

Empowering All Genders: A Deep Dive into Gender Equality Dynamics

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Abstract:

Gender equality is often confined to being perceived as a women-centric issue, with policies and discussions predominantly revolving around the challenges faced by women. However, this perspective is evolving, recognizing that gender equality is a shared responsibility involving men and boys. This study delves into the collective responsibility of all genders in promoting gender equality and challenges the prevailing gender norms. It emphasizes the need to empower women, address non-binary challenges, understand economic disparities, and combat discrimination for an inclusive society. It highlights the need to break free from traditional gender roles and stereotypes that hinder progress towards a truly equal society. It also identifies areas where men may face disadvantages and explores the values of gender equality for all genders. The hindrances to gender equality, encompassing stereotypes, unequal economic opportunities, discrimination, and violence, are examined. The study offers recommendations for achieving gender equality and underscores the necessity of collective efforts to create a society where all genders have equal rights, opportunities, and respect, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and diverse world.

Keywords: *Gender equality, Gender norms, Empowering women, Non-binary challenges, Inclusive society*

1.0. Introduction:

Gender equality is often viewed as a "women's concern." Historically, issues related to gender and policies promoting gender equality have primarily been framed as women's matters.

Nonetheless, gender equality is a shared responsibility for everyone, and there is a growing recognition that men and boys also play an integral role in addressing gender issues and advancing equality. It is widely accepted that progress toward gender equality can lead to positive transformations in the lives of both women and men, ultimately contributing to a better society.

Men bear a collective responsibility alongside women in promoting gender equality, actively contributing to this cause in various capacities. This responsibility extends to individuals, families, social groups, communities, and all sectors of society. Men should educate one another about the importance of respecting and empowering women, recognizing that genuine masculinity does not involve oppressing or discriminating against women. It is crucial to understand that women have their place not only in homes or traditional roles but also in schools, offices, boardrooms, and all aspects of society (Carla, 2013).

2.0. Objectives

The study aims to challenge gender norms, involve men in gender equality, empower women to break traditional roles, recognize non-binary challenges, understand economic disparities, combat discrimination, and propose recommendations for an inclusive society.

3.0. Materials and Methods

This study combines secondary data sources to examine gender equality in Nigeria. The research involved an extensive review of scholarly literature, policy documents, reports and grey literature from government agencies and civil society organizations related to gender equality.

4.0. Why gender equality is always tilted to women

Gender equality aims to address historical and systemic disparities and prejudice that predominantly affect women. This emphasis on women is rooted in acknowledging the historical and current disadvantages they've faced compared to men. These disparities manifest in areas like educational access, economic prospects, political representation, healthcare, and protection from violence. Initiatives for **gender equality** are dedicated to empowering women to bridge these gaps and ensure equal rights, opportunities, and treatment as men. It's essential to underscore women's rights and empowerment to rectify these imbalances and foster a just society.

Nonetheless, the ultimate objective of gender equality is to attain a state where all genders, encompassing men, women, and non-binary individuals, enjoy equal rights, opportunities, and treatment. This necessitates challenging conventional gender roles and stereotypes, which can be constricting and detrimental to every gender. Inclusive strategies seek to deconstruct these stereotypes and expectations to promote fairness and equity for all, irrespective of gender (Albertyn et al., 2014).

5.0. Are there areas males are being cheated or downplayed

A significant portion of the gender assessment conducted in the broader policy sphere is rooted in the assumption of female disadvantage or, conversely, narrows its focus on highly specific areas of female inequity, frequently neglecting concurrent male disadvantages. Concentrating exclusively on one facet of a dualistic population, without considering its counterpart, carries the potential to generate fresh disparities. It is imperative to evolve this approach to facilitate a more nuanced examination of gender and ethnic disparities. This entails recognizing the escalating diversity in choices and consequences for all genders and surmounting lingering restrictions on choices for both sexes. Gender disparity impacts all individuals, encompassing males. Stereotypes or 'norms' dictating the roles of women, men, girls, and boys commence during childhood and persist into adulthood. The experience of inequality is not uniform among all individuals. It is particularly pronounced and often distinct for those contending with multiple forms of discrimination (Callister et al., 2008).

