

Gender Inequality

9.1 Gender Inequality

Gender, which is defined as the attitudes, norms, expectations, and behaviors that societies construct around being male or female. These beliefs and behaviors often create gender inequality.

These are various forms of female disempowerment. One is the **gender earnings gap** where females receive lower wages than males. This is often linked to the **gender asset gap**, which, through a variety of mechanisms, prevents females from obtaining economic assets on par with men. These mechanisms can be discriminatory inheritance laws or laws relating to land ownership; marriage and social customs can also disempower women by making males the legal or customary head of household, entitling them to control all household income and property. Lack of access to income and property makes women appear less creditworthy and therefore incapable of obtaining needed loans.

Women are also disempowered since much of their work is considered non-market activity: cooking, housework and child care are primarily seen as female responsibilities and undeserving of direct financial compensation. If women work outside the home, they are still expected to complete these domestic tasks; these tasks often interfere with women's ability to carry out formal sector employment without requesting flexibility that employers may not be willing to give. In fact, knowledge of this double shift burden may make formal sector employers less likely to hire women, partly explaining why so many women work in the informal sector.

Despite these difficulties, women in LDCs tend to work outside the home just as frequently as women in more developed countries. This is partly explained by the fact that the relationship between prosperity and the **female labor force participation rate** (FLPR) is U-shaped: there are high FLPRs in both the poorest and wealthiest countries, with lower rates in countries in the middle.

While the earnings gender gap remains a problem there are some positive trends such as the increase in microfinance lending and declining birth rates. Female labor force participation is also increasing in most countries since 1980 as a result of globalization.

Women are also disempowered due to the gender gap in education. There are important regional differences in the LDC educational gender gap with the largest disparity occurring in South Asia and the smallest one in Latin America. Still, overall, 2/3 of the illiterate adults in the world are women. One reason for this disparity is that parents have discriminatory attitudes about female education. Some may feel there are few job opportunities for women, while others are concerned that too much education will make it difficult for women to find a husband. There is also the perception that the opportunity cost of educating girls is substantial: school age girls can do substantial housework such as fetching water and other important, time-consuming tasks. Parents (and girls themselves) may also have security fears relating to sexual harassment and assault. Menstruation often is embarrassing and disruptive in environments where proper facilities and privacy is lacking, causing girls to absent themselves.

Trends in this area are also hopeful. While education is still not equal, girls seem to be staying in school longer and some regions, like East Asia, have reached gender parity. There have been substantial gains in female literacy since 1970.

There is also a considerable gap in political empowerment between men and women. There are many fewer women than men in positions of political power, despite the fact that almost all states have equal voting rights for men and women. Women have found ways to influence politics outside of voting and holding office. Many women are active in **social movements**. These social movements seek to influence issues directly related to female empowerment, but also on other issues of interest to women and society generally.

Trends also seem positive related to political empowerment of women. Several countries have recently elected their first female leaders, and women seem to be given increasing responsibility in ministries. **Descriptive representation** has increased in some countries due to the establishment of **gender quotas** either for candidates or legislators. Attitudes of the public seem to be changing to be more supportive of female participation in politics.

Many analysts see gender inequality as a cause of underdevelopment. Two different approaches are associated with this idea: the first is called “women in development,” the second is “women as agents of development.” Both of these approaches are instrumentalist: they view gender equality as a way of promoting development.

The **women in development** (WID) approach is built upon the insight by economist Ester Boserup that poverty affects women and men differently in LDCs. For example, programs that increased education for boys, might not succeed in increasing education for girls. Programs to increase girl's education would need to identify and address those particular factors that prevented girls from attending and finishing their education. When programs did not do this, the result was a loss in efficiency for the program and for that country's development. More successful WID programs allowed a greater increase in human capital for development. While WID is no longer the dominant paradigm, the approach can still be seen through things like micro-lending for female entrepreneurs.

Economist Amartya Sen provided a different insight. Underdevelopment of women, he argued often had intergenerational impacts because women had direct influence over children. Infrastructural improvements in water, sanitation, health care and education were unlikely to help children unless mothers understood how, when and why to access them. For example immunizations were unlikely to be given in timely ways without some level of maternal understanding. Similarly, literacy of women tends to decrease child mortality, improve the health of children and increase the probability children will be educated. Therefore educating women made them agents who could help spread the benefits of development, helping future generations to better contribute to development.

A newer instrumentalist approach involves the notion that women tend to make better decisions than men. Therefore, excluding women from politics or even from household decisions results in practices and policies that hinder development.

There are several critiques of these instrumentalist views. First, the gender and development approach criticized WID's emphasis on the labor and production roles of women, while ignoring social and private dimensions of gender inequality. Getting women more integrated into the formal economy did not solve the problem of social expectations that women carry the additional burden of uncompensated household work. Additionally WID was capitalist oriented and did not consider the negative implications of this for women or society.

