

# Gender Equality – Is it an Answer for Women Empowerment in India?

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## **Abstract:**

### **Background:**

Initiative to empower women is a way of supporting them in developing their ability to understand their rights and opportunities in order to live a life with dignity and respect. If we look at women as a whole from a global perspective, we can observe that in some parts of the world they are more empowered, whereas in others they live with utmost deprivation. Women in developing countries, such as South Asian countries, are historically constrained by social, cultural and religious barriers, and studies have found that in countries where religious restrictions exist, women are less likely to have the most basic prerequisite for financial independence, such as having their own bank accounts. In some cases, the way they have to dress is also imposed on them by these external restrictions. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, women in some developing countries are still facing the issue of “dowry”, and some of them even experience harassment after marriage if the dowry expectation is not met. It is worth noting that it happens in places where “dowry” is banned and unlawful. In some places, there are cases where girl babies are not even given the right to take birth as parents prefer boys over girls. It is often found that the majority of social, cultural and religious restrictions on women are unfortunately defined and forced by fellow men. Although there are biological characteristics that separate women from men, if adequate opportunities are available, there is nothing that women cannot accomplish in this world. We can see women excelling in heavily physical male-dominant games such as football, cricket, boxing and so on when they are provided appropriate coaching. This shows that women are second to none in performing with confidence when opportunities are provided. It is appreciable that various government and non-governmental organizations around the world are working to raise awareness about women’s empowerment and gender equality. At the same time, we can also see social evils such as dowry deaths, violence against women and so on still happening in some parts of the world even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Research question and methods:**

Wherever we discuss about women empowerment, we can observe a close relationship between lack of women empowerment and gender disparity. This raises the question for this study, “Is gender equality an answer for women empowerment?” This study focuses on providing an answer to this question in the context of India, the largest democracy with the second largest population as it stands now. For this study, a descriptive research design is used to collect data from a random selection of Indian women in various fields of life. Responses were collected using the 14 parameters as listed in Tables no 2 and no 3. These 14 parameters were identified based on literature reviews and author’s exposure to India.

### **Results:**

Out of the 14 parameters analysed, “Opportunity for basic education”, “Opportunity for higher education”, “Opportunity for leadership role” and “Economic freedom” are the 4 parameters rated with a mean value greater than 2.5. Parameters such as “Disparity in pay for the same job”, “Decision making related to marriage”, “Freedom to choose own dressing style”, “Payment of ‘dowry’ for marriage”, “Death due to dowry issue”, “Sexual assault against women”, “Abuse at home”, “Men sharing childcare responsibilities”, “Men sharing family member caring responsibilities” and “Men sharing household work” are rated with mean values less than or slightly higher than 2. This shows that although improvements have been recognized in some areas, it has also been identified that improvements are required in other areas in order to make further progress in gender equality and women empowerment in India.

### **Conclusion:**

In this study, “gender equality” does not imply that men and women become the same. It implies that women have the same freedom as men to choose their own lives and avail opportunities to improve their lives for better themselves and those around them. This study concludes that practicing gender equality to provide gender justice without any prejudice to any specific gender can directly contribute to women empowerment. Women should have equal rights to make decisions and choose the best for themselves rather than being imposed on them by external factors. This study also concludes that although gender equality can directly contribute to improving women empowerment, women empowerment alone may not always be sufficient to address gender inequality.

**Key Word:** *Women empowerment; Gender equality; Gender discrimination; Gender equality; Gender disparity; Dowry in India.*

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## **I. Introduction**

Human rights day is celebrated globally on 10 December every year. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is considered the most translated document in the world as it has been translated to 500 languages. The slogan for human rights day observed on 10 December 2021 is “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights” (United Nations, n.d.). When we speak about “Equality” for all human beings, studies show that gender equality and women empowerment continue to face challenges across the globe. Even though significant progress has been achieved in women empowerment so far, much more needs to be done to ensure that women all around the world have the freedom to live with dignity and freedom to choose the opportunities around them to enrich their life for both their own benefit and the wider society. Basic human rights such as right to education, freedom to make decisions, right to live with dignity and so on are the absolute necessities for a society to function harmoniously. There is no supremacy for any specific gender, region, religion, race or colour in availing these basic human rights, and no one has the right to curtail the rights of others. The purpose of the study’s research question, “Is gender equality an answer for women empowerment?” is to examine the relationship between the two terms “Women Empowerment” and “Gender Equality” in the context of India. This study collected data based on responses for survey questionnaires from a random sample of women in a variety of professions including politicians, professionals, academics, farmers, entrepreneurs and housewives. Women living in India were selected for this survey. A comparison is made between these responses to analyse the relationship between gender equality and women empowerment. The results of the survey conclude that gender equality can directly help to improve women empowerment, whereas improvement in women empowerment alone may not always be sufficient to address gender inequality.