One concern revolves around family courts, where some believe biases may favor women in custody battles, potentially hindering fathers striving for equal custody rights. In education, there are worries that scholarship opportunities and evolving teaching methods may inadvertently favour girls, prompting a need for educational adjustments to ensure equal academic opportunities for boys. Additionally, some argue that healthcare systems and research funding disproportionately prioritize women's health issues, potentially neglecting critical health concerns affecting men. The perception of sentencing disparities and workplace hazards, primarily concentrated in male-dominated sectors, further contributes to this viewpoint. Addressing these concerns under the broader umbrella of gender equality is essential, striving for a society where all genders encounter equal opportunities, support, and respect. Recognizing the

unique obstacles faced by both men and women is a critical step towards building a truly equitable world.

6.0. What are the values of gender equality to men, women, and non-binary individuals?

Gender equality is beneficial to **everyone**. It promotes a fair and just society where individuals are not discriminated against based on their gender identity. Here are some advantages of gender equality:

Gender equality is a multifaceted imperative that encompasses several critical aspects. It upholds the principles of social justice by guaranteeing equal rights and opportunities for all, irrespective of gender identity, fostering a fair and equitable society. It plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth and development, as equal access to education and employment propels national prosperity by harnessing the talents of women and non-binary individuals. Gender equality is intricately linked to enhanced health and well-being, offering improved healthcare access and reproductive services to bolster overall welfare. It acts as a potent antidote to violence and discrimination rooted in gender identity, promoting a culture of respect and understanding that benefits society at large. Gender equality stands as a fundamental human right, ensuring individuals the freedom to lead authentic lives, free from discrimination or prejudice, thus advancing the cause of justice and equality for all (Victorian Government, (2021) and United Nations (2022).

These are just a few examples of the advantages of gender equality. By promoting gender equality, we can create a more inclusive and equitable society for all individuals.

7.0. Hindrances to Gender Equality

Hindrances to gender equality affect individuals of all genders, including men, women, and non-binary individuals. These obstacles can manifest in various forms and are deeply ingrained in societal norms, policies, and behaviors. Here are some common hindrances:

Stereotypes and Gender Norms:

Traditional gender roles and stereotypes significantly constrain opportunities and expectations based on an individual's gender. Men, women, and non-binary individuals are often pressured to conform to predefined societal norms that may not resonate with their unique abilities or aspirations. This rigid adherence to stereotypes creates a stifling environment where personal growth and expression are restricted (Kraińska, (2016) and Stewart et al., (2021)).

Men, in particular, confront societal pressure to fit into traditional masculine roles, restricting their emotional expression, caregiving involvement, and exploration of non-traditional career paths. This pressure to conform can limit their authentic selves and hinder their pursuit of passions that don't align with these preconceived notions of masculinity. For instance, a young boy who finds joy in dancing may encounter ridicule and discouragement, deterring him from embracing his true interests (Kraińska, (2016); Stewart et al., (2021)).

Conversely, women frequently find themselves navigating a societal landscape that prioritizes family responsibilities over career aspirations. Pursuing high-powered careers often leads to criticism and societal judgement, as they are expected to conform to the traditional roles of wives and mothers. This expectation can force women to compromise their ambitions and stifle their potential for growth and success in various professional fields (Kraińska, (2016); Stewart et al., (2021)).

Non-binary individuals grapple with a unique set of challenges within the confines of rigid gender norms. Society's binary gender framework often leaves them misunderstood and excluded, perpetuating confusion and a sense of not fitting in. Non-binary individuals face pressure to conform to either the male or female category, struggling to express their true identities outside these prescribed options. This exclusionary environment can create feelings of isolation and hinder their ability to openly and authentically be themselves.

It is evident that stereotypes and gender norms significantly impact individuals across the gender spectrum, restricting their personal growth and opportunities based on societal expectations. Breaking free from these constraints is imperative for a more inclusive and equitable society, one where individuals can express themselves authentically, pursue their passions without fear, and contribute to a diverse and enriched world.

Unequal Economic Opportunities

Unequal Economic Opportunities persist in various dimensions, perpetuating gender disparities. The gender wage gap stands out, where women and non-binary individuals consistently earn less than men for equivalent work. This earnings gap deepens for women of color and those in marginalized communities, further entrenching financial inequality. Concurrently, there's a concerning limitation in access to lucrative jobs, career growth, and entrepreneurship opportunities, stemming from pervasive gender biases and discrimination. (Layton, (2013) and Kazandjian et al., (2016)).

In this landscape, it's important to note that men are not immune to the effects of these biases. While they might, on average, benefit from higher wages, societal expectations often deter them from pursuing careers in fields traditionally associated with women, like nursing or primary

education. This reveals how gender norms can constrain occupational choices and perpetuate inequalities across the board.