Other critiques contended that gender inequality was not a cause but a result of underdevelopment. This would imply that once problems societal poverty were addressed, gender inequality would be resolved at the same time. There are also cultural critiques of the intrinsic value of gender equality. To these critics, even the instrumental arguments are simply an excuse for the Westernization of LDC's, a kind of cultural imperialism.

Female health and physical security are also important development issues. A significant concern is the fact that being female in an LDC carries significant risk of early death. Sen's research in 1990 popularized the idea of 100 million missing women, and subsequent research has confirmed the fact of **excess female mortality**. This occurs for at least three reasons. The first is that several of the more populous LDC societies exhibit a cultural preference for sons. This **son preference** may be linked to the fact that in certain societies, brides join the husband's family resulting in the loss of her labor to her birth family. In China, the bride's family must also provide an expensive dowry. This makes girls seem expensive to parents. With the advent of technology, sex-selective abortions have become more available. Coupled with the fact that economic imperatives or government policies have limited the size of families, parents seek male babies on their first or second pregnancy.

Daughters often experience comparative neglect in these and other societies. If medical and immunizations are considered expensive, it is more likely that families will get these for sons but not daughters if they are poor. Similarly, boys rather than girls might be given better and more food and water. Additionally, data show that girls are weaned earlier than boys (perhaps so that the mother can get pregnant sooner to try for a son), robbing female infants of important nutrients and immunities.

If girls survive to reproductive age, they then face the problem of **maternal mortality**. Death due to complications from pregnancy is common in many LDCs since in some areas it is rare to have births attended by skilled health professionals. The spread of HIV/AIDS is also a significantly higher threat to women than to men. First, biologically, women are 20% more likely than men to contract the disease from an infected partner. Second, in many societies, it is more common for girls to date and have as sexual partners significantly older men. Since these men have been sexually active longer, it is more likely that they are infected with HIV which they can pass to their younger partners.

Despite these problems, the trends are positive. Female life expectancy is increasing, maternal mortality is declining, and practices that led to comparative neglect and sex-selective abortions seem to be disappearing.

Another issue that poses a threat to women is gender violence. Rape, domestic violence and sexual assault and harassment occur at appalling rates in LDCs. Weak laws, cultural practices and biased judicial institutions all contribute to this. One example of a cultural practice is **forced marriage**. In general, forced marriages are

arranged by families, often without consulting the potential bride. In many situations, the bride is not an adult. In some cultures teen brides are preferred because of the perception of virginity.

Another form of gender violence is **female genital cutting** (FGC). In areas of the world where this is practiced, it presents serious health risks to the young girls. While the extent of the cutting varies from society to society, it is normally carried out by women without medical training or clean implements and results in physical and psychological trauma to the often unsuspecting victims. Infections can cause incontinence, blocked urine or menstrual flows and an inability to feel sexual pleasure.

Fertility rates also pose a threat to female health. High fertility exists in most regions of the global south, except in East Asia. Often poor rural parents want large families, given that children are expected to provide household and agricultural labor. Additionally, some cultures promote large families. Generally when economic concerns make large families economically difficult, especially during times of urbanization, fertility tends to fall. Contraceptive use in many societies is lower than demand, both for economic and cultural reasons.

Generally fertility rates, the average number of births per women, have dropped dramatically since 1960. Delayed marriage and higher female labor force participation rates seem to be important influences.

Many analysts believe that high fertility rates, leading to rapid population growth, are bad for development. This increases demands for infrastructure and government services, and leads to depletion of natural resources, including land. Large families also mean that families have to devote fewer resources and less attention to each child, possibly affecting the quality of child rearing.

Developing societies experience what is called the **demographic transition**. This has four stages. First, during the agricultural stage, there is high fertility but because of high death rates, there is low population growth. In the early modern stage, as health improvements are introduced, the death rate drops, but fertility remains high resulting in high population growth. Stage three see families adjust their expectation on family size to the modern realities of lower child mortality, fertility rates decline, resulting in lower population growth. This improves the age **dependency ratio** (increasing the proportion of the working age population) and provides a **demographic dividend** for society. This results in faster economic growth. In the last stage, currently common in post-industrial societies, population

size remains stable or decreases due to the settling of the fertility rate at or slightly below replacement values.

Some analysts critique the notion that high fertility is bad for economic development. They point out that economic development tends to require high population densities. Further, high fertility delays the onset of the final stage of the demographic transition where the age dependency ratio again changes as older people become a larger part of the population and slow economic growth.

The chapter presents a case study that explores Afghanistan's treatment of women as a cause of its underdevelopment. Cultural practices as well as Taliban policies that prohibited the education and empowerment of women are compared to explanations where Western imperialism or geographical issues can be identified as the cause of both Afghanistan's poverty and the situation of its women.