## **II. Literature review**

### **Women empowerment**

Women empowerment is globally identified as one of the key elements to achieve improvements in all walks of our lives. According to the Oxford learners’ dictionary, “empowerment” is the “act of giving somebody more control over their own life or the situation they are in” to live a socially respectable and economically independent lives. It aims to enable women to use their knowledge and skills to lead a life with dignity and respect. Their sense of empowerment gives individuals the confidence to do things that are important to them and for the wider society. Historically, because of deep-rooted cultural and philosophical misconceptions (Casimir et al., 2013), women have experienced all sorts of deprivation across cultures, races, regions and religions (Mandal, 2013). Irrespective of developed countries, developing countries, urban society or rural society, this deprivation and inequality exist everywhere except that it differs on the types of problems women face in these different groups. Even though there are more discussions on this topic, more work needs to be done in order to expand the reachability of women empowerment efforts across the world. Although lots of efforts are being currently taken by various government and non-governmental organizations, the persistence of the problems women face in equality of opportunities, improved social status, improved economic independency and so on raise questions on the strategies adopted in these efforts (Nwagbara et al., 2012). If we look at this in the perspective of rural areas in developing countries, we can see this gap is wider.

By empowering women, they become aware of their rights and opportunities, as well as develop the ability to shape their own and the lives of those around them. Empowering someone does not grant them complete freedom to act irresponsibly. It implies that they become aware of the rights and opportunities they have to live a life with dignity and contribute to the welfare of the society. If we look at history, the majority of the “rules of suppression” that women face in some parts of the world were decided by others, and eventually these rules became religious practice, cultural practice and so on, and it has come to a situation that no one can or no one dares to challenge them even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Challenges for women empowerment**

Although it is recognized that more efforts are required to improve women empowerment globally, it is important to identify the challenges that hinder these efforts and what needs to be done to address those challenges. A study conducted by Varghese (2011) suggests that women in Oman are aware of their rights and duties and also suggests that more needs to be done for their wider participation in trainings, seminars and paid employments. In this case, it is good to see that women are aware of their duties and more can be done to boost their confidence to take active participation in social and economic activities. In some other cases, women may

not be even aware of their rights and wider responsibilities to the society. In South Asian countries that have religious restrictions, including Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Maldives, Nepal and Bhutan, women are less likely to participate in financial activities than males (Aziz et al., 2022), whereas in countries with no such restrictions there are more active financial participations from women. In other words, these women are either not aware of their rights and may have adopted that life style as normal or they have little choice but to live with these restrictions. Unfortunately in India the potential role of women in the society has been ignored (Sharma & Varma, 2008) for centuries, maybe because of its social structure or because of ignorance of the fact that the women empowerment is not only a direct contribution to social progress but also helps to uplift women's ability to shape their own and the lives of their families in the future. Even though it continues to be the vision of every government to uplift or empower rural women by equipping them to improve their economic independency, it is still in its infancy. Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are instances where women have been denied access to education, training and employment because of social and religious beliefs or practices; it is worth to note India's first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's words in this instance:

*“If you educate a man you educate an individual, however, if you educate a woman you educate a whole family. Women empowered means mother India empowered”*

Dantas et al. (2020) conducted a study on migrant women in Western Australia and have suggested that more supportive policies are required to help migrant women to articulate their needs, aspirations and voices. When women from different cultures, races or educational backgrounds migrate to another country, it is important to recognize their education and skills and provide necessary support to ensure they are integrated into the indigenous society and enable them to contribute their part to the society. This may be the case with migrant women in other developed countries as well, because their original culture, race, education and so on will differ from indigenous women and adequate support, training and recognition have to be provided to empower and integrate these women into their society. In developed countries, where opportunities are more accessible to women, it is important to ensure there is no segregation within women based on race, culture or religion.

