, are more prone to discriminative practices in every sphere of life - PILDAT. Patriarchal mindset and feudalistic approach, hence, become the major hurdles for women to contest elections independently. Gender equality is, thus, just a hallucination in political arena.

Moreover, women are disadvantaged in terms of leadership roles. They are not given due roles owing to the false perception that they are emotionally volatile. Only 21% of government ministers are women. Besides this, only ten countries have a woman head of state, PEW report. Even the USA, a country claimed to be a champion of human rights, is yet to see a woman as head of the state. With an annual increase of just 0.52% points, gender parity in political



leadership will not be achieved before 2077, United Nations Women Report 2023. Therefore, women become victims of gender inequality even in terms of political participation.

Similarly, the plight of women is no different in the economic sphere. Women get fewer employment opportunities compared to men. Both men and women were created equal and are shaping society in their perspective; therefore, sanity demands equal access to resources. However, women have extremely limited work opportunities and are not preferred for higher roles in the firm. According to World Bank, the female labour force participation <sup>rate</sup> is 48% as compared to males with 74.8%. Consequently, they have narrow access to financial services such as loans and micro-financing. This alarming situation shows how women suffer heavily in terms of economic opportunities. A highly endangered wage system has also added to women's plight. The system is skewed in favour of men. Men get paid much more than women for the same work and effort. According to PEW research report, women are paid 25% less



Than men for the same amount of work.

Moreover, companies continue to violate maternity leave policies; either they do not pay them or ask them to resign.

This is exceptionally demotivating for the women. Hence, wage differentiation based on gender is another manifestation of gender inequality.

The disproportionate impact of climate change on women, owing to lack of resources in climate ridden areas prove that gender equality is a myth. This is evident; for example, in the gender breakdown of refugees; women and girls make up approximately half of the non-climate refugees, a number that rises to 80% for climate refugees (Schueman, 2022). Climate change also exacerbates violence against women, which can lead them to seek refuge even in non-disaster scenarios. Women refugees face significant challenges.

According to UN reports, 60% of preventable maternal deaths occur in humanitarian settings, and at least one in five refugee or displaced women is estimated to have experienced



sexual violence. In fact, any situation that disrupts the social structure seems to lead to negative outcomes for women and girls.

This is the third decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the world has entered into a new era of fourth industrial revolution. From advancement in technology to diversity in cultures, human beings are experiencing a refined version of life. Admit all this progress, there is a particular section of society that is void of basic human rights.

The daughter of Eve, the home maker, the reaper of generations - 'woman'. From advanced developed countries to the third world countries, women have always been subjugated at multiple forums. For ages, waiting for their importance to be recognized, women are fighting.

However, to some they are rebels, if they raise their voices against the norms set out by the patriarchal society. This clearly reflects the dearth of avenues available to them and it is not easier to live in a society where raising voice for the fundamental rights would be tantamount to death.



Multiple international forums and organizations have framed laws and regulations for ensuring gender equality, but everything is useless unless there is awareness from within. The battle for emancipation is not just restricted to one or two countries, rather it is the universal phenomenon that needs to be addressed for the survival of humanity as well as morality.

Women are subject to violence and discrimination across the globe. Patriarchy and the norms formed by the society have normalized violence to such an extent that if a woman speaks out against it she is considered as a rebel. Gender based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their life time (World Bank). This represents an alarming state for women. Nancy Chodrow in her masterpiece "The Reproduction of Mothering" describes if a male child sees his father committing violence, he too will become a violent husband. Similarly if a girl child sees her mother suffering, she ultimately would learn that violence is just



a normal act and that she should stay silent in all circumstances. Hence, generations have to suffer if the inequality and injustice is to be experienced by a single woman. The prevalence of GBV limits women's ability to fully participate in society, affecting their health, economic stability, and social well-being.

One of the major challenges to achieving gender equality is the restricted access that women and girls have to essential resources, opportunities and services. In many parts of the world, women face barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and financial resources, limiting their ability to achieve economic independence. For example, according to World Bank, women in developing countries are 20% less likely than men to have bank account, restricting their ability to start businesses or invest in their futures. Similarly, in rural areas, girls often drop out of school due to financial constraints or lack of access to safe transportation. Without access to these basic resources, women struggle to break free from cycles of poverty and



dependence.

Deeply rooted cultural and social norms continue to perpetuate gender inequality, reinforcing traditional roles that limit women's rights and opportunities. Harmful practices such as child marriage, female genital mutilation (FGM), and honor killings persist in many regions, despite legal efforts to combat them. For instance, according to HRCP, the country saw a total of 490 'honor' killing incidents taking place in 2024. These cases are not just statistics; they reflect the violent stripping of women's autonomy and dignity under the guise of family 'honor'.

