

GENDER IMBALANCE IN INDIA: A PSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Gender imbalance in India is a complex issue that has a significant psychosocial impact on individuals and society as a whole. Psychosocial factors such as gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs, and social norms contribute to the perpetuation of gender inequality, leading to a skewed gender ratio in favor of males. One major factor contributing to gender imbalance in India is the cultural preference for male children. This preference is deeply ingrained in traditional beliefs and has been perpetuated for generations. Sons are seen as the carriers of the family name and lineage, while daughters are expected to marry and leave their parents' home. This cultural bias is further perpetuated by religious and social norms that promote patriarchy and male dominance. Gender stereotypes also play a significant role in perpetuating gender inequality in India. Traditional gender roles dictate that men are the breadwinners and decision-makers in the family, while women are expected to be homemakers and caregivers. These stereotypes limit women's opportunities for education and employment, perpetuating their economic dependence on men and reinforcing gender inequality. The psychosocial impact of gender imbalance in India is profound. Women are subjected to discrimination, harassment, and violence, and are often denied basic human rights such as education and healthcare. The skewed gender ratio has also led to an increase in the trafficking of women and girls, as well as other forms of exploitation. Gender imbalance in India is a complex issue that has deep-rooted psychosocial causes. To address this issue, it is important to challenge cultural biases and stereotypes that perpetuate gender inequality and to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. This can be achieved through education, awareness-raising, and the promotion of gender-sensitive policies

and programs. The current work tries and review gender imbalance from a psychosocial perspective and what are the challenges that are to be worked around to counter this social vice.

Paper Identification



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The concept of Gender Imbalance refers to the unequal distribution of males and females in the population. If we talk about India specifically, as per the 2011 census the country then had a sex ratio of 943 females for every 1000 males, which was a slight improvement from the 2001 census which recorded a sex ratio of 933 females for every 1000 males.

The current work aims at understanding the concept of Gender imbalance and the basic psychosocial perspectives which affect this phenomenon especially in context to India. The work also will reflect on all challenges that impede the balance and The Government initiatives in place to address this social dilemma.

Despite the slight improvement the Gender imbalance is very prevalent in particular regions of India. Female foeticide, infanticide, and discrimination against girls in terms of access to education, healthcare, nutrition and basic rights are some of the most prominent reasons for this imbalance. Certain states like Haryana, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh exhibit the most skewed data where there are much fewer females than males in the population.

There are several factors impacting this imbalance in India, here we will systematically talk about the various Socio-Cultural, Psychological, Environmental factors impacting this Imbalance.

Socio-Cultural Factors Affecting Gender Imbalance:

In order to understand any socio-cultural phenomenon present in any given society one must first understand the basic core belief of that society. Once we understand what impacts the society at its most basic it becomes relatively easy to understand why a phenomenon no matter how archaic is continually carried on and on generationally. So, in order to understand why this gender

imbalance exists in a rapidly growing economy like India we need to understand the core concept of Patriarchy.

Patriarchal Mindset: The term Patriarchy refers to a social system in which positions of dominance and privilege are primarily held by men. It is both a technical as well as anthropological term which in effect means that a family or clan is controlled by the father or the eldest male or groups of males. This thought process essentially renders women as the subjugated or submissive class as they exercise no control in decision making and have no say and since they are controlled by males they have no free will in terms of economy, education, healthcare, social standing etc. This has led to the all-pervasive feeling of male superiority and is generationally continued. India is and has always been patriarchal in nature and it is not surprising that male child is seen as an asset and a female child is then viewed as a liability.

Sex Selective Infanticide: Due to a preference for male child sex selective abortion and female foeticide is still a very prevalent practice in certain regions despite rigorous laws against it. The desire for a male child is so keen that women who ironically have no biological say in the gender of the child (as they contribute X chromosome in any case) are subjected to psychological, emotional and a number of times physical abuse for giving birth to a female child. They are subjected to atrocities for a process that they have no control over.

Lack of Economic Privilege: In a patriarchal system all financial decisions are controlled by men. Even though the law is clear that a female child is as much a legal heir of paternal assets as the male child, but in most cases, she is deprived of that right as it is an unwritten ideology that she belongs to another family and the male heir will keep all the property within the family. Since women are not considered equal shareholders and thus have no say in financial matters. Even in their own homes and in a number of cases where the women are financial contributors to a household, they still have no say as to how the assets and finances are distributed. Overtime the belief that females cannot manage finances and that aspect must be left to the males has become so deep rooted that women themselves believe that they are incapable of managing finances. Women are often expected to choose careers that are considered "suitable" for women, such as teaching or nursing, rather than male-dominated fields like engineering or technology. This limits women's opportunities and perpetuates gender inequality in the workplace. Women are

often discouraged from going out alone or traveling independently, which limits their opportunities and perpetuates gender inequality.