Education is considered a milestone for women empowerment (Shetty & Hans, 2015) because as they acquire knowledge they will be better equipped to understand the opportunities around them and challenge the barriers that prevent them from accessing those opportunities. Those who are deprived of education and training will have less opportunities to develop their skills, which will cause them to live in ignorance of the opportunities around them. This not only impacts women, but also impacts the entire society. Education is not just achieving literacy; it enables people to think critically, improves their self-confidence and inspires them to aspire for a better life with dignity. When we talk about women empowerment we talk about women taking leadership roles (Sharma et al., 2014), whether in career, entrepreneurship or in any field they enter into. Sharma et al. (2014) suggested that women entrepreneurs not only interact with their women subordinates, but also listen to them and assist them in developing their skills to contribute effectively for the business. This will help the women subordinates to improve their self-esteem and make further progress in the future. Any effort to support women on education, entrepreneurship and further progress into leadership roles in all fields they work will help further enhance the progress achieved in women empowerment. Women empowerment is not only a requirement for women but is also a requirement for the entire society to ensure they can understand their rights and live with dignity as a society.

Opportunity to come up into leadership roles is another step towards women empowerment. Women in leadership roles are still found to be less in number compared with men. In some parts of the world, there are more women leaders in politics, business and other fields, whereas in others, women representation is still very poor. There can be many reasons for this. Sometimes women themselves might have taken the decision to tailor their life to prioritize their families, or sometimes it is externally imposed on them because of social, cultural or religious practices. Rubab et al. (2021) in their study identified that in a developed country such as Australia even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century less women are coming into political leadership roles and more needs to be done to increase women participation in this area. Similar is the case with women in entrepreneurship as well. Undoubtedly, women-owned enterprises are increasing across the world, and various government and non-governmental organizations are in place to help women entrepreneurship. In a study comparing women entrepreneurs in Indonesia and the United States, irrespective of the regional and cultural differences between these two countries, it was found that women entrepreneurs show care for others and focus on the process of listening and persuading (Sudarmanti et al., 2015) others to develop their skills and improve their performance. Empowering fellow colleagues and equipping them with more skills to contributing in their area of work is an important quality of an entrepreneur or leader.

### **Gender equality**

Although it appreciated the significant improvements achieved so far on promoting gender equality and women empowerment, UN Women, which is an entity of United Nations working for gender equality and women empowerment, also urged the need for more systematic and effective implementation of gender equality and women empowerment (UNWomen.org,2022). To understand the relationship between gender equality and women empowerment, it is important not to misinterpret the term “gender equality” as it gets misinterpreted most often. As mentioned in the definition below, it is not asking for men and women to become the same; instead, it is to ensure everyone irrespective of gender can use their rights and avail the opportunities to contribute their part towards self and social development. In other words, to ensure everyone gets equal opportunity to empower themselves instead of it being controlled or granted to them by someone else.

#### ***Gender Equality***

*“This refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a women’s issue but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centered development.”*.(UN Women Gender Equality Glossary, n.d.)

To achieve gender equality there should be an appropriate representation of women in all walks of life, whether it social, political or professional. The very basic human right for education can play a vital role in reducing gender disparity and help to improve women empowerment (Sharma et al., 2014). At the same time we can also see that sometimes because of social, cultural or religious reasons even educated women are forced to stay away from using their skills and knowledge for their growth as well as for the benefit of the society. If initiatives are taken to tackle these inequalities, it will create opportunities for skilled women to use their knowledge in IT and other innovative fields (Musaeva, 2021) and thereby contribute to the society and economy directly.

On leadership roles gender disparity is predominant everywhere globally. When it comes to tribal and rural communities it has been found that traditionally these women are disempowered socially and treated as less capable to lead and mostly refrained from societal leadership positions in India (Bhaskar & Kaushik, 2022). When there are women with appropriate leadership qualities, there is no reason why they are left behind in leadership roles in politics or in workplace. It may be the mindset of the male chauvinistic society, or it may be that women are not coming forward because of family commitments or social and cultural barriers. Whatever the reason, if women are appropriately represented in leadership roles, more can be done to ensure women’s rights are not subject to suppression. Gender equality in political leadership is not only the requirement for women, but it is also a requirement for all sectors of the society to represent citizens equally. In modern world women must also be able to capture the opportunities and come forward to self-empower rather than waiting for outsiders to empower them (Akhter, 2021), thereby the gender disparity in leadership roles will slowly wade away.