Apart from this, women are significantly underrepresented in leadership roles in politics, business and governance, limiting their ability to influence policies that affect them. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, as of 2024, only 26.5% of the parliamentary seats globally are held by women, showing slow progress in political inclusion. In corporate leadership, the gender gap is equally stark - women occupy only 8.8% of CEO positions. This



Lack of representation means that policies and decisions are often made without considering women's perspectives and needs.

In addition to that, weak or non-existent laws protecting women's rights further contribute to gender inequality. In many countries, legal systems fail to address discrimination, unequal pay, and workplace harassment effectively. For example, according to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024, 104 countries still have laws preventing women from working in specific jobs. Moreover, some nations lack strict laws against marital rape or domestic violence, leaving women vulnerable to abuse without legal recourse. Even when laws exist, weak enforcement and corruption often undermine their effectiveness.

Achieving gender equality is a multifaceted endeavor that requires comprehensive strategies across various sectors. The first and foremost important step is providing girls with equal access



to education is fundamental to promoting gender equality. "You educate a man; you educate a man, you educate a woman, you educate a generation". (Brigham Youngman). Educated women are more likely to participate in the labor force, make informed health decisions, and contribute to the economic development of their communities. A notable example of this approach is Bangladesh's Female School Stipend Program (FSSAP), initiated in 1994. The program aimed to increase female enrollment in secondary schools by offering stipend to girls who met specific criteria: attending at least 75% of school days, achieving a minimum of 45% in class-level tests, and remaining unmarried until completing their secondary education. This led to a significant rise in female secondary school enrollment and decrease in dropout rates, thereby empowering young women through education.

Secondly, implementing quota systems is an effective strategy to enhance women's representation in political



decision-making processes. Rwanda serves as a compelling case study in this regard. Following the 1994 genocide, Rwanda's 2003 constitution mandated a 30% quota for women in all elected positions. This policy led to a substantial increase in female political participation, with women holding 56% of parliamentary seats after the 2008 elections and 64% after the 2013 elections. As of 2024, women constitute 61.25% of Rwanda's parliament, the highest percentage globally. This significant female presence has facilitated the passage of progressive reforms, including equal access to land ownership and labour laws ensuring equal pay.

Thirdly, economic empowerment of women is crucial for achieving gender equality. In India, self-help groups (SHGs) have been instrumental in this regard. SHGs are small voluntary associations of women who come together to save and lend among themselves. These groups provide members with access to credit, promote savings and offer a platform for skill development. Participation in



SHGs has led to increase income levels, improved financial literacy, and enhanced social status for many women in India. Moreover, SHGs have empowered women to start their own businesses, contribute to household income, and participate more actively in community decision-making processes.

Lastly, establishing comprehensive legal frameworks to protect women from discrimination and violence is essential for gender equality. Spain's Organic Law 3/2007 for Effective Equality between Women and Men is a pertinent example. Enacted in 2007, this law aims to ensure equal treatment and opportunities in both public and private sectors. It addresses various aspects of discrimination, including employment, education, and political participation, and mandates measures to prevent gender based violence. The law also requires companies to implement equality plans and promotes balanced



representation in political and administrative positions. This comprehensive legal framework has been pivotal in advancing gender equality and protecting women's rights in Spain.

Critically articulated, Gender equality is still pie in the sky around the globe. Women are disadvantaged and marginalized in developing and developed countries. Organizations such as UN Women, Amnesty International, and Human Right watch are working closely with civil society organizations to achieve global standards for gender equality. However, still in many countries, women do not have to contend with the glass ceiling but the walls and barriers of every construction ham in them. As a result, gender equality continues to be a myth. Nevertheless, effective measures through education and new reforms to empower women in socio-economic and political domains will break the shackles of gender discrimination and make the dream of gender equality realizable.



All in all, in its more insidious form, gender inequality turns violent. Harmful gender norms are perpetuated at the highest level worldwide. In some countries, they become entrenched in laws and policies that fail to uphold or even violate girls' rights by restricting them from inheriting property, gaining education, and getting equal job opportunities. Pakistan, too, ranks very low on gender disparity. This is not just a major loss for Pakistan but for the entire world since gender inequality hampers the world from realizing its true potential. There is, hence, a dire need for the world to take adequate steps to eliminate the clothes of gender inequality. Promoting women's empowerment in socio-political and economic domains and implementing pro-women policies can certainly eliminate discriminative practices. Although the measures cannot bring change overnight, and progress will likely be frustratingly slow, the steps will show ensure accelerated and visible improvement if executed properly.



"A woman is human. She is not better, wiser, stronger, more intelligent, more creative or more responsible than a man. Likewise, she is never less. Equality is given. A woman is human."

— Vera Nazarian, *The Perpetual Calendar of Inspiration*.