

GENDER INEQUALITY IMPRESSIONS ON WOMEN'S MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH

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Abstract: Women play an important role in running the society. Better health is a key to human happiness and wellbeing. Economic development of a country is dependent on the health of the population and vice versa. Female under-empowerment is one of the most important reason of ill health in a society. The paper tries to understand the effect of gender inequality on the health of the women.

Keywords: Women, Health, Development, Empowerment.

Introduction: Women is an important and integral part of the social system. In the present world they are seen to manage both work front and household activities. They spend their life for the well being of the family and in return gets unequal access to food, education, employment and healthcare. The large majority of Indian women are constantly in the process of balancing more traditional roles and responsibilities with the ever changing modern environment. (Desai Manisha, 2003).

Health: World Health Organization (WHO) has defined health as 'state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely an absence of disease or infirmity'. In 1978 WHO added the phrase 'to lead a socially and economically productive life' to the definition. The definition refers to different aspects of health. Physical health refers to the anatomical, physiological and bio chemical functioning of the human body.

Mental well being refers to a state which indicates that the individual enjoys his routine, there is no undue conflicts, no frequent episodes of depression or elevation of mood. Social health means that level of health which enables a person to live in harmony with his surroundings. Social health can be measured by attitude scales, socioeconomic status, level of literacy, employment status etc. The determinants of health are genetic configuration, level of economic and social development, lifestyle, environment and health infrastructure.

Health and Development: Development is a complex process. Good health promotes human development. Better health is a key to human happiness and wellbeing. Economic development of a country is dependent on the health of the population and vice versa. Improving health outcome is not only related to provisions of health services but also to interventions outside health sector.

There is requirement to develop policies on the mechanism to deliver health. Safe motherhood depends on the strength and capability of rearing healthy children. It is very important for human development. It is important form of human capital.

Gender Inequality: Gender is a socially constructed term which refers to roles behaviours, activities and attributes that s given society considers for men and women. There is a need to apply gender equity to develop every human being. Gender equality refers to equal opportunity for people to realize their full rights and potential. Gender Inequality refers to differences in the distribution of rewards and/ or exposures and risks on the basis of gender. The World Bank has targeted gender inequality in both the developing and developed world as one of the primary roadblocks to economic growth. (Wilson John, 2009) Gender inequality affects health and well being. It is the right of both men and women to get equal access to health. The United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing, China on September, 1995 said that women have the right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. It is seen that the major barrier in achieving the highest attainable standard of health is gender inequality. The experiences of women in India are as varied as the country itself. In India, the educational and professional opportunities available to women from middle class or more affluent backgrounds are not much different from those afforded in Europe or the United States. In contrast the lives of other women are dominated by different socioeconomic realities that limit job opportunities and the possibilities for educational and career advancement, restrict access to healthcare, provide insufficient legal remedies in cases of domestic violence, harassment, assault and so on. (Desai Manisha, 2003).

Effect of Gender Inequality on Health: One of the most important social evil that perpetuates ill health in a society is gender bias or female under-empowerment. In India the effect of this is seen in cases of female foeticide, selective under nutrition of the girl child and healthcare related discrimination leading to greater female child mortality, multiple pregnancies and lack of maternal healthcare services, (Gupta Rajeev and Kumar Praneet, October 2007) Gender gaps are also persistent in health status, in access to health services, and in health outcomes. (Wach Heike, Hazel Reeves, February 2000). Gender

discrimination in access to health care and increasing resort to sex selective abortions are leading to increasing levels of excess female mortality among children, to male-biased sex ratios at birth.(Kabeer Naila, January 2008). In India, the 2011 census reveals that the overall sex ratio is 943 females for every 1000 males, showing a marginal increase of 10 points from the 2001 census of 933.. Maternal death is “ the death of a woman while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and site of pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy or its management but not from accidental or incidental cause.” The reason for maternal mortality rate can be attributed to under nutrition, lack of access to health care facilities as well as lack of awareness regarding healthy nutritional practices and immunization. The one indication of women’s poor access to health care (particularly prenatal care) is the wide spread prevalence of anemia, a condition treated simply and inexpensively by iron tablets . It is seen that over half of all pregnant women in India are anemic and anemia is the cause of 20 percent of maternal death. It is also seen that two third of all births take place at home or in facilities not attended by medical personnel, increasing the women’s health risks if unsanitary conditions exist or if there are complications during labour. Malnutrition compounded by heavy work demands, poverty , childbirth and the responsibilities of childrearing, result in an increased susceptibility to illness and an increased overall mortality rate (Desai Manisha, 2003). Depression among women is becoming a major problem. Rates of mental distress among Indian women are generally higher than Indian men. The causes of mental distress are mostly related to marital status and ability to have children. Domestic violence and abuse, as well as restrictions placed on women’s activities are also factors that contribute to low self

esteem and depression. (Desai Manisha, 2003). Kambo, et. al (2003) have indicated that there is need for creating community awareness about health care facilities and instill self concern in women for their own health needs. Sarmad et al.(2007) have seen that there is need to give more emphasis on female education, which has a positive impact on different aspects of life including reproductive health. Kumar et al.(2009) have commented that special emphasis is needed on education campaign for young males and youth to change their attitudes on masculinity and risk taking behavior. They said that emphasis has to be put on strengthening legislation that promotes gender equity and widespread publicity of laws against domestic violence and sexual abuse. Kumar, Bhanderi and Srinivasan (2010) have found that only a small proportion of women from the large number of women suffering from reproductive morbidity seek care. Socioeconomic conditions, caste norms, distance from health facilities, and duration of illnesses were the factors that determined Untreated Reproductive Morbidities.

Conclusion: The World Bank is trying to promote gender equality as one of the Millennium Development goals. The Millennium Development goals have targeted to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, promote gender equality and empower women, reduce child mortality and improve maternal health. It has to be noted that for the development of a country both men and women should make equal contribution towards the society. There is need to empower women for better health. The Beijing platform for action specific the need to focus on women’s empowerment and gender mainstreaming. There is need to frame policies to remove gender inequality in the country and improve the health status of the population.

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