As highlighted by Shannon et al. (2019), gender equality in science, medicine and global health has the capacity to create a great impact on health, social and economic gains. This study states that, in the medical field, a gender diverse medical workforce can provide better patient care, and in other business corporate settings a gender diverse work force has shown improved productivity, employee retention and satisfaction. When we talk about gender diverse workforce in all fields, there is a genuine question on disparity in pay offered to women. It is often found women with same or more skillsets and performing same role and tasks as their male counterparts are getting paid lesser. Even though organizations may not agree on this explicitly, recently more and more organizations are coming forward to address this issue. According to Graf et al. (2018), one of the most commonly reported forms of discrimination at workplace is inequality in earnings. This study states “one-in-four employed women said they have earned less than a man who was doing the same job; just 5% of men said they have earned less than a woman doing the same job”.

In a study conducted by Carli (2020), it is highlighted that around the world, irrespective of their employment status, women spend more time in childcare and other household work than men. Compared with the past, although the number of women in employment is increasing globally, the time that women invest in one-to-one care of the children is also increasing. This puts a lot of pressure on women in balancing their work

and family life. Even though there are exceptions where men share the childcare responsibilities, still it is the women who are taking time off and even sacrificing their job or career for childcare (Graf et al., 2018). This applies the same on care for other family members and sharing responsibilities in other household work. This study also suggested that more women had to quit their jobs to take care of family members, whereas lesser men did the same. These historical practices where women take care of all the household work still continues to be the case even if women are in a more demanding and busy professional life. It has to be admitted that lot of improvements have been achieved in this area, where we can see gradual progress in men understanding the importance of sharing household work and caring responsibilities for both children and family members. At the same time, in certain societies and cultures, it is still assumed that these are women's responsibilities and men have nothing to do with it even if they have the time to share these responsibilities. This gender disparity is something waiting to be addressed for a long time.

In Indian culture, there is a practice of “dowry”, a term that describes property or valuable items given by the wife's parents to the husband as a marital payment. This is a custom followed from the middle ages and was started to provide some economic safety to women after marriage (Jayant, 2021). In those days, because women were not employed or played any part in economic activities, this might have acted as a good support for their future life. But as time progressed, this has become a custom and it has become more of a demand from the husband's family rather than a practise of the wife's parents gifting their daughter. Now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, even though giving or accepting dowry is considered illegal, there are expectations from most of the men with the exception of a few that women's parents must give some valuable items to her at the time of marriage. This is also creating cases of harassments and death of women (Jayant, 2021) over dowry, sometimes even in well-educated families. Seth and Modi (2022) suggested proper education and empowerment can help women to protest against dowry system, and it can help to reduce dowry deaths. Perhaps because the new generation is becoming more empowered through recognition of their own strength and capability, they will be instrumental in eradicating this social evil from Indian society in the future.

All these studies show that even though there are improvements in reducing gender disparity, whether it is at home, workplace or in politics, still there is room for lot of improvement. There are some historically routed practices in branding women as responsible for certain duties such as household work, childcare and so on. When more and more women enter into employment, business and other fields, it is important to move away from these types of practices and share responsibilities equally by respecting women's rights to advance in their lives and careers while also fulfilling their responsibilities to their families. Although men and women are biologically different, using that gender difference as an excuse to prevent them from availing equal opportunities and rights as that of men is an absolute injustice not only to women but also to humanity as a whole, as it hinders progress in our society at all nook and corners of the world.

### **III. Research Methodology**

This study has used descriptive research design, where surveys and interviews were conducted based on questionnaires using a random sample of women from India in various fields such as politicians, professionals, academics, farmers, entrepreneurs and housewives. A total of 25 Indian women were selected for this survey. Responses were collected using the 14 parameters listed in Tables no 2 and no 3. These 14 parameters were identified based on the literature reviews and authors' exposure to India.

