Introduction

Gender inequality continues to be one of the lasting and deeply ingrained social problems in society even in the 21st century. Gender inequality is the definition of the unjust treatment or biased perceptions of individuals based on their gender. The unequal treatment is eminent in education, employment, healthcare, and representation in politics and individual rights. Gender inequality affects both men and women, however, it disproportionately affects women and girls. Gender inequality is an inherent social issue prevalent in institutional structures, and cultural norms and contributes to socio-economic differences. Addressing this requires a comprehensive and intersectional approach encompassing legal reform, public education, and innovative policy.

The Social Problem and Raised Issues

Gender inequality is recognized as a social problem by a diverse group of stakeholders including international organizations, governments of many nations, advocacy groups, researchers, and individuals who are directly affected by this social problem. Organizations like the United Nations, World Economic Forum, and many non-governmental organizations regularly publish reports highlighting gender differences across the world. The feminist movements evident in the pages of history till the contemporary times have advocated for equality in society and ushered awareness of the institutional and cultural bias in society (Leon-Guerrero, 2021, p.62). This awareness has also addressed the gender wage gap present in employment, further paving the way for raising voices against the social problem and breaking the barriers of society that limit a woman from achieving her full potential.

UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 emphasizes achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls. The aim is to mitigate all forms of discrimination, violence, and harmful practices against women and girls while uplifting them so that they can have access to

equal opportunities. Similarly, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap ranks countries according to gender differences based on economic participation, education, health, and political representation. These organizations determine equality by arguing that gender inequality is not only a moral and human rights issue but also a barrier to economic development and social unity.

Governments especially in the democratic and progressive nations have rendered gender inequality as a problem. For example, in the United States legislative measures like the Equal Pay Act in 1963 and the Education Amendment of 1972 encompassing Title IX were passed to battle gender discrimination. Social scientists and researchers give theoretical and empirical findings into the nature and aftermath of gender disparities which backs up the claims of the activists and policy makers.

Empirical Evidence Supporting the Claims

A fundamental body of empirical evidence supports the aspect that gender inequality is a pervasive and degenerative social problem that pulls society backward. From the economic perspective, the gender wage gap is a major indicator of the development of a nation. According to the U.S Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023), “Women in the United States earned 82 cents per dollar earned by men”. The World Economic Forum globally estimated that it will take 130 years to reduce the gender gap with the current pace of progress.

There has been significant improvement in education where literacy rates of women have improved even though differences still exist in many regions. According to the reports of UNESCO, female rates in Sub-Saharan Africa still lag behind males. Girls are bereft of education in the conflict zones and in conservative societies where they are expected to do only the household chores and remain within the periphery of the household.

In the political scenario, women are largely underrepresented in the present day as they are not accepted in leadership roles. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023), “It has been found that only 26% of parliamentarians around the world are women. In the corporate world women only comprise only 30% of the executive positions”.

Women also face hurdles while they access healthcare as they continue to face barriers while accessing quality healthcare. Women continue to be underrepresented in clinical research and therefore, face obstacles while accessing reproductive health services leading to gender biased health treatments. Furthermore, gender-based violence like domestic abuse and sexual assault affects women preventing them from raising their voices and the incidents go underreported. Due to stigma and systemic barriers, women are unable to report the incidents to the authorities, they face discrimination even when they are employed and in educational institutions (Leon-Guerrero, 2021, p.59). Due to the normalized standards of society, they find it difficult to properly convey their problems to the watchdogs of society who fail to offer protection due to structural impediments.

Who is Affected and How

The social problem of gender inequality affects everyone across all ages, races, classes, and geographical locations. However, women and girls are the most impacted by the inequity prevalent in the society. The effects of gender inequality vary according to the experiences based on race, class, disability, and sexual orientation. For example: Black and Latina women in America experience a significant wage gap in comparison to white women. On the other hand, Indigenous women in Canada face higher rates of violence and lower life expectancy due to rampant discrimination since the historical times and the stereotypes associated with the Indigenous population. The experiences of the LGBTQIA+ population are different especially

transgender women face unique challenges while accessing education, healthcare, employment, and housing.