Addressing these inequalities necessitates challenging stereotypes and discriminatory practices across all genders. A comprehensive approach involves fostering an inclusive work environment that welcomes diversity, actively works against biases, and ensures equal opportunities for all, irrespective of gender identity or expression. Only by dismantling these barriers can we pave the way for a truly equitable economic landscape.

Discrimination and Bias

Discrimination and Bias are deeply entrenched issues that affect individuals across the gender spectrum. Gender identity or expression can be a basis for discrimination, impacting both men and non-binary individuals, especially when their expression challenges traditional norms. This bias can manifest in various facets of life, including the workplace, education, politics, and healthcare.

Men can face discrimination or bias when they diverge from societal expectations related to their gender. For instance, choosing professions traditionally associated with women, like ballet dancing or stay-at-home parenting, can subject them to ridicule and judgment. This underscores how societal norms can constrain individual choices and perpetuate discriminatory attitudes.

Similarly, women endure pervasive gender-based discrimination across multiple domains. Workplace bias, sexist comments, and exclusion from decision-making processes are common challenges they confront. For instance, women are often overlooked for promotions or subjected to gendered stereotypes that undermine their professional capabilities, like being deemed "too emotional" for leadership roles (Hassan, (2019) and Duan, (2019))

Non-binary individuals, who exist outside the traditional male-female gender spectrum, also contend with discrimination, exclusion, or ignorance. Such prejudice can lead to mental health challenges and social isolation, highlighting the urgent need for a more inclusive and accepting society. Inclusive practices and education can help break down these biases, fostering an environment where all individuals can thrive regardless of their gender identity or expression.

Violence and Harassment

Violence and Harassment are distressing issues affecting individuals regardless of their gender identity. Women and non-binary individuals face alarmingly high rates of violence and harassment, encompassing domestic violence, sexual assault, and hate crimes. Tragically, society's response and support systems for survivors are often inadequate, exacerbating the trauma and hindering recovery. (Lee et al., (2014), Biroli, (2018), and Milovanova and Vasilevskaya, (2022)).

However, it's essential to acknowledge that men can also fall victim to violence and harassment, frequently tied to their gender expression or perceived non-conformity to traditional masculinity. This could manifest as bullying or physical violence when they don't adhere to conventional notions of what it means to be masculine.

Women, on the other hand, bear a disproportionate burden of gender-based violence, spanning from domestic abuse to sexual harassment and human trafficking. These forms of violence significantly curtail their freedom, safety, and overall well-being, underscoring the urgent need for comprehensive societal interventions.

Non-binary individuals, existing beyond the male-female gender binary, often face heightened violence and harassment due to their perceived deviation from traditional gender norms. Hate

crimes, bullying, and verbal abuse can be more severe for them, reflecting society's struggle to understand and accept gender diversity.

Gender-related hindrances have a far-reaching impact, transcending gender identity. To combat these issues effectively, challenging harmful gender stereotypes, promoting equality, and fostering inclusive environments are imperative. It is a collective responsibility to create a society where every individual can live free from the fear of violence or harassment, irrespective of their gender identity or expression. Individuals can thrive regardless of their gender identity or expression.

8.0. Recommendations for Achieving Gender Equality

Raising Awareness and Education:

Educating society on the significance of gender equality for all is fundamental. Implement comprehensive educational programs in schools, workplaces, and communities, highlighting the importance of inclusivity and dispelling gender stereotypes. Engage men, women, and non-binary individuals in dialogues that challenge traditional norms and foster understanding of diverse gender experiences and challenges.

Legal Reforms and Policies:

Advocate for policy changes that address gender-based inequalities comprehensively. Push for legislation that not only protects the rights of women but also recognizes and rectifies the injustices faced by men and non-binary individuals. Encourage governments and organizations to create gender-neutral laws that promote a fair and just society for everyone, irrespective of their gender identity.

Encouraging Male Involvement and Allyship:

Engage men as active participants in the journey towards gender equality. Promote positive masculinity by emphasizing the benefits of equality and debunking harmful stereotypes. Encourage male role models to advocate for inclusivity and challenge norms that perpetuate discrimination. Fostering allyship among men is crucial to creating a supportive environment for women and non-binary individuals.

Supporting Non-binary Individuals:

Acknowledge the unique challenges faced by non-binary individuals and work to create a society that respects and accommodates diverse gender identities. Ensure inclusive policies, healthcare systems, and educational environments that cater to the specific needs of non-binary individuals. Encourage open dialogues about gender diversity to foster understanding and acceptance.