### **IV. Data Analysis and Discussion**

The analysis is split into two parts: Part 1 shows the profile of the women who responded in the survey. Part 2 shows analysis on various parameters related to gender equality.

Table no 1 summarizes the education levels, field of work, annual income and age group of those who participated in this survey. The profile data show 56% of those who participated in the survey are graduates. On the field of work, it varies across different fields with more representation from working professionals in IT and entrepreneurs. On age group, 32% of those who were surveyed were in the age group of 30–40 years.

**Table no 1: Profile analysis of respondents– India.**

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>%</b>
Education levels	Graduation and above	14	56
	Plus 2 /Pre-Degree/ A Level	8	32
	10th standard	2	8
	Below 10th standard	1	4
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>
Field of work	Entrepreneur	3	12
	Working professional – service sector	4	16
	Academia	2	8
	Farming	4	16
	Housewives	3	12
	Working professionals– IT	5	20
	Working professionals– manufacturing sector	3	12
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>
Age group (years)	Below 20	4	16
	20–30	3	12
	30–40	8	32
	40–50	7	28
	50 and above	3	12
	<b>Totals</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100</b>

In this survey, data were collected and the responses for 14 parameters are summarized in Tables no 2 and no 3 respectively. Responses are grouped into four categories – “Good improvement”, “Moderate” improvement, “No change” and “Worse”. Each row in Tables no 2 and no 3 show the parameter, the number of people who responded in each of the above four categories, their percentage and the relevant scores. A weightage score of 4, 3, 2 and 1 are given for each Good, Moderate, No change and Worse result, respectively. Total responses, Total percentage and Total score are also calculated in these tables.

**Table no 2:** Gender justice – Level of improvement – India.

Parameters	Gender Justice –Level of improvement														
	Good			Moderate			No change			Worse			Total		
	N	%	S	N	%	S	N	%	S	N	%	S	N	%	S
Opportunity for basic education	12	48	48	8	32	24	2	8	4	3	12	3	25	100	79
Opportunity for higher education	10	40	40	6	24	18	2	8	4	7	28	7	25	100	69
Opportunity in leadership roles	8	32	32	10	40	30	4	16	8	3	12	3	25	100	73
Disparity in pay for the same job	5	20	20	3	12	9	5	20	10	12	48	12	25	100	51
Decision making related to marriage	3	12	12	3	12	9	7	28	14	12	48	12	25	100	47
Freedom to choose own dressing style	3	12	12	4	16	12	6	24	12	12	48	12	25	100	48
Payment of “Dowry” for marriage	3	12	12	3	12	9	9	36	18	10	40	10	25	100	49
Death because of dowry issue	4	16	16	3	12	9	9	36	18	9	36	9	25	100	52
Economic freedom	9	36	36	8	32	24	5	20	10	3	12	3	25	100	73
Sexual assault against women	3	12	12	3	12	9	5	20	10	14	56	14	25	100	45
Abuse at home	3	12	12	4	16	12	6	24	12	12	48	12	25	100	48
Men sharing childcare responsibilities	3	12	12	2	8	6	9	36	18	11	44	11	25	100	47
Men sharing family member caring responsibilities	2	8	8	2	8	6	9	36	18	12	48	12	25	100	44
Men sharing household work	4	16	16	3	12	9	5	20	10	13	52	13	25	100	48

Note: N – Number of people responded, % – percentage, S – Score (Good – 4, Moderate– 3, No change – 2, Worse – 1)

Table no4summarizesthe mean of the total scores. Out of the 14 parameters surveyed only 4 parameters show an average value greater than2.5.

Analysing these mean values “Opportunity for basic education”, “Opportunity for higher education”, “Opportunity for leadership role” and “Economic freedom” are the parameters rated with a mean value greater than2.5.We can see that it is a sign of improvement. At the same time, “Disparity in pay for the same job”, “Decision making related to marriage”, “Freedom to choose own dressing style”, “Payment of ‘dowry’ for marriage”, “Death because of dowry issue”, “Sexual assault against women”, “Abuse at home”, “Men sharing childcare responsibilities”, “Men sharing family member caring responsibilities” and “Men sharing household work” are rated with mean values less than or slightly greater than2 and are shown as areas of concern or areas that require more improvement in terms of gender equality.