Alternatively, men are also affected by gender inequality, especially in ways that reinforce harmful gender norms. Societal expectations encompassing masculinity can prevent the emotional expression of men discouraging their participation in caregiving roles which further contributes to mental health issues and suicide. However, these problems are not given prominence in public discussion compared to that of women.

Causes of Gender Inequality

Gender inequality is the consequence of historical, cultural, economic, and institutional factors. Since ancient times patriarchal norms have been deeply rooted in society which gives privilege to male authority and leadership. These norms have often been exemplified by cultural tradition, religious conviction, and representation by the media which reinforce the gender roles.

Discrimination has been normalized in many institutions adding to another significant cause. There are laws and policies with the aim of protecting the people, however, they fail to provide adequate protection to women when they face gender-based violence or when they do not get adequate parental leave. The policies often overlook the unique healthcare requirements of women due to systemic inequality (Leon-Guerrero, 2021, p.34). Women's roles in caregiving and education are undervalued from the economic perspective further cumulating to the systemic inequality.

Educational systems and representation in media normalize gender stereotypes which makes it difficult to bridge the gap in wages, educational systems, and accessing healthcare. The textbooks that are commonly used in schools do not highlight the contribution of women to societal changes. Media objectifies women and represses their voices which further contributes

to biased perceptions and limited aspirations for women (Leon-Guerrero, 2021, p.94). Socialization from an early age also makes men and women adhere to the gender roles that are expected of them. Even the career paths are determined by gender expectations.

Consequences of Gender Inequality

The consequences of gender inequality can be extensive which affects not only the women and girls but also the communities and nation. Gender discrimination hinders economic progress and limits productivity. Gender equality will help in the development of the nation because an equal workforce will encourage women to work further enhancing the growth of a nation.

Viewing from the social perspective it can be asserted that gender inequality exacerbates poverty, leads to poor health outcomes, and prevents girls from attaining education and leading a better life. Because of the social issue of gender inequality, it paves the way for gender-based violence which is normalized and overlooked. Women are not allowed to indulge in the domains that are specifically allotted to me like sports, technical fields, and politics. This regresses the nation and limits the development of a society. The underrepresentation of women in politics further adds to the regression because the governance does not consider the diverse perspectives and viewpoints of the population. In this type of society, the Government does not look into the needs and perspectives of half of the population.

From a psychological viewpoint, gender inequality affects self-esteem as the affected individuals are unable to express their opinions and utilize their full potential. In workplaces, it further influences women negatively as despite their efforts they are unable to get promotions or there is an age gap with their male counterparts. The article written by Calvin et al. (2022) articulates, “Title VII prohibits discrimination in employment on the basis of sex (or race, color,

religion, and national origin)". Despite legal reformation, the problem exists and it is posing hurdles in the lives of women who are seeking to establish themselves. The struggles do not cease for women as they try to live their lives while trying to strive hard in the workplace. Even in the arena of sports where they do not have the scope to show the world their full potential. In these male-dominated areas, women suffer from imposter syndrome, burnout, and harassment. Men also suffer from the aftereffects of gender discrimination as they find it hard to seek help for mental health issues or feel pressured to follow gender expectations giving rise to aggressive behaviors.

Existing Policies and Organized Responses

There are different policies and organized responses that address gender inequality and aim to uplift society. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is a salient framework that is meant to uplift the rights of women. This is meant to give rights to women so that they can navigate the world and make their choices instead of relying on the expected gender norms and roles. In order to uplift women many countries have established gender quotas in politics so that women can lead the political scenario and inspire other women to participate in politics and uphold the problems faced by women while striving to survive in the patriarchal society. According to authors Casad et al (2021), "Women of color face gender disparities since they not only contend with sexism in academia but also racism". Black women face further prejudice because of their skin colour which makes them difficult to access education and embark on the career path of their choice. Systemic inequality coupled with institutional barriers amplifies their struggle to receive education dominated by men and white privilege. Authors Casad et al (2021), further add that, "Women tend to lack social capital as demonstrated by receiving smaller lab spaces, lower salaries, and fewer prestigious opportunities

compared to their male counterparts". There must be strict enforcement of the policies so that women from different classes, races, and cultural backgrounds do not feel the urge to fit in.