Variations by country or culture

Gender inequality is a result of the persistent discrimination of one group of people based upon gender and it manifests itself differently according to race, culture, politics, country, and economic situation. It is furthermore considered a causal factor of violence against women. While gender discrimination happens to both men and women in individual situations, discrimination against women is an entrenched, global pandemic. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, rape and violence against women and girls is used as a tool of war.^[371] In Afghanistan, girls have had acid thrown in their faces for attending school.^[381] Considerable focus has been given to the issue of gender inequality at the international level by organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank, particularly in developing countries. The causes and effects of gender inequality vary by country, as do solutions for combating it.

Asia

Many Malay Muslim communities believe that passion and desire carry derogatory connotations, especially when it is applied to humans.^[391] The Muslim Malays believe that women have more sexual passion than men and that men have more logic.

One example of the continued existence of gender inequality in Asia is the "missing girls" phenomenon. It is estimated that due to the undervaluing of women, over 100 million males are living as a result of the infanticide of female

children, sex selection for boys, allocation of economic and nutritional resources that are taken away from female children, and generalized violence.

India

Some studies have documented that in villages in India, women are often discouraged to seek education. However, recent studies document remarkable success in efforts to improve girls' primary education. However, when it comes to secondary education, girls are still disadvantaged. Moreover, women's employment rates are still low and seem to have further declined in recent years. Recent studies also document unequal access to and control over family resources for Indian women including control over land and bank accounts as well as severe limitations on their geographical mobility.

In the Sitapur district, there is an event which involves men destroying gudiyas (rag dolls) that their sisters made the night before the festival. The long tradition reveals the embedded gender inequality within society. The bashing of the doll symbolizes the bashing of the spirit, to maintain control.

United States

The World Economic Forum measures gender equity through a series of economic, educational, and political benchmarks. It has ranked the United States as 19th (up from 31st in 2009) in terms of achieving gender equity.^[44] The US Department of Labor has indicated that in 2009, “the median weekly earnings of women who were full-time wage and salary workers was...80 percent of men’s”; The Department of Justice found that in 2009, “the percentage of female victims (26%) of intimate partner violence was about 5 times that of male victims (5%)”. “The United States ranks 41st in a ranking of 184 countries on maternal deaths during pregnancy and childbirth, below all other industrialized nations and a number of developing countries” and women only represent 20% of members of Congress.

Impact and counteractions

Gender inequality and discrimination is argued to cause and perpetuate poverty and vulnerability in society as a whole. Household and intra-household knowledge and resources are key influences in individuals' abilities to take advantage of external livelihood opportunities or respond appropriately to threats. High education levels and social integration significantly improve the productivity of all members of the household and improve equity throughout society. Gender Equity Indices seek to provide the tools to demonstrate this feature of poverty.

Despite acknowledgement by institutions such as the World Bank that gender inequality is bad for economic growth, there are many difficulties in creating a comprehensive response. It is argued that the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) fail to acknowledge gender inequality as a cross-cutting issue. Gender is mentioned in MDG3 and MDG5: MDG3 measures gender parity in education, the share of women in wage employment and the proportion women in national legislatures. MDG5 focuses on maternal mortality and on universal access to reproductive health. However, even these targets are significantly off-track.

Addressing gender inequality through social protection programmes designed to increase equity would be an effective way of reducing gender inequality.

Researchers at the Overseas Development Institute argue for the need to develop the following in social protection in order to reduce gender inequality and increase growth:

- Community childcare to give women greater opportunities to seek employment;
- Support parents with the care costs (e.g. South African child/disability grants);
- Education stipends for girls (e.g. Bangladesh's Girls Education Stipend scheme);
- Awareness-raising regarding gender-based violence, and other preventive measures, such as financial support for women and children escaping abusive environments (e.g. NGO pilot initiatives in Ghana);
- Inclusion of programme participants (women and men) in designing and evaluating social protection programmes;
- Gender-awareness and analysis training for programme staff;
- Collect and distribute information on coordinated care and service facilities (e.g. access to micro-credit and microentrepreneurial training for women); and
- Developing monitoring and evaluation systems that include sex-disaggregated data.

However, politics plays a central role in the interests, institutions and ideas that are needed to reshape social welfare and gender inequality in politics and society limits governments' ability to act on economic incentives.

It is interesting to note that NGO's tend to protect women against gender inequality and Structural violence. During war, the opposing side targets women, raping and

even killing them. This could be because women are associated with children and killing them prohibits there being a next generation of the enemy.

Another opportunity to tackle gender inequality is presented by modern Information and communication technologies. In a carefully controlled study,^[51] it has been shown that women embrace digital technology more than men, disproving the stereotype of "technophobic women". Given that digital information and communication technologies have the potential to provide access to employment, education, income, health services, participation, protection, and safety, among others (ICT4D), the natural affinity of women with these new communication tools provide women with a tangible bootstrapping opportunity to tackle social discrimination. In other words, if women are provided with modern information and communication technologies, these digital tools present to them an opportunity to fight longstanding inequalities in the workplace and at home.