Gender Roles: The society as a whole has set gender roles and women are essentially considered the nurturers and men are seen as the providers. The society thus divides each task as per these defined roles which loosely states that women must be at home and take care of the household and children and men will be the bread earners. These gender roles then translate into job possibilities and opportunities. Women are encouraged to pursue education and job opportunities in fields that are considered to be in the nurturer domain. These gender roles then limit access to women despite having aptitude and skills.

Gender Based Violence: the skewed gender ratio impacts the amount of crime against women. Regions which have a lower women to men ratio show higher crime against women. There are higher cases of domestic violence and all gender-based violence such as sexual assault, rape, psychological and verbal abuse. A number of women are subjected to these on a daily basis and prevalence of eve teasing from catcalls to serious stalking is due to the core belief in male supremacy. Women are viewed as the property of men, as a child she is the property of the father and then of the husband. The entire onus of the family honor falls on her shoulders. This is true of any patriarchal society and this causes rise in the mental set that men are safer and more valuable than women who can be exploited and thus must be subjugated.

Lack of Empowerment: Women empowerment is one of the most debated concept in today's society. But, what exactly do we understand by this term? In a most basic term it is the ability to have a voice, to be heard to be able to make decisions independently. All factors that lead to empowerment are literacy, financial independence and awareness. In essence all factors to which women are allowed limited access if at all. The opportunity to further their education, have a career, be able to make independent financial decisions, make decisions in domain archaically considered male dominated. These opportunities pave way for empowerment and since they are inaccessible to most women the concept of women empowerment remains mostly theoretical.

Domestic roles: Women are often expected to fulfill traditional domestic roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, while men are expected to be the breadwinners. This expectation limits women's opportunities outside the home and reinforces gender roles. Women

are often judged on their appearance, and there is a societal pressure on them to conform to certain beauty standards. This can lead to body shaming, low self-esteem, and other issues that affect women's overall well-being. Women are often judged harshly for their sexual behavior, while men are often praised for the same behavior. This double standard perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces patriarchal attitudes.

These are a few socio-cultural factors which impact the Gender imbalance and cause its maintenance despite its ill effect on the society in general.

Psychological Viewpoint in Gender Imbalance:

There are several psychological theories that attempt to explain the gender imbalance that exists in various areas of society. Here are a few examples:

1. *Social learning theory:* According to this theory, children learn gender roles and behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement. They learn what is considered "appropriate" behavior for their gender based on the messages they receive from parents, peers, media, and society. This theory suggests that the gender imbalance is a result of societal expectations and norms that influence how individuals behave.
2. *Cognitive developmental theory:* This theory suggests that children develop gender identity through a series of cognitive stages. Children first learn to label themselves and others as male or female, and then they begin to understand the characteristics associated with each gender. This theory suggests that the gender imbalance is a result of the cognitive processes that children go through in developing their gender identity.
3. *Social cognitive theory:* This theory proposes that individuals learn gender roles and behaviors through a combination of cognitive and environmental factors. People develop beliefs and expectations about gender through observing and modeling others' behaviors, as well as through their own experiences. This theory suggests that the gender imbalance is a result of the complex interplay between individual cognition and social context.
4. *Evolutionary psychology:* This theory suggests that gender differences have evolved as adaptations to the environments in which humans lived throughout history. Evolutionary psychologists argue that men and women have different reproductive strategies and that these strategies have led to the development of different psychological and behavioral traits. This theory proposes that the gender imbalance is a result of innate, biologically-determined differences between men and women.

It's important to note that these theories are not mutually exclusive and that multiple factors likely contribute to the gender imbalance that exists in various areas of society.

Challenges to Counter Gender Imbalance:

There are several challenges that need to be overcome to effectively counter gender imbalance in society. Some of these challenges include:

1. *Patriarchal attitudes and norms:* Patriarchal attitudes and norms are deeply ingrained in many societies, and they can be challenging to overcome. It is essential to challenge these attitudes and norms through education, awareness-raising, and public engagement.
 2. *Lack of political will:* Addressing gender imbalance requires political will and a commitment from governments to enact and enforce laws that promote gender equality. However, many governments may lack the political will to take action on this issue.
 3. *Economic inequality:* Economic inequality is a significant driver of gender inequality, and addressing it is crucial to promoting gender equality. However, economic inequality can be difficult to address, as it requires structural changes to economic systems.
 4. *Limited access to education and employment opportunities:* Women often face limited access to education and employment opportunities, which perpetuates gender inequality. Addressing this issue requires investing in education and job training programs that specifically target women and girls.
 5. *Violence against women:* Violence against women is a widespread problem and a significant obstacle to achieving gender equality. Addressing this issue requires comprehensive legal frameworks, enforcement of laws, and support services for survivors.
 6. *Cultural and religious barriers:* Cultural and religious barriers can be challenging to overcome, as they are often deeply ingrained in society. Addressing these barriers requires working closely with communities to promote cultural sensitivity and respect for human rights.
- Overcoming these challenges requires a long-term and sustained effort from various stakeholders, including governments, civil society organizations, and individuals. It requires a commitment to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Government Initiative to Counter Gender imbalance:

The Indian government has implemented several policies to address gender imbalance in the country, including:

1. *The Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques (PCPNDT) Act*: This law makes it illegal to determine the gender of a fetus and prohibits the use of any technology or technique for prenatal sex determination.
2. *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao (Save the Daughter, Educate the Daughter) program*: This program was launched in 2015 to promote the education of girls and to combat female feticide and infanticide.
3. *Mahila E-Haat*: This is an online platform launched in 2016 to provide a market for women entrepreneurs to sell their products and services.
4. *Women's Helpline*: The government has set up a national helpline for women, which provides counseling and support services to women facing gender-based violence.
5. *Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Mission)*: This program aims to provide clean and safe sanitation facilities for women, which is particularly important for their health and safety.
6. *The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act*: This law was enacted in 2013 to prevent and address sexual harassment of women in the workplace.
7. *The Maternity Benefit (Amendment) Act, 2017*: This law extends the duration of paid maternity leave for women from 12 to 26 weeks.
8. *One-Stop Centres*: These centers provide support and assistance to women affected by violence, including domestic violence, sexual harassment, and trafficking.
9. *Reservation for women in local government*: The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution reserve 33% of seats for women in local government bodies.

These policies are aimed at addressing the root causes of gender imbalance in India, including gender discrimination, violence against women, and unequal access to education and healthcare. However, their effectiveness depends on proper implementation and enforcement, as well as changing societal attitudes towards gender equality.

Suggestions to counter Gender Imbalance:

Addressing gender imbalance in society requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders, including the government, civil society organizations, and individuals. Some steps that can be taken to minimize gender imbalance in society include:

1. *Education and awareness*: Educating individuals and raising awareness about gender inequality and its impact on society is crucial. This can be done through formal education, media campaigns, and community outreach programs.

2. *Legal reforms:* Enacting and enforcing laws that protect women's rights and promote gender equality is essential. This includes laws that address issues like violence against women, equal pay, and access to education and employment.
3. *Empowerment of women:* Empowering women through education, employment, and leadership opportunities can help break down gender barriers and reduce gender inequality. This includes promoting women's participation in politics, business, and other areas of public life.
4. *Challenging patriarchal attitudes:* Challenging patriarchal values and norms that perpetuate gender inequality is essential. This includes promoting gender equality in the home, workplace, and society at large.
5. *Engaging men and boys:* Engaging men and boys in efforts to promote gender equality is crucial. This includes promoting positive masculinity and challenging harmful gender norms and stereotypes.
6. *Providing healthcare and social support:* Providing healthcare and social support for women, especially those from marginalized communities, can help reduce gender inequality. This includes access to reproductive healthcare, maternal and child healthcare, and support for women who have experienced gender-based violence.

Addressing gender imbalance requires a long-term and sustained effort from various stakeholders. It requires a societal shift towards gender equality and the promotion of diversity and inclusion.

Conclusion:

It is important to note that women are not responsible for maintaining gender imbalance in society. Gender inequality and discrimination are systemic issues that are perpetuated by patriarchal values and societal norms that marginalize women. However, it is true that some women may internalize patriarchal attitudes and contribute to maintaining gender imbalance. For example, some women may accept traditional gender roles and stereotypes that limit their opportunities and perpetuate gender inequality. Women may also discriminate against other women, such as judging their appearance or behavior based on patriarchal norms. It is essential to recognize that these attitudes and behaviors are not inherent to women but are learned and reinforced by societal expectations and cultural norms. Therefore, addressing gender imbalance requires challenging these norms and promoting gender equality through education, awareness, and policy changes. Women can play a significant role in challenging gender inequality by supporting other women, advocating for gender equality, and actively participating in efforts to

promote gender equality. Women's leadership and empowerment are essential to achieving gender equality and dismantling patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender imbalance. All the above-mentioned factors are interconnected and reinforce each other, contributing to gender imbalance in India. Addressing these issues requires a multi-pronged approach that addresses cultural attitudes, legal frameworks, and socio-economic factors.

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