Non-governmental organizations play a cardinal role in addressing gender equality, providing services to the affected individuals, and then conducting research. For example, U.N. Women supports worldwide programs that promote economic development, battle violence and address legal reforms (Agarwal, 2021, p.52). Grassroots movements like #MeToo have spread awareness about sexual harassment and assault, compelling a change in policies especially in workplaces and educational institutions.

Initiatives have also been taken in the corporate sector as the companies are increasingly implementing strategies for diversity, equity, and inclusion programs which are offering parental leaves, and conducting pay audits. However, critics are of the opinion that these initiatives are superficial and fail to address deeper structural inequalities.

Evaluating the Existing Responses

The existing responses have brought about a considerable change in society enabling women to break the hurdles posed by society. Reformation in the legal sphere and the increase in quotas will inspire women to participate in politics. However, cultural beliefs and institutional resistance deter women from effectively taking part in leadership roles. For example, women in executive positions in corporate or political offices often face sexism, tokenism, and lack of support from the people. Despite all these challenges women are marching forward and taking part in the arena which was primarily allotted to women since ancient times (Agarwal, 2021, p.36). Programs that are made for the economic empowerment of women may overlook obstacles like unpaid care work or limited access to childcare which negatively affects women.

Legal protections against gender-based violence are beneficial when they combine with the strong mechanism of enforcement with societal support for the survivors.

Additionally, most of the intervention for preventing violence and discrimination adopts a universal approach that fails to consider the aspects of intersectionality. Policies that give added advantages to white middle-class women might not give prominence to the unique challenges faced by women because of race and class. Therefore, the policies should be fabricated with a more nuanced and inclusive approach to creating a society where equality will be prevalent.

Conclusion

Gender inequality is a consistent and complicated problem that negatively influences individuals, communities, and nations on various levels. It is widely recognized as a significant obstacle to social injustice and economic development by institutions, governments, and researchers. The empirical evidence further sheds light on the pervasive nature of gender discrimination and its harmful effects on society.

Despite the transformation in policy and organized responses to this structural inequity, much work needs to be done. An approach addressing every aspect of inequality like legal reforms, cultural shifts, economic restructuring, and intersectional analysis is important. True progress is not only about giving a spotlight on the symptoms of inequality but also making a change in the underlying beliefs and systems that reinforce this inequality in society.

References:

Agarwal, B. (2021, May). Gender Inequality. In *Cooperation and Environmental Sustainability (paper presented at a workshop on 'Inequality, Collective Action, and Environmental Sustainability', Working Paper 02-10-058, Santa Fe Institute, New Mexico, 2002)*.

Casad, B. J., Franks, J. E., Garasky, C. E., Kittleman, M. M., Roesler, A. C., Hall, D. Y., & Petzel, Z. W. (2021). Gender inequality in academia: Problems and solutions for women faculty in STEM. *Journal of Neuroscience Research*, *99*(1), 13-23.

Calvin, A., Bowes, A., Carrick, S., & Pope, S. (2022). The price of success: Equal pay and the US women's national soccer team. *Soccer & Society*, *23*(8), 920-931.

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2023). Women in Parliament 2023. Retrieved From: https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2024-03/women-in-parliament-2023 [Retrieved On: 27-05-25]

Leon-Guerrero, A. (2021). Social problems: Community, policy, and social action. Sage Publications.

UNESCO (2020). Inclusion and Education. Retrieved From: https://www.unesco.org/gem-report/en/inclusion [Retrieved On: 27-05-25]

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2023). Women's earnings were 83.6 percent of men's in 2023. Retrieved From: https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2024/womens-earnings-were-83-6-percent-of-mens-in-2023.htm [Retrieved On: 27-05-25]