Equal Opportunities for All Genders:

Advocate for equal opportunities in education, employment, healthcare, and leadership positions. Encourage organizations to adopt inclusive hiring practices and promote diversity at all levels. Ensure that scholarship opportunities, teaching methods, and healthcare services are equitable for all genders, fostering an environment where everyone can thrive.

Engaging the Private Sector:

Collaborate with private companies to develop initiatives that promote gender equality. Encourage corporations to invest in diversity and inclusion programs, offering equal opportunities for career advancement and professional growth. Hold businesses accountable for promoting diversity and inclusivity within their workforces.

Community Engagement and Grassroots Movements:

Empower local communities to drive change by fostering grassroots movements that promote gender equality. Encourage dialogue, activism, and community initiatives that challenge harmful norms and stereotypes. Amplify the voices of marginalized genders to ensure their experiences and perspectives are represented and respected.

Media Representation and Cultural Shift:

Advocate for accurate and diverse representation of genders in the media. Encourage media outlets to portray individuals beyond gender stereotypes, promoting a broader and more realistic understanding of gender diversity. Engage in campaigns that challenge harmful narratives and encourage a cultural shift towards a more inclusive society.

Achieving gender equality is a collective effort that necessitates the active involvement of individuals, communities, governments, and organizations. By fostering awareness, challenging stereotypes, advocating for policy changes, and encouraging male allyship, we can build a society where all genders have equal opportunities, rights, and respect. The journey towards gender equality is everyone's responsibility, and together we can create a world that celebrates diversity and inclusivity.

9.0. Conclusion:

Gender equality stands as an essential cornerstone of a just and harmonious society, impacting individuals across the gender spectrum. Throughout our discussions, we have delved into the multifaceted aspects of gender equality, recognizing its significance in the lives of men, women, and non-binary individuals. The common thread that binds our exploration is the collective call

to challenge stereotypes, promote inclusivity, and foster an environment where all individuals, regardless of their gender identity, can thrive.

For centuries, societal norms have imposed rigid expectations on individuals based on their gender. Men have been confined within the restrictive boundaries of traditional masculinity, suppressing their emotional expression and limiting their aspirations to conform to predetermined roles. The pressure to embody stoicism and dominance has stifled their authentic selves, hindering personal growth and freedom of expression. Our discussions have underscored the critical need to liberate men from these societal constructs, encouraging them to embrace vulnerability, nurture compassion, and explore diverse life paths that align with their true identities.

Conversely, women have been burdened with societal expectations that prioritize family roles over career ambitions. The struggle to balance these expectations while aspiring for professional success has perpetuated a gender divide, hindering their pursuit of leadership roles and career advancements. Our conversations highlight the urgent necessity to break free from these stereotypes, empowering women to shatter glass ceilings and paving the way for a society that celebrates their accomplishments and contributions beyond the domestic sphere.

Non-binary individuals, existing outside the binary constraints of male and female, have faced persistent challenges arising from a society deeply entrenched in rigid gender norms. Their journey is marked by confusion, exclusion, and often, discrimination. Our discussions stress the importance of creating a world that acknowledges and respects the unique identities of non-binary individuals, fostering an inclusive environment where they can express themselves authentically and without fear of judgment.

In the pursuit of gender equality, we must recognize that each individual's experience is unique. The struggles and barriers may differ, but the ultimate goal remains the same - to create a society that upholds the principles of fairness, respect, and dignity for all genders. Our conversations emphasize the need for collective action, where all individuals, communities, governments, and organizations work in unison to challenge biases, rewrite norms, and advocate for policies that prioritize inclusivity.

Education plays a pivotal role in this collective endeavor. By enlightening individuals on the nuances and importance of gender equality, we can alter perceptions and cultivate a generation that values diversity. Engaging men and boys in this dialogue is equally crucial, for they too have a stake in the journey towards equality. Men must become allies, breaking free from the chains of toxic masculinity and actively contributing to a world where all genders are celebrated.

The road to gender equality is a journey we must embark upon together. It calls for a society that nurtures empathy, understanding, and acceptance. Let us envision a world where every individual is free to define their identity, pursue their passions, and contribute their unique talents without prejudice. Through dialogue, advocacy, and action, we can reshape the narrative and build a society where equality knows no bounds. The time to act is now, for a more inclusive and equitable future awaits us all.

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