**Table no 4:** Mean – Comparison.

Parameters	Mean
Opportunity for basic education	3.16
Opportunity for higher education	2.76
Opportunity in leadership roles	2.92
Disparity in pay for the same job	2.04
Decision making related to marriage	1.88
Freedom to choose own dressing style	1.92
Payment of “dowry” for marriage	1.96
Death because of dowry issue	2.08
Economic freedom	2.92
Sexual assault against women	1.8
Abuse at home	1.92
Men sharing childcare responsibilities	1.88
Men sharing family member caring responsibilities	1.76

Men sharing household work	1.92
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As we can see there are areas with good improvements such as opportunity for basic and higher education and opportunities for leadership roles in India. This is a good sign that as women become more educated, it will help to empower the new generation of women, and they can become more aware of their rights and develop capability to decide what is good for them, their family and their society without anything imposed on them externally by others.

From this study we can see that all those parameters such as opportunities for education and economic freedom rated with higher mean values are some of the factors that resulted in the improvement in women empowerment achieved so far in India. These two parameters can be very well attributed to the rate of growth in women empowerment globally. Ensuring opportunities for improvements are available to everyone irrespective of gender difference will help to empower women who are left behind historically based on different social, cultural, regional and religious reasons. From those parameters rated with lower mean value, we can see that a clear gender disparity exists even now and more needs to be done to tackle these issues. This study also shows that all these low-rated parameters if improved will directly help to empower women. For example, when men share childcare or family care responsibilities, there may be cases where women can continue with their profession without which they will end up sacrificing their profession to take care of the family. These types of support will help in further empowering women and thus their family. Some parameters such as issues on dowry may not be a global issue; but undoubtedly where it exists, it is a social evil that needs to be removed to treat women with dignity. Currently efforts are being taken by various government and non-governmental organizations to empower women, and still there are lots of areas as highlighted in this study where women are not empowered. So this study proposes to focus more on addressing gender inequality in order to achieve more progress in women empowerment. More focused efforts to address gender inequality or gender injustice can help to focus on the core issues that hinder women empowerment.

## **V. Conclusion**

This study has surveyed women with different profiles based in India. Even though it is recognized that this study was not conducted with global data collection, it is the view of this study that India, being a country with different social, cultural, religious and regional systems co-functioning in everyone's day-to-day life, can be a good representation of most developing countries for the purpose of survey in this study. Even though there can be differences on data if we were to take survey from other countries, we consider the survey findings in this study genuinely represents the problems majority of the women face in their day-to-day life globally.

Although the need for women empowerment is acknowledged on a global scale, there are parameters such as paying dowry, harassment or death because of dowry issues, sexual assault and abuse against women, not sharing care responsibilities and household work and so on will hinder any effort towards women empowerment. These parameters are pure examples of gender injustice and gender inequality. If we consider a scenario where gender inequality does not exist at least in these parameters mentioned above, we can then understand the level of empowerment it can have on women's life. At the same time, we can see that improvement in women empowerment alone may not directly help to improve all areas of gender inequality. It is observed that some of these gender inequalities are defined by fellow men hiding behind the rules of social, cultural or religious practices. Men have no authority to define the rules for women that stops them from availing the basic human rights that they are entitled to live with. Some of these deep-rooted mentalities can be addressed by spreading more awareness among men on the importance of gender equality for the benefit of the society and to the entire world itself. As mentioned before, this study does not consider gender equality to that of women and men being the same; instead, it recognizes the biological differences between men and women and considers gender equality as practicing gender justice by recognizing the rights of every individual to avail the opportunities and rights that they are entitled to without being suppressed by fellow citizens in the name of social, cultural, religious or regional barriers. This study concludes that although improvement in gender equality directly helps to improve women empowerment, improvement in women empowerment alone may not always be sufficient to address gender inequality; more efforts are required to spread the awareness of gender equality among men who can then understand the importance of gender equality to live with harmony in a better society where everyone can play their role for the benefit of each other. This study also suggests that more focused efforts to tackle gender inequality will be a good approach to achieve more improvements in women empowerment. A further follow-up research on how modern digital technologies can be used to improve awareness on gender equality and women empowerment can help to take this discussion to the next level.

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